

# VICTORIOUS

**BOAZ ADHENGO**



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## PREFACE

History is the narrative constructed by historians from traces left by the past. Historical enquiry is often driven by contemporary issues and, in consequence, historical narratives are constantly reconsidered, reconstructed and reshaped. The fact that different historians have different perspectives on issues means that there is often controversy and no universally agreed version of past events.

The English word history is derived from the Greek word *istoria* meaning inquiry, research, exploration or information. In a broad sense history is a systematic account of the origin and development of humankind, a record of the unique events and movements in its life. It is an attempt to recapture however imperfectly, that which is, in a sense, lost forever.

For many people, history is something best left to the historians and others interested in the past, yet history is very much part of the present for each and every one of us. In our everyday and professional lives, we constantly draw upon what has happened in the past, or rather particular versions and interpretations that have been both experienced directly and handed down to us. Moreover, history has a number of other uses or roles. Histories can provide analyses of the historical record in order to offer bases for making sense of and explaining contemporary phenomena.

Histories are important to those who see themselves as the subjects of such accounts, or at the very least recognize their roots in them. Histories are powerful because they both create and reinforce collective identities. Without a history, it is difficult to know who one is, where one comes from, or where one is headed. It is difficult to belong or have direction. Having a history is important because what is articulated as having happened in the past profoundly affects all aspects of our lives and will affect what happens in the future. History continues to be made, both in the sense of historians writing history and in the sense of unfolding events. Yet such collective characterizations of 'the past' are never fixed; they change in content and priority, are often contested, and are the result of selectivity; some things must be recalled and remembered, others must be forgotten, erased, or ignored: Others are even invented traditions.

Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by *quasiobligatory* repetition.

Historical events of any magnitude are bound to directly or indirectly affect people irrespective of a person's position and status in life. The repercussions of such events on a common man in particular are more than often drastic and debilitating.

It is upon such a perception that this book had developed from an objective to publicly understand the progress of Christianity, hitherto, with even more basis of making known. It might not be one of the perfect editions yet the resource is as important towards transcending the Church to even greater generations; we must understand how the persecutions against Christians started but importantly, how such persecutions ended. The following chapters will depict a simple narration until the decade of the popular crusades. Much emphasis on the ever changing global culture but greatly, the need to relate as humans in a peaceful world.

# CHAPTER ONE

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**romania**

The Roman Empire forms the broader political, social and religious context for the emergence of early Christianity. Two developments are especially important for the situation we find in the first century CE. The first one, beginning perhaps in **229 - 228 BCE** with the first Illyrian war, is the successive conquest of the eastern part of the Mediterranean world by the Romans, who were able to capitalise on the spread of Hellenism to all of Asia Minor, Persia and Egypt in the wake of Alexander and his successors, the *Diadochoi*. Then, in the second half of the first century BCE, the Roman republic was transformed into something new, retaining the name republic, but in fact now an autocracy of one man, who later took the eponymous title Caesar (*Kaisar* in Greek).

The path leading to Rome's imperial history was set by Gaius Julius Caesar, who was assassinated in **44 BCE** by senators fearing that he was trying to become a new Roman king. His grand-nephew and adoptive son Octavian won the struggle for power with his decisive victory over Mark Antony at the battle of Actium in **31 BCE**. Warned by Caesar's fate, Octavian avoided claiming for himself the title of king, but, owing largely to the military strengths of his legions which were strictly loyal to him, he now was without doubt Rome's most powerful individual. Through his discretion, political skill and long reign, he succeeded in establishing the *principate* as the new form of Roman government.

In **27 BCE**, when he had formally declared Rome a republic again, the senate bestowed on him the title Augustus, which means the 'venerated' or the 'revered one', with religious connotations. Religion played an important role in the conceptualisation of the emperor's role. The famous calendar decree of **9 BCE** from Asia Minor calls the birthday of the divine emperor the beginning of the good news (*euangelia*).

The predecessor of the Roman emperor cult is the ruler cult in the Hellenistic empires of the *Diadochoi* which honoured the reigning king with forms of veneration formerly used only for the Olympian gods. In Rome the emperor was declared a god of the state by the senate only after his death, but that did not hinder people in the provinces, first in the east, but then gradually in the west, too, from presenting divine honours and titles to the living emperor. In Rome Augustus found the elegant solution that sacrifices and libations might not be brought to him, but to his genius, seen as the divine force inspiring and guarding his personality which also shows a Roman penchant for making abstract ideas into gods (such as the goddesses *Roma* and *Pax*). But there always remained a difference between what was allowed and accepted in the provinces and what went on in Rome itself.

The emperor cult was not seen as an alternative to the inherited religions, but as a kind of superstructure which could be added onto the local cults. It functioned as a kind of institutional metonymy: it evoked the fact of Roman rule, gave an ideological foundation for it and furthered its social acceptability, at least for members of the leading classes to whom new and honourable careers as provincial priests of the emperor cult were offered.

Another stabilising factor was the Roman army. The Romans had twenty to thirty legions under arms. Each legion, led by a legate of senatorial rank, ideally consisted of 5,000 to 5,500 men (*the real numbers often were smaller*), drawn from the free population of Italy (later from the provinces, too, organised in six cohorts led by tribunes, each cohort itself subdivided into ten groups of eighty to one hundred soldiers called a century and led by a centurion. The centurion of the first century of the first cohort was called *primipilus* – the highest rank that could be reached by a simple soldier. The legionaries were heavy infantry. They were supplemented by auxiliary forces taken from the local population and used as cavalry, light infantry and

archers. Legionaries could expect to receive a grant of money and of land at their retirement. They sometimes settled in newly created ‘colonies’, like Philippi in Macedonia or Corinth in Greece.

Legions had to be moved as quickly as possible to zones of conflict; the officials had to travel to their assigned posts and, once in place, keep up contact with Rome. Hence, transportation and communication were of vital importance to the maintenance of the empire. Consequently, the Romans developed their excellent road system and *cursus publicus*, a postal and courier system. Though designed for military and official purposes, the roads nevertheless facilitated travel and communication on a more general scale.

The main language spoken in the whole of the empire still was Greek, used even in Rome and Italy by some writers. Latin was the next most important language, used especially in imperial administration. But local languages, e.g. Aramaic in Judaea, Punic at Carthage and Lycian in Asia Minor (cf. *Acts 14:11*), were still very much alive.

Since Augustus did not really create the formal position of an emperor (*theoretically Rome remained a republic with the senate as governing body and two consuls as its spokesmen*), the succession of a new *princeps* always proved to be a major weakness of the new system. Individual solutions had to be found in nearly every instance, beginning with Tiberius and Caligula.

Of special interest for us is Claudius, a nephew of Tiberius and Caligula’s uncle. In religious matters, he favoured a conservative approach that stressed the old Roman traditions, but he only intervened against other religious groups when he felt that they were disturbing the public order. In his famous letter to Alexandria, he did not grant citizenship to the

Alexandrine Jews, but he gave them other privileges and protected them against insults and persecution by the Greek population. In Rome, on the other hand, where the Jews had become very numerous, he had already prohibited their gatherings in **41 CE**, and in **49 CE** he expelled from Rome a group of unruly Jewish subjects, perhaps community leaders and Jewish Christian missionaries, whose clash had created some disturbances.

In the 250 years that separate the *Neronian* persecution in **64 CE** from the conversion of Constantine to Christianity, c.312, Christianity was an illegal and suspect religion whose members were subject to arrest, condemnation and, in many cases, death. In the second century, acts of persecution would be carried out on the authority of provincial governors, but, in the third century, the emperors themselves began to become involved until under Valerian (253 - 60) edicts were promulgated through the senate that were aimed at suppressing the worship of the church and inflicting damage on its adherents. For their part, the Christians expected alienation from surrounding provincial society and subjection to persecution. The aim of the persecution was to destroy the church, financially and socially, by confiscating its not inconsiderable property and by preventing the leadership from functioning. The first aim was understandable as within a few years the coin in common use, the *antoninianus*, would suffer a catastrophic devaluation. In addition, Christian services were forbidden, and Christian places of worship confiscated. There was good reason for these new tactics.

The persecutions under the emperor Decius (**249 - 51 CE**) divided the churches and had lasting consequences for the way the church was perceived and organised. Before **250 CE**, Christians had been persecuted from time to time. The severity and extent varied greatly, and the legal basis remains uncertain. Although there were occasional imperial rescripts or other

enactments, local popular feeling and the personal attitude of local officials (*always susceptible to bribes*) usually determined events. When the Emperor Decius had defeated his predecessor Philip (244 - 9 CE) in September 249, he decreed that all citizens should offer sacrifice to the gods. It was not a specifically anti-Christian decree: only the worship of the gods, not renunciation, was the subject of the *libellus*, or certificate of sacrifice, which every citizen had to obtain from the examining tribunal. Notable bishops fell victim: *Fabian* of Rome on 20/21 January 250, *Babylas* of Antioch soon after, and *Alexander* of Jerusalem died in the Caesarea prison.

Decius had decreed the most systematic attempt ever made to enforce religious conformity, and, as far as the Christian population was concerned, had considerable success. Persecution petered out when barbarian incursions distracted the emperor, and he perished on the northern frontier in June 251.

The church in Rome could not appoint a bishop for fourteen months. The problem of mass apostasy was, however, pressing, and the remaining clergy in Rome and Carthage were obliged to make decisions. Multitudes who had been brought up as Christians had lapsed, and found themselves excluded from the benefits of church membership. Excommunication was a grave matter. While it carried with it the threat of spiritual damnation, its physical and social consequences were more immediate and pressing than would be the case in modern western Christianity. The local church was a household, a *familia*, which made mutual provision for the sick, the widowed, the orphaned and the elderly, and for the decent disposal of the dead. The lapsed therefore sought ways to get themselves restored. Surviving clergy themselves might be compromised.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

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**heroditus**

Once upon a time, historians of the early church wrote a simple story of a pristine faith received from Jesus Christ and communicated to his disciples. With an agreed gospel summed up in the Apostles' Creed, they dispersed to spread the word in all directions. In time, however, this unified message was frustrated by distortions called heresies, which produced their own offspring, multiplying and diversifying, by contrast with the one truth entrusted to the apostles. Despite heresy and persecution, however, Christianity triumphed with the conversion of Constantine.

The gospels provide contrasting theatres for the public ministry of Jesus. Whereas the *Synoptics* have a shared focus on Galilee, with one final journey to Jerusalem, the fourth gospel views Galilee virtually as a place of refuge from a ministry conducted for the most part in Judaea and Jerusalem. In the most recent wave of historical Jesus research, there has been a marked preference for Galilee, due to a variety of factors, not the least of which are current trends among scholars interested more in the social than the theological significance of Jesus' life. Historians are missing an important clue to his career, however, if they ignore the fact that it was in Jerusalem rather than in Galilee that he eventually met his fate.

As one moves from west to east, both Galilee and Judaea follow a similar pattern in geomorphic terms - coastal plain, central hill country, rift valley and the uplands of Transjordan. On a north-south axis, however, real differences emerge due to the variety of climatic conditions. The marked decrease in annual rainfall from north to south is quite obvious in the landscape. Whereas the central Galilean hill country, with its rich alluvial soil and many springs, has a number of wide valleys running in an east/west direction, the *Judaeian* hill country has much less soil covering and tapers off quickly into the dry, arid desert region of the Dead Sea valley.

These differences should not be neglected when the historical factors having to do with the ministry of Jesus are investigated. The name Galilee, meaning the circle, is derived in all probability from the experience of the early Israelites inhabiting the interior highlands and surrounded by Canaanite city-states. Judaea, on the other hand, is a tribal name which came to particular prominence in the period of the Davidic monarchy, inasmuch as David himself was from the tribe of Judah. The Galilean tribes were Zebulon, Naphtali and Asher, with the tribe of Dan migrating north later. The accounts of tribal characteristics and behavioural patterns, found especially in the Blessings of Jacob (*Genesis 49*) and Moses (*Deuteronomy 33*), as well as in the Song of Deborah (*Judges 5*), suggest that the northern tribes were exposed to greater cultural diversity over the centuries. Certainly the region bore the brunt of the Assyrian onslaught in the eighth century BCE, with *Tiglathpilesar III's* invasion resulting in the destruction, and possible depopulation, of many centres in upper and lower Galilee (*2 Kings 15:29; Isaiah 8:23*). Judah succumbed to the Babylonians a century and a half later with the destruction of the temple and the deportation to Babylon of the king and the leading members of the aristocracy in **587 BCE**. Unlike the north, however, restoration in Judaea occurred quickly under the Persians, with the edict of Cyrus in **515 BCE** allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple.

A firm grasp of the history of both regions during the intervening centuries before the Common Era is vital to an understanding of the religious, cultural, and political context of Galilee and Judaea in the first century CE. The Persian province of *Yehud*, as it was officially named, remained a fairly insignificant temple territory for several centuries, despite the hopes of restoration expressed by various prophets. All that was to change after the conquest of Alexander the Great and the advent of the Hellenistic kingdoms; in the second century BCE, the Seleucid Empire in Syria began to collapse and various

ethnic groups, including *Judaeans*, were able to establish themselves within national territories. Once the threat from Antiochus Epiphanes (**175 - 164 BCE**) of forced assimilation of the *Judaean* temple cult of *Yahweh* to that of *Zeus* had been averted under the leadership of the *Maccabees*, the desecrated temple was rededicated in **164**, and the foundation of an autonomous Jewish state soon followed in its wake. Thereafter the second generation of the Maccabees, the *Hasmoneans* (**135 - 67 BCE**), initiated campaigns of expansion, which eventually led to the establishment of a kingdom that was as extensive territorially as that of David and Solomon in the tenth to the ninth centuries.

For the first time in almost a millennium, therefore, Galilee and Judaea were under the same native rulership, and significantly in the literature of the period the name *Judaeian* begins to be used, not just for the inhabitants of Judaea in the strict sense, but for all who embraced the Jewish temple ideology by worshipping in Jerusalem. By the mid-first century BCE, Rome was emerging as master of the eastern Mediterranean, and the Hasmoneans had been replaced by the *Herodians*, an Idumean dynasty entrusted by Rome with maintaining its interests in the region as client kings. Galilee, with *Sepphoris* (*only approximately six kilometres from Nazareth*) as its administrative centre, was recognised as a Jewish territory, together with Judaea in the south and *Perea* across the Jordan. These sub-regions were soon incorporated into the kingdom of Herod the Great, and were expected to make their contribution to the honouring of his Roman patron, Augustus.

The long reign of Herod (**37 - 4 BCE**) made a deep impact on both Galilean and *Judaeian* society, so much so in fact that on his death an embassy was sent to Rome requesting that none of his sons should replace him. Augustus responded by dividing the kingdom between Herod's three sons, assigning Antipas to rule over Galilee and Perea; Archelaus over Judaea and Philip over

Batanaea; Trachonitis and Auranitis in northern Transjordan. Galilee was once again, therefore, administratively separate from Judaea, as reflected in the gospel of Matthew's explanation of how Jesus, though born in Judaea, came to live in Galilee (Mathew 2:23).

Archelaus had so outraged his subjects that he was deposed by Rome in **6 CE**; and thereafter Judaea proper was administered by a procurator who resided in Caesarea Maritima, thus reducing Jerusalem to the role of a temple city controlled by a priestly aristocracy.

Antipas, called simply Herod in the New Testament (cf. e.g. *Mathew chs. 2 and 14; Mark chs. 6 and 8; and Luke chs. 1, 3, 9, 13 and 23*), aspired to, but was never given, the title 'king'. He ruled in Galilee and *Perea* until **37 CE**, when he too was deposed and his territory was handed over to his nephew Agrippa I. Despite his lesser status as 'tetrarch', Antipas continued with the style and policy of his father in ensuring that Roman concerns be addressed in his territories. John the Baptist suffered at his hands, probably because John's popularity and espousal of justice for the poor was cause for concern that an uprising might occur (*Mark 6:14 - 29; Mathew 14:1 - 12; Luke 9:7 - 9*).

Apart from a major renovation of the Jerusalem temple, Herod the Great had for the most part confined his building projects to the periphery of the Jewish territories: Samaria was renamed Sebaste (in Latin, 'Augustus'), with a temple to Roma and Augustus constructed there (Augustus was a former emperor who was believed to be a semi-god), as also at Caesarea Maritima on the coast where he developed a magnificent harbour. In the north, Herod constructed a temple to Augustus at *Paneas*, which his son, Philip, later renamed Caesarea (Philippi). Antipas continued this tradition of honouring the Roman overlords through monumental buildings in Galilee. Sepphoris

was made ‘the ornament of all Galilee’ and named *autokrator*, probably honouring the sole rule of Augustus. *Tiberias* on the sea of Galilee was a new foundation, in **19 CE**, honouring the new emperor who had succeeded Augustus, and Bethsaida got the additional name *Julias*, in honour Augustus’ wife, Livia/Julia.

