

The cover features a large, abstract graphic element consisting of two overlapping, curved lines. The upper line is a vibrant red, while the lower line is a muted grey. Both lines have a soft, brush-like texture and curve from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and depth. The title text is positioned in the upper left quadrant, partially overlapping the grey line.

Psychoanalysis  
of  
Christianity

Luigi De Paoli

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# *PREFACE*

This essay stems from a Dantesque journey among the multiple circles of “*The Divine Comedy*” which is Christianity, from the hellish to the paradisiacal, which I was fortunate enough to undertake with very qualified and understanding companions, both male and female.

On this journey mind and heart were conditioned by an unconventional route, the psychoanalytical one, which the undersigned followed first as a patient and then as a therapist, within the circles of the unconscious world. This means that the deductions which appear in this essay, although confirmed by documental data, are to be seen as coming from a different viewpoint from that of scholars of other disciplines.

## *The unconscious*

The prerequisite for those who go deep into the reading of this essay is that the human mind operates on a bi-logical basis: one process differentiates and is asymmetrical, conscious and rational and the other is unifying and symmetrical, unconscious and non-rational, with much interweaving and overlapping which nevertheless do not wipe out the bi-logical structure. The employment of the so-called “primary process” (unconscious) leads to views which are incompatible with those engendered by the use of the “secondary process” (conscious thought).

The secondary process, conscious or bivalent, which governs most of human activity and is responsible for the “reality principle”, is based on some tenets: 1) of identity (A is identical to A); 2) of bivalent logic (the proposition A can be either true or false); 3) of non-contradiction (two propositions cannot be true and false at the same time); 4) of incompatibility (A cannot be the same as B).

In brief, human beings can become aware of reality and put it into words thanks to the processes of differentiation, which cause the ideas and feelings to be disaggregated and distinguished.

The primary process, unconscious or symmetric, operative since birth, acts in a different way from the distinguishing logic. In dreams, as well as in other products of the unconscious (such as free drawing or slips of the tongue), the primary process is characterized by: 1) contradiction (an object can be both present and absent); 2) displacement (the boss can be “con-fused” with the father); 3) absence of time; 4) substitution of external reality with internal reality.

This implies that the unconscious unifies relationships among the elements of reality and “makes them symmetrical”, and so it treats the reverse of any relationship as if it were the same thing. For the primary process the affirmation “John is the father of Joseph” is equivalent to the contrary, i.e. “Joseph is the father of John”. It means that in the unconscious logic (like dreams, for example) there are neither doubts nor degrees of truth. Time has no sequence, the part is equal to the whole and the distinction between psychic and physical is precarious.

The fundamental difference, therefore, between the primary-unconscious-symmetrical-unifying processes the secondary-conscious-asymmetrical-distinguishing processes is that the latter allow categories or classes (the sick, the black, women, etc) to be separately distinguished, while the former ignore such differentiations. The human mind, therefore, is bi-modal, made up of two contrasting but also convergent structures, one asymmetrical (conscious and dividing) and the other

symmetrical (indivisible and unconscious), which are active to varying degrees during both diurnal and nocturnal life.

## *Christianity and the unconscious*

The reader accustomed to the accuracy of bivalent logic (or secondary process) must be aware that according to the psychoanalytical perspective all the fundamental aspects of the Christian experience, like faith in the Son of God, the Risen Christ, miracles, salvation, eternal life, the Eucharist, etc, have their roots also in the primary processes, which by their very nature are timeless and spaceless, indifferent to contradictions, so that a subject can be at the same time human and divine, dead and living, adult or infant.

If all this can be taken for granted by an eastern or Jewish person like Jesus, accustomed to identifying the elements of nature with those of the spirit, human persons with God himself, it is much less evident for western man, who defines reality almost exclusively on the intellectual-differentiating level.

## *Purpose of the text*

The purpose of this research is to pinpoint the unconscious evolution of the dynamics which characterize the historical organization of Christianity.

I confess to having taken the plunge after realizing that Christianity has been anatomized and scrutinized with the magnifying glass of politics, philosophy, commerce, law and art. In this vast encyclopedia of Christianity what stands out are the volumes dealing with secondary-differentiating-asymmetrical-conscious thought, but there is almost no analysis of Christianity on the primary-symmetrical-undifferentiating-unconscious level, apart from a few psychoanalytical studies on Jesus and certain aspects of ecclesial life.

Before such a paucity of psychoanalytical studies on the subject, mind and passion gradually inspired me to begin a journey into the “entrails” of such a complex and heterogeneous organization as Christianity. The decision was facilitated by the fact of having used psychoanalytical instruments in the examination of public and private organizations in order to explore their “unconscious structure”.

Well aware of the limitations of my cultural resources, I considered it wise to confine myself to finding the thread connecting the basic and pervasive unconscious processes of an organism which has involved billions of persons for two millennia.

The reader should consider the text as an “interpretative hypothesis”, requiring further elaboration. This new view may at first seem eccentric to both “Christians” and “Non-Christians”. But my hope is that it will bring “therapeutic benefits” for both groups.

## *Acknowledgements*

Before closing these notes I wish to express my gratitude to those who have read the essay, suggested amendments or translated it into English, particularly to Ms Veronica Wells, who also revised the text. I am greatly indebted to those who dwell inside me as permanent sources of light and warmth, even if they themselves are not aware of it. This work is also the fruit of the passionate and affectionate participation of my wife, Luciana De Petris, and my three children, Marco, Cristina and Luca, who in different ways contributed to the publication of the text on Internet.

“

## CHAPTER I

# *PSYCHODYNAMIC ASPECTS OF JESUS*

*“The day is nearing when people will understand that Jesus of Nazareth did not mean to add a new religion to the existing ones, but, on the contrary, wanted to break down all barriers that prevent man from being a brother to man and especially to the most different and despised”*

Ernesto Balducci

The obligatory premise for those who wish to get closer to Jesus<sup>1</sup> is that one must draw on and trust people who have had direct or indirect experience of him. This means that, clinically speaking, he cannot be “psychoanalysed” since he left no written or recorded trace of himself. Our research is based on the image of his living experience elaborated by those who have passed on their personal testimony relative to Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as it is possible to deduce from New Testament chronicles and from modern exegesis.

In this first chapter, I try to point out the most relevant traits of the person of Jesus, which cannot be separated from the “unconscious processes” which animate the writers who represented Him in the Four Gospels and in other canonical texts, while knowing full well that this means:

1) drawing on to texts written in Greek (probably unknown to Jesus), which for over 2000 years have undergone translations, addenda and transcriptions (by hand) that have changed many of the original meanings; 2) depending on narrations marked by discrepancies relative to his genealogy, family typology, place of birth. According to “*The Jesus Seminar*”, an association that unites many English speaking theologians, one can assume that 20% of the “*loghia*” (sayings) contained in the three synoptic Gospels could well be authentic expressions of Jesus. In any case, we are dealing with the testimony of a primitive Christian community that, after the death of the Galilean, experienced him as the “*Risen Christ*”, the “*Saviour*” and the “*Son of God*”.

This approach takes advantage of a daring but also fecund method, which is that of “dynamic equivalence”. That is, in other words, observing in the light of today’s psychology of the unconscious, the facts, gestures and expressions that Christian exegetes recognize with great probability as belonging to the historical person of Jesus in the hope that they resemble those used by him 2000 years ago, in order to produce an analogous impact.

Any reference to exegetic and theological problems relative to the “divinity” of Jesus is excluded, since that would also imply an adhesion of faith. Similarly, we have not taken into account those

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical quotations are taken from: “*The new Jerusalem Bible*, published by St Paulus, 2005; “*The revised English Bible*”, Oxford University Press, 1990

cultural currents that consider the figure of Jesus “not historical”. We take for granted that Jesus really lived and that his actions and messages are loaded with a symbolic meta-confessional dimension that is not always in accord with that of Christian theology and the Christian Churches.

## *The Hebrew Context*

Until two centuries ago Christians were not able to think of Jesus as a “Jew”, as opposed to the Jews who considered Him a “heretic“. This misunderstanding was reinforced, over the millennia, by the split between the “*historical*” Jesus and the “*Jesus of the faith*”. It was conceded that the former could be a Jew, while only the latter was a “Christian”. Thus we reach the following paradox: the faith “*of*” Jesus unites Christians and Jews, while faith “*in*” Jesus divides the two populations.

This work presupposes that the “mind” of Jesus was modelled in Hebrew culture, as was his prayer, his stories and his predictions. It seems generally agreed that the Nazarene was born at a moment of great social effervescence. In the first century there was no uniform people of Israel, but a galaxy of denominations, each with different organizations. They were in agreement with regard to the adoration of one God and the observance of Mosaic Law, but were divided on other points.

*Pharisees and Hellenists*, for example, had their respective synagogues, while the *Essenes* lived permanently in separate communities.

The ultimate point of reference within the Israeli people was that of the *Toràh* (Law), administered by the Courts, whose task was to pursue “*true Justice*”. The most complex cases were handled by the *Grand Sanhedrin of Jerusalem*, a real Supreme Court. The second power was the *Priesthood*, that was transmitted by inheritance and was reserved to the tribes of Levi. In the year 70 A.D. the Temple of Jerusalem was razed to the ground and the Priesthood disappeared from Judaism.

Jesus lived in a society, the Palestinian Judaic, that was split into two: on the one side there was the majority of the population, composed of poor labourers and slaves, almost all illiterate, harassed by the Roman invader; on the other there was a restricted Jewish aristocracy, composed of rich Sadducees and the priestly caste, which had the monopoly on “sacrifices” and offerings to the temple. A step below there was a small middle class, relatively well off, represented by Pharisees and government employees. Radicalisation of the conflict impelled the middle class of Pharisees to ally themselves with the imperial administration, which had the effect of pouring fuel onto the hatred of the Judaic aristocracy harboured by the sub-proletarians.

In response to this social division, groups pursuing very different objectives emerged.

There were revolutionary movements that aimed at overthrowing both political and Judaic power through violence; some Pharisees headed popular revolts to destroy the emblems of the Roman Empire (the Eagle) placed at the entrance to the Temple of Jerusalem. The perpetrators were burnt alive. Other popular manifestations resulted in thousands of deaths amongst the rebels.

The opposite strategy was based on non-violence and its most popular representative was John the Baptist, who believed that fundamental change could be achieved through “conversion” and “repentance”, in view of an imminent “universal judgement” that would bring evil people to justice and reward the good. Both movements, violent and non-violent, shared the hatred and desperation of the penniless masses in revolt against both the rich who oppressed the poor and the Judaic authority, concerned above all with its own economic interests.

The diversity consisted in the fact that the violent Zealots wanted change “here and now” while the non-violent Essenes and John the Evangelist aimed at a change in personal conduct as a prelude to a definitive and eschatological future.

Though sharing the anxiety of the disinherited and their rancour against the pleasure-loving oppressors, both Roman and Hebrew, Jesus had no qualms in discarding the insurrectional hypothesis of the Zealots. He felt closer to John the Baptist's group while not sharing their harsh asceticism. The objective was decisively utopian and required a psychodynamic organization able to swim against the current.

## *The strength of the Ego*

Billions of people do not believe that Jesus is God: few, though, doubt that He deserves universal admiration along with the founders of often contrasted but genuinely innovative religious, scientific, social or political movements.

In Jesus' case, regardless of confessional adhesion, his messages and his actions have universal value, being the product of a personality that, against wind and weather, proposed a way of life without bowing to the stereotypes of violence and sacrifice.

He was born, lived and died under the thumb of absolute power, where the Emperor (Augustus) was honoured both as "Divi Filius" (Son of God), and "Saviour" who ensured the wellbeing of the Empire.

We know he came from a rural environment, a village of a few hundred souls. He had a limited education and spoke the local language, Aramaic. On his "mental organization", insofar as we can deduce from the testimonies of the Evangelists and from his own narrative creations, the parables, it is essential therefore to dedicate some reflections.

### *Family and work*

Data on the life of the child Jesus are insufficient to allow us to deduce what influence the family might have had on his growth. He was the son of working people and thus he was not directed towards studying, but to gaining working experience with materials. From early childhood he was trained to treat wood in a special manner, which thus became a "transitional object" through which he learned that you cannot construct something new if you don't first dismantle the old, and that a tree trunk when not carved, cut or worked on remains an object ever similar to itself and cannot be enriched with new functions.

After living in Nazareth with his brothers and sisters for thirty years, he decided to abandon his work, his family and his own village. The break is significant, since it was inadmissible for a son to refute the authority and power of the head of the family, which was all but absolute over his children, even if they were married.

Thanks to the stability of the objects he has internalized (*in primis* the parents, who are the source of self-esteem and love), his mood is marked by serenity and the desire to appreciate and enjoy life to the full. His "sayings" and parables do not reveal feelings of inadequacy and self-pity, they are never expressions of revengeful or maniacal triumph.

His daily dealings and sense of fellowship with craftsmen like himself led him to appreciate the work of fishermen, farmers, vine-growers, merchants, taxmen, soldiers, builders, housewives. What was important for an artisan like him was the result, not the intention. "Good" and "Bad" people were *distinguishable on the basis of the generous fruit they produced, not by their "roots"* (cultural or confessional), which are meaningless if the tree is not productive (Lk 6,43-45).

He had very harsh words for the rich, who lived by exploiting others, but also for parasites who "*hid their golden coins under the ground*". He inverted economic philosophy based on accumulation, which brought only rivalry, and proposed solidarity to lighten the burden of the

underprivileged. At the same time he stigmatised the stupidity of “*the foolish virgins*” who went to the wedding feast unprepared, relying on the resources of others and the providence of heaven.

He kept away from any form of sociologic-physiologic-theological speculation. He did not concern himself with intellectual truths which were not the fruit of mediation and therefore could be manipulated and twisted by powerful people and their sycophants. He called his listeners to the concrete cases that life brought before him or to the hidden meaning of parables drawn from daily existence.

As a psychically mature person he was not seduced by the two most frequent and fallacious forms of flattery: omnipotence and submission. He relied on his basic self esteem and on the strength of his Ego. His view of himself did not depend on the approval of others. He refused to delegate his conscience to the religious authorities and to lean on sacral crutches.

The fact that his mind achieved an elevated level of freedom did not depend on any “*divine nature*”, but on the fact that he led a life that was consistent with his human condition, free from any superman or servile attitude. In his lifetime he never realized that he was a “*Divine person*”, nor did he claim to be “*incarnation of God*”, “*Son of God*”, “*Born to a Virgin*”, “*pre-existent to the world*”, “*Lord*”.

He determinedly disillusioned the expectations of those who hoped he would be a political leader that would liberate Palestine from Roman oppression and excessive taxation. As soon as the throng sought him in the hope of obtaining advantages, he withdrew to isolated places to meditate and pray. He shrank from idolizing flattery, ultimately “*satanic*” and subtle, from frustrated listeners in need of omnipotent figures. He derided those who were waiting for him to appear in Jerusalem as the Messiah by showing up astride a ... donkey. When Peter addressed him with the title of Messiah, inviting him to avoid conflict with the authorities, he pointed the finger at him, as if he were possessed by the devil: “*Out of my sight, Satan*” (Mk 8, 33).

### ***Another world is possible***

His debut was not propitious: his people considered him “*out of his mind*”. He had a dream which he transformed into a mission: he spent the rest of his life building a better world, in continuity with the great prophets of his people. His attention was not focalised on God or on the world, but on the connection between the two, the Kingdom of God, a theme cited over one hundred and thirty times in the Synoptic Gospels. Twenty parables mention it in various forms. In order to clarify what it consisted of, Luke the Evangelist ascribed to Jesus a project, probably never verbalized, which converged with the hope of eminent ancestors, like Isaiah (Is 61,1-2): to free the poor from the shackles of injustice by *bringing down the powerful*.

***“The spirit of the Lord is upon me... he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted, to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year from the Lord”... Then he began to speak to them: “This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening” (Lk 4,18-21).***

Moved by the current of thought of prophets who did not tolerate oppression and falsehood, he abandoned the idea of traditional religiousness and decided to place himself on the side of children not parents, the rejected not the advantaged, sinners not the devout, illiterates not the learned. The objective was incompatible with that of the Empire and that of any religion colluding with injustice. In order to fulfil such a demanding mission, he travelled from village to village, without economic support and without the rubber stamp of the Judaic authorities, in order to talk directly to ordinary people, announcing that it was possible to create a new Kingdom that would challenge the dominant way of thinking even at the cost of hostile reactions.



To the youth who asked for time to perform the burial rites of his recently dead father Jesus replied: “*Leave the dead to bury their dead*” (Mt 8,22). There is no interior freedom if dependency or “incestuous” bonds *between parents and children* are not severed.

When he said “*I have not come to bring peace but a sword*” (Mt 10,34) he reiterated that in order to reach full freedom of criticism and initiative it was necessary for man’s mind to cease to be a mere extension of the mind of parents or society.

In order to set up a *Kingdom of justice* it was not necessary to operate a political revolution or to pursue the dream so dear to the Israelites of “*a new heaven and a new earth*”. It was enough to conform to the rhythm of nature, knowing full well that “*a mustard seed which, at the time of its sowing, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth, yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub*” (Mk 4,30-32).

To indicate that the new temporal category was that of the “evolutionary present”, the images he resorts to are those of the *child*, the *seed*, *yeast*. The Kingdom of God is an invisible force that acts beyond all imagination.

He consistently dissuaded his followers from planning “reforms” or solutions using methods and structures that had been ingrained for centuries. Experience had taught him that “*no one sews a patch of new cloth on to an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it.. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skin, and then wine and skins are both lost*” (Mk 2,21-22). Nor was it reasonable to bother about old cloths and wineskins. He showed no intention of subverting the logic of society, which he knew to be of its nature calculating and egocentric. It was better to invest time and energy in making a new wineskin rather than to adjust or mend an old one. And in the same way it was better to build bridges for humanity to enable it to overcome ancestral divisions between man and woman, Hebrew and Publican, so that the seeds of empathy could begin to germinate.

He had a global conscience that allowed him to see that the stirrings of faith lay in the poor, the excluded and in people of “*good will*”, even if non-believers. He sought for relations that went beyond ties of blood or religion. He was convinced that we are brothers and sisters through love, not through chromosomal affinities. Treating a brother with contempt is equivalent to committing a crime. If such a fracture is not healed any act of cult is mere illusion.

The political message is disconcerting: workers starting late in the day are paid the same as those who have worked since morning. Attachment to money and possessions is as destructive as rust.

The organization of daily life should draw inspiration from the dynamic equilibrium of creation, where *the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields* have fed and reproduced for millions of years without worrying about accumulating things, wisely re-cycling their excrement.

The *Kingdom of God* has nothing to do with “theocratic states” or with waiting for a salvific event that will re-establish the original perfection of creation through the birth of a Messiah.

The role he meticulously avoided both for himself and for others who followed him was that of the “priest”, bureaucratic mediator between man and God through sacrifice, whose main function is that of reassuring the faithful that through cult and offerings they can obtain God’s benediction without toil.

## ***Transforming introspection***

Before starting a liberation project such as the one publicly taken on in the synagogue, Jesus went through a period of “transforming introspection” (*metanoia*), which entails a journey into the darkness of one’s own interior world. This implies coming to a reckoning with both the Super-Ego (which is the ensemble of laws, traditions and millenary censures) and the desires coming from the most archaic part of the Id (unconscious).

The three Synoptic Gospels are in agreement in telling us that he retired into the *desert for forty days, where he was tempted by the Devil*. Notwithstanding the oriental colour of the language context, what we want to underline is that in the course of such an introspective labour Jesus realized that his temptations were not so much concerned with his daily conduct as with his most immature desires, such as the unconscious longing for world domination, unlimited possession of goods and belief in the magical power of God. In this self-analysis he recognized within himself an infantile nucleus that would like to *transform stones into bread, be the ruler of all kingdoms, be able to fly from the pinnacle of the Temple with the assurance that he is sustained by angelic powers* (Lk 4,1-13).

Fully aware that dangers for personal and collective life do not come from outside but from “the heart”, he was not afraid to voice those “*bad thoughts that lead to evil*” which he had perceived within himself and within people he met. He knew the source of “*fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly*” (Mk 7,21-22). Feeling that he was a sinner, together with his followers, he went down to the River Jordan to receive a “Baptism of conversion” from John the Baptist, in whose company he stayed for a certain time.

In some way, he anticipated the observations of psychoanalysis when he pointed out that thoughts, dreams, fantasies are not harmless mind-games, but can become real actions if not dealt with by the Ego and if the latter does not guide the entire personality.

He had a hard time with hypocrites who, refusing to admit to harbouring *bad thoughts that lead to evil*, find solace by unconsciously exporting their worst aspects to unbelievers and outcasts, resulting in the creation of real and fratricidal divisions between people.

## ***Filial relationship with God***

Buoyed up by the affection of his family and his transforming experience with matter, the Nazarene, as a good Jew, gave his attention to “*ultimate reality*”, trying to internalise its energy. The truth he discovered was not doctrinal but of the emotional, relational, intuitive type and therefore inexpressible. It can be reduced to a human image of *Dad (Abba)*, not of the “Father” who in the Jewish society is a “master”. This cannot be apprehended through logical means, rather it demands suspension of memories, needs, doctrines and prejudices. The Nazarene did not talk of God as if he had had glamorous revelations or celestial visions. What is without form, without history and without limits cannot be explained, but only lived and experienced with caution and discretion.

Communion with the “*ultimate reality*” fed Jesus with irremovable faith in the potential goodness of all things and all people. Everything changed: God was no longer “*I am the one who is, Jahveh*”, but the “*Dad*” who takes care of his children. The barriers between races and castes disappear. Profound communion with the “*ultimate reality*” explains how Jesus moved progressively from the old Mosaic law to the new Beatitudes. The ideal is to become *a mild, merciful builder of peace*.

Conscious of the fact that only the pure, not the learned, see God, when he says “*he knows the Father*” (Mt 11, 27) it does not mean he understands his thoughts, nature or essence, and even less that he is His equal. For a Jew “*to know*” means to have intimate relations, to share affections, emotions, projects with the loved one. Intimacy leads him to believe that the “Father” does not command, he wants no slaves, only friends, demands no sacrifices. He is no longer the demanding, severe Super Ego of old, but he who forgives and remits all debts, even those of “*unfaithful administrators*” (Mt 18,23-35).

It seems at first sight that Jesus wanted to legitimize the patriarchal structure. In reality, the paternity he attributed to God invalidates all other paternities, so that everyone, men and women, can only be brothers and sisters. To be “father “ or “son” means to be it in love. He points out in the parable of the *prodigal son* that both the rebellious and squandering son (the younger) and the obedient and devout one (the elder) conceive their filial relationship only in terms of servility, while the ultimate joy of the father is to have a reconciled family, where “*one forgives seventy times seven*”.

He had no scruples in feeling that he was “*Son of God*”, because “*all who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God*” (Rm 8,14).

### ***Inter-personal relations***

He wore the clothes of ordinary people, without any particular sign of rank. He had a respectful, uninhibited way with strangers. Within a social context inclined to sexual, religious and racial *apartheid* he caused a scandal when he ate with those who were considered sinners because they belonged to despised categories like taxmen, street-walkers or gentiles.

In order to emphasize his new view of social usages he asked his disciples to invite to their banquet not important people, but the *lame, the blind and the poor*, since only they were ready to understand the “*Good News*”. Lunches and weddings were occasions to overcome taboos and disintoxicate relations among groups who hated one another, as when during a feast in a Pharisee’s house he let himself be anointed and kissed by a prostitute, thus completely disorienting his host, who was incapable of doing such a thing. While in all societies public whores were considered virtually untouchables, for Jesus she ceased to be one, if she decided not to sell her body but to use it to show tenderness, *washing his feet with tears, drying them with her hair and pouring perfume* (Lk 7,36-50).

Against the dominant “machismo” he upheld sexual equality in a society where a woman was only good for having children and looking after the house. He did not accept that a man could repudiate his own wife for banal reasons, thus putting her survival at risk. As a good Jew he nurtured a positive attitude towards marriage, but considered blessed the man who renounced such an option in order to devote himself to building an “anti-imperial network” of *justice (the Kingdom of God)*.

He publicly took on the defence of the prostitutes and scandalised religious leaders by asserting that the publicans might be dearer to God than those presumed just. On the day of the so-called “Universal Judgement” all believers would be amazed to learn that the true friends of God were not those who thought they had a privileged relationship with him but those who acted to *feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, host the stranger, comfort the sick and imprisoned*, even if they were atheists or agnostics.

Because of all this, he encountered furious hostility on the part of those bent on raising barricades in order to consolidate group identity and foment confessional, tribal or nationalistic pride.

### ***Solicitude for the recuperation of full health***

If it is true that, at least from the historical point of view, men have always been warriors and hunters inclined to the experience of violence and death, while women have been more involved in the generation and care of new-born life, it is undoubted that Jesus was more moved by feminine impulses of protection and tenderness, rather than the masculine drive for conquest and domination. He felt visceral compassion when he realized that “*the crowd resembles a flock without pastor*”, that “*listeners who followed him were hungry*” or that they were “*tired and weary*”.

People said of him that “*he went about doing good, curing all those who had fallen into the power of the devil*” (Acts 10,38). Like the prophets of Israel and charismatic healers from other religions, numerous prodigious deeds were attributed to him.

In performing signs that the Evangelists never defined as “miracles” he did not show any interest in evidencing a presumed divine nature. He attributed power to his Father, who made use of prophets, thaumaturges and people of all religions, to indicate how God is like the “*good Samaritan*”, who desires to re-animate all those who are or feel themselves to be *blind, lame, deaf, lepers, or even dead*” regardless of their origins. When he chanced upon the funeral of the widow of Nain’s son, he approached her and ordered her son to “*rise*” (Lk 7,14). He was empathically immersed in the pain of a mother and her sad future. Having lost her sole male support, as a widow she would have had to abandon her house and marry one of her husband’s brothers or some other male relative.

The ultimate purpose of his therapeutic actions was to awaken the energy and the betrayed hopes of the poor, by demolishing the widespread preconception according to which physical deformity, contagious illnesses, obsessions, short stature and poverty were the consequences, even hereditary, of divine punishment. He continually repeated to himself the liberationist “*mantra*” and never stopped practicing exorcisms, in order to show that nobody need any longer be under the domination of demoniac phantoms of omnipotence or impotence. He firmly removed the stigma attached to lepers and sinners according to the judgemental and persecutory conceptions of God promoted by self-interested guarantors of the sacred, who did not intend to renounce the role of a dominating Super-Ego. He challenged the wrath of the authorities when he decided to champion the defence of victims by healing a poor man with a withered hand on the inviolable day of the “Sabbath”.

He was not a magician who multiplied the *bread and the fishes* for the hungry crowd. The same miracle can be performed by the poor if they learn to share the little they have.

### ***Modeller of a new way of grouping***

Conscious of the paucity of his own strength and of the relevance of the desire for a kingdom founded on justice, he constituted an “open group” among the most original in human history. It was formed by people of both sexes whom he treated as friends. In order to be credible, they lived like those who were “last”, without home and work. The requirements were onerous but this only exalted the effort, intensified participation and answered to the demands that could not be satisfied by an institution.

They ate, slept, talked, suffered together, moving from village to village, without carrying bread, pouch, coins for their purses, taking advantage of occasional hospitality. The Nazarene did not ask them to take part in theological courses, knowing full well that the study of divine disciplines generated “scribes” and, thus, power, paternalism and superiority. The novelty consisted in overturning the logic of empire, by *not sitting in the first line but in the last one, because he who humbles himself will be exalted and he who exalts himself will be humbled by history*.

With patient determination he began to weave a new social fabric in the form of a “non-calculating community”. “*People will know you are my disciples through this: that you love one another.*” He was certain that all who followed his itinerary of faith and freedom “*would do even greater things*” than himself.

He gambled on the possibility that they might create an “ecological niche of collective reflection”, an area free of narcissism and the mercantile logics of career-making, thus proving that it was possible to contest the ideology of Empire and Religion.

The Kingdom of peace and justice may require leaders but has no room for bosses. Exemplary figures, not masters. Brothers and sisters as equals, not fathers. The only valid baptism was that of friendship that presupposes equality and respect for differences, empathy without confusion. The group was to be autonomous and create its own laws from within itself, as opposed to a heteronomous society that receives them from outside.

***Jesus consistently refused the messianic aspect of leadership. He did not leave any sacred writings or confessional emblems, did not write a constitution, did not institute hierarchical ranks, did not ordain priests, did not promulgate dogmas. He did not found a religion but a spirituality nourished on the earth, on work, on suffering and on Invisible Love.***

He invented a nomadic, roaming pedagogy, which welcomed \unexpected encounters and embarrassing questions. One learnt to pray to God as the “Father of everyone”, so that he might give “*our daily bread*”, adequate protection from “*temptations, reciprocal forgiveness*”, and “*remission of debts*”. In a society where an insolvent debtor was sold pitilessly as a slave, Jesus imagined a “universal pardon” that freed the poor from usurers.

It was a titanic undertaking. He had to cope with the frivolous Messianic expectations of his proselytes, whom he chided pitilessly when they vied and jockeyed with each other in order to gain privileges in the kingdom of heaven.

The Nazarene was accustomed to reciting the daily prayer “*I thank you, Lord, for not having created me a woman*”, until he discovered how much courage and determination were hidden in the faith of a humble woman, even pagan. He did not impose sexually or matrimonially related bonds on anyone. He wished that men and women could experience tenderness like rain that, as it falls to the arid ground, gradually wakens it to life.

He understood and taught that in order to discover “treasures” it was not necessary to visit different territories but to have a new way of seeing. The Truth which is able to change one’s life was to be met by walking the straight and narrow Way, living Life among the despised, avoiding “false prophets” and misleading publicity. Together with his group, he had to face a distressing choice: either the easy road made up of illusions and prodigious expectations, or the hard path that entails tiring changes. He chose the latter, because he wanted rebellion against all that oppresses to be a conquest by adult people, not a gift from a powerful father to incapable children.

## ***Relativization***

Sustained by a vision of life inspired by compassion, he fought for the principle that Law and its precepts should not become “idols” to adore. He was a threat to the powerful since he desecrated every authority, religious, secular or familial. He shook the imperial system by asserting the “lay” principle of clear separation between Empire and Religion, in such a way that they could not cannibalise each other or keep up “incestuous” relations. He gave back to personal consciousness the ability to decide what belongs to the transcendental sphere (God) and what to the secular (Caesar). Religious morality could not have a monopoly over worldly affairs (Mt 22, 21). Because of this programme of social “growth” he was accused of “*stirring the minds of people*” and of “*subverting the nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar*” (Lk 23,2).

The great symbols of religion are made relative, both of the Samaritan cult (*Mount Gerizim*) and the Judean (*Mount Zion and Jerusalem*). To the Samaritan woman he predicted a new spiritual reality, no longer confessional and nationalistic: “*Believe me, oh woman, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...the time is coming, indeed it is*

*already here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and true. These are the worshippers the father wants” (John 4,21-23).*

The maturity of his Ego allowed him to conceive a new era of human, shared living, where faith sheds its fanaticisms and absolutisms. His perspective was revolutionary: the temple, sacrifice, priesthood, repetitive prayer must be relegated to the museum of religions, because they ratify and sanctify division among human beings and create an illusory and magical faith. Instead of the Great Temple that was a place for men, the pure, the chosen people, where women and non-Jews were debarred, he imagined *“a house of prayer for all people”*.

### ***Humiliation and crisis of faith***

Like all creatures, he made crass mistakes about the future. He predicted:

*“All the peoples of the world ... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory... With a trumpet-blast he will send out his angels, and they will gather his chosen from the four winds... Truly I tell you: the present generation will live to see it all” (Mt 24,30-34; Mc 13,24-27; Lc 17,20-24 e 21,25-28).*

Hundreds of generations have succeeded him but none of these predictions has come to pass. This is the proof that he did not possess any superhuman faculty, such as omniscience or clairvoyance. He moved towards the future with confidence, but without reliable data. He was not immune to humiliation. In Galilee he appeared disoriented: crowds didn't follow him, the leaders of the Hebrew populace criticized him and demanded miracles, *“the minds of disciples are blocked”*. Peter himself argued with him (Mk 8,33). Though convinced that *“God will have justice”* a doubt crossed his mind: *“But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18,8)*

In the beginning, healing people created an aura of grandeur, associated with the illusion that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Then he began to hypothesize that the pursuit of a pacified and just society entailed going through bitter suffering and delusions. He was forced to realize that prodigious events feed expectations, galvanize enthusiasm, but don't change the hearts and minds of humankind. His listeners and proselytes, though moved by good intentions, remained in expectation of political advantages. On the road to Emmaus the disciples admitted to having hoped that *“he was to be the liberator of Israel” (Lk 24,18-19).*

In Gethsemane the crisis was cruel: he sweated blood and was racked by thoughts of failure. Or rather on the *“triumph of darkness” (Lk 22,53).* His only option was to tell his Father: *“Abba, Father,” he said, “all things are possible for you; take this cup from me. Yet not my will but yours” (Mc 14,36).* He nurtured an unshakable faith in his own resurrection. Like all great heroes or martyrs, he was sure that his own death would be an example and give strength to others. And that his Spirit would continue to flow and operate on future generations.

In his laborious development he was not free from contradictions relating to his Father, on the one hand preaching that *God takes care even of the hairs of our head and the birds in the sky*, on the other, while he agonized on the cross, shouting his desperation at Him because He did not come to his help. Not just one but two Evangelists (Luke and John) omit to transcribe Jesus' last words – *“My God, my God, why did you abandon me?”* - considered too scandalous if spoken by a pious Hebrew and by a “Son of God”. This pitiful psychic breakdown reveals how rooted, even in Jesus, is the archetype of God's omnipotence. He was unable to imagine that the good Father was, like all victims, powerless to convert the stony hearts of the executioners and send an Army of salvation to defend the innocent. That this hypothesis did not cross Jesus' mind was due to the fact that he shared, unconsciously, the resigned assumption that while God is virtually omnipotent he is *de facto* impotent against violence.

## *Between violence and non violence*

Every adult subject, in order to resist negative or destructive solicitations coming from the family and society, must be endowed with a quantum of aggressivity that allows his survival .

Jesus is no exception to the rule. He inherited a religious tradition in which violence belongs directly to God, together with love.

### *Jahveh's violence*

Those who study the Bible all acknowledge that Jahveh is represented as a God of liberation who has compassion on a people of slaves and is determined to free them from the tyranny of the Pharaoh. He is clearly on the side of the oppressed and hostile towards those who invoke his name but give no thought to the suffering.

The same scholars agree in admitting that violence constitutes a main axis of Jahveh's activity. The sinner who violates God's commandments is always under the threat of illness or the infamy of amorous betrayals. Infidelities of the chosen people are repaid with plagues, death and natural catastrophes.

Even the chosen people complain of their God's violence: *"But now you have abandoned and humiliated us...You scatter us among the nations...You make us.. the mockery and the scorn of those around us"* (Psm 44,10-15). Deported to Babylon they thirst for cruel revenge: *"a blessing on anyone who treats you as you treated us, a blessing on anyone who seizes your babies and shatters them against a rock"* (Psm 137,8-9).

The psalms are a collection of not very edifying requests, asking God to *"Break the teeth in their mouth, snap off the fangs of these young lions"* (Psm 58,6), *"Brandish spear and pike to confront my pursuers"* (Psm 35,3), *"O Lord, rise up to punish all the nations: show no mercy to all these malicious traitors"* (Psm 59,5).

It is true, however, that the Law of Israel prohibits the maltreatment of foreigners, the harassment of widows and orphans, usury, sexual violence and kidnapping, confirming the fact that merciful and protective images of Jahveh greatly outnumber the cruel and vindictive ones.

### *Jesus' violence*

Like all human beings, Jesus cannot avoid breathing the "polluted air " of his time. The "bipolar profile of Jahveh is always there, even if the certainty predominates that the Father has an innate passion for the liberation of social outcasts and an absolute predilection for children and widows. The outcome is necessarily conflictual. It is in fact surprising that the Nazarene's conduct is not in the least inclined to physical violence, while the view he spreads among his followers conserves elements of the Old Testament cruelty.

He highlights that God blesses those who endure unjust persecution or attempt not to repay evil with further evil, nevertheless he presents him as an implacable judge in meting out punishment. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard who killed the son of the owner, *"he will bring those wretches to a wretched end"* (Mt 21,41) and in that of the talents *"the useless servant will be thrown into darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth"* (Mt 25,30). The same end is in store for the man invited to a wedding who went there without a nuptial garment (Mt 22, 11). If the hand is the occasion of sin, it is better to cut it off so as not to fall into *"Gehenna"* (hell) where *"the worm will never die nor the fire be put out"* (Mk 9,48).

Only in Matthew's Gospel comes out the threat of an "eternal fire", which many exegetes think he never pronounced. Notwithstanding Christian Churches will exploit this passage to lay the foundation of terrifying theologies.

He would have predicted:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory... all nations will be assembled... he will separate people from one another... the sheep on his right and the goats on his left... he will say to the righteous: come, you whom my Father has blessed... for I was hungry and you gave me food... Then he will say to those on his left: 'go away from me... to the eternal fire...I was hungry but you never gave me food...'"* (Mt 25,31-46).

The Synoptic Gospels also tell us that he sometimes spoke of publicans and gentiles in less than respectful tones. But it was with the scribes and Pharisees that he adopted clearly offensive language, indiscriminately labelling them "hypocrites", "blind guides, serpents and a generation of vipers". Anti-Semitism was to make good use of Jesus' invective over the millennia to unleash hatred against the Jews.

The cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, that do not welcome his word, are accursed and destined to suffer worse punishment than that of Sodom. When he sees merchants in the temple courtyard, "he upset the tables of money-changers and the seats of the dove-sellers". (Mt 21,12)

Even taking into account the highly imaginative and apocalyptic language quoted above, and bearing in mind that not all Evangelists concur in assigning the same threats to Jesus, one cannot avoid recognizing that the expressions he used regarding the rich, hypocrites, perpetrators of injustices and of scandal are typical of a judicial mentality that aims at re-establishing right by compensating the victims with a reward and inflicting a penalty on the guilty without possibility of pardon and rehabilitation. Jesus seemed to dwell on a representation of God that was symmetric with that of the violent, though in his daily dealings he spoke of a Father who encourages people to "forgive seventy times seven".

If there is an aspect of Jesus' mental organization that "photographs" him as man, even if an uncommon man, it is exactly his inability to hypothesize a celestial Father completely free of judicial and vindictive traits. Certainly Jesus rejected the primitive Israelite conception of martial God, who calls for war and "makes the battlefield His oldest sanctuary" (J. Wellhausen), but succumbed under the weight of Hebrew theology, according to which revenge was the drug that God used to save the victims, that is, by triumphing over their oppressors. But in such form, the Father instead of being the one who creates living beings in his own image and likeness, ends up being the image and likeness of human creatures, with whom he relates in a mirror-like way: loving those who love Him and rejecting those who reject him.

When Jesus thought of Yahweh according to the judicial framework of Judaism he imagined the end of history as a great "Universal Judgement", in which the Sovereign of Heaven rewarded those who had obeyed Him and punished those who had rebelled. To tell the truth, he appeared even more cruel than earthly judges, since the punishment was eternal, completely out of proportion to the transgression.

But the Galilean had an access road to God that was rooted in their mutual affection. The silence of the Father was the sign that he was not acquainted with the mimetic and replicating circle of violence. The message coming from those who are illuminated by divine light is that true change is not brought about by armed revolt, but by displacement of the tyrants. The non violence proposed by Jesus consisted of provoking bewilderment in the aggressor by not reacting symmetrically with a return slap, but by creatively offering the *other cheek*. The oppressed and afflicted can win only if they re-appropriate their humanity by displacing the violent and not participating in the covering



falsehood which is the basis of violence. He admitted that the bullies could take away innocent lives, but could not impede their resurrection. This is perhaps Jesus' greatest legacy.

## *Subversive rebirth*

So, when he encountered “*a rich man*” who desired “*eternal life*” he pointed out that in order to conduct an irreproachable life on earth it was enough to follow the “*commandments*”. If he wanted to have “*a treasure in heaven*”, that is, to enrich the world with an exemplary undertaking for future generations, he would have to be re-born, that is, “*sell everything and give the profits to the poor*” in order to start a society where the free-giving of those who have more raises from destitution those who have less.

