

# *Resistance to Christianity:*

*A Chronological Encyclopedia of Heresy  
from the Beginning to the Eighteenth  
Century*

**by Raoul Vaneigem**

**Translated by Bill Brown**

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## Translator's Introduction

Born on 21 March 1934 in Lessines, Belgium, Raoul Vaneigem is best known for being a member of the Situationist International (the "SI"), which he joined in 1961. An unusual grouping of radical European artists, filmmakers and writers, the SI was founded in 1957 and dissolved in 1972. Between those years, the group reinvented the theory of proletarian revolution and propagated it through a journal called *Internationale Situationniste*, several books (including Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations*, first published in 1967 and translated into English as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*); and a number of scandalous provocations. The SI was deeply involved in the protests, riots and occupations that nearly toppled the French government in May-June 1968.

For Vaneigem, who is both an atheist and an anarchist, religious values and behaviors – guilt, self-hatred, fear of pleasure, hope for a future heaven on earth and, above all, contempt for the body and for the earth – persist even among those who consider themselves to be atheists and anarchists. They persist, not only in their political ideologies, which are often informed by the notions and practices of hard work, self-sacrifice and intellectual and moral superiority, but also in their emotional and psychological states, which are often dominated by weariness, resignation, self-contempt and a sense of impotence. Just like capitalists and bureaucrats employed by the State, atheists and anarchists all too often neglect or abuse their personal health, their capacities for sexual pleasure and the roles that women play in their organizations and actions.

First published by Fayard in 1993 as *La Résistance au christianisme, les heresies des origines au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, this book is a sober and serious historical (albeit subjective) investigation into the rise and fall of Judeo-Christianity. In his "Introduction" to *Le Mouvement du Libre-Esprit, Généralités et témoignages sur les affleurements de la vie à la surface du Moyen Âge, de la Renaissance et, incidemment, de notre époque*, which was first published in 1986 and translated into English as *The Movement of the Free Spirit* in 1998, Vaneigem says,

I want to challenge those who dehumanize history, seeing it as fated and fatal: hence my wish to pay homage to those who refused to give in to the idea that history moves toward some inevitable outcome. I want also to seek out signs of life, behind the edifices of religious and ideological obscurantism, and in so doing I hope to dispense once and for all with the cherished but no less dubious notion of a Christian Middle Ages.

Substitute (all of) “Western civilization” for “Middle Ages” and you will have an idea of what Vaneigem is up to in *Resistance to Christianity*.

In this incredibly ambitious project, Vaneigem both relies heavily upon and disagrees with a number of traditional historians, but especially Norman Cohn, the author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements*. Originally published in 1957, and revised and reprinted in 1961, this pioneering and exceptionally influential work claims that,

Although it would be a gross over-simplification to identify the [Medieval] world of chiliastic exaltation with the world of social unrest, there were many times when needy and discontented masses were captured by some millennial prophet. And when that happened movements were apt to arise which, though relatively small and short-lived, can be seen in retrospect to bear a startling resemblance to the great totalitarian movements of our own day [...] The time seems ripe for an examination of those remote foreshadowings of present conditions. If such an enquiry can throw no appreciable light on the workings of established totalitarian states, it might, and I think it does, throw considerable light on the sociology and psychology of totalitarian movements in their revolutionary heyday.

As Greil Marcus notes in *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*, the situationists “would carefully plunder” Cohn’s book, which was published in France in 1962 under the title *Fanatiques de l’Apocalypse*.

But the situationists saw the validity of Cohn’s hypothesis only when it was inverted. In *La Société du spectacle* (first published in 1967 and since then translated into English as *The Society of the Spectacle* by several different translators), Guy Debord, a co-founder of the SI, points out that,

The great European peasant revolts were attempts to *respond to the history* that had violently torn them from the patriarchal slumber that feudal tutelage had guaranteed. This was the millenarian utopia of *the terrestrial realization of paradise*, which brought back to the forefront what had been at the origin of semi-historical religion, when the Christian communities, like the Judaic Messianism from which they sprang, responding to the troubles and misfortunes of their time, expected the imminent realization of God’s Kingdom and added elements of disquiet and subversion to ancient society [...] So,

contrary to what Norman Cohn believes he has demonstrated in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, modern revolutionary hopes are not irrational sequels to the religious passions of millenarianism. Quite the contrary: millenarianism, which is revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, was already a modern revolutionary tendency, which still lacks *the consciousness of only being historical*. The millenarians had to lose because they could not recognize revolution as their proper project. The fact that they waited to act until there was an external sign of God's decision was a translation onto the level of thought of a practice in which insurgent peasants followed leaders from outside their ranks.

Though he generally accredits this analysis, Vaneigem's position in *Resistance to Christianity* is somewhat more nuanced. As he states in Chapter 33, "The great revolutionary movements gave to millenarianism a more ideological than religious form – nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate the role of irrational and Joachimite faith in Nazi millenarianism, that is to say, in the antithesis of the projects for a classless society or an ecological paradise, both brought to consciousness by the successive waves of the economy." But unlike both Cohn and Debord (who once half-jokingly proclaimed "The Cathars Were Right"), Vaneigem does not see a general consistency or uniformity in millenarianism. In his "Introduction" to *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, he says, "The partisans of the Free Spirit were divided on one fundamental issue."

Driven by their will to follow nature, some identified with God and the ordinariness of his tyranny, using force, violence, constraint and seduction to secure the right to gratify their whims and passions. Others refused to countenance such a union between a despotic God and a denatured nature, a union whose exploitation found perfect expression in the myth of a divinity at once pitiful and pitiless. Instead they saw the refinement of their desires and the quest for a ubiquitous and sovereign amorous pleasure as a way of replacing the spiritualized animal and its labor of adaptation with an authentic human species capable of creating the conditions favorable to its own harmonious development.

All through *Resistance to Christianity*, Vaneigem will highlight this division or disagreement among the so-called heretics. It is in fact the central theme of the book: he says "yes" to Simon of Samaria and Marguerite Porete, and "no" to the Cathars and Thomas Münzter. As he writes in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*,

Once this division has been drawn, and its significance has been recognized, the reader might fully understand the peculiar character of ‘modern life.’ Over the course of human history, have we not overcome all of the obstacles to freedom and happiness on earth that have been erected by the economy? Have we not ceased to be ruled and made miserable by the gods, God, the Church, kings and princes, dictators and political ideologies of all stripes? Yes, indeed – but we remain constrained by the economy itself, that is to say, by work and the commodity, by the production and consumption of pollution.

My translation of *Resistance to Christianity* (it is the only one to date) has been available online as HTML files since 2007. In 2013, this translation was thoroughly revised and corrected. I have decided to make it available now as a PDF as well, partly in response to requests from my readers, partly in anticipation of publishing it as a printed volume.

The original French volume includes both footnotes and endnotes by the author: the former, which are generally reserved for commentary (there are a few exceptions), are marked by asterisks; the latter, which are always reserved for the attribution of source materials and quotations, are marked by Arabic numerals. In my translation, all of these notes appear as footnotes.

As the reader will see, I have taken the liberty of offering my own footnotes. I have done so to translate phrases or words that were not in French in the original text; to elucidate references that might be obscure to his readers in the English-speaking world; and to draw the reader’s attention to connections that she might find interesting.

When necessary, I have supplied within brackets [thus] words that the author failed to include. If I relished a certain play on words or did not choose a literal rendering of a word or phrase, I have supplied the original French in italics and within brackets [*ainsi*]. When the author’s sentences have contained a great many sub-clauses, I have used parentheses (like this) for the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion. But when parentheses appear in quotations taken from the works of other writers, they have always been supplied by Vaneigem himself, and not by me.

Bill Brown  
New York City  
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## Author's Foreword

The rising tide of the commodity has not left standing a single traditional value of the past on the shore where two thousand years of the Christian era have come to an end. By ruining the mass ideologies that had zealously brought down the religious edifice, at a time when the State took over for God in the conduct of [terrestrial] affairs, did not this tide inevitably push towards annihilation the remains of a Church whose mysteries were socialized by The Council of the Vatican II?

The indifference into which the beliefs governed by rituals performed by the Party or the ecclesiastical bureaucracy are today stuck awakens an interest in their history that no longer supports an obsolete worry, no matter if it is apologetic or denigrating, but quite simply the curiosity preoccupied with its own pleasure and taking pride in the game of discovering what the official truths were so zealous to bury under the *ultima ratio*<sup>1</sup> of their dogmatic canon.

Could one imagine that Christianity, cleansed of the sacred apparatus by the great waters of commercialism would be able to escape from the crusher that has, in less than a half-century, broken the sacrificial rocks that the generations adored, with a mixture of fascination and terror, under the names of nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism?

Now that nothing exists of the shipwrecks of yore than a sea that is slack and weakly agitated by the fixed grin of mockery, it is a manner of archaeology that suits the objects that have long been sprinkled with a gangue of holiness; arousing respect or profanation, they have until now hardly solicited, I wouldn't say impartiality, but the naïve indiscretion of a discoverer devoid of prejudices and guile.

In the same way that it is now permitted to examine the birth, development and decline of Bolshevism, without exposing oneself to accusations of materialism, spiritualism, Marxism, revisionism, Stalinism or Trotskyism – which today give rise to smiles and yet are paid for in blood – focus on the Christian religion has been cleansed of the repudiations and praises of theology and philosophy, of the archaic *trompe-l'oeil* confrontation in which the God of some and the non-God of the others meet up in the heaven of ideas at the same vanishing point, at the same abstraction of corporeal and earthy reality.

With the feeling for the pre-eminence of the living mingles an astonishment that, for the one who remains naïve [*pour candide qu'il demeure*], experiences the

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<sup>1</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “the final argument.”



desire to know why and by which channels the world of ideas has so often required in exchange for chimerical horizons its pound of flesh slashed in the heart.

The crisis of transformation, which today corners the economy into destroying itself or into reconstructing itself (in either case, taking the world along with it), at least has the merit of opening up minds to the origin of inhumanity and the means of remedying it. The politics of sterilization that has made gangrenous the planet, [whole] societies, mindsets and bodies has demonstrated, by the pertinence of its extreme situation, how mankind – subjecting nature and his fellow men to market exploitation – produces, at the expense of the living, an economy that subjugates the living to a power that, at first, is mythical and then ideological.

Moved by a system of exchanges that they had created and that, while tearing themselves from themselves, determined them without ever completely mechanizing their bodies, their consciousnesses or their Unconscious, individuals, over the course of the millennia, have been nothing with respect to the formidable power that feeds upon their blood. How could their miserable lot not induce them to put the halo of an absolute authority as perfect as the celestial vault on the transcendence of a Father whose decrees managed fortune with the misfortune that proclaimed its eternal and capricious instance for generations on end?

Invested with an extra-terrestrial sovereignty, the mythical meaning of which only the priests had the power to decrypt, the economy, nevertheless, was inclined to unveil its fundamental materiality through the interests that, in a free-for-all that one could no longer profane, brought forth temporal masters and tycoons.

Religion – that is to say, “that which binds” – placed in the hands of a fantastic deity the central link in a chain that, enclosing tyranny and slavery from one end to the other, anchored to the earth the celestial power that the scorn of people for themselves had consecrated as sovereign, changeless, and intangible.

Thus God drew from the cyclical and archaic world, which was enclosed within the ramparts and moats of the agrarian economy, a durability that was ceaselessly contradicted during great tumults concerning the “end of time” by the innovative politics of commerce and free-exchange, which untied the loop of mythic time, corroded the sacred with acerbic spittle, and introduced the Trojan Horse of progress into the citadels of conservatism.

Nevertheless, despite the state of conflict that, in endemic fashion, opposed the conquest of markets to landed property, their antagonistic emanations – temporal and spiritual kings and priests, philosophy and theology – did not cease to constitute the two halves of God as long as the agrarian structure and its mentality remained dominant.

By decapitating Louis XVI, the last monarch of the Divine Right, the French Revolution killed the two-headed hydra of temporal and spiritual power, whose

most recent infamy in a long line of heinous crimes caused the young Knight of La Barre<sup>2</sup> to be brought to the scaffold for the crime of impiety.

If Rome, deprived of the secular arms that maintained the truth of its dogma, slowly fell to the rank of a spiritual scarecrow, this happened because the era of the lords and priests and its dominant economy did not come to its aid, thus removing from its penal ferocity the means of its arrogance.

The *Ancien Régime*, definitively broken under the inexorable mass of market freedom and democracy reduced to the lucrative, dismantled itself at the same time that it dismantled its ramparts, chateaux, siege mentality, and old mythic thought.

At that moment, God succumbed to the magical spell of a State that was able to rule without the guarantee of its celestial accomplice [*acolyte*]. Christianity then entered the spectacular history of the commodity. At the dawn of the Twenty-First Century,<sup>3</sup> Christianity will be destroyed, just like the other herd-instinct ideologies have been.

The fact that a kind of religious spirit and the sinister color of fanaticism continue to subsist at the heart of systems of ideas that supplant Christian mythology – including opinions that are the most furiously hostile to Christian allegiances – is demonstrated by the elation of the militants and the hysteria of crowds during the great masses solemnly held by the tribunes and haranguers of nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism.

The hysterical wrenching that throws man beyond his body in order to identify with a collective and abstract body – a nation, a State, a party, a cause – is indistinguishable from spiritual membership, I might even say spiritual adhesion, to a God whose glance, injected with solicitude and scorn, symbolically expresses the relations between the mechanical abstraction of profit and a living matter that is open to ruthless exploitation.

Thus there have been more crises in the last three decades than in the previous ten millennia. By selling ideologies from the shelves of indifference, the *self-services*<sup>4</sup> of the consumable-at-any-price have, *volens nolens*,<sup>5</sup> stripped the

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, the hostility – insidious or declared – of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish establishments with respect to a novelist who'd been condemned to death by Islamic fanaticism for impiety speaks volumes about the democratic sincerity and the spirit of tolerance willingly boasted of by those diverse sectarians of the “true God,” who are quite fortunately deprived of the help of State terrorism.

<sup>3</sup> An arbitrary dating system that accredits a Messiah and still recalls the extravagant appropriation of time by the Church.

<sup>4</sup> *Translator*: English in original.

<sup>5</sup> *Translator*: Latin in original, meaning “willingly or unwillingly.”

individual of the character armor that hides himself from himself, condemning him to constrained desires, without another way out than letting off steam than the dead passion of destroying and being destroyed. Thus, little by little, one sees the awakening of a will to live that has never ceased to appeal to the creation and pleasure that unites the self and the world. Isn't it henceforth a matter of each person attaining the amorous possession of the universe?

Just yesterday an object manipulated by a Spirit and nourished by its very substance, the individual – discovering on the earth and in his/her flesh the place of his/her living reality – today becomes the subject of a destiny that will be constructed by a renewed alliance with nature. Wearied by artificial desires that ascribed to him lucrative reason and that, over the centuries, led him where he had nothing to do, the individual contemplates with an amused curiosity the objects that have objectified him and litter the shores of his past, fragments of a death that, today, is refused.

Although weak enthusiasm for herd-like manifestations indicates a constant decrease of religious and ideological faith in the industrialized countries, the folliculars [*les folliculaires*] – able by fits and starts to galvanize a desperately lethargic, everyday spectacle – haven't failed, [while standing] before several momentary revivals of archaism and barbarity, to cry for the return of religion and nationalism. But, as Diderot asks, which ass will pass this shit? Which economic imperative will make a buttress for the ramparts of another age, hastily re-erected by desperation and resentment, and will prevent them from crumbling under the weight of the emptiness to be gained?

There is no doubt that the end of religious institutions doesn't mean the end of religiosity. Driven out by the debacle of the great ideologies – imperfectly satisfied by the sects, more and more badly lodged at the Churches (Catholic or Protestant) – the Christian sentiment now searches for new trickle beds [*lits d'écoulement*].

Will it spread out in favor of a landscape that ecological transformation is preparing to remodel? Some people smell it in the trails of ecological capitalism that draws off from de-pollution a profitability that the desertification of soils, sub-soils, and hopes for survival hardly guarantees any more. When celestial vocations are invested in terrestrial divinities (Gaia, Magna Mater, sylphs, dryads or other elementary forces), the name of the speculator makes little difference. Any belief that demands [self-] sacrifice is repugnant to the human.

On the other hand, I am delighted by the apprenticeship of the autonomy that, due the collapse of the supporters of and supports for the past, engenders the necessity of going it alone. The end of crowds, the [emergence of the] individual consciousness of the fight for life, the resolution to vanquish the fear of self (from which all the other fears are derived), the emergence of a creativity that,

substituting itself for the work that doesn't allow new generations to move toward a veritable humanity that, if its advent is not unavoidable, resides – for the first time in history – in the hands of men and women, and, more particularly, children who are educated in the pleasure of life, rather than in its morbid refusal.

Such is the perspective according to which I wish to examine the resistance that the inclination to natural liberty has, for nearly twenty centuries, opposed to the *antiphysis*<sup>6</sup> of Christian oppression.

In any domain whatsoever (historical, scientific, philosophical, social, economic or artistic), I cannot conceive of an analysis that would claim to work outside of the individual history in which are inscribed the everyday gestures of the one who has resolved to undertake that analysis. Although circumstances have spared me from contact with the religious thing, I have always experienced a singular repulsion for the mortified empire that is armored with a cross that's been driven into the heart of all those who are born into life. Thus, I understand the indignation of Karlheinz Deschner when his *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*<sup>7</sup> denounces the murders, impostures and falsifications committed by the Catholic Church, but I do not know at what point his polemic, by penetrating into the very terrain of the adversary, gains the recognition and interest that he has every reason to claim for himself. And why revive the embers of the millennium pyre with angry breaths, when the wind of a new time has condemned them to be extinguished?

Besides, is there not something that protects those who are attacked by the virtues of the menacing tone in the simple, obvious fact that atheists, freethinkers, anti-clericals and other militants of the “Good God in Shit”<sup>8</sup> – far from giving up Judeo-Christian comportment – have often gone over to its most odious practices: self-sacrifice, cults of the martyr, guilt, making people feel guilty, hatred of amorous desire, scorn for the body, fascination with the Spirit, quests for salvational suffering, fanaticism, and obedience to a master, a cause, a party? What better tribute to orthodoxy than heresy, than the non-conformism that infatuates itself with contesting the axis around which it gravitates?

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<sup>6</sup> *Translator*: In the works of Rabelais, Physis is joyful and unashamed, and Antiphysis is hateful and destructive.

<sup>7</sup> *Translator*: The first volume of *The Criminal History of Christianity* was published in German in 1986. The author (born in 1924) has most recently published Volume 8 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Translator*: an anonymous song from the 19th century, sung by Ravachol before his execution in 1892.

Hardly interested in arbitrating the dubious combat between victims and executioners, I prefer to free from the past – in which the forgotten, scorned, misunderstood, prejudged and calumniated are buried and stratified by the famous objectivity of the historians – the healing that the human tissue, irrigated by the freedoms of nature, untiringly works in order to reconstitute and strengthen itself by weaving the social network, despite the deleterious effects of fear, dereliction, suffering, faith in the beyond and the consolations of death.

Thus I seek to seize the living from beneath the dead things that have taken hold of it through a subtle mix of violence and persuasion – the living that has in fact been revived under the gaze of beings and things that are no longer indentified according to the traditional perspective in which God, the State and the Economy collect the tears of the terrestrial valleys for a happiness that is put off for another time and place, but are trembling from the beating of the wings of the living, more perceptible today because they longer suffer [under] the weight of the old oppressions.

Therefore, the reasons to be amazed by a life that is so obstinate that it flowers again by breaking up through the asphalt of an inhuman history [also] raise, in counterpoint, several doubts about the honesty and quality of the scholars and specialists who are accustomed to covering this history as if it were conquered terrain.

I know that a theologian, who makes a career by painting his God in order to expostulate about the radiance to the blind who do not perceive the ordinary evidence of it, orders the facts according to his manner of belief; that he gives his jargon the appearance of sensible language, calling desire “temptation,” pleasure “sin,” the embrace of lovers “fornication”; that he venerates with the title of “saint” the emulators of the heroes of the people honored by Lenin; that he uses the Gospels in the way that Stalin accorded truth to the *Soviet Encyclopedia*. This is what follows, not from the lie, but from proselytism. Encountering the same attitude when it is held by a historian who isn’t inspired by vast designs is enough, one will agree, to leave one perplexed.

What is one to think of the university scholars who are instructed in the science of dismissing the authenticity of manuscripts that have been handed from copyist to copyist and stuffed with interpolations, who nevertheless comment upon (as if they were original texts) and date at the very beginning of the Christian era the *Epistles* – which were rewritten, if not actually written, by Marcion, reorganized by Tatian, and submitted to corrections up until the Fourth Century – but attributed to a certain Saul, called Paul of Tarsus, a Roman citizen who lived around 60, when in point of fact Tarsus was only Romanized in 150?

No one is unaware that the manuscripts of the canonical Gospels and the *Acts of the Apostles* appeared in the Fourth Century at the earliest and

constituted – under the aegis of Constantine – the library of propaganda that Eusebius of Caesarea and his scribes revised and distributed to all the Churches that were thus universalized on the same dogmatic base. Apparently, these facts aren't of the type to trouble the good consciences of the researchers who, with a beautiful unanimity, take them for reports by living beings who were nearly contemporaries with the witnesses or apostles of an Adonai, Kyrios or Lord whose name (Joshua/Jesus) hardly imposes itself in its symbolic meaning of “God saved, saves, will save” until the very end of the First Century. The only dissonances in this ecstatic concert are the atheists Dupuy, Alfarcic, Couchoud, Kryvelev, and Dubourg; the Catholics Loisy and Guillemin; and the Protestant Bultmann.

To designate polytheism and the cults of the “strangers to faith,” few of these scholars have qualms about using the terms “pagans” and “paganism,” by which the Church signified its scorn for the beliefs of the *pagani*, peasants, hicks, and bumpkins impermeable to the civilization of the towns. What about the angels of the Jewish pantheon, the semi-legendary Paul and Peter, the agnostic Irenaeus, the philosopher Augustine of Hippone, the anti-Semite Jerome, the spiritual master of the Inquisition, Dominique de Gizman, and the massacerer of the Fraticelles, Jean de Capistrano? Many of them were given the title “saint,” with which the Church compensated its real and mythic servants. There are biographies of Stalin in which, without derision, he is called “Little Father of the People.”

It falls to atheism to furnish with the weapons of critique one of the most preemptory arguments of the Church, namely, the historical existence of this Joshua/Jesus, which accredits the legitimacy of its temporal power. Enraged enough to deny the divinity of Christ, a militancy of presumed free-thought will fall into the trap of this Jesus, friend of the poor, a kind of Socrates preaching the truths of a socialism of the Gospels and then dying on the cross due to the insolence of a pacifist tribune. Tertullian and the Christian movement of the New Prophecy could not have dreamed of a better future for their hero – freshly purged of his Semitism and disguised as Zorro for the edification and salvation of the working class – than what existed in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Once one admits the existence of an agitator and founder of the Church, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate – and this without the least contemporary [corroborating] testimony and while the name Jesus for a long time kept the meaning of the Biblical Joshua –, why be surprised that learned minds adopt the false listing of popes and bishops that was drafted by Eusebius of Caesarea and that back-dates the canonical texts, interpolates into writings from the Second Century citations that date from the controversies of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, and accuses of heresy – as if they were articulated in the year 30 [C.E.] around an orthodoxy that had scarcely begun in 325 [C.E.] – the Dosithian, Nazarene, Sethian, Naassene, Ebionite, Melchisedequian, Elchasaite, Carpocratian,

Basilidian, Marcionite, Anti-Marcionite, Montanist, Valentinian, Marcosian, Bardesarian and Novatian doctrines that mixed together ideas of many origins and that the Constantinian Church – by crushing, remodeling and readjusting them – would use to fashion the unstable foundations of its dogma?

In the manner of Stalin recuperating Bolshevism and shooting Lenin's companions, the Catholic "fathers" *a posteriori* condemned as heterodoxy, not only non-Christian choices (*hairesis* in Greek), but also the diverse Christianities on which the throne of Constantine was raised. And the historians have followed suit by discerning around Peter, "the first Pope of Rome," the meritorious efforts of a Catholic Church that struggled with a heretical perversion that corrupted the integrity of its canonical teachings.

Although it does not appear to me denuded of utility to emphasize such an imposture at a time when one quite incorrectly thinks that the pontifical authority and the clerical bureaucrats have survived the collapse of the last totalitarian citadels, I have found less charm in rectifying the opinion that nothing – other than some inertia of thought – continues to support the pretension to uncover under the leathery history of the past these innervations of the living, which are often frail and yet generate a force that is incomparably more effective than critical consciousness in the attempt to cleave the tombstones of oppression.

What is recovered under the label of heresy, the label by which the Church subjugated to its control, by naming them, diverse human and inhuman behaviors, the condemnation of which reinforced the superior power of orthodoxy? Episcopalian rivalries and internecine struggles, such as Arianism, monophysism and English Lollardism. And the lopsided walk of the body limping from constraint to license, from asceticism to debauchery, from repression to release, which the markets in penitence and death exploited with remarkable skill. And even a more secret attitude, an object of perplexity to the religious police: the individual will to create – in opposition to the social forms of *antiphysis* – a destiny that was better suited to the promises of a nature that had, until then, been relegated by its exploitation to the "beyond" of the human. One will easily divine the types of heresies or irreligious afterglows to which my curiosity is the most willingly attached.

For the sake of several readers who are familiar with the *Traité de savoir-vivre*, the *Livre des plaisirs* and the *Adresse aux vivants*,<sup>9</sup> I make it clear that my

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<sup>9</sup> *Translator*: Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes générations* (Gallimard, 1967), translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* by Donald Nicholson-Smith (PM Press, 2013); *Le Livre des plaisirs* (Encre, 1979), translated as *The Book of Pleasures* by John Fullerton (Pending Press, 1983),

apostil in *Mouvement du libre-esprit*<sup>10</sup> is applicable here: “A book has no other genius than the genius that comes out of it for the pleasure of living better. It is thus understood, from the beginning, that the study of the Free Spirit does not relieve me of such a demand [in my private life]” [*ne relève pas, pour moi, d’une telle exigence*].

On the other hand, a single merit must be granted to this work: that the solicitations of the pleasures of knowing and the pleasures of the gay science are known as much as possible. As a summary that, in the course of time, reveals itself to be the weeding of an uncertain history, this book, I feel, will at least escape the risk of competing for the most errors, ignorant remarks and unfounded hypotheses with the majority of the volumes, monographs and scholarly works that have, in our era, been piled on the heads of Jesus, the apostles and their universal legatees.

If it is, finally, necessary to furnish an excuse for a style of writing in which one hardly finds the care that I try to give to the books that are not too far removed from my way of my life, I would like simply to say that each matter has been given the treatment that it suggests.

January 1992

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and *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne* (Seghers, 1990), not yet translated into English.

<sup>10</sup> *Translator: Le Mouvement du libre-esprit* (Editions Ramsey, 1986), translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson as *The Movement of the Free Spirit* (Zone Books, 1994). Note well the translation of the apostil Vaneigem mentions: “If it is true that the test of a book’s intelligence is what it can offer toward the pleasure of living better, let me say, right from the start, that there is no such intention in my study of the movement of the Free Spirit” (p. 12).



## Chapter 1: A Nation Sacrificed to History

[There is no more] singular and paradoxical destiny than that of the Jewish people. The Books or *Biblia*, which, under the name “Bible,” founded the Hebraic mythology, raised that people to the elective glory of a unique God, who aspired to reign over all of humanity. Invested with an eternal and universal truth, the Jews only entered into the design attributed to YHWH at the cost of an effacement in time and space, of which no nation offers such an unhappy example.

Born from a Statist centralism that unified the nomads, hastily made sedentary on newly conquered territories, the arrogance of the God of the holy wars – by a cruel irony – would not cease to be puffed up with the wind of prediction to the extent that the temporal power of the Hebrews, far from seizing the world in order to propagate obedience to YHWH, would succumb under the blows of the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, and would find itself extirpated from the very places in which it had been established over the course of nearly two millennia.

That a nation unanimously placed its fate in the hands of a God and experienced hostility, hate, and scorn everywhere and for so long – its strange specificity doesn’t lie in this. But what surprises us is the fact that this nation kept faith and confidence in, and accredited, a deity that was quite the contrary to it.

Situating themselves in a mythical history, the temporal aspect of which was only the shadow of the divine will, the Jews submitted (as to a malediction to which they subscribed in advance) to an historical exclusion from which they only returned in the Twentieth Century by obliterating the religious under the timestamp of social preoccupations. Today, few believers deny that the army and the cooperative system offer to Israel better guarantees than those of YHWH.

It’s about time. Vilified, oppressed, massacred, and imprisoned in ghettos, they had not ceased to interpret the nightmare in an exegetical way. The malediction confirmed their status as the Chosen People; it conferred upon them – through water, fire, the blood of sacrifice and redemption, ordeal and salvation, expiation and redemption – an existence that was, so to speak, metaphysical, *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>11</sup>

Expelled from Palestine in 135 [C.E.], after the collapse of their last insurrection, the Jews would be stripped of their religion by a Christianity that

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<sup>11</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “under the aspect of eternity.”

issued from Judaism, the political career of which would emerge in the West in the Fourth Century under a Catholicism that conducted pogroms.

There isn't space enough here to make clear the detours by which a conquering will was transformed into resignation, nay, into dereliction, but it won't be useless to emphasize what one can call the opening out of Hebrew expansionist ambitions.

While a succession of reversals, saluted by prophetic agitators as just divine punishments, swelled with anger and blood the unmerciful myth of the God of Israel, a more pacific conquest made itself clear. Namely, a Diaspora extended to the four corners of the world colonies of Jews who, due to the intransigence with which they treated the question of the one God, did not find it repugnant to compromise when necessary to safeguard their right to asylum and their financial interests. It was here, in the opening of the spirit that imposed the laws of commerce, that cruel YHWH gave way to a more compassionate God, while Mosaic rigor accommodated itself to a relaxation of its rituals. It was here that the "treason" of Judaism would foment itself; that Essenean Judeo-Christianity was established to Hellenize itself.

Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman imperialism included in their respective expansionist politics the recognition of the gods honored by the vanquished nations. Nevertheless, after Babylon, the Greeks and Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and proscribed the cult of YHWH who allowed no other God than himself.

Once it accomplished the conquest of the territories of Canaan, the young and precarious Hebrew state remained on the defensive. It took root in an agrarian structure. Reassembling the nomads, it cemented the nation in a monotheistic bloc in which God, in solidarity with his people, created the Earth so that they could cultivate it and impose his law everywhere.

YHWH was still a God in formation when the Babylonian invasion of the Seventh Century [B.C.E.] brought down a serious blow upon the unitary myth, already dented by the schism between Judea and Samaria. YHWH had scarcely begun to distinguish himself from the Canaanite God El, a God of women and children, and whose plural form, Elohim, would not be foreign to the future dualism of Samaritan Jewish Gnosticism.

The local trading posts of the Diaspora did not constitute the bridgeheads, the billets of troops who were quick to open up paths for the merchants. But nonetheless there were Jewish slaves where the synagogue represented the Temple of Jerusalem. Although they were proselytes, these slaves isolated themselves in a defensive posture, as if the immobility of the sacerdotal caste that ruled over Judea, Samaria and Galilee was weighing them down.

The dynamism of the industrious Jewish classes got entangled in the nets of the Sadducean bureaucracy, the aristocratic caste of the functionaries of the Temple. Its conservatism concretized the God of conquest who had struck his powerless believers and who held as a salutary expiation the gift that they made to him every day of their existence.

The development of the modernist party, Phariseism, arrived too late, when the Jewish nation was only a colony that the successive empires indirectly inherited. The Pharisees also clashed with revolts of the extremist type that limited their project of massacring the *goyim*, or nonbelievers, and adoring YHWH. When Essenism broke with the Yahwehism of the Temple, it undertook to promote an ascetic rigor that would nourish the fanatical guerrillas of the Zealots against the Roman occupation and Pharisee collaboration.

Lacking a bite on history, the Jewish people, made toothless by an all-powerful God who had chosen them, condemned themselves to various holocausts.

Many times re-written and revised, the original kernels of the first Biblical texts date from the 10th and 11th centuries before the Christian era [B.C.E.], shortly after the establishment of the Hebrews in the land of Canaan.

They lived there as semi-nomads and in a mosaic of City-States of the tribes of the Semitic race. Nomads themselves, the Hebrews, whose tribes had visited Mesopotamia and Egypt and had gleaned from them religious beliefs and techniques of organization, seized hold of a part of the land of Canaan under the leadership of a person whom their mythology gave the name Moses.

The formation of the Jewish nation took place around the priest/warrior, who presented himself as the instrument of a patriarchal and creative divinity.

The victorious fights against the raids led by the “peoples of the sea,” the Philistines of the Bible, reinforced the political unity of the Hebraic tribes and designed, with the grand stature of El (who would become YHWH), the triumphant symbols of Hebraic power reduced to annihilating the Semitic nations and their archaic gods: Dagan (the Dagon of the Bible), Ashtoreth or Astarte, and Baal-Zebub, popularized much later under the diabolical traits of Beelzebub.

Around 1,000 [B.C.E.] perhaps King David inaugurated monotheistic syncretism, because Statist centralism needed a transcendent power to impose its cohesion on the tribes, which had traditionally been independent. Arrogating to himself the functions of the high priest, this temporal monarch canonized his power to guide the people chosen by El, the Father, creator of the universe and mankind, conceived in order to be obeyed.

The legend attributes to Solomon, son of David, the construction of the first Temple of Jerusalem, symbol of the faith and supremacy of the Jews, monument to monotheism, which hastened to destroy the invaders and that one day would be replaced by the Basilica of Rome.

Nevertheless, the tyranny of Solomon provoked the secession of the northern tribes. Upon his death, they refused obedience to his son and, strong with the consent of Egypt, founded in 900 [B.C.E.] an independent kingdom in which the cult of El-YHWH, imperfectly implanted, clashed with the partisans of the ancient gods.

From then on, Palestine was split between two rival regions: in the south, the kingdom of Judea, with Jerusalem as its capital; in the north, the kingdom of Israel, including Samaria and Galilee (today the West Bank).

Over the centuries, hate and scorn pitted Judea against Samaria, the former sheltering itself in the jealous cult of YHWH; the latter, more tolerant, offering itself to new ideas and Greek influences.

Because the Samaritans weren't part of the Judean tribe, the Judeans considered them to be, not Jews, but *goyim*, non-believers, generally associated with the anathema, "May their bones rot [while they are still alive]."

The opposition between Judeans and Samaritans explains an important part of the Hellenization of Jewish Gnosticism, omnipresent in the first Christianities. It especially explains the anti-Judaism that animated the "Men of the Community," the Essenes, and the fact that Greco-Roman racism would disguise itself as anti-Semitism.

Priding themselves on being the true children of Israel, the Samaritans rejected rabbinical Judaism and only retained as sacred texts the books of the *Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*.

On the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, places of worship were built that the Samaritans believed were more powerful than the Temple at Jerusalem. For them, YHWH, God of war and conquest, had not abolished El, the Father, from whom he issued, nor had he abolished the tetrad that he originally formed with his wife Asterath (Ashtoreth, Astarte), and their sons and daughter.

For the Samaritans, two feminine divinities attenuated the pitiless patriarchy that the Judeans claimed for themselves. So it was not by chance that women occupied a preponderant place in the philosophy of the physician and philosopher Simon, to whom all the varieties of Christianity – and Catholicism in its turn – would impute the origin of a thought radically hostile to the religious spirit.

In 722 [B.C.E.], Samaria succumbed to Assyrian invaders. The population, reduced to servitude, took the road of exile. Thenceforth, foreigners reigned over the territories that the legendary Moses had decreed "the Promised Land" and into which Joshua led his people.

In 586 [B.C.E.], Nebuchadnezzar seized the kingdom of Judea, razed the Temple and destroyed Jerusalem. Among those who survived, the notables and rich people were led away as slaves and "there only remained very few people [...]."

The historians designate the form taken by the religion of the Jewish people after the destruction of the First Temple and the captivity in Babylon as Judaism.”<sup>12</sup>

This defeat – the first in a long series – brought forth an apology as desperate as it was frenzied from the all-powerful God, as well as an exacerbated feeling of collective guilt. Upon each reversal, the litany of wandering prophets exalted the grandeur of YHWH, brooding over in psalm-like fashion the calling of the Jewish people to dominate the world and to prove in its heart the just expiation of its lack of faith.

Thus Biblical mythology resounds with hymns to expansionist snobbery at the same time (in counterpoint) that it chants the harsh harmonies of a ceaselessly repeated guilt. The beating of guilt gives rhythm to the Bible and the flight of broken wings punctuates Hebraic power.

Without too much difficulty, polytheism revoked one or the other of the divinities who were incapable of satisfying the prayers that were addressed to them. Does the supplicant not dare to threaten persecutory measures against the god who maladroitly does his job? But what about when it is a question of a unique God, the father of a national family whose children must fear, tremble, venerate and love, as well? Because YHWH would multiply the Chosen People until they were as numerous as the grains of sand by the sea; he would guarantee them an unequalled prosperity; all peoples would give in before the grandeur of Israel and serve it without a murmur. That history continued to ruin the promise of such brilliant glory – this is not what troubled the believer, who was little disposed to accuse the just and terrible YHWH of perjury, powerlessness and perversity.

No, it was obvious [to the ancient Jews] that the guilty ones were the Jews themselves, unworthy men, who – due to the split between the kingdoms of the North and of the South – had profaned the heritage of David, while the weakness of their zeal drew down the just wrath of the Lord. The cruelest of enemies – the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans – wove between the hands of the Eternal the net of unhappiness and redemption. Because if the children of Israel amended themselves, resigned themselves, welcomed misfortune with a morbid joy – and proclaimed their unshakable confidence in the fire of the ordeal – then divine mercy would bring down upon them his perpetual grace. Such is the essential message of the Biblical prophets and the canonized texts; men are invited to cover themselves with imprecations in order to redeem the incongruous conduct of a God who, having chosen to overwhelm an emerging empire with opprobrium, wouldn't hesitate to annihilate the [whole] universe that he created.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Simon, *Le Judaïsme et le Christianisme antique*, Paris, p. 49.

No doubt this is a unique phenomenon in history – a State, possessed by an invincible God and dispossessed of any victory, in which germinated the project of a universal theocracy, a millennium sanctifying the earth, a holy war in which the combatants had no arms with which to confront the enemy other than the teardrops from their bodies.

Once more, it was in Samaria that, against Yahwist intransigence, there emerged a dualism that opposed a good God, unknowable, ungraspable and not of this world, to the God of war, the Demiurge, creator of a bad world; this was an idea later adopted by Christianity of the Nazarene type, as well as by the hedonistic Gnostics of the Carpocratian school.

Where the political and military development of Judea ends, there begins the myth of religious imperialism.

A veritably imprecatory saga, remodeled from older texts, was inscribed on the steps of the Temple that was sacked by the Babylonians. For past heroes it had the “Judges,” priests and warriors who charged with leading holy war in the name of YHWH. They were helped – and here there was the heritage and recuperation of the pre-Yahwist cults – by women, prophetesses, such as Deborah, who commanded the tribes of the north. The *nazirs* [non-believers], ascetics and combatants devoted to God (Samson, for example), composed the shock troops.

The traditional rivalry between the temporal prince and the priest shows through in the fate reserved for the kings: honored in the narrative books [of the Bible], they were shamed in the prophetic books and the Psalms. For the fanatics of holy war, God was king and had no need of leading his people to the type of victory won by a head of State. Nevertheless, it happened that a particularly pious king took on the traits of a saint and was called *Messiah*, “anointed by the Lord,” which the Greeks translated as *Christos*.

Eli and Elise propagated the cult of YHWH in the towns and countrysides against the sectarians of Baal and the ancient gods. Jeremiah, agent of the Assyrian party against Egypt, preached the uselessness of the struggle against Nebuchadnezzar. He placed the stubborn defense of religion above political preoccupations, as if the unquestionable supremacy of God implied the infallible grandeur of the people among whom growing misery was only the secret sign of a triumph that was all the more assured by its delays in manifesting itself on the derisory level of human temporality.

Under the Roman occupation, the Pharisee party would not act otherwise, collaborating with the enemy for the greater glory of the God who tested it. Situating itself under the eternal gaze of the divinity, the spirit of Judaism claimed to be ahistorical. Prophets and heroes changed names and dates by remaining the same. Adam, Moses, Joshua, and Isaiah did not end up being present at every moment.

Around 550 [B.C.E.], the Babylonian empire could not resist the assault of the Persians. In 536 [B.C.E.], Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and reconstruct the Temple. Only the poorest returned to Palestine. Many exiles enriched themselves in Assyria and Babylon as merchants, entrepreneurs and bankers – in Nippur, the Murashu bank offered a perfect example of the successful Jew. They [the Jews] felt themselves to be among their co-religionists, re-grouped in little communities.

Thus began the pacific phenomenon of expansion – a mix of forcible exile and voluntary emigration – that the Greeks would give the name *diaspora*.

The Diaspora offered the particularity of founding Jewish trading posts that constituted so many enclaves of monotheistic Judaism in *goyische* territory. The closed theology of the agrarian myth was coupled with the spiritual opening that implied commercial practice and the circulation of commodities.

Implanted in polytheism, the synagogue represented the Temple of Jerusalem, but was disentangled from the sacerdotal despotism of the Sadducees and consequently more receptive to religious innovations. It was the place where the Pharisee party and the diverse Essenian-Christian tendencies confronted each other in the First Century.

The end of exile did not involve the re-establishment of a monarchy. Under the control of the Persians, the Jewish State was transformed into a theocracy. The high priest of Jerusalem directed a sacerdotal bureaucracy that, leading a dissolute existence, employed itself in collating and revising the ancient texts, the corpus of which would sanctify the unity of the nation under the shepherd's crook of the supreme God, the only one called upon to reign over the world that he had created. The outcome of the power rivalries in the leadership caste would, much later, produce the Sadducean party, conservator of orthodoxy in the kingdom of Judea that claimed a monopoly over Judaism.

Those who were subjected to despotism sometimes responded to the people of the Temple, whose rapacity was matched by a ritualism that replaced faith, with indifference and passivity, and other times with bouts of religious vehemence, appeals for purification, mortification, and asceticism, which were propagated by prophets who were quick to enflame the latent revolt of artisans, small merchants, and the plebes. Through revelation or “apocalypses” (as the Greeks called them), the illuminati announced in great cries the imminence of the end of time and easily gained the adhesion of the crowds in which shoemakers, carpenters, woodworkers and bakers did not disdain from playing the Rabbi and lending to their claims the rags of religious speculation. Such would be the ferment of future sects.

Even before 450 [B.C.E.], the old Samaritan schism engendered dissidences with Yahwehism. The *Letters from Elephantine* (Assouan), re-written on the occasion of a frontier skirmish between Israeli mercenaries in the service of the

king of the Persians and the Egyptians, showed the importance of the religions distinct from Judean monotheism in the Fifth Century.<sup>13</sup> In these *Letters*, one honored the God Iao, who was derived from El but seemingly different from YHWH. Sometimes confused with the Demiurge Ialdabaoth, Iao would be invoked much later by many Gnostic sects, including the Sethians. His name would be frequently mentioned in the magical conjurations, charm rituals, execration slabs, and talismanic stones called *abraxas*. And also celebrated in the *Letters* was the goddess Anath Bethel, from whom the mysterious Barbelo of the non-Christian Gnostics may have issued. Assim Bethel, child of Iao and Anath, had already passed for the Son of God.

In 400 [B.C.E.], the Persian Empire crumbled under the power of the economic, political and cultural imperialism of Greece. In 331 [B.C.E.], the victory of Alexander marked the end of Persian domination.

Upon the death of Alexander in 323 [B.C.E.], the Hellenic empire exploded, Egypt passed into the hands of Ptolemy, and Syria and Palestine became part of the Seleucid Empire.

It was at this time that the often-backdated books [of the Bible] were drafted in order to halo them with the prestige of ancient times. The Catholic Church, too, would move back the dates of its canonical Gospels for identical reasons.

*Deuteronomy*, falsely dated back to 622 [B.C.E.] and inspired by the return from Babylon, would be re-defined in the more ancient framework of the exodus in order to accentuate the role, in some sense re-actualized, of Moses, around whom the unitary myth that created a synthesis of the three great currents of thought (royal, sacerdotal and prophetic) was restructured.<sup>14</sup> The *Book of Ezekiel*, which had been projected back between 586 and 536 [B.C.E.], presented its heroes as if they were prophets and priests, even though the sacerdotal function did not exist at that time. The priests described were identical to the “Sons of Sadoq,” a sect founded around 300 [B.C.E.]. The last part of *Ezekiel* proposed a religious and nationalist eschatology: a great river flowed underneath the Temple in order to irrigate the holy earth while the final struggle against Gog, the enemy of Israel, whom Torrey identifies with Alexander,<sup>15</sup> took place.

In its first nine chapters, the *Book of Proverbs* betrays a Hellenic influence; several aspects recall a book of Egyptian wisdom called *The Wisdom of Amenemope*. It is significant that, little by little, the counsels of politeness and everyday civility dressed themselves up in a religious ritualism.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Hadot, *Histoire des religions*, Brussels, 1980-1981, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> C. C. Torrey, “Certainly Pseudo-Ezekiel,” *JBL*, 53, 1934.



Favored by Hellenization, books of wisdom founded a tradition that would play an important role in the Second Century redaction of the Logia, that is, the remarks attributed to Joshua/Jesus.

Through perpetual re-writing, the corpus of the sacred books – with the Greek plural noun *biblia* ending up in the singular noun *Bible* as if to suggest the idea of a single book dictated by the one God – claimed to be a celestial monument dedicated to the absolute power of YHWH, sculpted with bitterness, hatred, dereliction and megalomania that secreted a mentality resigned to support the foreign yoke and that drew from suffering its reason to exist. And this book, which only ever reflected the ignominy imposed on its scribes, was proposed for generations as a model to more than half the world.

The Sadducees would impute to the epic hero Moses the care of having prescribed, in all their details, the rites, costumes, habits, and objects of the cult around which the priests moved, instilling the omnipresence of God in the routine of gestures and comportments. The most ancient texts, legendarily attributed to the same “Father,” would thus be periodically reviewed, nay, corrected by prophets such as Dositheus, who, in the manner of many, characterized himself as the “new Moses.”

Also backdated, the text known under the name *Isaiah II* contains a part titled “The Songs of YHWH’s Servant” (50-53), the theme of which inaugurated the legend of the suffering Messiah. The Servant, a man resolved to sacrifice himself and die for the salvation of the nations, was scorned and misunderstood: “We rejected him, we did not have anything to do with him. Nevertheless, they were our sufferings that he carried [...] The punishment that gave us peace fell upon him. And it was by his bruises that we were healed” (53). Here there appeared for the first time the literary prototype of the envoy of God who dies for the salvation of all. The Essenes applied this model to their Master of Justice, who was put to death around 60 [B.C.E.], before the Nazarenes and their enemies in the Pauline School used it upon the Messiah that they called Joshua and the Greeks called Jesus.

Encouraging Samaria’s refusal of obedience to Judea, the Greek occupation allowed the Samaritans to erect in the region of Ebal and Gerizim a temple distinct from the one in Jerusalem. Thus Samaria encountered in the north the welcome that Judea had refused to give. In Samaria, from the conjunction of Judaism and Greek philosophy was thus born a thought that was oriented around knowledge of self and the world – Gnostic thought – that sometimes took root in religious speculation, other times in a feeling for life that revoked all forms of religion to the profit of a magic Hermeticism, nay, a somatic analysis, such as that of Simon of Samaria.

Such a modern spirit would easily propagate itself in the communities of the Diaspora, in the Jewish colonies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Rome and the Gauls.

From the Samaritan schism derived the sects that put forth different conceptions of Judaism: the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essen-Baptists who, through the Nazarene and Ebionite groups, would form the original Christianity.

The Samaritans only recognized as sacred texts the *Pentateuch* and the book by Joshua (who, under the name of Jesus, had a certain future). These texts and the manuscripts discovered at Qumran present similarities that accredit the close relations between the Samaritans and the Essenes; they differ from the Masoretic texts, which were exegetical enterprises on the sacred books written by Masorettes or Jewish theologians.

From 300 to around 165 [B.C.E.], the Hellenization of Palestine impregnated religious literature with a thought that was radically foreign to the Jewish mentality. Two civilizations clashed: one closed upon its agrarian economy and situating its commercial activities beyond its frontiers, in the trading posts and communities withdrawn into intransigent monotheism; the other, essentially mercantile, propagated its logic and rationality everywhere that its system of exchange penetrated.

Nothing is more antagonistic than [the relationship between] the mythic, analogical and ahistorical spirit of the Jews and the Greek *Logos*, the linear time of the historians, the usage of syllogism, analysis and synthesis, a reality in which the Gods drew their splendor from the capricious facets of destiny.

The Indo-European structure of the Greek language very imperfectly rendered Hebraic idioms, with its atemporal verbs, word play, magical sounds, phonetic equivalences, and numerical values attributed to letters – elements that lent to the pre-Gospel *midrashim* significations that developed Kabbalistic speculations, but were dead ends for the Greeks and ended in mistranslations. (“*Midrash*: Jewish (or Samaritan) exegesis. Term derived from the Hebrew *DRS*, ‘to seek, to search.’ Among all the rabbinical *midrashim* and the commentaries on the Torah and then on the Bible in its entirety, it is fitting to cite the *Midrash Rabbah*, the Great Midrash, a Hebraic compilation of which certain portions date back to an epoch much before the First Century.”)<sup>16</sup>

Although it attests to the universal curiosity of the Greeks, the translation by the so-called “Seventy” (because it was legendarily attributed to seventy translators) of the Biblical texts appeared to the Masorettes and Jewish theologians

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<sup>16</sup> B. Dubourg, *L’Invention de Jésus*, Paris, I, p. 251-260.

as a sacrilege and a betrayal of the Biblical message. It is here – it is not useless to say – that “Joshua” was, for the very first time, translated by *Iesous*, Jesus.

From the Alexandrian epoch came two literary genres that were diametrically opposed, but both of them entered into the fabrications of the “novels” about Jesus: the “wisdom” that bore the stamp of Hellenic morality, and the “apocalypses” or “revelations,” which were prophecies that were hostile to the Greek and then to the Roman occupiers, and that were rooted in the Hebraic myth of the all-powerful God, for whom punishments were the wages of love and redemption.

Issuing principally from Egypt, “wisdom” became Hellenized in Palestine through two texts destined for great influence. The first one was *The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* or, more precisely, *Wise Instruction and Proverbs Cared for Simeon, son of Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sira*. Although the Pharisees excluded it from their canon, the *Talmud* cites it nearly 80 times. The Catholics would make it one of their preferred books under the title that was imposed on it around 250 [C.E.] by Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage: the *Ecclesiasticus liber*, also known as the *Ecclesiastics*. (Not to be confused with the *Qohelet*, “He who speaks in the assemblies,” which the Catholics called *Ecclesiastes* – in Greek, “assembly” is *ekklesia*, the Church – and which is a text from the Fourth Century before the Christian era that communicated [then] unusable banalities about the bitter destiny of man and the ignominy of woman.) The epistle falsely attributed to Jacob borrows from it a great number of expressions, as does the *Logia* (attributed to Jesus), in which Simeon, who became called Simon-Peter, appears.

An early Hebrew manuscript version dating from the Eighth Century [C.E.] was exhumed in 1896 from the *gennizah* (a reserve in which sacred books that were no longer used were stored) in a synagogue at Cairo. The authenticity of the text was confirmed by the discovery, in 1964, at Masada – the high place of the Zealot resistance to the Romans – of a scroll that contained important fragments in the original Hebraic versions. (Yadim situates the redaction of the text in the pre-Herod period, around 40 [B.C.E.], between *Isaiah I* and the *Manual of Discipline*.)<sup>17</sup> The *Wisdom* was attributed to Rabbi Sira (around 190 [B.C.E.]). His grandson Joshua/Jesus had it translated into Greek around 117 [B.C.E.]

In the era of Rabbi Sira, the Seleucids – masters of Syria and Palestine – attempted to break the monotheistic rigor of the Jews by forced Hellenization. In 165 [B.C.E.], the revolt led by Mattathias Maccabee and his son, Judah,

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<sup>17</sup> Y. Yadim, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada*, Jerusalem, 1965; Th. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Sira zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus*, Leiden, 1973.

demonstrated one more time that State tyranny never puts an end to religious tyranny, but reinvigorates it with the same authoritarian principles that destroy it. The insurrection would offer a model of heroic and desperate holiness to the struggle that the Zealots – on the initiative of Judah of Gamala and his two sons, Jacob and Simeon – would conduct against the Romans later on.

By prohibiting the practice of worship in the Temple, the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-163 [B.C.E.]) succeeded in convincing the Jews of the vanity of terrestrial empires and the interest of a celestial kingdom, the imminence of which prophetic agitation had proclaimed.

The author of the *Wisdom* did not reject Hellenism, but strove to assimilate it into Judaism, as Philo of Alexandria did later on. Rabbi Sira's faith in the final victory of the Chosen People did not reject the luminaries of Greek thought.

The true son of Israel was a sage. Wisdom [*sagesse*] would save him, because "he who seizes the Law receives wisdom" (15, 1). Crowning messianic hope, *Sophia* (Wisdom) plays the role of great mediator between God and man: "She appears before him as a mother; like a virginal wife, she welcomes him; she nourishes him with the bread of prudence; she gives him the water of wisdom to drink."

The Greek word *sophia*, which translates the Hebrew *Hochma* and the Aramaic *Achamoth* – two feminine terms that also designate the Spirit – assumed a considerable importance in the Essenian-Christian Gnosticisms and the hedonistic currents in which figured, under a great variety of names and forms, that which brings salvation to men. Wife, mother and virgin, *Sophia* was at the origin of Miriam-Mary, the virgin mother, and her companion Mary of Magdalene (as presented in the *Gospel attributed to Thomas*), but also of the Holy Spirit descended upon the Messiah.

The second of the two texts by which "wisdom" became Hellenized in Palestine was the *Wisdom of Solomon*, drafted around 50 [B.C.E.], which allied with Judeo-Greek thought a magical conception that would be known in the Hermetic current and would become very popular, in particular, in Alexandria. In *Judaic Antiquities*, Flavius Joseph recalls that "God even accorded to him [Solomon] the comprehension of the art [of fighting against] against demons for the usefulness and healing of men. Having composed incantations thanks to which sickness is relieved, he left behind the exorcism formulas by which the possessor chases away the demons so that they may never return."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Flavius Joseph, *Antiquités judaïques*, Paris, 1929, VIII, 45.

An extract from the *Wisdom* attributes to Solomon knowledge “of the power of spirits and the thought of man, varieties of plants and the virtues of roots” (7, 20).

Researchers have wanted to detect here the ideas of an Essene community on the Lake Mareotis, which Philo names Therapeutes, and it is true that Judeo-Greek magic is not absent from the texts found at Qumran.<sup>19</sup> Christian Gnosticism of the First and Second Centuries included thaumaturgical groups from which diverse evangelic novels concerning Jesus took inspiration in order to disguise their heroes as exorcists, healers and miracle workers.

Rejected by the Pharisee synod of 80-90, the *Wisdom of Solomon* would later enter into the Catholic canon. The Platonism into which Biblical mythology seemed to merge allows us to glimpse the surpassing of Judaism, for which the Hellenized Christianities worked starting in the second half of the Second Century.

On the other hand, the hostility of Judaism towards Hellenization was exacerbated through a mode of original expression: “revelation,” better known under its Greek form, “apocalypse” – a term that much later assumed the meaning of “universal catastrophe.”

A cyclical thought that loops around in a dazzling shortcut of birth and death, the origin and the end of time, the alpha and omega of a world created in order to annihilate itself in its terrestrial form and be reborn in a cosmic beyond, apocalypse drains away in a sudden rage the multiple reasons for putting an end to an existence that is condemned to tragedy. Its suicidal resolution has avenging accents, because none of the powers would escape from the egalitarian leveling of the death that it announces. Over the centuries, the oppressed creature discovered in apocalypse a panacea for the maledictions of injustice, the end of the centuries that founds the hope for the Great Night and the days after it that sing. It is the song of an immobile history, fixed in its glaciation, which can only set off a total explosion. Born in the rupture of archaic Judaism with history, it reappears every time that dreadful oppression [*l’oppression désespérante*] explodes under the blows of a desperate revolution [*une révolution désespérée*].

Judaic and Christian literature contains fifty apocalypses. Two of them twinkle with a particular glimmer in the speculative torrent that would furrow the historical landscape in which Christs and Messiahs proliferated.

Attributed to the legendary patriarch Enoch, the *Parables* contain an apocalypse whose influence marked the myth of Jesus among the Christians. At the end of an ascension that leads him to the Kingdom of the Heavens, Enoch sees the

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<sup>19</sup> C. Puech, “Un rituel d’exorcisme (11 Q Ps Ap),” *Revue de Qumran*, XIV, #55, 1989.

Son of Man, that is to say, Adam, and discovers his true nature: the Son of Man collaborated in the creation of the world as an integral part of YHWH; he then sits at his right hand and, at the end of time, which is imminent, he returns to earth to deliver mankind from its pitiful condition.

The *Apocalypse attributed to Daniel* reflects the struggle of religious Jews against the political Hellenization of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Through an artifice that reveals a cyclical vision of history more than a deliberate lie, this work claimed to be from a previous epoch and thus foresaw the future. The author backdated the prediction of events that in fact took place under his own eyes, around 165 [B.C.E.], during the revolt of the Maccabee family and their partisans, the defenders of the faith.

Obeying a mythic logic, also conforming to the structure of Hebrew, which hardly accords with the rationality of the Greek [language] (which fails to render it), the narrative transposed the political situation to the divine plane. Michael, the chief of the angels and the protector of Israel, uses his power to save his people. The visionary prophesized the ruin of four great oppressive empires: the Babylonian, the Assyrian, the Persian and the Greek. The effective disappearance of the first three in 165 [B.C.E.], of course, augured the ruin of the fourth and revived the ardor of the combatants by demonstrating that God would never surrender his people to an impious domination. The fact that (once again) the crushing of the Jewish insurgents threw a bitter shadow on the antiphony “the time is near for His power and His justice to restore Israel to its glory” did not exhaust the source of a type of inspiration that, far from being discouraged, was stimulated by failure.

The last Jewish apocalypse would also be, under its zealously Christianized form, the only one that was retained by the Catholic canon, despite those that flourished up to the Sixth Century. The original Jew (lost) no doubt stigmatized the Roman politics of Tiberius, who from the year 19 [C.E.], encouraged the pogroms in Rome and prohibited the Jewish religion in Italy.

The Greek version, attributed to John, adopted the schema of all the revelations: evil has disturbed the divine order; order must be restored so that the kingdom of the heavens and the saints can be propagated on earth. The unleashing of calamities sounds the announced hour of the Days of the Savior, the extermination of the wicked, and the glory of Jerusalem. The era of prosperity, peace and heavenly happiness will coincide with the triumph of the “communities,” the Essene churches.

By claiming that only blind faith in God would vanquish the enemy, the *Apocalypse attributed to Daniel* dressed up in divine emanations the manifesto of the Assideans, the fanatical observers of Mosaic law and the shock troops of the Maccabean insurrection. The apocalypse later attributed to John resounds, in

similar fashion, with the echoes of the Zealot program; perhaps the rage to destroy Rome was not foreign to the fire of 64 [C.E.], which has been so unreasonably imputed to Nero.

The Maccabean wars also date the Psalms, songs of praise addressed to God by the devout, whose rhythms and repetitions were obeyed with care in order to impregnate spirits and comfort the faith.

## **Chapter 2: Diaspora and Anti-Semitism**

While the Hebrew word *galout* (exile) was used in a theological perspective and implied an eschatology of uprooting and return, the Greek term *diaspora* referred to an historical phenomenon: the dispersion of the Jews across the world.

In the beginning, the Jews of Judea and Samaria were chased from Palestine by a conspiracy of violence and political constraints. In 722 [B.C.E.], Israel, the Kingdom of the North, fell to the power of Babylon; in 586 [B.C.E.], the Kingdom of Judea succumbed in its turn.

A part of the population submitted to deportation, drawing from its unhappiness the hope of a return under the leadership of a hero chosen by God in order to help his people, sanctified by ordeals.

The realities of the situation, however, took the upper hand over the tortuous designs of providence. Many exiled Jews – little concerned with regaining their homeland because they held comfortable places, despite their transplantation – created communities, practiced their worship, instaurated a politics of mutual assistance amongst themselves, with the affluent supporting the poorest.

Thus the first Diaspora began as a movement of voluntary dispersion. It was accentuated after Alexander's conquest, when Palestine – inserted into the Greek world – participated in its intense commercial activity. The Jews thus propagated themselves in regions that were subjected to Ptolemy and the Seleucids, of whom they were the subjects.

To the longstanding communities in Egypt and Babylon were added those of Syria, Asia Minor, and, soon after, the entire Greco-Roman Empire.

A second Diaspora extended from the Second Century before the Christian era [B.C.E.] to the beginning of 135 [C.E.], when Hadrian's crushing of the revolt by Bar Kokhba marked the beginning of a third, dramatic exodus. The flame of persecution, revived by the return of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Christianity of the Second Century and the Catholicism of the Fourth Century, would consume the Jews all the way to the Twentieth Century.

In the course of the Second Century before the Christian era, the Asmonean dynasty built diplomatic relations with Rome, where Jewish communities were multiplying.

"One cannot easily find," wrote Strabo, who lived from 58(?) to 25(?) B.C.E., "a spot on the inhabited world that hasn't given asylum to this people and that isn't mastered by them." And Agrippa, in a letter to Caligula, wrote:



“Jerusalem is the metropolis not only of the country of Judea, but of many others due to the colonies that it has sent out, according to the occasion, in neighboring countries, [including] Egypt, Phoenicia, many parts of Asia, as far away as Bithynia, equally in Europe, Thessaly, Boeotia and Macedonia.”<sup>20</sup>

As in the majority of the great towns of South Gaul, there were Jews in Lyon, where, mixed with Christians of the New Prophecy, they were the victims of the pogroms of 177.

The statuettes in baked earth that caricatured Jews with circumcised phalluses – which attest to the presence in Treves, around 275, of a quite ancient community – were intended to stir up anti-Semitism.

The Jewish settlements in the towns explain the urban character of Judeo-Christianity and the Hellenized and de-Judaicized Christianities that succeeded them. Thus the insulting qualification *goyim*, which designated non-Jews (non-believers), would appear among the anti-Semitic Christians of the Second Century (because of the towns’ scorn for the conservatism of the countryside) in their use of terms such as *pagani*, “peasants,” “hicks,” “bumpkins,” and, in French, pagans. (Without scruple, historians have adopted the scorn that monotheism nourished with respect to polytheism, by speaking of “pagans” and “paganism.”)

Among the population of the Roman Empire, Jews constituted 7 to 10 percent of the total, [which was] around six million people, a number that exceeded the number of inhabitants in Judea.

In the First Century of the Christian era, the Jewish colony in Rome numbered between 40,000 and 50,000 people; it possessed fifteen synagogues in which there often grew rival sects: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Nazarenes, Ebionites, Naasenes, Sethians and converts to Judaism from all nationalities, a diversity in which the Zealot movement and its terroristic struggle against the Romans would introduce trouble.

For six centuries, the propagation of Judaism appeared to be a form of conquest. Unlike future epochs, which were headed for a decrease [in it], a very active proselytism multiplied the adepts among the dominant classes as well as in the disadvantaged milieus. Excited by monotheistic intransigence and incessant nationalistic and extremist revolts, the hostility of the State was accentuated under Tiberius and culminated in the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 and the annihilation of the Jewish nation in 135.

Nevertheless, four centuries later, the political principle of monotheism – “One God, One State, One Nation” – would seduce Roman power at the end of a long evolution that would see the Jews robbed of their sacred texts by the Greco-

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<sup>20</sup> J. Eisenberg, *Histoire du peuple juif*, Paris, 1974, p. 174.

Roman Christianities, which were themselves for the most part excluded from the Roman and Byzantine Churches, whose reign began in Nicaea in 325.

### **Jewish Proselytism and Anti-Semitism**

The Bible of the Seventy, the Greek version of the sacred texts, formed the iron lance of Jewish proselytism in the Greco-Roman Empire. It responded to a will to open up to the world of the *goyim*; the Pharisees expressed it first, before pitting itself against the modernism of certain Judeo-Christian sects that, not content to reject the sacrifices and priests of the Temple (as Essenism did), put into question the meticulous rituals of Mosaic law, especially circumcision, which was a major obstacle to obtaining conversions.

Jewish orthodoxy wasn't deceived; it held the Greek translation to be a betrayal of the spirit and the letter [of the law].

With the Bible of the Seventy, a civilization dominated by commercial capitalism seized hold of an agrarian civilization, which was walled up in its immobility and its mythic thought. Here began the plundering of the Jewish nation's sacred writings. Did not the apologist Justin affirm around 160 that these texts had ceased to belong to the Jews because they no longer understood them? For the first time, Adonai became *kyrios*, the Savior; Joshua was transformed into Jesus; and *messiah* became *christos*, Christ.

To the extent that Hellenized Judaism distanced itself from the Judean tradition – a tendency that anti-Judean Essenism clearly prepared – the Pharisees, the only orthodox Jewish sect that survived the disaster of 70, fell back on the traditional Biblical corpus, the *Talmud*. Attacked from all sides, the Pharisee community took refuge in a defensive attitude; it surrounded itself with dogmatic ramparts, but not without opening on the cosmic visions of Gnosticism the great window of Kabala.

Hellenized Judaism easily took root in Samaria, where the old refusal of YHWH still smoldered. From the Kingdom of the North radiated the Baptist Dunstan/Dositheos, Nazarenism, Essenism, and the philosophy of Simon, the “father of all heresies.”

Alexandria, the incubator of scholars and curious spirits, possessed an important Jewish colony. Greek anti-Semitism occasionally released upon it ferocious pogroms. It was a crucible in which the most diverse opinions mixed and clashed. There gushed from Alexandria – alongside a powerful Hermetic current that cultivated the mysteries of Egypt – apologetic texts such as the *Letter from Atistias*, the *Fourth Book of the Maccabees*, Flavius Joseph's *Against Apion*, and the works of Philo (who lived around 20 [B.C.E.] to 50 [C.E.]), in which Judaic faith absorbed Greek wisdom and was absorbed by it.

Even if Philo kept to the heart of Jerusalem, a metropolis and spiritual homeland, his conception and language were Greek. A philosopher of the Diaspora, he scattered the seeds of Judaism on foreign soils where the stones of anti-Semitism abounded and where anti-Judean Essenism had already been confused with Judeo-Christianity.

From the beginning of the First Century, the idea of a renewed Judaism that renewed Mosaic law coincided with the dynamism of a market in full expansion, where the commercialism of the Diaspora assisted and by turns competed with the places of Greek and Roman business.

“For a merchant,” Josy Eisenberg writes, “to be or become Jewish was the assurance of easily establishing business-relations in a number of countries, of benefiting from a warm welcome and great hospitality. For the poor, belonging to Judaism could represent the guarantee of assistance and regular aid [...]. In Alexandria, there were ship-owners and bankers who possessed great Jewish fortunes. But, to consider the entirety of the Empire, the majority of the Jewish population were people of small means. There were slaves among them. In Rome, neither the Trastevere neighborhood, nor those of the Porte Capere or Subure, could pass for distinguished. What one most often reproached the Jews for was not being sewn from gold, but, rather, being dressed in tatters and sordid.”<sup>21</sup>

Around the beginning of the Third Century, the historian Dion Cassius (155-235) asked himself about the phenomenon of Jewish expansion. “From whence comes this denomination? I do not know; yet among all men, even those issued from other peoples, there are those who follow the law of the Jews. This species even exists among the Romans. Many times repressed, they have always mended their forces and ended up conquering the right to freely practice their customs.” For Dion Cassius – and this is two hundred years after the supposed birth of Christianity – no notable difference existed between the Pharisees and the Marcionite Christians, the Christians of the New Prophecy, the Valentinian Christians, the Naassenes, the Sethians and Gnostics of all types.

The discredit that affected many of the ancient and modern forms of worship that were practiced in the Empire; the honors rendered to a God [and] to despots who offered the spectacle of their degeneration and flavored with bloody caprices their usual powerlessness to impose a coherent politics on the State; an insignificance that contrasted strongly with their protestations of austerity and patriotic grandeur – all [of this] incited nostalgia for a unity in which religious faith assisted the fervor of the citizenry, matched the charm of mystery with calculating

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

reason, ordered a new marriage of the heavens and earth, and united audacious and mercantile modernity with the prudent virtues of agrarian conservatism.

Jewish monotheism exactly proposed the principle of a unity founded on a community practice dominated by solidarity. The businessmen as well as the poor classes of the towns discovered a communal interest. After having favored emigration from Palestine, the high birthrate – justified by the fact that not having children “diminishes the image of God” – worked in favor of the rapid demographic growth of the Jewish colonies, whose social and economic power grew.

“Even in the masses,” Flavius Joseph noted in the First Century, “there has long been a vivid desire for our religion, and there isn’t a single Greek or barbarian town into which has not penetrated the practice of the Seventh Day [the Sabbath], during which one rests and observes the practice of fasting and the usage of candles, and many of our alimentary prescriptions.”<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, it was on the reef of complex rituals that the proselytism of the Jews would run aground. Their intransigence proceeded from a conservatism that was irreconcilable with the Greco-Roman mentality. The history of Judeo-Christian and early Christian sects was articulated in accordance with the incessant revision of Jewish monotheism and Messianism, as dictated by the nostalgia for a nationalized God, strong from obedience from the nations.

Attractive due to its unitary doctrine, the Jewish religion was also irritating due to its intolerance and fanaticism. The destruction of the monuments of other cults in the name of YHWH’s disapproval of idolatry caused scandal and kindled the racial hatred of the pogroms.

From the First Century onwards, everywhere that Jewish communities settled, incidents and conflicts eventually (sooner than later) exploded.

In 19, Tiberius, who reigned from 14 to 38, took as pretext the troubles in Rome caused by “three extravagant devoted Jews and a great woman converted to Judaism” to prohibit the Judaic cult in Rome and the entirety of Italy. According to Mommsen, “those who did not consent to publicly repudiate their faith and throw their sacred vessels into the fire were chased from Italy, at least those whom one did not judge suitable for military service; these Jews were incorporated into the disciplined companies, but their religious scruples led a great number of them [to be brought] before the war counsels.”<sup>23</sup>

Rome, which had up to 19 observed with respect to Judaism the tolerance that it applied to other religions, suddenly used anti-Semitism as a distraction from

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Th. Mommsen, *Histoire romaine*, Paris, 1863-1872.

the real or imaginary menace that the frequency of rebellions in Palestine represented in the Latium [central Italy]. No doubt the repression inaugurated by Tiberius was not unrelated to the decision of the evangelic novelists to situate the historical existence of Jesus under his reign.

When Gaius, Tiberius' successor, stirred up the great pogrom in Alexandria in 38, Philo did not hesitate, in his *In Flaccum*, to castigate the passivity of Flaccus and Roman power, which had favored the Greek party, superior in numbers to the Jews.

In a letter dated 41, Emperor Claudius threatened the Jews of Alexandria with punishment if they did not renounce their subversive schemes. He accused them of "fomenting a communal nuisance to the entire universe."

In 49, this same Claudius chased the Jews from Rome because they had provoked trouble there. In 64, taking the burning of Rome as a pretext, Nero organized a pogrom that official Catholic history would later present as the first persecution of the Christians.

Hatred for the Jews grew even more after the insurrection in Palestine, which, between 66 and 70, ended in the long guerrilla war of the Zealots. "In the neighboring Greek towns – Damascus, Caesarea, Ashkelon, Skytopolis, Nippos and Gadava – the Greeks massacred the Jews. In Damascus [alone], between 10,500 and 18,000 Jews were put to death."<sup>24</sup>

Other pogroms took place in Alexandria, Antiochus and Pella. All of the persecutions of the First Century, which the Catholics recorded in their martyrology with a view towards substantiating their own long history, were in fact pogroms. The refusal to make "sacrifices to idols," so frequently recalled in hagiographical legends, properly belonged to Jewish religious obstinacy. In 38, Philo of Alexandria interceded with the Emperor in favor of the Jews who refused to render homage to his statue. Up to the end of the Third Century, the catacombs served as the sepulcher and refuge for Jews and several (probably Naasean) Gnostics, whom the imperial power hunted down without making any distinctions.

The reproaches addressed to the Jews by Roman moralists most frequently emphasized their impiety, which was alleged due to the absence of priests, and their immorality, a traditional accusation with respect to mystical communities that were poorly known or had escaped from the control of the State. Celsus left no doubt in his *True Discourse*: "The people who have neither priests nor altars are identical to the atheists; living in closed communities, they have, one supposes, dissolute morals." Celsus also referred to the "orgiastics," persecuted in 42 [B.C.E.] by the Empire, in which they constituted secret groups and revived the

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<sup>24</sup> K. Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, Hamburg, 1986. I, p. 125.

traditions of the Dionysian cults. The same argument would later serve the Church many times in its condemnations of heretics.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the Zealots’ guerrilla war contributed to the popularization of the image of “the Jew with a knife between his teeth,” which the anti-Semitism of the Twentieth Century would regurgitate, unaware that it originated with the Pharisee Jew Flavius Joseph, friend of the Romans, for whom the Zealots were *lestoi*, bandits, hired killers or “knife-wielding killers.”

The stupidity of Greco-Roman anti-Semitism did not pale in comparison with the ignominy of its modern resurgence (this isn’t surprising). The poet Horace (65-8) was irritated by seeing his friend Fuscus convert to Judaism, observe the Sabbath and refuse to “laugh at circumcised Jews.”

Petronius (10-66) ridiculed the Jews by assuring his readers that they adored a Pig-God and gave thanks to the head of an ass.<sup>26</sup> If the idea of a Pig-God ironically mocks the prohibition on [eating] pork, the mention of a God with the head of an ass doesn’t lack interest: such a representation appeared on a number of Sethian magical amulets and confirms the presence in Rome – in the Jewish milieu of the 50s – of a group for which the Messiah was Seth, Son of Man, that is to say, the Son of Adam.<sup>27</sup>

For Pliny the Elder (28-79), “the Jews are a nation famous for their scorn for divinities,” and, according to Lysimachus of Alexandria, “Moses exhorted them to not be kind to anyone.” Martial (ca. 40 – ca. 104) had recourse to the leitmotif of fantastical frustration, which provided racism with the violence of relief: “You can not even avoid making love with circumcised Jews,” he said indignantly, conscious of the peril hanging over Roman virility.

Around 120, Tacitus denounced the decline of the Empire and the corruption of ancestral virtues in his frequent conversations about Judaism with the members of the Roman aristocracy, nay, the familiars of the imperial court. He indicated there was active commiseration for the Jews that contrasted with “the implacable hatred that they have for the rest of mankind.” He speaks of their “execrable superstition” and believes them “less guilty of having burned Rome than hating humanity.”

After the crushing of Bar Kokhba by Hadrian and the end of the Jewish nation, the anti-Judaism of the Judeo-Christians changed into anti-Semitism among the Hellenized Christians, as much under the influence of Marcion, the inventor of

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<sup>25</sup> M. Simon, *Recherches d’histoire judéo-chrétienne*, Paris, 1962; ID., *La Polémique antijuive in Mélanges Cumont*.

<sup>26</sup> Petronius, *Satyricon*, fr. 371.

<sup>27</sup> Whittaker, *Jews and Christians*, Cambridge, 1984, p. 82.

Saul/Paul, as under that of the Anti-Marcionites, such as Justin, who would attempt to approach Rome by alleging his hostility to all forms of Judaism.

“Judaism,” writes David Rokeah, “gives way to a replacement product that pursues the conquest of the pagan world. After the Second Century, the activity of the Christian ‘mission’ would intensify.”<sup>28</sup>

When Philostratus affirmed around 230 that “this people has for a long time been in revolt, not only against the Romans, but also against humanity in its entirety. The men who have imagined an unsociable life, which they do not share with their fellow creatures at the table, while making libations or offering sacrifices, are further from us than Susa or Bactra,”<sup>29</sup> his remarks could have been countersigned by those who would later accuse the Jews of deicide, namely, the fathers of ecclesiastic anti-Semitism: John Chrysostom, Jerome, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo.<sup>30</sup>

Judaism maintained such a morbid propensity to hold itself responsible for the ordeals of a “just God” that it attracted, in the manner that the masochist solicits the sadist, the donkey’s kick that would be delivered to it, after the definitive loss of 135, by a movement that came from its own heart [Christianity] and that, over the centuries, would martyr the Jews in the name of the love of Christ and a good God. A double abuse of authority presided over the birth of Christianity: the plundering of the Jews’ sacred texts and the legend of a crucified Messiah whose blood would fall upon them. The bloody irony of what Deschner calls the “criminal history of Christianity” is that Catholicism only ratified the incessant rewriting of Jewish texts by the prophets, the Essenes, the Christian Jews and their *midrashim*, and the hatred of the Esseno-Baptists for Jerusalem, whose priests executed their Master of Justice.

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<sup>28</sup> D. Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Conflict*, Jerusalem-Leiden, 1982.

<sup>29</sup> J. Eisenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> K. Deschner, *op. cit.*, pp. 117 sq.

## Chapter 3: The Judean Sects

Originally, the term “sect” did not carry any pejorative connotations. It designated certain political and religious factions that involved a part of the population.

One can confirm the existence of a Samaritan sect, which issued from the separation between the kingdoms of the North and the South, ever since the era of Alexander and Greek domination. Hellenization encouraged this sect by allowing it to build a temple distinct from the one in Jerusalem. Its members only knew and recognized the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and the *Book of Joshua/Jesus*, whose influence on the mythic genesis of the Messianic Savior was revealed in a sermon by Origen, written in the first half of the Third Century. The Samaritan Bible differed from the Masoretic text (subsequently established) and is close to the manuscripts discovered at Qumran.

### The Sadducees

It is believed that the sect of the Sadducees appeared about 300 years before the Christian era and was inscribed in the political line of Yahwehist centralism. Pre-dating the exile (586-536 [B.C.E.]), but actually drafted in the Fourth Century [B.C.E.], the *Book of Ezekiel* describes priests who are consistent with the idea that one has of the Sadducees, “the Son of Sadoq” (or Tsadoq). Combining the role of prophet and the function of the priest, Ezekiel unified in the same ministry two religious attitudes that had often been opposed: the popular agitator and the temple functionary.

A priest who claimed to have ordained Solomon (*Kings* 1, 38), Tsadoq evokes the idea of justice in accordance with the Semitic practice of wordplay known as *themoura*, “a Kabbalistic practice by which, on the basis of a logical table of permutations, one replaces one Hebrew letter with another. When applied to Biblical texts, these replacements permit one to multiply their hidden meanings (or what are held to be such).”<sup>31</sup>

Here, the key word is *tsedeq*, “justice,” which would be used by the Judeo-Christian sect of Melchizedek. One also finds it in the Essene cult of the Master of Justice, in the name they conferred upon themselves, “Sons of Tsadoq,” and even

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<sup>31</sup> B. Dubourg, *L’Invention de Jésus*, Paris, 1987, I, p. 266.



in the quality of “Justness,” ascribed to Jacob, who was later held to be an apostle by the Christian and Catholic evangelic legends.

The Sadducees believed in the unitary doctrine of the State and monotheism. A sacerdotal ruling class, the Sadducees made the Temple of Jerusalem the axis of its temporal power and the privileged place in which God manifested his will to guide his people. High functionaries of the divine judgment, the Sadducees especially devoted themselves to quarrels concerning precedence and rivalries for power.

Tasked with accomplishing the sacrifices of the Temple and with watching over the observance of the rites with which YHWH punctuated everyday existence, the Sadducees were hardly different in mindset from the Prince-Bishops of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance who, living in opulence and debauchery, only professed their faith in order to better assure themselves of the prerogatives of the Church and its sacred authority.

Good conservatives, the Sadducees absorbed revolt into change and apostasy into prophetic proclamations. Quite attached to their privileges, which they claimed came from an all-powerful God, they didn’t hesitate to collaborate with invaders or to ferociously repress the Jews who didn’t accommodate themselves to them.

The Pharisees treated the Sadducees like they were Epicureans, which the Pharisees thought to be an insulting term. The Christians accused the Sadducees of not believing in anything, a reproach that – following a malicious turn of events – Celsus and his contemporaries addressed to the Christians, with whom (as late as the Second Century) they still confused with the Orthodox Jews who had disappeared after 70 [C.E.]. The Sadducees, it is true, rejected the three great Pharisee teachings that were later reprised by the Christians: the expectation of a Messiah; the immortality of the soul; and – evoked for the first time in the *Book of Daniel* in 165 [B.C.E.] – the resurrection of the body.

The Sadducees’ support of Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ politics of Hellenization provoked the Maccabean insurrection. In 169 [B.C.E.], the pillaging of the Temple and the massacre of the factions hostile to the Greek party, followed two years later by the instauration in Jerusalem of the cult of the Olympian Jupiter, triggered a popular nationalist and religious upheaval that was led by a certain Mattathias. The movement participated in great prophetic agitations that demanded strict obedience to Mosaic law by everyone.

Killed in 166 [B.C.E.], Mattathias was succeeded by his son, Judah, surnamed Maccabee. Under his leadership, the rebellion grew and in 164 [B.C.E.] forced Antiochus IV Epiphanes to abrogate the measures he’d taken against the religion. Despite the amnesty and the re-establishment of the cult, Judah pursued the fight against the occupiers. Because his prosecution also struck the partisans of

Hellenism, his fanaticism alienated him from a faction of the Jews who were sensitive to the freedoms of Greek thought and the merits of rational critique. The death of Judah in 160 [B.C.E.] during the course of combat brought down a pitiless repression.

The ascension to power by Johann Hyrcan the First (134-104 [B.C.E.]) marked the beginning of the Asmonean dynasty. Hyrcan made himself odious to the Samaritans by seizing their country. He destroyed the Temple on Mount Gerizim; he annexed Idum to the south of Judea and Judaicized cosmopolitan Galilee. His son Aristobulus succeeded him, but died a year later, in 103 [B.C.E.]. His widow married Alexander Jonathan (103-76 [B.C.E.]), who arrogated the title of king for himself.

According to Flavius Joseph, a new party intervened in the quarrel between pontifical and monarchical power – that old quarrel between the temporal and the spiritual. The Pharisees confronted the Sadducees, who, thanks to an alliance with the despots of the day, had maintained their privileges.

The Pharisees came out against the attribution of the royal title to Alexander Jonathan. He soon thereafter crucified 800 Pharisees; the throats of their women and children were cut before their eyes.

From the same tormented matrix would come a third sect, that of the Sons of Tsadoq, or the Men of the Community, whom the Greeks called the “Essenes.” Hostile to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, they were also violently opposed to Jerusalem, the Temple and the practice of sacrifices.

Collaborators with all the occupiers of Palestine, the Sadducees did not survive the war of the Zealots, which ended with the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 [C.E.]. At the end of the First Century, only the Pharisees possessed a monopoly on Jewish orthodoxy.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Pharisees**

The Hebrew word *peroushim* means “separated, placed apart” and alludes to the schism that led to a nationalist and holy war against the Greek occupation by Mattathias and his son, Judah Maccabee in 163 [B.C.E.]. Better known by their Hellenized name “Pharisees,” these sectarians extolled the strict observance of Mosaic laws and opposed the Sadducees’ hypocrisy with popular fervor.

Vituperators of the dissolute morals of the sacerdotal caste, the Pharisees – precursors of the reform movements that castigated the morals of the Roman

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<sup>32</sup> M. Simon, *Les Sectes juives à l'époque de Jesus*, Paris, 1960; E.M. Laperrousaz, *L'Attente du messie*, Paris.

Church – celebrated the virtues of ascetic morality, emphasized the importance of solidarity, encouraged piety and rallied a crowd of oppressed people, whose feelings of frustration, disorder and envy they channeled.

In their struggle against the Sadducees' domination, the Pharisees used two institutional weapons that proved their organizational power: the Rabbinate and assemblies of the faithful or synagogues, which were the model for the churches of the future.

Whatever his trade, the *rabbi* ("my master"), a secular pedagogue, dispensed religious instruction among the working classes. After the defeat of 70 [C.E.] and the disappearance of the Sadducees, there were rabbis who imposed modernity on the Jewish religion, fixed the canon of sacred texts, defended orthodoxy, and condemned the heresies of the *minim* (dualists or Gnostics) and the *noisrim* or Nazarenes.

The synagogues (the source is the Greek word *synagoge*, which means "meeting") were the houses for priests, studies and meetings. The Essenes would imitate them by calling theirs "communities" (from the Greek word *ekklesiai*: "church" designates the place and "Church" the assembly that meets therein).

When bloody repression by Alexander Jonathan, allied with the Sadducees, fell upon them in 100 [B.C.E.], the Pharisees in large part left Judea and went to Galilee. There they were rivals with the Nazarenes in the second half of the First Century before the Christian era. In the cities of the Diaspora, their influence would not cease to grow until the great anti-Semitic waves of 70 and 135.

When Pompey seized Jerusalem in 63 [B.C.E.], thereby inaugurating a Roman domination that would last until 324 [C.E.], the Pharisees, in their turn, chose to collaborate with the occupiers.

In the same period, under the pontificate of Johann Hycran II, a dissident Rabbi (the head of an Essene community and known by the name Master of Justice) was put to death with the consent, if not on the instigation, of the Pharisees. The Essenes declared a hatred of the Pharisees that was equal to that which they felt for the Sadducees and Judaism in general. Not only would the execution of the Christ or the Essene Messiah lend its dramatic aura to the crucifixion of Jesus (as it reported by the evangelic legends), but it would also accredit the opinion of a death clamored for by the Pharisees.

Although little taken with the kings chosen by the Romans (such as Herod the Great), the Pharisees estimated that sovereigns govern by reason of a divine will and supported the principle that it was necessary "to render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar."

The Pharisees took the side of Rome in its struggle against the Zealots, whom one of their most celebrated sectarians, the historian Flavius Joseph, called *lestoi*, "bandits" and "terrorists." Wasn't it with the consent of the Roman

authorities that, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, the great rabbi Johanan Ben Zaccai and the Pharisees left the town? That exodus, voluntarily undertaken in order to avoid a confrontation of which the Pharisees disapproved, would, in a falsified version, enter into the apologetic novel known as *Acts of the Apostles* (end of the Second Century). In it, the Pharisees have become Christians, and thus they are accredited with nourishing no hostility towards Rome (from the second half of the Second Century on, the politics of the diverse Christianities strove to obtain a certificate of good citizenship from Roman imperial power). They took refuge at Pella, in Macedonia. Like the Sadducees, the Pharisees made a pact with the powers-that-be in order to better situate their religion beyond terrestrial contingencies. The Catholic Church would not do otherwise all the way through the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. On the other hand, the Pharisees drew upon themselves the hatred and scorn of the Zealots and the Essene factions that were favorable to them.

The Pharisees popularized the practice of the *midrash* or biblical commentary. The so-called sacred texts were re-copied, revised without scruple as a function of on-going polemics, read in public, explained, glossed, corrected by the evolution of mindsets, brought up to date, nay, even suppressed, as was the case with the *Book of Tobias*. A whole literature – *targum, midrash, mishna, Talmud* – was thus forged in the fires of the assemblies and the necessity of extracting from these texts a moral rule applicable to the community or the entirety of the believers.

The Pauline current, which Marcion would impose around 140 [C.E.] in order to counter the Judeo-Christian communities that claimed Peter and James for themselves, took a large part of its doctrine from the Pharisees' teachings: notably, the beyond in which the dead would be individually resurrected after a Last Judgment that would divide them up into the blessed, elected to a celestial Eden, and the damned, hurled down into Gehenna; the existence of the angels, agents and intercessors of the Divine Grace; the end of the world, in which a Messiah, sent by God, annihilates the terrestrial kingdoms in order to substitute the Kingdom of God for them; and the imminence of the times in which the power of the Savior will be revealed.

Like the Essenes, the Pharisees practiced the Holy Communion or Eucharistic banquet, but they defended a more personal religion, less austere, one better accorded with human weaknesses. Although attached to sacrifices and to the meticulous rigors of the observances, they were much more accommodating, which elicited the reproach of being lax from the Essenes, who themselves refused the sacrifices of the Temple in order to substitute for them the sacrifice of existence and the maceration of the body.

The Pharisees were ardent proselytizers but, unlike the Essenes, the Nazarenes and the Elchasaite Christians (who were mentioned in a letter from Pliny the Younger to [Emperor] Trajan), they were rather inclined to discourage neophytes. Another paradox: like the Christian Jews in the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* (90? 100? 110?), they did not remove the obstacles of circumcision, the Sabbath, the rites of purification or prohibited foods.

Placing emphasis on active solidarity, the Pharisees made the synagogues places of mutual assistance and encounter. In them they developed in a kind of social security system that provided assistance to the poor, the elderly, widows and the sick. The Churches (first the Judeo-Christian ones, then the de-Judaicized ones) claimed for themselves the charitable politics of the Pharisees, investing in them in order to establish themselves more easily in the working-class [*populaire*] milieus.

### **The Zealot Movement**

The Zealots constituted a national guerrilla front that brought together (in a shared hatred for the Roman occupation) diverse religious tendencies in Palestine and across the Diaspora, and were not a religious sect, properly speaking.

Herod, who was king from 37 to 4 [B.C.E.], did not fail to re-build the Temple, appease religious scruples and assure himself of the favor of the Sadducees and Pharisees. Nevertheless, an agitation that no doubt issued from the Essene and Baptist milieus (Dositheans and Nazarenes) ravaged the State under his control.

Speaking about the revolt led by Judah of Gamala, Flavius Joseph mentions a bandit by the name of Ezekias: “There was also a certain Judah, son of Ezekias, the formidable head of the brigands, who had only been taken by Herod with the greatest of difficulties.”<sup>33</sup>

Judah of Gamala (or Galilee) seems to have been the leader of the revolt that took place in the year 6. The crucifixion of his father, Ezekias, took place around 30 [B.C.E.].

The endemic state of the revolt became worse after the death of Herod in 4 [B.C.E.]. “Trouble exploded on all sides in the countryside [...]. A slave of the deceased king put on a diadem and, traveling the region with the brigands whom he had assembled, burned the royal palace at Jericho, as well as many of the luxurious residences.”<sup>34</sup> A shepherd, Athronges, also put on a diadem and traveled

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<sup>33</sup> Flavius Joseph, *Antiquités judaiques*, XVII, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Flavius Joseph, *La Guerre des Juifs*, II, 4, 5.

the country, killing Romans and the King's people. In response, the Roman General Varus was sent in with two legions and four regiments of cavalymen.

In 6, the census organized by Quirinus, the legate of Syria, gave the signal for a general insurrection that was conducted for religious reasons, because "only God can count his people" (which is how the census taken by David is described in the *Book of Samuel*, 2:24), but was especially caused by the miserable lot of the disadvantaged classes. The insurrection was led by Judah of Gamala, to whom Flavius returns several times.

"Then, a Galilean by the name of Judah pushed his compatriots to revolt by reproaching them for agreeing to pay taxes to the Romans and for supporting *mortal masters, beyond God* . . ." <sup>35</sup>

"There was also *a certain Judah, son of Ezekias*, the formidable leader of the brigands, who had only been taken by Herod with the greatest of difficulties. This Judah united around Sepphoris, *in Galilee*, a troop of desperate people and made an incursion against the Royal Palace. Having seized all the weapons that they found there, he equipped those who surrounded him and carried off all of the riches that he had collected from the place. He terrorized the entire neighborhood with raids and pillaging, aiming for a great fortune and *even the honors of royalty*, because he hoped to attain this dignity, not by the practice of virtue, but by the very excess of his injustice. . . ." <sup>36</sup>

"But a certain Judah the Gaulonite [Galilean] from the town of Gamala joined with a Pharisee named Saddok, and precipitated sedition. They claimed that the *Census* would lead to nothing less than complete servitude, and they called upon the people to reclaim their liberty. They said that if it should happen that they succeeded, this would be due to the fortune they'd already acquired, and if they were thwarted from seizing the goods that remained for them to take, at least they would have obtained the honor and glory of having shown the grandeur of the soul. Moreover, God preferred the success of their projects; so, in love with great things, they spared no expense in realizing it. . . ."

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Flavius Joseph, *Antiquités judaiques*, XVII, 10.

“Here were born seditions and political assassinations, sometimes of fellow citizens, immolated by the fury that caused them to fight against each other and by the passion to never give in to their adversaries, and sometimes of enemies; famine pushed them to the most shameful extremities; the seizure and destruction of towns, until this revolt delivered the very Temple of God to the fire of the enemy. So great was the influence of changing national institutions and overthrowing them that they lost what they had attained, since Judah of Gamala and Saddok – by introducing and awakening among us a *fourth philosophical sect* and by surrounding themselves with many adherents – filled the country with immediate troubles and planted the roots of the evil that would later strike it, and this thanks to their previously unknown philosophy (of which I have wanted to speak a little), principally because it was *the youth’s interest in this sect* that was the ruin of the country.

“The fourth philosophical sect had Judah the Galilean as its creator. His sectarians in general were in agreement with the doctrines of the Pharisees, but they also had an invincible love of freedom, because they judged that *God is the only leader and the only master*. The most extraordinary forms of death, the torture of parents and friends leave them indifferent, provided that they do not have to call any man by the name of master. As many people have witnessed the unshakable firmness with which they submit to all of these evils, I can say no more, because I fear, not that one would doubt what I have said about this subject, but on the contrary that my words would give too weak of an idea of the scorn with which they accept and support sorrow. This madness began to strike our people under the government of Gessius Florus, who, by the excess of his violence, caused them to revolt against the Romans. Such are the philosophical sects that exist amongst the Jews. . .”<sup>37</sup>

Flavius Joseph’s text calls for several remarks. The movement of the Zealots or the “zealous servants of the law of Moses” was not born under the government of Gessius Florus, that is to say, in 65; it emerged from the failure of Judah of Gamala, who was called the Galilean, as was the Messiah Jesus ([Flavius] Joseph is unaware of his existence), and who also wanted to become king of the Jews.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII, 1.

The name of the Pharisee, Sadoq, whom Flavius Joseph (himself a Pharisee) held in mediocre esteem, evokes the idea of justice, as does the Essenes' Master of Justice and the Judeo-Christians' Jacob/James. Finally, the grouping together of diverse religious tendencies that the historian calls the "fourth sect" – does it not suggest the idea of a religious syncretism in which each combatant, not recognizing any authority other than that of God, is the brother of and witness for Adonai, *Kyrios*, the Savior?

In 45, Cuspius Fadus – named the governor of Judea by Emperor Claude – had to face an insurrection led by the Messiah Theudas (aka Judah or Thomas), who was followed by a great many poor people. In the manner of Elie and Elisee in Hebrew mythology, he promised his troops they would take Jerusalem and cross the River Jordan without getting their feet wet. By promising to lead his flock into the holy land, he repeated the gesture of Joshua. Fadus suppressed the revolt. Theudas was decapitated, his partisans massacred.

Between 46 and 48, Tiberius Alexander, who succeeded Fadus, ordained the crucifixion of the two sons of Judah of Gamala: Simeon (Simon) and his brother Jacob (James).

Under Agrippa III, around 49, new clashes broke out between Jews and Zealots. Battles were fought beside the Temple. In 66, Caesarea was the theatre of battle between Jews and Greeks. Two years later, an incident brought fire to the powder. Eleazar, son of the great priest Anania and leader of the Temple's guards, killed the third son or the grandson of Judah of Galilee, Menachem, one of the leaders of the Zealot movement (his name means "paraclete" [in Greek] and "comforter" [in Latin]). The general war against Rome and the independence of Israel were proclaimed in a great confusion, because Jews from rival factions killed each other in Jerusalem. This would last up to 70 [C.E.].

Flavius Joseph, who had been the governor of Galilee, said the following with full knowledge of the causes of the Vespasian campaign.

"After the taking of Jopata, all of the Galileans who had escaped from the arms of the Romans surrendered to them. They then occupied all the places, except for Gischala and Mount Itabyrios (Tabor). The holdouts were also in Gamala, the town of the Taricheans, situated above the lake, where the kingdom of Agrippa ended, and [there were holdouts] next to Sogone and Seleucia, and also [on the shores of] Lake Semechonitis. The lake's width is sixty *verstes* and extends to the market town called Daphne, which is completely beautiful and has access to the sources from which comes the Little Jordan, [which flows] under the Temple of the Golden Cow (one of the golden cows in Jeroboam: I *Kings* 12, 29), before reaching the Great Jordan. By



sending delegates to these places and putting his faith in them, Agrippa has pacified them.

“But Gamala did not submit, counting on its solidity, because the soil was rocky and the town stood on a foothill, like a neck and two shoulders, and thus had the appearance of a camel. Thus it was called *Gamal*, but the people of the country did not call it by its real name, *Kamil* (the Galilean pronunciation of *Gamal*), because they detested this animal (in Greek, *kamelos*).

“On its flank and in front, there were depthless precipices; behind, it was not very fortified, but the inhabitants had reinforced it with a deep moat. As far as dwellings, they had been built extremely close together at the center of the place, and there were [horizontal] wells drilled through, all the way to the end of the town.

“As strong as the place was, Flavius Joseph had it fortified even more by constructing solid ramparts and establishing conduits and tunnels, so that one could also circulate through it under the ground.”<sup>38</sup>

Situated to the east of Lake Tiberias (Genesareth), Gamala – despite its privileged situation – fell into the hands of Titus, son of Vespasian, after tough fighting.

In August 70, the Roman *Decima Legio* seized Jerusalem, sacked it and ruined the Temple. The Zealots’ desperate resistance was sustained until the fall of Masada, their last fortress, in 73.

In the first half of the Second Century, revolt broke out again under the leadership of the Messiah Bar Kokhba. Hadrian crushed it in 135, reducing the Jewish nation and State to nonexistence for the next nineteen centuries.

If Flavius Joseph spoke of the Zealots as if they were a sect, this was because the insurrection had been experienced like a veritable national and religious epic, a saga whose scattered fragments nourished *midrashim* of anger, despair and eschatology before being revised and faultily translated into Greek and implanted into the propaganda narratives (first Christian, then Catholic) that falsified their meaning.

Jews of all beliefs were among the Zealots. A Hellenized aristocrat, Flavius Joseph – a functionary of the Roman Empire – reproached them for their violence

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<sup>38</sup> Flavius Joseph, *La Guerre des Juifs*, II, 11.

and fanaticism. (Nothing excludes the possibility that the fire that ravaged Rome in 64 [C.E.], to which Nero's pogroms responded, was the work of a hardcore faction of the Zealots active in Rome's Jewish community. In 49, troubles attributed to the Jews had exploded in Rome. Supposing that it isn't an interpolation, the formula "*impulsatore Christo*," which Suetone employs around 130 in his *Life of the Twelve Caesars* – "with the prompting of a Messiah," with *chrestos* or *Christos* simply translating the Hebrew *messiah* – refers to those troubles.) But, with xenophobia and nationalist messianism helping out, these religious tendencies amalgamated themselves into an apparent unity, from which Judeo-Christianity would draw a kind of specificity after the defeat [of 70 C.E.].

The Pharisees expressed the hope for salvation, the imminent end of the world, the approach of the Last Judgment and resurrection.

Despite the pacifism with which one generally credits them, the Essenes participated in the Zealot movement. The *Decima Legio* would raze the site of Qumran. Among the texts discovered at Masada – in addition to the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* – was a specifically Essenean ritual, [namely] the Sabbath prayer [sung] in union with the angels of heaven.<sup>39</sup>

What about a Judeo-Christian presence of the Ebionite or Nazarene type [among the Zealots]? The works of Flavius Joseph mention many names that also appear in the exegetical and propagandistic literature; they pop up in the Hebrew or Aramaic *midrashim* of the First Century, and the Catholic texts of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries. Thus it seems that, due to the ahistorical spirit of Judaism, the two Zealot leaders, Jacob/James and Simon, son of Judah of Gamala, "became" Jacob of Kepher Schanya, the leader of a the Nazarene community, executed between 41 and 42 on the orders of Herod Agrippa, and Simon the Essene, the enemy of Jochanaan (John the Baptist), respectively. The first of the two would later become James the Just and the second Simon/Peter, descended from Simon Cephas (Simon the Rock, Simon the Stone, Simon the Bald, Simon the Cruel, Simon the Unshakable?).

The agitator Theudas contains the *doublon*<sup>40</sup> Jude/Judas and Thomas. The evangelic legends call him "Athlete" (according to the Essene expression "athlete of virtue") and "father of the Savior." These four names would enter into the future communion of the apostles chosen for the patronage of diverse communities. Around the end of the Second Century, the assembly of the apostles would

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<sup>39</sup> Y. Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada*, Jerusalem, 1965.

<sup>40</sup> *Translator's note*: this French word can mean a two-sided coin, a "doubloon," or a typographic double.

constitute the team members of the only hero of whom no trace exists outside of Hebrew mythology: Joshua/Jesus.

It would not be without interest to mention Brandon's thesis, in which Jesus was a Zealot put to death along with other brigands or *lestoi*. Saul/Paul, an adversary of the communities or Churches that claimed James and Simon/Peter for themselves, erected Jesus as the exemplary value of his [Saul/Paul's] soteriological and penitential system. In order to please Rome, he substituted for the terrorist a saint put to death, not by the Romans, but by the Jews, who did not pardon him, his pacifism, or the ecumenism of his God of Kindness. These are fictions that, well into the Twentieth Century, took up the reins for the canonical Gospels in order to support the statue of an historical Jesus by according a growing credit to the Zealot hypothesis, which suppose that Jesus was the brother of James and Simon, and thus the son of Judah of Gamala. (One can not fail to cite one of the two remarks that do not conform with the kindness of the Messiah and that have persisted through the composite redaction of the Gospels: "Moreover, bring here my enemies who have not wanted me to reign over them and cut their throats in my presence. After having spoken thus, Jesus put himself at the head of his followers in order to go to Jerusalem" *Gospel attributed to Luke*, 19, 27-28.)

Although Dubourg's thesis of a Biblical Joshua (incarnated in many prophets) confirms the nonexistence of a historical Jesus as late as the second half of the Second Century (in 150, a work recognized by all the churches of the epoch under the title *The Shepherd of Hermas* does not mention him), it does not exclude the intervention – in the long struggle of dissident Jews against Rome – of a "new Joshua" with whom Theudas/Thomas (much later called the "twin brother of Jesus") might have identified himself.

After 70, Rome imposed the peace of the cemetery on Palestine. The Sadducee aristocracy disappeared; the last Zealot party desperately resisted at Masada. The Samaritans and the Essenes entered the war on the side of the Judeans, were decimated and took refuge in the cities of the Diaspora. Only the Pharisees – friends of Rome and defenders of the peace – escaped the violence of the conquerors, only to fall to the animosity of the vanquished, that is to say, the Esseno-Christians, who themselves fell apart into a multitude of sects that repudiated the bloody God of Israel, contested Mosaic law and rediscovered pacifism, which had been briefly forsaken.

## Chapter 4: The Men of the Community, or the Essenes

Only Flavius Joseph and Philo of Alexandria use the words *essènoi* or *essaoui* (from the Hebrew *esah*, “council” or “party”), which Dupont-Sommer<sup>41</sup> translates as “congregation” (“men of the community”), to refer to the Jewish dissidence that was hostile to the two sects that dominated Judea and the Diaspora: the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

Hadot does not rule out the influence of the Aramaic word *ossio*, “doctor,” in the origin of the appellation Therapeutes or the “doctors of the soul,” which Philo gives to an Essene sect located not far from Alexandria.

If it is possible to judge from the manuscripts discovered at Qumran, they called themselves the “Men of the Community,” “Council of God,” “Council of the Community,” “Sons of Sadoq” (or Tsadoq, Sons of the Just, or Sons of Justice). In a general way, they called themselves the “Loyal” or the “Pious.” In Hebrew, the word is *chasse*; in Syrian, it is *hasaya*, which means “pious” or “holy,” and is phonetically similar to “Essenean”). “The eastern door of Jerusalem, which overlooked the country of the Essenes, kept the name *Bab Essahioun*, which seems to recall the name of this mysterious community.”<sup>42</sup>

According to Qumranian texts from a later date, the Essenes formed a sect of the “New Alliance,” a formula that Marcion – in all probability inspired by the Christian Jew Saul – would translate as “New Testament” in order to oppose it to the Old one (with a measure of success that cannot be denied).

In its two centuries of existence, Essenism – the expansion of which followed the tracks of the Diaspora – did not fail to borrow from diverse streams and embrace many doctrines. Philo speaks of the “Therapeutes” of Lake Mareotis. In certain texts, the Men of the Community are identified with the *ebbyonim*, the “poor,” who had every reason to approach the Judeo-Christian sect of the Ebionists, who were close to or rivals of the Nazarenes, and against whom the *rebym*, the “many” (a term used by Saul/Paul to designate his disciples) seemed to be opposed.

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<sup>41</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les écrits esséniens découverts près de la mer Morte*, Paris, 1980, p. 408; J. Hadot, *op. cit.* p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> J. Marques-Rivière, *Histoire des sectes et des sociétés secrètes*, p. 92.

## History of the Sect

Rejecting the early hypothesis that fixes the origin of Essene dissidence under the Asmoneans Jonathan and Simon, Dupont-Sommer instead situates it under Alexander Jonathan (103-76 [B.C.E.]).

Opposition to the monarchal pretensions of the great priest Alexander Jonathan incited the leader of the Essenes to withdraw into the desert with his partisans, just as Moses did.

We know through Flavius Joseph that Aristobulus the First, successor to the great priest Jean Hycran, his father, would add the title of king to that of great priest. A year later, in 103 [B.C.E.], his brother Alexander Jonathan succeeded him and did not disavow this bold initiative: he took the title of king in his turn. Of the three great Jewish parties, only the Essenean party was strongly opposed to this innovation.<sup>43</sup>

The resolution to leave Jerusalem and enter the desert is evoked in *The Rule of the War of the Sons of the Light Against the Sons of Darkness*.

Where was the community located? The historian Dio Chrysostom (around 42 to 125) speaks of Essenes living near Sodom. For Saulcy, Qumran would be Gomorrah.<sup>44</sup> Doresse contents himself with stating “Sodom and Gomorrah count among the places in which their colonies were established.”<sup>45</sup>

In *Writing from Damascus*, the first master of the sect carried the title of priest. He issued from the sacerdotal family of Gemul and his dissidence derived, at the origin at least, from a power struggle in the Sadducee caste, mythically attached to Sadoq, the great priest under Solomon.

His title referred to the sacred notion of justice, to those just or holy people whom God designated as his chosen; in Christianity, Jacob/James would be an example of such a person. This was also the destiny of Melchizedek, a secondary biblical personage who, among certain Essenes, was elevated to the dignity of Messiah by the symbolic consonance of his name (*tsedek*, “justice”). Fragments

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<sup>43</sup> J. Picard (or de Picardie), “Histoire des bienheureux du temps de Jérémie,” in *Pseudépigraphes de l’Ancien Testament*, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Saulcy (Fr. de), *Dictionnaire des antiquités bibliques*, Paris, 1859.

<sup>45</sup> J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d’Égypte*, Paris, 1958-1959, II, p. 328.

that came from *midrashim*, reprised in the notes attributed to Saul/Paul, again attest to the veneration shown with respect to an *alter ego* of the Master of Justice.

Around 100 [B.C.E.] there developed in Qumran a Jewish sect that disagreed with the Sadducees and was hostile to the Pharisees, whom Alexander Jonathan persecuted. Upon the death of the monarch and great priest, his widow, Alexandra (76-77), occupied the throne and set up her son Hycran II as the sovereign pontiff.

Upon the death of Alexandra, a war broke out between Hycran II (67-63) and his brother, Aristobulus II. The Pharisees took the side of the former, while the Sadducees chose the latter.

Around 65 [B.C.E.], persecution by Hycran II fell upon the Essenes who had taken refuge in Damascus, the holy city of which the Hebrew name (*DMS*) means “sanctuary.”<sup>46</sup> Its mythical foundation is attributed to Seth, the Son of Man (that is to say, the Son of Adam), whose importance – emphasized in the Qumran manuscripts, as well as in the texts discovered at Nag-Hammadi – demonstrated the existence of the sects that believed Seth was the Messiah. The *Writing from Damascus* situated the event a little before the arrival of Pompey into Judea in 63 [B.C.E.].

Between 65 and 63 [B.C.E.] a drama exploded, the eschatological consequences of which surpass the history of the Essenes: the putting to death of the Master of Justice, who was, according to the *Commentary of Habacuc*, “the priest whom God had placed in the (House of Judah) in order to explain all of the words of his servants, the prophets.” Was this Onias the Just, put to death in the camp of Hycran II, as suggested by Dupont-Sommer? (According to J. M. Rosenstiehl,<sup>47</sup> the ancient kernel of the *Apocalypse of Elie* dates from the epoch of Hycran II. A king who was not anointed persecuted the virgin Tabitha, who is the Community of Qumran, but the Anointed One, the Messiah, came to deliver her and lead her to terrestrial paradise. The return of Enoch evokes that of the Master of Justice.)

Whatever the case, the Qumran texts thenceforth combined veneration of the victim, the “Last Priest” or the “Messiah of the Spirit,” with execration of the despot or the “Impious Priest.” Philonenko sees in the martyrdom of Isaiah a transposition of the history of the sect and the sacrificial execution of its Messiah.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> B. Dubourg, *L'invention de Jésus, op. cit.*, II.

<sup>47</sup> J.-M. Rosenstiehl, *L'Apocalypse d'Elie*, Paris, 1972, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> Philonenko (M.), *Pseudépigraphes de l'Ancien Testament et des manuscrits de la mer Morte*, Paris, 1987, t. I.

When Pompey seized Jerusalem and razed the Temple in 63 [B.C.E.], the Essenes propagated the rumor of a just punishment inflicted by God on the Judeans, who were guilty of the death of the Messiah. This scenario, which colored anti-Judaism with anti-Semitism, would, in the Second Century, enter into the fictional elaboration of the death of Jesus.

Little by little, the Men of the Community regained the region of the Dead Sea, not without leaving important colonies in the cities of the Diaspora and in Damascus, the sanctuary city in which the legendary biography of Saul/Paul situated the illumination of the prophet and his revelation of the Messiah.

An invasion by the Parthian Empire, which ravaged the Qumran region between 40 and 38 [B.C.E.], and an earthquake combined to ruin a secular community whose numerical importance was attested to by the architectural development of its buildings, the extensiveness of its agriculture, its irrigation system and even its cemetery, in which [both] men and women reposed.

The tolerant attitude of Herod (37 [B.C.E.] - 4 [C.E.]) favored the Essenes' freedom of movement. They traveled the roads that, from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, followed the banks of the River Jordan. There an important Baptist movement was born. Can one see an evolved Essenism, stripped of its elitism, or the perpetuation of the teachings of the Messiah called Dunstan/Dositheos, who was crucified, in the Nazarenism established in Judea, Galilee and Samaria well before the Christian era?

From 4 [B.C.E.] on, the guerrilla war against Rome provoked a new flow of people into Qumran. It is more than probable that a faction of Essenism furnished doctrinal weapons to the Zealot movement. At Masada, there were Essenes for whom *The Rule of the War of the Sons of the Light Against the Sons of Darkness* brought together eschatological combat and nationalist warfare.

In 68 [C.E.], Qumran was devastated by the *Decima Legio Pretensis*, the elite military horde sent by the Romans to crush the Jewish insurrection. But the development of Essenism was not broken; in fact, it had just begun.

With the divine punishment that fell upon Jerusalem and the Temple, which they never ceased to execrate, the Men of the Community showed themselves – in the broad daylight of the Diaspora – to be what they had always been: Messianic Jews expecting the imminent return of their *kyrios*, their Savior; enlightened ones whom the Greeks at the beginning of the Second Century called *chrestianoï* or *christianoï*, that is to say, quite simply messianics and not, as the historians have falsely suggested, disciples of a unique Christ.

Contrary to what Renan affirms, Christianity is not an Essenism that succeeded; it is nothing other than the ensemble of the Essene sects, which embraced the general term Judeo-Christianity and were opposed to the Pharisees.

Spared from Roman repression, the Pharisees tightened their ranks, fell back upon a rigorous canonicity that was concretized by the *Talmud* and its commentaries. They fought two heresies: the *nosrim* or Nazarenes, who were preoccupied with the reform of Mosaic law, and the *minim* or Gnostics, “those who know,” which included the dualists, who opposed the Good God and YHWH with the Simonian doctrine of individual salvation through self-creation.

## **Monachism and Ecclesial Organization**

Essenism evolved a great deal in two centuries. If its archaic form, which was of the monastic type, had not disappeared (due to the persecution pursued by Dece) from the hermitages and Coptic monasteries founded by Pachomius and Macarius around 251, then its doctrines would have taken on the more modern colorations that were expressed by Ebionism, Nazarenism, the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas*, the teachings of Saul/Paul, nay, the Elchesaitism of the *Homilies of Peter attributed to Clement*, not to mention the Enochians, Melchisedechians and Sethians.

The excavations at Qumran have uncovered a square building, flanked by a tower that was perhaps intended to watch for the return of the Messiah, who was put to death around 63 [B.C.E.].

A system of canals that began at a mountain stream fed seven pools equipped with a stairway and several round basins, which were reserved for the baptism of neophytes and purifying ablutions.

Dedicated to worship and meetings, the monastery did not shelter the members of the Community, who were lodged nearby. A meeting hall served as a place for the reading and exegesis of biblical texts, rewritten and revised without scruple by sectarians who were convinced that they were the only ones who held the truth. Did they not praise their Christ for having revealed to them the meaning of the Scriptures, thus elevating them to the status of God’s chosen ones, saints, “perfect ones”?

There [in the monastery] were celebrated the sacred banquets or “Holy Communion,” ritual meals of bread and wine (or water) by which the faithful communed with the presence of God (the Catholic Eucharist would be inspired by it and added the symbolism of the Flesh and the Blood, borrowed from the Phrygian cult of Attis).

According to estimates, the average population of Qumran was around 200 people. Its autocratic system was founded on agriculture, which was given over to the care of neophytes, while the Perfect Ones devoted themselves to praising the Savior, singing hymns and the exegesis of sacred texts. Flavius Joseph estimated



the number of Essenes in Alexandria (where Philo knew them by the name “Therapeutes”), Damascus, Greece, Asia Minor and Italy at 4,000.

The cemeteries have yielded the skeletons of men and women, probably the wives of the converts assigned to labor activities, who had been accorded the right to marry with the goal of procreating. They interred their dead with their heads facing north, which was different from other Jews, whom they considered to be non-believers: they judged themselves to be the only representatives of the true Israel. They included in this execration the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who were deemed guilty of spilling the blood of the Messiah. Refusing the sacrifices made under the aegis of the Great Priest, they called for divine vengeance upon the Temple, the object of infamy rebuilt by Herod.

As for Jerusalem, they nourished the ambition to deliver it from the Jews who, through their impious doctrines, had profaned the holiness of the place. Among several attempts effectuated in this regard, there was the tumult stirred up by Theudas/Thomas and his 4,000 “poor people” (*ebbyonim*), who partook of the Essene spirit.

Their apportionment of time also distinguished the Essenes from their co-religionists. The only true observers of Mosaic laws, they claimed their calendar came from divine revelation. Unlike the Judean calendar, theirs was solar, not lunar.

Following the indications that Ezekiel advocated, the year was divided into four trimesters and into months of 30 or 31 days, with the result that festivals fell on fixed dates. Easter echoed Wednesday 14 Nizan, two days before the Easter celebrated in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

This was the calendar to which the evangelic novel of Joshua/Jesus referred and was later adopted by Catholic orthodoxy when – appropriating the control of time in its turn – it would arbitrarily anchor at zero the beginning of the Christian era.