The *Herodians* in Galilee could best be described, therefore, as a wealthy aristocracy, stoutly loyal to the Herodian house and its policies, presumably because they were its beneficiaries and possibly also involved in administrative duties.

Landowning patterns in Galilee, as elsewhere in the ancient world, are difficult to determine with any degree of precision. Large estates farmed by lease-paying tenants rather than freeholding peasants were already present in Persian times (*Nehemiah 5:1 - 11*). The gospel parables also reflect this pattern (*Mark 12:1 - 9; Luke 16:1 - 9*).

Pressure could fall on small landowners as the ruling aristocracy’s needs had to be met. In a pre-industrial context, land was the primary source of wealth, but it was in short supply in a Galilee that was densely populated by the standards of the time. Increased taxation to meet the demands of an elite lifestyle meant that many were reduced to penury.

A schematic slide from peasant owner to tenant farmer, to day labourer - all recognisable characters from the gospel parables - was inexorable for many and, thus, gave rise to social resentment, debt, banditry and, in the case of women, prostitution. Relatively speaking, Galilee was well endowed with natural resources. The melting winter snows from Mt Hermon and seasonal rains ensured good yields and allowed for the production of a variety of crops. The slopes of upper Galilee were suitable for the cultivation of the vine and the olive tree, supporting the abundant production of wine and oil; the lake of

*Gennesareth* supported a thriving fish industry. The names of Bethsaida and Magdala suggest a connection with fish, and Jesus' first followers were actively engaged in this industry (*Mark 1:16*). The Greek name of Magdala, Tarichaeae, refers to the practice of salting fish for export, and this industry must have necessitated such specialised services as potters making vessels for export of liquid products, as well as boat, sail and net makers.

The most pressing question about the Galilean economy is the extent to which the benefits of these products accrued to the peasants themselves. Was the Galilean economy a politically controlled entity in which the peasants were mere serfs? In whose interest were the primary resources utilised? If, as we have suggested, the Galilean landownership pattern represented a combination of large estates and family-run holdings, then some degree of commercial independence would have been granted to the Galilean peasants. However, the refurbishment of Sepphoris and the building of Tiberias must have marked a turning-point in the Galilean economy, one which coincided with Jesus' public ministry. This provides the most immediate backdrop to his particular emphasis on the blessedness of the destitute and his call for trust in God's providential care for all.

The new Herodian class required adequate allotments in order to maintain a luxurious lifestyle (cf. *Mathew 11:19*) and, inevitably, this brought further pressure on the native peasants.

The dividing line, however, between subsistence and penury was always a thin one, as the threatened strike by the Galilean peasants in the reign of the emperor Gaius (*Caligula*) demonstrates (39/40 CE). In protest at the proposed erection of the emperor's statue in the Jerusalem temple, they decided not to till the land. Significantly, some members of the Herodian family were dismayed, fearing that there would not be sufficient resources to pay the annual tribute, which would lead to social

anarchy. Julius Caesar had recognised the problem caused for Jewish peasants by his restoration in **47 BCE** of their rights to support their temple, and, consequently, he reduced the annual tribute due to Rome. The 200 talents (*the equivalent of 600,000 Tyrian silver shekels*) from Galilee and Peraea to which Antipas was annually entitled as a personal income made a considerable demand on the populace.

A monetary system is essential for any developing economy, since as stored value it allows for a wider and more complex network of trading than the barter of goods, which can only occur at a local level. Tyrian coinage seems to dominate the numismatic finds at locations not just in upper Galilee, such as *Meiron, Gischala* and *Khirbet Shema*, but even at *Gamala* and *Jotapata* as well, both lower Galilean strongholds of Jewish nationalism in the first revolt. Most surprising is the fact that despite its pagan imagery, the Tyrian half-shekel was deemed to be ‘the coin of the sanctuary which all male Jews were obliged to pay for the upkeep of the Jerusalem temple. The usual reason given is that the Tyrian money retained a constant value in terms of its silver content for over a century and a half (**126 BCE - 56 CE**).

In order to maintain their elite lifestyle, the Herodians siphoned off the wealth of the land for their own benefit, without giving anything back in return. The Jewish ideal on the other hand affirmed an inclusive community in which all shared in the blessings of the land and its fruits. During the long reign of Antipas, the upkeep of *Sepphoris* and *Tiberias* drained the countryside of its resources, natural and human, causing resentment and opposition.

Much of Jesus’ public ministry, as portrayed in the gospels, was conducted against the backdrop of an unjust economic system. The gospels, even when they are presenting Jesus’ ministry in a post-resurrection situation, provide us with a window on the

economic conditions in Galilee as these can be discerned from other sources also. In order to understand the full impact of statements such as ‘Blessed are the poor,’ or ‘Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors’, they need to be heard in the context of attitudes and values surrounding wealth and possessions within both *Graeco-Roman* society and standard Jewish covenantal thinking. To be poor was to be lacking in honour, the most prized possession of all in Mediterranean society, and cursed by God according to the *Deuteronomic* principle that the good will prosper and the wicked will perish (*Deuteronomy 30:15 - 20*).

Yet Jesus was no starry-eyed romantic. Wealthy people who can lend money and then exact it back with interest are part of the landscape of his ministry, and thieves are a constant threat for those who seek to hoard their money (cf. e.g. *Mathew 6:19; 18:23 - 35; 19:16 - 22; 25:14 - 30*). The poor or the destitute are never far away, and they are frequent characters in his parables (*Mark 12:41 - 4; Luke 16:19 - 31*). On the other hand, it is important to recognise that this picture may be somewhat distorted because of the particular emphasis of Jesus’ ministry. Certainly, not everybody who was attracted to him was poor. The inhabitants of such places as *Capernaum*, *Corazin* and *Bethsaida*, all large villages situated in the fertile plain of *Gennesareth*, do not seem to have accepted his radical message (cf. *Mathew 11:19 - 21*). This points to the fact that the more affluent Galileans were not prepared to abandon possessions and family, even when they may have been happy to accept Jesus because of his healing powers.

This was the world in which Jesus grew up and which shaped his distinctive understanding of Israel’s destiny and his own role in it. Within the broad contours of the gospels’ portrayals and allowing for their later kerygmatic concerns, it is possible to discern two different though related strategies operating in the career of Jesus. In Galilee, he sought to address the social needs

of the village culture, whose lifestyle and values were being eroded by the new level of Herodian involvement in the region as a result of Antipas' presence. As a Jewish prophet, however, he had also to address the centre of his own religious tradition in Jerusalem, like other country prophets before and after him (*Amos, Jeremiah and Jesus the son of Ananus, for example*), whose unenviable task it was to proclaim judgement on the temple and the city. Thus, in their separate ways, both the *Synoptics* and John have retained different, but plausible, aspects of a single career that spanned both Galilee and Jerusalem.

While we know very little of the internal development and pressures within those churches, two major socio-political events without a doubt shaped their destiny: the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in **66 - 70, CE** and the crackdown against Jewish insurgency by Hadrian some sixty years later; with rededication of Jerusalem as *Aelia Capitolina*, with Jews forbidden, not only to live there, but even to gaze upon it from a distance. Hadrian's conquest of the city marked a shift in the community and leadership there, from those who were Hebrews in ancestry, with their bishops from the circumcision, to a church from the Gentiles, with the first bishop, Marcus, appointed. At this point Jerusalem officially becomes like the entire rest of the world, a part of the Gentile mission. But the isolation and rededication of Jerusalem did not mean the complete eradication of either Christians or Jews from Palestine. Many Jews moved to coastal cities, like Caesarea or *Javneh*, as also to Galilean cities, such as *Sepphoris* and *Tiberias*.

The destruction and isolation of Jerusalem after the two revolts meant that the traditional relationship between diaspora and centre was in some sense pulled inside out, until the formation of the Christian 'Holy Land' traditions in the fourth century reversed the direction once again.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

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### **organised christianity**

The early Christian community of Rome drew its membership from the artisans and freedmen living in large tenement blocks (*insulae*), and from freedmen and slaves working in the imperial household, particularly in the time of Commodus, Septimius Severus and their successors. Most non-servile Christians in Rome and elsewhere were *peregrini*, expatriate citizens of the towns and their territories of the Roman orient. They enjoyed neither Roman citizenship nor Latin rights until the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, the edict of Emperor Caracalla that granted citizenship to most free residents of the empire. Before 212 Christians fell under the jurisdiction of the *praetor peregrinus*, who administered the large migrant population in Rome, most of them *Greek-speaking* easterners. The Latin-speaking Christians of late second-century Rome were African provincials. The low social status of Christians led to their victimisation in periodic persecutions designed to rid the urban centre of bad people (*mali homines*) - individuals and groups who flouted the social norms, and abhorred public entertainments and religious festivals.

To engage the question of Christian self-definition is to become keenly aware that it is a process of differentiations and negotiations that is never final, and that the categories of description - 'Christian', 'Jewish', 'Greek' and 'Roman' - are not to be taken for granted. The communities these categories are said to designate are neither stable nor essentially known entities, but social formations continuously engaged in self-recreation. The threefold division of family life into relationships of the male head of household, the *paterfamilias*, with wife, children and slaves, was already popularised by Aristotle. It continued to structure further discussions of *oikonomia*, household management, throughout the Hellenistic period and, with certain important variances, carried into the household codes of the New Testament (especially Colossians 3:18 - 4:1; Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9; 1 Peter 2:18 - 3:7).

Asia Minor and Achaëa were nurseries for Christianity, as the New Testament shows. The churches there were planted, grew and changed in environs which harboured a long history, within cities (*Athens* and *Corinth*, *Ephesus* and *Pergumum* among them) in which civic pride flourished and a diversity of cultures proliferated. The context for Christians' lives was the empire and, for most of them, a polis with its rivalries, regional grandees, associations and gathered poor. Asia Minor (from the western coast of modern Turkey to the Taurus mountain range and northwards), with its long-established Greek cities, and Achaëa (Greece) were linked by the common language of Greek, by proximity to the Mediterranean and its culture, and through being subject to the ubiquitous Roman administration that had absorbed local leagues and made *coloniae* of the like of Corinth, Achaëa's capital.

The movement that began with Jesus of Nazareth and would eventually become the Christian church in its manifold varieties developed with astonishing rapidity and exhibited diverse forms from its earliest years. Most of those early developments remain invisible to us, and scholarly attempts to plot their outline must be viewed with scepticism, but roughly we may say, with a modern sociologist, that the movement began as a Jewish sect and was soon transformed into a *Graeco-Roman* cult.

Early Christian traditions about Ephesus and Athens (Acts 17–19; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14; 15:32; 18:23; 19:1, 10) show the interface between Christians, Jews, pagans, city politics and magic. The presence of diaspora Jews had been important in determining the locations for evangelism but, where confident Jewish communities existed, so might Jews, Christians, pagans and the authorities be in tension. The fourth gospel, traditionally associated with Ephesus, suggests this<sup>34</sup> and Luke's picture of fraught relations between evangelists, Jews, and a sometimes hostile populace in Achaëa and Asia does too (e.g. *Acts* 13:42 - 51; 14:1 - 7; 18:5 - 17, 19 - 20).

Corresponding to the locations of Jesus' own activity as depicted in the gospels, there seem to have been two centres of activity for his early followers. One was in the villages of (*mostly*) rural Judaea, Galilee and Samaria, the other in Jerusalem. It is in instructions by Jesus to his delegates or 'apostles' that we have our only primary source of information about the way the new sect may have established itself in the village culture of Palestine. There we see itinerant prophets who detach themselves from those ties of place and of family which, especially in a rural setting, ordinarily determine a person's identity: 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (*Mathew 8:20; Luke 9:58*). 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple' (*Luke 14:16; cf. Mathew 10:37*). On the other hand, they are made dependent for their subsistence upon the villagers to whom they are sent to proclaim their message of the reign of God (*see Mark 6:8 - 11 and parallels*).

Naturally this picture had been idealised to some extent by the time these traditions were incorporated into the written gospels. Nevertheless, it is clear that wandering, mendicant prophets or apostles played a considerable role in the spread of the Jesus sect in Jewish and Samaritan villages. Their mission was possible because they and the villagers shared a common culture which included not only the theological beliefs, the scriptures and the traditions within which Jesus' career was interpreted by his disciples, but also the socially familiar role that the disciples themselves acted out, that of the prophet. It is not so clear from our sources what kind of organised group, if any, may have emerged in the villages on those occasions when the prophets' message was accepted. Presumably there, as in the cities, adherents to the new Messiah would gather in homes for prayers, exhortations and celebration of the ritual meal, and leadership was apparently largely in the hands of the itinerants

or their local deputies. In several early Christian documents (*most clearly in Matthew and the Didache*) there is evidence of conflicts between local and itinerant leaders.

In a number of ways, however, the Christian groups of the first century were quite different both from typical cults in the Roman world and from other kinds of voluntary associations, such as craft guilds, which they otherwise resembled. Although the Christians had developed their own special rituals, these were not conspicuous to outsiders. Christians had no shrines, temples, cult statues or sacrifices; they staged no public festivals, musical performances or pilgrimages. As far as we know, they set up no identifiable inscriptions. On the other hand, initiation into their cult had social consequences that were more far-reaching than initiation into the cults of familiar gods. It entailed incorporation into a tightly knit community, a resocialisation that demanded (and in many cases actually received) an allegiance replacing bonds of natural kinship, and a submission to one God and one Lord excluding participation in any other cult. Moreover, this artificial family undertook to resocialise its members by a continual process of moral instruction and admonition; hardly any aspect of life was excluded from the purview of mutual concern, if we are to believe the writings of the movement's leaders. The church thus combined features of household, cult, club and philosophical school, without being altogether like any of them.

The Christian cult groups were unusual in another respect as well. While the household assembly was Christianity's toehold in the life of the *Graeco-Roman* cities, each of these cells of a dozen or so persons was made constantly aware of being part of a much wider movement. The concept of a single people of the one God was a self-image that the sect had inherited from Judaism. This notion was broadened, reinforced and given practical form in two ways. Mythically, the messianic ideology of the Christians drew upon the great stories of creation and

human origins in the book of Genesis - as was the beginning so must be the end. The earliest reports of baptismal rituals are thus filled with allusions to paradise and fall: in Christ the initiate puts on again the image of God lost by Adam; in him the primeval unity of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female is restored (cf. *Galatians 3:27.*; *1 Corinthians 12:13*; *Colossians 3:5 - 15*).

One of the most important and distinctive developments in the organisation of the ancient church is the establishment of what came to be called 'the monarchical episcopate', that is, governance of Christian groups in each city by a single bishop (Greek *episkopos*, 'overseer'), superior to other orders of clergy called 'elders' (*presbyteroi*) and 'deacons' (*diakonoi*). As the movement spread, beginning in the second century, back into the countryside, the urban bishops presided, in principle, also over the Christians in the towns and villages dependent upon their city - the region known as the *chora* in Greek. Yet this development, so significant for the future shape of the church, is exceedingly difficult to trace in detail, and its history remains controversial - partly because it is hard for modern historians to escape from the tendentious reading of the sources during centuries of polemics between Protestant and Catholic interpreters in the west, partly because the sources are themselves obscure.

The propensity of the Christian movement to create both local and *trans-local* institutions did not ensure early uniformity of structure, but the contrary. From the references to organisation in the New Testament and other early documents, we get the impression of considerable variety and experimentation, and also of frequent conflict not only between different figures and groups, but also between different modes of authority. For example, people whose authority came from their social position, like the householders and patrons of household communities, could clash with charismatics, like local or visiting

prophets (e.g. *1 Corinthians 12 - 14*; *3 John*). Local leaders could clash with itinerants, and different travelling ‘apostles’ might teach quite different beliefs and forms of behaviour.

One of the main reasons for the development of centralised authorities was the necessity for controlling deviant behaviour and belief. Deviance was peculiarly threatening, not only because of the comparative weakness of the groups, but also because of the universal claims which the movement made for itself. In the early decades of the Christian movement, only informal and ad hoc means were available for coping with disagreements. Individual deviants were subject to persuasion and censure by other individuals, including ‘prophets’, ‘apostles’ and other leaders in a meeting of the household assembly. The strongest sanction was shunning by the other Christians, especially by banning from the common meals, or expulsion altogether from the community (*1 Corinthians 5:1 - 13*; *Matt 18:15 - 18*; *2 Thessalonians 3:14 - 15*). To be sure, physical harm by magical means was also threatened (*1 Corinthians 11:30*; *Acts 5:1 - 11*; *Revelations 2:22 - 3*; cf. *1 Corinthians 5:5*), but Christian use of force on a regular basis to suppress deviance had to wait for the post-Constantinian alliance with state power.