To Nicodemus, an influential Pharisee who spoke words of admiration because “*nobody performs miracles as he did*”, Jesus pointed out that he had an ideological cataract on his eyes that did not let him transcend reality. And he said to him:

*“no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born from water and spirit...You ought not to be astonished when I say: you must all be born again. The wind blows where it wills: you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born from the Spirit”* (Jn 3, 2-8).

With the need for rebirth I think Jesus wanted to suggest the possibility of going beyond the two evolutionary stages of the human condition. In the first, the “*schizoid- paranoid*” stage, the newborn is led to split reality into “*good breast, bad breast*” and goes beyond this when he realizes that things are not simply either black or white, but contain a variety of aspects that can also be contrasting. The second stage is the “*Oedipal*”, that sees the child engaged in rivalry both with the parent of the same sex and his siblings, moved by the desire to possess for himself alone the parent of the opposite sex. At the conclusion of the psycho-evolutionary process the person is able to support his own ambivalence and to establish human relations based upon respect. This is the stage at which the *rich young man* who keeps the Commandments finds himself.

Like other exemplary human figures, Jesus was able to accomplish further evolution independently of reasoning and of calculating benefits: this is the third stage of “*innovative intuition*”. It has been proven that almost all important scientific discoveries, religious-philosophical visions, works of art, and social upheavals are not triggered by rational judgements but by dreams, flashes of genius, “*gusts of wind of unknown provenance*”. Thus we are talking about “*intuitions*” that would have remained dead for humanity had they not had an “*innovative*” quality enabling them to impact on the collective imagination.

When Jesus pointed out the need for *rebirth* he hinted at the fact that transformations characterizing the highest levels of “*hominization*” are the fruit of a perspicacity fed on hints, analogies, illuminating sensations of the same essence as the “*wind that blows where it likes*” and that bows to no dogma because it transcends all existing canons.

The Galilean could hypothesise that “*another world is possible*” because he did not listen to the “*wise men and potentates of the world*” but to “*the wind*” that emanates from children and women, who are considered non-persons, or from the detested Publicans. It is with them that one can be re-born, because it is with them that one can know one's self. In French, to know is *connaître* – *con naître* - to be born together. Driven by such a *wind*, he sees his enemies under a new light: they are no longer feared, hated or attacked. *Rather than curse them it is possible to bless them, pray for them if they do wrong, give them your shirt even if they have taken your cloak, lend them money without expecting to get it back* (Lk 6,27-36). The outcome of this strenuous re-birth is that the Nazarene realized that he could no longer return into the uterus of Judaism, of his family, of his village nor could he disown their chromosomes.

## *The world turned upside down*

From the totality of representations passed on to us by the Evangelists the historical importance of Jesus appears correlated to the fact that he achieved a “rebirth” which enabled him to:

- Subvert the religious order. He taught that God was present in poor and excluded people, not in those who limit themselves to invoking Him. All sacrifices are loathed by him since they are based on violence. He desired to be *adored in spirit of truth*.
- Subvert the social order. The cardinal values are generosity not wealth, service not power, brotherhood not patriarchal rights; bonds founded on friendship not on blood; doing good not so much to your friends as to your enemies.
- Subvert the legal order. He abolished legalised discrimination between pure and impure people, sacred and profane times. The *Law* (the *Sabbath*) is for man and not the other way round.
- Subvert the economic order. Workers taken on at the end of the day are paid the same as those who have worked since dawn. *Flowers and birds of the air* are the models for an economy in harmony with that of creation. He considered it wrong to accumulate wealth which in the end must be left behind.

## *Jesus resurrects like a “grain of wheat”*

One cannot analyse Jesus’ personality and omit what is considered the most important event of his life, his Resurrection. He himself had no clear vision of life after death, the future being dark, mysterious and inscrutable, like Jahveh.

What appears seriously documented is that the Hebrew people lived, like other populations, in continuity with the “realm of the dead”, *which is the memory of their descent*.

The disciples of Jesus lived in continuity with him and in order to prove that he was alive they spread the news that his body had “materially” disappeared from the place where it had been buried and that he had appeared to his friends intermittently for forty days to share with them moments of ordinary life. He broke bread and ate with them, appeared and disappeared like a ghost. After this earthly sojourn Jesus “*ascended to heaven... went to his Father... sat on his right ...entered once and forever into the sanctuary... he was raised to glory... elevated to the heights*”.

The editing of these events is taken as proof that the “crucified man” was resuscitated by his “Dad”, to show that God had not abandoned this innocent person who had been vilified and killed for listening to the cry of the unfortunate, and that he rewarded non violence by rendering vain the arrogant power of persecutors. The Resurrected Jesus, though, has another function, according to Paul.

*“Christ died for our sins... on the third day he was raised to life... appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve, and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers... Last of all he appeared to me, as though I was a child born abnormally... For he is to be king until he[God] has made his enemies his footstool... Now I am going to tell you a mystery: we are not all going to fall asleep, but we are all going to be changed, instantly, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds” (1 Cor 15).*

On the one hand, this conception of resurrection is magical, since it fantasizes that billions of dead from the beginning of time will be transformed at *the sound of the last trumpet*; on the other, it makes God appear as a subject animated by sentiments of revenge and sadistic complacency, since it seems that his most secret desire is to *put his enemies under his feet*.

All this clashes with the fact that the historical Jesus forgave his torturers, and so this vision of resurrection must be considered as “the word” of Paul, i.e. an unconscious transfer of personal vindictive impulses onto God, absolute dominator.

♣ First of all, Jesus' Resurrection does not convince non-Christian faiths, that is, three fifths of humanity, that nevertheless admire the historical Jesus. It seems at least strange that God should want to manifest His greatest power – resuscitating His son – through an unverifiable act, that requires the adhesion of absolute faith and is incompatible both with other faiths and with reason. The event loses its potentially universal value and acquires a merely confessional one.

♣ According to Matthew (28) the two women who reach the sepulchre find an “*angel of light*” who tells them: “*Jesus is not here because he is risen exactly as he told you...Suddenly Jesus came towards them and said : Hail!*”.

Mark (16) recounts that as many as three women go to anoint the body of Jesus. Waiting for them there is “*a youth, dressed in a white tunic*” who announces: “*Jesus is risen. He is not here*”. No mention of the appearance of Jesus himself. Luke's account (24) speaks of “*two youths with resplendent tunics*” who receive “*the women*” with the news that the Crucified man “*is not here but is risen*”. John's version is the most different, not only because there is only one woman (Mary Magdalene ) to receive the news from “*two angels dressed in white*”, but most of all because Jesus appears to her and exchanges a few affectionate words with her.

The only point on which the accounts coincide concerns the disappearance of Jesus' body, attested by an angel, who becomes two angels, then two men and finally a man. They all pronounce different phrases and assume different positions. Moreover the instructions they give the disciples are not formulated in the same way.

♣ The accounts in the Christian Bible give a somewhat inconsistent picture of the Resurrection. A biblical scholar, author of great tomes on Jesus and Paul, G. Barbaglio, acknowledges that the version of the four Evangelists, when compared together, differ from each other with regard to persons, times, places, forms, intentions, discourses, stories. In addition “*showing oneself does not strictly mean either a vision sensible to the eyes or a specifically interior vision, but rather the being overcome by a divine presence which reveals itself, a sense of being present which is a self-unveiling*” (G. Barbaglio, *Gesù ebreo di Galilea*, EDB, Bologna, p. 539).

♣ The Church teaches that belief in the resurrection is guaranteed by the testimonies of the disciples and pious women. It happens that they have not actually seen him “resurrect”. What is even more surprising is that their certainty, though expressed with embarrassment, rests on one or two individuals (“angels (?) dressed in shining white tunics”) who are strangers and, as such, completely unreliable. No sensible person would risk believing information of historical importance, blindly relying on people of unknown identities.

♣ The Ecclesiastic Authority, aware of the weakness of the above arguments, has recourse to the successive appearances of Jesus to his disciples and friends to confirm that he has risen. But this adds to the unreliability, since the Evangelists place these appearances in a discordant manner.

Mathews writes that the Risen Christ appeared to some Apostles on a mount in Galilee, Mark says he turned up in Galilee, at a supper table. Luke changes the location: he appeared in Jerusalem and ate with the Apostles. According to John he appeared both in Jerusalem and to seven disciples by Lake Tiberius, where he helped them fish. Paul's testimony is if even more different: in addition to the Apostles and Paul himself as many as five hundred people saw the Risen Christ.

♣ Earthly life for the Nazarene concluded with the Ascent into Heaven. In this case too, a conscientious Catholic does not know who to believe: Mark states that he sailed up to Heaven from a room in Galilee, Luke from the countryside near Jerusalem, while the Acts of the Apostles merely claim that he disappeared into the sky inside a cloud.

♣ The discrepancies are aggravated by “logical” considerations: for example, there is no theologian or Pope able to explain why the Father waited for three days to resuscitate His Son when he could have done it immediately on Calvary before a multitude of people, to whom it would have been impossible to deny that Jesus was really innocent and the Saviour of the world.

If God is really capable of bringing a corpse back to life, He must make such power visible, or risk losing the credibility of his words and attributes. In short: either the resurrection is a miracle which the senses can register and reason analyse, or it is a datum of faith, but in such case the testimonies of the Evangelists are redundant.

♣ In the paleo-Christian community there is a fervent conviction that Christ in Baptism communicates a vitality that goes beyond death. Paul insists: “*by our baptism we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we too should begin living a new life.*” (Rom 6,4) Paul asserts that we resuscitate while in life and operate in harmony with the God of love. Eternal life is not, then a condition of the future, nor a reward for those who have led their life in accordance with the law, but a quality of the present that characterises those who, in their daily existence, make efforts to establish justice and peace. Not only Christ has been resuscitated, but all Christians who live their Baptism to the full. According to Paul “resurrection” is a quality of the present and does not depend on an empty sepulchre.

♣ If Jesus’ resurrection is to be taken literally, then why not all the other cases described in other religions, where people ascended or were swept up into heaven? The same question holds good for the Hebrew Bible, where Solomon and Moses’ return to life is talked about, or for the New Testament, where one reads that when Jesus died “*the tombs opened and many holy people rose from the dead... entered the holy city and appeared to a number of people*”. (Mt 27,52-53) Who brought them back to life and why?

♣ Significantly, the official prayer with which the Catholic Church honours the “deceased” opens with the wish that God may give them “*Eternal rest... perpetual light...that they may rest in peace*”. There is no mention of *resurrection or eternal life* but only “*eternal rest*”.

♣ I think that the difficulties in putting together what appears contradictory depend on the fact that for Christians of all latitudes, brought up in a dualistic culture (Hellenic-Platonic), two separate entities exist, the body and the soul, matter and spirit, the dead and the living. For Christians of “Hebrew “ matrix, as for other peoples, such a schism is less dramatic. They can “see” “touch” and “listen “ to a dead body as if it were a “living one” where a western Christian” sees only a “spiritual soul”. In other words: for those who think in a non dualistic way the “body” of a dead man can go through walls or climb out of a tomb in order to join his dear ones, while for those who think in dualistic terms a dead man stays in his sepulchre while his soul flies to heaven.

♣ Today, insoluble questions come from children who, moved by a curiosity activated by growing scientific information, ask parents, catechists or priests questions of the type: How can the bodies of Jesus and Mary, both ascended to heaven, withstand temperatures of minus 60° at just 10,000 metres’ height? Why did Mary ascend to heaven without going through the tomb? What have mother and son been doing all day long for two millennia? Why did God separate Mary from Joseph, condemned to remain buried on earth for millions of years? It is useless looking for answers in the authoritative “*Catechism of the Catholic Church*” (1992).

♣ For the Israeli people, therefore for Jesus, resurrection is not a miracle nor is it a physically experimental fact. Andrés Torres Queiruga writes:

*“Faith in the Resurrection, if one can take it at all seriously, strikes at the root every imaginative scheme that in some way might associate it with a presence of empirical type. If we believe that the Risen Jesus is*

*really and simultaneously present in a Eucharist celebrated in Rome, rendered to a sick man in the heart of Africa and in the midst of a community gathered in Bolivia, it is obvious that this is beyond the laws of space and time, and cannot be perceived like other realities of the physical world. If the Resurrected Jesus were tangible or able to eat, he would necessarily be limited by the laws of space, that is, he would not have been resurrected... Continuing the reflection, a further step becomes evident: if someone asserts that he physically “sees” or “touches” the Resurrected One, we know perforce that this is “false” (A. Torres Queiruga, *La Risurrezione senza miracolo*, La Meridiana, p.41-42).*

♣ Jon Sobrino, one of the founders of *Liberation Theology*, interprets some of the contradictions that came up after the death of the Galilean.

*“On the one hand, to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ means that the historical Christ is the Son of God, that truth had manifested itself in that form, and that liberation must be found through following Him. On the other hand, resurrection is also that reality that permits the faithful to neglect the reality of the historical Jesus. The process of making faith in Jesus universal starts with the resurrection, but that very same process can be concluded with an abstract operation. The Resurrected Christ can be seen and interpreted within abstract concepts such as divinity, omnipotence, logos, etc” (Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the crossroads*, SMC press, p. 306-7).*

## ***Resurrection as transfusion of divine energy***

The theme needs a basic premise. In consulting ponderous works on the subject, I came across this curious datum: interpretations of Jesus’ resurrection depend on the socio-economic state of the exegete. Most works written by theologians of the “rich world” (North America and Europe) deal with the Resurrection without ever mentioning the people that are at the very centre of Jesus’ vivifying works: the poor, sick, prisoners, children, widows, peacemakers, etc. Theologians that write in societies racked with destitution almost always connect the Easter event to the above cited groups. Thus, opinions concerning the resurrection vary considerably according to whether one is on the side of the indigents or of the wealthy.<sup>2</sup>

Having said this, to reduce the Resurrection to a collective hallucination appears an onerous task, since the event transformed itself, for billions of people and for over 2000 years, into a source of exemplary and generous life. Dismissing the Resurrection as a tale for the weak-minded means forgoing the possibility of explaining how hordes of beggars, sick people, slaves, women were able to withstand enormous injustices, harassment and pain by identifying with the sufferings of the Nazarene and through the hope of a New Life.

At the same time, we are condemned to the labour of Sisyphus if we accept the Gospels as “historical” documents, due to the incongruities that mark them. It is hard to think they were prompted by the Holy Ghost, unless one wants to hypothesize that *God confuses the “wise”*, that is, those who think they “know”, but are incapable of perceiving meanings that go beyond the written word.

My hypothesis regarding the resurrection of Jesus is based precisely on the impossibility of conceiving it either as a material, physical and visible fact, or as a metaphorical, mysterious event linked to confessional “faith”. In the first case it would be a simple “re-animation”, in the second, a “virtual” state. In both hypotheses, Jesus would be mutilated in his transformative potentialities and would cease to be a truly New piece of News for all who aspire to a re-flowering of personal and collective life “here and now” on earth.

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<sup>2</sup> Authoritative theologians and scientists have dealt with the theme. Some of these contributions are found in two books : *Resurrection*” (by T. Peters, R.J. Russel, M. Welker, Pub. Eedemans) and “*An interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Pub. Oxford University ).

## ***The angel, fourth dimension of Resurrection***

If we adhere to the sayings of Jesus, “*life post mortem*” is neither a virtual or metaphysical state nor a process of “immortalization” and continuance of eternal life in after world.

To the incredulous Sadducees who ask him embarrassing questions about which of the seven brothers will be the definitive husband of a widow on the “*day of resurrection of the dead*”, seeing that they all married her here on earth, Jesus’ answer goes beyond the two options: either non-resurrection, or continuation of terrestrial life. Jesus indicates another path:

*“How far you are from the truth! You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. In the resurrection, men and women do not marry, they are like angels in heaven. (Mt 22,29-30)*

In western Christianity angels are often associated with ethereal objects, with wings, blond hair, flapping around the cosmos like God’s postmen. For a Hebrew, contrariwise, the angel is a figure that participates in an active way in the life of the people. *He is a “liberator”, a “leader”, “appears in dreams”, brings commands”, “opens prison doors”, “announces fecundation“, “advises on danger”, “announces joy”, “enters into contention with the devil”, “saves from the fiery furnace”, “takes care of”, “is witness to the conversion of sinners”,* but is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Like Jesus, he has no idea of the future and of the final moment in history. He is a force that guides people’s steps, in a manner that is neither experimental nor empirical, neither abstract nor ideal.

In Hebrew culture an angel is a trans-material essence, a fourth stage of creation, that opens history to surprising dynamisms. In my opinion, what Jesus means to say to the Sadducees of all times and all faiths (including Christians) is that, after death, generous men and women can no longer have a physical life, but they will have one like that of the “angels”, in the sense that they will continue to influence the history of living people in different ways from those allowed and realizable on earth.

Jesus is moved by the certainty that, though he will leave earthly life, he will go on vivifying future generations, opening the doors of their prisons through his own example. When he feels in danger of death, he asserts with great firmness: “*On the third day he [the Son of Man] will be raised again*”(Mt 17,23). In addition, he sets his “*resurrection*” in relation to the fact that he has to “*be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes; to be put to death, and to rise again three days afterwards* (Mk 8, 31). Resurrection is thus a challenge to tyrants, violent leaders, evil-doers because they will see emerge from the invisible network of human resistance those who will fight for a better world.

When the religious elite wanted to know with what authority he chased merchants and animals out of the Temple of Jerusalem, Jesus challenged them by saying: “*Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up again*” (Jn 2,19). He was referring not to the temple but to his own person, a totally natural metaphor for him, since he considered the human creature the true temple of God. With these words he meant to say that his death would not be a simulation or a temporary interruption of vital energy, much less that his resurrection would consist of coming out of human history in order to remain frozen in hyper uranium.

His life encountered biological discontinuity (death) but his personality would not die. Crucifixion would not prevent him from continuing to cure, liberate and raise up those who were ready to change. The energy that he sends out after his death would be the same as that which he accumulated in his relationship with the Father and with his brothers, and which allowed him to rekindle buried hopes.

## ***Resurrection as a “leaven” of history***

He said many times what the Kingdom of God looks like: it resembles yeast that dies in the mass of dough and in dissolving makes the bread rise. Or a grain of wheat that dies in order to be born again multiplying itself: *“unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and dies, it remains that and nothing more; but if it dies it bears a rich harvest”* (Jn 12,24-25).

The grain of wheat is not eternal, what is eternal is the chain of life. It is destined to disappear in the ground thus liberating an interior energy. Through chromosomal reproduction it guarantees the continuity of life by accepting its own death.

Jesus feels like a grain of wheat or as a tiny mustard seed, that, once interred, temporarily disappears, but returns to life as *“a tree big enough for the birds to come and roost among its branches”* (Mt 13,31-32). Jesus-seed encloses the same contradiction to be found in all living beings: he is destined to real death but, at the same time, he is the bringer of an exuberance, equally real, that extends to all human beings precisely by virtue of his death.

Equally, those who care about accumulating power and advantages for themselves have no access to resurrection. They are like grains of wheat that, not having ceded their energy because of avarice, dry up without transmitting any life. It is what is in store for the rich man: his life knew no exchanges with the poor beggar Lazarus and nothing was left for him other than to perish in his seclusion. The poor widow who, on the contrary, put all her modest savings in the temple coffer, made a gesture pointed out by Jesus as an example that will not die but rise again in an incalculable number of generations (Lk 1,1-4).

Endless life, according to Jesus, is that which is passed on from generation to generation by all who *“give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, help to the sick and hope to the afflicted”*. The diffusion of authentic life depends on these unknown Samaritans.

When the Nazarene said that *“he would rise again on the third day”*, Evangelists and disciples misunderstood the prediction. He guessed that his disappearance would be followed by inevitable mourning, followed by a demanding elaboration. He hypothesized that friends would begin to *re-mind others* (recall to their mind) and *re-member* (recall to the body's members) what they had lived with him, piecing together again what lack of trust in him and in God had shattered.

That Jesus should rise again *on the third day* does not imply that God forgot about his Son, but rather should be linked with the state of distress and confusion into which his group of followers had fallen. It was only after having regained trust in their leader so unjustly martyred that they began to feel that their friend had *“passed the baton on to them”*, and that now they must continue the race in the great stadium of life.

Jesus comes out of the sepulchre when those who believe in him *love one another*: only this will prove that he is a living person who transfuses life.

The destiny of martyrs and altruistic people, as also for geniuses and artists, is to open doors to immortality. All those who divinely illuminate posterity never die. Their works and virtues pass, invisibly but concretely, to the most receptive human communities, without limits of time. They do not cease living, even if in a *“non corporeal way”*; they are still historically alive. For those who are persecuted by evil-minded powers there is a further certainty: that of being indestructible for having demonstrated that it is possible to defy atavistic prejudices.

## ***Resurrections is multiplication of life***

In order to understand the certainty with which Jesus pre-figures his own resurrection, it is useful to draw on the martyr of our days who is his photocopy, Bishop Mons. Romero. Hounded and persecuted by the military junta of Salvador, abandoned by the Pope, and shown hostility by many ecclesiastics, he challenged his adversaries by informing them that he did not fear assassination. Officially and fearlessly he warned them with a threat, probably never uttered before: *“if you kill*

me – he shouted on the air – *I will return to life in the people of Salvador*”. Mons. Romero did not say *“I will rise again”* but *“I will rise again in the People of Salvador”*.

The reality is that his martyrdom produced a shock all over the world. His passionate determination to liberate the populace from military-political-financial tyranny has become part of the collective consciousness, ranging from parishes to progressive movements.

When Mons. Romero thought that his killing would immediately be followed by his resurrection, he was not hinting at the fact that his soul would go to Paradise to enjoy the beatific vision of God. He did not care about his own immortality or spiritual safety, but about the strength he would give to millions of people so that they might continue to believe that a Kingdom of peace and justice was possible.

Romero understood “empathetically”, not theologically, the relation that Jesus established between resurrection and persecution, between re-birth and beatitude. He internalized the words that Jesus spoke to Martha, who was upset at the death of her brother Lazarus: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever has faith in me shall live, even though he dies; and no one who lives and has faith in me shall ever die”* (Jn 11,25-26).

An analogous conviction animated martyrs like Ghandi , Martin Luther King and the Russian journalist A. Polititkovskaya (2006). By committing themselves to oppose despots and perverse management they reinforce faith in resurrection, that is, in the absolutely “real” fact, though not immediately empirical, that the ideals of a martyr are incarnated and multiplied in the life of the multitudes who need hope. These heroes, be they atheists or religious, not only resurrect psychologically, but also operatively even if their body is dissolved into earth. With their death they certify that their reasons are invincible.

Like “angels”, they return to earth to infuse courage, fill dreams with belief, defeat the demons of depression and proclaim that the murderers who kill the body cannot prevent the regeneration of the champions of justice in an infinite number of followers.

Resurrection is the mirror- and counter-image of the violent death of innocent people. Like Jesus, they were able to die without cursing or threatening retaliation against their torturers. In them there was the power of love that reveals itself not through spectacular and vindictive resurrections but through a capacity for forgiveness and empathic comprehension that may attenuate even the evil of torturers and let sentiments of a new and humane nature emerge: *“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing”*. The power that Jesus intuitively feels as of the essence of God is not judgemental and does not aim at condemning the wicked, but releasing the masses resigned to slavery.

The Nazarene envisaged *“Satan falling like lightning from heaven”* to imply that violence and hypocrisy are doomed to fail. Those who escape their hypnotic power will be able to *“tread down serpents and scorpions and... nothing shall ever hurt you”* (Lk 10,19). If the disciple of non-violence receives on his right cheek a backhanded slap from a bully, by offering the other cheek he can show that he wants neither to keep the vicious circle of violence nor accept the status of vassal.

***Obviously, all this does not eliminate the possibility that there may be a “resurrection of the flesh”, i.e. that the certain end of the planet and collapse of the galaxies may be followed by a mutation of matter and psyche into absolutely unpredictable forms. On the future of the Universe and its inhabitants neither the Bible nor science can boast any authority.***

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## CHAPTER II

# ***THE REVISIONISM OF THE DISCIPLES***

Jesus' first proselytes, even after his death, remained convinced that while the Emperor's "divinity" was manifested in his triumphing over the weak, flaunting his wealth and making laws in his own favour, the "divinity" of Jesus embodied the exact opposite, i.e. loving care of one's neighbour, even beyond the observance of the Law of the Talion.

At the same time, the identity of Jesus began to be the subject of discussion and uncertainty. For the Jews, for example, his condemnation had been legitimate, he had tried to change the Law, to lure Israel away from its tradition into apostasy. The first Christians rejected this version.

A hypothesis that was beginning to gain credence was that the "Calvary" of the Nazarene had been necessary in order to redeem humanity from sin, although his explicit mission had been to free society from its ills and the violence of the powerful. Jesus' followers couldn't understand how God the Father had decided to send his beloved son to his death. If Jesus was the Lamb to be sacrificed, then the Father had become party to homicidal violence, since he had sent his Son to mankind knowing full well that he would be subjected to its criminal logic, whereas the explicit intention had been exactly the opposite.

For other Christians it was inadmissible that God could appear, if not actually a conspirator, at best a being without real ability to counteract madness and illegality. In other words, how could the goodness of God the Father and his supremacy over pagan divinities be justified, if he was incapable of defending his own son? How could he be expected to save the children of this world if he couldn't save his own child, of divine nature into the bargain?

If we choose the first hypothesis, we risk presenting the Father as a real sadist, since he requires the blood of an innocent being in reparation for the sinful condition of his creatures. The other alternative is equally dramatic, because however good the Father may be, he is shown to be impotent when it comes to saving his own offspring from the spiral of violence.

***To resolve this contradiction, the most natural solution for the first communities was to blur the figure of the historic Jesus abandoned by the Father and to replace it with Jesus the Paschal Lamb rewarded with resurrection by the same Father.***

The evangelists Mark and Luke are illuminating examples of this contra-position: the former shows Jesus as a fully adult person who accepts the consequences of his own choice to the point of reproaching the Father with the shocking cry "*Why have you forsaken me?*" (Mk 15,34). Luke, on the other hand, doesn't feel like showing us a Son who blames his Father for his own disillusionment, and prefers to leave us a picture of a prophet who appears unmanned, docile and resigned to the will of his parent, with the expression "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Lk 23,46).

Mark even shows Jesus angry, Matthew and Luke tone down such human reactions, a sign that even the three evangelists do not share a common interpretation of either the life or death of Jesus.

### ***Jesus, society's scapegoat***

They are, however, in agreement in denouncing the crucifixion as the fruit of a plot on the part of the religious authorities, supported by Pilate, the Roman Governor. The High Priest Caiaphas is the person who, according to John, best exemplifies the political machinations underlying the death of Jesus, when he states before the Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin): “*You have no grasp of the situation at all! You do not realize that it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should be destroyed!*” (Jn 11,50).

One part of the Christian community considered that the killing of Jesus was a stratagem set up by the religious and political leaders to quell serious social disorders. In effect, when a society lacerated by socio-ethnic-religious hatred fails to recognize its most destructive impulses as springing from itself, it has recourse to a psychic mechanism of a “protective” type, which consists of attributing all the blame for the chaos unleashed to a subject whose elimination can bring peace. At this point the identity of the scapegoat radically changes and it becomes the saviour of society, an object to “divinize” for having brought about the miracle of conciliation. Hostilities cease as if by magic as soon as the destructive pulsions find a lightning conductor on which to discharge themselves.

If, while alive, the victim was seen as accursed, once it was killed it became blessed and a sanctified cult object. In the Jewish tradition the victim was an animal, the killing of which served to reconcile the sinner with Jahveh. But if the situation threatened to develop into revolt and the rebels had recourse to weapons, as was the case with the armed anti-Roman party of the Zealots, then the authorities needed a human sacrifice to show that the instigator of the troubles was definitively eliminated.

This was a first interpretation which the writers of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and John) seized upon. In reality Jesus did not merely oppose violence but was to unmask the use of the scapegoat as the “rationalization of aggressivity”, insofar as it served surreptitiously to remove guilt by transferring it onto the victim, under the illusion that this in turn served to eliminate social violence. With simple clarity Jesus uncovered the hidden design and motivation of those who despatched the goat into the wilderness, disguising their own violence on the innocent victim as a “force of salvation”.

At the height of his sufferings the Galilean asked the Father “*to forgive his executioners*”, aware that they were living under the tragic illusion that violence was a remedy for social ills, without realizing that it only made those ills more chronic. Opposing evil with evil only guarantees the perpetuation of the vicious circle, in the same way that describing those who are different as “enemies” leads inevitably to their becoming such.

Five centuries earlier Buddha had resolutely chosen the path of non-violence. The new element that Jesus brought to the universal conscience was the concept of pardon, which he invoked for those who used the protective mechanism of the sacrificial victim as a trick for building a virtual and fictitious peace. The Jewish priestly aristocracy itself aided and abetted this ploy by endorsing the sacrifice of animals, so that it was always an innocent creature that paid with its life for the sins and guilt of others. But in Jesus’ mind and in the depths of his being the living creatures most truly sacrificed were the multitudes of women, the sick, publicans, relicts, half-castes, unemployed, and children, who for centuries had suffered injustice of all kinds, hypnotized by the veiled but

widespread prejudice of the powerful that their immolation was necessary in order to maintain so-called social peace.

## ***Jesus, sacrificial victim of the Father***

After the disappearance of the Nazarene the disciples continued to practice non-violence as the fundamental mode of their commitment, letting themselves be martyred and refusing any support from extremist movements. But they could not understand and bear the weight of Jesus' anthropologically and politically disconcerting originality. They ceased to denounce the perverse use of the scapegoat on the part of the powerful and so remained prisoners of fantasies of violence, to the point of seeing it as part of God's design, even if they refrained from indulging in it themselves. Thus a new interpretation was born, according to which the death of Jesus was pre-ordained not by politico-religious oligarchs but by God himself, to redeem the world from sin.

Numerous New Testament writings present Jesus as the Lamb: "*You sacrificed, and with your blood you bought people for God of every race*" (Rev 5,9). The martyrdom of Christ acquires a salvific value for Christians. He is the "*sacrificial victim*" and instrument of expiation.

For John he is "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (Jn 1,29). Paul falls in with this thesis. The interpretation which has a decisive impact on Christianity is the following:

*"God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his death... God meant by this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had overlooked the sins of the past to demonstrate his justice now in the present"* (Rom 3,25-26).

The cross is no longer the mark of crime, it is not the tragic realization that God is not omnipotent in the face of evil. On the contrary, it is an instrument for making one's peace with God and for obtaining eternal salvation.

To have a more visual idea of what happened in the first Christian communities, one might imagine a "cross-fade" as used in a film, where one image becomes hazy as another is superimposed on it. The scandalous memory of Jesus, crucified for blasphemy and sedition, fades into the magical figure of "*one who atones for the sins of creation*", "*the New Adam*".

## ***The exaltation of the victim***

The first disciples did not think that Jesus had a divine nature but that he was "*a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you*" (Ac 2,22). Subsequently, like all sacrificial victims, he became a cult object. His personality was no longer contained within human limits, but overflowed them. His decisions were not prompted by his own desires but by those of the Father. Freedom was a fiction, being conditioned by a parental super-Ego.

He who had said that his disciples would do greater things than himself became the "*prodigy*" of creation. While the historic Jesus spoke and acted like one of the greatest innovators of the universal conscience, he was subsequently set on a pedestal that separated him from the rest of humanity. From preaching the Kingdom of God he graduated to being the CEO of the *Kingdom of God* itself. He was not born from a couple of normal parents but of a virgin who found herself pregnant by the Holy Spirit, who "*came upon her and covered her with its shadow*" (Lk 1,35).

To prove that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, he was attributed with two family trees going back for several centuries. They match by 50%, more or less. He was born - only according to

Matthew - in Bethlehem, since it was from this city that he was supposed to come “*according to the scriptures*”. To confirm that the event was ultra-terrestrial, angels appeared over the grotto in Bethlehem, a comet led the Wise Men to the spot, his baptism was corroborated by the appearance of a dove and by the voice of God, the devil transported Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and the dead rose from their graves. All these accounts are not taken as poetical or symbolical to indicate the Nazarene’s exceptional “psychic organization”, but as biological or material events.

He knew everything in advance, including his own death. If in his historic life he is a limited and impotent subject when faced with his accusers and persecutors, after his death he appears in a different light: “*God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names*” (Phil 2,9); “*through him all things came into being*”(Jn 1,3), “*he was predestined before the foundation of the world*” (1Pt 1,20), “*he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end*” (Rev 22,13).

In the *Letter to the Hebrews* the death of the Nazarene is accepted as associated with the sacrifices of the *Old Law*, which he, the Nazarene, tenaciously rejected. The *New Alliance* came into fashion, founded upon the blood not of an animal but of Christ, who

*“having offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, took his seat at God’s right hand, where he now waits until his enemies are made his footstool”* (Heb 10,12-13).

The writer of the letter does not realize that he is “re-cycling” in Jesus Christ the censurable parts within himself, attributing to him both the will to take upon himself masochistically faults and sins never committed and the sadistic pleasure of seeing *his enemies humiliated beneath his feet*. The Nazarene knew full well that in every “sacrifice” there nestled a concentration of turbid desires – on the one hand for self-divinization, on the other for revenge. That is why Jesus kept well away from presenting his work as a sacrifice, preferring to see it as a dedication to a Kingdom where there exist neither those who sacrifice (few, and well recompensed) nor those who are sacrificed (many, and rejected).

## ***Paul, the founder of Christianity***

Many observers have written that the turn in the evolution of Christianity taken by Paul, Greek-speaking man of culture, was decisive. In his letters (or in those attributed to him over two millennia) he never speaks of his parents, almost as if to indicate his own exceptional condition. He quotes the Old Testament 200 times but only twice mentions facts relative to the life of Jesus. He admitted that he was “*born of woman*”, “*son of David*”, therefore fragile and imperfect. But in the Letter to the Colossians he divinizes him and considers him

*“the first-born of all creation.. for him were all things in heaven and on earth... he exists before all things... he is Head of the Church... He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead”* (Col 1,15-18).

Everything was made through him: galaxies, black holes and quarks were planned from eternity to give glory to Jesus. He acquires a glorious name: “*the Christ*”, “*the Messiah*”. Unlike the evangelists, who keep alive the historical dimension of Jesus, even though *raising him up*, Paul sets him on an extraterrestrial throne and removes his fundamental acts and statements, accentuating almost exclusively the “*Risen Christ*” at the expense of Jesus the worker, the pilgrim, the healer, prophet and liberator.

The beginning of Paul’s mission was dazzling. He was the object of a divine revelation such as Jesus himself had never experienced. Formerly Saul, ardent castigator of Christians, he tells King Agrippa that on the road to Damascus:

*“at midday.. I saw a light from the sky... I heard a voice saying to me: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,... I have appeared to you... to appoint you my servant and witness... I will rescue you from your*

*own people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you. You are to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God” (Ac 26,13-18).*

Carried away in this self-revelation, Paul exaggerates on two points: on one he sees himself charged with a task beyond normal human strength, that of bringing the whole of humanity that does not know Christ out of the darkness into the light. On the other, he attributes to Jesus the desire to use him as a mere “*servant*”, while the real Jesus treated everybody as a friend, never as a servant.

The dose of superiority that characterizes the behaviour of Saul, former illustrious *Pharisee*, does not leave him after his conversion. He himself takes pains to specify that he is not like the other apostles, called publicly by Jesus. He is “*an apostle commissioned not by any human authority, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father*” (Gal 1,1). In the same epistle he goes as far as attributing to himself a dignity in some ways equal to that of Jesus, to whom he clearly sees himself as a rival, since they were both privileged by God *before birth*. He writes thus:

*“But when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother’s womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son to me, so that I should preach him to the gentiles” (Gal 1,15-16).*

Those who consider themselves depositaries of a revelation and God’s special messengers can easily slide into persecutory attitudes. Paul is a good example of this when he “*anathematizes*” those who contest his teaching:

*“But even if ourselves or an angel from heaven preaches to you a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let God’s curse be on him... I repeat again... anyone who preaches to you a gospel other than the one you were first given is to be under God’s curse” (Gal 1,8-9).*

It should be noted that the anathema is not addressed to those who fell away from the teachings of Jesus but from the declarations of Paul himself, who boasts pre-eminence since his message comes directly from God and not through intermediaries.

In many epistles evidence of competition with Jesus is difficult to deny. How can one explain the fact that Paul never speaks of the historic Jesus? He never mentions the healings, the exorcisms and the Beatitudes. All the troubled process of his growth to maturity as a man, a prophet, liberator and initiator of an unconventional itinerant community is amputated from the historic Jesus, while he is exalted almost exclusively as “*crucified, dead and buried*”. For Paul the importance of Jesus is reduced to the few days that precede and follow his death, of which the resurrection is the decisive event.

In a sincere and tireless attempt to convert pagans and Hebrews to Christ and in his desire to denationalize the Good News of Jesus and strip it of its associations with Judaism, he flung himself into preaching *the Risen Christ, the Lord, the Firstborn of God*, and ended up demonstrating the absolute necessity and priority of Christ rather than the Kingdom of God. This was in strident contrast with the Nazarene, who delved into the Scriptures to show that the liberation and healing of the afflicted was already in process, while Paul did so to prove that Christ had already been foreseen – thousands of years before – as the Glorious Saviour.

In brief, while Jesus’ faith rested on God the Father, Paul’s lay in the Risen Christ. In the former case, God loves and treats everyone as his own children and grants salvation to them all – without distinction of faith – provided they love their fellow humans in need. In the latter, salvation demands union with Christ, thus becoming more a confessional outcome rather than a universal fact. Paul, too, like the first apostles, suffered dizzying mental oscillations – for the most part unconscious – precisely because he did not come to terms with the affective and maturational aspects of the historic Jesus. On the one hand he could pride himself for being worthy of a special revelation, invested prior to his birth with a momentous destiny, such as happened to the demi-gods. On the other, he felt himself to be “*a child born abnormally... the least of the apostles... not really*

*fit to be called an apostle*" (1Cor 15,8-9). Paul believed in the love of God, but often in a context of exacerbation, since the Lord shows mercy but at the same time imprisons people: "*God has imprisoned all human beings in their own disobedience only to show mercy to them all*" (Rom 11,32).

While it is true that in the collection of his letters there rise to the surface temptations to grandiosity and submission which the Nazarene had fought against, it cannot be denied that Paul interpreted much of Jesus' message with passionate determination and loyalty. He was a tireless supporter of communities founded on brotherhood and reciprocal love, did manual work in order not to be a responsibility to others, undertook dangerous journeys, endured a long period of imprisonment, was capable of mediating disputes with the other apostles, had no problems about maintaining friendly relations with women, and, like Jesus, preferred to be put to death rather than respond with violence.

### ***Jesus "transfigured"***

In the Gospel attributed to St John, too, the identity card of the carpenter of Nazareth underwent various changes: he was no longer the extraordinary prophet acknowledged by John the Baptist, but became "*the Word*", the "*Logos*", terms incomprehensible to a Jew but familiar to a person of Greek culture. It is not surprising that there is no mention of his childhood or the Beatitudes. What was important to John was to show that the life of Jesus was "divine", which is why at the moment of his death on the cross Jesus said only "*I thirst*" and thus a prophecy of the Bible was fulfilled. Then after drinking some vinegar from a sponge, in almost perfunctory tones he said "*It is accomplished! Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*" (Jn 19,28-30).

The intention, certainly unconscious, was to remove the figure of Jesus from its historical-human-liberationist context. It is significant that *the Last Supper* is set before the Jewish Feast of the Passover, in order to dissociate it from the memory of the Exodus from Egypt and slavery. Jesus is described as a subject interested in being "glorified" together with the Father.

*"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you... for you have made him sovereign over all mankind... now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before ever the world existed"* (Jn. 17,1-5).

Yet John is the sole evangelist who excludes the possibility that Jesus will be a judge who condemns: "*I have come not to judge the world, but to save the world*" (12,47). At the same time the narcissism with which John credits the Nazarene has no bounds. Just before being crucified he makes affirmations barely touched upon in the three Synoptic Gospels:

*"I am the way, the truth and the light.... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father living in me... the Father is greater than I... Everything the Father has is mine... be courageous: I have conquered the world"* ( Jn 14,15,16,17).

Thus, instead of being merely *leaven, a grain of mustard-seed, a candle shining in the dark*, he is now the man who "*conquered the world*". The modest craftsman of Nazareth was now so pre-eminent as to become the central turning-point in history, the only place from which one can accede to the Father. At the same time, what he said and did was not just the fruit of his own conscience. He was "tele-guided by God.