The Essenes replaced sacrifices at the Temple with the sacrifice of the body: mortification extinguished the fire of desire and stoked the ardor of the spirit, to which their miserable existence reduced itself. Their fanatical asceticism nourished the ordinary misogyny of patriarchal peoples and pushed it to the state of neurosis. The Qumran manuscripts include a poem against women, the source of all the evils and troubles that afflicted men.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> A. Jaubert, *La Date de la Cène*, Paris, 1957.

<sup>50</sup> N. Toci, *I manoscritti del mar Morto*, Bari, 1967.

The *Rule of the War* proscribes sexual relations and excludes women, young men and the impure (understood to be those who ejaculate) from the ranks of the Enlightened Ones.<sup>51</sup>

A subsequent text, issued from Damascus, tolerates the last resort of marriage, but with the sole goal of procreating and perpetuating the sect.

Scorn for women runs in counter-point through all of the divisions of Christianity. Saul/Paul (an Essenean or Nazarene) only tolerated their presence in the ecclesiastical assemblies on the condition that they keep quiet; the Marcionites, Elchesaites, Montanists and Catholics all treated them like they were impure beasts. To support the idea that, given the prejudices of the times, this was quite ordinary would be to ignore the fact that, at the same time, the schools – nay, even the sects – recognized in women and love the priceless privileges of creating life and saving humanity. This was the case with Simon of Samaria, certain Naassenes and the Barbelites.

No doubt Pliny the Elder was right to paint an unlikable portrait of the Essenes as a “people without women, without love, without money.” Love was travestied by their adoration of God and their clannish solidarity. As far as the absence of money, which was the result of an autocratic economy or voluntary poverty (as it was among the Ebionites), it would later on haunt the collective and millenarian dreams that, taking root in the crises brought on by economic and social transformation, would demand the return to an egalitarian, fraternal, and disinterested Christianity – the cathartic prelude to the reign of the holy.

### **Essenism was the real original Christianity**

In the Eighteenth Century, the scholar Bernard de Montfaucon stirred up a polemic on the subject of the Therapeutes described by Philo of Alexandria. To Montfaucon, they were a Christian sect, an assertion he backed up with serious argumentation.<sup>52</sup> His critics retorted that other Jewish milieus presented the same singularities. Both were right: the Therapeutes were both Jewish and Christian. Until the beginning of the Second Century, the only form of Christianity was inscribed in the framework of a reformed and anti-Judean Judaism – that is, before Marcion rejected it in the name of a Greek Christianity.

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<sup>51</sup> J. Duhaine, “Etude comparative de 4 QM FG GG 1-3 et 1 QM,” *Revue de Qumran*, XIV, #55.

<sup>52</sup> B. de Montfaucon, *Lettres pour et contre la fameuse question si les Solitaires, appelés Therapeutes, dont a parlé Philon le Juif étaient chrétiens*, Paris, 1712.

Essenism brought together all the traits of primitive Christianity: it was baptist, believed in a Messiah, founded Churches and was marked by the duality of paths, Light and Darkness, nay, by the duality of the Demiurge and the Good God.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees used baptism as a ritual of purification, but among the Essenes it did not take on the value of a spiritual engagement and a communitarian rite of initiation. Thus a hymn proclaims:

It is by the humility of the soul with respect to all the precepts of God  
that the flesh will be purified When one sprinkles it with purifying  
[*lustrale*] water And sanctifies it in running water.<sup>53</sup>

Symbolically, water cleanses the body of its natural impurity, washing it of sensual passions, exonerating it of its material gravity and elevating it towards God in the ascendant movement of the spirit. Baptism remains without effect if it is not accompanied by a conversion of the heart. The doctrine of Saul/Paul gives to baptism the same spiritual meaning, inverting the baptismal conception honored by certain Alexandrian Gnostic sects, for which water meant the return to the maternal matrix and re-birth in the heart of the host community.

The current state of research does not permit us to conjecture if Dositheosian or Nazarenean baptismal practices influenced Essenism, but undoubtedly certain Essene traits proceeded from Samaritan freedom with respect to Judaic orthodoxy.

## **The Messiah**

The doctrinal system of the Men of the Community and the *Book of Enoch* I shared the lineaments of the Gnosticism and Messianism that would dominate first the Jewish and then the Hellenic Christianities up to, nay, beyond the Second Century.

In this system, the angels, the Princes of Light, confronted the fallen angels, the Princes of Darkness; the “couples” or syzygies opposed Michael and Raphael to Belial and Satan.

The theory of the Son of Man (Adam) is expounded in the *Ascension of Enoch*. When Enoch asks the angel who accompanies him about the Son of Man, “Who is he? From whence does he come?” the angel responds: “It is the Son of Man who possesses justice, who will reveal all of the secret treasures because the Savior of Spirits has chosen him.”

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<sup>53</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les écrits esseniens. . .*, *op. cit.* p. 16.

The angel specifies that he is also “engendered by Justice,” which is a reference applicable to the Essene Master and to Melchizedek, his *parèdre* [consort] or *alter ego*.

As the Son of Man was incarnated in the Master of Justice, he will return in the features of a new Messiah, whom Enoch’s parable names the Chosen One, according to the tradition inaugurated by the stanzas on the “Servant of YHWH” in the *Book of Isaiah* (42, 1).

Thus, as Philonenko<sup>54</sup> emphasizes, there exists a veritable Christology in the Qumran texts. It reaches such precision that people have supposed that in certain writings – such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (the parting remarks of the twelve sons of Jacob to their children: Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zabulon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin) – there must be interpolations by various Greek Christianities, nay, by Catholicism. Comparing the manuscripts found at Qumran with the revised versions, Philonenko reveals a small number of interpolations, most of them limited to the addition of the word *Christos*. Here was a Messiah ready to assume the emblematic name Joshua/Jesus.

Essene Christology evolved from a primitive conception to a modern vision of the Christ. The most ancient texts evoked two Messiahs: one, sacerdotal, who indicates to the faithful of the road to sanctification; the other, royal, who leads Israel to victory over the *goyim*. Forty years later, a single Messiah was expected: the Master of Justice, the Chosen One, the *Kyrios* chosen by God to reveal the “New Alliance” (the *Novum Testamentum* of which Marcion would speak).

The wait had begun many years before the Christian era. While the *Rule Annex* (1 Q. Sa 2/11-12) speaks of a time when God “will have engendered the Messiah,” the part devoted to Benjamin in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* clearly evokes the coming of a unique Messiah, the reincarnation of the Master of Justice.<sup>55</sup>

Then we too will arise, each in our tribe, adoring the King of the Heavens who will appear on the earth in the form of a humble man; and all those who have believed in him will rejoice with him. And then, all will arise, some in glory, others in shame, and the Savior will at first judge Israel for the injustices committed (against) him; when God comes in flesh (as) liberator, they will not believe in him.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Philonenko, *op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> Id., *Les interpolations chrétiennes*. . . , Paris, 1960, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

Let's recall that this is a question of a text unearthed at Qumran that does not include any subsequent interpolations. It is difficult not to discover in it the source of the mythical person called Jesus and the essentials of the doctrine attributed to Saul/Paul. Amplified by *midrashim*, completed by particular communitarian practices and by modern polemics, and adapted to the Greco-Roman mindset, the speculations arising around the Essene Messiah who was tortured around 63 [B.C.E.] would sketch out the scenario of a syncretic Messiah derived from Joshua, whose drama would be transposed so that it took place during the Zealots' war under Tiberius, while James and Peter, the heroic witnesses and disciples of the *Kyrios*, who had guided their acts, died while being crucified.

The secret name of such a Messiah formed the stakes in a long struggle in the places that had been penetrated by Jewish eschatology. Each Essene community or Church produced its own proofs and testimonies with a view towards winning approval for its Christ.

Grotto #4 at Qumran yielded an Aramaic text, the terms of which entered into the composition of the future Joshua/Jesus.

He will be great on the earth (O King, and he will make) peace and each will serve him. He will be called the Son of the Great God and by this name he will be called. He will be saluted as the Son of God and we will call him the Son of the Most High and his kingdom will be an eternal kingdom.<sup>57</sup>

He will be the heavenly figure of the Son of Man announced by the *Book of Daniel*, "the Chosen One in the presence of the Savior of Spirits." "The Light of the people," he will possess the spirit of wisdom, science and strength, the three qualities that would appear in the *Logia* or the remarks attributed (in the Second Century) to Jesus.

A number of traits anecdotally arranged in Jesus' evangelic novels abound in the Qumran writings. The apocalypse included in the *Testament of Joseph* nourished the legend of a virginal birth: "And I saw that from Judah was born a Virgin, wearing a linen robe, and from her emerged a lamb without blemish."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J. Fitzmayer, S. J., "The Q Scrolls and the NT after forty years," *Revue de Qumran*, XIII, #49-52, p. 613.

<sup>58</sup> Philonenko, *Interpolations, op. cit.*, p. 29.

The manuscript labeled 1 Q H 6, 12 imputes to this Christ-Lamb a calling that is no longer nationalist, but universal, following an overture that the Church ordinarily attributed to the school of Saul/Paul: “All nations recognize your truth and all people glory you.”

Moreover, the Master of Justice appears in the manner of the future Joshua/Jesus as a suffering Messiah and the founder of Churches: “God had wanted it that, in his sorrows, the Master of Justice built his glorious Church and, although the *Hymns* of the Master of Justice do not explicitly present his sufferings as capable of expiating the sins of the others, it is a fundamental doctrine of the sect and one finds in the *Songs of the Savior* (which figures in the *Book of Isaiah* and inspired Qumranian hymns) that that the Savior ‘was pierced because of our rebellions, destroyed because of our iniquities [...]. He takes care of the sins of many and he has interceded for the sinners’ (Isaiah, 3, 9, 12).”<sup>59</sup>

Another function of the Master of Justice was attributed to Joshua/Jesus and to Saul/Paul: announcing the Good News, which in Greek is the *Evangelion*, the Gospels.

The Qumranian hymns stipulate that God gave him the mission to be “according to His truth the one who announces the Good News (in the time) of His Goodness, evangelizing the humble ones, according to the abundance of His mercy (and watering them) at the source of holiness and consoling those who are contrite of spirit and the afflicted” (XVIII, 14-15).

This hymn inspired the “Songs of the Savior” in *Isaiah*.<sup>60</sup>

The spirit of the Savior YHWH is upon me, Because YHWH has anointed me. It is to announce the Good News to the humble that he has sent me, To bandage those who have a contrite heart [...]

Nothing is missing from the ensemble of the fundamental materials that, through re-writing and revision, ended up in the texts of the various Hellenic Christianities and Catholicism, and even in the text of “New Testament” that Marcion would brandish like a weapon against the “Old” one.

Dupont-Sommer does not fail to reveal it.<sup>61</sup> Essenism (or at least an Essene party that was perhaps Saul’s, one that was opposed to the partisans of Jacob, Peter

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<sup>59</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*, *Observations sur le Manuel de Discipline decouvert près de la mer Morte*, Paris, 1951.

and Thomas) claimed to be *the* sect of the New Alliance, otherwise called the New Testament (*Hymn*, V, 23; *Writing from Damascus*).

R. H. Charles, after studying the *Books of Enoch*, which were a part of the Essene canon, remarks that the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is “a product of the school that prepared the road to the New Testament.” He goes further, emphasizing that the famous *Sermon on the Mount* attributed to Jesus “in several passages reflects and goes as far as reproducing the same phrases from our text.” Charles adds that Paul seems to have used it like a *vade-mecum*.<sup>62</sup> Dupont-Sommer reveals the following, among other examples, in the *Manual of Discipline*: “I will not render retribution for evil upon anyone,” and there are even recommendations of the apostolic type: “They collectively observe truth and humanity, justice and law, and the love of kindness and a modest conduct in all of their ways.”<sup>63</sup>

Regarding Saul/Paul, Teicher has collated a great many analogies between the fragments of his letters and several Qumran manuscripts (according to Teicher’s thesis, the manuscripts are of late date and express the opinions of Judeo-Christianity and, in particular, those of the Ebionites).<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, the divergences between rival groups were inscribed on a common foundation, but the cleavage seems to be of a political – not to say, strategic – nature. The Essenean Churches of the Ebionite or Nazarene type that claimed for themselves the choices of James, Peter and Thomas, nay, even those of John the Essene mentioned by [Flavius] Joseph, conserved a relatively firm, elitist, and perhaps esoteric structure, whereas the schools propagated by Saul appealed to the *rebbim*, to the “many,” and thus affirmed themselves to be exoteric and populist.

## The Essene Churches

The Church of the Master of Justice claimed to be present in the whole world, to be universal, which is a term that translates the Greek word *catholicon*. This Church was built to “serve as an impregnable refuge for the Chosen Ones during the war that, at the end of time, the forces of evil would conduct against them.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> J. L. Teicher, “The Teachings of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 1952, III, #3-5.

<sup>65</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les écrits esséniens. . . , op. cit.*, p. 235.

Hymn VII (8-9) reveals the origin of the *Kephas*, the “rock,” the “stone/Peter” [*pierre*] that – combined with Simon the Zealot and Essene – would end up in the wordplay that would found the Church of Rome (“And on this stone/Peter, you will build your Church”). Sure enough, one can read in it the following.

And you have founded on the rock [*le rocher*] my edifice, And the eternal bases serve me as foundation, And all my walls have become a tested rampart That nothing can shake.

The Church is the community, the Assembly: “The source of justice and the reservoir of power [...] it is to those whom he has chosen that God has given as an eternal possession. And he has accorded to them a share in the fate of the saints and, with the Son of the Heavens, he has united their assembly, that of the council of the community.”<sup>66</sup>

The Essenean Churches organized themselves in relations of hostility to and competition with the Pharisee synagogues of the Diaspora. While the synagogal assemblies drew their unity from a Phariseeism endowed with a spiritual center (the holy city of Jerusalem, whose orthodoxy was guaranteed by the Temple), the Essenean communities, which were devoted to the unceasing revision of the sacred texts, decreed the end of time, speculated on the imminence, nature and name of the Messiah, and constituted rival Churches that were fecund with new doctrines. Three centuries would be needed for ecclesial monarchism to end up with the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, which was contested up to the Seventh Century, and the imposition of the universality – the *catholicon* – desired by the Master of Justice, the “Just Messiah.”

The *Manual of Discipline* makes clear the mode of organization in effect: “In all places where there are ten people from the party of the Community, there will not lack among them one who is a priest. And according to his rank, each of them will sit before him.”<sup>67</sup>

As among the Pharisees, the first places were reserved for the old ones, *prebyteroi*, that is to say, long-sighted people [*presbytes*], priests. One of them, called “the inspector of the many” (the *rebbim* or “many” refers to the faithful and are distinguished from the “perfect ones”), became the leader, archon, the *episcopos* (Greek for “bishop”). He was invited to carry himself like a

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<sup>66</sup> Règle, 11, 6-8, in Philonenko, *Pseudépigraphie . . .*, *op. cit.*, in Picard, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Observations . . .*, p. 24.



shepherd, like a pastor, which is a title that around 140-150 would inspire the writing of a Judeo-Christian novel attributed to Hermas in which the author deplores the discord among the diverse Churches of Rome.

Towards the end of the Second Century, certain Churches obeyed a collegiate leadership structure, a council of archons, while others adopted the monarchical form privileged by the politics of unification.

When Marcion provoked the rupture with Jewish Christianity, he attempted to found unified Churches that he wanted to have under the control of Rome: federations of Churches that were favorable to Saul's school and that rejected the communities that had chosen to place their legitimacy under the patronage of Zealot heroes, Ebionites, Nazarenes, James, Peter, Thomas, and Clement, the partisans of which treated "Paul" like a false prophet. It was still the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* that justified the number of the companions of a Messiah whose name, unknown to Hermas in 140, would begin to impose its revelation: Joshua/Jesus, the one who "saved, saves, will save." This was a minimal battle among the multitude of sects that bordered and confronted each other in Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, Colossee, Edessa, Rome. . . .

## **A Dualist Tendency**

The Jewish, Sadducee and Pharisee orthodoxies abominated all dualisms that, suspiciously revoking the uniqueness of YHWH, threatened the State and the national mystique. On the other hand, the Samaritans, who were often reticent with respect to the imported Judean God, never made a mystery of their attachment to the plural God El-Elohim, nay, to the dualism of the Divine Father/Divine Mother.

Essenism did not totally extirpate the Samaritan influence from its heart. The Jewish Gnosticism attested to by the *Books of Enoch* (which in fact combated other Gnostic tendencies) continued to exist in the diverse primitive Christianities – which were Jewish in the case of the Elchesaites' *Homilies of Peter* (around 110), Judaicized in the case of *The Shepherd of Hermas* (around 140), and Hellenized and anti-Semitic, in the case of Marcionism – as late as the second half of the Second Century, which ended with the popular development of the New Prophecy or "Montanism."

Dualist thought manifested itself in Essenism in diverse ways. No manuscript from Qumran implicitly expounds the idea that two Gods can exist. Nevertheless, certain currents accredited the syzygy of the Good God and the Demiurge, which was present in the doctrines of Cerinthus, Marcion, the Naassenes, the Sethians, the Barbelites and many other sects, Christian or not.

The Arab historian Shahrastani (ca. Seventh Century) affirms that, in the Fourth Century, Arius borrowed the doctrine according to which the Messiah was

the first angel of God for the Magharians, “who lived four hundred years before Arius and were known by the simplicity of their way of life and their serene abstinence.”

Who were the Magharians, whose existence dates back to the First Century before the Christian era? Their Arab name leaves little doubt; it means “people of the cavern or the cave,” because – Shahrastani makes clear – they hid their sacred texts in caverns.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the doctrine of the Angel-Messiah (the *angelos-christos*) was originally Essenean, since it was shared by the [various] Christianities and prevailed until the second half of the Second Century, when the campaign began to make Jesus an historical figure began.

In addition, this Arab historian explains that the refusal of an anthropomorphic YHWH induced them to impute the creation of the material universe to a Demiurge.<sup>68</sup> Thus it is not impossible that the dualist conception of a good and inaccessible God and a God who created the bad world (whom Marcion in his hatred of Judaism identified with YHWH the Bloody) existed in certain Essenean Churches and was defended by Marcion.

Without crediting Essenism in general with a position that was perceived as a scandal by the Pharisees (and much later by the monarchal current – for which there was only one God and one Bishop – to which the leaders of the Christian communities would attach themselves in reaction to Marcionism), dualism was unambiguously expressed in the doctrine of the two roads and even in the “couples” or syzygies that were still attested to by the *Homilies of Peter*. The struggle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness dominated the thought of the Men of the Community. To them, God “disposed for man two spirits [...] the spirit of truth and the spirit of perversion” (*The Rule of the War*).

In each generation, the Sons of the Prince of the Light and the Sons of the Angel of Darkness confront each other in a war from which the saints (the pure ones), who renounce the flesh and possess knowledge (*gnosis*), will emerge victorious.

Due to the privileges that they accorded knowledge, the Essenes belonged to Jewish Gnosticism, which would be perpetuated in Kabbalistic investigations.

“You have given me the intelligence of your faith and the knowledge of your admirable secrets,” declares Hymn VII (25). Gnosis is nothing other than secret knowledge. But from its essential root grew a great diversity of options, of choices (which translates the Greek word *haireisis*, heresy): dualism; the refusal or the surpassing of religion; monotheism; salvation by the individual himself, by a

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<sup>68</sup> Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, Utrecht, 1982, p. 154.

community, or by a Christ; and rational, mystical or magical approaches to the Logos. Gnosis implies the primacy of knowledge over *pistis*, faith, and the secret (the *apocryphon*, an apocryphal text that the Church – as part of its seizure of language and meaning – would identify with the “false, falsification”).

In the cities of the Diaspora, the esotericism of the Essenean groups more easily became an exotericism that was better suited to compete with the Pharisees’ proselytism. Such, no doubt, was the tendency of the school of Saul/Paul. Esotericism itself borrowed from different sources. The secret Gospels (the *Apocrypha*) and the Hermetic remarks of Jesus (the *Logia*) could only have come from the same Churches that – according to a manuscript from Grotto 4 at Qumran studied by S. T. Millik<sup>69</sup> – inferred from the morphology of individuals born under certain zodiacal signs their belonging to the cohort of the “spirits of Light” or the horde of the “spirits of Darkness.” (Such speculations could be found in the Christian astrology of Bardaisan, and also in divinatory magic, in the spirit of the quarrels over predestination, and in the art of recognizing sorcerers and sorceresses in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.)

### **Towards a Judeo-Christian Syncretism**

The thesis, accredited by the majority of historians, of a prophet named Jesus who founded a Church upon dogmatic truths that in fact only emerged after a long and painful period of labor in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries underestimates the marginal character of these religious speculations by hiding from sight the profusion of messiahs, sects, schools and communities in the particular milieus that they touch upon.

Dositheos, the crucified Samaritan Messiah; the Master of Justice, put to death by the Judeans; Melchizedek the Just; Enoch, who guided by the Son of Man; Barbelo, who collected sperm in order to save the world; Naas, the *Ophis-Christos* or Serpent-Redeemer; Three-Times-Great Hermes; Seth, the Son of Man with the head of a horse or donkey; Abrasax, with ophidian legs and a cockscomb, the saver of souls threatened by the Archons – so many Christs among whom Joshua/Jesus, whose name secretly means “God saved, saves, will save,” would later carve out a place for himself in the form of an angel sent by God.

And, among the four or five thousand Essenes of whom Flavius Joseph speaks, what a confusion! Partisans of James the Just, Simon-Peter, John the Essene, Jochanaan also known as John the Baptist, Theudas/Thomas, Saul known as “Paul” (in accordance with Marcion), Cerinthus, Zacchaeus/Clement and so

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<sup>69</sup> J. T. Milik, *Discoveries in the Judean desert. I Qumran, Cave I*, Oxford, 1955.

many others who commented upon and adapted the biblical texts by taking extracts from the *midrashim* (sometimes translated into Greek), the majority of which had disappeared, but about which it was possible to get an idea through a text that was not accepted by the Church and that illustrates the passage from Judeo-Christianity or Essenism to a Hellenized Christianity that was ready to ride roughshod over its Judaic roots: the *Didache*.

In the current of the First Century, there circulated among the non-Pharisee Judaicized milieu (Essene or Samaritan) a moralizing pamphlet titled *Doctrine of the Two Roads*, the title of which indicates its origin.

Re-copied, revised, developed and Hellenized, it ended up in a version that its last redactor (circa 140-150) gave the title *Didache Kyriou dia ton dodeka apostolon tois ethnesin* ("Teaching of the Savior addressed to strangers [to the faith] through the mediation of His twelve apostles").

An analysis of the various states of this text and the strata of its rewriting has permitted us to extract the oldest kernel of the *Didache*. It was inspired by the *Manual of Discipline* and it makes clear "the disciplinary order that is imposed on the community." In it, the higher-ups are called *episkopoi kai diakonai*, bishops and deacons. Moral compartments are ordered according to the "two roads." Also covered are baptism, fasting, prayer, and the sharing of bread (much later called the Eucharist).

The second great revision dates from 140-150 and is thus contemporaneous with the hostility adopted with respect to the original Judeo-Christianity. The text, known under the title *Didache* or *Doctrina apostolorum*, was honored in the Greco-Roman churches that, in the Diaspora, had separated themselves from the Jewish and Christian churches issued from Essenism. It is contemporaneous with the *Shepherd* attributed to Hermas of Rome (still Judeo-Christian), the *Homilies of Peter attributed to Clement* (based upon a Elchasaite text contemporaneous with Trajan), and the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* (around 117-130, according to Erbetta).<sup>70</sup>

A Trinitarian doxology would be added in the Fourth Century, due to polemics against Arius.

For a long time held as canonical, the *Didache* would finally be excluded from the Catholic Scriptures. A modern version of Judeo-Christianity, it refused the Judaic sacrifices and rituals, especially circumcision, which it spiritualized and interpreted symbolically. The name "Jesus" appears in it, but under features that were particularly embarrassing to the future Catholic orthodoxy: in the manner of the Master of Justice, he carried the title of Servant of God, and, in addition, he is

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<sup>70</sup> Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi del NT*, Turin, 1964, t. III.

perceived as an Angel-Messiah, an *angelos-christos*, in accordance with the traditions of the time and notably in agreement with the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas*, in which Jesus is simply the biblical Joshua.

## **Chapter 5: The Baptist Movement of the Samaritan Messiah Dusis/Dositheos**

### **Shadow and Light from Samaria**

If Samaria constituted an object of scandal for Judea, its neighbor to the south, this was because of the ancient cults that, still continuing to exist there, engaged in religious and nationalist resistance that was resolved to impede the invasion-politics of Yahwehism and its terrible, avenging and bellicose God.

The Samaritans only tolerated an archaic form of YHWH, one that was still close to El, the Father, and to the angelic plurality contained in his Elohim form. Holding that the sanctuary at Sichem on Mount Gerizim was the only true Temple, Samaritanism only recognized as sacred texts the Torah or *Pentateuch* (the first five books of the Bible) and the *Book of Joshua*, which Hellenization, soon established in Samaria, propagated under the name *Book of Jesus* (which is how would Origen would refer to it around 250).

The hatred between the Judeans and the Samaritans was exacerbated by the destruction of Sichem under the reign of John Hycran, an Asmonean prince and the Great Priest of Jerusalem (135-105 [B.C.E.]).

On the other hand, Hellenization, not well accepted in Judea, encountered a better welcome in Samaria. It is true that the Canaanite and Philistine substrata, which were quite hardy, were not strangers to Achaean settlement during the migrations of the Second Millennium before the Christian era. The persistence of cultural forms issued from the *Magna Mater*, allied with the audacious critiques of Greek philosophy, introduced into the closed universe of the Gods a quite corrosive mixture, of which the teachings of Simon and Barbelite practices offer singular examples – that is, after one discovers them underneath the silence and the calumnies accumulated by the eradications performed by the Church and its complacent historians.

This light from Samaria doesn't accord well with the shining and virtuous road chosen by Essenism. Nevertheless, it illuminates the birth of certain dissident sects, such as the still poorly known Sethians, whose Messiah-Son of Man one frequently encounters in the Qumranian manuscripts.

Located between Judea and Galilee, Samaria extended up to the banks of the Dead Sea, where the original kernel of Essenism was established. These places

were propitious for the implicit constitution of a front hostile to the Temple, Jerusalem, and Judean beliefs, nay, even to the law of Moses.<sup>71</sup>

Did not Essenean dualism have its origin in the Samaritan distinction between YHWH and his angelic component, Elohim? In any case, the heresy of the “two celestial powers” (a veritable crime against the unique God in the eyes of Jewish orthodoxy), although condemned by the *Books of Enoch*, was surreptitiously slipped into them in the form of the confrontation between the Good Angels and the Bad Angels.

Such a doctrine even impregnated the thought of the quite Phariseean Philo of Alexandria when he opposed the beneficial power of *Theos*, the Good God, to the punitive function with which the *Kyrios*, the Saviour (the Greek translation of Adonai, the equivalent of the *Tetragrammaton* YHWH), was tasked. Marcion limited himself to making precise the difference between the God of the Jews, the creator of a bad world, and the Good God that de-Judaicized Christianity substituted for YHWH as the creator of a world in which the good would be realized through the intervention of the Messiah-Redeemer.

But both Essenism and Samaritanism, despite the diverse views that they nourished, discovered in Dusis/Dositheos a Messianic figure, the importance of which few researchers have emphasized until now.

### **The Messiah Dusis/Dunstan/Dositheos**

In the Fourteenth Century, the Samaritan chronicler Abu'l Fath spoke of a certain Dusis or Dunstan around whom, at the time of the crisis engendered in 135 [B.C.E.] by the destruction of the Temple at Gerizim by Hycran II, were united a messianic and baptist group that he called the Dunstanites.

Was a second expansion of Dunstanism manifested by a new eschatological prophet named Dositheos, as Isser suggests?<sup>72</sup> He would have had a prophet named Aulianah as his successor .

But the name Dositheos, *Dosi-theos*, which refers to Dusis and means “Gift of God,” recalls Dusis’s status as an Angel-Messiah. No doubt he establishes a

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<sup>71</sup> “Can we exclude Samaritan influence from Qumran?” *Revue de Qumran*, VI, 1967, pp. 109 sq.

<sup>72</sup> S. J. Isser, “The Dositheosians,” in *Studies in Judaism in the Late Antiquity*, Leiden, 1976, XVII; Th. Caldwell, S. J., *Dositheos Samaritanus, Kairos IV*, 1962, pp. 105 sq; R. Simon Wilson, *Dositheos and the Dead Sea Scroll ZRGG* 9, 1957.

connection with another Messiah who came from Galilee: Hanina Ben Dosa, that is to say, son of Dusis.<sup>73</sup>

Dositheosism seems to have presented in Hellenized form the old Dunstanite movement, which was a baptist and messianic movement that resulted from a schism within Samaritanism.<sup>74</sup>

As in Essenean dissidence, Dusis's schism was accompanied by a re-working of the calendar: the adepts counted 30 days in each month. A century later, the Elchasaïtes – anecdotally expressing in the *Homilies* the scorn they felt for Saul (identified with Dositheos and Simon) – reported that Dositheos founded a sect of thirty men and a woman named the Moon, a prostitute in a brothel at Tyre and mistress of the prophet before throwing herself into the arms of Simon.

In the Sixth Century, Bishop Euloge encountered in Alexandria Samaritan groups that still reproached Dositheos for having altered a great many sacred texts. Abu'l Fath shared that same indignation.

In truth, if the Dunstanite prophet rewrote the sacred messages – as the Essenes, Nazarenes, Marcionites, Anti-Marcionites and Catholics did – this was because Moses [supposedly] spoke through his voice and thus entitled him to revise the law and adapt it to his divine truth.

Did not Dusis' disciples push the critique of Judean and Mosaic doctrines even further? This is the hypothesis advanced by Fossum.<sup>75</sup> Dositheos – the Hellenized version of Dusis – rejected the prophets accepted by the Jewish canon, called for the reform of Mosaic law, and even advocated the abolition of religious duties.

At the time, all the milieus preoccupied with Judaism debated the observance of and the challenges to the rituals allegedly decreed by Moses. After 140, the Hellenization of Judeo-Christianity did not take place on any other terrain. The rejection of the prophets foreshadowed Marcion.

As for the irreligious attitude, it tallied with the philosophy of Simon of Samaria, whom the heresiologues communally characterized as a disciple of Dositheos and the father of all heresies. But the confusion of Dositheos with Simon appears to have come from the same polemical vein as the identification of Saul with Simon, which was made by the partisans of the Churches of James and Simon-Peter.

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<sup>73</sup> Vilmar, *Annales Samaritani Abulfathi*, Gotha, 1865.

<sup>74</sup> J. E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: The Origin of the Idea of Intermediation in Gnosticism*, Utrecht, 1982, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36 and 37.



The Dositheosians participated in the general reform movement that, through Essenism, Ebionism, Nazarenism and Paulinism, would end up in the Hellenized Christianity of the Marcionites and Anti-Marcionites of the Second Century.

According to Abu'l Fath, the Dositheosians were called “the children of the Apostle” – the apostle being Moses.<sup>76</sup>

At the cusp of this era, which was officially decreed to be Christian, the apostles and their children were quite numerous. To efface the memory of them, it would be necessary to have a conspiracy [*conjuratio*] of ecclesiastical interests impose the symbolic power of Joshua leading the nations toward the mythical beyond of the River Jordan, but imposed under the redemptive name “God has saved, saves, will save” – a conspiracy [*conjuratio*] that would later be obliterated in its turn by the fabrication of a historical Jesus.

In Dositheos, Christian historicism wanted to incarnate a disciple of Jesus named Nathaniel, whose name [in Hebrew] matches Dositheos: Gift of God.<sup>77</sup>

The novels devoted to Jesus abound in effects of this type, in which reality, travestied and put on stage, works to the glory of the protagonist. The mythical hero thus subjugates beings and symbols from which, in fact, this legend comes.

Dusis preceded, foreshadowed and prepared the effervescence – quite limited until the Zealot movement gave it a large audience – in which messiahs, apostles, prophets, illuminati and charlatans carved out popular reputations for themselves by advocating the reform, rebirth or abolition of Judean conservatism.

Like Essenism, Dositheosism or Dunstanism was a baptist, messianic and reformist movement. Baptism occupied a primary place in it. Prayers were offered up in the water, such as bathing pools or the River Jordan, which was so fertile symbolically.

The erudite blinders on the researchers exploring (with the Church's prejudices) an epoch on which the Church fraudulently founded its foundations have hardly permitted them to disentangle what united reconciled and what distinguished the baptist and Samaritan currents of Dunstan/Dositheos (born around 135 [B.C.E.]), Essenism (around 100 [B.C.E.]), Nazarenism (around 50 [B.C.E.]) and the Johanism of Jochanaan/John the Baptist – all of which were attached to a great ascetic rigor and scorn for the body, the world, women, and life.

But there is something more troubling: Dusis was also a crucified and resurrected Messiah.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>77</sup> M. Goulder, *The Roots of the Christian Myth: The Myth of God Incarnated*, London, 1977.

The *Annals* of Abu'l Fath mention a group called the *saduqay*, which affirmed: "Men will know the resurrection because Dusis is dead from a shameful death and because Levy was stoned; because if Dusis was really dead, then all of the just men of the earth would [also] be dead."

Reserved for slaves and common criminals, the "shameful death" meant execution on the cross. The idea that Dusis, raised up to heaven, had not been struck [down] by a real death – when applied to Jesus – prevails in all the Christianities of the first three centuries, nay, even beyond, up to what Catholicism condemned under the name of "Docetism."

Incarnated as the Spirit of God and the reincarnation of Moses in a terrestrial existence marked by redemptive suffering, Dusis does not fail to evoke the syncretic Messiah of the Judeo-Christian Elchasaites, who expressed themselves around 110 in the *Homilies of Peter*: "There is only one true prophet: the one who since Adam has been incarnated in the patriarchs Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, and who, in the end, finds his rest by incarnating himself in Jesus."<sup>78</sup>

Like the Master of Justice, Dusis – a suffering and glorious Messiah – assured his faithful an eternal survival and a resurrection according to the spirit. Do not Dusis, the Master of Justice, Dositheos, Jochanaan, James and Simon-Peter all trace out the line of the successive syncretisms that were hostile to Yahwehism syncretism and that an ecumenicalism of diverse tendencies would – after the "apocalypse" of 70 – be united according to the myth of Joshua the Unifier?

It is not uninteresting to note that Levy, the disciple of Dusis, put to death by stoning, is found in the novels of Jesus in the figure of Levy the Publican, alias Matthew, to whom is attributed a secret Gospel and a Gospel consecrated by the Catholic canon.

Close to the Johanite, Ebionite and Nazarenean sects, the Dositheosians were opposed to the Naassenes. The *saduqay* mentioned by Abu'l Fath in fact taught that "the Serpent would govern the life of creatures until the day of the resurrection."<sup>79</sup> They identified the Serpent with the Cosmocrator, the Demiurge, the Bad God who ruled the world, while for the Naassenes, *NHS*, the Serpent, revealed the road to salvation. The Naassenes, it is true, sometimes shied away from asceticism and chastity, which was uniformly preached by Essenochristianity.

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<sup>78</sup> O. Cullmann, *Le problème littéraire et historique du roman pseudo-clémentin*, Paris 1930, p. 184.

<sup>79</sup> Vilmar, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

Did not the hostility to Yahwehism engender in Dositheosism the identification of YHWH with the Demiurge that would prevail in Marcionism? In a *midrash* from the Third or Fourth Century, the Samaritan Marqua evoked an ancient tradition in which YHWH revealed himself to be the supreme destroyer. He also reported an action of which one finds traces in the evangelic legends: “At midnight, YHWH destroyed all the first-born of Egypt.”<sup>80</sup>

The exegetes of the New Testament betrayed a certain embarrassment when they were faced with the lie that attributed to Herod the massive extermination known as the “massacre of the innocents.” The imputation of a heinous crime that Marcionism would count as one of a number of wrathful manifestations of the God of Israel to a perfectly bloody Jewish king expresses quite well the will of the fabricators of the Gospels to give an anecdotal and historical character to symbols and abstractions.

Finally, in the eschatological tumult of the times, Dositheosism carried a resonance that was not foreign to the leanings attributed to the mysterious Saul, so fabulously known under the name Paul of Tarsus.

According to Fossum,<sup>81</sup> a Dositheosian prophet named Aulianah (should we identify him with Hanina Ben Dosa?) proclaimed that divine forgiveness was on the verge of being accomplished. His disciples, sectarians of the Messiah Dosis, believed “that they already live in the period of divine grace.”

They affirmed that “salvation and the period of divine grace are not future events: paradise and the resurrection are to be found here and now.” Does not Saul/Paul express this in another fashion, by supporting the idea that the Messiah had already come, redeemed men of their sins and saved all those who, imitating his example, had sacrificed their flesh to the spirit?

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted by Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 245. [*Translator*: this was the last of the ten plagues God brought down upon the Egyptians. It is still part of modern Jewish celebrations of the Passover.]

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

## Chapter 6: Simon of Samaria and Gnostic Radicalism

Stripped of the lies and calumnies in which, like a laughable frock coat, the Judeo-Christian and Catholic traditions have clothed him, Simon of Samaria evokes the thinkers who, as much as Heraclitus or Lucretius, have irresistibly inscribed themselves in the modernity of each epoch.

A Hellenized Samaritan, born – according to the heresiologues – in the outskirts of Getta, in the course of the last years of the First Century before the Christian era, Simon was no doubt a philosopher and doctor in the manner of Paracelsus, whom he resembled in the care with which he simultaneously approached the microcosm and the macrocosm, the body of man and the totality of the world.

The few surviving fragments of his lost oeuvre suffice to suggest a radical will in the precise sense of the term: that which attaches itself to the root of beings and things. Issued from Greek rationality, his analysis undertook to return to the *materia prima* of the body (from which the mythical visions of the *Pentateuch* issued) that the Hebraic religion had snatched from the luxuriance of desires in order to transpose them – through a cathartic and castrating function – into the domain of the spirit.

A particular malediction affected the majority of the Censors. Fascinated by the works that they execrated, overwhelmed by their denatured and destructive rage, they succumbed to the need to cite extracts from the works whose existence they did not cease to deplore.

Around 230-250, the first version of a collection titled *Philosophoumena e kata pason aireseon Elenchos* (“Philosophoumena or Refutation of All Heresies”), abbreviated as *Elenchos*, began to circulate. Successively attributed to Origen and Hippolyte, the Bishop of Rome, the *Elenchos* probably emanated from the Christianity of the New Prophecy; it actually ranked among the heretics another Roman bishop, Callixte, who was accused of permitting the remarriage of widows and pardoning Christians who abjured – through fear of torture – things that were crimes in the eyes of the people loyal to the New Prophecy.

A chapter in this work devoted to Simon quotes extracts from his work *Apophysis Megale* in order to refute them, which it does with great awkwardness. (A kind of objective irony has wanted things such that the most serious study to date of Simon of Samaria comes from a Jesuit named Salles-Dabadie. Not content to publish the Greek text with an ostentatious critique, he pushed scruples as far as establishing a typographical distinction between the text

of the author, the remarks of Simon, and the interpolations. The entirety illustrates quite well the treatment applied by Christian or Catholic panegyrist to the manuscripts that they transcribed. To the extracts – interpreted in accordance with the polemics of the time – were added canonical citations, which were most often multiplied by later copyists. It is thus a question of proving that the claimed heretic knew these citations, deformed them or interpreted them falsely. The canonical traditions were thus backdated.)

According to Salles-Dabadie, the *Apophasis Megale* “is the testimony of an archaic gnosis and not a later one.”<sup>82</sup>

Fragment 1 *incipit* offers the original title (stripped of additions): *Apophasis tes megales dynameos* (“Revelation of the Great Power”). Much later, the work would be cited under the title *Megale Apophasis* (“Great Revelation”) at the instigation of Christians or religious sects that wanted to dress the philosopher up as a prophet and call him *o hestos uios*, the Son of “He who holds himself upright.” (The Judeo-Christians of the Homilies of Peter would make him into an impostor, a rival of Joshua/Jesus, but, by attacking the anecdotal Simon, they were actually aiming at the “false prophet” Saul/Paul).

The meaning of the text, Simon makes clear, “will be sealed, hidden, enveloped and placed in the dwelling in which the root of all has its foundations.”<sup>83</sup> “This dwelling is the man born of blood and (in whom) the Infinite Power has come to live.”<sup>84</sup>

The Great Power is nothing other than a fire whose nature is both hidden and apparent.

The visible (nature) of Fire contains all visible things, those that one perceives and also those that remain unperceived due to lack of attention; the hidden (nature) of Fire contains all intelligible things, those that come to thought and those that escape us due to absence of thought.<sup>85</sup>

Conscious and unconscious, Fire is the energy of life.

An eternal fire also engendered the cosmos. An unbegotten energy conferred six roots upon it: *Nous* and *Epinoia* (spirit and thought), *Phone* and *Onome* (voice

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<sup>82</sup> J. M. A., Salles-Dabadie, “Recherches sur Simon le Mage. L’*Apophasis megale*,” *Cahiers de la Revue biblique*, #10, Paris, 1969, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

and name), and *Logismos* and *Enthymesis* (reason and reflection). The Great Power is enclosed in the six roots, but only in a state of potentiality.

Does it thus remain asleep? It doesn't accede to the unity of its perfection: "It fades and disappears, as the power to understand grammar and geometry disappears in the human soul; because the power, helped by exercise, becomes the light of beings, but without exercise (it is) only incompetence and darkness; it disappears with the man who dies, as if it had never existed."<sup>86</sup>

The six roots of being inseparably participate in the individual body and the cosmos. *Nous* and *Epinoia* are male and female, the heavens and the earth, where the fruits of the macroscopic tree settle in order to reproduce themselves. *Phone* and *Onome* are the sun and the moon; and *Logismos* and *Enthymesis*, air and water.

With its equals, each element composes a unity in which the Great Power that is enclosed in them is recreated. By gathering together the elements into which it was scattered – just like Barbelo, the Judeo-Greek form of the *Magna Mater*, who collected in herself the sperm of all the scattered beings in order to impregnating herself with a new universe – the *Megale Dynamis* revealed itself as the "seventh power." (The seventh power would become the Hebdomad in the Valentinian systems.) At the same time, it manifests the presence in the macrocosm and the microcosm of the *Hestos*: the one who has stood up, stands up, will stand up. (Salles-Dabadie is surprised by the bizarreness of this formula. Nevertheless, it can only translate into Greek, *estosa*, *stanta*, *stesomenon*, the timeless character of the Hebrew words. The principle of a man assuming his potential divinity, standing at the center of himself and the world, is, of course, the opposite of the principle that the name Joshua/Jesus expresses: God saved, saves, will save.)

The fire/energy, unbegotten, thus engendered and placed man at the heart of corporeal and cosmic matter. Simon undertook to interpret the books of the *Pentateuch*, the only books recognized by the Yahwehist Samaritans, as the expression of the corporeal and terrestrial reality from which he judged them to be issued.

What does the *Book of Genesis* mean? Paradise is the womb, Eden is the placenta, and the river that "flowed from Eden and watered Paradise" (*Genesis*, 2, 10) is the umbilical cord.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

“This is divided into four branches because, on the both sides of the cord, there are two arteries, [which are] canals of breath, and two veins, canals of blood.”<sup>88</sup>

“When the umbilical cord, leaving the Eden/Placenta, fixes itself in the epigastria of the fetus, at the spot commonly called the umbilicus, the two veins conduct and transport the blood since the Eden/Placenta (fixes itself) in what one calls the ‘doors of the liver’ and they nourish the fetus.

“As for the arteries, which are – as we have said – the canals of breath (*pneuma*), they pass along each side of the bladder in the region of the flat bone, and end up at the great spinal artery called the aorta; and thus, the *pneuma* passes through the ‘secret portals’ (the sigmoid valves), which are the road to the heart, and provokes embryonic movement (literally, the respiration of the fetus).

“Because the infant, as it forms itself in Paradise, doesn’t take nourishment through its mouth and doesn’t breathe through its nostrils. Plunged into liquids, it would die on the spot if it breathed; it would breathe the liquid and would be asphyxiated. But it is entirely enveloped by the membrane called amniotic; it nourishes itself through the umbilical cord, and as I have said, it is through the means of the spinal (artery) that it receives the substance of the *pneuma*.”<sup>89</sup>

(Note that, for Simon, *pneuma* meant “breath of life.” The Barbelites would identify *pneuma* with *sperma*. For the Judeo-Christians, it was the Spirit, before ending up, among the Catholics, as the Holy Spirit.)

The four branches or vessels into which “the river that leaves Eden” was divided correspond to the four meanings of the fetus: sight, smell, taste, and sound. Touch only appears after the birth of the infant.

The river is what Moses called the Law, and each book addresses one of these meanings.

*Genesis* illustrates sight, the look that encompasses the cosmos. Crossing the Red Sea, *Exodus* is the road of blood that – through ordeals and bitterness – leads

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

to the knowledge of life. There begins taste, beginning with the “bitter water” (blood) that knowledge and the Logos change into sweet water, the source of life.

Explaining the transmutation of blood into sperm, Simon cites the flower of life offered by Hermes in the *Odyssey* (X, 304-305): “Its root is black and its flower like milk; the gods call it *moly*. Mortal men find it difficult to pull up; but the gods can do anything.”

Smell and breathing are linked to the third book, *Leviticus*; sound to the fourth, *Numbers*, the rhythm of which refers to speech. Finally, *Deuteronomy* refers to the [sense of] touch in the newborn, who discovers the world by appropriating it. As *Deuteronomy* recapitulates the preceding books, touch summarizes and contains the other senses.

But this is the most important part of Simon’s doctrine: the man who, in the formation and perfection of his senses, becomes aware of the presence in himself of the Great Power, and so acquires the ability to restore and re-create it in his future.

“Like grammar and geometry, unbegotten things are in all of us, as potentialities, not as actualities. Thus, if the assistance of words and instruction intervene; if bitterness is changed to sweetness, that is to say, if lances [are changed] into scythes and swords into plowshares, we will no longer be straw and wood destined for the fire, but fully realized, perfect fruit, equal and similar to the unbegotten and infinite Power. But if one simply remains a tree that does not produce perfect fruit, the tree will be destroyed.”<sup>90</sup>

There exists an indissoluble relation between the microcosm of the individual body and the macrocosm. If man does not realize his nature of Fire, his original and immanent energy, “he will perish with the cosmos.” (The *First Epistle to the Corinthians* attributed to Saul/Paul takes an expression from Simon [I, XI, 32] that isn’t the only residual trace of Gnosticism in the writings of this enemy of James and Peter. It gives a singular credit to the Homilies in which Simon designates Paul.)

What is the nature of the Great Power from the moment that it materializes itself in an engendered being? According to Simon, fire or the eternal energetic flux is identified with the reproductive [*génésique*] principle, sexual force.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.



“Among all engendered beings, fire is the principle of the desire for creation, and it is just that the desire for shifting creation [*la génération changeante*] is called ‘burning.’”<sup>91</sup>

“Therefore fire, which is simple, undergoes two transformations: in men, the blood, which is hot and red in the image of fire, becomes sperm; while in women, this same blood becomes milk. The masculine form (of fire) becomes a reproductive [*génésique*] force and the feminine form becomes food for the new-born.”<sup>92</sup>

For Simon, there is a somatization of the Great Power: it manifests itself in the power to engender beings through desire, but also through the power of desire to engender in its turn – or, more exactly, to re-create in the unity of its scattered fragments – the *Dynamis* of which all life is simultaneously the effect, the immanence and the future.

Becoming aware of the permanent flux of life involves seeing in libidinal energy the source of a will capable of realizing in each person the Great Power in action, which is none other than the government of destiny. This is what the religious spirit means by the expression “to become God.” Assuredly, no [other] man in Antiquity, with the exception of Lucretius, dared to affirm so strongly the primacy of the earth over the heavens and the man of desire over the spiritualized brute.

Completing his demythologizing of *Genesis*, Simon explains that the fire/desire energy is the flaming sword “that spins to guard the road of the Tree of Life” (*Genesis*, 3, 24).

“Because blood turns into sperm and milk, this same Power becomes father and mother; the father of the beings who are engendered, nourishment of the beings who grow up. It needs nothing and is self-sufficient.

“As far as the Tree of Life, ‘guarded by the flaming and spinning sword,’ it is, as we have said, is the Seventh Power, born from itself, which contains all things and which resides in the six powers” (that is to say, the six roots).

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

“Because, if this sword of flames did not spin, the beautiful tree would perish and destroyed; but if it becomes semen and milk, the Logos that resides in it as potential, finding a suitable and place for it to become the Logos of Souls, will begin in a very small spark, then will grow more and more. It will grow until it becomes an infinite and immutable power, equal and similar to an immutable eon, which will no longer submit to becoming during the infinite eternity.”<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the amorous conjunction of man and woman, through the act of creation, realizes the incarnation of the Great Power. From its conception, with the Logos, the infant receives the spark of the *Megale Dynamis*. This spark will belong to it by increasing its ardor for fire and Logos – otherwise called desire and consciousness of the creative act – in order to realize in itself the eternal presence of the energy that creates and re-creates itself without beginning or ending, and that is a flux of life.

Insofar as he or she develops – through desire and its consciousness (fire and its thought) – the *Megale Dynamis* from which he or she has received the spark, each person is in the position to pass from the state of energy-receiver to the ability to act on it and the cosmos. Surpassing the monstrous couple formed by man and his gods, the man of the Great Power invents a universe that belongs to him completely.

Simon is a Gnostic only due to the importance that he accords to the consciousness of the energy by which each person is assured of the privilege of becoming the totality of the life that he or she carries inside.

How could he not reject the men who had created gods by debasing themselves in the idea that the Gods had created them? And how could he not be subjected to the hatred of the people for whom the spirit religiously exalts itself through scorn for the earth, the body and desire?

The first travesty of Simon was to saddle him with the reputation of being a God-Man. Justin the Apologist incorrectly affirms that a statue was erected in Rome to the glory of this philosopher. (He specifies in Chapter XXVI of his *Apology* that Simon was as adored as Zeus was. He speaks of a woman called “the first thought of Simon.” She was Epinoia, in whom the *Nous* had incarnated herself; she was symbolized by Athena in Greek philosophy. Anecdotally translated by Justin, the allegorical Epinoia became Helene, mistress of Simon, prostituted in a brothel in Tyre.) Judeo-Christian stagecraft erected Simon as a rival

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-37.

of another God-Man named Jesus, whose project was to destroy and diminish man [with] the energy that Simon invoked to edify and increase him.

Perhaps we must to impute to these same disciples of Simon the deification spoken about by the Christian communities that claimed James the Just and Simon-Peter for themselves, and perhaps these communities' insistence on calling Saul/Paul by the name "Simon the Magician" suggests a kind of self-deification in which the presumed author of the *Epistles* identified the Great Power with the suffering and glorious Messiah, incarnated in each person. (Didn't Paul identify himself with the *Hestos*, with the God living in his heart, whom he called Joshua/Jesus and as whose champion he erected himself?)

In *The Name of God*,<sup>94</sup> Fossum explains that, for the Samaritans, the Great Power, the *Megale Dynamis*, designated the divine name as well as the human force assumed by the divine manifestation. Although Simon removed its religious meanings in order to identify the Great Power with a flux of creative life whose spark, rekindled by love, offers to the individual the ability to create him- or herself, the dominant mindset obeyed the religious conditioning that impregnated the sects that were both close to and radically different from the Simon's teachings, such as the Naassenes and the Barbelites, for whom sexual fusion remained within obedience to a divinity.

Simon's other singularity concerns the primacy that he accorded to the individual person and his or her body, which was in solidarity with the cosmos. His project resided in the realization and the mastery of destiny, not in the notion of salvation that Christianity would impose for nearly two thousand years.

Simon appeared at a point of fracture. The unitary Jewish myth encountered in its decline in the desacralizing critique of Greek rationality, which was a market rationality. And in the same way that the European Renaissance saw liberty concretized in the radicalism of Paracelsus and La Boétie, the beginning of the First Century – in creators such as Simon of Samaria and Apollonius of Tyana – manifested a human presence whose memory the regression into Christian myth would suffocate until both myth and the sacred would disappear in their turn.

The teachings of Simon would not escape the regression that would impose the return to religious forms, a return whose triumph Hellenized and rationalized Judaism – purged of its orientalism – would consecrate by crowning with its spider's web the bureaucratic empire that Rome had propagated in the world.

Simon's influence surfaced among the Naassenes and the Barbelites. It touched Saul/Paul and Marcion, and expressed itself in certain manuscripts at Hag-Hammadi. It even penetrated into the anti-Gnostic Christianity of the New

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<sup>94</sup> Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

Prophecy, in which Priscilla affirmed that the Christ “visited” her and slept near her in Pepuza (the New Jerusalem): he took the form of fire and “put his Wisdom in her.”

But it is especially in the Hermetic current, which was very important in Alexandria, that the connection [with Simon] was evident, but without it being easy to determine which one came first.

“It was indeed a new conception of the world,” Annequin writes, “that theurgists such as Alexander of Abonoteichus and Apollonius of Tyana proposed.”<sup>95</sup>

According to a remark attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, the earth, water, air and vegetal fire compose an alchemy of a microcosmic and macrocosmic realization that Simon would not disavow: “The doors of the earth are open; the doors of the heavens are open; the road of the flowers is open. My spirit has been understood by the spirit of the heavens, by the spirit of the earth, by the spirit of the sea, and by the spirit of the flowers.”<sup>96</sup>

Wasn’t it against such a teaching that the Talmudists warned? “Whomever researches the four things, on what is high, what is low, what was at the beginning, what will be at the end [...], it would be better for him if he had not been born.”<sup>97</sup>

The gnosis of *Hermes Trismegiste* presents a spiritualized version of Simonian doctrine (“If you are made of Life and Light, and if you *know* it, you will one day return to Life and Light”). On the other hand, the tradition that is expressed in the *Apocalypse of Asclepius* (the 8th scripture in Codex 6 of Nag-Hammadi) belongs to the Simonian theory of the *Megale Dynamis*:

“If you want to see the reality of this mystery, see the marvelous image of the union (*synousia*) that is consummated by man and woman: once it has come to its end, the semen spurts. At that moment, the woman receives the power of the man and the man also receives the power of the woman because such is the effect (*energein*) of the semen.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> J. Annequin, *Recherches sur l’acte magique et ses représentations aux I<sup>st</sup> et 2<sup>d</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1979, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Ménard, *Les Textes de Nag-Hammadi*, Leiden, 1975, pp. 127 and 128. [Translator’s note: the English translation published in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James M. Robinson, revised edition (San Francisco, 1990) is as follows: “And if you (Asclepius) wish to see the reality of this mystery, then you

A countercurrent to the morbidity that would be propagated by generations of Judeo-Christians, Gnostics, Marcionites, Anti-Marcionites, and Catholics, the *Apocalypse of Asclepius* denounced those who scorned the world and “preferred death to life.”

Inversely, it was an abstract and speculative tendency that illustrated the *Poimandres*, which would inspire several Gnostic cosmogonies. After the separation of the light from the darkness, a struggle between two antagonistic principles ensued. The divine entity, seduced by the image that it projected in matter, desired to unite with it. The father creator, in androgynous form, thus engendered a composite creature, half-Logos and half-*Anthropos*, or primordial man (Adam, according to Jewish mythology).

From his superior part, man radiates a luminous particle, ejaculated by the divinity and imprisoned in him. In the beginning, the spermatic emission of the divine power spurted. However, this *panspermie* is both spiritualized – the *pneuma* or breathe of life transcends the *sperma* – and identified with a fall, a cascading slide from the light into the terrestrial matrix, obscurity, chaos, and matter.

In fact, what fundamentally distinguished Simon’s teachings from those of the religious or Hermetic Gnostics is the nature of the amorous relation, a fundamental relation, exalted as a creative force or, on the contrary, burdened with guilt, tied down by the idea of downfall, mortified through renunciation, abstinence and asceticism.

Running counter to Simonian radicalism is the line that leads from brutal repression of the Esseno-Christian type to the hierogamiac rituals of the Naassenes and Barbelites, for whom ejaculated sperm nourished the divine *pneuma*. (Attacking the Perates, Irenaeus wrote that “they call the womb the factory of heaven and earth,” *Hysteram autem fabricatorum coeli et terrae*.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, at the end of the Second Century, the *Gospel attributed to Philip* called the *Plerome* [the Totality], the *koinon*, the “nuptial chamber or the “place of union.”)<sup>100</sup> This line even leads to magical practices. (Delatte speaks of a magic

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should see the wonderful representation of the intercourse that takes place between the male and the female. For when the semen reaches the climax, it leaps forth. In that moment, the female receives the strength of the male; the male, for his part, receives the strength of the female, while the semen does this.”]

<sup>99</sup> Irenaeus, I, 31, 1.

<sup>100</sup> “Les noces spirituelles dans l’Evangile selon Philippe,” *Museon*, Louvain, 1974, LXXXVII, 1-2, p. 157.

stone called the “key to the matrix,” no doubt tied to a rite of participation in the inseminating and sexual vitality that is the privilege of the Gods, which the magus hopes to appropriate like a particle of eternity.<sup>101</sup> Here there is a magic inherent in fetal creation: the womb forms the athanor; the transmutation of the sperm and the ovum refers to the notions of *surrectio* and *resurrectio*. The idea risked incurring the condemnation of the rabbis, according to a fragment collated by Koller: “God reserves three keys that he has not wanted to entrust to any intermediary: those to the womb, the rain, and the resurrection.”)<sup>102</sup>

### **The So-Called Disciples of Simon**

Because of our ignorance about the life and work of Menander, we must believe Justin the Apologist (which is hardly easy) that he was among the disciples of Simon. A Gnostic Samaritan, he taught at Antioch, where the Nazarenes enjoyed a certain influence. Irenaeus accused him of magical practices intended to vanquish the bad angels and resurrect the dead, which was a program that was vague, at the least, and did not exclude the Essenian-Christian viewpoint.

It’s the same thing with Saturnilus. Irenaeus attributed to him a dualism of Samaritan type, which distinguished between El the Father, become the YHWH of the Judeans, and Elohim, his angelic cohort around whom rebels elements had created the bad world.<sup>103</sup> A Savior-Messiah would only come at the end of a universe yielded to the forces of evil. And here Saturnilus, close to Essenism but not to Simon, advocated a strict asceticism. It seems that Saturnilus conferred upon his Messiah-Savior the emblematic name Joshua/Jesus, and was among the first to do so.<sup>104</sup>

As far as Cerinthus, he was one of the Judeo-Christian philosophers preoccupied with the name and nature of the *angelos-christos*. Indications from Epiphanius of Salamis, who in the Fourth Century treated him as a false apostle, and from Irenaeus, who engaged in a polemic with the Apostle John, throw *a contrario* a certain light on the fundamental text much later revised as the canonical Gospel attributed to John. One knows that, at first, this text carried traces of Naassenism and belonged to Christian Gnosticism. It isn’t impossible that Cerinthus – but these are only hypotheses – was the author of a *midrash* that was revised many times before being placed under the name of John, and that the

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<sup>101</sup> Delatte, *Etudes sur la magie grecque*, Louvain, 1914, p. 75.

<sup>102</sup> W. Koller, *Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft*, VIII, 1915, p. 229.

<sup>103</sup> Irenaeus, I, 24, 1-2.

<sup>104</sup> Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, New York 1959, pp. 15-17.

meaning of this *midrash* obeyed the syncretic will to match Naassenism with Nazarenism, the Serpent-Redeemer or *NHS* assuming the name of the Messiah Joshua/Jesus, himself identified with the crucified Serpent.

On the other hand, the shadow of Simon stands out more clearly upon the group founded by Carpocrates and his son Epiphanius, and upon the Gnostic Justin (not to be confused with the apologist decapitated in 165), the presumed author of the *Book of Baruch*, in which Genesis is analyzed in the light of the self-creation of man (the *autogene*). God planted the Garden of Eden by mating two unbegotten principles, Elohim and Eden, from which would be born a third principle, the most elevated, Priapus, in whom Good and Life were concentrated.

The name of the Great Power multiplied with the [number of] sects. Michel Tardieu studied the concept of *Bronte*, the Thunder, in the *Untitled Writing* (2d of Codex VI in the Nag-Hammadi Library) and showed that it is identified with the *Megale Dynamis*, with the Great Power that the *Apocrypha of John* called Ennoia, the Valentinians called Sophia, the Barbelites called Barbelo, and the Naassenes called Brimo-Demeter.<sup>105</sup>

The collection at Hag-Hammadi includes a hymn (NHL II, 8, 34-35), *Ego eimi*, which celebrates with a singular force the will of the individual to become his or her own creator in the fusion of universal forces:

“I am part of my Mother and I am the mother, I am woman, I am the virgin, I am the consoler of sadness, my spouse is he who engendered me and I am his mother and he is my father and my lord; he is my strength; what he wants, he says; in any case, I become, but I have engendered a lordly man.”

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<sup>105</sup> M. Tardieu, *Museon*, 87, 1974, p. 530.

## Chapter 7: The Phallic and Symbiotic Cults

The conquest of the lands of Canaan by the Hebrew invaders began by Judaicizing the agrarian cults that were honored by the vanquished and then by prohibiting and defaming their persistent practice. The same went for the rites adoring the Serpent, whose symbolism involved both phallic power and mysteries of fecundation.

Despite the danger that certain species present, serpents evoked by the grace of their movements the dance of love, to which the bodies of the lovers surrender themselves. Doesn't the allegorical representation of health – the caduceus in which two serpents intertwine – conserve the memory of the force of life inherent in pleasure and its slow crawling? More than any other mythology, the Bible changed the serpent into an object of abjection, terror and evil.

I would like to conjecture that the religious spirit that substitutes itself for an analogical and totemic approach to the serpent – which in a certain way removed from it the perils of venom and strangulation – has emphasized to the point of hyperbole the danger of death that was emphasized even more by the anathema hurled against this part of life and pleasure, which was so hostile to the power of the Spirit and its priests.

The Hebrews annexed the cult of the serpent to their gestating monotheistic syncretism. These were the *seraphim* (the “seraphs,” much later changed into angels).

In *Deuteronomy* (8:15), *nahash seraph* designates the burning serpents that murder people in the desert. *Numbers* (21:6) speaks of *nahashim seraphim*. If the word seraph is applied to serpents, this is because of an idea about a “burning bite,” because the root of the word in Semitic [languages] is the verb “to burn” and, more precisely, in *Jeremiah* (7:31), the act of burning infants on the altar of Baal.<sup>106</sup>

Fecundation and expiating sacrifice of the newborn infant or animal inscribe themselves in the essence of the religions: the production of lives reduced to their power to work implies the destruction or the repression of non-productive libidinal energy.

The serpent (*nahash*, *NHS*) plays a predominantly sexual role in *Genesis*. It is a condemned sexuality, as is well illustrated by a Talmudic tradition (*Aboda Zara*, 22 b): “When the serpent possessed Eve, he inoculated her with filth.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> W. Dulière, *De la dyade à l'unité par la triade*, Paris, 1965, p. 76.

<sup>107</sup> Rapporté, *Ibid.*, p. 78.



And *Genesis* is no less explicit in Adam's resolution (3:20) to call his wife Hawwah (Eve), playing on the Hebrew word *hayah*, which expresses the idea of life, and the Aramaic *hivyah*, "serpent." Much later, Clement of Alexandria would remark that, "if one thickens a little the pronunciation of the name of the first woman, one evokes in Jewish ears the word for the female of the serpent species."<sup>108</sup>

Sexual initiation, with its wantonness or the art of caresses, originally increased the benefits of [having] the woman. The patriarch, whom the violation of the earth by agricultural plowing had carried to an absolute power, treated women in the same spirit of exploitation. The lascivious and feminine undulation of exuberant life fell under prohibition, while the phallic "plowshare," symbolized by the bronze serpents that Moses held aloft in the desert, carriers of a deadly life, were erected as signs of power. The venom of those serpents impregnated women and nature, both condemned to produce until they were exhausted.

This serpent, the triumph and terror of virile politics, would be transformed in Hebrew mythology into Satan. Alan Rowe has shown the importance of the cult of the serpent at Beth-Shan, where he led a campaign of excavations. Beth-Shan was nothing other than the House of the Serpent-God and Shahan the divine serpent. Rowe remarks that *shahan* read backwards is *nahash*, the root *NHS* expressing in its diverse permutations the idea of the serpent in all the Semitic languages.<sup>109</sup>

It was to the archaic cult of the serpent – at the same time proscribed and recuperated by Judaism – that the sects that, at the time of their encounter with the various Judeo-Christianities and the Hellenized Christianities, attached themselves; they strove to integrate it into their myths of salvation, influencing certain of its tendencies before it fell under the condemnations of the New Prophecy and Catholicism.

### **The Naassenes or Ophites**

Late and rudimentary study has left one in ignorance concerning the history of the sect that, between Judaic antiquity and its appearance in Egypt, and particularly in Alexandria, speculated upon the redemptive nature of the Serpent or *NHS* (*nahas*).

The Naassenism of Alexandria perhaps constituted a syncretism that brought together Jewish, Phoenician, Egyptian and Greek elements. The Phoenicians gave

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

to the serpent the name *Agathodaimon*, “beneficent being” (the apotropaic meaning is not obvious). The Egyptians translated *Agathodaimon* as *kneph*, which one finds in the *knouphis* (coiled serpents) in amulets (*abraxas*). The contributions made by the old Ophidian cult of the Greeks would lend to Naassenism the belated name *Ophitism*.<sup>110</sup>

When Nazarenism gained importance towards the end of the First Century, the Naassenes, in their desire for ecumenical unity, did not reject the integration of the name Joshua/Jesus into their diverse list of names for their *Ophis-Christos*, their Serpent-Messiah: *Kneph*, *Agathodaimon*, *NHS*, and *Abrasax*.

Around 230-250, the competition between Jesus and the *Ophis-Christos* still worried Origen and made him indignant. Objecting to a Naassene prophet named Euphrates, he judged it useful to make this precise: “The Ophites are not Christians; they are the greatest adversaries of Christ.”

Moreover, the confusion between Christians and Naassenes proceeded from a tardy evolution, as Fossum remarks: “The serpent was transformed into a redeemer, while the God of the Old Testament was degraded into a harmful Demiurge, devoid of wisdom, named *Ialdabaoth*, who doesn’t know that there is a God above him.”<sup>111</sup>

Whatever the case, in the First Century, Naassenism entered into the quarrel of Messiahs that agitated the religious milieus on all sides. Despite the revisions and rewritings, both the *Canonical Gospel attributed to John* and the *Apocryphal Gospel attributed to Thomas* retained traces of a fundamental writing that belonged to the Naassene current in which the *Ophis-Christos* was substituted for the *Iesous-Christos*: “And just as Moses raised the Serpent in the desert, the Son of Man had to be elevated so that whomever believes in him will have eternal life” (*Canonical Gospel attributed to John* 3:14-15).<sup>112</sup>

Due to the necessity of falsifying history in order to demonstrate its antiquity, the Church advanced the idea that the Naassenes were inspired by Jesus and that NHS was a suffering and redeeming Messiah. Naassenism greatly preceded Christianity, but the Church even managed to draw inspiration from the martyrdom of the Master of Justice and Dusis. The primary nature of the seraphim that are the closest to God is that of the serpent, as the *Book of Enoch* recalls (20:7, 61:10, and 71:7). The serpent wanted to reveal to Adam and Eve the pleasure and knowledge in the union in which divine immortality dwells, and this is why the

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<sup>110</sup> J. Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme*, Paris, 1828, t. II, p. 53.

<sup>111</sup> Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted by Leisegang, *La Gnose*, Paris, p. 81.

jealous God punished it, nailed it to the ground or, according to certain texts attributed to Moses, to the Tree of Life on which its skin hung, crucified.

The *Gospel of Truth*, discovered at Nag-Hammadi, still tells the story of the Garden of Eden from a Naassene point of view: the principle of divine wisdom – the equal of Sophia, the Angel-Messiah or the *pneuma* –, the serpent proposed to offer knowledge to Adam and Eve. The Jealous God prohibited them access to gnosis and, expelling them from Paradise, condemned them to a mortal destiny.

*NHS*, the serpent of knowledge and pleasure in the manner of the *Kundalini*, which awakens the body to its potential richness, introduced into the human being, both male and female, the vital breath, which became the *pneuma* or the Spirit in the cults.

From the fact that their Serpent-God penetrated into Eve and into Adam, breathing immortality into them, some people have inferred that the Naassenes practiced coupling in a lack of sexual differentiation that symbolically recreated the original androgyny. Perhaps it was to them that the remark, sometimes attributed to Simon of Samaria, was applied: “All earth is earth, and it does not matter where one sows seeds.”

No doubt there existed a diversity of sects in Naassenism, since certain tendencies advocated asceticism and thus approached Esseno-Christianity, while others practiced sexual liberty in the name of the fusion of man, woman and world intertwined in *NHS*.

The invocation of a primordial erotic entity is expressed in a representation that was frequently engraved on the talismanic stones or amulets in the form of a cameo, to which one gave the name *abraxas* through a deformation of the name of the power, *Abbrasax*.

This was a tutelary God with the head of a rooster and legs in the form of serpents. Armed with a shield and a whip, he repelled hostile forces and erected himself in a phallic manner in the interior of an oval that symbolized the sex organs of women. Solar in its head and terrestrial in the ophimorphic legs that formed the supports of its sexual power, he was a God of fusion, the invocation of whom was modeled on the “song of the seven vowels”<sup>113</sup> that corresponded to the seven spheres that the initiate, elevated by amorous ecstasy, had to cross to attain the Great Power.

It is possible that, among the Naassenes, there developed the idea of health through sexual enthusiasm, quite close to Tantrism and dressing the thought of Simon up in religious garb.

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<sup>113</sup> Delatte, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

The idea that the Logos, in the manner of a serpent that had coiled up in the form of a circle – thus forming the *ouroboros* or the serpent that bites its own tail, which often figured on the *abraxas* –, descended into matter and returned to God, from which it issued, suggested to the Naassenes an interpretation of *Genesis* that imitated Simon's:

“The Ocean that flows in circles from high to low and low to high, and the Jordan that descends and resumes its course, are images of a single and same Logos that moves and constitutes the most intimate essence of the living world. Another symbol of this process is that of the serpent, *naas* or *ophis*, in the form of the serpent that bites its tail, thus figuring the cycle of becoming, the *Hen to Pan*. The serpent is the only object of their cult. ‘It is the humid element (the Ocean and the Jordan); without it, no being in the world could constitute itself, immortal or mortal, animate or inanimate. All is subject to it; it is good; it contains in a single horn, like the horn of a bull (*Deuteronomy*, 33:17), the beauty of all beings and it gives the grace of youth to each creature according to its own nature, because it impregnates all things “in the manner of the river that flows from Eden and divides into four branches”’ (*Genesis*, 2:10; *Elenchos*, V, 9:12-15). Eden, from whence flows the river, is the brain of man; the celestial spheres are the membranes that envelop the brain. The paradise that crosses the river is the head of man. The four branches in which it is divided, the Pison, the Geon, the Tigre and the Euphrates, are sight, sound, breathing and mouth. From the mouth comes prayer, the Logos as word; into the mouth comes nourishment, the spiritual nourishment obtained by prayer: ‘It gladdens, nourishes and forms the pneumatic, the perfect man.’”<sup>114</sup>

Likewise, according to the *Elenchos* (it is inevitable) – which seems to refer to a Christianized Naassenism because it radically differs from the philosophy of Simon – the Naassenes divided man “into three parts, of which the first is spiritual, the second psychical, and the third terrestrial. It is through knowledge of this man that knowledge of God begins: the knowledge of man, they say, is the beginning of perfection; the knowledge of God is its consummation” (*Elenchos*, V, 6:4-7). And the author of the *Elenchos* adds, accrediting a connection between some Naassenes

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<sup>114</sup> Lesisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

and the Nazarenes: “Such are the capital points of the many doctrines that James, the brother of the Savior, transmitted to Mariamne.”

Who was Mariamne? Not the Jewish queen, the wife of Herod who was put to death at the age of 90 (she lived from 60 [B.C.E.] to 29 [C.E.]), but another name for the Jewish Achamoth, the Greek Sophia, who would become Miriam-Mary, the Virgin and Mother of the Savior in the evangelic novels about Jesus.

It was Mariamne, issued from the ancient *Magma Mater*, whom the Naassenes placed above Chaos. She engendered the Son of Man (Adam), of whom *NHS* was one of the incarnations in order to save the men of the bad world in which the Demiurge holds them prisoner, at least according to the Ophites whose doctrines are reported by the *Elenchos*. (Celsus speaks of Christians drawing their origin from Mariamne. Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V, 63.)

The work of the Demiurge produced corruption and death. Thus the *Ophis-Christos*, born to the Virgin Mariamne, intervened:

“Thus no one can be saved, nor rise again, without the Son, that is to say, the Serpent. In the same way that he brought down from above the imprints of the Father, he likewise, inversely, carried back up from down here the imprints of the awakened Father and he reprised the traits of the Father’ (*Elenchos*, V, 17, 78). The entire cycle is conceived as a natural cycle, one might say, almost physical. The superior Logos attracts to itself the spiritual element of matter: ‘As the Naphtha attracts to itself all parts of fire, or rather as the magnet attracts iron and only iron, as the beak of the sea hawk attracts gold and only gold, as amber attracts scraps of paper; thus the Serpent brings back from the world, at the exclusion of everything else, the perfect race formed in the image of the Father and likewise his very essence, such that it had been sent by him down here.’”<sup>115</sup>

### **Perates, Cainites, Nicolaites, Koukeens**

The proliferation of the sects didn’t only affect Esseno-Baptism, but also characterized the great religious currents issued from other Judean and Samaritan sources. Naassenism was divided into rival groups, communities or Churches. In the doctrinal confusion of the first two centuries of the Christian era, the fundamental agreement among them proceeded less from the name and nature of the Messiah – *NHS*, Seth, Joshua, Dosis, Adam, Sophia, Barbelo, etc. – than from

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

behavior marked by asceticism and the renunciation or abandonment of the pleasures of love, or by the release of constrained desires.

An aggressive remark in the *Elenchos* in fact provides an observation: “The priests and guardians of this doctrine were those whom one at first would call the Naassenes, from the Hebrew word *naas*, which means ‘serpent’; thereafter, they also called themselves Gnostics, claiming to be the only ones to know the depths of things. They were divided into many sects in order to form a multiple heresy that in fact, in reality, was only one heresy, because it was the same thing that they designated with different names, with the result that rivalries have profited at the expense of the doctrine” (*Elenchos*, V, 3, 3-4).

Koukeens, Phibionites, Stratotics, Levitics, Perates, Cainites, Nicolaites – so many mysterious names: either local designations of groups anchored (despite their particularities) in a shared faith or the fantastical fruits of the heresiologues, who were always anxious to exhibit the chaos of the heterodoxies in order to emphasize the unity of the “true” belief in the “true” Messiah.

The preeminence of a saving Mother Goddess and a symbiotic cult of the phallic serpent brought a kind of unity to Naassenism, which was otherwise prey to behavioral variations that went from Essenean abstinence to the creative love advocated by Simon of Samaria.

According to the *Book of Scolies*, written by the Syrian heresiologue Bar-Konal, this was the poetic cosmogony of the Koukeens:

“God was born from the sea situated on the Earth of Light, which they call the Bright Sea. The Sea of Light and the Earth are more ancient than God.”

“When God was born from the Bright Sea, he sat on the waters, looked at them, and in them saw his own image. He extended his hand, took (this image), took it as a companion, made love with it and engendered with it a crowd of gods and goddesses.”

The idea of a God in love with his reflection, with his Spirit, with his Wisdom or Sophia, was not foreign to Judeo-Christian speculations on the nature of the *Angelos-Christos*.

The position of the Nicolaites appeared to be closer to Essenism:

“The Darkness (the abyss and the waters), rejected by the unbegotten Spirit, rose up, furious, to attack it; this struggle produced a kind of womb that, for the Spirit, engendered four Eons, which engendered fourteen others; after which the ‘right’ and ‘left,’ light and darkness,

were formed. One of the superior powers emanated from the Spirit, Barbelo, the Celestial Sea, engendered the bad entity (*Ialdabaoth* or *Sabaoth*), creator of the lower world; but, repenting, she used its beauty to create [*commencer*] health from the inferior cosmos.”<sup>116</sup>

A rumor has it that the Nicolaites, a name that comes from a Bishop Nicolas, the governor of their community, were made the object of polemics, to which the Greek text of the *Apocalypse attributed to John* bears witness. If one remembers that a person with the same name, John, took for himself a Gospel originally derived from a Naassene *midrash*, it is not improbable that, at the end of the First Century – while the Judeo-Christian philosophers such as Cerinthus, Saturnilus and the partisans of Saul/Paul confronted each other in Ephesus, Antiochus, Pergamon, Alexandria and Corinth – a program of Essenian-Christian reunification that excluded the old forms of Naassenism was added to the text of the original Jewish version. The text of the *Apocalypse* (2, 6, and 15-16) especially attacks the Nicolaites who were influential in Ephesus and Pergamon, where they seemed to have striven to reconcile Naassenism and Essenism.

In all probability, the Perates constituted a later branch of the Naassenes. In his study of *WAW*, the Hebrew letter that symbolizes the Messiah, Dupont-Sommers derives their name from the Greek word *paratai*, the “crossers,” those who cross the waters of corruption.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps they were confused with the Cainites, who, according to the *Elenchos*, believed that the serpent was “the sign with which God marked Cain to prevent him from being killed by those who encountered him” (V, 15).

In North Africa, Naassenes of the Cainite type rallied many adepts around a prophetess named Quintilla. These adepts professed the existence of two divinities. As with Marcion much later, their Demiurge was identified with YHWH. Cain, like the Serpent, was YHWH’s expiatory victory: “The serpent is Cain whom the God of this world did not agree to offer [as a sacrifice], while he agreed to the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because the master of this world wallows in blood.”<sup>118</sup>

It is possible that the Cainites of North Africa, who were absorbed by the Christianity of the New Prophecy (which was particularly influential in Carthage around 160-170), convinced it to give to its redeemer the generic name of the God who saves, Joshua/Jesus.

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<sup>116</sup> S. Hutton, *Les gnostiques*, Paris, 1976.

<sup>117</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *La doctrine gnostique de la lettre WAW*, Paris, 1961.

<sup>118</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

The sect of the Perates, which was perhaps contemporary with the *Elenchos* (it lingers upon it at great length), testifies to the existence of a late and Hellenized version of Naassenism.

The author of the *Elenchos* in particular rejects two prophets, bishops or founders of communities: Euphrates the Perate and Kelbes the Karystian.

“They gave themselves the name Perates because they believed that no creature can escape the destiny that waits for all engendered beings from their birth. Because what is engendered is necessarily corrupt [...] We, who are the only ones to know the necessary laws concerning creation and the road by which man entered the world, we are the only ones who know exactly how to live in it and *cross over* corruption [...] Death seized the Egyptians with their chariots in the Red Sea; the Egyptians are all those who are in ignorance – that is to say, all those who have not received gnosis. The exodus from Egypt was the exodus from the body; because the body, according to them, is a little Egypt; *to cross* the Red Sea is to traverse the waters of corruption, that is to say, Cronus; being from the other side of the Red Sea is to be from the other side of creation; to arrive in the desert is to find oneself outside of creation, there where the gods of perdition and the God of salvation meet up at the same time. The gods of perdition are the stars, which impose on engendered beings the fatality of a variable creation” (*Elenchos*, V, 16, 1 and 4).<sup>119</sup>

The interpretation that Simon of Samaria applied to the texts of the Bible are found here, but made from within the scorn for the body that is common to [all] the religions.

The Redeeming and Perfect Serpent was opposed to the serpents that inoculate [with] death. The following five quotes come from the *Elenchos*, V, 16, 6 *sq.*

“It isn’t only the Logos as primordial power issued from the Father who is the Serpent; the diverse powers that rule the terrestrial world are all serpents. Moses called the stars the serpents of the desert, which bite and kill those who want to cross the Red Sea. Also Moses showed to the children of Israel who had been bitten by the serpents in the desert the true and perfect Serpent; those who had faith in him

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<sup>119</sup> Following Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 101.



were not bitten in the desert, that is to say, by the powers. Thus, no one can save nor defend those who left Egypt, that is to say, from the body and this world, other than the Perfect Serpent that is full of all plentitude. Those who put their hopes in him were not be destroyed by the serpents of the desert, that is to say, by the gods of creation. This is what is written in the book of Moses. The Serpent is the power that was attached to Moses, the Virgin who changes into a serpent.”

Note that the serpent as the principle of pleasure – defined as perdition by the Perates – was vanquished by the phallic symbolism of the staff of commandment.

“The serpents of the magicians of Egypt, that is to say, the gods of perdition, resisted the power of Moses. But his rod overcame them and destroyed them all. The serpent that embraces the universe is the wise Logos of Eve. It is the mystery of Eden; it is the river flowing from Eden; it is the sign with which God marked Cain to prevent him from being killed by anyone who encountered him. The serpent is Cain whom the God of this world would not agree to offer [as sacrifice], while he agreed to the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because the master of this world wallows in blood. It is the serpent that, most recently, in the time of Herod, appeared in a human form.”<sup>120</sup>

Note that the Serpent incarnated in human form is evoked in the Semitic substrata of the *Gospel attributed to John* before it – like Melchizedek, Seth and the Master of Justice – was given the name Joshua/Jesus. The image of the crucified Serpent would be perpetuated in alchemical representations.

“[The serpent appeared] in the image of Joseph, who was sold by the hands of his brothers and who was dressed in a mottled robe only. It was in the image of Esau, whose robe received benediction, although he was absent, and who did not receive blind benediction, but who was enriched from beyond without receiving anything of blindness, whose face Jacob saw ‘as a man sees the face of God’ (*Genesis*, 33:10). It is of the serpent that it is written: ‘Like Nimrod the Giant, hunter before the Eternal’ (*Genesis*, 10:9). He had many adversaries, as many as there were serpents who bit the children of Israel in the desert and whose bites were healed by the Perfect Serpent

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<sup>120</sup> Alexandrian, *Histoire de la philosophie occulte*, pp. 366 and 367.

that Moses would raise up in the midst of them [...] The bronze serpent that was elevated by Moses in the desert is in his image.”

Cf. the text of the *Gospel attributed to John*: “And as Moses raised a serpent in the desert, thus it is necessary that the Son of Man be raised” (3:14).

“He is the only one whose the celestial constellation is visible everywhere. It is the great ‘beginning’ of which Scripture speaks. It is of him that it is said: In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was at the side of God and the Logos was God. In the beginning, he was at the side of God; he made everything and nothing was made without him. What was made by him is life.”

Note that one finds this again in the same Gospel (1, 1-3). The *Apocrypha of John* also belonged to this Naassenean or Peratean literature.

“It is by him that Eve was made; Eve is life. This Eve is ‘the mother of all the living things’ (*Genesis*, 3:20), the nature that is common to all, that is to say, she is the mother of the gods and the angels, the immortals and the mortals, the beings without reason and the beings endowed with reason.”

One final note: Eve as the principle of life and universal mother also appears in the doctrines of the Barbelites.

Opposite the Logos, which is similar to the serpent, matter rises up and curls upon itself; it is appears under the symbol of water, which one also encounters among the Naassenes:

“Corruption is water and nothing destroys the cosmos as rapidly as water; water extends itself in the spherical form of the world. It is Cronus (understood to be the external planetary sphere of Saturn, that which encloses all the others). It is a power the color of water and, from this power, that is to say, from Cronus, no creature can escape, because it is due to Cronus that all creatures incur corruption and no generation exists that doesn’t have Cronus as an obstacle along its route. This is the meaning of the verse by the poet concerning the gods. ‘I can attest to the earth, the vault of the heavens that cover it and the deadly waters of the Styx. It is the sermon of the immortals gods’ (*Odyssey*, V, 184 sq.).”

The *Elenchos* quotes a fragment of a Peratean hymn:

“I am the voice of the awakening in the eternal night. I now begin to deliver the power from the control of the veils of chaos. The power of the abyssal clay that takes and carries the mold of the eternal and silent humidity; the entire power, always in movement, of the aqueous convulsions that carry the one who rests, hold the one who wobbles, liberate the one who comes, relieve the one who rests, destroy the one who believes; the loyal guardian of the trace of the airs, she who benefits from what is poured on the order of the twelve eyes, who reveals the seal on the power that rules the places of the invisible water, the power that has been called the sea. This power, which ignorance has called Cronus, Cronus who was enchained when he closed the trickle of the thick and nebulous, obscure and dark [River] Tartarus” (*Elenchos*, V, 14, 1-2).

The syncretism of the Perates was not content with harmonizing the Greek and Hebrew mythologies; it incorporated into its doctrine of salvation an astrological speculation, also present in Essenism and the Christianities of Bardaisan and Priscillian.

The universe and the individual knew an existence subjected to astral influences that the Perates identified with the power of the Archons, agents of the Demiurge. The art of the Serpent-Logos consisted in escaping from them.

“In the same way that the stars tend towards the center of the world in order to move away again, thus the entire Creation moves away from its center, the Divinity, in order to return to it. The fall is designated by the left side of circular movement; ascension is on the right side. The heavens themselves offer a great fresco of the combat between the Logos, the Good and Perfect Serpent, and the master of this world, the Bad Serpent. The Logos is figured by the constellation of the Dragon; it has on the right and left sides of its head the Crown and the Lyre. Before the Dragon is kneeling the ‘pitiful’ man, the constellation of Hercules, who touches the end of the right foot of the Dragon. Behind him, the Bad Master of the world, the constellation of the Serpent, approaches in order to abduct the Crown, but the Stink Dragon encloses it and prevents it from touching the Crown” (*Elenchos*, V, 16, 14-16).

Note that the theme of the two serpents is evoked in the *Book of Isaiah* (27:1).

Still later, Epiphanius of Salamis attributed to those whom he called “Ophites” a Eucharist in honor of the Serpent-Redeemer. (Certain sects practice this Eucharist today.)

“They pile bread on the table; they summon a serpent that they elevate as a sacred animal. One opens its cage; the serpent comes out, gains the table, unfolds itself among the bread and, they say, transforms it into the Eucharist. Then they break the bread upon which the serpent has crawled and distribute it to the communicants. Each one kisses the serpent on the mouth, because the serpent was tamed by the incantation, and they prostrate themselves before a similar animal. It is through the serpent, they say, that they send a hymn to the Father on high. Such is their manner of celebrating their mysteries” (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, XXXVII, 5).

From the serpent of the lewd temptation to the *Ophis-Christos*, passing through the phallic and magic rod of Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient totemism of the animal that coils, intertwines, wriggles, penetrates, unites and ejaculates venom or life was spiritualized and entered into religious stereotypes without losing its ambiguous nature.

Uprooted from its original androgyny – which certain Naassenean groups hostile to Puritanism celebrated – the *ophis* was made a Redeemer Messiah and a Destroyer Messiah, a virgin of iron and terror who reigned over nature, the beasts and women in order to impose on the world the order of pure renunciation, incarnated in Jesus, and the order of pure release, incarnated in Satan, the *alter ego* of the Messiah.

Perhaps it was also through the means of the *Ophis-Christos* that the cult of Hermes-Logos, which the Greeks called *agathephoros*, carrier of the good (as the *agathodaimon*), and which offered the erect phallus to popular veneration, succumbed to a kind of castration.

Whatever the case, Essenean asceticism invaded the Greco-Roman world and, under the antagonistic varieties of Marcionism and Montanism, propagated in it fanatical tastes for continence, mortification and the martyred body.

But while the rod of Moses was substituted for the “golden staff of Hermes,” the rites of sexual fusion undertook a vivacity sometimes less clandestine than one might suppose, since Epiphanius of Salamis would encounter the Barbelites, who called themselves “Christians,” thereby restoring to the word the sense of “messianic.” Their Messiah did not call himself Jesus, but Barbelo.

At the end of the Fourth Century, Priscillian of Avila would not judge it useless to make it clear: “God is not Armaziel, Mariamne, Joel, Balsamus, nor

Barbilon; he is the Christ Jesus” (*Corpus eccles. latin.*, XVIII, 29). Mariamne was the Mother-Spirit-Sophia-Virgin and Mother of the Naassenes. Barbilon was Barbelo, the sperm-eating and redeeming divinity of the Barbelites.

### **Justin the Gnostic and the *Book of Baruch***

In the mid-Second Century, Justin the Gnostic – a Greek who was familiar with the Jewish texts and the master of an esoteric school in which instruction was dispensed under the seal of the secret – drafted the *Book of Baruch*, of which the Elenchos conserved extracts. (It isn’t impossible that Justin frequented the milieus of Kabalistic Jews who, under the cover of Phariseean obedience, perpetuated and amplified the gnosis of the Hermetic groups of Egypt and Asia Minor.)

The *Book of Baruch* offers an example of Judeo-Greek syncretism, quite different from that of Justin’s contemporary, Marcion, which was elaborated on the basis of the authority of Saul/Paul.

Justin refers to a myth, reported by Herodotus, according to which Heracles made love with a being who was half-young woman and half-serpent, and who gave him three children. He drew from this a Trinitarian theology:

““There are three unbegotten Principles of the All’: two are masculine, one is feminine. The first masculine principle is called the Good; he is the only one to carry this name and he possesses a universal prescience; the second is called the Father of all things; he is deprived of prescience, unknowable and invisible. The feminine principle is also deprived of prescience; it is irascible, it has a double spirit and a double body and absolutely resembles the being in Herodotus’ myth, who was a young woman up to the sexual organs and a serpent above them. This young woman was called Eden and Israel. Such are the Principles of the All, the Roots and the sources from which all existence issues; there aren’t any others. The Father saw this half-woman, Eden, fell in love with her, ignorant that she was from the future. This Father was called Elohim. Eden fell in love with Elohim, and desire united them in the pleasure of love. From this union, the Father had twelve angels. Here are the names of the twelve angels of the Father: Michael, Amen, Baruch, Gabriel, Esaddea . . . (the seven other names are missing from the manuscripts). The names of the maternal angels born to Eden are the following: Babel, Achamoth, Naas, Bel, Belias, Satan, Sael, Adonea, Kanithan, Pharaoh, Karkamenos, and Lathen. Of the twenty-four angels, some (the angels of the Father) serve the Father and do his bidding; the maternal angels

serve Eden. The ensemble of these angels form the Paradise of which Moses spoke: 'God planted a garden facing the East' (*Genesis*, 2:8), that is to say, opposite Eden, so that Eden would always be able to see Paradise, namely the angels. The angels are allegorically named the trees of this paradise: the Tree of Life is Baruch, the third of the paternal angels; the Tree of the Science of Good and Evil is Naas, the third of the maternal angels. It is thus, he says, that one must explain the words of Moses; Moses veiled his expression because everyone wasn't capable of comprehending the truth. When Paradise was constituted by the love of Elohim and Eden, the angels of Elohim prayed a little to the most noble of the earth, that is to say, not the bestial parts of Eden, but the noble regions of the earth, those that are placed above the sex organs and are similar to man, and they made man. The bestial parts serve the savage beasts and the other animals. They made man as a symbol of the amorous union of Elohim and Eden, and they mirrored their powers in him: Eden the soul and Elohim the *pneuma*. Here is how Adam is like the seal, the pledge of the love and the eternal symbol of the wedding of Eden and Elohim. Moreover, Eve was made, as Moses wrote, to be an image and a symbol, to conserve in her the imprint of Eden for all eternity. And likewise in the image that is Eve, Eden deposited the soul and Elohim deposited the *pneuma*. Then Adam and Eve received the commandment: 'Increase and multiply, and fill the world' (*Genesis*, 1, 28), that is to say, Eden. Such is the meaning of the Scripture. At her marriage, Eden gave to Elohim all her power in the guise of a fortune. It is in the example of this first marriage that women, to this day, still give a dowry to their spouses, loyal in this way to the divine law of their first parents, observed the first time by Eden with regard to Elohim. When all was created as Moses describes it (the heavens and the earth and all the creatures that it contained), the twelve angels of the Mother divided into 'four principles' and each of these four parts bore the name of a river: Pison, Gihon, Tigress and Euphrates, as it was written by Moses. The dozen angels, distributed among the four groups, wandered the world in all directions and were invested with a lieutenancy over the Cosmos by Eden. They never remained in the same place, but, as in a round, they made the rounds, ceaselessly changing place and, at regular intervals, ceding the places that had been attributed to them.

“When Pison ruled over a region, famine, distress and tribulations made their appearance there, because this group of angels bring with them a period of avarice. Likewise, each part of the world is the theater of plagues and sicknesses that follow the power and nature of the groups that dominate it. This deluge of evil, which varies with the group that is dominant, ceaselessly enlaces the universe in its inexhaustible wave, following the decree of Eden. Here is how this fatality of evil was instaurated. After having constructed and fashioned the world through his loves, Elohim wanted to regain the superior regions of the heavens to see that nothing was missing from his creation and he took with him his respective angels; his nature carried him towards the High, but he wanted to leave Eden here below, because Eden, being earth, did not want to accompany the ascension of her spouse. Reaching to the frontiers of the heavens, Elohim saw a light more powerful than the one he had created; he said, ‘Open for me the doors so that I may enter and praise the Savior; because I have believed until now that I was the Savior’ (deformed citation of *Psalms*, 118:19). From the heart of the light, a voice responded: ‘Here is the door to the Savior, the just can pass through it’ (*Ibid.*, 20). As soon as the door opened, and the Father (Elohim) entered among the Good without his angels and he saw what the eyes have not seen, what the ears have not heard and what the heart of man has not conceived. Then the Good said to him: ‘Sit on my right’ (*Psalms*, 110:1). But the Father said to the Good: ‘Savior, let me destroy the Cosmos that I have created because my *pneuma* remains imprisoned in man and I want to reclaim it.’ The Good responded: ‘Now that you are close to me, you can no longer do evil; by your reciprocal love, you and Eden, you made the world; thus leave Eden to enjoy the creation for as long as it pleases her; as for you, remain close to me.’ Seeing herself abandoned by Elohim, Eden tearfully assembled around herself her own angels and dressed herself splendidly in the hope that Elohim would again fall in love with her and re-descend towards her. But Elohim, who found himself under the authority of the Good, did not re-descend towards Eden. Then she commanded Babel, who is Aphrodite, to provoke the adulterous and divorced men; she had been separated from Elohim: she wanted the *pneuma* that dwells in man be tortured by sad separations and suffer, as she herself did from the fact of her abandonment. And Eden gave to Naas, her third angel, a great power and the mission to punish in all ways the *pneuma* of Elohim that lives in men; she thus punished

Elohim in his *pneuma* because he had abandoned his wife, despite giving his word. Seeing this, the Father Elohim sent Baruch, his third angel, to the aid of the *pneuma* that resides in every man. Upon his arrival, Baruch placed himself in the midst of the angels of Eden, that is to say, the middle of Paradise (because Paradise is the angels in the milieu in which they stand) and commanded to the men: ‘You can eat from all the Trees of Paradise, but you can not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,’ which is the serpent; that is to say, you will obey the other eleven angels of Eden, because if they bear the passions, they do not bear injustice. The serpent approached Eve, seduced her and committed adultery with her, which is contrary to the Law; then he approached Adam and committed the act of pederasty with him, which is also against the Law. It was from that moment that adultery and pederasty existed. It was from that moment that evil and good have ruled over men; the two have the same origin, the Father, Elohim. In fact, by elevating himself toward the Good, the Father showed the way to those who want to climb; by descending toward Eden, he was at the origin of evil for the *pneuma* that is in man. Baruch was thus sent to Moses and, through Moses, he taught the children of Israel the means of returning to the Good. But the third angel of Eden, Naas, who, through the soul issued from Eden, lived by Moses as in all other men, suffocated the prescriptions of Baruch to his own profit. This is why, on the one hand, the soul is subjected to the *pneuma* and, on the other hand, the *pneuma* is subjected to the soul. Because the soul is Eden; the *pneuma* is Elohim; both are found among all the human beings, men and women. Then Baruch was sent to the prophets so that the *pneuma* that lives in man would hear the prophets and tear themselves away from the bad works of the body, as the Father Elohim had done. This time again, Naas, with the help of the soul that, with the *pneuma* of the Father, lives in man, led the prophets astray; all let themselves be tampered with and they did not obey the words that Elohim had confided to Baruch. Finally, Elohim chose a prophet from the milieu of the uncircumcised and he sent him to combat the twelve angels of Eden and to deliver the Father from the twelve bad angels of the creation. These combats were the twelve labors of Hercules, labors that he accomplished in order, from the first to the last, by fighting the lion, the hydra, the wild boar, etc. Those are the names that strangers to the faith have given to the angels to express metaphorically the particular activity of each of the Mother’s angels. While he seemed to have succeeded in putting them all down,



he banded together with *Omphalos*, who is none other than Babel, Aphrodite; she seduced Hercules and stole his power, which consisted in the commandments that Elohim had confided to Baruch and she, in exchange, dressed him in her robe, that is to say, in the power of Eden, the power of below. Thus the prophetic mission and the labors of Hercules were aborted. Finally, in the days of King Herod, Baruch was once again sent here-below by Elohim” (*Elenchos*, V).

The following offers a typical example of interpolation. At the earliest, it dates from the Fourth Century, since Nazareth didn't exist before then.

“Having come to Nazareth, he found there Jesus, the Son of Joseph and Mary, a child of twelve years, occupied with tending his sheep; he revealed to him the entire history of Eden and Elohim from the beginning and into the future, and he said to him: ‘All the prophets who have come before you have let themselves be seduced; thus you are tasked, Jesus, Son of Man, with not letting yourself be seduced, but to announce the Word to men, to communicate to them the message touching upon the Father and the Good, then to return up to the Good and sit there, at the side of Elohim, our Father to all.’ Jesus obeyed the angel and said: ‘Lord, I will do all this,’ and he began to preach. Naas wanted to seduce him but he escaped, because Jesus was loyal to Baruch. Furious at not being able to lead Jesus astray, Naas crucified him. But Jesus left on the cross the body of Eden and climbed toward the Good. He said to Eden: ‘Woman, take your son,’ that is to say, the psychical man and the terrestrial man. Then he remitted his *pneuma* into the hands of the Father and he elevated himself toward the Good” (*Elenchos*, V, 26).

It is with pertinence that Leisegang detects in Justin and his mythology the echoes of an amorous torment, hypostasized as a cosmic drama. I leave the floor to the exegete. His sympathy for that vindictive man and his antipathy for the woman, here accorded to the sentimental interest that he sees in Justin, shows quite well the sensual origin of all *hairesis*, all the choices that are supposedly religious or ideological.

“Amorous desire and its satisfaction: such is the key to the origin of the world. The disillusion of love and the vengeance that follows them, such is the secret of all the evil and egotism that exists on the earth. The entire history of the world and humanity becomes a love

story. We seek, we find, we separate, we torture ourselves, then, finally, faced with a more acute pain, we renounce: that is the eternal mystery of love with the contradiction, intrinsic to love, that makes us desire to be delivered from women and the feminine. All this marks a fine intelligence concerning the essential differences that separate men from women. The tragedy of the destiny of the universe begins with the amorous impulse that carries its Creator to leave the domain of the Good. By descending toward Eden, who watches out for him, Elohim is charged with the first fault, into which a free decision and, at the same time, a natural instinct entered. If one considers that he left his wife, that he did not descend from the heavens to return to her, and that he repented of the consequences of his love and wanted to destroy all that issued from him, his guilt is enormous. Though his conduct might well appear, from the angle of the earth, to be a frightful infidelity, it was much less culpable than the conduct and the vengeance of Eden in which she found a partial justification. One thinks of a remark by Nietzsche: ‘Man fears the woman who loves: she will not recoil before any sacrifice, and all the rest will appear to her as without value. Man fears the woman who hates: because man in the depths of his heart is malicious; but the woman is bad’ (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. G. Bianquis, Paris, Aubier, 1946, p. 153). Eden was malicious: she did everything to thwart the ceaselessly renewed efforts by Elohim to efface the evil issued from him; efforts that would end after millennia of perseverance. Also sympathy was shared between Eden and Elohim. The sadness of God before the fatal consequences of his love and the distress of the disappointed woman both aimed at awakening the sympathy and emotions of the man who, in his poor little existence, let himself engage in this tragedy of love and have the experience of it. That Elohim finally reached salvation at the cost of laborious efforts, and that Eden, bent on saying no and impeding the work of the Good, found her tragic end in an eternal abandonment and was no more than a de-spiritualized cadaver: this responds to the sentiment of justice, which demands the most severe punishment for irreconcilable hatred.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

## The Adepts of Barbelo

Around 335, the young Epiphanius of Salamis, a future master-thinker of the Church and the author of a denunciatory list of heresies titled *Panarion kata pason ton aireseon* (“Medicine chest against all the heresies”), adhered to a sect that still called itself “Christian” in the Greek sense of “Messianic.”

Its Christ or Messiah, named Barbelo, who was a modern emanation of the ancient Goddess-Mother, revealed herself in the features of a *Sophia* who would be the exaltation, not of the *pneuma* in the spiritual sense, but of the breath of life, the sensual power of the body.

Tormented by guilt, and later on converted to the frenzies of asceticism, Epiphanius overwhelmed his first co-religionists with the same indignant rage with which Augustine of Hippo repudiated the Manichaeism of which he had been a zealous partisan.

Among the books that propagated the Barbelite doctrine, Epiphanius cites the *Book of Ialdabaoth*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Gospel of Eve*, the *Book of Seth*, the *Book of Noria*, the *Prophecies of Barkabbas* (cited by Basilides), the *Ascension of Elie*, the *Nativity of Mary*, the *Gospel of the Apostles*, the *Great and Small Interrogations of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philippe* and the *Gospel of Perfection*.

Several hypotheses have been put forth concerning the name of the Goddess. For Leisegang, it derived from the Hebrew *Barbhe Eloha*, “in four is God,” an allusion to the divine tetrad, not the *tetragrammaton* YHWH, but the ancient Semitic heavenly group: El the Father, the Mother (his wife), their sons and daughter, who became Father, feminine *pneuma*, Son, [and] Messiah or Christ. Others see in it a deformation of *baal Belo* or the cult of the divinity named Bel, issued from the rites of fecundity and light, still vital in Samaria despite the Yahwehist implantation, nay, even an emancipation from Anath. In the *Book of Baruch* by Justin the Gnostic, the entity Babel is identified with Aphrodite.

According to the report made by Epiphanius: “They adore a certain Barbelo, who lives, they say, in the eighth heaven and who issued from the Father. She is, according to some, the mother of Ialdabaoth; according to others, the mother of Sabaoth. Her son exercises over the seventh heaven a tyrannical authority and says to his subjects: ‘I am the Eternal and there isn’t any other; there isn’t any other God except for me’” (*Panarion*, XXV, 2 sq.).

The tyrannical Eternal is none other than YHWH, the God of the Judeans, identified by anti-Judean Jewish gnosis and then by Hellenic gnosis with the Demiurge, the bloody God, popularized under the name Ialdabaoth or Sabaoth; he presides over the destinies of an irremediably bad world. That YHWH-Ialdabaoth was the son of the Goddess-Mother here recalls the eviction of the cults of the

Woman and Mother by the patriarchy that acceded to power with Neolithic agriculture.

By understanding such words, Barbelite mythology says, the mother of the divine despot decided to save humanity from the miserable lot to which God had reduced it. How did she resolve to restore the power that an odious son has stripped away? By ruse and seduction. She presented herself to the Archons, the servants of the Savior, in the voluptuous majesty of her femininity and, having excited their desires, received their sperm “so as to thus restore her power, disseminated into the different beings” (*Panarion*, XXV, 2 sq).

The faithful to Barbelo thus imitated the saving gesture of the Goddess and, with the good conscience of an offering, abandoned themselves to the pleasure of making flow – in place of the blood that so many religions shed – the sperm and the cyprine [vaginal lubrication] whose the emission revives the energy of the *Natura Magma*.

In a passage that much later would inspire the inquisitors who accused Catharist and Vaudoisian ascetics of debauchery, Epiphanius reports the use of a sign of recognition, attested to by the Messalians, Beghards and Beguines, that – before the hedonist fashion for sexual liberties of the Twentieth Century – was long perpetuated among the young people, who indicated, by a caress in the palm of the hand, the imperious character of their desire:

“They have, from men to women and from women to men, a sign of recognition that consists, when they give their hands in order to greet each other, in practicing a kind of tickling in the palm of the hand if the newcomer belongs to their religion. As soon as they recognize each other, they have a banquet. They serve delicious food, eat meat and drink wine; even the poor ones do this. When they have banqueted well, and have, if I may say so, filled their veins with a surplus of power, they move on to debauchery. The man leaves his place at the side of his wife by saying to her: ‘Raise yourself and accomplish the *agape* [love feast] with the brother.’”

Note that the Christian Churches that claimed Thomas for themselves allowed for the existence of an amorous relation between Jesus and Salome: “Salome said: ‘Who are you, man? From whom do you (issue) to be on my bed and to have eaten at my table?’” (*Logion*, 65 of the *Hidden Words that Jesus the Living said to Judas Didymus Thomas*, popularly known under the title *Gospel of Thomas*). In the same order of ideas, the *First Epistle attributed to John* (3:9) declares: “Whomever is born from God does not commit sin, because the sperm of

God lives in him; and he can not sin because he is born from God. In this one can recognize the children of God and the children of the Devil.”

The man and the woman take care to receive the sperm between their hands and they pledge it to the Goddess-Mother so that she can fortify life in the world and also in them.

The sect frequented by Epiphanius offers an example of an archaic belief of the orgiastic type that was degraded by successive syncretisms; even the Christianity erected at Nicaea as the religion of the State was impregnated by the currents in which it was at first formulated before settling down as a political and theological doctrine. Many tendencies fundamentally hostile to Christianity would survive by adapting themselves with more or less flexibility to the norms imposed by Rome (the recuperation of the Celtic or Slavic mythologies, which were incorporated into the cult of the saints, is exemplary in this regard, as Robert Graves has shown).<sup>122</sup>

In the case of the Barbelites, who were tardily denounced by Epiphanius, perhaps communion of the Christian type replaced the tribute formerly rendered to the “breath of life” that strongly expressed amorous pleasure. As Leisegang recalls, “the word *pneuma* is immediately tied to the evocation of a spermatoc, reproductive matter. At the beginning, the *pneuma* had absolutely nothing to do with spirit; it was the ‘wind,’ is was a ‘hot air.’ The conception according to which it is a *pneuma*-wind, and not a *pneuma*-spirit, that engenders human life, is encountered in the Greek tradition.”<sup>123</sup>

The idea of a *sperma* that generated of life, of a substance that creates man and the world, is not absent from the Greek translation of “Spirit” by the word *pneuma* as it appears in the Old and New Testaments, but, little by little, it obliterated the most unacceptable element for a society dominated by religion: the act of self-creation, the creation of the world and the uncertain creation of the child who contains in his or her substance the amorous union of man and woman. The masked reality ironically resurged among a few playful stoics and the voluntarily castrated Origen under the traits of the *logos spermatikos* that became, in Saint-Sulpicean imagery, the language of fire of the Pentecost.

For the Barbelites, man and woman possessed the *pneuma*, the breath of God, in their own seeds [*semence*]. And the individual came closer to the divine essence as he or she radiated from his or her spermatoc power and dispensed it in a symbiotic [*fusionnel*] orgasm.

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<sup>122</sup> R. Graves, *La Déesse blanche*, Paris, 1986. [Translator: this book was originally published in English in 1948 as *The White Goddess*.]

<sup>123</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

“To unite with God,” Leisegang specifies, “one must mix and merge together one’s semen [*semence*] with the generating substance of the All. Salvation consists in removing one’s semen from terrestrial destination and leading it back to the celestial source of all semen.”<sup>124</sup>

Here is what Epiphanius of Salamis reports about the group in which was an adept:

“They offer to the Father, to the Nature of the All, what they have in their hands by saying: ‘We offer to you this gift, the body of the Christ.’ Then they eat it and commune in their own ignominy, by saying: ‘Here is the body of the Christ, here is the Easter for which our bodies suffer and are constrained to confess the passion of the Christ.’ They also do it with the menses of the woman. They gather the blood of impurity and commune with it in the same way. And they say: ‘Here is the blood of the Christ.’ When they read in the *Apocalypse* ‘I see a tree that bears fruit twelve times a year, and it says to me: it is the tree of life,’ they allegorically interpret it as the flux of menstrual blood of the woman.”

Epiphanius did not understand or didn’t want to understand that the Christ, the Messiah of the Barbelites, was not Joshua/Jesus, but Barbelo, whom Priscillian would call Barbilon. Epiphanius goes on to say:

“Although they practice a promiscuous commerce, they teach that one must not procreate children. Because it isn’t with the goal of procreation that they practice shameful acts, but for the sake of pure sensual pleasure (...). They engage in the sensual act until satisfaction; they collect the semen of their impurity, preventing it from penetrating and ending in a conception; then they eat the fruit of their shame.”

When Barbelo gave birth to the odious breed of the Eternal – YHWH-Ialdabaoth-Sabaoth (also called Kalakau) – she revoked her status as mother to be celebrated as the woman impregnated by the pleasure and love that she dispensed. Also the Barbelites had recourse to a voluntary form of interrupted of pregnancy, which doesn’t lack interest.

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135 and 136.

“When one among them, by surprise, let his semen penetrate too early and the woman became pregnant, listen to what they made still more abominable. They extirpated the embryo as soon as they could seize it with their fingers; they took the runt, crushed it into a kind of mortar, mixed in honey, pepper and different condiments, as well as perfumed oils, so as to conjure away distaste, then they united [...] and each communed with his fingers in this runt paste. The human meal completed, they concluded with this prayer to God: ‘We have not allowed the Archon of sensual pleasure to mock us, but we have welcomed the error of the Father.’ This is, to their eyes, the perfect Easter [...] Then, in their meetings, they enter into ecstasy; they smear their hands with [...] their seminal emissions; they extend them and, their hands thus sullied and their bodies entirely naked, they pray to obtain through this action free access to God. Men and women, they treat their bodies day and night with salves, baths and spices, and they devote themselves to sleep and drinking. They curse someone who is fasting by saying: ‘It is not necessary to fast, because fasting is the work of the Archon that created the Eon.’”

Here “the Eon” refers to the God who created the world (the Eon). The expression “Eon” is frequently found in the letters allegedly written by Paul, but translators have unfailingly made it their duty to render it as “world,” “century” or “epoch” so that the Gnostic connotation is avoided.

Epiphanius concludes: “[In the words of the Barbelites who cursed people who fasted], ‘it is, on the contrary, necessary to nourish oneself so that bodies are powerful and capable of carrying fruit in their time’” (*Panarion*, XXVI, 4-5).

Note that the *Gospel of the Egyptians* also justified the refusal to engender children: “And Mary-Salome demanded of the Savior: ‘Master, when will the reign of Death end?’ And Jesus responded: ‘When you women no longer make babies. . . . When you have removed the garments of shame and ignominy; when two become one; when the male and the female become one; when there is no longer man or woman, that’s when the reign of Death will end. . . .’ Salome responded: ‘Have I thus done well, Master, by not being a mother?’ And Jesus said: ‘Eat all the fruits, but from what is bitter (maternity), do not eat anything’” (quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, III, IX, 66, and by the *Second Epistle to the Church of Corinth* attributed to Clement).

In its most radical elements, the Barbelite doctrine was similar to the teachings of Simon of Samaria: the body is the earth, whose creative power merits the exclusive attention of men and people. The goal is the fusion of the me and the world, but, while Simon identified the consciousness of pleasure and the

consciousness of self-creation, the Barbelites, obeying a religious solicitation, ended in a mystical vision of pleasure that, in the last instance, was a tribute of the *soma* to the Spirit and the divine.

Like Tantrism, Barbelo, the orgiastic Goddess and sucker of the universal sperm, turns the pleasures of life into a heavenly duty, and sensual pleasure into a ritual obligation. Therefore what's disgusting is not sensually communing in sperm and abnormal excitation, but the travesty of amorous exaltation as an ejaculation of the sacred.

The Barbelite religion fomented a theology that was quite anterior to that which Catholicism would impose after Nicaea.

Two forces were opposed: the Good God, of whom Barbelo was the emanation, and the God who had created the bad world. By the road of orgasm, Barbelo led man back to the Kingdom of Light, from which the Demiurge was exiled in order to enslave it to its odious authority.

“In the beginning was the Darkness, the Abyss and the Water; the *pneuma* was among them and separated one from the other. But the Darkness became angry and grumbled about the Spirit; it advanced but the *pneuma* seized it and impregnated it with a being named *metra* (matrix). Once born, this being was impregnated by the same *pneuma*. From the matrix came four Eons; from the four Eons came fourteen others and there was a left matrix and a right matrix, Light and Darkness. Later on, after all those who preceded it, there appeared a deformed Eon; this united with the *metra* that manifested itself in the heights and it was from this frightful Eon that came the Gods, angels, demons and the seven spirits” (*Panarion*, XXV, 5).

“The *Book of Noria* – Noria is not the daughter of Adam, as she was among the Ophites, but the wife of Noah – recounts that Noria did not enter the Ark, because she wanted to kill the Creator of this world along with the rest of humanity: because she did not serve this Creator but the superior powers and Barbelo, the enemy of the Archon. Noria set fire to the Ark three times, from which one must conclude that ‘what was stolen from the Mother of the heights by the Archon who created the Cosmos and the other gods, angels and demons, we must take back from the power that is in the body, by means of the seminal emissions of man and woman’” (*Panarion*, XXVI, 1, 8-9).

It is in the *Gospel of Eve* (the Hebrew word *Hawwah* means “life”) that the symbiotic aspiration of the Barbelites – the identity of the me and the world that



offers the radiant presence of love in the flash of pleasure – appears with an astonishing poetry:

“I went up a high mountain and I saw a man of high stature and another one, who was shriveled [these are the Good God and Barbelo, hardened and diminished by the fear of his power], and I heard a voice like thunder, and I advanced so as to listen and it said to me:

‘I am you and you are me, ‘and where you are, I am, ‘and in all things I am inseminated. ‘And if you want it, you can gather me together ‘And if you gather me together, you will also gather yourself”  
(*Panarion*, XXVI, 3, 11).

## Chapter 8: Three Esseno-Christian Christs: Seth, Melchizedek, and Joshua/Jesus<sup>125</sup>

The diverse sects of the movement that was given the general name of Essenism inscribed at the top rank of their preoccupations, which were conferred a dramatic reality by the Zealot movement, the question of the Messiah, the envoy in whom God would confide the care of leading the people towards a promised new earth.

Due to their collaboration with the [Roman] occupiers, the Pharisees condemned Messianic speculations, and in particular those that, hoping for the reincarnation of Adam or one of his sons, claimed that the first man was a partner of God and took part in the creation of the world. For them, no Messiah infatuated with some kind of power could arrogate to himself any right or function exclusively reserved for Adonai, the Savior, the Creator. Adam chose evil and the Pharisees stigmatized as *minim* (Gnostics) those who affirmed that Adam repented, chose God and was saved, as the *Epistula apostolorum* claims. (“There existed Jewish traditions about Adam that represented him as the Vice-Regent of God, established like a king in a sphere above the world from which he imposed his domination on the entirety of creation. Several rabbis perceived the danger of contradiction and attempted to check the most perilous of these positions.”<sup>126</sup> Soon there was a struggle between rabbis and groups that claimed to valorize Adam as the essence of the Messiah, nay, even as the Father of the Messiah who was called the Son of Man.)

Many Essene factions supported the thesis of Adam seated at God’s right hand, redeemer of the human being and, at the same time, the Co-Regent of God, which was a proposition that was inadmissible to Yahwehist monotheism, but that shows through in certain letters [claimed to be] by Saul/Paul.

The *Letter to the Colossians* (1:15) makes the Christ a pre-existing agent of God in the creation. “The Messiah is called ‘Image of God’ and ‘The Head of the Body,’ which originally signified the entire universe (the ‘Church’ is almost surely an addition designed to destroy the parallelism between the hymn and the current cosmic vision).”<sup>127</sup> (This is an example of one of the many falsifications of the

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<sup>125</sup> *Translator*: I corrected a mistake: there were two footnotes marked number 27 in the original, which threw off the numbering of the successive ones.

