



28. THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND CHRISTIANITY

As previously described in chapter XIX of this series, the Roman Empire, as an institution, was an initiatic hierarchy that overlapped the Republic, without altering the structure of the latter. The Emperor was the supreme head of the army and, at the same time, was the Grand Master of chivalric initiations. However, only a patrician could become Emperor and, as such, he was also the head of both the priestly initiatic hierarchy and the hierarchy of the exterior priesthood. The first magisterial power corresponded to *Rex Sacrorum*, King of the sacred, as for example the sacrificial affairs¹; the second charge was that of *Pontifex Maximus*, head of the minor priesthood hierarchies that included the temple priests (sskr. *mahānta* or simple *pūjārī* and *arcaka*), the *augures* and the *haruspices*. Therefore, the Emperor represented all that was sacred in Roman religion, both at the esoteric and the exoteric levels, embodying both the priestly-patrician function and the warrior-chivalric one as guarantee of the regularity of the Republic. The Emperor was therefore divine (*Divus*) because he represented all that is sacred².



1. “Divus” Augustus Pater (the Divine Father August Emperor) and “Divus” Petrus Apostolus (the Apostle St. Peter)

The Jews’ refusal to honor Rome by making due offers to the images of the Emperor was considered by the Romans to be a rebellion against the mission of the Roman Peace (*Pax Romana*). The Jews considered that the only King recognized by them was their God Yehovah, rejecting in an exasperated way any recognition of the dominant authority³. The Christians inherited this fanatical attitude from the Jews and therefore incurred the same malevolence of the Empire. What the Romans could not accept was the refusal of the converts to Christianity to pay homage to the Emperor. In fact, they, who first brought flowers and fruit in front of the image of the Emperor and lit incense in his honor, suddenly refused to recognize its authority. This was considered a betrayal.

Even though several Emperors granted to the Jews the abstention from the imperial homage in exchange for the payment of a tax⁴, they never forgave the converted Christians for their stance,

¹ The *flamina* (sskr. *brāhmaṇa*), holders of the sacrificial sciences, depended on the King.

² This representation of the sacredness was the guarantee of the protection of the Gods on the State. It is untrue that the Emperor considered himself a God, as the Christian polemicists claim. The Emperors knew very well they were mortal, but the protection of the Gods that they guaranteed to the Empire indicated them as “divine”. As a matter of fact, in classical Latin also the Christian saint was called *divus*. Only in medieval Latin the title of *sanctus* eventually prevailed over the former. On the other hand, since the title of “saint” is attributed to those who after death has reached heaven, it does not mean that the title of “Holiness” attributed to the Pope assures that he will obtain posthumous salvation. As in Dante’ Divine Comedy, Hell is home to many passed Popes, even if in life they were called “Holiness”.

³ In truth, they recognized any King, whether he was anointed or not, as long as he was a Jew. This shows that their refusal to pay homage to the Roman Emperor was indeed motivated by simple racial reasons.

⁴ This does not mean that Roman authorities did not intervene heavily against the Jews on several cases of religious mystification. For example, when the Jews of Rome tried to spread the cult of Jupiter Sabatius with the surreptitious purpose of having the Sabbath day declared as rest day all over the Empire. Or when the Jews circulated false prophecies of an alleged “Jewish Sybil” who predicted the imminent end of the Roman Empire only with the objective of provoking psychological insecurity and political instability.



considering them as traitors and subversive sectarians. Rome was always tolerant of the religions of the conquered lands. Roman religion never knew neither proselytism nor missionaryism¹, so much so that it did not have the weapons to defend against the invasion of Christian proselytism. This explains why periodic riots broke out against Christians, which the Imperial authorities made their own. However, Christian propaganda greatly exaggerated the scope of these events². We have already clarified that at the time of Emperor Nero the trial against Jews and Christians for the great fire of Rome ended only with the condemnation of those who confessed the crime. The second “persecution” occurred during Domitian’s Empire (81-96 AD). In reality this was a trial against several Senators and a Consul for trying to overthrow the Emperor from the throne. In addition to the various political accusations there were also aggravating circumstances indicating that the accused had assumed Jewish behaviours and that perhaps they were Crypto-Christians. The other “persecutions” actually demonstrated the traditional tolerance of Rome towards foreign cults. The accusations for concrete offences had to be supported by evidence. Furthermore, anonymous complaints were not accepted. This does not mean that in many provinces of the Empire did not arise popular movements against Christians with the undeclared support of the local governors. The real great persecution came under the Emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD).



2. The Colosseum

However one must first understand the reasons behind it. Diocletian became Emperor after a serious institutional crisis of the Empire. In fifty years, twenty-two Emperors succeeded one another after fierce strife and bloodshed. The immense Empire at that time was administered by countless small provincial officials who, in the absence of a strong central power, took advantage of the situation to enrich themselves by indiscriminately exploiting the territories and the resources under their jurisdiction.