Disagreement among leaders was even more threatening to the group’s stability than deviance by ordinary members – successful handling of the latter could in fact strengthen coherence – but means for dealing with it were more difficult to achieve. Essentially there were available only persuasion and influence, exercised mostly through the familiar means of *Graeco-Roman* rhetoric within the structures of *amicitia* (friendship, i.e. reciprocity among social equals) and *clientela* (reciprocity between social superiors and their dependents). Classic instances of rhetorical persuasion and invective aimed at winning allegiance to one set of leaders rather than another are Paul’s letter to the Galatians and *2 Corinthians 10–13*.

Consultation among disagreeing leaders was sometimes successful (*Galatians 2:1 - 10; Acts 15*), sometimes not (*Galatians 2:11 - 13; Revelations 2:21*).

Unresolved differences usually led to separation between disagreeing leaders and their followers. Sometimes the separation was amicable, functional and by formal ‘contract’, as in the Jerusalem meeting (*Galatians 2:9*). More often, the result was a splintering of the Christian movement, a ‘schism’ (*1 John 2:19*). Because the earliest urban congregations, as we have seen, were small associations meeting in private houses, such division could be effected by refusal to admit to the house representatives of other groups, the itinerant ‘*prophets*’ and ‘*apostles*’ who were the principal agents of the church’s trans-local development (*2, 3 John*).

The followers of Jesus have often been called ‘peasants’, but that is a very imprecise use of the term, which in its most direct and simplest sense denotes *free men and women whose chief activity lay in the working of the land with their own hands*. The gospel traditions depict Jesus himself as a *tekton* or the son of one (*Mark 6:3; Mathew 13*), thus of a family of independent carpenters or builders. Among his disciples are sons of fishing families with slaves and hired workers; one is a ‘tax collector’ (*Mark 1:16 - 20; 2:14*). Support for the itinerant band is provided by women who evidently have some means, including the wife of a commissioner of the tetrarch (*Luke 8:2 - 3*). In the cities, the patronage of householders, some of whom had wealth and even civic status, like Gaius and Erastus of Corinth, was indispensable. There were slaveholders as well as slaves among the faithful.

Care for the poor by Christians who were better off was an obligation, already familiar in Jewish communities, that was frequently urged by Christian writers. ‘*Remember the poor*’ was the one requirement laid on Gentile Christian communities by

the Jerusalem apostles, as Paul reported the event (*Galatians* 2:9), and he laboured valiantly to make good on his promise to collect money from the churches he had founded for ‘the poor among the saints at Jerusalem’ (*1 Corinthians* 16:1 - 4; *2 Corinthians* 8 - 9; *Romans* 15:25 - 8), though he saw in this evidently not merely charity but also an expression of equity (*isotes*) among the churches, particularly solidarity between the Gentile Christians and the mother church of Jerusalem. Acts draws on the classical tradition of friendship as well as the *Deuteronomic* picture of Israel in the wilderness to depict an ideal community of goods under the apostles in Jerusalem (*Acts* 4:32 - 5).

One characteristic of the early Christian assemblies was the belief that the spirit of God or of Christ was present both in the community and within individual members of it, and that the spirit manifested itself directly in certain spontaneous activities. Perhaps the most dramatic was speaking in tongues (*glossais lalain*, whence the modern designation ‘*glossolalia*’, *1 Corinthians* 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:1 - 40; *Acts* 10:46; 19:6). Although the author of Acts rationalises tongue-speaking as a kind of instant translation service (2:2 - 13), the situation at Corinth addressed by Paul sounds more like the trance phenomenon often observed in some modern groups, including Pentecostal Christians. Losing conscious control, the subject pours out involuntary utterances – unintelligible to all but those with the ‘gift’ of interpretation (*1 Corinthians* 12:10; 14:27) - often accompanied by rapid or sudden bodily movements, profuse sweating and other uncontrolled physical signs. Yet, while glossolalia seems the epitome of a spontaneous, anti-structural phenomenon, it happens within the context of worship, set about with ritualised behaviour. That is clear from Paul’s directives in 1 Corinthians, and also from observations of modern tongue-speakers. The phenomenon occurs at predictable moments in the service, usually introduced by quite specific verbal formulas and physical actions. In adepts, there are even

‘trigger words’ that can induce or terminate the trance – and Paul seems to have assumed something similar, for he orders that the numbers of speakers and the occasions of their speaking be strictly regulated (*1 Corinthians 14:27*).

From the earliest penetration of the Christian movement into the cities outside Palestine, travel by individual Christians was of fundamental importance, not only for the spread of the cult to different places, but also for the reinforcement of the Christians’ understanding of themselves as a community that transcended local connections. Hospitality’ (*philoxenia*) was a virtue much praised by early Christians, especially to be sought in bishops (*1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Romans 12:13; Hebrew 13:2*); withholding hospitality was a means of social control (2, 3 *John*). The significance of travel and hospitality and the power of the resulting sense of the universality of the cult are vividly portrayed by one of the earliest extant Christian inscriptions, an epitaph erected toward the end of the second century in Hieropolis, Phrygia, by a certain Abercius. Abercius, perhaps the bishop of that city, describes himself as disciple of a pure shepherd,

*...who sent me to Rome to behold a kingdom and to see a queen in golden robe and golden shoes; but I saw there a people possessing a splendid seal. I also saw the Plain of Syria and all the cities – Nisibis, when I had crossed the Euphrates. Everywhere I got companions; with me in my carriage I had Paul. Everywhere Faith went before me and set out everywhere for food the Fish from the spring, all-great and pure, whom the pure virgin caught. Him she gave at all times to friends to eat; possessing an excellent wine, she gave it, mixed, with bread.*

Abercius’ imagery would have been cryptic to a non-Christian, but we can plainly see how the experience of the traveller, finding ‘everywhere....companions’ who celebrated the

eucharist and knew Paul and shared Abercius' faith, reinforced his grand conception of a single 'people' and 'kingdom'.

Christians seem to have been a tiny minority in most Mediterranean towns, but there was local variation. There are only four known places where Christianity was demographically dominant: at *Cotiaeum* and *Eumeneia* in Phrygia, at *Orkistos*, a village in the territory of pagan *Nacolea*, also in *Phrygia* and at *Maiuma*, the seaport of Gaza. A smaller city, *Oxyrhynchus* in Egypt, already had two churches in 295; both were prominent landmarks, giving their names to streets, but the town also had at least four pagan temples. A substantial number of its citizens, but perhaps not a majority, were Christian. Provincial capitals and imperial residences like Antioch, Nicomedia, Rome and Thessalonica seem to have been largely Christian only near the middle of the fourth century. Many provincial towns probably went the way of *Bostra* in Arabia, with a rough balance between pagans and Christians by the mid- to later fourth century.

In contrast, towns like *Aphrodisias*, *Ascalon*, *Athens*, *Baalbek-Heliopolis*, *Carrhae-Harran*, *Delphi* and *Gaza*, to name but a few; had predominantly pagan city councils until the late fourth or early fifth centuries. Estimates of the size of the Christian communities can only be made by reasoning backwards in time from later, better-documented periods, but this cannot always give satisfactory results.

The world in which the Christian church assembled was, without doubt, already politically structured. One is scarcely permitted, however, to draw the conclusion that the relation between church and state was regarded, from the beginning, as a particularly important problem. As a matter of fact, this wording appropriately characterises a central problem of modern times, in the same way as 'state' is a modern concept, arising in the Italian Renaissance. Even with reference to the *Middle Ages* it can be applied only to a point. The famous 'investiture

*struggles* were, of course, exactly not conflicts between church and state; to transfer this scheme to early Christian times would definitely involve the danger of introducing a great many anachronisms which tend to obstruct our understanding of the real challenges of those days.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

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### **towards monotheism**

By the time of Constantine the church was a sufficiently robust organisation for the emperor to engage it as a partner in unifying the empire. Systems of authority, patterns of belief and control of funds and property had turned the early household communities into an interlinked, empire-wide organisation that increasingly mirrored the structure of the empire itself.

The earliest known handbook for those responsible for running early churches is the *Didache* or *Teaching of the twelve apostles*. Compiled about **100 CE** using earlier material, some probably Jewish, it contributes to or is embodied in later church manuals like the Apostolic constitutions. It first sets out the moral teachings which all candidates for baptism should learn, then gives directions for baptism, fasting, prayer and the *eucharist*, regulations for the ministers of the church and the conduct of Sunday worship, and a warning about the impending judgement of God. Its early date is verified by its divergence from later practice in many respects.

The sacrifices of the Old Testament were interpreted in terms of personal dedication, especially in the case of Jesus. Widows as recipients of the church's offering are 'an altar of God'. Perhaps in the same charitable sense, the *Didache* depicts the prophets as the community's '*high priests*'.

The church in every place was God's sanctuary. It had no temples other than the people, individually and corporately. The purity of their life was their sacrifice, in contrast to the temples and rituals of pagans and Jews. They constituted the immortal soul dispersed in the body of the corrupt and dying world. To become one of this people, the convert needed a decisive break with the world around. Originally, this was a symbolic washing, traceable to the washings by John the Baptist 'for the forgiveness of sins', taken up by Jesus and his followers; but the resurrection of Jesus introduces a new dimension, that of the

Holy Spirit. The gift of the spirit is a matter of change of heart, moral reformation, the conforming of the mind to God.

The early church had no official creedal formula before the Council of Nicaea in 325, and even then there is little evidence for the Nicene Creed displacing local forms of baptismal confession. However, short summaries of the faith occurred in various contexts from the time when the New Testament was written.

A distinctive outcome of Christian theological reflection in the first few centuries was the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. But the notion that God created the world ‘out of nothing’ was not simply inherited from an already well-developed Jewish or philosophical position; it was only clearly defined as monotheism was defended against Gnosticism and set in debate with philosophy.

The early Christians shared the monotheism of the Jews. During a long period of theological reflection, Israel had worked out the conception of one unique and universal God who, in his absolute freedom and power, had created the world and all things living in it. God’s motive for creation was his goodness; his providence kept the world in being until his coming to pronounce final judgement upon it. A fully developed doctrine of monotheism is usually ascribed to *Deutero-Isaiah* in the sixth century BCE: the pagan gods do not really exist, and their idols are worthless.

In the third century BCE, a new process took its beginning: the encounter between Judaism and Greek culture. In the debates which arose about the true God, the teaching of the Bible proved to be an asset for the Jews. There also was a strong tendency toward monotheism in Greek thought, winning more and more ground under Roman rule. Apart from philosophical speculation about first principles, it was a common assumption that the gods of paganism were nothing but single aspects or powers of the

one supreme God. Neither Jewish nor pagan monotheism were absolutely pure: they could exist alongside belief in angels, demons or inferior gods. But the fundamental idea of monotheism was clear.

Despite strong anti-Jewish prejudices in Greek and Roman society, the discussion about a philosophical understanding of God and his creation was profitable for both sides. Jewish missionaries won sympathisers and even made converts among the pagans all over the Mediterranean world. A fine example of the appreciation of the language of Genesis can be found in Pseudo-Longinus, an unidentified Greek author of the first century CE: Moses, he says, shows his adequate understanding of the power of God by making him bring forth light and earth merely by his word. A whole historical tradition is known to us describing the Jews as a nation of philosophers. However, more books were written by Jews about the agreement between Judaism and Greek philosophy than vice versa. The explanation is easy: it was more important for the Jews to be accepted as a '*philosophical*' nation, while there existed no such necessity for the Greeks. Jewish teachers experienced what was virtually unavoidable in their situation: they adapted their own ideas to those of their opponents and so unconsciously changed their own views, producing tensions over the question how far *Hellenisation* might be pushed. Its high point is found in the work of Philo of Alexandria.

A hypothetical observer in the first centuries before and after Christ might have had the impression that Jewish and pagan doctrines of God were converging. The most influential philosophical school in the first two centuries after Christ was Stoicism. The Stoics were not only a group of specialised scholars, but, with their teaching and their literary work, they dominated their followers' world-view, particularly in the field of ethics. Their austerity in life appealed to seriously minded intellectuals. Although the Stoics fostered materialism, they

could give a theistic turn to their language about God. By the end of the second century, however, Platonism was dominant, and confrontation with this philosophy was most important for the moulding of the Jewish/Christian doctrine of creation. The period of Middle Platonism (50 BCE - 250 CE) saw a definite turn towards theology. God, the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, the favourite dialogue for Middle Platonism, was equated with the supreme God. From the cosmogony of the *Timaeus*; the characteristic ‘*three principles*’ doctrine was derived. Three principles of equal standing, God, ideas and matter, constitute the world. The eternity of matter, out of which the world is made, was generally accepted, but at the same time the question is debated whether the ordered cosmos had its origin in time.

The assumption of more than one supreme principle of the universe, however, was unsatisfactory, even contradictory. Plotinus found the solution for this problem. He constructed a hierarchy of being, with the ‘One’, the unique and absolute ground of all being, on the top, followed in descending order by intellect (*nous*), soul (*psyche*) and matter (*hyle*). The last, which is most distant from the One, is neither being in the full sense nor absolutely non-being. It lacks all positive qualities and is identified with evil.

It was quite possible for philosophers to speak in exalted terms of God as the maker and ruler of the world. There was, however, an important qualification to be respected: divine power needed a material substrate for creative action. The heavenly creator is imagined as a craftsman who gives form to his chaotic material, taking his models from the ideas (*so the majority of Platonists*). Even if the world had a beginning in time (*the minority opinion among the Platonists*), primordial matter remained the eternal substrate of the world. The assumption that God could bring forth whatever he wished solely by his will and his power without any help from outside seemed absurd to educated people. God had to conform with the laws of nature.

Furthermore there was a strong sense that ‘*nothing comes out of nothing*’, and so anything without a material substrate would be a sham or a phantom.

Between 130 and 160, Gnostic teachers could regard themselves as the leading intellectuals of Christianity. During the same period, however, a growing number of theologians belonging to the *great church* took the offensive against heresy. Connecting philosophical training with biblical insight, they became equal opponents to heretical teaching. The person who represents this gradual change was Justin Martyr. Originating from Samaria, he was a Christian teacher in Rome. Justin wrote on many subjects. He addressed pagans, Jews and heretics, and he tried to win his readers for the Christian faith by means of philosophical arguments, for he was convinced that Christianity was the one true philosophy which had existed before it was split up in different schools.

Justin points out that the Christians and Platonists agree in saying that God, in the beginning, ‘created and ordered everything’ through his logos. This is a conventional formula in the age of Justin. But he can also say: *God in his goodness created everything from formless matter*. Here Justin clearly follows Platonic teaching. As far as we know, Justin was the first Christian theologian to set out in parallel the Christian story of Genesis and the creation myth in the *Timaeus* (*Plato’s Dictum*). According to Justin, Plato took over the doctrine that God made the cosmos out of *unoriginate* matter from the opening verses of Genesis. Justin understood Genesis 1:2 as a statement about chaotic pre-existent matter. There is no evidence to support the idea that Justin imagined that matter was created by God before he ordered it. Justin, like other educated Christians of his age, presupposed eternal matter as the stuff of creation. Obviously at this point Justin did not perceive any difference between Christian and Platonist teaching.

Teaching and learning were characteristic of Christianity from the beginning. The term used in the gospels for the followers of Jesus is disciples (*mathetai*), that is pupils, and Jesus himself is addressed both as ‘*rabbi*’ and ‘*teacher*’. In second-century texts such as the Apostolic fathers and the Apologists, Jesus is presented as the teacher, with the teaching that fulfils and surpasses all others. This teaching focused on ethics, but its warrant lay in the revelation of the will of the one creator God who oversees everything, even seeing into the heart, so that not just actions but motives were laid bare. Christian Gnosticism reflects this teaching emphasis in its claim to have received true knowledge from revelations imparted by the Christ. It is hardly surprising, then, that correct teaching (*dogma* in Greek, *doctrina* in Latin) became a characteristic concern of early Christianity, and this made the church more like a philosophical school than a religious organisation; for it was not beliefs, doctrines or even ethics that characterised ancient religion, but traditional ritual practices performed in temples, shrines or households. Christianisation would eventually transform notions of what a religion is by emphasising creeds and correct doctrine as conditions for practising its cult.