<sup>126</sup> Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

letters of Saul/Paul by his copyists and translators. They were intended to make the reader forget that Saul had belonged to Jewish Gnosticism.)

Nevertheless, the name of the Messiah varied according to the sect; therefore the name was precisely what conferred power to the community or Church. A fragment from an apocryphal *Book of Daniel* discovered at Qumran insists on the expectation of a savior delegated by God and carrying the Name: “He will be called the Son of the Great God and by his Name he will be named. He will be greeted as the Son of God, one will call him the Son of the Most-High.”<sup>128</sup>

The quarrel about the secret name of the Son of God: was it Adam reincarnated or the son of Adam, the Son of Man? The *Testament of Abraham*, a text of Jewish origin from the First Century before the Christian era, describes Adam crowned in the heavens. Such was also the vision of Saul/Paul in the second *Letter to the Corinthians* (22-23), which evoked the presence of Adam in Paradise or the third heaven.

The *Apocalypse of Adam*, another text of Judaic origin from the First Century, discovered at Nag-Hammadi (Nag-Hammadi Library V), contained the revelation of the future destiny of the Adamites, offered by Adam to his son, Seth.

For Fossum, “Adam was the first manifestation of the True Prophet.”<sup>129</sup> Adam possessed the spirit of God, which brought knowledge (gnosis) of all things, past and future (*Homilies of Peter*, III, 17). The cycle of legends concerning Adam constituted the axis of Jewish speculations that turned around the nature of the Messiah. It originally explained the theme of the descent and ascension of the savior.<sup>130</sup>

According to the *Poimandres*, the heavenly Adam was made in the form and image of God, a formulation that Saul/Paul took up when he assured [his followers] that Jesus was a form of God.<sup>131</sup>

## The Messiah Seth

The new Adam and Son of Man that the Ebionites and Nazarenes would christen Joshua, was, for some Essenes, the third son of Adam, Seth. The important Sethian literature discovered at Nag-Hammadi proves that the vogue for religious syncretism didn't hesitate to absorb the doctrines of other sects, such as those of

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<sup>128</sup> J. A. Fitzmayer, “The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies*, 20, 1973-1974, p. 391.

<sup>129</sup> Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

the Naassenes (some Sethians estimated that the savior had deceived the creator by assuming the form of a serpent), the Cainites, for whom Seth was Adam's brother, and the sectarians attached to Joshua (the *Gospel of the Egyptians* expresses the equivalence between Seth and Joshua/Jesus). (The collection at Nag-Hammadi includes a great number of Sethian works, sometimes indistinct from each other, due to the successive syncretic waves of works by Naassenes, Barbelites and Joshua/Jesus-Christians: the *Three Pillars of Seth*, the *Epistle from Eugnosta* (which became *Sophia Jesus*), and the *Paraphrase of Sem* (Seth), in which the mediating Spirit intervenes in the primordial struggle between Light and Darkness.)<sup>132</sup>

Seth was born to Adam and the Virgin Eve. Their descendants were the "spiritual," "pneumatic" or "perfect" Sons of the Light, who extolled asceticism and the stimulation [*l'exacerbation*] of the spirit at the expense of the body.

According to Sethian mythology – at least as one is able to discern it in the writings at Nag-Hammadi – Ialdabaoth (the God of *Genesis*) created a bad world. Nevertheless, in the man that he produced was perpetuated a heavenly spark that, aspiring to return to the superior places from which it had come, showed the road to salvation. Like Sophia, Barbelo and Naas, Seth was the Messiah of the Good God, superior to Ialdabaoth.

The Sethians divided history into four periods: the age of Adam, the age of Seth, the age of the first Sethians, and the present, in which the Sethians prepared for the return of their Messiah. After the end of time, the faithful, the Sons of the Light, would enter a *pleroma* [a fullness] superior to the places created by the Demiurge. Because "their kingdom isn't of this world." Come from elsewhere, "non-natives," as they would say, they would return to the side of the Father in a universe illuminated by four entities: Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth (in the same way that the Judeo-Christians selected four angels, Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Oriel, and that the Catholics would place the four canonical gospels under four symbols that doubled the names Mark, Matthew, Luke and John: the eagle, the lion, the bull and the man).

The Messiah Seth announced the return to the "other world." The race of Seth, Puech says of Seth's sons and their descendents, is "another" race, a foreign or strange race in the strong senses of these terms.<sup>133</sup> (Strounsa thinks that the

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<sup>132</sup> *Nag-Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. Hedrick and Hodgson, 1988, pp. 55-86.

<sup>133</sup> C. Puech, *Les Nouveaux Ecrits*, p. 127; M. Tardieu, "Les livres mis sous le nom de Seth et les séthiens de l'hérésiologie," *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, NHS 8, Leiden, 1977.

famous Elisha ben Abuyah – who was condemned by Jewish orthodoxy at the beginning of the Second Century because he rejected the Talmud and therefore became *aher*, “other,” a “stranger/foreigner,” “non-native” – was a member of the Sethians.<sup>134</sup> (*Sperma eteron* translates *zera aher*.) This idea was shared by other Christian sects, including those devoted to Joshua/Jesus, whose adepts, to the great scandal of the Greeks and Romans – for whom all of the religions assumed their meaning in the citizen-cult of the State – displayed the greatest scorn for death and punishment because they were assured of re-joining the true kingdom of light (and such was still the profession of faith of Justin the Apologist, condemned to death around 165).

The *Elenchos* quoted from extracts from a Sethian cosmogony in which (as among the Naassenes) one can perceive a religious recuperation of Simon of Samaria’s attempt to return the mythological inspiration of the *Pentateuch* to the human body. Here the cosmos was in the image of the belly of a pregnant woman.

“In the womb, the innumerable imprints gave birth to the infinite multitudes of living beings. This infinite variety that bloomed in the form of different beings born under the heavens was inseminated by the odorous effluvium of the *Pneuma* that came from on high with its light and was mixed in. From the water surged a first-born principle, a powerful wind, impetuous, the first cause of all existence, because the wind makes the waters boil and raises them up in waves. Therefore the formation of the waves resembled the effort of the womb to deliver itself from man or the spirit as soon as it was excited and heated by the shock of the *Pneuma*.”

Note that, in a process inverse to that of Simon and his cosmo-somatism, the *sperma* (sperm) becomes *pneuma* (spirit); the coupling of man and woman that creates the world gives way to religious allegory, to spiritualization. The Sethians called themselves *Pneumatics* in opposition to the Hylics, the sons of Cain, and the Psychics, the sons of Abel.

“When this wave raised by the wind was elevated above the waters, it conceived and, conforming to its nature, received the fruit of the woman; it retained the light disseminated from on high with the odorous effluvium of the *Pneuma*, that is to say, the Spirit in the various forms that are the Perfect God, descended from on high, from

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<sup>134</sup> G. Strounsa, “Aher, a Gnostic,” in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, II.

the Light and the *Pneuma* unbegotten in human nature as in a temple, born from water by the impulse of nature and the movement of the wind, combined and mixed with the body, as salt impregnates things and the light impregnates darkness, aspiring to be free from the body [that is] without the ability to find salvation or issue. Because what had been mixed in was only a very small spark, a kind of fragment separated from the luminous radiance that was introduced into the corporeal world in multiple forms and that ‘retained the depths of the great waters’ (*Psalms* 29:3), as the Psalm says. The light from on high thus had only a thought and a care: how the Spirit was to be delivered from a shameful death and the dark body, delivered from his father below, the wind that raised the waves in unleashed whirlwinds and engendered the Spirit, his perfect Son but of a difference essence. Because it was a ray of this perfect light descended from on high, imprisoned in the dark waters, frightening, bitter and impure; it was the luminous *Pneuma* that was carried above the waters (*Genesis*, 1:2). Thus, when the raised waves of water conceived the fruit of the woman, they retained in all sorts of forms – as does the belly of a pregnant woman – the disseminated light, as one sees among all living beings. The impetuous and terrible wind rerouted its whirlwinds like a serpent, a winged serpent.”

Note that the winged serpents are the *seraphim* (seraphs). As among certain Naassenes of the ascetic tendency, the Redeeming Serpent was opposed to the Serpent of Lust. Here the womb was impure, which was the inverse of the Simonian conception.

“This it is through this wind, that is to say, through the serpent, that creation began in the manner described, all things having begun their generation at the same time. Thus, when the Light and the *Pneuma* were received in the chaotic and impure womb, source of corruption, the serpent, the wind of darkness, the First-Born of the waters penetrated it and engendered man, and the impure womb neither loved nor knew another form. The Logos from on high issued from the Light, being similar to the serpent, deceived it by this resemblance and penetrated into the impure womb in order to break the bonds that enclosed the Perfect Spirit that had been engendered by the First-Born of the water, the serpent, the wind, the beast, in the impure womb. Such was the slavish form; such was the necessity that obliged the Logos of God to descend into the heart [or womb] [*sein*]

of a virgin. But it did not suffice that the Perfect Man, the Logos, had penetrated into the heart [or womb] [*sein*] of a virgin and appeared in the darkness the pains of childbirth. After he entered into the shameful mysteries of the womb, he washed and drank from the gushing, living water that must exhaust anyone who wants to divest himself of the slavish form and assume the heavenly garment” (*Elenchos*, V, 19-22).

It would suffice for the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus to translate this myth into a legend of virginal birth, embellished as a familial saga. Likewise, the triad Light, Pneuma and Darkness, *alias* the Father, the Mother (or the feminine Spirit, the *Sophia*/Wisdom) and the Son, would engender future Arian and Catholic speculations on the Trinity.

The library of Nag-Hammadi contains a Sethian text, titled the *Epistle of Eugnosta*, which clearly expressed the ideas that the Joshua/Jesus sects of the Second and Third Centuries would not have any scruples about exploiting and recuperating in the name of their mythic hero.

“In the Infinite appeared the Father produced by himself; he produced an androgynous man, whose masculine name is lost to us, but whose feminine name is Sophia-Pansophos. The immortal man created a great eon with the gods and archangels: he is called: the God of Gods and the King of Kings; he is the Faith of the things who then produced themselves; he possessed an intelligence, an intention [*ennoia*], a thought . . . like the primordial being. This first heavenly man, united with his Sophia, produced an androgynous son; the son was the first engendering Father, the Son of Man, whom one also calls: Adam of the Light. He created in his turn an eon peopled by a multitude of angels that one names: the Ecclesia of the luminous saints. He united with his Sophia and produced a great androgynous light that is, in his masculine name, the Savior, the creator of all things, and, in his feminine name, Sophia, generator of all, whom one also calls Pistis.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> J. Doresse, *Les Livres secrets des gnostiques d’Egypt*, p. 211. [Translator: cf. “Eugnostos the Blessed” in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James M. Robinson, revised edition: San Francisco, 1990: “Afterward another principle came from Immortal Man, who is called ‘Self-perfected Begetter.’ When he received the consent of his consort, Great Sophia, he revealed that first-begotten androgyne, who is called, ‘First-begotten Son of God.’ Now, first begotten, since he has his

To affirm that the Messianic sects had deformed the dogmatic message of Jesus and his apostles is to suppose that this orthodoxy had existed in the First Century, when in fact it was still in its infancy in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. With a strange complacency with respect to ecclesial falsifications, many historians have preferred to ignore the stratification of successive syncretisms that – drawing upon the doctrines of the Sethians, Naassenes, Barbelites, Elchasaites, Nazarenes and others – ended up, under the name of Joshua, offering to the federated powers of the bishops a powerful shield and a universality that was required by their political projects of conquest and Empire.

The *Epistle of Eugnosta* was thus cut out, recomposed on the model of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, and given the title *Sophia of Jesus*.<sup>136</sup> (The prologue to the *Canonical Gospel attributed to John* was also inspired by Sethian texts.)

### **The Messiah Melchizedek**

The *Epistle to the Hebrews*, attributed to Saul/Paul by the Catholics, to Barnabas by Tertullian and to Apollos by Luther, linked the priesthood of the Messiah Joshua-Jesus to the priesthood of Melchizedek. According to Fitzmeyer, this epistle was addressed to the Essenes.<sup>137</sup>

Who was Melchizedek? For biblical mythology and orthodox Jews, he was a person of little importance, a priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem). Therefore Essenean texts treated him with veneration and credited him – as well as Adam and Seth (with whom he was sometimes confused) – with the vocation of Messiah.

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authority from his father, created angels, myriads with number, for retinue. The whole multitude of those angels are called ‘Assembly of the Holy Ones, the Shadowless Lights.’ Now when these greet each other, their embraces become like angels like themselves. First Begetter Father is called ‘Adam of the Light.’ And the kingdom of Son of Man is full of ineffable joy and unchanging jubilation, ever rejoicing in ineffable joy over their imperishable glory, which has never been heard nor has it been revealed to all the aeons that came to be and their worlds. The Son of Man consented with Sophia, his consort, and revealed a great androgynous Light. His masculine name is designated ‘Savior, Begetter of All things.’ His feminine name is designated ‘Sophia, All-Begettress.’ Some call her ‘Pistis.’”]

<sup>136</sup> *Rediscovery of Gnosticism, op. cit.*, II, p. 656.

<sup>137</sup> J. A. Fitzmeyer, p. 619.



Cave 11 at Qumran revealed a *midrash* in which Melchizedek was held as the announcer of the Good News (otherwise called the Gospels) and was none other than the Messiah through whom salvation would come.<sup>138</sup> Hero of the battle of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, he vanquished Belial, the master of evil (“He who announces the Good News is the Messiah”).

Furthermore, Melchizedek came to be associated with Michael, the head of the angels. Other characteristics that completed the sketch of the figure of Archangel Michael would be of great consequence for Christo-angelology. One gave to Melchizedek the name “Michael” and it was to him that one connected *Psalms* 110: 1 and 4. He was invested with a cosmogonic function: he was the maintainer of the universe. According to *Enoch*, 69:14 *sq.*: “God placed into the hands of Michael the Secret Name by which the heavens were suspended before the creation of the world and for eternity; the Name by which the earth was created upon the waters and by which the profound secrets of the mountains became the beautiful waters.”<sup>139</sup>

Moreover, the *Zohar* makes this precise: “Everywhere you find mentioned Michael, who was the first of the angels, the Shekhina is suggested.”<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the Shekhina (or Achamoth) is none other than the Spirit, feminine in Hebrew, figured under the traits of Sophia, Mariamne, Miriam and Mary.

The *Book of Enoch*, which were dear to the Essenes, called Melchizedek the Son of Man, in accordance with the *Book of Daniel*, which was adopted by the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus to describe their Messiah.<sup>141</sup>

Spanning from the Second Century before the Christian era to the First Century that inaugurated it, the text of Enoch existed in three manuscript versions in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: Greek, Ethiopian and Slavic. One can distinguish an orthodox Jewish redaction in which YHWH mercilessly punished the two hundred watchers or *Egregores*, and an Esseno-Christian redaction in which God, having judged their fault to be pardonable, reconciled himself with them, a softening that – like the salvation accorded to Adam and the Serpent by the Sethians and Naassenes – suggested the appearance of a God of kindness who opposed his mercy to the intransigence of the God of Israel.

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<sup>138</sup> *Revue de Qumran*, VII, 1970, #27, pp. 343 *sq.*

<sup>139</sup> H. Corbin, “Necessité de l’angélologie,” in *L’Ange et l’homme*, Paris, 1978, p. 38.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>141</sup> A. Vaillant, *Les Livre des secrets d’ Henoch*, Slavic text and French translation, Paris, 1976; M. A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, Oxford, 1976; R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch*, London, 1917.

The miraculous birth of Melchizedek in *Enoch* foreshadowed that of Joshua-Jesus: without the intervention of a carnal father, he was engendered by a woman (the Spirit, the Shekhina/Achamoth/Sophia, Mariamne/Miriam and, much later, the Virgin Mary). Following the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (7:16), the Messiah endowed with the name Jesus “was not made according to the law of carnal order.”

Finally, Melchizedek, whose name [as we have seen] contained an allusion to justice (*tsedeq*), participated in the Essene thematic of the Master of Justice. The *Testament of Levy* said: “And then the Savior will raise up a New Priest to whom all the words of the Savior will be revealed, and he will exercise a judgment of truth on the earth during a multitude of days.”

A manuscript from Nag-Hammadi pushed this identification much further: it evoked heavenly messengers who assigned to Melchizedek his future role as great-priest and predicted for him the destiny of a Messiah condemned to undergo torments so as to triumph over death.

At the end of the Second Century, the devotees of Melchizedek would disapprove of Theodote Trapezetes, with whom they nevertheless shared the belief in an angel-messiah, an *angelos-christos*. They estimated that it was Melchizedek and not Joshua-Jesus who was the superior angel. The quarrel would reappear in the Fourth Century with Arius, who, far from being an innovator, remained loyal to the old angel-Christology, which was permitted by the ensemble of the Christian sects until the second half of the Second Century.

Werner showed that Arius interpreted the *Epistle to the Hebrews* as proof of angel-Christology (Jesus as angel of the Savior) and was inspired by the argumentation of the followers of Melchizedek who, drawing from the same *Epistle*, reached the conclusion that the Christ, as far as his essence and rank, was not above but below the heavenly angel Melchizedek.<sup>142</sup>

### **Joshua/Jesus, Unknown Prophet and Syncretic Messiah**

The creature whose crucified body and spirit of sacrifice have dominated two thousand years of an inhuman civilization pushed abstinence and abnegation so completely that he left no traces of his own passage through history.

Neither historians, philosophers, authors, nor polygraphs – no one in the First Century ever heard the hero of the evangelic novels speak. Pliny the Elder (instructed in the existence of the Nazarenes, nevertheless), Justus of Tiberias,

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<sup>142</sup> M. Warner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas problemgeschichtlich dargestellt*, Berne and Tubingen, 1953, p. 344.

Juvenal, Martial, Dio Chrysostom, Philo of Alexandria, Petronius – all knew nothing of him.

Flavius Joseph, an attentive observer of a war of the Jews in which he collaborated with the Romans, mentioned Theudas, James and Simon, the son of Judah of Gamala. But the least echo of the exemplary gesture of a New Joshua, named “Jesus” by the Greeks, never reached him, except through the intervention of a copyist who, to a Slavic version [of Joseph’s text] from the Twelfth Century, added information about Jesus, the absence of which struck him as inadmissible to a contemporary historian. The patriarch of Constantinople, Photios, showed more honesty, if not naivety, in this regard. Commenting on a copy of the *Chronicles* of the Kings of the Jews, credited to Justus of Tiberias (he possessed the manuscript, which has since disappeared), Photios – in his *Myriobyblion* (108), a collection of analyses of 279 different texts read by him – was indignant about the silence concerning Jesus by an author who had lived several kilometers from Capernaum, a city that was famous in the sacred geography of the Church.<sup>143</sup>

The Qumran manuscripts spoke of Seth, Melchizedek, the Master of Justice. They said nothing about Jesus, unless “Jesus” was a kind of identikit of the Messiah and a text plagiarized by *The Sermon on the Mount*.

In the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas*, a Judeo-Christian text from end of the First Century or the beginning of the Second Century that advocated the abandonment of Mosaic law, not only in the spirit, but in its letter (circumcision of the heart must replace circumcision of the sexual organ), Jesus was none other than Joshua, the son of Noun. Around 230-250, Origen, in his sermon on Joshua/Jesus, celebrated the timeless and exemplary glory of the biblical Joshua whom he called Jesus.

In 135 (and not between 80 and 90), the Pharisean convention condemned the heresy of the *noisrim* or Nazarenes, but knew nothing of a community leader named Jesus.

One must wait until the beginning of the Second Century to find an allusion to the *chrestianoï*, otherwise known as the followers of the Messiah (*Chrestos* or *Christos* translates the Hebrew word *Messiah*). Around 111, a letter from Pliny to Trajan asked the Emperor about the fate reserved for the *chrestianoï* – in all probability, the Elchasites – who “assemble before the dawn to sing hymns to the Messiah as if to a God” (*Christo quasi Deo*).

In the same epoch, Tacitus’ *Annals* and, a little later, Suetonius, did not speak of Jesus but of *Chrestos*, the cause of agitation under Nero. Therefore, there existed at the same time a quite historical *Chrestos* who preoccupied Emperor

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<sup>143</sup> I. Kryvelev, *Le Christ: mythe ou réalité?* Moscow, 1987.

Hadrian and aroused the disapproval of Greco-Roman public opinion: the nationalist Messiah Bar Kokhba, hero of the last insurrection of the Jewish people. Tacitus and Suetonius were not unaware that the Rome of Claudius and Nero had repressed many agitations of Jewish Messianism conducted by the Zealot movement. The Elchasite behavior described by Pliny in his letter to Trajan, towards which he was lenient, did not justify the repulsion felt by Tacitus and Suetonius: their insulting commentaries were much more inspired by insults addressed to the Jewish religion and the contemporaneous rise of anti-Semitism.

Around 160, the Christ or Messiah of a Christian such as Justin the Apologist was not a historical individual. He was a God incarnated in the form of a man, martyred on earth and returned to the divine essence of which he was the emanation (this was the doctrine of the *angelos-christos* that Catholicism would condemn much later under the name Docetism). The irony was that the conjecture about a prophet born from a man and a woman [originally] emanated from a Jew. Justin reported in his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*:

“Those who affirm that the Christ was a man, and that he was anointed and became the Christ by election, seem to me much closer to the truth than your doctrine. Because we Jews expect the Christ as a man born from a man, and Eli will come to anoint him when he has come. But if the one of whom you speak claimed to be the Christ, one must conclude that he was a man born from a man. Yet, since Eli did not come to anoint him, I do not believe that he was the Christ.”<sup>144</sup>

(Note that Marthe de Chambrun-Ruspoli, who quoted Justin, added: “It is perhaps in response to this argument that we read in the Gospels that Eli returned in the person of John the Baptist.”)<sup>145</sup>

And Trypho also objected: “You Christians follow vain rumors; you have invented a Christ for whom you unwisely sacrifice your lives.”<sup>146</sup>

How can the historians be so little attached to the testimony of attested facts that they have accredited the Catholic and Roman fable of a historical Jesus, whereas for Justin (a Saint and martyr, according to the Church) he was still an *angelos-christos*, and while Jesus possessed neither family nor history in the letters of Saul/Paul, whom Marcion was the first one to mention?

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<sup>144</sup> Justin, *Dialogue avec le juif Tryphon*, p. 49.

<sup>145</sup> M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Phénix*, p. 69.

<sup>146</sup> Justin, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

In a challenge to the forgeries by Eusebius of Caesarea and “the Church Fathers,” the Emperor Julian, who in 350 or so wrote his *Against the Galileans* (as a precaution, it was later destroyed, except for several quotations), found himself justified in stating: “If you can show me that one of these men is mentioned by the well-known writers of the epoch – these events [supposedly] took place under Tiberias and Claudius – then you would be right to consider me to be a perfect liar.”<sup>147</sup> Obviously, Julian did not belong to the long line of liars.

On the other hand, in the Fourth Century, Jerome – a saint according to the Church – exposed the truth by disseminating the letters that Seneca exchanged with Paul, proving that the author of the epistles (like the adventures imagined by the *Acts of the Apostles*) had an historical and dogmatic existence well before Marcion’s discovery of it. (The question of the Gospels that, canonical or apocryphal, were only *Kultlegende*<sup>148</sup> to Soden<sup>149</sup> will be examined later in this book.)

Today, everything takes place as if the historians, finally perceiving the enormity of the official lie, are now devoted to evoking a plausible, historical Jesus, despite the first two centuries in which he played [the role of] angel-Messiah: a spark imprisoned in a body freed itself from death and returned to God. Not ignoring the character of the “pious fables” (cf. Loisy, Bultmann, Guillermin and Schweitzer) of the anecdotes that exoterically translated the elements of the myth, these historians draw from New Testament – the texts of which were revised as late as the Fourth Century – information that was coupled with events from the very first decade of the First Century. Brandon thus advances the idea that Jesus was a Zealot, crucified between two *lestoi* or brigands, which was the term Joseph [Flavius] used to describe the anti-Roman guerrillas.<sup>150</sup> In order to win the good graces of Rome, the Pauline school made a pacifist of the martyr who crucified by the Jews, not by the Romans. As for Robert Amberlain, who bases himself on the crucifixions of James and Simon (the sons of Judah of Gamala), he infers that Jesus was their father and also a Zealot.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> P. de Labriole, *La Réaction païenne. Etude sur la polémique antichrétienne du I au IV siècle*, Paris, 1934, p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> *Translator’s note*: German for “cult legends.”

<sup>149</sup> H. von Soden, *Christentum und Kultur in der geschichtliche Entwicklung ihrer Beziehungen*, 1933.

<sup>150</sup> Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, Manchester, 1967.

<sup>151</sup> R. Amberlain, *Jésus ou le mortel secret des templiers*, Paris, 1976.

## Elements of a Forgery

The 70-odd canonical and apocryphal scriptures elaborated for the greater glory of the Messiah Jesus illustrated in an exemplary manner a remark by Robert Graves: “Almost all [of them] were explanations of ritual or religious theory, overlaid with history: a body of instruction corresponding with the Hebrew Scriptures and having many elements in common with them.”<sup>152</sup>

Such a large number of elements entered into the fabrication of a historical Jesus that accounting for them all would require several volumes and a quantity of energy that, for my part, I would prefer to invest in more passionate matters. Thus I will content myself with recalling the most obvious.

The only Jesus known in the First Century was the biblical Joshua, son of Noun, and Jesus ben Sirach, whose name appears in a book of wisdom.

The myth of Joshua carried a double eschatology: a national salvation recalled by the River Jordan, beyond which the successor of Moses led his people, and a universal salvation, because the crossing of the heavenly river, or the baptismal immersion in its waters, was accomplished without encountering any opposition from the kingdom of the Father. The syncretism born from the Zealot opposition to the Roman occupiers did not fail to found the preoccupations of the Zealots, Essenes, and Nazarenes in a universal eschatology. The reincarnation of the *Tsedeq*, the Just One martyred around 63 [B.C.E.], was revived in the crucifixion of James and Simon of Gamala, brothers or witnesses of God according to a *midrashic* expression reprised by the *Apocalypse attributed to John*.

In *Revolution in Judea* [English in original], Maccoby supposes that Barabbas and Jesus were actually one person: the first of the two, put to death as a “bandit,” was a political symbol of the second. For myself, I am inclined to approach the meanings of the two names: Bar Abbas, Son of the Father, and Joshua/Jesus, “God saved, saves, will save.” Especially so, since an Naassene sect clearly evoked the trinity of Kalakau or Adam, the man from on high; Saulassau, the mortal man from below; and Zeesai, the Jordan that flows towards the high and that Adam deposed through the terrestrial suffering that was overcome in order to return to the Father.

It was still Joshua, the Jordan and the soul imprisoned in matter that was described by a Naassene hymn transcribed in the *Elenchos*:

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<sup>152</sup> R. Graves, *La Déesse blanche, op. cit.*, p. 66. [Translator: first published in English in 1948 as *The White Goddess*. Rather than translating the French translation back into English, I have quoted the original text.]

Jesus said: regard the Father, Pursued by evil on the earth, Far from your breath, the earth truly wanders: It looks to flee from bitter chaos, and it does not know how to cross it.

At the instigation of Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage who died in 258, the Catholics called the *Ecclesiasticus liber* (or the *Ecclesiastic*) by the name *Sophia Iesou uiou Sirach* (the *Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach*), the last book of wisdom to figure in the Bible of the Seventy. Written on the eve of the Maccabees' uprising, this work enjoyed a great reputation among the Zealots.

“Whoever seizes the Law receives Wisdom.” And this “comes before him like a mother; like a virgin wife, she welcomes it; she nourishes it with the bread of prudence, she gives it the water of wisdom to drink.” As in all the Gnostic and Christian developments, this *Sophia*, who was simultaneously mother, wife and virgin, ruled at the side of God and communicated her knowledge (her gnosis) to the Sons of Israel so that they could be saved. But her remarks encompassed more than just the Hebrew people. She meant to found an alliance in which God encountered Israel in order to promote the order that would permit all of humanity to accede to salvation.

Thus the Essenean sects referred to a New Alliance (*Novum Testamentum* in Latin), the universal message of which the Master of Justice would express through his return.

In his study of Lilith, Jacques Brill says, with pertinence, with respect to the *Sophia Iesou uiou Sirach*: “The author is represented in it as a child whose marvelous deeds and gestures illustrate wisdom, in the manner in which the deeds and gestures of Jesus are treated in the *Gospels of Childhood*.”<sup>153</sup>

The Virgin wife and mother, the child nourished by divine wisdom – did not they offer to prophetic imaginations and commentators on community rules enough elements for an anecdotal staging that would facilitate access to simple souls? The clumsy and confused didactics of the Hebrew and Aramaic *midrashim* easily found among Greek authors the novelistic form that pleased the people. The *Homilies of Peter*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Acts*, and the apocryphal and canonical gospels were [all] literary fictions with apologetic pretensions.

Before the [creation of the] staging and imagery that illustrated [certain] allegories and symbols, there might have existed other compilations of wisdom that continued [the saga of] Jesus ben Sirach. This was the case with a work discovered at Nag-Hammadi: *The Hidden Words that Jesus the Living Said and*

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<sup>153</sup> J. Brill, *Lilith*, Paris, 1986.

*Were Transcribed by Judas Didymus Thomas*, which the Catholics later called the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>154</sup>

The idea of Jesus developed from a tradition of wisdom that had opportunely given the angel-Messiah a doubled human [and divine] nature. Here was sketched out the figure of the insurgent, the audacious thinker and the philosopher proffering the truths of biblical morality, with which Jewish orthodoxy, ensconced in its sacerdotal rituals, did so little. The *Sophia* that was dispensed under his name served as a guide for the leaders of the Nazarene and Ebionite communities; it also brought to them the authority of the master who rained down upon his disciples, witnesses, and brothers in spirit.

Other compilations of wise remarks made by Jesus ben Sirach had been disseminated ever since the Second Century, when Basilides stated he'd affirmed received from Matthew the secret doctrines of the Savior – the name Jesus being confounded with the saving role of the *Sophia*-Spirit. There existed under the name Matthew, *alias* Levy, an apocryphal gospel and a gospel revised according to the Catholic canon.

The hypothetical conjunction of a sage born from the book of Jesus ben Sirach and from the *angelos-christos* named Jesus is confirmed when one finds out that, around 100-110, the Christian Gnostic Saturnilus of Antiochus, who was the first to found his doctrine on the name of Jesus, established a distinction between a just and wise man named *Iesou*, on the one hand, and the Messiah or Christos, the intelligence of the transcendent God that united with him when he became an adult, on the other.

To the warrior Joshua, who prophesized the reconquest of Palestine, was added Joshua the Sage, who summoned men to the incarnation of the *Sophia*-Spirit that would conduct them to salvation. And to that amalgam was added the Adamic Joshua, the double of Melchizedek/Michael.

“From the start, the entire trajectory of Joshua/Jesus rests upon the Christianity of resurrection and salvation,” Dubourg writes.<sup>155</sup>

The *Gospel of the Ebionites* spoke of the final union of the Holy Spirit (the *Sophia*) with Jesus, the last of the prophets. And, according to the *Gospel of the Hebrews*: “The Holy Spirit says that it was lodged in all of the prophets, [finally] taking its repose in Jesus.” At the end of the First Century, the Ebionites, Cerinthians, and Nazarenes managed to impose a syncretic and prestigious name of such a nature to put an end to the quarrels over Messiahs in which were mixed *NHS* the Serpent, Barbelo the Essential Woman, Sophia, Seth, and

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<sup>154</sup> J. Doresse, *L'Évangélie selon Thomas*, Monaco, 1988.

<sup>155</sup> B. Dubourg, *L'Invention du Jésus*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 264.



Melchizedek the Master of Justice (sometimes symbolized by another sign of Messianic rallying, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet WAW).<sup>156</sup> (Hermetic thought and magical practices were manifested in a number of sects in which abounded talismans and *abraxas* [stones] engraved with signs of power – IAW, WAW, WW, the sign W transcribing the omega and the litany of the seven vowels. Jung was able to identify Jesus with *lapis*, “stone,” in latter-day alchemical texts.)

After the collapse of Palestine in 70, the warrior Joshua ceded place to his divine transcendence, to his spiritual *alter ego*. Having lost the war, he propagated in hearts a message of hope that was less contingent, more generously universal and prudently timeless: “God saved, saves, will save.” The meaning of the Name left no doubt.

“Jesus, whose name is also the Savior,” Ptolemy writes, “or even, according to his Father, Christ and Logos; or even the All, because he proceeded from all.”<sup>157</sup>

Even the canonical Gospel placed under the name of Matthew did not dream of hiding it: “You will give to him the name of Jesus because he will save” (*Gospel attributed to Matthew*, 1:21).

Up to the end of the Second Century, nay, beyond, this Joshua/Jesus was nothing other than the Spirit-*Sophia* of God incarnated in the suffering of terrestrial existence, overwhelmed by death, resurrected, and returned to the place of his divine origin.

For Justin the Apologist, the Christ was identified with the *Sophia* or the Logos described by Philo of Alexandria: “God engendered from himself a form of power and a rational beginning, before all his works, who he also called the Holy Spirit, the glory of the Savior and, at other times, the Son or sometimes Wisdom or the Angel of God or the Savior or Logos. He sometimes calls himself ‘commander in chief’ when he appears under the human form of Joshua, the Son of Noun.”<sup>158</sup>

In the Second Century, the Christian Jew Aristo of Pella erected the messiah with the divine name as the co-creator [of the universe]. His *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscos*, cited by Origen (*Contra Celsum*, IV, 52), stated that the first verse of *Genesis* had to be read *In filio Deus facit coelum et terram* (“God made the heavens and the earth in the person of his Son”).

Even the canonical [*Gospel attributed to*] Matthew, despite being purged more than once of its Judeo-Christian and Gnostic residues, conserved the idea of a Son of Man who co-created the world with God: “The Son of Man will arrive in

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<sup>156</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *La Doctrine secrete de la lettre WAW d’après une lamelle araméene inédite*, Paris, 1961.

<sup>157</sup> Leisegang, *La Gnose*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>158</sup> Fossum, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

his glory, accompanied by all the angels, and he will sit with majesty upon his throne with all the nations united before him” (*Gospel attributed to Matthew*, 25:31-32). We still cite the Jewish liturgical fragments of the *Constitution of the Apostles*, in which the Savior was simultaneously the Son, *Sophia*, Logos, Great Priest and Angel of the Great Council.

Henri Corbin writes:<sup>159</sup>

“It is anthology of *christos-angelos* that requires reproduction here. In general, the question is so rarely present in the minds of our contemporaries that we, at least, must choose a few references concerning the broad traits. There is the Christology of the Judeo-Christians and the Ebionites, for whom the *Christos* that descended upon Jesus at the moment of baptism in the Jordan was one of the Archangels, who had power over the [other] angels and the creation in general, and who was the lord of the future *Aion*, as Satan was the lord of the current *Aion*. There were the Elchesaites (issued from the preceding sects), for whom the *Christos* appeared as an angel of immense stature and masculine sex, and revealed the Book to the founder of the sect, and who was accompanied by a feminine angel, his sister, who was the holy Angel-Spirit (*ruah* is feminine in [the] Semitic [languages]). Among the Valentinians, the *Christos* was an angel from the pleroma. In the Gnostic book of the *Pistis Sophia* and in the “Books of Joy,” there was a *Christos-Gabriel*. And there was the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which belonged to Judeo-Christian literature, and in which the figure of the Archangel or, better said, the figure of the *Christos-Michael* was the dominant figure. In a very old treatise titled *Of the Triple Fruit of the Christian Life*, the *Christos* was one of the seven archangels created from the fire of the seven evangelic princes (*ex igne principum septem*). In the *Book of the Ascension of Isaiah*, there was the *Angelos-Christos* and the holy Angel Spirit.”

A multiform Joshua, a son of the Virgin *Sophia*, a Logos, an *angelos-christos*, an author of wise remarks, an Adam who was the co-creator of the world – the Messiah was all this, except the son of Joseph and Mary who was born in Bethlehem, preached the Good News, healed the paralytics, helped the widows and the orphans, and succumbed to the wickedness of the Jews for preferring humankind to Israel.

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<sup>159</sup> H. Corbin, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church would describe as a “heretical perversion” the Christian vision that served as the basis for the instauration of its temporal and spiritual Church.

It is true that there existed an ecclesial Christology that inspired the mysterious Saul/Paul and his school in order to ordain the political project of their Churches. There was a crucified person, the victim, not of the Jews, but the Judeans, quite dead in 63 [B.C.E.] – but time is nothing to history when it comes to mythical matters. He contrasted sharply with the disorder of the wandering prophets and their partisans. Was it not assured (*Hymn XVIII*, 14-15) that God gave him the mission of being, “according to his truth, the one who announces the Good News in the time of his goodness, evangelizing the humble people according to the abundance of His mercy (and watering them) from the source of holiness and consoling those who are contrite of spirit and afflicted”?

Whereas the “Songs of the Savior” from *Isaiah* declared:

The Spirit of the Lord YHWH is upon me, because YHWH anointed me. It is to announce the Good News to the humble people that he sent me, To bandage those who have contrite hearts.<sup>160</sup>

And again, in the same text, there was this foreshadowing of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary: “YHWH called me from the womb; From the loins of my mother he mentioned my name.” And his betrayal by some of his own disciples:

And the men of my Council being in revolt and murmuring nearby  
And the mystery that You have concealed in me, They calumny  
among the sons of the unhappy.<sup>161</sup>

This Messiah was tailor-made for the men of power who were resolved to impose their authority on other communities, nay, to federate the Churches, by nourishing the dream of one day offering Rome a State religion. The true founders of the monarchical Churches would be Marcion and the “Paul” whose letters he exhibited. But Marcion discredited himself through a false maneuver. Blinded by his anti-Semitism, he rejected the Old Testament as a whole. He went even further: he ruined the very foundations of the temporal Church by imputing the creation of the world to a bloody and crazy God, to a Demiurge whose work reached such

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<sup>160</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les écrits esséniens. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>161</sup> Cited by Laperrousaz, *Les manuscrits de la mer Morte*, Paris, 1961, p. 55.

perversity that there was nothing more urgent than renouncing it by rejoicing in the beyond of a Good and Unknowable God.

The bishops of Smyrna, Carthage, Rome, Lyon, Antioch and Alexandria did not think that they could increase their control over the popular and aristocratic mindsets of the world if they professed a perfect disdain for terrestrial and corporeal matter. They invented a carnal Jesus, who had both of his feet on the earth, certainly assuming divine grace and invested with a saving role, but carrying himself like any other human creature. He would be a God who shared the common existence of the humble people, with their temptations and weaknesses. The popular Christianity of the New Prophecy greatly contributed to the painting of this portrait of the Savior.

A proletarian due to his father, a slightly silly carpenter, he could claim an incontestably divine ancestry due to his mother, Mary the Virgin, who was *Sophia*, Mariamne, while his divine *parèdre* [consort], Prunicos the prostitute, became Mary Magdalene.

Mary herself was not born yesterday. In *The Return of the Phoenix*, Marthe de Chambrun-Ruspoli noted that, according to the old Egyptian religion, “TUM, in his capacity as Creator, sent across the abyss the soul of his Son, the Word, whom he engendered by himself from his own substance. And he pronounced these words: ‘Is made flesh’ (text from the Merenra Pyramid, line 97, Editions Maspero). And the Spirit (Thoth), crossing the abyss to the earth, stopped before the sycamore at the feet of which NOUT, the Virgin, stood. He made the divine germ penetrate into her womb.”<sup>162</sup>

Alexandria and Upper Egypt was an old crucible for speculations on the female Spirit, much later made virile by an angel procreating the New Joshua.

Why was Jesus [supposedly] born in Bethlehem? Because the biblical text *Micah* (5:1) declared:

And you, Bethlehem, Ephrata, Although you are small among the clans of Judah, From you will come out, for me, Those who will dominate Israel.

The cave and the date 25 December, borrowed from the mythology of Mithra, entered into the policy of recuperating the competing cults, whose references were Christianized.

Thus it went, from the borrowed symbolism of the bread and the wine to the rituals of Attis and the replacement of the Essenean Eucharistic banquet, in which

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<sup>162</sup> M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

sharing bread and water simply reestablished the commensality that united the members of the same community.

The Passion (from *patiri*, “to suffer”) drew its inspiration from the torments of the Servant of the Savior reported in the *Book of Isaiah* and brought up to date in the epic of the Master of Justice, a suffering and glorious Messiah.

Nazareth, a market town that did not exist before the Fourth Century, was anecdotally substituted for the term “Nazarene,” which designated the sect that had invented the syncretic doctrine of the Joshua-Savior. The mention of Nazareth in a text, apocryphal or canonical, clearly indicates that the revision dated from the era of Nicaea [325 C.E.], at the earliest.

The Messiah was killed on the Mount of Olives because Zacharias cited it as the place where the great miracle would be accomplished.<sup>163</sup>

The couple or syzygy of Mary and Mary Magdalene reproduced the doubling of the Virgin *Sophia* and the prostitute Prounikos, who was the former’s form after she had fallen and been imprisoned in matter. The miracles popularly attributed to Apollonius of Tyana enriched the imagery of the therapeutic Messiah, whose life achieved its end at thirty-three years, in perfect accord with the number that signified purification among the Jews.

The Third Century began to invent for Jesus a childhood in which his mother, *Sophia*-Mary, was endowed with a Morganatic husband. The idea of the cross came from a symbol in the works of Justin. In his *Apology* (60:5), he noted, “Plato [...] says of the Son of God that God extended him through the universe in the form of an X [...] He did not see that this sign was a cross.”

The instauration of a State religion in Nicaea in 325 *ad majoram Dei gloriam*<sup>164</sup> endowed the Truth with a dogma and an army finally determined to impose it on all of humanity. The Church, securing the vacillating powers of the emperors to its profit, extended itself into the territories where the *pax romana* had buried the local civilizations under the rockslide of its authority.

Orthodoxy invented a past for itself and, having chosen from among thinkers such as Paul, Justin, Clement and Irenaeus (whose works were purified and rewritten), condemned as heretical perversions the varieties of the Christianities that had preceded it and from which it had extracted the rudiments of its theology. The light of Jesus, his apostles and his faithful were thus condemned to the contempt and silence of the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and atheist historians, all of whom fell to their knees before the testimony of the New Testament – the

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<sup>163</sup> Maccoby, *Paul et l’Invention du christianisme*, p. 60.

<sup>164</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “for the greater glory of God.”

effervescence of three centuries, the amusing state of which Bernard Dubourg summarized thus:

“And all the Gnostics, who squabbled and gutted each other on occasion, were, like the primitive Christians, Jews or Samaritans; all of them, like the evangelists and the (pseudo-?) Paul who invented/discovered ‘Jesus/Joshua,’ sculpted narrative, visionary, allegorical and eschatological (but not historical!) monuments from piles; and all of them, with blows of *midrash*, polished these monuments upon the unique basis of the same and unique Hebrew Bible. So that they recognized it and knew it (as sacred): because long and hard would be the battle between (and within) the Gnostics, orthodox Samaritans, Phariseean Jews, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots and primitive Christians with respect to the sacredness, one by one, of the books of the Bible. There would be brawls with respect to *Ezekiel*, *Enoch*, the *Canticle of Canticles*, etc. – brawls with respect to the beginning of the book of *Genesis*. And so many texts were discarded, excommunicated and buried in the *genizoth* (see the manuscripts of the Dead Sea).”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> B. Dubourg, *op. cit.*, II, p. 46.

## **Chapter 9:**

### **The Messianic Sects of Joshua/Jesus: Nazarenes, Ebionites, Elchasaites**

At the confluence of Essenism, Samaritanism and the baptist movement of Dunstan/Dositheos, sects were formed in which a certain communality of doctrine and practice didn't exclude rivalries and struggles for power. Their conjunction, no doubt precipitated by the Zealot insurrection, ended in the consecration of a syncretic messiah invested with the secret name "God saves," in whom was incarnated the long line of prophets "anointed by Adonai" and persecuted for their untimely revelations.

All distinguished themselves by a rigorous asceticism; scorn for material goods, the body, women, and pleasure; recourse to the purifying and initiating rite of baptism; the foundation of communities or *Ecclesiai* (Churches); propagation of the doctrine of the two roads, one of Light and the other of Darkness, sometimes pushed to a cosmic opposition between a Good God and a God who created a bad world; and the expectation of a Messiah or, more exactly, his return, because (sent by the Good God) he had been pitilessly put to death by the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem or their henchmen. The redemption promised by this Angel-Messiah would spread his grace to all of humanity, compensating the just and punishing the wicked.

Hostile to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, these sects accommodated themselves to the philosophical speculations of Philo of Alexandria. His Judaic monotheism actually gave to *gnosis* a kind of safe-conduct that the supposed Fathers of the Church didn't fail to use. On the other hand, with a perfect unanimity, they execrated the Great Power of life that the works of Simon of Samaria had illustrated.

#### **Nazarenes and Ebionites**

Pliny the Elder, recopying reports drafted on the orders of Emperor Augustus by one of his generals, Marcus Agrippa, indicated in Book V of his *Natural Histories* that not far from Apamea, in Syria, Nazarenes lived in a city called Bambyx, Hierapolis or Mabog.

Marcus Agrippa having died in 12 [B.C.E.], Dubourg situated his investigations between 30 and 20. Accounting for the lapse of time required for the

establishment in Syria of a sect born in Palestine, Dubourg judges plausible the presence of a Nazarene current around 50 [B.C.E.].<sup>166</sup>

In the beginning a priest-warrior who consecrated to YHWH an existence of austerity and piety, the *nazir* thereafter designated a man devoted to God by a vow of “*nazireat*.” This word suggested a connection with “Nazoreans” or “Nazarenes”: “the observers, the conservers.”

Rallied to the rigorous faction of Judaism, hostile to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, they inscribed themselves in the general line of Essenism, of which they perhaps formed a community or Church. The Greek authors of the *Acts of the Apostles*, who compiled and rewrote ancient *midrashim* in order to reconcile the schools of Simon/Paul and Simon Cephas, staged a Jewish orthodoxy that vituperated the *hairesis ton nazoraion*, the heresy of the Nazarenes.

The Phariseean rabbis knew them under the name *noisrim* and declared them to be heretics (*aher*, “others”), not in 90 as is often advanced, but in 135, when – after the revolt of the Messiah Bar Kokhba, which they refused to join – the legend of a Joshua/Jesus who was a pacifist and respectful of the Romans was born.

Bar Kokhba stigmatized the Nazarenes in his letters under the name “Galileans.” In the Second Century, Hegesippus referred to one of the Jewish sects of his time in this way, but for Emperor Julian (331-363), cited by Cyril of Alexandria, “Galilean” was still a synonym for “Christian.” Moreover, several texts designated the Messiah Jesus by the word “Galilean.”

Like the other anti-Judean Jewish sects, the Nazarenes did not escape the Zealot wildfire. Only their refusal to rally themselves to the troops of Bar Kokhba around 133-135 exonerated them from the reproach of violence and haloed them with the pacifism thanks to which the Greco-Roman Christian communities distinguished themselves from “Semitic fury.”

Issued from Jewish extremism, Nazarenism paradoxically opened the door to an incessant revision of the Mosaic message and law. Their *midrashim*, which were disseminated in the assemblies of believers, prepared the coming of the Messiah that Israel invoked in the heart of the troubles of the war, corrected the prophecies of the past, adapted them to the modernity of the circumstances, and thus formed the streams of the foreseeable torrent that would swell the Good News announced by the Hymns of the Master of Justice.

One would be deceiving oneself if one gave to Nazarenism a unity that contradicted the echoes of the quarrels between their leaders, whose names have been preserved: Theudas/Thomas the Egyptian, Jacob/James, Simon Cephas, John

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<sup>166</sup> B. Dubourg, *L’Invention de Jésus*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 157.



the Essene, Zacchaeus/Clement, Barnabas, Saul also known as Paul, and Jochanaan also known as John the Baptist.

A sect of the Ebionites, still active in the Fourth Century and certainly derived from these *ebbyonim* (“poor people”), laid the foundations among the Essenes for voluntary poverty, the perilous virtues of which the Messalians, Waldensians, Beghards, Fraticelles and Apostolics would later rediscover.

The Nazarenes, or at least the tendency for which Jochanaan represented the only prophetic authority, perpetuate themselves to this very day in Mandaism, still alive between the Tigris and Euphrates. Their name means “those who know,” the “Gnostics.” They were also known as the “Christians of Saint John” – meaning Jochanaan/John the Baptist. Their doctrines, which arrived late in the day and have been clarified by an abundant literature (*Ginza* or *Treasure*, subdivided into a *Right Ginza* and a *Left Ginza*), formed a syncretism in which Judeo-Christian, Iranian and Babylonian elements were mixed.

The Mandaeans claimed for themselves Hibil (Abel), Shitil (Seth), Anosh (Enoch) and John the Baptist, and formed one of the branches of Nazarenism, which, in search of a unique Messiah, rejected the accord established by the partisans of James, Simon/Peter and Saul/Paul under the name Joshua/Jesus, because, according to them, Anosh had showed that Jesus was a false prophet.

## **Elchasaites**

In the third year of Trajan’s reign, around 100-101, Nazarenism seemed to give way to a new generation of Christians: the Elchasaites. (The diversity of the names need not confuse us. The “Sampsans,” whom Hegesippus called the “Masbotheans,” only offered variants of the expression *seo ayya*, otherwise known as “the Baptists.”) A sacred book was delivered to the prophet Elchasai, the head of a Christian community, by two angels, one male, the Son of God, the other female, the Holy Spirit – which no doubt justified the inquest conducted by Pliny the Younger, the papal legate of Bithynia. The *Homilies of Peter* counted among their writings, at least in its original versions. The Elchasaites also constituted a Christianity that was different from the opinions that the Catholics of the Fourth Century tried to impose. This was why Epiphanius of Salamis – being ironic in his *Panarion* or *The Medicine Chest* when he said, “Not being Christians, Jews, nor pagans, but something of an intermediary; at base they are nothing” – showed *a contrario* that they were in fact simultaneously Jews, Christians and pioneers of a Greco-Roman Christianity (but the Church would attribute that [pioneering] role to the enemy of the Elchasaites, Saul/Paul, after it had snatched him from the hands of his discoverer, Marcion).

Did not Elchasaitism, with its real or mythical prophet – Elchasai is related to the Aramaic word *Ieksai*, which means “Hidden Savior” – foreshadow the great current of popular Christianity that, under the name New Prophecy, obeyed the Christ reincarnated in the prophet Montan? It isn’t easy to build a precise opinion [about this] upon the comings-and-goings of the various sects, prophets and apostles who clashed with the ordinary fanaticism of accepted truths. The ancestors of the Mandaeans rejected Joshua/Jesus; the [respective] partisans of James and Peter, hostile to Jochanaan also known as John the Baptist, somehow managed to denounce the imposture of Saul/Paul, whose disciples held Peter to be a traitor and renegade. The faithful to Jude/Thomas triumphed at Edessa, but without attracting a unanimous veneration, because certain people saddled him with the role of Judas. Add to this the fact that Elchasaitism, which was hostile to Marcion and active in Rome with Alcibiades of Apamea, witnessed the birth of Mani, the future founder of a religion and the clear inspiration for the dogmas of Marcion.<sup>167</sup> Mani, raised in an Elchasaite community, reprised the Samaritan titles “Unique Envoy” and “True Prophet.” The “Unique Envoy” was an old Judeo-Samaritan name for the principal agent of God (“The one who is designated the Envoy of God has received the Spirit of God,” *Isaiah*, 61:6). This was also the status of the Master of Justice and Joshua/Jesus. All the inspired prophets – Elchasai as much as Montan – could have claimed him. One understands why Catholicism accorded exclusivity to Jesus, the only “True Messiah,” and why it prohibited any competition under the pain of death.

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<sup>167</sup> G. P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigation into the Evidence for Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and It’s Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists*, Tubingen, 1985.

## **Chapter 10: Quarrels about Prophets and Apostles: Jochanaan, Theudas/Jude/Thomas, Jacob/James, Simon- Peter, Barnabas, and Saul/Paul<sup>168</sup>**

If history did not preserved the least trace of someone named Jesus, on the other hand, his inventors and worshippers – disguised over the course of time as his brothers, companions, witnesses, disciples or apostles – easily and randomly revealed themselves in the accounts of the First Century. So it goes with John the Baptist, Thomas, James the Just, Simon Cephas and Barnabas.

Paradoxically, concerning Paul – the best known, upon whom the biographers have expounded with the greatest gullibility – there remains almost nothing of the epistles that, reduced to the sincerity of love letters, accommodated the mixed doctrines of the Marcionites and anti-Marcionites before they were washed, purified and re-sharpened several times according to the rectified line of the Fourth Century.

### **Jochanaan, Also Called John the Baptist**

In *Jewish Antiquities*, drafted around 95, Flavius Joseph spoke of a preacher named John.

“He was a good man who encouraged the Jews to practice virtue, justice for all and piety to God so that they could receive baptism. In fact, God considered baptism to be pleasant if it served, not to pardon certain faults, but to purify the body, after the soul was purified by justice.”

(Note here the connection with the Master of Justice, James the Just, Tsadoq, and Melchitsedeq.)

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<sup>168</sup> There was an obvious error in the original: 31 footnotes embedded in the text, but 33 footnotes at the end of it. Now fixed, the error was caused by the footnotes formerly numbered 19 and 20, which should have been combined into one, and the footnote formerly numbered 29, which was perhaps included by mistake.

“Around John were assembled many people who, having heard him, reached the greatest excitation” (*Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 116-118).

The Greek version of Joseph’s *War of the Jews* (written around 90) doesn’t mention Jochanaan. Two Slavic versions, written much later and unreliable, return to this person. One reads in the first version:

“At this time, there lived among the Jews a man of strange costume; he applied to his body the hides of animals everywhere he wasn’t covered by his own hair. In his face, he was similar to a savage.

“He went to the Jews and summoned them to freedom, saying: ‘God sent me so that I can show you the Path of the Law, by which you can deliver yourselves from many powerful people. And over you will not reign a mortal, but the Very High who sent me.’

“And when the people heard this, they rejoiced. And he was followed all over Judea, the region in the vicinity of Jerusalem. And he did nothing other than plunge them into the waves of the Jordan and then sent them away, saying to them that they should renounce their bad works, and that he would give them a king who would emancipate them and submit to them all who were not submitted to them, but that he himself would not be submitted to anyone.

“Some blasphemed, others believed him. And as he had been led before [Herod] Archelaus, and as the doctors of the Law had been assembled, they asked him who he was and where he had been until then. He responded to them: ‘I am a man, the Spirit of God has led me, and I feed upon reeds, roots and carob.’

“They threw themselves upon him to torture him if he did not renounce his words and acts, but he said: ‘It is for you to renounce your abominable works and become devoted to the Lord your God.’

“And Simon, originally an Essenean scribe, arose in anger and said: ‘We read the divine books every day. But you, who come from the forest like a beast, you dare to instruct us and seduce the crowd with inflammatory discourse.’ He hurried to punish him physically. But he punished them by saying: ‘I will not reveal to you the mystery that lives in you, since you haven’t wanted it. Through this will come on you an inexpressible unhappiness, and it will be your fault.’

“After having spoken thus, he went to the other bank of the Jordan and, [since the others] no longer dared to molest him, he continued to act as before.”

In the second Slavic version, Herod intervened.

“Alone, this man whom one called a savage came before him (Herod) in anger and said to him: ‘Why have you taken the woman of your brother, infamous one? Because your brother died a pitiless death, you too will be mowed down by a false fate [*la faux céleste*]. The decree of God will not be lifted, but you will perish miserably in a strange country. Because you do not uphold [*tu ne suscites pas*] the line of your brother; you satisfy your carnal passion, since he already had four children.’

“As soon as Herod heard this, he became angry and ordered him to be beaten and chased away. But he did not cease accusing Herod everywhere that he found himself, until Herod had him seized and ordered him to be killed.

“His character was strange and his life wasn’t human. He lived like a spirit without flesh. His lips never knew bread. Even at Easter, he didn’t eat unleavened bread, saying that it had been given in memory of God, who had delivered his people from servitude, as a consolation because the road had been sad. As far as wine and the intoxicating drinks, he didn’t even let them near him. And he had a horror of all animals. He disapproved of all infractions, and he made use of carob.”

A fanatic of anti-nature, an ascetic moralist, and a hysterical and extreme imprecator, Jochanaan inscribed himself in a current that hasn’t ceased, up to today, to oppose against the freedom of life a system of corporeal and spiritual occlusion that propagates morbidity and death around itself. Depending on the circumstances, such dispositions fit in with the resentment of the disinherited, nay, even entire peoples who had been subjected to Roman colonization and who erected their God as a timeless machine of war against the imperialist violence of the West.

According to the Slavic manuscripts, his rage at the people of the Temple did not spare the masters of the country. Presented to Archelaus, who was the Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Edom from 4 [B.C.E.] to 5 [C.E.], and

subsequently banished, Jochanaan would succumb much later (according to the evangelic legends) to the blows of Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee from 4 [B.C.E.] to 38 [C.E.].

The news raged along the Jordan that Joshua – a conqueror, a thaumaturge, a maker of miracles (he stopped the sun) and a leader of the Jewish people – had crossed over, had surpassed a limit that was inseparably terrestrial and celestial.

As in Essenism, his baptism symbolically liberated the soul from the “stain of the body” and consecrated a penitential choice, the renunciation of the goods of the earth and the mortification of the flesh. The least pleasures horrified this holy man, and he execrated the animals, whose sexual liberty annoyed his aggressive chastity. If he covered himself with animal skins, it was to resemble a certain Esau, of whom *Genesis* spoke (25:25-26).

The hostility of the Sadducees and Pharisees did not rally to him the adhesion of any of the Essene factions, because a Man of the Community named Simon (so famous that [Flavius] Joseph cited him) violently took him aside and manifested the animosity that reigned between the saints or perfect ones, who were devoted to prayer and study, and the preachers of voluntary poverty or *ebbyonim*, the Ebionites. Here it was a question of rival currents of Essenism, because Simon would not have seated himself among his worst enemies, that is, the sacerdotal aristocracy of the Temple.

Therefore, the hostility to John the Baptist remained strong among the Nazarenes-Elchasaites from whom the *Homilies of Peter* emanated. For the Elchasaites, who were adepts of James the Just and Simon-Peter, John the Baptist incarnated the Messiah’s adversary. A syzygy was situated within the antagonism between the Light and the Darkness, between Jesus, the Son of Man and the good path, and Jochanaan, the Son of Woman, and the path of evil.

Opposed to the Essenism of the communities – the subsistence of which agriculture assured by various meats and wine, which thus allowed the neophytes to marry and satisfy themselves, with the aim of procreation, in a sexuality reduced to occasional coitus – the wandering prophets extolled absolute dispossession and continence without reserve: they stigmatized the “laxity” of their co-religionists.

Another sect issued from Essenism, Mandaeism (from *manda*, “gnosis”), held John the Baptist as its founding apostle, and having rejected the false messiah named Jesus, professed an equal scorn for the Jews and the sectarians of the impostor “denounced by Anosh” (Enoch).

In the very heart of Nazarenism, contradictory *midrashim* retraced the complexities of the quarrels of the prophets. The echoes of these Hebrew and Aramaic texts (today disappeared) even clearly resounded in the later-day canonical Gospels that translated into Greek writings whose allegorical and Semitic meanings escaped their redactors.

In the *Gospel attributed to Luke*, John the Baptist was not the simple herald of Jesus, but the announcer of the end of time and the imminent kingdom of God. The works placed under the names of Mark and Matthew presented John the Baptist as equal in importance to Jesus, whom he baptized. He recruited his partisans from among the Jochanaanites and only acceded to the front of the mythological stage once his master was decapitated. Herod, moreover, saw in Jesus the reincarnation of John the Baptist.

On the other hand, the *Gospel attributed to John* reduced his role to the smallest share. He was neither prophet nor Eli, but only “the voice that cries out in the desert”; not the Light, but a witness to the Light.

From whence comes the question: did not the John who was proposed to be the author of a Gospel that, at the beginning, was Gnostic (Naassene or Sethian) – did he not come from John the Essene whom Flavius Joseph mentions? As far as the *Apocalypse*, which was a Jewish text transcribed into Greek and also attributed to a certain John [under the title *Revelations*]: it cited neither Jesus nor Jochanaan, but evoked two “witnesses of God” in struggle against the Beast, that is to say, Rome. Put to death, they remained three days without burial and then were resurrected up to the heavens. Therefore, according to Joseph, there existed two Jewish and anti-Judean leaders who were victims of the Roman occupation: Jacob/James and Simon, the sons of Judah of Gamala, who were the mythic witnesses to the Angel-Messiah summoned to lead the Just to final victory, despite the terrestrial failure of 70, and to conquer the world in the name of a God who was more powerful than YHWH, the bloody and boastful God.

### **Theudas/Jude/Thomas**

In 45, in *Jewish Antiquities* (XX, 97-98), Flavius Joseph cited the tumult caused by the “magician” Theudas (“magician” was a qualifier frequently synonymous with “Egyptian” due to the great vogue for Hermeticism in Upper Egypt.) (Note that, on the other hand, there was no trace – other than in the composite novel titled *Acts of the Apostles* – of an agitator by the name of Etienne, who speculated on the Torah, invented *midrashim*, rose up against the people of the Temple, and claimed to be a just man who had been cruelly persecuted and would return to the earth. This “imaginary Etienne”<sup>169</sup> fits a portrait that could have included the majority of the Essenean preachers, all of whom modeled themselves

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<sup>169</sup> R. Eisenmann, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumrans*, Leiden, 1983.

on the Master of Justice in the midst of a “messianic agitation (that) soon began and didn’t end until Bar Kokhba.”)<sup>170</sup>

In the words of Flavius Joseph,

“At the time Fadus was the governor of Judea, a magician by the name of Theudas persuaded a great crowd to take their riches with them and follow him to the Jordan. He said that he was a prophet and that, after he had divided it by command, the river would allow them to pass easily. By speaking thus, he deceived much of the world. But Fadus didn’t let him enjoy this folly. He sent against him a troop of cavalry, which attacked them spontaneously, killed a great many, took many of the survivors, and captured Theudas himself and, after decapitating him, sent the head to Jerusalem.”

The Talmud identifies the Theudas mentioned by Joseph with Ben Stada, who promised his partisans he’d destroy the walls of Jerusalem as Joshua had destroyed those of Jericho.<sup>171</sup>

Theudas also enjoyed the posthumous privilege of having furnished at least two recruits to the evangelic legends of the apostles. Because Theudas or Thaddeus corresponded to Judah or Judas, who was none other than Thomas. There’s no mystery as to why the acts and gospels called him the “twin bother of Jesus,” because Thaddeus, Jude and Thomas [all] mean “twin,” from which came the double of the Greek translators, who were unaware of the original meaning of the name and surnamed Thomas “Didyme” (*didumos*, “twin”).

While the Nazarene disciples of James and Simon-Peter established themselves in Antioch, those loyal to Theudas/Thomas propagated themselves in Edessa, where their communities founded a specific [kind of] Christianity before entering the syncretic wave of the years 90-100. At the beginning, each sect expressed the truth of its quest for a unique messiah by putting itself under the patronage of an elder, a witness or a “brother” of the Savior. The unification of the various Judeo-Christian currents engendered the legend of apostles who had been initially united (complete with differences, doubts and betrayals) around the Lord, the Adonai, who had descended to the earth.

By guaranteeing the separation of the waters of the River Jordan for the crowd of his partisans, Theudas/Jude/Thomas identified himself with Joshua. His crossing transmuted the waters of death into the waters of life. In the mythic and

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> J. Moreau, *Les persécutions dans l’Empire romain*, Brussels, 1964.



messianic spirit of the epoch, Joshua and Thomas were mentioned at the same time in the *Acts of Thomas* (the manuscript dates from the Sixth Century and no doubt transcribed a much older text): “Jesus then appeared under the form of Thomas and sat on the bed.”

Thomas/Theudas was/were probably referred to by the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, in which the will to asceticism common to all Essenian-Baptism expressed itself violently: [“]Jesus came to abolish the works of women and procreation, and thus to abolish the death that affects everything brought in the world.[”] (Note that, outside of the Christian milieu, this idea also existed in several Hermetic groups in Alexandria. According to Chapter 18 of the *Poimandres*, love was the cause of death. Asclepius supported the contrary thesis.)

The same spirit was encountered in a text discovered at Nah-Hammadi and popularized under the arbitrary name the *Gospel according to Thomas*.<sup>172</sup>

This work had points in common with the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of Philippe*, the canonical gospels, the doctrines of the Naassenes, the Sethians and the Enochians (*logion* 11), Essenism (*monachos* does not mean “monk,” but the “perfect man,” as in the texts from Qumran), Marcion (*logion* 32), Theodotus and Heracleon (*logion* 144), and the *Recognitiones*, a Latin and later version of the *Homilies of Peter*, I:84 (*logion* 39).<sup>173</sup>

The text [of the *Gospel according to Thomas*] included 118 *logia* or remarks attributed to Joshua/Jesus, put onstage in the form of brief dialogues between James, Thomas and Simon-Peter. Imprinted by a number of Semitisms, the text seems to have been a collection of rewritten, translated and sequenced *midrashim*. It manifestly inspired the authors of the canonical gospels, who purged it of doctrinal archaisms and strengthened its ascetic rigor.

In a reversal of the real that was itself the inhuman essence of religion, the condemnation of desire and pleasure ended in the identification of the Holy Spirit with a mother, a mother who gives life, whereas women who bring children into the world engender death. (Note that this is the sense, that is to say, contrary to nature, that Jesus was called “the Living” in the work attributed to Thomas.) The Adamism of this return to paradise implied a total emaciation of sexuality. In paradise, man was neither male nor female, but identical to a putatively asexual child. As soon as it ate the forbidden fruit of sensual pleasure, its primitive unity

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<sup>172</sup> J. Menard, “L’Evangile selon Thomas,” *Nag-Hammadi Studies*, Leiden, V, 1975.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*; Grant. [*Translator*: text missing from original. The bibliography cites three works by M. Grant.].

was lost, and the result was a man different from the woman. Only a spiritual androgyny – as the pure spirit of a body without desire or impulses – would return to it the disincarnated unity from which it proceeded. This same speculation was illustrated in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. Catholicism would condemn as heretical the frenzied asceticism that adepts of the communities devoted to Jude/Thomas practiced until the Third Century (this was perhaps the reason that the evangelic novels recognized by the Church execrated the double of the good Thomas: the informer named Judas).<sup>174</sup>

## **Jacob/James**

In his *Ecclesiastical History* (II, I, 3-4), Eusebius of Caesarea cited an extract from the *Hypotyposes* of Titus Flavius Clemens, also known as Clement of Alexandria, who was born around 150 and died around 210. Clement was a Christian philosopher classified among the orthodox by the Catholics, but whom the patriarch and theologian Photios I (820-855) judged to be impious and heretical in many of his opinions.

A commentator on biblical texts, Clement belonged to anti-Marcionite Christian Gnosticism, as did the Christians of the New Prophecy and its disciple, Origen. Clement drew his references from the *Epistle of Jude*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which later were condemned as apocryphal, because Clement didn't know the canons that didn't yet exist when he was alive. Of course, his future copyists were careful to compensate for his legitimate ignorance by adding in backdated citations.

For him, gnosis allowed one to discover the topography of the celestial dwellings, inhabited by the cohorts of hierarchically arranged angels. Gnosis revealed to him the superimposed or successive worlds through which the soul elevated itself to attain its supreme repose. And Joshua/Jesus was none other than the informed guide in this spiritual adventure.

According to the extracts produced by Eusebius, Clement declared: “The Lord, after his resurrection, brought gnosis to James the Just, John and Peter; they gave it to the Seventy, of whom Barnabas was one.” (Note that this was enough for Eusebius to consecrate James the “bishop of the Church of Jerusalem.”)

In another work, the *Stromates*, in which he attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy and Jewish prophecy, Clement called the true gnosis “Christian,” unlike Irenaeus who, vituperating the Christian Gnostics Marcion and Valentinus, judged gnosis and the teachings attributed to Jesus to be irreconcilable. Clement

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<sup>174</sup> J. Doresse, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, op. cit.

referred to the “true tradition rightfully issued from the holy apostles Peter, James, John and Paul, transmitted from father to son,” thus composing a list of ancient masters in which were unified, in a desire for unity, two antagonistic currents: that of Saul/Paul and that of James and Peter.

James, in whom the Master of Justice was reincarnated, played a role of the highest rank in a work discovered at Nag-Hammadi: *Here are the hidden words that Jesus the Living said and that were transmitted by Didyme Jude Thomas*, which proclaimed, “The disciples said to Jesus: ‘We know that you will leave us; who above us will (then) be the (most) great?’ Jesus said to them: ‘There where you will go, render yourselves to James the Just, the one because of whom the heavens and the earth were produced’” (*logion* 13).<sup>175</sup>

The phrase “because of whom the heavens and earth were produced” made James nothing less than the co-creator of the universe, at the same level as Adam and Jesus, who was furthermore his “brother.” This remark, borrowed from a *midrash* that claimed for itself the authority of James, illustrated quite well how the [self-] legitimating acts of the Church – which, as it happened, erected the master as the auxiliary and right arm of God – were collected, collated, and harmonized to the extent that the initially disunited Nazarene Churches became federated and formed accords among themselves. Thus, there would appear – engendered by a community inspired by a Levy/Matthew – a work titled *The Secret Words that the Savior said to Judas Thomas and that I, Matthew, wrote down while I heard them speak to each other*, sometimes called the *Gospel according to Matthew*.<sup>176</sup> (Note that Saul/Paul also spoke of a vision in the course of which he heard “the ineffable words that no one is permitted to repeat.”) The pious lies by virtue of which the local Churches invented witnesses or brothers of the Messiah would be seen as instances of inadmissible naivety in the eyes of the redactors of the New Testament, who would take the precaution of giving the colors of historical probability to these falsifications or, more exactly, these myths, and thus effaced the original documents, which were accused of being crude aberrations. (Note that, with respect to the invention of witnesses and brothers, the abbeys of the Middle Ages didn’t proceed in any other fashion when they invented patron saints and exhibited their relics so as to attract the faithful, crowds and alms.)

By the way, the figure of James wasn’t exclusively connected to Judeo-Christianity, since the Naassenes – according to the *Elenchos* (V, 7) – kept in their

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-35.

teachings “the principle points of the doctrine that James, brother of the Lord, transmitted to Mariamne.” Here the Lord was *NHS*, the Redeemer Serpent, and Mariamne corresponded to Miriam/Mary. It was also under the name of James that, after the Second Century, the *Proto-Gospel of James*, a recitation of the childhood of the Christ Jesus and the story of Mary and Joseph the carpenter would be disseminated.

The original specificity of a Jamesian Christianity, with its own Church, was perpetuated in Nestorianism, which was condemned as a heresy and still exists to this day in Jacobite Churches.

James, prophet and Messiah, assumed the roles of witness, brother, and apostle of Joshua/Jesus to the extent that the diverse currents of Essene-Christianity, nay, even the Sethian, Naassenean and Barbelite forms of messianism slowly came together and grouped their [respective] patrons or founders together within the apostolic cohort of the Lord.

A fragment from the Judeo-Christian writer Hegesippus (end of the Second Century), transcribed by Eusebius of Caesarea, described James the Just as an ascetic “sanctified in the womb of his mother,” a trait attributed to Jesus. This accounts for the mythical slide of James (the Messiah of an Essene community) into Jesus (the syncretic Messiah of the first Churches, which were, perhaps, federated by Elchasai).

Like Dunstan, Jochanaan, the Servant celebrated by *Isaiah* and the other spawn of the Master of Justice, Jacob/James did not eat meat, never shaved, combed his hair, or washed. He dedicated all of his time to prayer. Hegesippus called him “rampart of the people,” because “those who have faith keep it through James.”

Among the Elchasaites, James passed for the true founder of their community. The primitive text of the *Homilies of Peter* presented itself as a letter from Clement, *alias* Zacchaeus, to James.

History has preserved traces of two people named Jacob tied to Messianic agitation; the ahistorical spirit of the *midrashim* easily united them in an identification made plausible by the common front of Zealotism and Essenism. According to Flavius Joseph (*Judaic Antiquities*, XX, V, 2), Jacob of Gamala, son of Judah and brother of Simon, was crucified around 45, under the reign of Tiberius Alexander, who succeeded Caspius Fadus (responsible for the execution several months earlier of Theudas/Thomas) as procurator of Judea.

The first Jacob, a Zealot, was doubled by another, who was either a Nazarene or an Ebionite. The Talmud and a *midrash* set themselves against a Christian Jew named Jacob of Kephher Schanya (or Maia Simai), who was accused of contesting the orthodox rituals prescribed by *Deuteronomy*. Interrogating Rabbi Eliezer on a point of doctrine, Jacob was invited to answer and advance an

interpretation drawn from *Micah* (2, 7) that emphasized the solicitude of God in the interests of men. Eliezer rallied to Jacob's explication and thus drew upon himself the reproach of complacency with respect to Nazarenism.

### **Simon-Peter**

Named governor of Bithynia in 111, Pliny the Younger solicited directives from Emperor Trajan on the conduct to adopt with respect to the *chrestianoï*, whose behaviors had aroused unfavorable reactions among the inhabitants (*Letters X*, 96-97). Oscar Cullmann has shown that the incriminated Christian sect was that of the Elchasaites, whose doctrine synthesized the teachings of Nazarenism and Ebionism, if not other Messianistic sects.<sup>177</sup> Their ideas were expressed in an ensemble of texts that were revised many times, and for a long time were held as orthodox by virtue of Clement's name, under which they had been organized. Indeed, Clement (the "Gentle") – a translation of Zacchaeus from the Bible – was the third Pope of Rome in the official histories of Catholicism. Rejected much later by the Church, these writings would be re-baptized *Pseudo-Clementines* by the historians who were, it should be noted, hardly eager to contradict aberrant speculation concerning the epoch in which any Roman pontificate lived.

Under the name of Clement (the [First] Pope of Rome and successor to Peter) – "Clement" was in fact a fictive person invented by Irenaeus and consecrated by Eusebius<sup>178</sup> – a text was disseminated that analysis reveals had three states. First, the *Homilies* or the *Epistle of Clement to James* was a Greek revision of an old *midrash* placed under the name of Zacchaeus. Second, a Greek development, called the *Anagnossos*, was translated and revised under the title *Recognitiones* ("Recognitions") by Rufin, a notorious forger and censor of the works of Origen. Third and last, the *Epithome* represented the Catholic version, amputated from the text of the *Homilies*, which would reappear much later under the title *Summary of the Predictions of Peter by Clement*.

The Hebrew source has disappeared, but the primitive kernel, extracted by Cullmann, explicitly revealed the central theme of the speculations advanced by the author: "The true prophet and the intelligence of the law according to the teachings of the Mosaic tradition." Cullmann summarized it thus:

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<sup>177</sup> B. Dubourg, *L'Invention de Jésus*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 354.

<sup>178</sup> O. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 and 83.

“The world with its sins and errors is compared to a house that is filled with smoke. The men who find themselves inside search in vain for the truth, which doesn’t enter. Only the true prophet, by opening the door, can give it to them. This prophet is the Christ, who first entered into the world in the person of Adam, anointed by the oil of the Tree of Life. For all beings, God made a prototype: for the angels, an angel; for the spirits, a spirit; for men, a *man* who is Adam-Jesus. Adam was without sin, despite certain mendacious passages in the Scriptures. Adam, the true prophet, announced the world to come. By contrast, Eve, who was inferior to him as the moon is inferior to the sun, was appointed to the present world as the prototype of the prophets born from women, whereas Adam was the ‘Son of Man.’ The feminine principle led the men of the first generation astray from the path of truth. Their depravity manifested itself especially in the practice of *sacrifices*. But since the beginning of the world, the true prophet hasn’t ceased to travel through the centuries, changing name and form. He was incarnated in Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Moses renewed the eternal law that Adam had already promulgated, but, at the same time, by authorizing sacrifices through a law, Moses made a concession to the hardening of the Jews that placed a curb upon the most serious excesses: sacrifices had to be offered to God only, and only in a unique place. But this permission was only provisional. Moses foreshadowed a future prophet who would abolish sacrifices. The true prophet finally reached his perfect repose in the Christ. He put an end to sacrifices and replaced them with *baptism*. Also, during the Jewish War, only the baptized were saved. Before dying, the true prophet chose twelve apostles, and, in the manner of Moses, tasked seventy-two doctors of the law with transmitting the truth. By abolishing sacrifices, the Christ did not abolish the law, but that which was not part of primitive law. He announced that, until the heavens and the earth had passed, not an iota or a trait of the Law would fall.”<sup>179</sup>

The author (or authors) of the *Homilies* were inscribed in the reformist current that was more and more critical of the biblical texts and Mosaic law. They not only eliminated the prophets who represented feminine principles, but also certain important parts of the Pentateuch. Of course, the Elchasaites, in conformity with

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the Essenean matrix, rejected the sacrifices of the Temple. “When the Law was put down in writing, it was subjected to a certain number of additions that contained errors against the unique God” (*Homilies*, II, 38). This argument recalled those of the Dunstanites or Dositheosians. James, their prophet, mystically presided over the authority of a church to which Peter himself was obliged to render an account.

As far as the defense of the unique God, it was inscribed in the polemic of the two Gods and their [respective] natures. Was it necessary, in the manner of Marcion circa 140, and perhaps in the manner of Saul, the enemy of the Elchasaites, to postulate the existence of a Good and Christian God radically different from YHWH, the creator-God of a bad world, a bloody God who betrayed his people, a Demiurge who was master of a deplorable universe? Or was it necessary to rally to the Elchasaite thesis, from which would in fact be born the God of Irenaeus, Tertullian and then the Catholics and the Protestants (“God kills with his left hand, that is to say, through the ministry of the Bad, which, by temperament, takes pleasure in tormenting the impious. But he saves and does good with his right hand, that is to say, through the ministry of the Good, which was created for rejoicing in lavishing blessings on the just and saving them,” *Homilies*, XX, 3)?

Finally, the Elchasaites, having entered into the general quarrel about the “true messiah,” were perhaps the first ones to produce – with Saul/Paul and Saturnilus – the ecumenical name of Joshua/Jesus.

In the manner of the various Christianities of the first two centuries, their [the Elchasaites’] conception of the Messiah was that of the *angelos-christos*. He had been created as one of the archangels – in the same way that Michael was also Melchitsedeq. “For all beings, God created a prototype: for angels, an angel; for the spirits, a spirit; for men, a man who was Adam-Jesus. Adam was without sin, despite certain mendacious passages in the Scriptures.”<sup>180</sup>

Elchasaite Christianity believed in the successive reincarnations of the Messiah, who had, “since the origin of the world, changed his form and name, and thus reappeared ceaselessly and ceaselessly in the world” (*Homilies*, III, 10).

No doubt the Messiah was manifested through the voice of Elchasai, just as he prophesized a half-century later through the mouth of Montanus in the popular Christianity of the New Prophecy, born in Phrygia, in the immediate neighborhood of the Bithynia of Pliny and the Elchasaites.

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<sup>180</sup> Cited by Maccoby, *Paul et l’invention du christianisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 260. [Translator: I am not sure why this passage, just quoted within the long passage from Cullman, has been repeated.]

But the means of preventing other enlightened ones from obeying the revelation of the Messiah? The two great enemies of Elchasaitism – like those of Montanism and Tertullian, but later on – also held the message of the Christ.

Cullmann did not detect in the primitive text of the *Homilies* a charge made against Marcion, which was refuted instead by a subsequent copyist who revised the text. On the other hand, as Baur has demonstrated, the hostility manifested with respect to Simon “the Magician” in fact aimed at Saul/Paul, held to be a false prophet.

Nevertheless, the authors of the *Homilies* did not know any of the letters by Paul, nor the texts of the New Testament invented by Marcion. They simply preached the good news, the gospel, and rejected that of Saul, the founder of competing churches.

According to the *Homilies* (II, 17), “the gospel of the lie, preached by the seducer, came first; then came the gospel of truth, after the destruction of the holy place.”

Which holy place? Jerusalem and the Temple? But Essenism didn’t cease demanding the annihilation of the town consecrated to the “impious priest.” Wasn’t this, instead, a question of Qumran or Damascus, that is to say, *DMS*, the sanctuary, towards which Paul traveled, according to this legend, when he had [received] the revelation of the Messiah? (Unless the allusion is to [the era] after 135.)

If Saul/Paul was treated as a false witness to the Lord, his notes stigmatized his adversaries as “false brothers.” Between the different communities invested with the divine message, harmony decidedly did not reign.

Towards the end of the Second Century, and more surely in the Fourth Century, the monarchical Churches – aiming to win the good graces of imperial power – effaced from their histories the divergences between the partisans of James and Peter and the disciples of Saul/Paul. Simon-Peter and Paul, finally reconciled, reigned as the patron saints of Rome, in which they had never set foot.

Nevertheless, the hatred for the “impostor” never completely disappeared from the restoration of the Christian edifice by Catholicism. A manuscript discovered by Schlomo Pines that illustrated the opinions of a Jewish community from Syria in the Fifth Century accused Paul of Tarsus of having falsified the teachings of the Messiah. This false prophet rejected the Torah with the intentions of attracting to himself the favors of Rome and acquiring personal power and influence. Having flattered the anti-Semitism of the Romans, he was the one truly responsible for the destruction of the Temple in 70. And this text, caught up in the polemical whirlpools of the Fifth Century – during which the Church invented the legend of “Paul, apostle to the gentiles” who won the Empire over to Christian convictions – objected that “His Christianity was only pure Romanism; rather than



converting the Romans into Christians, he converted the Christians into Romans.”<sup>181</sup>

Furthermore, this manuscript denounced the impostures and contradictions of the canonical gospels and only accorded credit to the original Gospel, the one drafted in Hebrew. This community, which made exclusive claims for the authority of James and Peter, existed until the Tenth Century, according to the Jewish philosopher Saadia Gaon.

Perhaps it was from the same milieu that came a kind of “novel about Paul” that attacked the official novel called the *Acts of the Apostles*. Epiphanius of Salamis (438-496) echoed it in his *Panarion* (30, 16, 6-9):

“They affirmed that Paul was Greek. According to them, he went to Jerusalem and, after having lived there a certain amount of time, he felt an inextinguishable passion for the daughter of the priest. It was for this reason that he became a proselyte and was circumcised. But when this young woman rejected him, he became so enraged that he committed libels against circumcision, the Sabbath and the Law.”

The vogue (no doubt quite limited) for Elchasaitism survived the Jewish revolt of 133-135 that ended in the defeat of Bar Kokhba and the end of the Palestinian nation. The future of Christianity henceforth belonged to the Pauline tendency, which the ship owner and founder of Churches, Marcion, exploited before he himself was rejected by the popular development of a Hellenized Christianity, whose the birth in Phrygia clearly showed its relationship to the Christianity of the prophet Elchasai, established in Bithynia.

As far as Simon-Peter, the disciple or younger brother of James, his name derives from the Hebrew *Symeon* and from the Aramaic sobriquet *Kepha*, “rock.” Thus, Simon the Rock, Simon the Pitiless or Simon the Bald.

His only historical traces led back to Simon, son of Judah of Gamala and brother of Jacob, put to death as a Zealot. Was he confused with Simon the Essene, whose violent hostility to John the Baptist Flavius indicated? The *Homilies* do indeed execrate Jochanaan. Another mark of Essenism, the *Testamentum domini* (a discourse addressed to the Sons of Light) appeared in the *Homilies*.

The *Recognitions*, a development and revision of the *Homilies*, preserved a list of couples or syzygies: the Antichrist was opposed to the Christ as Cain was opposed to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Isaiah to Jacob, Aaron to Moses, John the

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<sup>181</sup> J.-M. Tosenstiehl, “Portrait de l’Antichrist,” in *Pseudépographie*, p. 59.

Baptist to the Son of Man, and Paul to Peter. (It isn't useless to recall that the first description of the Antichrist – as well the Messiah's horoscope – were discovered among the manuscripts at Qumran.)

The authority of Simon-Peter eclipsed that of James around the end of the Second Century. He triumphed over Saul at Antioch, where he acted as James' delegate. It was in Simon-Peter's midst that Clement was instructed in Caesarea and learned from his mouth the doctrine of the "true prophet." The legend of his death, invented by Tertullian and reprised in the *Acts of Peter*, entered into the dogma of the Church in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries by virtue of the efforts undertaken to offer to Rome, the Emperor and the citizens (all of whom were hardly eager to embrace Catholicism) the ancient patronage of the two pillars of faith, Peter and Paul, united despite themselves for the great glory of God. (Note that the *Acts of Peter*, still part of the canon in the Fourth Century, were rejected as "apocryphal" upon the triumph of the belief that Peter had founded the Roman Church. In the Twentieth Century, certain archeologists – who, like the historians, were motivated by their sense of Christian duty – strove to discover his tomb. The Light of Faith only illuminated their absurdity.)

## **Barnabas**

No historical certitude gives plausible contours to the person named Barnabas. In his study of the apocryphal books of the New Testament, Erbetta made him a Levite from Cyprus, a Jewish member of the minor clergy involved with the services at the synagogue.<sup>182</sup> He was supposedly the companion of a certain Mark, author of a Gnostic, secret gospel in the line of Essenean teachings. *A Letter to Theodore* by Clement of Alexandria (end of the Second Century) affirmed that this Mark "composed a gospel of a more elevated spirituality for the usage of those whom one made perfect [...] Nevertheless, he did not divulge the things that should not have been pronounced."<sup>183</sup>

Everything leads one to suppose that the apocryphal text attributed to Mark, whose name would later on crown a canonical gospel substituted for the Gnostic one, was similar in its content to the epistle placed under the name of Barnabas, which is a text of great interest for the comprehension of Judeo-Christianity at the end of the First Century and the beginning of the Second. In the opinion of Erbetta, this epistle was composed in Alexandria, Syria or Asia Minor, and in its Greek

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<sup>182</sup> Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi*.

<sup>183</sup> Cited by M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Phénix, op. cit.*, p. 165.

form dated from the years 117 to 130. Transcribed again for the Sinaiticus manuscript of the Fourth Century, it was held as canonical until [Pope] Gelasius' decree set it aside.

Originally Hebrew or Aramaic, the text defined the program of revising Judaism undertaken by Essenism in its entirety, and more particularly by the sects of the Diaspora that adapted anti-Judean Christianity to the Greco-Roman way of thinking.

The reproach addressed to Pharisean orthodoxy much later nourished the anti-Judaic polemic. It wasn't a question of globally rejecting Yahwehism, as Marcion wanted, but expelling the Jews from biblical exegesis, of which they had "shown themselves to be unworthy." Hadn't they chosen to interpret the writings of the Bible literally and not in a spiritual sense? The *Epistle of Barnabas* thus recommended the practice of circumcision of the heart and not that of the flesh ("circumcise the hardness of your heart"). (Note that the abandoning of circumcision during the rites of conversion indubitably favored proselytism and the adhesion of non-Jewish believers.)

In the same way, the prohibition of [certain] foods had to be understood symbolically as a refusal to associate with the people shaped by immorality. The Temple of Jerusalem had to give way to a true temple that lived in the heart of the believer. So as to more clearly break with Jewish practice, the Sabbath was shifted from the sixth to the seventh day, consecrated *dies domini*, Sunday.

The second part of the *Epistle* corresponded almost completely with the Hebrew manual that was revised, corrected and disseminated by Jewish Christians under the name *Didache*. One notably found in it the doctrine of the two paths (*Barnabas*, 18-20), which conformed with the Essenean combat between the Light and the Darkness.

But in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the two most significant elements of Judeo-Christianity in the process of Hellenization showed the obvious influence of Naassenism and a strictly biblical conception of Jesus. For the Christians who were contemporaries with the famous letter of Pliny, Jesus – insofar as he was the Christ – was none other than the successor to Moses, Joshua, the holder of the New Alliance or *Novum Testamentum*.

As for Naassenism: "The fall of Eve was provoked by the Serpent. The Lord wanted to convince them that their sin made them prey to the malediction of death. From then on, although Moses had ordained, 'No found or sculpted object shall serve as God to you,' he himself constructed one to represent Jesus. Moses constructed a serpent of bronze; he exhibited it to the eyes of all; and in the voice of a herald, summoned the people to assemble. Once united, they begged Moses to intercede in their favor so that they could heal themselves. Moses said to them: 'If one of you is dying, then he should direct himself to the serpent attached to the

wood (the cross) and he should fervently put his hopes in the one who, though dead, can give life, and at that instant he will be healed” (*Epistle of Barnabas*, 12:7).

As for Jesus, his person presents no historical trace at all. There is not the least allusion to the anecdotes complacently reported by the canonical and Catholic texts. He was simply Joshua, son of Noun or Nahum, an angel of God, co-creator of the world, the alpha and omega, an immanent being without any connection to the events that unexpectedly took place in the era of Tiberius and Procurator Pontius Pilate.

“What then did Moses say to Jesus, son of Noun, after having imposed on him, inasmuch as he was a prophet, this name, uniquely so that all the people knew that the Father had revealed everything concerning the subject of his Son Jesus? Moses thus expressed himself to Jesus, son of Noun, after having imposed this name upon him, when he sent him to visit the earth: ‘Take a book between your hands and write down what the Lord says: at the end of time, the Son of God will destroy the entire house of Amalek down to its foundations.’ Here again Jesus was not the son of a man, but the Son of God revealed in flesh through the means of an effigy that had preceded him. And as one says that the Christ is the son of David, this very David prophesized full of fear and conscious of the errors of the sinners. . .” (*Epistle of Barnabas*, 12, 80).

It is fitting to compare the *Epistle of Barnabas* to a letter attributed to Saul/Paul by the Catholics (not without some difficulty): the *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

In his *De pudenda* (20), Tertullian attributed this epistle to Barnabas. Luther placed it under the name of Apollos, one of the opponents supposedly encountered by Paul.

For Prosper Alfaric, the text was of Alexandrian origin and took up a *midrash* from the 60s that was revised and Hellenized around 135:

“Christ, the first-born Son of God, enthroned Sovereign-Sacrifice-Performer, shed his blood ‘once for all’ so as to remove sorrow and death from the lives of men. Divine promoter of a New Alliance, he had – upon the order of his Father (5/8) – to descend ‘for a short time’ ‘below the angels,’ to take human form and submit to a Passion. His death and resurrection rendered the immolations of the Temple null and void, and rendered the sacrifice-performers [*les sacrificateurs*] of the race of Aaron useless; because his divine nature, perfected by

suffering, made him the Perfect Victim. Passing through ‘the door’ to the heavens in which the Just would rejoin him (13/14), he immolated himself in his celestial sanctuary, not in a temple constructed ‘by the hand of man’; he worked the purification of sin by his blood, but he did not take their sins on him and did not become a ‘scourge.’”<sup>184</sup>

The drama of the timeless Christ excluded all terrestrial historical existence. Moreover, he did not live on the earth: he “appeared” in flesh (9:26) so as to identify himself with the humans whom he was charged with saving. The prototype that is suggested here was Melchitsedeq, who was like Jesus “without father or mother, without genealogy, having neither a beginning to his days nor an end to his life.” Those who denied Christ would be trampled by him (10, 13); gehenna awaited the impious.

Many of the features exhibited in the primitive kernel of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* were found again in the notes that, perhaps, were drafted by Saul/Paul.

### **Saul, Called Paul of Tarsus**

Catholics, Byzantines, Protestants and Christians of all kinds have erected Paul and his Christian theology as a pillar of the Church. His biography offers fewer lacunae than that of Holderlin. Bernard Dubourg notes with irony that, “Everywhere one speaks of the psychology of Paul, the voyages of Paul, the doctrinal efforts of Paul, the difficulties of Paul, etc. – as one speaks, elsewhere and at random, of the mood-swings of Caligula, the peregrinations of [the Count of] Lapérouse, the hypotheses and theories of Kepler and the tribulations of Socrates. That’s it: in learned opinion, Paul is the Socrates of the Church. . . . Even better, he is a Socrates who writes.”<sup>185</sup>

On what has such striking certitude been based? On a composite novel whose late-Second Century redactors compiled from apologies and Jewish *midrashim*, the meaning of which escaped them and which they translated and explicated anecdotally, historicizing the Hebrew myths. And on fourteen letters recorded in manuscripts that were contemporaneous with the instauration of Catholicism and State orthodoxy.

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<sup>184</sup> P. Alfarcic, *Le probleme de Jésus*, Paris, 1954, p. 21.

<sup>185</sup> B. Dubourg, *op. cit.*, II, p. 149. [*Translator*: cf. Frederick Nietzsche’s definition of Socrates as “the one who doesn’t write” and Jacques Derrida’s comments on Socrates in *The Post Card*.]

Picking out the incoherencies and improbabilities of the first document, Dubourg emphasized the *midrashic* elements that were revealed by a retroversion of the text into Hebrew.

According to the *Acts of the Apostles*, Paul was a Jew who became a Roman citizen and was originally from Tarsus, in Cilicia. He then changed his Jewish name, Saul, to Paul. His writings do indeed bear the mark of many Semitisms that are perceptible in the Greek redaction.

It is impossible to be a Jew and a Roman at the same time, Smallwood declares. The adhesion to Roman citizenship “involved the duty to participate in both pagan social rites and religious observances that were incompatible with Jewish orthodoxy.”<sup>186</sup>

The fact that the authors of the *Acts of the Apostles* attributed to Paul Roman citizenry in Tarsus indicates quite well the epoch in which they forged this biographical fantasy. Tarsus was not made Roman until the second half of the Second Century. Voltaire did not fail to perceive the following in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: “Was Paul a Roman citizen, as he boasts? If he was from Tarsus in Cilicia, Tarsus wasn’t a Roman colony until 100 years later, all the antiquarians agree.”

Paul’s pilgrim’s journey evokes that of Aeneas. After a journey to Malta, Paul borrowed an Alexandrian vessel with the “insignia of the Dioscuri” (*Acts of the Apostles*, 28:11) to return to Rome. In the attempt to accord the Hebrew myths and Greek philosophy, in which the symbolism of the Dioscuri or twins [Castor and Pollux] did not assume a small importance, this apparently journalistic detail awoke echoes of the voyages of initiates, like that of the Argonauts. Particularly because the inventor of Paul – the Christian dualist and anti-Semite Marcion – used his profession as a ship-owner and a businessman to found his own Churches everywhere.

Therefore, due to a strange amnesia, the historians and biographers of Paul generally forget to mention that he was indeed a product of Marcion, the *bête noire* for Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justin, various Pharisean or Christian Jews and, much later, Catholic apologists.

Nevertheless, it was Marcion and Marcion alone who, around 140 or 150, revealed the existence of ten epistles written by someone named Paul, the founder of Churches in the East.

Nevertheless, these letters existed prior to Marcion and they attested to quarrels between diverse communities or Esseno-Christian Churches. The hostility between these groups, some sworn to James, Peter or Thomas, the others sworn to

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<sup>186</sup> E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rules*, p. 234.

Saul/Paul, led the historian Bauer to conjecture that the person of Simon caricatured in the *Homilies* was in fact a stand-in for Saul, who – contrary to the “true witnesses,” James and Simon Cephas – claimed to have received the revelation of the Messiah.

Who was the original author of Paul’s epistles, which were recopied in the Fourth Century, in an atmosphere of dogmatic fabrication, and revised on the basis of the Roman past that the Church of Constantine and Theodore falsified without scruple? Loisy doubts their integrity and authenticity. Meeks holds seven of Paul’s letters to be authentic, and attributes *Thessalonians* I and II, *Timothy* I and II, *Philemon*, *Hebrews* and *Titus* to the Pauline schools of the Second Century.<sup>187</sup>

For Ory, “the interpolations in the letters of Saint Paul are certain and obvious; they travesty the appearance of Paulinism in an extravagant manner.” According to Deschner, opinion today agrees to recognize the existence in the First Century of several short notes, echoes of pastorals, polemics and *midrashic* speculations on the Messiah whom Saul/Paul, in any case, did not present as a historical person.<sup>188</sup> The word “Christ” comes from the Bible, in particular, from Isaiah; on the other hand, it is not impossible that “Jesus” was an addition made at the beginning of the Second Century.

To whom were the letters addressed? The historians obedient to Catholicism and Protestantism have designated them to be the *goyim*, the non-Jews, whom Catholicism called the *gentiles* (kind people) or *pagani* (peasants).

In Medieval Hebrew, *goyim* had the connotation of impiety, which was emphasized by the anathema: “May their bones rot [while they are still alive].”<sup>189</sup> Dubourg remarks: “But in the Hebrew of the Bible or Qumran, ‘GWY, GWYM,’ mean ‘nation, nations.’ The epistles of Saul/Paul were not addressed to the Romans, Ephesians, Galatians or Corinthians, but to the Jews or Judaicized people of the Diaspora. They were addressed to the Jews of all nations. They carried traces of the *midrashim* of rival groups before they were revised by Marcion, who

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<sup>187</sup> G. Ory, *Le Christ et Jésus*, Bruxelles, 1968; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, London, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>188</sup> K. Deschner, *op. cit.*, III, p. 99.

<sup>189</sup> *Translator*: I am not sure why Vaneigem specifies that *goyim* had this meaning in “Medieval Hebrew,” when it seems that it had this meaning in Ancient Hebrew, as well. Note that in the first chapter of his book, he writes, “Because the Samaritans weren’t part of the Judean tribe, the Judeans considered them to be, not Jews, but *goyim*, non-believers, generally associated with the anathema, “May their bones rot [while they are still alive].”

cut them loose from their purely Jewish foundations.”<sup>190</sup> The letters transmitted the revisionist and anti-Judean theses common to Essenism, Nazarenism, Ebionism and Elchasaitism.

If Marcion used the authority of Saul/Paul to give an apostolic character to the Churches he founded everywhere in opposition to Jewish Christianity, this was because he had discovered in them many arguments against orthodox Judaism, nay, against YHWH.

Saul’s *midrashim* and polemical fragments thus fell into the hands of Marcion, who was in opposition to the Nazarene/Elchasaite current. Marcion recopied them, not without bending their meaning to fit the polemical orientations of his times. He intended to federate his Christian Churches by imposing upon them the central reference point of Rome, thus foreshadowing the politics instaurated by Catholicism two centuries later. Nevertheless, his authoritarianism and his arrogance as a businessman (a legend has it that he attempted to buy the Judeo-Christian communities established in Rome, whose myths, legends and polemics were collated by the *Shepherd* of Hermas) set against him the Judeo-Christians and the Hellenized Christians who – also hostile to Christian Jews – refused Marcion and his doctrine, having judged his dualism and his global condemnation of Hebrew mythology (the Old Testament) to be unacceptable.

Revised by Marcion, Paul’s letters were then subjected to the corrections judged to be useful by the anti-Marcionites: Justin, Polycarp, Tertullian, and Irenaeus. In addition, Tatian – the presumed author of the first version of the three “synoptic” gospels – improved their aesthetic aspect by polishing and harmonizing them with the Greek version.<sup>191</sup> But Tatian, who was condemned later on for the extreme asceticism that he shared with those faithful to the New Prophecy, yielded the Pauline epistles to which orthodoxy would require several adjustments to be made. So many revisions, interpolations and harmonizations followed each other, stacked up, stratified – all to produce the historical authenticity of manuscripts from the Fourth Century! And yet hundreds of scholars have founded their studies and their honesty on these letters, arbitrarily backdated to the First Century.

The two *Letters to Timothy*, called “pastorals,” carried anti-Marcionite developments. (On the other hand, the voyages evoked in them might well be those of Marcion. The names Titus, Mark and Luke figure in them.) They emanated from the enemies of the ship-owner. The author, who had no scruples about signing these texts “Paul, apostle of the Christ,” would be – according to Deschner<sup>192</sup> – the

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<sup>190</sup> B. Dubourg, *op. cit.*

<sup>191</sup> K. Deschner, *op. cit.*, III, p. 99.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100 and 101.



bishop named Polycarp (second half of the Second Century), who was close to the Christian current of the New Prophecy.

The two *Letters to the Thessalonians* disavowed an older letter by Paul.<sup>193</sup>

The *Letter to the Galatians* retained something of the quarrels between the Jews of the Diaspora. The first *Letter to the Corinthians* extolled asceticism and advanced the Phariseean idea of the resurrection of the body. The second evoked differences with Apollos.

In the *Letter to the Colossians*, the word “Church” took on a Catholic meaning (which it did not have in the other texts) and thus was of a later date.

Priscillian still held the *Letter to the Laodiceans* to be an authentic text from Paul, when in fact it was a Marcionite text from the years 160-190.<sup>194</sup>

Must we recall that all of the so-called Catholic letters, which were placed under the names of Peter (I and II), John (I, II, and III), James and Judas were forgeries? In the middle of the Third Century, Origen mentioned them for the first time and judged them to be subject to controversy.

The correspondence between Seneca and Paul, no doubt inspired by Jerome, “Father of the Church,” offered the slightly too clairvoyant merit of presenting Paul as the contemporary of Nero and a perfect Roman citizen. These letters met the fate of the letters exchanged between Jesus of Nazareth and King Agbar. Disparaging a few outrageous fakes makes it easier to attribute truthfulness to the epistolary dabbling of the apostle.

What remains of Saul/Paul after he’s been screened by the critique that is legitimate to bring to bear on every dubious historical person?

He was assuredly a Jew, perhaps Hellenized, but certainly not a Roman citizen. Perhaps he adhered to the doctrines of the Pharisees, as his legends suggest. In any case, his syncretism retained the Phariseean idea of the resurrection of the body and an ecclesial organization for which the synagogue offered an efficacious model. “It is following the path described by those of the party that I serve the God of my fathers, keeping my faith in all that there is in the Law and in what is written by the prophets, having hope in God, as they have it in themselves, that there will be a resurrection of the just and the sinners.” (Note here the use of the word “the path”: *odos*, the “path,” and not *hairesis*, the “choice.”)

Traces of Essenism weren’t lacking from the Pauline corpus. Murphy O’Connor has detected their presence.

As Dubourg noted, the symbolism of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, not to the city, but to *DMS*, the sanctuary, would be added to the

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>194</sup> Erbetta, *op. cit.*

doctrine of the two paths, Light and Darkness, to anti-Judaism, to the refusal of the sacrifice of animals in the name of penitential sacrifice. Saul rejected anti-Essenean Phariseeism, and encountered the revelation of the expected Messiah. He affirmed the return of the Master of Justice, of the Just Person, of whom Jacob/James affirmed himself to be the brother. He saw him in the light of Essenism. And he founded Churches and thus aroused the animosity of the established communities that treated him as a false prophet.

If Paul extolled the universal Church, he did so in strict obedience to the Master of Justice, for whom the Church “wants to be universal, present in the entire world, eternal; it feels itself to be in communion with Eden and even with Sheol.”<sup>195</sup>

In the novel called *Acts of the Apostles*, there was, perhaps, some confusion between Paul and the Egyptian, that is to say, Theudas/Thomas. Did not Saul momentarily rally the groups loyal to the “twin brother of the Lord” before erecting himself as a privileged witness?

Just as Moses heard the voice of God in a flaming bush, Saul perceived the Messiah and heard his voice in an illumination. He proclaimed that he had “been individually selected as an apostle by the Christ himself, in a face-to-face meeting to which he was the only witness.”<sup>196</sup>

Here we find the only holder of the truth, privileged by his own authority among the apostles, about whom the Qumranian manuscript *Writing from Damascus* says this: “Those called by a name [the conscripts] are those who hold themselves upright until the end of time.” But Simon of Samaria used this same expression, but in a completely different sense: the *Hestos*, The-One-Who-Holds-Himself-Upright, was the man who created his destiny by being aware of the Great Power (the *Megale Dynamis*) present in him. Although the doctrine of Saul/Paul was situated in a perspective that was radically opposed to that of Simon, his adversaries stigmatized him by identifying him with Simon, “who wanted to be God.” (Note that, in the biblical texts, there was a Saul who was a son of Simon, who might have been the malicious inspiration for this polemic.)

Traces of quarrels weren't lacking. A legendary tradition reported by Eusebius has it that Paul assassinated James the Just. The *Homilies* contained a direct attack on Saul, as Cullmann emphasizes: “Truth doesn't need to be sought in an ecstatic way, but it imposes itself on whomever believes in the true prophet. By this natural path, the truth was revealed to Peter when he made his confession:

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<sup>195</sup> M. O'Connor, o.p., *Truth: Paul and Qumran. Studies in New Testament Exegesis*, London-Dublin-Melbourne, 1968.

<sup>196</sup> A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les écrits esséniens. . .*, op. cit., pp. 378 and 379.

[‘]You are the son of the Living God.[’] Simon (that is to say, Paul), on the other hand, rested his supposed knowledge of Jesus on a vision that had no value and that did not confer upon him the right to the apostolate.”<sup>197</sup>

For their part, the Paulinians didn’t spare Peter. An evangelic fable accused him of having denied Christ, of behaving, in sum, like another traitor, Judas/Thomas. Thus did the apologetic novels translate the quarrels concerning ascendancy between the diverse Esseno-Christian communities of the First Century.

The *Letter to the Galatians* (2:11-14) rejected Simon-Peter in particular: “But when Cephas went to Antioch, I remained opposed to him because he was reprehensible. In fact, before the arrival of several people sent by James, he ate with the pagans. But when they arrived, he snuck away and held himself aside, for fear of circumcision. Like him, the other Jews dissimulated, with the result that Barnabas himself was taken in by their hypocrisy.”

The allusion to circumcision, unimaginable on the part of Saul, a Jew, seems like the intervention of the anti-Semite Marcion. (Horace gave the appellation an insulting connotation and spoke of “turning up one’s nose at circumcision”).

In the second *Letter to the Corinthians*, Saul balked: “I am not at all inferior to those ‘very high’ apostles, although I am nothing.”

This response emphasized quite well the nature of the reproach. Another interesting indication appeared in the *Letter to Timothy*, falsely attributed to Paul, which implored his interlocutor to live in Ephesus so as to combat those who referred to “endless genealogical fables.” Isn’t one founded in supposing that certain Churches undertook to provide a historical consistency to Jesus who, from then on, was very different from the Messiah of whom Saul/Paul spoke?

Because the only Messiah that Paul recognized was the *angelos-christos*, the envoy of Adonai. And on this point his belief agreed with those of the Judeo-Christians, the Marcionites and Anti-Marcionites such as Justin the Apologist. Renan was perceptive when he wrote: “For Paul, Jesus is not a man who lived and taught, but a completely divine being.”

Irony has wanted things so that the prophet who was the dearest to the Catholic Church had undeniably to fall under the blow of accusations of heresy, which were dictated to Catholicism due to its care for fabricating the historical existence of Jesus: Docetism, the belief in an Angel-Messiah who assumed human form for a brief terrestrial and voluntary downfall.

The Savior incarnate, dead and resurrected, had nothing in common with a rabbi who agitated the people, nor with a sage, slightly Brahman, who dispensed

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<sup>197</sup> O. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

his secret wisdom in the *logia* piously and falsely compiled by Matthew and Thomas.

For the Christians who followed Paul, for the Nazarenes, the Ebionites, the Elchasaites, the Marcionites and the Anti-Marcionites (at least up to Justin), Joshua/Jesus had neither childhood, parents, nor any adventure other than his descent into the darkness of matter and his ascension towards the Light. He appeared suddenly, without anyone knowing from whence he came. He was a heavenly Adam and a Logos. Even the canonical gospel placed under the name of Mark didn't know anything about baby Jesus and was content with the anecdotal staging of his wise remarks (*logia*) and his penitential message.

Like all Christians up to the 150s or 160s, Paul was a Gnostic. "In Pauline Christianity," Maccoby writes, "the *gnosis* that the Savior bestows is nothing other than the knowledge of the saving power of his own sacrifice, which only has meaning if the initiate shares the mystical sacrificial experience."<sup>198</sup>

The Greek text of the letters presented a good number of expressions that were used in Gnostic writings; the Latin and other translations took care to efface them. Speaking of the assault of the forces of evil against the Messiah, the Greek version literally said, "None of the archons of this eon (*archton tou ainos toutou*) knew it (his glory) because, if they had known it (*gnosis*), they would not have crucified the glorious Lord" (I *Corinthians*, 2:8). The Christ is a *pneuma*: "the Lord is the Spirit" (II *Corinthians*, 3, 17).

"If I live, it is no longer me who lives, it is the Christ who lives in me," Paul wrote in the *Epistle to the Galatians* (2:10), but since Christ was a *pneuma*, Paul was a *pneumaticos*, a "Perfect One" possessed by the spirit that expressed itself in him. (Note that Paul's conception of a pneumatic baptism was opposed to the baptism by water of the Elchasaites and Nazarenes.) And Leisegang remarks: "It is no longer he who lives but the Christ who lives in him, speaking through his mouth, becoming him. Such is the sense in which Simon [of Samaria] was aware of being the Great Power God."<sup>199</sup>

Paul's dualism was expressed by [the incompatibility he saw between] the path of Light and the path of Darkness, the internal man and the external man, and the struggle between the Christ and Belial, the leader of the ages. Nevertheless, no allusion to the two Gods put Jewish monotheism into question.

Moreover, Paul fought other Gnostics at Corinth – Nicolaites or Barbelites – who estimated that the ecstasy in which the *pneuma* or Holy Spirit revealed itself gave one the freedom to act according to one's desires (I *Corinthians*, 6, 12, 15,

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<sup>198</sup> Maccoby, *op. cit.*

<sup>199</sup> Leisegang, p. 74.

16). Once more, the choice between a daily practice governed by asceticism or one governed by hedonism determined the demarcation among the various Gnosticisms.

The *Letter to the Colossians* evoked the opposition of the Pauline current to a Hermeticist group that practiced the astral magic that amulets or abraxas carried. This epistle explicitly rejected the doctrine of the *stoichea* [first principles]. One had to renounce it to follow Christ, “because it is in him that the plerome [fullness] of the divinity truly resides,” and “we are enslaved to the elements of the world” (*upo ta stoicheia tou cosmou*). (Note that the theory of the *stoicheia* accorded the power to act upon the stars and the destinies of men to magical rites and incantations such as the “song of the seven planetary vowels.”)

On the other hand, the *Letter to the Colossians* alluded to a secret doctrine, secret in the sense that the gospels revealed *apocrypha* or hidden things. “I knew a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago – was it in my body? I do not know, was this outside my body? I do not know, only God knows –, this man was elevated to the third heaven [...] and heard the inexpressible words that no man is allowed to repeat” (II *Corinthians*, 12:2). Did not Valentinus – who around 140 left Egypt for Rome, where he knew and fought against Marcion – claim that, “through the intermediary of Theudas, one of the proper disciples of Paul, he himself had understood the secret teachings of Paul”?<sup>200</sup> Therefore Theudas was none other than Thomas, under whose name appeared the *Logia of Jesus* discovered at Nag-Hammadi. Note that the canonical gospel attributed to John was related to the Gnostic gospels via its vocabulary and ideas. Thus, the Christ existed *en arche* (at the beginning of the world); he was the Logos of God, the *Zoe* (the Life) and the *Phos* (the Light) that spread the *pneuma* (the Spirit) of life. This does not preclude a refusal of Samaritan *gnosis*, which was expressed by the interview between Jesus and a Samaritan woman to whom he explained that the salvation of the Samaritans came from Judea.

The Good News (the Gospel) of Paul constituted the only gospel to which Christians of all kinds referred until the Third Century. The *Epistle attributed to Clement*, which emanated from a Judeo-Christian milieu at the beginning of the Second Century, let it be understood that the Messiah whose return had been so often promised had still not yet come.

The Good News of Paul – should we not say the Good News of Marcion? – was that the Redeemer had in fact been manifested in a suffering Messiah. Not only had the Jews not recognized him [Jesus], but they put him to death, too.

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<sup>200</sup> E. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, New York, 1981.

## **Chapter 11: Marcion and the Hellenization of Christianity**

Despite the passage of two centuries and the accusations of heresy that separated him from the State religion, Marcion (born in Rome in the Fourth Century) deserved to be considered the true father of the Catholic Church, a father maladroitly abandoned to the world, a runt that only his enemies brought to maturity.

Missionary zeal; the determination to found communities; the hope for supreme authority, the inauguration of which he would receive in Rome; the monarchical organization of the *ekklesiai*; virulent anti-Semitism; the conception of a Christian philosophy purified of its Judaism; a theology inspired by Greek thought: these [qualities of Marcion] were a great many of the fundamental traits of the future Catholic Church.

With Marcion, Christianity – with contempt for historical truth – arrogated for itself a Hellenic genesis propagated by the myth of Paul, “apostle to the Gentiles.” Even today, many historians shamelessly ratify Christianity’s birth from Greek origins.

Marcion’s talent was that of a businessman. Due to the events of his time, he understood that Christianity renounced any possible future if it didn’t break all ties with Judaism, which was disapproved of all through the Greco-Roman world because of the endemic state of insurrection in Palestine and [the cities of] the Diaspora.

In 115, the Jews destroyed the temple of Zeus in Cyrene. An agitator named Luknas or Andrew (a name annexed by the apostolic legends) took power and was acclaimed king of the Jews. Andrew called for the destruction of all the monuments of idolatry before [the arrival of] the Day of the Lord. The rumor was propagated that the insurgents ate their enemies and anointed themselves with their blood. The massacre of non-Jews struck good Greek and Roman consciences with horror; one possessed a letter – emanating from the mother of a general sent to put down the rioters – in which she prayed that her son would not be “roasted by the Jews.” One knows how collective exactions to violence of this type – made over the course of two thousand years of religious criminality – nourished the grievances of Catholic, Protestant, Byzantine and atheist mobs that unleashed their pogroms against peaceful ghettos.

That same year, the insurrection of the Jews of Alexandria spread to the Delta and the Thebaide, and gained in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Cyprus.

In their holy war against the *goyim*, the Jews destroyed Salamis. Around 117, Trajan moved to end the revolts. Ten thousand Jews were executed.<sup>201</sup>

Nevertheless, Simeon Bar Kokhba took up arms in 132 and fought against Rome. In 135, he was beaten and killed in his fortress at Betar. The Jewish nation was banned by Greco-Roman “civilization,” in which the nobility of thought accommodated itself so easily to the circus games.

Well before the new insurrection, the Judeo-Christians had – unlike the Essenes of the First Century – distanced themselves from the holy war. They had refused to give their support to the Messiah Bar Kokhba: one of their letters had condemned the attitude of the “Galileans.” Thereafter, the Christians accentuated what separated them from the Jews: the profession of pacifist faith; non-violence; the virtues of sacrifice; and the rejection of circumcision and the Jewish ritual observances (all the more so because Hadrian, basing himself on the Roman law that prohibited corporeal mutilations, formally prohibited circumcision).

After 135, the persecution pitilessly struck the Jewish communities. Rabbi [Joshua ben] Hananiah was burned alive; Rabbi Akiba was skinned alive. In his *Contra Celsum*, Origen recalled the great massacres of the “circumcised.” Even if this Christian refused the worship of idols and abstained from offering sacrifices to the Emperor, he demanded his Greek or Roman citizenship and proclaimed his difference from the Jews in an absolute manner.

Marcion’s anti-Judaic reforms survived in the disorder propagated by the political wildfire at the heart of the Judeo-Christian churches that were prey to struggles for influence. Those reforms advocated an ecclesial politics centered upon Rome and made strong by its rupture with “Jewry.” The few biographical elements [available to us] confirm this.

Marcion would have been born in the last years of the First Century in Sinope, on the Pont (around 95 or 100, according to Harnack).<sup>202</sup>

Marcion soon entered into conflict with the Judeo-Christian communities. His father, the Episcopo of an *Ekklesia*, chased him away for having supported opinions hostile to the faith that were, no doubt, inspired by Saul and his disciples. Marcion went to Asia Minor, where he clashed with the local Christian churches, which appear in all probability to have been Elchasaite.

A rich ship-owner, Marcion had the practical intelligence of a businessman. His rationality, seduced by Greek philosophy, felt repugnance for the analogical spirit of the *midrashim* and the Hebrew wordplay that the Greek translations reduced to absurdities. The bloody and inhuman character of the biblical texts

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<sup>201</sup> W. H. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, Oxford, 1965, pp. 222 sq.