When the strong man came to power, that is, Diocletian, he found himself in a disarrayed and bankrupt empire, in the hands of corrupt, treacherous and rapacious officials. The only support he had was from the army that had acclaimed him as Emperor. With an iron fist, he punished the profiteering civil officers, he set price ceilings wherever they had been skyrocketed by speculators. To better govern the immense territory, he divided the Empire into two parts ruled by two *Augusti* Emperors. In turn the

¹ Proselytism corresponds to the conviction of one to the doctrine being preached by someone. Once the superiority of that doctrine is demonstrated, the former accept to become proselyte or disciple of the latter who has convinced him. Traditionally, when a sovereign happened to become a proselyte, his people too followed his choice. However, missionaryism uses any legal or illegal means to penetrate different populations and to distract them from their traditional cults by corrupting their behavior through economic, health, educational assistance, or creeping into their social and political context, bringing tension and division by means of blackmail and coercive propaganda.

² In 2011, Pope John Paul II consecrated the Colosseum to the Christian martyrs who allegedly were given to the lions there. However, there is no historical testimony from either the Roman or the Christian side proving that the Colosseum was the scene of any martyrdom.



Augusti divided their halves of the Empire into two further parts, sharing the responsibility of government with two *Cæsares* Emperors. The two *Augusti* and the two *Cæsares* were called Tetrarchs¹.



3. The Tetrarchs

Among the various actions that Diocletian took to strengthen the Empire there was the resumption of the persecution of the Christians. They continued to refuse homage to the Emperor at a time when a strong restoration of his authority was needed. Moreover, when the Emperor could only rely on the army, those who were Christian declared themselves pacifists and refused to carry arms. The wrath of Diocletian was then unleashed against the structure of the Church, which was seen as a state within the state. It was especially his Caesar, Galerius, who decided to outlaw the priestly hierarchy and the Christian public worship. In some cases there were indeed trials that ended with death sentences, but they were few in number and, in any case, motivated by accusations of treason against the State.



4. The Tetrarchy

We must also add that in these first three centuries the prevailing Church, the one based in Rome, which also enjoyed the support of the Churches of the most important cities of the Empire, such as Alexandria, Edessa, Antioch, etc., had increasingly moved away from its Semitic origins, often integrating doctrines, rituals and symbols from other religions of the Empire. This had made Christianity more agreeable to the Roman palate, eventually resulting in the baptism of numerous patricians and knights who represented the social elite of the Empire. In addition, the crisis of the Empire of the period before Diocletian coincided with a moment of collapse of the ancient Roman religion. The oracles had gone out, and of the ancient Mystic sanctuaries only Eleusis survived. The

¹ Miraculously, this arrangement proved very successful and was never the cause of the disunity of the Empire.





original religion of the Romans evidently had not been able to adapt to the times. No priestly personality (comparable to that function which is represented in India by Veda Vyāsa) had appeared to restore the ancient doctrines and to revive rituals and sacrifices. The Romans turned more and more to the religions and initiatic ways of the peoples they had dominated: the Egyptian religion with the Isis Mysteries; the Chaldean Mysteries; the cult of the Unconquered Sun (*Invictus Sol*) and the Mithraic Mysteries of Persian origin; the Druidic religion, especially in the northern regions of the Empire.



5. The solar god Mithra sacrifices the Taurus constellation

In short, Roman religion, which had deliberately identified itself with the State with the purpose of creating the Empire, was no longer satisfactory at the intellectual and emotional levels. The persecution of Diocletian did not bring any useful results, and in 311 AD the very Galerius had no option but to declare Christianity *religio licita* (licit religion).



6. The Emperor Constantine has the vision of the cross

In 313 AD the new Emperor Augustus, Constantine I, restored to Christianity the total freedom of worship, on a par with the other religions of the Empire. As Emperor of Rome, Constantine¹ was also the Supreme Pontiff, and in this capacity he hierarchically placed himself above the bishop of Rome and all the other bishops and Christian patriarchs. It was as *Pontifex Maximus* that Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, referred to in the previous chapter, obtaining the public obedience of all the bishops, including the pope².

The Christianization of the Empire led to a decrease in the number of soldiers in the army, as Christians unwillingly lent themselves to military life. To replace these defections, Rome decided to

¹ If it is true that the mother of Constantine, St. Helena, was a Christian, the conversion of Constantine is devoid of any serious evidence. He certainly was a follower of the Persian religion of *Invictus Sol* and initiated into the Mithraic Mysteries. His conversion is affirmed only by apologetic Christian sources. It is significant that these apologists, as for example Lattantius, narrate the conversion of Constantine while they remain silent about his function as *Pontifex Maximus*, which was the highest authority for all the religions of the Empire and recognized as such by the entire Christian hierarchy.

² It is from this period that the bishop of Rome assumed the title of Pope, from the Greek *πάπας* (*pàpas*), father.



enlist in its legions the barbarians from the regions at the border of the Empire¹. This was a fatal mistake. By doing so Rome left the security of the State in the hands of its worst enemies.