The solemnization of the Crucified One is also augmented by the Evangelists, who tell of miracles never to be repeated: re-animation of corpses, walking on water, changing of water into wine and multiplication of loaves and fishes. The prophet-healer who unequivocally refused to be called "*Lord or Master*", because for him only the Father was Lord and Master, after the crucifixion-resurrection was transformed into "*Sovereign*", "*constituted son of God with power*", "*mediator of a new alliance*", "*who could subject all things to his power*", "*was seated beside the Father on his throne*", "*destined to govern all nations*", "*he conquered the world*".

The titles the Evangelists and communities attributed to him bore no relationship to his historical identity, laboriously developed over the years. Two in particular were wildly off the mark: *Messiah and Son of God*.

Jesus never proclaimed himself *Messiah, Anointed, Christ*, terms of equivalent meaning but loaded with political significance. If he had declared himself such, he would have been seen by the Romans as a subversive to be eliminated as a potential King of the Jews. Peter, when he acknowledged him as Messiah, was rebuked, since Jesus saw it as a sign that the apostle shared a conception of the Messiah as a powerful political entity.

Dozens of exegetes continue to perform and publish research on the second title Jesus was honoured with, *Son of God*. He certainly considered himself a devout Jew and, as such, in no way to be likened to God the Father, whom he invoked and addressed in a scandalously original way, calling him our equivalent of “*Dad*”. If it is true that the Synoptic Gospels record the episode of the “*Transfiguration*”, in which a voice taken to be the Father’s is heard declaring from a cloud: “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*”, it is also confirmed by the same Evangelists that it was creatures possessed by the devil, coming out of the tombs, that called him *Son of God*, and the devil himself who invited him to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, since as *Son of God* he would surely have parachuted into celestial arms. So what is one to believe in, the cloud or the demons?

***For a realistic interpretation of what happened in the first communities, one needs to keep firmly in mind that the Christians found themselves faced with an Emperor (Augustus) who was worshipped in pagan temples as the “Son of God, Saviour and Healer”. The simplest way of degrading him was undoubtedly that of transferring these titles to Jesus, who thus acquired a divine essence.***

The Churches did not realize, however, that through this unconscious double manoeuvre that “disfigured” the emperor and “transfigured” Jesus at the same time, they were merely replacing a pagan emperor with a Christian one, in which the binary-hierarchical system persisted in the contemplation of one Lord, the Son of God, who saved and healed, while all the others remained without divine properties.

This confirms the fact that every idealization demands emasculation as its counterpart. On the pretext of exalting the Galilean’s human greatness, reflection of the divine, his life story and his mission of liberation were sterilized as a result. Isolating the resurrection from his biography, Jesus became the individual who overcame death and devils, not the one who had to succumb to them. Deification and resurrection, as victory over death, meant that Jesus was moved up into the pantheon of Gods to be adored, but without any trans-mutational effect on the personality of human beings. The more Jesus became the *Christ, the Lord of Glory, Divine Redeemer, the Lamb of God*, the less importance he acquired as a fighter for the primacy of service as opposed to that of power.

Once he was “*exalted by God over all other beings*” the consequence of such a declaration was obvious. There was only one “*chosen people*”, the Christian one. There was only one higher civilization, the Christian one. If Jesus’ “genital” (creative) position consisted of recognizing every human being as God’s good creation, after his “*ascent into heaven*” the perspective on earth changed completely. The Church began unconsciously to divide peoples into two categories, the Christians, bringers of salvation, and the non-Christian peoples, objects of salvation.

His divinization brought with it the renunciation of the relative and the return of the absolute. If Jesus was God – indeed the only incarnation of God - no further manifestations of him were

possible. No word was equal to that of Jesus, no ethic was superior to the one master, no Constitution could disregard the requirement of Christian roots. He had to have “the first place in everything” said Paul. The narcissism of Christianity began to have Biblical endorsement.

## ***Castration and divinization***

Only a few decades after his death, the communities began to remodel the personality of the Nazarene, whose mission was now presented not so much as one of healing and liberation from demonic obsessions and religious prejudice as of the redemption of sin. The Old Testament was read from a Messianic point of view, in order to demonstrate that his arrival on the scene had been predicted from the dark night of Time. His progressive idealization, however, veered simultaneously towards emasculation. Paul effectively describes this contradictory movement. On the one hand the Nazarene “*made himself nothing, assuming the form of a slave... was obedient even to the point of death, death on a cross*”. On the other “*Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names*” (Ph 2,6-9). He is God, but also “*suffering servant*”. Jesus is no longer a threat to the “*whited sepulchres*” or for those who expect miracles and prodigies at no cost to themselves. He ceases to be the liberator and healer. He is “*High Priest, the Messiah, the Servant of Jahveh, the Redeemer, the Eternal Word (Logos), the Christ*”.

His laborious process of “*rebirth*” is pushed to one side. Events of little effective importance for humanity, such as his Transfiguration and his appearance after death, steal the scene. The Nazarene appears free of contradictions, and his erroneous predictions are suppressed. A well-known Catholic Biblicist, Ortensio da Spinetoli, summarizes as follows the evolution of the group of disciples and evangelists a few decades after Jesus’ death:

*“Between Jesus and the old religion there was no longer a break but only continuity and complementarity. The dissident prophet... became the honoured victim who rises up, pleasing to God, for the sins of the world. The message of Jesus “I have given you the example, as I have done do you likewise” was replaced by Judaic theology and later by Christian sacramentalism... The culminating point of the re-interpretation of the Christian movement was its institutionalisation. Jesus had wanted his followers to create a family, a brotherhood....”Let the first among you be the last, and he who commands, serve”. In spite of these precise declarations...the Christian community chose to become hierarchical.... From a man of the earth he became a personage of heaven, from son of Man to Son of God... The Christ of the Gospels, while still remaining the carpenter’s son, habitually appeared as the Lord of Glory... The Christ of Religion had taken the place of the Christ of history” (Ortensio da Spinetoli, *Gesù di Nazareth*, Edizioni La Meridiana, pp.220-222).*

In spite of this idealization, Evangelists and Apostles continued admirably to take inspiration from the generative and adult intentions of the historic Jesus. They supported themselves with their own work, undertook missionary journeys amid considerable dangers both known and unknown, founded communities without lording it over them, and did not fear imprisonment or torture. With courage they continued in Jesus’ anti-nationalistic and anti-idolatrous line.

The opposing interpretations relative to the life and resurrection of Jesus mirror the uncertainties and the ambiguities that began to creep into the thought of the early communities. Paul’s case is paradigmatic. He sang of love with moving realism, fully aware that having “*faith that could move mountains*” or “*giving all one’s goods to the poor*” meant nothing if one did not live one’s life with love. At the same time he could not manage to shake off his Jewish-patriarchal reflexes when he exhorted “*children to be obedient to their parents, wives to their husbands, slaves to their masters*”, even if he recommended that parents, husbands and masters should treat with love the



persons subordinate to them. A solution not in line with what Jesus was urging, according to which no true disciple of his could continue to think along the old hierarchical lines “*boss, master and father*”.

There is no doubt that the faith of the primitive communities was that Jesus would continue to work effectively within the universal conscience, but on the other hand, their expedients to annul its subversive potential were blatant.

C. Duquoc, a well-respected French theologian, wrote as follows:

*“The conclusion that all reflection on Jesus of Nazareth depends on the Paschal event can lead us, in our quest to know him, to settle for the most glorious and solemn claims on his account: Jesus, Lord, Messiah, Saviour, Son of God, exercises the functions of God.... The proclamation of the majesty of Jesus is an unconscious procedure directed to immunizing us against the revolutionary demands of the words and behaviour of the historic Jesus. He has been “eternalized”, “made divine”, in order to exile him from daily existence and confine our recognition of him to the liturgy and celebrations”* (Christian Duquoc, *Jesus, Queriniana*, p.23).

## ***Double identity***

With the death of Jesus we observe a kind of psychic landslide which set off two “telluric movements” travelling in opposite directions. We refer to the fact that on the one hand, the Resurrected One is accredited as “*God*”, “*Son of God*”, “*Lord of Heaven and Earth*”, “*the Messiah*”, “*the Redeemer*”, whereas on the other he is venerated as “*victim*”, “*Lamb of God*”, “*obedient Son*”, “*Sent by the Father*”. This is an incongruous combination: the person of the Nazarene is raised to stratospheric heights but is simultaneously degraded, since he is given the status of a subject (*lamb*) fit only to be sacrificed.

The final outcome of this theological surfing, oscillating between idealization and mortification, is the eclipse of his historic and “genital” personality. The hymns and titles which magnify his profile have the unconscious objective of eliminating the figure of the liberator and replacing it with that of the servant. Through this metamorphosis Jesus is rendered a historically innocuous subject, to be adored

The identity card which the first disciples handed down in their writings presents a bi-frontal Jesus. One face shows him as the Father’s obedient son, victim of the great powers, lamb who redeems the errors committed by others. Obviously, as a servant, he has no power to change situations of injustice and repression. A servant certainly cannot found an anti-hierarchical and brotherly community.

The other picture is exactly the opposite: Jesus is “*the Christ, the “Glorious Lord of Heaven*”. He can bring the dead to life, feed thousands of hungry people with a few loaves and fishes, guarantee eternal life for his followers. This “gigantograph” of his powers shows us only miracles that cannot be repeated in history. They are exhibitions of a one-off power that does nothing to change the permanent wretchedness afflicting “featherless bipeds” (M. de Unamuno).

***All the above, of itself, does not clash with the opinion or the belief that Jesus is a “divine reality”, in the sense that he reveals in his parables and sayings and by his martyrdom a “plus” universally recognized as a gift coming from a sublime transcendental reality.***

The supernatural miracle which Jesus performed and for which every man and woman of good will is grateful, is his having borne witness, with the aid of his companions both male and female, to the

fact that it is possible to resist the most common human temptations without entering into the repetitive cycle of sacrificial violence, power and possession.

## ***A psycho-socio-analytical hypothesis***

The variety of the interpretations elaborated by the proto-community are, in my opinion, comprehensible if framed in the historical-sociological situation. As I wrote at the beginning, the disciples and followers of the Nazarene were poor and shared with most of the Jewish people an angry aversion for the priestly aristocracy, the Sadducees and the “collaborators” in cahoots with the Roman Governor. For them it was natural to identify themselves both with the suffering Jesus and with the Resurrected One recompensed by the Father with eternal glory. On the basis of these historical data I claim that there were at least three undeniable unconscious and imperative requirements which were to induce the poor and enthusiastic believers to develop interpretations difficult to reconcile with the substantially seditious behaviour of Jesus.

1. Identifying themselves with the so-called “*Son of Man*” who rebelled against the religious authorities to the point of being hunted down by them, the first generation of Christians tended to direct their conscious hatred against such people as representatives of paternal authority, while part of this unconscious hatred was in reality directed against God-Father who permitted such torments and injustices. When an object is attributed with characteristics of unlimited perfection and power, it is unconsciously attacked the moment it deludes and frustrates one’s expectations.
2. The supporters of the Nazarene had a second motive for identifying themselves with the crucified Jesus, which was that of expiation. Feeling guilty for having nourished desires for revenge and death against both the politico-religious leaders and God, they felt the need to expiate such murderous fantasies. The Nazarene became the ideal representative of their reparatory pulsions, to the point of his being seen as “*paying for the sins of all*”.
3. By raising Jesus from the condition of “*Son of Man*” to “*Son of God*” the disciples were unconsciously gratifying their most intense desire, which was to abandon their status of poor and oppressed and be finally rewarded with a new and superior genealogy. If a man treated as a malefactor, even though he is innocent, now sits at the right hand of God, then also those who have been exploited and abused can hope for a time when they will be freed from their rapacious rulers, as Jesus was freed from his when he entered a new existence.

E. Fromm, distinguished scholar with a profound knowledge of the human psyche and the Jewish world, sums up what happened in the first Christian communities:

*“... the enthusiastic believers identified themselves with the crucified Jesus; it was they who suffered death on the cross and in this way expiated their desires for the death of their father... And since they could identify themselves... with Jesus as a man who had suffered, there was the possibility of creating an organized community... united by their common identification with the suffering Jesus elevated to God”* (E. Fromm, *Dogmi, gregari e rivoluzionari*, Ed. Comunità, pp. 56-58; *The dogma of Christ*, 1955).

## ***The two nucleuses of the first Christian communities***

While aware of the difficulties of handling historic data of the distant past, inevitably strongly subjective in presentation, I think that we can reasonably hypothesize that the first Christian community, the one described in the New Testament, was animated by two psycho-dynamic nucleuses. One was substantially adult and genuinely innovative: it explains the group's drive for democratic management, the practice of non-violence, the pursuit of fraternity and sexual parity in an imperial and male-chauvinistic society, and for the spread of a spirituality in which God is the Father of all, with a special passion for the weakest. The Christians were observed with suspicion as "atheists" since they prayed in private homes and did not practice any official rites. Peter's challenge to the interdict against eating in the houses of pagans was paradigmatic: "*God has no favourites among persons*".

The second group developed from the defences which the proto-Christians put up to camouflage their own impotence in the face of the objectively appalling task Jesus had bequeathed to them. Unconsciously they preferred to have recourse to the idealization of Jesus at the expense of his historic dimension of liberation. This explains the weakening of the commitment "*to bring the joyful message to the poor... to proclaim the liberation of prisoners... to free the oppressed...*", in a word, the Utopia of the Kingdom of peace and justice. It was a sign that the Ego of the proselytes needed to identify itself with the ideal Ego of their Leader, to avoid accepting the fact that they were not what they would like to be.

Raising clouds of incense to the Resurrected One and wrapping him in an aureole of grandiose titles virtually smothered the work of maturation and "rebirth" he had accomplished for himself and a group of itinerant disciples.

***In other words, it was precisely the defensive mechanism of the eternalization of Jesus which permitted his de-historicization and emasculation.***

***Perhaps it is true that the process of idealization is inseparable from that of castration.***

## CHAPTER III

# ***CONSTANTINE AND NARCISSISTIC DISORDER***

### ***The Christians of the first three centuries***

The Christians of the first three centuries lived and worshipped in various ways and conditions, without the clear predominance of one particular organization, culture, class, race or language. In the year 187 St Irenaeus listed 20 varieties of Christianity. Copies of the Gospels, the Apocalypse, the Letters and the Acts abounded. The shared and charismatic direction of the first communities of the apostolic period, however, gradually gave place to an organization in which the local churches were presided over by bishops, who resolved doctrinal and disciplinary problems with recourse to local synods. Some bishops recognized, others contested, the supremacy of the Church of Rome, which was consulted as an example of care and consideration of the poor and commitment in the struggle against heresy. Benefices and donations endowed the Roman community with a certain economic well-being which, during the persecutions of the year 250, permitted it to maintain a bishop and 43 presbyters. The Church's powers of resistance were such that the Emperor Decius declared that he would prefer to have a rival emperor in Rome rather than a pope, a title then used for all bishops. Current subjects of discussion were the date of Easter and also the readmission to the Church of those who had committed grave sins such as adultery and apostasy.

The central theme of theological reflection began to shift from the Jewish world to the Greek, and questions such as the relationship to each other of the three persons of the Trinity became important. But in spite of divergences of opinion the need was not felt for dogmatic definitions or centralized authorities. In an empire completely lacking in social services the Christians financed works of charity, provided food and burial for the poor, took care of children, orphans, the shipwrecked, old slaves and people who worked in the mines and on the islands. They were admired because they promoted marital fidelity, lived in sexual parity and brought up their children with zeal and devotion.<sup>3</sup> To human beings and the poor in particular they gave an importance unheard of in the rest of the ancient world.

### **The “anti-idolatrous network” of primitive Christianity**

In continuity with the Hebrew tradition, the idea that the Christian Churches most firmly rejected was that of the worship of the emperor, considering it an act of polytheism or idolatry. Christians could pray for the emperor and respect his laws, except for those which demanded idolatrous submission. This insubordination was intolerable to nearly all the Roman rulers, who feared the

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<sup>3</sup> However, they were also objects of incessant hostility and contempt, considered the scum of humanity, insolent barbarians, because they ridiculed the gods of the empire and denounced their immorality. They were accused of atheism, of drinking human blood, of adoring an ass and practising demonic magic. They venerated their bishop, not the Roman magistrate, and were in no way disposed to burn incense before a statue of the Emperor, even at the risk of being imprisoned, tortured or condemned to forced labour. They refused to go to the games, which they considered violent, or to the theatres, which were often synonymous with obscenity. They held to the principle of peace and blessedness: “*Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God*”.

subversive potential of the Christians, since they damaged the divine image of the unifying force of the empire.

As a foreign religion which violated Roman law, the Church was accused of *lèse-majesté*, high treason, or insurrection against the State. Several thousand Christian martyrs, including bishops, presbyters, judges, and theologians paid tribute with their blood for their faith in God. Many others abjured or abandoned their faith for fear of losing their lives or being harmed in some other way. But although tried and disadvantaged, their numbers increased and they always responded with non-violence. The intensity of the imperial persecutions swung between periods of extreme ferocity and others of tolerance and peace. In the year 64 Nero blamed the Christians for burning Rome. Cruel persecutions were unleashed by Trajan (98-119), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Septimius Severus (193-211) and Alexander Severus (222-235).

In the end the emperor realized that the instruments of violence only made the non-violent stronger and the state weaker and impotent. In 311 Galerius issued the first edict of tolerance.

### ***Constantine's dream of triumph***

The instigator not of a change but a complete reversal with regard to the Christians was a pagan emperor, worshipper of the Sun God, Constantine, who, to win and hold power. could only follow a road sown with corpses.

In the afternoon before the battle with his rival, Maxentius, he saw a flaming cross in the sky accompanied by the words "*en toutoi nika*" (*under this sign you will win*). The legend has passed into history. The following morning Constantine heard in a dream a voice commanding him to emblazon his soldiers' shields with the letter X crossed vertically with a P, a well-known monogram of Christ. Constantine obeyed and advanced toward the battlefield with a banner bearing that symbol. Near the Milvian Bridge on the outskirts of Rome he defeated his opponent Maxentius. Rarely have dreams changed the course of human history as in Constantine's case.

Before departing from Rome, to put himself in favour with Pope Melchiades he gave the pontiff the Lateran Palace and built at his own expense the city's first basilica, St John in Lateran. Subsequently he met Licinius, Emperor of the Eastern Provinces and potential antagonist, and together they promulgated an edict, known as the Edict of Milan (313), in which, according to Eusebius, they decreed:

*"We. Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus, have agreed to guarantee the respect and rights of religious cults and to assure the Christians and all others of their right to follow freely any cult they favour, so that whichever divinity it may be that exists in heaven may look kindly upon us..."*

The edict in addition ordered the restitution to their legitimate Christian owners of assets and properties previously confiscated. Degraded soldiers were reinstated and men condemned to slavery regained their freedom. Subsequent resolutions punished adultery, made divorce more difficult, forbade the use of torture, and granted Christians authority to liberate their own slaves.

Constantine, monotheist and worshipper of the *Sol Invictus*, unquestionably had the merit of saving from discrimination, torture and arbitrary attacks a vast number of Christian citizens, who represented probably as much as ten percent of the Roman Empire.

### ***The Donatist crisis and the intervention of the emperor***

After the Edict of Milan, which restored freedom and security to the Christian community after centuries of aggression, new problems arose. The first of these exploded in what is now Tunisia, where many Christians strongly rejected the idea that the Church could ally itself with the emperor, in view also of their long anti-Roman tradition. The thunderclap that announced the first tempestuous conflict was the ordination of Donatus as Bishop of Carthage on the part of 80 bishops

from Numidia, who had invalidated the ordination of the previous bishop, Cecilianus, considered a “traitor”.

The problem was not discussed by a regional synod, as was traditional, but was delegated to the new protector of the Church, Constantine, who took the side of Bishop Cecilianus, since he represented the current in favour of working side by side with the emperor. The Donatist crisis gave rise to two new dilemmas never before encountered: the Church considered the mediation of a pagan emperor in its own affairs both legitimate and desirable, but at the same time this made all too evident the incipient incapacity of the local Churches to maintain their time-honoured linguistic and pastoral autonomy.

### ***The Jesus dispute: man or God***

The end of the persecutions allowed the Christians to dedicate themselves to matters of more philosophical and doctrinal nature. Of the inevitable clashes of opinion by far the most heated was not related to problems concerning the afflictions of the poor and slaves but to intellectual disputes about the nature of Jesus himself. There were baptized believers who claimed that Jesus was both man and God, but this contrasted with the Jewish line of thought according to which there was only one God, a truth supported by other Christians who denied the divinity of Jesus. From here, what with the idea that there might be two divinities – indeed, three, in view of the divine nature of the Holy Spirit – it was but a short step into the abyss of heresy and confusion.<sup>4</sup>

The epicentre of the earthquake was Alexandria, where the learned Athanasius attacked the theory of another noted theologian, Arius, who insisted that there could be no common identity among the three persons of the Trinity, because the Father alone was uncreated. The Word was the first of all creatures, but not eternal like the Father. If Jesus was the Son of God, he could not be co-eternal and not even of the same substance. His most contested assertion was that “*There was a time when the Son was not*”.

### ***The first Catholic Council (Nicaea, 325), convoked by a pagan Emperor***

Remembering the difficulties encountered during the Donatist affair in Carthage, in the year 325 Constantine, at his own expense, convoked a Council in Nicaea, near to his capital Constantinople, not out of concern for Jesus but because of the need to overcome the demon of division. Contemporary reports speak of the Council as an event made solemn even by the way Constantine made his entrance, “*like a heavenly image of God*”.

Under the direct supervision of the imperial delegates the participants had to find a formula which would constitute a reasonable basis for unifying the family of Christians and could then be imposed by “political” means.

The Arian thesis of the purely creatural state of the Logos was defeated in favour of the divinity and humanity of Jesus. The 300 eastern bishops and the Bishop of Rome’s three delegates had to decide whether Christ was of the same substance as the Father (*homoousios* = consubstantial) or similar to the Father (*homoisios*). The burning Nicaean debate, as humorists have put it, was all about a diphthong (*ou*).

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<sup>4</sup> Among the various groups it was the Gnostics who thought that Jesus was the authentic expression of God, therefore the food that he ate was not excreted but became incorruptible. The Docetics resolved the biological quandary by affirming that Christ was a spectre whose sufferings and death were mere appearance. The Monarchists suggested another solution; the Father himself descended into the womb of Mary to transform himself into Jesus Christ. In opposition to this was the theory formulated by the Ebionites, the most Judaized group, according to which Jesus was solely human.

The imperial mediators consented to approve the “Creed” (i.e. the belief)

*“in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, begotten not made, being of one substance (homoousios) with the Father”.*

The Council of Nicaea, according to St Eusebius, concluded with the approval of the Creed and the imperial acknowledgement that Christianity was “venerable law” and “true doctrine”, while paganism was condemned as “pretentious superstition” (Vita Cost. III, 17-21).

The Christians began to recite a Creed saturated with abstract concepts that had almost nothing to do with the real life of the Galilean prophet. With Nicaea was born a Christology without Jesus. The Catholics of the IV century learned that he was “God of God, Light of Light, true God of True God, who for our sins became man”. There are a few words about his birth (*born of the Virgin Mary*) and his death (*suffered under Pontius Pilate*) without a mention of the fundamental elements of his mission.

The effects of the Council of Nicaea were disturbing:

1. The composition of the assembly was ambiguous: on the one hand it was Christian, on the other anti-Christian. The emperor’s emissaries/ inspectors (pagan) were present, but also wealthy privileged bishops, far from any relationship with the poor.
2. Since his “waking dream” was to eliminate physically every rival (starting with Maxentius), Constantine made it clear to the bishops that he would not tolerate dissension, conflicts or differences. Adhesion to the imperial system was summed up in the slogan “*One God, one Emperor, one Empire, one Church, one Faith*”.
3. With Nicaea Constantine triumphed over his most insidious rival, the Church, forcing it to obsequious submission. After the banquet and the solemn exhortation to remain united, the bishops who refused the confession of faith were obliged to go into exile. The curious thing is that three years after Nicaea, Constantine, feeling that he had been deceived, recalled Arius (the loser) from exile and sent into exile Athanasius (the winner).
4. Influenced by the dominant Greek culture, tending toward division between matter and spirit, the Church turned its gaze from material-social problems to concentrate on the spiritual and transcendent (the nature of God) in order not to impair the pact with the emperor.

### ***Dogma is safeguarded by the emperor. One is born “Christian”***

The new thing about Nicaea was that the faith tended to wall itself up behind rocks of dogma which imprisoned future, ignored symbolic language (for example, the parables) and paralysed the creativity of the people.<sup>5</sup> One did not become a Christian through free adhesion to the life of Jesus, but only by submitting one’s self to the “true doctrine” or to the “time-honoured law”, summarized in the Greek-style formula known as the “Creed”. One was condemned as a heretic not for a behaviour contrary to that of the Nazarene, but for not adhering to a doctrine guaranteed, controlled and sanctioned by the emperor.

In the following decades baptism was imposed on all citizens of the empire. Soon enough, it began to be based specifically on the acceptance of the official doctrine of the Creed.

The Christianization of Europe was the child of this event: the conversion of a king automatically meant the enforced conversion of the nation. Heresy became a crime against the State.

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<sup>5</sup> In the previous centuries the Christian community used to hold local councils or synods with the participation of one or more bishops to resolve doctrinal, pastoral or disciplinary problems, with severe penalties for non-adherence from admonition to excommunication. The unity of the faith was guaranteed by community experience and mediated by symbols, not by rational definitions or philosophical elaborations. Much less did it need imperial seals and state authorization, which would have involved a police-like control of the faith. The model was the “First Council of Jerusalem”, in which apostles and disciples settled the delicate question of circumcision in a climate of democracy and community, without dogmas or anathemas.

## ***Constantine, the new “Logos”***

To understand the intellectual weight of Constantine on the Church and on the history of the Christian West, it is only right to start from the work of his biographer, the Catholic Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, Eusebius, author of the first part of “*The History of the Church*” and of “*The Life of Constantine*”. The intention of the bishop-theologian-historian was to convince Christians and pagans that the emperor had performed the God-given task of unifying humanity through the foundation of an empire under a single ruler, which eliminated the two main causes of enmity among men – polytheism and paganism. For Eusebius the *pax christiana* coincided with the *pax romana*, exactly the opposite of what Jesus maintained.

One year before the emperor’s death, the theologian bishop delivered to the imperial court of Constantinople an ardent panegyric on Constantine (*Oratio de laudibus*), starting from the assumption that God exists, the “*Supreme Sovereign*”, the “*omnipresent Logos*” that governs the cosmos from heaven. And, as in a mirror, on earth there was the sovereign beloved of God, Constantine, who was carrying out a historic and visible work of salvation and who “*ordered all things on the earth*” (I,85). In imitation of the Eternal Logos, *he purified the world from idols, modelled the Kingdom of Earth in the likeness of that of Heaven* (IV.85), defeated those who persecuted the saints, and proclaimed a Golden Age of peace on the earth.

In this oration he established a direct relationship between the Sovereign of Heaven (God) and that of the earth (Constantine), without mentioning Jesus. The Logos he spoke of was not Christ but a common concept in Greek philosophy indicating God. It was not the Logos of St John made flesh in Jesus. *The Logos, Sovereign over principalities* and the power of evil. was incarnate, in fact, in Constantine, to whom God gave victory on earth.

## ***Christ and Constantine: two Emperors***

In Eusebius’ reasoning Christ was not eliminated but replaced by Constantine, the new Messiah, “*manifestation of the universal Saviour of mankind.... a new and real epiphany of God on earth*” (X, 99). He “*eclipsed the ancient falsehoods about the gods... and revealed to all the one true God*” (X, 101-2). The decisive moment in history was not the appearance of Jesus but the proclamation of the sovereign as “*ruler of the earth*”.

In this new theological-imperial view, the place of Jesus of Nazareth, who opposed the violence of the world through the cross, was taken over by the new sign from heaven granted to the leader who eliminated his adversaries in the name of God. Christ was no longer the crucified malefactor but “*King of Glory*”, “*the Lord who triumphs over the world*”.

The very baptism of Constantine, which took place on his deathbed, was presented by Eusebius as an act which did not so much signify his conversion to Christianity as the certainty of “*feeling himself worthy of immortality and a sharer of light divine*” (IV, 63). By virtue of his direct relationship with God, the emperor stood above the Church, with which he had never participated in any form of worship and which he never associated with Jesus of Nazareth. In paintings and mosaics he appeared clothed with the grandiose symbols of God: his head was encircled with the nimbus rounding the heads of saints. He was proclaimed “*like unto the apostles, supreme victor resplendent with all the virtues of piety, pillar of the Church, sovereign friend of God*”. This association with majesty also involved Jesus, who was more and more frequently represented and adored as a regal figure, in an aureola of glory and shimmering gold. The humble Nazarene was vested with luxurious cloths and endowed with symbols of earthly power as victor over the enemies of the faith.



The emphasis was placed on royal dignity, as can be seen in the magnificent mosaics which from Byzantium to Ravenna show him as “Pantocrator” (Lord of the world). It is pointless to seek the victims of power in such representations. The theologian Basil Studer rightly states:

*“In the light of this theology, or rather political soteriology, one can now understand why, from this period on, Christ has been presented as Emperor, as Lord of the World. In fact, in the new ideological climate of the incipient imperial Church a kind of exchange between Christological and imperial titles soon took place. On the one hand, titles with a typical imperial significance, such as Rex universitatis, pambasileus, etc. were transferred to Christ, or biblical names, such as Kyrios, Soter, Rex gentium, creator, were reinterpreted with an imperial meaning. On the other hand, the emperor received titles bearing Christological significance, such as “servant of God, peace-maker, healer of souls, Father” ( B. Studer, Dio Salvatore nei Padri della Chiesa, Borla, pp.184-185).*

## ***The monarchical-imperial Church***

Constantine, though unbaptized, had no qualms about addressing the bishops to clarify that “*You are bishops constituted by God to rule over the internal matters of the Church and I am over external matters*”. He reserved for himself the function of *Father, Shepherd, Healer of Souls, Peace-maker*. In this way he performed two acts which set in motion a kind of “confusion of identity” in both political and religious history. He ceded to the bishops one part of the religious powers which every emperor had held for centuries, claiming for himself the divine role of “*bishop among bishops*”, “*bishop instituted by God*”, “*bishop of those who are outside*”, as well as “*pastor of souls*”.

The effect of this confusion of identity was that within a few decades the Church became a monarchy, acquiring an imperial aspect, investing itself with power and privileges, with a priestly caste capable of influencing local and imperial politics.

The outward signs spoke volumes: the Churches were no longer family homes but basilicas, often covered with gold and mosaics. The prayers, acclamations, the Te Deum, reveal a theology of glory and triumph.

With two different decrees (313 & 319) the emperor indicated that Church and religion were to be at the service of the empire, dispensing the ecclesiastics from taxation and government service so that they might not be distracted by extra-ministerial anxieties. According to Bishop Eusebius, Constantine considered that neglect of divine worship “*caused grave danger to public life*”, therefore he desired that “*all clergy should be freed from any responsibilities of State ... In fact, if they fulfil their high service to God, they are of the greatest use to the State*”(History of the Church, (X, 7, 1-2).

The rich and the imperial aristocracy found it very advantageous for their offspring to enter the priesthood, to avoid the heavy taxes on their property. With the acquisition of wealth the Church took on secular obligations. It ran hospices for the poor, lodging houses, orphanages, hospitals, and also the annual distribution of grain subsidies to the city’s poor and widows. This charitable activity was guaranteed and backed up by the State, with great benefit to the peace of the regime.

## ***The Bishops, the empire’s civil servants***

The most silent and spectacular innovation concerned the nature of the ecclesial organization, which was symmetrical to that of the Imperial State. The bishops were equivalent to senators, with their relative insignia. In imitation of the imperial functionaries they set themselves up with palaces, accepted stipends from the State, had free transport, and acquired the right to judge civil lawsuits even if only one of the contesting parties appealed to the bishop, in spite of the opposition of the other party.

A process of hierarchical classification commenced within the ranks of the clergy. Bishops became ever more differentiated from priests and deacons. The Gospel became the prerogative of a bureaucratic structure and no longer the responsibility of the Christian community. While in the first centuries the important bishops were often martyrs, with Constantine excellence resided in the urban see. The most influential were not “saints” but the five “metropolitans” of the pentarchy: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

### ***The Christians: from persecuted to persecutors***

If after the Edict of Milan (313) Constantine still respected pagan cults, limiting himself to condemning the politically dangerous practice of witchcraft, with time things changed: from tolerance of all religions the balance swung increasingly in favour of Christianity, to the detriment of Judaism and paganism, whose temples began to be demolished and replaced by Christian basilicas. Among the subjects to keep an eye on were the Jews.

In 341 the Emperor Constantine approved the first anti-pagan law, which imposed the closing of pagan temples. For those who performed sacrifices there was the death penalty and confiscation of goods.

In 380 the Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the “religion of State”. The citizens of the empire were no longer born free but Christians, by virtue of the Catholic nature of the State. They had to subscribe to the same faith, doctrine and religious discipline. Heavy sanctions were inflicted upon heretics and dissidents. The Edict of Thessalonica was a portrait of distortion in action:

*“We desire that all peoples subject to our government profess the religion which the apostle Peter transmitted to the Romans... We therefore order that the name of Catholic Christian be given only to those who consent to this faith and that all those who foolishly withdraw from it be called heretics. Their communities shall not usurp the name of church and they will be punished not only by divine wrath but also by the provisions which we will make under the inspiration of heaven”* (Codex Teodosiano, 16,1,2).

In the Codex of Theodosius there are over 50 decisions in defence of Catholic orthodoxy, with regulations concerning even ecclesiastical discipline. Citizens of the empire were forbidden to marry Jews, Arians and heretics, all of whom were deprived of civil rights.

The reversal was complete: instead of the alliance between Empire and paganism, there was now one between Empire and Christianity. The new persecutors were the ex-persecuted. The use of violence against heretics was justified. To prevent the spread of heterodox writings and opinions, “preventive censorship” appeared on the scene.

### ***The Councils and rivalry between Christians***

A hundred years after Nicaea (325) tension between Christians was red hot. There were no more quarrels about the Trinity and the same substance of *Father* and *Son* (*homoousios*) but about the “nature” (*physis*) of Jesus Christ. The leaders of the dispute were always the Patriarchs, representatives of communities marked by political and cultural antagonisms.

The Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, emphasized the existence in Christ of two natures, one divine and the other human (*duo-physisitism*). Two subjects co-existed in him, one divine and the other human. The Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyrillus, considered the leader of Egyptian nationalism, held that Jesus Christ had only one nature, divine and human at the same time (*mono-physisitism*), and that he was “*the incarnate nature of the Divine Logos*”.

The argumentative zeal of both contenders was in inverse proportion to their (Christian) charity. Cyrillus, fortified by imperial support and that of most bishops, succeeded in getting Nestorius condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431), taking advantage of his rival’s absence. The Council

espoused the “*monophysitism*” of the Alexandrians, which could only enflame the souls of the defeated Byzantines. The two opponents, sustained by masses of fanatical followers including monks and virgins, clashed ferociously and, it being impossible to come to an agreement, excommunicated each other. The rivalry became chronic, and fifteen years later the emperor called another Council in Ephesus (449), for which he himself selected participants and agenda.

The Egyptian Patriarch forced the Council to declare the Patriarch of Constantinople a heretic. Since heretics had to be eliminated, he ordered a gang of dock-workers and, later, monks to drag the irreducible adversary out of his church and beat him up savagely. Three days later the Head of the Church of Constantinople died. The ascetic Barsuma shouted to the soldiers “*Tear to pieces anyone who says Christ has two natures!*”. The brutality, the procedural irregularities and the arbitrariness of the decisions earned the assembly of Ephesus the name of the “*Council of Thieves*”.

The following year the Emperor Theodosius died (450) and his sister Pulcheria convoked another Council in the neighbourhood of the capital (Chalcedon, 451), aimed at pacifying the Christian communities divided by the problems of whether Jesus Christ had two natures or only one. As in Nicaea, they came to blows over questions of grammar, not a diphthong this time but a preposition: “of” or “in”. A single Christ was recognized, not “*of*” two natures but “*in*” two natures, without separation or division (*vere homo, vere Deus*). The decision was corroborated by the emperor, who ordered all Christians to accept the decision of Chalcedon and cease all controversy. Heresy was a violation of the Laws of the State.

### ***The Emperor, guardian of orthodoxy and discipline***

The peak of ecclesial derailment was reached by the Emperor Justinian, who did not restrict himself to “defending” the faith by seeking to mediate between the warring factions. He took upon himself the mission to define true Catholic doctrine, in order subsequently to impose his own magisterium on the bishops, the empire and on Christianity itself. Theology became a “political fact”, justified thus:

*“Two are the principal gifts liberally donated by God to men: the priesthood and imperial authority (sacerdotium et imperium). The first concerns things divine, the second human affairs. Proceeding from the same source, both adorn human life... The prosperity of the realm will be assured if there is universal obedience to the Holy Canons of the Apostles, handed down and illustrated by the Holy Fathers”* (Preface. Sesta Novella).

Justinian’s objective was not the *Kingdom of God* preached by Jesus, but the prosperity of the empire, in its turn bound to the orthodoxy of the Catholic faith; therefore he who governed had to concern himself with its application. Such a premise entitled the authorities to persecute Jews, dissidents and heretics, or to exile disobedient clerics. In an attempt to heal long-standing divisions between upholders and opponents of Chalcedon (the fourth Council after Nicaea, Ephesus I and Ephesus II) Justinian called a fifth Council in Constantinople in 553.

### ***Theological Byzantinisms and geo-political divisions***

In the VI century the bloody battle no longer raged over diphthongs (*ou – iu*) or prepositions (*of – in*), but on the conjunction “and” (*que*). The formula “*I believe in the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father*”, approved in Nicaea in 325, was unilaterally altered by the local Council of Toledo (589) to “*I believe in the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son* (in Latin *filioque*). The interesting thing is that the introduction of the “*filioque*” into the Catholic Creed was imposed by the King of Spain and then endorsed by the Synod of Toledo in 633, in spite of the fact that the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon had confirmed that any alteration of the Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople was prohibited.

If that were not sufficient to show that monarchies fought each other with the weapons of dogma while enjoying the blessing of the Christian hierarchy, one only needs to remember Charlemagne. With the objective of challenging the Byzantine Empire this monarch inserted and imposed the *Filioque* in the Creed of the Churches of Northern Europe in order to have himself crowned by the Pope as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. And in 1014 another Emperor, Henry II, had the *Filioque* inserted into the German liturgy, with the approval of Pope Benedict VIII. In response, the Patriarch of Byzantium suppressed the name of the Pope in liturgical prayer, before the final break between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

### ***The Councils, schismogenous institutions?***

In analysing the “unconscious” structure of Christianity, it was necessary to spend time on Constantine and the Councils precisely because it was the conclusions reached in those centuries that became the foundation of the doctrine of all Christian Churches and of the liturgy. It is enough to think that for sixteen centuries Christians have been repeating the Trinitarian form of the Creed without knowing of the bitter events and controversies that determined the wording.

If there is no doubt that the Council Assemblies served as the Church’s organs of consultation when settling a doctrine to be recognized by the majority of Christians, it is also virtually incontrovertible that they need to be seen for the political instruments that they were, manipulated by the Byzantine Emperors, to whom the Catholic hierarchy gave the last word in matters of doctrine and dogma.

Many historians confirm that the numerous episcopal assemblies, precisely because they took place under self-interested imperial supervision, only made the divisions between Church and nations worse, or at best were unable to heal them. All in all, these conciliar meetings did little to conciliate. After the Assembly of Chalcedon, for example, the Coptic Church of Egypt broke away, as did the Jacobite of Syria, the Ethiopian, and the Armenian Churches, never to return to the “mainstream” of Roman Catholicism. Geopolitical tensions also started to become chronic. When the Council declared itself in favour of placing Constantinople-Byzantium above all the other Churches, Pope Leo protested, because he wanted Rome to be the one which commanded.