<sup>202</sup> E. Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremde Gott*, Leipzig, 1921.

furnished him an argument that was opportunely confirmed by the violence of the Jewish revolts. In place of the latent dualism of the Essenians, Marcion substituted the irreconcilable character of YHWH, God-creator of a world of war and misery, and a Good God to whom the schools of James, Simon-Cephas, Thomas, Clement and Saul/Paul implicitly referred.

Marcion bet upon anti-Judaism and hostility for the people of the Temple, Jerusalem, the Pharisees and the murderers of the Master of Justice. He supported his doctrine with the help of peremptory reasons and promises of a beautiful future in the Church, but, at the moment of struggle, he insulted the voluntary poverty of the communities: he offered 200,000 sesterces to the Roman Churches in order to subject them to his authority, with an eye on an international federation.

Marcion was the first to comprehend that Rome, constituting the center of a civilization that was proposed as an example for the whole world, was the axis of gravitation from which Christianity, purified of its barbarity, hoped to radiate a “universal” glory (the word *catholicon* came into play towards the end of the Second Century and was popularized in the Fifth. Tertullian avowed: “The Hermetic tradition of Marcion has filled the universe.”)

Around 140, in the Roman city in which the churches – still Judeo-Christian – were torn by rivalries for power (according to the contemporary novel by Hermas, *The Shepherd*), Marcion met Cerdon, disciple of Saturnilus of Antioch. He [Marcion] composed two works, which were lost or destroyed by the Church.

The *Apostolicon* was nothing other than a compilation of letters attributed to Saul, Romanized as Paul. The *Evangelion* expounded the Good News, the unique Gospel, the Gospel of Paul, to which both the Marcionites and the anti-Marcionites referred. Basing himself on the letters that he re-copied and rewrote by stripping them of their Semitisms, Marcion thus drafted Paul’s evangelic message.

Resch believed the canonical *Gospel attributed to Mark* to be the work of Marcion, which was then corrected by the anti-Marcionites.<sup>203</sup> He noted that Jesus’ childhood was not mentioned in it, that the opposition of Jesus to the Torah didn’t possess the least ambiguity, and that the staging of the remarks or *logia* didn’t break with the conception (common to Judeo-Christianity, Saul/Paul and Marcion) of an *angelos-christos* incarnated in a being of wisdom, that is, an emanation of the Sophia.

In the reaction against Marcion, anti-Marcionite prologues were added to the Gospels attributed to Mark, Luke and Matthew. Conceived to combat the idea of the Angel-Messiah, they gave the traits of a historical Roman person to the allegorical material. The Montanist propagandistic narratives about Pilate, Paul and

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<sup>203</sup> H. Resche, *Die Werkstatt des Marcusevangelisten*, Jena, 1924.



Peter (the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, etc.) contributed to the eventful decor of this drama.

Marcion died around 165, after an adventurous life, in which the journeys of Paul probably marked the backdated milestone. Did he not derive his apostolic legitimacy, everywhere that he presented himself, from the simple assertion that Paul had been present several generations previously?

His disciple Apelles followed his work in Rome and Alexandria. He demonstrated the absurdity of the biblical texts in his *Syllogisms* (lost). He seemed, however, to have broken with the Marcionite doctrine of the two Gods. He admitted only one, a good one, the creator of the angelic world, from which escaped a perverse angel, the Demiurge who inclined all things towards evil. Apelles approached the Christianity of the New Prophecy: he gave to Jesus not a simple human appearance, but a real body and the mission to correct the unfortunate work of the Demiurge. His *Revelations* (lost, if it was not in fact the apocalypse of Paul or Peter) re-transcribed the visions of a prophetess called Philomene. A polemic opposed her to Rhodon, disciple of Tatian.

Marcion invented a Western Christianity, one without a Jewish [i.e., Eastern] past. He rejected the *midrashim* of the Nazarene and Elchasaite Churches, the elements of which later entered into the Greek Gospels attributed to Matthew, Thomas, James, Andrew and Philip. According to Joseph Turmel,<sup>204</sup> Marcion – using the short notes by Saul – gave to his churches, which were “Catholic” before the advent of Catholicism, a Roman master, a citizen of the town of Tarsus, which was Romanized in 140 or 150.

Marcion’s ascetic renunciation did not contravene the morality of Christianity in its entirety (except for the sects in which Naassene or Barbelite syncretism dominated). The New Prophecy, though it was hostile to Marcionism, abounded in the same practices, if not the same meanings. Marcion refused sexuality, pleasure and even marriage, which he judged propitious for the work of the Demiurge. The New Prophecy limited itself to encouraging detachment from the body to the profit of the spirit.

Despite its violent rejection of Judaism, Marcion’s dualism did not yet assume the scandalous character that State Catholic monotheism would imprint upon it. Is an example needed? In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin the Apologist – a determined anti-Marcionite – gave to his interlocutor a remark that evoked the trouble that the belief in a Good God caused:

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<sup>204</sup> J. Turmel, *Histoire des dogmas*, Paris, 1931-1933.

“We know your opinion on these subjects, but it seems that what you say is a kind of absolutely unprovable paradox; because your assertion that the Christ was God, pre-existing before all the ages, and deigning to become a man and to be born, not as a man from a man, seems to me not only a paradox but an absurdity. Respond to me at first how you could prove that there is another God alongside the one who is the Creator of all things, and then show me how this God also deigned to be born from a virgin.”<sup>205</sup>

Marcion’s missionary activity and his determination to establish non-Jewish and unified Churches everywhere did not, in themselves, offer any reason for disapproval because, under the cover of a special effect proper to the Catholic Church and to all power, the glory taken away from Marcion rained down upon the person of Paul, the sacred “apostle to the Gentiles.”

Marcion’s activity displayed such effectiveness that, in 400, there still existed Marcionite churches in Rome, in all of Italy, in Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Armenia, Cyprus and even Persia, where Manichaeism developed. He propagated everywhere the unique Gospel inspired by Paul and the appellation adopted by Catholicism: the “Old Testament,” to which he opposed the New Testament, translating in this fashion the expression “New Alliance,” which, according to the manuscripts of Qumran, defined the Church of the Master of Justice.

Leisegang summarizes the conceptions of Marcion as follows:<sup>206</sup>

“The Gospel of the Christ teaches merciful love, while the Old Testament teaches a malevolent punitive justice. The Christ is the Son of a God of love, and the faith in this God is the essence of Christianity. The history of the whole world, described in the Old Testament, from Adam to Christ, forms an immoral and repulsive drama, staged by a God who created this world, which is as bad as possible and who, departing, could not be better than his lamentable creation. Thus it is impossible that the Christ is the Son of the creator revealed in the Old Testament. This creator is just and cruel, whereas Jesus is love and kindness personified. Therefore, Jesus is, by his own words, the Son of God. He thus could only be the Son of a God completely different from that of the Old Testament. He is the Son of

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<sup>205</sup> Cited by M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Phénix*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>206</sup> Leisegang, *La Gnose*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187 sq.

a Good God, remaining until now unknown to man and a stranger to this universe, because he had absolutely nothing in common with it. This God is the Unknown God that Saint Paul announced at the agora of Athens. This God is the father of the Christ.

“The Old Testament lost its quality as the Holy Scriptures of Christianity. It did not know the True God and did not know anything about Jesus. The words of the prophets and the psalms, until then considered to be prophecies relative to the Christ, had to be submitted to a literal reinterpretation, after which they no longer apply to Jesus. The Law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist. John was the last Jewish prophet; like his predecessors, he preached a Demiurge of cruel justice, he knew nothing of the Good God, who remained foreign to all the Jews. That this was the case, Jesus himself confirmed it. He [Jesus] did not cease, in his language as well as in his conduct, to violate the Law of the Old Testament, to disobey the God who instituted it. He declared an open war on the doctors of the Law, the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus welcomed the sinners insofar as he turned away from those who passed for just in the sense of the Old Testament. Jesus showed in last prophet of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, an ignoramus and the subject of scandal. He himself had said that the Son was the only one to know the Father and that, thereafter, all of those who had come before him had known nothing of him, but had preached another God [...]

“When Jesus spoke of the bad tree that could only bear bad fruit and the good tree and its good fruit, he understood the bad tree to be the God of the Old Testament, who had only created and could only create what is bad. The good tree, on the other hand, is the Father of the Christ, who can only produce good things. And, by denouncing the stitching of a new piece into an old frock and the putting new wine into old bottles, Jesus expressly prohibited the establishment of any kind of connection between his Gospel and the religion of the Old Testament with its [bad] God.”

And when Marcion wrote, “O marvel of marvels, rapture and subject of amazement, one can absolutely not say nor think what surpasses the Gospel, there is nothing to which one can compare it,” he provided the tone for generations of historians for whom Christianity was the product of Greek civilization and had nothing to do with the Jews.

Nevertheless, Marcion stirred up a lively disapproval in his lifetime. Is it necessary to point out his authoritarianism, his extreme rigor, the envy of the other Church leaders, or the hatred of the Judeo-Christians whose anti-Judaism did not imply a rejection of the Bible?

The response [to this question] resides in the reactions and polemics engendered by his theses. Against them were drafted Gospels and Acts that reported that Jesus was a Jewish agitator, put to death by the Jews, certainly, but nourished by the milk of biblical wisdom. The Gospel placed under the name of Luke detailed the childhood of the Christ, a man born from a woman, even if the *sperma* was called *pneuma*, “Spirit.”

Paul, the Marcionite apostle, penetrated into the anti-Marcionite texts that attested to his “veritable existence.” Thus, the *Acts of the Apostles*, a novel that presented itself as a historical chronicle, reconciled the apostles Simon-Peter and Paul.<sup>207</sup>

Other letters by Paul were written: the so-called “pastorals.” Joseph Turmel has established that the letters of Ignatius of Antioch – the same ones that tradition cites as the [first] appearance of the word “Catholic” – revealed the existence of a Marcionite version (135, at the earliest), which was revised around 190-210 by another bishop of Antioch, Theophilus, who, despite his hostility to Marcion, complacently expounded upon the inspiration of the *Novum Testamentum*.<sup>208</sup> This Theophilus did not hesitate to speak of the letters of Paul as the “holy and divine Word,” but not without preliminarily ridding them of their Marcionite expressions. He also borrowed from Theodotus the notion of the trinity and undertook the “harmonization of the Gospels, which thus appeared to him nearly deprived of harmony,” as Deschner remarks.<sup>209</sup>

In order to demolish Marcion, Theophilus was joined by Denyse of Corinth, Philippe of Gortyn, Hippolytus of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyon, Justin the Apologist, Bardaisan of Edessa, Tertullian, Rhodon and Modestus. These were mostly men who enjoyed a certain power as leaders of Christian communities.

But the worst enemy of Marcion was Marcion himself. How could a founder of Churches, engaged in politics and temporal and spiritual affairs, hope to build the power of God upon the foundations of a world that he condemned because it was the work of a Demiurge, a bloody and pernicious God? How could he succeed in establishing a Universal Church in an odious society, which simple faith invited

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<sup>207</sup> A. Huck, *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, 1936.

<sup>208</sup> J. Turmel, *op. cit.*

<sup>209</sup> K. Deschner, III, p. 75.

one to renounce right away? And to which authority could a bishop go to durably legitimate a Jesus who had not lived the life of the humble people whom he ruled?

By breaking with Jewish mythology, did not Marcion remove his credit from a Christianity that was completely borrowed from biblical exegeses? Justin understood this quite well when he condemned Marcion and explained to Trypho that – the Jews having lost the key to its interpretation – the Bible thenceforth belonged to the Christians, who were the only ones in a position to confer upon it its true meaning.

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, had no sympathy for the inventor of Paul; his *Epideixis* explained Christian doctrine on the basis of biblical prophecies. Neither did Tertullian, though he was close to the one who called marriage trash and an obscenity. Because, if Marcion, despite his dualism, was not a Gnostic – for him, faith (*pistsis*) took precedence over *gnosis*, and adhesion to Christ was not founded upon knowledge (*gnosis*) – he nevertheless stripped the martyrdom of Jesus of its penitential meaning when he separated it from the tradition of Isaiah and the [other] biblical prophets. Therefore, deprived of the sacrificial model of the man dead upon the cross, the Church lost meaning and usefulness.

## **Chapter 12: The Inventors of a Christian Theology: Basilides, Valentinus, Ptolemy<sup>210</sup>**

In the crucible of Alexandria, the expectation of a Savior who would untangle the obscure paths of the destiny of humanity produced disparate developments on the basis of ancient Egyptian wisdom, Greek thought, eastern magic and the Hebrew myths.

From opposite directions, Philo of Alexandria and Simon of Samaria cast the shadow of an absent person, cut out from Judeo-Christian asceticism or from the aspiration of man to save himself.

Against Nazarenism and Elchasaitism, which were forms of Essenism that had been offered up to Greek modernity, there arose the will to emancipate oneself from the gods, which was celebrated by men such as Lucretius of Rome, Simon of Samaria, Carpocrates of Alexandria and his son, Epiphanius. Between these two extremes, various schools, sects, secret or Hermetic societies and inner circles of magicians and sorcerers intermingled and cooked up – for their own uses and according to the rules of existence that they advocated – an astonishing luxuriance of concepts, visions and representations in which the multiplicity of internal and external worlds were coupled (beyond or on this side of the best and the worst) by the most extravagant imaginations.

In Alexandria, there was born – in the daily interpenetrations of the infernal and paradisiacal universes, which were punctuated by riots, pogroms and social struggles – a theology that successive pruning, rational readjustments and polemical reasoning transformed into a dogmatic edifice that was shakily built upon nebulous foundations, which the Church did not cease to sure up through the combined action of bribed thinkers and State terrorism.

When modern historians have refused to follow Eusebius of Caesarea, for whom the Catholic Church had illuminated the world from the beginning of the Christian era and had thereby aroused the envy of Satan and his henchmen,

“The Churches had already illuminated the whole world, like the radiant stars, and the faith in our Lord and Savior flourished in all humanity, when the devil, who is the enemy of the good and the truth, and who does not cease to hamper the salvation of men, turned all of his artifices against the Church [...] He did everything so that the

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<sup>210</sup> Please note that there were two footnotes numbered 18 in the original.

impostors and the seducers, who had usurped the name of our religion, brought the faithful who were attracted to them down into the abyss of corruption . . .” (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastic History*, IV, 7)

perhaps they have been attempting to extract from the various philosophical and moral systems that were hastily assembled under the heading of “gnosis” the ideas and opinions from which the dogmatic writings of the New Testament and the theses of Nicaea were born.

### **Basilides of Alexandria**

To this day, all we know of Basilides comes from Eusebius’s diatribes, which were based on an ancient refutation made by a certain Agrippa Castor; on Irenaeus, who was so hostile to Valentinus that he stuffed all the Gnostics into his sack of malice; and on the *Elenchos*, whose author was determined to demonstrate that gnosis came from Greek philosophy.

What can one divine of Basilides’ existence? A contemporary of Carpocrates, he led a Pythagorean school in Alexandria – he conserved Pythagoras’ theory of metempsychosis – that was adapted to the tastes of the times. Basilides’ renown peaked around 125 or 135. His son Isidore continued his teachings.

Perhaps due to Philo’s influence, Basilides’ syncretism encompassed the Judaic elements of Elchasaitism and Naassenism.

Basilides referred to Barkabbas and Barcoph, the presumed sons of Noah and brothers of the Noria attested to in Naassenean, Sethian and Barbelite writings. Clement of Alexandria (who lived between 150 and 215) took him to be the master of a certain Glaucias, a “disciple of Peter,” that is to say, an Elchasaite or Nazarenean Christian. Many of his moral considerations later entered into the remarks that the *Gospels* attributed to Luke and Matthew would attribute to Jesus.

Basilides’ morality attempted to trace, through a just moderation, a median route between the extreme asceticism of the Judeo-Christians and the sexual liberty of Carpocrates and the Barbelites. He didn’t fail to evoke Pelagius’s thesis. Yet nothing establishes whether this adversary of Augustine [actually] knew the Alexandrian philosopher.

Basilides supposed that man had a will to perfection that was apt to assure his salvation as a spiritual being. According to the relation of each person to his sexual impulses, Basilides distinguished three categories of individuals: those who had no attraction to women; eunuchs; and men of desire whose merit was

vanquishing their passions, thereby permitting the triumph of the spirit over the body:

“Certain men have an innate natural aversion to women; if they conduct themselves in conformity with this natural disposition (through abstention from sexual relations), they will do well not to marry. They are eunuchs from birth. The forced eunuchs, the ascetics of the trestle who only dominate themselves so as to attract praise, are those who mutilate themselves and have been rendered eunuchs by accident or force. They are eunuchs by force and not by virtue of a rational resolution. Those who have rendered themselves eunuchs because of the eternal kingdom have made this decision due to the natural consequences of marriage, because they dread the cares that preoccupation with subsistence involves.”<sup>211</sup>

To that third category, Basilides – the enemy of obsessive abstinence and the ferocity that it involves – extolled the virtues of intermittent relief and assuagement, which were, nevertheless, subject to the regulations of the will and the spirit:

“Do not throw your soul in the fire by resisting day and night in the fear of lacking continence, because a soul that exhausts itself in an uninterrupted resistance cuts itself off from hope. Thus, take for yourself – as I have told you quite clearly – a woman of temperament, so you are not diverted from the grace of God. And when you have extinguished the fire of desire through the seminal effusion, pray in good conscience. But if (...) you desire, not to act perfectly in the future, but simply not to fall, get married.”

(Note that this remark would be reprised, no doubt in an anti-Marcionite sense, in Chapter 7, verse 9, of the first *Letter to the Corinthians*, attributed to Saul/Paul: “Better to marry than to burn.”)

“However, such [a man] might be young or poor or weak, and, following the counsel of the Lord, does not want to be married. May he not separate himself from his brother; may he say: [‘]I am going to a sanctuary, nothing can happen to me there.[’] He keeps a distrust of

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<sup>211</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, III, 1, 1-3.



himself, and he says: [‘]brother, lay your hands on me so that I do not sin,[’] and he will obtain spiritual and sensible help. It will suffice that he wants to do good for him to do so. Many times it happens that we say with our lips that we do not want to sin, whereas our thoughts persist in sinning. Such a person cannot do what he would like, uniquely through fear of incurring punishment. There are in human nature things that happen by necessity and by nature, and things that are simply natural. Thus clothes are necessary as well as natural. But the pleasures of love are only natural, we are not constrained by them.”<sup>212</sup>

The responsibility of the individual for the choice of a virtuous morality extended to suffering or experiencing misfortune; they were punishments for faults. His sense of guilt and nature as the source of defilement and impurity proceeded from a Judaic vision that Christianity inherited. Even a child was potentially guilty.

“I say that all those who have risked this affliction have owed this benefit to the One who leads all with gentleness, because they have sinned, but their faults have remained hidden. If in fact one had any other thing against them, it would be that they do not suffer this penalty as prevaricators for the bad actions that they have committed, but who are not outrageous, like adulterers and assassins; but because they are Christians, He summons them to suffering, He consoles them, with the result that they imagine themselves not suffering. Someone might risk suffering without having sinned at all, but this is very rare. And still he doesn’t fall under the blow of suffering because a cunning power has set traps for him, but we must envision his pain as that of a child who suffers, though, apparently, has not sinned (...) This is an advantage for the child who has not sinned or, at the very least, has not committed any act of sin, but still carries within him the disposition to sin, to fall into suffering and undergo many misfortunes; likewise, every man, even those who are perfect and have committed no act of sin, falls into suffering and suffers in the same way as the child does. He carries within himself the disposition to sin; if he has not sinned, this is because he has not had the occasion, with the result that there is no place to inscribe innocence to his credit. Whoever has the intention of committing adultery is an adulterer,

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

even if he has not committed the act; whoever has the intention to commit murder is a murderer, even if he hasn't gone through with it. It is the same with the innocent of whom I spoke; when I see him suffering without having done anything evil, I say that he is bad, because he had the intention to commit sin. Anything rather than imputing the evil to Providence. [...] Perhaps you will not keep my words in mind and you will think to get me into difficulty by showing me such a person and saying to me: [‘]this one or that one there has sinned because he suffers[’]; I would respond, if you permitted me to do so: [‘]he hasn't sinned, he resembles the child who must suffer.[’] If you insist with more vehemence, I would tell you: [‘]whatever man you show me, he will still be a man; only God is just.[’] No one is free from defilement, as has been said.”<sup>213</sup>

(Note that the reference is to *The Book of Job*, 14:4. Such ideas nourished the letters attributed to Saul/Paul.)

A fragment attributed to Isidore, the son of Basilides, expounded a theory about free will that would later be adopted by Catholicism.

“When you have convinced someone that the soul is not simple, that it is the force that is inherent in it that gives birth to the passions of the worst, the bad people will not, for all that, have a better reason to say: [‘]I was forced, I was pulled in, I acted despite myself, I did such an act against my will,[’] whereas in fact he himself has inclined his desires towards evil and has not struggled against the powers of the matter that is inherent in him. We must show ourselves to be the masters of the inferior part of our natures by using our reason gain the upper hand.”

To found in a cosmic way his morality of the “perfect,” the “pneumatic” or the “man [who lives] according to the spirit,” Basilides appealed to a cosmogony, many elements of which made their way into future theological quarrels. Leisegang justly established a connection between Basilides’ idea of a superior God and the conception attributed to Denys the Areopagite.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 12, 83.

<sup>214</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

Basilides:

“There was a time in which nothing existed; this nothing was not one of the existing things but, to speak clearly, without any digression, without any kind of artifice, absolutely did not exist. When I say, ‘exist,’ I am not affirming that the nothing ‘existed,’ but, to make what I mean to say understood, absolutely nothing existed.”<sup>215</sup>

Pseudo-Denys:

“We go higher; we now say that this cause (God) is neither soul, nor intelligence; that it possesses neither imagination, opinion, reason, nor intelligence; that it can neither express nor conceive; that it has neither number, order, grandeur, nor smallness, neither equality, inequality, nor similitude; that it does not see; that it does not remain immobile nor does it move; that it neither keeps itself calm, nor possesses power; that is neither power nor light; that it does not live nor is it life; that it is neither essence, perpetuity, nor time; that one cannot grasp it intelligibly; that it is neither science, truth, royalty, wisdom, [the] One, unity, deity, good, nor spirit in any sense that we might understand; that it has neither line of descent, paternity, nor anything that is accessible to our knowledge, nor to the knowledge of any other being; that it has nothing of what belongs to non-being, nor to what belongs to being; that no one knows it such as it is and that it itself does not know anyone as being; that it completely escapes all reasoning, naming and knowing; that it is neither darkness nor light, neither error, nor truth; that it absolutely cannot affirm anything nor deny anything; that when we pose affirmations or negations that apply to realities that are inferior to it, we neither affirm nor deny anything, because all affirmations remain on this side of the unique and perfect cause of all things, [and] because all negations reside on this side of the unique and perfect cause of all things, because all negations reside on this side of the transcendence of the one who is simply deprived of everything and situated beyond everything.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> *Elenchos*, VII, 20.

<sup>216</sup> Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, *Théologie mystique*, Paris, 1943.

Therefore, from this God – who was all-being and all non-being, and who was *Sige*, pure Silence (as a result, the disciples of Basilides were apparently required to be silent for five years) – there ejaculated a seed from which three entities were born. The first was the Son of God, *consubstantial* with his Father, and the term used by Basilides was the famous *homoousios* [consubstantiality] around which the quarrel of Arianism and the break with Byzantium took place. The Son was thus of the same nature as his Father. The second birth was that of the *pneuma*, the Spirit, the spark of God that plunged into matter and that aspired to return to its celestial kingdom. And the third, the veritable scrapings [*raclure*] of the divine sperm, was none other than the earth, the body, and matter, fortunately clarified by the *pneumatic*, spiritual spark.

The *pneuma* frolicked between two spaces: the inferior cosmos, which was our universe, and a hyper-cosmos. One day, the *pneuma*, by raising itself up and believing that it attained the highest place, made itself the Lord (the archon), and created a son who appeared so beautiful to him that he had him sit on his right. He then conceived the Ogdoad, or the eighth heaven, in which he reigned over the celestial creatures.

When the ethereal beings, still issued from the *Logos Spermaticos* that produced the divine nothingness, were ordered to rise, a second archon was summoned to rule over the seven other heavens or Hebdomad. The archon of Hebdomad was the one who spoke to Moses and identified himself with the Demiurge. His creation multiplied the material and spiritual traps that the *pneumatics* had to overcome to regain the *Pneuma*, co-regent with the Lord of the Ogdoad.

In the same way that sin entered the world because the first archon claimed to have a power that wasn't his, due to his nature, all the sins of man resided in the will to power that incited him to surpass the limits of his nature.

Both extreme asceticism and license came from sin, because they set themselves aside from the just milieu claimed by Epicurean morality.

Later on, Irenaeus presented a version of Basilides' theology, to which the scraps of the legend of Jesus would be joined:

“From the unbegotten Father, Nous was engendered first; from Nous was engendered the Logos; from the Logos, Phronesis; from Phronesis, Sophia; from Sophia and Dynamis [were engendered] the Virtues, the Powers and the Angels whom he named the first ones, and it was from them that the first heaven was created. From these angels came other angels who made a second heaven similar to the first. From these angels came [still] others, in their turn and in the same fashion, in the image of the superior angels, and these angels

formed a third heaven. From this third heaven was born a fourth, and thus there followed, in an analogous fashion, the Princes, Angels and 365 heavens. It is from this number of heavens that the year has 365 days. The last heaven, the one that we see, is filled by the angels who made everything that is in the world. They shared among them the earth and all the people who are on it. Their leader is the God of the Jews. This last one, because he wanted the other people to be subjected to his people, that is to say, to the Jews, the other princes raised themselves up against him and paralyzed his plans. This was why the other people were animated by hostile sentiments with respect to his people. But having seen their corruption, the unbegotten and innumerable Father sent his unique Son, Nous, who is called Christ, to deliver those who believe in him from the domination of those who made the world. He manifested himself to their people as a man on the earth and accomplished the powers. But it wasn't he who suffered; it was a certain Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry his cross to its place. He was crucified by error and unconsciously, after which he was changed by Jesus so that he would be taken for him. Jesus took the form of Simon and mocked them, because he remained nearby. He was the incorporeal power and the unbegotten Nous; this is why he was able to transform himself at will, and he thus returned to the one who had sent him, mocking those who had not been able to keep him, and he was invisible to all. Those who knew this were delivered from the Prince and Creator of this world. It isn't the crucified to whom one must confess, but he who was crucified in appearance, that is to say, Jesus, who had been sent by the Father to, by this action, destroy the works of those who had made the world. Thus the one who confesses to the crucified man is a slave to the power of those who created the world of bodies; on the contrary, the others are free; they know how the unbegotten Father had spared them all. But redemption is only extended to the soul, because the body can only dissolve itself in conformity with its nature. . . . Likewise, the prophecies came from their leaders who made the world, the Law, in particular, from the one who brought the people out of Egypt. Sacrifices to the gods had to be scorned and held as nothing, but they took part in them without scruple; likewise they were not bothered by any action or the exercise of any sensual pleasure. They likewise practiced magic, the evocation of ghosts and all of the other magic tricks; they invented all sorts of names for angels, and put some in the first heaven and some in the second, and they applied themselves to

distinguishing the names, principles, angels and powers of their (...) 365 heavens. It was thus, for example, that the world to which the Savior descended and from which he ascended was called Kaulakau. The one who knew all the angels and their origin became invisible and ungraspable to all the angels and the powers, in the manner of Kaulakau. Just as the Christ was unknown to all, they must not be recognized by anyone, they are invisible and unknowable to all, whereas they know all the beings and can cross them all. ‘You know all, but no one knows you!’ – such is their formula [...] Few people are capable of this knowledge, one in a thousand, ten in ten thousand. They are no longer Jews, they say, and not even Christians. It is forbidden to reveal their secrets; one must keep them in silence. They determined the site of the 365 heavens as if they were mathematicians. They borrowed their theories and applied them to the particular requirements of their doctrine. Their leader is Abraxas; the numeric value of the letters of this name is 365.”<sup>217</sup>

(Note that those who were “not even Christians” nevertheless constituted a branch of the Esseno-Christian tree: a Hellenized branch, different from Marcionism, although the absence of women from their cosmogony confirmed their tendency towards asceticism.)

Disentangled from the Christianity of the 180s, in which Irenaeus placed the Basilideans, their syncretism suggested – due to the importance given to Abrasax and magic carvings [in stones], called abraxas – a connection to the cult of Mithras, from which the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus precisely borrowed the image of a solar divinity. It is probable that Basilides facilitated the exchange between Mithraism and Christianity.

The importance of magic, on the other hand, appears unquestionable. Bonner studied the talismans that bear representations of Abrasax, the Anguiped divinity with the head of a rooster, who thus united the sun and the earth, light and darkness, male and female.<sup>218</sup>

Based on the reports concerning Abrasax and Mithras:

“Jerome (*In Amos* III (P.L., XXV, col. 1018 D) notes that Basilides designated his all-powerful God with the magic name Abraxas; by adding up the respective numerical values of each Greek letter in this

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<sup>217</sup> Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, I, 24-6.

<sup>218</sup> Bonner (C.), *Studies in magical, gnostic amulets*, London 1950.

name, one obtained the number of circles that the ‘Sun’ describes in the course of a year; this is the same god as Mithras, [because] this name, although formed with different letters, totals the same numerical value:

“A-B-R-A-S-A-X  
1+2+100+1+60+1+200 = 365

“M-I-T-H-R-A-S  
40+5+10+9+100+1+200 = 365

“From then on, the meaning of the 365 heavens is clear. Just as the circuit of the seven planets distinguishes seven heavens, each circle described by the sun forms a heaven, that is to say, a spherical envelop traced out by this circle. Therefore, each day the sun travels a circle that is slightly different from that of the preceding day, and it is thus that, following Egyptian computations, which count months of thirty days each, there are three-hundred-sixty circles or heavens. The five other circles echo the planets, except for the sun and the moon, which are assigned particular roles, and the annual interstitial week of five days, which is the same thing, since the days of the week carry the names of the planets. The sun is Helios, and Mithras-Abraxas is the Archon who embraces the totality of the solar circle as a unity. Mithras and Helios are in a father-son relationship. Mithras is the Great God; Helios is his Logos, thanks to whom he developed himself, created the world; and he plays the role of mediator between man and God. He had the same function as the *Christos-Logos*; see the ‘liturgy of Mithras’ and the speech of Emperor Julian about King Helios.”<sup>219</sup>

According to Basilides, the Great Archon had a son, the Christ of the Ogdoad. The Hebdomad then had his Archon and he, in his turn, [had] a son, also Christ, the solar Christ, the simultaneously divine and human twin of the superior Christ of the Ogdoad.

Thus Abrasax became the prototype of the *Christos-Helios* and the epoch that he governed.

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<sup>219</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

“Abraxas, like Mithras, designates the God who unites in himself the power of the seven planets, because his name is composed of seven letters. Because these seven letters have the total value of 365, it follows that he contains within him 365 partial or subaltern gods. As temporal grandeur, he contains everything in a year or each year that the world lives; he is the Eon, the Eternity. Each partial god presides over one day. An echo of this belief subsisted in the calendar of the Catholic Church, in which each day carries the name of a saint, the king of that day. The Christian gods simply took the place of the pagan gods.”<sup>220</sup>

### **Valentinus and the Valentinians**

In a letter to the consul Servianus, Emperor Hadrian (117-138) gave an idea of the confusion of messianic sects then called “Christian”:

“Hadrian Augustus to the consul Servianus, greetings! I have found in Egypt, about which you boasted to me, only a fundamentally frivolous nation, inconstant, at the mercy of the first quack who comes along. The adorers of Serapis are Christians and those who call themselves Christian bishops adore Serapis. It is impossible to find in Egypt a synagogue-chief, a Samaritan or a Christian priest who is not an astrologist, a soothsayer or a charlatan, as well. When the patriarch comes to Egypt, some implore him to adore Serapis, others to adore the Christ. They only have a single God. He is adored by Christians, Jews and all the other peoples.”<sup>221</sup>

It was from the microcosm of Alexandria that Valentinus came; along with Philo and Basilides, he was the father of speculative theology. Fleeing the troubles and repressions of the last war of the Jews, he went to Rome, where he stayed from 136 to 140; [while there] he crossed paths with the Judeo-Christians, whose dissensions the *Shepherd* of Hermas deplored; with Marcion and his Pauline Churches; with the disciples of Carpocrates, for whom hedonism traced out the path to salvation; and with the mobs of bishops and leaders of Christian sects who had uncertain doctrines, but who satisfied their appetites for domination with all of their false teeth.

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>221</sup> Rougier, *Celse contre les chrétiens*, p. 13.



A brilliant rhetorician, a poet, and the author of letters and essays, Valentinus only shared with Christianity a certain propensity for asceticism and references to a redeemer, the Christ-Logos or a spiritual entity tasked with guiding souls towards the kingdom of the ineffable and good God. He was the author of the treatise *The Three Natures* (lost) and the *Gospel of Truth*, which was discovered at Nag-Hammadi.

Did Valentinus prophesize in the manner of Elchasai or, twenty years later, Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla, the initiators of the New Prophecy? Nothing permits one to be assured of this, but note the importance he [allegedly] accorded to ecstasy in a later report made by Epiphanius of Salamis:

“An indestructible spirit, I salute the indestructible ones. I announce to you unspeakable, inexpressible and supra-celestial mysteries, which cannot grasp the Powers, the Dominations, the subordinated Forces, or any compound being, but which are only manifested in the thought of the Immutable” (*Panarion*, XXXI, 5, 1-2).

The Valentinian theological system developed Basilides’ cosmo-genesis with a complexity that evokes tortuous scholastic discourse. According to the *Gospel of Truth*, the divine world or Plerome (which expresses well the modern term “totality”) was founded on a duality: the Ineffable, the male principle, and Silence, the female principle. From their coupling was born a second duality, and from it came a quaternary principle, with the whole forming the Ogdoad (2+2+4=8). Eleven couples of Eons (entities, powers, forces) proceeded from it; men and women delineated this amorous adventure of creation, which was as foreign to Judaism as it was to Catholicism. The total was 8 + 22, that is, 30 Eons, of which the last one, the youngest, was none other than Sophia. Relegated to the place furthest away from the primordial duality, Sophia was pregnant with desire and revolt, and engendered the Demiurge, the God of *Genesis* and the world.

By striving to separate her desire from the obscurity that reigned beyond the Plerome, Sophia abandoned into flesh a fragment of spirit and soul. So as to save the spirit imprisoned in matter, the celestial Messiah sent the Christ Jesus to teach men the nature and destiny of their souls, with the result that, crossing the threshold of death, they returned to their place of origin.

Platonism, which was inherent in the idea of a world that imperfectly reflected the primordial Eon, explained the manner in which Valentinus’ theology prefigured the simplified and desexualized version of Catholic dogma, but also foreshadowed the legalisms of the theologians from Arianism to Jansenism.

As for Jesus, if he was no longer Joshua – because Valentinus’ Christianity wanted to be purely Greek – then he remained the descendant of *Sophia*, the *pneuma* or Spirit, here designated by the term Logos.

In a poem, Valentinus illustrated another remark, which the *Elenchos* ascribed to him (VI, 42, 2) in this way: “Valentinus claims that, having seen a new-born, he asked it who he was; the baby responded that he was the Logos.” This manner of proceeding, on the part of the author of the *Elenchos*, illustrated quite well its anecdotal reduction of a philosophical discourse. Here is the poem, as transcribed by the *Elenchos* in an earlier passage (VI, 36, 7):

I see in the ether everything mixed together in the *pneuma*, I see in the spirit the *pneuma* bearing the totality: The flesh suspended in the soul, The soul carried away by the air, The air suspended in the ether, The fruits coming from the abyss, A small child emerging from the womb.

It was in reaction against such conceptions that the gospels recounted the childhood of Jesus, his escapades, and his family. They principally derived from a popular Christianity, a Christianity that rejected the abstractions and elitism of the Valentinians, because it needed exemplary legends to support its martyrs and faith, the *pistis*. The New Prophecy, carrying even further the simplicity of Elchasaitism, condemned speculations about the Savior, the *Sophia*, the Good God and the bad world, all of which were incomprehensible to the humble people. In his *Stromates* (II, 3), Clement of Alexandria wasn’t wrong when he wrote: “The Valentinians attribute to us the faith of the simple people; as for them, they claim to possess gnosis, because they are saved by nature, a benefit that they receive from the superior seed; they say that this gnosis is extremely far from faith; according to them the *pneumatic* is separate from the psychic.”

Clement was also a philosopher but, in the manner of Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, he adhered (if not directly) to the New Prophecy, then at least to the fervent movement that it inspired and that would only later alienate his excessive taste for martyrdom and aggressive puritanism. Irenaeus took up the pen against “so-called gnosis,” while Clement identified gnosis with the Christian faith, but both of them chose – instead of the Hellenization of Christianity that, little by little, assimilated it into a renewal of Greek philosophy – the social and non-violent wildfire that united in the Churches and under the authority of the bishops both the poor and rich peoples whose mythical and ecumenical spirit described (for the first time) a Jesus stripped of his angelic nature and portrayed as an agitator: the one who chased the merchants from the Temple, healed the unfortunate, incurred the betrayal of his friends, submitted to an infamous death, and was resurrected in

glory in the kingdom of the heavens, according to the hopes of the Montanist martyrs. In fact, on the question ‘Which rich man can be saved?’ Clement wrote a homily in which he extolled the collaboration of the classes in their shared detachment from the benefits of this world. (An echo of this would be retained in the composition of the *Gospel attributed to Matthew* towards the end of the Second Century.)

Nevertheless, the future theological corpus of the Church came from Valentinus. The *Tripartite Treatise* discovered at Nag-Hammadi revealed a trinitarian conception of God, composed of the Father, the Son and the *Ekklesia* (in the sense of “mystical communities of the faithful” illustrated by Hermas). According to Tertullian, the same conception was found in the works of Heracleon, a disciple of Valentinus. Theodotus, also a Valentinian, spoke of the Father, the Son and the *Pneuma*-Spirit more than a century and a half before Nicaea.

The *Treatise on the Resurrection* (Nag-Hammadi), which was of Valentinian origin, supported a doctrine according to which “the resurrection of the believer has already happened” and exhorted the Christians to live like they had already been resurrected. The New Prophecy fought against a similar assertion, and two letters placed with impunity under the name of Paul, the *Letters to Timothy*, attempted to combat this Valentinian argument.

The *pneumatics* or Perfect Ones thus attempted to accede to the state of pure spirit. Their conception of Jesus responded to their aspirations: he was the son of a carpenter and the friend of the poor; such was the populism of Montan.

According to Clement,<sup>222</sup> the Valentinians believed that Jesus “ate and drank, but did not defecate or urinate. The power of his continence was such that food did not spoil in him, because there was no corruption in him.” Perhaps the Barbelites and the Carpocratics were not wrong to make fun of such a concordance between spiritual asceticism and constipation.

The incorruptible Logos thus became the principle of eternity: “You have been immortal since the beginning; you are children of eternal life, and you want to experience death so as to exhaust and dissolve it, and death will die in you and through you. Because when you dissolve the Cosmos without being dissolved yourself, you dominate all of creation and corruption.”<sup>223</sup> These would be admirable remarks if they did not involve a perspective that was radically hostile to life, because they implied a spiritualization in which the body and its desires were precisely reduced to nothing.

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<sup>222</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, III, 6, 59.

<sup>223</sup> *Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora*, translation and notes by G. Quispel, Paris, 1949.

Especially as it was developed by Mark, Valentinianism did not exclude a relationship with Hermeticism. According to the *Elenchos* (VIII, 14), a certain Monoime – in all probability a symbolic name, like Allogene or Autogene – based himself on the iota of *Iesou* and was inspired by Plato and Pythagoras when he argued: “The roots, the octahedron, the tetrahedron and all similar figures of which fire, air, water and earth are composed, come from the numbers enclosed in the simple feature [*trait*] of the iota, which is the Perfect Son of the Perfect Man.” Such doctrines flourished among the doctors of Kabala and among the scholars of the Renaissance, such as Marsilio Ficino. According themselves poorly with the political will of the bishops and their flocks to push Jesus toward the steps of the Imperial Palace, they only encountered condemnation and scorn.

## Ptolemy

Ptolemy occupied a particular position in the Valentinian school. He was known through a *Letter to Flora* that Epiphanius recopied in his *Panarion*, but not without garnishing it with quotations from the canonical Gospels with the care of a Catholic who wanted to confirm the ancient age of a dogma that in fact distorted [the thought of] the perverse and heretical Ptolemy.

Confronted with the variety of doctrines that composed Christianity in the second half of the Second Century, Flora had lost the light of the Spirit. Marcionism and anti-Marcionism were then agitating the Christian, Jewish and Greco-Roman milieus.

Ptolemy estimated himself so well prepared to suggest a philosophical surpassing of the two positions that he confessed his past adherence to Marcionism: “I, who have benefited from the knowledge of the two Gods.”<sup>224</sup>

More than two centuries after the birth of Essenism, the problem of Mosaic law continued to nourish speculations in the milieus preoccupied with the choice of a religious path.

“My dear sister Flora. Until now, few people have understood the Law given by Moses, because they have not exactly known the legislator, nor his commandments. These things will be quite clear to you, I think, when you have understood the contradictory opinions concerning them. Some say that the Law was given by God the Father; others, on the opposite side, maintain that it was established by the Adversary of God, the corruptor-devil, in the same way that

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<sup>224</sup> Cited by Leisegang, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 and 204.

they also attribute to him the creation of the world, affirming that he is the Father and the creator of this universe. Both positions are entirely in error, mutually contradictory and neither of the two camps have grasped the truth of the subject.”<sup>225</sup>

Ptolemy distinguished three stages in Mosaic Law: a Law of God, a Law of the Jews, and a revision according to the Spirit (the *pneuma*) that founded Christianity.

“The *Law of God*, pure and free of all inferior alloys, is the Decalogue, the ten commandments divided into two tablets, which prohibit what is necessary to avoid and commands what must be done; these commandments, no doubt pure, were still imperfect and clamored for completion by the Savior.

“The *Law mixed with Injustice* was given in vengeance and talion against those who committed injustice and ordered the tearing out of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and to punish murder with murder. Because he who commits an injustice in the second place isn’t less unjust than the first; there is only a difference in the order; the work is the same. Moreover, the commandment was and remains just, having been decreed because of the weakness of the addressees in the case of a transgression of the pure Law. It only hinders he who is not in accord with nature nor with the goodness of the Father of All. Perhaps this proscription responds to its goal, but it only explains itself through a necessity. Because he who does not want a single murder to be committed by decreeing ‘You will not kill at all,’ and who ordered the killing of a murderer in reprisal, has given a second law; and by distinguishing two kinds of murderers, he who has prohibited all murder hasn’t seen that he has been led astray by necessity. This is why the Son sent into the world by God abrogated this part of the Law, in full knowledge that it was also the Law of God; because he placed it in the Old Testament, along with the other commandments, when he said: ‘*God* said: He who curses his father and mother must be killed.’

“Finally, there is the *distinctive part of the Law*, instituted in the image of the *pneumatic laws par excellence*: I understand this to be

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

the proscription relative to sacrifices, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Easter, unleavened bread, etc. All these practices, being only images and symbols, received another meaning, once the truth was manifested. They have been abolished in outward form and in their corporeal application, but they have been restored in their *pneumatic* meaning; the words remain the same, [but] their content has changed. Thus the Savior ordered us to offer sacrifices, not sacrifices of animals bereft of reason or flavor, but sacrifices of hymns, praises, acts of grace, charity and benevolence towards the next person. Likewise, we are to practice circumcision, not that of the corporeal foreskin, but that of the *pneumatic* heart. The Savior requires fasting, not corporeal fasting, but *pneumatic* fasting, which consists in abstaining from all evil. We nevertheless observe outward fasting, because it can be of some profit to the soul, if it is practiced with discernment, if one doesn't observe it so as to imitate others or by routine or because it is the day of fasting, as if a day could be fixed for that. One practices it at the same time that one recalls true fasting, so that those who cannot observe this practice have the reminiscence, thanks to outward fasting. Likewise, the Easter lamb and the unleavened bread are images, as shown by the Apostle Paul. 'The Christ, our Easter, has been immolated,' he says, and 'so that you will know what is unleavened, do not participate in the leaven (what you call leaven is [actually] evil), but so that you will know a new dough.' "Thus, the part that is incontestably the Law of God is divided into three parts. The first part was fulfilled by the Savior, because the commandments – 'you will not kill at all, you will not commit adultery, you will not make false oaths' – were included in the prohibition of anger, coveting, and swearing. The second part was totally abolished. The commandment 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' which is mixed with injustice and itself contains a work of injustice, was abolished by the contrary commandments of the Savior, because the contraries were mutually exclusive.

"Finally, it [the Law of God] is divided into a part that is transposed and transformed from the corporeal to the *pneumatic*: the symbolic part that is given to the image of the laws *par excellence*. Because the images and symbols that represent other things have a value as long as the truth does not appear; now that the truth is here, one must do the works of the truth, not the works of the image. This is also what his disciples and the Apostle Paul showed; they alluded to the symbolic

part, as I have called it, with respect to the image of Easter and the unleavened bread, and to the part of the Law mixed with injustice, when he said: ‘The Law of the Commandments has become obsolete through a new teaching’ (*Ephesians*, 2:15); [and he alluded] to the part not mixed with evil when he said: ‘The Law is holy and the Commandments are holy, just and good.’”<sup>226</sup>

If these quotations from Paul participated as much in Judeo-Christian revisionism as Marcionism, the end of the letter [by Ptolemy] sketched out a return to monotheism. Thanks to the impetus of Augustine of Hippo and his thesis of the weakness of man, Catholicism developed the Ptolemaic explication of the evil introduced into the world.

“As much as this is possible in a short space, [Ptolemy wrote] I think I have sufficiently shown you the intrusion into the Law of a legislation of human origin, as well as the division of the Law of God itself into three parts. It remains for me to say what is good about this God who established the Law. But this as well I believe I have already shown you, if you were paying attention. Because if this Law wasn’t instituted by the perfect God himself, as I have said, nor by the devil (it isn’t even permitted to say this), then the legislator must have been a third in addition to the others. It was the Demiurge and the creator of this whole world and all that it contains. He is different from the other two essences, an intermediary between the two; one rightly gives to him the name of Intermediary. And if the perfect God is good by essence, which he truly is – because our Savior said that there is only one good God, his Father, whom he manifests – and if the God of contrary essence is bad, wicked and characterized by injustice, then the one who stands between the two, being neither good, nor bad, nor unjust, can be called just, because he judges in conformity with the justice in him. On the one hand, this God would be inferior to the perfect God, beneath his justice, since he is engendered and not unbegotten (a single one is unbegotten, the Father from whom all things come, because all things depend on him, each in their own way); on the other hand, he would be greater and more powerful than the Adversary. He would thus be, by nature, of a different essence and a different nature than the essence [and nature] of the two others. The

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

essence of the Adversary is corruption and darkness – because he is material and of multiple forms – whereas the unbegotten essence of the All is incorruptible and light in itself, simple and homogenous. The essence of the Demiurge gives birth to a double virtue, but he is only, in himself, the image of the [sole and] Good God. Now, do not worry about how the unique and simple principle of all things (which we confess and we believe), about how an unbegotten, incorruptible and good principle has been able to come from the very essences of corruption and the Intermediary, who is of dissimilar essence, whereas it is in the nature of good to engender and produce beings that are similar and of the same substance.”<sup>227</sup>

Ptolemy then announced in his letter-preamble to a Christian [rite of] initiation that Flora had to elevate herself to a superior degree of instruction. His status as leader of a community or as a bishop, legitimized by a claimed apostolic descent, authorized him to confer such instruction:

“Because, if it pleases God, you will later learn the origin and the birth of these natures, when you have become worthy of the tradition of the apostles, a tradition that I have also received through succession, and moreover I can confirm these words through the instruction of our Savior.

“I am not worn out, my sister Flora, from having said this in several words. I said to you clearly that I would be short, but I have nevertheless treated the subject exhaustively. These remarks will be able to help you later on, if, after having received the fecund seeds, like the beautiful and good earth, you will one day bear their fruit.”<sup>228</sup>

Thus an elitist Christianity that substituted the refinement of a philosophical tradition for the crude matter of Hebrew mythology penetrated into the aristocratic and cultivated milieus of the Empire. Upon this Christianity of schoolmasters, the source of future Catholic theology, there would suddenly break a Christianity that was wild, fanatical and popular, and that would, on the basis of renunciation and sacrifice, elevate [*ériger*] the misery and resentment of the disinherited classes. Its

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287 and 288.



program would inscribe itself in this remark (attributed to Jesus and hostile to the “*pneumatics*”): “Happy are the poor of spirit.”

### **The *Pistis Sophia***

A late text (from the Third Century), the *Pistis Sophia* was a passably muddled, esoteric novel in which the remarks seemed to obey a concern with according two antithetical notions: *pistis* (faith) and *gnosis* (knowledge). Leisegang summarizes it as follows:

“We are in the twelfth year after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus recounts for his disciples, united on the Mount of Olives, his voyage across the world of the Eons and the Archons, whose power he had broken. In the course of his ascension, he encountered Pistis Sophia, whose adventures he describes at great length. In the beginning, she dwelled in the thirteenth Eon; desire for the superior world of the light made her raise her eyes towards the light of the heights. She thus drew upon herself the hatred of the Archons of the Twelve Eons; it is necessary to understand by this [reference] the masters of the fixed heaven, who correspond to the twelve signs of the Zodiac. It was between this heaven and the domain of the light, in the intermediary place, beyond the world limited by the heaven of the stars, which Sophia inhabited. A false light attracted her towards the world and she became stuck in matter. Desperate, she addressed thirteen prayers of contrition to the light of the heights and implored that she be saved from the snares of her enemies. When she arrived at the ninth prayer of contrition, Jesus was sent into the chaotic world on the orders of the first mystery. He transported Sophia from Chaos to a place secluded from the world. Pistis Sophia then addressed to God a suite of hymns of thanks, because he had saved her from her distress. Finally, Jesus ascended again and led Pistis Sophia – that is to say, the emanations of the Great Invisible – and their unbegotten and their self-engendered and their engendered and their stars and their blunders [*leurs impairs*] and their archons and their powers and their lords and their archangels and their angels and their decans and their liturgies and all the dwellings of their spheres and all the orders of each one of them. And Jesus did not tell his disciples all about the extension of the emanations from the Treasury or their orders, and he did not tell them about the saviors of each order, and he did not tell them about the guardian who is at each of the doors to the Treasury of Light, and he

did not tell them about the place of the Twin Savior who is the Child of the Child, and he did not tell them about the place of the three amen, the places in which the five trees grow, nor anything about the place or the extension of the seven other amen, that is to say, the seven voices. And Jesus did not tell his disciples what kind are the five parasites, nor where they are placed; he did not tell them in which fashion the Great Light is deployed, nor in which place it is placed; he did not tell them about the location of the five regions, nor anything concerning the first commandment, but only spoke to them in general, teaching them that they exist; he did not speak of their extension nor the order of their places. . . . It is all an engulfed world that reveals itself to us in this indefatigable enumeration of supra-terrestrial entities, celestial regions and magic symbols; a world in which the first readers of the book must find themselves perfectly at ease among the Eons, decans, liturgies, archons and angels, the innumerable mysteries and their places.”

## Chapter 13: Marcus and the Hellenization of Jewish Hermeticism

Irenaeus vituperated the Hermeticist Marc (or Marcus) in his *Refutation of So-Called Gnosis*,<sup>229</sup> which revealed his sympathies for the contemporary movement of the New Prophecy, many of whose followers perished in the pogroms at Lyon in 177. He mocked the favors lavished upon him [Marcus] by the aristocracy, “the ladies in robes bordered with purple” (a privilege of the senatorial classes) and his propensity for the pleasures of love. True or false, the anecdote that he relayed – so often plagiarized by Inquisitorial reports – carried the reprobation of popular Christianity for the “sins of the flesh”:

“One of our deacons from Asia, badly taken with him, welcomed him [Marcus] into his house. As his wife was nicely made, the charlatan seduced her body and soul, and she followed him for a long time. Finally, and not without difficulty, the brothers converted her. She did not cease being penitent and cried about the outrage that the charlatan had caused her.”<sup>230</sup>

Well versed in *gematria* – interpretation based upon the numbering of the Hebrew letters – Marcus belonged to the Jewish milieu of Palestine or the Diaspora. He frequented Alexandria, where he was subjected to the influences of Philo, Basilides, and Carpocrates; Asia Minor, which was the birthplace of Elchasaitism and so-called “Montanism”; and Gaul, where Irenaeus fought him.

Marcus renewed ties with the feminine nature of the Spirit (Achamoth or Sophia). This was the meaning of the [rite of] initiation that he practiced, although Irenaeus’ report does not exclude an erotic usage of prophecy, taken up by the faithful of Montan: “After having introduced the germ of Light into the woman that he initiated, he declared to her: [‘]See, grace has descended upon you. Open your mouth and prophesize! [’] If she stammered that she didn’t know how to prophesize, he made invocations and repeated: [‘]Open your mouth, say anything, you will prophesize.”<sup>231</sup> It is pleasing to recall here the original identity of

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<sup>229</sup> *Translator*: originally written in Greek around 180, and not to be confused with *Adversus haereses* (“Against Heresies”).

<sup>230</sup> Irenaeus, I, 13, 5.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 13 sq.

the *pneuma* and the *sperma*, and the orgiastic character of the vocal modulations ascribed to the prophetesses of the past.

According to the *Elenchos*, Marcus reproduced the miracles that the tales of Montanist propaganda diffused concerning Jesus, who went from being an *angelos-christos* to the Zorro for the poor. Before the faithful, he transformed water into wine, poured it into a small cup that he decanted into a large one, which was miraculously filled to the brim. His priestesses then administered the beverage in the guise of communion.

When the Church of the Fourth Century unleashed its polemic against the New Prophecy and its puritanism (which was called “Encratism”), it calumniously maintained the confusion between Montanism, which accorded certain sacerdotal functions to devoted women, who were sanctified by their virginity, and the cult of Marcus, in which women incarnated the spirit that impregnated bodies through love, a practice that the Church only perceived in terms of “license,” “debauchery,” and “fornication.”

Due to a natural malediction, fanaticism never resists the temptation to expound the doctrines – thus saving them from annihilation – that are the objects of its execration. Irenaeus thus provided precise information about the teachings of Marcus, which were the meeting point between Pythagorean mysticism and Jewish Kabala.

The *Sige* of which Basilides spoke (the Silence of the Nothing-God) had, according to Marcus, deposited in himself, as in a womb, the germ of the Tetrad or quaternary. In Hebrew, tetrad or quaternary is *kolorbas*, which the heresiologues transformed into a certain Colorbase, a disciple of Marcus.

The tetrad, an emanation of the Ineffable God, descended from the invisible places in the form of a woman. She revealed to him her proper essence and the genesis of the All.<sup>232</sup>

“In the beginning, when the Apator – unconceivable, without essence, neither male nor female – wanted to render it ungraspable nature graspable and its invisible nature visible, it opened its mouth and emitted the Word (Logos), equal to itself. The Logos placed itself before Apator and showed Apator its essence, because it was the visible manifestation of the Invisible. The pronunciation of the name took place in the following manner: he said the first word of his name, this being:

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 1 sq.

A P X H  
1 2 3 4

“It was composed of four letters. Then he pronounced the second word that was also formed from four letters. Then came the third, which contained ten letters. The following one contained twelve. The pronunciation of the whole name included thirty letters and four words. Each of these elements had its particular letters, its own particular character, its particular pronunciation, its particular aspect, and none of them knew the figure of the word in which it was only an element, not even the pronunciation of its neighbor; through its own sound, it imagined itself pronouncing the All. Because each of them took the sound that was its own for the All, whereas it was only a part of the All, and it did not cease to resonate until, in its emission, it reached the last letter of the last element. After that, the restoration of the All took place when the All became a single letter and heard the single and self-same emission of the voice; according to the Marcosians, the image of this pronunciation was represented by the [‘]Amen[’] that we say together. The sounds formed the substanceless and unbegotten Eon; they were the forms that the Lord called angels and that uninterruptedly see the face of the Father. The common and expressible names of the letter-elements are the Eons, *Logoi*, Roots, *Spermata*, Pleromes [fullnesses] and Fruits. As for their individual and particular names, they were – according to Marcus – contained in the name of the *Ekklesia*. The last sign of the last letter of these elements made its own voice heard; the sound of this voice went out and engendered – in the image of the letters – its own elements; it is from them that the things of our world were made and that engendered those that came after them. The letter itself, the sound of which followed the echo from below, was reprised on high by its own syllable so as to complete the entire name; as for the sound, it remained below, rejected from the beyond. The element itself, from which the sign descended with its pronunciation, was composed of thirty letters, and each of these thirty letters contained in itself other letters, thanks to which the name of this letter was determined; and these last letters, in their turn, were designated by other letters and so on, with the result that their multitude extended to infinity, because each one was spelled in its turn with letters. The following example will make what one means better understood: the letter  $\Lambda = \Delta E \Lambda T A$ , which contains five letters:  $\Delta$ , E,  $\Lambda$ , T, and A. These letters, in their

turn, are written by means of other letters, and so on. Thus, if the structure of the Delta already breaks down into an infinity of parts, each letter, by engendering others in its turn and by transmitting [*en relayant*] others, then the ocean of letters of this primordial Element is vast. And if a unique letter is in fact infinite, you will see the abyss full of the letters of the entire name that – following the *Sige* of Marcus – composes the Propator. The Propator, aware of his incomprehensibility, gave to the elements that Marcus also called Eons the faculty of making each one re-echo its own pronunciation, a single one being incapable of expressing the All.”

Then came the evocation of the Naked Truth, in which each part of the body corresponded to letters, themselves twins of the twelve signs of the Zodiac, the twelve planets, the twelve hours, and the twelve masters (the Archons) of the entities or tutelary powers (*daimon*):

“After having revealed this, the Tetractys said to him: [‘]I want to show you Aletheia herself; because I have made her descend from the dwellings on high so that you can see her naked and so that you can remark her beauty, so that you can even hear her speak and so that you can admire her wisdom. Look on high:

[‘] her head A Ω  
her neck B Ψ  
her shoulders and her hands Γ X  
her bosom Δ Φ  
her midriff E Γ  
her belly Z T  
her genitalia H Σ  
her thighs Θ P  
her knees I Π  
her legs K O  
her ankles Λ Ξ  
her feet M N[.’]”

This ancient tradition, probably issued from the Jewish milieu in Alexandria in the First Century, clarifies the remark reprinted in the *Apocalypse attributed to John*: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, said the Lord God, the One who is, who was and who will be the All-Powerful.” (Dubourg has indicated the Hebrew origin of the formula “The One who has been, is, will be”: “Hebrew verbs are not conjugated in

the past, present or future (...) but the accomplished or unaccomplished.”<sup>233</sup> For example, the accomplished form of the verb “to say,” *MR*, means: he says/has said/will say, completely, absolutely; while the unaccomplished form, *Y’MR*, means it is/was/will be in the process of being said.)

The entirety of the correspondences between the letters and the Eons constituted the plerome. By grasping an eon in its totality, magic allowed action upon the universe. (Manuscript 44 at Nag-Hammadi contained an invocation based upon the vowels. The “symphonia” or song of the seven vowels, each of which represented a planet, allowed one to express, through the various possible combinations, the harmony of the celestial spheres and to exert action upon the stars. [Charles] Fourier later expounded a similar conception. The universe conceived as language gave meaning to Kabbalistic and magical investigations.)

By annexing the Logos Jesus, the syncretism of Marcus defined itself as a Christianity and perhaps revealed why an agreement existed in Alexandria and Antioch, towards the end of the First Century or at the beginning of the Second, between the schools of Saturnilus, Cerinthus, Peter, James, Thomas and Saul concerning the secret name of the Messiah, the biblical Joshua erected as a symbol of revised Judaism.

The Hellenized version [of Marcosian syncretism] probably referred back to the same calculations that intrigued the esoteric circles to which Essenism gave the tone (cf. the horoscope of the Messiah and the interpretations of the letter *Waw* or *Episemon*, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet):

“When the Tetractys said these words, Aletheia looked at him and opened her mouth to pronounce a word (Logos). This Word became a name and the name was that which we know and say: Christ Jesus. Once this name was pronounced, she immediately returned to a profound silence. As Marcus expected her to say more, the Tetractys advanced to say: [‘]Have you thus considered to be insignificant the Word that you have heard from the mouth of Aletheia? This is not a matter of a name that you have known and have believed that you have possessed for a long time. You have only known the sound; you have not known all of its virtue. Because IHΣOYΣ is a name honored by all; it is composed of six letters and it is invoked by all of the appeals.[’]

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<sup>233</sup> B. Dubourg, *L’invention de Jésus*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 245.

“The three primordial elements, which compose the three pairs of powers (*Pater* and *Aletheia*, *Logos* and *Zoe*, *Anthropos* and *Ekklesia*) and which, together, yield the number 6, and from which proceed the twenty-four letters, if one multiplies them by four, that is to say, by the Logos of the Ineffable Tetrad, yields the same number as the letters do – that is to say, twenty-four. These twenty-four elements belong to the Unnamable. They are carried by the six powers so as to produce the resemblance of the Invisible. The images of the images of these elements are the three doubled letters Ξ Ψ Ζ that count double, as six letters; so, by virtue of the analogy, one adds them to the twenty-four letters and one obtains the number 30. As the fruit of this calculation and this economics [*cette économie*], there appears in the resemblance of an image the one who, after six days, climbed the mountain as the fourth and became the sixth, who descended again and was retained in the Hebdomad, being himself the Ogdoad and possessing in himself the complete number of the elements. This number was revealed by the descent of the dove when he came to be baptized. The dove is the omega = 800 and the alpha = 1, because its numeric value is 801.

“It is for the same reason that Moses said that man was formed on the sixth day (the name ΙΗΣΟΥΣ is composed of six letters); this is also why the salutary economics of the Passion was accomplished on the sixth day; it was the preparation by which the last man appeared for the regeneration of the first. The beginning and the end of this economics of salvation was the sixth hour, the hour at which he was nailed to the wood. Because the Perfect Nous, knowing that the number 6 contains in itself the virtue of creation and regeneration, manifested to the sons of the light, by the *episemon* that appeared in him, the regeneration that is worked by him [...]

“As far as Jesus, here is his ineffable origin: from the first Tetrad, Mother of All, came the second Tetrad in the manner of a daughter; thus the Ogdoad was formed; from it came the Decade. This was the origin of the number 18. Thus the Decade, come to join with the Ogdoad and multiplying it by ten, would engender the number 80, and the number 80, multiplied again by 10, produces the number 800, with the result that the total of the letters, going from the Ogdoad to the Decade, is 8, 80, 800, which is Jesus, because the name Jesus has the numerical value of 888:



Ι Η Σ Ο Υ Σ

10 8 200 70 400 200 = 888.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 and 228.

## **Chapter 14: Carpocrates, Epiphanius and the Tradition of Simon of Samaria**

Going against the Christian current, which was generally ascetic and propagated in the Second Century by Gnostic esotericism and the *pistis* of the New Prophecy, the teachings of Carpocrates and his son Epiphanius inscribed themselves in a line of life that only Simon of Samaria had known how to trace out upon the tormented colorlessness of the era.

Carpocrates' biography remains obscure. Origen confused him with Harpocrates, son of Isis and Osiris, a solar god under Greco-Roman domination, often represented in the magic papyrus seated on a lotus, the male principle that penetrated the feminine principle in order to impregnate her with his light. Carpocrates taught at Alexandria and wed Alexandria. Their son, Epiphanius, who died at the age of 17 in 138, was interred on his island of birth, Cephalonia. Around 155 or 156, a [female] philosopher named Marcellina taught the doctrines of the father and the son in Rome.

Clement of Alexandria had the merit of transcribing a short extract by Epiphanius on justice:

“Justice consists in a community of equality. A single sky spreads out and embraces the entire earth within its circumference; the night shows all of the stars equally; as for the sun, author of the day and father of the night, God makes it shine on the earth from on high, equally for all the beings that can see. They all see it in common, because he makes no exception for the rich, the beggar or the sovereign, no matter if foolish or wise, woman or man, free man or slave. The brute animals themselves have no difficulty in seeing the sun, because God has poured the light of the sun on all creatures from on high, as a communal good, and he proves his justice to the good as well as to the wicked; thus no one possesses more, nor steals from his or her neighbor in order to double his or her own share of light. The sun makes the pastures grow for the communal enjoyment of all the animals, and his justice is distributed among all, in common and in equality. It is for such a life that the species of the cow was made, as well as each individual cow, that of the pigs as well as each individual pig, that of the sheep as well as each individual sheep, and so on. Justice is manifested in them under the form of a community.

“Moreover, all is spread out in equality for the species following the principle of community; nourishment is spread out for the beasts that graze, for all equally, and without being ruled by law; on the contrary, nourishment is provided by the liberality of the Master for all in conformity with his justice. Even concerning procreation, there are no written laws; because these would be false laws. The animals procreate and engender in the same fashion, and practice a community that was inculcated in them through justice. The Creator and Father of All gives the faculty of sight to them all in common, and his legislation consists exclusively in the justice issued from him. He does not make a distinction between man and woman, reasonable and reasonless, or one being and another. With equality and communally he shares the faculty of sight and he gives it equally to all through a single and self-same commandment. As far as the laws, which do not punish men who are ignorant of them, there are those who have learned them in order to act illegally. Particular laws fragment and destroy communion with divine law. Do you not understand the words of the Apostle: ‘I have only known sin through the law’? By this, the Apostle meant that ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ only entered the world through the laws and that this was the end of all community. Because what remains in common for those who do not enjoy property, goods, or even marriage? And yet God created for all, communally, the vineyards that do not chase away the sparrows or the thieves, and likewise with the cereals and other fruits. But it was from the day that community was no longer understood in the sense of equality and was deformed by the Law that the thief who steals animals and fruit was produced. God created all for the communal pleasure of mankind; he united man and woman so that they could enjoy shared company [*un commerce commun*], and he likewise coupled all the living beings to manifest his justice as community in equality. But those who were born thanks to this have denied their origin from the community that brings people together. They say: ‘He who marries her must keep her,’ whereas all can share her, as the example of all the other living beings shows.”

Epiphanius still taught in proper [religious] terms that “God placed in male beings a powerful and impetuous desire to propagate the species, and no law, no custom, can exclude it from the world, because it is the institution of God. Thus the words of the legislator, ‘You must not covet’ (*Exodus*, 20:17,

and *Deuteronomy*, 5:21), are ridiculous and even more ridiculous is what follows, ‘[you must not covet] the goods of your neighbor,’ because the same God who gave to man the desire intended to couple beings with a view towards procreation [also] ordained the destruction of desire, although he did not take it from any living being. But the most laughable of all is ‘[not coveting] the woman of your neighbor,’ because this necessarily leads the community to separation.’<sup>235</sup>

Epiphanius’ text, which was of an astonishing modernity, participated in a thought and a behavior that was radically hostile to Stoic, Epicurean and Christian morals.

Carpocrates and Epiphanius both belonged to a Greek milieu that rejected Judaism. In the same way that Simon of Samaria restored the spirit of the Pentateuch (and Genesis, in particular) to the body, Epiphanius mocked the biblical commandments and the notions of sin and guilt. The Law of Moses fomented crime for the same reason that prohibition engenders transgression.

Thereafter, quotations from Paul were subjected to the ordinary revisions made by the heresiologues, who added canonical extracts to them in order to blunt the dissent of doctrines that had nothing to do with Christianity but nevertheless brought the Messiah Joshua (as well as Serapis, Seth, Abrasax and Harpocrates) into their own syncretisms; or these quotations referred back to a Paul who was completely different from the image of him that Marcion and his successive manipulators presented, that is to say, a Saul/Paul whose teachings justified the name Simon, which was adopted by Elchasaites living under the rule of Trajan.

Written when Epiphanius was 15 or 16 years old, the work of this young man whom Jacques Lacarrière<sup>236</sup> called the Gnostic Rimbaud linked social equality to the free exercise of desire. His critique of property surpassed the Rousseauist conception, and one had to wait until [Charles] Fourier and the radicalism of individual anarchy, with its principle “We only group ourselves according to affinities,” for there to be an echo of the precocious genius of Epiphanius of Cephalonia.

I do not see why Marcellina, a disciple of Carpocrates and Epiphanius who taught in Rome around 160, would have decorated her school “with painted icons enhanced with gold, representing Jesus, Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle,” as Irenaeus claimed,<sup>237</sup> unless this wasn’t simply an occasion for the Bishop of Lyon to condemn the Christians who preferred Greek philosophy to the Bible.

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<sup>235</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, III, 2, 9, and 3, 9.

<sup>236</sup> *Translator*: cf. Jacques Lacarrière, *Les Gnostiques* (Idées Gallimard, 1973).

<sup>237</sup> Leisegang, *op. cit.*, pp. 180 and 181.

On the other hand, it is probable that the community founded on the liberty of desire drew the idea that “the soul must be thoroughly tested before death” from Pythagorean theory, because, “for Epiphanius, desire was the expression of the first will of God and nature.”<sup>238</sup> And according to Simon [of Samaria], since desire was identified with fire (the principle of creation and the principle of passion), there was nothing in the unity of the macrocosm and the microcosm that could limit it.

Epiphanius applied his conception of justice to mankind, the animals and the plants. The living beings and things perpetuated themselves by changing form. Irenaeus interpreted this theory, which rendered everything strange and odious to him, in terms of magic and metempsychosis:

“They also practiced magic, incantations, amorous love potions, love feasts, the invocation of the spirits of the dead and the spirits from dreams, and other forms of necromancy, claiming that they had power over the princes and creators of this world and, moreover, used that power over all creatures of this world. They had loosened the bridle on aberration to the point that they claimed to have complete freedom to commit any act, impious or atheist, which pleased them, as if it were human opinion that made the difference between a good act and a bad one. The soul, they said, must – through a migration from one body into another – exhaust all forms of life and possible actions, if it had not done so in its first life. We do not dare to say, hear, or even think about or believe that such things took place in our towns; but their writings teach that, before death, the soul must be completely tested before its final repose.”<sup>239</sup>

A line by Irenaeus does not appear troubling: “[For them] it is faith and love that saves; the rest is irrelevant and only human opinion distinguishes between good and evil.”

According to Simon’s *Megale Apophasis*, faith in oneself and love led to the Great Power, which resided in each person and moved the world. What is astonishing is the fact that, in a letter by Paul, the theme of faith and love gave birth to an enthusiastic development that clashed with misogyny and ascetic harshness, which were confirmed everywhere [else] in the epistolary works of the man who, successor to Moses, stole the title of Apostle from him.

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<sup>238</sup> Leisegang, *La Gnose, op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>239</sup> Irenaeus, I, 25.

“When I speak in tongues, of men and angels, if I lack love, I am merely resonating metal, a resounding cymbal. When I have the gift of prophecy, the science of all mysteries and all knowledge (*gnosis*); when I have the most complete faith, that which moves mountains; if I lack love, then I am nothing. When I give all my belongings (to those who are starving); when I surrender my body (like a slave), to remove pride; if I lack love, then I gain nothing. Love takes patience, love renders service, it is not jealous, it does not swagger, it does not inflate with pride, it is not ugly, it does not seek its own interest, it does not become irritated, it does not hold grudges, it does not rejoice in injustice; it finds its joy in truth. It fills everything, it believes everything, it endures everything. Love will never disappear [...]” (*Epistle to the Corinthians*, I:13).

Which anti-Marcionite, coming to the potluck of Paul’s epistles, brought this fragment of Carpocratic doctrine and inserted it into a Christian perspective?

## **Chapter 15: The New Prophecy and the Development of Popular Christianity**

Born under the pressure of the Zealot guerrilla war and the struggle against Greco-Roman oppression, the messianism of the First Century pertained exclusively to a Judaism that was on the road to reformation, hostile to the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The sects that speculated on the secret name of the Messiah only agreed on Joshua in the 80s and 90s. They developed a philosophical and esoteric doctrine that was hardly propitious for wide distribution. The Elchasaite Christians, who aroused the suspicions of the governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger, offered, no doubt, the very first example of a Christianity established in more open milieus. They practiced social aid to widows, orphans, and the disinherited; and, imitating the proscriptions honored in the Phariseean communities, they prayed to and celebrated the God-Messiah (*christo quasi Deo*, in the words of a letter written by Pliny).

Their numerical importance had not yet aroused the distrust of the authorities beyond Bithynia, the region nearby Phrygia, where the cults of Attis and Mithras were still dominant. In Bithynia, there grew the first de-Judaicized and exoteric Christianity, a mass Christianity of the kind that stimulated the Saint-Sulpicean imaginations of people like Sienkiewicz and *tutti quanti*,<sup>240</sup> who, an age later, rejuvenated the martyrs of the New Prophecy so as to throw them into Nero's lion's den.

It isn't useless to insist upon it: the Church behaved towards the various Christianities from which it issued like Stalin, who excluded from history all of the first Bolsheviks in order to erect Lenin as a holy apostle. "True" Christianity – the one that gave a historical existence to Jesus; invented Mary, Joseph, the Child, the popular agitator, the enemy of the Jews, and the good thief put to death under [the reign of] Tiberius; grouped together the apostles of rival churches, finally united into a great mass movement; and mentioned Pontius Pilate for the first time – also engendered new thinkers, including Tertullian, who, placed under the names Phrygian heresy, Montanism, Pepuzism, and Encratism, would be thunderously expelled from the Church in the Fourth Century.

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<sup>240</sup> *Translator*: Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), the author of *Quo Vadis*. *tutti quanti* is Italian for "all the rest."

At the time when the Marcionite Churches brandished the authority of the Apostle Paul on the basis of programmatic letters and clashed with the traditional Judeo-Christian communities, the Christianity preached by the prophet Montanus became successful in Phrygia and soon after in North Africa, Palestine, and Asia Minor, and then turned towards Rome and won over Gaul.

Montanus addressed himself to the disinherited, slaves, artisans and rich people who had renounced their goods, and not to the exegetes who were well versed in the interpretation of mythological writings or to the biblical rats who nibbled on words in order to nourish their ascendancy over a handful of disciples.

The important thing was no longer *gnosis*, knowledge, the learning that disentangled the obscure paths leading to salvation, but faith, *pistis*, the feeling of belonging to the army of the Christ, of being disposed to sacrifice one's life for him as he sacrificed his life for the benefit of mankind, whatever the nation or social class to which they belonged.

The movement that was propagated under the name New Prophecy countersigned the birth of a veritable, modern Christianity, stripped of its Judaism, a Christianity that rejected Gnostic intellectuality and [instead] taught the principles that remained alive until the decline of Catholicism and Protestantism: sacrifice, the renunciation of the goods of this world, voluntary poverty, the taste for martyrdom, the consecration of suffering, chastity, virginity, abstinence, misogyny, the execration of pleasure and the repression of desire.

Although variously received according to the region and the Church – the Marcionites and the *pneumatics* scorned it, while the bishops tolerated by the imperial power dreaded its ostentatious pretensions to martyrdom – the New Prophecy attracted a large membership and, for the very first time [in the history of Christianity], organized a powerful federation of Churches in which the rival bishoprics of Cephas, James, Thomas, Clement, and Saul/Paul, and even certain fringes of Naassenism and Sethianism, were subsumed. This was the evangelic Christianity dreamed about by the millenarians and apostolics in struggle against the Church of Rome, which, born in the corruption of temporal power, would remain in power and corruption.

Around 160, the prophet Montanus, in whom Christ was supposedly incarnated, preached the good word in Phrygia and Mysia. Two prophetesses, Prisca (or Priscilla) and Maximilia, assisted him, which was an innovation that was in flagrant contradiction with Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism.

The New Prophecy announced the end of time. It was a millenarianism to which Irenaeus and Hermas were receptive. Asceticism was erected as its rule of conduct. The faithful, invited to repent, to fast and to purify themselves of their sins, would inaugurate the New Jerusalem, destined to be concretized in the



locations of the two market towns of which all traces have been lost: Pepuza and Tynion.

Montanus' syncretism drew abundantly from the great competing religion, that of Attis. From this epoch came communion through the bread and wine identified with the flesh and blood of the Messiah, as it was used in the rituals of Attis. For the voluntary castration of the priest of Cybele-Attis was substituted the castration of desire, abstinence and the virtue of virginity, to which some believers showed themselves to be so attached that they preferred torture to their renunciation.

Their provocative taste for martyrdom soon attracted the aggressive ardors of the crowds, always disposed to let off steam at the expense the weak and the resigned, and those of the functionaries who were delighted to furnish diversions from their plundering and abuses of authority.

Around 166 or 167, the pogroms in Smyrna involved the death of a bishop named Polycarp. Thereafter, Polycarp – the putative author of a letter from the Church of Smyrna to the community of Philomelium, in Phrygia, and consequently suspected of adhering to the New Prophecy – was celebrated in the *Acts* that exalted his martyrdom. But Eusebius of Caesarea, revealing the proceedings of the Church, took care to add an anti-Montanist interpolation to it, as Campenhouse has proved.<sup>241</sup>

The New Prophecy dominated Carthage, where Tertullian would shine, and in Lyon, where Irenaeus defended their millenarianism and asceticism. In Rome, the New Prophecy enjoyed the favor of at least one bishop, [the future pope] Eleuterus. Several pogroms that indiscriminately massacred Jews and Christians decimated the adherents to the New Prophecy in Lyon and Vienna in 177 and in Palestine in 178. Tertullian would sing the praises of the martyrs of Scillita, lynched in 180. The persecutions that the new Christians attracted, like a lightning rod attracts lightning, engendered in willingly anti-Semitic mindsets [the perpetration of] massacres that were not encouraged by the insidious consent of the procurators who played the role of Pontius Pilate washing his hands, but were ordered by the imperial power.

The quest for martyrs even provoked the repugnance of their persecutors. Did not Tertullian report, in a protest that was addressed to the pro-consul Scapula – *Ad Scapulam*, 5, 1, from 212 or 213 – that in 185 the pro-consul of Asia, Arrius Antoninus, encountered a group of Christians carrying knotted cords around their necks and asked to be executed? The pro-consul sent them back, telling them that

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<sup>241</sup> Frend, *Martyrdom and Early Christianity*, p. 288.

if they wanted to commit suicide, there were cliffs and precipices from which they could throw themselves.<sup>242</sup>

Such an ostentatious propensity for death sanctified by torments aroused the prudent reprobation of the bishops, the community leaders who wanted to negotiate for the freedom of worship, and even simple Christians who estimated that continence and privation were sufficient to guarantee their happiness in the beyond. These same reservations were expressed in the middle of the Third Century, when Novatian's movement revived the New Prophecy in its most extreme aspects; and in the Fourth Century, when the Donatists and the Circumcellions excommunicated the *lapsi*, the priests who had abjured by arguing that a living priest was better than a dead one when it came to propagating the faith.

The New Prophecy thus encountered the hostility of certain leaders of *ekklésiai*. The Episcopo of Anchiale, in Thrace, took measures against its adepts in 177, while the persecution was raging in Lyon. A certain Themison produced against the new Christianity an *Epistola ad omnes ecclesias*, which Rufinus hastened to interpret as a definite reference to Catholicism. (In reality, Montanism founded the first actually popular ecclesial universality, a *catholicon*, which was no longer elitist, as Marcion's had been.)

The bishop Melito of Sardis also stood up against the prophetic rage of Montanism in *On the Christian Life and the Prophets*. He had the best reasons in the world to do so, because, in the manner of Justin, he addressed to the emperors apologies and appeals in favor of a religion for which he solicited tolerance. One could also cite [in this context] Theophilus of Antioch and Athenagoras.

Around 195, Apollonios of Ephesus, a personal enemy of Tertullian, affirmed that "Montanus and his crazy female prophetesses" were hanged (this is hardly surprising) and that "Priscilla and Maximilia gave themselves up to debauchery" (which sounds more like [an allegation made by] Eusebius).<sup>243</sup>

According to Runciman, "In the Sixth Century, the congregations of the Montanists burned themselves alive in their churches rather than submit to the persecution of Justinian. In the Eighth Century, the remainder of the sect perished in a similar holocaust."<sup>244</sup>

Reduced to the state of a marginal sect by 331, christened the "Phrygian heresy," "Montanism," and even "Pepuzism" ([by] Basil [of Caesarea], Epiphanius [of Salamis], the codex of Theodosianus, and Augustine of Hippo, who borrowed it

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>243</sup> Apollonios of Ephesus, quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*.

<sup>244</sup> Runciman, *Le Manichéisme médiéval*, p. 23.

from Epiphanius), the New Prophecy formed the foundations of Greco-Roman Christianity. It is ironic that the New Prophecy's extreme masochism furnished the history of the Church with a good part of its official martyrology.

The Catholics thus appropriated Blandina and her companions from Lyon. The *Acts* that exalted the torture of the faithful, who were thus assured of eternal bliss, made use of Montanist propaganda. In the Third Century, two works achieved a remarkable popular success: *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* and *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which took the form of a letter to the Church of Carthage (Montanist) that recounted the torture of two virgins put to death in 203, under Septimius Severus, who prohibited all proselytism among Jews and Christians.

The martyrdom of the Montanist Perpetua inspired a vision, which was attributed to her and was supposed to harden the convictions of future victims. In it, the author evoked a *refrigerium*, a place of preservation in which the martyr, refreshed and washed of his wounds, waited for the dawn of his glory and sometimes manifested himself to the living to exhort them to religious duty. The *refrigerium* – in which the tortured person, endowed with a new body, prepared to shine at the side of the God thanks to an imminent ascension – would much later give birth to [the idea of] purgatory.

It is more than probable that, in their first versions, the *Acts* of Andrew, Pilate, Paul and Thecla, Peter and [other] apostles emanated from the “propaganda services” of the New Prophecy. Many would be submitted to revisions in an easily calculated manner.

Prediction-making, which was among the activities little valued by the clergymen who aspired to exercise their priesthood with the benediction of the State, risked lending itself to untoward abuse. The seer arrogated to himself the right to change the Law and the laws, since God had spoken through his mouth.

If one can believe Epiphanius of Salamis' *Panarion* (II, 1, 18), Montanus proclaimed: “I am neither an angel nor a messenger, I am the Lord, the all-powerful God, present before you in the form of a man.” Montanus clearly marked a rupture with the conception of a Messiah who claimed he was the *angelos-christos*, the messenger-angel of God. (Between his two “Marys” [Priscilla and Maximilia], Montanus concretized in human form the personage of Jesus, who had until then been abstract, a secret and sacred name, an angel descended from the heavens and resurrected in the beyond to assure the salvation of all through his sacrifice.)

The remark [attributed to Montanus], which disavowed Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism, implicated the human character of Jesus and his nature as a divine being, as a spirit capable of reincarnating himself in other prophets.

Tertullian was not mistaken: it is the man possessed by the spirit who can pardon, not the Church: “The Church will no doubt accord pardons for sins, but [this would be] the Church of the Spirit, through a spiritual man, not the Church as the ensemble of bishops” (*De pudicitia*, 21, 17). This was competition that the Catholic Church could not tolerate. It claimed to unite in itself the temporality of the Son and the incarnation of the spirit that spoke through the Church’s voice, proffering truths – orthodoxies – and condemning to death the prophets who followed each other from the Ninth to the Seventeenth Centuries.

Nevertheless, the New Prophecy contented itself with following, to the letter, the Apostle, the only apostle to the Second Century (in 220, Tertullian still did not know an authority other than Paul). And the first *Letter to the Corinthians* proscribed prophecy without any circumlocutions: “He who prophesizes edifies the assembly [...] I prefer that you prophesize. He who prophesizes is superior to he who speaks in tongues.”

The New Prophecy accorded to whomever spoke by the Spirit “the full power to renew traditional eschatological conceptions from top to bottom.”<sup>245</sup>

Prophecy entered into the practices of the majority of Christian communities. It was prescribed by the *Didache*. It reappeared in the Seventeenth Century in Pietist sects, which willingly identified themselves with primitive Christianity. Priscilla, practicing ecstasy, foreshadowed Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch of Antwerp and Theresa of Avila, when she [Priscilla] affirmed that the Christ had visited her and slept near her, at Pepuza, taking the form of fire and penetrating her with his wisdom.

The New Prophecy was also concerned with millenarianism, the imminence of the end of time, and the instauration of the kingdom of God on earth. Tertullian of Carthage and Irenaeus of Lyon were its ardent defenders. Montanus was the Holy Spirit descended to the earth. “Maximilia was the last prophetess, after whom one must only expect the end of the world.”<sup>246</sup>

In each millenarianism, the same scenario was reproduced: “The New Jerusalem will descend from the heavens to Pepuza. The Montanists received exceptional promises that would be kept at the End of Days. Due to the impending end, ethical demands took on an exceptionally acute depth.”<sup>247</sup>

For Tertullian, avoiding martyrdom was clinging to a world condemned to impending destruction. “Do not desire to die in your bed or in the languor of

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<sup>245</sup> Aland, *Augustin und der Montanismus*, 1960, p. 132.

<sup>246</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48, 2, 4.

<sup>247</sup> Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

fever,” he wrote in *De fuga*, “but rather in martyrdom, in order to glorify he who suffered for you.”

In sum, did not the tortures inflicted by the mob or by the justice system enclose in good logic an existence from which asceticism prescribed the removal of all pleasure?

Tertullian, an adept and philosopher of the new current, laid the foundations for a new Christian morality, with which Catholicism compromised, but Calvinism and Protestantism in general desperately tried to promote. Respectful of the abstinence extolled by its adversary, Marcion, the New Prophecy nevertheless gave a completely different meaning to its asceticism. The Marcionites and the supporters of [the idea of] a bad world created by the crazy God refused pleasure, procreation, and food that wasn't frugal, so as to not ratify a work that they denigrated. The Christians of the New Prophecy rejected neither the world nor the flesh; they only wanted to purify them and purify themselves, so that that the Spirit would descend to and reside upon the earth without the hindrances of materiality.

Long fasts rejected the pleasures of terrestrial nourishment and exalted spiritual communion. The refusal of amorous relations did not pursue a will to extinguish the race of men, as it did among the Gnostics who were “beyond the world,” but limited pleasure to procreative coitus in the manner of the Essenes. “It is not permitted, once one is a Christian, to contract a second marriage, because only the contract and the dowry separate marriage from adultery and fornication” (Tertullian, *De pudicitia*). The hatred of women shared by Tertullian, Epiphanius, Augustine and the master thinkers of the Church was accompanied by the worship of virginity. The idea of Mary, virgin and mother of the Christ, certainly drew from the legends of Montanist propaganda.

(Note the following with respect to the hatred of women. The *Elenchos* said: “The relations of man and woman are the work of pigs and dogs.” Tertullian: “Woman, you are the door to the Devil. It was you who persuaded the one [Adam] whom the Devil did not dare to attack directly. It was because of you that the Son of God had to die: you must always go about dressed in mourning and in rags and tatters.”)

Montanism also preached (for the first time in the history of the Christianity) the resurrection of the body, which Saul/Paul had so oddly borrowed from the Pharisees. In his *De resurrectio carnis*, Tertullian says, “Of those who deny the resurrection of the flesh, the prophetess Prisca said: they are flesh and they hate the flesh.” By dying, the martyrs exchanged their torn bodies for bodies of glory that would enter into the divine cohort of saints, the veritable celestial Church.

Both virginal and penetrated by the Spirit, the prophetesses of Montanus aroused the reprobation of many community leaders. Tertullian insisted on celebrating their chastity in *De exhortatione castitatis*; the author of

the *Elenchos* (around 230) reproached the new Christians for “letting themselves be guided by weak women [*femmelettes*]”; and Origen, who pushed abnegation to the point of self-castration, referred them back to the Apostle Paul who constituted their supreme authority – that polymorphous Paul, first erected against Marcion, his inventor, and then against the anti-Marcionites: “Women, the Apostle said, must keep quiet in the ecclesial communities. Here is a prescription that the disciples of the women, those who let themselves be instructed by Priscilla and Maximilia, have not obeyed.”

(Note that Priscilla believed that the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, a text from 160 or 170 that was originally Marcionite and placed under the name of Paul, was authentic.)

## **The New Prophecy and the Christian Philosophers of the Second Century**

The New Prophecy threw the paving stone of faith into the pond of the many Christian Gnosticisms. *Pistis*, which brought the exalted crowds to [undergo] ordeals and [experience] a fervent conviction that polytheism knew nothing about, exercised a kind of fascination for Greco-Roman mindsets that Judaism had previously exercised and that, since the last war of the Jews, xenophobia had condemned.

“True” Christianity swept away the theological arguments from the Gnostic systems. The fabrication of texts redesigned the personage of the Christ Jesus with the realism of everyday existence. This fabrication reduced speculations about the *angelos-christos* to a secondary plane and bluntly mocked the intellectual Christians who had been diverted from the study of the Jews and their Scriptures and who had thrown themselves into Greek mythology and Platonic scholasticism.

Justin the Apologist, Irenaeus of Lyon, the author of *The Shepherd* and Tertullian all launched a philosophical offensive – implicitly supported by the army of the Christ, which scorned death in the name of the Living Spirit – against what Irenaeus called “so-called gnosis.”

### **Justin the Apologist**

Although his death [roughly] coincided with the birth of the New Prophecy, Justin belonged to Hellenized and anti-Marcionite Christianity: the search for martyrdom; the recuperation of the Jewish Scriptures; the care taken to invite the State to recognize this religion, purged of its Semitism, which was odious to the Greeks and Romans; and a Church whose pacifist and non-violent ideals did not contravene public order.

Born around 100 in Flavia Neapolis [Nablus], in Samaria, Justin was initiated into philosophy and, in particular, Plato and Stoicism. He founded schools at which he taught a Christianity that had broken with Essenean Judaism without rejecting the texts of the Scriptures.

Drafted around 135, after the defeat of Bar Kokhba and in the wave of anti-Semitic hysteria that followed it, Justin's *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* affirmed that – the Christians having freed a truth from the Scriptures that the Jews no longer understood – the Bible by all rights belonged to the Churches of the Christ. (At the same time, a *Diatribes against the Jews* by Apollonius Molon and *On the Jews* by Philo of Byblos were circulating.)

Though his Messiah was still related to the *angelos-christos* of Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism, Justin rejected Marcion's aggressive dualism. Justin's Good God confronted, not the Demiurge who had created the world, but the Adversary, the fallen angel, the bloody rebel raised against the Divine Order: Satan the tempter.

Justin's schools were celebrated in Asia Minor and Rome. He wrote a lampoon of Marcion that has been lost. Tatian, his disciple, discovered in the New Prophecy the application of Justin's lessons: one must follow the example of the Christ through the purity of one's mores and self-sacrifice taken to the point of martyrdom.

Among the first [followers] of the new religion, Justin lay the bases for recognition by the central State (it is possible, in this sense, that the morbid extremism of the Montanists displeased him, as it was repugnant to Melito of Sardis, but it is also true that Tertullian, another apologist, found nothing distressing in it). Justin published an *Apology to the Roman Senate in Favor of the Christians*. Several years later, around 154, he reiterated [his points] in a *Second Apology to Antoninus the Pious in Favor of the Christians*. (These *Apologies* reflected the new political line of the Churches. A federation, with Rome at the head, could assure the State of a religion of change, a solution in which Christianity could be substituted for Rome's weakening polytheism and the solar cult of the Emperors. Thus, Quadratus of Athens wrote to Hadrian and Aristide; Justin wrote to Antoninus, who reigned from 138 to 166; and Melito of Sardis and Apollonaris of Hierapolis wrote to Marcus Aurelius, who reigned from 169-177. Did not Athenagoras of Athens, the ruler from 177-178, declare in his *Petition in Favor of the Christians* that "the Empire and Christianity have grown side by side. The prince has nothing to fear, but everything to gain by the conversion of the Empire"?)

But these efforts were in vain. The Greeks and Romans did not care to distinguish Christians from Jews, or Justin's friends from the multitude of sects – Sethians, Cainites, Nazarenes, Elchasaites, Marcionites, Judeo-Christians,

Valentinians and anti-Marcionites – that supported the idea of a crucified and resuscitated Messiah in whose name the other cults were excluded as idolatries, while Rome, like a good State merchant, had freely tolerated them.

Religious fanaticism appeared particularly odious to the Greeks and Romans. Their interests proscribed searching for it in Palestine. Did not *Deuteronomy* (17:12) enjoin that “he who gives in to pride and does not want to obey the authority of the priest who serves YHWH your God, nor the sentence of the judge, will die and thus you will extirpate the evil from Israel”?

Therefore, what did Justin ask of the Emperor? The help of the State against those contemptuous of the Holy Spirit – by which one meant the partisans of Simon of Samaria and all those who could be identified with them. Ammianus Marcellinus would have been able to write in the Second Century what he had established in the Fourth: “The wildest animals are to be feared less by men than the Christians.”<sup>248</sup>

Intolerance: such was still the reproach that Celsus, in his *True Discourse* (178-180), addressed to the people he found indistinguishable (Jews and Christians), to the sectarians of the crucified Serpent, the God with the head of a donkey (Seth) and a magician named Jesus.

The laurels of the martyr with which Justin found himself encumbered were as necessary to his fanaticism as was the taste for death celebrated by Tertullian and the Christians of the New Prophecy. There was a bad quarrel between Justin and the cynical philosopher Crescents, who challenged the former to take his scorn for existence to its logical end. The conflict became inflamed; a trial ensued. Crescents found an ally in the prefect Junius Rusticus, a Stoic philosopher who had initiated Marcus Aurelius into the doctrine of Epictetus. The polemic ended dramatically with the decapitation of Justin in 165.

A dialogue, which has been preserved, played on the meanings of “gnosis” – science, learning and knowledge.

Rusticus: “You who know (you who have knowledge, learning), how can you imagine that, if I have you decapitated, you will be resurrected and rise to the heavens?”

Justin: “I do not imagine it, but I know it from certain science.”

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<sup>248</sup> Ammien Marcellin, quoted in Rougier, *Celse contre les chrétiens*, Paris, 1977, p. 13.



In his pamphlet *Sects on the Auction Block*, Lucien of Samosata, a contemporary of Justin, refused to cite the Christians. Nevertheless, it is possible that this author had the Christians of the New Prophecy in mind when he ironically pointed out the following in *The Death of Peregrinus* (quoted by Rougier in his *Celsus against the Christians*): “The unfortunate imagine that they are immortal and that they will live eternally. Consequently, they scorn ordeals and voluntarily surrender to death.”<sup>249</sup>

Goaded by the solicitations of collective masochism, the crowds only devoted themselves more easily to the bloody excesses by which they exonerated themselves from the repressions and setbacks they suffered. In these early instances, the victims did not succumb to the legal actions brought by Antoninus the Pious or Marcus Aurelius. The twenty-three-year-long reign of Antoninus counted among the least bloody in Roman history and were preserved in memory due to the *suavitas morum* (the gentleness of the morals of the emperor). Despite an excusable repugnance for sanctified morbidity, Marcus Aurelius did not depart from the principles instituted by Trajan: do not to seek out the disciples of the Christ, but only punish them if, denounced, they refuse obedience to the Emperor and the offerings of the traditional cults.

### **Hermas and *The Shepherd***

In Rome, around the middle of the Second Century, under the name of *The Shepherd*, there circulated a collection of texts collated in the manner of a novel, the author of which called himself Hermas. Held in great esteem by Christians for three centuries, it would be excluded from the canon by [Pope] Gelasius’ decree at the end of the Fifth Century.

A didactic work of Judeo-Christian inspiration, *The Shepherd* presented itself as a revelation. (Its author referred to the apocalypse of *Eldat and Modat*, now lost). It contained five visions (the last of which was actually an apocalypse), twelve precepts and ten parables. Its spirit, still close to the Essenean *Manual of Discipline* and the *Writing from Damascus*, brought together Nazarenism and the New Prophecy-in-gestation, without succumbing to Marcionite influence. Its dualism had nothing in common with the “two Gods.” It referred to the two spirits of *The Rule of the Community*: “God, who created man, placed before him two spirits so that (he is) guided by them until the moment of the visit: these were the spirits of truth and iniquity.”

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<sup>249</sup> P. Giet, “Un courant judéo-chrétien à Rome au milieu du IIe siècle,” in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme*, Paris, 1965.

An embarrassment to the Catholic Church, *The Shepherd* presented a Christian panorama that was completely different from the fanciful statements of the official history.

Hermas not only knew nothing of a historical Jesus, but didn't even know the name "Jesus." He knew nothing of Mary, Joseph, Pilate and their associates.

"The visions name the Son of God once, in a formula: 'The Lord swore it by his Son,' which doubles another one: 'The Master swore it by his glory' (6, 8, 4), which is suspect as a result."<sup>250</sup>

The Son of God was the Spirit, the Great Archangel, sometimes named Michael.

Though Hermas and his associates resided in Rome, they never heard (and for good reason) anyone speak of the canonical gospels, nor of Matthew, Luke, Mark or John. Hermas' only references were to the Bible, the one that Marcion called the "Old Testament." If *The Shepherd* spoke of apostles, it did so in the sense of itinerant missionaries who propagated the Christian doctrine: the book distinguishes them from the *didaskaloi*, that is, those who taught (this was the era of the *Didache*, which was inspired by the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas*).

In 150, Hermas had no knowledge of a monarchical episcopacy, *a fortiori* of the "Ancient Pope," who according to the historians then reigned over the Church's destiny. "Those who were farsighted [*presbytes*] and bishops [*episcopos*] are synonymous for him." Moreover, Hermas denounced the ambitious caste of the priests: in a *Vision* he compared them to poisoning apothecaries and, in the *Ninth Similitude*, to venomous reptiles.

As in Essenism and Pharisean practice, the Church was identified [by Hermas] with a community tasked with protecting widows, orphans, and the poor. It appeared to him as an old woman, and he appealed for her rejuvenation through the purification of the faithful.

Purity of mores and the necessity for penitence that washed the soul of its sins constituted the central articulation of Hermas' Christian doctrine. In it, the old Essenean tradition married the movement of the New Prophecy at the moment of its birth.

Chastity was exalted in a scene that prefigured the adventures of Parsifal: Hermas resisted the temptation of women who cajoled and solicited his love. He did well, because – having triumphed in the test – it was revealed to him that,

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<sup>250</sup> E. Junod, "Création romanesque et tradition ecclésiastique dans les Acts apocryphes des apôtres," in H. Koester and F. Bovon, *Genèse de l'écriture chrétienne*, 1991.

under the appearance of seductresses, “virginal natures” had been hidden. And “these virgins, who were they? They were holy spirits.” Thus the virgin martyrs of the New Prophecy acceded to their reality as saints, clothed, beyond the pangs of death, in resplendent bodies, haloed by virtue. Through a pleasing return of things, the Italian painters [of the Renaissance], grooming their mistresses in ecstasy for the churches, rendered these women with their native sensuality. (We know, for example, that Filippo Lippi’s Madonnas depicted the pretty nun whom he seduced and who abandoned the God of her convent for the God of love, the revelation of which haloed her.)

In accord with the future rigor of Tertullian and the new Christianity, Hermas rebelled against those who judged sins of the flesh to be of little importance. Nevertheless, his asceticism was opposed to the spirit of Marcion and his doctrine of the two Gods: “Believe that there is only one God [...] Thus believe in him and fear him, and through this fear be continent.” Faith (*pistis*) had the upper hand over *gnosis* (knowledge). On the other hand, if there existed a possibility of salvation through works, through good acts, in no case did Hermas refer to redemption accomplished through Jesus. In addition, questions of penitence and redemption were settled between the sinner and God, without the intervention of the priest. The faithful was he who, living in fear of displeasing the God of Goodness, banished earthly pleasures and nourishments from his existence: “He who commits adultery lives like the non-believers (*tois ethnesin*).” Calvin did not say anything different.

## **Irenaeus of Lyon**

Around 180, Irenaeus, the bishop of a Christian community in Lyon, wrote a work against other Christians – principally the Marcionites and Valentinians – in which he attacked *gnosis* and [the pursuit of] salvation through knowledge. He related the entirety of these doctrines back to a unique source: the radicalism of Simon of Samaria.

His attempt corresponded to the New Prophecy’s rejection of philosophical elitism, esotericism, and even magical practices that were communicated in the name of the Messiah by a cultural class that was opposed to the faith of the simple believers, who in their turn were little interested in speculative quibbles and who obeyed an austere existence and a constant aspiration for martyrdom in order to assure their posthumous bliss.

Three years later, in Lyon and Vienna, pogroms put to death both Jews and the new Christians. The Marcionite, Valentinian and Marcosian Gnostics in all probability escaped from them because of their contact with the well-to-do classes (the “dames of the purple-bordered robes,” disciples of Marcos).

In Irenaeus' desire to purge the Churches of the extreme influence that anti-Semitism accorded to Greek philosophy, he wrote – not *Against the Heresies*, which was originally a Latin and later work that suggested that its author spoke in the name of a Catholic Church and a well-established orthodoxy – but *The Highlighting and Refutation of So-Called Gnosis*.

Irenaeus opposed blind faith, the *pistis* of the simple people who followed the law of the Christ without asking any questions, to the abstract developments of the Gnostics, which, by virtue of his polemical conventions, he relayed in the form of a tissue of absurdities. He had an already Pascalian profession of faith, which inspired the “Happy are the poor of spirit” line that the authors of the Gospels attributed to Jesus:

“It is better, it is more useful, to be ignorant and know little, and to approach God through charity, than it is to appear learned and know much by committing blasphemy against the one they call the Demiurge.”<sup>251</sup>

Irenaeus had two good reasons to attack Marcion and Gnosticism. A partisan of the unification of the Churches, resolved to confer the supreme authority to a Roman bishop, he perceived the antithetical character of ecclesial monarchism and the belief in two Gods, one ungraspable, the other despicable.

In the second place, Irenaeus was the author of an *Epideixis* in which the Christian doctrine was explicated on the basis of the prophetic texts of the Bible, the same ones that Marcion had rejected as immoral and incoherent.

Irenaeus' love for the prophetic tradition drew him to the Christianity of the New Prophecy and the Christ who was incarnated in Phrygia, thus arousing a wave of conversions everywhere in the Empire. In support of such a hypothesis, it is fitting to recall that Tertullian mentioned a bishop of Rome who was a partisan of the Montanist current, and one knows that Irenaeus intervened in favor of the new faith at the side of Eleuterus, a bishop of one of the churches of Rome between 170 and 190.

Annexed by Catholicism due to his hostility to *gnosis* and his defense of the monarchical principle in the Church, Irenaeus suffered the same fate as Origen, who was revised and corrected by Rufinus. The *Epideixis* disappeared. Irenaeus' millenarianism, which was shared by Hermas and the New Prophecy, was eradicated from his work. The discovery of a manuscript in the Nineteenth Century

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<sup>251</sup> Quoted by Rougier, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

was necessary to reestablish the millenarian “heresy” of this bishop, who had been sanctified by the Church at the cost of several instances of censorship.

The works of Irenaeus were recopied, revised, and stuffed full of interpolations (quotations from canonical gospels), while Tertullian, who was particularly erudite, knew no other gospel than the “Good Word” of Paul. Of the original text of the *Refutation*, there only remain Greek fragments of citations made by the author of the *Elenchos* and [other] notorious forgers: Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis and Theodoret of Cyrus.

### **Tertullian, Philosopher of the New Prophecy**

Born around 160 in Carthage and issued from the aristocracy, Tertullian had a classical education. Breaking off his studies of rhetoric, philosophy and the law, he devoted himself to dissipation in his youth, only to suddenly renounce it, perhaps around 190, and converted to Christianity, which for the first time was massively propagating itself.

“We only got here yesterday,” Tertullian wrote in 197, “and already we have filled the earth and all that is yours: the towns, the islands, the fortified posts, the municipalities, the villages, the camps themselves, the tribes, the ten families, the palace, the senate, the forum; we have only left you your temples.”<sup>252</sup>

While persecutions most often took the form of pogroms – Tertullian himself took care to separate the wheat from the chaff in his *Adversus Judeos* – pro-consul Vigellius Saturninus decapitated eighteen Romanized Africans and Christians in the small town of Scillium in 180.

Tertullian was inflamed by the New Prophecy. “I was blind, deprived of the light of the Lord,” he moaned, “only having nature for a guide.”<sup>253</sup> This was why he was only in the world “to weep for (his) faults in the austerity of penitence.”<sup>254</sup>

Tertullian’s militant asceticism rejected the “dream-sunk poets who ascribe to the gods the vices and passions of men” and the philosophers who become “patriarchs of heresies.”<sup>255</sup> He admired Justin, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus, whom he imitated in a series of polemics against Marcion and the Valentinians.

Note that the New Prophecy professed a fanatical asceticism, though different from that of Marcion, for whom pleasure seeking was a concession to the

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<sup>252</sup> Tertullian, *Apologétique*, 37, 4.

<sup>253</sup> ID., *De poenitentia*, I, 1.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>255</sup> ID, *De anima*.

bad work of the Demiurge. “The God of Marcion,” Tertullian wrote in his *Adversus Marcionem*, “by reproving marriage as bad and sullied by shamelessness, acted to the detriment of chastity, the interests of which he had the appearance of defending.” If women had some importance in Montanist revelation – to the point that the author of the *Elenchos* mocked “their respect for the divagations of the weak women who indoctrinate them” – this was at the cost of a frankly claimed chastity, of the status of inviolable virginity (the martyrs preferred death to defloration). A spiritual movement *par excellence*, founded on the repression of desire, the New Prophecy responded to the entreaties of Tertullian: “By economizing on flesh, you will acquire the Spirit” (*De exhortatione castitatis*).

Tertullian extolled martyrdom (“Blood is the seed of the Christians”); condemned second marriages (in a polemic against the Carthaginian painter Hermogenes, who defended the eternity of matter, Tertullian reproached him for being married several times); appealed to continence; and scorned women and the pleasures of love.

Note that the taste for martyrdom was the doctrine that provoked hysterical adhesion to Montanism and provoked its backward surge and growing discredit. Did not Tertullian proclaim in his *De fuga* “do not desire to die in your bed, in the languor of a fever, but as a martyr, so that he who suffered for you is glorified”?<sup>256</sup>

Associating richness with luxury and debauchery, the New Prophecy directly attacked that part of the clergy that subsisted on tithes from the faithful and painlessly acclimated itself to the duties of faith and the compromises of worldly representation. This was why Tertullian, like the author of the *Elenchos*, rejected Callixtus, one of the principal bishops of Rome (his name was later given to an ensemble of catacombs), whom they reproached for his laxity.

The Church did not lack arguments for condemning Tertullian. But the importance of his apologetic works incited Catholicism to set him aside using other methods. His biographers insinuated that he only adopted Montanist views rather late, meaning by this that he was under the influence of Gnosticism, which unfortunately the vigor of his thought and style did not discredit. A lampoon of the heresies was even attributed to him: one in which anti-Gnosticism was placed next to critiques of Montanism!

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<sup>256</sup> *Translator*: in an instance of bad editing, this passage repeats an earlier one in this same chapter.

## Chapter 16: Tatian and the Fabrication of the New Testament

Born in Syria around 120, Tatian posthumously became one of the founders of the Church due to his extremism in matters of asceticism. Irenaeus attacked him because, “like Marcion and Saturnilus, he called marriage a corruption and debauchery. He maintained that Adam was not saved.”<sup>257</sup>

Converted to Christianity, and a disciple of Justin in Rome, Tatian was exposed to attacks by Crescens, Justin’s accuser. Teaching Christianity in Rome around 172-173, he professed the anti-Marcionism of his master and transmitted it to his disciple, Rhodon. Then he left for the East and founded schools while the New Prophecy took off. One supposes that he died at the end of that decade.

Tatian’s single known work falls under the heading of the apologetic. His *Speech to the Greeks* opposed Christianity to Greek philosophy, in general, and the Stoics, in particular. In it he developed ideas shared by Tertullian and the new popular current. His profession of monotheist faith contradicted accusations of dualism, which were often made about him by the Catholics. On the other hand, his idea of the Christ had not evolved beyond that of Justin: “The heavenly Logos, the spirit born from the Father and Reason issued from the reasonable power – in imitation of the Father who engendered him – made man in the image of immortality, so that, just as incorruptibility is in God, man likewise participates in the lot of God and possesses immortality. But before forming man, the Logos created the angels.”<sup>258</sup> The Holy Spirit was called the Minister of God who had suffered.

Tatian’s essay *On Perfection, According to the Savior* is lost, but Clement of Alexandria picked out of it an absolute condemnation of marriage that surpassed the Montanist spirit. The Church profited by erecting Tatian as the leader of a phantom heresy called Encratism, in which were grouped together – thanks to the Church’s Fourth Century struggle against the Donatists and the Circumcellions – the supporters of an excessive moral rigor.

No doubt there was another reason for the animosity of the Church towards Tatian. Deschner cites him as one of the copyists who re-worked the letters of Paul and gave them a stylistic unity.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Irenaeus, *Mise en lumière et réfutation*, I, 28, 1.

<sup>258</sup> Tatian, *Oratio*, VII.

<sup>259</sup> K. Deschner, III, p. 109.

The growth of popular Christianity engendered a general revival of Jewish *midrashim*, translated somehow or other by the Judeo-Christians: it was now a matter of de-Judaicizing them and explaining them rationally to the general public. Tatian has been credited with having harmonized, in addition to Paul's letters, the many propagandistic texts that presented themselves as the Gospel preached by "the" Apostle, because there was only one at the time.

Nevertheless, neither Irenaeus, Tertullian, nor Clement of Alexandria mentioned the *Diatessaron euaggelion*, which would remain the dogmatic work *par excellence* of the Syrian Christian churches until the Fifth Century, when they were replaced by the four gospels of the Catholic Church. A Greek fragment of fourteen lines recovered at Dura-Europos dates from 230 at the latest. It proposed placing end to end the fragments of the gospels attributed to Mark, Luke and Matthew. Was this [a fragment of] the *Diatessaron* and, if so, was it the one by Tatian? How come Tertullian, an admirer of Tatian, did not mention it? As for the fragments by Irenaeus, they were altered too much to offer serious testimony concerning the canonical gospels in the Second Century.<sup>260</sup>

## The Canonical Gospels

What aspect did Christianity present at the end of the Second Century? Although the Greeks and Romans did not distinguish it from Judaism and were confused about the differences between the sectarians of Jesus, the Sethians, the Naassenes, the Barbelites and other messianists, the New Prophecy established in the urban milieu a popular Christianity that attracted slaves, a fraction of the plebes and the petite bourgeois, as well as a fringe of the aristocracy, which until then had been rather receptive to Gnostic doctrines and philosophical Christianity.

If the importance accorded to faith, to life according to the Christ, to asceticism, to the refusal of riches, and to the vocation of martyrdom reduced Gnosticism to a marginal existence (though Christianity nevertheless exploited it in the genesis of its theology), Gnosticism was embraced by a good number of bishops and heads of communities who, since Trajan's conventions (renewed by Hadrian), had been integrated into public life and who, careful to avoid all scandal, already carried themselves as if they were future ecclesiastical bureaucrats of the triumphant Church. The ardor and fanaticism of the poor Christians disturbed the lax bishops of the Second Century. They formed the proto-Catholic current or,

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<sup>260</sup> H. W. Hogg, "The *Diatessaron* of Tatian," in *Ante-Nicaean Fathers*, Grand Rapids, 1951-1956; M. Wittaker, *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, Oxford, 1982.



more exactly, they were chosen in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries as the representatives of a backdated orthodoxy.

Ecclesiastical reluctance reinforced the numbers of *lapsi*, which were increased by the persecutions of the Third Century, whereas Montanist intransigence was perpetuated among the partisans of Novatian and, much later, Donat.

The *midrashim* of the Elchasaite and Judeo-Christian Churches conferred a legitimacy to particular and often rival churches: the churches of Thomas, Simon-Peter, James, Saul-Paul, Clement, Philip, Matthias. . . . The unity imposed by the great movement of the New Prophecy collated diverse writings that had been translated several times from the Hebrew or Aramaic, revised and copied. This incongruous ensemble then gave birth to a propaganda-literature adapted to the popular nature [*facture populaire*] of the movement. Anti-Semitism, miraculous fables and the exaltation of poverty and sacrifice little by little composed a Jesus who was more in conformity with the plebian mindset. The apostles, initially the witnesses of the Lord, whose mythical authority guaranteed this or that a community, thenceforth formed a [unified] cohort tasked with propagating the Christian law that was substituted for Mosaic law.

The apostles erected as saints and martyrs served as models for the exaltation of the Christians of Carthage, Scili, Lyon, Vienna and Rome.

The *Acts* circulated, telling of the marvelous adventures, deaths and ascensions of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Philip, Andrew and James, who were the heroes of a saga dominated by Joshua, cut from the same cloth as the Christians who caused scandals and perished for their faith.

Justin<sup>261</sup> and Tertullian<sup>262</sup> mentioned the *Acts of Pilate*. (Augmented in the Fifth Century by a description of hell, the *Acts* became, in the Eighth Century, the *Gospel of Nicomedes*, in which the legends of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail appeared. The *Acts* was originally a Montanist or pre-Montanist text that was excluded from the canon.) Considered a saint and martyr in Syria and Egypt, Pilate still belonged to a dramaturgy in which the *angelos-christos* lived a brief terrestrial existence in a historical context.

The *Acts of Pilate* contained materials that, in the hands of copyists who were less exalted and more careful with historical probability, were put to use in the fabrication of the canonical Gospels:

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<sup>261</sup> Justin, *Apologie* I, 35, 9-48, 24.

<sup>262</sup> Tertullian, *Apologétique*, 21, 24.

“It was the sixth hour; a darkness covered the entire world until the ninth hour. The sun was obscured: the veil of the temple went from on high to down below, and cut it in two. Jesus cried in a loud voice: My Father, Abi, Adasch, Ephkidron, Adonai, Sabel, Louel, Eloei, Elemas, Ablakanei, Orioth, Mioth, Ouaoth, Soun, Perineth, Jothat.”<sup>263</sup>

The names mentioned by Jesus, which identified him with a magician or a thaumaturge, corresponded to the Eons of power, many of which figured upon the *abraxas* or talismans of magic rituals.<sup>264</sup>

Tertullian’s narrative in his *Apologetics* merits being quoted [here] because, effacing the thaumaturgical aspects, it composed a more sober and yet very different version than that retained by the Catholic canon. The Christ was still the *angelos-christos*, but prey to a terrestrial drama that was perfectly understandable by the faithful who were headed towards ordeals and a radiant heavenly resurrection.

“Thus, what comes from God is God, the Son of God, and the two make only one. Thus the spirit that comes from the spirit and the God who comes from God are different in measure: he is second in rank, not in condition, and he comes from his source without being detached from it.

“Thus, this ray of God, as he had always foretold, descended into a Virgin and, being incarnated in her womb, he was born man mixed with God. The flesh united with the spirit nourished itself, grew, spoke, taught, worked – and that is the Christ. For the moment, accept this ‘fable’ (it is similar to yours), while waiting for me to show you how the Christ was revealed and who were those who, in advance, circulated among you fables of this type, so as to destroy this truth.

“The Jews also knew that the Christ would come, because the prophets had spoken to them. And, indeed, even today, they await his coming, and between them and us there is no greater subject of contestation than their refusal to believe that he has already come.

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<sup>263</sup> *Acta Pilatis*, translation by E. Revillont, Paris, 1912.

<sup>264</sup> Matte-Bonnes, R. and C. Bonner, *op. cit.*

“Because two ascensions of the Christ were announced: one that would be accomplished in the humility of the human condition; the other was expected at the end of the world, in the sublime splendor of the paternal power received and the divinity clearly manifested. Therefore, the Jews – not understanding the first – have believed that the second was the only one, and they hoped for it as it was more clearly foretold.

“Due to their sin, the Jews have indeed merited being unable to understand the first one: they would believed it, if they understood it, and they would have been saved, if they believed it. They themselves say in the Scriptures that, as a punishment, they have been deprived of wisdom, intelligence and the usage of their eyes and ears.