Yet theological struggles concerning cosmological issues, which were certainly at stake in the second century, also impinged on the question who Jesus really was. At a remarkably early date we find opposition to the ‘*docetic*’ notion that the Christ was a supernatural being who was never fully *enfleshed*. The *heresiologists* associate such views with the lineage of those following what they dubbed ‘gnosis falsely so-called’ using a scriptural tag (*1 Timothy 6:20*). If Christ revealed the true Father, who so transcended the material universe that creation was alien to the divine and produced by a lesser, fallen demiurge, then of course the Christ could not really be born, or suffer and die. Gnostic texts tend to attribute revelatory teachings to the risen Christ, their gospels often not being

accounts of the life and teaching of one who existed as a human, historical person.

It is plausible to suggest that some early Christian communities were modelled largely on the Jewish synagogue, an organisation that had both religious and school-like properties. For, while it is true that, away from Jerusalem, the synagogue was a ‘prayer-house’ (*proseuche*), which to some extent replaced the temple, yet, at the heart of these Jewish communal organisations, particularly in the diaspora, was a process of learning about Jewish literature and traditions, a cultural education to match the schools of the surrounding Greek culture. As the Greeks had their law, their history, their poetry, so did the Jews. Greek schools engaged in education through the reading of ancient classical texts, from the stage of learning grammar, through education in rhetoric, to the study of philosophy – for, rightly interpreted; the whole of philosophy was to be found in ancient revered texts, like the epics of Homer. The Law and the prophets provided Jews with comparable ancient texts, and an even greater incentive to study them in that they were the Word of their God, teaching the way of life required of them to fulfil their covenant with the God who had chosen them to be his own people. Jews developed scholarly methods of literary criticism analogous to those of the *Graeco-Roman* grammarians; and the works of Philo are evidence that at any rate some Jews also found in their scriptures the kind of intellectual and philosophical systems their Greek contemporaries found in classical texts. In the diaspora especially, reading and interpreting these texts came to constitute the heart of Jewish religious activity, rather than offering sacrifices in the faraway Jerusalem temple.

From a Jewish point of view, their coupling of Jesus Christ with God in worship was blasphemy, as is already hinted at in the reports of debates with Jews in John’s gospel (*John 6:41 - 59; 8:21 - 59*), and from a philosophical point of view, it was simply

contradictory. How could they have it both ways? The apologists undoubtedly imagined they could, as they borrowed and developed an explanatory model in the notion of the *logos*, but their solution was challenged in the third century. The debate would continue into the fifth century and beyond, and out of it would be forged the characteristic doctrines of Christianity: the Trinitarian concept of God and the *christological* claim that two natures, human and divine, were present in the one Christ.

Monotheism was a fundamental article of faith from the beginning of the church. God was defined as omnipotent, as the ruler of the universe, leading the human race on the way to salvation. The Gnostics, however, despised matter as being the source of evil. They devalued the creator God of the Bible, and assumed an absolutely good God in utmost transcendence. The juxtaposition of two gods, however, was against all the tendencies of the time, and would ultimately be marginalised.

Creation out of nothing was originally a *Hellenistic-Jewish* formula expressing the power of the creator God. It was used in a rather imprecise manner. The debate about God's creative work led to two opposing alternatives: '*shaping of pre-existing matter*' or '*creation out of nothing*'. Despite the difficulties felt in the Greek philosophical tradition, the latter view won. It became the classic Christian formula for expressing the absolute freedom and boundless power of God.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **byzantium empire**

Two thousand five hundred and fifty-eight years ago a little fleet of galleys toiled painfully against the current up the long strait of the Hellespont, rowed across the broad *Propontis*, and came to anchor in the smooth waters of the first inlet which cuts into the European shore of the *Bosphorus*. There a long crescent-shaped creek, which after-ages were to know as the Golden Horn, strikes inland for seven miles, forming a quiet backwater from the rapid stream which runs outside. On the headland, enclosed between this inlet and the open sea, a few hundred colonists disembarked, and hastily secured themselves from the wild tribes of the inland, by running some rough sort of a stockade across the ground from beach to beach. Thus was founded the city of Byzantium.

The settlers were Greeks of the Dorian race, natives of the thriving seaport-state of Megara, one of the most enterprising of all the cities of Hellas in the time of colonial and commercial expansion which was then at its height. Wherever a Greek prow had cut its way into unknown waters, *there Megarian* seamen were soon found following in its wake. One band of these venturesome traders pushed far to the West to plant colonies in Sicily, but the larger share of the attention of Megara was turned towards the sun rising, towards the mist-enshrouded entrance of the Black Sea and the fabulous lands that lay beyond. There, as legends told, was to be found the realm of the Golden Fleece, the Eldorado of the ancient world, where kings of untold wealth reigned over the tribes of Colchis: there dwelt, by the banks of the river *Thermodon*, the Amazons, the warlike women who had once vexed far-off Greece by their inroads: there, too, was to be found, if one could but struggle far enough up its northern shore, the land of the *Hyperboreans*, the blessed folk who dwell behind the North Wind and know nothing of storm and winter. To seek these fabled wonders the Greeks sailed ever North and East till they had come to the extreme limits of the sea. The riches of the Golden Fleece they did not find, nor the country of the Hyperboreans, nor the tribes of the Amazons; but they did

discover many lands well worth the knowing, and grew rich on the profits which they drew from the metals of Colchis and the forests of Paphlagonia, from the rich corn lands by the banks of the Dnieper and Bug, and the fisheries of the *Bosphorus* and the *Maeotic* Lake. Presently the whole coastland of the sea, which the Greeks, on their first coming, called *Axeinos* - "*the Inhospitable*" - became fringed with trading settlements, and its name was changed to *Euxeinos* - "*the Hospitable*" - in recognition of its friendly ports. It was in a similar spirit that, two thousand years later, the seamen who led the next great impulse of exploration that rose in Europe, turned the name of the "*Cape of Storms*" into that of the "*Cape of Good Hope*."

The *Megarians*, almost more than any other Greeks, devoted their attention to the Euxine, and the foundation of Byzantium was but one of their many achievements. Already, seventeen years before Byzantium came into being, another band of *Megarian* colonists had established themselves at Chalcedon, on the opposite Asiatic shore of the *Bosphorus*. The settlers who were destined to found the greater city applied to the oracle of Delphi to give them advice as to the site of their new home, and Apollo, we are told, bade them "build their town over against the city of the blind." They therefore pitched upon the headland by the Golden Horn, reasoning that the Chalcedonians were truly blind to have neglected the more eligible site on the Thracian shore, in order to found a colony on the far less inviting Bithynian side of the strait.

From the first its situation marked out Byzantium as destined for a great future. Alike from the military and from the commercial point of view no city could have been better placed. Looking out from the easternmost headland of Thrace, with all Europe behind it and all Asia before, it was equally well suited to be the frontier fortress to defend the border of the one, or the basis of operations for an invasion from the other. As fortresses went in those early days it was almost impregnable (*two sides protected*

*by the water, the third by a strong wall not commanded by any neighbouring heights*). In all its early history Byzantium never fell by storm: famine or treachery accounted for the few occasions on which it fell into the hands of an enemy. In its commercial aspect the place was even more favourably situated. It completely commanded the whole Black Sea trade: every vessel that went forth from Greece or Ionia to traffic with Scythia or Colchis, the lands by the Danube mouth or the shores of the *Maeotic* Lake, had to pass close under its walls, so that the prosperity of a hundred Hellenic towns on the Euxine was always at the mercy of the masters of Byzantium. The Greek loved short stages and frequent stoppages, and as a half-way house alone Byzantium would have been prosperous: but it had also a flourishing local trade of its own with the tribes of the neighbouring Thracian inland, and drew much profit from its fisheries: so much so that the city badge - its coat of arms as we should call it - comprised a tunny-fish as well as the famous ox whose form alluded to the legend of the naming of the *Bosphorus*.

During the fifth century Byzantium twice declared war on Athens, now the mistress of the seas, and on each occasion fell into the hands of the enemy - once by voluntary surrender in **439 B.C.**, once by treachery from within, in 408 B.C. But the Athenians, except in one or two disgraceful cases, did not deal hardly with their conquered enemies, and the Byzantines escaped anything harder than the payment of a heavy war indemnity. In a few years their commercial gains repaired all the losses of war, and the state was itself again.

The Byzantines were, if ancient chroniclers tell us the truth, a luxurious as well as a busy race: they spent too much time in their numerous inns, where the excellent wines of *Maronea* and other neighbouring places offered great temptations. They were gluttons too as well as tipplers: on one occasion, we are assured, the whole civic militia struck work in the height of a siege, till

their commander consented to allow restaurants to be erected at convenient distances round the ramparts. One comic writer informs us that the Byzantines were eating young tunny-fish (*their favourite dish*) so constantly, that their whole bodies had become well-nigh gelatinous, and it was thought they might melt if exposed to too great heat! Probably these tales are the scandals of neighbours who envied Byzantine prosperity, for it is at any rate certain that the city showed all through its history great energy and love of independence, and never shrank from war as we should have expected a nation of epicures to do.

Byzantium was one of the cities which took the wise course of making an early alliance with the Romans, and obtained good and easy terms in consequence. During the wars of Rome with Macedon and Antiochus the Great it proved such a faithful assistant that the Senate gave it the status of a *civitas libera et foederata*, “*a free and confederate city*,” and it was not taken under direct Roman government, but allowed complete liberty in everything save the control of its foreign relations and the payment of a tribute to Rome. It was not till the Roman Republic had long passed away, that the Emperor Vespasian stripped it of these privileges, and threw it into the province of Thrace, to exist for the future as an ordinary provincial town [A.D. 73].

Though deprived of a liberty which had for long years been almost nominal, Byzantium could not be deprived of its unrivalled position for commerce. It continued to flourish under the *Pax Romana*, the long-continued peace which all the inner countries of the empire enjoyed during the first two centuries of the imperial regime, and is mentioned again and again as one of the most important cities of the middle regions of the Roman world.

But an evil time for Byzantium, as for all the other parts of the civilized world, began when the golden age of the Antonines

ceased, and the epoch of the military emperors followed. In **192 A.D.**, Commodus, the unworthy son of the great and good Marcus Aurelius was murdered, and ere long three military usurpers were wrangling for his blood-stained diadem. Most unhappily for itself Byzantium lay on the line of division between the eastern provinces, where *Pescennius Niger* had been proclaimed, and the Illyrian provinces, where Severus had assumed the imperial style. The city was seized by the army of Syria, and strengthened in haste. Presently Severus appeared from the west, after he had made himself master of Rome and Italy, and fell upon the forces of his rival *Pescennius*. Victory followed the arms of the Illyrian legions, the east was subdued, and the Syrian emperor put to death. But when all his other adherents had yielded, the garrison of Byzantium refused to submit. For more than two years they maintained the impregnable city against the lieutenants of Severus, and it was not till **A.D. 196** that they were forced to yield. The emperor appeared in person to punish the long-protracted resistance of the town; not only the garrison, but the civil magistrates of Byzantium were slain before his eyes. The massive walls “*so firmly built with great square stones clamped together with bolts of iron, that the whole seemed but one block,*” were laboriously cast down. The property of the citizens was confiscated, and the town itself deprived of all municipal privileges and handed over to be governed like a dependent village by its neighbours of *Perinthus*.

Caracalla, the son of Severus, gave back to the Byzantines the right to govern themselves but the town had received a hard blow, and would have required a long spell of peace to recover its prosperity. Peace however it was not destined to see. All through the middle years of the third century it was vexed by the incursions of the Goths, who harried mercilessly the countries on the Black Sea whose commerce sustained its trade. Under *Gallienus* in **A.D. 263** it was again seized by an usurping emperor, and shared the fate of his adherents. The soldiers of

*Gallienus* sacked Byzantium from cellar to garret, and made such a slaughter of its inhabitants that it is said that the old *Megarian* race who had so long possessed it were absolutely exterminated. But the irresistible attraction of the site was too great to allow its ruins to remain desolate. Within ten years after its sack by the army of *Gallienus*, we find Byzantium again a populous town, and its inhabitants are specially praised by the historian *Trebellius Pollio* for the courage with which they repelled a Gothic raid in the reign of *Claudius II*.

The strong Illyrian emperors, who staved off from the Roman Empire the ruin which appeared about to overwhelm it in the third quarter of the third century, gave Byzantium time and peace to recover its ancient prosperity. It profited especially from the constant neighbourhood of the imperial court, after *Diocletian* fixed his residence at *Nicomedia*, only sixty miles away, on the *Bithynian* side of the *Propontis*. But the military importance of Byzantium was always interfering with its commercial greatness. After the abdication of *Diocletian* the empire was for twenty years vexed by constant partitions of territory between the colleagues whom he left behind him. Byzantium after a while found itself the border fortress of *Licinius*, the emperor who ruled in the *Balkan Peninsula*, while *Maximinus Daza* was governing the *Asiatic* provinces. While *Licinius* was absent in Italy, *Maximinus* treacherously attacked his rival's dominions without declaration of war, and took Byzantium by surprise. But the Illyrian emperor returned in haste, defeated his grasping neighbour not far from the walls of the city, and recovered his great frontier fortress after it had been only a few months out of his hands [A.D. 314]. The town must have suffered severely by changing masters twice in the same year; it does not, however, seem to have been sacked or burnt, as was so often the case with a captured city in those dismal days. But *Licinius* when he had recovered the place set to work to render it impregnable. Though it was not his capital he made it the chief fortress of his realm, which, since the defeat of

*Maximinus*, embraced the whole eastern half of the Roman world.

It was accordingly at Byzantium that *Licinius* made his last desperate stand, when in **A.D. 323** he found himself engaged in an unsuccessful war with his brother-in-law Constantine, the Emperor of the West. For many months the war stood still beneath the walls of the city; but Constantine persevered in the siege, raising great mounds which overlooked the walls, and sweeping away the defenders by a constant stream of missiles, launched from dozens of military engines which he had erected on these artificial heights. At last the city surrendered, and the cause of *Licinius* was lost. Constantine, the last of his rivals subdued, became the sole emperor of the Roman world, and stood a victor on the ramparts which were ever afterwards to bear his name.

# CHAPTER SIX

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**constantine**

When the fall of Byzantium had wrecked the fortunes of *Licinius*, the Roman world was again united beneath the sceptre of a single master. For thirty-seven years, ever since Diocletian parcelled out the provinces with his colleagues, unity had been unknown, and emperors, whose number had sometimes risen to six and sometimes sunk to two, had administered their realms on different principles and with varying success.

Constantine, whose victory over his rivals had been secured by his talents as an administrator and a diplomatist no less than by his military skill, was one of those men whose hard practical ability has stamped upon the history of the world a much deeper impress than has been left by many conquerors and legislators of infinitely greater genius. He was a man of that self-contained, self-reliant, unsympathetic type of mind which we recognize in his great predecessor Augustus, or in Frederic the Great of Prussia.

Though the strain of old Roman blood in his veins must have been but small, Constantine was in many ways a typical Roman; the hard, cold, steady, unwearying energy, which in earlier centuries had won the empire of the world, was once more incarnate in him. But if Roman in character, he was anything but Roman in his sympathies. Born by the Danube, reared in the courts and camps of Asia and Gaul, he was absolutely free from any of that superstitious reverence for the ancient glories of the city on the Tiber which had inspired so many of his predecessors. Italy was to him but a secondary province amongst his wide realms. When he distributed his dominions among his heirs, it was Gaul that he gave as the noblest share to his eldest and best-loved son: Italy was to him a younger child's portion. There had been emperors before him who had neglected Rome: the barbarian Maximinus I. had dwelt by the Rhine and the Danube; the politic Diocletian had chosen Nicomedia as his favourite residence. But no one had yet dreamed of raising up a rival to the mistress of the world, and of turning Rome into a

provincial town. If preceding emperors had dwelt far afield, it was to meet the exigencies of war on the frontiers or the government of distant provinces. It was reserved for Constantine to erect over against Rome a rival metropolis for the civilized world, an imperial city which was to be neither a mere camp nor a mere court, but the administrative and commercial centre of the Roman world.

Constantine, with all the Roman world at his feet, and all its responsibilities weighing on his mind, was far too able a man to overlook the great need of the day - a more conveniently placed administrative and military centre for his empire. He required a place that should be easily accessible by land and sea - which Rome had never been in spite of its wonderful roads - that should overlook the Danube lands, without being too far away from the East; that should be so strongly situated that it might prove an impregnable arsenal and citadel against barbarian attacks from the north; that should at the same time be far enough away from the turmoil of the actual frontier to afford a safe and splendid residence for the imperial court. The names of several towns are given by historians as having suggested themselves to Constantine. First was his own birth-place - Naissus (*Nisch*) on the Morava, in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula; but Naissus had little to recommend it: it was too close to the frontier and too far from the sea. Sardica (*the modern Sofia in Bulgaria*) was liable to the same objections, and had not the sole advantage of Naissus, that of being connected in sentiment with the emperor's early days. Nicomedia on its long gulf at the east end of the *Propontis* was a more eligible situation in every way, and had already served as an imperial residence. But all that could be urged in favour of Nicomedia applied with double force to Byzantium, and, in addition, Constantine had no wish to choose a city in which his own memory would be eclipsed by that of his predecessor Diocletian, and whose name was associated by the Christians, the class of his subjects whom he had most favoured of late, with the

persecutions of Diocletian and Galerius. For Ilium, the last place on which Constantine had cast his mind, nothing could be alleged except its ancient legendary glories, and the fact that the mythologists of Rome had always fabled that their city drew its origin from the exiled Trojans of Æneas. Though close to the sea it had no good harbour, and it was just too far from the mouth of the Hellespont to command effectually the exit of the Euxine.