The list of dramatic events unleashed by Council debates controlled by the emperors could not darken the culturally original horizon opened by the concept of reality as “trinitarian”, implying that the old dualist, Manichean culture typical of the pre-genital stage was being superseded. The world and God were no longer either one or two. In the words of the Spanish-Indian theologian, R. Panikkar, champion of inter-religious dialogue:

*“God, Man and the World are engaged in a single adventure which constitutes true reality... It is not a matter of imperfect man on one hand and a perfect God on the other, but, rather, a ”cosmotheandric” reality which exists in all time and in every situation”* (R. Panikkar, *La Trinidad*, Aguas Vivas, Barcelona 1989, p.108).

Centuries of theological debate on the Trinity and the divinity-humanity of God have undoubtedly generated an interesting proliferation of doctrinal postulates, but at the cost of hatred among Christians so ferocious as to break out in wars of religion, national conflicts, burning of churches, profanation of sacraments, and coldness precursory to active enmity, still virulent today.

Hans Küng, one of the best known Catholic theologians, writes:

*“Naturally Christians increasingly wonder if such Greek speculation, which has audaciously sought to spy on the mystery of God at head-spinning heights, may not be similar to the attempt by Icarus, son of Dedalus, ancestor of Greek craftsmen, who, with his wings made of feathers and wax, came too close to the sun and fell to earth”* (Hans Küng, *Cristianesimo, essenza e storia*, Bur, .201; *Das Christentum*, 1994.).

## ***Martyrs disappear, monks are born***

One of the most noticeable consequences of the Constantinian shift was the appearance of hermits, ascetics and anchorites, who directed their lives to the contemplation of God. At the end of the year 200 one or two hermits might have been found living in Egypt, but they were very rare. It was after the Constantinian shift (312) that monasticism established itself, with St Anthony Abbot, a semi-illiterate peasant who decided to withdraw into the desert. His austere life motivated new ascetics to follow his example. In Palestine the monks lived in separate cells around the church, where they met for the Sunday rite. In 330 St Macarius founded the celebrated group of anchorites in Sketis (Egypt). In 323 St Pachomius initiated a form of monastic experience based not on solitude, considered too risky, but on a communal life, the *coenoby*, (from the Greek “*coinos-bios*), hence “*cenobites*”.

It is difficult to dismiss the hypothesis that the appearance of widespread monasticism, unknown to Christian communities until the beginning of the IV century, may well have been a response, silent but provocative, to a secularized Church which was losing the characteristics of an alternative community and where there was no longer martyrdom, previously considered a supreme grace. After Constantine such grace was impossible, since persecution had ceased.

If demons no longer frequented pagan altars or the cruel minds of the governing class – thought the hermits – then they hide themselves in the hearts and above all in the passions of men. The highest virtue must be sought not in the struggle against the Antichrist, but against sin. The aim was “the perfection of one’s personal life”, and the best way to achieve this was “flight from the world”. The martyrdom of blood was replaced by the daily martyrdom of a life based on mortification.

## ***Perfect monks and imperfect laity***

The Constantinian shift was loaded with consequences still felt today. The first sprang from the separation of monks and laity, therefore the spiritual knowledge acquired by the former enabled them to become preachers and teachers of the Christian populace, considered fundamentally ignorant. With these premises, it was logical that monks, priests and bishops, being more cultured and spiritual, should feel themselves authorized to take on the whole running of the Church, confining the “carnal” faithful to a role of dependence and passivity.

A second consequence, linked to the preceding one, was the new conception of sexual life that appeared in the Church, this also unknown both to Judaism and previous Christian generations. On one side there were married people, on the other the celibate. Marriage was increasingly considered a state of im-perfection, while virginity-chastity-celibacy were assimilated to *states of perfection*. It was logical that those who received “*the ineffable sweetness of celestial wisdom*” should consider the pleasures of the flesh of a lower degree.

## ***Ecclesial degeneration***

The metamorphosis which the Church suffered as a consequence of the scission and confusion of identity and roles was such that the Father of the Church, St Gregory of Nazianzus, preferred to renounce the bishopric of Constantinople for the following reason:

*“I did not know that we had to compete with consuls, governors and famous generals...or that our stomachs had to long for the bread of the poor and consume in luxury that which they needed, belching before the altars. I did not know that we had to ride on fine horses or travel in luxurious carriages, preceded by processions, amid shouts of acclaim... Pardon my error. Choose someone else who agrees with the majority”* (Oration XI.11,27).

He refers to the fact that it was customary to elect bishops “from the ranks of the army or the navy”. St John Chrysostom discovered six cases of simony at the Synod of Ephesus (401): “*The guilty admitted without too many excuses that they had paid bribes in order to be nominated bishops and exonerated from civil obligations*”.

Thirty years after the death of Constantine the promoters of an anti-pope, Felix, and the supporters of Damasus, successor of the deceased Pope Liberius, encountered each other in a regular military battle, leaving 137 dead in the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome. The secretary of Pope Damasus, St Jerome, charged with the task of preparing the official Latin version of the Scriptures, offers an interesting glimpse of ecclesial behaviour:

*“The parchments are coloured with purple, gold is melted down to form the words, the manuscripts are embellished with jewels, while Christ lies outside the door, naked and dying”* (St Jerome, Letters, 22,32).

Perhaps the most realistic conclusion is that expressed by the bishop and Doctor of the Church, St Hilary of Poitiers (died 367), who asked himself, now that the Church was no longer persecuted by the State, what new persecutions the Christians of the day had to worry about:

*“Now instead we must fight against an even more treacherous persecutor, an enemy who flatters; he does not beat our backs but caresses our bellies; he does not confiscate what we need for life but enriches us for death; he does not push us towards the freedom of prison but loads us with honours in his palace of servitude; he does not weary our bones but takes over our hearts; he does not cut off our head with his sword but kills the soul with gold.... he builds churches to destroy faith”* (S. Hilary of Poitiers, *Contro l'Imperatore Costanzo*, Città Nuova Ed, Roma 1997, p.48).

Only thirty years after the death of Constantine, St Hilary of Poitiers realized that the Church had come up against a very dangerous “*enemy*”, because he behaved as a “*flattering*” friend. He did not subject us with “*flagellation*” but by “*caressing*” our primary needs (“*the belly*”). He did not give “*life*” but “*death*”, by lavishing us with riches. He did not use prisons, but subjugated Christians with “*palaces and honours*”. He was a criminal in “*kid gloves*”, because he “*killed*” without shedding blood: “*he killed the soul with gold*”.

Jerome, another Saint, realized that the Church was leading a double life: while it proclaimed the Gospel of God “*made flesh*”, it adorned and bejewelled itself, leaving the wretched lying outside the door. St Gregory of Nazianzo described his fellow bishops as “*rivals*” of the governing classes, obsessed by “*fine horses and luxurious carriages*”, ostentatiously preceded by “*acclamations*”.

These merciless comments – coming from holy men who had experienced the Constantinian shift at close quarters – reveal the Catholic Church marked by a serious pathology, the same syndrome that characterizes systems based on domination.

Certainly the post-Constantinian Church did contain expressions of behaviour consistent with the Nazarene, represented by generous charitable activity toward the weaker classes. Yet the three saints cited, authoritative witnesses of the degeneration of the Church in the IV century, consider that in Constantine the Church had a new and insidious enemy, not outside but inside.

In my opinion, this was *narcissistic disorder*.

## ***The Church and narcissistic disorder***

Narcissistic defences and traits are present in every person from birth, and are essential for the protection of the Ego and the maintenance of self-esteem. They are a residue of that singular unity which the infant experiences in its union with the body of the mother and which makes it feel

omnipotent. If during the course of development the baby is treated with insufficient care and love, it counterattacks, and its narcissism gives rise to a narcissistic disorder of the personality. This prospers when the subject unconsciously feels distressed by two dissonant internal currents. On the one hand it is driven by an imaginary sense of grandeur, demonstrable power, belligerence and perfection, while on the other it perceives itself to be impotent and dispirited, with a fear of being rejected and unworthy.

This is a phantasmal and behavioural mixture which marks anyone whose infancy has been gravely lacking in loving care. As a reaction to this deficiency the subject develops a practice of over-compensation to the point of feeling unique and gifted with exceptional qualities, and with the right to special privileges. Not infrequently he feels he is God. He aspires to achieving success and unlimited power, with few scruples. He treats other people as objects. He makes efforts not to appear domineering and camouflages his aggressivity under seemingly compliant and charming behaviour. He has a high sense of duty with regard to work. When his standard of perfection is questioned, he gets angry, and his rage can turn toward vindictive retaliation, with the suspicion that people are jealous of him and want to attack him, so he is careful to identify and eliminate potential rivals. He is incapable of self-criticism and tormented by the fear that the weakest and most vulnerable parts of himself may be wounded by humiliating attacks.

## *Constantine*

If the above are the main characteristics of narcissistic disorder, there is no doubt that Constantine suffered from it, even if his behaviour embraced other more mature and socially fertile aspects.

The roots of the trouble are to be found in his infancy, influenced by the early separation of his parents, of different social and cultural levels: his mother was a servant in a tavern, his father a general in the Roman army, who, having risen to become Diocletian's right arm in Britain, immediately abandoned his wife. Constantine grew up as the son of a repudiated woman, whom he left while still young, to go to the imperial court.

These biographical data are enough to let us understand how Constantine's mind was magnetized from early childhood by two opposite poles: that of the father-general, grandiose and aggressive, and that of the mother-serving woman, impotent and dejected.

Once he became emperor, Constantine set himself to gain supreme control of the West. It is characteristic of subjects with clear narcissistic disorder to feel themselves called by God to divine achievements. The legend that Constantine was interested in spreading was that he had had a special divine "vision" and that he had seen with his own eyes a "trophy" of a bright and shining cross in the sky accompanied by the words "*under this sign you will win*". He saw the cross not as a symbol of suffering but as a *trophy*, an expression of the desire to prevail over his adversaries and to rule the world. The next morning he had another extra-terrestrial communication telling him to use this sign when he had to face his enemies. The dream and the vision were an integral part of the emperor's megalomania, and he used them as a divine mask to cover his desire to rule the world.

Grandeur and the desire for power can be traced in many political acts. Susceptible to flattery, moody, he had no qualms about taking the life of his opponents and perpetrating massacres in North Africa.

The defender of orthodox Christianity had great merit in pacifying the empire and restoring liberty to the Christians, but he also had an impressive criminal curriculum. In addition to disposing of his political and military rivals, Constantine strangled his brother-in-law, Licinius, Emperor of the East (325), killed his eldest son, Crispus, and a month later his second wife, Fausta. These atrocities were provoked by mere suspicion, confirming the fact that the narcissist is incapable of controlling his internal pulsions, since the fear that the Ego cannot survive without permanent and universal admiration holds sway. Constantine needed not just to win but to triumph. In his fantasy he believed

he was endowed with superiority due to a divine power which assured him of victory over his enemies. His compulsion for triumph drove Constantine to subjugate the Church in order to have no rivals even on the religious plane. More than one scholar has maintained that he killed the spirit of the Gospel and the early Church not with recourse to persecutions, as his predecessors had done, but by seduction through power.

## ***Ecclesial disorder***

Starting from the IV century Constantine's megalomaniac dream and animosity progressively penetrated the Church. The bishops "*consumed in luxury the needs of the poor*". Convinced that they had divine chromosomes, the ecclesiastical elite demanded unadulterated devotion. Difference of opinion was considered disloyalty and lack of love, the one true crime that the narcissist could not tolerate. Orthodoxy was presented as perfection, whereas in reality it was a cover under which sadism brooded. The finalization of the fundamental dogmas (Nicaea, Chalcedon) was achieved by excommunicating the dissidents. The Church summit became aggressive toward the so-called heretics and the bishops who did not agree with the emperor. Arian and pagan books were burnt publicly. The thirst for power and honours kindled rivalry among the various Patriarchs, including the Bishop of Rome himself.

That this was *narcissistic disorder* is proven by the fact that if, on the one hand the Council sessions were moved by a desire to develop the faith, on the other they were preceded by hair-splitting disquisitions accompanied by anathemas and followed by wrangling and schisms. The churchmen and the faithful who dragged along behind them could not admit that the theological obstinacy they encountered had its origin in blatant prejudice – of class, nationality, and language, not to mention personal antagonisms. They used sophisticated "Byzantinisms", linguistic diatribes and exegetic minutiae to prove their points and debunk their opponents. It was an exercise in "rationalization of aggressivity" directed to masking the arrogant part of the Ego, which refuses to recognize any reasoning except its own. This is proved by the fact that for centuries the so-called "Brothers-in-Christ" were embroiled in hostilities over a diphthong (*ou- iu*), a preposition (*di - in*) or a conjunction (*et - e*), which still keep the Churches of East and West apart today.

Thought was not utilized to improve the real and the possible but to defend presumed perfection and superiority. Philosophizing over abstract ideas (person, substance, nature of God, etc.) or aspects of grammar (prepositions, diphthongs and conjunctions) served to keep a conscious control over those pulsional charges (rancour, eros, envy, etc.) which flee from the power of logic.

To lighten the pressure of their own interior shadows, peopled with cupidity, pre-eminence and jealousy, the Heads of the Church had recourse not only to the above-mentioned "rationalization" but also to "projection", a psychological disguise which allowed the reprehensible parts of the Ego to be eliminated by transferring them onto dissidents or heathens, against whom furiously aggressive campaigns could be waged, in order to achieve the sensation of embodying a totally good subject fighting against totally bad objects. One might say that behind the screen of the Council Fathers' persistent dogmatization there lurked in reality the desire to satisfy a fratricidal libido. The Councils document the fact that the more the bishops "dogmatized", the more they became aggressive.

## ***The scission of Jesus***

The ecclesial reversal, set in motion by Constantine and completed by successive Byzantine emperors, was not born out of nothing. It had its distant roots in the simultaneous idealization and



debasement of Jesus, a process which burst on the world in macroscopic manner after his death. The earliest Christians considered him *Son of God*, yes, but also *victim and servant*.

By the beginning of the IV century the sociological composition of Christians had changed; they were no longer the persecuted faithful of the past who needed to identify themselves with the *innocent victim* to expiate their unconscious parricidal desires. After Constantine, the Liberator, they had no motives for dethroning the father-God-Emperor, and consequently felt no essential urge to raise themselves to the level of God. With Nicaea a new interpretation of the Nazarene began to germinate, in conformity with the different sociological condition of IV century Christians.

Erich Fromm writes:

*“Dogma developed from the idea of a man who became God changed into the idea of a God who became man. There was no longer any need to overthrow the father... Gratification resided in the pardon and love which the father offered to his docile children, and at the same time in the regal, paternal position which the suffering Jesus was coming to assume while remaining the representative of the afflicted masses”* (E. Fromm, *Dogmi, gregari e rivoluzionari*, Ed. Comunità, 1973 p.96; *The dogma of Christ*, 1955),

After Constantine Jesus stopped being the subversive trying to undermine traditional religion and critical opponent of the social order: There was no longer any need to overthrow the “father”, who on the contrary “offered his docile children pardon and love”. He was *Christ Triumphant, the obedient Son*. The former became the symbolical reference point for the powerful, the latter for the poor and illiterate. With various consequences:

- The two contrasting icons of Jesus, one as “*sovereign of Heaven*” and the other as “submissive to the Father”, ceased to be conceptual expressions and became the model on which the post-Constantinian Church structured itself. This scission of the person of Jesus worked for the authority both of the empire and of the Church, which colluded in utilizing the (supposed) double identity of Jesus, one regal and the other servile, to justify the splitting of the Church (and of society) into two compartments, one which commanded and the other which obeyed.
- The Christian masses were unconsciously induced to trust in the new “political defender” of the faith, Constantine, rather than in the Resurrected Carpenter. Christianity, which for centuries had opposed the absolute authority of the emperors, becomes the religion of the empire.
- The final outcome was confusion between the two institutions, the political and the religious. Emperor and bishops traded off their insignia and their functions. Confusion of identity became paradoxical: the Church assumed features evermore “pagan” and “temporal”, while the State became increasingly “Christian-style theocratic”.
- The mixture involved all the manifestations of the Church, both Byzantine and Latin. Faith became confused with doctrine, baptism with state citizenship, ecclesiastical ministries with political careers, asceticism with monastic life, chastity with virginity.

One of the most significant consequences of the narcissistic disorder of the post-Constantinian Church is that the message of Jesus, after being “centrifuged” into Greek culture, had to be subjected to the Aristotelian principle of “the exclusion of the third”, which does not admit a third way between being and non-being, by which a thing is or is not. This is due to the predominance of secondary processes (i.e. logic) with the consequent suffocation of the primary (or unconscious) processes which could accommodate changes of meaning regardless of “rational” rigour.

***If for the unconscious system Jesus could be simultaneously Son of God and Son of Man, for the rational mind one of the two claims is true and the other is false (a third solution is excluded). In***

*fact, the dogmas elaborated according to the principles of Aristotelian logic had to conclude that the Nazarene could not have been born of a regular “human couple” because that would clash with the claim that he was the Son of God.*

If a religious organization can disregard poetry, parables, dreams and instinctual needs and impulses, it inevitably becomes prisoner to the “Doctors of the Temple” and the sado-masochistic dynamics that permeate much of their behaviour. As we shall see in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER IV

# ***AUGUSTINE AND PERSECUTORY GUILT***

### ***Faith and theocracy***

Fifty years after the death of Constantine, the relationship between the Church and the Byzantine Empire developed in a way unthinkable to the early Christians. It was by order of Theodosius (380) that Catholic orthodoxy was established and the dogma became “State Law”. In a theocratic state the Catholic Magisterium could impose Church doctrine, ethics and membership dependent on meeting two different, if not opposing, exigencies: to endorse the religious apparatus as that desired by the one, true God and, at the same time, recognize the right of the State to use violence against the insubordinate. In the final analysis this implies justifying the absolute necessity for every human being to become Christian by receiving Baptism at birth.

### ***The ideological and political use of Baptism***

While during the first three centuries Christians liberally followed Christ’s message, the “governmentalization” of Christianity made the preaching of the Gospel less imperative in winning new converts.

If initially Baptism presumed the desire “*to put on Christ...to be reborn into a new life*”, after Constantine it was already quite different. No longer was a long and difficult catechumenate necessary, positions in both civil and military life were allowed and there was no risk of a sense of inferiority as befell the Jews and pagans.

In order not reduce Baptism to a “bargaining chip” with the State and to endow it with a theologically acceptable dignity, the ecclesiastic apparatus found in “original sin” and the threat of eternal damnation the root from which to implant the necessity that all men be baptized in the name of Christ.

To understand the significance of the pastoral-theological change of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century one need only consider the fact that even today there are still two billion Christians who were baptized immediately following birth without their consensus (with exceptions). From the 4<sup>th</sup> Century on, hosts of ecclesiastics no longer limited themselves to blessing children as Christ did but baptized them (often by coercive means), as bearers of the hereditary taint of original sin which predisposes them to eternal sorrow.

### ***Original sin, unmentioned in the Bible***

It is a well-known fact that in the Hebrew Testament (or Old Testament – OT), creation is spread out over six days on the last of which God creates Adam and Eve. He places them in the Garden of Eden, categorically forbidding them, on pain of death, to eat “*the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge*”. The “serpent” persuades Eve that by eating “the apple” she will be raised to the level of God. Eve picks one and offers it to her companion. The two are found out by means of God’s radar and the woman is condemned to suffer in childbirth and the man “*to toil for his food*”. They are driven out of the garden; and he places the cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life.

This biblical account (*Genesis 1-4*), still open today to innumerable interpretations – from the literal to the mythical-symbolic – is one of the most powerful, most significant cultural constructs fashioned by man to explain the origins of life.

For the purposes of this work we have to presume that in Genesis and in the Jewish tradition :

- Adam and Eve's disobedience is never interpreted as a sin, let alone an 'original sin'. To a Jew it is unthinkable that guilt could be hereditary and transmitted by means of sexual intercourse.
- In Jewish theology the concept of a "*supra-natural condition*" is non-existent, as is the idea of a 'fall' which cannot be remedied by repentance.
- Creation in itself is incomplete and defective, so that the shortcomings of the universe precede those of Adam and Eve.

In keeping with his culture, Jesus

- never referred to the possible existence of an "*original sin*", let alone one passed on to one's progeny. The act of disobedience was not to be blamed on far-distant forefathers, nor was it of such gravity as to offend God's honour, since he unfailingly loves all his creatures.
- never preached his own mission in terms of "redemption" or of "atonement" for a presumed ancestral sin.

It was only in the IVth Century that the sequence *original sin-hell-Baptism-Redemption* became a consecrated part of Christian belief.

### ***Augustine, theorist of "original sin"***

This theological shift was brought about by a brilliant and prodigious theologian and bishop, not only a saint but a "Doctor of the Church". Augustine (354-430) was born in Africa at Tagaste (Numidia-Algeria), a few years after Constantine's death (337). His works, still studied in every seminary and read by a multitude of people of every religion, are the product of complex personal and cultural events. Among these was his lengthy experience within Manichaeism as an auditor, though he abandoned the sect when he converted to the Catholic faith at the age of 33. He was 37 when he was ordained a priest and four years later he was made bishop of Carthage. His cultural background was entirely Latin.

In Augustine's mind, the account in *Genesis* was no literary invention put together by a series of brilliant poets attempting to explain the beginnings of the world and the origin of evil. Mistaking the virtual for reality, he claimed that the first pair of humans were born in a state of utter perfection, physically and psychically intact, immune from violence, suffering and death and holding in their hands the destinies of thousands of billions of their own kind.

When they disobeyed God they condemned the entire succession of human beings to ignorance, to animal lust and suffering. The sin of indocility is transmitted to Mankind not by imitation or by pernicious social circumstances, all of which might be considered plausible, but through procreation, in other words, through sexual intercourse. Clearly, no geneticist, not even one of the Catholic faith, has ever succeeded in locating the "genes" of original sin.

At the outset, the first progenitors were entirely without cunning, depravation or sin. After "*...breakfasting upon apples...*" as Voltaire so sarcastically said, they became sinners without limit, to the extent that a divine Saviour was called for to offset their radical disobedience by His own limitless obedience to the will of God.

With well-founded concern the theologian Vito Mancuso writes:

*"God conceived a plan...the creation and deification of Man, the grace of original saintliness... 14 billion years ago he created the universe... 4 billion years ago he created life, and the first couple... made in his own image and likeness... out of excessive curiosity Adam and Eve, God's privileged allies, find themselves his*

*enemies... (God) knew we would come to this and we would live in this alien world and notwithstanding he chose to change our destiny ...all because of a minor transgression committed by that first feckless pair. Now what kind of logic is that?"* (V. Mancuso, *Per amore*, Ed. Mondadori, p. 95-96).

The key question still remains: was the (presumed) *original sin* a fact revealed to Augustine or was it rather a negative personal experience that he projected onto that first primitive couple?

To answer this one has to bear in mind that:

- When the Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Catholicism the “State religion” we are in the year 380 – Augustine, at 26, was in his intellectual prime and could hardly be unaware of the political and cultural consequences of the Theodosian edict.
- His theological output was profoundly influenced by 1) Manichean doctrine; 2) and his parents sexual behaviour. These two factors are worth closer examination..

## 1. *The Manichean influence*

*Manichaeism* is a philosophy which conceives of the entire creation as the product of two principles, one good and the other bad.<sup>6</sup>

Although Augustine was a follower of the Manichean sect, he opposed this philosophy, maintaining that evil did not lie in the material or in the nature of things, but only in the turmoil arising from human freedom. For him, as for all the Church Fathers, evil is the corruption of order.

In an attempt to defend the excellence of God’s design, Augustine did not conform to the Judaic-Christian tradition according to which creation was a mingling of light and darkness, evil and good, chaos and order. Under the Manichean influence, he allowed himself to be persuaded by a latent contraposition between good and evil, the saintly and the demonic, the passions and the spirit. The condition is well described in his *De Civitate Dei* (CD):

*“In Paradise, then, man lived as he desired; he lived without any want.... there was no excessive heat or cold... no sadness of any kind was there, nor any foolish joy; the honest love of husband and wife made a sure harmony between them... The man, then, would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited by lust”* (De Civitate Dei, XV, 26).

In this decidedly science-fictional vision, the Manichean influence is evident, as Augustine takes it as established fact that God, after creating a universe in stages marked by chaos, stellar explosions, complex and problematic evolution, assembles a Hollywood set with a mild, temperate climate for the “first bridal pair”, ensuring perfect faithfulness by endowing them with genitalia remote-controlled by the will, entirely lacking in lustful passion or shortcomings of any kind. The picture is based on the *a priori* conviction that our progenitors were perfect and not painfully lacking in the tools and models for survival, as any scientist or person of good sense would presume necessary for the first humans who appeared on earth around a hundred thousand years ago.

The want of balance becomes evident when Augustine, driven by the law of opposites, moves from the scene of earthly paradise to the “*revolt of the flesh against the spirit*”:

*“For, as soon as our first parents had transgressed the commandment, divine grace forsook them, and they were confounded at their own wickedness... They experienced a new motion of their flesh.... For the soul, revelling in its own liberty, and scorning to serve God, was itself deprived of the command it had formerly maintained over the body. And because it had willfully deserted its superior Lord, it no longer held subject its own inferior servant (the body); neither could it hold the flesh subject, as it would always have been able to do had it remained itself subject to God. Then began the flesh to lust against the Spirit”* (De Civitate Dei XIII, 13).

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<sup>6</sup> Followers of this doctrine, even though married, abstained from sexual relations as they rejected the idea that the soul was served by bio-corporal dynamics. The soul, emanation of good, falls into sin through its union with the body, whose very weight leads it to wickedness.

## 2. *The Influence of the parental couple*

This idealized vision of the primordial state finds its explanation, incomplete but fundamental, in the psychological sufferings that afflicted Augustine from his early childhood. We know that his parents were profoundly different in sociological, psychological and religious terms. With laudable sincerity and courage, this is how he describes his mother, Monica and his father in *The Confessions*:

*“She arrived at a marriageable age, and she was given to a husband whom she served as her lord. And she busied herself to gain him for thee [God]...she endured with patience his infidelity and never had any dissension with her husband on this account. For she waited for thy mercy upon him until, by believing in thee, he might become chaste...Many matrons whose husbands were more gentle than hers bore the marks of blows on their disfigured faces, and would in private talk blame the behavior of their husbands She [(Monica) would blame their tongues, admonishing them seriously...-that from the hour they heard what are called the matrimonial tablets read to them, they should think of them as instruments by which they were made servants”* (*Confessions*. IX 9.19).

From these autobiographical notes it would seem reasonable to deduce that the idea had been planted in Augustine’s mind that between his parents there had never been loving or spiritual relations. Only violent sex on his chauvinist father’s part and compliance from the submissive woman. The exact opposite of the Nazareth family: the relationship between Mary and Joseph, according to Augustine, was asexual but intensely religious and loving.

Violent too is the way in which Monica is “*given to a husband*” to whom she became a servant, rather than a bride. Their marriage was, in fact, a commercial contract of the basest kind, as one between a master and his slave. The father’s pleasure was no more than lustful domination. His wife sanctions this servitude to the point where she defends her role as victim, in contrast to her women-friends who complain about their own husbands’ barbaric sexual behaviour.

Without meaning to, Monica teaches her small son, future “Doctor of the Church”, that marriage is a sado-masochistic bond, in which the male has the right to *violate* the woman even in *the intimacy of the marriage bed*, while the woman is obliged to avoid “*any and every quarrel*” and to relinquish her own dignity, placing her hopes in prayer to the omnipotent God to bring about the conversion of her partner from sub-person to person.

Bearing this in mind, it was natural that Augustine unwittingly repeated his parents’ relationship. In an outburst of sincerity unusual in a cleric, he wrote about how at the age of seventeen he took a mistress, a woman unworthy of the very name whom he eventually abandoned just like any other master. With her he had an *unwanted* son, Adeodato. After 12 years of life together, he was “*forced (by his mother) to send her away*” even though she was “*the only one I loved*”. In this relationship Augustine was intent (although he failed) on avoiding conception for two reasons. Above all he shared the Manichean philosophy that procreation was an act of the devil, creator of the body and the world, the true kingdom of darkness. And besides, his mother Monica was very much opposed to the liaison between her son and his companion, to the point where she forced her to return to Africa, as she was determined he should marry a woman of suitable social rank. Monica chose a new bride for Augustine, but as he was not prepared to wait two years for the marriage to take place, he took another mistress. He describes this period of his life thus:

*“Active efforts were made to get me a wife... my mother took the greatest pains in the matter. For her hope was that, when I was once married, I might be washed clean in health-giving baptism ...proposals were made for a girl who was as yet some two years too young to marry. Meanwhile my sins were being multiplied. My mistress was torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, and my heart which clung to her was torn and wounded till it bled. And she went back to Africa, vowing to thee never to know any other man and*

*leaving with me my natural son by her... ..I could not bear the delay of the two years that should elapse... I procured another mistress...nor indeed was the wound healed that had been caused by cutting away my former mistress” (The Confessions VI 15).*

In this skilful analysis of his own internal world, Augustine clearly shows how, as a fully mature adult, his mother intervened and brought about three painful “amputations” concerning the three people involved in his intimate life.

From her son’s side she tears away the woman he was bound to, the woman is sent way and, in addition, their son Adeodato is forced to grow up without the love and comfort of his natural mother. . All in the name of social propriety which takes on the face of a tyrannical, merciless divinity.

Few writers have ever been able to describe in just a few lines a multiple, coincident mutilation of two lovers and their child at the hands of a mother, Monica. She is living proof that in the pathology of sado-masochism every victim (the wife) unconsciously empowers her partner (the husband) with the role of her tormentor. But the victim-mother (Monica) shows no hesitation in assuming the part of the executioner as soon as she finds a vulnerable subject on whom to inflict pain (Augustine, her son). We see the same dynamics in Augustine (sadist) with his mistress (masochist) who is forced in the end to relinquish even her own son. It all takes place under the guise of a “higher good” and of God’s will.

The “fatal wound” inflicted by his mother persuaded Augustine that he should take the opposite direction to that of the “lusts of the flesh”. He definitively relinquished marriage and “*all human hope*”.

*“All the gloom of doubt vanished away...for thou didst so convert me to thee that I sought neither a wife nor any other of this world’s hopes” (Confessions VIII 12).*

Before converting to Christianity, our theologian had to undergo the long, difficult process of separation from his mother who, understandably unsatisfied by her marriage, found in her son an alternative source of love – not without “*earthly longings*” which made themselves felt when he was about to leave Africa for Rome and Milan.

*“(My mother) grieved deeply over my departure and followed me down to the sea. She clasped me tight in her embrace, willing either to keep me back or to go with me, but I deceived her.... That night I slipped away secretly, and she remained to pray and weep.... the shore dropped out of sight. Wild with grief, she was there the next morning and filled thy ears with complaints and groans which thou didst disregard, although, at the very same time, thou wast using my longings as a means and wast hastening me on to the fulfillment of all longing. Thus the earthly part of her love for me was justly purged by the scourge of sorrow. Still, like all mothers--though even more than others--she loved to have me with her, and did not know what joy thou wast preparing for her through my going away” (Confessions V 8.15).*

The “carnal earthly longings” were like a fierce flame that scorched all the members of the family, for many years engulfing Augustine, who shared his father’s inability to manage his genitality in an adult way and with respect for his partner. But Monica too was chained by her passionate love for her son, not allowing him the freedom to make his own choices. It cannot be considered chance that “concupiscence” continued to be Augustine’s overriding obsession. She pursued him to Milan where, at last, he told her he had taken the first step, so longed-for by his mother, of leaving the Manichee sect.

It is interesting to note that Monica didn’t receive the news of her son’s forsaking the heretical group with immense joy. She is intent on maintaining her control over him, to the point of having him yield to “Catholicism”. “*Calmly, and with a fully confident heart*” she was sure she would

triumph: so, just as she had emasculated him by driving away his mistress, she was in no doubt that she would succeed in “*reviving him*” with the omnipotence of her “*tears*”.<sup>7</sup>

From these few frames, a type of family life emerges marked by a perverse need to have control over the weaker members, Augustine’s father over Monica, she over her son, Augustine over his son and his mistress.

But Augustine was a free man and, from adolescence he was given to spates of independence, going as far as committing a minor theft.

*“Theft is punished by thy law, O Lord, and by the law written in men’s hearts, which not even ingrained wickedness can erase. .... Yet I had a desire to commit robbery, and did so, compelled to it by neither hunger nor poverty...There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its color or for its flavor. Late one night--having prolonged our games in the streets until then, --a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree.. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden.. I loved my error--not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself” (Confessions II 4. 9).*

*“My pleasure in it was not what I stole but, rather, the act of stealing. Nor would I have enjoyed doing it alone--indeed I would not have done it! O friendship all unfriendly! You strange seducer of the soul” (Confessions II 9.17).*

*“Did I wish, if only by gesture, to rebel against thy law, even though I had no power to do so actually--so that, even as a captive, I might produce a sort of counterfeit liberty, by doing with impunity deeds that were forbidden, in a deluded sense of omnipotence? O rottenness! O monstrosity of life and abyss of death!” (Confessions II 6.14).*

The above-mentioned extracts, written while practising his episcopal ministry, concern the minor theft of some “pears” committed as an adolescent. He did not steal out of need but only “*because it was forbidden*”, for the pleasure of “*self-destruction*” and of “*shame itself*”. This trivial act was not carried out on his own, but with others, “*Oh, friendship all unfriendly! You strange seducer of the soul*”. His satisfaction lay in having “*rebelled*” against the law that prevented him from taking the “forbidden pears”. In this adolescent escapade, there is the desire of a “*captive*” seeking a “*counterfeit liberty*”, “*in a deluded sense of omnipotence*” while performing an action seen as illicit by his parental Super-ego.

At this point, the reader could compare these autobiographical notes with what Augustine wrote (see the first part) regarding Adam’s sin and find a millimetric superimposition between the two transgressions.

In fact, Augustine is doing nothing more than project the long-past, guilt-inducing experience of the theft of the “pear” onto his progenitor Adam, who appropriated an “apple” together with a woman, stealing what belonged to God. What renders Augustine’s interpretation “projective” in nature, is his attributing to Adam the same intention as his own, that of wishing to experience the waywardness of rebellion and a sense of omnipotence as a rival to the God-Master of the garden. If Adam finds himself naked and filled with shame, the adolescent Augustine feels “*rottenness*”, “*the monstrosity of life*” the “*abyss of death*”, subject to “*the wrath of God*”.

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<sup>7</sup> *She (Monica) had mourned me as one dead, but also as one who would be raised to thee. But to thee (God), she poured out still more frequent prayers and tears ... she was fully confident that thou who hadst promised the whole would give her the rest, and thus most calmly, and with a fully confident heart, she replied to me that she believed, in Christ, that before she died she would see me a faithful Catholic. (Confes. VI 1.1)*



*“Instead, the mists of passion steamed up out of the puddly concupiscence of the flesh, and the hot imagination of puberty, and they so obscured and overcast my heart ... Thy anger had come upon me, and I knew it not”* (Confes. II 2.2).

## *The Augustinian split*

At first it is hard to see why Augustine chooses in his autobiography to recall an act of early disobedience that every child, however well-bred, has surely committed during his childhood. The hypothesis necessary to examine the way in which creatural existence is first marked by divine wisdom, then by the work of the Evil One so that the period of innocence is followed irremediably by that of sin. The former corresponds to submission to parental authority, in particular that of the mother which is then followed by independence. For Augustine, autonomy was synonymous with rebellion; freedom with wickedness; pleasure with sin. Childhood was the absence of wickedness while puberty, the period which marks the beginning of sexual freedom, was is when *“the mists of passion... and the hot imagination so obscure and overcast the heart”*.

This dichotomy permeates the whole of Augustinian philosophy. A few examples suffice.

### *1. Fallen Mankind – the Garden of the Elect*

Ignoring the entire biblical structure and Christ’s message, which never mentions the possibility of a *sexually transmitted original sin*, Augustine fixes on the image created by the Apostle Paul (by whom he was much inspired) of God as a potter with *“power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour”* (Rom. 9,21).

The bishop, driven by his old concupiscence uncontrolled by reason, changes the text to the following: *“But God, like a potter of the same lump made one vessel to honour, another to dishonour. But first the vessel to dishonour was made, and after it another to honour. For in each individual, as I have already said, there is first of all that which is reprobate, that from which we must begin; afterwards is that which is well-approved”* (CD XV 1.2). The manipulation is obvious. Augustine reverses the order of the creation of the vessel (first *to dishonour* and then *to honour*), in order to endorse his somewhat grotesque theory according to which God models two kinds of vessels (of humanity in other words), whit diametrically opposed characteristics: one damned, the other saved. The bizarre task of the *“divine potter”* would be to create a *“closed garden”* where the fortunate preordained would occupy – in a number predetermined all the way to eternity – the places (limited) left free by the fallen angels. Reserved for the majority, on the other hand, is a hell of eternal damnation since they are not baptized, *“fallen mankind”* of *“iniquitous sinners”*.<sup>8</sup> Apart from being bizarre, the *“potter”* (God) is an accomplished conjurer who sometimes appears with the enticing face of mercy and at other times with that of cruel vengeance. When he preordains man to blessedness he acts with mercy, while when he preordains damnation he applies justice alone. In the end, God himself would seem to be in the grip of a *narcissistic personality disorder*.

In order to establish the indispensability of baptism immediately at birth, Augustine never refers to Christ, but to the Apostle Paul’s previously mentioned saying, only reshaping it to fit his own

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<sup>3</sup> *“This very thing which is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, nor was it lacking from the beginning of the human race until Christ Himself came in the flesh, when the true religion, that already existed, began to be called Christian.”* (Retr. I 13,3).

theory, inferring that: 1) children are born through the evil of concupiscence<sup>9</sup>; 2) the hereditary act of transmission of original sin, which subjects them to the devil, is cancelled by Christ's redemption; 3) the fruits of which can only be enjoyed by joining the Church through baptism, which frees the newborn child of sin and automatically brings him into God's grace.

Children, therefore, come into the world marked by a state of enmity with God, and are not the blessed fruits of creation. More astounding still is that the baptized are less enslaved by lust compared to the unbaptized pagan, who continue to bear the taint of concupiscence and so are more inclined towards wickedness.

According to Augustinian doctrine the injustice suffered by fallen mankind, which involves more than 90% of men and women from primordium to the present, does not depend, for example, on their having squandered their lives in intemperance, but on the tragic misfortune of not having a handy Catholic priest to baptize them *post partum* over the course of thousands of years.

Centuries later St Thomas Aquinas countersigned the Augustinian theory, writing: "*In the earthly paradise, man should have been as an angel with regard to his spiritual being, but concerning his body he would have lived an animal life*" (I q.98 a.2). "*It is a mistake to maintain that some men descended from Adam through intercourse are without original sin. This would mean that some men would have no need for Christ's redemption*" (On Evil q.4,art.6 Resp.). *The child who finds himself in the desert and dies without being baptized is not saved.* (Quest. Disputatae, 6,q.3, art.1).

At the end of the second millennium, John Paul II in his "*Catechism*" (389) confirms Augustine's thought : "...we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ".

## 2. *Grace - eros*

Augustine was the loudest cantor of Grace and, at the same time, a relentless censor of pleasure. He admits to the existence of "*good concupiscence*" when it is God's desire, or the wish for happiness or for natural things, such as the birth of children (*concupiscentia naturalis*). However, "*concupiscence of the flesh*" is the expression of a rebellion against God and a demoniac force that serves to perpetuate *original sin* through the generative process which links fathers and their children.

While according to Jesus the urge for chaos lay in the accumulation of possessions and power, for Augustine it came from "sexual pleasure" in that it drives out thought and undermines control of the body. The influence of Manichean philosophy, opposed to pleasure as the work of the devil, is strongly felt when Augustine describes intercourse between Adam and Eve as entirely without arousal: "*The man, then, would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited by lust*" (CD 14,24).

In this haunting coldness of the two bodies there is no trace of feeling, of whispered exchanges between the lovers, their tender caresses: only rationality and the will of the man who, "*with complete serenity of soul and body, penetrated his wife's womb*" (CD 14,26).

The most dramatic contradiction appears when Augustine claims that Adam and Eve were created in sanctity and righteousness and granted Grace that would allow them command of their passions. Such perfection, in the end, proved to be a cardboard mask when the two human prototypes had to reckon with the wily serpent. The "*preternatural*" gifts they were supposed to have been blessed with vanish once they consume their "apple-based snack", i.e. when they fail to abide by God's rules.