“In their debasement, the Jews have thus concluded that he [Jesus] was only a man; and naturally, because of his power, they took him for a magician: in fact, they saw him, according to his own word, chasing demons from the bodies of men, giving sight to the blind, purifying the lepers, straightening up the paralyzed, [and] finally bringing the dead back to life, always according to his word, making the elements serve him, calming the tempests and walking on the waters, thus showing that he was the Son previously announced by God, and born for the salvation of all, this Word of God, eternal, first-born, accompanied by his power and intelligence, having his spirit for support.

“Hearing the preaching of his doctrines, which confounded the doctors and notables among the Jews, they were exasperated, especially since they saw an immense multitude flocking to him: to the point that, finally, they delivered him to Pontius Pilate, who then governed Syria in the name of the Romans and, through the violence of their votes, they forced the pro-curator to deliver Jesus to them so as to put him on a cross. He himself had foretold that they would act thus; this would not have been much, if the prophets had not also foretold it.

“And yet, attached to the cross, he made many miraculous remarks at his death. Indeed, from himself he rendered his soul with his last words, averting [*prévenant*] the services of the executioner; at the same moment, the day was deprived of the sun, at the moment that he

marked the place of his orb. One certainly believes that this was an eclipse, and those who do not know that this miracle had also been foretold for the death of the Christ, not understanding the reason, deny it, and yet you find this global accident set down in your archives.

“Then the Jews, after having detached the body [from the cross], and after having deposited in it a sepulcher, watched over it with great care, using a military guard: as he had foretold that he would be resurrected from the dead on the third day, the Jews feared that his disciples, furtively removing the cadaver, would outwit their suspicions.

“But on the third day, the earth suddenly trembled, the enormous rock placed upon the sepulcher was set aside, the guard – struck by fright – dispersed, the disciples did not show themselves, and in the sepulcher one found nothing other than the remains of a tombstone.

“Nevertheless, the Jewish notables, who had an interest in having people believe in [the commission of] a crime and in diverting a tributary and dependent people from their faith, spread the rumor that he had been taken away by his disciples. In fact, for his part, he did not appear before the multitudes, so as to not uproot the impious from their errors and so that faith, which was destined for a quite precious compensation, was costly to men.

“But Jesus passed forty days with several disciples in Galilee, in the province of Judea, where he taught them what he had to teach them. And then, having trusted to them the mission of preaching throughout the whole earth, he was elevated to heaven enveloped in a cloud: an ascension much more true than yours, the ascension that Proculus customarily attributes to Romulus.

“Pilate, who was himself already a Christian in his heart, announced all of these facts relative to the Christ to Tiberius, then to Caesar. (*Note by Vaneigem*: there’s no doubt that the historical staging of the trial of Jesus the agitator was drawn from the Christian legend of Pilate. The events here originated in cosmic dramaturgy and hierophany.) The Caesars themselves would have believed in the Christ, if the Caesars were not necessary to the era or if the Caesars had been able to be Christians as well as Caesars.

“As for the disciples, scattered throughout the world, they obeyed the precepts of their divine Master; after having suffered greatly, them too, at the hands of Jewish persecutors, confident in the truth, they ended up joyfully sowing [*semer*] [their own] Christian blood in Rome, during the cruel persecutions of Nero.

“But we will show you unimpeachable witnesses of the Christ, even among those whom you adore. This is a great point, which I can put forward, to obligate you to believe the Christians, even the very ones who prevent you from believing the Christians.

“For the moment, here is the chronological history of our religion; here is, we declare, the origin of our sect and our name, with their author.

“One can no longer reproach us for any infamy, one cannot imagine that there is something else, because it is not permitted for anyone to lie about his religion. Indeed, by saying that one adores something other than what one [actually] adores, one denies what one adores and one transports one’s tributes to another [thing], and by transporting them, one no longer adores what one has renounced.

“Therefore we say, and we say it publicly, and we cry it aloud when we are hurt by your tortures and bloodied: ‘We adore God through Christ.’ Believe he was a man, if you like; it is through him that God wanted to be known and adored.

“To respond to the Jews, I would say that it was through Moses that they, too, learned to adore God; to the Greeks, I would say that Orpheus in Pieria, Musea in Athens, Melampus in Argos, and Trophonius in Boeotia bound men [together] through initiations.”<sup>265</sup>

Simultaneously with the propagation of the Gnostic Gospels (the persistence of an older Christianity, which was discovered at Nag-Hammadi), fantastical narratives (similar to the ones that Tertullian decanted for the usage of the Greeks and Romans) continued to give to Jesus the features of a historical person who was

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<sup>265</sup> Tertullian, *Apologétique*, XXI, p. 8 sq.

quite close to Apollonios of Tyana, not without recalling that he remained God in the very reality as his human adventure. For the new Christian wave, Jesus was not a pure spirit. Such a belief, among others, founded a passage in the canonical *Gospel attributed to Luke* (24, 36-43).

In brief, these were the polemics and ideas of the Second Century, which – recuperating and explicating Jewish and Essenean speculations about the Messiah – ended up, through additions and corrections to the novels about Jesus, with the Jesus who made people forget about Joshua (but tardily, because in 240 Origen still emphasized the omnipresence of Moses’ warrior).

Upon all those who, in the growing power of Christianity, glimpsed the perspective of an ascension to power was imposed the necessity of ordering and harmonizing the acts, letters, apocalypses and gospels that were as great in number as the rival communities.

This was the epoch in which Celsus, in his *True Discourse* (around 180), mocked the multitude of Christian prophets, their rivalries, and their lack of scruples in fabricating texts and in revising the old ones several times. (Tertullian showed where the shoe pinched when he wrote the following with some irritation: “One cannot say that we invent our own materials.”) Each Church placed its gospel or sacred text under the name of a “founding father” or an apostle.

The majority of them are unknown. Nevertheless, one can cite Tatian and a certain Leucius Charinus. Tertullian attributed the *Acts of Paul*, which included the narrative of his martyrdom and the love that young Thecla felt for him, to the zeal of an Eastern priest who dedicated a true cult to the Apostle (the text enjoyed great popular success in its Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Slavic and Arabic versions). The *Acts of Paul* participated in Montanist fervor, as did the *Gospel attributed to Bartholomew*, in which Jesus says, as if addressing Montanus: “salvation to you, my twin, second Christ.”

On the other hand, the *Ascension of James*, of Elchasaite origin, heatedly rejected Paul.

Over the course of the cascading translations, the misreading of the Hebrew and Aramaic texts created incoherencies and peculiarities that were all the more perceptible in the apocryphal and canonical Gospels that abounded in quotations from the Hebrew mythologies.

The *Epistula apostolorum*, probably issued from Asia Minor or Egypt in the second half of the Second Century, appeared to be an attempt at syncretism that insisted on the miracles and resurrection of Jesus. An apocalypse was inscribed in the millenarian preoccupations of Montanism: in the *Epistula*, Jesus responded to questions about the dates of the *parousia* [second coming] and the resurrection. In it there were elements shared in common with the *Gospel attributed to John*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and Hermas’ *The Shepherd*. In

the same spirit, but without millenarian allusions, the *Acts of the Apostles*, retained as canonical, reconciled the competing views of Paul and Simon-Peter in a historical novel. It corrected the *Epistula*, which, in the Montanist line, attacked the bishops and priests who were accused of having misled the people of God, after having championed “Saul, that is to say, Paul.”

Ninety-four texts of Christian propaganda were produced between the Second and Ninth Centuries. Twenty-seven of them were retained in the formation of the neo-testamentary corpus and defined the Catholic Holy Scriptures. These “gospel truths” proceeded from a *melting pot*<sup>266</sup> in which armies of copyists battled to remodel and prune second- and third-hand materials with adjustments that were demanded by the polemics of the time in order to end up with a dogmatic corpus that the imperial, pontifical and inquisitorial instances placed beyond contestation. (Note what Celsus said: “It is quite well-known that many among them [...] have revised the primitive text of the Gospels three or four times, and even more, in order to refute objections to them.”) Arguments from authority remain efficacious, if one judges from the pusillanimity with which the historians of today approach the question. Therefore, as always, with the exception of several phrases from the Pauline letters, all of the texts of the New Testament are fakes – historical falsifications that covered for quite real struggles that took place over many epochs – of the same nature as the *Letters of the Jews sent to the Overseas Brothers at the time of Jesus*, in which Jews from the year 30 congratulated themselves for crucifying the Messiah. (In 1348, these *Letters* procured for the inhabitants of Ulm excellent reasons for putting an end to the “Jewry” of the city.)<sup>267</sup>

Nevertheless, no one is unaware that the manuscript called *Sinaiticus*, which contained important fragments of the gospels later chosen as canonical, belonged to a batch of fifty manuscripts that Eusebius of Caesarea, a sycophant of Constantine, had transcribed around 331 under the orders of the Emperor, who desired to autocratically unify the emerging Catholic tradition by distributing copies of them to the principal Churches of the Empire. They were subjected to further modifications, as the abbot Bergier emphasized in his *Dictionary of Theology*: “Men truly knowledgeable in matters of exegesis, and especially [the] sincere [ones], recognize that the text of the New Testament was not set before the end of the Sixth Century.”

Jesus had been an Angel-Messiah, then an agitator put to death despite the Christian Pontius Pilate and because of the Jews. From the exoteric background [*la*

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<sup>266</sup> *Translator*: English in original.

<sup>267</sup> Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

*facture exotérique*] provided by Montanism, Jesus – God and Man, as in the doctrines of Tertullian – emerged and was then seized and remodeled by anti-Montanist reactionaries.

Catholicism issued from the victory and the vengeance of the *lapsi*, the priests who, through fear of torture, abjured during the successive persecutions of the Third Century. To the Montanist principles of Novatian and, later, Donat, these priests opposed a conciliatory Jesus, less intransigent, less penetrated by asceticism than the messiah[s] of Tertullian, Clement and Origen.

The critique of sources, which did not start until the end of the Twentieth Century (and then timidly), shows the various stages in transformation of the biblical Joshua into Jesus of Nazareth.

When a community or Church had the need to affirm its cohesion, it gave itself rules that it founded on an older authority. It thus borrowed from the Bible or the *midrashim* remarks (*logia*) that it attributed to the Lord, spiritual master of the faithful, much later identified with Joshua/Jesus.

“The statement, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving,’ presented in the *Acts of the Apostles* (20:35) as a *logion* of Jesus, was in fact a Jewish maxim originally. One also finds it in the *Didache* (1:5), but it isn’t certain that this text recognizes in it the status of the word of the Lord [...] The Church adopted the Jewish precepts by adapting them to its needs and by transforming them into the *logia* of Jesus.”<sup>268</sup>

By Hellenizing themselves, the various Christianities of the Second Century also referred to Greek fables and philosophical precepts.

The *logia*, which were also inspired by the “wisdom” of Solomon and Jesus the Son of Sira, inscribed themselves in the perspective of Gnostic Christianity. Jerome, citing a *logion* from the *Gospels of the Hebrews* in his *In prophetam Ezechielem commentarius*, wrote, “Whoever has saddened the spirit of his brother is guilty of the greatest crime,” which was in fact a banal moral commandment that he placed into the mouth of Jesus. Therefore, the remark played a role in Gnosticism, as a passage from Hermas makes clear: sadness is a vice because it chases away the Holy Spirit, who inhabits the human soul. The spirit of the brother is not the *animus*, but the *pneuma*.

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<sup>268</sup> H. Koester and F. Bovon, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



“One can find other theological reasons that lead to the transformation of ancient words and the elaboration of new *logia*: for example, on the occasion of the controversy that took place with respect to the renewal of the pardons accorded to the sinners after their conversion to Christianity (...) an argument that was based on the content of a *logion* could only acquire more weight.”<sup>269</sup>

In fact, great controversy was born from the rigor and intransigence of the New Prophecy. It was against it that the redactors of the gospels placed under the names of Matthew and Luke attributed these remarks to Jesus: “If seven times a day your brother offends you and seven times he returns to you to say, ‘I repent,’ you will pardon him” (*Gospel attributed to Luke*, 17:4). See also the staged episode that insists on the pardon merited by apostate priests, despite the opinions of Novatian and Donat: “Then Peter approached and said to him, ‘Lord, when my brother commits an offense against me, how many times should I pardon him? Seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times seven times’” (*Gospel attributed to Matthew*, 18, 21-22).<sup>270</sup>

The popular expansion of Christianity in the Greco-Roman Empire, under the impetus of Montanus and Tertullian, ended in the anecdotal translation of Gnostic speculations, in the apologue and the staging of the *logia*. The New Prophecy propagated imagery that the Catholic Church, contrary to Protestant reluctance, had always encouraged among the “simple of spirit.”

A passage from the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* shows the origin of the sponge of vinegar presented to Jesus on the cross:

“The Epistle of Barnabas testifies in another manner, quite simple, of giving to some statement the authority of the Lord’s word. In two instances in the text, the citation of a *logion* of the Lord concludes an exegetical debate.

“In the first passage, the author asks, in the framework of a discussion on the meaning of the Jewish sacrificial rites (*Epistle of Barnabas*, 7:11): ‘And why does one put the wool in the middle of the thorns? It is a foreshadowing of Jesus proposed to the Church: the thorns are formidable; he who wants to remove the scarlet wool must suffer a great deal to make himself master through this test.’ And to

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43 and 44.

continue, in the style of the *logia* of Jesus formulated in the first person, and by making the phrase follow the expression φησιν ('he said'): 'Thus those who want to see me and await my kingdom must seize me through ordeal and suffering.'

"As Barnabas gave a typological significance to the entirety of the rite, such a remark by Jesus can be 'freed' from the Jewish model without particular effort.

"Another passage (*Epistle of Barnabas*, 7:4-5) offers a second example of this kind of method: 'All the priests, but they alone, eat entrails not washed with vinegar. Why?' And Barnabas now makes the Lord intervene in person, to give a response to his question: 'Because you will make me drink bile with vinegar, me, who will offer my flesh for the sins of my new people; you eat, only you, while the people fast and lament in the sack and ashes!'"<sup>271</sup>

Thus the three gospels called synoptic were laboriously composed, harmonized somehow or other, and placed under the names of three unknowns: Mark, of which there was a secret version, which Harnack attributes to Marcion; Matthew, perhaps issued from the *Apocryphal Gospel attributed to Matthew*, which has disappeared; and Luke, [written by] a stylist, a professional writer like Leucius Charinus or Tatian. (It seems established that the *Gospel attributed to John* was originally a Christian Gnostic text, if not also Naassenean or Sethian. The oldest fragments – according to the book by I. Bel, *Christian Papyri*, London, 1935 – date from the years 125-165.) The "unquestionable truth" of the synoptic gospels eclipsed a great number of "secret" gospels (*apocrypha* in Greek), to the point that the Church imposed on the word "apocryphal" the meaning "false, falsified."

The writings discovered at Nag-Hammadi made no references to the synoptic gospels, and the Jesus attested to by several texts was only an Angel-Messiah. But it would be important to the Church of the Fourth Century, in its struggles against Arius and Donat, to situate historically the person of the Messiah Jesus, so that he no longer appeared as the "second Christ," like Montanus, and that his divine nature was "consubstantially" mixed with the human nature of a prophet of whom the Church of Rome would erect itself as the universal legatee through a direct line of descent from the twelve apostles – especially Paul, the Roman citizen, and Peter, the first "pope" of the Latin New Jerusalem.

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Chapter 17: Three Local Christianities: Edessa and Bardaisan, Alexandria and Origen, Antioch and Paul of Samosata**

While the New Prophecy, for the first time and despite the dissent of a minority of the bishops, concretized the project of a Christianity that attempted the conquest of the Greco-Roman Empire and ended up unifying the rival churches, there were three cities in which the oldest Judeo-Christian traditions guarded their particularities and perpetuated their privileges as ancient communities.

Such was the case with Edessa, Alexandria and Antioch, the fortresses of Essenism-Nazarenism.

### **Bardaisan of Edessa**

Starting from the First Century, Edessa was a hub of Christian expansion.

“The structure of the archaic Christianity of Edessa,” Drijvers writes, “shows the existence of varied groups with diverse opinions that fought against and complained about each other.”<sup>272</sup>

Established in Edessa, in the First Century, at the same time that it agitated spirits in Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus, was a system of beliefs that issued from Essenism and engendered, on the foundation of local particularities, Churches that obeyed their own laws and doctrines.

The community or *ekklesia* of Edessa was placed – no doubt due to the missionary activity of some disciple of Thomas – under the patronage of Jude or Thomas, fancifully elected “witness” of the Lord.

This organization had to orient itself in the current of the Second Century according to the *logia* attributed to Joshua/Jesus and supposedly compiled by Matthias or Thomas. The Churches of Edessa perpetuated a Judeo-Christianity of the Elchasaite type and no doubt evolved towards anti-Semitism without, it seems, tipping over into either Marcionism or Montanism.

In Edessa in 201, the first building intended for meetings of the believers and taking the name “church” was constructed. It was destroyed shortly afterwards

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<sup>272</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden, 1980, p. 194.

by a flood, [which might be taken as] the sign of a singular carelessness on the part of the tutelary God.<sup>273</sup>

Around 180, one of the Churches, led by Bishop Palut, attempted to impose its authority on all Christians. His adepts called themselves “Palutians.” The struggles for precedence among the diverse Churches of Edessa lasted until the Fifth Century, when the Palutian faction assumed power for themselves and, rallying to the theses of Nicaea, embraced Catholicism. Consequently, this faction hastened to label as heretical the Churches that had shown hostility towards it in the past.

Such was the fate of the work of Bardaisan (or Bar Daysan), who offered an original example of one of the many syncretisms whose successive stratifications composed the Christianity of the first four centuries.

Born in Edessa in 144 or 155, Bardaisan belonged to the aristocracy and received a serious philosophical education before converting to the new religion in 180. (For a time, he adhered to the Valentinian school.) His vast learning also embraced astrology, ethnology and history. With his son Harmodius, he composed some 150 hymns in honor of the Syrian churches.

His *Dialogue on Destiny* and his *Book of the Laws of Countries*, from which his disciple Philip compiled his teachings, did not escape the destruction ordered by the Church, although Eusebius did authorize the citation of a few extracts.<sup>274</sup>

When Caracalla dealt a mortal blow to the independence of Edessa in 216, Bardaisan went into exile and reached Armenia, where, according to Moses of Chorene, he pursued historical research and worked for the propagation of Christianity. Thereafter his teachings accorded a growing place to the idea of liberty.

One cannot exclude the possibility of an encounter between Bardaisan and an Indian ambassador sent by the Emperor Heliogabalas around 218. One believes that Bardaisan died in 222, leaving behind disciples and Christian communities that continued to exist until the Fifth Century.

Bardaisan’s philosophical Christianity situated itself at an equal distance from the New Prophecy, the ascetic rigor and fantastic masochism of which he rejected, and from an ecclesial current that aimed at making itself into a recognized authority in the social order of Rome.

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<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 7.

<sup>274</sup> *ID.*, *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on the Faith of Bardaisan of Edessa*, Assem, 1965.

If he took up from the Valentinian Theodotus the trinitarian conception – Father, Son and *Pneuma*-Spirit (or *Sophia*) – that triumphed at Nicaea, Bardaisan was opposed to Marcion and he rejected the [idea of a] demiurgical creation. According to Bardaisan, the world was the work of a Good God, because, despite its imperfections, salvation entered into mankind’s possibilities. Thus Ephrem the Syrian was wrong to denounce the influence of Bardaisan on Mani, the founder of the Manichean religion. If the Bardaisanites excluded from their canon the two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, no doubt this was due to Marcionism, which presented versions that were anterior to the Catholic corrections.

Bardaisan did not divide men into three classes, despite the commonly-held Gnostic opinion of the Second Century – hylics, psychics and *pneumatics* – but distinguished in each person three levels in the ladder of consciousness: the *soma*, the *psyche*, and the *pneuma*. Through the Christ, God provided the model of a gradual elevation that traced out the path of salvation.

The Bardaisanites obviously knew nothing of the canonical gospels, but referred to the *Acts of Thomas* and the *logia* that composed the gospel attributed to the mythical apostle of Edessa.

Drijvers detects the influence of Philo of Alexandria, transmitted by the Jewish milieu, which were well established in Edessa.<sup>275</sup> The Essenean and Judeo-Christian doctrine of the two paths, Light and Darkness, left traces in Bardaisan’s conception of liberty.

This conception proceeded from a spirit of divine origin, which, united with the soul, descended through the seven spheres of the planets (the Hebdomad) in order to implant itself in the human body at the moment of birth. Because the soul was subjected to the influence of planetary forces, which it must cajole at the time of its future ascension, the hour of birth determined the course of [the person’s] existence and distributed fortune and misfortune [into it].

In his goodness, God nevertheless permitted man to escape from the unavoidable. United with the soul, the spirit arrogated for itself the privilege of influencing circumstances. Knowledge of the horoscope intervened in salvation in a decisive manner. Adam made bad use of such a gift and did not authorize his soul to return to the place of its divine origin, which Bardaisan called the “nuptial chamber of Light.”<sup>276</sup> (The *Gospel attributed to Philip*, from the same era, evoked the relations between redemption and *koinon*, “nuptial chamber,” in which the union with the Plerome, the Divine Totality or the Ogdoad, takes place. The soul, the spirit and the body give birth to quite piquant anecdotal translation [of this

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<sup>275</sup> ID., *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

process]: “Three walk with the Lord at the same time: Mary his mother and his sister and Madeleine, whom one calls his companion. Because Mary is his sister, mother and companion,” Section 32.)

The coming of the Christ – still conceived as an *angelos-christos*, not as the historical founder of a religion – unveiled the soul’s path to salvation, the manner of untangling obscurity and darkness in order to vanquish the influence of the planets and assure the soul’s final redemption. Here Bardaisan expounded the theory of free will, the battle-horse of future Catholicism.

The envoy of God, Jesus filled no other mission than indicating, through the sacrifice of his flesh, the salvational path and the *gnosis* that taught one how to leave the obscure chaos of the body. Not an extreme asceticism, as was required by the New Prophecy, but a sacrificial exercise that elevated the spirit and united it with the breath of the soul, which held the power to vanquish the conjuration of the planetary injunctions and thus [was able the soul to] return to the light. He who identified with the Christ modified the astrological laws and increased his power over the macrocosm. Such were the teachings of Bardaisan. It was the thought of Simon of Samaria, but inverted by its *antiphysis* [rejection of nature] and denatured by the example of Christ. A thought that, even if Christianized, did not remain any less unacceptable to ecclesial authority, since Bardaisan entrusted the work of redemption in the hands of each person, without the help of any Church.

## **Audi**

If one believes Michael the Syrian, the Archdeacon Audi (or Audie) belonged to the Bardaisanite community at the end of the Third or the beginning of the Fourth Century. To support his legitimate authority, he produced “apocalypses” and the *Acts of the Apostles*, which the Constantinian Church – adopting the political line of the “Palutians” – would condemn as “apocryphal.”

Grégoire Bar-Hebraeus, an Arab theologian in the Seventh Century, attributed to Audi ninety-four “apocalypses” (revelations). Underneath the scornful and anecdotal reduction that Bar-Hebraeus imposed on Audi’s ideas, the Bardaisanite doctrine of the descent and resurrection of the Spirit confronting the planetary Eons showed through: “(Audi claimed) that the Christ descended to all of the firmaments and that their inhabitants did not know him, and that his body was celestial, and that he was injured by the lance, and that he was not injured, that he was hung from the wood and that he was not hung.”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> E. Junod and J.-D. Kaestli, *Histoire des Actes apocryphes des apotres*, p. 41.

Audi's conception was not essentially different from that of Arrius, the quarrel about whom – at the same time – irritated the emerging tyranny of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. Audi rejected the decisions made in Nicaea. Exiled to Scythia, he would propagate his Christianity among the Goths.<sup>278</sup>

## Origen of Alexandria

The fate reserved for Origen and his work revealed the falsification that was accomplished by the Church after the Constantinian turn. An authentic Christian martyr and a philosopher in the service of faith, he was condemned for heresy because, despite the revisions of his doctrine, his Christology was still that of an angel-messiah and his Jesus found its source in Joshua. In addition, he had sympathies for the New Prophecy, and he devoted himself to asceticism with a disconcerting rigor, which authorized him to scorn the apostate clergy of his era – the heritage of which the Constantinian Church would claim for itself.

Origen's work was reduced, as if by chance, to tiny fragments, which were contained in several large volumes: so great was the zeal of Rufinus and other guardians of orthodoxy to reconstitute it and rectify it according to the correct dogmatic line.

Born around 185 to Christian parents in Alexandria, the city of all the doctrines, Origen was in his adolescence when his father, Leonides, surrendered to torture in 201 and then perished during the persecutions of the New Prophecy.

Origen was initiated into Neo-Platonist philosophy, which he tried to accord with Christianity. A disciple of Clement of Alexandria, he combated the work of Celsus [titled] *The True Discourse*, which was directed against the new religion. In Rome he met Hippolytus, a bishop and philosopher, to whom the *Elenchos* is sometimes attributed. In the same way that Hippolytus (like Tertullian and the Montanists) vituperated the laxity of another bishop of Rome, Callixtus – whom many historians have taken for a pope – Origen, who succeeded Clement as the head of the Christian *didaskale* of Alexandria, entered into conflict with the bishop [named] Demetrius. It is true that Origen pushed the concern for chastity to the point of self-castration, in order to resist, without beating around the bush [*sans ambages*], the temptations of the flesh. Forced into exile in Caesarea in 231, he died from tortures inflicted around 254 under the persecution of Decius.

Received badly by the clerical party of the *lapsi*, Origen – a century after his death – drew upon himself the displeasure of Epiphanius of Salamis, and he was

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<sup>278</sup> C. Puech, "Audianer," in *Reallexicon fuer Antike und Christentums*, 1950, pp. 910 sq.

then officially condemned by Emperor Justinian the First at the second Council of Constantinople in 553.

The Church reproached Origen for having neglected the historical character of Jesus-Christ, which was, no doubt, too recently invented and which the skill of Rufinus – who amended, expurgated and corrected everything that did not agree with this dogma – did not succeed in introducing.

Interpreting the Bible in an allegorical sense, Origen identified the Christ with an eternal Logos named Joshua, who returned to the Father without ceasing to be present in the spirit of the Christians. His commentaries on Jesus, son of Noun, explain, “God gave the name Jesus-Christ our Lord to him who is above all names. Therefore, the name that is above all names is Jesus (...) And because this name is above all names, over the generations no one has received it.” And Origen recalled the first mention of Jesus. It is found in *Exodus*: “God summoned Jesus and sent him to fight against Amalek.”

In her preface to the *Homily about Joshua/Jesus*, Annie Jaubert emphasizes the importance of the typology of Joshua: “The reason is that this typology constituted itself precisely in opposition to Judaism. No one being greater for the Jews than Moses, prophet and legislator, the Christians had to prove that the Old Testament, through the person of Jesus Nave, had already manifested the superiority of Jesus over Moses.”<sup>279</sup>

How can we not infer from such reasoning the appearance of Jesus as the mythical founder of Christianity at the beginning of the Second Century, a double of Moses that the Greco-Roman *remake*<sup>280</sup> erected as a Montanist agitator and then the founder of the Roman Church?

In fact, Origen preserved a Christianity whose spirit was originally formed in Alexandria, in the circles of Essenean, Nazarenean, Philonian and Elchasaitean speculations. Like Clement, he remained a Gnostic in the sense that knowledge unveiled to consciousness what the faith of the New Prophecy revealed to the body, that is, a purification in which access to salvation resided. In exchange for purification, God, in the infinity of his love, accorded a universal redemption in which the demons and the Devil himself could be saved.

Despite the calumnies of the so-called “Church Fathers,” the least limited of whom admired his erudition, Origen[’s ideas] would be perpetuated in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, Johannes Scotus Eriugena and even Hildegarde von Bingen and Eckhardt.

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<sup>279</sup> A. Jaubert, preface to *Homélie sur Josué/Jésus d’Origène*, Paris, 1960.

<sup>280</sup> *Translator*: English in original.



## Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch

At the beginning of the Fourth Century, in Edessa, King Abgar – converted to the religion that had recently been recognized by the State – circulated personal letters addressed to Jesus-Christ and to which he had obligingly responded. Thus Abgar re-engaged for his own profit the operation engaged in by the Church in order to attribute the status of historical personages to Jesus, Paul and Peter. Later rejected as crude fakes, these letters only differed from the New Testament by their (too elevated) degree of improbability.

Like all of the potentates touched by the commercialism [*affairisme*] of Rome, King Abgar used Catholicism as an instrument of power. He reorganized the clergy of the city, conferred upon them a monarchical form, transformed the temples into churches and the traditional festivals into consecrations of the saints, and religiously marked out the space and time of the city, as the Church undertook to do at the level of the *Imperium Romanum*.<sup>281</sup>

Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch in 260, anticipated King Abgar's reforms by fifty years. To the title of leader of the Church of Antioch, he added those of Governor of the Syrian province of Commagene and Queen Zenobia of Palmyra's Secretary of Finances.

Personage of the first rank in the region, Paul of Samosata was on the best terms with Zenobia, and favored a Syrian nationalism that aroused the suspicions of Rome and encouraged revolt by his peers and ecclesiastical rivals. A synod united in Antioch deposed him in 268.

Paul of Samosata's doctrine showed the line of uncertainty in which the debate on the nature of the Christ was still stuck. For him, God had engendered the Logos that could be called the Son. The Logos inspired Moses and the prophets, and then Jesus, who was only a man when, during his baptism, the Logos entered him and transformed him into a perfect being. From then on, he accomplished miracles, triumphed over the sin in himself and in all men, with the result that his death redeemed and saved all of humanity. He pre-existed and judged the living and the dead.

Ironically, the synod that deposed Paul of Samosata would reject the term *homoousios* (consubstantial) by which he designated the identity of God and the Christ; this was the same quality that the Church imposed in the Fourth Century as the only Trinitarian truth.

Paul's conception of the Trinity, it is true, took a personal turn that was hardly compatible with the idea that the Church would forge in the Fourth Century.

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<sup>281</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, p. 196.

According to Leontius of Byzantium, “he gave the name of Father to God, who created all things; the name of Son to himself, who was purely a man; and Spirit to the grace that resulted from the apostles.”<sup>282</sup>

Theodore of Mopsuestia attributed to Paul of Samosata a remark whose echoes – a thousand years later – still reverberated among the Amauricians and the partisans of the Free Spirit: “I do not desire the Christ because he had been made God, but because such as he was made, I was made, since this [godliness] is found in my nature.”<sup>283</sup>

The enemies of Paul of Samosata did not lie in an exaggerated fashion when they affirmed that, in Antioch, the psalms that were sung were less in honor of God than in his honor. Paul accorded a place for women in religious offices, but nothing permits one to affirm that this was not done in the manner of the Montanists and their virginal prophetesses.

The heresiologues detected his influence in the Nestorianism of the Fifth Century and in the Paulician movement that struggled against Byzantium in the Eighth Century.

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<sup>282</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *De sectis*, 3, 3.

<sup>283</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Une controverse avec les Macédoniens*, Paris, 1913.

## **Chapter 18: Novatian, the Apostate Clergy and the Anti-Montanist Reaction**

The breath of popular Christianity fanned the pyres in which the faithful were consumed and the resentment of the crowds accustomed to pogroms and hunting for Jews was nourished. According to its custom, imperial power imputed responsibility for the disorders not to the executioners, but the victims. The State's persecutions replaced cunningly fomented instances of lynching, which indiscriminately struck all of the partisans of a God who was hostile to the other divinities.

In 202 – contrary to the wishes of his wife, Julia Mamaea, who was favorable to the new religion (or so one says) – Septimius Severus promulgated an edict that prohibited Jewish and Christian proselytism. The death of the Emperor suspended this repression; it was revived under Maximinus and then disappeared again, not without sporadically being rekindled in the ordinary flames of the pogroms. One of them exploded in Cappadocia, at the instigation of the governor. The pogrom in Alexandria in 249 inspired increased rigor on the part of Decius. Thus he dreamed of restoring the ancient religious values and reinvigorating the unity of the Empire through the annihilation of the Jews and the Christians. A similar project revolved in the heads that the influential bishops managed to keep on their shoulders. Little by little, a new doctrine was formed, a realistic and political kind of Christianity: Catholicism.

Among the small number of victims of the trials begun in 250, the philosopher Origen, an adept of Montanist asceticism, died following prolonged torture.

A ruling promulgated against the Christians by Valerian in 257 suggested that they need not repudiate their worship, but make sacrifices to the ancient gods. The edict of tolerance issued by Gallienus reestablished the peace in 260. Nevertheless, the idea of a national religion pursued its course. Emperor Aurelian, penetrated by the desire to revive the brilliance of Rome through the radiance of a universal belief, readjusted the old monotheism of the *Sol invictus*, the cult of the Sun King, to fit himself. Death prevented him from restoring an authority that ecclesial propaganda soon after recuperated: it identified Jesus-Christ with the unconquered Sun. Under the ferule of the bishops who were attached to their prerogatives and on the lookout for all compromises that would be profitable for their power, the austere Christianity of the Essenes, the Nazarenes, the Gnostics,

the Marcionites and the New Prophecy prepared to prostitute itself devotedly to the State.

After Gallienus' edict, the police and the governors tolerated the exercise of Christianity. But the truce was brutally interrupted to create room for the last and bloodiest of the repressions, that of Diocletian, who, from 303 to 305, pursued both Christians and Manicheans in a crazy fury. Those who abjured – and they were many – ceased to be troubled.

The edict of tolerance issued by Galere in 311 suffered a brief interruption under Maximinus, but he was vanquished in 313 by Licinius, whose victory announced the triumph of Christianity as the religion of the State.

Eusebius of Caesarea, a sycophant of the emperor who, through cunning and flattery, assured his credit with the court, had good reason to exalt the faith and the firmness of the martyrs, whom he estimated to number in the tens of thousands. Frend, a historian of persecutions, counted between 2,500 and 3,000 victims in the East and 500 in the West over the course of more than a century.<sup>284</sup> (The catacombs of the Via Latina date from the years 320-350 or 350-370. Contrary to the assertions of the Saint Sulpician legends, no known Christian sarcophagus was anterior to the Third Century.) Priests and bishops close to Rome abjured more willingly than those in the East, who were in solidarity with the local Churches, whose hostility to Roman power would not soon be disarmed, thus kindling Donatism and Arianism before provoking the schism of Byzantium.

Eusebius's hyperbolic cult of the martyr makes one think of Stalin, who allied the glorification of Bolshevism with the massacre of its survivors. Who worked the most effectively for the triumph of Eusebius and the clerical bureaucracy, the fishnet of which would fall upon the world? The *lapsi*, the apostates, the backsliders. As for authentic Christianity, the party of the New Prophecy (the only holder of the laurels of the martyrs), it would fall – under the name Montanism – into the trashcan of “heretical perversion.”

From the beginning of the Third Century, the tension grew between the fervent Christians, who were more attached to faith than to life, and the bishops, whose sense of reality preferred a abjured priest to a dead one. Refusing torment, the renegade – for the greater glory of the Church – in fact made use of leisure to exploit the work of the martyrs for edifying ends. This was an old argument in which principle ceded place to necessity. The delirious masochism of the

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<sup>284</sup> Frend. [*Translator*: rest of footnote missing from original. Two works by W. H. Frend are listed in the book's bibliography: *Martyrdom and persecution in the early church*, Oxford, 1965, and *The Donatist church: A movement of protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford, 1952.]

Christians of the Second Century, it is true, offered moderate spirits several reasons to calm down and reject offerings to death. All right. But the “party of the bishops,” which was scorned by Hermas, Origen and Tertullian, applied itself – while Rome increased the magnitude of its repression – to the safeguarding of an ecclesiastical power that made double use of moderation by protecting itself with police-related fury, on the one hand, and by condemning an asceticism that was hardly compatible with Greco-Roman license, on the other.

Tertullian had already stigmatized the laxity of certain bishops and their taste for power. “*Episcopatus semulatio schismatum mater est*,” he wrote in his *Adversus Valentinus*: “The rivalry of bishops is the source of schisms.”

Calixte, one of the principal bishops of Rome between 217 and 222, drew the reprobation of another bishop, Hippolytus, sometimes identified as the author of the *Elenchos*. Accused of laxity because he accorded ordination to remarried priests (Tertullian and Montanism prohibited remarriage), Calixte was a heretic in the eyes of the author of the *Elenchos*: “A Christian from another school has sinned; this sin, whatever it was, was not imputed to him, they say, provided that the guilty one hastened to join the school of Calixte.” The school of Calixte – whom the historians have long taken to be a pope and whose name was given to certain catacombs – was, according to the *Elenchos*, in the hands of the henchmen of abortion: “It was then that the women, self-avowed Christians, began to make use of medications capable of preventing conception and bandages intended to make them have abortions.”<sup>285</sup>

Pseudo-Hippolytus did not hesitate to situate Calixte in the line of the Elchasaitism that had been born in the third year of Trajan’s rule (around 100); a certain Alcibiades possessed the Elchasaites’ sacred book. The heresy, as it appeared here and would be confirmed later, at first circumscribed a category in which anything that opposed or contested the bishop’s authority was attacked in a slanderous manner. Assassinated during a riot in 222, Calixte suffered the thunderous displeasure of the *Elenchos*, [though] his “lax” policies would open the doors of holiness for him. Even better, the dictionaries consecrated Calixte the sixth Pope of Rome, although the papacy did not appear until the Seventh Century.

Around 250, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage – in which Tertullian and the New Prophecy were dominant – set himself up as the defender of the *lapsi*. His doctrine, expounded in an essay called *On the unity of the Church*, laid the political foundations for Catholicism. For him, every legitimate bishop was the inheritor of the “Peter’s pulpit” and had the right to combat anyone who contested him. Such

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<sup>285</sup> A. Siouville, *Hippolyte de Rome: Philosophoumena ou Réfutation de toutes les hérésies*, Paris, 1928, p. 194.

was the principle that most often founded heresy. The expression “Peter’s pulpit,” intended to reinforce local power, was attacked by Etienne, the Bishop of Rome around 254-257: this foreshadowed the conflict in the Fourth Century between Rome, which monopolized “Peter’s pulpit” and accredited the execution of Simon-Peter in the imperial city, and the Churches that were firmly established in the East.

Against ecclesial *Realpolitik*, Novatian attempted to revive the ardors of Montanist faith. Ordained a bishop in 249, he did not escape the quarrels about precedence, which set the various community leaders against each other. After the execution of Bishop Fabian, Novatian took control of a part of the Roman clergy and extolled a rigor that was strengthened by asceticism and the duties of faith. Indignant about the great number of faithful people and priests who abjured by agreeing to make sacrifices to the emperor or by buying certificates of abjuration, Novatian refused to re-admit into the community those guilty of renunciation. Opposed to another bishop of Rome named Cornelius – a partisan of moderation – Novatian developed a penitential current and assured himself of the support of many Churches. He ordained himself on the basis of other bishops rallied to his determinations.

Novatian’s doctrine emanated directly from the New Prophecy. In *On the Advantages of Chastity*, he implored the members of the “Virginal Church” to remain pure in order to keep a place of welcome for the Holy Spirit. Tertullian did not say anything different. The influence of Origen was discernible in Novatian’s text *On Jewish Food*, in which he perceived an allegorical description of the vices in the dishes condemned by the biblical texts.

Novatian’s enemies, Cornelius of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage, held in esteem a treatise later called *On the Trinity*, although the word *trinitas* did not figure in it. This treatise discoursed upon the unity of the Father and the Son. Because the Son of God became man, he could lead humanity to eternal salvation. After the Constantinian turn, such speculations were invoked in support of a conflict that it accentuated: the one between the local Churches, which were close to the faithful and attentive to matters of faith, and the centralized and bureaucratized Church of Rome and its emperor.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> H. J. Vogt, *Coetus Sanctorum: Der Kirchenbegriff des Novatian und die Geschichte seiner Sonderkirche*, Bonn, 1968.

## Chapter 19: Arianism and the Church of Rome

The Council of Nicaea, convened on the orders of Constantine in 325, marked the birth of orthodoxy and, consequently, heresy. At that time, the tortuous line of the dogma that took centuries to make precise its immutable truths arrogated for itself the privilege of a rectitude that people like Eusebius, Epiphanius, Augustine, Jerome and their cohorts extended back into the past, as far as Jesus, the chosen founder of Catholic invariance.

The Church pushed cynicism to the point of claiming for itself a Christianity that condemned the following successive manifestations as heresies: Nazarenism, Elchasaitism, Marcionism, anti-Marcionism, Christian Gnosticism and the New Prophecy.

In the Third Century, the notion of *hairesis* – questionable choices, subject to polemic – became a weapon thanks to which the bishops defended their privileges against all contestation. In the hands of emperors and then popes, heresy was legally identified as a crime of high treason. When the popes uprooted from the declining Empire the ecclesial authority that they had arrogated for themselves, they perpetuated in law the old Roman legislation that had formerly been used against the Jews and the Christians, who had been defined as “rebels” against the State and “perverts” contravening moral order.

By imposing himself as emperor by divine right, Constantine successfully led a political enterprise in which his predecessors had only fared poorly. The party of collaborators, which the Christian *lapsi* had formed, encountered the aims of Constantine, who – having vanquished Maximinus and Licinius – wanted to consolidate the unity of the Empire. Nourished by the conception of an ecclesial monarchism that erected Rome as the New Jerusalem, national security [*la raison d’Etat*] presided over the birth of Catholicism, the triumph of which remained burdened by the memory of the Christianities that founded it and that it treated as bastards and abortions.

The polemics of the first three centuries concerned freedom of choice. The Council of Nicaea defined religious truth and, from then on, inaugurated the permanence of the lie: the forgery of gospels, the falsification of writings, the destruction of heterodox works, and the fabrication of an official history to which the majority of scholars and historians still subscribe today.

Constantine was touched by grace? Here we go. I borrow the following lines from a Catholic historian, Henri Guillemin: “Constantine did not believe in ‘Jesus-Christ’ in any fashion; he was a pagan and he would only convert (if he ever did

so) upon his death in 337. When he ordered the meeting at Nicaea in 325, he was only being shrewd, a realist, and ‘pragmatic,’ and, when faced with the growing numerical importance in his Empire of the sectarians of ‘*Krestos*,’ he drew from this fact the consequences that imposed themselves concerning the well-being of his government.”<sup>287</sup>

Around the deathbed of the Emperor one found the true father of Catholicism: Eusebius of Caesarea.

## **Eusebius of Caesarea**

In his commentary on Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Life of Constantine*, Jacob Burkhardt describes Eusebius as the “first totally dishonest and unjust historian of ancient times.”<sup>288</sup>

“To understand the necessity that caused Eusebius to fabricate an *Ecclesiastic History*, canonical texts and a direct line of descent from the apostles out of the scattered pieces of a three-century-long puzzle, it is fitting to recall that he was, above all, the first theorist to “introduce a rational conception of imperial power into the interior of a coherent ideology and metaphysics.”<sup>289</sup>

For Eusebius, “the terrestrial kingdom was in the image of the celestial kingdom.” The task of the sovereign was that of the Logos: to make the law rule over the here-below. “Carrying the image of the celestial kingdom, eyes fixed on heaven, he led and governed mortals on the model of the archetype fortified by imitation of monarchical power (that of the Logos).”<sup>290</sup>

Eusebius’s history of the Church logically had to lead to the theology that he developed and that was nothing other than the justification of the power of Constantine, the incarnation of the Logos by the grace of God, whom he was duty-bound to serve:

“God the Father, whom he called the Supreme Emperor, had certainly created the world. After having created it, he enclosed it in the reins of

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<sup>287</sup> H. Guillemin, *L’Affaire Jésus*, Paris, 1962, p. 75.

<sup>288</sup> R. L. Wilker, *Le Mythe des origines chrétiennes*, Paris, 1971, p. 58.

<sup>289</sup> J. Jarry, *Hérésies et factions dans l’Empire byzantin du IV au VII siècle*, Cairo, 1968, p. 189.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.



divine wisdom by making it submit to the constraints of time and the cycle of the years. But he entrusted this world, once created, to his only son, the Word. Eusebius of Caesarea made him ‘the eminent moderator of the world,’ the ‘common conservator of all things’; the Cosmos produced him so that he could govern it; ‘God entrusted him with the reins of this universe.’ ‘He received from the infinitely good Father a hereditary role’; ‘he rules what is inside as well as outside of the vault of heaven,’ and imposes harmonization on all things.

“The Logos is thus the governor of the Cosmos, the one who maintains order in creation. It makes a harmony among all things, added Eusebius of Caesarea. He [the Son] was not a viceroy totally exterior to the ensemble that he governed. He was like the soul and spirit of the world. In fact, Eusebius of Caesarea described his functions in a characteristic passage: ‘The Divine Word,’ he said, ‘is not composed of parts and is not constituted from contraries, but is simple and indivisible. In a body, the parts and members, the viscera and the intestines are multiple in their assemblage, but a single soul, a single spirit, indivisible and incorporeal, is spread throughout the ensemble; likewise, in the universe, the world itself is one, everything being combined from multiple parts, but the Divine Word, endowed with an immense and all-powerful force, also single, deployed throughout the universe, does not stray here and there, but spreads through all things and is the cause of all that happens therein.’”<sup>291</sup>

Thenceforth, theology furnished its privileged framework to [gainsay] the risks of ecclesial politics and imperial power, always in solidarity despite violent rivalries. Theology thus seized upon two doctrines that offered neither novelty nor anything religiously shocking: Donatism and Arianism. The first inscribed itself in the line of the New Prophecy and Novatian; the second revived Gnostic-Christian speculations on the relations between God and his messiah.

## **Arius**

Although his name was invested with a glory propagated by the artifice of an alleged Arian party, neither Arius’ life nor his works justified the celebrity with

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<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190 et 191.

which he was rewarded. Born in Libya or Alexandria around 260, he studied with Lucien of Antioch and lived in Alexandria, where Peter, the bishop of the city, executed in 311, mentioned him for the first time. He belonged to the category of priests who eagerly awaited honors and preeminence. A partisan of Meletius of Lycopolis, a rival of the deceased Peter, Arius acceded to the priesthood under Achillos, the successor to the martyred bishop, and was then elevated in rank under the bishopric of someone named Alexander. Extolling asceticism, Arius's popularity grew among the faithful who were still receptive to the old influence of Montanism, renewed by Novatian.

In 318, Arius opposed his bishop, reproaching him for having attributed an equal eternity to the Father and the Son in a sermon. For Arius, the Son was neither eternal nor equal to the Father. Created according to the principle of all things, the Son only received his divine nature once he was invested with his mission as savior on earth. The first opinion resembled Jewish, Essenean and Nazarenean Gnosticism, according to which Adam, or the new Adam erected as the redeemer messiah, was the co-creator of the world. The second revived Montanism: the messiah was a man, sharing in the vicissitudes of common human existence, but the Divine Spirit was incarnated in him at his birth, since he was the son of *Sophia* or Mary. The two [opinions] were part of the evolution of the Christianity of the first two centuries.

A synod of a hundred bishops, convened around 318 or 319, excluded Arius and his partisans from the Christian community; he was refused communion, which marked belonging to the congregation. He left Alexandria and went to Nicomedia, where he enjoyed the support of Bishop Eusebius, despite having written a verse and prose pamphlet called *Thalia* (the Banquet) that had a great popular success. [Bishop] Alexander retorted through a detailed report on the quarrel. The hostility of Licinius to the Christians and his war against Constantine relegated these debates to a secondary level of preoccupations, but once he was master of the Empire (after the defeat of Licinius), Constantine triumphantly acceded to double sovereignty, spiritual and temporal, and – at the request of Arius' friends – convened a council at Nicaea, not far from Nicomedia.

In 325, Constantine, circumvented by his councilor Hosius of Cordova, who'd been won over to the party of Bishop Alexander, convinced three hundred bishops to take up positions against Arius.

The credo of Nicaea resulted from an imperial opinion that was hostile to Arius' theory, according to which "God existed when the Son did not," and "he [the Son] didn't exist before birth." The credo held that the Son was a "true God issued from the true God and forming the same substance with the Father," which translates the Greek term *homoiousios* [consubstantiality].

Arius obeyed and renounced his doctrine. In 328, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea, exiled along with their friend Arius, regained their positions. In 335, the synod of Tyr rehabilitated Arius. Constantine, whose sole desire in excluding them was to assure the unity of the young universal Church, had been preparing to reintegrate him [Arius] into the clergy of Alexandria when the unfortunate protestor died in 336. (The official Christian version of his death shot at him the last arrow of polemical elegance by propagating the rumor that he had unexpectedly died while satisfying an urgent need. The abbot [François-André-Adrien] Pluquet, following other heresiologues, rejoiced in such brilliant proof of divine wrath.)<sup>292</sup>

From this shallow quarrel – in which only the authority of the emperor, elevated to the dignity of *pontifex maximus* (sovereign pontiff), was important – the theologians drew an enormous jumble of implications that were as thunderous as they were empty. Underneath the legalisms of this Arian party, artificially swelled in order to give importance to the negligible, there raged a power struggle between Rome and the Eastern Churches, and an unceasing combat between the West and Byzantium.

From a speculative point of view, it was easy to brandish the reproach of dualism, nay, even Marcion's concept of "two Gods" against Bishop Alexander and his thesis of the "Eternal God, Eternal Son." The credo of Nicaea recognized a single God to parry Marcionism, which the Manichean religion would claim for itself.

After the death of Constantine I, reconciliation seemed to rule. Nevertheless, quite soon after that, his successor, Constant, supported the party of Nicaea, while in the East Constantine II gave his support to the Arians. After the death of Constant in 350, Constantine II, maneuvering through the intervention of several councils, attempted to Arianize the West and hunt down Arius' enemies.

Nevertheless, dissent was born from the sudden victory of Arianism. Three factions emerged: the Anomeans affirmed that the Son was not similar (*anomoios*) to the Father; the semi-Arians (or *homoiousians*) stated that the Son shared the same substance (*homoiousios*) as the Father; and the *homoeians* believed that the Son was like (*homoios*) the Father.

In fact, such doctrinal positions were only pawns on the chessboard of rival influences: Valens, emperor from 364 to 378, inclined in favor of the *homoeians*.

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<sup>292</sup> Abbé Pluquet, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des égarements*, Besançon, 1817, article "Arianism." [Translator: this work is also known under the title *Dictionnaire des hérésies, des erreurs et des schismes* ("Dictionary of heresies, errors and schisms") and seems to have been first published in 1762.]

Gratian and Theodosius the First defended Nicaea. (Note that Theodosius imposed on all Christians an orthodox faith to which he brought the repressive firmness that thenceforth prevented deviation from [the interests of] national security [*la raison d'Etat*]. In the strict sense, he was the founder of Catholic orthodoxy.) The decrees of 380 and 381 condemned Arianism, chased its partisans from the Church and foreshadowed many executions, the first victims of orthodoxy before Priscillian. In 381, the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the credo of Nicaea and condemned the semi-Arians (the *homoiousians*).

With the emergence of a State religion, the *episcopatus aemulatio* – the race for Episcopal honors (which Tertullian mocked and labeled the “mother of all schisms”) – was run more easily because the destiny of the martyr was no longer dreaded.

Born in Cilicia around 300, Aëtius was a rhetorician based in Antioch. He was a disciple of Arius before he founded the Anomean party and created his own doctrine by discerning dissimilarity between the Father and the Son, in whom the Logos or Holy Spirit was incarnated. A friend of Emperor Gallus, Aëtius used certain opportunities to make his views triumph, but his fate was tragic. Condemned to exile upon the fall of Gallus (354), he aroused the reprobation of the Councils of Ancyra (358) and Constantinople (360). Summoned by Emperor Julian and named bishop, he canceled his functions upon the death of the last tolerant emperor (the one whom the Church named the Apostate because he wanted to restore religious freedom). Aëtius participated in the revolt of Procopius (cousin of Julian), barely escaped capital punishment, and died soon thereafter in Constantinople, where his secretary, Eunomius, developed a doctrine according to which the Father and the Son, though dissimilar in essence, were united by the same will.

Athanasius, Alexander's successor, combated the theses of Arius and Aëtius, reinforced the Nicene party and invented the Arian party in his *Discourse Against the Arians*; he portrayed Arianism as a power that threatened faith and Arius himself as the very spirit of heresy.

From such theological hyperbole – under which banal rivalries for power between the notables of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople were played out – burst forth an Arian missionary vocation that almost carried off the laurels of orthodoxy by winning the sympathy of the new rival powers in Rome.

Constantine had only condemned Arius because he wished to protect the unity of the Church and the unity of the Empire. Arius had threatened their stability and order to the extent that his influence had not affected the vast majority of the people. Constantine was not unaware that, when he exiled Arius, he condemned his principal enemy, Athanasius, to the same fate. Likewise, Constantine II – [working] in the uncertainty in which orthodoxy was still situated – also kept

Athanasius and Aëtius aside. Everything could have capsized at any moment. Weakened by the edict of tolerance issued by Emperor Julian (361-363), both parties experienced a kind of victory. The Nicaeans carried off the West; the Anomean missionaries converted the Goths, who, after invading Spain and North Africa, imposed Arianism on them. As far as Byzantium, whose hostility with respect to Rome did not cease to grow, it gave its schism a theological pretext by rejecting the post-Nicaea formula that was born in Spain during the Seventh Century: “The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son,” a quarrel that was called *Filioque* (and of the Son).

The rivalries between Arian, anti-Arian and pseudo-Arian factions rallied a good number of individuals who were in search of social promotion or animated by simple opportunism. (Note that the schismatic Lucifer, the Bishop of Cagliari in Sardinia, laid the bases for an anti-Arian Church so that he himself could profit from it.) Was not Acacius, a bishop and the successor of Eusebius of Caesarea, successively Arian under Constance, Nicaean under Jovian, and Anomean under Valens? Such was the case with many.

More interesting was Aerius, the priest of Pontus, ordained by Eustathius, the Bishop of Sebaste, against whom he entered into conflict and reproached for abandoning the ascetic conduct to which he subscribed before attaining dignity.

Aerius became part of the counter-current of Nicaea and the religious establishment of State control by advancing the opinion that no difference in rank between priests and bishops should exist. He condemned the ostentation of the ceremonies multiplied by the Church and judged useless the prayers for the dead, which were a source of revenue for the clergy. Finally, according to him, Easter did away with Jewish superstition. Epiphanius of Salamis – who used a procedure that was popular among the inquisitors of the Middle Ages, that is to say, intentional confusion – associated Aerius with the Arians, to whom he thus imputed hostile feelings for the [Church] hierarchy.

## Chapter 20: Donatus and the Circumcellions

From the moment that Constantine agreed to support the Christian communities in 313, he took hold of the Church and treated it as an instrument of his State power. He accorded to the bishops he recognized the license to enact sentences under imperial protection. His patronage of large-scale construction projects (Saint Peter's Basilica, Saint John Lateran's Basilica and Saint Agnes's Basilica in Rome; the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem) – which honored a faith that he openly mocked if it did not consolidate his own absolutism – aroused the reprobation of a popular Christianity that had been impregnated by asceticism and martyrdom ever since the end of the Second Century.

An old dispute opposed the party of the torture victims, the Christians who remained unshakeable in their convictions [even] when faced with their executioners, and the party of the *lapsi* and the *traditores*, the renegades and the traitors, who were more numerous and, due to their very pragmatism, better authorized to accede to the clerical responsibilities thenceforth conferred by the State.

It was in Carthage, the bastion of Tertullianism, that the most significant incident exploded; it was precipitated by an anti-Montanist offensive that was under the control of a corrupt clergy.

During the persecutions launched by Diocletian, which were brief but cruel (303-305), the majority of the clergy abjured. A small group of priests from Abitina (Tunisia), imprisoned in advance of being tortured, denounced the *traditores*. They proclaimed that only those who, following their example, remained loyal to the faith would reach paradise. Their intransigence irritated the clergy of Carthage and, in particular, the Archdeacon Caecilianus (Caecilian), who was later accused of preventing other Christians from bringing food and comfort to prisoners.<sup>293</sup>

When Caecilian succeeded the bishop of Carthage, who died in 311, the majority of the faithful reacted with indignation. A young bishop named Donatus [Magnus] led the protests.

Born in Numidia, Donatus had already attracted attention as a young bishop in Casa Nigra by demanding, at the conclusion of the persecutions, a new baptism for the lapsed clergy members. Taking up these entreaties, a council of seventy bishops met in 312 and deposed Caecilian and replaced him with Majorinus, the

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<sup>293</sup> *Acta Saturnini*, in *P.L.*, 18, 8, 701.

chaplain of Lucilla, a rich Spaniard who had been executed under the reign of the collaborating bishop.

That same year, Constantine crushed his rival, Maxentius, and seized North Africa, which had until then been ruled by the deposed emperor. On the recommendation of the Roman clergy, in which apostasy was dominant, Constantine restored Caecilian to his position, allotted him an important subsidy, and exempted from all taxes the clergy who obeyed the renegade.

Nevertheless, upon the death of Majorinus, Donatus succeeded him with the consent of Caecilian's enemies, who sent the emperor a list of the crimes imputed to his protégé. Donatus went to Rome to plead his legitimacy, but Miltiades, the Bishop of Rome, whom Constantine consulted because of his African origins, took sides against him, which caused Donatus to be condemned by the Emperor.

Principally concerned with unifying his empire, Constantine moved from threats to conciliation. In 321, he repealed the decree of exile that had struck Donatus, whose influence had not ceased to grow. In 336, upon a territory that today stretches from Tunisia to East Algeria, two hundred and seventy Donatist bishops controlled communities in which the lax party of Caecilian was in the minority. In Egypt, the Donatist bishop Melece enjoyed great popular support.

No doubt Donatus would have benefited from the tacit tolerance of imperial power if the peasant revolt of the Circumcellions had not been grafted on to his movement and thus formed its working-class [*populaire*] wing.

In 346, a commando group of Circumcellions attacked the commission sent to North Africa by the Emperor. Despite their disapproval of this action, Donatus and his principal partisans were exiled to Gaul, where the bishop of Casa Nigra died in 355.

The Circumcellion movement allied with religious fanaticism (hostile to the laxity of the wealthy) the demands of the disinherited of the countryside: laborers, shepherds, slaves, and poor peasants. Their name came from *circum cellas*: those who roam around the barns (*cellae*).

They called themselves "saints" and "athletes" (*agonists*), which were terms issued from Essenism and Judeo-Christianity. Armed with clubs (each of which was called "Israel"), the Circumcellions attacked owners of large properties and functionaries, and liberated slaves, to whom they entrusted the task of treating their [former] masters as they had been treated in servitude. They combated the Devil in the person of his representatives: terrestrial property-owners, tax collectors, magistrates and anti-Donatist priests. They acted under the leadership of two men, Axid and Fasir, "*duces sanctorum*" (leaders of saints), who, according to Optatus

(340), “made property owners and creditors tremble.”<sup>294</sup> The Circumcellions supported the cult of the martyrs and opposed the sanctification brought about by asceticism to the idle and hedonistic existence of the rich.

Disavowed by the Donatists, the Circumcellions did not resist the imperial army and ended up massacred around 348.

Nevertheless, Donatism survived until 429. It rejected the principal demands of the Circumcellions, which were so often reprised by the [various] millenarian movements: the reign of the saints; universal equality under the sole power of God; moratoria on debts; judgments and executions of the rich; and the suppression of slavery.

Donatus, who at the beginning cautioned against the zeal of the Circumcellions in their hunt for apostates, approved of their suppression but did not recover his credit with the Emperor.

The party of the *lapsi* and the morally lax regained the upper hand. Optatus attacked his adversaries in *Against the Donatists*. From 399 to 415, Augustine of Hippo undertook to chase them from Carthage. Moreover, they were outlawed, starting in 411.

Thanks to one of the many ironies of history, Donatism disappeared in 429, at the same time that Roman colonization was swept away by the invasion of the Vandals, who imposed as the new State religion the very Arianism that had previously been condemned as heresy.

The social and political components that had assured the success of Donatism also conducted it towards its downfall. The nationalistic demands of Numidia and Mauritania provided satisfying reasons for Donatus’ opposition to Rome and his project of creating an African Catholic Church. When he asked, at least according to Optatus’ *Against the Donatists*,<sup>295</sup> “What has the Emperor to do with the Church?” the response was doubly articulated. His Church – outside of which “there was no salvation” (the same was true for the Church of Rome) – refused to submit to the imperial power of an emperor who was at once the head of State and the leader of the clergy. He defended the principle of national Churches, independent of a central power.

But Donatus also contested the preeminence of temporal power over spiritual power. Such was the opinion of the papacy starting from the Seventh Century. Augustine, an enemy of Donatism and a partisan of spiritual preeminence, was not misguided when he borrowed from the Donatist theologian Ticonius the doctrine of the two cities (the terrestrial city and the city of God).

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<sup>294</sup> Optatus, *Contra Parménien le Donatiste*.

<sup>295</sup> ID., *op. cit.*, ed. Vassal-Philips, 1917, 3, 3.



On the other hand, Donatus' Montanism and Tertullianism went against the attempts of the Church of Rome to reconcile itself with a Latin aristocracy that was little inclined to asceticism and Puritanism. His Church claimed to be the "Virgin Church" of Tertullian, in opposition to the temporal Church of the *lapsi*. It was a "closed garden," a refuge for the long-suffering people of God, a place in which adjured priests could have no part.

The Donatists did not grant – and [here] one again finds the arguments of the *Elenchos* against Calixte, the Bishop of Rome – that a dignitary who had lost his celestial existence in order to save his terrestrial life had the right to pursue his ministry. The sacraments accorded by such a bishop were deprived of value. The sacred character of the function did not accommodate itself to an abuse of authority. The clergy of Rome, in which the *lapsi* were in the majority, disagreed. For them, any bishop was invested with the right to give the sacraments, even if, as a man, he showed himself unworthy of the sacredness that he distributed. This was an endemic conflict, one that clarified – from a certain angle – the very notion of heresy. Provided that he did not put aside dogma (and thus remained an obedient son), a priest, bishop or pope could surrender himself to debauchery and infamy without losing the grace that the Church accorded him. But if he practiced virtue by contravening orthodoxy in his discourse, he incurred damnation in the beyond and the here-below.

Augustine formulated his doctrine concerning the nature of the Church and the sacraments in opposition to Donatus. Not only did he appeal for police repression against individuals and groups that put Catholic orthodoxy aside, he also made precise the point that the sacraments acted *ex opere operato*,<sup>296</sup> through the sacred character of the officiant.

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<sup>296</sup> *Translator*: "from the works performed," that is, from the sacrament itself.

## **Chapter 21: The Spirituals, Also Called Messalians or Euchites**

Unlike Arianism, Donatism and Monophysism – which, born from rivalries of nations and Churches, might better be characterized as schisms rather than heresies – the movement of the “Spirituals,” who were called Messalians or Euchites by their adversaries, was only Christian in appearance, under which was expressed the [common] people’s taste for life, so easily diverted by dereliction, leveling and destructive asceticism, and religious or political fanaticism.

By combating the rigor of the New Prophecy, as it was perpetuated by Novatian, Donatus and the Circumcellions, the Church of Rome used a political wisdom of which many popes showed themselves to be the worthy inheritors. Though it was protected by its status as a unique religion, Catholicism did not win the game. Except for a minority, the Greco-Roman aristocracy was reluctant to banish from its everyday life the pleasures of the bed, the table, nay, even the bloody games of the circus. Unlike the “Virgin Church” dear to Tertullian and Donatus, the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church required a strict obedience to its authority and its representatives by those who accorded the sacraments and the absolution of sin. In all the accommodations thus rendered possible – and the specifications of Augustine of Hippo soon came to clarify things – nothing prevented a Roman citizen inclined towards hedonism from embracing Catholicism. Priests, bishops and popes, moreover, only put the brakes on their ordinary ribaldry after the Sixteenth Century, that is, after the cold shower of the Reformation, which washed the Catholic stains from the primitive Christianity, the true Western Christianity, which was anti-Semitic and puritanical: the New Prophecy.

But the anti-Montanism of the Church also expressed the voice of wisdom. The trinity, by virtue of which the Church – as much as the Spirit – mediated between God and the Son, who was incarnated in the weakness and corruption of human and terrestrial nature, also fulfilled a primordial function: it avoided the confrontation with dualism; it set right the balance between good and evil, oppression and revolt, repression and relief. The reverse of Puritanism, it was unbridled license. In this sense, the “Messalian” movement constituted the antithetical continuation of Montanism.

In his *Hymns Against the Heresies*, which were composed in Edessa between 363 and 373, Ephrem [the Syrian] spoke of people who gave themselves up to a free morality under the cover of devotion. They called themselves *pneumatikoi*, “Spirituals.” Their adversaries called them the

“Messalians” (from the Syrian word *m’salleyane*, “those who beg”) or Euchites (from the Greek *euchitai*).

Epiphanius of Salamis mentioned their presence in Antioch around 376 or 377. He described them as vagabonds who refused to possess any goods, slept in the streets of the town, men and women mixed together, rejected all forms of work and contented themselves with begging and praying.

Their initiator was Adelphius, but other names were linked to a current that was scattered everywhere, that continued to perpetuate itself, and that (one can plausibly conjecture) rallied together a great number of people who were drawn more by ephemeral sensual pleasure than by the prize of a hypothetical beyond – indeed, this current never ceased to trace its furrows underneath the prudent appearances of religious obligation. Dadoes, Sabas, Hermas, Symeon and Eustathius of Edessa have been mentioned by Photius, Michael the Syrian, Bar-Hebraeus and Philoxenus of Mabbourg.

In the 380s, Flavian, the patriarch of Antioch, persecuted the Spirituals and chased them into the provinces of Lycaonia and Pamphylia, where the bishops condemned them around 388. In 390, Flavian of Antioch went further by anathematizing all of the Messalians, despite Adelphius’ attempts to defend their cause.

The persecution of the Spirituals was extended into Armenia. Letoios, bishop of Melitene, ordered the burning of monasteries into which the Messalian doctrine had penetrated. (The recidivists were condemned to having the hollows of their knees sliced open.)<sup>297</sup>

Around 405, Atticus, the patriarch of Byzantium, insisted on the necessity of expelling the Messalians. Later on, Nestorius was associated with the struggle. In 428, the imperial police were tasked with intervening against the Spirituals and making them outlaws. In 431, the Council of Ephesus ratified the measures previously taken, without great success, it would seem.

In the second half of the Fifth Century, the Spirituals united around Lampetius, a priest ordained around 460 by Alypius, the Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia. According to Theodore Bar Konai, Lampetius founded monasteries, located in the mountainous region between Cilicia and Isauria, where men and women lived a joyous life. (Note that in the Third and Fourth Centuries, the various ascetic Christianities condemned the women who lived with bishops, priests or deacons, and also exercised sacramental functions, under the name “Agapete,” *agapetai*, “the darlings.” The Celtic tradition, which was relatively favorable to women, introduced the Agapetes into the new Christian cults of

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<sup>297</sup> Runciman, *Le Manichéisme médiéval*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Ireland and Britain, in which, during the Sixth Century, there still existed monasteries composed of female hosts, *cohospitae*, who conferred the sacraments without, for all that, renouncing their [feminine] charms. The Arthurian legends often evoked them.<sup>298</sup> Around 150, *The Shepherd* by Hermas gave an allegorical meaning to their double nature as libertines and holy “virgins.”)

There were other such monasteries in Egypt, where Lampetius enjoyed the protection of Alpheus, the Bishop of Rhinocoloura (El’Arich, near the Palestinian border). How could they not revive the memory of Carpocrates in Alexandria? But the patriarch of the city [El’Arich], either through nonchalance or sympathy, was content to demand an oral repudiation of their errors from these “uncultivated” people.

The actions taken at the beginning of the Sixth Century by the patriarch of Antioch, and his refutation of a work by Lampetius titled *Testament*, showed the persistence of the movement, which was also being fought by the Monophysite Churches of Syria.

One found Spirituals in Constantinople towards the end of the Sixth century, grouped around a moneychanger named Marcian, from whom came the name Marcianites, according to Maximus the Confessor.<sup>299</sup> Photius, the author of a Ninth Century study of the Messalians, spoke of contemporary heretics with whom he occupied himself.

In its most radical aspects, the Spirituals’ doctrine was devoted to justifying the practice of a freedom that guaranteed them the feeling of having attained perfection and impeccability.

The Church principally reproached them for their scorn of the sacraments and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Men and women lived in the streets or in monasteries, were animated by the grace of having vanquished the demon that was in them, and thus acted with the assent of the angels and the Spirit.

From the remarks reported by their adversaries came elements of a philosophy that especially aimed at justifying the pleasures of the way of life that they had chosen.

The fall of Adam had introduced into every person, from birth, a demon that dominated and pushed him or her towards evil. Baptism and the sacraments

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<sup>298</sup> *Translator*: cf. the “Castle Anthrax” scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), in which “eight-score blondes and brunettes, all between sixteen and nineteen-and-a-half” ask Sir Galahad to spank them and then let them perform oral sex on him.

<sup>299</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Scolies sur la hiérarchie ecclésiastique de Denys*, in *P.G.*, 4, 3192b.

remained inoperative against such a presence. Only prayer – and here it was not a question of the Church’s prayers, but rather of continual and assiduous incantations – had the power to chase away the demon. Prayer had to be accompanied by a severe asceticism, of a duration sometimes extended to three years. It ended in a state of [impassive] equanimity – *apatheia* – that realized the union with the Spirit. The Spiritual thus recovered Adam before the Fall or, if you prefer, the Christ, who was – according to Origen, Paul of Samosata, Donatus and Nestorius – the [form of] man assumed by the Logos. (Note that certain Messalians were thus passed off as Nestorians or Monophysites, before being denounced and chased away.)

According to the testimonies collected by John of Damascus [in the late Seventh or early Eighth Century], the expulsion of the demon and the union with the Spirit evoked the orgasm of amorous union. The Spirit, similar to fire, made man into a new being; it recreated him because “fire is the demiurge,” fire is the ardor of desire and the Great Power of life, as it was for Simon of Samaria.

The Spiritual was thereafter invested with the gift of prophecy; he was similar to the Christ and did not sin in whatever he did. The recourse to fasting, asceticism, mortification of the flesh, discipline and the instruction of the soul fell into disuse.

Lampetius mocked the monks whom he saw deliver themselves up to abstinence and penitential clothing, because they thereby showed that they had not acceded to perfection. Nevertheless, the Antoine-and-Macaire<sup>300</sup> crew did not make room for his efforts in the daily struggle against the demon of lust that the Master of the Altar Piece from Isenheim would express with so much pictorial happiness.<sup>301</sup>

Lampetius himself lived in pleasure, dressed in delicate clothes and unveiled to his disciples the path to perfection, which did not lack attractiveness. “Bring me a beautiful young woman,” he said, “and I will show you what holiness is.”<sup>302</sup>

Proclaiming themselves to be blessed [and happy], the Spirituales inverted the project of holiness that had been pushed to extremes by the Montanists and that the anti-Montanist Church exhibited in the enclosure of ascetic monasticism, in its hyperbolic martyrology and in its calendar, wherein they [the martyrs] replaced the *daimon* that, according to the Gnostics, governed every day. (With respect to

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<sup>300</sup> *Translator*: Antoine the Great and Macaire of Pispir lived in the Fourth Century and are considered saints by Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

<sup>301</sup> *Translator*: The Isenheim Altarpiece is an altarpiece sculpted and painted by the Germans Niclaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald, respectively, in 1512–1516.

<sup>302</sup> Photius, edited by Henry, p. 39.

ascetic monasticism, recall the ascetic, Catholic monks who, in Alexandria in 415, let off steam by flaying alive the beautiful Hypatia, a philosopher and brilliant mathematician.) Furthermore, the Spirituals' pre-Adamite Christ was everything that would displease a Church (which they managed to do without, if one can judge from the singular path to salvation that they pursued.).

Practicing a sovereign freedom, the Spirituals rejected work, which they held to be shameful activity. They advised against making alms to the poor and needy so as to reserve for themselves, the truly poor in spirit, such resources, which their bodies needed to sustain themselves, since they, having rediscovered the purity of Adam, could wed Eve in complete Edenic innocence.

### **Borborites, Coddians, Stratiotics, Phemionites**

The heresiologues harbored a clear propensity to multiply, under a variety of names, the opinions that contravened their doctrines or those of the Church of Rome. They intended to demonstrate by this [profusion] the extent of the confusion and incoherence that reigned from the moment that their views were set aside. It seems that the movement of the Spirituals was thus fragmented into many names, such as Stratiotics, Phemionites and Coddians (from the Syrian word *codda*, “platters,” which designated “those who eat apart”).

The term Borborite merits some attention. Victor Magnien recalled that the *borboros* (or “quagmire”) symbolized the impure life in which the uninitiated dwelled.<sup>303</sup> Plotinus identified the Borborites with the third category distinguished by a number of Gnostics: the Hylics, the prisoners of matter.

The Borborites were condemned by a codex issued by Theodosius II. According to Philostorgius, Aëtius was reduced to silence by a Borborite.<sup>304</sup>

Ecclesiastical opinion gave to “Borborite” the meanings “dirty, filthy, uncultivated.” In 480, Lazarus of Pharb spoke of people who were “ignorant and mocked all beliefs.” He said that one could apply the following proverb to them: “For the pig’s fiancé, a bath in the cesspool.”<sup>305</sup>

Was it a question of uninitiated people submitted to the perfect Spirituals and striving through total destitution to attain the revelation of the Spirit, from which absolute freedom proceeded? Or did the term [“Borborite”] quite simply designate the immense majority of the beings, tormented by the difficulties of

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<sup>303</sup> V. Magnien, *Les Mystères d’Eleusis*, Paris, 1938.

<sup>304</sup> Philostorgius, *Epitome Historiarum*, III, in P.G., LXV, 501-505.

<sup>305</sup> Quoted by Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

existence, who enjoyed the simplest pleasures without being preoccupied with some divinity other than fortunate or unfortunate chance?

## Chapter 22: Monophysites and Dyophysites

Two currents stood out from the tormented landscape of ecclesiastical rivalries, the quarrels of the Churches struggling for the recognition of their authority and preeminence. They corresponded to the two poles of imperial power: Rome and Byzantium, on the one hand, and Alexandria, the cradle of Hellenized Christianity, on the other.

Monophysism was more a schism than a heresy. Born in Alexandria, this doctrine was not innovative but used old speculations on the nature of the Messiah to differentiate itself from [the doctrines promulgated in] Rome. After the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, the Eastern Churches seized hold of the Jacobites of Syria and the Armenian churches in order to constitute their dogma, which is still honored by the Copts of Egypt. But one must also take account of the ceaseless animosity between Alexandria and Antioch, the city in which – ever since the end of the First Century – the communities devoted to James and Simon-Peter had been established. The judgment of Tertullian, “*episcopatus aemulatio schismatum mater est*,”<sup>306</sup> was verified once again.

By rejecting Arius, the Church of Rome had defined, through the credo of Nicaea, the rudiments of Catholic dogma: the Christ was God; he formed a single substance with the Father; although he was created for all eternity by the Father, he was incarnated by descending to earth and thus became a man entirely apart [from other men]. This was the position of Tertullian and, for Rome, it was the one that most advantageously defined the role of the Church: a spiritual and temporal power; the union of the celestial and temporal kingdoms. The Church had been founded by God and by “Jesus, put to death under Pontius Pilate,” and its two principal apostles, Peter and Paul, were martyred in Rome, which was thereby designated the legitimate place for the “Holy See.”

Arianism, issued from Alexandria, established a subordinate relationship between God, the creator of all things, and the Son, created as any man was, but invested by the divine Logos. “Did you have a son before he was born?” Arius asked of mothers, and his question, ironically aimed at the Mother Church,

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<sup>306</sup> *Translator*: previously mentioned in Chapter 19, this Latin maxim, which appears in Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*, can be translated as, “Envy of the episcopate is the mother of all schisms.” Note that, in Vaneigem’s text, the maxim is (incorrectly) recalled as *episcopatus aemulatio mater schismatum est*, when in fact it is *episcopatus aemulatio schismatum mater est*.



attacked the pretension of ecclesiastic Rome [“the eternal city”] to divine permanence.

It was in Alexandria that Cyril, a disciple of Athanasius (Arius’ enemy), led a revolt against Rome. This revolt was grafted upon one of the specious quarrels in which Alexandria and Antioch had been engaged for centuries.

There was a single substance common to the Father, the Son and the Logos (or the Spirit). But what was the nature, the *physis*, of the Jesus who was both a man entirely apart and the God of all eternity?

For the party of Antioch, there were two natures in the Messiah: one divine and one human. Such was the opinion of Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Theodoret of Cyprus, and Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. That’s wrong, retorted the party of Alexandria. To admit two natures was to recognize two Messiahs, two people: one the eternal Logos; the other a historical individual. Monophysites, or the supporters of a single nature, thenceforth entered into the ranks of those who combated the Antiochians or Dyophysites, who distinguished two natures.

Paradoxically, Monophysism derived from the hostility manifested towards Arius by Athanasius of Alexandria, who insisted on the single nature of the God Logos incarnate. Around 370, Apollinaire of Laodicea (Latakia, in Syria), desiring to pursue the struggle against Arianism, insisted on Athanasius’ thesis and thus provoked the animosity of Epiphanius of Salamis, the hunter of heretics and the sworn enemy of Origen.

In 374, Epiphanius denounced Apollinaire to Damasus, the Bishop of Rome: Apollinaire was condemned by a synod.

In 381, while the ecumenical council of Constantinople anathematized Arianism and Apollinaire’s theses, an adversary of Apollinaire named Diodorus of Tarsus (an Antiochian) took a position that was opposed to the incriminated doctrine. Diodorus decreed that the most important things about the Christ were his human nature, his suffering, and his exemplary sacrifice. He counted two natures in this Messiah who, used a pretext, was tossed from one camp to the other on the waves of a theology of power: the Word or Logos, the Son of God, and Jesus the man, the son of Mary. Theodore of Mopsuestia then developed Diodorus’ theory.

The difficulty faced by the clerics who tried to legitimate their authority by fortifying it with “divine truths” precisely concerned the way that they transformed into concrete realities the purely speculative reasons that Judeo-Christian Gnosticism had maintained at the very limits of coherence: God drew from his eternal essence a Logos (or image) whose the spark (or reflection) preserved its imprint in human matter. From this Divine Wisdom – *Sophia* or Mary, the feminine Spirit – was born a Messiah, a savior, a redeemer, who (though still of the same virginal essence as his mother) assumed the body of a man, knew the

miserable lot of mortals and, through, his exemplary sacrifice, ascended towards his Father by showing mankind the path to salvation and the upward route of the divine that was inside it. What spoiled and complicated the metaphysical purity of such a construction was the will or the necessity to introduce into it a temporal power, a legal authority.

The apologue of *Sophia*, the virgin, and Prunikos, the prostitute, contented itself with allegorically expressing the descent of the Spirit into matter and the deplorable fate that was imposed upon it by the “malediction of the flesh.” But parthenogenesis by a young Jewish bride who gave birth to God after having welcomed a dove?!

In 423, when Theodosius II named the Antiochian Nestorius to be the patriarch of Constantinople, popular Greek Christianity adopted the custom of celebrating Mary as the mother of God, thereby dressing up in fashionable clothes one of the commonly invoked ancient Goddesses. She was called *Theotokos*. (Note that, in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, the custom of offering cakes to Ceres became Christianized. The new Christians who dedicated to Mary the offerings that were reserved for her archetype were called “Collyridians,” a word derived from the Greek *collyres*, “little cakes.” Epiphanius unleashed his fury against them, no doubt due to his misogyny, but also because he suspected that, under the Christian facade, the old fertility rites remained intact.)

Nestorius (381-451), the Bishop of Byzantium from 428-431, claimed for himself the Dyophysite school of Antioch. His disciples held him, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodorus of Tarsus to be the “three great lights of the Church.” His political realism persuaded him to vehemently persecute the “heretics,” particularly the Messalians, and to follow the Antiochian tradition of historical exegesis rather than the allegorical tradition of Alexandria. Nevertheless, he clashed with the general sentiment of the Greek Catholics by rejecting the expression “mother of God” (*Theotokos*) and choosing instead *Anthropotokos* or *Christotokos* (“mother of Man” or “mother of the Christ”).

Cyril of Alexandria, adversary of Nestorius and partisan of Apollinaire of Laodicea, quickly counter-attacked: “If the Christ is God, and Mary is his mother, how could she not be the mother of God?”

In 431, the emperor convened a council at Ephesus. Through a maneuver that revealed the political obedience of theological argumentation, the partisans of Cyril, arriving first, obtained the condemnation of Nestorius. Mary triumphed as the *Theotokos*, the mother of God, and Nestorius was deposed. Although the Nestorians replied at counter-council in 436 by deposing Cyril, the patriarch of Byzantium was banished to Petra, then in Upper Egypt, where he died. By imperial order, the ensemble of his works was burned. Nevertheless, a copy of his *Bazaar of*

*Heracleides* escaped destruction. In it, he proclaimed that God could not have been born from a woman, nor could he die on the cross. This was a thesis that was commonly accepted by the Christian Gnostics of the Second Century and that the Church later condemned under the name “Docetism.”

Nestorius’ fall caused the ruination of the Dyophysites Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who – held as orthodox in their era – were posthumously placed among the camp of the heretics. Nevertheless, Diodorus deployed great ingenuity by explaining that, in Mary’s uterus, the Logos had built a temple for itself. This temple was Jesus the man, headed for birth and suffering, whereas the divine Logos, for its part, escaped the influence of a human destiny.

Likewise, Theodore insisted on the conjoining, in a single person, of a man, completely human, with the Logos-Son, perfect in its divinity and consubstantial with the Father.

In 489, the school of Edessa, in which Nestorianism enjoyed a great popularity, fell under the prohibitions of Emperor Zenon. The persecution chased away the Nestorians, whose Churches spread everywhere in the East, from Samarkand and Tartary to India and even China. They have continued to exist to the present day; they conserve the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and not from the Son, which is what the Byzantine Church affirmed. The West has only kept traces of these doctrines, which were condemned under the name “Adoptianism” and associated with Felix of Urgell and Elipand, the Bishop of Toledo, who was excommunicated by the Council of Frankfurt in the Eighth Century for maintaining that God had adopted Jesus the man in order to deposit his Logos in him.

In its will to maintain the unity of a Church of which it remained the true master, imperial power sought to reconcile the partisans of Cyril and Nestorius in the first half of the Fifth Century.

Did not Eutyches, the Archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople, try to unite these points of view in the following formula? – in Jesus there were two natures that only formed a single one once the union with the Logos was accomplished.<sup>307</sup>

In 451, Emperor Marcian convened a new council in Chalcedon, not far from Byzantium. The decision was [that the Christ had been] one person with two natures. The Monophysites, hurt by the attribution of two natures, were dismayed; the Dyophysites, for whom “one person” was unacceptable, were dissatisfied. The Council also excluded Eutyches. The Egyptians felt betrayed. They declared: “We

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<sup>307</sup> *Translator*: yes, he did, and, as a result, he was condemned as a heretic by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

would be killed if we counter-signed the text of Leon” (the Bishop of Rome who seemed to have envisioned two natures in his *Tome*). “We would prefer to die at the hands of the emperor and the Council, than at those of our followers.”<sup>308</sup> Their prudence with respect to confronting their faithful was only too justified. The Council had scarcely deposed Dioscorus, the Monophysite bishop of Alexandria, when his successor, Proterius, mandated by the Council, was lynched by a mob.

The Monophysite schism affected Egypt, half of Palestine, Syria, Ethiopia, the South of Arabia, and Georgia; [thus] it outlined an anti-Chalcedonian front of Churches. The Churches of Armenia, which were not represented at the Council, became Monophysite in the Sixth Century.

In the East, there subsisted a [pro-]Chalcedonian party: the Melchites, who professed opinions hostile to Monophysism; Emperor Justinian tried to reconcile them with the Monophysites. After having Vigilius, the Bishop of Rome (a “Pope,” as some have called him since then), kidnapped, Justinian kept him prisoner for seven years, until he signed a Monophysite “capitulation.”

The Syrian monk Jacob Baradaeus (500-578) founded new Monophysite Churches all through the East. The Churches in Syria kept his memory by calling themselves Jacobites. These were orthodox Churches that hunted down heretics, as everywhere else, with the help of their thinkers: Severus of Antioch, Jacob of Serugh, Philoxenus of Mabbug, John of Tella, and Theodore of Arabia.

In the wake of Monophysism was situated the sect of the *agnoetes* (the “ignorant”), which was founded by Themistios, the Deacon of Alexandria, who, preoccupied with the intellect of Jesus, established a distinction between the omniscience of God (which was in Jesus, but in an unconscious state) and his comprehension, which hardly surpassed the understanding shared by other men. Carried along by rival powers, speculation gave something piquant to the decision of the Council of Chalcedon: two natures, but only one person in Jesus. But Themistios did not occupy a position in the Church worthy of the interest that was satisfied by the Monophysism of the Coptic Churches, which were thenceforth independent of the Archbishopric of Rome (which became the papacy) and thus, on the Byzantine side of things, assured of a relative peace.

Eulogius, the [Greek Orthodox] Patriarch of Alexandria (580-607), and Pope Gregory I [590-604] both condemned Themistios.

The quarrel over the nature(s) of the Christ suggested to Julian, the Bishop of Halicarnassus, the opinion that – because Jesus was not entirely human – his body remained incorruptible and inaccessible to suffering. Combated by the Monophysite Severus of Antioch, chased from his Episcopal See, and condemned,

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<sup>308</sup> J. D. Mansi, *De sacrorum conciliorum novo collectio*, 1759, 7, 58-60.

along with his partisans, under the barbaric label *Aphthartodocetes*, Julian took refuge in Alexandria in 518.<sup>309</sup>

A sectarian of Julian of Halicarnassus, Gaianus – enthroned in place of Theodosius (a supporter of Severus) in 535 – united his partisans, or “Gaianites,” in a faction that perpetuated the spirit of Paul of Samosata. Communion was given in his name; and the women baptized their own children in the sea by invoking the name of Gaianus, who did not disdain from passing himself off as the “second Christ” and receiving Mass in person.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, Cambridge, 1972.

<sup>310</sup> J. Jarry, *Hérésies et factions dans l'Empire byzantin du IV au VII siècle*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

## **Chapter 23: Pelagius and Augustine, or the Conception of Free Will and Predestination**

By way of Augustine of Hippo, who fought against them, the doctrines of Pelagius enriched Catholic dogma, then in the process of formation, with two specifications that were important due to the power that they conferred upon the Church of Rome and the incessant quarrels that they maintained over the course of the centuries.

Augustine's battles marked the beginning of the requirement to baptize children, who were held to be impure at birth, and the advent of the theory of predestination – later on judged to be heretical, but without triggering the impossible condemnation of one of the principal “fathers” of Catholicism – which he fabricated in order use it against his old enemy, Pelagius.

Pelagius (340?-429?), born in Britain or Ireland, no doubt retained traces of the Celtic freedom of spirit when he reached Rome around 400. A little before the fall and sacking of Rome by the Goths, who had converted to Arianism (410), Pelagius and his disciple Celestius left for Carthage, where his brilliant mind and rhetorical talents won him the friendship of Augustine of Hippo, the bishop of the city. But Augustine's authoritarianism quickly ceased tolerating the uncertainties that Pelagius' ideas propagated concerning the function of the Church, over which the master of Carthage intended to establish absolute hegemony. (Note that Augustine did not hesitate to retrieve from Ticonius, who was a partisan of a type of Donatism that he anathematized, the theory of a City of God that was superior to the terrestrial city and attributed with imperial power, which was precisely in decline in the Roman Empire.)

Pelagius took refuge in Palestine, in which another Catholic doctrinarian, Jerome – put on his guard by Augustine's emissaries – persecuted him and charged his doctrine with Manichaeism, which was Catholicism's religious rival, repressed everywhere with the greatest violence. (Note that Augustine himself was a renegade from Manichaeism. He had turned his vehemence against his former co-religionists by calling down upon them the rigors of the law. It was from him that came the bloody repression that struck the Manicheans and, later on, the Paulicians, the Bogomiles and the Cathars.)

Acquitted by the Synod of Jerusalem in 415, Pelagius and Celestius were excommunicated two years later by Pope Innocent I. At first, Zosimus, Innocent's successor, showed some sympathy towards Pelagius, but he soon pulled himself together and definitively condemned him at the Council of Carthage in 418.

The stakes, it is true, set in motion powerful interests.

To better understand Pelagius' teachings and Augustine's attitude [towards them], it is fitting to situate them within the anti-Montanist reaction that was conducted with firmness by the "lax" politics of the ecclesiastic majorities in the West.

If the Church reconciled itself with Greco-Roman hedonism by exiling puritanical rigor to the monasteries; if it kept the sacrificial perfection of the Christ as a difficult-to-access ideal; then it also acquiesced (without too much difficulty) to the depraved morals of many priests and faithful people, provided that the Church's authority and sacramental function were publicly privileged.

The Spirituals or "Messalians" weren't the only ones to turn away from the duplicity of the Church and to use several hastily Christianized arguments to cover for their quite common decisions to obey sexual impulses and the pleasures of existence, but without preoccupying themselves with obedience or guilt.

Around 380, a certain Helvidius – apparently a disciple of Auxentius (an Arian Bishop of Milan and the predecessor of Ambrose) – drew down upon himself the thunderbolts of Jerome (344?-420) for having mocked the virginity of Mary and for maintaining that she had had other children because the canonical gospels mentioned the "brothers of the Lord." With fervor, Jerome tried to show that these brothers were only Jesus' cousins. But this was getting way too tangled up in the word "brother," which – in the spirit of Essenism and Nazarenism – was identical to "witness," which became *martus* in Greek and "martyr" in French [and English, too]. For Judeo-Christians, the brother or witness only meant the one who partook of the same sacrifice as that of the "Servant of the Lord" celebrated by the *Book of Isaiah*.

But Helvidius' remarks were less concerned with promoting historical exegesis than with having done with the alleged superiority of virginity over the amorous relation. This was why he rejected Tertullian, Montanus and all of the Christianity of the New Prophecy.

A similar doctrine was found in the thinking of Jovinian, a disciple of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. In Rome, where his audience was large, Jovinian was ironic about Mary's virginity: he argued that such a birth made Jesus a fantastical being, the *angelos-christos* invoked by the [very] Gnostics and Manicheans who'd been condemned by the Church. To the hypocritical asceticism of the faithful, Jovinian opposed the healthy inclination to the pleasures of the table and love, and to the benefits of life, which were real favors accorded by divine goodness. For him, the purification of baptism was sufficient to wash away all sin and to protect oneself against the traps set by a demon who was eager to spoil and corrupt the gifts of God.

Condemned by Pope Siricius and the Council of Milan, which had been convened in 390 at the request of Ambrose, Jovinian was exiled by imperial proscription.

Among the fiercest of Jovinian's adversaries were Jerome, a supporter of Marian virginity and the author of *Against Jovinian*; the no-less misogynist Augustine; and Pelagius.

What separated Pelagius from the puritanical Augustine? A certain concept of human dignity. Pelagius did not share the conception of a fundamental ignominy of mankind, which the Bishop of Carthage had brilliantly summarized in this finding: "*Inter fescas et urinam nascimur*" ("We are born between shit and piss").

Pelagius' austerity was related to that of Seneca and the atheistic moralists of the Nineteenth Century, nay, even the freethinkers who denounced the debauchery of the clergy. Pelagius estimated that mankind made use of a force of will that was sufficient to attain virtue and goodness. There was no need for divine aid or the mediation of the Church if one wished to follow the ethical rules that were prescribed everywhere. All virtues resided in germ-form in each individual; it was sufficient to bring these seeds to fruition if one wished to fight against the temptations of evil.

One could not trace out the roads of public morality any better than by avoiding the detour of the Church.

The Church [according to Pelagius], reduced to its smallest share, only intervened through the sacraments, which guaranteed the salvation of the soul when terrestrial life had accomplished its destiny according to the precepts of moral law.

Our freedom [according to Pelagius] was as total as that of Adam and Eve before they misused it and condemned themselves to downfall. By learning the privileges of moral will from infancy, men could obey God's designs, and baptism (which was not given to children at the time) simply affixed the Church's seal, as if it were a passport to eternal beatitude.

Many citizens of the Empire – among those who prized moral rigor or Stoic or Epicurean philosophy – practiced such principles without having the need to give them a Christian coloration. Even among the Catholics, Theophronius of Cappadocia maintained that the omniscience of God knew all that would happen, but did not positively know it as an accomplished fact, [thus] leaving to mankind the freedom to act beyond all determinations. In the spirit of Theophronius, it was a question of reconciling the absolute power of God and human freedom, which the Church, called upon to extricate itself from Augustinian predestination, would call "free will."

And so, at the same time that Pelagius reminded his followers of the principles of secular morality, Augustine (foreseeing the decline of imperial unity



and its stranglehold over the West) prepared for the advent of a pontifical authority that would cover the entire world with traps, the tangled links of which the City of God and the terrestrial city would ceaselessly tighten.

Augustine launched a machine of doctrinal war against Pelagius. To the freedom defended by his adversary, Augustine opposed a theory that, later on, Calvinism and Jansenism regurgitated: predestination.

The fate of mankind was traced out for all eternity by God, who, as absolute master, decided upon the salvation or the damnation of his creatures. A terrible doctrine, which, condemning human beings to fear and trembling, reduced their pride and abandoned them, gasping, to the consolations of a Church that recalled their indignity to them.

To break the Pelagians' excessive confidence in mankind, Pope Honorius subjected them and the philosopher Julian of Eclanum to the penalties prescribed for heretics. Pelagius and Celestius died in exile, one believes, shortly thereafter.

Another effect of predestination highlighted an obvious fact that was even more embarrassing to the Church than freedom left in mankind's own hands. If the fate of each being was determined according to the whims of God, what good was there in worrying about the protections of the Church, the priests and the sacraments? Thomas Aquinas' laborious arguments were required to grant to the all-powerful divinity the freedom to choose salvation or damnation in the conscious and willful manner called "free will."

Augustine never incurred the least reprobation; he had done too much for the grandeur and enrichment of the Church [to be censured]. But, in 475, the Council of Arles condemned as a heretic someone named Lucid, who supported the ideas that, the freedom of mankind having been annihilated by the fall into sin, each person's destiny was controlled by a predestination required by God, and that, by virtue of this predestination, each person's destiny irreparably led to damnation or eternal life.

The amplified functions of original sin and the impurity imputed to newborn infants gave to [the Church's] dogma a response that aimed at annihilating the hopes that Pelagius placed in perfecting mankind. The Montanists, in their horror of nature and life (although such a revulsion had already animated Essenean zeal), were the first ones to recommend the baptism of infants, at a time when the custom was not widespread. Augustine held up to mankind, which was (according to Pelagius) capable of raising itself towards virtue, the opposite portrait: man was a sickly creature, imbecilic, prey to all the temptations of the flesh and quite unable to resist them. Why? Because the original stain of the sin of Adam had penetrated him from his birth. Only baptism washed him of the infamy that the Church could only tolerate when it welcomed the faithful into its sanctuary.

Once the baptism of children was established as a necessity, the newborn was devoted to the Catholic faith from the very first hours of its life. Children who weren't baptized would die like animals; the others lived amidst errors and repudiated innocence. A profitable market in penitence and redemption – purchased by gifts, emoluments, alms, and submission – took root in the Augustinian doctrine of the intrinsic weakness of the body and the mind.

No one had the force of character great enough to successfully resist all temptation. One sinned by pride if one estimated oneself able to evade [all] the demoniac ruses of nature. And so man, that miserable and negligible being, succumbed to sin because Rome had authorized him to redeem himself, to regain his salvation, not through the person of Augustine, but in the heart-warming bosom of the Church. Later on, the skillful organization of responsibilities and free will established a calculus of salvation and damnation that opened up the purchasing of indulgences and absolutions at a price.

The credit of Augustine in the matter was merited, as long as one excused his doctrinal lapses into the black ride of predestination.

## Chapter 24: Priscillian of Avila

Among the letters falsely attributed to Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage (executed in 258), there is one – emanating from Novatian’s partisans, that is to say, from the Christians loyal to the New Prophecy and hostile to the *lapsi* – that attested to the presence in Spain of Christian communities of the Montanist tendency, the ardor of which Novatian had revived in the fire of imperial persecution.

In 254, an African council convened under the aegis of Cyprian provided its support to the Novatians who, in Lerida, León and Astorga, rejected the ministers suspected of abjuration during Decius’ repressions.

Thus, with the Constantinian turn, the Catholic ecclesial faction that had acceded to power universally recognized the authority of the perjured priests and collaborators. (See the example of Bishop Caecilian, the enemy of Donatus in Carthage.) A century later, Bishop Pacianus of Barcelona denounced penitential discipline and the rigor of the priest or bishop named Sympronianus.<sup>311</sup>

Priscillian’s intervention was evidence of the persistence of a Christian tradition with which Catholicism confirmed its break because of its political aims. The execution of Priscillian put a bloody mark on an archaic Christianity that had been sacrificed to national security [*la raison d’Etat*].

Through the unanswerable argument of the sword, Catholicism cut itself off from a Christianity that did not cease to haunt it during the long funeral procession of the Vaudois, Apostolics, Flagellants, and Spiritual Franciscans, right up to the emergence of a Reformation in which the spirits of Montanus and Tertullian were reincarnated in the founding fathers of modern capitalism.

Born around 340 to a well-to-do and probably senatorial Roman family that lived in Gallaecia, Priscillian was in his thirties when he joined a Christian current that was traditionally ascetic, millenarian and always on the look-out for the second coming of the Christ.

Priscillian soon clashed with the representatives of Rome and the new tendency. Among the clerical functionaries of the emperor, two dignitaries – Ithacius, Bishop of Ossonoba (Faro) and his metropolitan, Hydatius of Emerita Augusta (Merida) – accused Priscillian of imposing upon his followers an oath of loyalty to him. These functionaries inflamed the Council of Saragossa, which in

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<sup>311</sup> H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church*, Oxford, 1976.

380 brought together twenty-six bishops from Spain and Portugal, and two from South Gaul. What was the exact accusation? That Priscillian, well versed in biblical exegeses, referred to texts other than the canonical ones, which had only been recently imposed. But the progress of Manichaeism, the great religion in competition with Catholicism, offered the “Romans” the occasion to have recourse to the amalgam, which was an ordinary ingredient in such polemics. Priscillian, a perfect ascetic, declared himself in favor of celibacy for the priests. It didn’t take more than that [for his enemies] to associate him with the disciples of Mani, against whom the neo-Novatian had, it so happens, never ceased to struggle.

That same year, Priscillian was chosen to be the Bishop of Avila. This angered Hydatius, who obtained, in quick succession, the support of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan and a future saint, and an imperial ruling that ordered the deposition of Priscillian and the banishment of the [other] “pseudo-Bishops and Manicheans.”

Soon afterwards, Priscillian, two friendly bishops and three women from his congregation went to Rome via Aquitaine to plead their case and prove their religious orthodoxy. They expressed the wish to be judged, not by a civilian tribunal, but ecclesiastic authorities. In Milan, Ambrose refused to give them an audience. Addressing themselves to Macedonius, Ambrose’s adversary, they managed – through his intervention – to meet with Emperor Gratian, who was originally from Spain. Gratian was convinced by their arguments and restored Priscillian and his friend, Bishop Instantius, to their positions.

Ithacius reacted by going to Trier, where he reported the affair to Gratian. But, in August 380, Gratian was assassinated by a rival, another Spaniard, Magnus Maximus, who was acclaimed “Augustus,” although legitimate recognition of him was refused, which abandoned him to the uncertainties of usurpation.

Pressed by the desire to reconcile the sympathies of a unitary and Roman Church, Magnus Maximus took hold of the trial like it was a political tool and convened a synod in Bordeaux so as to settle the question by a veritable pontifical sovereignty.<sup>312</sup> His hatred of Gratian enjoined him to demonstrate that, unlike his predecessor, he would tolerate neither polytheism nor heresy. Priscillian, summoned to Trier with his friends, confronted the bishops of Spain and Gaul, who had previously been favorable to the decisions of Maximus.

With the exception (one says) of Martin of Tours, all [of the members of the synod] condemned the Bishop of Avila, who – in his combat against the Manicheans – had reproached them for their recourse to magic and was now [in his

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<sup>312</sup> N. Cohn, p. 226. [*Translator*: here Vaneigem refers to the French translation of Norman Cohn’s *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, (New York, 1957), p. 219.]

turn] accused of Manichaeism and sorcery. Tortured, he confessed his magical powers, his role in demonic assemblies, and his custom of praying in the nude. The repressive tradition of the Church attempted to identify in the popular imagination Manichaeism and, later on, Valdeism, with rites of sorcery, which easily kindled the pyres of fear and hatred.

The iniquity of the trial of Priscillian aroused the reprobation of Martin of Tours and, perhaps, that of Siricius (whose timid power aspired to the recognition of the pontifical title). A second chance given to Priscillian was abruptly ended by the decapitation in Trier between 385 and 387 of the six people charged with “magic and immorality.” Received with indignation by the Christian communities, the news elicited a few belated regrets from Ambrose of Milan. The remains of Priscillian, repatriated to Gallaecia around 396, were the objects of veneration usually reserved for martyrs of the faith.

As the death of their leader did not weaken the Priscillians, Emperor Honorius issued the ruling of 408 against them. In 561 or 563, the Council of Braga judged it useful to anathematize seventeen “errors” imputed to Priscillian.

It is difficult to disentangle the Priscillian doctrine from the calumnies that the Church has intermixed with it over the centuries. Its basis derived from the Christianity that was dominant from the second half of the Second Century to the end of the Fourth, and that the Church condemned under the names Montanism, Encratism, Novatianism and Origenism. Thus Priscillianism was unacquainted with the compiled gospels, which had been canonically enriched with arguments hostile to Arius and ascetic rigor. Priscillianism brought together clerics and lay people in assemblies in which asceticism and the cult of virginity were exalted. If one can judge from the similar state of the Pietist congregations of the Seventeenth Century, it is probable that ecstasies, illuminations, prophecies and other forms of religious hysteria common to Puritanism were manifested in Priscillianism.

Neither Spain nor the working-class strata of Christianity had [yet] adopted the Nicene conception of the trinity. “Long after Nicaea, a very archaic view and a similar experience of the Trinity continued to be dominant.”<sup>313</sup>

According to Priscillian, Christian asceticism partook of the presence of the Christ-God. As in the prescriptions of Tertullian, one dreamed of exhausting the body in order to make the Spirit within it grow. As with Justin arguing against Trypho, the Christ was nothing other than the divine Logos. The presence of God resulted more from a personal experience than rational reflection. Revelation of the God-Christ permitted mankind to attain the state of perfection through the exercise

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<sup>313</sup> A. J. M. Goosen, *Achtergronden van Priscillianus' christelijke ascese*, Nimegue, 1976, p. 401.

of rigor. And Priscillian spoke of a *nova nativitas*, a new birth. Was it not his heritage that was welcomed by Spanish Catholicism, which – from Dominique to Queipo de Llano, passing through Ignatius and Loyola, and [through the] genius loci,<sup>314</sup> Theresa of Avila – furbished the weapons against life known as *Viva la muerte*<sup>315</sup> and *Perinde ac cadaver?*<sup>316</sup>

Must one exclude the recourse to astrology, if not magic, from a teaching that was founded on the imitation of the Christ and that conferred “*quies, libertas, unitas*”?<sup>317</sup>

“The Priscillianist heretics,” Pope Gregory stated, “think that all men are born under a conjunction of stars. And, to help their error, they appeal to the fact that a new star appeared when Our Lord showed himself in the flesh.”<sup>318</sup> Perhaps the notion of a new birth gave rise to astrological speculations that were similar to those made by Bardaisan of Edessa. As for magic, its practice was fairly widespread in the Christian milieu, as was attested by the *abraxas* or talismans on which the Christ replaced Seth, Ophis, Mithra, Serapis or Abrasax. The cult of the saints itself made use of the invocations in which the sign of the cross was substituted for the song of the [seven] vowels and gestures that translated diverse expressions.

To recognize Priscillian as the first victim of [Catholic] orthodoxy and the [universal] jurisdiction adopted in matters of heresy – which has been the customary way that the historians have seen him – is to forget the massacres of the Arians and the Donatists. The novelty of the death of Priscillian in fact resided in the iniquity of the trial and the arguments made against the accused. In fact, at Trier, the curtain was raised on a long series of staged events in which the accused – condemned in advance by the judgment of the Church – passed under the parodic sign of “justice” and entered into the flaming circle of expiatory sacrifice by which the clergy imposed the dogma of their purity and divine power upon the sinners.

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<sup>314</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “the spirit of the place.”

<sup>315</sup> *Translator*: “Long live death” was the slogan of the Spanish fascists in the 1930s.

<sup>316</sup> *Translator*: a shortening of *perinde ac si cadaver essent*, Latin for “as obedient as a corpse,” a Jesuitical slogan of Ignatius: “Let everyone persuade himself that those who live under obedience must let themselves be led and ruled by divine providence through their superiors, as if they were a corpse which allows itself to be carried here and there and treated in any way.”

<sup>317</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “rest, freedom, unity.”

<sup>318</sup> Gregory the Great, cited in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* (Priscillian).

## Chapter 25: Paulicians and Bogomils

### The Paulicians

In the Fourth Century, Armenian Christianity, despite its idiosyncrasies, offered the same landscape as that of the cities of Latium and Greece, if not the entire Empire: an old Christianity of an ascetic spirit; a pro-Roman clerical party that was better and better structured; Marcionite communities; local Churches like those founded by Paul of Samosata; and archaic cults that were Christianized or that included the Christ in their ecumenism: Naassenes, Barbelites, Sethians, Valentinians, and sometimes all of these beliefs confounded together. (Note that this runs counter to what the majority of historians affirm, and yet is revealed by the sepulcher of the Aurelii.)

In Armenia, the pro-Roman faction tried to free itself from Montanist Christianity, the Marcionite Churches and the schools of Bardaisan. Epiphanius, responsible for keeping track of the movements that resisted Roman Catholicism, mentioned a sect founded by a certain Peter of Kapharbarucha, which he designated “Archontics,” whose doctrine was propagated by Eutactus of Satala. This doctrine was a syncretism of Marcionism and Barbelism. From Marcion, it took anti-Semitism and the dualism according to which the Demiurge, creator of an odious universe, was none other than Sabaoth, the God of the Jews, who resided in the seventh heaven and governed the Hebdomad. To rejoin his original Mother, Sabaoth had to elevate himself to the eighth heaven (Ogdoad). We do not know the type of ecstatic practice by which union with the adept was established, [but it was] no doubt induced through incantations in order to avoid the traps set by the henchmen of the abominable Sabaoth.<sup>319</sup> The Archontics did not bother with baptism or the sacraments.

After 325, the monarchs embraced Catholicism due to complacency and diplomatically imposed it on their subjects. The Roman clerical faction thus took hold of the key posts and repressed all of the isolated pockets of resistance, which were soon after listed in the catalogues of heresy, the identification files that inquisitorial police officers used until the Eighteenth Century.

The Paulicians, who appeared in the middle of the Seventh Century in Armenia (the province that lay between Asia Minor and the Byzantine Empire), seemed to have come from Samosata, from which they were chased by

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<sup>319</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, I, 3.

persecution. Fleeing Armenia and the combined zeal of the Church and the princes, they found refuge near Koloneia, under the suzerainty of the Arab caliphate. In fact, a little after 630, the Arabs quickly seized the Byzantine provinces in North Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Syria; they then threatened Byzantium, which was torn by internal struggles.

Although Peter of Sicily believed that the Paulician movement went back to Paul of Samosata, it is more credible to link it with Paul the Armenian who, from 699 to 718, consolidated it.

Dualists, the Paulicians did not adhere to the Manichean religion. Instead, their doctrine went back to archaic Gnostic Christianity, adapted to the Paulicians' status as an embattled minority.

Peasants grouped together in "free" agrarian communities – note that the Paulician communalist model played a role in the peasant uprisings led by Thomas the Slav in Asia Minor (820-824) – the Paulicians became soldiers to resist any power that intended to indenture them. A good God supported their faith; the other, a God of Evil, was identified with Byzantine authority, which was intent on annihilating them. They did not bother with the sacraments or with baptism, communion, penitence, or marriage. They rejected fasting and Catholicism's feast days. They execrated the cross (an instrument of torture and death), the worship of the saints, and the icons, which perpetuated superstitious practices.

The Paulicians' Jesus was an *angelos-christos*. In the Old Testament they saw the work of the Demiurge. As for priests, they judged them to be useless, harmful and corrupt, and they did not fail to kill them if the occasion presented itself.

They themselves had no clergy members, but placed their trust in pastors who were tasked with preaching and in the *didachoi* (teachers) who explained the sacred texts. Without tipping over into Marcion's asceticism, the Paulicians allied themselves with his primitive Christianity, which venerated the Apostle Paul and rejected the authority of Peter.

The Paulicians began to be persecuted after their establishment in Koloneia, where the bishop decimated them with the consent of the emperor. The first leader of their community, the Armenian Constantine, died at the stake in 682. His successor, Simeon, suffered the same fate in 688. But the Paulicians found among the Arabs a tolerance that was cruelly absent from the Catholics. Under the influence of Paul the Armenian, their doctrine – until then a form of Christianity that was common in 140 (except for baptism, which they refused, perhaps belatedly) – took on a coloration that was more clearly hostile to the clergy and Catholicism.

Thereafter, their history was confounded with the atrocious war that Byzantium fought against them.



Nevertheless, ravaged by the conflict concerning the icons (726 to 843), the Empire turned its rage from away the Paulicians, in order to focus it on the hostile factions that the quarrel about the icons had set against each other. (Note that the quarrel about these images only aggravated the endemic social war in which two factions confronted each other: the Blues, of aristocratic leanings, and the Greens, artisans mostly, often favorable to heterodoxy.)

In the spirit of Nestorius, the Iconoclasts did not tolerate the figuration of the principal divinities but, unlike the Paulicians, they venerated the cross and nourished no sympathy for indications of heresy. Moreover, the worst persecutions took place on the initiative of the iconoclast Leon V (813-823). They continued under Theodora, who reestablished the cult of the images.

Exterminated in Byzantium, the Paulicians asked for the help of the Arab emirs. Some of the Paulicians enlisted in the Islamic troops that harassed the imperial city. In 843, a punitive expedition from Byzantium triggered a rebellion led by an officer named Corbeas, whose father, a Paulician, was impaled. He commanded a group of 5,000 men and founded an independent state in Tefrik, where he made use of the benevolent aid of the emirs of Melitene and Tarsus.

With his militia of soldier-peasants, in 856 Corbeas broke the offensive launched by Petronos, brother of the Empress Theodora. Two years later, he beat the army of Michel III. In 860, raids against Nicaea and Ephesus attested to the power of Tefrik. Killed in battle in 863, Corbeas was replaced by Chrisocheir, previously denounced by the patriarch and heresiologue Photius.

The intervention of an ambassador, Peter of Sicily, who had been sent among the Paulicians, was less an attempt at reconciliation than a spy mission, because, if Basil the First was defeated by Tefrik in 870 or 871, the assassination by betrayal of Chrisocheir in 872 caused the end of Tefrik, which was sacked by the Byzantines. The priests – inquisitors long before there was an Inquisition – organized the systematic massacre of the Paulicians, whether they were men, women or children. The escapees took refuge in the Balkans and Thrace, where, between 1081 and 1118, Alexius I Comnenus undertook to eradicate them.

In the Arab armies that seized Constantinople in 1453, there were Paulician Christians whose hatred of the oppressive Empire fed their spirit of vengeance.

In 1717, there still existed a Christian community in Philippopolis that venerated the Apostle Paul and refused to recognize the authority of Rome due to their hostility to the orthodox Church. Such a community still exists today under the name “Unitas.”

## The Bogomils

“During the reign of the very-Christian Peter, there appeared on Bulgarian soil a priest named Bogomil (he who loves God); in truth, he should have called himself Bogunemil (he who is not loved by God). The first [to do so], he began to propagate heresy on Bulgarian soil.” Thus began the *Treatise Against the Heretics, by the Unworthy Cosmas the Priest*, a precious source of details about the movement that carried the name of its founder.

The one who, with a complacent servility, called himself “unworthy priest” seized upon the terms in a letter sent by Theophylact, the Patriarch of Byzantium, to King Peter of Bulgaria (who died 969); this letter anathematized the representatives “of a resurgent ancient heresy, Manichaeism mixed with Paulicianism.”<sup>320</sup>

In its specificity, and without precisely reviving the Manichean religion, Bogomilism played the role of hub between the Paulician communities, the distant inheritors of Marcion, and the Catharist beliefs that, starting in the Eleventh Century, reached the Rhine Valley, Cologne, Flanders, Champagne, Northern Italy and Provence.

Initially governed by a propertied Boyar aristocracy and founded upon a Slavic rural commune, Bulgaria became feudalized in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. Under the influence of the neighboring Byzantine Empire, its princes adopted Catholicism and, as elsewhere, imposed it on their subjects. Nothing is more false than the idea that there was a spontaneous conversion of the people to the doctrines of Rome and Byzantium. The Nazarene, Elchasaite, Marcionite, Valentinian, Montanist and Tertullianist Christianities had inspired the adhesion of a growing number of the faithful; but Catholicism was always propagated by the high [and mighty] at the persuasive point of a temporal sword. From 325 on, Catholicism ceased to be Christian, as Christianity ceased to be Jewish after 135. And Catholicism, with greater rigor than it had treated the Jews, [severely] dealt with the adepts of Valdes’ voluntary poverty, Michael of Cesena, the Apostolics who dreamed of reviving the Christianity of the New Prophecy, and the Protestants (who, taking up the baton of the abhorred Church, in their turn justified the massacre of the Anabaptists and the dissidents).

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<sup>320</sup> B. Primov, *Les Bougres: Histoire du pape Bogomile et de ses adeptes*, Paris, 1975, p. 97.

Colonized by the Byzantine clergy, Bulgaria was covered with monasteries and saw descend upon the peasantry “monastic vermin”<sup>321</sup> who subsisted on the work of rural communities.

The doctrine of Bogomil did not bother with Manichean complexities. It professed a moderate dualism, in conformity with the antagonism of forces and the interests at stake.

[In Bogomilism] God created the universe, that is to say, the seven heavens and the four elements (fire, air, water and earth). God, the resurgence of the plural God Elohim, reigned harmoniously over a cohort of angels, when one of them, Satanael, rebelled and was thrown to earth, which he separated from the waters, thus creating – under the essentially divine light of the sun – the material universe and mankind. Nevertheless, Satanael included in the human body an angelic fragment, with the result that the duality of good and evil was incarnated in each person.

To aid humanity, God sent the angel Christ – still an *angelos-christos*. Satanael ordered that he be crucified, but the Messiah was resurrected, confounded his adversary and sent him to hell, thus exiling him from earth, which he ceaselessly tried to reconquer in order to finish his malevolent work. Satanael had allies completely disposed towards restoring his privileges to him: kings, priests, the rich and the Church. Thus Bogomilism rediscovered in dualism the subversive ferment that had been propagated by the Paulicians, who were also attached to the independence and autarky of rural communities.

Hostile to the frequentation of churches, the Bogomils called Saint Sophia the residence of demons. They mocked baptism: if water possessed such power, they remarked, then all of the animals, and especially the fish, were baptized [and thus without sin]. The rites of bread and wine were an absurd symbolism.

Without tilting into the excess of asceticism, the Bogomils criticized the dissolute existence of the priests who summoned others to the sanctification the soul, as Cosmas reported: “If you are saints, as you claim you are, why do you not live the life that Paul described to Timothy? A bishop must not have the least vice; he must marry only one woman; he must be sober, honest, correct and welcoming; he must be neither a drinker nor a quarreler, but a kind person who manages his house well. These priests do the opposite. They get drunk; they steal; they give themselves up to vice in secret, and there are no means to prevent them from doing so.”<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> *Translator*: Cf. “love letter” XXXIV, dated 1 July 1779, by Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, the Count of Mirabeau (1749-1791).

<sup>322</sup> M. Erbstoesser, *Les Herétiques au Moyen Age*, Leipzig, pp. 51 and 52.