7. Barbarians in the Roman army

It was precisely under the weak Christian Emperors successors of Constantine that the barbarians came to control the Roman army. The only attempt at restoration took place with the Emperor Julian, called the Apostate (330-363). Baptized as a child, Julian abjured Christianity, assumed the Roman religion and was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Mithraic Mysteries.



8. St. Mercury treacherously kills the Emperor Julian

After becoming Emperor he began to purge the Christians from the heart of the State and the army. Great warrior and profound philosopher, Julian wanted to Romanize the barbarians by engaging them in a series of victorious enterprises. In this way he wanted to conquer the loyalty of the barbarians who fought with him. But his adventure did not last long. He was killed in Persia during a battle, struck from behind by a Christian, or so goes the story².

In 375 AD, the Emperor Gratian refused the title of *Pontifex Maximus* (Supreme Pontiff). This title was immediately usurped by Pope St. Damasus, without any regular transmission from the imperial side. Damasus, whom the Church calls “saint”, was in fact an individual eager for power, capable of unleashing any violence in order to affirm his authority, which was questioned by many bishops and by their Churches. The truth is that following the edict of Constantine, the exterior hierarchy of the Church

¹ With the term barbarians, the Romans meant no longer only foreigners, but also populations that belonged to uncultivated civilizations, devoid of spiritual religions and virtuous customs. For the most part, the barbarians were crude warriors dedicated to brigandage and violence. These populations belonged particularly to the Germanic group. Among them the Angles and the Saxons, the Goths, the Alemanni, the Franks, the Vandals, the Burgundians, the Marcomanni, the Gepids and the Heruli. To these must be added the Huns, a Central Asian population of Turkish stock that played a significant role in the crisis of the Western Roman Empire. In contact with the new Christian Empire, the barbarians were converted to the Aryan Church. This was a further reason for friction with the Church of Rome. The barbarian populations had always manifested a spontaneous inclination for heterodoxy. It is not by chance that even today the most mutable forms of Protestantism flourish wherever there are Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians.

² The Christian legend sanctified the murderer of the Emperor Julian with the name of “Saint Mercury”.



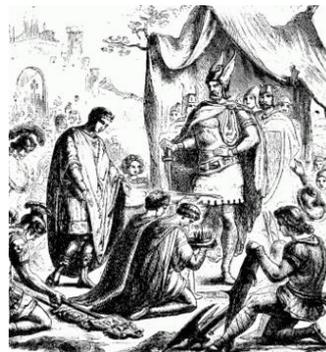
quickly degenerated in the pursuit of wealth, privileges and earthly power. This resulted in a decline in the wisdom and transmission of the rites that reached its apogee during the 7th century. True Christian wisdom was limited to hermits and isolated monastic communities¹.



9. Barbari ariani nell'esercito romano

It was under the Emperor Theodosius (347-395) that Christianity was declared official religion of the State. From that moment, all access to the temples of the gods, sacrifices, and Roman religious feasts were forbidden. The ancient Roman religion was contemptuously called pagan, from the Latin word *pagus* or “rustic” (country or village).

In the early 4th century there was a massive shift of the Asian population of the Huns to the West. The Germanic barbarian populations took refuge in the territories of west Europe, demolishing the administrative structures and defenses of the Western Roman Empire. The Huns came to threaten Italy and its new capital, Milan. The Roman army alone with the help of the barbarian hordes managed to drive the Huns back to the Danube. The welfare of the Western Empire was therefore preserved also thanks to the contribution of the barbarians who were welcomed as saviors, when in reality they were only another invader. Even leaders of the Roman army were often barbarians. And so it was that Odoacer, king of the Heruli and general of the Roman Empire, deposed in 476 AD the last Emperor Romulus Augustus, assuming the title of King of Italy². Thus, the collapse of the imperial power in the West allowed the barbarian peoples to seize vast abandoned territories: first the Angles and then the Saxons in Britain, the Visigoths in Spain, the Vandals in Sardinia and North Africa, the Franks in the north of Gaul, the Burgundians in the center of Gaul, the Swabians in Portugal. The Imperial ecumene in the West was over.



1. Romulus Augustus surrenders the imperial crown to Odoacer

¹ Only rarely were the monks also priests. The divergence between degenerate secular priests and authentically spiritual monks reached its peak when numerous monastic rules (including that of St. Benedict of Nursia) prohibited the access of priests to monasteries.

² Romulus Augustus, fatally, bore the name of the first King and first Emperor of Rome. Despite everything, the prestige and sacredness of Roman Empire prevented Odoacer from proclaiming himself an *Imperator*. He then sent the insignia and the *Lares* (ancestors images) of the city of Rome to Constantinople, to the Emperor of the East. With this symbolic gesture, the Emperor Zeno returned to be, at least theoretically, the only ruler of both the Eastern and Western Empire.