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<sup>4</sup> Now from this concupiscence whatever comes into being by natural birth is bound by original sin. It is the daughter of sin, as it were; and whenever it yields assent to the commission of shameful deeds, it becomes also the mother of many sins. (*On Marriage and Concupiscence*, Book 1,24)

### 3. Man - Woman

Augustine was certain that God first created Man, from whose rib he made Woman which would indicate that between the two there is a state of superiority (man) and inferiority (woman). The latter is the first to be seduced by the *serpent* since she has a lower level of rationality. If Adam falls into temptation, it is only because of his fear that his companion would be alone when cast out of Paradise. Both are guilty but with a difference: the fault of Adam, superior in intelligence, lies in having obeyed a “woman”, who is more passionate. Even in the irreconcilable division between “the *holy city*” and “the *earthly city*”, most of the blame is placed on woman and her “*corrupt manners*”.<sup>10</sup>

This is in complete antithesis with the Bible, in which the moral responsibility is equally shared by both sexes. Eve is never even mentioned by the four Evangelists. Apart from the *Sirach* (*Ecclesiasticus* in the Protestant *Apocrypha*), only Paul writes that “*Eve was seduced by the serpent*”, with no implication of sin, let alone one sexually transmittable. Jesus never speaks of women as temptresses or as Satan’s accessories.

This was of no interest whatsoever to Augustine, who had learnt from his mother Monica that the relationship between men and women is that of “*master and servant*”. He confesses: “...*it could be said that woman was made a help for man if the work of childbearing is excluded*” (*De genesis ad litteram* 9, 5-9). And yet, he is aware that the aim of creating man and woman (*Genesis*) is that “*they shall be one flesh*”, united by a bio-psychical bond.

Augustine’s mistress, mother of his son, is linked to him only by his “*wayward passion*” “*temptations and overwhelming lust*”. He never mentions her by name, thus debasing the very psycho-spiritual elements of her nature. His conversion to Christianity is greeted with tremendous relief at being released from the pleasures of the flesh and from the desire and need for a woman. Augustine’s sex phobia, according to his friend Possidius, remained intact even as a bishop.<sup>11</sup>

For Augustine “*the woman together with her own husband is the image of God ... but when she is referred separately to her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one*” (*De Trinitate*, 12.7.10). To be equal to man, woman has to wait till Judgement Day.

This anthropological split definitively set the seal on the inferiority of women for the Church and so-called western Christianity. The irony is that Augustine, instead of referring to the community of Christ in which differences in dignity are unimaginable, unconsciously assumes as “natural” the asymmetry internalized from his own parents.

Even though Augustine in theory believes in a couple’s spiritual union, in reality he jeopardizes it by demeaning the woman, in whom one can love “*her humanity but loathe her womanhood*” (*De sermone domini* 1,5).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “*And this calamity, as well as the first, was occasioned by woman, though not in the same way; for these women were not themselves betrayed, neither did they persuade the men to sin, but having belonged to the earthly city and society of the earthly, they had been of corrupt manners from the first, and were loved for their bodily beauty by the sons of God, or the citizens of the other city which sojourns in this world.. and when they were captivated by the daughters of men, they adopted the manners of the earthly to win them as their brides, and forsook the godly ways they had followed in their own holy society*” (CD XV 22).

<sup>11</sup> “...*No woman ever set foot in his house, he never spoke to a woman except in the presence of a third person or outside the parlour, he made no exceptions, not even for his elder sister and his nieces, all three of them nuns*” (Vita Augustini, 26).

<sup>12</sup> “*In those years – he writes - I had one whom I knew not in what is called lawful wedlock, but whom my wayward passion had discovered... remaining faithful even to her; in whom I found out truly by my own experience what difference there is between the restraints of the marriage bonds, contracted for the sake of issue, and the compact of a lustful love, where children are born against the parents will*” (Confessions IV 2).

### 3. *Virginity - Marriage*

Unlike the Manicheans, who forbid procreation in order to avoid “*any glimmer of light being trapped in the body*”, Augustine considers reproduction a good thing as long as it is the only purpose of marriage, with its burden of “*tribulations*”: “*(the) suspicions of jealousy of married life, in the begetting and nurture of children, in fears and sorrows of childlessness. For how very few, after they have bound themselves with the bonds of marriage, are not drawn and driven to and fro by these feelings?*” (*De sancta virgine*, 16.16).

With a vision of married life so pessimistic it is understandable that Augustine imagines a paradise where Adam has a spiritual body, free of libidinous urges and his relationship with Eve is also spiritual, committed to praising God unceasingly. Had their sexual intercourse not been an act of disobedience, it would have taken place without arousal or excitement, “*all organs obediently serving the will to procreate*”.

Clearly, the ideal marriage and model for a (presumed) sex life was the chaste union of Mary and Joseph, which lacked any physical relationship whatsoever. For Augustine it was actually preferable that “*two friends should live together than a woman and a man dwell side by side*”. (*Genesis*, 9,5-9)

The only intercourse that is without sin is when procreation is its aim, which, together with faithfulness and indissolubility, make up the threefold benefits of marriage. A couple who fails to generate offspring are called upon to practise genital self-mutilation, the equivalent of total chastity. Sex is forbidden between the elderly, women in menopause, during menstruation or while pregnant. Regarding contraception, there are no degrees of morality between permissible and illicit, natural or unnatural: it always sinful, even more so than prostitution or adultery.

*“intercourse, even with one's lawfully wedded spouse, can take place in an unlawful and shameful manner whenever the conception of offspring is avoided. Onan, the son of Juda, did this very thing, and the Lord slew him on that account”* (*De adulterinis connubiis* 2,12).

Augustine's condemnation of *coitus interruptus* was wholeheartedly endorsed by Pope Pius XI in his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*: “*Small wonder, therefore, if Holy Writ bears witness that the Divine Majesty regards with greatest detestation this horrible crime and at times has punished it with death*”.

In a collection of ecclesiastical canons compiled by Gratian and published in 1142, Augustine's sexual morals were listed in order of gravity. Second place on the “lust price-list” was given to *adultery*, third to *prostitution* and fourth to *incest*. At the top of the list was *coitus interruptus*, together with oral-anal sex, all of them considered “*sins against nature*”. So the most highly criminalized were not adultery or incest extra conjugal or incestuous relations but instead, all the possible variants of sexual pleasure within a married relationship.

Only clerics and virgins preserved their “bodily purity”. The moral superiority of the virgin state over the married state was to be ratified by the Council of Trent, who were to catalogue as “*damned*” those who refused to recognize the virgin state and sexual abstinence as more elevated and more blessed.

The Augustinian thesis remained official Church doctrine. The *Roman Catechism* asserted that marriage could not be undertaken for pleasure. Pope Innocence XI, in 1679, confirmed that “*pleasure alone is not exempt from sin*”.

## 5. Soul - body

In Augustine's opinion, the dawn of human existence was marked by a perfect "hierarchy", in which the soul "governs" the body, the parts of which can then live in harmony. The Neoplatonic schema on which he was suckled brought him to believe that the soul, reason, and the will are ontologically superior to the bio-somatic forces, and therefore the body totally lacked dignity.<sup>13</sup>

This dichotomy springs from that between the "superior" and the "inferior" spirits. Augustine writes: "*When as a whole (the spirit) contemplates the truth, it is the image of God; and in the case when anything is divided from it, and diverted in order to the cognition of temporal things...it is not the image of God*" (*De Trinitate*, 12.7.10).

Augustine goes beyond Tertullian's moderate dualism: to his thinking only the soul is spiritual and immortal. The body is pure passivity, extended spatial substance, merely a material instrument. This dualism is the crutch used to hold up the thesis according to which the soul, and only the soul, is immortal, a claim that finds no analogy anywhere in the entire Bible. Early Christian theologians, such as St. Justin, expressed absolute certainty that resurrection will be of the total man and not the immortality of the soul on one hand and the perishability of the flesh on the other .

## 6. City of God – the earthly City

In 410 Rome, capital of the Roman Empire, was invaded by the Alaric hordes. Foreseeing that it would be hopeless to rely on Emperors in their decline, Augustine realized the necessity of thinking in terms of a new political theology.

While the Nazarene speaks of a "*kingdom of peace and justice*" to be realized on earth, Augustine in his "*City of God*" (CD) describes the existence of cities: one "*earthly*", self-seeking and indifferent to God, the other "*heavenly*" and steeped in altruistic and divine love.

*"Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self"* (CD, XIV 28).

**And further on:** "*Thus the founder of the earthly city was a fratricide (Cain). Overcome with envy, he slew his own brother (Abel), a citizen of the eternal city, and a sojourner on earth*" (CD XV, 5).

As always, the starting point is that hapless pair of progenitors who, following their transgression, are overcome by their *concupiscence* and bring into the world two sons, one good, the other a murderer, with two conflicting "political" effects. He wrote: "*Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God*" (CD XV 2.2).

In *Genesis* (4,17) Cain is in fact described as the first founder of a city, but not of the secular city as opposed to the heavenly one. Driven by a compulsive dichotomization, Augustine turns the two brothers into the initiators of two stories which take off in different directions: Cain is the citizen of

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<sup>13</sup> *The man, then, would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited by lust*" (CD XV 24.1).

*Passive obedience is required of the body. "Should you wish to define the soul – writes Augustine - and you ask me what the soul is. I would reply without hesitation: it seems to me that it is a substance that is part of reason, created to rule the body"* ( *De quantitate animae*, XIII,22).

our story where self-love, pride and contempt for God reign supreme, while Abel is the one to found the Church, making its wandering way towards the city of God.<sup>14</sup>

Augustine's fantasy is so detached from reality that he fails to see that Abel, once dead, cannot be the founder of a city. Much less a "heavenly" one, if it's true that he died unbaptized and therefore, according to Augustine's dualist logic, is still burning in the flames of Hell together with his parents.

Belonging to the two cities gives rise to two opposing consequences.

***"But, on the other hand, they who do not belong to this city of God shall inherit eternal misery, which is also called the second death, because the soul shall then be separated from God its life, and therefore cannot be said to live, and the body shall be subjected to eternal pains. And consequently this second death shall be the more severe, because no death shall terminate it"*** (CD XIX 28).

According to Augustine the "earthly city" where men and women live bears no trace of God's love unless the inhabitants become members of the Church through baptism. From this point of view it was up to the State to promote the cult of God and to support the Church, since it was the only agency able to save humanity from eternal damnation. The State was Christian above all in its members, and then in its purpose. It could only be monarchic, being the image of the hierarchic order of the universe and of divine order in particular.<sup>15</sup>

## 7. Peace - War

Augustine's writings, amounting to over a thousand, overflow with anthems, exhortations and elaborate reflections on peace. But on war as well.<sup>16</sup>

In his "Letter 189 to Boniface", after reminding him of the two most important commandments, to love God and to love your neighbour as you love yourself, Augustine writes:

***"Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service. Among such persons was the holy David... Think, then, of this first of all, when you are arming for the battle, that even your bodily strength is a gift of God... Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace Let necessity, therefore, and not your will, slay the enemy who fights against you"***.

To those first generation Christians, it would most probably have seemed blasphemous to think in terms of "*slaying the enemy*". Theologians of the first three centuries, such as Tertullian and

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<sup>14</sup> The earthly city tends towards wickedness, in that it is beyond the law of God though there is still the desire for peace, order, justice and autonomous prosperity. In order to be happy in society it was necessary to be a citizen of the City of God. Those who belonged to the earthly city, perhaps because they were born thousands of years before Christ, perhaps because they were not converted, were mercilessly condemned by Augustine's God to "two deaths" one more atrocious than the other.

<sup>15</sup> Hence it was required to work together with the Church since it was the instrument for the salvation of Mankind. Ethical social problems could be solved starting from conversion and personal asceticism. Augustine opposed the idea, shared by Plato up to Cicero, that the State may aim at perfecting citizens' morals and that the republic may administer justice, so long as it is established on a basis of common benefit.

<sup>16</sup> "But it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war." (Letter to Darius, n. 229).

In the same letter there is also praise for the fighting soldier: "Those warriors are indeed great and worthy of singular honour, not only for their consummate bravery, but also (which is a higher praise) for their eminent fidelity, by whose labours and dangers, along with the blessing of divine protection and aid, enemies previously unsubdued are conquered, and peace obtained for the State, and the provinces reduced to subjection".

Origen, considered violence as being incompatible with the Gospel, therefore Christians were to put into practice the commandment “*Though shalt not kill*”.<sup>17</sup>

Augustine gave a new meaning to the Commandment to the point of rationalizing the “*just war*”, dishonouring the position taken by those Christians who refused to enter into wars which the ecclesiastic authorities retained “*just*”.

His concept of original sin is a conveyor belt that led him to draw precise and consistent conclusions in the administration of the *polis*. Damaged by its chaotic libido, the human community needs a Superego (an authoritarian State) that serves to keep social violence in check, controlling it through force.

The sovereign, as God’s vicar on earth, is responsible for protecting the Church from heretics, seeking their “retraction”. Augustine was against violence and the use of torture, although he maintained that the Church had the right to use police methods against heretics, not tearing their flesh or by burning but “*chastising them with rods*”. The use of force was necessary to preserve the unity of the community. As forerunners of the Inquisition, preventative suppression was called for to identify heresy at its very outset.

## *Augustine and the new model of the Church*

These observations so far would be seriously lacking without acknowledging that Augustine lived an extraordinary experience of faith. He never baulked in his quest when faced with evil or ignorance.

All his great themes move elliptically around two fixed focal points: God and man. “*Love and do what you will*” is perhaps the most liberating affirmation to spring from the heart of a bishop, an affirmation that no Church or pope would dare to propose as a foundation of Christian teaching.

He deals with subjects that range from psychology to mysticism and to the State, all with passionate love. His intellectual life, interwoven with poetry and profound insight, greatly influenced not only the Catholic Church but also Protestantism (Luther, at the beginning of his mission, was a monk in the Augustinian order), Kant, Descartes, Pascal, Heidegger, Jaspers.

He is undoubtedly great when he revitalizes literature in the skilful psychological analysis that leads to his discovery of the presence of God’s Trinity in the structure of the human mind. He used science, dialectics, history and the Holy Scriptures. He praised wisdom as the means to understanding things eternal and he tirelessly sought a connection between faith and reason.

He lived frugally together with other monks, all forbidden to own anything. Food was plain and simple except for what was served to guests and to the sick. Clothes came from a shared collection.

Where Augustine shines as an uplifting exception in the history of the Church is in his *Confessions*. No priest, bishop or pope has ever been able to publicly discuss the “*sins of the flesh*”, the uncontrollable impulses of lust, the anguish arising from unrelenting darkness, as did Augustine. His endeavour at self-analysis is worthy of the highest regard and admiration.

His life ended bitterly. The Vandals invaded Africa and besieged Carthage in 429. A year later, he died, seeing “*the church without priests, virgins and monks scattered, others tortured and murdered, others captured and losing the innocence of their faith*”. The inglorious end of the

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine theorizes that war when ordered by God – that is the Church – becomes laudable, above all when undertaken to convert pagans and destroy heretics. The fact must be recognized that Augustine supported the concept of war that gained ground in the Church immediately after Constantine’s Milan Edict. The Council of Arles, for example, even provided for excommunication of soldiers guilty of desertion, for the reason that “the State is no longer persecutor” and therefore conscientious objection was not legitimate as it had been when the State was pagan.

diocese run by the most learned and cultured of the Church's bishops proves the strength of the Christian community and their ability to stand up even to persecution when they place their trust in a "divinely human" Friend, while their faith becomes ephemeral when they have to depend on a theocratic state or on the science of the "wise".

## ***Augustine and the Magisterium***

The Latin/Western Church has been definitively shaped both by Augustine's complex and creative thinking and also by the sado-masochistic genes unconsciously passed on by his parents.

The Catholic Magisterium has adopted almost entirely his theories, which include

- the self-repeating mechanism of original sin,
- Christ's bloody Redemption to redress Adam's sin,
- double predestination for the saved and the damned,
- asceticism as the sublimation of guilt,
- the monarchic- hierarchical structure of the Church and the State,
- the obsessive presence of the sin of concupiscence,
- the down-grading of marriage to the sole purpose of procreation
- the belittlement of women,
- the imposing of celibacy on the priesthood
- the use of violence to punish deviants,
- the justification of war,
- anti-Judaism,
- the State as guarantor of Catholic orthodoxy,

Although none of the abovementioned theses is endorsed anywhere in Christ's praxis or teachings, the Council of Trent followed the Augustinian trajectory, embellishing it with "anathemas".<sup>18</sup>

The seeds of Augustine's theories reappeared in John Paul II's *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), in which he confirms the images of the "fiery furnace" and the "eternal fire", repeating what had been stated at the Councils of Constantinople, Lateran, Florence and Trent. He also confirmed the Augustinian thesis on the necessity of Baptism for eternal salvation::

*"The Church does not recognize any other means except Baptism to ensure entry into eternal bliss" (CCC 1257). With this ritual the Christian becomes "living rock...a new creature... a part of the divine nature...no longer belongs to himself ...he is called upon to submit to others, to serve them in the community of the Church, to be "obedient" and "submissive" to the Church leaders" (CCC 1269).*

Once again Baptism is used to consecrate an anti-community, patriarchal order, based on obedience both "to others" and "to the Church leaders". Baptism, instead of being the sign of a "rebirth in the Spirit", serves to introduce the faithful back into the womb of the ecclesiastical Organization which will see to it that they remains "obedient" and "submissive" subjects, after charging them with having an indelible stain.

From Augustine the principle filtered into the Church that "our true good is free slavery". "From here – writes Elaine Pagels – to claiming the legitimacy of military force, torture, capital punishment, the denial of civil rights to non-Christians, abolishing free speech and the exiling of

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<sup>18</sup> Without the Catholic faith "it is impossible to please God.

- " If anyone does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he transgressed the commandment of God in paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice in which he had been constituted, and ...incurred the wrath and indignation of god, and thus death with which God had previously threatened him... let him be anathema".
- At the same session, the Council affirms that although Jesus Christ "was risen for all, nevertheless not everyone may benefit from his death, but those alone who have received the merit of his suffering" (Denzinger, session V, Council of Trent).



*Donatist bishops was just a short step and Augustine made it.* (E. Pagels, *Harvard Theol. Review*, 1985, p. 67-69).

## ***Sado-masochism and persecutory guilt***

One of the most lasting legacies of Augustine's magisterium concerns the theme of guilt, subject of major significance for psychoanalysts who differentiate between two types of guilt: depressive and persecutory.

Depressive guilt is what is suffered by those who are aware of having caused harm to someone and has nothing to do with depression or melancholy. It is the fruit of insight, therefore the person is able to take responsibility for his action and to put things right or provide compensation. It doesn't lead to self-reproach. The remorse felt is genuine and inspires positive action which counterbalances the burden of having harmed another person.

Persecutory guilt, on the contrary, does not begin with remorse or the awareness of having treated someone badly. It is perceived as an unbearable, crushing weight coming from the external world. It is the result of an excessively guilt-inducing relationship on the part of a figure of authority (mostly within the family), cold and unloving, that makes the child feel "in the wrong" and "guilty" for something he is unable to understand. He becomes intolerant of criticism, unable to see his own mistakes, as this would trigger a feeling of unworthiness.

Fear of rejection makes him feel obliged to please those in authority at all costs. His sense of guilt tends to diminish through his use of reason, but if the traumatic incident is profound and goes un verbalized the conflict becomes either overwhelming or turns chronic.

### ***Augustine, persecuted and persecutor***

From early childhood Augustine had to bear the burden of the distressing lives of parents whose example provided him with clearly conflicting values and behaviour, to the point where he felt like an unwanted child. The adolescent escapade of the theft of the "pears" and the chaotic sensuality in his youth were evidently a way of lightening the un verbalized tension and turning the repressed hostility towards objects outside the family instead of those within it, in order to safeguard it.

When a child attacks unloving parents, even if only in his imagination, he has to bear the subsequent feeling of guilt at believing he provoked enmity between his parents by the simple fact of his birth. From here springs the unconscious feeling of being "in the wrong", even though, consciously, he thinks the opposite.

Given that the guilt he is arbitrarily saddled with is not the result of a genuine offence, it inevitably becomes "persecutory", so it cannot be wiped out by making reasonable amends. Augustine's circumstances are paradigmatic. Not being able to express verbally his own aggressiveness towards either his invasive mother or his domineering father, Augustine transferred the desire of transgression and the consequent feeling of guilt onto Adam and Eve. With this "trick" it was no longer his parents that put into the world "wicked, sinful children" but those two ancient progenitors.

If on one hand the defence mechanism allowed him to deviate the attack from his real parents to the imaginary ones (Adam and Eve), on the other, it failed to satisfy rational logic, so the feeling of guilt persisted and became persecutory.

One way of discharging this guilt is to project it onto objects felt to be bad so that they can be attacked and censored. With this unconscious strategy, the subject who feels "persecuted" is authorized to attack the (presumed) "persecutor".

This is what happened in the case of the “Doctor of the Church”. In many of his writings he argues fiercely with Pelagians, Manichees, Donatists, Pagans, Aryans, Jews, etc. He supported repressive imperial policies against those who did not accept Catholic orthodoxy. His heated “moralizing”, “evangelizing” campaigns and crusades against the “wicked” served on the one hand to suppress his guilt for desiring the elimination of those he unconsciously hated (his parents), on the other to experience the sensation of being a champion of good in the struggle against evil.

The persecution of the external enemy allowed him the feeling of being in harmony with God, but it seriously limited his personal life, making him “contentious” and “belligerent” towards those who bore any kind of “blemish”. Polemics became the instrument to consecrate his own integrity. Churches and “Christian” sects are still impregnated with this Augustinian spirit.

Persecutory guilt slides into “paranoia”. Augustine gave signs of this when he launched an attack on supposed “heterodoxies”, against which inquisition followed by torture were justified. He did not limit himself to defending the faith with the “force” of the State or by punishment. With refined sadism, theologically camouflaged, he threatened a far more devastating punishment, that of eternal hell-fire for those who refused to submit to the Hierarchy. The double predestination, paradise for the meek and hell for the rebels, shows how far removed Augustine was from the God who, in Christ’s parable, trustingly awaits the “straying son” without the solidarity of the other “orthodox” son. It was due to this extremely pessimistic concept of sin that the Orthodox Church venerates Augustine not as *Saint* but as *Blessed*.

There is another way of escaping from the obsession with guilt while still remaining within the sado-masochistic circle of hell which Augustine had assimilated from his parents. It involves turning the “persecution” against oneself, through inner torment, unrelenting self-accusation, self-denial. Augustine spoke of himself in terms of “rotteness” “a monstrosity of life and profundity of death” but also as the object of the “wrath of God”. When accusing oneself of being generally “wicked” or “unworthy”, relief is then sought in self-inflicted punishment (penance or sacrifice) or in seeking out a messianic figure (Redeemer) who will cast out the moral stain.

Unlike depressive guilt, which recognizes a true transgression and is able to find a means of making suitable amends, persecutory guilt perceives non-existent sins which are atoned for with self-accusation followed by self-absolution, both of them groundless.

The “*narcissistic personality disorder*” is a mixture of sacrificial love – as in the case of Augustine’s father and mother – which calls for one who demands “sacrifices” and the other who must “sacrifice himself”. This asymmetrical relationship marks the history of all Churches and of so-called Christian society, in which men lord it over women, rich over poor, leaders over subjects, priests over the faithful.

There is no doubt that Augustine left to the post-Constantinian Church a legacy of not only great humanistic and spiritual treasures but also a pathology due to which the Christian is warped by an unfathomable contradiction: he is persecuted by God for a sin never committed that makes him feel sinful and wicked, while at the same time he is forced to discharge his sense of guilt by attacking and condemning all those who are heterodox because do not agree with “his” truth.

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## CHAPTER V

# ***CHRISTIANITY AND NARCISSISTIC DISORDER***

With Constantine and Augustine (IV and V century) two different and divergent movements started up. The emperor shifted the axis of Christianity towards the Greek-Byzantine culture, geographically Oriental, while the African theologian did the opposite, towards the Roman-Latin-Occidental world. A millennium later western Christianity suffered a new bipartition brought about by Luther and Calvin (XVI century) who, intolerant of papal authoritarianism and longing to put in first place the Word of God and personal conscience, undertook a separation from the Catholic Church, giving birth to the "Protestant Church".

At the end of 2000, Christians, according to the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, there were four aggregations of Christians: the most numerous was the *Catholic* (more than a billion), followed by the *Protestant* (near half a billion), the *Independent Christian Churches* (almost 400 million) and the *Orthodox* (just over 200 million), in total 2 billion and 200 million.

The boom movement was that of the Churches which are neither Catholic, nor Protestant nor Orthodox, but Independent, where the presence of the Spirit as well as the founder is relevant.

In this chapter my analysis will be concentrated on the Roman Catholic Church for two reasons: it embraces a greater number of faithful, and has a much greater "political weight" than the Orthodox and Protestant Churches, if for no other reason than that as, a "Pontifical State", it is diplomatically accredited to almost all other nations. It should be emphasized, once again, that my psychoanalytical approach does not aim to "draw up a balance" of the Church, which is the task of historians, but to investigate the subterranean dynamics which constitute its "institutional unconscious". Bearing in mind two important facts.

The first is that the Catholic Church is a complex organization, endowed with one of the longest histories, universally esteemed for its extraordinary profusion of activities, doctrines, rituals, symbols and works of art, all springing from the love of God for mankind.

The second fact is that this dimension of the Catholic Church, constituting its adult and mature part, inspired by the story of its Founder, is coupled with another, marked by features of immaturity, in vibrant disharmony with the life of the carpenter-prophet-healer-martyr who rose from the dead. This is probably the aspect to which Vatican II referred when it asserted that

*"For, taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion".*  
(*Gaudium Et Spes*, 19)

In this courageous self-criticism Vatican II emphasized that atheism can be sustained not only through personal *negligence*, which is quite obvious, but also because of a *deceptive presentation of doctrine* and for *defects in the Christian's own religious, moral and social life*. The Council Fathers were therefore aware that in both doctrine and personal life there can be *hidden vices* (or

unconscious ones) which, in view of their seriousness, gravely damage the image of God they manifest. It is precisely to this that our particular attention is directed in this chapter.

## ***The evolution of power in the Church***

The first element which strikes everybody when analyzing an organization so widespread in the world is the importance of authority. It is well known that the official doctrine, rites, organization and moral teaching of the Catholic Church were not defined by Jesus but by the bishops in the first millennium and, in the second, by Peter's Vicar, the Pope, whose decisions admit no opposition. This is why the entire Roman Catholic Church can fall into error, deviations or heresies that no one is able to correct.

The evolution of power in Christianity is not uniform and could be divided into three stages.

♣ In the first three centuries the Church was organized under the authority of bishops and patriarchs, dependent on each other and with no absolute power. The title of Pope (from the Greek pápas = father) was used for the first time by the bishop of Rome Liberius (352-366). Under the following popes Damasus (366-384), Siricius (384-399), and Innocent I (401-417), the Church of Rome became pre-eminent. Starting from Leo I (440-61) the title of pope became reserved exclusively to the bishop of Rome, because he represented the new Peter, understood as the "*new Moses*", "*the legislator of the New Alliance*", "*the head of all the chosen people*", holder of the *plenitudo potestatis*. All the Councils of fundamental importance were convoked through the initiative of Byzantine emperors.

♣ The second metamorphosis took place at the beginning of the second millennium. In an attempt to break the *unholy alliance* which had grown up between the hierarchical Church and various European monarchies, Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) sought to carry out a "Reform", as it is known, in order to deprive the feudal system of the prerogative to nominate bishops. The intention was not to return to the origins of Christianity, but to reverse the pattern inaugurated by Constantine. Political structure did not have to be guaranteed by the Emperor, but by the papacy, which outweighed it, since obedience to Peter ensured the right order intended by God. The Vicar of Peter aimed at "theocracy", that is, to be the absolute monarch of a world-wide state, entitled to establish the "law" in all nations. His power was to be unbounded: "*The Pope can do everything in the Church and without him nothing is valid or right*".

The 27 propositions of *Dictatus papae* (1075) contain the *summa* of the new gospel of "the reformist" Pope.<sup>19</sup>

His successor, Urban II, started a new aggressive strategy: at the end of the Council of Clermont (1095) he invited Christians and princes to take up arms against the heathen. The *eight crusades* stretched over two centuries. New titles honoured the papacy: Innocent III (1198-1216) defined himself not only as Vicar of Peter but also of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

♣ The third innovation was introduced by Pius IX. As he realized he was losing for good the temporal power which had lasted for more than a millennium and the status of "pope-king" with it, he convoked the First Vatican Council I (December 1869) in order to sanction the dogma of papal

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<sup>19</sup> Some "gems", of clear constantinian imperial genealogy: 7) *The pope alone is permitted, according to the requirements of the times, to establish new laws.* 8) *The pope alone may use the imperial insignia.* 9) *His authority is such that all princes of the world must kiss his feet.* 12) *He can dethrone Emperors.* 18) *His sentence cannot be revoked and he alone can revoke those of all others.* 19) *No person can judge him.* 27) *The pope can release subjects from the vow of allegiance to the unworthy.*

<sup>20</sup> "Just elected" (37 years) writes in the *Sicut universitatis conditor*: "*As God, creator of the universe, created two great lights, the larger to preside over the day and the smaller to preside over the night, so he established... two great powers... pontifical power and royal authority... So as the moon receives its light from the sun and therefore is inferior to him... so royal power derives from papal authority the brightness of its own dignity..*".

infallibility, which was achieved in spite of marked clashes between the episcopal area, emphasizing the dimension of collegiality in the Church, and the opposite area, which aimed at a hierarchical Church ruled by a pope with absolute power.

### ***Absolute papacy (ab-solutus)***

In order to visualize the difference between the brotherly, communitarian, egalitarian, self-managed, non-resident structure inaugurated by Jesus and that of the present Church, it is sufficient to run through the titles, the rights and the functions that his Vicar has assigned to himself. Until 2005 we could read in the *Papal Yearbook* that the Pope is:

***1) Bishop of Rome; 2) Vicar of Jesus Christ; 3) Successor of the Prince of the Apostles; 4) Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church; 5) Patriarch of the West; 6) Primate of Italy; 7) Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province; 8) Sovereign of the Vatican City State; 9) Servant of the servants of God.***

What such titles mean is meticulously defined by the Vatican bible, the *Code of Canon Law (CCL)*, according to which the Roman Pontiff exercises his supreme authority through the Curia (360), which, together with him, form the Apostolic See.<sup>21</sup>

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#### <sup>21</sup> **The Roman Pontiff**

- *is the supreme administrator and steward of all ecclesiastical goods. (Can. 1273)*
- *is the supreme judge for the entire Catholic world; he renders judicial decisions personally, through the ordinary tribunals of the Apostolic See, or through judges he has delegated. (Can. 1442)*
- *not only possesses power over the universal Church but also obtains the primacy of ordinary power over all particular churches and groups of them. (Can. 333)*
- *can convoke an ecumenical council... suspend, or dissolve a council, and approve its decrees. (Can. 338)*
- *appoints bishops or confirms those legitimately elected. (Can. 377)*
- *The cardinals especially assist the supreme pastor of the Church through collegial action in consistories in which they are gathered by order of the Roman Pontiff who presides. (Can. 353)*
- *The synod of bishops is directly subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff who:1/ convokes a synod as often as seems opportune to him... determines at an appropriate time before the celebration of a synod the contents of the questions to be treated, ... defines the agenda; (Can. 344)*
- *has the innate and independent right to appoint, send out, transfer, and recall his own legates either to particular churches in various nations or regions or to states and public authorities. (Can. 362)*
- *has the supreme direction and coordination of endeavours and actions which pertain to missionary work and missionary cooperation. (Can. 782)*
- *Only the Apostolic See adjudicates the fact of the non-consummation of a marriage and the existence of a just cause for granting a dispensation. (Can. 1698)*

#### ***The Roman Pontiff is above Law and any judgement***

- *The First See is judged by no one. (Can. 1404)*
- *No appeal or recourse is permitted against a sentence or decree of the Roman Pontiff. (Can. 303)*
- *A person who makes recourse against an act of the Roman Pontiff to an ecumenical council or the college of bishops is to be punished with a censure. (Can. 1372)*

#### ***The Apostolic See***

- *Without prejudice to the prescript of can. 586, institutes of pontifical right are immediately and exclusively subject to the power of the Apostolic See in regard to internal governance and discipline. (Can.593)*
- *The suppression of an institute pertains only to the Apostolic See; a decision regarding the temporal goods of the institute is also reserved to the Apostolic See. (Can. 584)*
- *Inasmuch as institutes of consecrated life are dedicated in a special way to the service of God and of the whole Church, they are subject to the supreme authority of the Church in a special way. §2. Individual members are also bound to obey the Supreme Pontiff as their highest*

In addition the Roman Pope has authority as “Head of the State”, clearly specified in the “*New Fundamental Law of the Vatican City State*” (22-2-2001):

*"the representation of the State in foreign relationships and with other subjects of international jurisdiction, for diplomatic relationships and the conclusion of treaties, is reserved to the Supreme Pontiff through the Secretariat of State".*

Like a Superman, the Roman Pontiff occupies all the ecclesial space and arrogates to himself all functions:

1. legislative: he alone can issue valid laws for all the Church;
2. judicial: he alone is the supreme judge and his sentences admit no appeal;
3. executive: he alone can nominate or confirm all the heads of the local communities and of the Curia, and fix the agenda of the whole Church;
4. doctrinal: he alone has the power to define doctrine and ethics and to validate or invalidate Synods and Councils;
5. administrative: he alone is the supreme administrator of the entire patrimony and assets of the Church;
6. cult and rites: he alone has the power to establish the sacred liturgy and to grant dispensations;
7. political: he is sovereign of the Papal State and, for this reason, can be a member of international institutions.

According to the *CCL* one could say that the pope is the Kingdom of with his own monarchy.

It has to be stressed that none of the above mentioned roles was ever claimed or enacted by the popes of the first millennium.

From a psychodynamic point of view such a Pope, endowed with a "*suprema, ordinaria potestas*" over all local Churches, free to act "*according to his own personal opinion*", regardless of any opposition, reveals an Ego so inflated and imposing as not to admit the existence of any “Other”.

The primacy of the Pope parallels Elias Canetti’s incisive observation: "*the intention of the powerful is grotesque: he wants to be the one and only*".

A subject who regards himself as *ab-solutus*, i.e. free from any bond with the community, is, clinically speaking, a prey to madness. If he is in power, which happens frequently in history, he is capable of leading a nation or an organization to insanity and self-destruction.

This does not mean that the papacy is a wholly delirious institution, since it is shown to contain within itself a part that is indeed aware of reality and of its own responsibilities. Nevertheless it represents such a psycho-sociological anomaly as to invalidate its work and to keep the entire organization in a pathological state.

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*superior by reason of the sacred bond of obedience. §2. It is for the Apostolic See to order the sacred liturgy of the universal Church, publish liturgical books and review their translations in vernacular languages, and exercise vigilance that liturgical regulations are observed faithfully everywhere. (Can. 590 §1)*

- *Dispensation from all irregularities is reserved to the Apostolic See alone if the fact on which they are based has been brought to the judicial forum. (Can. 1047 §1)*
- *The local ordinary can dispense his own subjects residing anywhere and all actually present in his own territory from all impediments of ecclesiastical law except those whose dispensation is reserved to the Apostolic See. (Can. 1078 §1)*
- *In addition to the Roman Pontiff, ... can dispense from private vows... (Can. 1196)*
- *Relics of great ... cannot be alienated validly in any manner or transferred permanently without the permission of the Apostolic See. (can.1190§2)*
- *The permission of the Holy See is also required for the valid alienation of goods whose value exceeds the maximum amount. (Can. 1292)*
- *With the prior approval of the Apostolic See, however, the conference of bishops can suppress some of the holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday. (Can. 1246 §1)*

## *The intra-ecclesial split*

If the above mentioned titles are accurately weighed, one incurs the risk of getting tangled in a sort of strabismus, because the Pope exhibits two divergent and conflicting images. The first shows a subject who is in charge not only of a diocese, but of the Universal Church; not only a spiritual but also a political head, who enjoys authority over other States; and whose competence extends not only to religious, but also to social, ethical and economic matters.

The opposite representation outlines the pope as the "*servant of the servants of God*", which means a subject who possesses no authority at all, being relegated to the lowest level of the community and of scientific-religious knowledge. He is *the sovereign of the faithful and their servant* at the same time; he is at the top of the hierarchical ladder (Supreme Pontiff) and, contemporaneously, is the lowest of the lowly; he sits on a throne to command but, at the same time, kneels to receive the orders of his subjects.

The attributes of the Roman Pontiff defy the laws of human rationality: no logic can assimilate totally antithetical social roles, such as *Vicar of Christ* (or God on earth) and *servant of servants*. In a normal social dynamic no one can be president of an organization and at the same time its doorman or waiter. Until today no religion or human organization, except the Roman Catholic Church, has granted its head the right to exercise absolute power with freedom to judge everything and everybody while remaining exempt from any criticism himself, and at the same time imposed on him the duty to be the "*servant*" of all. Such a religion is due to be classed as raving, a source of mental turbulences for its adherents. The basic assumption of the Pope is that to absolute truth must correspond absolute Unicity, the One and Only. This is the abiding principle of all *imperial or absolutistic* systems, according to which only in Unicity is there Perfection, Order and Love, whereas without Unicity there is imperfection, chaos and hatred.

History proves that pretensions to absolute Unicity are inevitably "schismogenetic" (lead inevitably to schism). It was only with Constantine and Augustine that a process of vertical division began to take place within Christianity between a first-class Church (Roman Catholic) and those of second-class (not Roman); between the only true Redeemer (Jesus Christ) and those who are unauthenticated; between the infallible Truth (Catholic) and the fallible ethos; between persons who are sacred (clergy) and the profane (lay people), between the predestined for heaven or for hell.

The author of the Code of Canonical Law (CCL), John Paul II, must have understood the devastating nature of *absolute primacy*, saturated with striking contradictions, if in the encyclical *Ut unum Sint* (1995) he diplomatically chose to acknowledge that the present exercise of the Roman Papacy must be re-examined. In fact, if it does not generate a psychosis, it is certainly dominated by a *narcissistic disorder*.

## *Master and servant: the two natures of the Church*

The afore-mentioned pathology is not a prerogative of individuals, it is also characteristic of social organizations, in which it is magnified. As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, you only need to go a public audience to observe on the one hand the behaviour of the Pope playing the leading role of the Supreme Pontiff, a concentration of competence and grandness, and, on the other hand, the mass of extras forming the mute and spellbound congregation of the faithful.

## 1. Papal megalomania

The grandiosity of the pope, as can be gathered from the *Code of Canon Law*, is based on his firm belief that he is in permanent and exclusive communication with God, of whom he claims to be the Vicar. He does not confine himself to making explicit his own experience of God, whose will, norms and feelings he claims to define for the terrestrial globe. In the name of God he establishes which sins are *mortal* and which are *venial*, as well as the political, economic and social alliances which are pleasing to God, with their respective penalties and rewards. He enters into the merits of scientific theories or ethics. Censorship, excommunication and expulsion are the order of the day for those who do not manifest full "*submission of mind*". He can render compulsory what was optional for the Nazarene (celibacy) and optional what was mandatory (poverty or non-violence).

The aura of secrecy and privacy allows him to show off a supernatural dimension. Believing himself privy to divine mysteries (as Vicar of Jesus Christ), he can boast of rights and qualities inconceivable to the normal human mind. That's why he cannot act like an ordinary man who cooks, does shopping, plays with children or discusses the problems of the world with workers, women or young people. He does not live in a comfortable house but in an enormous treasure-chest full of frescoes by the greatest artists. He is protected by a small army within a state of which he himself is the ruler. He is not dressed like normal heads of state or of the main religions. His clothes are made by the finest tailors and designers, he wears fancy shoes, rings, and a variety of elaborate head-gear and capes as symbols of a royalty without compare on this earth. If he wore garments like those of the *carpenter* whom he is supposed to represent, he would acquire a "natural" dimension, losing his alleged "supernatural pedigree", guarantee of flawlessness, and could not be considered by faithful and unfaithful alike as the only Pontiff (in its original meaning "bridge-maker"), by means of whom salvation passes from God to humanity.

So secrecy, inviolability, imperviousness to appeal are not temperamental aspects of the Pope, but direct consequences of the presence of a *narcissistic and megalomaniac nucleus* which induces the Pope to live as if he were the incarnation of the "divine nature" of Christ and thus worthy of veneration.