And Cosmas specified that, “the Bogomils denigrate the rich; they teach their own not to submit to lords and to execrate the king. They spit in the faces of the notables and criticize the Boyars and think that God shows hatred for all of those who serve the King and they teach all the serfs not to work for their lords.”<sup>323</sup> (Note that Cosmas retorted: “All men must submit to the powerful. It is not from the lords that God comes.”)

Like the Paulicians, the Bogomils mocked the saints, the icons and the relics, which were sources of profitable commerce. In the cross they saw a simple piece of wood that they called “the enemy of God.” To them the miracles of the Christ were fables that, at the very least, had to be interpreted symbolically. (Note that in the Seventeenth Century, the Englishman Thomas Woolston died in prison for supporting this very thesis.)

Rejecting the Old Testament, which was the work of Satanael, the Bogomils preferred a version of the *Gospel attributed to John*, that was true to its ancient form as a Gnostic text.

Old-time Gnosticism also put its stamp on the Bogomils’ two-tiered organization: the Perfect Ones, or Christians, who were the active and intellectual kernel (those who save), and the believers, who were peasants and bourgeois for whom *pistis* sufficed.

The Bogomils named *consolamentum* a form of sacrament through which the neophyte acceded to the status of perfection by having a copy of the *Gospel attributed to John* placed on his [or her] head as a sign of the assembly’s acquiescence.

The Perfect Ones ate no meat, preached, did not work, and collected no tithes. All of the believers received the *consolamentum* on their deathbeds or at an advanced age.

Who was Bogomil? A Macedonian priest who was initially loyal to the Church of Byzantium and Rome. Revolted by the situation of the peasants, who were the victims of war, the Boyars and the clergy, he broke with Catholicism and preached in the region of Skopje and in Thrace.

Cosmas opposed Bogomil by repeating the official doctrine: “The priests of the true faith, even if they are lazy, do not offend God,” and “It is ordered that you honor the officiants, even if they are bad [...] The men of the Church are always consecrated by God.”<sup>324</sup>

Concerning the miseries of the world, Cosmas furnished a simple and ecumenically convincing explanation, one that satisfied the Hebrew religion, the

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<sup>323</sup> B. Primov, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

papacy and Calvin: “Each among us must wonder [...] if it wasn’t because of them that God put war on the earth.”<sup>325</sup> Such was not the opinion of Bogomil and his partisans, who were more and more numerous.

In fact, events provided Bogomilism with a foundation that wasn’t only social, but national, as well. In 1018, Emperor Basil II put an end to the existence of the Bulgarian kingdom and crushed the nation under the yoke of Byzantine authority. Under the cover of the peasant uprisings, to which the nobility and the towns now gave their aid, the Bogomil influence focused the resistance to the Empire; that influence invaded the cities, crossed the frontiers and reached into Byzantium, despite constant and cruel persecution.

Euthymius of Acmonē,<sup>326</sup> who pursued the Bogomils with a completely clerical hatred, called them *fundaiagites*, that is, “carriers of beggar’s bags,” “truly impious people who serve the devil in secret.”<sup>327</sup> Euthymius’ diatribes still nourished the zeal of the persecutor Alexis Comnenus in the Twelfth Century.

In the Twelfth Century, the Bogomil movement was established in Byzantium. Anne Comnenus, daughter of the emperor, left a narrative that was enlightening for the manner in which one of the town’s Perfect Ones was captured and put to death in 1111.

“A certain monk by the name of Basil excelled in the teaching of the heresy of the Bogomils. He had twelve students whom he called his apostles, and he had attracted several converts, who were perverted women living bad lives who spread evil everywhere. The evil ravaged many souls with the rapidity of fire.

“Some Bogomils were led to the palace and everything indicated that Basil was their master and the leader of the heresy. One among them, by the name of Divlati, was put in prison and interrogated in the hope that he would denounce them; at first, he did not consent to do so, but, after having been subjected to torture, he denounced Basil and the apostles that he had chosen. Then the Emperor sent many people to find him. And one [of them] discovered Satan’s archesatrape,<sup>328</sup> Basil,

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<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> *Translator*: I have been unable to find any references to this person, unless he is Euthymius Zigabenus, a Twelfth Century monk who compiled a work about heresy titled *Panoplia Dogmatica* for Alexius I Comnenus.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>328</sup> *Translator*: Satan’s primary governor in Persia.

a man in a monk's habit, with an emaciated face, without beard or moustache, very tall, an expert in the art of teaching heresy.

“The Emperor, wishing to learn the secret mystery from him, invited Basil under a special pretext. He descended from his throne to go meet Basil, invited him to his own table, held out to him all of the fisherman's snares, and baited his fishing-hook so that it would catch this monstrous omnivore. Many times tempering his hatred and disgust for the monk, the Emperor overwhelmed Basil with flattery and he feigned that he wanted to become Basil's student and, not only did he want this, but so did his brother, Isaac, as well; the Emperor affected to recognize divine revelation in each of Basil's words and submitted himself to Basil in all things, on the condition that the wicked Basil would implore the salvation of his soul. . . . And Basil then unveiled all of the heresy's doctrines. But what made him do this?

“The Emperor had previously ordered that a curtain be installed in the corridor between the part reserved for the women and the spot in which he found himself [alone] with the demon, so that Basil would unmask himself before everyone and reveal everything that he had been hiding in his soul. Hidden behind the curtain, one of the clerics wrote down everything that was said. Suspecting nothing, this imbecile [Basil] began to preach, the Emperor played the student, and the cleric wrote down ‘the teachings’ . . . But what happened then?

“The Emperor drew back the curtain and snatched away his mask. At the same time, he had convened the Church's entire synod, all of the military leaders and the entire senate. An assembly was convoked, presided over by the venerated patriarch of the imperial city, Nicolas Gramatik. In front of everyone, the diabolical doctrine was read aloud, and it was impossible to deny the accusations. The leader of the accused did not renounce his ideas and soon defended them openly. He declared that he was ready for the flames, to submit to the punishment of the whip and to experience a thousand deaths. . . .

“Basil, a veritable heresiarch, refused to repent. This was why the members of the holy synod, the most worthy monks and the Patriarch Nicolas himself decided that Basil deserved to be burned alive. The Emperor, who had often spoken with Basil and was convinced that he

was of bad faith and would never deny his heresy, adopted this opinion. The order was given to erect a large pyre in the Hippodrome. A deep pit was dug and very tall tree trunks were piled into it and then covered with leaves, one might say [making] a thick forest. When the pyre was lit, an immense crowd entered the Hippodrome and sat on the tiers, impatient for the events to begin. The following day, a cross was erected so that the impure one had the possibility – if he feared the flames – to deny his heresy and head towards the cross. In the audience there were a great number of heretics who came to watch their leader Basil. . . .

“The excited crowd gave him the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the horrible spectacle that the pyre presented; he felt the heat of the fire and saw the flames that crackled, that rose like tongues of fire up to the top of the granite obelisk that was erected in the middle of the Hippodrome.

“This spectacle did not make Basil hesitate; he remained inflexible. The fire did not melt his iron will, no more than the Emperor’s promises did. . . .

“Then the executioners seized Basil by his clothes, raised him up high and then threw him, completely clothed, into the pyre. The flames, which became furious (one says), swallowed the impure one without releasing any odor; the smoke remained the same [color], there only appeared in the smoke a white ray among the flames. This is how the [natural] elements stood up to the impious.”<sup>329</sup>

The execution of Basil and a great number of his partisans did not hinder the progress of Bogomilism. In 1167, another Perfect One left Byzantium for Italy and France, so as to unite assemblies there: the West knew him as “Pope Nikita.”

Despite the extermination-politics of the Serbian and Bosnian princes, the missionary activity of Bogomilism continued to multiply its Churches: [they included] the Bulgarian Church, the Church of Dragovjit (Thrace), the Greek Church, the Patarene Church (Bosnia), and the Church of Philadelphia (Serbia). Bogomilism found popular support among those who reacted against Rome’s

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-164.

prohibition of the use of native languages in the liturgy, but also among fighters for independence.

The Bosnian Church, for a time recognized by the princes, was subjected to new persecutions from 1443 to 1461, and due to its hatred of Catholicism, turned more willingly towards the Turks. “This was why, when Bosnia fell under Ottoman domination, a great number of its inhabitants adopted the Muslim religion.”<sup>330</sup>

Meanwhile, the adepts from Bulgaria, called *bougres*,<sup>331</sup> tried to instaurate – in opposition to Rome, and from Milan to Languedoc, and from Cologne to Flanders and Orleans – impossible peaceful communities, fraternal and little inclined to martyrdom.

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<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>331</sup> *Translator*: Larousse indicates this word means, “Bulgarian heretics who engaged in sodomy.” More modern meanings include “poor buggers,” “blokes,” and “guys.”



## **Chapter 26: Christs and Reformers: Popular Resistance to the Institutional Church**

The Church – by confirming the personal and temporal authority of the lax and collaborationist priests and bishops, against whom Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Novatian, Donat and those faithful to popular Christianity had rebelled – loosed upon the world a horde of clerics who were most often greedy and unscrupulous, and whose mission was the circumvention of kings, lords and worldly owners.

Gregory of Tours' intention in writing his *Historia Francorum* was to present a damning assessment of clerical morals in Sixth Century Gaul. With rare exceptions, the men in question were merely lubricious vicars and dignitaries, thieves and murderers, and the rivals of the masters of the earth in violence and deception when it came to extracting the greatest possible profit from the peasants and artisans. While the purely formal reprobation of the Bishop of Tours relieved his own bad conscience – he deplored at great length the fact that conditions had not permitted him to remedy a state of affairs that he condemned from the depths of his heart – the lay people, the monks and the priests, who were sensitive to the misery of their parishioners, threw themselves into a sacred mission of which the Church, in their eyes, showed itself to be unworthy. Their interventions ended up inspiring a reformist politics in Rome, but only in the course of the Eleventh Century. The goals of this reform movement – the suppression of the selling of sacraments and the purchasing of ecclesiastical offices, and the restriction of the priests to celibacy – also responded to the desire to free the Church, the parishes and the monasteries from their dependence upon monarchs and nobles, who were the masters of ecclesiastical appointments at all levels. The idea that ordination did not suffice to absolve the priest of the duty to lead an exemplary and “apostolic” life only entered into the views of Rome at the Council of Trent, which was held after the success of the moralistic campaign of the Reformation.

### **The Christ of Bourges**

In his chronicle for the year 591, Gregory, the Bishop of Tours, reported that an inhabitant of Bourges, exhausted in a forest, experienced a kind of trauma or ecstasy when he saw himself suddenly surrounded by a swarm of flies or wasps.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, X, 25.

(Note that this same phenomenon was mentioned in the revelation of the peasant from Vertus. [See below.]

Living in a state of shock for two years, this man finally reached the Arles region, where, dressed in animal hides, he lived like a hermit and devoted all his time to prayer. At the end of a long period of asceticism, he claimed that he was invested with the supernatural gifts to heal and to prophecy.

Wandering through Cevennes and Gévaudan, he presented himself as the reincarnation of Christ and blessed his companion with the name “Mary.”

Gregory attributed to the demon the exceptional powers that he demonstrated and that drew to him a growing number of partisans. The man distributed to the poor the gold, money and clothing with which his wealthy believers had honored him.

The chronicler accused him of having formed and leading an armed band that pillaged the towns and killed the bishops. Aurelius, the Bishop of Puy – before whom this army of Christ had emerged – sent to him an ambassador who assassinated him through betrayal. His partisans were massacred or dispersed; Mary, subjected to torture, confessed that this Christ had resorted to diabolical proceedings to assure his control over the people.

Gregory himself admitted to having met several of these saints of the Last Days, who awakened a fleeting hope among the people whose miserable lot in the midst of war, pillage, torture, famine, epidemics and death quite naturally disposed them to sedition, which was additionally supported by the apostolic seal of the divine.<sup>333</sup>

## **Adalbert**

In 744, Winfrid (later sanctified under the name Boniface), acting with the approval of Pope Zacharias and the Frankish Kings Pepin and Carloman, united in Soissons a synod that was intended to break the popular movement of the monk named Adalbert.<sup>334</sup>

A wandering preacher, self-avowed monk and practitioner of voluntary poverty, Adalbert attacked by the Bishop of Soissons, who had prohibited him from preaching in the churches.

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, X, 25.

<sup>334</sup> J. B. Russell, “Saint Boniface and the Eccentrics,” *Church History*, Chicago, 1964, XXXIII, 3.

In the countryside, Adalbert had erected crosses, at the foot of which he addressed crowds seduced by his remarks. Soon his followers built little chapels, then churches, in which he could preach.

To those who heard him, he affirmed having been invested with divine grace from the womb of his mother. In the manner of Mary, and just as the gospels of the childhood [of Jesus] had reported, she had brought him into the world through her right side, thus designating him to be the second Messiah. Adalbert's privileged relationship with God was expressed in a prayer that Boniface transcribed for the Pope's sake. In it, Adalbert evoked the support of the angels, thanks to whom he had obtained – for himself and his faithful – the grace of being fulfilled in his desires. Like King Abgar, Adalbert kept a personal letter from Jesus, from which he derived his teachings.

The synodal report noted with disdain that the simple people and the women had stopped following the priests and bishops. Adalbert seemed to be the object of a natural worship that competed with the traditional trade in relics, because his followers kept as precious the fingernail clippings and locks of hair with which Adalbert rewarded them.

Arrested and condemned by the synod of Soissons in 744, Adalbert managed to escape. The following year, another synod, one presided over by Boniface and King Carloman, excommunicated him but without appreciable results, because, that same year, a synod in Rome of twenty-four bishops presided over by Pope Zacharias himself decided to declare that Adalbert was insane, no doubt because of the difficulty of cracking down against a man who was so popular and whose disciples had not ceased to grow in number. We know nothing of his end, but in 746 an ambassador of King Pepin, who was close to the Pope, attested to the persistent vogue for this Christ in Northern France.

## **Leuthard**

Though the Bogomil missionaries, who were Slavic or Byzantine merchants, began to propagate their doctrine in Germany, France and Italy around 1000, Leuthard (a peasant from Vertus in Champagne) wasn't so much the first manifestation of Catharism than [the most recent manifestation of] the tradition of wandering messiahs and prophets.

One day, Leuthard returned from the fields, after having an illumination. (Note that Raoul Glauber<sup>335</sup> attributed to Leuthard, just as Gregory of Tours did with the Messiah of Bourges, the experience of seeing an aura of bees, which

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<sup>335</sup> *Translator*: a Benedictine monk who lived in the Eleventh Century.

sometimes appeared in folklore and [fairy] tales.) Leuthard decided to leave his wife and break the church's crucifix. With a sudden eloquence, nourished by the feeling of having the word of God, he preached a return to the apostolic virtues. He enjoined his many adepts to no longer pay tithes and to accord no faith in the Old Testament.

Arrested in 1004 and taken before Bishop Gebuin II of Châlons (who was an educated and cunning man), Leuthard became aware of the vanity of his enterprise, found himself alone, cleverly accused of being insane, and he threw himself into a well that same year.

Leuthard's rejection of the cross, the Old Testament and marriage – as well as his ordinary condemnations of the Church and tithes – does not suggest [to us] the influence, even a confused one, of Bogomilism. Especially so because, less than a century later, peasants in the Châlons region were accused of Catharism. But it is true that, around 1025, the Italian Gandulf openly preached Bogomilism.

### **Éon de l'Étoile, or Eudo de Stella**

Originally from Loudéac in Brittany, perhaps the son of minor nobility, Eudo preached in the name of Christ against the priests and monks in 1145 or so, at the same time that Bernard of Clairvaux was hastening to bring more dignity and a holy appearance to the monastic orders and the clergy. Eudo lived in a community that was supposedly quite numerous, and exalted asceticism and the evangelic life.

His faithful called him the Lord of Lords. At a time when the myth of an immanent justice nourished the hopes of the disinherited, Eudo came to judge the living and the dead. Chroniclers have mocked his completely personal interpretation of the formula for exorcism: "*Per eum qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos,*"<sup>336</sup> which meant, according to him, "By Éon who comes to judge the living and the dead." How was he different from the Jewish, Gnostic and Judeo-Christian exegetes of the Bible? Wasn't this the way that the famous evangelic truths were written on the basis of the Hebrew and Aramaic *midrashim*?

In the forests in which his partisans took refuge, as if in a new "desert," Éon founded a Church with archbishops and bishops to whom he gave such names as Wisdom, Knowledge, and Judgment, each of which were endowed with a singular Gnostic connotation. (Note that a systematic study, in the manner of [Robert] Graves, of all the Christian mythologies would show the progress, nay, even the

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<sup>336</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "in the name of the One who comes to judge the living and the dead."

wandering, the recreation, the reoccurrence and the transformation of [certain] fundamental themes.)

While Brittany, ravaged by famine in 1144 and 1145, was prey to pillage and brigandage, the partisans of Éon conducted raids that, by destroying churches and monasteries, assured their own subsistence.

According to William of Newburg, Éon and his faithful lived in luxury, were magnificently dressed, and enjoyed a state of “perfect joy,” an expression that perhaps suggests a faraway influence of the Bogomils or Cathars, but one must remember that William drafted his chronicle fifty years after the events he describes.<sup>337</sup>

Like Paul of Samosata or Gaianus, Éon celebrated Mass in his own name. An even more curious trait: he possessed a scepter in the shape of a Y. The two branches of the fork, when elevated towards heaven, meant that two thirds of the world belonged to God and one third belonged to Éon. The proportion was inverted in the contrary movement, which conferred upon Eudo a nearly absolute power over the world, which was the old dream of the Marcosians, Simon of Samaria, and the Barbelites – memories of ancient trinitarian conceptions that were no doubt unfamiliar to the gentleman from Brittany.

As was frequently the case when complacency prevailed over the quest for a richer life, Éon confronted the representatives of the Church who met in Rouen in 1148. Thrown in the archbishop’s prison, he perished there from hunger and ill treatment. His partisans, arrested, died on the pyre.

## **Two Reformers: Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne**

While the new towns attempted to use insurrection to obtain the independence that was refused them by the secular lords and the prince-bishops – who were increasingly objects of a growing hatred because they, residing in the city, publicly insulted the Church’s principles of holiness through their dissolute morals and rapacity – preachers wandered around France, where peasants and artisans were the most disposed to receive their messages. Two figures, identified by ecclesiastic repression, stand out from the others, who remain unknown, that is to say, the independent preachers, communalist agitators, Bogomil missionaries and Cathars who denounced clerics and monks attached to the privileges of Rome and who tracked veritable heretic-hunters paid off by the Church.

Around 1105, Peter of Bruys, an old Provençal priest, traveled the south of France, preaching, especially on the eastern side of the Rhone. He called for the

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<sup>337</sup> William of Newburg, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, t. XXV.

destruction of churches, because one could pray just as well in an inn or a stable. He burned crosses, the instrument of the martyrdom of Christ, whose symbolism accorded all-too-perfectly with the cruel oppression of the Church.

[For Peter of Bruys] the dead had no need of prayer. Of what value were sacraments administered by priests who were most often unworthy, and why was faith not sufficient to assure the salvation of the believers, who were so badly served by the clergy of Rome?

Not content with encouraging the traditional refusal to pay tithes (which sufficed to bring about accusations of heresy), Peter of Bruys denounced the market in penitence and indulgences.

He thus attracted the animosity of Cluny, where Bernard of Clairvaux moralized to the clergy about the respect and obedience that were due to the dignitaries of the clergy, and, at the same time, incited them *ad capiendos vulpes* (to capture the foxes of heresy). The Council of Toulouse condemned Peter's doctrine in 1119, no doubt due to the agitation that he had fomented, in the course of which (one believes) he met his disciple and successor, Henry of Lausanne.

Peter of Bruys perished around 1126 in an ambush near the Abbey of Saint-Gilles, where he had preached. A faction probably incited by Cluny seized and lynched him, before throwing his body into a pyre. (Note that the cross sculpted on the tympanum of the Cathedral, then being constructed, was erected in defiance of Peter's partisans, who denounced the cross's morbid and mortifying character.)

Several years later, Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, distributed a *Treatise against the Petrobrusians*<sup>338</sup> that justified the [repression of the] doctrines adopted by Henry of Lausanne, around whom the partisans of Peter had rallied. The Councils of Pisa (1134) and Lateran (1139) made that condemnation precise.

Deceased around 1148, Henry of Lausanne (also called Henry of Le Mans) founded his agitation on the communalist struggles that opposed the cities to the Church and the land-owning aristocracy, which was often hostile to the emerging bourgeoisie. His doctrine, which was perfectly coherent, mixed ideas promulgated by Peter of Bruys with elements derived from Bogomilism, and which prepared the way for Catharism, nay, even the movement in competition with it (the Waldensians).

The origins of Henry of Lausanne remain obscure. A monk or a hermit, he was highly cultured; Bernard of Clairvaux called him *litteratus*. Perhaps he preached in Lausanne against the general corruption of the clergy and in the

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<sup>338</sup> *Translator*: "Petrobrusian" is a contraction of "Peter of Bruys."

Petrobrusian spirit that opposed the *ekklesia*, identified with the community of believers, to the Roman Church. In 1116, the success of Henri's predictions in Le Mans troubled Bishop Hildebert of Lavardin, who prohibited him from preaching. Henri ignored him and enjoyed, it seems, a considerable role in the government of the city. It is probable that the bishops at first tolerated some of Henri's reforms. As Pope Innocent III had recommended raising the moral state of prostitutes and saving them from scorn, Henri persuaded them to cut their hair, burn their rich clothes, and rid themselves of their jewelry. His sect offered them outfits and their adepts married these "impure" women who had no dowries. In place of marriage, the celebration, as Henri prescribed it, solely consisted in the mutual consent and sincere union of their hearts.

An equally clear break with the misogyny harbored by the Church was part of this courteous current, which, even today, is only superficially studied, but was certainly noticed by the court of Champagne, at which Andreas Capellanus [aka André le Chapelain] contrasted it with practices in the Languedoc, where the freedom of women was translated into the juridical domain. (Note that Capellanus' *De amore*, written around 1185, exalted women and carnal love in one part, while it collated the most excessive features of misogyny in another.)

Henri's exaltation of apostolic virtues did not tip over into ascetic rigor, because he – unlike the Cathars – estimated that the flesh merited neither an excess of dignity nor an excess of indignity.

In 1116, chased from the town or having left it voluntarily (one isn't sure), Henri traveled through Poitou, Bordeaux and the region of Albi. No doubt he participated in the agitation in Toulouse, where it is possible that an encounter with Peter of Bruys radicalized his evangelic doctrine. In 1119, the Council of Toulouse denounced Henri's "errors." It seems that, at the same time, his partisans were sacking churches, demolishing altars, burning crosses and roughing up the Church's representatives.

Arrested by the Archbishop of Arles, Henri was brought before the Council of Pisa. Confronted by Bernard of Clairvaux, Henri feigned acceptance of his arguments and agreed to enter Cîteaux Abbey, so as to avoid prison, if not the pyre.

He soon escaped and returned to Provence. If we believe the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was resolved to finish off the Henricians, Toulouse lived under the influence of this reformer. It is true that the Count did not discourage the anti-Roman movement, which was widely popular and from which Catharism would freely benefit. One doesn't know if Henri fell into the hands of Cardinal Alberic, a papal legate of Rome, who had sworn Henri's downfall. His tracks disappeared in 1144.

Around 1135, a community in Liege claimed to follow Henrician doctrines: rejection of the baptism of infants and prayers for the dead, and refusal of the sacrament of marriage in the name of the union of hearts.

Like the Bogomils, Henri was inclined to reject the Old Testament. His condemnation of the ornamental luxury of the churches, to which Bernard de Clairvaux had subscribed, foreshadowed the voluntary poverty of the Waldensians.



## **Chapter 27: The Communalist Prophets**

The Eleventh Century brought to the Western populations [of Europe] a slight amelioration of their condition, which demographic growth soon condemned to precariousness. While the development of the cities introduced the air of liberty into the confined atmosphere of an agrarian system that was socially frozen according to the three orders of RATHERIUS OF VERONA (soldiers, priests and farmers), the economic growth of the towns began, little by little, to absorb the surplus of laborers from the countryside.

The proliferating [numbers of] beggars, fomenting riots that were easily manipulated in the most diverse ways, were reserves that the lords, archbishops, guild leaders and popular agitators learned to use [for their own ends]. The violence of these riots struck the masters as well as the rebels and the Jews, who were scapegoats for all kinds of fantastical resentments.

The first Crusade, launched in 1095 on the instigation of Pope Urban II – whose motivations included the desire to relocate the superabundance of underprivileged people, ruined nobles, and people of uncertain fate to the conquered countries – suddenly discovered in the designs of God something that sanctified the thirst for ambition, greed and [the need for] bloody desublimation.

The influx of poor people into the towns posed a dilemma for the Church: how could it Christianize people reduced to the state of wild, starving dogs by extolling the holiness of the poor, while the high clergy lived in opulence?

Cohn notes:

“Insurrections occurred chiefly in Episcopal cities. Unlike a lay prince, a bishop was a resident ruler in his city and was naturally concerned to keep his authority over the subjects in whose midst he lived. Moreover the attitude of the Church towards economic matters was profoundly conservative; in trade it could for a long time see nothing but usury and in merchants nothing but dangerous innovators whose designs ought to be firmly thwarted. The burghers for their part, if once they decided to break a bishop’s power, were quite capable of killing him, setting fire to his cathedral and fighting off any of his vassals who might try to avenge him. And although in all this their aims usually remained severely limited and entirely material, it was only to be expected that some of these risings should be accompanied by an outcry against unworthy priests. When the lower

strata of urban society were involved[,] such protests tended in fact to rise shrilly enough.”<sup>339</sup>

## The Patarin Movement

The reforms undertaken by the Clunisian monk Hildebrand, made pope under the name Gregory VII, attempted to promote the moralization of the clergy in a way that would favor the Christianization of the masses. At the same time that it desired to free the Church from the temporal control of the Emperor of Germany and the great feudal lords, Gregorian reform clashed with the very privileges of the ecclesiastic dignitaries, prince-bishops, archbishops, bishops and even priests who arrogated to themselves an excessive authority over rural communities and parishes.

“The purity of the life that the heretics preached became the second great goal of Gregory VII, who insisted on the personal dignity of the priests who performed the sacramental duties.”<sup>340</sup>

The Patarin movement in Milan and Florence conferred upon Gregory’s reforms a popular basis, in which voluntary poverty was proposed as the model for an apostolic life and which organized the communities of the faithful according to a mode of solidarity and mutual aid that was quite similar to that of the synagogues and churches of the Second Century.

The name “Patarin” probably derived from the neighborhood of Pataria in Milan, inhabited by hucksters [*regrattiers*] and dealers in second-hand items. The Patarins, contrary to a confusion often made between *cathari* and *patari*, had nothing in common with the Cathars, who were not preoccupied with the reform of the Church or even adhesion to Christianity.

In 1057, Guido, the Archbishop of Milan, condemned the Patarin movement. Social insurrection was battering the authority of the men of the Church, with the consent of the pope, whose politics bet that communal liberties would break the

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<sup>339</sup> N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l’Apocalypse*, Paris, 1983, p. 46. [Translator: this is the French translation of Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements*, New York, 1961, pp. 33-34. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, I have quoted directly from the English-language original.]

<sup>340</sup> A. Borst, *Les Cathares*, Paris, 1974, p. 73.

power of the feudal bishops. Nevertheless, “the union of the Pope and the Patarins was a union of means and not ends.”<sup>341</sup>

Tactically in solidarity with the reformers, the bourgeois and the weavers, who animated the movement, demanded liberties that the Church combated from the moment that the aid of these allies had lost its utility.

The *pataria* spread rapidly to Tuscany. They continued to exist until the 1110s in Florence and the 1120s in Orvieto and the region of Trier. Nevertheless, the reaction was speedy. In Milan, the Patarins, accused of arson, were massacred in 1075.

The case of Ramihrdus of Cambria was exemplary in this sense. In 1077, an insurrection by bourgeois and weavers forced the bishop to enfranchise the town. Priest Ramihrdus, who was close to the weavers (they propagated the most radical demands and doctrines), proclaimed that he would not receive communion from the hands of any of the abbots or bishops who were thirsty for power and gain. Accused of heresy and burned alive, Ramihrdus had the posthumous consolation of being honored as a martyr by Gregory VII.<sup>342</sup>

In order to compete with the reformers who were too audacious, the hermits of Cîteaux, under the leadership of Robert of Molesme, founded ascetic and voluntarily poor groups that renounced all personal property. “To possess the smallest amount of money was, for them, a flagrant infraction of this principle and a ‘grave’ sin.”<sup>343</sup>

In the same way, Robert of Arbrissel and his nomadic penitents, within the heart of the Church, defended one of the themes of the anti-clerical reformers: mankind only used the riches of which God remained the unique owner. But were not Rome, the churches and the abbeys instituted as the depositories of God’s presence? Twenty-five years after its establishment, Cîteaux was a rich monastery with a doctrine centered on the poor. The papacy did not delay in rendering to the Church the property of the Lord, whose glory it kept alive.

## **Tanchelm of Antwerp**

Even when stripped of the calumnies of the Archbishop of Utrecht, the figure of Tanchelm differed from Ramihrdus and the Patarin movement in many ways. Tanchelm’s first steps towards power were part of the framework of

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> T. Manteuffel, *Naissance d’une hérésie: Les adeptes de la pauvreté volontaire*, Paris-La Haye, 1970, p. 29.

pontifical reforms to which Robert II, the Count of Flanders, was attached; Tanchelm might have been the Count's registrar or notary. He assuredly took advantage of a conflict between the Count and the Archbishop of Utrecht to arouse the people of Antwerp against a corrupted clergy. Anecdote has it that the cohabitation of a priest named Hilduin with his niece incited Tanchelm to fulminate against the ecclesiastic hierarchy.

Tanchelm went to Rome, where Pascal II, the pope from 1099 to 1118, influenced his views. He then preached an anti-clerical doctrine, as well as the refusal to pay tithes and the rejection of the sacraments delivered by unworthy priests, in Antwerp, Utrecht, Bruges and Zeeland.

To the Church of the clerics, Tanchelm opposed the Church of the simple people, whose guide he proclaimed himself to be in the name of the Spirit that was incarnated in him. It is hardly probable that, denouncing the "brothel of the Church," he surrendered himself to public debauchery, as was claimed by Norbert of Xanten, who became holy following his fight against Tanchelm. On the other hand, the facts that Tanchelm called his companion Mary and favored marriages "according to the heart" revealed a conception that, perhaps, was propagated by Bogomilism, that is, if one supposes that an ideology was necessary to justify an on-going practice among the working classes.

A communalist prophet, Tanchelm governed the city in the name of God, surrounded himself with an armed ceremonial guard that was devoted to him and gave an increasing number of sermons in the hysteria proper to this genre of ritual. One of his friends, the blacksmith Manasse, led a brotherhood of twelve men that recalled the apostles.

In a prelude to the Archbishop of Utrecht's offensive, a priest stabbed Tanchelm in 1115. His adepts kept power in Antwerp, until the armed forces and the predictions of Norbert of Xanten (who also preached, but in the framework of orthodoxy, that is, apostolic poverty) combined to assure the clergy's control over the town, whose history was highlighted by continuous revolt against the Church.

Under the patronage of the Divine Spirit, Tanchelm united the functions of a tribune and the mission of an apostle. The demand for freedom, exalted by communal independence, was spontaneously wedded to a renewal of the Christian community, one that was hostile to riches and the useless pomp of the Church, and identified the true apostolic practice with poverty, fraternity and solidarity organized through the works of mutual aid and help for the starving. Around 1250 in Antwerp, Willem Cornelisz, a kind of "worker priest" close to the weavers of the time, reprised the idea that the goods of the rich and the clergy belonged to those whom poverty had sanctified.

## **Arnaud of Brescia**

Another communalist tribune and reformer, but one who did not make explicit references to Christ and the apostles, Arnaud (born in Brescia around 1100) had the stature of a condottiere whose aspirations oscillated between a taste for power and a sincere attachment to the freedoms of the most disadvantaged.

Studying in Milan, where the Patarin movement affected him, and then studying in Bologna, Arnaud left for Paris to receive instruction by Abelard.

In 1129, as Leader of the Canons Regular, Arnaud gained a popular audience by extolling evangelic asceticism, which was the antithesis of the oppressive hedonism of the clergy (as regrettable as it was in his mind). He condemned the ownership of property by the priests and demanded more rigorous reforms. Thus, he did not delay in entering into conflict with the bishop of the town. Condemned by the Council of Lateran in 1139, though he did not profess the ideas of Peter of Bruys or Henry of Lausanne, Arnaud was banished.

A refugee in France, close to Abelard, he incurred the threats of Bernard de Clairvaux, who pursued the master of his animosity. Persecuted by Bernard, Arnaud left for Constance, from which he [also] had to flee, denounced by an insidious letter from the holy reformer. The troubles in Rome suddenly offered him the occasion to put his ideas into practice.

Upon the death of Innocent II (1143), a conflict of succession broke out; it was doubled by a schism caused by an Antipope, Anacletus II. The Roman bourgeoisie soon profited from these events by demanding the recognition of its rights. A crowd lynched Pope Lucius II. Arnaud survived as a mediator. He dealt with Eugene III, the successor to Lucius, and reestablished him in his functions, but did not succeed in keeping him under his control. In fact, the new Pope estimated it was more prudent to take refuge in Viterbo.

His hands free, Arnaud openly declared that he wished to destroy the power of the Church. His sermons preached the secularization of the clergy's goods, the confiscation of the riches of the bishops and cardinals, and the abolition of their temporal power. The spiritual leader of the Roman revolution, he demanded a communal republic that excluded the Pope's government. His program offered history the inconvenience of anticipating Garibaldi's program by eight centuries.

On 15 July 1148, Eugene III – quite powerless to shake Arnaud's power if the tribune's politics did not tip over into delays and indecision – hurled an anathema upon Arnaud. Arnaud was mistaken when he appealed for help from Emperor Frederick, who was little inclined to tolerate the instauration in Rome of a popular and republican government. His [own] partisans were divided on the merits of such a daunting solution. In 1155, Arnaud left Rome and fell into the hands of Frederick Barbarossa, who, cutting across Tuscany, extended his

tyrannical claws towards Rome. From then on, everything played out very quickly. For the price of a tactical reconciliation, Arnaud was delivered to Pope Adrian IV, who hastened to hang and burn him.

The Arnaudites, sometimes called the “poor of Lombardy,” sought refuge in France, where the partisans of Henry of Lausanne and Peter of Bruys joined them. Several years later, Peter Waldo revived the dream of reform that implied a return to the evangelic community – historically speaking, the community of the Second Century, the one that Christian mythology and its sectarians back dated to Jesus and his apostles in an idyllic Palestine.

## **Hugo Speroni**

Even if the presence of a particularly eloquent tribune or agitator gave a specific originality to the ideas of reform, the majority of communalist insurrections pell-mell mixed together demands for independence, appeals for commercial freedoms and condemnations of the dignitaries of the Catholic Church.

As discreet as it was, the work of Hugo Speroni, a jurist from Piacenza, wasn't any less indicative of the popularity of the ideas traditionally characterized as heretical and presented as the emanations of small groups that were marginal or in the minority. In 1177, at the same time that Peter Waldo sowed trouble in Lyon, Hugo Speroni led the struggle with equal brio on the political and religious fronts.

Speroni placed emphasis on the importance of interiority, the intimate conviction of faith, which was sufficient in itself, and he rejected the Church and its sacramental arsenal. He rediscovered Pelagius when he assured [his followers] that the infant was born without sin and was thus saved, without baptism, if it should happen to die. The true Christian had no need to pass through the sacrifice of atonement to become chosen. The moral obstinacy to practice virtue was sufficient to fulfill the conditions of salvation. The right of the pure or perfect ones to unite according to the [desires of the] heart, without submitting to the ecclesiastical ritual of marriage, derived from this conviction.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Ilarino, *L'eresia di Hugo Speroni*, Rome, 1945.

## Chapter 28: Philosophy against the Church

The elaboration of a theological system that justified the diverse privileges of the Church was nourished by Greek philosophy, from which Justin, Valentine, and Clement of Alexandria solicited aid in founding the monotheism of the Hebrew Creator-God upon rationality. Although interminable theological controversies had germinated, over the course of the centuries, in the uniquely Catholic manure of the trinity, predestination, free will, and grace, and had occasionally given rise to accusations of heresy (as in the cases of Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers), these controversies did not exceed the framework of orthodoxy and, in any case, hardly threatened the foundations of the faith propagated under Rome's control.

Gnostic, Platonic, Aristotelian and Plotinian speculations – often badly digested by the Roman doctrine – made the ecclesiastic body sick more than once and threatened to empty out its substance. This philosophy, which the Church intended to treat as *ancilla theologiae*,<sup>345</sup> as the servant of the Church, inherited the very same weapons (designed to combat the closed system of dogma) that market rationality and the free circulation of goods turned against the conservatism of agrarian structures. Philosophy also was founded on the aspirations to plenitude and emancipation that the body suggested to thought, that is, to people with particularly sensitive natures.

Thus, sooner or later, the terrestrial economy had to absorb the celestial economy, and reject the sacred like excrement.

In 531, in Ephesus, the Monophysites produced works against their adversaries that were attributed to a certain Dionysius the Areopagite, whom the official history (according to Rome) passed off as an epigone of Paul and one of the bishops of Athens. The Archbishop of Ephesus contested the author's authenticity. In fact, everything indicates that the author was in fact an Alexandrian philosopher of Gnostic inspiration who wrote during the second half of the Fifth Century. By a singular destiny, and perhaps because they furnished the powerful Monophysite Churches with arguments, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite were preserved, and they fed a number of mystical visions and the conception known as pantheism, in which God, being everywhere, was in sum nowhere.

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<sup>345</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “the servant of theology.”

[In the doctrine of Pseudo-Dionysius,] God, unknown to himself, manifested himself by means of a series of emanations that came from the spiritual natures or the angels with material natures that composed the world. The essence of all things, God gave substance to all that existed.

God did not know evil, because evil possessed neither substance nor creative power, but only resided in the lack of perfection in living creatures. It fell to each person to realize the ascension towards the *plerome* [the totality] of the good according to the ladder of perfection and the destiny of all things, which was to return to the primordial unity. The soul united with the one whom could only be known through a state of innocence by means of “knowledge beyond all knowledge.”<sup>346</sup> This is what Nicolas of Cusa called “erudite ignorance.” The partisans of the Free Spirit later claimed to possess an innocence in which knowing and non-knowing coincided in order to justify the impeccability of their unhindered lives.

### **Johannes Scotus Eriugena**

Around the middle of the Ninth Century, the theories of Pseudo-Dionysius inspired a philosopher of such brilliant intelligence that he seduced Charles the Bald, who was thenceforth resolved to protect this thinker against all obstacles to his freedom of conception.

Born in Ireland or Scotland around 810, Johannes Scotus Eriugena was around 30 years old when Charles the Bald invited him to teach grammar and dialectics at the palatial school of Quierzy, near Laon. The philosopher’s *De praedestinatione*, written in 851 at the request of Hincmar, the Bishop of Reims (who was then engaged in a polemic with Gottschalk), drew the condemnation of the Council of Valencia in 855, but without prejudicial consequences for its author.

Charles the Bald begged Eriugena to translate the works of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor and Pseudo-Dionysius from Greek into Latin. Composed between 862 and 866, and written in the form of a dialogue between master and disciple (a dialogue in which the ideas of Amalric of Bena and David of Dinant were reconciled), Eriugena’s *De divisione naturae* was condemned in 1210 at the Council of Paris, following the Amalrician agitations. Pope Honorius I ordered the burning of all copies of it in 1225. In 1681, the Oxford edition still merited an entry in the [Inquisitorial] Index. Johannes himself died around 877.

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<sup>346</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De theologia mystica*, II, 3.



In fact, his system excluded theological speculation. According to his *De praedestinatione*, “the true philosophy is the true religion and the true religion is the true philosophy.”<sup>347</sup>

“Universal nature, he tells us, is divided into four categories: the being who is not created and who creates; the being who is created and who creates; the being who is created and does not create; the being who is not created and does not create. The first and last of these categories are related to God; they are only different in our understanding, following which we consider God to be the principle or the final goal of the world.”<sup>348</sup> Such are the main ideas in his system.

“According to Scotus Eriugena, ‘two intellectual methods lead to God: one by the road of negation (απνηση), which makes a clean sweep of all our representations of the divinity; the other by the road of affirmation (βεβαιωση), which applies to God all of our intellectual conceptions, with no exceptions, all of our qualities, and even all of our faults. These two methods, far from being mutually exclusive, form a single method that consists in conceiving of God as the being above all essence, all goodness, all wisdom, and all divinity, as the nothingness inaccessible to intelligence, with respect to which negation is truer than affirmation and which remains unknown to itself.’<sup>349</sup>

“The infinite being reveals himself by means of ‘theophanies,’ that is to say, through the series of creatures who emanate from him. These are accessible to intelligence, ‘in the same way that light, to become perceptible to the eye, must scatter itself into the air.’ It is not by virtue of a movement subject to his nature that God created what exists: ‘to be, to think and to act are confounded for him in a single and self-same state. God created all things, which signifies nothing

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<sup>347</sup> J. Scotus Erigena, *De praedestinatione*, I, 1. [Translator: the long passage full of quotations that follows this remark comes from A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siècle*, Strasbourg, 1875. See footnote 12, below.]

<sup>348</sup> J. Scotus Erigena, *De divisione naturae*, II, 1.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 19.

other than: God is in all things. Of him alone can one say that he exists; the world only exists insofar as it participates in the being of God.<sup>350</sup>

“Mankind finds itself among the supreme causes, an intellectual notion eternally conceived by divine thought. Mankind was made in the image of God and was destined to be the mediator between God and his creatures, the place of union of the creatures in a single and self-same unity. If mankind had not sinned, the division of the sexes would not have been produced: mankind would have remained in the primitive unity of its nature. Moreover, the world would not have been separated in him from paradise, that is to say, he would have spiritually inhabited [it] in the unity of his essence; the heavens and the earth would not have been separated in him, because all of his being would have been heavenly and without any corporeal element. Without the fall, he would have enjoyed the plenitude of being and would have reproduced in the manner of the angels.

“Nothing of what exists would have fallen into nothingness; the end of the fall of nature is the departure point for its rising.<sup>351</sup>

“Here-below, mankind possesses in itself two elements that compose universal nature, spirit and matter; he reconciles within himself the two opposed extremities of creation. He is the mediator between God and the world, the point at which all creatures, spiritual as well as material, are brought together in a single unity. Human nature lost nothing of its primitive purity through the fact of the fall; it has conserved it completely. It isn't in this nature that evil is seated, but in the perverse movements of our free will. Like any primary idea, it enjoys an imperishable beauty; evil only resides in the accident, in individual will. The image of God continues to exist in the human soul.<sup>352</sup>

“It is through human intelligence that the return of the creation to God takes place. Exterior objects, conceived by us, pass into our nature and

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 74.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 7.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 5.

united with it. They find in it the first causes, in which they return through the effect of our thought, which glimpses the eternal essence in passing phenomena and identifies itself intellectually with God. Thus the visible creatures go back up with us in God. ‘The Word is the principle and the final goal of the world; at the end of time, it recovers the infinite multiplicity of its own being come back to itself in its original unity,’ or to employ the allegorical language that reduces the facts of Christian revelation to the status of symbols and images of this evolution of the divine being: ‘Christ rose into the heavens in an invisible manner in the hearts of those who elevate themselves to him through contemplation.’<sup>353</sup>

“[‘]Physical death is the beginning of the return of mankind to God. On the one side, matter vanishes without leaving any traces; on the other side, all the divisions successively issued from the divine unity and that co-exist in the human soul return, the one to the other. The first stage of this universal unification is the return of mankind to the primitive state of his nature, such as it existed in heaven, without the division of the sexes. Resurrected Christ preceded us to the paradise of human nature unified with itself, in which all creatures are one.’<sup>354</sup> All men indistinctly return to the unity of human nature, because this nature is the communal property of all. But here a triple distinction is established. Those who were elevated during their lives as high as the contemplation the divine being, will be elevated above the unity of their heavenly nature, to the point of deification; those who did not surpass the ordinary level of terrestrial existence will remain in the state of glorified human nature; and those who yielded to the ‘irrational movements of perverse desire’ will fall into eternal torment, without [any] human nature, which formed the foundation of their being, becoming attained in its ideal bliss through their suffering. Individual consciousness alone will be the seat of suffering.

“‘After the annihilation of this world, there will be no malice, no death, no misery. Divine goodness will absorb malice; eternal life will absorb death; and bliss will absorb misery. Evil will end; it will have

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<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 20.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 7.

no reality in itself because God will not know it.”<sup>355</sup> All of Scotus Eriugena’s treatise on predestination is dedicated to the exposition of this same idea. Eternal suffering is absolutely condemned by the logic of his system.”<sup>356</sup>

## David of Dinant

If diffuse pantheism, which, up to the Twentieth Century, tended to mobilize God in a world that he only made, and thus compensated for the declining authority of the various religions, this same conception – at a time when the Church imposed the presence of its divinity with the daunting persuasion of its priests and the weapons of the princes – took on a diametrically opposed meaning.

In 1210, the Council of Paris, Peter of Corbeil (the Archbishop of Sens), and Peter of Nemours (the Bishop of the city [Paris]), all had excellent reasons for sending the Amalricians to the pyre and to pell-mell condemn Amalric of Bena, Aristotle, and David of Dinant. As long as they spun around in the inner circles devoted to scholastic quarrels, ideas did not seriously threaten the foundations of faith, but, when they served as pretexts or justifications for a natural irreligion or for the frightened hostility that clerical politics stirred up, they soon acquired an importance of which their authors were sometimes unaware.

It is difficult to represent the doctrine of Dinant with precision, because nothing other than quotations from his work exist. Nevertheless, he seems to have advanced a formula that, in the Eighteenth Century, under Spinoza’s hand, still scandalized the religious milieus: *Deus sive natura*, (God is nothing other than nature).<sup>357</sup>

According to the *Chronicle of the Monk of Loudun*, Dinant was born in the Meuse Valley, lived in the family circle of Pope Innocent III, and was a clever politician, jurist and man of learning.

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<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 25.

<sup>356</sup> A. Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siècle*, Strasbourg, 1875, p. 12. [*Translator*: Jundt’s conclusion seems unjustified. How can one say, “Eternal suffering is absolutely condemned by the logic of his system” when one has just reported that, “those who delivered themselves to the ‘irrational movements of perverse desire’ will fall into eternal torment”?]

<sup>357</sup> C. They, *Autour du décret de 1210: David de Dinant: étude sur son panthéisme matérialiste*, Kain, 1925.

The *Compilatio de novo spirito*, attributed to Albert the Great, specified that Dinant fled France at the time of the Council of 1210 because “he would have been punished if he had been caught.”

Albert quoted extracts from Dinant’s *Liber de tomis sive divisionibus*, also known as *Liber atomorum*.

According to David, everything is simultaneously matter, spirit and God. These three terms formed a unique substance from which the indivisible components of the body, the intellect and the soul (that is to say, matter, spirit and God) had their source.

In Jundt’s opinion,<sup>358</sup> David knew about a work written by Avicenna (an Arab philosopher and contemporary of Avicenna), called *Fons vitae* (*The Fountain of Life*), which supported the thesis of a material substance endowed with different modes of expression that went from the simple to the complex.

Obviously, [such] metaphysical subtleties had less interest than the conclusion, to which many people subscribed, even if they couldn’t read or argue: namely, that there is only terrestrial life, and it falls to each person to construct his or her destiny within it. This was in fact the lesson propagated by the Amalricians.

### **Thomas Scotto and Herman van Rijswijk**

The name Thomas Scotto would have [completely] disappeared from history (carefully purified by the Church) if it hadn’t appeared at the very heart of the clergy of executioners who perpetuated the memories of their victims. The Inquisitor Alvarus Pelagius granted him a note in his *Collyrium contra haereses*, published in 1344.

First a Dominican and then a Franciscan, Thomas Scotto taught at the school in London that studied papal decretals in the first half of the Fourteenth Century.

After having a dispute with him in Lisbon, Pelagius threw Scotto in prison and then, in all probability, burned him.

What doctrine can be gleaned from the inquisitor’s accusations? Contrary to the opinion that holds that there was no atheism in the Middle Ages, Scotto’s conception suggested the thesis of an eternal and uncreated world. The soul was annihilated at death. Scotto rejected the sacraments, the virginity of Mary, the miracles of the Christ, his divine nature, and the authority of the Church. Four centuries before Isaac Pererius, Scotto held that mankind existed before Adam. He estimated that the world would be better governed by philosophers than by

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<sup>358</sup> A. Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siècle*, Strasbourg, 1875.

theologians, and had little respect for people like Augustine of Hippo and Bernard de Clairvaux.

Is it excessive to conjecture that Thomas Scoto was only one example among other thinkers whose dangerous opinions prudence required one not to publish? Pelagius noted one of the heretical ideas with which he was charged: “Three impostors have deceived the world: Moses deceived the Jews; Jesus deceived the Christians; and Mohammed deceived the Saracens.”<sup>359</sup> This was the celebrated title of a book [*De Tribus Impostoribus*] attributed to Frederic II or to his chancellor, Peter of the Vineyard, of which no trace has been found, that is, other than an edition from the end of the Seventeenth Century, thanks to a priest named Meslier.<sup>360</sup> But the text, real or fictional, cast a scandalous shadow from the Eighth to the Seventeenth Century, due to the concision with which it summarized an opinion that many people professed secretly or that was held by people connected to the universities and among the wandering or Goliard clerics, but was prevented from being discussed openly by the omnipresent suspicions of the clergy.

At the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, several before Geoffrey Vallee, [Lucilio] Vanini and [Giordano] Bruno,<sup>361</sup> another Free Spirit – Herman van Rijswijk – was placed on the pyre in 1512 as a recidivist, after having escaped from prison, to which a trial in 1502 had condemned him. Herman’s works, since disappeared, affirmed that the world had existed for all eternity and did not begin with creation, “which was an invention of the stupid Moses.” Herman denounced the “buffoonery of the Scriptures.” Faced with the inquisitor, a notary and a witness, he added to the end of the accusatory act: “I was born a Christian, but I am not a Christian [any longer] because the Christians are perfectly stupid.” All of these men – from David of Dinant to Herman van Rijswijk, passing through

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<sup>359</sup> *Translator*: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, New York, 1986, p. 179, which via a footnote refers the reader to Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos espanoles*, Madrid, 1929, p. 530.

<sup>360</sup> *Translator*: Jean Meslier (1664-1729), a French Catholic priest who authored an atheistic *Testament*, but this does not seem to be the *Traité sur les trois imposteurs*. Note that, in 2002, Vaneigem himself edited and wrote a preface for a volume published by Éditions Payot et Rivages (Rivages poche / Petite Bibliothèque) that offered modern French versions of Geoffrey Vallee’s *L’Art de ne croire en rien*, also known as *La Béatitude des chrétiens ou le Fléau de la foi*, and a French translation of an edition of *De tribus impostoribus* published in 1598.

<sup>361</sup> *Translator*: all of whom were burnt at the stake as “heretics” in the second half of the Sixteenth Century.

Thomas Scoto – allow us to conjecture that these were neither the first nor the only atheists before the Renaissance, which inflicted upon the Church of Rome, in particular, and religion, in general, injuries that no scar tissue would ever heal.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, Paris, 1986; P. Fredericq, *Corpus documentarum*, Gard, 1889-1900, I p. 452.

## Chapter 29: The Cathars

The uncertain lights of Marcion have projected the most diverse shadows on the world and history. The frantic founder of a Church of which he claimed to be the master, Marcion imprinted on the ecclesiastic party, which appeared among his adversaries, the political will in which temporal demands folded and refolded Christianity until it fit into the Constantian mold. Mani, who came from an Elchasaite milieu, was also influenced by Marcion. Where Marcionite Churches failed because of the untenable paradox of a missionary authority that wanted to confront the absolute evil of the universe, Mani wended his way through the old Persian dualism, which was better disposed to receive it than the Greco-Roman propensity to market rationality and national security that was easily conquered by monotheism.

The Paulicians and the Bogomils formed other branches that grew in parallel to the dualism that was rooted in the separation of mankind from itself and that diffused into light and darkness, good and evil, and the spiritual and the material, the fractured unity of human life that was born from nature and that aspired to rediscover in it in a new, peaceful and creative alliance.

The Cathar movement, such as it was propagated in Northern Italy, Provence, the Rhineland region, Flanders and Champagne, originally was fostered by Bogomil missionaries. The heretic hunters were not mistaken when they called them “Bulgari” [*bougres*], that is to say, Bulgarians (the *Song of the Crusade*, V. 18, calls the Albigensians “those from Bulgaria”). The term “Cathar,” which came from the Greek word *catharos* (“pure”), became *Ketzer* (“heretic”) in German. Flanders knew them from the beginning as the “piffles” and in Gaul they were called the “weavers,” a reference to a guild that was prompted to take action against tyranny and to spread ideas of liberty.<sup>363</sup>

Catharism manifested itself in the current of the Twelfth Century as a new syncretism, assimilating several Christian notions and texts, but on a basis absolutely different from Christianity and *a fortiori* from the Catholicism of Rome.

### The First Bogomil Missionaries

Singular though it was, the case of Leuthard of Vertus suggested the presence of Bogomil missionaries, wandering merchants, pilgrims, itinerant day-

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<sup>363</sup> C. Gaignebet, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1985.



laborers or Goliards who were active in Western Europe. Other isolated sectarians met in Ravenna and Mainz.

Around 1018, an important group that was well established in the working-class milieus of Aquitaine rejected the cross, baptism, marriage and the consumption of animal flesh. Around 1022, the population of Toulouse showed itself receptive to their influence – from whence came its reputation as an old nest of heretics that Petrus Valium claimed it was: *Tolosa tota dolosa*.<sup>364</sup>

In 1022, the Orleans affair exploded.<sup>365</sup> The nobles and priests of the Church of the Holy Cross, including a familiar of King Robert and the confessor of Queen Constance, professed Bogomil opinions, perhaps influenced by an Italian missionary. They held that matter was impure; and they rejected marriage, the pleasures of love, baptism, communion, confession, prayer, the ecclesiastic hierarchy and the material existence of the Christ (“We were not there and we can not judge if it is true,” they said in their confessions). Through the laying-on of hands, they purified the believer of his or her sins. The Holy Spirit then descended on him or her; from then on, his or her soul was raised up and delivered from suffering.

Denounced to King Robert, this group was placed on the pyre on 28 December 1022, following the penalty reserved by customary right for sorcerers. The chroniclers of the time assured their readers that the condemned went to their deaths laughing.

In 1025, in the dioceses of Châlons and Arras, an Italian named Gandulf incited the enthusiasm of the disinherited and the weaver-workers by preaching a doctrine in which various social themes, Bogomilism and the reforms announced by Henry of Lausanne and Peter of Bruys were mixed.<sup>366</sup>

For Gandulf, it was absurd to impose baptism on newborns whose reason wasn’t sufficiently enlightened to accede to evangelic life. Unworthy priests had no right to the pretensions that their responsibilities conferred upon them. The Eucharist was only a “*vile negotium*,” a “vile business”: how could Christ share his body of flesh, become bread, with so many faithful? Faith had little regard for the facts. The Churches were only masses of stones; the cross and the ecclesiastic hierarchy with its bells and songs merited no attention at all.

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<sup>364</sup> *Translator*: punning Latin for “Completely deceitful Toulouse.” Petrus Valium appears to be another name for Peter de Vaux-Sarnai.

<sup>365</sup> *Translator*: the Seventh National Council of Orleans, held in 1022 under Bishop Odolric, proceeded against the Manicheans.

<sup>366</sup> Stefano, *Riformatori*, p. 347; Illarino, *Eresie*, p. 68.

Marriage had no importance: it was only a question of making love without being saddled with an aggressive concupiscence (this position was absolutely opposed to Catharism, but, on the other hand, it ratified the emerging and ephemeral privileges of women, which were expressed in a watered-down form by courtly love).

The apostolic life consisted in living from the work of one's own hands, not hating anyone, and loving all one's fellows. Gerard the First, the Bishop of Cambrai and a clever man who was favorable to reform of the Church, preferred to close his eyes and, refusing to repress Gandulf, "reconciled him with the Church."

And yet, in the same era, Terry, a hermit living in a grotto near Corbigny, in the Nevers region, made similar remarks and was burned along with two women from among his faithful.<sup>367</sup>

In Italy, from whence came certain agitators, Bogomilism had put down roots and engendered specific doctrines. In 1028, a community of some 30 people belonging to the nobility, and centered around the Countess of Ortes, met at the chateau of Monteforte. They formed an ascetic group whose aspirations to an evangelic Christianity assimilated the teachings of Bogomil and foreshadowed Catharism.

[In their doctrines,] Christ was not God, but the Soul of man, the beloved of God. The hidden meaning of the Bible (note that their recognition of the Old Testament separated them from the teachings of the Bogomils and Cathars) and the revelation of the Holy Spirit presided over the regeneration of each person. The new man, disapproving of all that came from this world, discovered in his virginity his most elevated ideal, the doctrine of the "pure love" ("If he is married, his should consider his wife to be his mother or his sister, and dream that humanity, like the bees, will perpetuate itself without sin"). This same doctrine was proposed in different versions by the [Benedictine] Monials of the Thirteenth Century, the erotica of the troubadours, and the Cathars.

"All goods must be placed in common; one must not eat meat; one must fast and pray constantly, *vicissim*,<sup>368</sup> day and night. One must mortify oneself to be forgiven and, as soon as natural death approaches, let yourself come to an end through its companions to

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<sup>367</sup> Dupin, *Histoire des controverses du XII siècle*, chap. VI.

<sup>368</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "in turn" or "again."

achieve martyrdom and holiness.”<sup>369</sup> (This prescription was the same as the Cathars’ voluntary death or *endura*.)<sup>370</sup>

When the Archbishop of Milan, Ariberto, undertook to pursue these people, they offered no resistance, confessed their faith and, obliged to choose between the adoration of the cross and the pyre, they willingly threw themselves into the flames, assured of another world that would liberate them from the miserable imperfections of terrestrial existence.

Other adepts of similar beliefs showed up near Verona, Ravenna and Venice. Gerard Segrado, the Bishop of Csanád from 1037 to 1046, remarked that they had many brothers in faith in Greece. They scorned the Church, the priests and their rites, and mocked the resurrection of the flesh.

Between 1043 and 1048, the agitation spread to the region of Châlons, not far from Vertus, where Leuthard had previously sowed trouble. At the time of the Council of Rheims (1049), there were mysterious assemblies of peasants who refused marriage and the pleasures of love. They practiced the laying-on of hands and refused to kill animals.

In 1051, in Goslar, the emperor condemned to the gallows those Lorrain peasants who refused to kill the chickens that the bishop of the town had presented to them as a test of their beliefs.

For almost a century, no document attested to the perpetuation of Bogomilism, which was subjected to local interpretations in its propagation in Western Europe. Either its adherents assured themselves, through an extreme prudence, of the protections of clandestinity, or the communalist insurrections gave their demands a less religious aspect.

It wasn’t until the 1140s that Byzantium’s persecution of Bogomilism pushed towards the west a new wave of believers, often identified with the Manicheans. No doubt the deplorable outcome of the Second Crusade returned to their foyers Crusaders who had become disillusioned and, since their stay in Byzantium, had become carriers of a new faith in which the powerful were identified with Satan’s henchmen.

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<sup>369</sup> A. Borst, *Les Cathares*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>370</sup> *Translator*: A fast or series of privations intended to purify the soul before (and often leading to) death.

## The Second Wave of Bogomil Preaching

Towards the end of the first half of the Twelfth Century, the “*novi haeretici*”<sup>371</sup> appeared everywhere and in force. The name “Cathar” was only applied to them after 1163. The preachers, surrounded by their partisans, gave way to schools, organizations and Churches.

In 1143, in Cologne, there were many people who led the apostolic life, gloried in possessing nothing, worked with their hands and punctuated with periods of fasting and prayer an existence that was in conformity with the veritable Church, which was assuredly not that of the rich prelates. The first abominable pyres were lit for them in Cologne and Bonn.

At the same time, two brothers from the village of Bussy, Evrard and Clement, who propagated ideas of reform and purification, were delivered to Guibert of Nogent, who had them lynched and burned by his henchmen.<sup>372</sup>

In Périgord, around 1147, the “*novi haeretici*” easily seduced nobles, clerics, monks, nuns, peasants, and weavers. “In scarcely two years, the Cathar movement controlled the areas from the Rhine to the Pyrenees (...) The spark lit in the East now became a powerful flame.”<sup>373</sup>

The former partisans of Henry of Lausanne rallied to a Cathar bishop who preached in the region of Albi. In the north, Champagne had a [Cathar] bishop at Mont-Aimé. The gravedigger Marcus, converted to the new faith, preached in Lombardy. Wandering missionaries reached Naples and England, where around 1162 adepts were quickly put to death. On 5 August 1163, several Cathars were burned in Cologne, in front of the Jewish cemetery, at the instigation of Canon Eckbert. The scholar Hildegarde von Bingen did not disdain from denouncing them.

With the development of a veritable Church, internal dissidence and polemics grew. Western Bogomilism was grafted upon an ensemble of social demands and a kind of apostolic reform as moral practice took precedence over dogmatic questions. The gap grew wider between the Christian component of an egalitarian evangelism and a dualist religion that had nothing in common with Christianity of the Montanist type that was propagated by the currents of voluntary poverty.

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<sup>371</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “new heretics,” a phrase one finds in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux circa 1140.

<sup>372</sup> B. Monmod, *Le Moine Guibert et son temps*, Paris, 1905.

<sup>373</sup> A. Borst, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

The intervention circa 1167 of Nicetas, the Bogomil Bishop of the Church of Byzantium (who was close to Marcus, the deacon of the Italian Cathars), imprinted on the entirety of the movement a more exacerbated dualism: Satan, the master of an execrable world, was a divinity parallel to the God of Goodness. The entirety of the beliefs in which the majority of the Cathar communities recognized themselves thereafter composed a doctrine that was irreconcilable with the principles of Christianity. More than a heresy, Catharism showed itself to Rome with the magnitude of a competing religion, a regeneration of Manichaeism.

Nevertheless, rivalries and schisms multiplied within Catharism. The conception according to which the purity of ideas and rites depended upon moral purity constituted a weapon in the rivalries for power. The Cathars of Florence rejected Garattus, candidate for the Lombard bishopric, as well as his doctrine, because he had been caught in the company of a “star of the Shepherd.”<sup>374</sup> The star that Lucifer brought down with him in his fall was called a prostitute.

Furthermore, in 1178, certain bishops of Toulouse and the Aran Valley professed their Christian faith and disavowed the belief in two divinities.

Such internal dissensions surreptitiously introduced a ferment of desperation into the movement, the power of which attracted all social classes, as Arno Borst has shown:

“The archbishops of Bordeaux, Narbonne and Bourges were seriously threatened by Catharism. In the surroundings of Albi, Toulouse and Carcassonne, in Gascony, the Cathars were so numerous that the Count of Toulouse, frightened, had to intervene in 1177. The Cathars appeared in the north of France, in Bourgogne and Flanders; as well as in Nevers, Vézelay, Auxerre, Troyes, Besançon, Metz, Reims, Soissons, Roanne, Arras and other towns. In Spain, they were still rare, but one found them in England around 1210. In Germany, one encountered them all along the Rhine, in the archdioceses in particular, but also in the bishoprics along the Danube, in Passau and Vienna. But their paradise was the north of Italy, the walled-in worlds of the cities of Milan, Udine, Como and Viterbo. Towns, out-lying areas, villages and chateaux were filled with them. Everything that, near-by or from afar, had been more or less more favorable to the birth of Cathar ecumenism, now found itself implicated by the great stupefaction concerning a universal conspiracy against the Catholic

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<sup>374</sup> *Translator*: the planet Venus is nicknamed “the star of the Shepherd” because it can easily be seen at dawn, before the sun has risen.

Church. All of the social strata were touched by the Cathar missions. The severity of Cathar morality attracted the ruling classes; noble and princely patrons, knights, and rich and cultivated people were attracted to it everywhere. Priests and monks received and put into practice the new sacred teachings. But these were not the milieus that spread those teachings, because, at that moment, evangelic morality was no longer the fundamental preoccupation of the Cathars: Bogomil dogma had passed to the first rank. Its simple rationality particularly touched the lower classes. A gravedigger who daily experienced the destruction of matter preached in Italy. His principal theme: the Demon created the flesh. Men of letters and weavers, workers belonging to sedentary or meditative professions, followed the ruling classes; workers and unskilled laborer fell into step. A proletarian intellectualism took hold of Bogomil teachings. Despite the ‘affinity of choice’ that united the laboring classes with the most elevated layers of society, this was not a proletarian movement. It remained disparate in its social structure and, in 1125, it was still unclear which would one impose itself, the high or the low, the adepts of a simple Christianity or those of Bogomil dualism.

“The Cathars’ situation on the economic plane also rested on a contradiction. They certainly extolled apostolic poverty. Each ‘Perfect One,’ upon his entrance into the sect, had to give his fortune and his goods to the Cathar Church and satisfy his needs through the work of his own hands. The adept was poor, no doubt, but the Church was rich. In 1162 in Flanders, and in 1163 in Cologne, it offered to the Catholic prelates the spectacle of a church corrupted by money; in 1177, in the south of France, it swam in riches.

“In Rimini, as in Beziers, the Cathars offered loans. Mobs crowded around them ‘*pro subsidiis temporalibus*.’<sup>375</sup> And the heretics, who were themselves merchants, conducted their [business] affairs and the affairs of the soul in public places and at the same time. They collected gifts for their Church. They did not prohibit their adepts from practicing loans with interest; the rich believers relieved their consciences with large offerings. Once again appeared the conflict between the exigencies of Western evangelic morality and the

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<sup>375</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “temporary assistance.”

financial necessities of a Church founded on a well-defined dogma; profiting from the confused situation that created Catharist contradictions, a precocious capitalism was instaurated.

“In politics, the position of the Cathars was not clear. Especially in the south of France, the ascetics who scorned the world were soon supported by the nobles and, at the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, almost all of the barons were adepts. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse (1194 to 1222) and Ramon Roger of Foix (1188-1223) were examples of this. Their wives supported the Cathar Church. An old aristocrat, Pontius of Rodelle, explained to Foulques, the Catholic Bishop of Toulouse: [‘]The Cathars are our parents; they live among us. Why must we persecute them?['] But it was not simply the severe and impressive morality of the Cathars that seduced the nobility. The nobility in Provence was poor and the Cathars were the enemies of the Catholic Church, whose riches came from the lords. The Cathars did not have a political program; [but] they became the instrument of politics when they offered their alliance to the Count of Toulouse against Paris. The Pope was not completely wrong when he reproached them – he who makes a powerful person is always well made. Here enthusiastic honor and bad conscience coexisted; here the material here-below infiltrated into piety and renunciation.”<sup>376</sup>

The first popular and Christian reaction to rise up against Catharism would have furnished an army of great efficacy – if Church hadn’t disavowed and rejected it as heresy. Born around 1173, centered around a merchant named Peter Waldes or Waldo, the Waldensian current propagated fidelity to Catholic dogma and, at the same time, the necessity of a reform of ecclesiastic morals. Perhaps it was too late when, their opportunity missed, the popes hastened to combat the Cathars on the terrain of voluntary poverty.

When the Cathars reproached the Spanish Bishop of Osma, Diego de Acebo, for preaching amidst splendor, he chose to confront them under the [outward] appearance of poverty and humility. Dominique de Guzman and his Dominican order adopted a similar tactic. The paltry results quickly augured the inevitable recourse to the final solution.

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<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-93.

The assassination of the papal legate Pierre of Castelnau in 1208 by sympathizers of the Count of Toulouse and the Cathars quickly justified the necessity of offering the indispensable extension of the sword to the crucifix.

Cîteaux<sup>377</sup> preached the Crusade. The conflict that opposed King Philippe August to his vassal, the Count of Toulouse, added political interests to the hopes for profit and plunder that were less hazardously achieved than they were in the Saracen regions.

## The End of Catharism

The violence of the Crusade against the Albigensians gave the Church a position of strength that gave it time to craftily enact reforms with which it would less and less accommodate itself. How could people so sensitive to the delights of the beyond, where the Good God reigned, not be resigned to the encounter with the brutes of the north? Even when their resistance was organized, the Cathars carried their defeat within themselves. Their goodness was founded on the renunciation of self; their love was founded on abstinence. What strength could they draw from the pleasures that were not of this world?

While extermination tightened around them, the Cathars did not tire of dogmatic quarrels. Around 1230, John of Lugio composed a vast work in Latin, in which he tried to revive the Christian tradition by finding a justification for Catharism in philosophy.

In Italy, the towns won over to Catharism were, by turns, protected or repressed according to political about-faces that, breaking or renewing alliances, incited the Emperor to fire up the pyres or extinguish them.

Languedoc succumbed in the blood (most often mixed together) of the Cathars, the Catholics and the peasants who still practiced the old agrarian cults, and in the blood of those who did not bother to believe in any dogma. But the Church carried to victory by the French [version of the] *reconquista* fell into the hands of the kingdom decorated by the *fleur-de-lis*. For two centuries, the Church paid the price by indenturing itself to French temporal power.

Frederic II, anticipating all Roman initiatives, soon gave the force of law to the ordinances of the Council of Lateran. He decreed death by fire for all the Cathars. For him, heresy was a crime against the State; he held as heretical anyone who dared to contest his decisions, since he was the Pope.

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<sup>377</sup> *Translator*: that is to say, Arnaud Amalric, the Seventeen Abbot of Cîteaux, who is infamous for saying *Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius*. (“Kill them all. For the Lord knoweth them that are His.”)



Rome made use of the Dominicans, those henchmen dressed in monks' habits. Languedoc particularly execrated their founder, Dominic, and his acolyte, Peter, called the Martyr, whom the hardliners succeeded in executing. In 1231, the Inquisition finally began to function. It took on and legalized the work of the heretic-hunters, who had acted almost on their own, as did Robert the Bulgarian<sup>378</sup> or Konrad von Marburg, torturers who organized huge burnings everywhere they went.

Around 1244, with the fall of the bastion of Château de Montségur, Catharism received the deathblow. It thenceforth perpetuated itself clandestinely, stirring up renewals of repression in 1295, when the pyre ended Peire Autier's campaign of agitation, or in 1321, when Pastor Guillaume Bélibaste fell into the hands of the Inquisition and perished in fire. In 1340, the pyre was lit at Carcassonne for the last Cathars. They survived up to 1322 in the areas around Florence, until 1340 in Sicily, 1388 in Sienna and 1412 in Turin. (Note that the first signs of hysteria concerning the "black Manichaeism" of sorcery, which appeared in the Fourteenth Century and culminated in the Sixteenth Century, suggested a continuation of Catharism without Cathars, as well as regressions in the freedom of women and the freedom to love. Identifying the Waldensians and the Perfect Ones with sorcerers – one spoke of the "*vauderie*"<sup>379</sup> of Arras – the Church recuperated the principle of purity and, in its way, pursued the combat of the angels against the forces of evil: marginal people, Jews, and "inferior" races, all of whom were considered sectarians of the Devil.)

## Dualism and Asceticism

Despite their diversity, the various local Catharisms – mind you, Albigensianism, swelled by the Crusade, was incorrectly presented as the entirety of the movement – shared certain common traits, principally linked to dualism and an ascetic rigor that composed the first Greco-Roman Christianity.

It is customary to recognize in these various Catharisms two modes of dualism. One, mitigated, conceived of a single God, the creator of all things, including, among others, the angel Satanael, who repudiated his native goodness, corrupted himself, and drew upon the matter of a corrupted world. The human soul, proceeding from two primordial angelic natures, made use (through free will)

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<sup>378</sup> *Translator*: a former heretic who "converted" and became a member of the Dominican Order.

<sup>379</sup> *Translator*: a term that both refers to Waldo (Valdes), the founder of the Waldensians, and witchcraft. Cf. *Black's Law Dictionary*.

of the faculty of choosing good or evil, and thus threw itself into salvation or damnation.

This doctrine was propagated in the milieus that were attached to a certain Christian formalism.

[On the other hand,] absolute dualism broke more deliberately with Christianity and recognized two antagonistic powers, as one did in Marcionism. The material world was the work of a Bad God. The Good God engendered an incorruptible universe, that of spirits or the Spirit.

The theory of the *angelos-christos* resurged in Catharism. The Christ, angel of God, only possessed a spiritual body.

In his *Book of the Two Principles*, John of Lugio argued for the co-eternal character of the perfect world, the domain of the God of Goodness, and the bad world governed by Satan. The idea that Satan forced God to reveal the evil that was in him under the forms of the Will to Justice and the Power to Punish proceeded curiously – perhaps influenced by the Kabalistic Jewish milieus or the Passagians – from the Jewish Gnosticism attested to by [the existence of] an Essene faction. (Note that the Passagians were a Judaicized sect that appeared in Lombardy and was condemned at the Council of Lombardy in 1184. Hostile to the sacraments and the Church, this sect believed that circumcision was indispensable for salvation.)

Like Marcionism, Catharism professed an absolute refusal of nature, which was identified with evil, perversion and death. Underneath an apparent respect for life – which enjoined them from killing other men or animals, excluded theft and violence from their behaviors, and taught them to conduct themselves as fundamentally good people (traits that one found among apostolic preachers such as Gandulf) – the Cathars scorned the pleasures of existence. At the heart of a civilization in which the privileges of love and women were only timidly asserted, the Cathars condemned all amorous relations as mortal sin. Even marriage was a “*jurata fornicatio*.”<sup>380</sup> Women were to be avoided with fright. Some Cathars estimated that Satan inhabited the bodies of pregnant women.<sup>381</sup> Such an extreme rigor did not exist without reversals or excesses. It seems that the Catharist Bishop Philippe hazarded the idea – reprised by the Beghards of the Free Spirit – that “there is no sin below the waist.”

It is true that the believers did not fall into the constraints of the puritanism imposed on the Perfect Ones, and that they had the right to get married.

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<sup>380</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “legalized fornication.”

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

The Perfect Ones refused to swear, take oaths or sit on tribunals, because human justice was essentially diabolical. It was not permitted for the Perfect Ones to carry arms, eat meat or enjoy the least sensual pleasure.

The *consolamentum*, the principal ceremony and the heritage of Bogomilism, absolved all sin and initiated one into the order of the Perfect Ones.

The *endura* (the fast that was sometimes prolonged until to death) was a form of suicide. It was never made the object of an obligation or an incentive, contrary to the assertions propagated by the Catholics, but it did possess a certain attraction for people who were little disposed to discover the charms of the here-below.

Few Cathar texts have survived, other than the *Liber de duobus principiis* by John of Lugio and the *Interrogatio Johannis*, a gospel of Bogomil origin. Other writings circulated and were echoed in the *Summa de catharis* by an apostate Cathar, Rainier Sacconi. Fables that composed a veritable mythology translated the teachings of the Perfect Ones into colorful narratives (a dragon carries off angels in the folds of its tail; battle in a glass sky that breaks under the weight of demons; the theme of *golem* animated by Lucifer. . .). Their influence on folklore still hasn't been studied.

## Chapter 30: The Waldensians and the Adepts of Voluntary Poverty

The Waldensian movement illustrates the opportunity lost by Rome in its struggles against the Cathars and the subversive effects of the urban pauperization that was exploited by the “apostolic” reformers. Few records exist that clarify the figure of the movement’s founder, a rich merchant from Lyon named Peter Waldo, Waldo or Valdes, perhaps *de la Vallée* [of the valley].

Legend has it that he received a warning from heaven while listening to the *Lament of Saint Alexis*. He made gifts of all his belongings in order to devote himself to voluntary poverty and evangelism, such as they were prescribed by the canonical text attributed to Matthew: “If you want to be perfect, sell your goods, give them to the poor.”

Around 1170, men and women assembled around Waldo and began to preach voluntary poverty in the strict context of Catholic orthodoxy, without any possible collusion with Catharism, with the *pataria*, who were explicitly anti-clerical, or *a fortiori* with the Henricians, Petrobrusians or “apostolics.”

The conflict began when the Archbishop [of Lyon] Guichard (1165-1181), guarding his privileges, prohibited the group from preaching. Waldo was summoned to the Pope. He went to Rome where the Pope, scalded by the radicalism of the Patarins, enjoined him to preach only upon the request of the clergy. This was done to support the Archbishop of Lyon. Waldo ignored him. He was excommunicated and chased from the town by Archbishop John of Canterbury, which was an error all the more unpardonable because, according to Thouzelier, at a regional synod held in Lyon in 1180, Waldo had signed a profession of faith in which he confirmed his devotion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>382</sup>

Between 1181 and 1184, there circulated a *Liber antihaeresis* that clearly opposed the true Christianity of the Waldensians to the non-Christian teachings of the Cathars. Nevertheless, the partisans of Waldo, summoned to Verona in 1184, were condemned as “pertinacious and schismatic”<sup>383</sup> by a scornful decree that identified them with other heretics. The repressive machine, thereafter set in motion, massacred them until the Seventeenth Century with the refinement of

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<sup>382</sup> Thouzelier, *Catharisme et Valdésisme en Languedoc*, 1966.

<sup>383</sup> *Translator*: Publio Elvio Pertinace was proclaimed the Emperor of Rome the morning after the murder of Commodus in the year 192.

cruelty that tyrants [usually] reserved for their best friends. Thouzelier situates the death of Peter Waldo between 1206 and 1210; Gonnet between 1205 and 1206.<sup>384</sup>

The rapid expansion of the movement easily conquered Northern Italy, where Patarins and Cathars shared the loyalty of the population, which was unanimously hostile to the Roman clergy.

In 1205, Waldo probably assisted in the schism between the Italian and French branches of the movement. Preserving Waldo's doctrine, Giovanni di Ronco led the "poor Lombards." The group, sometimes known as the Roncolists, experienced other schisms. The "del Prato" group, formed in Milan, soon drew closer to Catholicism.

The traditionalist sect recommended manual labor and recognized private property. In its practice, if not in its doctrine, the Roncolists sometimes resembled popular Catharism. Italian Waldensianism soon rallied the support of the "*humiliati*," a kind of Patarin group very active in the workers' milieu, principally in the explicitly subversive class of the weavers. Innocent IV was clever enough to accord his support to these "honest workers." During the Colloquy of Pamiers, which was united by the French Waldensians (sometimes called "Leonists"), the Roncolists' organization and orthodox seal of approval influenced the schism of Durand of Huesca, who, after joining the party of Rome, founded the Order of the Poor Catholics and engaged in a crusade of apostolic virtue against the Cathars that, two years later, was followed by a more effective and better-armed crusade that was intended to propagate the truth in a peremptory fashion. (Note that the *Opusculum contra haereticos* has been attributed to Durand of Huesca's companion, Ermangaud.)

The Waldensian community continues to exist today, despite secular persecutions. It formed a specific Church among the Protestant currents.

The rupture with the Church of Rome gave the Waldensian doctrine a more resolutely critical content. In the name of a practice that was in conformity with the morality of primitive Christianity, the Waldensians entered into the ranks of the reformers.

According to them, the Church of Rome became corrupt after Pope Sylvester [314-335]. They were indignant about the Cistercian philosopher Alain de Lille, for whom bad priests fulfilled their sacred roles perfectly, provided that they followed the rites. For Waldo's disciples, the validity of the sacraments depended on the inward purity of the priest who administered them.

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<sup>384</sup> Thouzelier, *op. cit.* [Translator: the entry for Peter Waldo in *Wikipedia* places his death circa 1218.]

They rejected the baptism of infants for the same reason that the Henricians and the Petrobrusians did. They fought the sale of indulgences, founded penitence on personal contrition and only agreed to confess to men who were fundamentally good. They denied all significance to the Messiah and communion through bread and wine, that is, if it was not administered in commemoration of the Last Supper, the feast that united Jesus and his friends.

The Waldensians estimated, as Paul did in his *Epistle to the Corinthians*, that it was better to marry than to burn with concupiscent ardor and that, if there was to be a marriage, it should at least be founded on the mutual inclinations of the spouses.

Unlike the Cathars, the Waldensians recognized in women the same rights possessed by men. They denied the existence of purgatory and subscribed to the widely accepted opinion that hell existed on earth and that, in the conjuration of war, famine, misery, massacre and torture, it had no need of anywhere else to exercise its ravages.

The morals of the Waldensians were close to the customs of the Cathars, but without completely tipping over into misogyny and being horrified by sex. The Waldensians prohibited oaths, because they only had to answer to God. They condemned war and the practices of justice, and particularly fought against corporeal punishment and the death penalty. Nevertheless, the remarks made by the Waldensian Raymond-Roger, the Count of Foix, who justified to Bishop Jacques Fournier the [necessity of the] justice without which “there would be no peace and security among men,” suggested that triumphant Catharism or Waldensianism would have quickly accommodated themselves to the cruel penal repressions of the era.

While Waldensianism was ceaselessly born again from the pyres that were lit everywhere to annihilate it, and [managed to] spread to Provence, Languedoc and Italy, to reach Liege, Trier, Metz, Strasbourg, Mainz and the Rhineland, before touching Bavaria and Austria, pontifical power discovered in an adept of voluntary poverty the opportunity to recuperate under the Church’s control the enterprise prematurely begun by Peter Waldo. Exalting a virtue that he knew was fallible (forgiveness for falling to live up to it had to pass through the ecclesiastic market in redemption), Francis of Assisi (1182-1225) proposed a syncretic order in which orthodoxy would preside over vows of poverty and act in defense of the universal fraternity, including animals, which the Cathars refused to kill.

In 1209, Innocent III approved the rule of this order, in which men and women were active, as was the case among the Waldensians. It was a third order that was more particularly devoted to the lay people living in the world, nay, even the married people, and thus guaranteed a Catholic presence among the disinherited and “dangerous” classes in the urban milieus.

Engaged on the side of the Dominicans in the crusade against the Cathars – in which their leniency was intended to temper the rigor of the “brother preachers” – the Franciscans digested badly the Waldensian heresy that they had so hastily swallowed.

The observance of [voluntary] poverty very quickly created a divergence between the “Conventuals,” who maintained respect for pontifical decisions, and the “Spirituals,” whose scorn for terrestrial goods more and more opposed an ecclesial politics that was won over by the solicitations of mercantile development and the call to “Get Rich.”

In 1254, a Spiritual from Pisa named Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino was inspired by the millenarian theories of Joachim of Fiore and, in his *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel*, predicted the imminent disappearance of the Roman Church and the advent of a Spiritual Church, in gestation in Franciscanism. Gerardo died after eighteen years of severe incarceration, without having repudiated his convictions.

He found disciples in Peter-John Olivi (1248-1298), whose *Postilla in apocalypsim* announced the replacement of the Church of the flesh (Rome) by the Church of the Spirit, and in Ubertino of Casale (approximately 1259-1320), who preached in Perugia against the Pope and the monarchy, and who called the Church “Babylon, the great harlot who lost humanity and poisoned it, delivered it up to the pleasures of the flesh, pride and avarice.”

Forced into exile to escape from the resentment of Pope John XXII, who strove to decimate the party of the Spirituals, Ubertino of Casale – when he served as an Inquisitor in Tuscany, in the valley of Spoleto, and in the region of Ancona – still cracked down against the Free Spirit who seduced a dissident group within the Spirituals, that is say, the Fraticelli.<sup>385</sup>

In the diversity of forms taken by the doctrine of voluntary poverty, Begardism and the movement of the *Pastoureaux* [the shepherd boys] responded in an opposite manner to the social problems posed by the growing pauperization of the towns and countryside, but they shared a refusal of Waldensianism.

While the Beghards and Beguines rapidly distanced themselves from Catholicism, from which they initially emanated, and became devoted to the teachings of the Free Spirit, the crusade of the Pastoureaux – with its pillaging and

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<sup>385</sup> *Translator*: note well that, though it is not mentioned in the English or French versions of *Wikipedia*, this assertion is confirmed by the Italian version of that online encyclopedia: “*In quegli anni Ubertino fu anche inquisitore, e in questa veste nel 1307 condannò per eresia frate Bentivenga da Gubbio, capofila della corrente italiana dei Fratelli del Libero Spirito.*”

anti-Semitism – was part of the tradition of the raids against Islam that the papacy had encouraged under the name “Crusades.” In a predictable return of [certain] enthusiasms, due to the failure and disarray of the Crusaders, the movement of the *Pastoureaux* turned the weapon of purification (previously aimed at the Muslims) against the priests and the “bad Christians.” Norman Cohn reports in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*:<sup>386</sup>

“At Easter, 1251, three men began to preach the crusade in Picardy and within a few days their summons had spread to Brabant, Flanders and Hainaut – lands beyond the frontiers of the French kingdom, but where the masses were still as hungry for a messiah [...] One of these men was a renegade monk called Jacob, who was said to have come from Hungary and was known as the ‘Master of Hungary.’ He was a thin, pale, bearded ascetic of some sixty years of age, a man of commanding bearing and able to speak with great eloquence in French, German and Latin. He claimed that the Virgin Mary, surrounded by a host of angels, had appeared to him and had given him a letter – which he always carried in his hand, as Peter the Hermit is said to have carried a similar document. According to Jacob, the letter summoned all shepherds to help King Louis to free the Holy Sepulcher. God, he proclaimed, was displeased with the pride and ostentation of the French knights and had chosen the lowly to carry out his work. It was to shepherds that the glad tidings of the Nativity had first been made known and it was through shepherds that the Lord was now about to manifest his power and glory.

“Shepherds and cowherds – young men, boys and girls alike – deserted their flocks and, without taking leave of their parents, gathered under the strange banners on which the miraculous visitation of the Virgin was portrayed. Before long thieves, prostitutes, outlaws, apostate monks and murderers joined them; and these elements provided the leaders. But many of these newcomers too dressed as

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<sup>386</sup> N. Cohn, *Les Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse*, pp. 98-102. [Translator: Vaneigem refers to the French translation of Norman Cohn's *In Pursuit of the Millennium*. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, I have directly quoted from the original, pages 82-87. All ellipses in conformity with Vaneigem's citations.]



shepherds and all alike became known as the *Pastoureaux*. Soon there was an army which – though the contemporary estimate of 60,000 need not be taken seriously – must certainly have numbered many thousands. It was divided into fifty companies; these marched separately, armed with pitchforks, hatchets, daggers, pikes carried aloft as they entered towns and villages, so as to intimidate the authorities. When they ran short of provisions they took what they needed by force; but much was given freely for – as emerges from many different accounts – people revered the *Pastoureaux* as holy men.

“(…) Surrounded by an armed guard, Jacob preached against the clergy, attacking the Mendicants as hypocrites and vagabonds, the Cistercians as lovers of land and property, the Premonstratensians as proud and gluttonous, the Canons Regular as half-secular fast-breakers (...) His followers were taught to regard the sacraments with contempt and to see in their own gatherings the sole embodiment of truth. For himself he claimed that he could not only see visions but could heal the sick – and people brought their sick to be touched by him. He declared that food and wine set before his men never grew less, but rather increased as they were eaten and drunk (again the ‘messianic banquet’!) He promised that when the crusaders arrived at the sea the water would roll back before them and they would march dryshod to the Holy Land. On the strength of his miraculous powers he arrogated to himself the right to grant absolution from every kind of sin. If a man and a woman amongst his followers wished to marry he would perform the ceremony; and if they wished to part he would divorce them with equal ease. He was said to have married eleven men to one woman – an arrangement reminiscent of Tanchelm and which suggests that Jacob, too, saw himself as a ‘living Christ’ requiring ‘disciples’ and a ‘Virgin Mary.’ And Jacob’s bodyguard behaved exactly like Tanchelm’s. If anyone contradicted the leader he was at once struck down. The murder of a priest was regarded as particularly praiseworthy; according to Jacob it could be atoned for by a drink of wine. It is not surprising that the clergy watched the spread of this movement with horror.

“Jacob’s army went first to Amiens, where it met with an enthusiastic reception. The burghers put their food and drink at the disposal of the crusaders, calling them the holiest of men. Jacob made such a

favorable impression that they begged him to help himself to their belongings. Some knelt down before him 'as though he had been the Body of Christ.' After Amiens the army split up into two groups. One of these marched on Rouen, where it was able to disperse a synod which was meeting there under the Archbishop. The other group proceeded to Paris. There Jacob so fascinated the Queen Mother Blanche that she loaded him with presents and left him free to do whatever he would. Jacob now dressed as a bishop, preached in churches, sprinkled holy water after some rite of his own. Meanwhile, while the *Pastoureaux* in the city began to attack the clergy, putting many to the sword and drowning many in the Seine. The students of the University – who of course were also clerics, though in minor orders – would have been massacred if the bridge had not been closed in time.

“When the *Pastoureaux* left Paris they moved in a number of bands, each under the leadership of a ‘Master,’ who, as they passed through towns and villages, blessed the crowds. At Tours the crusaders again attacked the clergy, especially Dominican and Franciscan friars, whom they dragged and whipped through the streets. The Dominicans’ church was looted, the Franciscan friary was attacked and broken into. The old contempt for sacraments administered by unworthy hands showed itself: the host was seized and, amidst insults, thrown into the street. All this was done with the approval and support of the populace. At Orleans similar scenes occurred. Here the Bishop had the gates closed against the oncoming horde, but the burghers deliberately disobeyed him and admitted the *Pastoureaux* into the town. Jacob preached in public, and a scholar from the cathedral school who dared to oppose him was struck down with an axe. The *Pastoureaux* rushed to the houses where the priests and monks had hidden themselves, stormed them and burned many to the ground. Many clergy, including teachers at the University, and many burghers were struck down or drowned in the Loire. The remaining clergy were forced out of the town. When the *Pastoureaux* left the town the Bishop, enraged at the reception that had been accorded them, put Orleans under interdict. It was indeed the opinion of contemporaries that the *Pastoureaux* owed their prestige very largely to their habit of killing and despoiling priests. When the clergy tried to protest or resist they found no support amongst the populace. It is understandable that

some clerics, observing the activities of the *Pastoureaux*, felt that the Church had never been in greater danger.

“At Bourges the fortunes of the *Pastoureaux* began to change. Here too the burghers, disobeying their Archbishop, admitted as many of the horde as the town could hold; the rest remaining encamped outside. Jacob preached this time against the Jews and sent his men to destroy the Sacred Rolls. The crusaders also pillaged houses throughout the town, taking gold and silver where they found it and raping any woman they could lay hands on. If the clergy were not molested it was only because they remained in hiding. By this time the Queen Mother had realized what sort of movement this was and had outlawed all those taking part in it. When this news reached Bourges many *Pastoureaux* deserted. At length, one day when Jacob was thundering against the laxity of the clergy and calling upon the townsfolk to turn against them, someone in the crowd dared to contradict him. Jacob rushed at the man with a sword and killed him; but this was too much for the burghers, who in their turn took up arms and chased the unruly visitors from the town.

“Now it was the turn of the *Pastoureaux* to suffer violence. Jacob was pursued by mounted burghers and cut to pieces. Many of his followers were captured by the royal officials at Bourges and hanged. Bands of survivors made their way to Marseilles and to Aigues Mortes, where they hoped to embark for the Holy Land; but both towns had received warnings from Bourges and the *Pastoureaux* were caught and hanged. A final band reached Bordeaux but only to be met there by English forces under the Governor of Gascony, Simon de Montfort, and dispersed. Their leaders, attempting to embark for the East, were recognised by some sailors and drowned. One of his lieutenants fled to England and having landed at Shoreham collected a following of some hundreds of peasants and shepherds. When the news of these happenings reached King Henry III he was sufficiently alarmed to issue instructions for the suppression of the movement to sheriffs throughout the kingdom. But very soon the whole movement disintegrated, even the apostle at Shoreham was torn to pieces by his own followers. Once everything was over rumours sprang up on all sides. It was said that the movement had been a plot of the Sultan’s, who had paid Jacob to bring him Christian men and youths as slaves. Jacob and other leaders were said to have been Mahometans who had

won ascendancy over Christians by means of black magic. But there were also those who believed that at the time of its suppression the movement of the *Pastoureaux* had broached only the first part of its program. These people said that the leaders of the *Pastoureaux* had intended to massacre first all priests and monks, then all knights and nobles; and when all authority had been overthrown, to spread their teaching throughout the world.”

Less than a century later, the fear and resentment aroused by these people who were disinherited by the Crusades (whom Jacob and his *Pastoureaux* in their rage and vindictiveness truly were) secretly fed the hatred that fell upon other inheritors of the Crusades, but this time it was the privileged factions, the bankers of the French state who were burned by their defaulted creditors in front of Notre-Dame in Paris in 1314. Characterized as heretics and sorcerers, the Templars joined in the same inferno the humble people and the powerful people who had served a power that no longer perceived the utility of their services and opportunely disencumbered itself of the witnesses of its turpitude.

## Chapter 31: The Movement of the Free Spirit<sup>387</sup>

In opposition to the religious system that captured beings and things so as to “bind” [*relier*] them (in accordance with the meaning of *religio*) to a temporal power that drew its justification from a heavenly transcendence, the Movement of the Free Spirit (active from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries) was an ensemble of options that were more individual than collective and were determined to privilege relations with the earth, the body, desire and the flux of life that nature ceaselessly regenerates.

Only the theses of Simon of Samaria, reported by the *Elenchos*, resembled this effort, which discovered in natural irreligion the primary matter of desire, which can be refined to attain a veritable humanity.

The conception of a relational unity with nature, perfectible on earth and in the individual, not by the paths of asceticism and renunciation but, on the contrary, through pleasure in oneself and in others, escaped from the syzygy of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

In its radical form, the attitude called “Free Spirit” by the Inquisitors, who were hampered in their effort to situate it, did not easily enter into the classification of the heresies, but belonged to the project of the total man, as old in its hopes as the wanderings of mankind separated from itself by an economy that exploits it.

Penetrating into the [Catholic] convents, the Beguine convents, and the Franciscan orders, and seducing the clergy attached to Christianity or Catholicism, the spirit of freedom [also] affected the appearances of those who were more in conformity with the dominant discourse; [in such cases] the refinement of desire gave way to the good caprices of those who, identifying themselves with God, engaged in the attempt to appease that is common to all tyrants.

### **The Amalricians**

The ecclesiastic concern with identifying the behaviors that escaped the control of the Catholic Church with a particular heresy grouped together, under the name Amalricians or the disciples of Amalric of Bena, various clerics, many of

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<sup>387</sup> Please note that in the original, though they were only 14 footnotes embedded in the text itself, the end of the volume listed a total of 18 of them. I believe that, by providing footnotes of my own, I have fixed the problem.

whom were parish priests in villages situated not far from Paris (Vieux-Corbeil, La Celle, Ursines, Lorris, and Saint-Cloud).

Originally from Bena, near Chartres, Master Amalric taught in Paris, where one of his assertions stirred up controversy at the heart of the university. In 1204, his theses that all Christians were members of Christ and actually suffered the torture of the cross with him were submitted to the Pope, who condemned them. Amalric abjured and died around 1207. Struck by a simple pontifical reprobation, Amalric's conceptions did, in themselves, not present anything subversive, that is, if they did not translate into theological jargon the reality more concretely lived by the simple people or if they did not express what was said quite brutally by those accused in the trials of 1210 and 1211: if Christ died for the sins of humanity, their redemption exempted each person from having to pay them off a second time through suffering, renunciation, contrition, guilt, penitence and submission to the Church.

Ten of the accused perished on the pyre; four were condemned to prison in perpetuity. In 1211, Master Godin, cleric of Amiens, was burned for having propagated Amalrician ideas, which the Council of Lateran condemned by judging them to be "much more senseless than heretical." A revealing formula: beyond heresy, the negative province of orthodoxy's territory, there existed only what was "beyond sense."

Among the eighty victims executed by fire in Strasbourg in 1215, there were Waldensians and Cathars who were accused of affirming that "the crudest sins are permitted by nature and are in conformity with nature."<sup>388</sup>

In 1216, there appeared in Alsace and Thuringia "a new and shameful heresy. Its partisans were assured that it is permitted and in conformity with nature to eat meat and other foods at any time and on any day, and even to devote oneself to any sensual pleasure without the need for any atonement."<sup>389</sup>

An unknown person was burned in Troyes in 1220 for claiming that the Holy Spirit was incarnated in him. He shared the conviction of the knight who fought Thomas Aquinas and had declared to him: "If Saint Peter was saved, I will be also, because in him, as in me, the same spirit lives."

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<sup>388</sup> Johannes Nauclerus, *Chronica*, Cologne, 1544, p. 912. [Translator: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, translated as *The Movement of the Free Spirit* by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson (New York: Zone Books, 1994, p. 100].

<sup>389</sup> Livarius Oliger, "De secta operitus libertatis" in *Storia e Letteratura Reccolta di Studi et Testi*, Rome, 1943, p. 101. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 100.]

It isn't useless to recall that, at a time when the comportment of the majority of people was not affected by the mixture of terror and controlled hope that was propagated by the Church of Rome, nor by the ascetic rigor extolled by the Cistercian missionaries, the Cathars and the Waldensians, most people [instead] rallied around the most popular and summary credo: "Enjoy life and mock everything else."

The Goliards (wandering clerics) mocked the Church, parodied the evangelical texts, and sang the Mass of the God Bacchus: "*Introibo ad altarem Bacchi, ad deum qui laetificat cor hominis.*"<sup>390</sup>

In the Eleventh Century, Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124) vituperated one of the nobles who was unconcerned with religion. This nobleman, called the Count Jean de Soissons and a friend of the Jews – note that Guibert had written a work called *Against the Jews* – treated the Passion of the Christ as if it was a lie; he affirmed that he only frequented the church to amuse himself by watching the beautiful women who came there to pass the night. According to the Count, there was no sin in making love. On the point of death, he declared to the confessor: "You want, I can see, that I give my goods to parasites, that is to say, to the priests. They will only get a pittance."<sup>391</sup>

In the Thirteenth Century, speaking of students who were contemporaries of Amalric, Petrus Comestor wrote: "In drinking and eating they had no equals. They were devourers at the table, but were not devoted to the Mass. At work they yawned; at a feast they feared no one. They abhorred meditation upon sacred books, but they loved to see wine sparkle in their glasses and they swallowed intrepidly."<sup>392</sup>

Such a discovery, which was applicable to all strata of society, only ended up [in certain quarters] authenticating the native weakness of mankind and ratifying the resolution of the Church to shoulder and absolve mankind's sins in exchange for gratuities and obedience.

The Waldensians and Cathars, who did without the Church's services, were formidable competition; but what could one say of the people who pushed

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<sup>390</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "I will go to the altar of Bacchus, to the God who gladdens a person's heart."

<sup>391</sup> B. Monod, *Le Moine Guibert et son temps*, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.* [*Translator*: in Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 102, this passage ends with a footnote that credits Petrus Comestor, *Scholastica historia Magistri Petri Comestoris sacre Scripture seriem breuem nimis et expositam exponentis*, Paris, 1513-19. Note that Petrus Comestor (Pierre le Mangeur) means "Peter the Eater."]

insolence as far as proclaiming that each person had the right to follow his or her desires, without bearing in mind anything else and without experiencing the least guilt?

What did John, priest of Ursine, teach his parishioners? God made everything, evil as well as good. What good was it to be concerned when both evil and good emanated from him?

A certain Garnier de Rochefort summarized the Amalrician doctrine in his *Contra Amaurianos*. In this work he made it clear that, according to the Amalricians, whoever has understood that God accomplished everything by himself can make love without sinning. God being in each person, it was sufficient to attain inward revelation to behave according to his intentions in whatever one does. Such was the pantheism that – perceived in its philosophical implications – caused the condemnations of Scotus Eriugena, David of Dinant and Aristotle in 1215.

William the Goldsmith, designated the group's master thinker, advanced the idea that, "five years from today all men will be Spirituals, to the extent each one will be able to say: 'I am the Holy Spirit' and 'I existed before Abraham,' just like Christ when he said, 'I am the son of God' and 'I existed before Abraham was born.'"<sup>393</sup>

For the first time, it seemed, the doctrine of Joachim of Fiore found its subversive utilization.

In his *Chronicle*, William the Breton indicated the point at which the time of the saints announced by Joachim was – at the beginning of the Thirteenth Century – mixed with the freedom of spirit that was identical to the consciousness that each person can have of the divine presence acting within him or her and tracing out the path of perfection and impeccability (note that the idea of the *Sophia* or the divine spark enclosed in each person was, after more than a millennium, still tied to the Gnostic conception):

“They thus say that in our epoch the sacraments of the New Testament have ended and that the time of the Holy Spirit has come; there is no longer a place for confession, baptism, the Eucharist and the other guarantees of salvation. Hereafter, there will only be salvation through

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<sup>393</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, *op. cit.*, p. 103. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 109, which via a footnote refers the reader to Garnier von Rochefort, in Clems Baeumker (ed.) “Contra Amaurianos,” *Beitrag zur Geschichte zur Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1926), vol. 24.]



the inward grace of the Holy Spirit, without any outward work. And they understand the virtue of charity in such a wide sense that they are assured that all actions considered to be sinful have ceased to be so if they were accomplished by virtue of charity. This is why, in the name of charity, they deliver themselves up to debauchery, adultery and other pleasures of the body. And they promise impunity (the uselessness of penitence) to the women with whom they sin and to the simple people they deceive, preaching that God is a being of goodness, not a judge.”<sup>394</sup>

A sermon by Johannes Teutonicus, the Abbot of Saint-Victor in Paris from 1203 to 1229, insisted on the traits that were most shocking to Christians and Catholics:

“Here there are profane novelties, propagated by people who are disciples of Epicurus, rather than Christ. With daunting guile, they secretly devote themselves to making it believed that one can sin with impunity. They are assured that there is no sin and that as a result there is no one who, for having erred, must be punished by God. Capable of affecting on their faces and in their remarks the appearance of piety, they inwardly reject virtue, in their minds and in their occult works.

“The height of the most extreme folly and the most impudent lie: they do not fear, they do not blush to affirm that they are God! Infinite extravagance! Abominable presumption! They call God the adulterous man, the bed-companion of other men, the creature soiled by all infamies, the receptacle of all crimes. Here are those who surpass the amorality [*l'égarement*] of the gentiles, who lie with more modesty by claiming that the greatest of their princes, once dead, became gods. Assuredly, he is deranged in his heart who says ‘God doesn’t exist.’ But the individual who claims ‘I am God’ is even more senseless.

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.* [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 109-110, which via a footnote refers the reader to William the Breton, “Gesta Philippi Augusti,” in H. Francois Delaborde (ed.), *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton*, Paris, 1882-1885, vol. 16, p. 175.]

“Ah! at least such a plague does not pollute this town, the source of all the sciences and the true flowering of wisdom!”<sup>395</sup>

If pantheism could be summarized by the formula “*Deus sive natura*” [God or nature], the Free Spirit implied the identification “*Deus sive homo*” [God or man]. The question(s), “Which God and which all-powerful [force]?” required a preliminary clarification: “Which behavioral choices should the thus-justified individual obey?”

Is not the thirst for power of the sovereigns and princes authorized by a divine will that legitimates it? There was an often-discerned tendency in the Free Spirit to legalize through self-deification a similar power or something that was claimed to be one. Nevertheless, a radically different tendency was expressed by the doctrines of “pure love” or “refined love.”

### “*Fin Amor*”

Hadewijch of Antwerp – whose exegetes, more concerned with religion than with history, have improperly annexed her to their pantheon of devotees – mentioned in her *List of Perfect Ones* the Beguine Aleydis, who was condemned to the pyre by Robert the Bulgarian for her [concept of] “just love.” Unlike the Waldensians burned at Cambrai in 1236 by that sinister hunter of heretics, Aleydis was alleged to have professed Amalrician ideas, which were found in the towns along the Rhine (Cologne, Mainz, and Strasbourg) and the northern cities (Valenciennes, Amiens, Cambrai, Tournai, Brussels, and Antwerp).

The doctrine of pure love – which, fifty years later, Marguerite Porete identified with the life force in which human nature liberated itself from its alienation from nature [*sa dénaturation*] in order to mix itself with the will of a Good God – haunted the poems and visions of Hadewijch of Antwerp and several Cistercian Monials in the north, without one being able to decide with certitude if pure love was spiritual ecstasy, an *amor extaticus*, or an exaltation of amorous pleasure, or a combination of the two, as in the diverse paths of Tantrism.

The bawdiness of the times, from which only a part of the bourgeoisie and several defenders of clerical austerity escaped, was enjoyed – as was attested to by various fables, [works of] literature and [historical] chronicles – with an equal attraction in the cottages, convents, chateaux and churches. The ordinary obstacles

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<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104 and 105. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 110-111, which via a footnote refers the reader to Joseph de Guibert, *Documenta ecclesiastica christianae perfectionis*, Rome, 1931.]

to such bawdiness were feelings of guilt, contrition and remorse, which fed the coffers of penitential redemption and the market in indulgences.

Thus, the union with the Spirit, or with its Christian form, the Christ, alias the *pneuma* or *Sophia*, was revealed in the eyes of the adepts of the Free Spirit as identical to the union of man and woman, the *koinos* [the shared-in-common] that was evoked by the Hermetic work by Asclepios and the *Gospel attributed to Philippe*. Amorous pleasure, identified with the finally renewed unity between the body and the spirit, regenerated the Adamite state, the state of innocence in which there existed neither sin nor guilt. This was why, from the poorest people to the aristocracy, the Free Spirit gained adhesion – an adhesion that was most often above suspicion, to the great disappointment of the inquisitorial police. Because they were little interested in sacrifice, the supporters of the Free Spirit obeyed prudence and, with rare exceptions, neither preached nor issued propaganda.

### **The New Spirit in Swabia**

A text titled *Determinatio de novo spiritio*, attributed to Albert the Great, and intended for use by the Inquisitors, sounded the alert about a current that, though neither Catharist nor Waldensian, did not (for all that) represent any less of a threat to religion, whether in Rome or elsewhere.

The denunciation made by Albert implicated several convents in the Riess, the region neighboring Augsburg, Nordlingen, Olmutz and Tübingen.

In 1245, at the time of the first Council of Lyon, the Bishop of Olmutz deplored the presence in his diocese of wandering agitators of both genders, dressed like religious people but hostile to the ecclesiastic hierarchy and estimating that God availed himself of an absolute freedom.<sup>396</sup>

Such reformers, who were closer to courtly ideas than to Cistercian asceticism, easily won over to their teachings a number of ecclesial communities that had been split between guilty debauchery and puritanical hysteria.

Did not they offer the peace of the heart and the grace of the spirit to the amorous inclination that carried men and women, naturally passionate, towards each other? Among the articles in the list of charges set out by Albert, many left no doubt about the loudly proclaimed innocence of the relations saddled with guiltiness by the Church, the various ascetic heterodoxies, and lay morality.

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<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 116, which via a footnote refers the reader to Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen in Mittelalter*, Berlin, 1935, p. 400.]

“Man can find himself united with God, with the result that he no longer commits a sin, no matter what he does.

“According to them, there are no other angels than human virtues, no other demons than the vices and sins of men. There is no hell. All creation is God in his plenitude. The angels would not have fallen if they had acted as they should have in their union with Lucifer.

“Men united with God, whom they claimed themselves to be, did not have to render honor or respect to the saints, nor to observe fasts nor similar things on the Lord’s day.

“He who is united with God can satisfy his carnal desires with impunity in any fashion, with one or the other gender, and even by reversing the roles.

“It isn’t necessary to believe in the resurrection.

“[...] They affirmed that, during the elevation of Christ [the raising aloft of the Host and the Chalice], they are elevated; that, standing or sitting, it is to themselves that they address these signs of reverence, but they make them in order that others are scandalized.

“People prevent or delay their own perfection of their qualities when they yield themselves to fasting, flagellation, discipline, vigils and other things of the same type.

“It is fitting not to apply to oneself to work, but to take the leisure to taste how sweet the Lord is. Prayers have no value when they are [made] under the yoke of manual labor.

“[...] Those among them who want to become perfect need not think of the Passion of the Christ.

“It is not necessary to be concerned, either in sorrow or bitterness, with the mistakes made and the days lost. Such suffering delays access to a more complete grace in them.

“They believe that the blood of good men – like themselves – or their plenitude must be venerated in the same way as the body and blood of

Christ on the altar. They are assured that freedom, evil, rest and corporeal wellbeing create in mankind a place and habitation for the Holy Spirit.

“They say that Christ knew them carnally, that a woman can become God, that a mother of five children can be a virgin, that one of them breastfed the baby Jesus with his mother until exhaustion and fainting.”<sup>397</sup>

Love was at the center of the debate that agitated the most evolved minds of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. The privileged place of women, recognized for the first time in history, posed the question of the refinement of morals, an approach to sexuality other than one confined to the ordinary rule of repression, with its morbid and mortifying visions [on the one hand], and desublimation, with its parade of rape and cruelty [on the other]. The *dolce stil nuovo* and the erotica of the troubadours, so uncertain in their daily practices, suggest a preoccupation that the end of the Twentieth Century has barely begun to rediscover and that was mythologically sketched out by Dante’s path of initiation to Beatrice.<sup>398</sup> Thus it is fitting to strip away the theological clutter and the falsifications that encumber the works of Hadewijch of Antwerp and Marguerite Porete, which the religious prejudices of the scholars have remained content to bury under the moth-eaten cover of mysticism.

### **Marguerite Porete**

Originally from Hainaut, Marguerite Porete probably belonged to a comfortable and cultivated milieu, perhaps the court of Bourgogne, a resident of Mons, where the Countess Philippa de Hainaut – the daughter of Guillaume d’Avesnes – was considered to be a refined spirit, attached to courtly ideas.

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<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115 and 116. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 118-120, which refers the reader to Herman Haupt, “Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sekte vom freien Geiste und des Beghartentums,” in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, Gotha, 1885, vol. 7.]

<sup>398</sup> *Translator*: for the “sweet new style,” see Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova* (1295), and, for the path to Beatrice, *Divina Commedia* (1321).

Perhaps Marguerite was a Beguine before breaking with the entirety of the clergy: “Beguines say I am in error, (as do) priests, clerics and preachers, Augustinians and Carmelites and the minor brothers.”<sup>399</sup>

At the end of the 1290s, her work on “the person of refined love” was burned at Valenciennes on the orders of Gui II de Colmieu [aka Guido of Collemezzo] (the Bishop of Cambrai from 1296 to 1306), who prohibited the author from diffusing other books or doctrines.

Nevertheless, she relapsed and – as a provocation or in innocence? – transmitted a [copy of a] book entitled *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. Denounced to the Inquisition, she appeared in 1307 before Guillaume Humbert, the Inquisitor General of France, who was the confessor of Philippe the Beautiful and the future accomplice of Philippe de Marigny in the extermination proceedings against the Templars.

Marguerite refused to take an oath, not in the manner of the Waldensians or the Cathars, but because the “free soul does not respond to anyone if it does not want to.”<sup>400</sup>

On 11 April 1310, she was judged to be a heretic and recidivist. Fifteen extracts from her book, which was condemned, served in the redaction of the *Ad nostrum* that listed – at the time of the Council of Vienna of 1311 – the principal charges against the Beghards and Beguines who were blemished by the Free Spirit. She was delivered to the flames in Paris on 1 June 1310. Her companion or lover, Guion de Cressonaert, a cleric of the Cambrian diocese who called himself the angel of Philadelphia, was apprehended and condemned to prison in perpetuity for having tried to save her. (Note that, in the name “angel of Philadelphia,” there might have been a reference to the Church of Philadelphia, one of the Bogomil Churches, still active in the Balkans.)

The text of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, which is preserved in the library of the Condé Museum in Chantilly and published by Romana Guarnieri,<sup>401</sup> reveals [the presence of] interpolations of a great stylistic triteness. The orthodoxy of these interpolations presented an advantage over the original (lost) in that they facilitated the book’s diffusion during the eras in which the mystical speculations of people

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<sup>399</sup> M. Porete, *Le miroir des simples âmes*, in Guarnieri, *Il movimento del libro spirito*, Rome, 1965, p. 617. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 129.]

<sup>400</sup> R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.*, p. 127. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 130, which via a footnote refers the reader to Guarnieri, *Il movimento del libro spirito*, p. 586.]

<sup>401</sup> R. Guarnieri, *op. cit.*

like [Jan van] Ruysbroeck and Gerhardt Groote removed the subversive character of Marguerite's propositions.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the most audacious theses of *The Mirror* reflected a common mindset that existed in Germany and even in the region of Langres, where the Franciscan Inquisitor Nicholas of Lyra, one of Porete's accusers, fulminated against the heretics who, by supporting the idea that one need not listen to the prophets but only to live freely according to the flesh, "maintained their own filthiness under the mantle of devotion."<sup>402</sup>

Marguerite did not identify God with nature such as it reigns in the wild state among mankind and the animals, but with a refinement of human nature that, stripped of its envelop, accedes to the state of perfection or purity comparable to that of the philosopher's stone.

Although stuffed with interpolations prescribed by the orthodox milieus, the text of *The Mirror* is one of the rare testimonies of the Free Spirit that was spared – perhaps due to the canonical revisions [made to it] – from the destructive zeal of the Church. Moreover, in its initial iteration, Marguerite's doctrine did not differ from the mysticism of Eckhart, Beatrice of Nazareth or Mechthild of Magdeburg: "The soul touched by grace is without sin." According to a *scala perfectionis* [a ladder of perfection], seven initiatory graces conduct the *pneuma* to the pleasure of God, [to] the afterglow of the seven planets of the Hebdomad, beyond which the Ogdoad or Pleroma begins.

Annihilated in God, the soul loses its will, its desires and its essence, and identities itself with the totality, the Pleroma. Here Porete went beyond the limits of ecstatic love, of the beatific vision in which the mystics sank. Because that effusion, erected in the pleasure of God, conferred freedom to the love that was the divine presence of life, acting in the multiplicity of its desires.

"And so, why should such souls worry about what is necessary for them when necessity demands it? For such souls, this would be a lack of innocence and would be troubling to the peace in which the soul recoils from all things. Who is he who must worry about needing the four elements, such as the brightness of the sky, the warmth of fire, the dew of the water and the earth that supports us? We make use of the four elements in all the ways that Nature requires, without the reproach of Reason; [these are] gracious elements made by God, like all other things; and thus such souls use all things made and created of

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<sup>402</sup> R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.*, p. 128. [Translator: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 131.]

which Nature has need, with the same peace of heart they use the earth upon which they walk.”<sup>403</sup>

One has to create a nature in which the God of goodness is reincarnated [after being] obliterated by the avatar of the Demiurge Ialdabaoth, who perpetuated the God of the Roman Church, which Marguerite called the Small Church. The one who, through the grace of love, fits into himself the manifestation of such a God possesses the *megale dynamis* of which Simon of Samaria spoke. It falls to this person to develop it so as to found a new Edenic innocence on earth.

To the antiphysis of Catholicism, Marguerite opposed a rehabilitation of the state of nature before the fall, before the intervention of sin and guilt. To awaken in oneself the sleeping God was to emancipate oneself from all social constraints in order to give desire the freedoms of nature.

To describe Porete as a quietist is to read her with the spectacles of a theologian. Horror of sexuality was [successfully] propagated everywhere in the Seventeenth Century, but in the Thirteenth Century it was only a dead letter and vain chatter in the sermons of the clerics who were openly living with their lovers and in a state of debauchery. The grimacing and terrible face of sin only truly began to impose itself in the Fifteenth Century, at the service of the market in death and promotional morbidity. Unlike Teresa of Ávila, [Antoinette] Bourignon and [Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte] Guyon,<sup>404</sup> Porete pressed into the annihilation of the soul a reinvention of the body to which love conferred the mark of its all-powerfulness.

### Heilwige Bloermardinne

In Brussels in the first years of the Fourteenth Century, Marguerite’s doctrine and “*fin amor*” were illustrated by the mysterious preeminence of a woman whose reputation held in check an Inquisition that was, it is true, often discouraged by the liberal politics of the opulent cities.

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<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. [Translator: here Vaneigem is quoting from Marguerite Porete’s *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. See *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 132.)]

<sup>404</sup> *Translator*: mystics of the Sixteen or Seventeenth Centuries.