Byzantium, on the other hand, was thoroughly well known to Constantine. For months his camp had been pitched beneath its walls; he must have known accurately every inch of its environs, and none of its military advantages can have missed his eye. Nothing, then, could have been more natural than his selection of the old *Megarian* city for his new capital. Yet the Roman world was startled at the first news of his choice; Byzantium had been so long known merely as a great port of call for the Euxine trade, and as a first-class provincial fortress, that it was hard to conceive of it as a destined seat of empire.

When once Constantine had determined to make Byzantium his capital; in preference to any other place in the Balkan lands, his measures were taken with his usual energy and thoroughness. The limits of the new city were at once marked out by solemn processions in the old Roman style. In later ages a picturesque legend was told to account for the magnificent scale on which it was planned. The emperor, we read, marched out on foot, followed by all his court, and traced with his spear the line where the new fortifications were to be drawn. As he paced on further and further westward along the shore of the Golden Horn, till he was more than two miles away from his starting-point, the gate of old Byzantium, his attendants grew more and more surprised at the vastness of his scheme. At last they ventured to observe that he had already exceeded the most ample limits that an imperial city could require. But Constantine turned to rebuke them: "*I shall go on,*" he said, "*until He, the invisible guide who marches before me, thinks fit to stop.*"

Guided by his mysterious presentiment of greatness, the emperor advanced till he was three miles from the eastern angle of Byzantium, and only turned his steps when he had included in his boundary line all the seven hills which are embraced in the peninsula between the *Propontis* and the *Golden Horn*.

The rising ground just outside the walls of the old city, where Constantine's tent had been pitched during the siege of **A.D. 323**, was selected out as the market-place of the new foundation. There he erected the Milion, or *golden milestone*, from which all the distances of the eastern world were in future to be measured. This central point of the world was not a mere single stone, but a small building like a temple, its roof supported by seven pillars; within was placed the statue of the emperor, together with that of his venerated mother, the Christian Empress Helena.

The south-eastern part of the old town of Byzantium was chosen by Constantine for the site of his imperial palace. The spot was cleared of all private dwellings for a space of 150 acres, to give space not only for a magnificent residence for his whole court, but for spacious gardens and pleasure-grounds. A wall, commencing at the Lighthouse, where the *Bosphorus* joins the *Propontis*, turned inland and swept along parallel to the shore for about a mile, in order to shut off the imperial precinct from the city.

Linked to the Senate House by a colonnade, lay on the north the Palace of the Patriarch, as the *Bishop of Byzantium* was ere long to be called, when raised to the same status as his brethren of Antioch and Alexandria. A fine building in itself, with a spacious hall of audience and a garden, the patriarchal dwelling was yet completely overshadowed by the imperial palace which rose behind it. And so it was with the patriarch himself: he lived too near his royal master to be able to gain any independent authority. Physically and morally alike he was too much overlooked by his august neighbour, and never found the least

opportunity of setting up an independent spiritual authority over against the civil government, or of founding an imperium in *imperio* like the Bishop of Rome.

It was in A.D. 328 or 329 - the exact date is not easily to be fixed - that Constantine had definitely chosen Byzantium for his capital, and drawn out the plan for its development. As early as May 11, 330, the buildings were so far advanced that he was able to hold the festival which celebrated its consecration. Christian bishops blessed the partially completed palace, and held the first service in St. Sophia; for Constantine, though still unbaptized was determined that the new city should be Christian from the first. Of paganism there was no trace in it, save a few of the old temples of the Byzantines, spared when the older streets were levelled to clear the ground for the palace and adjoining buildings. The statues of the gods which adorned the Baths and Senate House stood there as works of art, not as objects of worship.

The reign of Constantine (306–37 CE) was momentous for Christianity. Before it, and indeed during Constantine's first years, Christians continued to suffer persecution; after it, all but one emperor followed Constantine's example in supporting Christianity. Christianity did not become the official religion of the empire under Constantine, as is often mistakenly claimed, but imperial hostility had turned into enthusiastic support, backed with money and patronage. However, some of Constantine's actions opened up splits between the Christians themselves. The term the *peace of the church*, used by Christians to denote the ending of persecution, is something of a misnomer in light of the violent quarrels which followed during the rest of the fourth century and after. Nevertheless, Constantine's patronage of the church set it on an altogether different path and made it in a real sense a public institution with a legal presence and official recognition.

Constantine was born at Naissus (modern Nish), perhaps in 272 or 273 CE, the son of Constantius Chlorus by his first wife or perhaps concubine Minervina. Constantius was at first Caesar (junior emperor) and then Augustus (senior emperor) in the west (293 and 305 CE) under the Diocletianic system of power sharing known as the tetrarchy.

The years 305 - 12 CE saw the breakdown of the *tetrarchic* system established by Diocletian under the pressure of individual ambition, of which Constantine was by no means innocent. The idea had been that there would be two emperors (*Augusti*) in east and west, and two Caesars who would eventually succeed them, thus providing a smooth succession and avoiding the civil strife and competition that marked the third century. It worked well enough until Diocletian and his co-emperor Maximian both retired from power in 305; thereafter stability was lost. Constantine found himself excluded from the succession and, according to some, managed a dramatic 'escape' from Diocletian's successor Galerius in Nicomedia. When Constantius died in York in 306, Constantine was proclaimed emperor there by his father's troops on 25 July. He knew that it was critical to establish his position and quickly left Britain for Gaul, where, despite the disapproval of Galerius, he soon obtained the title of Augustus from the senior emperor, Maximian, who had re-emerged from retirement. This politically useful endorsement was sealed by a dynastic marriage between Constantine and Maximian's daughter Fausta. At this stage it is clear that Constantine was willing to use the title *Herculius*, which was part of the apparatus of tetrarchic imperial cult. Nevertheless, there were others jostling for power, including Maxentius (*the son of Maximian*), Maximin Daia, Galerius and Licinius. This is a confused period of intermittent warfare and alliances, for which we have no complete narrative history, and which can be reconstructed only with difficulty, with the help of numismatic and legal evidence.

Constantine was as ruthless as any in his pursuit of personal ambition, and sought divine help where he found it expedient.

Constantine's '*New Rome*' developed on the site of an older and non-Christian city, and it seems to have been planned as much as a seat of imperial power as a Christian capital. Yet later the emperor prepared a mausoleum for himself at Constantinople in which he would be surrounded by sarcophagi representing the twelve apostles and referred to himself as '*the bishop of those outside*'. The patronage of Constantine and subsequent emperors during late antiquity transformed bishops and their roles in totally unforeseen ways. In earlier centuries the number of bishops had been limited; now almost every city in the empire had a bishop, and classical cities survived as episcopal sees. Since these bishops and many of their lesser clerics were recruited primarily from the class of local notables, increasingly the ecclesiastical hierarchy attracted men away from service as municipal magistrates. In earlier centuries bishops had been loosely connected through letters, visits and occasional councils; now they developed a more extensive organisation that was modelled on the imperial administration. The consolidation of this new hierarchy led to a heightened emphasis on new attitudes about clerical service, such as ambition and competition that seemed at odds with Christian ideals. In earlier centuries bishops and their congregations had been marginalised in Roman society; now Christian emperors were ready to use churchmen as judges and envoys. As their financial resources increased, bishops founded charitable institutions, constructed churches and shrines, and presided at festivals. Eventually bishops became the peers of the emperors at Constantinople and rivals to the barbarian kings in the West. During late antiquity Christianity became not just the leading religion in the old Roman world. As its bishops appropriated or sanctioned more and more nominally secular activities, Christian spirituality also became the dominant worldview.

The story of *Western Christianities* from Constantine to the close of the sixth century is one of both expansion and the formation of diverse *Christianities*. The expansion is slow and difficult to trace: at the beginning of the fourth century, the Western regions of the Roman Empire were much less Christianised than the East, only an estimated 2 per cent of the population. Although the progress can be tentatively gauged from the archaeological and epigraphic records or from the multiplication of episcopal sees, a general picture is difficult to establish. The countryside presumably resisted Christianisation (*if it ever became completely Christian*) far longer than the urban population; missionary efforts by bishops or monks (*if they occurred*) changed little. The Christianisation of Western aristocracies, on the other hand, has been comparatively well studied. Only in the second half of the fourth century did Christianity develop a message attuned to the ideology and value-system of the social elite that would attract many of them.

The administrative and cultural bedrock of Roman society was its cities. At the beginning of the fourth century there were perhaps about 900 cities in the Eastern empire and more than 1,000 in the Western empire, with the densest concentrations in core Mediterranean regions like central Italy, southern Gaul, North Africa, central and southern Greece, western Asia Minor, and parts of Syria, Palestine and Egypt. A few of these cities were very large in both population and area, such as Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Carthage. Some were medium sized, famous as ports, residences of imperial officials or centres of education. The vast majority were quite modest, each consisting of a small built-up urban centre that administered a surrounding rural territory and dependent villages. After Constantine a bishop would have been consecrated for almost every city and for some of the villages too. Since controversies over doctrines often led to the consecration of rivals, some cities had two or even more bishops.

Bishops had many official duties, including the selection and supervision of clerics, the administration of finances, and the management of charitable foundations. As local patrons they represented their cities and individual citizens before imperial magistrates. Their primary task, however, was their spiritual ministry, in particular the celebration of the liturgy and preaching. Every week throughout the Roman Empire bishops and their priests preached thousands of sermons and celebrated the liturgy with millions of parishioners. To accept episcopacy was to commit to a lifetime of service and devotion. During the ceremony of consecration new bishops could literally feel the heavy spiritual weight of the office settling on their shoulders.

The rise of bishops hence cannot be separated from this fundamental transformation of classical cities, even if the exact nature of this interaction is difficult to determine. If this decline was due to the political decisions that siphoned resources from cities and provided local notables with alternative careers in the imperial administration, then bishops benefited from the failure of cities.

By the early fourth century the empire had been divided into over one hundred provinces, each administered by a provincial governor. Ecclesiastical provinces corresponded to these civil provinces, and the bishop of the capital city in each province became the metropolitan bishop. These metropolitan bishops were charged with convening provincial councils to resolve disputes between bishops, or between a bishop and his clergy or his congregation. Metropolitan bishops also had some jurisdiction over the other bishops in their province, and their consent was required for the appointment of new bishops. The acknowledgment of particular bishops as metropolitans was a consequence of the civil prominence of their sees as provincial capitals.

Personal devotion certainly motivated Christian emperors to demonstrate their patronage for bishops and clerics. But these emperors might well have additional political reasons for promoting the status and influence of bishops. From the beginning emperors had had to worry about challengers, such as the great senators who represented the traditions of the old Roman republic and who held offices in the imperial administration. To undermine the collective prestige of senators, emperors had promoted equestrians and provincial notables to high offices, and they had sometimes even relied upon the advice of freedmen, slaves, or, occasionally, their own mothers, wives and mistresses. During late antiquity some emperors were promoting eunuchs at court and barbarians to serve as military officers. The primary reason for the attractiveness of eunuchs and barbarians could also be applied to bishops and clerics: even though they were close advisers, they could not replace emperors. The ecclesiastical hierarchy became more prominent and influential from the early fourth century in part because emperors wanted to promote another counterweight to the influence of other prominent groups in Roman society, such as senators and military commanders. In the perspective of emperors, bishops and clerics were attractive as advisers and agents because, like equestrians, freedmen and slaves in the early empire and eunuchs and barbarians in the later empire, they did not become emperors.

Christian diversity is partly due to major political transformations within the later Roman Empire. Perhaps the most important of them was the growing split between the Western and the Eastern parts of the empire. After the death of Constantine, the political division of the empire responded to administrative expediency and the military exigencies of almost uninterrupted warfare on *the Rhenish, Danubian* and *Persian* borders. The political centre shifted to the East, to Constantinople. During the fifth century, various German nations filled the power vacuum in the West. Their *Homoian*

churches punctuated the map of Roman *Christianities* in Italy, Gaul, Spain and North Africa.

Throughout the fourth century, while Christianity moved fast from prohibition to toleration to preferred status to state religion, the Jews saw a series of grave infringements upon their rights and social status, limiting in drastic ways their integration into society. Judaism was now tolerated, at best, only because the Jews cherished the Old Testament (*which, Christians said, they misread in some important ways*). After 380, when Theodosius I published in Thessalonica his edict *Cunctos populos*, making Christianity into the state religion, the Jews became for all practical purposes second-class citizens, although they were not demoted from the status of *cives romani*. In a sense, they had become ‘*dhimnis*’ *avant la lettre*. (In 388, Theodosius prohibited marriage between Christians and Jews).

Both the legal and the social situation of the Jews seriously deteriorated from the end of the fourth century. As intercommunal violence between Jews and Christians became more and more common, the authorities hesitated between legal protection of the Jews and passive or even active support of the Christian mobs, who often moved with the blessing of the bishops.

*Heresiology* was the combative theological genre for asserting true Christian doctrine through hostile definition and ecclesiastical exclusion. In the fourth to sixth centuries the union of Christian orthodoxy with Roman political power can easily seem to modern eyes to be a bad match. Emperors peeved by the inability of religious practitioners to come to an enforceable consensus for the protection of the state worked with bishops increasingly polarised by local traditions and civic unrest in a high stakes game of imperial orthodoxy. The unprecedented Roman imperial legislation on religious dissent was entwined with the general expansion of bureaucracy and law in the later

empire. In this political context heresy was increasingly no longer only an ecclesiastical matter or a serious theological challenge, but a problem of public safety since correct belief and worship ensured the unity and stability of society. *Heresiological* categories were often a means to establish or maintain common boundaries. The development of creeds and imperial law, however, was matched by an increasing theological and political complexity so that conflicts in at least North Africa, Syria and Egypt persisted due to regional concerns and local theological traditions.

*Heresiology* can be read as the political claim of an exclusive ideology made through the *demonisation*, exclusion and silencing of the other.

Heresiology developed in the first three centuries as a Christian literary discourse to define and refute theological error as a means of ensuring correct belief and exclusive identity. Like many products of late antiquity it was a hybrid of various local cultural and religious traditions that had been placed in dialogue by the unified Roman Empire. The culture of late antiquity was a curious blend of classical pagan forms and newly developed Christian ones.

The development of central institutions of theological and imperial authority in the fourth to sixth centuries transformed the sectarian practices of Christian unity and diversity. No central institution or political process had existed to regulate belief before the fourth century, but rather communication among local communities created webs of theological and ecclesiastical consensus. Given the geographical diversity of Christianity, doctrinal variations were inherent, if gradually regulated by literature that established common beliefs and emerging boundaries.

From the fourth century on, theological controversies were public and often lengthy, punctuated by new representative councils called and enforced by emperors. They also involved powerful urban bishops, sometimes several to a city, as representatives of local traditions rather than individual house church leaders or teachers engaged in mainly literary battles. Not surprisingly, lasting theological consensus was slow to be achieved, politically as well as theologically, due both to the complexity of questions concerning God and salvation, and the difficulty of fully reconciling different theological traditions.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

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## **crusaders**

The Crusades were launched by European Christians to reclaim Jerusalem and other holy sites in the Middle East from Muslims. Christians mounted these religious wars between 1096 and 1291. A major purpose was to gain control of Palestine. This area is the ancient homeland of Jews and the place where Jesus lived. The spiritual heart of Palestine was the city of Jerusalem.

In the 10th century, Palestine came under the rule of a rising Muslim power, the *Seljuk Turks*. They were building a huge empire and treating Christians badly. The advances of the Seljuk Turks into Byzantine territory, and their ill treatment of Christians, alarmed the Byzantine emperor. In 1076, the *Seljuks* took Jerusalem. In 1095, the emperor asked Pope Urban II for help. The pope called on Christians to go on a religious war to turn back the *Seljuks* and win control of Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Muslims were not the only targets of these religious wars. Europeans also mounted violent campaigns against Jews and Christian heretics. Religious wars were waged in Europe and North Africa, as well as the Middle East.