Transparency of procedures or open debates on his doctrines are inadmissible since such investigation would reveal their weaknesses and undermine their superiority and perfection. In order to identify every any possible hint of dissent, he has recourse to the services of a *Holy Office* plus voluntary informers, so that the thinkers denounced can be rooted out, as Augustine taught in the VI century, if they do not fall into line with the supreme doctrine validating himself as the *Vicar of Christ*.

He does not like to live among people endowed with frankness and a spirit of criticism. Bishops and theologians themselves, well aware of the Pope's pride and extreme susceptibility, refrain from addressing expressions of open dissent or criticism to him, as they fear he may react with vindictive triumph, which can extend to humiliating, condemning, ordering a retraction or excluding any who dare to attack his superhuman prestige.

From a careful reading of the CCL, it appears that the faithful are not simple "sheep" but, like "Dolly", the famous cloned sheep, mere copies of the *animus* of the Supreme Pontiff. In a certain sense, on the basis of the CCL, he is a *de facto* "prolicide", in imitation of the God-Father who demands the sacrifice of his beloved Son, while from an even more pessimistic point of view he can be seen as "genocidal", since he takes away all attributes of adult life from his own people, depriving them of the use of their natural faculties such as judgment, deliberation, self-organization, formulation of doctrines and even management of the common goods of the Church.



Since he is not without a mature nucleus, the Pope is, of course, capable of exercising power with humanity and sensibility. The papacy, however, as both the CCL and historical-sociological analysis show, is an interwoven fabric of love, certainly, but also of tyranny, since the pontiff arrogates to himself so many roles that those who share with him the same religious faith are left empty-handed.

This means that every action on the part of the papacy (and by derivation of the Catholic hierarchy), even if performed with excellent intentions, will always be tainted with intrinsic violence. All of them effectively dehumanize the subjects to whom they are addressed, whose opinions, judgments, requirements or complaints are valueless. According to the prescriptions of the CCL in the Catholic Church there is no happy medium: the Pope is All, the faithful are Nothing. "*I am Tradition*" declared Pius IX somewhat naively.

But the dilatation of the papacy would not necessarily be a guarantee of a greater closeness to God: it is instructive to note that out of the 134 popes of the second millennium only five are "saints", one of which relinquished the charge (Celestine V). Nevertheless the pope endows himself with the honorary title of "Holy Father".

## **2. *The Oedipal bond pope-Church***

If we observe the fact that the Pope demands of believers not only obedience, but "communion" and absolute fidelity (made more stringent for theologians and bishops by an oath), then the psychodynamic scenario assumes a special hue, making one think that somewhere there is a lurking need to be the *darling of the Church*, the most loved subject of the community, without any obligation of reciprocity.

The mere fact of disregarding the opinions of the Episcopal college highlights the unilateral nature of the emotional relationship and his incapability of sharing life with his brothers and sisters. As in foetal and post-foetal life, the primary need (pre-genital) is that the mother-Church be unconditionally dedicated to him without any regard for his siblings.

It is sufficient to observe the public appearances of the pope to note how, by occupying the position of the only actor, he ousts any pretender from the heart of the Church. If the latter is theologically accredited as the Mother who gives life (Mother-Church), and if the pope is the *Holy Father*, then he is her spouse and enjoys her exclusive love.

All the others, including bishops, are thrown out. As a matter of fact, we when in common parlance we say: "*the Church has declared... the Church has excommunicated.. the Church has canonized..*" everybody understands that the pope is the Church (never vice versa), and that he is the sole legitimate point of reference. In the public imagination the connection Church-pope is immediate, precisely because only the pope "possesses" the Mother-Church in both a symbolic and practical sense, receiving her unreserved love.

The pope's unconscious horizon is substantially parallel to that of the "spoiled and privilege" son, who yearns to couple with and possess the mother (Church) removing everybody else, in order to live in the fullness of pleasure without limits and obligations. In the psychoanalytical literature this event has become known as "*Oedipal*" for its connotation with incest. It should be explained that such an anthropological phenomenon is experienced by every person, at any latitude, and could have analogies with what is theologically designated as *original sin*.

The most important characteristic of the *Oedipus* scenario, understood as a mythical event, is not the physical nature of the coupling with the parent of the opposite sex, which is virtually impracticable due to the "taboo" in force in all civilizations. Rather it is the limitless strength of a

desire which tends to overflow the banks of Law, which in turn imposes severe restrictions on the child's whimsical and capricious instinctual impulses from the first year of life onwards. Only the patient and loving care of parents succeeds in taming the child's Ego, enabling him/her in the end to accept reality and abandon the nostalgia for his-her parent's absolute love.

When the pope describes himself and acts as one who alone - in his capacity of substitute for God (Vicar of Christ) - has the right to perform a range of legislative, judicial, political and doctrinal functions, he reveals himself to be incapable of accepting his own contingent limitations and exhibits the dream-need (pre-genital and oedipal) of enjoying the exclusive and venerating predilection of the Mother-Church. If it is true that the pope thinks he is the only subject delegated "to possess" all the assets of the Church (as sanctioned by the CCL), two facts of institutional importance follow:

1. by defining himself *Holy Father*, and not *Holy Son*, he refuses any earthly authority above himself able to restrain his ambitions and force him to acknowledge that he cannot behave like a tyrannical child, who demands total love and reverence for himself alone.
2. as a father, who owns the Mother-Church for his exclusive use, he cannot have brothers or sisters. It is indicative that in his allocutions the pope addresses Catholics not as *siblings* but as "*dear children*".

Aware of a vulnerability deriving from irrational convictions, the Pope seeks to protect his Oedipal-infantile nucleus by rising himself to the level of God. He adopts *sacred* vestments and symbols of power, dignity and sumptuousness by which he hypnotizes spectators, to the point of convincing them that he enjoys a metaphysical-ontological superiority.

From this megalomaniac daydreaming it follows as logical consequence that the faithful are reduced to virtual realities. Oedipus (papal) and castration (of the faithful) are, therefore, indissoluble processes.

### ***3. The infantile nucleus of the people***

Observed from the point of view of the *unconscious*, undoubtedly partial, the ecclesial dynamic holds thanks to a pact unintentionally signed by the "Pope-leader-absolute" and the "christened-submissive-insignificant faithful". The former proposes himself to the latter as the incarnation of the their ideal, assuming the features of an impressive being who stands out above all and guarantees an eternal Eden to those who obey him. If believers wish to be associated with such privilege, they must, in exchange, perpetuate that condition of infants, deprived of reasoning power, with which they have been received and maintained in the Church since the day of their baptism.

Due to the presence of the narcissistic-megalomaniac nucleus of the pope, that - I repeat - is part of its identity, the Roman Catholic can take one of two directions. Those who think the pretensions of the Head of the Church are infantile or anti-evangelical are more inclined to deny validity to his declarations, to the point of silently acknowledging the decay of their own adhesion to a Church in which they are worthless. Religious-sociological research proves that the majority of Catholics, above all the young and the educated, now judge the Pope's teachings as obsolete and are quitting the Church in ever-increasing numbers. The problem is acutely highlighted by Antony De Mello, Indian and Jesuit mystic, when he states: "*a society that has put down its rebels has achieved its own peace but has lost its future*".

The other segment of the Catholic world, however, ever-diminishing and mostly composed of old and poorly educated people, finds comfort and security precisely in the extraordinary attributions of the Pope. Experiencing itself as a part of reality fantasized as omnipotent and omniscient is a

guarantee of worth for an Ego mutilated by infantilizing pedagogical procedures, and with this illusion it is possible to find a crutch and keep on one's feet.

Therefore these faithful have a complementary benefit in submitting themselves to the sacred authority of the pope: they can - unconsciously - feel themselves incorporated in a huge and perfect entity, belonging to the only true Religion, taking part in an advanced civilization, already holding the keys of Salvation.

Against such virtual advantages the faithful are vampirized of their real potentialities. Although in the documents of the Magisterium they are ennobled as a "*royal, priestly and prophetic people*", in the ecclesial life they lose the rights deriving from their *regal* nature, because the only true king is the pope; they are deprived of *prophecy*, as they are rendered aphasic by the super-master, who has the monopoly of word; they are exempted from every *priestly ministry*, as they belong to the profane world. The conscience of the Christian is degraded to executive organ of the papal-ecclesiastic Magisterium, which performs the task of disciplining the whole of life, from sex to politics, in a most meticulous and incontestable way.

It was Pius X himself who established in the encyclical *Vehementer Nos* (1906) the following principle, in radical contrast with the message of the Galilean:

*"Since the Church is the mystical Body of Christ, a Body led by Shepherds and Doctors... the Church is of its nature an "unequal society, made up of two categories of persons: the Shepherds and the Flock... the multitude has no other duty than to let itself be led, following the Shepherds like docile sheep" (Enchiridion of the Encyclical, IV, 142, EDB).*

This kind of obedience to the Head leads to a "mental black-out" of the Ego and to the suppression of possible doubts. The interior vacuum is filled with ideological clichés supported by sermons and rites whose unconscious goal is to create the feeling that God's love, the *good Shepherd*, takes care of his sheep, provided they are obedient. For a lot of Christian adhesion to the Church is experienced as if they were part of an entity which is omnipotent and triumphant but reduces them to disadvantaged children.

The childlike condition of a billion Catholic laymen is such that they are unable even to read the Gospel in the Church, let alone deliver a homily, lead prayers, perform gestures reserved to the celebrant or have a deliberative vote in the parish council or on economic matters. Practically everything is reserved to the *sacred order*, which causes a bizarre paradox, for while the pope on the one hand is continually reminding us that the life of every being is sacred from the first moment of fertilization, on the other hand he "desacralizes" the newly christened as soon as they become part of the Church and the mystical *Body of Christ*, stating that the only sacred person ... is the priest.

An eminent Catholic writer comments thus on the situation: "*It seems that for every Catholic there is only one perfectly legitimate activity, without risk of excess: the apologia of ecclesiastical authority and of its methods, the fanatical exaltation of its small success, the concealment of its defeats, even at the cost of shameful lies*" (George Bernanos, 1940).

## ***Perfection and guilt***

What Bernanos considers a pathology of the Church is its *narcissistic disorder*, an incoherent agglutination of *idealization (apologia of ecclesiastical authority), fanatical exaltation, concealment of defeats and lies*. The result is an impoverishment of mental capacities which consequently provokes a weakening of the emotional connections with others. In a world built on the ideal of perfection, the materialization of a considerable persecutory aggressiveness against those who, being different or impure, might threaten interior cohesion, is inevitable. Internal purity and persecutory violence depend on each other.

The conversion of heart and of mind, basic axis of religious experience, becomes problematic because faithful and leaders, driven by the narcissistic disorder, tend to miscalculate both good and evil, fluctuating between opposing feelings of unworthiness or superiority. The unconscious connection between papacy and faithful, far from being a mere fantasy or theory, immobilizes them in a bond that prevents them from achieving the “reality principle” that would allow each of them to fully acknowledge both their own and the other’s shortcomings and merits. Living in an undifferentiated unity, without space for individualization, engenders a group illusion such as: “we are already perfect, why change or convert”?

Several times John Paul II publicly begged pardon of all humanity for the sins committed by “unknown children of the Church” against women, Jews, science, slaves and the colonized. This courageous denunciation did not go so far as to admit that such "sins" were in fact committed under the inspiration or with the complicity of the teachings of the papacy itself. The abortive recognition of such mistakes is aimed at keeping spotless the aura of perfection of the Roman Pontiff, who is consequently exempted from compensating the victims. The *narcissistic disorder* that unconsciously pervades the Church has only two options: either perfection or simulation of guilt.

Ethics that aim at absolute perfection, lacking barycentre and hence being extremist, fluctuate from the greatest severity (for example in the sexual field) to the greatest complaisance (for example towards injustice, war and corruption).

*The social translation of ethical disequilibrium is well illustrated by the report of Transparency International 2000, according to which in the 10 countries with less corruption (graded 1-10) Catholics constitute 10%; while in the countries in which corruption is very high (graded from 41 to 74) Catholics make up 87% of the population. Sociology, too, confirms that the path to (supposed) perfection runs parallel with that of (real) corruption.*

The ideal that believers are called to is not that of the Beatitudes, which is not easy, but the attainment of the (supposed) perfection of God, which is impossible: "*Be perfect like your Father in heaven*". Such an asceticism, supported by an ideological-liturgical-catechetical apparatus, is focused on an attribute of the Father and the aspiration to internalize it. While for Jesus true spirituality consists of providing concrete help to one’s brethren in need (*to give food and water to the hungry or thirsty, to visit the sick and imprisoned*), for the Church the paramount investment is in achieving the "*state of perfection*". Hence the privilege accorded by the Magisterium to the so-called "*religious life*". The monks or nuns who take a vow of chastity-obedience-poverty automatically and legally enter a *state of perfection*, even if they neglect their brothers and sisters in difficulty. Whereas the volunteers of *Caritas*, who freely dedicate hours to serving at the refectory of the poor, do not live in a state of perfection, since their goal is not the achievement of the perfection of the Father but the provision of brief relief to people in pain.

In this scenario of compulsory perfection, the Catholic Church is unable to envisage pastoral methods and programs which might allow one billion believers to perform a balanced and constructive self-analysis in order to distinguish between “persecutory” self-accusations of imaginary sins, and “depressive” guilt for having inflicted real sufferings or harm on neighbours or God. This is the heritage of St. Augustine, as commented on in the preceding chapter, which is why most Christians cannot distinguish 1) **truth from ambiguity** and 2) **love from violence**.

## ***1. The tangle of truth-ambiguity***

Following the example of Jesus, many supporters of the Church have contributed to creating doctrines and methods which are the produce of a passionate search for truth. It is well documented that the development of science is due to the yearnings of many Christians not only to explore every corner of the unknown but also to mend their errors through the honest acknowledgment of them.

In spite of this, in my opinion, there is a certain shady element in the behaviour of the institutional Church. As mentioned above, in the *Pontifical Yearbook* the pope defines himself as on the one hand "*successor of the Prince of the Apostles*", "*Monarch of the Papal State*", and on the other "*Servant of the servants*". In normal logic the monarch has dignity and power which are incompatible with the lowly state of a servant. If opinions or behaviours lend themselves to misinterpretations, uncertainty and confusion, we speak of "ambiguity", only detectable by the outside observer. The subject who is the source of ambiguity does not experience either confusion or doubt. The pope would never acknowledge his double role of *monarch of a State and Successor of the Apostles* as ambiguous, while it is clear for millions of persons who see him swing from behaviours proper to a head of state to others more in keeping with a religious leader. There are presidents who welcome him with a guard of honour as if he were their counterpart, while on other occasions the same Heads of State kneel or kiss his hands, treating him as a superior spiritual Authority.

Ambiguity is a special type of psychological organization characterized by the co-presence of unconnected nucleuses. That is why there is no awareness of contradiction. When the Oedipal-childlike nucleus remains detached from the mature one, doctrines and actions can be interpreted or experienced by other persons as confusing, of uncertain nature and directed to both honourable and dishonourable goals.

If the papacy, by becoming *absolute* and *infallible*, aimed at making Truth inalterable and certain, the result is the reverse: the confusion among Catholics is blatant and the credibility of the papal teaching is at record low. Intoxicated by the exuberance of their own magnificence and by the freedom *to act according to their personal opinion*, the popes have established doctrines in contrast with those of their predecessors. All this makes the definition of "truth" rather ambiguous for it is impossible to establish who is or was the really infallible pope. Some examples:

- **The eternal salvation** of non-Catholics is a perfect example. The Council of Ferrara-Florence (1442), approved by the pope, established:

*"The Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and announces that nobody can participate in eternal life if he is outside the Catholic Church, therefore not only the heathens, but also the Jews and heretics will go to the eternal fire... if before the end of their life they have not joined the Church".*

Millions of catechists, priests and bishops have been repeating for centuries this "Truth" : colonists and conquerors destroyed the symbols of pagan religions and demanded the forced conversion of submissive peoples to the Church using the threat of an eternal life spent among the fiend's forks. If theologians or laymen dared to go counter to such doctrine they could already end up in the Inquisition's hell on earth. Five hundred years later Vatican II, convoked and approved by the pope, stated that "heathens" and "Jews" (the majority of humanity!) are not automatically destined to perdition

*"Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience" (Lumen Gentium,16).*

- **The interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures** underwent dramatic contradictions under the papacy. For more than a millennium it had maintained that the Bible, as word inspired directly by God, could not contain any error. When Galileo proved that astronomical

discoveries were incompatible with the literal interpretation of the *Sacred Scriptures* he was first admonished by Paul V (1616), then ordered to relinquish Copernican theory and in the end was brought before the Inquisition's Tribunal (1633) to be condemned as

*"seriously suspected of heresy for having supported and believed a doctrine that is false and contrary to divine and the Sacred Scriptures and that the sun is the centre of the universe...and the earth is not the centre of the world"*.

Three centuries and half later John Paul II contradicted this thesis not of mere "theologians" but of the papal Magisterium itself, affirming that the literal interpretation of the Bible was no longer possible:

*"The pastoral judgment required by the Copernican theory was difficult to the extent that geocentrism seemed to be part of the teaching of the Scriptures...The error made by the theologians of the time supporting the centrality of the earth was to think that our knowledge of the structure of the world was, somehow, imposed by the literal sense of the Scriptures...Galileo, sincere believer, was paradoxically more perspicacious than his opposing theologians"* (1992).

Not sufficiently schooled by Galileo's case, Pius IX (1877) condemned the theory of evolution and the Darwinian paradigm as *"disgusting with regard to history, the tradition of peoples and Reason itself"* because it *"degrades man to the level of the unreasoning brutes"*. A century later, new turnabout for Catholics: Pius XII considers evolution *"a serious hypothesis"* (*Humani Generis*, 1950) and JP II confirms the cogency of it: *"Today, half a century after the publication of the encyclical, new knowledge leads one to consider the theory of evolution as more than a mere hypothesis"* (*To The Pontifical Academy*, 1996).

- **The use of physical and moral violence** was the object of a radical change on the part of the Magisterium. Innocent III decreed (*Cum ex Officii Nostri Ours*, 1207) that heretics *"had to be delivered to the secular power and punished"*. Innocent IV, with the *"Ad Extirpanda"* bull, declared the use of torture in the interrogation procedure as legitimate. Paul III, in 1542, set up the headquarters of the Inquisition in Rome legalizing the use of violence and penal action, ranging from preventive censorship for the slightest suspicion, abjuration, financial sanctions for printers, up to the stake. Eight centuries later, the Catholic flock learnt from John XXIII that *"the bride of Christ prefers to use the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity"*. John Paul II is even more explicit:

*"Torture that makes use of physical and moral violence to extort confessions is contrary to the respect of persons and human dignity"* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 2297). *"Another distressing chapter of history which sons and daughters of the Church should reconsider in a spirit of penitence is that of acquiescence to intolerance and the use of violence in the service of truth particularly as evidenced in some centuries "* (*Tertio Millennium Adveniente*).

- **Slavery** is a sad chapter of the papacy's ambiguity. Nicholas V, in 1452, authorized the king of Portugal to *"to invade, capture and subdue the Saracens and Christ's enemies and condemn them to perpetual slavery"*. His successors, Callixtus III, Sixtus IV, Leo X, blessed the conquest of Africa by the Portuguese army and recognized the *"possession of slaves"* as a legitimate reward. Alexander VI granted the king of Spain the faculty of subjugating the American Indian. Paul III, in *Sublimis Deus* (1537), changed this ordinance and proclaimed that *"the Indians should not be deprived of their freedom and enslaved"*. Centuries later Gregory XVI condemned the inhuman trade of black slavery, defining it as the *"shame of Christian nations"*. Thirty' years later (1864) a new counter-order was dispatched to Catholics by the Holy Office, through which was upheld:

*"Slavery, per se, is not an affront either to natural or divine law... in fact the possession of slaves on the part of the owner is only merely a matter of convenience... So Christians can lawfully buy slaves or give them in payment for debts"*.

- **The Jews** are the object of disconcerting stances on the part of the papacy. Numerous pontiffs of the XI and XII centuries forbade compulsory baptism, desecrating raids on

synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. (Nicholas II, Callixtus II, Innocent III up to Gregory IX, with the *Constitutio pro Judeis*, 1120). Simultaneously other popes guaranteed the anti-Semitic theologies of authoritative Fathers of Church (Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine), to the point of introducing into the liturgy of Good Friday a prayer for the conversion of the perfidious Jews:

*"Eternal and omnipotent God, who do not exclude from your pity even the treacherous Jews, hear the prayers we offer for the blindness of that people".*

With John XXIII the pastoral changed, the liturgical anti-Jewish prayer was abolished and Vatican II acknowledged that *"neither the Jews of that time, nor those of today can be accused indiscriminately of the crime committed in the passion of Jesus"*.

- **The superiority of virginity over marriage** is another occasion for the papal zig-zag. The Council of Trent sanctioned (session XXIV, can.10) :

*"Those who say... that it is not better and more blissful to remain virgin or celibate than to be married will be excommunicated".*

Centuries later Pius XII confirmed the superiority of virginity and celibacy over marriage. J P II, however, was not afraid of contradicting his predecessors or suffering excommunication as decreed by the Council of Trent by affirming the opposite in 1982:

*"In the words of Christ about continence for love of the Kingdom of Heaven there is no hint regarding the inferiority of marriage... the words of Christ mentioned in Mathew 9, 11-12... do not provide a motive to support the superiority of virginity or celibacy... Marriage and continence neither contradict each other, nor divide the human (and Christian) community in two fields".*

- **In the sphere of human rights** the course changed by 180 degrees. Pius VI (1791) declared in *"Quod Aliquantum"* that freedom of religion and thought *"is a monstrous crime... a chimerical right"*. Gregory XVI, in 1832, assured the faithful that freedom of conscience was a *"poisonous error"*, as was also the dreadful *"freedom of the press"*, never sufficiently loathed and execrated (*Mirari vos*). Pius IX, in unison with his predecessors, established that it was *"true delirium"* to hold that

*"freedom of conscience and cult is a right which belongs to every person and which must be proclaimed and ensured in every well founded State" (Quanta Cura).*

Over a century later one billion Catholics now have to believe the opposite Truth, namely that it is no longer *"delirium"* to consider freedom of conscience, religion and speech as a right. Vatican II confuted the statements of previous popes by recognizing humanity's right to an immense range of freedoms, including that of religion and *"to act according to the true dictates of conscience"*.<sup>22</sup>

If it is noteworthy that pontifical Teaching changes its opinion to get nearer to common sense, as well as to the principles of the Gospel, it is also true that no pope openly criticizes the theses of his predecessor even though he himself may consider them wrong, Therefore it is absolutely plausible that a future pontiff could declare as misleading a theory today reckoned as "true". And hence the ambiguity of papal pronouncements or doctrinal U-turns over the centuries, which applies also to the methods used to formulate binding truths.

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<sup>22</sup> These include the right freely to meet and form associations, the right to express one's own opinion and to profess one's religion both publicly and privately (GS, 73); Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent (GS, 29); The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.(2) This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right. (DH, 2). Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom. even in matters religious (GS, 26).

## *Pastoral ambiguities*

A good example comes from Vatican II (1962-65). When the assembly raised the problem of evaluating the legitimate use of the "contraceptive pill", Paul VI decided not to permit the subject to be discussed by the 2500 bishops present, fearing they were not sufficiently enlightened by the Spirit. The *narcissistic disorder* persuaded him to mask such an imperious gesture with a "mask of democracy" by establishing a "*pontifical commission*". The manoeuvre turned out to be deceitful when the pope rejected the almost unanimous conclusion (in favour of the "pill") expressed by the commission which he himself had appointed.

In a *narcissistic disorder*, however, the opposite can occur: the next Pope can avail himself of his limitless power to dispense a "pardon" as soon as he realizes that the papal doctrine does not convince even the bishops. He could admit the mistake, but that would go against the dogma of papal infallibility, causing an irreparable shock for submissive believers. Confronted with a general rejection of the doctrine on contraception on the part of the mass of Catholics, what the papal Curia did was to have recourse to a stratagem in order to escape such a "pincer movement": the defence of infallibility and the awareness of the actual mistake. Via the *Pontifical Council for the Family* the Curia issued a *Vade-mecum for priests hearing confessions* (1997) in which,

*even reasserting "the intrinsic malice of contraception" confessors are invited "to accept that penitents are in good faith in cases of error due to subjective invincible ignorance, should the priest realize that the penitents, even though orientated to live in harmony with their faith ... would not change their present behaviour but rather would pass to sin formally".*

The text is exemplary and could give a hint for a "Pontifical Vade-mecum of narcissistic disorder". When an absolute leader sanctions a doctrine that appears to be in contrast with human reason he has two solutions with which to corroborate his own perfection: he can impute the responsibility for the failure of the doctrine to the believers, to their *subjective invincible ignorance*, to their resistance to *changing their current conduct*, or rather to their perseverance in *formal sin*. Alternatively he can be delighted with his own omnipotent mercy by exempting sinners from their (nonexistent) faults and acknowledging in them a fictitious *good faith*.

The game of "appearing" instead of "being" is an integral feature of the narcissistic dynamic that pervades ecclesial life. It is sufficient to observe the *Universal Synods* that the papacy has convoked in the last 40 years with the purpose of showing that it is in tune with the democratic processes of many nations and with the resolutions of Vatican II.

In contrast to the latter, marked by collective participation and total transparency (open to the media), the successive Vatican Synods turned out to be a simulation of collegiality, an "ambiguous democracy", because the agenda was planned by the Curia, discussion was controlled and the decisions reached purely consultative-advisory<sup>23</sup>.

## *2. The amalgam of violence and love*

Parallel to a bi-millenary history of Christianity, distinguished by commendable and inestimable examples of charity, abnegation and defence of the weak, plus extraordinary creativity, there is an

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<sup>23</sup> Parochial and diocesan boards of the whole catholic universe are imbued with this misunderstanding: freedom is purely formal and the faithful are mere photocopies of the pope's centralized authority. It is all manoeuvring, certainly inspired by good will, aiming at juxtaposing the two clashing souls of the Church: the human one, sensitive and tolerant, with the inflexible, haughty and absolutistic one. The result is that all these meetings are perceived by the majority of the faithful and clergy as suspect and certainly infertile.



irrefutable aspect, marked by attitudes of aggressive intolerance, which have turned Christians into the most notorious prototypes of human violence.

The Catholic Church, with Vatican II, succeeded in correcting a lot of doctrinal formulations devoid of charity, without admitting that it had softened, manipulated and even reversed – above all since the Constantinian shift - the Good News of "non-violence" inaugurated by Jesus to the point of justifying violence both on the "Other" (war, the Inquisition, slavery, crusades, colonialism, etc.) and on the "Self" (sacrifice-submission).

It is indisputable that the Catholic Magisterium is animated by love in its promotion of the spiritual and social elevation of humanity, but it is also undeniable that within many sermons and official documents, including the catechism itself, there is latent a thirst for limitless revenge. A mortal sin, blasphemy, for example, or the use of contraceptives, is enough, according the Catechism of John Paul II, *"to ensure that the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell where they suffer " eternal fire"*, in addition to which there is an even greater torment, i.e. *" the eternal separation from God"*.

Not only hell but even heaven is pervaded by quivers of cruel revenge. After Augustine also Thomas Aquinas writes that

*"in the celestial kingdom the blessed will experience no compassion for the damned... will take pleasure in the pains of. In this way the divine justice and its preservation will be the reason for the beatitude of the blessed and, accidentally, the pains of the damned...."* (Sup. Q.94 a.3).

This "celestial sadism", a true rarity in the history of religions, stimulated the fantasy of the most celebrated Doctor of the Church in complicity with the Supreme Authority. To be precise, cruelty is projected on the Trinity itself however dogmatically defined as "Holy". Even though in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus clearly appears to have been condemned by "political-religious Powers", subsequent Christian theology removed that historical event and taught that it was the Father who demanded the death of Jesus as compensation from a humanity which had offended the order established by God. To cleanse such an infinite offence an equally infinite reparation was required. In reality this "theology" is the daughter of Roman Law, which was adopted by the Church as its own institutional code when it became part of the Holy Roman Empire.

It is transparent that this God suffered a worldly-imperial (Constantinian) cloning by being equated with a monarch who, faced with his subjects' rebellion, demanded that his honour, once offended, be repaired through humiliating submission. According to this legalistic-imperial perspective only the self-sacrifice of a Son-God can satisfy and give God-Father back his dignity, however cruel this may be towards the Son himself. As a consequence theologians and Magisterium mould together two contrasting personalities of God: one is a celestial, infinite source of love, but the other is a juridical, growling and narcissistic monster, who is keen not to save the world but to get reparation for being slighted by creatures who dare to be independent. This God not only has the features of that serial-killer, Constantine, who did not hesitate to kill even his own son, but also resembles Augustine's parents handcuffed to each other by an unconscious sado-masochistic tie. The Christian-ecclesiastical God certainly grants grace but only in exchange for the death of an innocent victim. The anthropologist R. Girard has valid reasons when he writes:

*"God claims not only a new victim but the most cherished and loved one, his own Son. This postulate undoubtedly contributed more than any other thing to discrediting Christianity in the eyes of men of good will".* (R. Girard, *De choses cachée depuis la fondation du monde*, ed. Grasset, Paris, 1978).

It is not easy to retort to those who write that the *Good News* Jesus brought has become, for the majority of human beings, *Bad News*, since he himself has been transformed into a mixture of love and violence.

## ***The violence of rite***

The fact is worth considering that over the centuries, in almost all religions, a connection became established between rite and priesthood which included violence. Most rites, in fact, contemplate both a sacrificial victim and a priestly order. Violence cannot do without an expiatory victim who puts an end to rivalry in the group by concentrating all wickedness on himself in order to transform it, through his death, into beneficial violence and thus bring peace. The novelty is that in the Catholic Church (but also in the other Christian Churches) rite contains a double message: on the one hand Father, Son and Spirit constitute a nature composed of creativity, grace, goodness, pity and infinite salvation; on the other hand Father and Son are united through an unequal and violent relationship.

The fundamental cult of the Catholic Church, the Eucharist, does not escape a certain ambivalence, if one is to believe that the violence Jesus had to suffer was *holy*, since it was requested by God himself with the intention of showing his infinite love. In his "*Catechism*" JP II teaches that in the Eucharistic rite Jesus Christ ascends to the role of *victim-servant*, with the objective of reconciling, repairing and providing compensation.<sup>24</sup>

It is undeniable that rite aims to promote in the faithful a real experience of goodness, brotherhood and commitment to a fairer and peaceful society. Even so it has its centre in the "sacrifice" of Jesus, enforced by the Father. This thesis appears even more paradoxical if we observe that the Nazarene unequivocally kept his distance from any kind of priesthood and sacrifice.

My hypothesis is that the Christian exegetes and leaders have chosen such a track, so divergent from that which Jesus followed, to get rid of their sado-masochistic drives, unacceptable to those who crave to look "perfect". Through rite the sadistic impulses, inevitable in every person, are surreptitiously exported to God-Father, who consequently appears as a vengeful torturer. The tendency to masochistically accept suffering and injustice emigrate to God-Son, who is transformed into a "*docile Servant*", available for slaughter.

This dichotomy owner-servant, sadism-masochism, authoritarianism-obedience, which pollutes a large part of catholic doctrine and organization, finds its theatre in the Mass. This subject will be extensively dealt with in the chapter dedicated to the Eucharist.

## ***Violence of the order of priesthood***

The duo violence-love is supported by a conception of rite that has its centre in another couple, "priest-who-sacrifices" and "faithful-who-are sacrificed". In order to preserve this asymmetric relationship the Magisterial Authority undertakes to form a class of priests suitable for a salvific ministry (as sacrificers) after giving confirmation of their absolute obedience, i.e. of self-emptying and renunciation of self-realization (as sacrificed). To this end the papacy establishes that candidates for the priesthood have to go through the stage of sacrificial victim first, then they can ascend to the opposite role of victimizing or sacrificing subject. Only in this way can they reach full identification with the bi-polar Christ, sacrificed Victim and sacrificing Priest. In order to be qualified to demand that his future congregation of believers take on the same role of sacrificial Lamb, the aspiring priest must first sacrifice his entire self. Not only married love but also political, literary, scientific, social and artistic interests and commitments. He is trained to think that through his own "sacrifice" he will be loved by both the parent figures, God-Father and Church-Mother. In return for this love he is prepared to surrender his will to his Superior, even at the cost of silencing his own conscience and suppressing his emotional reactions. This explains why it is so rare for ecclesiastics to enter into a frank and spontaneous dialogue.

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<sup>24</sup> "*Jesus is the suffering servant who lets himself be led to the slaughter bearing the sin of multitudes*"(608).

With the aim of obtaining an important place at the altar, the curriculum of every priest-victim requires him to spend at least five years of his youth in a place set apart from the world (seminary), avoiding any form of cohabitation with women, involvement in manual work or professional activity. In short, he must do the opposite of what the Nazarene did for nine-tenths of his life.

The purpose of such isolation is twofold: 1) to favour the acquisition of a revealed doctrine which is abstract, unverifiable, independent of experimental sciences and protected from the "world" and from doubts; 2) to mature an inner disposition so that all the orders of his superiors are considered as "the will of God", even if this entails the amputation of natural sensibilities such as emotions and affection. In short, the purpose consists of introjecting the Church as a "hierarchical-pyramidal structure", set up for the fulfilment of tasks in a downward direction, from top to bottom without circularity. The priest becomes the "*Civil servant of God*", and his actions thus cause divine effects not by virtue of his own personality but of the task he is assigned to.<sup>25</sup>

In *Psychology of the masses* Freud explains that in organizations where members identify themselves with the chief (soldier with commander, priest with bishop), freedom of thought is excluded because it would create commotion threatening cohesion. As for the novice, he has no other choice than to deny his own Ego's needs by accepting a "miniaturization of his "Self" in order to safeguard the body of the Mother-Church by submitting himself to the Holy-Father. With his heart nailed to normative charts of the Super Ego the seminarian can become a sacrificial element of the hierarchical pyramid. Once his total abnegation of Self for the good of his Mother-Church is proven, he is *consecrated*, that is, endowed with sacred power, able to communicate *divine mysteries* and act in the *Person of Christ*. After giving evidence of his own *sacrifice* he can, in the name of God, demand the same of his parishioners. He acquires the power not so much to fulfil the mandate of Jesus – to go forth together with a community of friends to preach the Kingdom of God, to heal the sick and to free the oppressed, all things that certainly do not require any consecration – as to turn the people of Christ into docile *sacrificial victims* of *God's employee*. One of his focal tasks will be to persuade humankind that they are all sinners, in need of redemption through a "specialized mediator".

This unconscious but concrete design of the Hierarchy clashes more and more frequently with the adult conscience of those clerics who realize they belong to a structure depriving them of dignity and autonomy. This is one of the reasons for the crisis affecting many Catholic priests, to which only two basic solutions can be found: either to suppress the conflict with the hierarchical apparatus by accepting the role of *employee of the sacred* or to run away and face a succession of new problems: residence, pension, new job, legal disputes etc. There is, as is well known, a third category composed of "front line priests", admired for their pastoral work carried out in situations of great hardship. However this is a mere minority, too small to have any hope of influencing the crisis openly, due to the narcissistic-sacrificial nature of the clerical organization which has trained its own members to a form of communication that shuns personal problems and inner conflicts. It is well proven that those who have internalized a domination-oriented mental scheme have a high rate of "anti-introspection".

It goes without saying that psychoanalysis is a discipline banned by all Roman Catholic institutions.

## ***Violence of ascesis***

Jesus certainly cannot be compared with a modern psychotherapist, but there is no doubt that he is in favour of a rigorous introspective discipline in order to humanize mind and personal conduct. If, on the one hand, he perceives hypocrisy, hostility, arbitrary judgement and power-seeking as

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<sup>25</sup> E. Drewermann, *Kleriker, psychogramm eines ideals*, Walter-Verlag, 1989

dangerous, on the other he does not fail to notice that there are forms of suffering which can be inflicted by those who wield power for the pleasure of "*imposing unbearable burdens in the name of God*". The sado-masochistic circuit, a mixture of love and violence, also pollutes the ascetic life and is patent in *The Imitation of Christ*. This book, on which millions of Christians have been formed, clearly advocates self-inflicted violence, and the paradigmatic model is Jesus, the victim who immolates himself. The author, Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), addresses his readers thus:

*"I remember having done nothing good, while I have always been prone to vice and slow to amend... As I [Jesus] offered myself to God the Father on the cross for your sins, in the same way you must offer yourself voluntarily every day in the Mass as a pure and holy oblation... the cross is always ready and waiting for you everywhere... Christ's whole life was cross and martyrdom, and you are seeking rest and joy? ... Drink eagerly from the chalice of the Lord if you want to be his friend ... When you find tribulation sweet and it pleases you for love of Christ, then you will be able to believe you have found paradise on earth... Oh Lord, I deserve nothing but to be whipped and punished for having seriously offended you ... The true profit of man consists of repudiating himself... I am in your hands, my Lord, do whatever you will with me... Dear Son, you cannot have perfect freedom if you do not renounce yourself totally... Look for solitude, value being on your own, do not talk with anybody... My Lord, detach me and free me from any temporary consolation of creatures... Dear Son, diligently observe the movements of nature and those of Grace, because they proceed in opposite directions"*.

The purpose of this "Augustinian" asceticism is to deprive Christians, especially priests, of the awareness of being the "living image of God", to the point of inducing them to think the opposite, i.e. that they are "*lurid sinners*", "*hungry beggars*", "*earth and mud*", "*unworthy of any good*". The perspective is not "*the abundant life*" which Jesus speaks of, but the masochistic pleasure, sadistically proposed, of "*drinking eagerly the Chalice of the Lord... looking for no joy and rest... talking with nobody... finding tribulation sweet*".

The supreme Authority, instead of assessing such recommendations as antihuman, holds their authors up as stars of the religious firmament. According to these teachers, masters of persecutory ascesis, the movements of nature proceed against those of Grace. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, is what the believer recites mechanically. If he succeeds in convincing himself that he is blameworthy and can exist only in an asymmetric relationship with God (and his representatives), then passivity becomes a natural disposition requested by the God of clerics who have trained according to a sado-masochistic discipline. The fundamental Christian virtue is "*blind obedience*", moulded on the kind demanded by the dominant system, all the better if analogous to that of the "*dead body*" as suggested by St. Ignatius.

The pattern of this discipline is the *Jesus-victim* who immolates himself because his Father claims his death in reparation for original sin. In this degrading asceticism the personality of the Madonna herself is overturned, and she becomes "*the humble servant*", exactly the opposite of what she chose to be in the song of the *Magnificat*, in which she declares her desire "*to bring down mighty kings from their thrones, to lift up the lowly, to fill the hungry with goods things, to send the rich away with empty hands*" (Lk 1,51-53).

## ***The violence of Christian initiation***

Missionaries and monks have contributed to spreading the Good News peacefully and without state support, even among the so called "barbarians", since the fall of the Byzantine and Roman Empire. But the fact is that the majority of Christians have received Baptism without any chance of consent. Europe's conversion to Christianity, in large part, took place according to the same scheme that Catholic parents adopt with their children. In the case of nations, it is the monarch who, acting as parent, imposes on his subjects-children compulsory baptism and their conversion to the new religion. As soon as the monarch is christened (nearly always for political convenience), the nation is christened on industrial scale.... For example:

- One of the first nations to do this was Armenia, where King Tiridates (261-317) proclaimed Christianity the official religion.
- The baptism of King Miriani of Georgia was followed by that of the entire nation;
- that of Clovis (499-505) was followed by that of the Franks;
- that of King Arnold (960) by Denmark;
- that of King Mieszko (966) by Poland;
- that of King Geza (975) by Hungary;
- that of Prince Vladimir I (988) by Russia with Greek-Byzantine ritual.
- Sometimes it is the wedding between monarchies of different religions which ensures a mass baptism; as was the case of the Catholic Queen of Poland who, by marrying the Grand Duke of Lithuania, succeeded in converting the whole of his country to Catholicism (1386).
- In the XV and XVI centuries, through the colonization fostered by the discovery of Latin America and with the military conquests of some regions of Africa and Asia, patronized by monarchs of Spain and Portugal, baptism was imposed on the indigenous populations. The enslaved Africans, deported to Brazil, were branded and christened, simultaneously transformed into merchandise and Children of God.