Of [Heilwige] Bloermardinne<sup>405</sup> there only remains the popular legend of a thaumaturge revered by the people and the notables, a few biographical references and the pages that her enemies devoted to her.

The daughter of an alderman named Guillaume Bloemart (he died sometime between 1283 and 1287) and a member of a family that was among the most influential in Brussels, Heilwige must have been born between 1250-1260 or 1283-1287; her death certificate carried the date 23 August 1335.

While still a parish priest at Sainte-Gudule, the mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck – later suspected of [having] Free Spirit [sympathies] by [Jean Charlier de] Gerson – engaged in a lively polemic against Heilwige. Tradition assures us that such animosity forced her to flee Brussels under popular pressure, and seek refuge in Groenendael Abbey (Vaux-Vert), in which she passed the rest of life.

In his *Life of Jan Ruysbroeck*, Henri Pomerius<sup>406</sup> collected the testimonies of Jan van Schoonhoven, Ruysbroeck's companion and successor:

“There was in Brussels, during the time that the servant of God (Jan Ruysbroeck) was a secular priest, a woman of perverse beliefs, called Bloermardinne by the people. She acquired such a reputation that, during sacred communion, when she approached the altar, collective opinion had it that she walked between two seraphs.

“She had written a lot on the spirit of freedom and on infamous carnal love, which she called seraphic love. Many disciples, who shared her convictions, venerated her as the creator of a new doctrine.

[“]To teach and to write, she sat, one is assured, in a silver chair. After her death, this seat, one says, was offered to the Duchess of Brabant because of Bloermardinne's thought, the permeation of which the Duchess guarded. Likewise, cripples touched her dead body, hoping to recover their health.

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<sup>405</sup> *Translator*: alternate spellings of her last name include Bloemart, Bloermardine, Bloemards, and Bloemaerts.

<sup>406</sup> *Translator*: born Hendrik Utenbogaerde and sometimes known as Henricus Pomerius (1382-1469). The title of his work about Ruysbroeck was *De origine monasterii Viridisvallis una cum vitis B. Joannis Rusbrochii primi prioris hujus monasterii et aliquot coetaneorum ejus*.

“A man full of piety and pained by the spread of the error [Ruysbroeck] soon set himself against the perversity of this doctrine, and his disciples were so numerous that – in the name of truth – he unmasked the writings that only contained heresies under the cover of truth and that, in contempt of our faith, Bloermardinne had long attributed to divine inspiration. In this campaign, he proved to have wisdom and courage, because he did not fear the dangers of Bloermardinne’s disciples, and he did not let himself be deceived by the appearance and truthful perfume of these false doctrines. I can attest, having had the experience, that these harmful writings were at first clothed in the veil of truth, so well that no one detected [in them] the germ of error, that is, if it wasn’t by the grace and with the help of the One who teaches all truth.”<sup>407</sup>

Though he didn’t name her, Bloermardinne was the one who affirmed the unity of carnal and seraphic love, which was rejected by Ruysbroeck in *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriages*:

“They believe themselves elevated above all the choirs of saints and angels, and above all recompense that might be merited in some way. Thus they think that they can never grow in virtue, nor merit more, nor commit sin; because they no longer have will, they have abandoned to God their spirits devoted to rest and idleness; they are one with God and, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are reduced to nothingness. The consequence is that they can consent to any desire of inferior nature, because they have returned to innocence and the laws no longer apply to them. From then on, if Nature is inclined towards what gives them satisfaction, and if resisting means that one’s idleness of spirit must be distracted or hindered, they obey the instincts of nature, so that their idleness of spirit remains unimpeded. They also have no esteem for fasting, feasts or any other

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<sup>407</sup> *Translator*: Cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 144-145, which via a footnote refers to Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus documentorum Inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae*, Ghent, 1889-1900, vol. I, p. 186.

precepts, and they only observe them for the esteem of men: because in all things they lead their lives without conscience.”<sup>408</sup>

### **William Cornelius of Antwerp, Voluntarily Poor Man and Adept of the Free Spirit**

When they were not oppressing the people in the name of a power emanating from Rome, the members of the lower clergy willingly made common cause with the oppressed. Among the agitated population of weavers in Antwerp, William Cornelius seems to have had the reputation of a man of integrity whose advice was valued because he was less concerned with the Church's interests than with the lot of the simple people that the Church wanted to rule. His title “Master” appeared in a grant issued by the Cathedral of Notre-Dame of Antwerp in 1243. According to his slanderer, Thomas de Cantimpré, William benefited from a prebend that he later renounced to found a movement of voluntary poverty.

Cornelius added to Waldensian asceticism a program that sought to reform the indulgences and, working against oppression by the dominant class, he propagated the idea that poverty washed away all sin. The [official] charges against him summarized his doctrine this way:

“The indulgences of the prelates do not serve souls.

“No one can give alms (by deducting them) from his surplus.

“No rich person can be saved and all rich people are avaricious.

“It is permitted to steal from the rich and give to the poor.

“No one who is poor can be damned, for all [of them] will be saved.

“There will be no hell after the Day of Judgment.

“As rust is consumed by fire, all sin is consumed by poverty and annulled in the eyes of God.

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<sup>408</sup> *Translator*: see *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 147, which via a footnote on p. 149 refers to J. Ruysbroeck, *L'ornement des noces spirituelles*, Brussels, 1928, p. 200 and *sq.*

“Simple fornication is not a sin for those who live in poverty.

“There are only three mortal sins: envy, avarice and ostentatious prodigality; also knowing your wife when she is pregnant.

“What one calls sin against nature is not a sin.

“No man should know his wife more three times a week.”<sup>409</sup>

The last article calls for a remark. To the freedom that ruled in matters of sexual relations among the weavers, Cornelius attempted to add respect for women, which was the very principle of the refinement of love. Against the misogyny shared by the bourgeoisie and its fabliaux, he proposed a code of courtesy in which women were neither the objects of rape nor spiritualized subjects. The state of poverty, voluntary or not, accorded them the right to give themselves to whomever pleased them (the crime characterized as “fornication” by the clerical police) and to refuse if they judged it good to do so. Thus this parish priest made himself the spokesman of the [female] workers exhausted by labor at the workshops – the same ones whose miserable existence was evoked by Chrétien de Troyes – to the point of feeling the occasional inopportuneness of the constant solicitations of the men infatuated with their virile prowess.

Such ideas, which were propagated from 1240 to the end of the Thirteenth Century in Antwerp and Brabant, illuminated the writings of Hadewijch and her international group, which she called “The New Ones” (*De Nuwen*).

Around 1243, Cornelius’ agitation took advantage of a conflict that opposed the people of Antwerp to the Bishop of Cambrai (upon whom the town depended), who were accused of embezzlement and tyranny.

In 1248, at the instigation of the Dominicans who reproached him for his lack of zeal in the struggle against heresy, Guyard de Laon, the Bishop of Cambrai, resolved to crack down on William’s partisans. On 23 June, sickness overtook Guyard at the Abbey of Affligem, where he died on 16 September. Bishop Nicolas des Fontaines, who succeeded him in 1249, organized and personally financed the repression.

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<sup>409</sup> *Translator*: cf. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 114-115, which via a footnote refers the reader to Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus.*, vol. I, pp. 119-120. Note that *The Movement of the Free Spirit* went on to list one more charge: the idea that “If a woman is poor and indigent, she can give herself without sin.”

The natural death of William around 1253 did not discourage the ardor of his partisans. Nicolas des Fontaines did not succeed in doing so, despite exhuming and burning, in 1257, the body of the man who was a priest-worker before they were priest-workers. In 1280, the Dominicans still roamed the Brabant, where Duke John ordered his subjects and officers to put themselves at the service of the Dominicans when they required it.

## Chapter 32: Beghards and Beguines

Around the end of the Twelfth Century, associations that were both religious and secular were founded, most often on the initiative of magistrates or rich bourgeois. The members of these associations, designated by the names “Beghards” and “Beguines,” lived in communitarian houses called “béguinages.”

Founded as a public service to contain the multiplication of poor people in the towns that drained the surplus of manpower from the countryside, these communities were independent of all monastic orders and placed under the exclusive control of the local bishops. The influx of beggars of both genders did not cease to grow, especially in the northern towns such as Liege, where the first such establishments started between 1180-1184 (and thus were contemporaneous with the initiatives of Peter Waldo in Lyon), Tienen (1202), Valenciennes (1212), Douai (1219), Ghent (1227) and Antwerp (1230). In 1250, there were more than one thousand adherents in Paris and Cambrai, and two thousand in Cologne.

Mixing individual and communitarian interests together, the current of the Free Spirit awoke a particular echo in the béguinages that Jundt paints in an idyllic tableau:

“In France and Germany, the Beguines lived in great numbers in the same house, whereas in Belgium their habitation recalls to us less a cloister than one of our modern workers’ cities: they were composed (and are still composed today) of a series of small houses, each of which didn’t hold more than two or three Beguines; at the center a church and a hospital for the aged or sick sisters was erected; close-by one found a cemetery. The type of life led by these women occupied a space between monastic life and profane life. They did not renounce the society of men, nor terrestrial affairs and occupations; they made vows of chastity and obedience, but not in an absolute manner like those in the religious orders; they conserved the freedoms to leave the association when they wished and to get married (...)

“It wasn’t long before there were imitators. Brotherhoods of artisans, most often weavers, formed in their image in the different towns where they had their establishments. Called *Beghards* by the people, the members of these eminently secular associations enjoyed the same independence as the Beguines; they devoted their lives to manual

labor and the exercise of piety, and thus attracted the favor of the people.

“The progress of these two religious societies did not fail to create enemies, especially among the secular clergy, whose jealousy they aroused. The parish priests received a certain sum per year to indemnify them for the losses caused by the presence of the priests who were specially attached to each of these associations; one even gave them a portion of the price of burials when some rich bourgeois, and such cases were not rare, demanded to be buried in the cemetery adjoining the establishment; as far as the religious orders, they could only lose out to the pious foundations that deprived them, not only of the support of many members, but also important donations.”<sup>410</sup>

The spirit of freedom spread like wildfire in the communities of men and women who were less preoccupied with theological quarrels than the two great themes debated in the Thirteenth Century because their reality was tested every day: the meaning of poverty and the practice of love, which aspired to raise itself from brutal satisfaction to the art of pleasure. Where were such immediate questions of utility and pleasure more likely to discover responses than in these places of refuge and encounter in which Beghards and Beguines learned, through a beneficial idleness and under the pretext of good works, to live according to their preferences?

From 1244 on, the Archbishop of Mainz set himself against the abuses that the young Beguines were making of their freedom. It is true that the monastic communities and the parish priests cast a disapproving eye on the impetuous zeal of certain béguinages that, through their aid that was offered free of charge, deprived them of profitable business. At the beginning, the Pope intervened to defend the Beghard communities against the plundering and legal actions perpetrated by the local clergy, but local condemnations multiplied very quickly. In 1258, the Synod of Fritzlar condemned the wandering Beguines and Beghards who begged to cries of “*Brod durch Gott*”<sup>411</sup> and preached in secret and subterranean places.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 46.

<sup>411</sup> *Translator*: German for “Bread for the sake of God.”

<sup>412</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, *op. cit.*, p. 149. [*Translator*: *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson, Zone Books: New York, 1994, pp. 154-155, which via a footnote refers the reader to

In 1307, at the Synod of Cologne, Bishop Henri II of Virneburg enumerated the charges against them. Among them, one found such commonly-made remarks as “To make love is not a sin” and “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are no longer under the law, because the law is not imposed on the just, on those who live without sin.”

In 1311, Pope Clement V was disturbed by the progress of the Free Spirit in Italy and everywhere else. At the Council of Vienna, which took place that same year, he launched against those “who call ‘freedom of spirit’ the freedom to do whatever pleases them” two decrees, *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus*,<sup>413</sup> the ensemble of which formed the *Clementines* and thereafter served as an inquisitorial guide for the systematic persecution of the Beghards and Beguines, which dragged to the pyre a number of good Catholics who were devoted to the struggle against pauperization. But the adepts of the Free Spirit adjured, if necessary, for the simple reason that sacrifice or martyrdom did not enter into their aspirations.

### **The Communities in Cologne and Świdnica**

Walter of Holland, the author of *De novem rupibus spiritualibus* (*The Nine Spiritual Rocks*), a text that is lost today but which Mosheim consulted in the Eighteenth Century, founded in Cologne a group that met in a place called “Paradise.” According to the chronicler William of Egmont, a couple represented Jesus and Mary. After a ceremony conducted by Christ dressed up in precious clothes, a nude preacher invited the assembly to undress and celebrate their re-found Edenic innocence with a banquet, followed by the pleasures of love.

In the manner of the “*Homines intelligentiae*”<sup>414</sup> who were active a century later in Brussels, an initiatory ceremony based on “refined love” expressed the unity of the body and the spirit in the identification of amorous ecstasy and the incarnated Spirit, and removed sin and guilt. (Note that this was another resurgence of the Gnostic *pneuma* identified with the *sperma*.) As among the Barbelites and Messalians, courtesy and the refinement of pleasure – in order to accede to good consciousness – took the paths of hierogamy and psychoanalysis (before there was such a thing) in which God the Father, the Son, his mother, virgin and wife

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Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum novas et amplissima collection* (1759), vol. 23, p. 997.]

<sup>413</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “We Have Heard” and “Since Certain Women.”

<sup>414</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Men of Intelligence.” Cf. Chapter 37 of the present work.



(traditional factors of castration and repression) suddenly gave their unreserved consent to the essential quest for love.

The persecution led by Bishop Henri II of Virneburg sent Walter to the pyre in 1323. William of Egmont counted fifty victims who were burned or drowned in the Rhine.

Nevertheless, another community existed at the time. It continued up to 1335, which indicates the popular expansion of the movement and the repression's lack of effectiveness.

Indeed, in 1335, a certain John of Brünn (Brno), who lived with his brother Albert in a Beghard community in Cologne for twenty years, adjured and avoided the pyre by rallying to the Dominican order. In his confession to Gallus Neuhaus, the Inquisitor of Prague, he revealed the singular practices of the Free Spirit in the ecclesiastical lower-orders.

The association was divided into two classes: the neophytes and the Perfect Ones. The first group, after having given all of their goods and clothes to the second group, begged and learned to renounce their own desires, in order to be touched by divine plenitude. They devoted themselves to jobs that constrained them and were repugnant to them so that they could better break [down] the body and empower the spirit. Once descended below all conscience, with the result that they stole and killed with impunity – they called such killings “sending them back to eternity” – without scruples or remorse,<sup>415</sup> they acceded to the state of perfection and lived in luxury and pleasure. They made love with the Beguines or adepts whom they recognized, as among the Messalians, by the usage of code and signs (tickling the palm of the hand, touching the end of the nose), unless they simply declared “*Fac mihi caritatem*” (“Give me charity”), because they excelled at giving a more agreeably sensual meaning to ritualized formulas.

For twenty-five years, a community of Beguines or Monials functioned at Świdnica, in Silesia, on a model identical to that of Cologne. The denunciation of mistreated novices drew the attention of the Inquisitor Johannes Schwenlenfeld, who died in 1341, as many functionaries of his type did, under the blows of an anonymous avenger. Revealed by an inquest in 1332, the facts brought to light practices quite similar to those reported in the Eighteenth Century by Diderot's *The Religious* and attested to by the cadavers of newborns frequently discovered in the old monasteries. Such facts only take on a certain character here because of the

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<sup>415</sup> *Translator*: Note well what Vaneigem says in the part of *The Movement of the Free Spirit* that is dedicated to John of Brünn's confession (p. 160): such a horrific admission “illuminates both the influence and the distortion of Free Spirit ideas in para-ecclesiastical communities.”

doctrine of spiritual freedom that was invoked to justify them. The same annihilation of the will among the novices who were reduced to slavery and submitted to the caprices of the “Marthas” or mistresses; the same state of impeccability and absolute license among the Perfect Ones, dressed in the most beautiful finery and passing [*coulant*] their days in luxury and debauchery. Gertrude of Civitatis, the superior of the community, stated: “If God created everything, then I co-created everything with him. And I am God with God, and I am Christ and I am more.”<sup>416</sup>

The “Marthas” of Świdnica often visited other convents or communities. Their presence was attested to in Strasbourg, where their teachings reflected a sermon falsely attributed to Eckhart: *Such was Sister Catherine, the Daughter that Master Eckhart had in Strasbourg*, which described the diverse stages of the initiation of a novice acceding to the Free Spirit and the Adamite innocence of “Everything is permitted.”

### **Wandering Beghards and Beguines**

The trials of the Beghards and Beguines who propagated the doctrine of an absolute freedom or, in the manner of Marguerite Porete, the art of refined love, furnished an indication of the degree of dispersion of a current whose meaning the Church failed to understand, [even] as it postulated its eradication.

The majority of the condemned had either given in to presumption and played the [role of] prophet or Christ in a sensual apostolate or had, due to the numbers of their partisans, aroused the suspicions of the inquisitorial functionaries, the monks and the priests who were always ready to make the first move so as to avoid condemnation by the religious police.

While the popularity of Bloemardinne and her reputation for holiness discouraged the inquisitors in Brussels and chased away Ruysbroeck, a post-Eckhartian treatise entitled *Meester Eckhart en de onbekende leer* (“Master Eckhart and the Unknown Teachings”) attested to the presence of identical preoccupations in Holland. Soon after, Gerhard Groote and his *Modern Devotion* strove to oppose to the Free Spirit a mystique that was both reduced to pure intellectual speculation and strictly billeted within the limits of dogma. In 1380, Groote denounced Bartholomew, an Augustinian partisan of the Free Spirit;

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<sup>416</sup> *Translator: cf. The Movement of the Free Spirit, p. 177.*

he exhumed and burned the body of Matthew of Gouda, who had affirmed that he had “more reasons than Christ to be called God.”<sup>417</sup>

In 1336 three Beguines “of high spirit” who were arrested in Magdeburg hastened to abjure “their errors and horrible blasphemies” and were set free. That same year, a certain Constantine was burned in Erfurt. In 1339, three Beghards “professing the crudest pantheism” were sent to prison in perpetuity in Constance. Others were arrested in Nuremberg and Regensburg (1340), then Wurzburg (1342); Hermann Kuchener suffered the penalty of fire in Nuremberg in 1342 for having professed the return to the innocence of Adam before the fall.

The theologian Jordan von Quedlinburg composed a work that attempted to refute the Beghards of Free Spirit. Romana Guarnieri selected important extracts from it.<sup>418</sup>

The Inquisitor Schadelant sent Berthold von Rohrbach, accused of having preached the theses of the Free Spirit in Franconia, to the pyre at Spire in 1356.

Hidden by the Spanish Inquisition, which often became a gigantic pogrom, the German Inquisition exercised a bureaucratic ferocity worse than anywhere else. It kindled the largest number of pyres and ran its procedural machinery with the greatest efficiency. It was also in Germany, when the flames of heresy were extinguished, that women, men and children accused of sorcery took up the slack for the Beghards and wandering prophets. In this domain, the Frenchmen [Henry] Boguet and [Pierre de Rosteguy] de Lance, pursuing the demons of their morbid fantasies, gave their German colleagues a run for their money.

The execution of the Beguine Metza von Westenhove in 1366 was of a particularly odious character. Condemned fifty years earlier for having propagated the freedom of acting according to one’s desires, she was judged to be a recidivist at an advanced age and was offered up as a sacrifice during a welcoming festival organized by the city [of Strasbourg] for a prince.

The case of Johannes Hartmann, called the Spinner (the Weaver), arrested and burned in Erfurt in 1367, illustrated the behavior of certain adepts of the Free Spirit – behavior that reminds one of conceptions of Donatien Alfonse François de Sade.

The state of perfection and self-deification to which Johannes acceded, through the preliminaries of asceticism and revelation, prescribed that he unreservedly follow the caprices, desires and passions that God, that is to say, he himself and nature, had inspired in him. He desired a woman? He seduced or raped

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<sup>417</sup> R. Guarnieri, *op. cit.*, p. 459. [Translator: cf. *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 92.]

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.

her. A valuable item? He appropriated it. The owner objected? He sent him [back] “into eternity,” where he garnered the money that had been spent and the pleasures that it had offered to him. And Johannes had this peremptory formula: “It would be better if the entire earth perished than for him to renounce an act incited by nature.”<sup>419</sup>

That same year [1367], Walter Kerling, Hartmann’s accuser, sent seven other Beghards to the pyre at Nordhausen in Thuringia.

In France, the troubles of the great peasant revolt and the war with England left the wandering preachers a greater leisure to escape the nets of the heretic-hunters. It seems that, in Paris, the numerical importance of the Beghards and Beguines known under the name “Turlupins” (in the Netherlands and England they were called “Lollards”) drew down upon them the repression of 1372. Mosheim supposed that many came from Germany, fleeing the persecutions.<sup>420</sup> The Inquisitor of Ile-de-France, Jacques de More, killed them along with Jeanne Dabenton, their prophetess. The pyre also consumed the body of her friend, who died shortly before in prison. Some Turlupins reached Savoy, where the Pope engaged Count Amadeus to crack down on them [there], [and] then in Switzerland. An adept of the Free Spirit was burned at Bremgarten, near Berne.

“According to [Jean Charlier de] Gerson, the sect still had representatives in his era, but they fled the populous localities and hid themselves in overlooked and deserted places.

“Gerson preserved the fundamental points of their doctrine for us. They taught that a man, when he had achieved the peace and tranquility of the spirit, was relieved of the requirement to observe the divine laws; that it was not necessary to blush at anything that was given to us by nature; and that it was through nudity that we returned to the state of innocence of the first men and that we attained the supreme degree of bliss in the here-below. ‘These Epicureans, dressed in the tunics of Christ, introduced themselves amongst the women by simulating a profound devotion; little by little they won over their confidence and did not delay in making them the playthings of their passions.’ Abolishing all decency, not only in their language, but also in their relations with each other, they conducted secret meetings in

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<sup>419</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, op. cit., p. 174. [Translator: *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 182.]

<sup>420</sup> Mosheim, *De beghardis et beganibus commentarius*, Leipzig, 1790.

which they tried to represent the innocence of Paradise in the manner of the heretics of Cologne. In several passages Gerson sets them into relation with Joachim of Fiore. It is probable that they based their principle of spiritual freedom on the theory of the three ages, and it is without doubt that one of the five prophetesses charged with announcing the beginning of the era of the Holy Spirit was seized in Lyon in 1423.”<sup>421</sup>

While Gerhard Groote launched the mystical and orthodox movement of the New Devotion in Holland, Germany intensified its persecution of the Beghards. On 26 January 1381, Conrad Kannler, brought before the inquisitorial tribunal at Eichstädt, expounded upon his conception of the Free Spirit: “It is achieved when all consciousness of remorse ceases and man can no longer sin (...). I am one with God and God is one with me.” He insisted on the legitimacy of satisfying his passions, whatever they were, on the condition that the desire assumed an irresistible character.<sup>422</sup> Thus it was that the Fraticelles and, later on, the *Alumbrados* of Spain recommended to men and women that they sleep nude, side by side, and remain chaste as long as possible, in order to lead their passion to the point that it could no longer contain itself.

The group founded by Nicolas of Basle placed itself in the line of the Free Spirit, Joachimite millenarianism and the various Christs of the Eleventh Century.<sup>423</sup>

Considering himself to be infallible in the incarnation of God, Nicolas availed himself of all rights and powers. Holder of an authority that he esteemed to be superior to that of the Pope, he had the power to release his disciples from all other forms of obedience and from the state of sin and guilt. To live in his veneration granted them the state of Edenic innocence. Thus he founded a “libertarian theocracy,” that is, if two such diametrically opposed notions could be accorded with each other.

Enthroned by Nicolas, some of his disciples enjoyed analogous prerogatives. Martin of Mainz, a monk originally from the Abbey of Reichenau in the diocese of Constance, thus acquired the privilege, conferred on him by his God and the sovereign pontiff [Nicolas], to liberate his disciples from submission to anyone –

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<sup>421</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>422</sup> [H.] Haupt, *Beitrage zur geschichte der Sekte von freiern geiste und des Beghartentums*, Gotha, 1885.

<sup>423</sup> K. Schmidt, *Nikolaus von Basel*, Vienna, 1866; H. Haupt, *Zur Biographia des Nicholas von Basel*, in ZKG, 1885.

Church, lord or master – other than himself. He was burned in 1393. The “sovereign pontiff” himself mounted the pyre with two Beghards who were his apostles in Vienna in 1395. Several disciples of Martin of Mainz (the name of his brotherhood, the “Friends of God,” recalled Marguerite Porete’s expression, “The true friends of God”), perished at the hands of the executioner in Heidelberg during those same years.

While inquisitorial zeal incited the partisans of the Free Spirit, whether they were Beghards or lay people, to a growing prudence, the doctrine progressed in England, where Walter Hilton denounced the “errors of false spiritual freedom and false mystic illuminism” in his *Scala perfectionis*.<sup>424</sup>

England was favorable to the reforms of John Wycliffe (1320-1387) who, without exactly speaking from within the heresy, gave his support to voluntary poverty, denied the clergy the right to possess temporal goods, and skillfully entered into the schemes of the Regent of England, the Duke of Lancaster, who was hostile to the papacy. A schismatic, Wycliffe added to the quarrels between the popes and anti-popes a nationalistic note from which the future Anglican Church opportunely profited until the Sixteenth Century. Nevertheless, in 1415, thirty years after his death, the Council of Constance ordered that his body be exhumed and burned.

The Lollards, who were English Beghards, found in Wycliffe’s reforms good reasons for social struggle, which distinguished them from the individualistic demands of the Free Spirit. Nevertheless, the tendency [towards individualism] manifested itself here and there, even if it did not present the same radicalism as it did in the large European cities.

John Cobham, a disciple of Wycliffe, a lord and aristocrat close to the king, and a protector of the Lollards, who were tracked by Bishop Arundel, was accused of heresy in 1413. His confession of faith recalled his loyalty to the king and denounced the Roman Pope, who was characterized as the Antichrist. Condemned to death, Cobham managed to escape and led an army of Lollards whose voluntary poverty and impeccability kept alive both the egalitarianism of John Ball and German Beghardism.

Captured and condemned to be hanged and burned, Cobham left many disciples whose activities hastened the instauration of Protestantism in England, but also the popularity of a certain “spiritual freedom” that was extolled by the Familists and Ranters of the Seventeenth Century.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> *Translator*: original written in English, *The Ladder of Perfection* (circa 1380) was later translated into Latin.

<sup>425</sup> H. B. Workman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, London, 1901-1902.

One doesn't know if it is fitting to link Cobham's movement with the activities of Paul Crower, burned in Scotland in 1433 for having propagated Adamite ideas similar to those of the *pikarti* and the Men of Intelligence.

### **The End of the Beghards and Beguines**

Gregory XI, sensible to the grievances that were formulated by the Beghards and Beguines who remained faithful to the strict orthodoxy of their semi-religious order, brought some moderation to inquisitorial zeal. In 1394, Pope Boniface IX annulled those reservations and concessions in order to have done with the heresy all the more quickly. Johannes Wasmod of Hamburg, the Inquisitor of Mainz, then the Rector of the University of Heidelberg, seconded his enterprise by writing a *Tractatus contra haereticos, begardos, lolharddos et schwestriones*,<sup>426</sup> which was rich in information about those still-flourishing communities.

“Nothing would thenceforth hinder the action of the Inquisitors. In 1402, two partisans of the Free Spirit, Wilhelm and Bernard, perished on the pyre; the first in Lübeck, the second in Wismar. In Mainz, at around the same time, several heretics who preferred to abjure their doctrines rather than submit to torture were seized. The Inquisition's last victims among the partisans of the Free Spirit lived around the middle of the Fifteenth Century. Around 1430, someone named Burkard was burned with his companions in Zurich; in the canton of Uri, the same penalty was inflicted on a certain Brother Charles, who had created many relationships among the populations in these regions. Constance, Ulm, and several towns in Württemberg also inflicted similar tortures; in other localities the heretics abjured and underwent penitence.”<sup>427</sup>

In 1457, the Archbishop of Mainz incriminated a Beghard named Bosehans, who was judged guilty of distributing heretical books. A still badly indexed literature circulated, often attributing seditious writings to orthodox authors. (Note that *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was attributed to Mary of Hungary; *Sister Catherine* to Eckhart; and the *Buch von Geistlicher Armut*<sup>428</sup> to Tauler. These

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<sup>426</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Treatise Against Heretics, Beghards, Lollards and Beguines.”

<sup>427</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>428</sup> *Translator*: German for *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*.

mistakes increased due to the speed of the printing press [invented at roughly the same time].)

The death on the pyre of the Beghard Hans Becker, “*laicus indoctus*,”<sup>429</sup> burned along with his books in Mainz in 1458, was perhaps the last execution of a Beghard. Thenceforth preaching was nourished by social demands, while appeals for the moralization of the Church headed towards the Reformation. But the Free Spirit continued to exist in a clandestinity that was dictated by prudence. It reappeared in broad daylight with the Spiritual Libertines fought by Luther and Calvin, and among the Ranters, who were hostile to Cromwell.

Matthias von Kemnat, relating the execution of a Beghard in Mainz in 1453 in his *Chronicle of Friedrich I*, still thought it good to address a warning to his readers: “Guard against the hermits who live in the woods, the Beghards and Lollards, because they are filled with heresies; guard against the articles [of faith] that they profess and that are such that simple people can not hear them without danger.”<sup>430</sup>

At the end of the Fifteenth Century, in his *Nave of the Crazy*, the satiric poet Sebastian Brandt mocked the scandalous comportment of the Beguines. His contemporary, Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg, a preacher from Strasbourg, objected to the “people of the Free Spirit,” but he estimated that they lived far off in the woods and valleys that were unknown to other people, as if they had re-found in nature the freedom that would have been refused to them by the towns that were severely controlled by the clergy. Dream, regret or ironic vision? Frenger related the imaginary world of Jerome Bosch, who painted the storms and frenzies of internal landscapes while at his peaceful retreat at Hertogenbosch, to the teachings of the Free Spirit.

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<sup>429</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “ignorant layman.”

<sup>430</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 108.



## Chapter 33: The Millenarians<sup>431</sup>

What the Jewish, Essenean and Christianized apocalypses (or “revelations”) expressed, via the adventures of God, was the historical myth of a Golden Age, passed but promised to return, such as that myth was conceived, in regret and hopefulness, by the Greco-Roman mindset, which was disappointed by the disorder of the emperors and which adorned an ideal and universal republic with all possible virtues.

In those “revelations,” the creator God, originally imperceptible and inaccessible, approached his creatures and, through a growing epiphany, manifested himself in order to separate the just and loyal from the bad and wicked, with the result that, after the latter were annihilated, he would descend to the earth and, with the saints and the elect, build a kingdom that would last a thousand years.

The Constantinian Church, allegedly “Catholic,” accommodated itself poorly to a doctrine previously and collectively received by a Hellenized Christianity that aspired to the triumph, not of an ecclesial authority, but of the *ekklesia* or the community of the faithful. Justin the Apologist, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian and Origen were all convinced millenarians. This conception discretely continued up to the Twelfth Century, despite the reticence of the clergy, the exclusive holder of salvation, which controlled access to the kingdom of the saints.

### Joachim of Fiore

With the renewal of the social and political forms of the Twelfth Century, there was sketched out a consciousness of history-in-progress but still enclosed in the cyclical form of myth. The revolutionary process of market expansion, which incited philosophy to free itself from theological tutelage, also instilled at the very heart of the language of God the venom [*venin*] of becoming [*devenir*], a venom from which that language eventually died.

The idea of an Eden uprooted to the beyond and inscribed in a human future more or less closely expressed – at the heart of a theocentric cosmos – the same hopes for the future that would be sung (to the point of loss of voice and life) by the ideologies of the revolutions still to come.

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<sup>431</sup> Please note that in the original, footnote 6 – though it appeared at the end of the book – was not embedded in the text. It is now, as footnote 9.

Ironically, such a project was born in the brain of the monk who was the least inclined to sow trouble in the ecclesiastic universe. The theories of Joachim of Fiore only offered a danger to the Church due to the interpretations that the turmoil of the age made of them.

In the Ninth Century, Bishop Raterius of Verona founded the conservative society that produced the agrarian economy upon the balance of three orders: the *oratores*, the monks and priests; the *armatores*, the soldiers; and the *laboratores*, the workers who fed those who protected them on earth and in the name of heaven.

Everything happened as if the commercial flight [*l'essor*] of the towns – an arrow shot at the modernity of capital – made the cyclical and static representation of Raterius veer into the spirit of Joachim, flattening and stretching it according to a linear becoming that was ordered into three ages.

The *Book of Concord of the New and Old Testaments*, written around 1180, put forth a sampling of formulas, none of which were threatening to the Church, but their meaning [and direction] – sharpened by history – cut like a knife into the adipose flesh of Roman power.

“The first era was that of knowledge; the second is that of wisdom; the third will be that of full intelligence. The first was servile obedience; the second is filial servitude; the third will be freedom. The first was the ordeal; the second is action; the third will be contemplation. The first was fear; the second is faith; the third will be love. The first was the age of slaves; the second is that of sons; the third will be that of friends. The first was the age of old men; the second is that of young people; the third will be that of children. The first passed in the glimmer of the stars; the second is the aurora; the third will be a full day. The first was winter; the second is the beginning of spring; the third will be summer. The first carried nettles; the second one roses; the third will carry lilies. The first one provided grass; the second one corncob; and the third will provide wheat. The first provided water; the second wine; the third will provide oil. The first refers to the Septuagesima; the second to Quadragesima; the third will refer to Easter. The first age refers to the father, who is the author of all things; the second to the Son, who deigned to invest our [mortal]

clay; the third will be the age of the Holy Spirit, of which the apostle said, ‘There where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’”<sup>432</sup>

The explosive mix of the Joachimite component and historic evolution found a detonator in the precise date that the Calabrian monk assigned to the advent of the Third Age. Joachim counted 42 generations of 30 years each, thus 1260 years, from Adam to Jesus. As the same period of time had to be reproduced from the birth of the Christ, the new era had to start at the dawn of 1260. Great troubles and the unleashing of the Antichrist obviously were the prelude to the birth of a paradisiacal world in which the saints joyfully expected the return of Christ.

Under the archaism of these cyclical calculations, there slid a subtle political design. Joachim foresaw the growing importance of the beggar orders, [which were] a veritable war machine that the Church opposed to the progress of the Waldensinian heresy and the voluntarily impoverished reformers. It was of the latter’s preeminence that Joachim dreamed when he announced the reign of the saints. And the order closest to apostolic austerity, Franciscanism, succumbed the easiest (through a malicious return) to the seductions of millenarianism.

With the rule of the elect in the Joachimite Third Age, the reign of the Church would be abolished. There would no longer be Father, nor Son, nor rites, nor sacrifices, nor sacraments, just one law, the *lex libertatis*.<sup>433</sup> The Amalricians, nay, even the simple reformers, such as Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne, had already predisposed the Joachimite spirit to a social and individual practice that was radically hostile to Rome and, in the best of cases, to the very essence of religion, which is the exile of self. Indeed, faced with the imminence of a paradisiacal nature in which God would be dissolved, how could one prevent abstract concepts from retaking bodily form when the ecclesiastic barrier that prohibited access to the conjoined pleasure in the world and in oneself was broken?

Previously sterilized by theological and philosophical speculation, certain words began to recover their fecundity. In the notion of perfection germinated the refusal of all guilt; contemplation became the illumination of the God of desire that each person carried inside; charity was elevated to the art of erotic courtesy; love translated the effusion of lovers; and freedom at least evoked the freedom of nature

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<sup>432</sup> Joachim of Fiore, *Concordia*, 7, 28 c. [*Translator*: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Paterson (Zone Books, New York), p. 66. Note the shift at the end of this passage from a chronological ordering to an ordering in which everything is “cyclical and static,” that is to say, confined to the present tense.]

<sup>433</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “the law of freedom.”

and at most the surpassing of the unfortunate coupling of divine tyranny and oppressed and violated nature.

## Joachimism

The writings of Joachim encountered an immediate success among the literate. Among the Amalricians condemned in 1210, William the Goldsmith and Master Godin of Amiens had already drawn the subversive implications of the imminence of the Third Age. If Waldensianism and Catharism knew nothing about them, the “spiritual” faction born from the dissensions in the Franciscan order perceived in the rule of the saints the emergence of a society inspired by the voluntary poverty that Francis of Assisi had so cleverly snatched from Waldo’s disciples, the Cathars and the apostolic preachers.

The date 1260, foreseen by Joachim as the inauguration of the new era, exploded into multiple social, political and religious fragments. The shock waves that agitated the stratification of the centuries accumulated by the passage of time – though deprived of the Edenic expiration date, [thereafter] always deferred – involved no other consequence than the revision of the prophetic calculus.

Two works of wide distribution drafted in the second half of the Thirteenth Century proved the repercussions of Joachimism on the political rivalry between Rome and the emperors of Germany. The *Abbatis Joachim Florentis scriptum super Esaiem prophetam* (the manuscript of which was belatedly printed in Venice in 1517) and the *Interpraetatio praeclara abbatis Joachim in Hieremian prophetam* (printed in Venice in 1525) fixed 1260 as the end of the affliction of the Holy City. The German Emperor, Frederic II, was the whip held in the hands of God and destined to punish the sinful Church. The *Imperium* ravaged by the Saracens, who in their turn were destroyed by the Mongols and the Tartars, had led the world to the brink of annihilation. Thereafter, as backlash, there would finally be the rule of peace and the era of the just. (Note that, in the Nineteenth Century, at a time when ideological language had supplanted religious language, such was the conception of the anarchist Ernest Coeurderoy in his *Hurrah, or the Revolution of the Cossacks*.)<sup>434</sup>

The elitism of the Spirituals discovered nourishment appropriate to their chiliastic pretensions in the theories of Joachim of Fiore. In 1254, a Spiritual from Pisa, Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino, radicalized and popularized Joachimite ideas

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<sup>434</sup> *Translator*: Vaneigem wrote a preface titled “‘Terrorism or Revolution’: An introduction to Ernest Coeurderoy” for a collection of Coeurderoy’s writings published by Editions Champ Libre in 1972.

in his *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel*. Insisting on the fateful year 1260, he prophesized the disappearance of the Roman Church and the advent of a spiritual Church, in germination in Franciscanism. The condemnation of the book in 1255 incriminated the abbot from Fiore, who was thenceforth suspected of heresy. Condemned to perpetual imprisonment, Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino died, after eighteen years of severe incarceration, without having denied his conceptions.<sup>435</sup>

Joachimism was revived again, but more vividly, among the Spirituals, who took up the old program of reform and were increasingly opposed to the commercialized [*affairiste*] politics of Rome. A radical faction, on the boundary between Franciscanism and the Free Spirit, was born from the Spiritual current; the Church condemned it under the name “Fratricelles.”

Finally, there appeared an egalitarian social movement – that is to say, it was “egalitarian” once one removed from it the anti-Semitic resentment of the *Pastoureaux* and the morbid comportment of the flagellants – in which God constituted less a religious reference than a principle of government that excluded the Church and the princes in the name of a new and classless society.

## Gerard Segarelli

In the Italian towns, the political and social struggle most often responded to the confusion of quarrels between the Guelphs, allies of Rome, and the Ghibellines, partisans of the Emperor of Germany. The will to purge the Church of its corruption (which Savonarola still demanded in 1491) and revolutionary millenarianism were involved in virtually all the tumults that broke out monthly, if not weekly.

In the Joachimite year of 1260, in Parma, then ravaged by famine and internecine wars, a shopkeeper named Gerard Segarelli – renewing the gesture of Peter Waldo – sold his goods to the profit of the poor and decided to promote a community of faithful in which the apostolic virtues of Christ and his apostles were revived.

Illuminated and, no doubt, imprinted by the hysteria shared by preachers and tribunes of all types, Segarelli soon played the role of popular and picturesque Messiah, although he failed to denounce as lies and calumnies the majority of the ridiculous traits that the Franciscan Salimbene piled upon him. (Note that in his *Chronicle*, Salimbene confessed the motives for his nasty incontinence: “The people of Parma give more willingly to these vagabonds than to the brother

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<sup>435</sup> Joachim of Fiore, *Concordia*, 7, 28 c.

preachers or the minor brothers.”)<sup>436</sup> Segarelli enjoyed the benevolent protection of Bishop Opizo, who was, perhaps, motivated less by solicitude than by aversion to the official beggars who constituted the Dominicans, universally detested for their base police work, and the Franciscans, often charged with hypocrisy.

Rallying the flagellants to his ecumenism, Segarelli traveled through the town to cries of “*Penitenziagite!*” the popular form of “*Poenitentiam agite!*” (do penitence).<sup>437</sup>

With the aid of an old Franciscan, Robert, called Fra Glutto (Glutton), Segarelli organized a brotherhood to which thronged disciples described by Salimbene as “debauchees, cowherds, swineherds, loafers who roamed the streets eyeing the women, and good-for-nothings who neither work nor pray.”<sup>438</sup> In vain did the Council of Lyon of 1274 order them to dissolve or rally to one of the orders recognized by Rome.

Strong from their large numbers and their growing audience, the Segarellists sent out missionaries, wandering apostles often confused with the Beghards, who shared with them a common devotion to voluntary poverty and the impeccability that it guaranteed.

The influence of “the spirit of freedom” was not absent from Segarellism, despite its exhortations to penitence. The prophet himself made assurances that the life of the poor was the true life of the apostles, “the most perfect of lives (...), freedom in adoring God, freedom in sermons, freedom in the relations between man and woman.”<sup>439</sup>

One attributes to Segarelli and his disciples the practice – recommended by the very orthodox Robert of Abrissel – of the “white martyr,” which consisted in a couple going to bed nude and interlaced, but resisting the natural solicitations of love. The current of the Free Spirit gave to the exercise a more human meaning by changing it into a patient refinement of the desire that was not satisfied until it had become irresistible. It is probable that certain apostles of Segarelli conformed more willingly to the latter version of this martyrdom, denuded of excessive rigor.

Salimbene was surprised that Segarelli refused to assume the role of community leader, although he was the object of a great veneration. Sincerely

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<sup>436</sup> E. Aegerter, *Joachim of Fiore: L’Evangile éternel*, Paris, 1928; J. C. Huck, *Joachim of Fiore und die joachimistische Literatur*, Freiburg-en-Brigau, 1938.

<sup>437</sup> *Translator*: cf. Matthew 4:17.

<sup>438</sup> *Chronica fratris Salimbene*, in *Monumenta Germaniae scriptores*, XXXVII, I, pp. 255 sq.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.* [*Translator*: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 81.]

devoted to the myth of Christ, he deemed it detrimental to his holiness if he governed rather than shone. Nevertheless, he couldn't avoid all forms of temporal power.

Guidone Putagi, brother of the Podestà of Bologna, took control of the government of the congregation and exercised it for many years, despite an ostentatious way of life, which was not in conformity with evangelic requirements.

A schism was declared and degenerated into armed struggle in which each camp disputed Segarelli, a most unfortunate God in his successive incarnations [and attempts] to once again be present at the birth of a Church.

Guidone's partisans won the battle, but shortly afterward, he left the brotherhood and rallied to the Order of the Templars. (Note that his adherence left the road open to calculations about the open-mindedness of the future victims of [King] Philippe the Fair and [Pope] Clement V. Merchants and bankers two centuries ahead of their time, they [the Templars] welcomed received ideas and the pleasures that were cynically camouflaged by the exemplary reputations of the soldiers and businessmen who were above all suspicions.)

In 1286, Pope Honorius IV condemned the Segarellist apostolics and prohibited them from being received or given alms that should have gone into the Vatican's coffers.

A year later, the Council of Wurzburg enjoined the faithful to no longer welcome nor feed the wandering apostolics dressed in extravagant clothing and called *leccatores*, *ghiottoni*, or *scrocconi*, that is to say, "gluttons."<sup>440</sup>

According to Salimbene, Segarelli was increasingly eccentric. Three of his disciples, accused of debauchery, were hanged in Bologna so that there were doubts about their holy calling, which had been so loudly proclaimed.

Thrown into prison, Segarelli owed his salvation to the Bishop of Parma, who offered him refuge in his house. Nevertheless, a new bull issued in 1290 by Pope Nicolas IV restarted the repression. In 1294, on the authority of the Inquisition, two men and two women who were members of the congregation were put on the pyre. That same year, in order to surprise an institution that was unanimously abhorred, even by civil power and several ecclesiastic authorities, the Episcopal system of justice brought before it the prophet [Segarelli] whose downfall Rome had sworn and whom it had condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

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<sup>440</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, Paris, 1986, p. 73. [Translator: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 80-81. *Leccatores* is Latin for "flatterers" or "lechers"; *ghiottoni* means "gluttons"; and *scrocconi* means "scroungers."]

This [action] did not take into account the tenacity of the religious police. The pursuits engaged in by the Inquisition caused the condemnation of Gerard Segarelli to death, forty years after his divine revelation. With him perished many of his partisans, including Etienne, one of his principle evangelists.

Among those who, on 18 July 1300, contemplated the prophet in his tunic of flames, was one of his partisans, [Fra] Dolcino of Novara, who later brought to Joachimism the modern form of a social and peasant-based revolution, and thus inaugurated a tradition that continued to exist until the decline of the colonies in the Twentieth Century.

## **The Guillelmites**

At the same that Segarelli was agitating Parma and attracting the hostility of a Church that was obsessed with the accumulation of capital, a millenarian group founded in Milan claimed for women the privilege of guiding humanity as a whole towards the Third Age and the egalitarian kingdom.

In the prophetic year 1260, a young widow and her son arrived in Milan. Guglielma, said to be from Bohemia, seems to have been the daughter of Constance, wife of the king of Bohemia. Nothing authenticates such parentage other than the declaration of one of her disciples, Andreas Saramita, who had been to see Constance in the hope of recovering a debt. Soon thereafter her exemplary piety attracted followers, whose numbers grew with her reputation as a thaumaturge and the multiplication of miraculous instances of healing. The worship of this saint was soon brought into the whirlwind of fashionable messianic ideas. Her sectarians let it be understood that she had been chosen to convert the Jews and the Saracens, and to instaurate the universality of the Christian faith.

Around 1276, a gilded legend maintained that Guglielma was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, designated the harbinger of Joachim of Fiore's Third Age. She was incarnated as the third person in the Trinity as Christ had been the incarnation of the second in the body of a man. Her nature was at once divine and natural, if one believes two of her more zealous partisans, Andreas Saramita, a notable from Milan, and an *umiliata*<sup>441</sup> in the ancient convent of Biassono, Sister Maifreda da Pirovano, who belonged to the powerful Visconti family. Guglielma had the prudence to openly contest a pretense that was subject to Inquisitorial confirmation, but, with or without her consent, her role as saint implicated her in the double signification of millenarianism and feminine preeminence, which –

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<sup>441</sup> *Translator*: Italian for “humbled person.”



from the Cistercian Monials to Hadewijch and Porete – did not cease to disturb the Church.

When Guglielma died on 24 August 1281, she left her goods to the Cistercian community of Chiaravalle, near Milan, where she was buried in a great abundance of piety. The cult organized in her honor did profitable business. A month after the transfer of her remains, Andreas Saramita, with great pomp, exhumed the body. He washed it with wine and water, and preserved the precious mix as a cream for the healing of the sick. Maifreda used it for the healing of pilgrims; she also instaurated particular ceremonies for the anniversary of Guglielma's death and the transfer of the [remains of the] saint. The abbey, whose prestige grew year by year, attracted the favor of generous donors. One of them, Giaccobe da Novati, a nobleman from Milan, bequeathed to it all of his goods and offered his powerful protection to the Guillelmites.

Nothing more was necessary for the group to claim that it constituted the kernel of a new Church, marking the advent of the reign of the saints. Andreas, the spiritual son of Guglielma, devoted himself to defining a new dogma. The Archangel Raphael announced to the blessed Constance that the Holy Spirit had been incarnated in her; he had chosen feminine form because, in masculine form, he would have perished like Christ did, and the entire world would have perished with him. The grave at Chiaravalle was elevated to the glory of the Holy Sepulcher, rites were prescribed and communion was held there.

From time to time, Guglielma appeared to the faithful in the form of a dove. The gospels were replaced by Andreas' writings, which imitated Paul's epistles. Maifreda, the author of litanies and prayers, prophesized the second coming of Guglielma and the end of the traditional papacy. She herself would become the pope. She worked to form a cardinal college exclusively composed of women. She gave her benediction, celebrated Mass, consecrated the Host, and gave communion to the faithful, sumptuously dressed.

The support of a number of rich Milanese, including the Visconti family, in all probability explains the slowness and hesitations of the Inquisition. It was disquieted by the Guillelmites in 1284, but contented itself with a simple admonition. The inquests of 1295 and 1296 were not followed up upon. However, when Maifreda revived the millenarian danger by announcing the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost 1300, the Church decided to intervene against a hotbed of agitation that had consolidated a front of apostolics, Fraticelles, Dolcinians and heterodox Beghards.

Among the Guillelmites who were arrested, four or five were condemned as recidivists. On 23 August 1300, Sister Giaccoba dei Bassani mounted the pyre. In September, it was the turn of Andreas Saramita and Maifreda. Lighter penalties were given to the others. Guglielma's remains were exhumed and burned. Thus

ended a schism that opposed the patriarchal Church with a feminine one and that gave a gynocratic character to millenarian hopes. It wasn't until the writings of Guillaume Postel in the Sixteenth Century that the idea of salvation through women reappeared.

### **Dolcino of Novara**

In Dolcino was incarnated the millenarian aspirations of the urban areas and the old collectivist dream of the peasant commune, which was a convergence that, as late as the Twentieth Century, governed the archaic and modern meanings of economic, political and social revolution. Remarkable for his intelligence, courage and sincerity, Dolcino offered seven centuries of history one of the first and noblest revolutionary figures to have contemplated the instauration of a new society.

Originally from the region of Novara, Dolcino was the son of a certain Giulio, a priest in Trento in the Ossola valley or a hermit from Prato near Novara. Another priest, Agosto, attached to the church of St Agnes in Vercelli, took charge of Dolcino's education and entrusted him to a pedagogue named Sione. His brilliant mind attracted animosity. A calumnious imputation accused him of stealing from his protector, driving him from Vercelli. Perhaps he then joined a wandering group of Apostolics, Fraticelles or Beghards, adepts of Segarelli. His prestige and eloquence rallied to him a large number of partisans. Carried to the head of the Segarellist movement a month after the execution of the prophet, he drafted a new version of Joachimite doctrine.

[In this version] the past was divided into three periods. The first covered the centuries of the Old Testament; the second extended from the coming of Christ to Pope Sylvester and situated itself under the sign of penitence; the third ran from Sylvester to Segarelli, marked by the decadence of the Church that no reform had succeeded in saving: not that of Benoit, nor the attempts of Dominic or Francis of Assisi. The fourth period, inaugurated in 1260, led towards the annihilation of the corrupt Church, the end of the monks and the priests, and the triumph of the poor and humble, the only carriers of the Holy Spirit and the [future] creators of a new fraternal and egalitarian society.

Like all the prophets, Dolcino made the error of fixing a precise date – [in his case, it was] in three years, that is, in 1303 – for the universal upheaval from which would burst forth the light of the terrestrial kingdom. Politically, Dolcino bet upon Frederic II, an enemy of the papacy, on whom it fell to accomplish the designs of divine justice.

In accordance with the *Apocalypse attributed to John* and Bogomilist tradition, Dolcino identified the angels of the seven Churches: Sylvester for

Pergamum, Benoit for Ephesus, Dominic for Laodicea, Francis for Sardis, Segarelli for Thyatira and Dolcino himself for Philadelphia. (Note that at the same time, Guion of Cressonaert, a friend of Marguerite Porete, also called himself the angel of Philadelphia.)<sup>442</sup>

The course of events contradicted Dolcino's short-term prophecies. Boniface VIII died in 1303, the victim of the brutalities to which he had subjected Nogaret and Colonna, mandated by Philippe the Fair, King of France. Frederic did not manifest himself and the new pope, Benoit XI, was chased from Rome by Colonna's faction, took refuge in Perugia and did not temper the zeal of the Inquisitors against the Dolcinians.

A second epistle from Dolcino pushed back the date of the end of the Church of Rome by two or three years. In 1304, Benoit XI perished unexpectedly, no doubt with the aid of a poison; Frederic had no part in it. Clement V, enemy of the Beghards of Free Spirit, proclaimed his resolution to finish off the Dolcinian movement.

At the head of some four thousand men, Dolcino – accompanied by his friend, the rich and beautiful Margarita of Trento – commanded a staff of experienced men, such as Alberto of Cimega, Longino Cattaneo of Bergamo, Federigo of Novara, and Valderigo of Brescia. Dolcino then began a guerrilla campaign that baffled his enemies with its great mobility, winning Bologna, Modena and Northern Italy, especially the regions around Bergamo, Brescia, Milan and Como. Arrested three times by the Inquisition, he escaped [each time]. He ended up establishing himself in the region neighboring Novara and Vercelli, where the peasant populations regrouped under his leadership into a veritable peasant revolt.

Milano Sola, a rich property owner from Borgo di Sesia, offered to shelter Dolcino, but the pressure brought by the armies levied by the Holy See incited him to search in the mountains of Valsesia for a better refuge. Mount Balmara and then, in 1305, the *Parete Calvo*,<sup>443</sup> snowy and difficult-to-reach summits in the Alps, were erected as fortified camps for a population of fourteen hundred people, organized as a commune.

Around the couple formed by Dolcino and Margarita, the partisans were called to lay down the basis for a new world in which the goods necessary for survival were collectivized, property was abolished and marriage – which reduced women to objects of appropriation – was suppressed in the name of the “union according to the heart.” Dolcino recommended the practice of nudity among

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<sup>442</sup> *Translator*: cf. Chapter 31 of the present work.

<sup>443</sup> *Translator*: Italian for “the Bare Wall.”

couples, refining the gestures of love until irresistible desire accomplished the will of nature in an innocence that revoked all guilt.

Clement V identified the struggle against the Dolcinians with a crusade that was enriched by indulgences. Through threats and promises, the people of Valsesia were forced to adhere to a line that was intended to prevent all aid to the besieged. Pushed by deprivation, Dolcino's partisans conducted raids and pillages that alienated the sympathies of the villagers who had been initially won over to their cause, but the presence of enemy troops contributed to the increasingly insupportable misery and the cowardice ordinarily found in such situations.

Nevertheless, the audacity of Dolcino turned to his favor a situation judged to be disastrous. The Podestà of Varallo, who fell into the hands of the Dolcinians after trying to seize the *Parete Calvo*, was exchanged along with his troops for an important shipment of supplies.

On 10 March 1306, after a yearlong stay in the cold and amidst scarcity, the Dolcinians abandoned a retreat that would have doomed them to a slow annihilation and succeeded in taking up a new position on Mount Rubello, near the village of Treverio in the Vercelli region. Badly armed and weakened, their numbers did not exceed a thousand, but they nevertheless managed to break two offensives launched by the Bishop of Vercelli. Pushed by famine, Dolcino provoked the enemy into battle by throwing himself into a hazardous confrontation from which he emerged the victor. The prisoners he captured were exchanged for supplies.

By multiplying his Bulls of Crusade and promising tax reductions and advantages for all the [religious] orders, Clement V obtained military reinforcements from Lombardy, Piedmont and the Count of Savoy. To the blockade [of Dolcino's position], Clement V added catapults and armies of experienced mercenaries.

In the process of writing *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri didn't hide his sympathies for Dolcino's guerrilla war. It put him on his guard concerning the tactic of falling back into an inhospitable climate and depriving one's forces of the advantages that had assured the mobility of seasoned and well-fed troops. (Note that the three books of *The Divine Comedy* corresponded to the three Joachimite ages. The three stages of the *Scala perfectionis*<sup>444</sup> pertained to both the alchemical process and the quest for "refined love.")

At the start of winter, a battle that turned to carnage saw the Dolcinians victorious again. The blockade and the severity of the cold were, finally,

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<sup>444</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "The Ladder of Perfection," the title of a work by Walter Hilton. Cf. Chapter 32 of the present work.

motivations for their heroism. On 23 March 1307, the assault exhausted the last resistance.

Clement V showed his relief by giving prebends and fiscal compensation to the Crusaders. His resentment caused him to inflict the most odious punishments upon Dolcino, Margarita and their friends. Dragged through the streets of Vercelli, they were – like many arrestees on the way to the pyre – dismembered alive with the aid of red-hot pincers. Witnesses recounted that Dolcino did not let out a cry.

Bernard Gui, one of the most ignoble men ever produced by inquisitorial fanaticism, devoted his life to the pursuit of the remaining Dolcinians. They were burned in Toulouse in 1322, along with Pierre de Lugo, who was originally from Galicia; in Trento in 1332 and 1333; in Compostela, where the disciples of the Italian Dolcinian Richard were condemned on the instigation of Bernard Gui; in Prague around 1315; in Rieti in 1335, despite the municipal authorities, who refused to deliver the Dolcinians to the Inquisition; in England; in Padua around 1350; in Avignon, under John XXII; in Naples in 1372; and in Germany at the beginning of the Fifteenth Century.

Although it was led by the parish priest Guillaume Cale, the great French peasant revolt [of 1358] was not encumbered by religious considerations. It involved more rioting and tumult than a politically organized plan and a program of precise demands. The peasant movement in England led by John Ball in the second half of the Thirteenth Century enjoyed the sympathy of the Lollards but – except for Ball’s preaching and his celebrated question “When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?”<sup>445</sup> – the religious connotations remained absent. The same was true with the revolt led by Watt Tyler<sup>446</sup> and the many working-class insurrections that split the great cities. Millenarianism, still impregnated with the sacred spirit, did not reappear until the Anabaptists of Munster. It fascinated thinkers such as [Tomasso] Campanella and [Wilhelm] Weitling, a contemporary of [Karl] Marx. The great revolutionary movements gave to millenarianism a more ideological than religious form – nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate the role of irrational and Joachimite faith in Nazi millenarianism,<sup>447</sup> that is to say, in the antithesis of the projects for a classless

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<sup>445</sup> *Translator*: rather than translating Ball back into English, I have quoted from the original. “Delved” means dug, as in digging the fields, and “span” means “spun,” as in the spinning of fabric.

<sup>446</sup> *Translator*: a leader of the revolt of the peasants in England in the Fourteenth Century.

<sup>447</sup> *Translator*: here Vaneigem is supporting the central thesis of Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: 1957).

society or an ecological paradise, both brought to consciousness by the successive waves of the economy.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> E. Agnanine, *Fra Dolcino*, Florence, 1964.

## Chapter 34: The Flagellants

Stoicism taught that one should endure suffering; Judeo-Christianity taught one to love it. From punishment as proof of divine love to the love of punishment was only a step. Did not the markets in dereliction, death and fear count among the most profitable for the Church?

The appearance in Perugia around 1250 of the movement of the Flagellants was part of a conjuration of events – the famine of 1250, the plague of 1259, the bloody struggle between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines – that was propitious for the nourishment of the sentiment that the displeasure of losing oneself carried the consolation of involving the whole world in that loss. The Joachimite expiration date of 1260 once more catalyzed the tumult of passions that an impossible life easily turned towards the outlet of death.

At first encouraged by the Church, hysterical and collective self-punishment – due to its pretensions to exclusivity – rapidly came to threaten the privileges of afflicting and consoling that were reserved by the clergy. The existence of hell on earth removed all credit from the merchants of the beyond. Propagating, indeed, surrendering oneself to outrages and torments of the flesh identified one with Christ and released one from all duties to the Church.

For a long time, flagellation counted among the self-punitive practices admitted by the Church. It expressed the ordinary scorn for terrestrial life and pleasure that was inherent in all religions, without (for all that) curtailing an existence denuded of attractions by the quest for a sanctifying ordeal, as in the New Prophecy or the Cathars' *endura*.

“It was in the crowded Italian towns that organised flagellant processions appeared for the first time. The movement was launched in 1260 by a hermit of Perugia and spread southwards to Rome and northwards to the Lombard cities with such rapidity that to contemporaries it appeared a sudden epidemic of remorse. Led usually by priests, masses of men, youths and boys marched day and night, with banners and burning candles, from town to town. And each time they came to a town they would arrange themselves in groups before the church and flog themselves for hours on end. The impact which this public penance made upon the general population was great. Criminals confessed, robbers returned their loot and usurers the interest on their loans, enemies were reconciled and feuds forgotten.

Even the two warring parties which were dividing Italy, the Guelphs or supporters of the Pope and the Ghibellines or the supporters of the Emperor, for a moment lost some of their intransigence. Whole towns became involved in the movement – at Reggio the chief magistrate, the bishop and all the guilds took part. As the processions moved along they constantly increased in size, until they were many thousand strong. But if at times people of all classes would join in, it was the poor who persevered; so that in the latter stages of the movement they alone remained.

“The circumstances under which this first outbreak of mass self-flagellation occurred are significant. Even by medieval standards, conditions in Italy at that moment were exceptionally hard. In 1258 there had been famine, in 1259 a serious outbreak of plague. Above all, incessant warfare between Guelph and Ghibelline had reduced the country to a state of the utmost misery and insecurity. The situation of the Guelph towns was particularly desperate, for their cause had just suffered a heavy blow when the Florentines were defeated at Montaperto, with fearful slaughter, by the Tuscan Ghibellines. Frederick II’s son, Manfred, seemed well on the way to establishing his sway over the whole of Italy. It was not for nothing that the flagellant movement started in a Guelph city and flourished amongst Guelphs. Yet all these afflictions were felt to be but a prelude to a final and overwhelming catastrophe. A chronicler remarked that during the flagellant processions people behaved as though they feared that as a punishment for their sins God was about to destroy them all by earthquake and by fire from on high. It was in a world which seemed poised on the brink of the abyss that these penitents cried out, as they beat themselves and threw themselves upon their faces: ‘Holy Virgin take pity on us! Beg Jesus Christ to spare us!’ and ‘Mercy, mercy! Peace, peace!’ – calling ceaselessly, we are told, until the fields and mountains seemed to echo with their prayers and musical instruments fell silent and love-songs died away.”<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l'Apocalypse*, Paris 1983, pp. 134 and 135. [Translator: here Vaneigem refers to the French translation of Norman Cohn’s *In Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York, 1957), pp. 125-126. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, I have quoted directly from the original.]



Through the sentiment that this was an intolerable existence, from which so often came the obscure desire for universal annihilation, the principle of hope also fought its way through: the phoenix reborn from its cinders. Thus the most diverse traits [and people] were mixed together in the flagellant movement: the refusal of the Church and the clergy; the divine freedom to which the most disinherited (thus those who suffered the most) acceded by right; and those who – like the Beghards of Cologne, the Beguines of Świdnica and the former Messalians – overcame the ordeal of sorrow and entered into the promised land of Edenic happiness; but also the resentment of the oppressed people who turned this way and that way against the powerful and who, in the ordinary discharges [*l'ordinaire sanie*] of cowardice and sadism, most often tortured and massacred Jewish men, women and children.

In 1349, the Pope rejected the Flagellants: “Most of them or their followers, beneath an appearance of piety, set their hands to cruel and impious works, shedding the blood of Jews whom Christian piety accepts and sustains.”<sup>450</sup>

In 1261 and 1262, the movement crossed the Alps, went up the Rhine and entered southern Germany, where it took a turn that was more popular, more anti-clerical and more faithful to Joachimite eschatology. The appeals to purity of soul and faith didn't fail to revive the anti-Semitic basis that had been cultivated by Emicho of Leiningen, the Master of Hungary, and an anonymous clergyman from Passau, who authored a chronicle in the second half of the Thirteenth Century that attributed all the world's misfortunes to the Jews and heretics.

If one participated in a procession of flagellants, the duration of which was thirty-three-and-a-half days (in memory of Christ's age), this was deemed enough to assure one of the impeccability of whatever one did and, obviously, to exempt one from the Church and its sacraments. After 1262, the on-going threat to clerical profitability justified the prohibition that was pronounced against the hysterical hordes who exhibited their bloody wounds and pled Christ-like sorrows in the countryside and the towns in order to be able to devote themselves, without committing any sins, to couplings, libations, rape and pillage.

The Black Plague of 1348-1349 revived the propensity to merciful suffering, on which the Church of the Fifteenth Century based its lucrative market in death. Possessed by a holy fury, groups of fifty to five hundred people paraded in successive waves in Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary, exorcising through an exemplary expiation the just anger with which God overwhelmed his creatures. England, little concerned with a redemption obtained by a cynical overbidding in misfortune, rejected the flagellant movement.

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 147. [*Translator: In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 139.]

Repressed in Strasbourg in 1296, Bergamo in 1334, and Cremona in 1346, the Flagellants still managed to invade Bruges, Ghent, Tournai and Dordrecht. The bishops sometimes tolerated them and tried in vain to temper their devastating zeal.

As the excess of horrors accumulating in the 1350s elevated suffering to the dignity of a supreme good, millenarianism reappeared: it was the logical extension of the project of annihilation conducted by God with a great power of conviction. A mysterious *Heavenly Letter*, which no doubt issued from Segarellism, announced the decision of the Lord – as dictated to a prophet – to exterminate mankind. Angered by the unworthy conduct of his creatures and, in particular, by the rich, God would only spare humanity in exchange for general repentance and contrition embellished by the whip. One still had to receive clemency through the intercession of Mary. The egalitarianism of the adepts of voluntary poverty alienated the nobility from the movement, though the nobles sometimes gave in to penitential solicitations. Did not Clement VI prescribe the virtues of flagellation? He retracted his support and, in 1349, he condemned the movement, with the result that the messianism of the artisans and peasants turned to confront the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the clergy, the hedonism of which – judged to be contrary to the wishes of God – had aroused heavenly anger.

Anti-clericalism most often gave way to anti-Semitism. The pogroms made good use of the unleashing of pent-up frustrations upon the marginal people who had been condemned to disgrace by the Church, which made the Jews scapegoats when they ceased to fill up the coffers of the bishops and princes. The Jewish communities of Frankfurt, Mainz, Cologne and Brussels were exterminated. (Note that, in 1146, Peter the Venerable, the abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny, had already remarked, “What good does it do to go to the end of the world (...) to combat the Saracens when we let live among us other infidels who are guiltier with respect to Christ than the Mohammedans?”<sup>451</sup>)

In Thuringia, Konrad Schmid led the millenarian flagellants. He revived the legend of the return of Frederic, the Emperor of the Last Days, to which Dolcino had imprudently given political credit.

Renewing the tradition of the itinerant Christ, Schmid demanded an absolute submission to his person. He decreed that self-flagellation was the prelude to the birth of an Edenic age to come in 1369. The Inquisition hastened to seize Schmid and burn him in Nordhausen in 1368, one year in advance of the due date.

By reinforcing its repression, Rome tried, as it was its custom, to recuperate the movement to its profit. The Spaniard Vincent Ferrier took control of the penitents, who were severely boxed in and controlled; he won his sanctification by

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<sup>451</sup> Cited by Delumeau, *La peur en Occident*, Paris, 1978, p. 313.

giving an orthodox coloration to the welts made by the whip.<sup>452</sup> He was only partially successful in this. Seeing himself overwhelmed on all sides, [the anti-flagellant] Gerson adjured in 1417 by renouncing his stinging apostolate.

From then on, the Inquisition took the initiative. The pyres (principally in Germany) reduced to cinders some ninety flagellants in 1414; three hundred of them in 1416; and a dozen in Nordhausen in 1446 and Sondershausen in 1454. The last victims succumbed around 1480.

The Flagellants' doctrine hardly bothered with theological subtleties. Konrad Schmid advocated a second baptism, a baptism of blood, which conferred [personal] salvation and doomed the Church, the clergy and the sacraments to uselessness. The refusal to pay tithes and the denunciation of the trade in indulgences belonged to all the popular movements that the Church did not cease to arouse against it and its clerical bureaucracy. The rejection of the cult of the saints and purgatory would form [Martin] Luther's heritage, as would anti-Semitism, all things considered.

Domenico Savi, also called Meco del Sacco, was burned in 1344 in Ascoli; his doctrines attested to the penetration of Free Spirit ideas even in the destructive fury of the Flagellants. In fact, he taught the following theses, here transcribed in the spirit of the inquisitors who sent him to death.

“Their impudent caresses that went as far as pleasure were not a sin; men and women praying together in the obscurity of the night do not commit sin, whatever else they might be doing at the time; it was permitted for women to flagellate themselves for their sins, nude and publicly; lay people also had the power to absolve all sins.”<sup>453</sup>

Nevertheless, the Church discovered in collective self-flagellation a way of exercising over the populations a form of control, the power of which the official history has always exaggerated. Catholicism only inspired a true devotion in the Fifteenth Century, on the eve of the schism that amputated half of its empire. Using the fear of death and the horror of a beyond that perpetuated the atrocities of terrestrial destiny, Rome readjusted its control over subjects reduced to the state of sinners.

The Dance of Death, deploying an avenging and egalitarian imagery (since death spins all the social classes in its sinister round), celebrated the interminable

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<sup>452</sup> *Translator*: called “the Angel of the Last Judgment,” and a ferocious anti-Semite, Ferrier was canonized by Calixtus III in 1455.

<sup>453</sup> R. Guarnieri, *Il morimento del liberto spiritio*, Rome, 1965, p. 427.

festival of dead life, and the only recourse was to pay the parish priest (lying in ambush for the last breath) for the “last rights” that gave a life-saving meaning to sorrow. There would be great pardons for those who suffered greatly if they resigned themselves to honor the bills that the Church deducted from every moment of an existence that it subjugated, from the cries of birth to the death rattles of the final agony. Ironically, from the Fifteenth Century onward, the Church imposed itself under the traits of a mother, while death, in its half-emaciated skeleton, took on the figure of Woman according to the patriarchy: an enemy in life, a friend in putrefaction.

## Chapter 35: The Fraticelles

The name “Fraticelles” (from the Italian *fraticelli*, sometimes translated in French as *frérots* [“kid brothers”]) designated the radical dissidents of the “Spiritual” faction that, in the Franciscan order, were opposed to the “Conventual” or orthodox wing: they adhered to the strict vocation of poverty, as prescribed by Francis of Assisi.

Although John XXII, in an instance of polemical malignance, applied the term “Fraticelli” to the Spirituals, he never made the mistake of seriously attacking them, though they were blemished with the same spirit of freedom as that possessed by the Beghards, Beguines, Apostolics and Dolcinians.

Respectful of the original directives of Franciscanism, the Spirituals extolled – in addition to absolute poverty and the refusal of all ecclesial property – theses that were more and more embarrassing for the Church, which was engaged in the whirlwind of business affairs and was already provided with the modern financial power that had hardly begun the decline of its political and spiritual authority of the Twentieth Century. Three men took the lead in the fight against pontifical politics: Angelo Clareno (Pietro da Fossombrone), Pierre Jean Olivi or Oliveu, and Ubertino of Casale. Angelo Clareno gave an historical account of the conflict in his *History of the Trials and Tribulations*.

According to him, Crescentius [of Jesi] – general of the Order from 1244 to 1248 and successor of Elias of Cortona – showed “the same avidity for wealth and science, the same aversion for the poor convents scattered in solitude, which he changed into sumptuous monasteries; around him, the brothers chased after testaments, summoned their debtors to justice, attached themselves to schools of dialectics, neglected prayer and Scripture in favor of the useless curiosities of Aristotle.”<sup>454</sup> Brother Bonadies, a jurisconsult and the deputy of the general, “drank fraud and lied like water.” He observed with a malevolent eye the growing sect of Spirituals “who (he thought) did not work according to the truth of the Gospel, scorned the rules of the order, believed themselves better than the others, lived in their manner, related everything to the Spirit and even wore cloaks that were too short.”<sup>455</sup>

Innocent IV, then at war with Frederic II, gave Crescentius permission to pursue the dissidents and destroy to the roots “their occasions for schism and

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<sup>454</sup> Clareno, *Historia septem tribulationum* (ALKM).

<sup>455</sup> Cited in Cantu, *L'Italie mystique*, p. 198.

scandal in the order.” The ascension of John of Parma to the head of the order restored power to the Spirituals for a time, but his sympathies for Joachimite theories and the reforms of Segarelli offered their enemies the occasion to amalgamate the austere Spirituals with the “libertarian” party of the Fraticelles.

After exile in Armenia between 1290 and 1293, an autonomous group led by Liberatus (Peter of Macerata) and Angelo Clareno obtained the protection of Pope Celestine V and, in 1294, formed the *Pauperes heremitae domini Caelestini*.<sup>456</sup> In vain, because Celestine’s successor, Boniface VIII, had the greatest interest in the temporal preoccupations of the Church. He condemned the Spirituals, threw into prison the poet Jacopo Benedetti, who – converted to voluntary poverty after the accidental death of his wife (which did not prevent him from comparing women to serpents and Satan) – had joined Angelo Clareno’s friends.

Liberatus and his adepts took refuge in Achaia, then Thessaly. Upon the death of Liberatus, Angelo Clareno became the head of the Spirituals and returned to Italy. One of his partisans, the physician and alchemist Arnaud of Villeneuve, convinced Clement V to reconcile the two rival tendencies.

Ubertino of Casale, the leader of the Spirituals in Tuscany, went to Avignon to confront the leaders of the Conventual faction, Bonagrazia of Bergamo and Raymond of Fronsac. It is not useless to recall that Ubertino estimated it good not to incur any reproach for having guilty sympathies for the Fraticelles, because, as an Inquisitor, he had cracked down on the Franciscan partisans of the Free Spirit in the Spoleto region. Arnaud himself did not disdain from anathematizing a doctrine so contrary to religion. The conciliation ran aground because the Conventuals did not know at what point the progress of the economy strengthened the power of the Roman Church and its then-uncertain control over nations and principalities.

The ascension of John of Cahors, a formidable businessman, to the pontificate under the name John XXII gave the signal for the repression to begin. The same reprobation fell upon the Spirituals, Fraticelles, Dolcinians, Beghards and partisans of the Free Spirit, who Clement V had condemned at the Council of Vienna in 1311.

The Pope ordered the sovereigns among whom the Spirituals had sought refuge to expel them as heretics. The bull *Sancta romana* attributed the official denomination “Fraticelles” to them for the first time.

Arrested in Avignon and then freed, Angelo Clareno precipitously left for Italy, where, in 1318, he began rallying partisans to the thesis that Christ and his disciples possessed nothing. In 1322, at the Chapter of Perugia, he obtained important support in the person of Michael of Cesena, the general minister of the

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<sup>456</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “The Poor Hermits of Lord Celestine.”

Franciscan order, who held the absolute destitution of Jesus and the apostles to be “holy and Catholic” dogma. (Note that to combat the thesis of the Spirituals by the use of iconographic propaganda, the Church recommended that painters represent Jesus and the apostles carrying purses for the collection of alms.)

This thesis directly challenged the interests of the Church, that tributary of capitalist development that slowly freed itself from the agrarian mode of production. Soon one saw the Joachimite legend return in force, rewritten and adapted for the people of the time. John XXII, leader of the “corporeal Church,” was stigmatized as a “mystical Antichrist.”

This Antichrist, scorning the reformers and their preoccupation with the sordid aspects of life, retorted with a very shrewd maneuver.

While Francis of Assisi had prescribed that Holy See hold on to all of the order’s property, the Pope decided to transfer it [back] to the Franciscans, entrusting them with a responsibility that also transformed them into property owners whether they liked it or not. At the same time, his Bull dated 12 November 1323, *Cum inter nonnullos*, condemned as heretical the theses of Michael of Cesena, who quickly took refuge with his friends under the auspices of Emperor Louis of Bavaria.

Angelo Clareno went into exile in Basilicata, where he continued to lead his party until his death in 1337.

The Spirituals remained active in the region of Naples, in Sicily (to which the Tuscan group of Henry of Ceva withdrew) and in Tabriz, Armenia.

It was among the [Spiritual] adepts of Monte Maiella that the Roman tribune Cola di Rienzi was welcomed after his first failure.

In the eyes of the Church, there no longer existed a single Franciscanism, that of the “Observants.” The dissidents fell under the inquisitorial label “Fratricelles of Opinion,” with “opinion” designating adherence to the theses of voluntary poverty.

## **Bernard Délicieux**

On 7 May 1318, the first victims of Franciscan orthodoxy perished on the pyres of Marseille. That same year, the Inquisition condemned to perpetual prison one of the rare, if not the only public and openly declared adversary of the Catholic and Roman police.

Born in Montpellier in 1260 and entered into the Franciscan order in 1284, Bernard Délicieux soon became the spokesman of the populations of Toulouse, Carcassonne and Razes, indignant about the machinations of the Inquisition and the barbarity of the Dominicans. In Carcassonne he led a riot that seized the citadel and freed the heretics held in the official “wall” or “prison.”

It was part of his intentions to appeal to the justice of the King of France, more generous in matters of faith but, implicated in a conspiracy (his involvement was real or faked in the hope of bringing him down), he drew upon himself the displeasure of Philippe the Beautiful. The King had the consuls of Carcassonne, Limoux and Razes hanged; his despotic nature did not support the politics of communal autonomy. Reprieved in 1307, Bernard fell into the net patiently woven by inquisitorial vindictiveness in 1313. He was accused of having attempted to poison the Pope with the complicity of Arnaud of Villeneuve. The crudeness of the accusation caused some hesitation; he only escaped the pyre by dying in 1320, after two years of incarceration in the jail of God's executioners, whose infamy he had denounced. It was only in the Sixteenth Century, with the appearance of Sebastian Castellion, that a second voice in the world concert demanded the abrogation of the death penalty for crimes of belief.

### **Prous Boneta**

In 1325, the Inquisition seized Prous Boneta, venerated by the Spirituals for her courage and humanity. Imprisoned in 1315 in Montpellier, she resolved – soon after being freed – to give her help to the persecuted Spirituals with her sister Alisette.

In 1320, Prous had been gripped by visions, similar to those of Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Teresa of Avila. Later, she had an ecstatic encounter with Christ. On Maundy Thursday in 1321, he had breathed his *pneuma* into her and promised her that she would give birth to the Holy Spirit that would inaugurate the Third Age. According to her own version of Joachimism, Elias was Francis of Assisi and Enoch was Olivi.

The power given to Christ by God ended from the moment that Olivi was invested with the Holy Spirit: the papacy would soon after cease to exist, and the sacraments and confession would fall into desuetude. Thenceforth, contrition effaced sin, without the need for either penitence or priests.

Rising up against the massacre of the Spirituals and the lepers, unjustly accused of poisoning water sources in 1321 and 1322, and whom she compared to the Innocents (the presumed victims of Herod), Prous Boneta offered all the traits of a perfect victim to the eyes of the Inquisitor of Carcassonne, Henry of Chamay. She did not repudiate any of her convictions in front of the tribunal and was delivered to the flames in 1325.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> H. C. Lea, *Histoire de l'Inquisition au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1900, p. 49.



In Avignon, the celebrated troubadour Raimon of Cornet barely escaped the pyre in 1326. Jean de la Rochetaillade (Juan de Peratallada, better known to the alchemists as Rupescissa) was spared such a fate by justice. Professing Joachimite opinions, this friend of Arnaud of Villeneuve and the Spirituals compared the Church to a bird that is born without feathers and strips the plumage from all others so as to adorn itself through pride and tyranny.

While the trials of the Spirituals multiplied in number, Free Spirit and libertarian compartments were more and more often incriminated. Most often this meant the ordinary calumnies by which popes, ecclesiastic dignitaries and inquisitors imputed their own debauchery and erotic fantasies to poor ascetics. The Spirituals had always fought the Fraticelles, and nothing permits one to suspect that the martyrs of Franciscan rigor – such as Francesco of Pistoia, burned in Venice in 1337, John of Castillon and Francois of Arquata, executed in Avignon in 1354, and Michel Perti, reduced to cinders in Florence in 1389 – took libidinous liberties.

In 1341, John XXII definitively confirmed the dissolution of the dissident group, doomed thereafter to extermination. Due to one of the aftershocks that often bring people permeated by infamy to their downfall, this Pope, who was sensitive to the odor of burning fagots – he had the Bishop of Cahors (his own home town) skinned alive and burned – , suddenly reiterated the doctrine of Pelagius on the innocence of newborns and the uselessness of baptizing them. A council instructed him to keep silent concerning a matter that was so profitable for the Church's interests, which he had always defended vehemently. Scared to hear from his mouth such manifestly heretical remarks, the council's fathers deposed him and discretely put him to death.

### **Bentivenga da Gubbio**

It fell to the members of the Franciscan Observance – an order that, from its beginning, was invested with inquisitorial missions, since the Franciscans were reputed to act with less ferocity than the Dominicans – to impose a final solution to what John XXII called the “pestilential plague of Fraticellianism.”

Unlike the Spirituals who had broken with the practice of asceticism, the Fraticelles were most often confused with the Beghards and the Apostolics of Free Spirit. Such was the case with Bentivenga da Gubbio.

In Parma, Bentivenga adhered to the apostolic group of Gerard Segarelli until the Episcopal prohibition of 1281, which forced the adepts to disperse. He then joined the Minorites (the “minor brothers” or Franciscans) and, in Umbria, rallied the partisans of Free Spirit, who seemed to be numerous in the region. Before his arrival, in Spoleto, there was grouped around a certain Ottonello

a *Congregatio Libertatis*<sup>458</sup> that was combated by Giacomo da Bevagna, whom Clare of Montefalco would much later suspect of [having a] free spirit. Ottonello's influence was such that the Flagellants passing through the valley abandoned their procession to discover the effects of pleasure freed from suffering.

Conceit incited Bentivenga to expound his theories to Clare of Montefalco, then sanctified. She delivered him to the Inquisition with six other Minorites. Ubertino of Casale, part of the Spiritual current, had already taken him to task in his *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*.<sup>459</sup> He had reproached him for ideas “inspired by the Devil to corrupt the spirits of the simple people.” He summarized those ideas in this way:

“1. Apathy: an impious fraud has appeared, inspired by the Enemy, which corrupts the spirits of the simple people, according to which they must – under the pretext of serenity in the will of God – remain as insensitive to the Passion of Christ as to the suffering of anyone else, and to rejoice only in the pleasure of God, without caring if one offends God or bothers anyone else. And they say, ‘God guides all towards the best choices.’

“2. Impeccability: they say that men who have the grace of God and charity cannot sin. They affirm that those who sin in some fashion have never had charity or the grace of God.

“3. From the very true principle of the death of the Son – we can do nothing good without grace – they infer that, whatever we do, it is done through grace. For this reason, they say that eating and making love and other, similar things are not due to faults in us, because grace – they are assured – incites us to do these things.”<sup>460</sup>

In the summer of 1307, Bentivenga was condemned to life in prison in Florence.

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<sup>458</sup> *Translation*: Latin for “Congregation of Liberty” or a “Free Congregation.”

<sup>459</sup> *Translation*: Latin for “The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus.”

<sup>460</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, *op. cit.* [Translator: cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free-Spirit* (New York: Zone Books, 1986), p. 128.]

## Paolo Zoppo

In Rieti in 1334, the Inquisitor Simone da Spoleto began a legal proceeding against a group of Fraticelles united around Paolo Zoppo. Robert of Arbrissel called the test that consisted in sleeping nude between two nude women and triumphing over the desire to make love the “white martyrdom.” With a widow and her servant, Zoppo practiced a style of caress in which delays imposed upon the “*amor extaticus*”<sup>461</sup> were related to the tantric method of illumination obtained through sexual tension. The *Homines Intelligentiae*<sup>462</sup> in Brussels and the *Alumbrados* or “Illuminati” of Spain practiced the same [method of] delayed pleasure. Paolo Zoppo and his companions paid with life-long imprisonment for wanting to substitute the refinement of amorous pleasure and the celebration of women, creators of all joy, for the ordinary, cunning and brutal debauchery of the convents.<sup>463</sup>

At the time of the trial in Rieti, it appeared that the Fraticelles envisioned electing a Pope who would be opposed to the “Antichrist John XXII.” According to François Vanni of Assisi, Angelo Clareno himself recommended giving the pontificate to Philippe of Majorca.

In 1419, the Inquisitor Manfred of Vercelli reported that the “Fraticelles of Opinion” – particularly numerous in Florence, Tuscany and the region around Rome – refused to submit to Martin V because they had their own pope. In 1451, when Nicolas V tasked the Inquisition with proceeding against the Fraticelles who had taken refuge in Athens, he specially recommended the capture of their pope.

## The Extermination Trial of the Fraticelles

Tasked by Martin V in 1418 and 1426, and by Eugene IV in 1432, with pitilessly pursuing the Fraticelles, James of the Marches and John of Capistrano – both honored with the title of saint for their good inquisitorial services – burned thirty-six rebel residences and increased the number of book-burnings. The hatred

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<sup>461</sup> *Translation:* Latin for “ecstatic love.”

<sup>462</sup> *Translation:* Latin for “Men of Intelligence.” See Chapter 37 of the present work.

<sup>463</sup> F. Ehrle, *Die Spiritualen, ihr Verhaltnis zum Franziskanerorde und ze den Fraticelle*, ALKG IV, 1888, pp. 78 sq.; L. Fumi, *Bolletino di storia patria per l’Umbria*, V, 1899, pp. 349-382.

that they aroused in the people was such that they had to ceaselessly protect themselves against assassination attempts.

In 1449, new pyres were lit in Florence. In 1452, the same year in which Jerome Savonarola was born, James of the Marches published his *Dialogue Against the Fraticelles*, in which he recounted the extermination-trial at Maiolati.<sup>464</sup>

There had been a community of Fraticelles of Free Spirit in Maiolati ever since 1410 or 1420. A bell at the church carried this inscription, which was dated 1429: “Brother Gabriel, Bishop of the Church of Philadelphia, parish priest and general minister of the minor brothers.” (Note that, a century earlier, a friend of Marguerite [Porete] had called himself the angel of Philadelphia.)<sup>465</sup>

The minutes of the trial were inspired by the accusations that Epiphanius [of Salamis] had once made against the Barbelites (the Inquisitors also used them without scruple against the Waldensinians and the Cathars): men and women were meeting at night, chanting hymns,

“[and] extinguishing the candles and rushing to each other according to chance. The children issued from such commerce were brought before the assembly; they were passed hand-to-hand in a round until they died. The one in whose hands they died was elected the great pontiff. They burned one of the babies and threw the cinders in a vessel [*a barrel*] into which they poured wine; they made those initiated into their brotherhood drink from it. They fought against the ownership of goods and believed that the faithful need not to engage with any magistrates and that the souls of the fortunate would only see God after the resurrection.”<sup>466</sup>

Thus did Pierre Bayle recount the trial in his *Dictionary*. As was his custom, he relayed the arguments of the prosecution and defense. He did not believe in [the existence of] a practice that was often used to justify the cruelest repressions and that the Inquisitors called the “*barilotto*.”<sup>467</sup> The propaganda that was skillfully

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<sup>464</sup> *Translator*: on 1 June 1428, Martin V ordered the Bishop of Ancona to strictly enforce his rulings against the Fraticelles in Maiolati, where all the suspects were tortured on the rack and their village was destroyed.

<sup>465</sup> *Translator*: in an instance of what can only be called bad editing, this remark repeats a point that had already been made in Chapter 33 of the present work.

<sup>466</sup> P. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, “Fraticelli.”

<sup>467</sup> *Translator*: Italian for “keg or barrel.”

conducted to bring the discredit of pious souls upon the unfortunate Fraticelles exercised its ravages upon public opinion with a durable effect, since, for a long time afterward, popular language preserved the insulting expression “*Tu sei nato dal barilotto*” (“You were born from a barrel”).

For all that, Bayle estimated that there was a strong probability that this Fraticellian community led a joyous life for thirty years, enjoyed a terrestrial existence that was as luxurious and luxuriant as possible, with the approval of the heavens, and in the absence of the guilt that gnawed at the tormented hedonism of the powerful. The rage of the two holy inquisitors was only exacerbated. A great expiatory blaze illuminated the sinister depths of their consciences.<sup>468</sup>

In 1466, a group of Fraticelles arrested and tortured in Assisi confirmed – upon the insistence of the inquisitors – the use of *barilotti* in Poli, which was near Tivoli, in the Marche, and in Maiolati. This sect, known under the name “The Truth,” which had anachronistically Freemasonic connotations, distributed pamphlets in which the ideas of the Free Spirit were expounded.<sup>469</sup>

As among the Beghards of Cologne, the solicitation to love was expressed by the formula “*Fac mihi caritatem*” (“Give me charity”), with *caritas* here returning to its original meaning of “love of one’s fellow man,” *carus*, “beloved.”

The Fraticelles then disappeared from the Inquisition’s registers, but a popular fable has it that, entrenched in the deep valleys and forests, they continued fantastical convents that haunted the tormented imaginations of the readers of de Sade, Lewis, Ann Radcliff, Walpole and the gothic novel.

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<sup>468</sup> Oliger, *op. cit.*; Guarnieri, p. 476; Ehrle, *op. cit.*, p. 78 and *sq.*

<sup>469</sup> F. Ehrle, *op. cit.*, pp. 127, 137 and 180.

## **Chapter 36: The Eastern Reformers: The Hussites and Taborites**

Rome discovered in Bohemia a source of considerable riches. Half the land belonged to the clergy, which – exploiting it in the name of Christ – aroused a popular hatred more lively than anywhere else, if that was possible.

In Prague in 1360, the ascetic reformer Jan Milič denounced the corruption of the Church, the veritable incarnation of the Antichrist, and vainly exhorted the priests to the voluntary poverty characterized as evangelic.

Upon the death of Milič, his disciple, Matthew of Janov, pursued his reforms. He opposed the “body of the Antichrist,” served up in the form of the Host during the communion of the corrupted Church, with the Eucharist of the *Ekklesia*, the true Church of the faithful. The commensality of bread and wine, which Janov opposed to the abstract and mechanical ritual of clerical communion, explained the exacerbation of the Eucharistic quarrels in Bohemia during the Hussite, Taborite and Adamitic wars. (Note that the communion that used two items was begun as a symbol that was hostile to Catholicism, in which one communed with a single one.)

Around 1380, the reformist doctrines of Wycliffe – in favor of which the sly hostility of England with respect to Roman power worked – began to spread.

John Huss, an admirer of Wycliffe, suddenly brought to his preaching a universal turn towards critiques that until then had been kept within the limits of nationalist claims. The prestige attached to his function as Rector of the University of Prague conferred upon his voice an import that made it resound everywhere in Europe. He proved it when John XXII summoned to Prague the emissaries charged with preaching a crusade against his personal enemy, the King of Naples, and collected the funds necessary for the enterprise through a promotional sale of indulgences. In the name of the sacred Scriptures, Huss rose up against the cynicism of this Pope and condemned an attitude unworthy of Christian teachings.

Huss was neither a heretic nor a revolutionary. He simply pushed honesty to the point of imprudence when he denounced the economic and financial politics of the Church. His presumption incited him to bet upon King Wenceslas, who was favorable to him, but whose more powerful interests diverted him from Huss' fate.

Excommunicated and summoned to the Council of Constance in 1414, Huss went there accompanied by his disciple, Jerome of Prague, and fortified by the safe-conduct guaranteed him by Emperor Sigismund. Huss defended his thesis in front of the Council: the Christ was the leader of the Church, not the Pope. The

council decided in his favor on one point: it deposed Pope John XXIII for simony, murder, sodomy and fornication – complaints that, all things considered, could have been made against the majority of the pontifical sovereigns.<sup>470</sup> (Note that, in the Twentieth Century, in order to efface the memory of a Pope who did not count among the worst, another one was given the title “John XXIII.”)

On the other hand, the ecclesiastic dignitaries did not let themselves be stripped of their lucrative apostolic functions. Led by the French Cardinal, Pierre d’Ailly (a convinced millenarian who remained attentive to his immediate interests), the Council Fathers excommunicated John and Jerome, and delivered them to the pyre in 1415. Emperor Sigismund, who had counseled Huss to retract his statements, hardly wanted the creation of an independent Bohemia, the demands for which he perceived underneath the theological arguments. This was a bad calculation, because the executions of Huss and Jerome precipitated insurrection.

While King Wenceslas broke with the Hussites on the insistence of Pope Martin V and his brother, Emperor Sigismund, the Church of Bohemia passed to secular control and was snatched up by Roman domination.

In July 1418, when Wenceslas excluded from the government of Prague the representatives of the working-class neighborhood of New Town, weavers, stone carvers, brewers and peasants seized City Hall and defenestrated the new councilors. Under the pretext of hunting down the patrician families hostile to John Huss, the uprising well and truly made itself a part of the tradition of communalist class struggles.

The guilds and artisanal confederations expelled the Catholics, expropriated the monasteries and confiscated the ecclesiastic riches to the profit of insurgent Prague. Very quickly, a gap grew between proletarian radicalism and the notables who had hastily converted to Hussism. A moderate party emerged, which, close to the Catholics, nevertheless distinguished itself by communing through bread *and* wine, that is to say, with two items. Its members adopted the name Utraquists.

In 1419, the radical wing of the Hussite movement organized itself on a resolutely autonomous basis. Located on a hill near the Castle of Bechyně, a group of partisans renamed the hill by using the appellation that the canonical *Gospel attributed to Matthew* had brought to eminence by proclaiming that it was the place

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<sup>470</sup> J. Delumeau, *op. cit.*, p. 371. [*Translator*: The original German title of Luther’s pamphlet was *Das Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*. It has been translated into English by Walter I. Brandt as “That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,” *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962).]

where Jesus had announced his return before being elevated to heaven: Mount Tabor.

The Taborites accorded to each person the right to interpret the Scriptures. They rejected purgatory, prayers for the dead, and the cults of the saints and the relics. Like the Waldensians, they refused to take oaths and were against the death penalty. Once more there intermixed (in favor of working-class demands) the themes of voluntary poverty, egalitarian millenarianism and, in an antagonistic manner, the thrust of the Free Spirit and the weight of extremist fanaticism.

In 1420, the news that the fire of God was going to descend upon the towns and villages started a great exodus towards the mountains, where five Taborite cities were erected under divine protection, because “they would not deal with the Antichrist.”<sup>471</sup>

To justify the massacre of sinners, the preacher Jan Capek based himself on citations from the Old Testament: “Cursed is the man who restrains his sword from spilling the blood of the enemies of the Christ. Each believer must wash his hands in blood.”<sup>472</sup> Some people, such as Petr Chelčický, faithful to the principle of pacificism, reacted against the hysteria of such remarks and denounced the ruse of Satan, who was clever to suggest to the furious that they were angels tasked with purifying the world.

In March 1420, the truce between Sigismund and the moderate Hussites gave way to a merciless war in which the personality of the Chief Taborite, Jan Žižka, imposed itself. By crushing the German and Hungarian troops, whose swords [supposedly] had the benediction of Rome, Žižka haloed himself with a prophetic glory. It fell to him to instaurate the millennium and to prepare, through the kingdom of the saints, the return of Christ to earth. The social program had hardly changed: “All men will live together like brothers, none will be subjected to another.”<sup>473</sup> “All the lords, all the nobles and all the knights will be executed and exterminated in the forests as outlaws.”<sup>474</sup> As often happened, the first victims of the purge were not exterior enemies but the radical wing of the Taborites, the “Pikarti,” who were decimated by Žižka in the name of holy morality.

The collectivization of subsistence instaurated in the Taborite communities did not bother with organizing the production of goods, and so the Taborites were soon reduced to pillaging and raids for their supplies. The plundering of the

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., p. 232. [Translator: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 225.]

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> H. Kaminisky *The Free Spirit in the Hussite Revolution*, The Hague, 1962, p. 47.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 48.



nobility and the clergy was followed by the exploitation of the peasants, who found themselves in a worse situation than they did under the regime of the lords.

In April 1421, Žižka annihilated the libertarian communities formed by the Pikarti and the Adamites. Nevertheless, their protests for egalitarianism did not cease to spread, and fomented peasant revolts in Bourgogne and Germany, where the peasants' war became endemic.

In 1430, the Taborite armies attacked Leipzig, Bamberg and Nuremberg. Their victories provoked uprisings against the patricians in Mainz, Constance, Weimar and Stettin. Nevertheless, the moderate wing – the Ultraquists – seceded and soon passed over to the enemy. In 1434, at Liban, the Ultraquists of Bohemia defeated the Taborites. This was the beginning of a slow debacle that came to an end with the seizure of Mount Tabor in 1452. The majority of the survivors of the general massacre returned to peaceful ways and founded the community of the Moravian Brothers. For all that, the Taborite doctrine did not cease to propagate itself and continued to keep alive, in the towns and countryside, the flame of freedom that found a decrepit world to set on fire.

Around 1460, when Bohemia had just emerged from a long civil war, two nobles demonstrated the point at which the expectation of the millennium remained alive. Besides the usual chronological calculations of the *parousia* [the Second Coming], Janko and Livin von Wirsberg expounded an original conception of God's relations with the world that he created. Through his imminent return, the Son of Man prepared to save not only humanity but God himself, crippled since the beginning of time by the sins of mankind. It was to be delivered from his own suffering that God appealed to the Savior. The idea of a divinity that is nothing without the men who created him thus pursued its course.

How was this new reign, destined to restore God to his power, to begin? With the extermination of the armed forces of the Antichrist: the pope and his ministers, followed by all adversaries. Only 14,000 people would survive to found the Spiritual Church. The "sword" of this crusade would be formed by the former Taborites, generally regrouped into bands of brigands. After the disaster at Munster, Jan van Batenburg did not act otherwise.

Centered in Eger, this movement even exercised influence on the Fraticelles of Italy. The year 1467, predicted as the return of the Christ in bloody majesty, incited the legate of the Pope to act with determination. Janko escaped the repression; Livin abjured in order to escape the pyre and died in the prison of the archbishop, in Ratisbonne.

## Chapter 37: The Men of Intelligence and the Pikarti of Bohemia

On 12 June 1411, Willem van Hildernissem of the Carmelite Order was called before the Inquisitor Henry of Celles, who was acting on the behalf of the Episcopal tribunal of Cambrai. Willem van Hildernissem was accused of playing an important role in a Free Spirit group known to Brussels under the name “the Men of Intelligence” [*Homines Intelligentiae*]. Formerly a reader of Holy Scriptures at the Carmel of Tienen, he found an inspired ally in Gilles of Canter (Gilles the Cantor, Aegidius Cantor), a sexagenarian layman (probably the son of a noble family) who was dead by the time of the trial.

Everything seems to indicate that they shared an interest in the theories of Bloermardinne, whose memory remained more vivid than any Inquisitor dared to imagine. Consequently, Henry of Celles – attached to the Abbey of Groenendael where Ruysbroeck, the enemy of Bloermardinne, died in 1381 – barely escaped a premeditated assassination attempt by the partisans of the *Homines Intelligentiae* at a ford crossing. Since he was not killed, a song ridiculing him circulated in Brussels.

The support that the group received from both the working class and the notables (their meetings were held in a tower owned by an alderman) was not irrelevant to the leniency of the judgment against them. After three years in prison, Willem was allowed out, perhaps due to a conciliation in which he adjured and rejected the most subversive part of Gilles’ doctrine.

The Joachimite connotation was immediately clear from the very name of the sect. The Third Age was to be that of the natural intelligence of beings and things, a “erudite ignorance” in which the innocence of the child and the knowledge of the total man was joined – a union of *gnosis* and *pistis*, with *pistis* not meaning faith in God but faith in oneself. Gilles of Canter had said that one day the Holy Spirit inspired him and said to him: “You have arrived at the stage of a child of three years.”

In the original, natural state of freedom, there was neither sin nor guilt, neither spiritual nor temporal authority. The Church, the laws and the sacraments had no meaning; neither did penitence and redemption. The only important thing was the path to perfection on which amorous ecstasy translated the state of perfect humanity (“divinity” in religious language). The adepts of Gilles and Willem thus traveled along – if they desired to – an initiatory road marked by the diverse degrees of amorous pleasure, but each person was free to remain chaste or to give him- or herself up to libertinage.

Well versed in the Holy Scriptures, Willem van Hildernissem was able to justify any behavior with appropriate quotations, because everything was desired by God.

In the “paradise” in which the sectarians united without distinctions based on class or wealth, Gilles of Canter taught a way of making love “that was the one of Adam [and Eve] before the Fall.” This was probably a [form of] delayed orgasm, without ejaculation, ending up in tantric illumination and the removal of the fear of possible pregnancy for the women.

The absence of fear and guilt, allied with an art of enjoyment [*un art de jouir*] that was authorized in the most voluptuous quests in all domains, easily induced the idea in the minds of the adepts that they belonged to an elite, without common measure to the mass of contemporaries leading absurd and frightened lives under the shepherd’s crooks of the lords and the priests.

The prudence employed during their trial, and the laughable severity [the lightness] of the judgment [against them], suggested the skillfulness of the adepts in propagating their doctrines in complete safety: they enjoyed great favor in the urban areas and the protection of the notables. Such were the doctrines that the “Pikarti,” who left Picardy to radicalize the Taborite revolution, attempted to implant in Bohemia.<sup>475</sup>

### **The Pikarti, or the Adamites of Bohemia**

Who were the Pikarti who, around 1418, flocked to Bohemia, where the Taborites had instaurated a kind of peasant collectivism? Contrary to the opinion that sees in the word *Pikarti* a translation of *bagardi*,<sup>476</sup> Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini<sup>477</sup> gave it the meaning “Picard, originally from Belgian Gaul.”<sup>478</sup> The Free Spirit doctrine that they propagated suggested a close relationship with the *Homines Intelligentiae*, whose community in Brussels had been prosecuted by the Inquisition.

In the manner of the Anabaptists tramping towards Munster a century later, the Pikarti converged on Bohemia, where the Hussite insurrection sent out glimmers of freedom and gave glimpses of an opportunity for an existence in accordance with the teachings of Willem van Hildernissem and Gilles of Canter.

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<sup>475</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, *op. cit.*, p. 180 and *sq.* [Translator: see Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 192-195.]

<sup>476</sup> Translator: Latin for “Beghards.”

<sup>477</sup> Translator: Pope Pius II.

<sup>478</sup> L. de Brezová, *De Gestis*, Prague, 1893, p. 431.

The Picardian doctrine especially took hold in the regions that were badly controlled by the Taborites, such as Žatec, Plzen and Prague. It showed through in a watered-down form in the closed field of the theological quarrels that surrounded Sigmund of Repan and especially Martin Huska, called “Loquis,”<sup>479</sup> who preached a kind of Dolcinianism that evoked the end of time and the reign of the saints. In the fashion of the times, Huska announced “a new kingdom of the saints on earth, where the good will no longer suffer,” because, he said, “if the Christians must always suffer in this way, I would not want to be a servant of God.”<sup>480</sup>

In February 1421, the chronicler Laurent of Brezová denounced the progression of the Free Spirit among the Taborites: “Because of this heresy, alas! The brothers living in Tabor have split into two factions, one Picard[ian], the other Taborite. The most faithful party, the Taborites, expelled more than two hundred men and women who were infected by the Picard[ian] heresy.”<sup>481</sup>

In the Eighteenth Century, [Isaac de] Beausobre would attribute to the Pikarti the name “Adamites,” due to the Edenic innocence that they claimed for themselves. According to Laurent of Brezová: “Traveling through forests and over hills, several of them fell into such madness that men and women disencumbered themselves of their clothes and went around nude, saying that clothing had been adopted because of the sins committed by the first parents, but they were in a state of innocence. Through a similar madness, they imagined that they did not sin if one of the brothers had commerce with one of the sisters. And, if the woman gave birth, she would say that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. (Baptism was not practiced because) children of parents living in holiness (that is to say, the members of the community) were conceived without the original, mortal sin (...). They prayed to God whom they possessed inside them by saying: [‘]Our Father who is inside us . . . [’]”<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Speaker” or “he who speaks.”

<sup>480</sup> *Translator*: *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 193, which via a footnote refers the reader to Karl Adolph Constantin Hofler, “Geschichteschreiber der husitischen Bewegung in Boehmen,” in *Fontes rerum austracarum* (Vienna, 1856-66), sec. 1, vols. 2, 5 and 7.

<sup>481</sup> L. de Brezová, *De Gestis*, *op. cit.* [*Translator*: *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 193, which via a footnote refers to Lawrence of Brezová, “De gestis et variis accidentibus regni Boemiae,” in *Fontes rerum bohemicarum* (Prague, 1893), p. 431.]

<sup>482</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit*, *op. cit.*, p. 186 and *sq.* [*Translator*: see *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 193-194, which via a footnote refers to Brezová, “De gestis,” pp. 475, 495 and 517.]

Aloof from Picardian radicalization, Martin Huska remained loyal to the apostolic tradition and was inspired by more moderate demands that would inaugurate a religious modernism in matters of the Eucharist.

The autonomy of the Picardian community would last two months, from December 1420 to January 1421. Its spokesperson, Peter Kanis, seconded by men and women of the people such as Rohan the Blacksmith, Nicolas (also known as Moses), Adam, and Mary, preached in the taverns and celebrated the free weddings based on love that the clergy and the Taborites called fornication or sexual license.

Soon enough, the persecutions of the Pikarti began. Nicolas of Pelhřimov published a treatise against Kanis as a prelude to the attack that, around mid-April, military chief Jan Žižka launched against those expelled from [Mount] Tabor. Fifty prisoners, including Peter Kanis, were burned at Klokoty.

The survivors then organized their resistance under the leadership of Rohan the Blacksmith. On 20 April, after violent fighting, Žižka crushed the Pikarti and sent twenty-five prisoners to the pyre. Others were executed in Prague.

On 21 October 1421, the partisans of Kanis, who had taken refuge in a forest outside of Bernatrice, succumbed and were exterminated, except for a single person who was spared so that he could give a report on the Picardian doctrine. Before fleeing to the south, a small number of Adamites occupied the fortress of Ostrov for a while by conducting subsistence raids against the villages, which gave them a reputation for brigandage.

The terror by which Žižka's Taborites exonerated themselves from their own difficulties made an expiatory victim of Martin Huska. Although Huska was no longer in solidarity with the Pikarti and had abjured, Žižka vowed that he would be burned in Prague, along with his friend Procope the One-Eyed. Frightened by the troubles in the capital, where Huska enjoyed great sympathy, the magistrates preferred to send their executioners to Rudnice. Huska and Procope were put to death there in a refinement of the tortures that the Inquisition envied in the justice meted out by the Taborite heretics, who were inspired, it is true, by the very same God.

## **Chapter 38:** **The Victory of the Reformers and the Birth of the Protestant Churches**

That which is called the Reformation and saw the emergence of schismatic Churches around Martin Luther and Johannes Calvin did not add any fundamental novelty to the program of the reformers who, from the Eleventh Century on, fought against the temporal interests of the clergy and Rome. Commonly accepted among historians, the idea that Catholicism had had control over the people of Europe was contradicted from the moment [and there were, as we have seen, many such moments] that one distanced oneself from the power of the laws imposed by the princes and the ecclesiastic hierarchy, with its grid of parishes, confessors, priests, inquisitors and preachers who propagated guilt, horror of sexuality, the Satanism of women, the omnipresent image of death and a Hell directly inspired by the services of penal justice.

The fear of and hatred and scorn for the Constantinian Church never ceased to animate the most diverse classes of society. Indifference and irreligion reigned in the disadvantaged milieus, while the cynicism of false piety served the beggars and solicitors. Only the aspiration for a pre-Constantinian Christianity – ascetic, altruistic, loyal to voluntary poverty, inclined towards martyrdom, anti-clerical and theocratic – brought a religious coloration to the collectivist nostalgias from the Fourth to the Sixteenth Centuries. Each time that Christianity manifested itself, the Catholic Church persecuted it (with the exception of a brief period in the Eleventh Century).

Attentive to the temporal prerogatives that, through enrichment, conferred upon it a considerable power, the Catholic Church was more and more distanced from the *Ekklesia*, the spiritual communities of the faithful, which pinned their hopes on the Waldensians, the adepts of voluntary poverty, Wycliffe's Lollards, the Hussites, the Taborites and a crowd of agitators whose project to abolish tithes guaranteed [a certain amount of] success.

In the Church itself, voices were raised to clamor for new accords between the interests of God and the financial interests of a “multinational” that claimed to be descended from the Zealot Simon, metamorphosed into Saint Peter.

“Our greasy canons believe themselves freed from God if they sing in a clear voice, in the choir, a hallelujah or a response; then they to return to their homes to entertain themselves and have supper with their wandering minstrels and

jugglers.”<sup>483</sup> This diatribe was not written by Savonarola, nor by Luther, but by Anthony of Padua (1195-1231), an orthodox spirit but aware of the split between the faith of the poor and the Church of the rich that, through its carelessness, discouraged the resignation of the disadvantaged, who were quite flabbergasted by “living like Christ did.”

Neither Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola, Luther nor Calvin pursued aims that were revolutionary, schismatic or hostile to Catholicism. Their designs placed them in the political line of Gregory IX when he took the side of Ramihrdus against the high clergy.

The development of the economic process gave Luther and Calvin a weapon that was finally capable of breaking the spiritual monopoly that the cynicism of the pontifical bureaucracy had discredited through the scandal of the market in indulgences and the priority given to business affairs. The expansion of commerce, the growing independence of the banks and the preindustrial artisanal enterprises established a state of mind that was favorable to the new reformers. The separation from Rome did not simply signify the end of an odious hierarchy that intermixed faith and financial interests; it implied the ideas that belief properly belonged to the individual in his or her relationship with God and that the management of capital constituted a domain separate from religion, [but] governed by the imperatives of Christian morality. The rigorous obedience to God of a Calvinist businessman was in accord with the intransigent search for profit, because – banishing the crazy expenditures of hedonism – it underwrote an ascetic morality that was in conformity with the Christian institution. As Max Weber has shown, Protestantism discovered in the austerity of accumulation and the reproduction of capital a Puritanism that inspired the “free” relationship between the sinner and the tutelary God who kept watch over the rate of profit. While Rome had looted [*pille*] and squandered [*gaspille*], the reformers economized and invested.

The concern with rendering moral the morals of the clergy intervened too late to dam up the pious ethics of the reformers. The Council of Trento ran aground in its attempt to restore the authority of Catholicism in the northern regions, the cradle of the industrial revolution and the first bourgeois, parliamentary and democratic regimes.

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<sup>483</sup> [Emile Gebhart,] *L'Italie mystique*, p. 156.

## Two Agitators at the Dawn of the Reformation: Hans Böhm and Girolamo Savonarola

“He was,” Norman Cohn writes, “a shepherd and, in his spare time, a popular entertainer, drumming and piping in hostleries and in the market-place – whence the nickname, by which he is still known, of Drummer (or Piper) of Niklashausen.”<sup>484</sup>

Through an ordinary irony of history, Hans [Böhm] heard the Italian Franciscan John of Capistrano, not as a pitiless inquisitor, the author of the massacre of the Fraticelles in Maiolati, but as a brother extolling repentance and the rejection of luxury in Germany thirty years previously. Since John of Capistrano had invited his listeners to take part in the bonfire of the vanities, in which the people set aside their beautiful clothes, their games of dice and cards, and their objects of pure enjoyment, on the day of Lent, this shepherd decided to burn his drum in front of the parish-church of Niklashausen and start preaching.

Mary appeared to him and intimated to him the order to propagate the Good Word, so that Niklashausen could be raised to the glory of a terrestrial Jerusalem. In the local church, there was a statue of the Virgin, to which miraculous powers were attributed. The priest of the parish did not give his support to this project, which would have erected Niklashausen, not Rome, as the place selected by divine providence.

This little shepherd suddenly revealed himself to be endowed with an extraordinary eloquence. He soon inferred from the fascination that he exercised upon the crowds and diverse classes of society that God had endowed him with thaumaturgic powers. He preached the simplicity of morals, which was strong enough to keep any soul out of hell. The bonfire of the vanities was to be followed by violent attacks on the corrupt clergy and the powerful.

He soon incited his listeners to refuse to pay taxes and tithes. And that the priests should abandon their outrageous privileges and content themselves with whatever the people agreed to give them.

The Archbishop of Mainz, who had until then been restricted to a prudent reserve, plotted to put an end to an agitation that had won over a growing number of regions in Germany.

In the words of Norman Cohn:

“In the end Böhm emerged as a social revolutionary, proclaiming the imminence of the egalitarian millennium based on the Law of Nature.

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<sup>484</sup> *Translator*: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 241.



In the coming Kingdom the use of wood, water and pasturage, the right to fish and hunt would be freely enjoyed by all, as they had been in olden times. Tributes of all kinds would be abolished forever. No rent or services would be owed to any lord, no taxes or duties to any prince. Distinctions of rank and status would cease to exist and nobody would have authority over anybody else. All would live together as brothers, everyone enjoying the same liberties and doing the same amount of work as everyone else. 'Princes, ecclesiastical and secular alike, and counts and knights should only possess as much as common folk, then everyone will have enough. The time will have to come when princes and lords will work for their daily bread.' And Böhm extended his attack beyond the local lords and princes to the very summit of society: 'The Emperor is a scoundrel and the Pope is useless. It is the Emperor who gives the princes and counts and knights the right to levy taxes on the common people. Alas, poor devils that you are!'

"No doubt Böhm's teaching appealed in different ways to different sections of the population. The demand for the overthrow of all rulers, great and small, probably appealed particularly to the urban proletariat; we know that the townsfolk did in fact come to Niklashausen, not only from Wurzburg but from all over southern and central Germany. On the other hand, in demanding that wood, water, pasturage, fishing and hunting should be free to all men, Böhm was voicing a very general aspiration of the peasants. The German peasants believed that these rights had in fact been theirs in olden time, until usurped by the nobility; this was one of the wrongs which they were always expecting the future 'Emperor Frederick' to undo. But above all it was the prestige of the preacher himself, as a miraculous being sent by God, which drew the tens of thousands into the Tauber valley. The common people, peasants and artisans alike, saw in him a supernatural protector and leader, such as the 'Emperor Frederick' was to have been: a savior who could bestow on them individually the fullness of Divine Grace and who would lead them individually into an earthly Paradise.

"News of the wonderful happenings at Niklashausen passed rapidly from village to village in the neighborhood and was carried further afield, too, by messengers who went out in all directions. Soon vast hordes of common folk of all ages and both sexes, and including

whole families, were streaming towards Niklashausen. Not only the surrounding country but all parts of southern and central Germany were in commotion, from the Alps to the Rhineland and to Thuringia. Artisans deserted their workshops and peasants their fields, shepherds and shepherdesses abandoned their flocks and hastened – often still in the same clothes and carrying their picks and hammers and scythes – to hear and adore him who was now known as ‘the Holy Youth.’ These people greeted one another only as ‘Brother’ or ‘Sister’ and these greetings acquired the significance of a rallying-cry. Amongst the multitudes of simple, wildly excited folk there circulated fantastic rumors. What the *plebs pauperum* had believed of Jerusalem these believed of Niklashausen. There Paradise had literally descended upon the earth; and infinite riches were lying ready to be gathered by the faithful, who would share them out amongst themselves in brotherly love. Meanwhile the hordes – like the *Pastoureaux* and the Flagellants before them – advanced in long columns, bearing banners and singing songs of their own composition.<sup>485</sup>

Hans Böhm began to preach around 1474. Towards the end of March 1476, the pilgrimages [to hear him] led to retaliatory measures on the part of the large towns. The municipal council of Nuremburg prohibited its inhabitants from going to Niklashausen. Wurzburg closed its doors and armed its militias. On 12 July, the Prince-Bishop sent a squadron of cavalry to the holy city. Arrested, Hans Böhm was incarcerated in Wurzburg, while a peasant, invested in his turn with a prophetic role, incited the people to march upon the Episcopal city, where the walls would fall like those of Jericho. Forty millenarian liberators were killed. Judged hastily, Hans Böhm was sent to the pyre where he died, one says, singing hymns. The offerings deposited by the pilgrims in the church of Niklashausen were confiscated. The Archbishop of Mainz, the Bishop of Wurzburg and the count upon whom the New Jerusalem depended did not disdain from sharing the loot equitably amongst themselves. The cinders of the prophet, dispersed so that no cult could render homage to him, did not fail to put into the air of the time the seeds of a millenarian and reformational resurgence that would break the reins of all-powerful Rome.

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<sup>485</sup> N. Cohn, *Les Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse*, pp. 247-254. [Translator: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 243-245. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, I have quoted directly from the original.]