In this chapter, you will read the story of these religious wars. You will explore the effects of this warfare on Christians, Muslims, and Jews. You will also learn how new Muslim empires arose after the wars, and how Islam continued to spread to new parts of the world. Why did European Christians begin the religious wars, or Crusades, at the end of the 10th century?

To answer this question, we need to look at what was happening in Muslim lands at the time.

During the 10th century, the Seljuk Turks established a new Muslim dynasty. The Turks were a Central Asian people who had been migrating into Muslim lands for centuries. The *Seljuks* were named for a Turkish chieftain who converted to Islam in

the mid-10th century. In 1055, his descendants took control of the Abbasid dynasty's capital of Baghdad in what was then Persia. A Seljuk sultan now ruled the old Abbasid Empire.

The *Seljuks* were eager to expand their territory. Moving westward, they took Syria and Palestine from the Fatimid dynasty. They also overran much of Anatolia (also called Asia Minor), which was part of the Byzantine Empire. In 1071, the *Seljuks* defeated a large Byzantine army at *Manzikert* in present-day Turkey.

The Seljuk advance alarmed Christians in Europe. They feared for the safety and property of Christians living to the east. The *Seljuks* growing power seemed to threaten the Byzantine Empire itself. Christians also worried about the fate of the Holy Land, especially the city of Jerusalem, where the *Seljuks* treated Christians and their holy sites with intolerance.

As it is today, Jerusalem was a sacred city to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It was the spiritual capital of the Jews, where their great Temple had once stood. It had also been their political capital in ancient times. For Christians, it was the city where Jesus was crucified and arose from the dead. For Muslims, it was where Muhammad ascended to heaven during his Night Journey.

Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine first came under Muslim rule during the Arab conquests of the 7th century. Muslims built a shrine in Jerusalem, called the Dome of the Rock, to mark the spot where they believed that the Night Journey had occurred. Under Muslim rule, Jews, Christians, and Muslims usually lived together peacefully. People of all three faiths made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and built houses of worship there. Depending on the policies of various Muslim rulers, however, non-Muslims' rights and freedoms varied from time to time. Some Muslim rulers allowed the destruction of important Christian churches.

After the *Seljuks* took control of Palestine, political turmoil made travel unsafe. Tales began reaching Europe of highway robbers attacking and even killing Christian pilgrims. Christians feared they would no longer be able to visit Jerusalem and other sacred sites in the Holy Land. Together, with concern over the Seljuk threat to Christian lands in Europe, this fear helped pave the way for the Crusades.

The Crusades began as a response to the threat posed by the *Seljuks*. By 1095, the *Seljuks* had advanced to within 100 miles of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. The emperor appealed to Pope Urban II for help.

The pope invited nobles and Church leaders to attend a council in Clermont, France. There, he called for a crusade to drive out the Muslims and reclaim Jerusalem. He promised entry to heaven to all who joined the fight.

French-speaking nobles (*franks*) quickly organized armies to fight in the Holy Land. In addition to trained knights, thousands of townspeople, craftsmen, and peasants joined the crusade.

Throughout the Crusades, the Christian faith inspired many to put on the red-cross, worn by Crusaders as a symbol of their mission, and join the fight. But people joined the Crusades for other reasons as well. Merchants saw the chance to earn money through trade. Younger sons of nobles hoped to gain estates in the Holy Land. A person who had fought in the Holy Land also gained respect and prestige at home.

### ***The First Crusade (1096–1099)***

The First Crusade was called in November 1095 by Pope Urban II at the town of Clermont in central France. The pope made a proposal: O Sons of God, “*you must help your brothers living in the East, who need your aid for which they have already cried*

*out many times!’’ The Turks (Seljuqs) have conquered Christian lands (Byzantine Empire) from Romania (Anatolia) to the Arm of Saint George (Bosporus). O Sons of God, no matter your status, no matter your wealth, “strive to help expel that wicked race from Christian lands before it is too late!’’*

All who went on this expedition were granted the remission of sins. *“Let those who previously waged private war improperly against the faithful go against the infidels in a war that should be started now and should end in victory! Let those who were once robbers now become soldiers of Christ! Let those who formerly fought against their brothers and relatives now fight justly against barbarians! Let those who were once mercenaries for a few shillings now obtain eternal rewards!’’ Go forth; go forth, “with the Lord going before you. Whoever for devotion alone, but not to gain honour or money, goes to Jerusalem to liberate the Church of God can substitute this journey for all penance.”*

This appeal was the combination of a number of contemporary trends along with the inspiration of Urban himself, who added particular innovations to the mix. For several decades Christians had been pushing back at Muslim lands on the edge of Europe, in the Iberian Peninsula, for example, as well as in Sicily.

In some instances the Church had become involved in these events through the offer of limited spiritual rewards for participants.

Urban was responsible for the spiritual well-being of his flock and the crusade presented an opportunity for the sinful knights of western Europe to cease their endless in-fighting and exploitation of the weak (*lay people and churchmen alike*) and to make good their violent lives. Urban saw the campaign as a chance for knights to direct their energies towards what was seen as a spiritually meritorious act, namely the recovery of the

holy city of Jerusalem from Islam (*the Muslims had taken Jerusalem in 637*). In return for this they would, in effect, be forgiven those sins they had confessed. This, in turn, would save them from the prospect of eternal damnation in the fires of Hell, a fate repeatedly emphasised by the Church as the consequence of a sinful life.

The holy expedition, pushed and prodded along by apocalyptic anger and utopian exhilaration, metamorphosed into a holy war following “*in the footsteps of Christ*”- where each step, more sanguine than the last, ultimately led to the violent cleansing of His city and sepulchre.

Within an age of such intense religiosity the city of Jerusalem, as the place where Christ lived, walked and died, held a central role. When the aim of liberating Jerusalem was coupled to lurid (*probably exaggerated*) stories of the maltreatment of both the Levant's native Christians and western pilgrims, the desire for vengeance, along with the opportunity for spiritual advancement, formed a hugely potent combination. Urban would be looking after his flock and improving the spiritual condition of Western Europe, too. The fact that the papacy was engaged in a mighty struggle with the German emperor, Henry IV (*the Investiture Controversy*), and that calling the crusade would enhance the pope's standing was an opportunity too good for Urban to miss.

A spark to this dry tinder came from another Christian force: the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Alexios I feared the advance of the Seljuk Turks towards his capital city of Constantinople. The Byzantines were Greek Orthodox Christians but, since 1054, had been in a state of schism with the Catholic Church. The launch of the crusade presented Urban with a chance to move closer to the Orthodox and to heal the rift.

Four European nobles led the First Crusade. Close to 30,000 Crusaders fought their way through Anatolia, and headed south toward Palestine. In June of 1098, the Crusaders laid siege to the city of Antioch in Syria. Antioch was protected by a ring of walls. After nine months, the Crusaders found a way over the walls. Antioch fell to the Christians.

In 1099, the Crusaders surrounded Jerusalem and scaled the city walls. After a month of fighting, the city surrendered. The victorious Crusaders killed most of the people who had fought against them. They sold the survivors into slavery. With Jerusalem taken, most of the Crusaders went home. Some, however, stayed behind. They established four Crusader kingdoms in Palestine, Syria, and modern-day Lebanon and Turkey.

The Frankish settlers had to fit in to the complex cultural and religious blend of the Near East. Their numbers were so few that once they had captured places they very quickly needed to adapt their behaviour from the militant holy war rhetoric of Pope Urban II to a more pragmatic stance of relative religious toleration, with truces and even occasional alliances with various Muslim neighbours. Had they oppressed the majority local population (*and many Muslims and eastern Christians lived under Frankish rule*), there would have been no-one to farm the lands or to tax and their economy would simply have collapsed.

The Frankish states of Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem established themselves in the complex religious, political and cultural landscape of the Near East.

The Franks were always short on manpower but were a dynamic group who developed innovative institutions, such as the Military Orders, to survive. The Orders were founded to help look after pilgrims; in the case of the Hospitallers, through healthcare; in that of the Templars, to guard visitors on the road

to the River Jordan. Soon both were fully-fledged religious institutions, whose members took the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. It proved a popular concept and donations from admiring and grateful pilgrims meant that the Military Orders developed a major role as landowners, as the custodians of castles and as the first real standing army in Christendom. They were independent of the control of the local rulers and could, at times, cause trouble for the king or squabble with one another. The Templars and Hospitallers also held huge tracts of land across Western Europe, which provided income for the fighting machine in the Levant, especially the construction of the castles that became so vital to the Christian hold on the region.

### *The Second Crusade (1146–1148)*

In December 1144 *Zengi*, the Muslim ruler of Aleppo and Mosul, captured Edessa to mark the first major territorial setback for the Franks of the Near East. The news of this disaster prompted Pope Eugenius III to issue an appeal for the Second Crusade (1145-49). Fortified by this powerful call to live up to the deeds of their first crusading forefathers, coupled with the inspiring rhetoric of (Saint) Bernard of Clairvaux, the rulers of France and Germany took the cross to mark the start of royal involvement in the Crusades. Christian rulers in Iberia joined with the Genoese in attacking the towns of Almeria in southern Spain (1147) and Tortosa in the north-east (1148); likewise the nobles of northern Germany and the rulers of Denmark launched an expedition against the pagan Wends of the Baltic shore around Stettin. While this was no grand plan of Pope Eugenius but rather a reaction to appeals sent to him, it shows the confidence in crusading at this time. In the event, this optimism proved deeply unfounded. A group of Anglo-Norman, Flemish and Rhineland crusaders captured Lisbon in 1147 and the other Iberian campaigns were also successful but the Baltic campaign achieved virtually nothing and the most prestigious expedition

of all to the Holy Land, was a disaster. The two armies lacked discipline, supplies and finance, and both were badly mauled by the Seljuk Turks as they crossed Asia Minor. Then, in conjunction with the Latin settlers, the crusaders laid siege to the most important Muslim city in Syria, Damascus. Yet, after only four days, fear of relief forces led by *Zengi's* son, Nur ad-Din, prompted an ignominious retreat. The crusaders blamed the Franks of the Near East for this failure, accusing them of accepting a pay-off to retreat. Whatever the truth in this, the defeat at Damascus certainly damaged crusade enthusiasm in the West and over the next three decades, in spite of increasingly elaborate and frantic appeals for help, there was no major crusade to the Holy Land.

To regard the Franks as entirely enfeebled would, however, be a serious error. They captured Ascalon in 1153 to complete their control of the Levantine coast, an important advance for the security of trade and pilgrim traffic in terms of reducing harassment by Muslim shipping. The following year, however, Nur ad-Din took power in Damascus to mark the first time that the cities had been joined with Aleppo under the rule of the same man during the crusader period, something that greatly increased the threat to the Franks. Nur ad-Din's considerable personal piety, his encouragement of madrasas (*teaching colleges*) and the composition of jihad poetry and texts extolling the virtues of Jerusalem created a bond between the religious and the ruling classes that had been conspicuously lacking since the crusaders arrived in the East. During the 1160s Nur ad-Din, acting as the champion of Sunni orthodoxy, seized control of Shi'ite Egypt; dramatically raising the strategic pressure on the Franks and at the same time enhancing the financial resources at his disposal through the fertility of the Nile Delta and the vital port of Alexandria.

The Crusaders owed their early victories, in part, to a lack of unity among Muslim groups. When the Crusades began, the

Seljuk Empire was already crumbling into a number of smaller states. Muslims had trouble joining together to fight the invaders. When Muslims started to band together, they were able to fight back more effectively.

That Crusade ended in failure. An army from Germany was badly defeated in Anatolia. A second army, led by the king of France, arrived in Jerusalem in 1148. About 50,000 Crusaders marched on the city of Damascus, which was on the way to Edessa. Muslims from Edessa came to the city's aid and beat back the Crusaders. Soon after this defeat, the French army went home, ending the Second Crusade.

### ***The Third Crusade (1189–1192)***

Over the next few decades, Muslims in the Middle East increasingly came under common leadership. By the 1180s, the great sultan Salah al-Din (*SAL-eh ahl-DEEN*), called Saladin by Europeans, had formed the largest Muslim empire since the *Seljuks*. Salah al-Din united Egypt, Syria, and other lands to the east. He led a renewed fight against the Crusaders in the Holy Land. Salah al-Din quickly took back most of Palestine. In 1187, his armies captured Jerusalem; this loss of Jerusalem shocked Europeans and sparked the Third Crusade. King Richard I of England, known as “*the Lionheart*,” led the European fight against Salah al-Din.

In 1191, Richard's army forced the surrender of the Palestinian town of Acre (*AH-kreh*). Afterward, arrangements were made between the two sides to exchange prisoners. When Richard lost patience waiting for Salah al-Din to complete the exchange, Richard ordered the deaths of all 2,700 of his Muslim prisoners.

Richard then fought his way toward Jerusalem, but his army was not strong enough to attack the city. Salah al-Din's forces had also grown weaker. In September 1192, the two leaders signed a

peace treaty. The Crusaders kept a chain of cities along the coast of Palestine. Muslims agreed to let Christian pilgrims enter Jerusalem.

### *Later Crusades*

The Crusades continued for another 100 years. Some Crusades were popular movements of poor people, rather than organized military campaigns. In 1212, for example, thousands of peasant children from France and Germany marched in a Children's Crusade. Few, if any, ever reached the Holy Land. Some made it to European port cities, only to be sold into slavery by merchants. Some returned home. Many disappeared without a trace.

This heretical historicism, in which heretics were the enduring and persistent witnesses to the immortal and infinite Church, was crucial to the making of Medieval Latin Christianity. Such a model for understanding heresy was hardly surprising in a world where, at least from the eleventh century onward, Latin Christians endeavoured to imitate the Christ of history (as revealed in the New Testament) and were judged holy by the veracity of their imitation. Heretics, despite the divine potential inherent in imitative practices, never copied the life of the Saviour, even if, in their perversity, they thought they were doing so.

None of the later Crusades succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem. Muslims, meanwhile, were gaining back the land they had lost. In 1291, they took Acre, the last Crusader city. This victory ended some two hundred years of Christian kingdoms in the Holy Land.

## ***Mongol Invasion***

As you have learned, Muslims succeeded in driving the Crusaders from the Holy Land. Even as the Crusades were taking place, other changes were happening in Muslim lands. By the mid-1200s, Muslims were facing a greater threat than the European Crusaders - the Mongols.

The Mongols were a nomadic people whose homeland was north of China. In the 13th century, Mongols began wars of conquest under their leader, Genghis Khan (*JENG-giss KAHN*). After attacking northern China, Genghis Khan turned his sights westward. The Mongols swept across central Asia, destroying cities and farmland. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were killed. Many were carried off to Mongolia as slaves.

Under Genghis Khan's successors, the Mongols built an empire that stretched across much of Asia. They defeated the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia and seized parts of Persia. In 1258, they destroyed Baghdad and killed the sultan. Farther west, Muslims were able to stop the Mongol advance. The *Mamluks*, Turks whose capital was at Cairo, Egypt, led the resistance. In the mid-1200s, they had overthrown the dynasty begun by Salah al-Din. In 1260, they defeated the Mongols in an important battle in Palestine. The *Mamluks* continued to rule Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Arabia, and parts of Anatolia until 1517.

The Mongols still ruled a huge empire in Asia, including China. Toward the end of the 1200s, in some places they began converting to Islam. The adoption of Islam helped bring unity to their empire. The Mongols made Persian the language of government. They rebuilt the cities they had destroyed and encouraged learning, the arts, and trade.

The Mongol empire was one of the largest the world had ever seen. It suffered, however, from in-fighting among rivals. Local rulers controlled different regions. By the mid-1300s, the empire was badly weakened.

### ***The Reconquista***

Crusaders fought against Muslims in Europe and North Africa, as well as in the Middle East. One important series of wars was called the Reconquista (*ree-con-KEE-stah*), which means “*reconquest*” in Spanish. Christians launched these wars to retake the Iberian Peninsula from Muslims. The Iberian Peninsula is a region in southwestern Europe that contains Spain and Portugal.

The *Umayyads* had established a Muslim dynasty in Spain in the 8th century, where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in peace. However, non-Muslims had to pay a special tax.

Over time, Christian rulers in northern Iberia chipped away at Muslim lands. The pace of reconquest quickened after the Umayyad caliphate in Cordoba broke up into rival kingdoms in 1002. In 1085, Christians gained a key victory by capturing Toledo, in central Spain.

Muslims gradually gave up more and more territory, and new Muslim dynasties were intolerant of Jews and Christians. In 1039, Portugal became an independent Christian kingdom. By 1248, only the kingdom of Granada, in southern Spain, remained in Muslim hands.