In an efficient summing up, the President of the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique, Mons. Vieira Pinto, in 1975, sketched in the violent methods implemented by the Magisterium in order to spread the Good News:

*"the Church actively collaborated with the colonial regimen... appeared visibly on the side of colonialist rulers, announced a Gospel of resignation and obedience to established order while allowing it to be exploited by colonial power... Religion divided the people... not only divided, but prevented people from being people" (Il Regno, Bologna, n.19, 1975).*

The bishop refers to the fact that the evangelization of Africa, in synchrony with that of Latin America, is the outcome of an illicit deal between monarchies and the papacy, sword and cross. As early as 1455 Pope Nicolas V, with the bull "*Romanus Pontifex*", allowed the King of Portugal, Alfonso V, to take possession of the African coasts down to Guinea, and "*to defeat and subjugate any sort of Saracens, heathens and enemies of Christ... to reduce to perpetual servitude their peoples*", with a peremptory clause: the king had to strive to propagate the Christian faith even on behalf of his own successors. Pope Calixtus III confirmed the decision of his predecessor. Decades later, before the disputes over Latin America between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, the Spanish Pope, Alexander VI, wrote to the King of Spain:

*"in the plenitude of apostolic authority... with the authority of omnipotent God... [I declare] that we donate and assign to you all the islands and lands found and to be found in the western and southern part of the continent bounded by a line starting from the North Pole... down to the Antarctic pole.. with all their dominions, cities, jurisdictions and properties".*

In recognition of this papal concession, the Catholic King of Spain had to spread Catholic doctrine. Anyone who dared to go to these territories without the King's special permission would be immediately excommunicated (*latae sententiae*) by the pope.

When Hernán Cortes disembarked in the Gulf of Mexico in 1517, he repeated what Constantine had done 1200 years before: he marched to the capital preceded by a standard with the cross and the inscription: "*Let us follow the cross and under this sign we will win, if we have enough faith*". The miracles he performed had nothing to do with those of Jesus, but with gunpowder and the sword. After over two months of heroic resistance, the Emperor and 200.000 Aztecs were slain. Then began the systematic destruction of temples, cults, feasts, sacred books, followed by an "armed sacramentalization without evangelization" (*Testimonianze*, Firenze, n.319, 1989).

In the Church there are praiseworthy cases of non-violent evangelization. Those most consistent with Christian charity were carried out by Jesuits in Paraguay, by Mathew Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in India. The latter two men were bold missionaries who attempted - in a non violent way – to integrate Catholicism both with Confucianism and Brahmanic culture. These experiments of non violent evangelization were repeatedly demolished both by the Most Catholic Spanish monarchy in the case of Paraguay, and, in the case of China and India, by the Holy See (1704) or directly by the papacy (1744).

The arrival of Christians in North America in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century was not welcomed joyfully by the local populations. The colonizers (English, French, Dutch) began to fight with each other. With the definitive supremacy of the English army – protestant – two criminal processes started: the black African slave trade and the genocide of American Indians.

The most reliable conclusion is that adhesion to Christianity, in fact, is compatible only with the use of military force or the power of state, not with meekness and respect for freedom of conscience, save for honourable exceptions. However only dominant classes took advantage of "Christianization". The Kenyan leader, Jomo Kenyatta, bitterly comments: *"When missionaries arrived in Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said to us: "Let us pray" and we closed our eyes. When we reopened them, we had the Bible and they had the land "*.

## ***Violence on women***

Very few people question the fact that Jesus carried out a revolution by recognizing the dignity of the women of his time, receiving them as permanent companions, no longer condemned to put up with the sexist taboos of men. In the first Christian communities women shared all the ministries: they were *"apostles"*, *"evangelizers"*, *"teachers"* and even *"prophetesses"*. A century later old male prejudices against women began to regain strength, especially on the part of celibates, whose obtuse despotism went so far as to use the first part of Paul's advice (*"wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord"*, Ef 5,22) but not the second, which prescribes reciprocity. Two or three centuries after Jesus' death women progressively lost parity, responsibilities and respect. The Church derailed towards "misogyny" and legitimized several forms of exclusion and inferior status of women.

- The *Apostolic Constitutions*, dating back to the year 380, forbade women not only to teach but also to serve at the altar. Saint Augustine (354-430), together with various Fathers of the Church (IV and V sec.) theorized that, as *"man is subject to Christ, in the same way woman is subject to man"*, not through revealed reasons, but because *"it is more consonant with the natural order that men hold power over women, rather than women over men"*.
- The antifeminist and scientifically false opinion of Aristotle enjoyed a new vogue with St Thomas, according to whom the generative and active power of animals resides in the male sex, the passive in the female. He explains that there are two kinds of "submission": one is "servile" and the other is "civil", exercised by the master for the common good. *"This is the state of submission to her husband in which nature placed woman, since nature itself has given man more discernment"* (Sum. Theol. q92 a1, 1).
- Even the Madonna is downgraded by this Doctor of the Church, in order to support the superiority of man. Thomas Aquinas writes: *"There is no doubt that the Blessed Virgin received to an eminent degree the gift of wisdom. She could exercise this wisdom in contemplation, but she did not have wisdom enough to teach... teaching is not appropriate to the female sex"* (Sum.Theol. q27a 5° 3).
- Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical *"Immortale Deo"* (1885) takes advantage of Augustine's thesis to announce to women the "Good News" of Men: *"You [ God ] place husbands in the dominant position with regard to wives, not to exploit the weaker sex, but to accept the bond of a sincere love"*.

With this premise, engraved for centuries in the cerebral lobes of all seminarists, woman is completely inadequate to hold a leading, prophetic, teaching and liturgical role in the Catholic Church, in good company with many other religions and Christian Churches. In the end the Christian woman suffers a double sexist violence: first and foremost the male Magisterium sponsors the Greco-Roman ideology, according to which the differences between man and woman are "natural": man is eminent, while woman is subordinate; the first is made for thought, public tasks and power, while the second for maternity, affection and service. In addition, the seal of God is used to guarantee inequality, so that only man can be the "*icon of God*" and priest, while woman is not the "image of Christ" and, consequently, cannot fulfil the same functions as man.

Proof of how woman is biologically condemned to live within the canon fixed by androcentric power, is dramatically clear in that of the rape. If a woman (even a nun) is sexually abused, she is bound by ecclesiastical (patriarchal) law to carry to term a repugnant pregnancy and not to see her own rights acknowledged, because those of the foetus come first.

In papal ideology women's rights cannot have the same equal weight as those of the Other, whether foetus, partner or aggressor. The embryo has the right to become a person with freedom of thought and action but not the raped woman. According to the supreme Magisterium the rapist can paradoxically force a woman "to sacrifice herself", to the point of imposing on her the obligation to love her embryo and take care of its future.

These are the conclusions of the pseudo-scientific and pseudo-theological premises of pontifical power, based on the Augustinian dichotomy of victim (woman)-sacrificer (man), according to which woman was to be subordinate to man (and the male sacerdotal order), based on laws exhibited as natural and divine. In confirmation of the clear tendencies to privilege the dominance of man over woman, there is no papal pronouncement or censorship – as far as I know – which treats the deviations of "machismo" and patriarchy with the same severity with which feminism has been condemned. Centuries ago the ecclesiastical authority established an association of woman-submission-sin in contrast to that of male-power-sacred. The Good News, preached by male clergy, has a different value for Christian women: original sin is attributed to Eve, while the salvific action of God to the male sex. The sons of God have the monopoly of being the representation of Christ, the daughters of Eve being that of sin.

### ***Violence and sexuality of priests***

In the international press, at the end of the second millennium, articles came out concerning Catholics, nuns included, who publicly denounced sexual abuses perpetrated by priests. Many of these persons applied to the courts to claim damages for the moral and psychological injuries they had suffered.

What is internationally considered as a scandal is not only the sexual abuse perpetrated by clerics, which is statistically possible in a large organization, but the fact that the Catholic episcopate knowingly covered up the sexual crimes committed by members of the clergy (including the former Cardinal of Vienna), instead of being in the front line in analyzing the phenomenon and instituting a "therapeutic" climate. The "childlike and narcissistic" justification produced was always the same: the defence of the impeccability of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. With such a subterfuge, the authorities find themselves up a blind alley. On the one hand they cannot deny that the "predators of minors" do something objectively wrong, but they cannot suspend or denounce them because that would endanger the faith of "simple persons" and the image of the *consecrated* as symbols of perfection. There is nothing they can do but - in full awareness - ask the victims to maintain a sepulchral silence on the paedophilic activities carried out by priests, having recourse to the usual

*theology of self-immolation*. But such complicity is at risk in the media society, which pitilessly penalizes the "*whited sepulchres*" once they are uncovered.

In the accounts given by the victims what is striking is that the priest never uses force on the weaker subject but is able to seduce him to the point of convincing him that the priest is good and his mission is to love, to do good, but never to harm. The main aim of those who abuse the vulnerability of children is to persuade them to perceive violence as an act of love or initiation to pleasure and life. Also in the case of the confessions of nuns raped by a priest what comes out is that the man justifies his need of sexual "services" – on the part of a virgin and consecrated person – with the fact that the sister's "immolation" is a safeguard for the priest in order to avoid the risk of Aids, an event more likely with "non-consecrated" women. The sister, as a woman and an inferior being, is the designated victim. If she does not bow to the sexual drives of the priest-aggressor, she becomes morally responsible for two scandalous repercussions: the deadly illness which the priest could contract sleeping around with prostitutes, and the resultant drop in the number of priests. In narcissistic disorder "the pathology of idealization" is mixed up with that of "perversion", so that it is possible to hide imperfections and weaknesses with the sacrificial cooperation of victims.<sup>26</sup>

## *Church leaders and political power*

Historians and theologians unanimously acknowledge that the summit of all Christian Churches, from Constantine on, let itself be involved in a political-economic system beneficial to ruling classes. This did not prevent some popes from recognizing the injustice of many secular structures. Leo XIII wrote in his most important encyclical: "*a very small number of the immensely rich has imposed on the infinite multitude of proletarians a yoke little less than servile*" (*Rerum Novarum*, n.2).<sup>27</sup>

The fact is that the majority of Catholics, catechized by industrious shepherds, have for centuries been sponsoring emperors, sovereigns, feudatories, rich people, great landowners, colonizers, military regimes, dictatorships of Nazi-Fascist mould and conservative parties. Never movements for independence, liberation or reform.

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned it is noteworthy that the "absolute papacy" is in spontaneous and natural consonance with conservative systems, since both support, more or less surreptitiously

- an opposition (officially denied) to democracy
- the superiority (officially denied) of a (white) race, of a (western) culture, of a sex (male), of (Christian) religion
- the defence of armaments and the "just war"
- the centrality of the family, in which man holds power and woman is for service
- the theory that nature and matter are lower realities of secondary importance
- the reduction of morality to the sexual dimension, so that politics, commerce, finance, are practically free from ethical constraints
- the accumulation of private property and the free market, with unlimited profit.

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<sup>26</sup> "There are many arguments which, through the use of extremely spiritual language on the subject of consecrated virginity, suggest an obscure and morbid background which makes one think more of a refused and corrupted sexuality than one which is genuinely sublimated" (Carlos Dominguez Morano, ADISTA, 13.5.02).

<sup>27</sup> Leo XIII also writes: "If the ownership of capital, as a means of production or control of technological knowledge and abilities, prevents others from joining this network of solidarity, it has no justification and is an abuse before God and men" (*Rerum Novarum* n.43).



The absolute papacy, holder of a power which can be defined neither by a Council nor by a Christian community, practically shares the same structure as the “great powers” (commercial-industrial-financial), which refuse to be circumscribed by the State or *super partes* agencies. Both papal and secular powers recognize no other sovereignty or law than that of God (for the papacy) or of the Market (for capitalism). They do not practice democracy or participation but try to interfere in elections in order to accommodate them to the wishes of the elites. The “absolute papacy”, since it is itself by definition free to speak and act “*ad libitum*”, i.e. without any restriction, cannot in all fairness impose a ceiling on the narcissistic-predatory pretensions of voracious entrepreneurs and rulers, real nightmare of the poor.

The pope is certainly sorry about the increasing difference between the rich and the poor. He is well aware that in 1960 20% of the world’s wealthiest citizens possessed 30 times more than the poorest 20%, while the gap had grown 60 times in 1990 and 90 times in the year 2000. Even more painful for him must be the fact that the inequalities between rich and poor are statistically greater in Catholic countries. In the encyclical “*Centesimus annus*” JPII writes that “*capitalism is incapable of acting according to ethical standards, regardless of the good will of the individual capitalist. It is not only incapable, but is based on exactly the opposite principle*”. These words are commendable but merely smoke in the eyes of those who have been shipwrecked by development. For them what is unpardonable is that, from Constantine onwards, the popes and the Christian Churches have never created a spiritual climate able to de-legitimize a system based on inequality.

In December 2006 the United Nations Report clarified that 1% of the world’s population holds 40% of financial assets and real estate, while 50% has only 1%. Such gigantic disproportion causes the Roman pontiff such anxiety that every day he invokes greater justice. He knows the metastasis of this inequality. He criticizes criminality, consumerism and the soft pornography of the entertainment industry, but not the mega-machine which produces or supports them. Sectors of the Catholic episcopate describe neoliberalism as the “*mask of organized crime*” without calling into question the causes of this unlimited confiscation of humanity’s wealth by a minority which blazons “unlimited consumption”, well aware that it is leading the planet toward collapse.

As far as I know, the papacy has never fostered a theological-pastoral action to define the limits of profit, private property and the exploitation of the earth’s resources in spite of its extraordinary diplomatic apparatus and its weight in international institutions. Strangely enough, the *absolute papacy* sets strict and millimetric boundaries only for sexual activity. For centuries it has been establishing which contraceptive techniques are licit for Christian couples while maintaining an awkward silence with regard to those permanently anti-fertilizing and tendentially omnivorous dynamics, such as appropriations and profiteering, which jeopardize social solidarity.

The Catholic ideology is well summarized by St Pius X (1903-14), according to whom it is

*“established by God that in society there are princes and subjects, masters and proletarians, rich and poor, wise and ignorant”* (*Motu proprio Azione popolare Cristiana*).

Pius x, with the weight of his holiness, backs up the capitalistic-neoconservative thesis, according to which God wants the world divided into two unequal categories (*princes and subjects, masters and proletarians, rich and poor, wise and ignorant*).

### ***The neo-constantinian pact***

With the implant of constantinian “imperial genes” inside the Christianity, the latter loses the identity acquired in the first three centuries. The aristocracy of the Church (pope and bishops)

formed a definitive alliance with the political-economic powers, with which it established a tacit agreement which could be read in the following way:

- The pontiff refrains from clearly condemning the neo-colonial and hoarder philosophy of the "Global Merchants" and from promoting any doctrinal action or pastoral campaign that could be interpreted in favour of the lumpenproletariat of the planet and against the few but powerful owners who control the destiny of the world.
- In exchange, the latter, through their media and the conservative parties linked to them, commit themselves to defend the topics beloved by popes which do not put at risk the neo-liberal benchmarks of unlimited accumulation and the cynical *market economy*. The hard fact is that neither right-wing parties nor multinationals oppose any objection to the requests of the Roman Pontiff in matters of sexual morality, the family, euthanasia, Catholic schools and "Christian roots", provided these affairs do not interfere with "Mammon", the God-Market-profit.
- The pact, as in the case of Constantine, aims at curbing and, at the same time, masking social conflict. In an ultra-unequal system, like neo-liberalism, the centripetal morality of the Church, based on moderation of instincts, voluntary service and charity, turns out to be essential in order to counterbalance the centrifugal drives of the lavish search for pleasure and individual profit, which are the basic incentives of all imperial-aristocratic systems.
- Obviously the pact takes for granted that the whole Church will be unfailingly aligned with the papacy, the only subject in a position to stand as guarantor of the barter "*do ut des*". If there are Catholic movements hostile to the "neo-Constantinian pact", like the Theology of Liberation or the grass roots Christian communities who prefer to follow the path of Jesus to free peoples from modern Pharaohs, then the "Vatican Battery of Anathemas" (the former Holy Office) comes into action so that the world always remains divided into victims (Sons) and executioners (Fathers), as Constantine, Augustine and Saint Pius X teach.

A recent documentation of this "pact" is offered by the book which reveals the concealed negotiations between His Holiness and the US President, R. Reagan, aimed at accelerating the shattering of communism in the USSR and particularly Poland<sup>28</sup>. No wonder that the Pope, in exchange for this favour from the President of the super power, decided to condemn the Theology of Liberation as "subversive" (1987). Two years later the Berlin wall collapsed and the Russian empire fell apart. Latin America, however, remained under the economic yoke of the US.

That being said, it is nevertheless true that the pope was not barred from intervening in international politics in support of the underprivileged, but he did not take advantage of this position. Yet he enjoys, the sole religious head in the world, the status of "*Observer without right of vote*" in the UN and the main international institutions. So it seems paradoxical that over a billion Catholics have never been consulted by the papacy about the political issues that most concern them.

The Constantinian inheritance once more returns to the stage in this case, since the papal prerogative is in fact granted to an ambiguous "Trinitarian" entity which is simultaneously "*Holy See*", "*Vatican City State*" and "*Roman Catholic Church*". No wonder if the aforementioned "Trinity", product of an old "incestuous embrace" between State and Church, praises the "*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*" (1948) on the one hand, since it is useful to defend the Catholic Church in nations where it is a minority presence, while on the other it considers such a "*Magna Carta*" virtually incompatible with the Constitution of the Catholic Church.

In «*Human Rights Law Journal*» (Dec. 1995) Jean-Bernard Marie highlights that the Vatican has ratified only 10 out of 103 protocols, conventions or declarations relative to human rights, which is even fewer than Ruanda, China and Cuba. It did not sign agreements on matters of: *elimination of*

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<sup>28</sup> C. Bernstein and M. Politi (*His Holiness John Paul II and the secret history of our time*, Rizzoli, Milan 1996)

*sexual discrimination; professions and employment; protection of indigenous peoples; genocide; war crimes; apartheid; abolition of slavery; capital punishment; penal servitude. The narcissistic disorder is blatant: on the one hand the Roman Pontiff is the world's standard bearer in the crusade for the "dignity of human life from the moment of conception"; on the other he torpedoed the claims of Catholics by not acknowledging 90% of international agreements on human rights, since he explicitly disapproves of fundamental issues like the effective equality of men and women; the participation of Catholics in the designation of their leaders and in decision-making; freedom of speech and teaching; the legal guarantees for a fair trial.*

## **Christian Churches**

If it is true that *narcissistic disorder* took root in the IV century due to the alliance between State and Church, preceded by the "mutation" of the historical personality of Jesus in process since the first century CE, it is reasonable to think that all Christian Churches have been infected by that pathology. On Orthodox, Protestant and Independent Churches I wish to make some comments.

### **Orthodox Church**

Among the ancient Christian Churches the Orthodox is probably the most well known for its devotion to the Holy Spirit and the importance assigned by the Fathers of the Church to mystery and spirituality. But due to the union with the Byzantine and post-Constantinian Empire, it was infected with *narcissistic disorder*, clearly evident in recent official document of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church, the most influential of the Orthodox world for the number of faithful.

Self-satisfaction for its own perfection is boundless:

*"The Orthodox Church is the true Church of Christ... it is the one and only... it cannot sin or be in error... Disobedience to the legitimate authority of the Church is disobedience to the Holy Spirit... [ in it ] Holy Tradition and the fullness of Grace are integrally maintained without corruption... it does not accept the equality of any other religious confession"... it occupies a central place on the path towards the unity of Christians"* (Jubilee Council of Bishops, 14 August 2000, Moscow).

Behind this self-proclaimed *impeccableness, infallibility, incorruptibility and centrality*, intolerance towards diversity becomes manifest when it says that *"The propensity to tolerance of the divergence of ideas in matters of faith is unacceptable"*. Threats and violence are explicitly exalted as necessary means for the ecclesial life: *"The Church has always treated in a strict and intransigent way those who have expressed ideas contrary to the purity of the salvific faith, as well as those who have brought divisions and discords into the Church"*.

This hieratic language goes hand in hand with judicial parlance in conformity with the Byzantine-Constantinian principle of "symphony", according to which to the *only celestial realm* must correspond an *earthly realm*, in which Church and State (symbolized by a two-headed Eagle in Orthodox Churches and institutions) collaborate on equal terms for the good of their subjects. This goes back to the infantile nostalgia of having both parents (Church and State) in harmony and without conflict in order to guarantee the survival of their dependent children. Like all pre-Oedipal dreams, the *symphony* proves to be unrealistic and the document of the Russian Orthodox Council reveals this when in its packed pages it fails to mention the *Kingdom of peace and justice*.

The attention of the "bishop-parents" is concentrated on the exaltation of their own "caste", without any concern for "the children-faithful", still mostly indigent and despairing even in XXI century Russia.

This exclusion of believers from the ecclesial organization is a boomerang for the Orthodox hierarchy. If the Russian Tsar is the head of the Orthodox empire and the guarantor of the well-being of his subjects, and if he becomes – starting from Peter I - a demigod, owner of everything and everybody, he can also reduce the Church to a "*Ministry for the Orthodox Confession*" and direct the Synod through a *Proxy*. However, even though the majority of the clergy submits itself to the power of the State, one should not forget that there have always been monks and saints who illuminate the Orthodox Church with charity and *silent prayer*, not to mention the martyrs and "*starez*", venerated guides of the spirit and lodestones of pilgrimages.

## ***Protestant Churches***

An intense religious movement began in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century through Luther and Calvin, who made the Bible the main authority for the Christian faith in contrast with the papacy, seriously compromised by simoniacal activities and temporal interests. The need for conversion, the study of the Sacred Scriptures (forbidden by the pope), the emphasis on the freedom of conscience constitute a new propellant for the reform of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the weight given to St. Paul's thesis, according to which man can save his soul only through the grace of God and not through "deeds", leads to the support of theories diametrically opposed to those of Jesus, for whom only concrete actions moved by love of one's neighbours are essential, even in absence of any religious creed.

Faith can be a stage of delusion or of self-exaltation and is proved by the evolution of Luther himself, capable of spending hours in prayer or translating the Bible but also of giving vent to criminal actions, as when he upheld the *German princes'* brutal repression of the uprising of the exploited peasants who – basing their principles on the Gospel – presented a threat to the interests of the landowners. "*These times - he wrote - are so extraordinary that a prince can more easily gain heaven by bloodshed than by prayer*". Such an affirmation shows how the Christian inheritance of what is abstract (*prayers*) can be a camouflage for violence (*bloodshed*) when the two activities are dissociated in the absence of the control of the Ego.

This dichotomy comes up again in the thesis of the *double predestination* held both by Luther and, to greater degree, by Calvin, who perpetuated a theological system, copied from Augustine, which was intrinsically as irrational, unjust and visceral as a God who rewards and punishes human beings regardless of their concrete behaviour.

The Synod of the Protestant Bishops of 1647 declared;

*"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels... are predestined to everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death... and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished (Ch.3.) As for the wicked and ungodly, God as a righteous judge.. does blind them... sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had... and moreover, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan"* (Westminster confession, chap. 3,n.3; chap.5, n.6).

Max Weber's comment on this is: "*The grace of God can neither be lost by those people to whom it is assigned, nor be acquired by those to whom it is denied*".<sup>29</sup> The conclusion the acute German sociologist appears to have missed is that such a God is a coupling of extremisms, since while on the one hand he is unlimited love, on the other he is a compendium of illogicality and blind wickedness.

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<sup>29</sup> M. Weber, *Protestant Ethics and the spirit of Capitalism*, Dover Publication.

A Christian trained to a such strabismus cannot avoid being disoriented for lack of criteria for establishing what is right or wrong, reasonable or unreasonable, since even God maintains an enigmatic silence with regard to these dilemmas.

If "Capitalism" arose in the protestant world (and not in the "orthodox", which rejects the thesis of Augustinian predestination) this is not by sheer chance: if it is true that God pre-assigns human creatures to two completely opposing states of existence, one happy and the other unhappy, any social system which takes inspiration from him is fatalistically divided into "*lucky people*" (a few super millionaires) and the "*ill-fated rest*" (billions of starving and homeless people).

The geopolitical corollary of this *double predestination* is that there are peoples "chosen" by God and "others" whom he neglects. According to the words of the Christian emperor of the third millennium, there is one nation, the USA, that "*is light in the darkness... has a divine mandate... is delegated by history to be a model of justice in the world... and leads the crusade of absolute Good against the absolute Evil*". The repercussion of every compulsory idealization is *narcissistic disorder*, marked by proud and aggressive pretensions which inspired the American Senator H. Cabot Lodge to say: "*The USA has a record of conquests, colonisations and territorial expansion unequalled by any other people of the XIX century*". It is the same emperor-president Bush, counselled and subsidized by protestant Churches and tele-evangelists, who asserts that the USA must be the fount of law, have the monopoly of weapons of mass destruction and are entitled to attack prospective enemies in advance.

Such fundamentalist views are forcefully contrasted by other Evangelical Churches. Giants of the protestant faith and Nobel Peace Prize winners, like Schweitzer, M. Luther King, N. Mandela and Desmond Tutu spent their lives preaching non-violence and defending the victims of injustice.

### ***Independent Churches***

Independent Churches are to be considered one of the most remarkable religious expressions of the last decades, all the more interesting in that they proliferate in the South of the world, among the "vagrant of the globalization" but also among people overcome by divorce, alcoholism and the lack of affective networks. In these Churches what predominates is interest in Jesus the healer or the Spirit who expels the devil through exorcism and animates the low-spirited. The members frequently look after the poor, homeless, the sick who cannot rely on hospitals and free drugs.

The drawback is that because of a religious ideology according to which "*only God can save*", the proselytes end up considering themselves impotent in face of the only one who is really almighty, God. After being indoctrinated and convinced of being nothing compared with the one who is "All", they spontaneously tend to submit themselves to authority, to ignore social degradation and to vote for Conservative parties. Many of these Churches act as a "Trojan horse", outwardly alluring for healings and solidarity but invisibly led by cynical intentions of dictators, multinationals, unscrupulous bosses of parties (frequently heads of these Churches) who teleguide believers in a mixture of Holy Spirit and brain-washing. It happens that they are often under judicial enquiry or media criticism because of the assets they accumulate with suspicious goals and means.

## ***Liberation and non-dualistic option***

Scrutinizing the "*primary process*" of the Christian Churches, my hypothesis is that the *narcissistic disorder* which filters through them is maintained by two unbalanced nucleuses, one self-divinizing, aggressive and intolerant, and the other servile, frustrated and yielding, a combination which makes

the institution waver between opposing feelings of inferiority and grandiosity, between pulsions of love and destructiveness. If Christians do not go out into the world proclaiming and putting into effect the liberation undertaken by both Moses and Jesus, this is not due to bad will but to the weakness of an Ego which is reluctant to set out on the journey to freedom.

The process initiated by Moses more than 3000 years ago was not only political, but also “psychic”, since he discarded both submission to and suppression of the Pharaoh. Jesus did the same: he rejected both the violent solution of the “zealots” and the passivity of his contemporaries.

The mature leader resists being trapped by the dualistic thought of either-or, that’s why he refuses to think there are only two solutions: either to command or to obey, insurrection or capitulation, wealth or destitution. What Moses invented, followed by Jesus, is the irreversible withdrawal from extreme contraposition by proposing a “third way”, even though this may mean a laborious Exodus and years of personal and social work and will inevitably be harassed by infantile nostalgia for both slavery and the ideal vision of a land of *milk and honey*.

Aspiration to liberation has always been active in Christianity, nevertheless it ended up caged in the bipolar option which hacks human history in two. On one side there is the tragic condition of those who are out reach of salvation (atheists and non-Christians), people who are devoid of divine energies (sacraments) and live in doctrinal error, without revealed truths (dogmas). On the other side there are the "redeemed", who are born again through Baptism, blessed by infallible doctrines and divine forces. The psychic world is divided: mind has supremacy, emotions are suspect. The more quoted functions are those of thought, which elaborates theories with apologetic goals, while the existence of a nocturnal or unconscious world is undervalued. While in the Bible dreams are extremely important, in the Christian world they are irrelevant.

Because of its *narcissistic pathology*, Christianity cannot adopt a therapeutic or pedagogical attitude towards evil or bad people. Christians have to choose: either the annihilation of the guilty-bad-deviant person (by means of State-inflicted violence or the threat of eternal fire) or the innocent victim’s self-blaming immolation. These alternatives materialize, even if not in an exclusive way, in the thought and actions of Christians, who have developed forms of belligerence (denounced also by JPII), as well as of masochistic abnegation, pillar of much Christian asceticism, of which Saint Margaret Alacoque is a clear expression when she writes:

*"It seems to me that I am sentenced to eternal torture. All the good I can do could not redeem my smallest sin... I cannot pay my debt, my divine Lord, as you see".*

This kind of spirituality is not indicative of "depressive guilt". The Saint offended nobody, therefore she did not reasonably have to beg pardon. Even wishing to make up for any harm she might have done, she could not "*pay the debt*". She is clearly prey to "persecutory guilt", since she is unfairly "*sentenced to eternal torture*" by a moody and unjust God.

In my view Saint Margaret portrays the "black hole" in which the Churchgoer plunges, oppressed by an indefinable guilt (original sin), which makes him feel incapable "*of redeeming the smallest sin*". Catholics repeat "*I am not worthy, have mercy on me*", while they feel authorized to practice or to justify violence as sacred. The compulsory baptism of children, the submission of the poor and proletarian masses, the inferiority of women and anathema for dissidents are practices presented as aiming at a superior good.

This psychological oscillation is conspicuous in the Catholic Church, as it is more centralized. The Roman pontiff, for example, exhorts the faithful to have unshakable confidence in Christ and in his freely-given love, but he betrays his own distrust in this *Saviour* by preferring to resort to the secular arm of the State (by means of concordats, Christian democrat parties, pressures on Members

of Parliament, etc.) or of his own State (through Vatican diplomacy) in order to impose moral codes – even on non Catholics – since he is unable to evangelize through dialogue as Jesus did.

In addition the *narcissistic disorder* sublimates and simultaneously disfigures even God, who sometimes is made to appear as a strict and implacable father with those who dare to violate his own laws while at other times he is generous and magnanimous with those who show him filial obedience. Hence the close affinity with the mafia's "God-father", which a passionate believer, Simone Weil, hints at: "*Christianity has become totalitarian, all-conquering, exterminatory, because it has not developed the concept of God as present even if he is absent and takes no action*".<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps there is no more effective image than that of a *totalitarian, all-conquering Christianity* to portray a pathology prey to a pulsional conflict between *violence* and *love*, due to the lack of a well-adjusted Ego as mediator. The ecclesial body is not in a position to recognize its own violence, being driven by a love which is not realistic but idealized. The inadequate resolution of the conflict ends up by rendering the Christian Churches "*a culturally intractable*" subject" (S. Weil), with which no religion can establish relationships based on equal terms.

### ***Psychodynamic consequences***

All this does not negate the many hidden actions of solicitude for the poor and defenceless carried out by the consecrated as well as by anonymous faithful, but it emphasizes an aspect of the ecclesial pathology which can be summed up in this way:

- God is a liberator-saviour-redeemer, full of compassionate love for the sick and for victims, but he is also a sadist-persecutor-executioner who harbours revenge against the non-baptized and rebels, destined for the eternal crematorium.
- From this God, made up of two personalities, springs Christianity, and the Catholic Church in particular, with two ontologically dissimilar personalities: one is divine and grandiose, embodied in the sacred Hierarchy, which *demands sacrifice*, and the other is human and servile - the faithful - destined to be the *sacrificial victim*. Trained to this duplicity, believers cannot do anything except become the "incarnation" of the dissociation of the two-faced God, by favouring or justifying aggressive actions and, at the same time, trying to behave according to Christian *caritas*.
- The Christians, convinced as they are that the whole of history is pivoted on Christ, the only begotten-Son of God, flaunt the superiority of the West, which gives them the right to take to the "non Christians" the true faith by courtesy of state, morality by law and welfare as a by-product of the free market.
- Morality becomes bicephalous: due to the presence of an unbalanced Ego, it is pitiless in matters of sexuality and yielding in matters of justice and war.
- Not being organized as an educational community, the Church is unable to alleviate or forewarn of conflicts. In the XX<sup>th</sup> century two World Wars were fought between Christian nations (apart from Japan): the first (1915-18) left 19 million dead and the second (1939-45) 60 million, but the Churches were unable to achieve any collective insight concerning the crimes perpetrated by Christians, to indicate that violence is a "natural" data, as the rift between the poor and the rich, princes and vassals.
- The inner processes of the Church are unhinged. Doctrine prevails over praxis, rite over contemplation, dogma over research, discipline over persuasion. By concentrating on miracles, the magic of the sacraments, the wonders of eternal life, Christians end up

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<sup>30</sup> Simone Weil, *Quaderni*, p.205, Adelphi

neglecting the project of an anti-dualistic and humanizing liberation undertaken by Moses and Jesus.

## ***Beyond the unconscious***

All this confirms that, in addition to the dynamics unconsciously linked with narcissism, there are indeed mature energies represented by the innumerable beneficial deeds on the part of Christians in favour of the sick, handicapped, orphans, old people, emigrants and the poor, to which hospitals, schools, therapeutic communities and missions bear witness.

Everybody knows that the Churches have created innumerable hospitals, schools, therapeutic communities, missions, lay and theological movements which propose and put into effect non-violent models of life in explicit continuity with Jesus the Hebrew.

Humanity has undoubtedly benefited from their insistence on ethical topics such as the family, the indissolubility of marriage, sexual moderation, respect for life, chiefly on the part of the Roman papacy. But it is the accent on prayer, love, charity and the dignity of the human person which make the Christian communities a reservoir of hope and warmth, a training school in humanity for all people, especially children.

Moreover, the world would not be the same without the stimulus that Christianity has given to music and to all forms of art. Equally important have been the actions promoted by many Christians in favour of peace, democracy, the secularity of State, the defence of the working classes, trade unionism and cooperatives, not to mention the martyrs killed because of their opposition to brutal dictatorships.

If Christianity has been able to put up with the weight of such *narcissistic disorder* it is certainly due to the co-presence of an "Ego", both in the clergy and in the faithful, full of confidence and love of God and one's neighbours.

***What is lacking, according to my analysis, is the presence of a "Communitarian Ego" able to regulate the relationships among the split sub-organizations of the psyche and to mitigate pathological defensive processes like omnipotence, rationalization, projection, maniac triumph and disrespect, widely used for over two millennia and still in force.***

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## CHAPTER VI

# ***EUCCHARIST, FROM SUPPER TO SACRIFICE***

In order to prove how Christianity in the course of its history was upset by *narcissistic disorder* it is necessary to penetrate the fundamental ritual of Christian churches, the Eucharist. In the first two centuries it followed in great part the structure of the *Last Supper*: it was celebrated by the Christians in their homes, was presided over by the head of the household or a person, male or female, esteemed by the community, always included a prayer of thanksgiving using Jesus' own words and then was followed by a shared meal.

The Constantinian turning-point offered the Christians, in addition to freedom of cult, the opportunity of having basilicas, where liturgy became elaborated and sumptuous. In the IV<sup>th</sup> century the Eucharistic was celebrated in churches which began to spring up all over the empire. Moreover it became "priestly": the head of the family or the elderly no longer presided over it, let alone women. Between the IX<sup>th</sup> and XI<sup>th</sup> century the Eucharist was a ceremony performed by *consecrated men*, not by the people. With the compulsory conversion of entire nations to Christianity, the faithful became less and less learned in matters of faith; the Mass they attended was mostly celebrated in a language (Greek or Latin) which was incomprehensible to the majority and it ceased to be a communitarian encounter and became a "mass cult".

### ***Goal and structure of the Eucharist***

The Eucharistic rite, in all Christian Churches

- is celebrated in a temple;
- is led by an ordained or official minister, always a man, with a few exceptions in Evangelical churches;
- does not foresee any meal in common
- excludes any personal dialogue or exchange among participants.

Due to the impossibility of considering the differences, often marginal among various churches, I will confine myself to highlighting the basic features of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church, apart from specifying occasional references to other churches.

The Holy Mass is made up of two phases: the liturgy of the Word followed by that more properly Eucharistic. The official text regulating every (Roman Catholic) celebration is the *Canon of the Mass*, which prescribes a rigorously planned sequence of movements, readings, chants, to which every celebrant must conform together with the people.

The central part is related to the *Last Supper* through the phrases of Jesus, which are repeated by the priest: "*he took a piece of bread... 'Eat it, this is my body'...Then he took a cup... and gave it to them and said: 'Drink it all of you : this is my blood... Do this in memory of me'*".

The last stage of the ritual is the "communion", that is, the distribution of the host to the faithful by the priest. It is preceded by the "Our Father", some invocations and the exchange of a "sign of peace" among the members of the congregation.

On the structure of the Eucharist I think it is useful to develop four orders of considerations which are, to large extent, valid also for the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches, with the exception of the subject of "transubstantiation".

1. *Prayer and Paschal Supper of Jesus the Hebrew*
2. *the ideology of sacrifice*
3. *"transubstantiation"*
4. *the betrayal.*

## ***1. The paschal Supper of Jesus, the Hebrew***

The Eucharist has its roots in the "Supper" that Jesus celebrated with his most intimate friends, both men and women, to commemorate the *Jewish Easter*, typified by a socializing context.

### ***The prayer-dialogue of the Hebrew***

The birth of Israel marks a major advance in human culture due to the fact that every Hebrew, since his childhood, learns to treat God as a person, not as a celestial divinity separated from history. He feels that he can give thanks to his Creator but also blame him for his amnesia and demand an explanation for the wrongs he suffers. The communication he establishes with Jahveh involves reciprocity. If on one hand it is licit "to project" human feelings or decisions on God, on the other the believer has the right to show his Creator the whole range of his emotions, from love to frustration.

God is made so anthropomorphic as to appear like a human subject who speaks with expressions analogous to those of a lover, who is disposed to tolerate the umpteenth irreverence. When patriarchs, prophets, kings and ordinary Jews are interrogated by God, they believe it to be obvious and natural to reply, to ask for explanations, to doubt. Moses, as soon as he receives the order of Jahveh to go to the Pharaoh and demand the liberation of the Israelites, expresses his own incredulity, declares himself unfit because of his shyness and stutter and asks him to choose someone else.

God cannot only command. He must prove to be capable of helping Moses in this reckless enterprise by showing him with a couple of *ad hoc* miracles that he can be trusted. The dialogue between Jahveh and his people is not like that between a father and his infant, but between a father with a grown up-son.

Bred to equal communication, every Israelite has a deep faith in his Creator, whom he dares to criticize and reprimand.

### ***The prayer-monologue in Christianity***

It is a widely shared hypothesis that the gradual amputation of Jesus from his Jewish roots proceeded relentlessly from the first century on to the point of criminalizing the whole Jewish people. Consequently the millenarian *two way* communicative dynamic - inaugurated by Judaism – has vanished almost completely in the various Christian Churches. What has become predominant is the ascending approach, made up of expressions of glorification, pleas for mercy, adoration, and thanksgiving to God, a mirror of what happens in a society where a monarch does not admit dialogue. With this separation from the Jewish mainstream any communication between God and the Christians has become repetitive and maimed. The assembly is unable to express its own internal polarities, so that

- it gives voice only to thoughts of love, devotion and glory to God, stifling any feelings of chagrin or anger against him;
- the belief that Jesus Christ proceeds from the Father and (*et*) the Spirit, as many Councils affirm, can only be intellectualized, not experienced emotionally;
- man's sole needs are spiritual. Physical ailments, old age, passions, eros, hunger, etc. are practically struck off the liturgy;
- the fixed idea of eternity, together with the prospect of the *promised Kingdom* or of its opposite, eternal damnation, makes contemporary history insignificant. Rite virtually clouds any reference to dramatic daily events (wars, conflicts, injustice, etc.).

In short, the Eucharist admits only one polarity, God. Only one path, upward. The minister honours God with thousands of titles, extols his biblical Word, calls him to become the Bread of Life in the host, but never asks him for explanations of the evils of the world. God, in turn, does not interfere with the faithful, does not get angry with them or encourage them.

Clergy and faithful, for example, consider it practically blasphemous to speak to God with the same words as Jesus: "*My God, my God, why did you abandon me?*". This does not mean that in the Mass the Hebrew God is ignored. The religious Authority holds him in high consideration with the readings of Old Testament. What I want to underscore is that in a liturgy that is strictly linked with "*the paschal*" experience of Jesus all possible interlocution between God and the community is interdicted.

Hence the hypothesis that the Eucharistic "monologue" has the unconscious purpose of transforming the ancient Alliance – a commitment for both Jahveh and the Israelites - into its contrary, that is, a "pact of mutual disengagement" on the part of both God and his children.

The Father appears satisfied when his worshippers praise and plead with him as *Majesty, immense Goodness, infinite Glory*. For his children it is sufficient to acknowledge themselves as sinners and unworthy of such a Father, provided that he does not impose onerous tasks or threaten them with punishments. This pact of "non interference", maintained by ritualized monologues, could explain why, after millions of Masses celebrated over the five continents, practically nothing new happens in society, while the *paschal Supper* of Jesus, theoretically identical, in fact marked a watershed in the history of religions.

Hence the widespread sensation that the Eucharist is not a *supper* among friends but a meeting of de-corporealized subjects, pure spirits, set in the space-time of eternity, in a beatific pre-vision, so that every effort to change things on the earth is esteemed futile, since the shared goal of believers is "*to get together to enjoy Glory in Christ*".

## ***Paschal feast and liberation***

The consequence of a religiousness focused more on eternity than on history is that the majority of Christians do not live the *Supper of Jesus* as the most important feast of the year, which he "*intensely wished*" to celebrate with his people, the *Passover*. It is the family meal that Israelites have joyfully celebrated over a millennium, not so much to remember but to re-live the experience of their fathers when they were set free from the Egyptian oppression through the direct participation of God and with the aid of Moses.

*Passover* is the birthday/Christmas of the Hebrew people, who count months starting from the month of Nissan, (March-April), month of the astronomical spring, in which they believe the world was created. *Passover* falls in the month of Nissan, in which nature frees itself from the chains of winter which the Jews associate with the chains and slavery their people suffered in Egypt for centuries. The paschal meal, the progenitor of all the festivals, is prescribed in details by Jahveh.

The feast takes place in a home and is chaired by the head of the household. All the participants are seated round a table adorned with the signs of liberation: *the roast, lamb, the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the honey cake and the wine*, which, together with the *word*, form the elements that help people to be involved in the history of liberation. The father pours the wine into a goblet that he hands around, blesses it, then breaks the bread into pieces which are distributed to the fellow guests. Afterwards he reads the history of the Exodus from Egypt. Through this banquet children and young people come to understand that they were granted freedom and so have the duty of thanking and blessing the one who enabled them to pass from oppression to liberty.

For centuries the first Christians regularly joined together around a table in private homes, where they shared the food also with the poor. As at every normal dinner they greeted each other affectionately and exchanged words of comfort in memory of Jesus, crucified and resurrected. Such a meal had no room for priests, standardized readings, ritually defined gestures, sacred vestments or furnishings. They never considered the possibility of gathering in a temple, it being unthinkable to separate the Eucharist from a common meal.

## ***2. The ideology of sacrifice***

With the amputation of their Jewish roots and the transition to the Greek-Roman world, Christians began to interpret the life and death of Jesus in an unhistorical way, increasingly idealized and suitable for a Church that, from Constantine on, had undertaken the commitment to defend authoritarian systems and the ruling elites. In order to guarantee the division between rich and poor, men and women, sacred and profane subjects, landlords and servants, as if it had been established by God, the Hierarchy found in the *sacrifice* the keystone to support such a system. With at least two consequences: one affecting the ritual and the other the faithful.

### ***The sacrifice of Jesus in the ritual***

The basic topic of the Eucharist is the *sacrifice* of Jesus, victim of the sins of men. In the Catholic Church all the faithful are invited to pray in this way:

- "*Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer to you*".
- "*May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands*".
- "*We ask you to accept and bless these gifts we offer you in sacrifice*".
- "*We offer you this sacrifice of praise*".
- "*We offer to you, God of glory and majesty, this holy and perfect sacrifice*".
- "*Lord, may this sacrifice ...advance the peace and salvation of all the world*".
- "*Lord, look upon this sacrifice which you have given to your Church*".
- "*We pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven*".
- "*Look with favour... upon the sacrifice of Abraham*".
- "*Sanctify, our God, this offer with the power of your blessing... in spiritual and perfect sacrifice*".
- "*In this sacrifice, our Father, we as your ministers and your holy people, celebrate the memorial of the blessed passion of Christ your Son*".

In these prayers, the intention to shift the emphasis from shared meal to cult is patent. Jesus stands not as a *liberator* as he spoke of himself, but as a *holy and immaculate victim*.

In the Eucharist he is the "scapegoat" who receives the weight of the community's sins. By killing him the members of a society torn by enmities can momentarily regain peace so that the *victim* ceases to be an evil agent and becomes a *saviour*, frequently an object of cult.

By resorting to rite it is possible to split “good violence” (divine-redeemer) from “bad violence” (inhuman-destructive). René Girard emphasizes this when he says: <sup>31</sup>

*“The hypothesis that violence against a designated victim may in fact be a ‘fundamental principle’ of any religion seems well grounded, since on the one hand it puts a stop to an otherwise vicious circle of violence, on the other it gives birth to the vicious circle of the sacrificial rite... repetition of the first killing which reestablished order inside the community”.*

According to Girard sacrificial action is meaningful for the faithful only if they are blind to the role which violence plays in the rite. That’s why the Nazarene, empathetically close to victims, rejects the idea of *sacrifice* and refuses any hypothesis of "good" violence, knowing that violence is a spiral which induces more violence and that only systems based on power need sacrifice, not those based on service. He has to accept a death sentence as a blasphemer and guilty of fomenting social upheaval, for unmasking the alliance between the Roman empire and the Priesthood, both indifferent to the cry of the distressed. He was too realistic to think he was capable of "*taking away the sins of the world*" or "*redeeming*" humanity from original sin, as the first disciples claimed for him. W. Wink writes:

*“Jesus’ martyrdom is the fruit of superabundance. His suffering is not imposed but chosen. «No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will» (John 10,18). Martyrs are not victims overwhelmed by evil, but hunters who succeed in bringing this evil into the open by offering themselves as bait” (W.Wink, Engaging the Powers, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1992).*

After a rigorous study of the Gospels, the behaviour of Jesus can hardly be classified as that of *a victim, a priest, let alone as holocaust*. Luke the evangelist emphasizes that (Lk 19,47): "*The chief priests and the leaders of the people wanted to kill him*" when Jesus attacked the temple, the most sacred place for a Jew, associating it with a "*market*", "*den of thieves*" , whose priests conducted business with the Roman ruler and invader. That is why as soon as he performed a good deed in a way or at moment in contrast with the Judean tradition there was an outcry against him as a criminal.

On another occasion it was a parable that got him into trouble, when he provocatively hinted that a certain owner of a vineyard could not enjoy the harvest because wicked tenant farmers wanted it all for themselves: "*The chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables and knew that he was talking about them, so they tried to arrest him. But they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet*" (Mt 21,45-46).

Persecution did not affect the Nazarene alone: the courts were to use violence also against his disciples, who were invited not to be not sheep or sacrificial victims. Until the end of the world the deadly anger of leaders, secular as well as religious, was destined to fall on them.

Jesus identified his own murderers. The "deicide" was not carried out by the Hebrew people, as many disciples, Holy Fathers and Augustine upheld, but by the chief priests and the teachers of the law. The Synoptic Gospels are unequivocal: the Roman Prefect (Pontius Pilate) presided over the trial, issued the death sentence on the grounds of a circumstantial denunciation by the Jewish authorities. For the High Priest the Nazarene was guilty for having claimed to be the *Son of God*. His accusers maliciously insinuated that he was a political revolutionary who was endangering the legitimacy of the Roman Governor declaring himself to be the longed-awaited *Messiah*, with the ambition to become the King of the Jews. With such a charge the Romans could only see him as a subversive who was trying to undermine State security and duly crucified him.

All the clandestine agreements that led Jesus to his death on the cross are eliminated from the awareness of the faithful simply through a liturgy which turns him from the *liberator* of the

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<sup>31</sup> René Girard, *la violence et le sacré*, Ed. Grasset, Paris, p.129-132

downtrodden into a prototype of self-immolation and passivity. If this analysis is plausible, a well-grounded hypothesis could be that Eucharist helps - unconsciously and taking for granted noble and sincere motivations - to model the mind of the baptized to fit in with the bipolar “*sacrificial scheme*”, according to which God requires an agent who performs the sacrifice (priest) and a victim (people) who sacrifice themselves.

### *The sacrifice of faithful*

The ideology of sacrifice deforms. It deforms not only the historical personality of Jesus, but the nature of the assembly itself by means of two convergent modalities.

The first is carried out all through the Canon of the Holy Mass, as mentioned before, which drums into the faithful the principle that Christian life must be a cloning of *sacrifice* and not of *liberation*. The papacy, for example, authoritatively teaches that just as Jesus was in perfect communion with the Father through his own sacrifice, so the same relationship must exist between the *Holy Father* and the faithful.

The homily, fundamental part of the rite and strictly reserved to priests, is an instrument utilized to present the Gospel in such a way that the hearers have no option but to accept the interpretation and wishes of the ecclesiastical authority. This is confirmed by the fact that any other comment or interpretation on the part of the laity is forbidden. Therefore the sacred ritual is directed to implanting in staunch Catholics the subliminal conviction that they have to “immolate themselves” if they want to gratify God’s ministers.

The second procedure by which the ideology of sacrifice is instilled in the faithful is implemented through the dynamics of liturgy. Believers are officially requested *to sacrifice* their entire personality, adopt a physical position of relative immobility, dissociate themselves from the congregation and respond or sing in harmony with the written norms. This is prescribed by the *Canon*, a sort of *software* that the papacy and most Christian churches introduce into the ecclesial *hardware* in order to get an automatic standardization of the assembly.

The main difference between the Eucharist of the first centuries and that of the post-Constantinian era lies in the purpose of the two celebrations. The “*Supper*” of Jesus, preceded by the washing of his friends’ feet, is substantially “pedagogical”, as he wanted his disciples to learn to do what he himself in fact did and become available to serve one another.

In the liturgies of all the Christian Churches, apart from petty differences and acknowledging that there are celebrations carried out by certain “unsubmissive” communities, the primary goal is to train the faithful, who have to restrict themselves to listening, repeating and mechanically doing what is imposed. This does not mean that the trainer-minister is insensitive to the fact that the faithful may desire to imitate the Nazarene. What I wish to stress is that in the training prescribed by the *Canon* everybody is treated as non-human, non-endowed with conscience, affections or emotions worth expressing in words and exchanged with their other siblings.

Every minister who complies with the rules of the ceremony, insofar he deprives his audience of any form of dialogue and personal involvement, transforms himself – regardless of conscious intentions - not into an educator, but into a “shepherd” (not metaphoric but real) who leads his acquiescent “sheep” (not metaphoric but real), already prepared to be immolated, i.e. despoiled of their own functions of *homo sapiens*.

In the same way as the sacrifice of Jesus satisfies the Father, so that of the faithful is directed to satisfying the ministers, who can enjoy the privilege and pleasure of being listened to, followed and loved in an affectionate and unchallenged way by a mass of pious listeners.

The vertical distortion that occurs between “shepherds” and “sheep” is not isolated, because it is associated with the horizontal one. All the churchgoers, as in a theatre show, must gaze at the only

actor on the scene (male and celibate in the Catholic Church). Impaired as they are in their capacity to answer or exchange with the others their own spiritual experiences, they automatically end up feeling strangers to one another. Liturgy substantially follows the rules of any show, since the *Canon* does not permit any expression of friendship within the congregation before, during or after the "performance".

As in every production of a play the distance between the leading actor (the minister, on a higher level), and the first row of onlookers (faithful, low) is often greater than 10 meters and is indicative of the separation which marks the two poles. The arrangements of the seatings prevents dialogic relationships among the participants. This is easily noticeable in all Christian temples, except for the Orthodox Churches, in which the faithful remain standing but still without interpersonal communication.

Perhaps it is going too far to consider the Eucharist potentially "schizophrenogenic", tending to break up the psyche, but it is also true that if on the one hand it invites churchgoers to nourish the same feelings of tenderness that God has for all creatures, on the other it unconsciously encourages them to be blind and indifferent to one another, since the slightest conversation is officially frowned upon, apart from the formal *sign of peace*.

### ***The anti-community ritual***

In order to grasp the abyss which separates the Eucharist from the original *Supper* of Jesus it is illuminating to read the recommendations that Paul and the Apostles addressed in their letters to their brothers and sisters in the most remote settlements. In a society lacerated by hatred and racial, sexual, social and religious divisions, Jesus' first followers centred their attention on the formation of a sympathetic community which involved body, affections, widely-ranging help, hospitality, mutual correction and confession of sins.

More than 50 times Paul and the Apostles use the expression "one another" in order to animate their own siblings:

- *Love one another warmly... and be eager to show respect for one another (Rm 12, 10).*
- *Have the same concern for one another (Rm 12, 16).*
- *You are capable of correcting each other (Rm 15, 14).*
- *Be tolerant one another and forgive one another (Col 3, 13).*
- *Confess your sins one another (Jm 5, 16).*
- *Have the same concern for one another (1 Cor 12, 25).*
- *Accept one another (Rm 15,7).*
- *Greet one another with a brotherly kiss (Rm 16,16).*
- *When you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another (1 Cor 11, 33).*
- *Help to carry one another's burdens (Gal 6, 2).*
- *Let love make you serve one another (Gal 5, 13).*
- *Encourage one another (1 Ts 5, 11).*
- *Help one another (1 Ts 5, 11).*
- *Be at peace with one another (1 Ts 5, 13).*
- *Make it your aim to do good to one another (1 Ts 5, 15).*
- *Show your love by being tolerant with one another (Ef 4, 2).*
- *Be kind and tender-hearted to one another (Ef 4, 32).*
- *Submit yourselves to one another (Ef 5, 21).*
- *Love one another intensely from the heart (1 Pt 1, 22).*
- *Open your homes to each other without complaining (1 Pt 4, 9).*
- *Put on the apron of humility, to serve one another (1 Pt 5, 5).*
- *But if we live in light... we have a share in one another's life (1 Jn1, 7).*

There is no doubt that Christianity should get the "Nobel Prize for Peace" at least for having inspired relational patterns so pregnant for other people and the social peace. The Apostle Paul uses many evocative images relative to the "*Mystical Body*" to indicate how each and every assembly,

not only the Eucharistic, should be an example of divinizing communication. Every believer is invited not just to say *Amen* but to manifest or interpret the dreamlike dynamics of God, who reveals himself in *messages in strange tongues*. Paul's solicitation leaves no room for doubts:

*"When you meet together each of you brings a psalm or some instruction or a revelation, or speaks in a tongue or gives an interpretation. Let all these things be done in a way that will build up the community"* (1 Cor 14,26).

Paul is aware that Christians who sing love or peace are prisoners of their own destructive phantasms if they do not meet to "*confess each other their sins, to carry one another's burdens, to correct each other*". The Eucharist becomes an epic of a dream-like peace if it does not educate the "commensals" to come to terms with their most natural passions and to re-import within oneself the most unpleasant parts which have been clandestinely exported into other peoples. If they "*accept each other*", even the most turbid fantasies can be considered as "common heritage of humankind".

The amazing thing is that none of the Christian Churches (save for a few exceptions) stages *Jesus' Supper* in the light of these zealous recommendations, many of which are explicitly forbidden by the Roman Curia. The justification adduced is that the Christian congregation is much more numerous than before, so it is impossible for reasons of *public order* to allow individual members to address the assembly with "*a psalm, an instruction, a revelation*" or "*to confess their sins to one another*".

If indeed at least small Christian gatherings had the right to behave according to the Apostles' counsels, such an excuse would not appear so childish, but the prohibition applies to the whole spectrum of Catholic communities. The Roman papacy, notably, severely punishes the priests or the communities who want to put into practice the aforementioned suggestions, or to take inspiration from the convivial structure of *Jesus' Supper*. Many Christian Churches do the same, being all "daughters of Constantine".

It is sad to think what immense human richness has gone lost over the centuries because of the opposition to the Apostles' admonitions on the part of the so-called "Shepherds", who prevented the faithful from developing networks of fraternity. The deep explanation, in my opinion, is that a community of siblings who enjoy freedom of speech and self-organization would be incompatible with the ideology of sacrifice and refuse both roles, that of "people-sacrificed" as well that of "priest-sacrificing". This bi-polar logic is inherent in any hierarchical-monarchic organization, which is why the post-Constantinian church cannot ignore the ideology of sacrifice.

### ***From "mystical" to imaginary body***

It is indubitable that the Eucharistic liturgy fascinates everybody for its solemnity and impeccable performance. It is certainly an opportunity to go back to the source of a transcendent and biblical spirituality. But precisely because of a climate of contrived sacredness and harmony, the assembly is induced to behave itself as a celestial spirit, prefiguration of other-worldly perfection. It appears as good energy even if freezes emotions and bodies.

The "theatricalization", ensured by timing, spacing, actors (ministers), set scripts (*Canon*) all fixed by the "Clerical Direction", aims at offering a heavenly and meta-historical representation where there are neither differences nor chaos.

However, an unhistorical and disembodied liturgy is merely a simulation of the *Mystic Body* spoken of by Paul. Rather, it represents the unconscious desire to be born again in the garden of Eden without conflicts and avoiding the hard work of shared correction. It is a "maternal bosom" which promises freely-given love and salvation. Beyond subjective intentions, it serves to show an ideal



and self-sufficient body which reabsorbs antagonisms and rivalry in a unifying totality free from doubt.

There is a price to pay in order to belong to a body fantasized as Paradise: lack of imagination, absence of warmth, paralysis of thought. All these elements are part of the *narcissistic disorder* that filters through the Christian Eucharist and churches as a whole.

### ***C. Transubstantiation of bread or Christians?***

Many passionate pages have been written over the two millennia on "how", "when", "for how many minutes", "by whom" the Bread and the Wine of the Eucharist undergo "transubstantiation", term which means the transformation of the substance of the bread and the wine into that of the body and blood of the "Lord" through the words of the minister. The Council of Trent, valid only for the Roman Catholic Church, officially affirms that: "*after the consecration of the bread and the wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is contained truly, really and substantially under the appearance of those tangible things in the noble sacrament of the Holy Eucharist*". The bread and wine keep their external shape but the inner substance becomes the body of the Risen Jesus. The Council imposes two conditions for the descent of Jesus to the assembly: there must be the earthly material (bread and wine) and a minister (ordained, celibate and male) who pronounces the words of consecration.

What counts is not a heartfelt rapport with the community, as epitomized by the Nazarene, but the transmission of *sacred power*. The consecration, in fact, is valid only if performed by an ordained minister. Paradoxically the Mass is null and void if it is celebrated by a community of people who gather in the name of Jesus without a priest, while it is valid if performed by a consecrated celibate in private form, or in presence of a crowd of faithful who ignore each other. All this is perfectly logical: if the Eucharist is a *sacrifice* and not a *Supper in the memory of Jesus*, for then the "minister who sacrifices" is enough, since the faithful are insignificant for the purpose of the cult.

Aware of thousands of historical-exegetical difficulties, I dare to interpret what in the "unconscious mind" of Jesus might mean the words and the gestures he used at the feast of the Passover in the company of his closest friends, both male and female. In particular I think it useful to formulate some hypotheses on the experience of Jesus concerning

#### **A) Food**

#### **B) The transformation of the guests, present and virtual**

#### ***A) Food and alimentary chain, God's metaphor***

Jesus began the Supper with a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father according to the Hebrew ritual. While they were eating he took a cup of wine and said: '*Take this and share it among you*'. Then he took bread... broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "*This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*" (Lk 22, 17-19).

One of the first problems arising from this famous expression of Jesus' is the interpretation of the word "*body*", which in western culture is associated with living matter. For Jesus and his companions, all Hebrews, it denotes the whole personality. It represents the singularity of a being, incarnates the evolution of nature, contains traditions and values inherited from society.

For one who feels part of creation eating bread implies the knowledge that thousands of ears of corns made themselves available to be reaped and ground. In a cup of wine there are dozens of bunches of grapes which were pressed and implacably crushed, thus losing their own identity but

yielding their substance to others. In the Christian culture, which tends to be individualistic and mercantile, a piece of bread, a glass of wine or a rib of lamb are very rarely experienced as produce connected with the immense chain of Life, which is essentially permanent self-donation. Also science recognizes a wonderful cosmic connectivity, due to which the life of all living beings depends on self-dissolution, on letting themselves be fragmented in order to join the metabolic chain of other creatures. However, when we eat we rarely take cognizance of that paradoxical but axial law according to which death is indispensable for the development of life.

The Hellenistic imprinting in Christianity is so deep that matter is seen as the inverse of spirit, body in contrast with soul, the law of nature in contradiction with that of God. Yet it is true that Christians often associate God with the sun in terms of energy or splendour, without considering that this star makes possible the existence of our planet through the uninterrupted and free self-disintegration of megatons of its own matter, until thermal death. In other terms, it burns with love for all living beings. Like God.

This gift of the sun, through photosynthesis, becomes life for plants, the leaves of which offer themselves as nourishment to the earthworm which in turn feeds the sparrow. Each shift of energy has a different trophic level, so that this energy passes from plants (producers of organic substances) to herbivores (first order consumers), and then to the carnivores (second order consumers). The alimentary chain ends with the activity of the decomposers (bacteria and fungi), which have the function of transforming the remains of plants and animals into substances which become in their turn nutriment for plants, to which they give back the elements assimilated in order to perpetuate that interdependence which is the law of all creation.

In theological treatises and in encyclicals one can read that God is pure selfless giving, without reflecting that the law of the universe and the alimentary chain is characterized by the same limitless generosity. Life on earth is possible thanks to the continuous and bountiful transfer of energy, from plants to animals and from these to earth, in a succession of life and death, acquisition and decomposition, anabolism and catabolism, production and consumption. This implies that all forms of life depend on one another, all linked by the need for nourishing substances, but also by the duty of self-disaggregation in order to become food for others.

The metabolic chain bears witness to the loving readiness of living creatures to die in order to develop life. No meal or alimentation would be possible in the world without the propensity both to receive and to give. In the bread and wine on the table (also Eucharistic) there are the signs, unfortunately undervalued, of the transformations following the Big Bang, from the assemblage of macromolecules to the developments of flora and fauna which feed and help one another.

It is when the Nazarene anticipates the outbreak of homicidal violence that he reminds his companions that in every meal lovingly shared there is the memory of the fraternity he inaugurated in spite of general distrust. Sharing a meal without social discrimination illustrates also the ecological interdependence, the sympathetic commitment of creatures and the cosmic presence of "ultimate reality".

The demise of Jesus has a direct and deep contiguity with the decomposition, slaughter and burnings which have occurred on the planet over billions of years. These are hints of the self-donation, to which the elements of biophysical reality submit themselves for the common good. Only an exacerbated and indiscriminate "Christian-western narcissism" has been able to idealize the so-called sacrifice of Jesus, to the point of separating it not only from that of other martyrs, Christian or not, but from the constant and amazing unselfishness that characterizes the cosmos.

From a systemic point of view, Jesus' death can be considered "divine" precisely because it incarnates the self-donation which has been taking place in matter since its first appearance, the mirror image of God's generosity.

When the Magisterium teaches that Jesus died *to obey his Father* one is induced to imagine that he lived with a super technological invisible cell-phone stuck to his ear, ready to receive orders in perennial infantile obedience. The Church's messages hardly contemplate that he was, in the first place, in sync with the code of creation, in which the *will of the Father* is inscribed as spontaneous bounteousness and infinite altruism. Isn't it true that the Nazarene invites his friends to read the book of nature rather than the volumes of scholarly scribes?

In his images *salt, yeast and seeds* bury themselves in darkness and disappear to *be born again* in other parts of nature. Sheep donate themselves to the hungry wolf, some seeds dropped by the farmer on the soil go to feed birds. *Crows do not sow or reap*, they are directly nourished by the alimentary chain which is based on permanent exchanges without compensation, because there is no exclusively private profit in Creation. The only goal of this traffic is the propagation of life.

Every meal is also the product of hard work and the silent labour of millions of invisible operators (peasants, cooks, truck drivers, workers in the food industry, etc.) who, through real and unknown connections, make possible human survival. None of this appears in ecclesiastical liturgies, which are devoted to idealizing the miracle of bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ, overlooking the fact that all creation is the body of God, is the expression of a Holy Alliance between Donation and Dissolution, Nature and Work, Matter and Spirit, Life and Death.

### ***B) Transubstantiation of table companions***

From the very beginning the Eucharist was called "*breaking of bread*" and was a celebration of the life-death-resurrection of Jesus in a climate of joyful friendship. When the *narcissistic disorder* prevails, the concern shifts from people's life to the search for external perfection, for meticulous compliance with formalities from the use of vestments to the way of receiving the "host" in the hand or mouth.

Compared with an immense theological literature dedicated to the transubstantiation of the material bread and wine, writings devoted to the "transubstantiation" of Christians are insignificant. Yet the latter seems to be the only objective of Jesus, who desires people to change the "substance" - not the exteriority - of their way of thinking and acting.

He doesn't have the slightest interest in modifying a piece of bread in an omnipotent way, nor in gathering followers for a weekly rite which has no effect on their own existence. In continuity with the prophets he reminds them that the Father hates sacrifices and appreciates only prayers followed by a careful concern for those who suffer to help them to enjoy life. When a woman addresses him with words of admiration, "*Happy is the woman who bore you and nursed you*", he emphasizes to her that happiness does not lie in the uterus or in a piece of bread, but in "*listening to the word of God and putting it into practice*" (Lk 11,27-28). On Doomsday the hurt and maimed bodies of the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the imprisoned and the persecuted will show to the world the "Samaritans" who came to their aid.

The Eucharist and the resurrection are the same thing for the Nazarene. Both are the Epiphany of hope if people learn to become like bread and wine, able to offer themselves as energy which revives and transforms mummified bodies and minds. Sharing the same food in memory of the Martyr for *liberation* means to metabolize his plans, his integrity and his compassion.

From Jesus' deeds it is strange to deduce that he wants the host consecrated by an erudite delegate. He prompts his friends to love and serve one another. Instead of a mute group he prefers one in which it is possible to speak about personal wounds, where a block provoked by a betrayed love can dissolve in a dialogue without recriminations, where everybody learns to deal with the collapse of their fantasies of omnipotence and to stitch up lacerated relationships.

*“If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering” (Mt 5, 23-24).*

Because of the *narcissistic disorder* and the intense rivalry among them, Christian Churches ignore such solicitation, unconsciously convinced they have reached celestial union with God without any real solidarity even with siblings of the same faith. The apostle James is not afraid of taking the lid off the contradictions into which Christian can fall if they think that by incorporating a duly consecrated a piece of bread or wine they internalizes Jesus’ character: *“pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father, is this: coming to the aid of orphans and widows in their hardship, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world” (Jn 1, 27).*

An eminent Christian philosopher, Lévinas, sums up the problem in this way: *“I was hungry and you fed me...” (Mt 25, 35). “I find that there is more transubstantiation in this verse than in the bread and the wine”.* For Lévinas *“every man who is hungry has an inalienable right over me, so none of us can sleep in peace as long as even one person is hungry”.*

The belief, probably sincere, that by eating the Host one automatically incorporates the life of the Risen Jesus reminds one the misunderstanding of the man who went to the restaurant, read the menu, saw the photo of a fish, chose it and... ate the menu. Not realizing that the "sign" is not the "substance".

## ***4. The Eucharist and betrayal***

No celebrations (weddings, inaugurations, parties, etc.) are free of a certain shadow. And Jesus’ *Passover* is not an exception. As soon as he entered the upper room he sensed an odour of... disloyalty. A few hours later, in fact, some of his friends openly let him down, others disappeared. It is symptomatic that in the Eucharistic liturgies of all Christian Churches, even though they give great importance to the Lord’s *Supper*, there is no mention of the dramatic change the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, pitilessly emphasize. After the supper, they sing the psalms of the feast and Jesus said to his companions:

*“You will fall away from me tonight, for the scripture says, ‘I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered...’.* At this Peter said to him: *“I will never fall away, even if all fall away from you”.* Jesus said to Peter: *“I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times”.* Peter said to him: *“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you”.* And all the disciples said the same (Mt 26, 31-35).

The temptation to give up a demanding commitment is human and it does not spare the dinner guests. At the end of that memorable *Supper*, *“between his friends an argument arose concerning which of them was to be considered the most important”.* Even though they had seen him kneel to wash their feet, their minds were so moulded on the praxis of dominion as to consider contention for power as normal and the idea of service utopian. How many "dinners" today are occasions for currying favour with the powerful and advancing one’s career!

In the most important liturgy of the Christian life the memory of the disciples’ turnaround gets lost. Because it is too much in contrast with the belief that the consecrated Bread automatically gives divine and immortal life to the faithful.

In effect, if through the repeated ritual suggestions Christians strongly feel themselves to be already *redeemed by the Blood of Christ, saved by his Sacrifice, partaking of God’s life*, obviously they cannot consider themselves as "traitors" of Christ (like Peter and Judas) if he has just transformed them. Hence the difficulty for Christians to see themselves as the same as other people, i.e. a mixture of fidelity and cowardice, generosity and meanness.

In order to avoid a disorganization of their mind, the ecclesiastical Hierarchy resorts to the consolidated strategy of erasing from the *Lord' Supper* the mention of historical events that might insinuate that Christians themselves are in fact *traitors* of the Crucified.

Analysing the facts objectively, the "betrayal" does not seem to me so much individual as ecclesial, if we think that the Eucharistic celebration, imposed by the ecclesiastical apparatus:

- removes the memory of the liberation from slavery in Egypt carried out by Jahveh, as celebrated in the feast of the Passover, as well as the pregnant two-way communication between God and his people;
- transforms both Jesus and Christians into prototypes of inertia and self-immolation, hence victims, the former submitted to the Father and the latter to powers;
- prevents the faithful from forming an adult community, capable of self-organization without *fathers, masters and teachers*;
- distracts the attention from the afflictions of those who suffer under the blows of bandits and incline Christians to behave like the "Levite" and the "priest" who would not stop to aid a wounded man.

If what the Nazarene preaches is true: "*from this they will recognize you, if you love one another*", it does not seem irreverent to conclude that the Eucharist ends up being an unrealistic idealization of love, in spite of the seriousness and abnegation of churchgoers and priests in conforming to the Gospel.

The "*Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (1992), in the chapter on the Eucharist, underlines that it is "*a sign of unity, bond of charity, the Lord' supper... which he ate with his friends... Its is the breaking of bread... remedy of immortality... Since the earliest times, together with the bread and the wine for the Eucharist, Christians have offered their own gifts to be shared with those who are in difficulty*". Millions of Catholics, however, find nothing of this in a normal Sunday Mass. That's why they probably avoid it. Maybe they think that idealization has replaced realism in the pope's mind, since he sees:

- *a sign of unity and a bond of charity* where there is an objective estrangement among the participants, a contradiction imposed by the sacred hierarchy;
- a *Supper* where there is only an altar for a *sacrifice*;
- *a breaking of bread* where there is no bread to share, but only "industrially prepared wafers";
- *a remedy promising immortality* when it is obvious that man is certainly subject to death;
- *a presentation and sharing of gifts with the needy* while the faithful neither offer nor share any gift, at most they give alms.

The "narcissistic disorder" that characterizes the Church, convinced as it is that what it does is an impeccable expression of its "divine life", prevents it from recognizing the rift between the "sacrificial cult" and the *Supper* of the Nazarene. In order to reduce this pathology somebody once suggested placing a cockerel by the altar at every liturgical assembly to mitigate triumphalistic tones and produce a gain in realism, source of humility. It might also serve as an allusion to the unfaithfulness that Christians persist in without being aware of it.

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# SUMMARY

**1° Chapter** Christianity grew up in the wake of a man, Jesus of Nazareth, whose personality has definitively acquired a prominent position in the universal conscience for having uprooted God from the Temple and the sacerdotal caste in order to plant him in the heart of humanity (Emanuel = God with us). Imbued with a love trusting in Jahvè and a prophetic passion for the defenceless, he thwarted the culture of a society which idolized the emperor and testified by his way of living, together with a group of friends "of no fixed abode" that it is possible to build an "anti-idolatrous network" (*Kingdom of God*) in the same way as that "leaven" through the leavening action, unostentatious but pervasive, of *the pure in heart, the children, the humble, the peace-loving, the persecuted*.

He travelled to the extreme borders of both suffering and of beatitude, encountering and overcoming the driving desires ("temptations") for dominion, superiority and private profit which trouble human condition. He taught that the full humanization was not exempt from contrasts and persecutory impulses and that the "true religion" lay in injecting a curative process in those who live in distress, causing confidence that *"another world is possible"*, and that even hunger can be defeated if the most generous share their *"five breads and five fishes"*. In his prayers he addressed God as "Our Father" not "My Father" and, as a son aware of his own limits, asked Him *"to forgive sins and deliver from temptations"* all creatures, including himself. But, as he dared to reveal that disreputable, hypocritical and ambiguous haggling with the empire, he was sentenced to death as subversive.

**2° Chapter** The Jewish root of the Nazarene progressively withered as well his way of speaking, popular and rich in metaphors. Some Apostles and Evangelists omit mention of his many acts of healing, exorcisms and the Beatitudes. His death on the cross was interpreted in different ways: at first he was the "scapegoat" for the violence of the Jewish authorities in cahoots with that Romans, then became the "victim" claimed by the Father himself in order to take away the sins of the world. If in the beginning he was *"a man confirmed by God"*, subsequently *"he was exalted by God above all beings, is the Alpha and the Omega"*.

Even though the communities of the first two centuries keep the fraternal and alternative structure of their origins at the cost of martyrdom, they unconsciously set in motion a double mutation of the Nazarene: idealization which coexists with castration. He was elevated to *Son of God, Lord of Heaven, Redeemer, Messiah*, but at the same time he was degraded to *Lamb of God, obedient Son, sent by the Father to find the lost sheep*. He was eternalized and divinized to the point of making almost indecipherable the historical goal for which he spends his own life: *"to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives and downtrodden, the recovery of sight to the blind people"* and to pardon his murders.

**3° Chapter** For three centuries the Christians were persecuted, until Constantine in 313 granted them full freedom of cult (313) but at the price of using the Cross as triumphant symbol of self elevation on rivals. The bishops, once integrated in the imperial system from which they received substantial social and patrimonial advantages, entrusted the pagan Emperor the convocation and the supervision of the first Council for the composition of theological conflicts (Nicaea, 325).

One of his successor, Theodosius, declared Christianity religion of the Empire and considered the disobedience to the dogma "crime against the State". The confusion of roles and identity

mongrelized both the State, which becomes an official source of the Christian doctrine and discipline, and the Church, which accepted privileges and civil mandates never admitted before. Such ecclesiastical degeneration was exposed by authoritative Fathers of the Church. The *narcissistic disorder* that characterized the behavior of Constantine, driven by grandiosity, desire of triumph and criminal aggressiveness, contaminates the Church which from “persecuted” became “persecutor”.

**4° Chapter** The forced conversion, the defence of the just war and the harassment of the Jews penetrated in the ecclesial fabric and are theologically legitimized by Augustine (IV-V century). Influenced by a Manichean culture and family experiences of dominion-submission, he thought the human condition was marked by asymmetrical relationships of superiority-inferiority, including between spirit and body, the few predestined for Heaven and the many for Hell, the baptized and pagans, men and women, virginity and marriage, the earthly city oriented to evil and the city of God (the Church) oriented to good.

Stained by an "original sin" transmitted through the evil of the concupiscence and intercourse of their parents, every Christian was unconsciously made to feel as if he were being persecuted by God for a sin never committed, which he can only get rid of either through a self-disparaging asceticism (masochism), or by hounding heretics and heathens in order to enjoy the pleasure (sadism) of feeling himself a crusader of good against evil.

**5° Chapter** As interest in the history and the experience of the Nazarene waned, the Churches, and above all the Roman Catholic, unconsciously tended to mould themselves according to the two natures attributed to him. The "divine" became centred in the "sacred Hierarchy", which speaks and acts as if it had God's power; the "human" was represented by the mass of "lay faithful" in the role of the "obedient servant" with the duty to do the will of "shepherds". If the Nazarene said "*stand up and walk*", the sacred Authorities said: "sit down and shut up".

The Christians, moreover, endorsing the twofold image of God - on one side *liberator-saviour-redeemer* and on the other *dominator-avenger-victimizer* - remain trapped in a "contradictory incarnation". They are the personification of charity towards the wretched, compassion for the weak, comprehension towards aliens; at the same time they exhibit an ethical superiority and support systems which idolize money, defend the law of the powerful and amplify inequalities. The *Ecclesial Ego* (of all the Christian Churches) is unable to harness the *narcissistic disorder* because of a lack of internalization of the historic Jesus' strong Ego, ripened in a warmly affectionate community, including his family. The consequence is that instead of a *mystical Body* Christianity is a "crushed body" in thousands of Churches which, save for a few exceptions, are incapable even of praying together and liberating the poor and outcast.

**6° Chapter** A representation of the mutation unconsciously experienced by the Christian Churches is offered by the Eucharistic rite, which ceases to be a banquet of male and female companions to celebrate and re-live a Liberation through the memory of the Exodus and the Risen Christ. It goes back to the ancient ritual of "sacrifice" in a sacred temple, but with the animal replaced by Jesus, the Lamb that removes the sins of the world through his own self-immolation. The sacrificial structure is well theatricalised by the division of the assembly: on the one hand the "ministrant who sacrifices", standing behind the altar or seated on a throne, endowed with power and speech; on the other the "sacrificed-faithful", trained to comply with the conventional signals of the ministrant, who requires them to sacrifice themselves by abstaining from every kind of greeting, dialogue, embraces or mutual confession. This is confirmation that Christianity is not a

community-body, where all parts help each other tenderly, but a mass without verbal and affective communication, split into "*shepherds*" and "*sheep*", rulers and subjects.

## ***What prospects?***

It goes without saying that over the course of history Christianity has been a force of compassion, advocate of personal dignity. Even so, it seems obvious that it is marked not so much by unavoidable individual defects, as by a "genetic malformation" that began in the first Christian community, which attributed to Jesus the same binary structure of the Roman Empire. In order to elevate the Nazarene above all other creatures, it is as if – figuratively speaking – the disciples transferred into his DNA the “double helix” of the Empire, one strand of which is that of the Emperor, worshipped as *Son of God and Saviour*, claiming sacrifices; while the other strand is that of the populace, *servants and victims*, fit only for sacrifice.

Once this “imperial double helix” was implanted in Jesus, he logically acquired a double personality: he was (like Augustus) *Son of God and Saviour*, but at the same time he was *servant and victim* (like the people). This dichotomy was inherited by the Christian churches, which developed two psychodynamic nucleuses: one self-divinizing and potentially sadistic-dominant-colonialist; the other subordinate-masochist, disposed to self-immolation.

Because of the above indicated *genetic malformation* in Christianity, a process of separation set in between the historical Jesus and the Risen Christ, between the only true Redeemer (Jesus Christ) and those who are untrustworthy, between the first class Church (Roman Catholic) and second class confessions; between the sacred ministers and the profane faithful, between law and sympathy.

If the analysis under this hypothesis can be considered reliable, it seems improbable that Christianity will be able to get rid of its *narcissistic disorder* by having recourse to breast-beating, councils, ecumenical meetings, reform campaigns, personal asceticism or proliferation of "independent" churches, initiatives certainly useful but far from adequate in the treatment of a pathology which does not concern specific elements of Christianity but the transmission of a "malformation".

Influenced by Moses and the prophets, Jesus strove to generate a way of being which was “non-dualistic”, based on warm, fraternal, communitarian, empathetic and equal relationships. He rejected “dualistic” schemes, which cause *apartheid between God* (or his Son), who is omnipotent and worthy of adoration, and all living creatures, which are passive and valueless.

Not only Jesus but many of his friends, both men and women, risked their life to prove that there is another way of living in this world (not the other world), without having to be either master or slave, persecutor or scapegoat.

Each person, according to the Nazarene, contains a liberating force proceeding from both God and nature, like *leaven* in bread, or *salt* which enhances the taste of human relationships.

When his disciples ignore or modify their native “genes” they become like *salt* good for nothing. Jesus says this in an unequivocal way:

***"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Listen, then, if you have ears!"*** (Lk 14, 34-35).



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