Many Jews and Muslims remained in areas ruled by Christians. In the late 1400s, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand wanted to unite Spain as a Catholic country. They used the Inquisition, a Roman Catholic court, against Muslims and Jews who claimed to have converted to Christianity. The Spanish Inquisition was

extremely harsh. Judges, called inquisitors, sometimes used torture to find out whether supposed converts were practicing their old religion. Thousands of people were burned at the stake.

In 1492, Granada fell to Ferdinand and Isabella, ending Muslim rule in Spain. In the same year, Jews were ordered to become Catholics or leave the country. More than 170,000 Jews left their homes forever. Many found refuge in Muslim lands, including in Constantinople, now called Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Muslims remained in Spain, but many were forced to become Catholics. Spain expelled remaining Muslims beginning in 1609. This expulsion ended centuries of cooperation among these groups and Christians in Spain.

Crusading survived in the memory and the imagination of the peoples of Western Europe and the Middle East. In the former, it regained profile through the romantic literature of writers such as Sir Walter Scott and, as lands in the Middle East fell to the imperialist empires of the age, the French, in particular, chose to draw links with their crusading past. The word became an ignite for a cause with moral right, be it in a non-military context, such as a crusade against drink, or in the horrors of the First World War. General Franco's ties with the Catholic Church in Spain invoked crusading ideology in perhaps the closest modern incarnation of the idea and it remains a word in common usage today.

In the Muslim world, the memory of the Crusades faded, although did not disappear, from view and Saladin continued to be a figure held out as an exemplar of a great ruler. In the context of the 19th century, the Europeans' invocation of the past built upon this existing memory and meant that the image of hostile, aggressive westerners seeking to conquer Muslim or Arab lands became extremely potent for Islamists and Arab Nationalist leaders alike, and Saladin, as the man who recaptured Jerusalem, stands as the man to aspire to.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

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### **details of islam**

Muslim tradition states that in 610, in a cave on the outskirts of the Arabian city of Mecca, an orphaned merchant named Muhammad began receiving divine revelations. He was instructed to preach to the people of Mecca, who were mostly pagans, encouraging them to abandon idolatry and worship only the one true God (*Allah in Arabic*), the same God worshipped by the Jews and Christians. The new faith was to be known as ‘Islam’, a word meaning submission of one’s will to God, while the revelations themselves would eventually be gathered into the Qur’an (*recitation*), the Muslim holy book. Muhammad’s message was not well received by the inhabitants of Mecca, which was an important trade centre that profited from pilgrims visiting the Ka’ba, the shrine of the Black Stone, at the time a popular pagan religious site. In 622, in response to increasing pressure, Muhammad immigrated to Medina, about 200 miles to the north, where his message was more favourably received. Muhammad then fought an eight-year war with Mecca, culminating in his conquest of the city in 630. The Ka’ba was confirmed as the holiest site of Islam, being seen as a shrine built by Abraham and Ishmael (*Abraham’s oldest son and the ancestor of the Arabs*) that had been taken over for pagan use, and most of the inhabitants of Mecca converted to Islam. By the time that Muhammad died in 632 his message had spread across the Arabian Peninsula, and most of the pagans of the region had converted.

The Muslim faith centres on the belief that there is only one God, omnipotent, omniscient and with no associates, partners or offspring. This is the same God as that of the Christians and Jews, who are presented in the Qur’an as having received the divine revelation previously, but also as having misunderstood or distorted it. Thus the scripture that was revealed to Muhammad is seen as a corrective and clarification. Muhammad himself is understood to be the last and ‘seal’ of a long line of prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus (*who is regarded as having been born of a virgin by divine will*,

*and is explicitly noted as being a great prophet but not the son of God).*

An often-misunderstood concept in Islam is jihad, striving on behalf of the faith. The term is frequently translated as ‘holy war’, a translation that only conveys one aspect of the teaching. The Qur‘an itself demonstrates a mixed attitude towards violence. A survey of its verses shows that at times the text seems to encourage forbearance from the Muslims in the face of opposition, while at other times it advocates warfare, albeit within limits.

Muslim scholars resolved the apparent contradictions in the text using theories of abrogation, whereby one teaching was seen as being superseded by another, and in the case of warfare they related the various teachings to various stages of the Prophet’s career, during which he was initially encouraged to turn away from conflict, but was later allowed to engage in defensive and then offensive warfare as the ongoing conflict between Mecca and Medina developed. After the death of Muhammad, the Muslim campaigns out of the Arabian Peninsula were fought in the name of the military jihad. However, as the pace of conquest slowed, the obligation to fight for the faith became less of a universal concern and instead began to take the form of periodic raids made on enemy territory, often by volunteers living on the borders of the Muslim state. At the same time, under the influence of Muslim religious scholars, jihad teaching became increasingly sophisticated. Various regulations became formalized, including the prohibition of attacks on non-combatants or destruction of property, and guidelines on who was obliged to take part and under what circumstances. The former bipartite division of the world into dar al-islam (*the Abode of Islam*) and dor al-harb (*the Abode of War*) came to be nuanced with the addition of dar al-‘ahd (*the Abode of the Treaty*) or dar al-sulh (*the Abode of Peace*), non-Muslim territory that remained autonomous provided that its people

recognized Muslim authority and paid tributes. Peace agreements with states in the dar al-harb were also made, facilitating trade and diplomatic exchanges.

While fighters in the holy war were promised Paradise if they were killed in action, deliberate self-destruction was forbidden as part of the wider prohibition of suicide in Islam. In addition, by the twelfth century a number of Muslim religious scholars, particularly Sufis (Muslim mystics), had conceived a division of the jihad into al-jihad al-akbar (*the greater jihad*) and al-jihad al-asghar (*the lesser jihad*). The military jihad was viewed as the lesser of the two; the greater jihad was a spiritual struggle waged both externally – *speaking or writing in defence of the faith* – and above all internally – *against one's own inner sinfulness* – something that was seen as a prerequisite before one undertook the lesser jihad. Although the timing is a matter of some debate, the doctrine was probably crystallizing during the first decades of the crusading period.

From the earliest days of Islam it was recognized that the Muslims could not realistically expect all people to convert to their faith. Indeed, the validity of some other religions is explicitly noted in the Qur'an. However, it was also recognized that there would be conflict with members of these other faiths; indeed, Muhammad himself had to deal with opposition from three of the Jewish tribes inhabiting Medina. The Qur'an again provided some guidance; for example, Qur'an 9: 29 states the following:

*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor in the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and his Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*

On the basis of passages like this the Muslim leadership gradually developed a policy stating that Christians and Jews could remain in the Muslim community, and enjoy rights of protection by the Muslim rulers, in exchange for acknowledging Muslim authority, paying a poll tax and accepting certain social restrictions such as wearing distinctive dress, not bearing arms or riding horses, and not building new places of worship. As the Muslim conquests proceeded, this policy was extended to followers of other faiths who could not practically be expected to convert en masse to Islam. Non-Muslims under Muslim rule became known as *ahl al-dhimma* (*the People of the Pact*) or dhimmis. The enforcement of these social restrictions on dhimmis was uneven, and treatment of them was highly variable; at times non-Muslims rose to high ranks within Muslim courts or were even involved in the defence of cities against other Muslims or non-Muslims; at other times they suffered persecution or came under intense pressure to convert or emigrate.

An important teaching in Islam is that Muhammad was the last prophet, so no other Muslim could now take over this position. Leadership of the Muslim community passed instead into the hands of a succession of figures known as *Khalifas* (caliphs, successors). The first three of these were chosen by approximate consensus of the Muslim community, but the fourth, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law *Ali ibn Abi Talib* (*reigned 656–61*), faced opposition throughout his reign and was killed in the course of a civil war over the caliphate. Thereafter power passed under the control of a dynastic succession of caliphs, the *Umayyads* (*reigned 661–750*), who ruled from Damascus. They were in turn ousted by the Abbasid family, who founded the next caliphal dynasty and soon established their seat of power at Baghdad. In the meantime, the Islamic polity had continued to spread, through a mixture of armed conquest, acquiescence of local populations and voluntary conversion. By the time of the 'Abbasid takeover in 750, the Muslims had dismantled the

Persian Empire, taking over territories as far east as *Transoxania* and north-west India; had conquered much of the Levant, North Africa, and Spain; and had even conducted raids into what is now France. At the same time, many of the administrative structures of the state had been set up, including the establishment of Arabic as the major language of the administration and the standardization of the coinage into a distinctive form bearing Arabic inscriptions and no iconography.

The early Abbasid caliphs enjoyed a heyday of power, and the first century of their rule saw the Muslim world prosper economically and intellectually. Lucrative trade networks were established across the Muslim world and to places beyond. Literature, both prose and poetic, flourished, and advances were made in science, law, philosophy and theology. Scholars took works from the Classical, Persian and Indian traditions and translated them into Arabic; many of both these texts and books by the scholars who worked on them subsequently passed into Europe, mainly through the Iberian Peninsula. However, this age of prosperity did not last, for the ‘Abbasids at least. Economic problems, rebellions and the increasing domination of the caliphs by their troops starting in the later ninth century resulted in many of the provinces becoming independent from Baghdad’s control. The final insult, from the ‘Abbasid point of view, came in the mid-tenth century when Baghdad itself was taken over by the armies of the Buyids, a Shi’ite clan from Persia. Forced to accept the Buyid conquerors as their ‘deputies’, the Sunni caliphs became for the most part figureheads, maintained in power only to give legitimacy to the decrees of their theoretical subordinates.

The late tenth century saw the beginning of the immigration into the Muslim world of large numbers of Turks from Central Asia. Most of these converted to Sunni Islam, and one Turkish clan, the Seljuks (*Saljuqs*), led their armies in a series of campaigns that enabled them to take control of much of the Middle East. In

1055 Seljuk troops took control of Baghdad, and the Buyid caliphal deputy was now replaced by a Seljuk one, known as the sultan. Although the caliph now had a Sunni deputy, this did not mean that the caliph regained significant power, and periodic conflicts between the caliphs and the sultans would take place in the twelfth century.

In the wake of the aforementioned Seljuk takeover of Baghdad, as the Seljuks and their allies spread their influence further west, the area known to Muslim writers as Bilad al-Sham (*or simply al-Sham, roughly corresponding to modern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian autonomous areas and the edge of south-east Turkey*) became contested between the Seljuks and the Fatimids. It is important to note that this conflict had religious as well as political dimensions. This was not merely a conflict over territory fought between two Muslim powers. The Seljuks, as Sunnis, sought to present themselves as the defenders and promoters of the true faith against dangerous heretics who had taken control of a disturbingly large amount of territory and posed a real threat to the ‘Abbasid caliphate; indeed, a pro-Fatimid general had briefly taken control of Baghdad, imprisoning the ‘Abbasid caliph, in 1057–58. The Fatimids, in the meantime, saw themselves as the representatives of the true line of caliphs, and saw the Seljuks as supporting a heretical pretender whose ancestors had usurped power in the eighth century. Thus the Levant was the site of a struggle between two powers, each of which regarded the other as a legitimate target of holy war fought on behalf of Islam.

The Seljuk armies were largely composed of two major groups: mamluks (*slave-soldiers*) and Turkmen (*Turcomans, free nomadic Turks*). The mamluks were normally used as the backbone of the Seljuk armies, while the rather less disciplined Turkmen, who brought their families and flocks with them, were used in a supporting role or allowed to engage in their own raids, which could prove to be a convenient way to distract enemies

from major Seljuk campaigns. During the reign of the Seljuk sultan Alp-Arslan (*reigned 1063–73*), Turkmen tribesmen conducted raids against Byzantine territory in Asia Minor and northern Syria. Tensions between Alp-Arslan and the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes (*reigned 1068–71*) mounted, and in 1071 they met in battle at Manzikert (*Malasjird*), near Lake Van. The Byzantine army was defeated and the frontier collapsed. The Turkmen raids into the region now became a flood of immigrant settlers, and a relative of Alp-Arslan set up a new sultanate, based at Nicaea (*Iznik*); this became known as the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, to distinguish it from the so-called Great Seljuk Sultanate that we saw established previously. In the meantime, the Byzantine emperors sent appeals for aid to Western Europe, contributing to the build-up of support for the crusade that would eventually manifest itself in military action at the end of the eleventh century.

A survey of the Muslim sources for the period before the Crusades suggests that the Muslims of the Levant knew very little about the Franks. Mentions of them in the Muslim sources are sporadic, and the most helpful passages tend to come from the Muslim tradition of geographical writing. As indicated previously, before the Crusades the Muslim writers use the term *ifranj* to refer principally to the inhabitants of the region roughly corresponding to the Frankish empire of Charlemagne, and the Frankish capital is variously identified as Rome or Paris. The Franks themselves are depicted as warlike and violent, and are sometimes described as a particularly unified people, while at other times they are represented as being divided and feuding with one another. At the same time, the Franks have a somewhat blurry relationship with the Byzantines, who are sometimes identified as their neighbours, and at other times seen as their overlords, with Frankish lands being part of the Byzantine Empire. Most sources agree that the Franks and the Byzantines have a shared religion, Christianity.

This image of ignorance is open to question, however. It is apparent from the Muslim sources that Frankish merchants and pilgrims visited Muslim lands, and we also know that Franks served in the Byzantine armies as mercenaries. We also have evidence of embassies exchanged between Frankish and Muslim rulers. Perhaps most telling are the two different accounts of the Franks given by the traveller and geographer al-Mas‘udi. In one of his works, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa-Ma‘adin al-Jawhar* (*Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gemstone*), he gives us an account of the Franks that is unusually well informed, even to the point of providing a list of the Frankish kings. However, in another of his works, *Kitab al-Tanbih wa-l-hhraf* (*The Book of Instruction and Supervision*), he presents an account that gives a radically different depiction of the Franks, presenting a rather fanciful image of them as sluggish, blue-skinned brutes.

Given that the *Kitab al-Taribih* was written after the *Muruj*, it would be nonsensical to suggest that al-Mas‘udi’s knowledge of the Franks got worse. Instead, it would seem that al-Mas‘udi wished to convey a sense of Muslim superiority over the uncivilized, non-Muslim barbarians, and to do this he exploited stereotypes of bestial nature and religious inferiority through his presentation of the Franks. Al-Mas‘udi’s position is in some ways a salutary reminder for us of the wider tendency of medieval sources to privilege moral messages over factual accuracy, as well as the fact that most of the Muslim writers were first and foremost religiously trained scholars, which naturally affected the emphasis of their literary output. Thus before the Crusades the Franks often only appear in Muslim sources when including them serves the agendas of the writers, and such appearances are sparse enough to suggest a level of ignorance that may actually be over-estimated.

According to the Aleppine chronicler al-‘Azimi, the first inkling that the Muslims of the Levant had of the arrival of the First Crusade was when the Byzantine emperor Alexios Komnenos

wrote to the Muslims in 1096 to inform them of the impending arrival of the Franks. Whatever the truth of this, the first major encounters that took place between Muslims and crusaders occurred when the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum was repeatedly raided by the forces of the People's Crusade (*or Peasants' Crusade*) in the autumn of 1096. The Seljuks of Rum dispatched them easily and without mercy, wiping most of them out in less than a month.

The Seljuk sultan of Rum, Kilij-Arslan I (*reigned 1092 - 1107*) may have considered the People's Crusade to be simply a continuation of previous Byzantine raids into his territory. Franks had, after all, served in the Byzantine armies before. Thus he may have under-estimated the magnitude of the threat when the major armies of the First Crusade began to gather at Constantinople in late 1096 and early 1097. In any case, he was unable to defeat this second wave of crusaders in battle when they advanced on his capital of Nicaea, and the city fell to them in June 1097. Two more Seljuk defeats followed, at Dorylaeum (*Eskişehir*) and Heraclea (*Ereğli*), and then the crusaders fought their way to Antioch, besieging it in October 1097. The city fell to the crusaders in June 1098, and they subsequently beat off an army led by Kerbogha, the atabeg of Mosul (*reigned 1095 - 1102*). In the meantime, a contingent of crusaders under Baldwin of Boulogne had already taken control of the Armenian city of Edessa (*Urfa*) in March 1098, inaugurating the first Latin Christian state in the Levant. Antioch, now the second of the Latin states, came under the control of Bohemond of Taranto (*reigned 1098 - 1111*). In December 1098 the crusaders took Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, and the Muslim sources emphasize the fact that the Franks slaughtered many of its people. The psychological effect of the conquest of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man was very great, however, and it is notable that a number of Muslim rulers came to terms with the crusaders as they continued their march south towards Jerusalem.

By the time that the crusaders reached it in June 1099, Jerusalem was in Fatimid hands, having been taken by them from its Seljuk-appointed Turkmen ruler the previous year. Fatimid tenure of the city was brief; it fell on 15 July, after a crusader siege lasting little more than a month. Both the European and the Muslim sources emphasize the magnitude of the massacre of Muslims and Jews alike that took place at the holy city after the crusaders broke through the walls. The Fatimids sent an army to rescue the city, but it was defeated at Ascalon in August 1099. Jerusalem soon became the capital of a Frankish kingdom, and over the years that followed the crusaders continued to expand their holdings in the Levant, including setting up their fourth state, the County of Tripoli, in 1109.

Many Muslims reacted to the Frankish invasion with shock and outrage, and poets and preachers issued emotional calls to both the local rulers in the Levant and the Great Seljuk sultan of the east for aid against the European interlopers. While the Egyptians sought to mount some opposition to the crusader expansion, such calls went mostly unheeded by the Muslim rulers in Bilad al-Sham, many of whom quickly realized that they could form alliances with the Frankish rulers against their Muslim or Frankish rivals. However, after the fall of Tripoli the Great Seljuk sultan Muhammad (*reigned 1105 - 18*) was moved to act. Between 1110 and 1115 a number of expeditions were launched against the Franks at his direction. These were not received favourably by the Muslim rulers in the Levant, who probably feared a re-assertion of Great Seljuk power in the region, and after the last expedition was opposed by a coalition of Frankish and Muslim rulers and defeated by a Frankish army from Antioch at Danith in September 1115, the sultan Muhammad refocused his attention east, abandoning the Levant to its fate.

The year 1119 witnessed the first major Muslim victory against the Franks when the Turkmen ruler of Mardin, Ilghazi

(*reigned 1108 or 1109 - 22*) defeated and killed Roger of Salerno, the regent of Antioch (*reigned 1113 - 19*), at the Battle at Balat, a Frankish loss that was so complete and bloody that it became known to the Latin chroniclers as *Ager Sanguinis (the Field of Blood)*. Ilghazi did not capitalize on his success, however, and he died in 1122. It fell to others, the best known of whom is the ruler of Mosul, ‘Imad al-Din Zangi (*reigned 1127 - 46*), to pursue the war against the Franks. Zangi spent much of his time pursuing his own political ambitions in the Levant and Iraq, including repeatedly attempting to take control of Damascus, but he also prosecuted periodic campaigns against the Franks. Most famously, towards the end of 1144 he took advantage of the fact that Joscelin II of Edessa had been called away from his capital, conquering the city on 24 December and thus bringing the first of the capitals of the crusader states under Muslim control. Zangi himself died two years later, assassinated in September 1146; according to some sources, he was killed by a Frankish slave while he lay incapacitated by over-indulgence in alcohol. His territories were divided between his sons, principally between Sayf al-Din Ghazi (*reigned 1146 - 49*), who received Mosul and his father’s lands in the east, and Nur al-Din Mahmud (*reigned 1146 - 74*), who received Aleppo and his father’s holdings in Bilad al-Sham.

It is important to note from the outset that the armies with which the Muslims fought the Franks were diverse in composition and tactics, and every military encounter had its own particular circumstances and physical context, so that what follows is only a brief overview of the armies and tactics of the Muslim forces. When the crusaders arrived in the east, the Fatimid army was in the process of being reformed by the viziers Badr al-Jamali and al-Afdal Shahanshah. The core of the army was made up of infantry, including archers and javelin troops, who were supported by light cavalry and a range of other troops, including mercenary light infantry from Daylam in Persia, black African slaves serving as heavy infantry and Turkish mamluks and

horse-archers. As a result of the reforms, the mercenary and slave contingents were expanded, though the core contingents remained the basis of Fatimid tactics, which required infantry and cavalry to co-operate effectively.

### *This Man Zangi*

‘Imad al-Din Zangi is often regarded as having been the first of the great Muslim counter-crusaders, a reputation that is based on his conquest of Edessa in 1144. However, it is difficult to establish how far he himself took an interest in the jihad against the Franks; indeed, it seems far more likely that territorial and political ambitions were the primary motives behind his actions. Zangi himself had been brought up in a violent and ruthless political environment. His father Aq Sunqur, a Turkish mamluk, had served both Alp-Arslan and Malik-Shah, including acting as the governor of Aleppo from 1087 to 1092, but in the conflict over the Great Seljuk Sultanate that followed Malik-Shah’s death he had been killed in 1094, when Zangi was about ten years old. Thereafter Zangi was brought up by another of Malik-Shah’s mamluks in Mosul and began his career there. After holding a number of governorships in Iraq, he was appointed governor of Mosul, as well as *atabeg* for two Seljuk princes, in 1127. He quickly extended his territory in northern Iraq and in 1128 he negotiated the handover of Aleppo. He then divided his attention between east and west, expanding his territory in northern Bilad al-Sham at the expense of either the Franks or other Muslims, including several attempts to take control of Damascus, and intervening in the politics of Iraq and increasing his holdings there. The taking of Edessa was arguably an act of opportunism, with Zangi acting only because he could take advantage of the fact that its ruler and much of its army were absent.

Zangi was certainly seen as a great mujahid (*jihad fighter*) by those around him. Both during his lifetime and afterwards, poets and historians praised his zeal in fighting against the Franks; the caliph rewarded him for his conquest of Edessa with numerous honorific titles; and monumental inscriptions proclaimed his devotion to the holy war. However, Zangi himself spent more time increasing his territory and fighting fellow Muslims in both Iraq and the Levant than he spent pursuing campaigns against the Latin states, and it is not clear that he was seriously concerned with the jihad, except in so far as it helped him further his political ambitions. In addition, numerous sources attest to the brutal and uncompromising manner in which he dealt with his subjects and opponents. His troops, whom he ruled with an iron fist, were terrified of him. According to the sources, his cruel acts included killing, enslaving, mutilating and torturing prisoners, Muslim as well as Frankish; breaking promises of safe conduct; and once, when drunk, divorcing his wife and ordering that she be raped by stable-hands. At the same time, some depict him as seeking to preserve military discipline and public morality through his uncompromising approach. Yet whatever they thought of him beforehand, in the eyes of the Muslim writers Zangi's conquest of Edessa was his salvation, gaining him forgiveness for all his misdeeds.

As indicated above, it is clear that the Muslim writers were aware that the Franks were Christians, but the extent of their familiarity with the specifics of the Catholic Christianity followed by the Franks is far more difficult to determine. In any case, it is also clear that they were keen to depict the Franks' religious beliefs in as negative terms as possible. The Muslim writers considered their understanding of God's wishes for and from humanity to be superior to that of the Franks; they were, after all, the recipients of the Qur'an, which was understood as being among other things a corrective to the misunderstandings that had crept into the religious practices of the earlier recipients of the religion of Abraham. This sense of superiority was then

accentuated by the fact that the Muslims were at war with the Franks, with the result that the Muslim writers emphasize the points of conflict between Christianity and Islam and for the most part disregard the features shared by the two faiths.

It is worth noting the vital position that both Jesus and Mary occupy in Muslim views of their salvation history. Mary, as the one chosen by God to bear the prophet preceding Muhammad, is held in enormous esteem (*indeed, Maryam [Mary] is an immensely popular name given to baby girls in the Muslim world*). Jesus, likewise, is immensely respected, and Muslim understandings of the end of his time on earth state that he was not crucified, but was instead taken up to Heaven by God and will return in the end times to slay the Antichrist.

## CHAPTER NINE

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**cultured**

Before the practice of Christianity, culture has been in existence. Culture is the regimented way in which a set of human beings conduct their lives. Culture was involved in the conception, broadcast and adaptation of the gospel. Culture represents a picture of a group of people. It highlights their traditions and achievements. While some aspects of culture are beyond by larger world like language, music, literature, technology, history, art, habits, etc. other aspects are unique to respective people.

The universality of the gospel necessitated a difference between Christianity and culture. Christianity can continue living in any culture, but every culture will have a definite beliefs, values, or practices which say the opposite to Christianity and for that reason must be put aside. The Jewish stressed on peripheral uprightness by obvious compliance to rules had to be put aside, for salvation is obtained by faith alone, apart from works. The Gentile practices of idolatry and immorality also had to be rejected as contrary to one's calling in Christ. Any agreement to culture which obstruct the teaching of the gospel should also be abandoned. It all seems quite simple, doesn't it? However history reveals the difficulty which the saints have had in constantly relating Christianity to culture.

The European experience of Christianity was formed in the context of the Roman Empire. In the worldview of the Roman Empire:

- The world is divided between civilized and uncivilized.
- The Imperium is the political expression of an ordered life.
- The civilized live their lives according to the laws of the Imperium.
- The ultimate goal of the Imperium/centre is to bring all peoples under the control of the Imperium giving them order, culture, and civilization.
- Those people living outside of the Imperium are without law, culture and morals.

- The Imperium invades, conquers, and subjugates others, bringing them under its authority for their own good - so that these *others* may be civilized.
- Those considered pious and virtuous are compliant and loyal to the Imperium.
- To abide by the social-cultural norms giving order to society and to exhibit the habits and character traits important to the success of society is to be *civil*.
- The customs (*mores – norms/laws*) of the City State or Imperium are the model for the culture and the morals defining what is an ordered life and what is civilized.

The advent of Christianity expanded these Roman concepts into a vision of converting pagans. The effort to conquer and occupy the Western Hemisphere was a joint venture of the Church and State.

Hitherto, in this past, the church has applied great effort to recognize with modern day culture without becoming either inaccessible from it or indistinguishable to it. The church has endeavour, with different degrees of success, to relate to modern culture without creating a counter-culture and without being obsessive by secular culture. Pointless to say, the church has not always succeeded in walking the tight rope between these two boundaries.

When the church enunciates modern culture corrupt, it seeks to get rid of that culture from Christianity by making a counter-culture of its own. Proper Christians are trained to accept this counter-culture in position of their previous way of lives. When the church is controlling as much as necessary, it may seek to enforce this "Christian culture" on society as a whole. Such was the case in the second century when Roman government was committed to religion.

One of the greatest of the problems that has agitated the Church is the problem of the relation between knowledge and piety,

between culture and Christianity. This problem has appeared first of all in the presence of two tendencies in the Church - the scientific or academic tendency, and what may be called the practical tendency. Some men have devoted themselves chiefly to the task of forming right conceptions as to Christianity and its foundations. To them no fact, however trivial, has appeared worthy of neglect; by them truth has been cherished for its own sake, without immediate reference to practical consequences. Some, on the other hand, have emphasized the essential simplicity of the gospel. The world is lying in misery, we ourselves are sinners, men are perishing in sin every day. The gospel is the sole means of escape; let us preach it to the world while yet we may. So desperate is the need that we have no time to engage in vain babblings or old wives' fables. While we are discussing the exact location of the churches of Galatia, men are perishing under the curse of the law; while we are settling the date of Jesus' birth, the world is doing without its Christmas message.

The representatives of both of these tendencies regard themselves as Christians, but too often there is little brotherly feeling between them. The Christian of academic tastes accuses his brother of undue emotionalism, of shallow argumentation, of cheap methods of work. On the other hand, your practical man is ever loud in his denunciation of academic indifference to the dire needs of humanity. The scholar is represented either as a dangerous disseminator of doubt, or else as a man whose faith is a faith without works. A man who investigates human sin and the grace of God by the aid of dusty volumes, carefully secluded in a warm and comfortable study, without a thought of the men who are perishing in misery every day.

But if the problem appears thus in the presence of different tendencies in the Church, it becomes yet far more insistent within the consciousness of the individual. If we are thoughtful, we must see that the desire to know and the desire to be saved

are widely different. The scholar must apparently assume the attitude of an impartial observer - an attitude which seems absolutely impossible to the pious Christian laying hold upon Jesus as the only Saviour from the load of sin. If these two activities - on the one hand the acquisition of knowledge, and on the other the exercise and the inculcation of simple faith - are both to be given a place in our lives, the question of their proper relationship cannot be ignored. The problem is made for us the more difficult of solution because we are unprepared for it. Our whole system of school and college education is so constituted as to keep religion and culture as far apart as possible and ignore the question of the relationship between them.

A man can believe only what he holds to be true. We are Christians because we hold Christianity to be true. But other men hold Christianity to be false. Who is right? That question can be settled only by an examination and comparison of the reasons adduced on both sides. It is true, one of the grounds for our belief is an inward experience that we cannot share--the great experience begun by conviction of sin and conversion and continued by communion with God--an experience which other men do not possess, and upon which, therefore, we cannot directly base an argument. But if our position is correct, we ought at least to be able to show the other man that his reasons may be inconclusive. And that involves careful study of both sides of the question. Furthermore, the field of Christianity is the world. The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavour. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom must be advanced not merely extensively, but also intensively. The Church must seek to conquer not merely every

man for Christ, but also the whole of man. We are accustomed to encourage ourselves in our discouragements by the thought of the time when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. No less inspiring is the other aspect of that same great consummation. That will also be a time when doubts have disappeared, when every contradiction has been removed, when all of science converges to one great conviction, when all of art is devoted to one great end, when all of human thinking is permeated by the refining, ennobling influence of Jesus, when every thought has been brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ.

We are all agreed that at least one great function of the Church is the conversion of individual men. The missionary movement is the great religious movement of our day. Now it is perfectly true that men must be brought to Christ one by one. There are no labour-saving devices in evangelism. It is all hand-work. And yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that all men are equally well prepared to receive the gospel. It is true that the decisive thing is the regenerative power of God. But as a matter of fact God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favourable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.

But by whom is this task of transforming the unwieldy, resisting mass of human thought until it becomes subservient to the gospel - by whom is this task to be accomplished? To some

extent by professors in theological seminaries and universities; but the ordinary minister of the gospel cannot shirk his responsibility. It is a great mistake to suppose that investigation can successfully be carried on by a few specialists whose work is of interest to nobody but themselves. Many men of many minds are needed. What we need first of all, especially in our African churches, is a more general interest in the problems of theological science. Without that, the specialist is without the stimulating atmosphere which nerves him to do his work.

But no matter what his station in life, the scholar must be a regenerated man--he must yield to no one in the intensity and depth of his religious experience. We are well supplied in the world with excellent scholars who are without that qualification. They are doing useful work in detail, in Biblical philology, in exegesis, in Biblical theology, and in other branches of study. But they are not accomplishing the great task, they are not assimilating modern thought to Christianity, because they are without that experience of God's power in the soul which is of the essence of Christianity. They have only one side for the comparison. Modern thought they know, but Christianity is really foreign to them. It is just that great inward experience which it is the function of the true Christian scholar to bring into some sort of connection with the thought of the world.

Modern culture is a tremendous force. It affects all classes of society. It affects the ignorant as well as the learned. What is to be done about it? In the first place, the Church may simply withdraw from the conflict. She may simply allow the mighty stream of modern thought to flow by unheeded and do her work merely in the back-eddies of the current. There are still some men in the world who have been unaffected by modern culture. They may still be won for Christ without intellectual labour. And they must be won. It is useful, it is necessary work. Yet the culture of today cannot simply be rejected as a whole. It is not like the pagan culture of the first century. It is not wholly non-

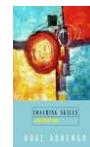
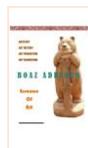
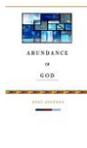
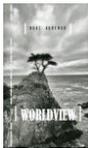
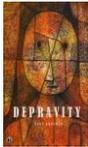
Christian. Much of it has been derived directly from the Bible. There are significant movements in it, going to waste, which might well be used for the defence of the gospel. The situation is complex. Some of modern thought must be refuted. The rest must be made subservient. But nothing in it can be ignored. He that is not with us is against us. Modern culture is a mighty force. It is either subservient to the gospel or else it is the deadliest enemy of the gospel. For making it subservient, religious emotion is not enough, intellectual labour is also necessary. And that labour is being neglected. The Church has turned to easier tasks. And now she is reaping the fruits of her indolence. Now she must battle for her life.

The situation is desperate. It might discourage us. But not if we are truly Christians. Not if we are living in vital communion with the risen Lord. If we are really convinced of the truth of our message, then we can proclaim it before a world of enemies, then the difficulty of our task, the very scarcity of our allies becomes an inspiration, then we can even rejoice that God did not place us in an easy age, but in a time of doubt and perplexity and battle. Then, too, we shall not be afraid to call forth other soldiers into the conflict.

The Church is puzzled by the world's indifference. She is trying to overcome it by adapting her message to the fashions of the day. But if, instead, before the conflict, she would descend into the secret place of meditation, if by the clear light of the gospel she would seek an answer not merely to the question of the hour but, first of all, to the eternal problems of the spiritual world, then perhaps, by God's grace, through His good Spirit, in His good time, she might issue forth once more with power, and an age of doubt might be followed by the dawn of an era of faith.

# Also by Boaz Adhengo

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