## Girolamo Savonarola

For Girolamo Savonarola, Joachimite prophecy, voluntary poverty, the asceticism of the Spirituals, and the political calculations of the communalist tribunes formed a conjunction of diverse ambitions that [both] elevated him to power and plotted his downfall.

Born in Ferrara in 1452, he distinguished himself [from the others] in the Order of the Dominicans by his eloquence and his culture. The Prior of the Monastery of Saint Mark in Florence, he soon exercised upon the brilliant court of Lorenzo de' Medici a fascination that increased the appeal of purity, so common in the decline of [enjoyment taken in] guilty pleasures.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, whose philosophical theses were condemned by the Church, discerned an ally in this monk-prophet who, through his diatribes against the *luxuria* and *aviditas*<sup>486</sup> of the Pope and the clergy, added his voice to the popular anger, accumulated over the centuries, about the despotism of Rome.

Savonarola's millenarianism was quite seductive in a time during which reversals of fortune and ordinary misery suggested an imminent apocalypse. Savonarola shared with Dolcino the mistake of giving a too-precise date to his prophecies. He announced terrible misfortunes for Italy. He was believed, because misfortune occurred every day. Death even appeared in the lines of the poems in which Lorenzo celebrated youth and beauty.

Against the vices and tyranny of the papacy, Charles VIII, the King of France, brandished the "scourge of God, the vengeful sword," the new Charlemagne, the new Frederick, the new king of a Third Age. Marsilio Ficino, a scholar who was well versed in Kabala and a friend of literature and pleasure, discerned in the monk [Savonarola] the acrid odor of a rigor as pernicious as the Sadean hedonism of the prelates and aristocrats.

After the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, who, at the end of a dissipated life, had invested Fra Girolamo with the secret hope of redemption, [his son] Piero de' Medici showed greater reserve, nay, even frank hostility to the one who now aspired to rule the lives of the Florentines.

Savonarola's appeals to voluntary poverty, which revived memories of the Fraticelles and the Spirituals, rallied to him the suffrage of the disadvantaged classes. He soon after tipped over into the mystical Puritanism that is shared by of all the [religious] extremisms.

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<sup>486</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "lust" and "greed," respectively.

The flight of Piero, the proclamation of the Florentine Republic in 1494, and the triumphal entry of King Charles VIII into the city granted Savonarola the power of a spiritual and temporal leader.

[The new government of] Florence, promoted as the New Jerusalem, finally marked the beginning of the Third Age, the prelude to the return of Christ to earth and the massive conversion of the Turks and the Jews.

The hysteria inherent in the compulsion for virtue kindled in the town, renowned for the refinement of its arts, purifying flames that one called “pyres of the vanities.” On them were thrown jewels, ornaments, books, paintings, and luxurious clothes.

Sandro Botticelli, the most sensual of the painters, succumbed to this destructive madness, to this rage in which life took revenge upon the scorn that had overwhelmed it by annihilating with a sinister joy all that had made life pleasant. Into this rage was mixed the legitimate resentment of the exploited, on whose backs pressed the weight of luxury, from which the exploited were excluded. Savonarola’s sermons, which both flattered the demands that he could not satisfy and the hatred to which he gave evangelical virtue, alienated him from the aristocracy and the intellectuals little by little, at the same that his promises of a new order remain dead letters politically.

The party of Rome regrouped its partisans. Pope Alexander VI, who was intelligent, brutal and corrupt, excommunicated the monk and prohibited him from preaching. Savonarola ignored him. Arrested in his convent at Saint Mark, tortured, and charged with heresy, which his doctrine did not merit, he was – despite the effervescence of his partisans, the *Piagnomi* (a name that came from the *Piagnone*, which was the bell in the convent of Saint Mark) – hanged and burned with two of his disciples, Domenico da Pescia and Silvestro Maruff, on 23 May 1498.

The program for the renewal of the Church, which Savonarola had folded into the uncertain politics of the city, was expounded by Luther as a protest by all of Christianity against the ignominy of Catholicism, the religion soiled by the unworthiness of its priests. Luther had the prudence to remain in Germany, where the tradition of the emperors and princes who were hostile to Rome made the old principle *cuius regio, eius religio*<sup>487</sup> work in favor of Lutheranism.

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<sup>487</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Whose realm, his religion,” that is to say, the religion of the ruler becomes the religion of those who are ruled.

## From Heresy to the Religion of the State: Luther and Calvin

The Reformation of the Church triumphed with Luther and Calvin, but it triumphed outside of the Church and against it. What victories could those who dreamed of a renewal of faith and the freedom of belief hope to see from the new religions of the State?

Born in 1483, a student, then dismissed from the University of Erfurt in 1505, Luther was ordained a priest in 1507. He attained the position of professor and preacher at the University of Wittenberg due to the sympathies that he aroused in the Prince-Elector of Saxony.

A visit to Rome in 1511 revealed to him the state of cupidity and license that reigned among the prelates and at the pontifical court. Assuredly, he was not the only one, nor the first, to be jealous of the splendor and luxury of the Church, to be indignant about it with great vehemence.

The promotional sale of indulgences, begun by Pope Leon X to finance the building of the Church of Saint Peter, offered Luther an occasion to excite the discontent of the northern towns and the regions heated by the agitation of Böhme and the Taborites, but also the discontent of the German princes, who were traditionally hostile to Rome and were soon thereafter (around 1520) put off by the authoritarianism of the Catholic Emperor Charles V.

The archbishop of Mainz, deputized the Dominican [Johann] Tetzel, a talented preacher who would absolve all sins if his price was paid, to collect funds from the sale of indulgences, which could allow someone “to fornicate with the Virgin Mary herself.”<sup>488</sup>

After Tetzel’s arrival in Wittenberg, a violent polemic opposed him against Luther, who had the double advantage of being there with him and able to express with the colorfulness of popular language opinions that were widely held. With the glibness of a traveling businessman, Tetzel proposed to settle the debate with an ordeal of fire and water: “I mock your jackass braying,” Luther retorted. “In place

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<sup>488</sup> *Translator*: in the priceless words of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1914): “History presents few characters more unfortunate and pathetic than Tetzel. Among his contemporaries the victim of the most corrosive ridicule, every foul charge laid at his door, every blasphemous utterance placed in his mouth, a veritable fiction and fable built about his personality, in modern history held up as the proverbial mountebank and oily harlequin, denied even the support and sympathy of his own allies — Tetzel had to wait the light of modern critical scrutiny, not only for a moral rehabilitation, but also for vindication as a soundly trained theologian and a monk of irreproachable deportment.”

of water, I advise you to use the juice of the trailing vine and, in place of fire, the aroma of a roasted goose.” The rough treatment that the people gave to Tetzel’s emulators alarmed those in Rome responsible for the *marketing*<sup>489</sup> operation founded on the redemption of sin, while the monk of Wittenberg – emboldened by his popularity – summarized in ninety-five articles his theses against the Roman clique. On 31 October 1517, he attached them to the walls of the Church of All Saints. The Cardinal Cajetan, the apostolic nuncio and the ecclesial hierarchy tried and failed to get him to sign a retraction.

In 1520, the Papal Bull *Exsurge* condemned forty-one of Luther’s propositions and ordered that his pamphlets be burned. Accompanied by his disciples, Luther went to the door of Wittenberg, where a pyre had been lighted, and, with great solemnity, threw both the Papal Bull and the writings of Luther’s adversaries into it.

From Germany to England, by way of France and the Netherlands, the pyre of Wittenberg – which had symbolically consumed the power of Rome – inflamed public opinion. For the princes and kings, Catholicism was merely an instrument of political domination. None of them had any scruples about rejecting it if it encumbered more than it served. In 1527, the very loyal servant of faith named Emperor Charles V subjected Rome to the most pitiless sacking and massacres that it had known since the days of the Visigoths. Francois I, King of France, no less a good Catholic, burned the Protestants but helped the German reformers in their struggle against Charles V; he hated the Emperor so much that he did not hesitate to ally himself with Islam.

The economy had condemned Dolcino, the Spirituals and Savonarola, but it saved Luther and his movement; it carried them to power by virtue of the force that, underneath the outward appearance of religion and ideology, began to appear in broad daylight as the veritable mode of government of mankind: the economy.

Luther and Calvin ratified the obscure decrees of free enterprise, and even helped crush peasant communalism and condemn the Free Spirit that was so resolutely irreconcilable with the economic control exercised over the lives of men and women.

In 1521, Charles V summoned Luther to appear before the Diet of the Princes convened in Worms, in the Rhineland. Strong from the sympathy that his act of rebellion had aroused among the lords who were not anxious to grovel under the boot of the Emperor, Luther presented his profession of faith like a challenge, then, foreseeing arrest, took refuge in Saxony, where the Elector – under the

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<sup>489</sup> *Translator*: English in original.

pretext of imprisoning him – protected him at his castle in Wartburg. There Luther translated the Bible into German and laid the basis for a new dogma.

In 1521, Thomas Müntzer, taking the freedoms claimed by Luther literally, joined the peasants in revolt and revived the hopes for a Joachimite Third Age. In 1525, Luther, in his pamphlet titled *Against the Bands of Looting Peasants and Assassins*, appealed for the most pitiless repression, thereby removing the last hesitations from the German princes concerning his doctrine and co-signing the birth of Lutheranism as the religion of the State. In five years, the heresiarch repeated the Constantinian operation of the Roman Church in his own way. He set himself up as the *pontifex maximus*<sup>490</sup> by according the support of the bourgeoisie of free enterprise (which saw in enrichment the compensations for sacrifice and obedience to a reasonable God) to the national and religious independence of the Northern principalities and kingdoms.

## **Johannes Calvin**

The career of the heresiarch Johannes Calvin ended with a *coup d'Etat* whose success he himself assured. He was born in 1509 at Noyon, in Picardy, where his father, the prosecutor at the local chapter, had reserved a career for him in the Church. After studying at the College of Montaigu in Paris, Orleans and Bourges, he published a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia*.

Around 1533, he adopted the ideas of the Reformation. Suspected of having drafted the rant by his friend (the Rector of the University of Paris, Nicolas Cop, who was deeply permeated by the Lutheran doctrine), he fled to Angouleme and then took refuge in Nérac with the help of Marguerite of Navarre, sister of Francois I and protector of the reforms.

In 1534, Calvin was in Basle, where he drafted the first version of *The Christian Institution*. In 1536, Guillaume Farel, who attempted to establish the Reformation in Geneva, invited him to use his authority to convince the citizens, who were not in a hurry to exchange a new religious truth for an old one that they cared little about. Banishment sanctioned them both in 1538 and Calvin went to Strasbourg, where Martin Bucer had consolidated one of the bastions of Lutheranism. Returning to Geneva in 1541, Calvin thenceforth worked to establish his [own] power. An opposition among the inhabitants of the city rose against him, founded just as much on the awareness of belonging to a free state as on the repugnance that Calvinist austerity aroused among the people who were naturally inclined to the joys of existence. Calvin worked patiently at breaking the party of

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<sup>490</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Supreme Pontiff.”

political freedom – stigmatized under the name “libertines” – that was led by Jacques Gruet and the faction constituted by Pocques, Perceval and Quintin Thierry, vituperated under the name “Spiritual Libertines.”

In 1547, after an iniquitous trial, Jacques Gruet was decapitated for having defended the free choice of atheism and for fighting against the dictatorship of the Puritanism that, in the Northern Europe, forged the Anglo-Saxon mindset that English Victorianism and Americanism illustrated in the most deplorable way.

To confirm the truth that God had enjoined him to impose and to share in the Inquisitorial barbarity, Calvin did not fail to put on the pyre the physician Michael Servetus [Miguel Serveto Conesa], who had taken refuge in Geneva in 1553.



## Chapter 39: The Dissidents from Lutheranism and Calvinism

In 1523, Luther published the treatise *Jesus-Christ was born Jewish*, which accused the papacy of having distanced the Jews from the truth faith. The Church had confined them to [the practice of] usury; it had calumniated them, accused them of “using Christian blood to remove their bad odor,” and “I do not know what [other] nonsense.” “If we would like to help them,” the Reformer wrote, “it is the law of Christian love that we must apply to them, not the law of the Popes.”<sup>491</sup>

What became of such beautiful dispositions, after the “Constantinian” turn of the religion called reformed and after the appeal to a holy war against the peasants? In 1543, two pamphlets were published one after the other by the master of Wittenberg: *Against the Jews and their Lies* and *Vom Schem Hamphoras*.<sup>492</sup>

Jean Delumeau judged it useful to yield some extracts from writings that Hitler reprint in millions of copies:

“The Christ, the Reformer [Martin Luther] writes, did not have ‘enemies more venomous, more determined, more bitter than the Jews.’ He ‘who lets himself steal, contaminate and curse for them has only to (...) climb up into their asses to adore this sanctuary (and) then praise himself for having been merciful (...): Christ will compensate him on the day of the Last Judgment with the eternal fire of Hell.’ When Judas was hanged, ‘the Jews sent their servants with platters of money and pitchers of gold to collect his piss along with the other

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<sup>491</sup> J. Delumeau, *op. cit.*, p. 371. [*Translator*: The original German title of Luther’s pamphlet was *Das Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*. It has been translated into English by Walter I. Brandt as “That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,” *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962).]

<sup>492</sup> *Translator*: the original German title of “Against the Jews and Their Lies” was *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*. It has been translated into English by Martin H. Bertram as “On the Jews and Their Lies,” *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). The full title of *Vom Schem Hamphoras* was *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* (“Of the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Chris”). An English translation of it appears in Gerhard Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology: Martin Luther’s Anti-Jewish Vom Schem Hamphoras, Previously Unpublished in English, and Other Milestones in Church Doctrine Concerning Judaism* (McFarland, 1992).

treasures, and then they ate and drank that shit, and had thus acquired eyes so penetrating that they perceived in the Scriptures glosses that were not found in them by either Matthew or Isaiah themselves' . . . 'When God and the angels hear a Jew fart, there are such bursts of laughter and gamboling!'

“‘Observe all that the Jews have suffered for fifteen hundred years and there will be much worse for them in Hell (...). They must tell us why (...) they are a people who are rejected by God, are without a king, without prophets, without a temple; they can't give any other reason than their sins. . . .’ ‘Never has the anger of God manifested itself with more brilliance than on these people.’

“‘To make this blasphemous doctrine disappear, it will be necessary to set fire to all their synagogues and, if anything remains after the fire, to cover it with sand and mud so that one can no longer see the smallest tile or rock from their temples. . . . One must prohibit Jews from being among us and on our soil, and from praising God, praying, teaching or singing, upon pain of death.’”<sup>493</sup>

In that same year, 1523, when Luther had extolled a certain tolerance for the Jews, he had also propagated prudent reservations about the notion of the heresy – reservations that, no doubt, had intimated to him his own destiny:

“‘If you want to extirpate heresy,’ Luther wrote in 1523, ‘above all you must know how to remove it from the heart and lead men to turn away from it through a profound movement of the will. The use of force will not exhaust heresy, but will reinforce it. . . . Because if, using force, one burns all the Jews and the heretics, one will not convince nor convert a single one through such means.’”<sup>494</sup>

“‘But after the violence of Th. Müntzer and the war of the peasants, and while the princes and towns adhered in great numbers to the Reformation, Luther then changed his tone, by virtue of another logic that was contrary to the first one: Protestantism is the return to Scripture, the removal of the ‘novelties’ – the Roman ‘superstitions’

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<sup>493</sup> J. Delumeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 372 and 373.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 518.

as well as the ‘sacramentalism’ of [Huldrych] Zwingli. Inversely, ‘the wickedness of the world’ manifests itself as both ‘idolatry and heresy.’ The State could not tolerate these satanic aberrations. The Reformer thus judged as necessary the intervention of civil authority so as to bring an end to ‘abominations’ such as Mass. Under threats, the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of Wittenberg was forced to cease celebrating Mass on Christmas 1524. Two years later, Luther wrote to John, the new Elector of Saxony: ‘There must only be a single kind of preaching in each place.’ In 1527, he demanded that the Elector organize ‘ecclesiastic visits’ to his territory. Thenceforth, in the Lutheran countries, the State would control the organization of the Church, would break up religious deviances, and would oversee the preaching of the Gospels. The ‘German mystical spiritualists,’ disappointed with Luther, had good sport reproaching him, as well as the other reformers of the era, for having substituted ‘a new papacy,’ a ‘paper papacy’ (the Bible), for the Roman papacy. For Schwenckfeld, Luther ‘led us out from Egypt and through the desert, across the Red Sea, but he left us there, wandering aimlessly, and yet strove to persuade us that we were already in the Promised Land.’ A little later, Weigel would reproach the ‘Pope of Wittenberg’ for having organized a new slavery and persecuting visionaries.”<sup>495</sup>

Luther did not disdain from adopting from the popes that he vilified the ordinary hypocrisy that, to serve powerful interests, one had to suffocate with the left hand the morality that one caressed with the right. When Philippe of Hess asked Luther for authorization to marry a second spouse in a just wedding, the spiritual master, after equivocating, accepted on the condition that the affair remained secret. The recognized Landgrave sent a cask of Rhineland wine as the price for the indulgence. At least Pope Julius II paid Michelangelo with the money that he had extorted from the Catholics.

Calvin knew nothing of such weaknesses. He detested pleasure with a visceral hatred and his faith never tolerated the least lapse. Unlike Sebastian Castellion, who protested against the barbarity of the treatment of Michael Servetus and declared in his *Treatise of the Heretics*, “We see that there is hardly any sect – and today there are so many of them – that does not see the others as heretical, with the result that, if in one city or region you are esteemed to be truly loyal, in

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<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 519.

the next one you are esteemed to be heretical,”<sup>496</sup> Calvin – just a few month after he assassinated Servetus – published a *Declaration to Maintain the True Faith*, in which he declared:

“Our merciful [one], who takes such great pleasure in letting the heresies go unpunished (...) would like it – out of fear that the Church of God is not defamed by too much rigor – if we were to make a fashion of all the errors. . . . Therefore God does not want us to spare either the towns or the people, indeed, to the point that we must raze the walls and exterminate the memory of the inhabitants and frustrate everyone as a sign of a much greater hatred, for fear that the infection might spread further.”<sup>497</sup>

Theodore Beza raised the stakes even higher:

“Tyranny is a lesser evil than having license such that each one acts according to his fancy, and it is better to have a tyrant, even a cruel one than not having any prince at all, or having one under whom each person is permitted to do what he wants. . . . Those who do not want the magistrate to mix himself up in religious affairs, and principally to punish heretics, scorn what the Word of God expresses . . . and bring ruin and extreme destruction to the Church.”<sup>498</sup>

“The Prince ‘must erect and maintain good edicts against those who by simple stubbornness want to resist the establishment of the true religion, as we see, in our time, is being done with respect to the papacy by the Anabaptists and other heretics in England, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, a good part of Germany and Switzerland.’”<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Castellion, *Traité des hérétiques*, p. 12.

<sup>497</sup> Calvin, *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraie foi*, in *Opera omnia*. [Translator: note that, in the original French, “frustrating” is (mis)spelled *fruster*, and that Vaneigem placed [*sic*] after it.]

<sup>498</sup> Th. De Beze, quoted by Delumaeu, *op. cit.*, p. 520.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 521.

## Hans Denck

While the shadow of Lutheranism and Calvinism threatened to spread over the world an obscurantism that, compared to Rome, had the false advantages “reason” and “freedom,” Hans Denck – along with Sebastian Castellion – was one of the rare, lucid and sincere men for whom human feelings had the upper hand over beliefs and ideologies that were so quick to suffocate those feelings under their sublime abstractions.

Denck was a member of no party other than his own; he had no ambition to govern others. To him, emancipating himself from all constraints appeared a sufficient task. Lutheran freedom did not accommodate itself to such license – indeed, it was hardly reconcilable with any other Church, it is true.

Born in 1500 in Habach, in Upper Bavaria, Denck entered the University of Ingolstadt at the age of 17. While pursuing his studies at Basle, he worked as a proofreader at a print shop and perfected his Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He read Erasmus, was passionate about medieval mysticism, and adhered to the ideas of Thomas Müntzer. On the insistence of the Lutheran [Johannes] Ecolampadius, he was named Rector of the Saint Sebaldus School at Nuremberg when he was 23. He got married and frequented the milieus that, without anachronism, can be called libertarian.

Like other large preindustrial towns, Nuremberg oscillated in the backwash of the Reformation between Lutheran tyranny, disappointment with imperfect freedoms and the old Catholic current in which the restless and disenchanting ebbed and flowed. Indifference to the [whole] religious thing, which, under the imperative ritual observances, had dominated the absolute reign of Catholicism, changed into cold and willful skepticism.

A number of strong spirits, including the clergy, no doubt shared the atheism of Thomas Scoto or Herman van Rijswijck, but were not bold enough to proclaim it, that is, beyond the people who possessed the means of [protecting] their insolence – such as Frederick II or the *condottiere* [Federico da] Montefeltro, whose casket bore the inscription that was destined to have a beautiful future: “Neither God nor master.” The contestation of the existence of God now resulted from the multiplication of dogmatic truths and parties of the “true faith.”

The affair of the “three Godless painters”<sup>500</sup> offered to the municipality the occasion to crack down upon the party of the skeptics. The mocking banter that was opposed to religion rather easily found complacent ears among the people. It sharpened the language of the intellectuals and the artists. The three implicated

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<sup>500</sup> Kolde, *Zum Process des Johann Deuck*, 1890.

painters (the brothers Behaim [plus Georg Pencz]) enjoyed the friendship of Hans Denck, whose independence of spirit had more than once irritated the Lutheran notables, [Andreas] Osiander in particular.

The council summoned him to appear and demanded of him a confession of faith that would wash away all suspicion. Denck complied and expounded upon his doubts with a provocative sincerity in two successive texts.

Examining the beliefs in which he had been educated, he apparently adopted the position that it was a matter of a purely fictive faith, “because it had not triumphed over my spiritual poverty, my inclination to sin, my weakness and my sick situation (...). I will not venture to claim that I now possess the faith that translates itself into life, although I see clearly that my lack of belief can no longer continue before God.” And he added: “All believers are, at one moment or another, unbelievers. To become believers, they must let their passions and the terrestrial man die in such a fashion that it is no longer they who live, as they do when they lack of belief, but God who lives in them through the mediation of Christ.”<sup>501</sup>

God’s presence acting in man freed him from all constraints and all sin: such was the doctrine of those Calvin called the “Spiritual Libertines.”

On 25 January 1525, Denck was condemned to banishment. Forced to leave his family and stripped of his university position, he took refuge in June 1525 among the Anabaptists of Saint-Gall, who were themselves victims of the hatred of the Lutherans; he would soon shock them with his conceptions of individual freedom. Wandering led him to Augsburg, where he stayed until October 1526, drafting *Wer die Wahre warlich lieb hat*,<sup>502</sup> a balance sheet of paradoxes, contradictions and absurdities in the Bible, which brought him to this conclusion: the quarrels about interpretation had no shared meaning; only the presence of God in each person, when the Spirit deigned to reveal it, mattered and served as a guide to existence through the spontaneity of the impulses that it engendered.

Hostility from the Lutherans forced Denck into exile again. The same fate awaited him in Strasbourg, where [Martin] Bucer and [Wolfgang] Capito denounced him for subversive activities.

He was already worn out by his solitary combat when he arrived in Basle in September 1527. Ecolampadius was disposed to accord him asylum on the condition that he adjured. Denck wrote a kind of confession, mixing a few concessions (dictated by weariness) with opinions close to those of [Caspar] Schwenckfeld and his notion of the inward man. Ecolampadius became part of the

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<sup>501</sup> J. Danck, in *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, Paris, 1930.

<sup>502</sup> *Translator*: German for “Those Who Love the Truth Truly.”

tradition of the inquisitorial lie by publishing it under the title (deceptive at the very least) *The Abjuration of Hans Denck*.

When Denck died from plague in Basle at the age of 27, he was about to publish *Von der Wahren Liebe*.<sup>503</sup> In it he insisted on the following theme: he who loves God and has God in his heart need not bother with institutions, which only blind him.

In 1528, two of his texts, which appeared as the preface and the appendix to the *Theologia Deutsch*,<sup>504</sup> made it clear “that the creature is necessary to God and that the man deified by illumination, as well as Christ, enjoys union with Him,” which was an idea that the philosopher Jakob Böhme – another victim of the New [Protestant] Churches – developed in the Seventeenth Century.

The Nineteenth Century saw in Denck one of the pioneers of free thought. No doubt he influenced the lucid and tormented conscience of Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, it seems that the combined hatred of the Protestants and the Catholics was caused by the impregnation of the Free Spirit, which was discernible in his thesis: “Where there is faith, there is no sin; where there is no sin, there resides divine virtue.”<sup>505</sup>

## **Sebastian Franck**

A philosopher and historian, Sebastian Franck belonged to the very small number of humanists who allied intelligence with an unfailing passion for tolerance and respect for life.

Born at Donauwörth, in Swabia, in 1499, he enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, where he associated with Martin Bucer, the future master of Strasbourg. Despite his contacts with Luther after 1519, he began his ecclesiastic career in the Catholic Church, which he left around 1525. An evangelic preacher in the region of Nuremberg, he married Ottilie Behaim, sister of the [godless] painters Bartholomew and Sebald, who were disciples of [Albrecht] Dürer and Free Spirits to whom all forms of religion were repugnant.

Nevertheless, Franck took a position against the justification through faith defended by Hans Denck, who was also a friend of the Behaims, and Franck

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<sup>503</sup> *Translator*: German for “From True Love.”

<sup>504</sup> *Translator*: written in the Fourteenth Century by an anonymous author, and published by Martin Luther in 1516 and 1518, this mystical work was reprinted in 1528 by Ludwig Haetzer.

<sup>505</sup> J. Danck, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastique*, Paris, 1930.

adopted a position that was in conformity with Christian principles. But in 1529 he resigned from his ecclesiastic position, moved to Strasbourg, associated with Michael Servetus and Caspar Schwenckfeld, and gradually adopted the attitude of Denck, for whom convictions only had meaning due to the coherence between ideas and life experiences that were stripped of artifice and hypocrisy. Such was the spirit that animated his masterpiece, *Chronica, Zeytbuch und Geschichtbibel* (*Chronicles, Annals and History of the Bible*), published in 1531. Erasmus took offense at a quotation and denounced him to the Council of Strasbourg; with the support of Bucer, he got Franck expelled. Exposed to the hatred of Erasmus and the Lutherans, and condemned by [Philippe] Melanchthon, Franck ended up as a printer in Ulm, the council of which rejected several demands for his expulsion, including one made by Philippe of Hess, Luther's patron. Franck took the time to publish several personal works and a treatise by Cornelius Agrippa before he was banished in 1530. Taking refuge in Basle, where he entered into a second marriage with the heiress from a family of great publishers, Franck did not cease publishing – his collection of proverbs enjoyed a great popularity – and fighting for tolerance and the suppression of the death penalty. (“If the choice was given to me, I would much rather be in the condition of the many whom the world has condemned as heretical than among those whom it has canonized.”)<sup>506</sup> He died in 1542, scarcely 43 years old.

Hostile to all forms of ecclesiastic organization, he rejected the authority of the priests as well as that of the Scriptures. The Gospels, he said, had replaced pontifical authority with a *papieren Papst* (a paper Pope). That authority was the cause of all evils; he denounced it in a society dominated by the strength and power of the Prince. No war was just because all wars derived from the principle of appropriation. On the other hand, his pessimism hardly accorded any credit to revolt. Closer to the Tao than to La Boétie,<sup>507</sup> he contented himself with identifying God with a feeling of internal plenitude, in which he dreamed that brutality and the misery of an immutable world were annihilated.

In the insurmountable and vain confrontation in which truths fought each other bitterly, tolerance represented the only human virtue. (“Thus take from each sect what is good and leave the rest to the Devil.”)<sup>508</sup> This was enough to bring down upon him the animosity of the majority of the humanists, ideologues and

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<sup>506</sup> S. Franck, *Chroniques, annales et histoire de la Bible*.

<sup>507</sup> *Translator*: Étienne de La Boétie, a contemporary of this period (1530-1563), was the author of *Discours de la servitude volontaire ou le Contr'un* (“Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or the Anti-Dictator”).

<sup>508</sup> S. Franck, *Chroniques, annales et histoire de la Bible*, *op. cit.*



sectarians of his time, from the Catholics to the Anabaptists. On the other hand, Sebastian Castellion did everything he could to distribute his works, to which Valentin Weigel, Jakob Böhme, Dirck Coornhert and the historian Gottfried Arnold paid homage.

### **Karlstadt and Schwenckfeld**

The rivalry for power that quickly opposed Luther to Andreas Rudolf Bodenstein, also known as Karlstadt, determined a rivalry of opinions that was even more subject to uncertainty than the dogma of the Protestants, which was uneasily cemented together through various controversies. The Constantinian Catholic Church had hardly proceeded otherwise, but its absolutism dealt with doubts at the point of a sword. The similar operation attempted by Luther, Calvin and Henry VIII of England did not take part in the same historical conditions. Underneath the predominance of the agrarian mode of production, the mole of mercantile expansion was at work. The progress of the values that were open to modernity did not guarantee the stability of the divine order and the immutable power of its ministers.

The defeat of the Roman Church, the power of which was only imperfectly restored by the counter-offensive of the Council of Trento, thus prohibited the despotic pretensions of the popes of the Reformation to go beyond local tyrannies that resisted contestation poorly.

Unlike Denck, Müntzer, Storch, Hoffmann and Schwenckfeld, Karlstadt did not have a doctrine properly speaking. He contented himself with mocking Luther, with dogging that conceited windbag whose shadow extended over Europe.

Born around 1480, Karlstadt studied philosophy and theology in Erfurt (1499), then in Cologne (1500). He became a professor of theology, exegete of the Bible and doctor of law at the University of Sienna. Interested in Luther's demands, he soon clashed with the man's intransigence, for which the dogmatic interpretation of sacred texts had the upper hand over the generosity of the heart's impulses. Was it not precisely the most sensitive part, nay, the most sensual part of man that had most ardently led the combat against the Roman clergy?

Karlstadt's meeting with Thomas Müntzer, whose revolutionary millenarianism both fascinated and frightened him, hastened this break with Luther, who chased Karlstadt from Wittenberg. Taking refuge in Orlamünde, where he came out against the necessity of baptism and communion, he was expelled on the insistence of his old friend, who pursued him in hatred everywhere he had the support of the princes. Karlstadt only found peace in the company of Zwingli, who founded a rival [Protestant] Church in Zurich and did not follow Luther. Karlstadt defended positions that were close to the ideas of Denck,

estimating that the sincerity of faith dispensed with [the need for] all spiritual authority. He was teaching at the University of Zurich when he died from the plague in 1541.

Freedom was the cause of the break between Luther and Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490-1561), whose sect experienced equal persecution under the Catholics and the Lutherans. In the line of Denck, Schwenckfeld rejected the sacraments and religious rites in favor of faith, in which humanity founded its feeling of being in step with the designs of God. He put the accent on the inward man, whose mystical experiences partook of illumination. Certain Pietists later claimed his teachings.

### **Michael Servetus**

A physician and humanist, born around 1509 in Villanueva, Spain, Michael Servetus [Miguel Serveto Conesa] owed his dramatic end less to the audacity of his thought – which was more common and less reckless than it might appear – than to a settling of accounts to which the morbid authority of Johannes Calvin lowered itself. His medical studies at the University of Toulouse and the University of Paris induced in him, as was the case with Rabelais, a certain skepticism in theological matters. The man who discovered the mechanisms of the circulation of blood in the lungs experienced some difficulty in finding clarity in the Trinity that was a part of the Constantinian arsenal and had presided over the instauration of Catholicism as the religion of the State.

Anti-trinitarianism, popularized by Socin and his friends, responded less to a theological preoccupation than to the questioning of the Church through the derision of a principle that had never succeeded in getting itself out of trouble and whose mystical character had in fact hidden the political necessity of keeping steady – between God (the Father) and humankind (the Son) – the balancing act of the Spirit that governed the temporal in the name of a heavenly mandate.

Published in 1531, Servetus' *De trinitatis erroribus*,<sup>509</sup> supporting Arius and the old Gnosticism, denied the existence of the Spirit – and thus the Church – as a distinct being. According to Servetus, everything took place between the Logos, which was eternal, and the Son, who was not.

In 1553, the anonymous publication of Servetus' *Christianismi restitutio*<sup>510</sup> drew down upon him threats from the Inquisition. Arrested in Lyon and imprisoned, he had the good fortune to escape and the misfortune of going to

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<sup>509</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “On the Errors of the Trinity.”

<sup>510</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “The Restitution of Christianity.”

Geneva, that is, nearby Calvin, with whom he had exchanged letters more than once. The *Restitutio* was an ironic take on Calvin's *Institutio* and it alarmed Calvin in that Servetus adopted positions in it that were close to those of Anabaptism. But his freedom of morals and language especially worked upon Calvin like an insult to his majesty as a prophet. An unjust trial, to which no one gave credit (because the complaints offered no common measure with the accusations that had been made against Jacques Gruet), succeeded where the Inquisition had failed and successfully completed Rome's work. Servetus was burned alive on 27 October 1553.<sup>511</sup>

### Sebastian Castellion

By the force of things, the Reformation was part of the desacralization inherent in the mercantile expansion that, in the Twentieth Century, reduced the religions of the industrialized nations to supermarket junk. With its multiple sects, Protestantism marked the transition from clerical theocracy – supported by a huge apparatus of popes and monarchs who ruled by virtue of divine right – to the ideologies that were founded on a restrictive ethics and that oscillated between totalitarianisms of the nationalist or collectivist type and the demand for freedom that was in fact authorized by the becoming of the economy.

The importance of morality in the “reformed” religion prolonged the will of the reformers who, starting in the Eleventh Century and in the whirlwind of urban freedoms, had undertaken to make the Church moral. Even if ethical despotism was most often succeeded by the tyranny of dogmatic prescriptions, the absence of a sacred orthodoxy – a rectilinear perspective in which God was the point of flight and arrival – no longer authorized one to speak of heresies from the moment that Protestantism occupied the predominant position in a given country or region.

If Calvin treated Servetus like a heretic, this was because he estimated himself to be equal to the Pope, elected by God, fixing in Geneva the New Jerusalem that did not stop fluctuating geographically. On the other hand, his role as puritan dictator took the upper hand during the polemic between him and Sebastian Castellion. The controversy was no longer theological, but ideological. It put into question the inhumanity of the repressive discourse attributed to God.

Official history makes a lot of Erasmus, the humanist and anti-Semite, intellectual and misogynist, defender of freedom and partisan of the death penalty for heretics, whom he occasionally denounced. He knew nothing of Guillaume

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<sup>511</sup> R. Bainton, *Hunted Heretics*, 1953; G. H. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1962.

Postel, who discerned in the emancipation of women the foundation of a humane society, nor nothing of Castellion, who fought for tolerance.

Born in 1515 in Saint-Martin-du-Frêne, in the Bugey, where the influence of the Waldensinians continued to exist, Sebastian Castellion studied in Lyon and associated with the humanists who were seduced by the new ideas. The spectacle of the persecutions and his reading of Calvin's *The Christian Institution* won him over to the Reformation. He left for Strasbourg, then Geneva, where Calvin offered him a professor's position in 1542. His *Sacred Dialogues* reflected his first hesitations concerning Calvin's growing authoritarianism. In it he celebrated tolerance and remarked, "There is no one who more obstinately resists the truth than the great ones of this world." He soon left Geneva, having attracted the animosity of the man whom he had the naivety to admonish for his sectarianism.

A reader of Greek at the University of Basle, he provided the first manifesto of free conscience in the preface to his translation of the Bible into Latin. Indignant over the execution of Servetus in 1553, which inspired him to write *De haereticis an sint persequendi?*<sup>512</sup> (Basle, 1654), he developed a doctrine that was opposed to predestination, which Calvin used to justify his own crimes.

Published in 1562, Castellion's *Advice to Desolate France* called for universal tolerance and the refusal to "force consciences." It opposed the fanaticisms and horrors of the wars undertaken for the greater glory of God. Rarely has a book been welcomed by such unanimous reprobation. Lutherans, Calvinists, Catholics and humanists all judged the project to abolish the death penalty for the crime of heresy to be criminal. His nephew and brother-in-law, guilty of having introduced the book into Geneva, had to take flight to save their lives. Until his death on 29 September 1563, Castellion did not cease distributing throughout all of Europe letters that extolled freedom of thought and that were sent to all those whom he estimated capable of sharing his ideas and spreading their effects.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> *Translator*: Latin for "Should Heretics be Persecuted?"

<sup>513</sup> H. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, Paris, 1892.

## Chapter 40: The *Alumbrados* of Spain

Quite discreet until then, the Inquisition was unleashed in Spain in 1492 and took up – under the mantle of [defending] a threatened faith – a gigantic genocidal operation that was principally directed against the Jews; the systematic plundering perpetrated against them kept the coffers of the State full. The power that bestowed upon the Inquisition badges for services rendered in the art of balancing the accounts of the kingdom, whose conquest of American markets had in a certain [indirect] way been financed by the Jews, brought down upon Spain the functionaries of the religious police, with which Northern Europe had cancelled its contracts and Renaissance Italy valued more [for their activities] beyond its borders than within them.

Italian Catholicism accommodated itself to pleasures that, sooner or later, were struck by redemption, remorse and contrition. The hedonism of a country inclined to luxury and passion erected (more effectively than the Council of Trento) a natural barrier against the incursions of Reformation Puritanism, of which Savonarola's the pre-Calvinist austerity had presented the enticing program.

Still stuck within the old agrarian structures in which the tastes for life and liberty were only expressed by the insurrections of the *comuneros*,<sup>514</sup> several peasant revolts and the emerging wealth of the large towns, Spain kept the heritage of the ascetic masochism of Priscillian and Dominic Guzman, the leader of an order of divine killers whose fervor Loyola revived by giving it a less brutal but more civilized turn.

In Spain, the Inquisition – with a zeal that was the envy of its German counterparts – lastingly prevented the establishment of Protestantism, which it failed to contain in Flanders, despite frightening massacres.

Nevertheless, the Inquisition was disconcerted when it discovered the existence of groups of people, apparently quite numerous, who devoted themselves to the freedoms of love by way of the paths of ecstasy, which, through strange references to the old Gnosticism and the Hebdomad, popular language situated in the seventh heaven.

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<sup>514</sup> *Translator: the Guerra de las Comunidades de Castilla* (The “War of the Communities of Castile”) was fought against Charles V between 1520 and 1521.

Bataillon sets 1512 as the appearance of the qualifier *alumbrado*, which was applied to a Franciscan who was “*illuminated* by the darkness of Satan.”<sup>515</sup>

In Toledo, where the influence of heterodox Sufis had been secretly perpetuated, the Inquisition hesitated to pursue Isabel de La Cruz, who had a reputation for holiness and around whom had formed a group whose teachings recalled those of Marguerite Porete. It wasn't until 23 September 1525 that the General Inquisitor Alonso Manrique de Lara promulgated an edict against the *Alumbrados*, no doubt under the cover of a campaign against the Protestants, with whom they could only be confused by some malignity of the Holy Office. Arrested in 1529, Isabel de La Cruz was condemned to life imprisonment. One of her disciples, the priest Juan Lopez, mounted the pyre in Grenada one year later.

The chronicler Alfonso de Santa Cruz transcribed several articles from the charges at the trial in Toledo:

“They say that the love of God in man is God. (. . . They) affirm that ecstasy or illumination leads to such perfection that men can no longer sin, neither mortally nor venally; that illumination frees and releases one from all authority; and that they need not render accounts to anyone, not even to God, because they have put their trust in him (from whence comes their refusal of sacraments, prayers, and good works).

“They call the Host a bit of pastry; the cross a stick; and genuflection idolatry. They believe the annihilation of their own will is the supreme glory (...). They deny [the existence of] Hell (...).

“Far from weeping over the Passion of the Christ, they rejoice and enjoy all the pleasures during Holy Week. They state that the Father was incarnated like the Son [was] and believe they speak with this God neither more nor less than with the Corregidor of Escalona. So as to remember Our Lady, they contemplate the face of a [real] woman instead of contemplating an image. They call the conjugal act union with God. The sect is centered around Isabel de La Cruz and a certain Father Alcazar.”<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> M. Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne*, Paris, 1937, p. 73. [Translator: *Alumbrados* can be translated as “Illuminati.”]

<sup>516</sup> M. Menendes Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxas espagnoles*, Madrid, 1929, p. 526.

At the same time, a group of *Alumbrados* developed around the beata<sup>517</sup> Francisca Hernandez, who was originally from Canillas de Albaida, near by Salamanca. Around 1519, her court consisted of young clergymen: Bernardino Tovar, the Franciscan Gil Lopez, and the secondary-school graduate [*le bachelier*] Antonio of Medrano, whose amorous relations with Francisca were denounced to the Inquisition, which condemned the lovers to live separately.

Relocated to Valladolid, Francisca first lived with Bernardino Tovar and then with the financier Pedro Cazalla. In the tradition of the *Homines Intelligentiae*, she founded an occult center named “Paradise,” in which the refinements of love conferred Edenic innocence at the end of an initiation that intermixed chastity, libertinage and all-encompassing passion.

At his trial, Antonio of Medrano declared that, ever since he had known Francisca, God had given him the grace to no longer experience carnal desires, with the result that he could sleep with a woman in the same bed without harm to his soul. On the other hand, Francisco Ortiz affirmed: “After having relations with her for around 20 days, I acquired more wisdom in Valladolid than I did studying in Paris for 20 years. Because it is not Paris, but Paradise, that can teach me such wisdom.”<sup>518</sup>

Francisca Hernandez seemed to have attained such a decree of holiness that continence was no longer necessary for her. The richest part of her teachings no doubt consisted in disencumbering her disciples and lovers from the feeling of guilt, which – along with the fear of pleasure – formed a vicious circle in which love was poisoned. The theologian Melchior Cano expressed the eruditely irreligious enterprise of Francisca in a formula of an astonishing modernity: “Remove fear and give assurance.”

It was precisely upon anguish and fear, the foundations of all religion, that the Inquisition played to annihilate *Alumbradismo*. Arrested in 1529, Francisca Hernandez and her follower, Maria Ramirez, denounced – under the threat of torture and the *quemadero*<sup>519</sup> – Bernardino Tovar, his brother, and fourteen other people. And, according to the will of the inquisitorial tribunal, they denounced them not as *Alumbrados* but as Lutherans, which does not lack piquancy, given the hatred Luther and Calvin had for the adepts of the Free Spirit.

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<sup>517</sup> *Translator*: Spanish for “beatified” or “Blessed.”

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 530.

<sup>519</sup> *Translator*: Quemadero De Tablada was a place for executions, built in Seville in 1481.

In many regions of Spain, the *Alumbrados* represented such a force that the Church did not dare to attack them directly and preferred to identify them as Protestants, the condemnation of whom aroused fewer hesitations. They were so numerous in Seville that the Inquisition did not intervene. “[‘]The major part of the town is infected,[’] reported a letter of the times. [‘]There is no Duchess or Marquise, no woman of high or low condition, whom one cannot reproach for some error of this heresy.[’]”<sup>520</sup>

In the second half of the Sixteenth Century, a group of *Alumbrados* pushed imprudence as far as publicly contesting the Church’s teachings. In 1578, a Dominican, Alonso de La Fuente – who denounced the *Alumbrados* from his pulpit at Llerena, in Extremadura – was interrupted by a woman who said: “Padre, the life they lead is better than yours, and their doctrine is better, too.” Her audacity, supported (in all probability) by a favorable opinion, one commonly accepted in the region, aroused the immediate reaction of the Inquisition. Arrested and subjected to torture, she confessed the names of her companions.

Eight members of the secular clergy expounded their doctrine. Fernando Alvarez and Father Chamizo recommended that novices meditated on the wounds of the crucified Christ with such ardor that they became red in face, broke out into a sweat, felt sorrow in their hearts, became nauseated and ended up feeling an ecstasy in which, according to their expression, they “become liquefied in the love of God.” Porete had spoken of the “annihilated soul” that announced the identification with the God that Simon of Samaria called *megale dynamis*, while the Beghard John of Brünn evoked the identity of the *pneuma* and the *sperma* in the fusion that left him *totaliter liquefactus*.

Rendered impeccable by orgasmic illumination, they acceded to the state of perfection and, permanently plunged into inward exaltation, were justified in following their desires and rejecting the Church, its authority and its rites.

In addition to Alvarez and Chamizo, who was reproached for having initiated into heavenly pleasure thirty-four people, the community at Llerena included Juan Garcia, a clergyman from Almedralejo and the secondary-school graduate Rodrigo Vasquez, a parish-priest in La Morea, who affirmed: “If the Turks had been able to capture and win over Spain, we would all live as we want.” The community also included Doctor Cristobal Mejia, a clergyman from Cazalla; a Franciscan from Valladolid, who was 63 years old; Pedro of Santa Maria; a parish-

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<sup>520</sup> R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.*, p. 193. [Translator: see R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 199, which via a footnote refers the reader to *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* (Paris, Letouzey, 1930), vol. 2.]



priest from Zafra, Francisca de Mesa, who, speaking of the Passion of the Christ, asked: “What good is it to be preoccupied every day with the death of this man?”<sup>521</sup>

In Zafra, where the adepts united around the widow Lari Gomez, a shoemaker named Juan Bernal nourished the intention to present to the court a memoire in favor of the *Alumbrados*.

The group had existed for four years when the Bishop of Salamanca, Francisco Soto Salazar, took charge of the inquest of 1578. When he died in Llerena, on 21 June of that same year, rumors accused the *Alumbrados* of having poisoned him. The majority perished on the pyre.

Such was the context in which the mystical exaltation of Juan de la Cruz and Teresa of Avila took place. At first suspected of *Alumbradismo*, both of them – hastening to furnish proofs of their perfect submission to the Church – channeled the carnal ecstasies that haloed them with a divine grace towards a morbid asceticism.

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<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194. [Translator: see R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 201.]

## Chapter 41: The Spiritual Libertines<sup>522</sup>

At the same time that the Spanish Inquisition was worried by the people who didn't give a rat's ass about Catholicism, Protestantism, the Church or its reforms and who lived in the quest for love and discovered in it the very meaning of their existence, Luther and Calvin attempted to subdue – in the countries slowly conquered by their glacial truths – the natural liberties that, among the common people, authorized the spiritual liberties that were being arrogated by the Reformers.

### Eloi Pruystinck and the Eloisten

With the development of the economy, Antwerp around 1520 was the scene for a new wave of individual initiative that pushed forward the audacity of private enterprise, the conversion of God into divine capital and, at the same time, the propensity for luxury and the feeling of power that elevated the man of business to the dignity of the elect, nay, even the Demiurge.

At the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, when God – carved up by two factions that disputed their exclusive ownership of him – finally left a chance for the human [to appear], a slate-roofer by the name of Eloi Pruystinck, an “*illiteratus et mechanicus*”<sup>523</sup> proletarian, agitated the working-class neighborhood of Saint-Andrew.

A letter from David Joris<sup>524</sup> indicated that an encounter got the two men talking about the following question: What is the best life according to the God of goodness and freedom praised by the Reformation, at least in the mind of Eloi?

In February 1525, Pruystinck went to Wittenberg with the intention of persuading, with the justness of his convictions, the man towards whom Europe had turned its eyes: [Martin] Luther, entangled in his sudden glory. Pruystinck confronted Philippe Melanchthon in the presence of the master who, scandalized

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<sup>522</sup> Please note that, in the French edition of this book, the first 5 footnotes “fell off” their respective pages, so I have had to reestablish their locations.

<sup>523</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “illiterate and unskilled.” According to J. C. Margolin, “Libertins, Libertinisme et ‘Libertinage’ au XVIe Siècle,” published in *Aspects du libertinisme au XVIe siècle* (1974), this was the phrase used by Calvin to describe Pruystinck.

<sup>524</sup> *Translator*: an Anabaptist leader (1501-1556) in the Netherlands.

by the libertarian opinions of Eloi, sent a veritable letter of denunciation to the Protestants of Antwerp:

“I have learned how much your country is agitated by spirits who are full of errors, who devote themselves to hindering the progress of the Christian truth; I know that there has come among you a demon incarnate who wants to induce you into error and divert you from the true intelligence of the Gospel, so as to make you fall into darkness. To avoid his traps more easily, I would like to provide you with some of his propositions: ‘Each man,’ according to him, ‘has the Holy-Spirit; the Holy-Spirit is nothing other than our reason. – Each man has faith; nature has taught me to do to my neighbor what I would like done to me; to have faith is to act this way. – Each one will have eternal life; there is neither Hell nor damnation; only the flesh will be damned. – The law is not violated by bad desires as long as my will does not give in to them. – Those who have the Holy-Spirit do not sin any longer, because they have no reason.’ There is no one who does not want to be more knowledgeable than Luther; everyone wants to win his spurs at my expense. Your demon, when he was here with me, denied all of the articles [of faith], although it was demonstrated that they were his and although he betrayed himself by defending several of them. To tell you the truth, he is an inconstant and lying spirit, full of audacity and insolence, who allows himself to affirm something and then deny it at the same time, who never dares to maintain what he has advanced, and who only came here to praise himself for having discussed a few things with us. With energy he supported the idea that God’s commandments are good and that God does not want sin to exist, which I willingly conceded to him; but he obstinately refused to agree that God, in not wanting sin to exist, nevertheless permits it to reign over mankind. I do not doubt that he represented me to you as if I said that [the existence of] sin is desired by God.”<sup>525</sup>

Returning to Antwerp, Eloi did not cease to continue to propagate his conception of a life inspired by a good God who was hostile to violence, punishment and guilt, and whose grace rendered Edenic innocence to those who followed their desires and their propensity for happiness. Eloi seems to have

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<sup>525</sup> M. Luther, *Werke, Weimar*, 1883-1908, vol. XVIII, French translation in Jundt, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

associated with the humanist Johann Campanus, a gentle man whose project – expounded under the title *On the Possibility of a Union of the Christians and the Turks* (1546) – in part inspired Pruystinck’s ideas. (Note that, in 1530, Melanchthon refused any contact with Campanus and demanded that he be arrested. After the Servetus affair, Campanus was imprisoned for twenty years.)

In February 1526, Eloi and nine of his friends were arrested for the crimes of heresy and reading forbidden books. The penal moderation that the Regent Marguerite of Austria encouraged in the Netherlands explains the clemency of the judgment [against them]. Condemned to apologize and wear a pectoral sign that designated him a heretic, Eloi – loyal to his refusal of martyrdom – simulated such perfect devotion that the magistrates dispensed with the defamatory mark.

A group formed around Eloi that was more and more important. Dominic of Uccle, who was the “writer of all their books,”<sup>526</sup> created their propaganda, which was distributed in Holland and Germany. Van Meteren revealed that among their many adepts there were several bourgeois from Antwerp, “the best, the richest and the most respected, who agreed to live together joyously and in an Epicurean manner.” And this chronicler deplored “their impious opinions, which were supportive of the world and the flesh, and which derided and treated as stupidities both the Catholic religion and the Protestant one.”<sup>527</sup>

Like the *Homines Intelligentiae* in Brussels a century earlier, the Eloisten lost all prudence to the extent that the people who were indifferent to the wars conducted in the name of the pope of Rome or the pope of Wittenberg were increasing in number. In 1533, the Lutheran [Michel] Carnovianus, passing through Antwerp, spoke with indignation about the “Illuminati” there in a letter he sent to Johannes Hess: “Those men are far more perverse and obstinate than the Anabaptists.”<sup>528</sup>

The winds of repression became more violent when, in 1531, Marguerite of Austria ceded the Regency of the Netherlands to her niece, Mary of Hungary, sister of Charles V, who was resolved to pursue the heretics, “repentant or not, with a sufficient severity that it roots out their error and without any other consideration than that of not entirely depopulating the provinces.”<sup>529</sup>

No doubt the frenzied persecution of the Anabaptists temporarily diverted the Inquisitorial eye (in which the light of the pyres shined) away from the

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<sup>526</sup> *Translator*: in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 207, Vaneigem attributes this quote to the accusation of 1544 against the Eloisten.

<sup>527</sup> Van Meteren, *Historia der Nederlanden*, Amsterdam, 1623.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.* [*Translator*: Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 208.]

<sup>529</sup> *Translator*: Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 208.

Eloisten. Nourishing as little sympathy for the adepts of Melchior Hoffmann as for the other henchman of the God of Justice, the Eloisten did not join the [Anabaptist] Münsterites who plotted to seize Antwerp's City Hall on 11 May 1535. The frightful massacre that ensued thus spared them, while the siege of the town by the Duke of Gelderland, acting for the King of France and against Charles V, gave them a fresh deferment.

The fatal blow would come from Deventer, where Jorien Ketel, a friend of David Joris, was tortured and denounced Corneille Van Lier, a lord of Berchem (a village near Antwerp), his two brothers-in-law, the French jeweler Christopher Hérault, a companion of Eloi, and a "slate-roofer." When informed [of these facts], the Governess Mary of Hungary demanded expeditious justice.

Other accusations, cleverly spread around, proceeded from the Calvinist milieu.

In 1544, Vallerand Poulain (from Strasbourg) wrote to Calvin: "Our brothers from Valenciennes, who previously provided us with certain writings of the Quintinists, have returned (...). If you take up arms against the Quintinists, I will rejoice. (...) My brother Raymond has written to me that these horrors are now spreading in Lower Germany through the actions of certain people named David and Eloi. He still has not yet sent me the exposé of their doctrine as he promised me he would. When he sends it, I will transmit it to you." Everything indicates that the announced exposé was none other than the *Summa doctrinae*, which published [in Latin] by [Johann Joseph Ignaz von] Döllinger. I provided the French translation in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*.<sup>530</sup>

In July, the police arrested Eloi, Christopher Hérault, John Davion (a rich bourgeois originally from Lille), Jan Dorhaut (a poor salt-seller), Dominic of Uccle (the author of the pamphlets), the painter Henri de Smet, the engraver and sculptor Cornelis van den Bossche, and others.

A large number of Eloisten took flight and went to England, where some of them joined the Familists of Henry Niclaes. On 14 September 1544, Dominic of Uccle, learning of the tortures to which Eloi was subjected, profited from the absence of his guardian and hanged himself in his cell. On 25 October, Eloi was burned. His legend as an amiable dreamer and gentle Epicurean continued into the

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<sup>530</sup> French translation in R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du Libre-Espirit*, p. 210. [Translator: Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 218-223, which via a footnote refers the reader to I von. Döllinger, *Beitrag zur Sektengeschichte* (Munich, 1890), vol. 2, no. 62, pp. 664-668, and Jules Frederichs, *De Sekte der Loisten* (Ghent, 1891).]

Nineteenth Century in his neighborhood of Saint-Andrew, where Georges Eeckhout welcomed it.<sup>531</sup> Héroult and his companions were decapitated.

No doubt the Eloist movement survived clandestinely. The chroniclers no longer mentioned it, but in 1550 the existence of a group of men and women claiming for themselves the freedoms of love was indicated in the environs of Alost, in Flanders. In 1561, an attack on a convent of Dominicans near Bruges was attributed to this band. Then they moved towards the iconoclast blaze. The exploits of Jacob Gheeraerts, called the Dutchman, evoked the partisans of Battenberg<sup>532</sup> more than the peaceful Eloisten, but it does not appear from Eloi's doctrine that the partisans of the sweetness of life would let themselves be slaughtered without defending themselves.

The Eloist influence was discernible in the Familists, the Ranters, Dirck Coornhert and the anti-clericalism that, for a long time, was strong in the city that Richard Payne Knight [1750-1824] assured his readers was, from the beginning, devoted to the symbiotic cults of the Magna Mater.

## Jacques Gruet

It is to the honor of Geneva, corrupted by dictatorship, that, in that city, there were citizens who were inclined – according to a tradition of national liberty – to claim the free disposition of self and rose up against the theocratic pretensions of Calvin. Several enlightened bourgeois took it upon themselves to confront the fanatic who was resolved to subject the entire population of the city to his austere compulsions.

This revolt, baited by ridicule, revealed [the existence of] an atheistic and irreligious current that, due to the uncertain fate of the Reformation party, was still entitled to pleasant licentiousness.

Benoîte, the wife of Senator Pierre Ameux, justifying the luxuriance of her amorous life, declared that she only saw in it the fortunate effect of the “communion of the saints.”<sup>533</sup>

Jacques Gruet, leader of the opposition to Calvin, composed a pamphlet that evoked the theses of Thomas Scotto and Herman of Rijswick. Though he ordered the destruction of this book, the autocrat could not prevent himself from quoting extracts in his *Opinion that Calvin will deliver at the Proceeding that one must convene against the Book by Gruet in the Senate of Geneva*.

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<sup>531</sup> G. Eekhoud, *Les libertins d'Anvers*, Paris, 1912.

<sup>532</sup> *Translator*: cf. chapter 42 of the present work.

<sup>533</sup> *Histoire de Genève*, I, p. 399.

In 1547, Gruet tried to stir up the people of Geneva. He affixed an appeal to revolt on the walls of the principal church in Geneva. Had he waited too long? Calvin obtained his arrest and the arrest of Gruet's friends. The accused were decapitated and Calvin reigned as master in his citadel, throwing to the mercy of divine anger the enemies that he attracted so as to better consume them or that he denounced to the magistrates, Catholic or Protestant, so that justice was done.

Calvin called "libertines" the friends of political and religious liberty, which his authority reduced. He gave the name "Spiritual Libertines" to a faction that propagated the doctrine of the free satisfaction of desire in accordance with the tradition of the Free Spirit that existed among the humanists and the people of the people who were seduced by the modernity of the Reformation and rebuffed by its obscurantism.

Jacques Gruet rejected the existence of God and denied the existence of eternal life in the beyond, "saying of the law of God that it was worth nothing, just like the people who made it, and that the Gospel is only lies and that all of the Scriptures is a false and crazy doctrine."<sup>534</sup>

In an article on the Gruet affair, Berriot published several remarks attributed to the incriminated pamphlet. He added to them a letter discovered at the time of Gruet's arrest.<sup>535</sup>

"Moses is mocked in his 'person' and in his 'doctrine,' as are all the 'patriarchs and prophets,' who are characterized as *folz*, *resveurs*, *fantastics*: as for 'their *escriptures*,' the author only has 'detestation'! There is no tenderness for the 'evangelists' and 'disciples' upon whom he inflicts the epithets *maraux*, scoundrels, apostates, oafs, *escervelés*. As far as the Virgin Mary – through whom Jesus is attacked – she is ridiculed in her 'honor' and her '*pudicité*,' since she is described as a 'bawd' . . . Nevertheless, it is Christ who is the target of the most lively insults: the manuscript denies his 'divinity,' contests 'his Passion,' and his 'resurrection'; Jesus of Nazareth, at first called 'Nycollas de Molle' by the pamphlet, is defined as 'a

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<sup>534</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>535</sup> *Translator*: in what follows, there are many words in Middle, not Modern French: *folz* means "crazy people"; *resveurs* are "dreamers"; *escriptures* are "writings"; *maraux* appears to be "rascals"; *escervelés* are "scatterbrains"; *pudicité* is "modesty"; *cuidoit ester* appears to be "believed (himself) to be"; and *follastre* is either "amorously playful," or "crazy star" or just "crazy."

beggar, a liar, a *folz*, a seducer, a wicked man and a miserable, unhappy fantastic, (...) a boor full of malignant presumption' whose 'miracles (...) are only sorceries and antics' and whose hanging [from the cross] was 'merited'; in brief, Christ, who '*cuidoit estre* the son of God' and who 'was a hypocrite,' was in fact 'dead miserably in his folly, a crazy *follastre*, a great drunk, a detestable traitor and a hanged wicked man'! The 'Holy Spirit,' which seems of little interest to the author, is only the object of several blasphemies, 'intolerable' or 'abominable,' it is true; while 'the (...) *Escriptures*, the Old as well as the New Testament,' are the subject of many pages of manuscript that express a veritable 'detestation': 'The Gospel (...) is only lies,' 'all of the *escripture* is false and wicked and (...) have less meaning than Aesop's fables' since 'it is a false and crazy doctrine' . . . Thus, the author clearly vows 'to mock all Christianity' and 'all the Christians who have believed in (...) Jesus Christ and believe and would like to believe' [in him]. He finally questions in a fundamental fashion 'this law of God that is worth nothing'; he 'blasphemies against the divine power and the essence of God' and, denying that God is 'creator of the heavens and earth,' he 'renounces and abolishes all religion and divinity,' so as to conclude: 'God is nothing,' 'men (are) similar to the beasts' and 'eternal life' doesn't exist!

"Faced with such remarks, the historian of ideas certainly regrets not having access to the thirteen manuscript sheets that were publicly burned in 1550, as well as the original copy of the letter *Clarissime lector*,<sup>536</sup> which was found at the time of the arrest and of which Gruet, in 1547, denied paternity, but which he admitted that he had in his possession and which he said he got from Jean des Cordes, which has also disappeared, in the Nineteenth Century it seems. . . . Through a fortunate turn of events, François Rocca – the secretary of the Consistory, later the archivist of Geneva in 1768, and someone who knew of the Gruet affair through the *Letter* from [La] Monnoie that concerned *The Book of the Three Impostors* – had, while recounting the entirety of the trial in his *Collection of Manuscript Memoirs* concerning Geneva from 1526 to 1593, copied several pieces and transcribed the precious text of the *Clarissime lector*, which still

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<sup>536</sup> *Translator*: Middle French for either "Clearest reader" or "Most renowned reader."



existed at that point, a text to which explicit reference was made by both the interrogators of June 1547 as well as [Théodore de] Bèze's *Vita Calvini* and Letter LXXVII from Calvin to [Pierre] Viret. . . . It is thus in François Rocca's *Manuscript Memoirs*, deposited at the Geneva Historical Society, that one can find a copy of this document that is so important to the history of the thought of the Renaissance and that obviously merits quotation at length:

‘Dear illustrious reader,

‘There are men of diverse opinions: one is a professor of literature (*litterarum professor*), another is a soldier (*bellicator*), another is in love with riches, another is a philosopher, another is a blacksmith. What do I seem to you, illustrious reader?

‘I do not know what men have said and written, but I believe that all that has been written with respect to divine power is false, illusion and fantasy. . . . Several wise men say that man was created from the substance of the earth and that the first man was Adam. . . .

‘Truly, I myself think that the world is without beginning (*absque principio*) and will have no end (*nequam aliqua finis*). In fact, who is the man who was able to truly describe the beginning of the world? None other than Moses, who described the first generation, and this same Moses wrote about what took place two thousand years before his own epoch: therefore, all that he wrote, he had it in his mind, having no other authority than what he himself said and what he says was revealed to him. . . . Me, I deny his authority because many men have contested it (...). He says that he saw God in the form of fire and that God presented himself to him in another form (... as) a voice (...). Truly, I am in agreement with Aristotle, who wrote the following after reading the works of Moses: I am astonished to see this preposterous person [*ce cornu*] say a lot and prove nothing (*iste cornutus multa dicit, sed nihil probat*)!

‘This same Moses affirmed, as I have said, that his first narratives were revealed to him by God, which is something I do not know about (...). After him came other men who invented still more (...) and added other fables and wrote them (...) [fables] like Job, Isaiah and the other ancients. Then the moderns, such as Jerome, Ambrose, Bede, Scot,

Aquinas and other barbarians (*barbari*) invented other falsehoods (...). Still others would come later (...).

‘Nevertheless, what dignity did their God have? It is a horrible thing to make man, give him life and then, after two hours and three days of it, to bring death to him (*est res nefanda facere hominem, dare illi vitam, post tandem alicui tempus vitae duarum horarum alteri trium dierum et postandem illi contribuere mortem*). It is an improbable thing to create man and then break him (...). Likewise, some say that the soul is in the body, while others say that it is a spirit: where does this spirit go when it leaves the body? If you respond to me: it remains in a certain place, waiting for the final advent, then why does God not leave it in its own body, rather than changing its place? If you say: they are at rest, glorifying God, and the others are in Hell, [then I would respond] if they are in Hell, some essence would appear, therefore nothing is known of these things with certitude! . . . Likewise, if it happens that some are resurrected from among the dead, I believe that they would have described something of the form of this other world, like Lazarus and many others. . . . But are these things invented for the pleasure of men, like those [stories of people] who sleep for a whole year?

‘And then, the one whom one calls Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God: why did he suffer so badly during the Passion? If he were the Son of God, he would have demonstrated the power that he said God had. I do not believe that he was the Son of God, but that he was a madman (*fantasticus*) who wanted to glorify himself and all the things that have been written on this subject are most certainly false (...).

‘Me, I believe that when a man is dead, there is no more hope for life (*Hoc ideo credo quod, cum mortuus est homo, nulla altera expectatio vitae*).

‘Finally, we who are called Christians: do we not think that the Jews, the Turks and those who live differently are condemned because they do not believe in Christ? Therefore, if truly there is only one God, master of all things (*unus Deus actor omnium rerum*) who created mankind, why did he create such a great multitude only to make them perish (*quare creavit tantam magnam multitudinem et postea vellet*

*ipsam periri facere*)? This is absurd: do you not see that all prosper, the Turks as well as the Christians? (...)

‘Nevertheless, as I said at the beginning, there is a difference in the nature of men: some are bloodthirsty, others are peaceful; some are truly chaste where women are concerned, others are lustful. From whence could this come? From the nature of the elements (*ex natura elementorum*). . . . While our moderns support the idea that this machine (*hanc fabricam*) is entirely governed by a single God, I think that the astrological philosophers are closer to the truth (*puto philosophos astrologos propinquiores esse veritati . . .*). I truly think that everything is driven by the sun, the moon and the stars, along with the four elements (*sole, luna et stellis, cum quatuor elementis*). Nevertheless, if you ask me who made these things, since no one is their author (*nullus est auctor de iis*), I do not know how I would respond to you. But there are astronomers (...) such as Plato and Aristotle, and, if you read them, you will perceive the truth more closely (*sunt aliqui astronomi [...] sicut Plato, Aristoteles quos, si leges, percipias proprius veritatem*).’’<sup>537</sup>

In his *Scrutinio Atheismi*, Spizelius attributed to his contemporary, Theodore Simon, the following credo: “I believe in three things: the heavens, the earth and the heavenly form. The earth is the nourishing mother of all things and the heavenly form contains all thought and all speech. Thus eat, drink and partake of pleasure, because God is nothing other.”<sup>538</sup>

## Quintin Thierry and His Friends

Around 1525, in Antwerp, while Eloi the Roofer was using the Scriptures to justify the search for pleasures and amenities of existence, Coppin of Lille – known through Calvin’s nasty allusions<sup>539</sup> – professed a similar teaching in his hometown. Not far from there, in Tournai, a tailor named Quintin Thierry (or Thieffry) left his trade and his city to go to France where a state of mind that was both detached from Catholic dogma and reticent with respect to Lutheranism was spreading. In any case, Quintin and a companion, Bertrand des Moulins, hardly

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<sup>537</sup> F. Berriot, *Un procès d’athéisme à Genève, l’affaire Gruet*, BSHPF, 1979.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>539</sup> Calvin, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des libertins*, Geneve, 1547.

had difficulty rallying sympathy. Antoine Pocques of Lille and Claude Perceval, no doubt originally from Rouen, seconded Quintin after the death of Bertrand des Moulins. In Paris, Quintin confronted Calvin, who later on, in a pamphlet, complained about having “to repeat this gossip.” Many artisans in the capital shared the opinions of the man from Tournai.

For his part, Pocques went to Strasbourg where, using the double language of devotion, he deceived the Lutheran Bucer and obtained from him letters of recommendation for the Protestants in other countries. Nevertheless, stating in 1538, this same Bucer warned Queen Marguerite of Navarre, the author of the gallant tales of the *Heptameron*, who – at her court in Nérac – sheltered the innovators who were threatened by the politics of her brother, Francois I, whatever their opinions were.

Pocques pushed insolence and provocation to the point of meeting with Calvin, but, more mistrustful than Bucer, he accorded Pocques no recommendations.

On the other hand, the court of Navarre was favorable to the discourse that gave to ordinary terrestrial pleasures, willingly practiced in this stratum of society, the best reasons in the world. Did not one impute [Marguerite] Porete’s book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to the “Marguerite des marguerites”?<sup>540</sup>

Describing the small court at Nérac, Jundt remarked: “One spoke a lot there, it is true, of inward piety, but one gaily surrendered to the pleasures of life.”<sup>541</sup>

In 1543, Pocques and Quintin received an attentive welcome at the court of Marguerite. There they developed the idea that there was no sin in devoting oneself to the sensual pleasures of love and that following the liberties of nature resulted precisely from the presence in each person of a God of universal goodness.

When Calvin’s accusations – enclosed within his treatise *Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines who Call Themselves Spirituals* – arrived in Nérac, they only aroused scorn and reprobation. Marguerite expressed quite clearly the contempt in which she held this text directed “against herself and against her servants.”<sup>542</sup> She let the author know that she did not desire to have such a contemptible man near her.

His insistence finally ended up alarming Marguerite, whose sympathies for people persecuted by her brother placed her in a difficult situation. It was appropriate for her to avoid the thunderbolts from Geneva even more than those that came from Rome.

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<sup>540</sup> *Translator*: “Marguerite of the daisies” or perhaps the “Daisy of the daisies.”

<sup>541</sup> A. Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

Pocques and Quintin returned to the Netherlands, where Calvin's henchmen – Vallerand-Poulain and his friends – had not been inactive. On 13 September 1542, in Valenciennes, Hugues Lescantelier, a brewer from Maire-lez-Tournai, and Caso Hocq were decapitated for supporting a “new sect called ‘libertine.’”

Lescantelier had proclaimed his state of impeccability, while Hocq – rediscovering the theses of primitive Christianity – explained that Christ did not die on the cross, but that he had simply abandoned his human appearance, which he'd taken on to manifest himself on earth.

In 1546, Quintin – denounced by Calvin to the Catholic authorities of Tournai, who drew their accusations from his pamphlet – was arrested with many of his partisans, who were shoemakers, carpenters and other artisans. Quintin, apprehended because Calvin had said that he had rallied many ladies of the city to his sect, was hanged and burned. Three of his friends perished by the sword.

Quintin shared with Jacques Gruet contempt for so-called apostles. Calvin was indignant: Quintin “had assigned an epithet [*quelque brocard*] to each of the apostles in order to render them contemptible. And so he called Saint Paul ‘broken pot,’ [using his Picardian dialect he called] Saint John ‘young idiot,’ Saint Peter a denier of God and Saint Matthew a usurer.”<sup>543</sup>

Quintin rejected all forms of the Church, the rituals and the sacraments. God, by dying on the cross after his descent to earth, thus signified that he had abolished sin. From then on, one need only follow one's inclinations without being preoccupied with anything else. Quintin and his followers celebrated amorous passion, which offended Calvin with an intensity that said a great deal about his own conceptions about the matter:

“These miserable people profane marriage, mixing men with women like brute beasts, wherever their concupiscence leads them. (...) They color this brutal pollution with the name of spiritual marriage: they call ‘spiritual movement’ the furious impetuosity that pushes and enflames a man like a bull and a woman like a dog (...). They also make a similar confusion with their goods, saying that it is in accordance with the communion of the saints that no one possesses anything as his own, but that each one takes what he would have.”<sup>544</sup>

“Around 1546, their doctrine was taught in Rouen by an old Cordelier, who counted among his proselytes several ladies from

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<sup>543</sup> Calvin, *Contre la secte . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.* [Translator: Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, p. 232.]

noble families. He was put in prison the following year as a Protestant. Calvin, to whom his writings were communicated, refuted them in an epistle addressed to the Protestant community of Rouen. Set free, the Cordelier published in response *The Shield of Defense*, to which Farel would oppose *The Sword of the Word* in 1550. In France, the last vestiges of the Spiritual Libertines met at Corbigny in the Nivernais; in 1559 Calvin wrote to the Protestants of this town to warn them of the heretics' tracks. Several rare clues still indicated the presence of these heretics in the towns along the Rhine beyond Strasbourg. In a letter to Rodolph Gwalther, one of the theologians of Zurich, Viret reported the existence of the sect in Lower Germany in 1544, and Calvin, in the same year, let it be understood that the heresy had partisans in Cologne. In 1545, the Walloon community of Wesel declared in its confession of faith that it rejected, among other errors, those of the Libertines.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 131; R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.*, p. 215 and *sq.* [Translator: Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, pp. 224-232.]

## **Chapter 42: The Anabaptists**

If in the Sixteenth Century no religious movement endured as much combined hostility from the Catholics, the Protestants and the temporal authorities as Anabaptism did, this was because it added to the religious discourse of egalitarian theocracy the old social dream in which nostalgia for a golden age provided the weapons of hope to the desperate struggle against the exploiters and the destroyers of natural wealth.

In the premonition of the Third Age, the imminence of which fit in with the crisis of the birth of modern capitalism, the proletarian demands of the towns easily mixed with the peasants' aspirations and the regrets of the old autarkic rural communes.

The specter of the millennium, whose agrarian fundamentalism brought the inhumanity inherent in the celestial mandate to the surface in the antithetical ideologies of Bolshevism and fascism, engendered among the partisans of the old order and the adepts of a new one a climate of endemic hatred and fear that was propitious for all the excesses of cruelty.

Close to the Waldensian tradition, the peaceful Anabaptists did not incur persecution any less than those who extolled armed struggle. The peaceful ones nourished such a calling for martyrdom that they practically solicited the executioner's hand. In Münster, where their equality assured by divine right was instituted, the partisans of armed struggle showed that the God of the little fathers of the people hardly spared the children judged to be unworthy of his goodness.

### **Storch, Pfeiffer and Müntzer**

Anabaptism (at least in the writings of its enemies) designated an ensemble of independent groups that were governed by prophets or apostles armed with the sword and word of God. Their common traits evoked the demands of the reformers of the Middle Ages. They rejected the imposition of baptism on infants because it was generally administered by unworthy priests and because it did not obey the choices consciously made by individuals in the community of the faithful. In practice, baptism played a role among the Anabaptists, and especially the Münsterians, similar to the one played by party-membership cards among the old Stalinists of the Twentieth Century. It was a sign of election that authorized access to the egalitarian kingdom of the saints.

The absolute authority that the Anabaptists recognized in God, whose ministers they were, freed them from obeying the spiritual and temporal authorities. In the German principalities, that authority expressed the nearly unanimous rejection of the prince-bishop and his allies. The collusion of the Catholic and Lutheran notables partook of the discredit of two religions that were judged to be irreconcilable with God's designs. Anabaptism especially estimated itself to be the carrier of a new order. It needed to destroy the ramparts of the old tyrannies in order to impose the authoritarian reign of the saints. Such a project discovered its social ferment in the peasant wars and the insurrections of the miners, weavers and crowds of unemployed workers.

Peasant discontent was a constant factor in history ever since the era of Circumcellions and bagaudae.<sup>546</sup> The peasant uprisings led by Dolcino, William Carle and John Ball punctuated this constancy with an energy that was exacerbated each time that the economy, through the free circulation of goods, broke the closed system of the agrarian mode of production, which was the motherly paradise that was ruined by the sordid exploitation of terrestrial and human nature.

From century to century – like sparks from a forge in which a humanity devoted to Hell was active – there flew manifestoes, prophecies and pamphlets such as *The Book of One Hundred Chapters*, written at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century by the “revolutionary of the Upper Rhineland.”<sup>547</sup>

Inspired by John Ball and the radical Taborites, this work expounded the demands for equality and justice that animated the revolt of the *Bundschuh*<sup>548</sup> and breathed life into the idea of freedom that Luther had celebrated before repudiating.

Grouping together peasants, poor people from the villages and wandering mercenaries, the *Bundschuh* movement drew its name from its emblem, which was the peasant's laced buskin. (According to Maurice Pianzola, their flag was painted by Jerg Ratgeb.)<sup>549</sup> Led by a man of the people, Joss Fritz, a forest ranger from the

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<sup>546</sup> *Translator*: not discussed in the present work, the *bagaudae* were insurgent peasants in the Third Century.

<sup>547</sup> N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l'Apocalypse*, p. 255. [*Translator*: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 250. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, I have quoted directly from the original.]

<sup>548</sup> *Translator*: German for “tied shoe,” the *Bundschuh* movement linked together a series of peasant revolts in Germany between 1493 and 1517.

<sup>549</sup> M. Pianzola, *Peintres et vilains*, Paris, 1962. [*Translator*: in 1974, Vaneigem adopted the name “Ratgeb” to publish *De la grève sauvage à l'autogestion généralisée* (Paris: Éditions 10/18).]



village of Lehen, this movement made an attempt to take Sélestat in 1493 and imposed itself in the region of Speyer in 1502. The insurrection was crushed, but Joss Fritz managed to escape the repression and, in 1513 and then again in 1517, organized new conflagrations in Swabia and Alsace. His millenarian program did not bother with theological considerations: he called for the extermination of the rich and the nobles, and for the establishment of an egalitarian and fraternal society. Except for the patrician caste and the lords, the majority of the towns were receptive, and the current of sympathy aroused by the peasant wars expressed itself so strongly among the artists of the time that the majority of the official histories of art have preferred to pass over them in silence. Only Pianzola has taken the pleasure of indicating these artists in his study, *Painters and Villains*.<sup>550</sup>

These artists were [Albrecht] Dürer, [Matthias] Grünewald, [the aforementioned] Jerg Ratgeb (who was a painter and military counselor to the armed peasants quartered at Pforzheim in 1526), the brothers Hans Sebald and Barthel Beham (already condemned for irreligion at a celebrated trial at Nuremberg), Lucas Cranach, Nicolas Manuel Deutsche, Urs Graf, Philippe Dietmar (decapitated at Wurzburg in 1525), and Tilman Riemenschneider (renowned for the never-equalled beauty of the hands of his figures and whose fingers were broken by the executioners at the time of the tortures in Wurzburg in 1526).

It fell to Müntzer and his friends to give to the movement a type of religious carapace, which was more apt to stifle than to protect it, because the spirit of sacrifice more predisposed the movement to martyrdom and expiatory defeat than to the victories of natural liberty.

Born in Stolberg (Thuringia) in 1488, Thomas Müntzer studied Greek, Latin and Hebrew in the course of several brilliant years at the university, which destined him for the priesthood. Soon thereafter he rallied to Luther's party, but quit it no less rapidly when, having become the Pastor at Zwickau, not far from Bohemia, he met the weaver Nicholas Storch.

Influenced by the Taborite movement, Storch preached the imminence of the millenarian revolution. The saints or the Elect of the New Age would be the faithful who possessed in themselves the Spirit or the Living Christ. Müntzer adhered to Storch's views and gave them a more theological and sacrificial turn.

Stripped of his own will, the adept exposed himself – in the manner of Christ – to ordeals and suffering, which Müntzer called “the cross.” Finally allowed a kind of resurrection, he received the Living Christ in himself, and the will of God manifested itself through its intermediary. Here the idea of the

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<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

incarnated God, common to the Free Spirit, passed through the preliminary of the renunciation of life, along the access road to social purification without which there was no kingdom of the saints.

Like Savonarola, Müntzer rejected culture and erudition, and condemned reading, pleasure and lust. His preaching against the Lutheran notables and the lechery of the bishops attracted the sympathies of the weavers and the miners who were reduced to poverty by inflation.

In April 1521, the municipal authorities chased him from the city. Storch unleashed an uprising that was quickly crushed. Müntzer traveled through Bohemia, was expelled from Prague, wandered in Germany and in 1523 found himself the preacher of Allstedt in Thuringia, where – with the peasants, copper-mine workers and artisans from the town – he founded the League of the Elect, which prefigured the secular League of Communists that Marx dreamed was the iron lance of the proletariat.

Invited to preach before the Duke John of Saxony in July 1524, he predicted the return of humanity to Christ, to nature and to paradise in harmony and peace. Was the sovereign, an open and tolerant spirit, seduced by Müntzer's eloquence and program? He took time to reflect before summoning the prophet to Weimar for a reconciliation, at which he simply asked him to abstain from all prophetic declarations.

Nevertheless, because Heinrich Pfeiffer, an old monk, had incited a revolt of the disinherited classes against the patrician oligarchy in Mulhausen, Müntzer hastened to join him and give him the League's support. The failure of the insurrection chased Müntzer from the city and convinced him to bet upon the peasant movement. Through a second audacious act, Pfeiffer succeeded in reversing the municipal majority and instaurating working-class power.

In April 1525, at his church, Müntzer hoisted a white banner painted with a rainbow, which was the symbol of the divine law that haloes the earth. Müntzer then began an apocalyptic discourse whose hysterical ardor augured a great deficiency in the means required for such an enterprise: "If there are but three of you who, trusting in God, seek only his name and honour, you will not fear a hundred thousand. Now go at them, and at them, and at them! The scoundrels are as dispirited as dogs. . . ." <sup>551</sup>

Pfeiffer refused to leave Mulhausen. Storch, on the other hand, joined the peasant forces led by the messiah of the Third Age.

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<sup>551</sup> N. Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 270. [Translator: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 267.]

Joss Fritz conducted guerrilla operations with his skillful and rapid forces. As for Müntzer, he put the fate of his army in the hands of the same God that Luther invoked, from his side, to aid the princes and finish off the rabble. In Frankenhausen, five thousand peasants – hoping for a gesture from the Savior until the last minute – let themselves be massacred. The army of the princes and Luther lost eight mercenaries. Storch found death trying to escape from the vise that the masters of heaven and earth tightened upon him. On 27 May 1525, Thomas Müntzer and Heinrich Pfeiffer were decapitated after being subjected to the customary tortures. The repression fell upon all of Germany. But if revolutionary Anabaptism ebbed in the countryside, it did so only to be reborn with an increased rigor in the towns, where economic development progressed at the cost of a frenzied exploitation of the proletariat.

### **Hut, Hübmaier and Hutter**

While the persecutions in the towns and countryside increased the visions of pyres, gallows and wheels [of torture], which the works of Pieter Brueghel held up like judicial charges against a completely besmirched humanity, the Anabaptist movement hesitated between the anemic pacifism of the Waldensians and the violence in which God (as usual) recognized his own.

A disciple of Müntzer, and also a native of Thuringia, Hans Hut did not hesitate to announce that, in 1528, Christ would descend to the earth and loan the sword of his justice to the re-baptized saints so that they could annihilate the parish-priests, pastors, nobles and kings. The Kingdom of God would be established in the shared community of goods and the freedom of love.

Captured in 1527, Hut died in prison, no doubt due to torture, leaving to others the care of bringing his program to completion: “Christ would return to earth and placed the two-edged sword of justice in the hands of the re-baptized Saints. The Saints would hold judgment on the priests and pastors for their false teachings and, above all, on the great ones of the earth for their persecutions; kings and nobles would be cast into chains.”<sup>552</sup>

Hut wasn't the only one to substitute a God of resentment and great purification for the God of the dominant oppression. In 1528, the Anabaptists of Esslingen, on the Neckar River, and Ulm fomented social revolution under the flag of what the Twentieth Century calls “extremism.” (Note that the last monotheistic religion, Islam, rediscovered in extremism a similar clash between the decline of the agrarian system and the emergence of mercantile modernity.)

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<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278. [Translator: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 275]

Unlike the doctrines of Hut and Müntzer, those of Balthasar Hübmaier (called Pacimontanus) professed an absolute pacifism and a great spiritual opening. The Pastor at Waldshut in Bavaria and a preacher at the Cathedral of Regensburg, he expounded the cause of Anabaptism in 1525. Shortly thereafter, he became uneasy and went to Zurich, from whence he was chased in 1526.

Taking refuge in Moravia, he rallied the sympathies of the inhabitants of Nikolsburg to his pacifist ideals. He gained the protection of the lords of Lichtenstein. He founded a print shop, from which came tracts that popularized the new faith. His adepts were estimated to number around twelve thousand people.

Around 1527, Hans Amon, the leader of the Anabaptists in Lower Austria, provoked a schism in Hübmaier's community. Amon estimated that believers must not possess anything of their own, unlike the more moderate opinions that Menno Simons later adopted in accordance with the doctrinal line traced out by Hübmaier.

Nevertheless, Moravia soon experienced the backwash of the repressive wave that hit Germany. Since Vienna had summoned him to appear and answer for his religious options, Hübmaier –who refused to retract his remarks – was delivered to the Inquisitors by his protectors, the lords of Lichtenstein. He was burned on 10 March 1528.

Hans Amon took refuge with his disciples in Slavkov, better known as Austerlitz. There in 1523 he faced the dissidence of a faction – inheritors of the line of the *Pikarti* or Adamites – that intended to live in accordance with free sex, nay, even free love.

John Hutter, a native of Moso in South Tyrol, was invited to lead the community: he banished those who had enriched themselves. Threatened with arrest, he left Moravia for Tyrol, where he died, executed in February 1536.

Under the name “Hutterite,” the Moravian Anabaptist community known in Slovakia as the “Habans” – from the Hebrew *ha banim*, “the true children of God” – continued the fundamental teachings of the Waldensians that had been adopted by Anabaptism: the rejection of private property; the refusal to pay duties and taxes by arguing that the State used this money to finance armed conflicts; the [popular] election of the preacher who led the community; baptism submitted to the decision of adults; the refusal to bear arms; and the condemnation of war and the death penalty. Such was enough to arouse the permanent animosity of the temporal and spiritual authorities against them.

Around the middle of the Sixteenth Century, there were nearly seventy thousand adepts in Moravia. Incited by the Jesuits, the Catholic authorities chased them from the country. The adepts' refusal to fight during the Thirty Years' War ended up in their dispersal. They went to Transylvania, Poland, southern Russia and, starting in the Eighteenth Century, the United States.

Meanwhile, the doctrines of the Mennonites distanced the faithful from their ambition to establish the egalitarian kingdom of “each for God and God for all” on earth.

## **Melchior Hoffmann**

The path taken by Melchior Hoffmann irresolutely traced itself out between the aggressiveness of Müntzer and Hut and the pacifism of Hübmaier. Born around 1495 in Schwäbisch Hall, Hoffmann was enthusiastic about the mystical works of Tauler and the writings of Luther, whom he defended at Valmiera until his expulsion from the town in 1523. At Tartu in Estonia, he preached against the use of images, in 1525 inspiring an iconoclast riot, in the course of which the crowd prevented his arrest.

Hoffmann’s obstinacy in predicting the end of time drew upon him the hostility of the Lutherans, one of whom (Tegetmaier) forced Hoffmann to leave Tartu. In Stockholm, where he got married, Hoffmann fixed 1533 as the advent of the era of the saints. Exiled by [King] Gustave Vasa, he fled to Lübeck with his wife and children. Then he went to Magdeburg, where the Lutheran Nicolaus von Amsdorf demanded his expulsion. Welcomed in Holstein, he was flushed out by the intrigues of Luther, whose zeal in persecuting dissidents was the envy of the inquisitors. Summoned by Duke Christian to present himself at a public confrontation in Flensburg, Hoffmann responded, not without arrogance, to the question of the identities of his partisans: “I do not recognize any adherents. I hold myself upright and only in the Word of God. Each one does the same.”<sup>553</sup>

Chased from Denmark, Hoffmann took refuge at Frise [in France], where he encountered Karlstadt, then went to Strasbourg. There, in 1529, he published his *Dialogues* on the quarrels of Flensburg. He associated with Caspar Schwenckfeld and produced many prophetic texts. Then Hoffmann joined the Anabaptists and intervened at the Council at Strasbourg so that a church might be assigned to them. This brought a torch to the fire of the repression. Once again he was forced into exile. In Frise, he founded an Anabaptist community, while Luther raged against those whom he (drawing upon Hoffmann’s first name) called “Melchiorites.” Luther’s words had the virtues of a guillotine blade. In 1531, Volkertszoon and eight [other] Melchiorites were decapitated at The Hague. Stirred by the ardor of their martyrdom, Hoffmann preached in Hesse and Frise where, around 1532, Obbe Philips became his disciple.

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<sup>553</sup> *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Scottsdale, 1955-1959, article “Melchior Hoffmann.”

In the incessant blaze of the violence, Hoffmann suddenly proposed – in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* – a peaceful conception of Anabaptism that excluded all recourse to weapons, persuaded, as he now was, that the redemption of humanity proceeded from those who preached in the desert.

He had scarcely appeased the notables and the property owners when a pamphlet in which he addressed prayers, not to Christ nor to the Holy-Spirit but to God alone, displeased the Protestant clergy, who, like all priests and ministers, were quick to take offense that one might address oneself to the master of the heavens without referring to the masters of the earth. Bucer, the Pope of Strasbourg, provoked his arrest.

Hoffmann's biographers have estimated that this was an error from the point of view of maintaining order, because his growing influence had little by little counterbalanced the directives of the insurrectional wing of Anabaptism, which, growing in Holland, soon inspired a wave of urban revolts that ran aground in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Lübeck, but succeeded in Münster.

After the crushing of the Münsterites, among whom his disciple Rothman perished, the conditions of Hoffmann's detention became more serious. Only the hope of dragging a public retraction out of him – which Bucer and Capito tried to do – saved him from capital punishment. He died in 1543, never having lost his eloquence, his naivety or his faith in the imminence of the terrestrial Jerusalem.

Ironically, the majority of Hoffmann's disciples found themselves at the center of the Münsterian powder keg. But it is true that, for close to a century, Anabaptism expressed in theological terms an endemic insurrectional situation, the violence of which most often got lost in the countries dominated by Catholicism and its religious wars. Like Hans Denck, who ironically regretted that God had not permitted him to believe in God, the Anabaptists substituted for the God of the feudal lords a collectivist God who was elected by the members of the party. In this sense, Münster offered a beautiful example of the divine collectivism that was headed for a terrible future once God was deposed by the State, which, self-sufficient, no longer felt the need to invoke a heavenly phantom to perpetuate the reign of fear on earth.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> N. Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 279. [*Translator*: though there is nothing on p. 275 of Cohn's *In Pursuit of the Millennium* that would call for such a footnote on Vaneigem's part, he is certainly supporting Cohn's basic thesis.]

## The Münsterites

“North-west Germany at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century consisted in the main of a number of petty ecclesiastical states, each with a prince-bishop as its sovereign. Usually such a state was torn by fierce social conflicts. The government of the state was in the hands of the prince-bishop and of the chapter of the diocese, which elected him and to a large extent controlled his policy. The members of the chapter were recruited solely from the local aristocracy – a coat of arms with at least four quarterings was commonly an indispensable qualification – and they often chose one of their own number as bishop. This group of aristocratic clerics was subject to no control by any higher authority; in the regional diet they were powerfully represented and could always rely on the support of the knighthood. They therefore tended to govern solely in the interest of their own class and of the clergy of the diocese. In the ecclesiastical state, the clergy were not only very numerous – in the Bishopric of Münster there were some thirty ecclesiastical centres, including four monasteries, seven convents, ten churches, a cathedral and of course the chapter itself – but also highly privileged. Members of the chapter enjoyed rich prebends and canonries. The monks were permitted to carry on secular trades and handicrafts. Above all, the clergy as a whole were almost entirely exempt from taxation.”<sup>555</sup>

In 1531, Chaplain Bernt Rothmann was converted to Lutheranism at Münster. He enjoyed the support of the guilds and a rich textile manufacturer, Knipperdollinck. Seduced by the prophetic inspiration of Melchior Hoffmann, Rothmann preached the imminence of the “messianic sorrows” that announced the birth of a new era in 1533, the 15th centenary of the death of Christ.

Upon the death of the bishop, the guilds opened the town to Protestant pastors. Hunted everywhere, the Anabaptists came there as if to the Promised Land.

In 1531, Sebastian Franck summarized *The Fifth Epistle attributed to Clement* thus:

“A little later, Nimrod began to reign and then anyone who was successful there dominated his neighbor. And they began to divide the

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<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280. [Translator: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 276.]

world and to quarrel about questions of property. Then one distinguished Mine and Yours. Finally, the people became savage, like wild beasts. Each one wanted to be more beautiful and better than the others, in fact hoping to become their master. But God had made all things to be held in common, as today we still enjoy the air, fire, the rain and the sun in common; a few thievish and tyrannical men cannot appropriate and jealously keep these things for themselves.”<sup>556</sup>

The theme of the *Fifth Epistle* was a favorite of Rothmann, whose popularity was growing with the influx of unemployed Dutch workers, whom the rich Lutherans could not see wandering the streets of the city, permeated by holiness, without experiencing fear.

The imprisonment of Melchior Hoffmann in Strasbourg weakened the pacifist faction and favored the efflorescence of the apostles and prophets who were more willing to brandish the torch of Münster. Among the latter, the baker Jan Matthys of Haarlem and Jan Bockelson (also called John of Leyden) set themselves up as the spokesmen for a crowd for which God was readying himself to set the table for a new egalitarian law.

In February 1534, a veritable hysteria for conversion seized the city; the streets were filled with ecstatic people who professed their obedience to the eternal Father, to whom they delivered the city hall without encountering any opposition. Lutherans and Catholics took flight while the voices of Rothmann, Matthys and Bockelson proclaimed Münster to be the New Jerusalem.

The goods of the banished Lutherans and Catholics were confiscated and used to enrich communal funds. While a decree promulgated the death penalty for those who balked at letting themselves be re-baptized, the Bishop of Münster organized the siege of the town and alerted the princes and municipal counsels so that the hordes that were converging upon the egalitarian millennium could be intercepted and massacred.

After the death of Matthys, who was killed during a sortie that a divine order enjoined him to attempt, Bockelson imposed a collectivist regime and a theocratic dictatorship by virtue of which all opposition was a crime of high treason.

Each person was paid by the municipal power; in the refectories, communal meals assured the needs of all under the auspices of fraternal communion. Since [private] property was a sin, it was mandated that the doors of the houses be kept open. The executions of “heretics,” presided over by “the King of the Final Days,” went on and on in an atmosphere of terror, to which famine was soon added. Like

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<sup>556</sup> S. Franck, *Chronica*, GA.



all paradises of heavenly or governmental obedience, the reign of the perfect ones turned into Hell.<sup>557</sup>

The millenarian revolution imploded into horror. After the town was recaptured, the great fear caused by Anabaptism effaced the dream and nightmare of the collectivists of God with even greater ferocity. Dismembered by red-hot pincers while still alive, John of Leyden, Knipperdollinck and their friend Krechting – who all died without crying out – condensed into an eternal silence the inhumanity of the [unity of the] oppressor and the oppressed that continues to reign under the deceptive name of human history.

### **Pacifists and Terrorists: Menno Simons and Battenberg**

The annihilation of Münster enraged the hardliners at the same time that the pacifism of Hübmaier and old Hoffmann restored Anabaptism to the road of sweet resignation. God once again found the odor of holiness in the very fetidity of his carnivorous breath.

Although persecuted as much as the Münsterites, the disciples of Menno Simons (1496 to around 1560) or the “Mennonites” professed a resolutely nonviolent doctrine that was stripped of collectivist demands. In 1537, the tendency inspired by Hübmaier came under the control of Simons, who organized it and founded one of the many Protestant churches still in vogue today in Holland, the United States and Canada.

By contrast, the guerilla war led by John of Battenberg, born in 1495 in Guelders, marked a stage of transition between the disaster at Münster and the mass arrival of the Iconoclasts in the southern Netherlands and northern France.

Abandoning his functions as the Mayor of Steenwijk in the Overijssel, John of Battenberg rallied the insurrectional wing of the Anabaptists and, in 1535 – during a tumult caused by the sect – seized Oldeklooster, a monastery in the Bolsward region.

That same year, he founded with the survivors of Münster the group called *Zwaardgeesten*, “The Spirits of the Sword.” Identifying himself with Isaiah, and tasked with preparing the return of Christ to earth, Battenberg called for the destruction of the churches, preached polygamy and the community of goods, demanded divorce when one of the partners in a couple refused to practice confession, and exhorted his followers to use their swords to exterminate anyone who didn’t share his opinions.

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<sup>557</sup> Barret and Gurgand, *Le Roi des derniers jours*, Paris, 1981.

In 1536, the Congress of Bocholt tried in vain to reconcile the Münsterites, the partisans of Battenberg and the sectarians of David Joris. The pacifists carried the day and Battenberg's appeal to armed struggle was judged to be premature.

Arrested in 1537 in Vilvoorde near Brussels, Battenberg died on the pyre in 1538, leaving Zeylmaker, Appelman and Mickers at the head of the *Zwaardgeesten*. Attacks against the monasteries and churches increased; pillaging was carried out in Alkmaar (1538), Utrecht (1541), the Overijssel, Frise, Brabant, Leyden and the surroundings of Münster, where the Battenbergian Peter Van Ork was burned in 1544. Despite the execution of Appelman in Leyden that same year, anti-clerical action intensified in Frise (1549), Alost (1550), where a group of insurgents practiced sexual freedom, Leyden (1552) and Courtrai (1553).

The sacking of churches and the assassination of their ministers had popular approval, "because there was no lack of people who did not like priests and they gladly applauded the priests' troubles and disasters" and wanted to "hang their balls in the air," as Marcus van Vaernewijck wrote in his *Memoirs of a Ghentian Patrician on the Religious Troubles in Flanders*.<sup>558</sup>

## The Iconoclasts

Even after the disappearance of the leaders of the Battenbergist party, the Anabaptist uprisings did not cease inflaming the Netherlands and northern France. But their social and political motivations gained the upper hand over their religious character with a growing obviousness. The national struggle undertaken in the Netherlands against Spanish domination created a heterogeneous front in which the most diverse interests tried to unite within the general discontent, which lacked a shared program. The nobles uneasily tolerated the restrictions imposed on their regional privileges by the absolutism of Philippe II; the bourgeoisie balked at paying taxes for a war that hindered its growth; and even the clergy feared having its hands tied by the State power that the Inquisition wielded with a self-interested fervor. As far as that "dangerous animal called the people," to use the words of [Antoine Perrenot de] Granvelle, the Governor of the Netherlands, it only had recourse to toppling those in charge and the symbols of their oppression, that is to say, nearly the totality of what surrounded it.

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<sup>558</sup> M. Van Vaernewijck, *Mémoires d'un patricien gantois sur les troubles religieux de Flandre*. [Translator: this book was first published in Dutch under the title *Van die beroerlicke tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelick in Ghendt 1566-1568* by C. Annoot-Braeckman, Gent 1872-1881.]

The social violence was doubly useful for the political designs of the contenders for power: [for example] it brought William of Orange to royalty and maintained his legend as the liberator of the northern provinces. Through the repression that the social violence incurred and, once victory was assured, he was legitimated in the eyes of the princes, who were impatient to cage the wild beasts after having let them roar for a while.

In 1566, discontent seemed to start up in Saint-Omer. (Note that, as early as 1562, two Calvinist weavers led to the pyre in Valenciennes were liberated by rioters. In 1564, the people forced open the doors of the prisons in Bruges and Brussels.) The troubles spread to the north. On 13 August [1566], in Bailleul, the crowd destroyed the cloister, burned the crosses and the sacerdotal habits, and brought down the tabernacles. The sacking lasted eight months and spread to Armentieres, Menin, Hondschoote (which was so constant in its resolution that, later, the commissars of the Duke of Alba – charged with [implementing] penal sanctions – stayed away), Tournai, where several magistrates embraced the party of the iconoclasts, a part of Artois, Brabant, Utrecht, Zeeland and Amsterdam. In Antwerp, the houses of the rich were pillaged on the third day.

On 8 April 1566, taking the surge of the iconoclasts as their pretext, Catholics and Calvinists made a remonstrance known as the “Compromise of the Nobles” to the Regent Marguerite of Parma and the “bad counselors to the King.” In it, the Catholics and Calvinists coupled their rejection of absolutism with their promise to restore order. They adorned themselves, as if it were an escutcheon, with the epithet “Beggars,” which a minister had applied to them in an insulting manner and which the destroyers of cathedrals adopted at every opportunity.

On 25 August 1566, Marguerite of Parma feigned to give in. She decreed the suppression of the Inquisition, freedom for the Protestant religion and amnesty for the nobles accused of conspiracy. The latter hastened to suppress the riots and intervened in the consistories to calm the peoples’ spirits. William of Orange marched on Antwerp and the Count of Egmont attempted to restore order in Flanders, where the number of rebels was estimated to be sixty thousand out of a total of two hundred thousand inhabitants.

Reassured by guarantees of freedom offered to their ministries, the Calvinist preachers condemned the iconoclastic party, whose ardor had not weakened. At first, those whom one called the “howlers” [*hurlus*] in northern France refrained from killing and carrying off ecclesiastical goods, which were generally destroyed on the spot. They prided themselves on the total destruction of some four hundred churches.

Having concentrated the Spanish troops, Marguerite went on the offensive in December 1566. She annulled the decisions that had dictated to her the necessity of

playing for time and sent the army to Armentieres, Tournai and Valenciennes, where it brought the repression begun by the feudal lords to a good end.

William of Orange and [Hendrik van] Brederode fled to the northern provinces, where an open guerrilla war was being fought against Spain. The expeditious justice instituted by the envoy of Philippe II, the Duke of Alba, spared neither the iconoclasts, the Catholics, the Calvinists, nor the nobles who were judged to be disloyal. (The Counts of Egmont and Horn were decapitated in 1568.)

In the southern provinces, the “Beggars” engaged in harassment of the enemies on two fronts. Those in the forests fought in Hainaut and Artois under the leadership of Guillaume de La Marck,<sup>559</sup> and in Flanders under Jean Camerlynck, originally from Hondschoote, and the preachers Michiels and de Heule, the son of a rich family from Bruges. On their side, Jan Abels and the “Beggars” of the seas attacked Spanish ships with the aid of light, small boats. They profited from the benevolence of Elizabeth of England and the aid of William of Orange, who tried (in vain) to make them submit to his authority. On 1 April 1572, the seizure of the port of La Brielle and the subsequent occupation of Vlissingen marked a decisive stage in the liberation of Holland. Alba, who failed in his attempt to recapture it, was recalled to Spain the following year. The movement of the “Beggars” fell under the blows of William of Orange and, in the south, was only able to launch political conspiracies that had no results.

The last flare-up of revolutionary Anabaptism embraced the regions of Cleve and Wesel in Westphalia in 1567. A shoemaker named Jan Willemsen, leading three hundred adepts (among whom were survivors of Münster), founded the nth version of the New Jerusalem, to which Adamite practices gave a bit of piquancy. Polygamy was prescribed and the Messiah Willemsen married twenty-one chosen ones. The community of goods did not implicate an economy of production; the saints lived off of raids and pillaging, and attacked the homes of the priests and nobles. They lasted a dozen years before succumbing to punitive expeditions.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> *Translator*: there seems to some mistake here, for a number of other sources list Guillaume II de La Marck (1542-1578) as the admiral of the “Beggars of the Sea” in the Eighty Years War.

<sup>560</sup> Bouterwek and N. Cohn, *Zur Literatur und Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, Bonn, 1884, p. 306.

## **Chapter 43:**

### **The Individualist Messiahs:**

### **David Joris, Nicolas Frey, Henry Niclaes**

#### **David Joris**

Among the wandering preachers whom the Reformation and the free interpretation of the sacred texts set in motion along Europe's roads, David Joris distinguished himself more through the singularity of his destiny than through the originality of his thought. Pursued by the hatred of the Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Mennonites and Münsterians, this man – upon whose head there was a price wherever he went – ended his life peacefully in Basle, under the outward appearance of a notable, an orthodox adept of Protestant doctrines, honorably known as John of Bruges.

Born in Bruges, perhaps in Delft, less probably in Ghent, in 1501, he was surnamed David due to the role traditionally played by his father, Joris, in the literary societies that portrayed the sacred mysteries. After a career as a glass engraver in Delft, he traveled in the capacity of a merchant through the Netherlands, France and England, frequently visiting Antwerp, where he engaged in polemics with Eloi Pruystinck, founder of a group of Free Spirit.

In 1524, he wedded Dirckgen Willems in Delft. In 1528, his enthusiasm for the Reformation and his hostility for the Roman clergy earned him public torture and a banishment of three years. He then adhered to the most persecuted sect, the Anabaptists, went to Strasbourg in 1535 and manifested his opposition to the violence of the Münsterites. Quite anomalously, his megalomania never brought him to renounce the ideals of pacifism and tolerance.

A vision he had of the prophetess Anneken Jans suddenly revealed to him his eschatological mission. Identifying himself with the biblical David, whom his father so often played on the boards of the local theater, he preached renunciation, asceticism and the advent of the millennium. The number of his partisans soon worried the temporal powers, which took repressive measures against him. Like all those elected by God, David discerned in the threats that stood out against the horizon the traditional ordeals that announced the birth of a new era. He wrote to the court of Holland, to Philippe of Hesse and to the Emperor, soliciting their support for the Davidian royalty that God had enjoined him to found.

In 1539, when Menno Simons denounced him as a false prophet, Anneken Jans was burned at Delft. Condemned to exile, Joris clandestinely visited Holland, Frise and Belgium. After the death of John of Battenberg, many [of the

Battenbergian] terrorists joined his party, in which non-violence offered an increasingly large place for certain Free Spirit ideas, in particular, for Adamism, that is, the necessity of recovering Edenic innocence.

Although he was hunted everywhere in Europe, David Joris devoted himself to a frenetic activity intended to get himself recognized as a messiah. He went to Oldenburg and Strasbourg, encountering there the moderate wing of the Anabaptists, whom he irritated with his obstinacy in demanding their obedience. In 1542, his most important work, *The Book of Marvels* ('t *Wonderboeck*), was published.

David denied the Bible its self-avowed privilege as the only [true] Book. Mystical experience took priority over Scripture because only revelation illuminated the presence of God in each person. Identifying the body of man with the temple of God, David – in the first edition of his book – represented “the last Adam or the new ecclesiastical man” and “the fiancée of Christ, the renewal of all things” in engravings that were judged to be “obscene.” A note made precise the idea that the attractiveness of the young woman (or the Eve) of the era of the saints symbolized “the bliss, life and voluptuousness of the spirit.” Once more, amorous coupling discovered a pretext for its natural legitimization in spiritual androgyny. The secret life joyously led by David after his retreat to Basle used religious discourse to remove shame and bad conscience.

Jundt quotes many extracts from his *Wonderboeck*.

“God is absolute, without beginning, a light beyond all light, a depthless abyss, the eternal origin of all that exists, an endless end. He remains unchanging and impassive, incomprehensible and silent, reposing on the foundation of his own being, like a rock or a mountain of gold. Essence without essence, he does not manifest himself in his absoluteness; he does not think about himself, nor does he express what he is, as his grandeur, length, size and depth surpass all human conception; everything is annihilated in comparison with him. And yet he is the supreme activity; he is the eternal essence and lives in all objects. It is not outside of ourselves that we must look for him, but inside us, because he is the Spirit; he is the infinite light of eternal justice, wisdom, truth and reason; he is the Lord of this very light, substance, life and intelligence that enlighten the intimate thoughts within the hearts of the believers and thanks to which we are able to distinguish the objects of the visible world: holy and pure essence, of perfect beauty and innocence.

“The eternal and hidden God is obliged to manifest his unknowable essence through his Word of justice, in the power of his eternal wisdom and truth; he realizes in his Word the potentiality that he has to know himself. In his Word, he lets escape outside of himself, and creates in visible form, his Sons and Daughters in conformity with his own manner of being, and they are destined to possess in all truth his Spirit and essence, as the eternal lights of the new heavens. God knows himself in the Word, which is the image of his divine splendor, his Spirit and his substance, insofar as it is inclined towards the world of the creatures; he expresses in himself all that exists, his holy creatures [who are] equal to him, who are his Sons and Daughters. In this way, God begins to exist in concrete form in his creatures; his creation has its eternal origin in himself and continues indefinitely by means of the Son, that is to say, by the divine intelligence and the distinctions that this intelligence establishes in the absolute essence. Everything that emanates from God is and remains God; God remains in everything, all in all, him alone and no one other. In this emanation towards us, God has received in Christ the many denominations, by means of which we try, stammering, to express his essence. This emanation does not exhaust the divine essence: similar to a fountain that flows without interruption, the Spirit of God overflows all parts and lets escape beyond him the plenitude of his being, strength, life and intelligence.

“When a person is elevated to the perfection of the life of the Spirit, for him there is no longer any difference between good and evil, life and death, fall and rising. The members of the body fulfill quite different functions and yet are equally necessary to it: it is likewise unnecessary to say that one thing is not as good as another, because all things are equally good in the eyes of God and it isn't possible to make them otherwise or better. To scorn anything would be to scorn God in his entirety [*son oeuvre*]. It is only for us that there are different degrees of beauty, faith, spirituality and holiness: for God and in God there is neither augmentation nor diminution; he remains immutable in his essence and he has always been so. If someone – following the example of the Pharisees – wants to render his external life irreproachable so as to appear just and good in the eyes of mankind, it is only necessary for him to aggravate the state of corruption in which he finds himself; because if he scorns the work and life of God, he damns his soul through his own justice and his

own wisdom. No: to be blamed and condemned on earth is to be justified and sanctified in heaven. What one in the here-below calls ugly and corrupt is beautiful and praiseworthy to the Lord; because what pleases men displeases God; what they call good, he calls evil; what they consider to be pure and holy, he considers impure and execrable. In the same way that light follows darkness, and day is born from night, it is necessary that faith manifests itself through incredulity, hope through despair, love through hate and envy, kindness of the heart through cunning, simplicity through duplicity, innocence through shamelessness, frankness through dissimulation, the spirit through the flesh, the truth through the lie, and heavenly essence through terrestrial essence; and so it is necessary to place oneself above the judgment of men, whether they blame you or they praise you, to act in complete freedom, and to realize with a total independence good through evil, what is imperishable through what is perishable, and to let what is luminous and pure manifest itself in its purity through what is impure.

“Mankind must completely abandon itself to God’s direction and do what he commands, women as well as men. God only acts from eternity in eternity; everything that exists is his work. It follows that all that is, must be, and all that does not exist, must not. God in his goodness has made everything good. Thus we live without being concerned about anything, because we are free from all evil; we reside and live in the good. We abstain from finding anything bad, because all God’s works are good. If someone does us wrong, we do not get carried away: do we get irritated with the stone against which we stub our toe? In the same way that a flute does not play itself, but is played by the breath of a person, thus mankind does not act by itself, but [by] God, who made it, speaks and manifests himself through it. Mankind is the property of God; the unique goal of its existence is to glorify its Creator; thus it must not seek its own glory in anything, but must attribute all glory to God and Christ, according to the terms of the Scriptures. Each must be content with the destiny that has been assigned to him; mankind must obey, without murmuring appeals to his Creator, must be ready to follow God anywhere he pleases to lead it and must let God make of it what he wants. Does not the potter have the right to give the clay the form that suits it? With his iron scepter, the Eternal will break all resistance from his creatures, as easily as the potter in anger smashes the vase that he has fashioned. The man to



whom these truths appear too elevated must not reject them for the simple reason that he does not understand them; he must receive them in complete submission and keep quiet about what exceeds his understanding, otherwise he risks, according to the Scriptures, blaspheming God in his ignorance.

“Born-again people need no longer desire, seek and marry according to the flesh any woman, as if they were [mere] men, subjected to their sinful natures, but can desire, seek and marry – according to the inward Spirit – the heavenly substance, whose beauty is eternal and whose glory is imperishable; they must in their intelligence conceive the splendor and purity of the divine essence, the unalterable satisfaction that God experiences in himself, and they must let all the rest follow its regular course, according to the good will of God. A man must not devote himself to a woman, and a woman should not devote herself to a man: the elect must devote themselves exclusively to the Lord. It is not that men and women must cease to procreate, which would be contrary to the plan and will of God: here it is a question of the marriages of the angels, celestial weddings, long since prepared for the children of God, according to the words of *Jeremiah*, Chap. XXXI: a woman will surround a man and unite with him; she will become a man with him, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. It isn't of a single woman of whom the prophet speaks, but seven women united into one, the Fiancée of Christ who resides in seven communities. Seven women, yes, seven communities – understand me well! – must voluntarily humble themselves before one man who is Christ and they will be called his wives. Many communities give to Christ the names of Lord, Husband and King; but they are not his wives and his body: as long as they have not become his wives, he will not be their husband and their life. Christ lives for God and the community lives for Christ, that is to say, woman lives for man, but man does not live for woman. In fact, man was not created for woman, but woman was created for man. Woman is deprived of liberty, vigor and will; she is placed under the power of man, not under the protection and power of God. Such were Adam and Eve, whose image we carry in our nature: they were two souls, originally united in a single body. That unity was broken: man carries in himself the substance of the heavens; woman the substance of the earth. This is why it is necessary for woman to become man, according to the Scriptures, so that the substance foreign to the divine

being disappears. Then man will be an angel before the face of God, and man and woman together will again become equal to the Creator. Whosoever is not be found in this state of heavenly marriage will be cursed.”<sup>561</sup>

Jundt concludes: “David Joris thus founded the legitimacy of polygamy or, rather, elective affinity, on the metaphysical principle of the re-composition of the integrity of human nature through the union of the sexes in a single being.”<sup>562</sup>

The unfortunate turn of events that he experienced gave David Joris the feeling that it was better to live an existence that was in accordance with the Lord but less bitter than that of a messiah, sect leader, apostle and exile. His mother was decapitated at Delft. In Deventer, his friend and publisher, Juriaen Ketel, died on the scaffold; his confessions led to the death of Eloi Pruystinck of Antwerp and the execution of his “libertine” friends. Filled with hatred, Menno Simons pursued Joris, denounced his hypocrisy and the debaucheries perpetrated under the cover of perfection.

A polemic with Jan Łaski in Frise, where his authority as prophet was smashed, motivated David Joris to withdraw to Basle. There, under the name John of Bruges, he presented himself as a Lutheran who was persecuted by the papists. In 1544, he moved to Basle with his family, including his son-in-law, Simon Blesdijk, who was a defector from the Mennonites.

Become a respectable citizen thanks to the money that his disciples sent him, David Joris continued to send many letters of millenarian hopes to his partisans, who lived as far away as Denmark. He justified his retreat by referring to the flight of Christ to Egypt. No doubt he found good reasons to reassure his disciples’ voluntary poverty, while he himself lived in opulence with the funds of his sect.

Moreover, he used his credit as a notable from Basle to openly fight in favor of tolerance. He defended Michel Servetus and united in friendship with Schwenckfeld and Castellion. Towards the end of his life, he quarreled with his son-in-law Blesdijk, who went from unconditional friend to enemy. David Joris died on 25 August 1556 and was interred with great pomp at the Saint-Leonard Church in Basle.

Approximately two and a half years later, following family quarrels in which Blesdijk was involved, Joris’ identity was brutally revealed. This caused a scandal in the city. Worried, his family and friends protested their innocence. They

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<sup>561</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

affirmed that they knew nothing of David's doctrines, whose hardly orthodox aspects were condemned by Blesdijk in a pamphlet. They publicly adjured.

On 13 May 1559, the [exhumed] body and books of David were thrown on the pyre. As late as the Seventeenth Century, partisans of David Joris continued to exist in Holstein, surrounded by polemics and calumny. David found a defender in Gottfried Arnold, who attempted to rehabilitate him in his *Unpartelische Kirchen – und Ketzer – Historie*.<sup>563</sup>

## Nicolas Frey

The cases of Nicolas Frey and Henry VIII of England make for a piquant comparison. While the sword of justice overcame one and served the other, the same divine will conferred the seal of its absolutism upon their very personal choices in matters of conjugal and private affairs.

“Nicolas Frey was originally from [Bad] Windsheim in Bavaria, where he was a trader of furs. When the Reformation came to this town, he became one of the most zealous partisans of the new ideas; but a short time later he allied himself with the Anabaptists in the countryside, received a second baptism, which would be the occasion for trouble in his native town; he was imprisoned and then released when he promised to change his conduct. But when the authorities demanded that he publicly retract his errors, he preferred to flee rather than submit to this humiliation. Thus after fifteen years of marriage, he left his wife, Catherine, with whom he had eight children, and headed towards Nuremburg. Taking advantage of the hospitality that he was offered in this town by one of its most pious and respected citizens, he won over to his doctrines the sister of his host, a woman named Elizabeth, and engaged with her in what he called a spiritual and celestial marriage. Catherine, the abandoned wife, arrived a little later in Nuremburg and encouraged her husband to return with her to their native town. In response, Frey mistreated her and chased her away. Later on, he wrote about this subject to his spiritual sister or, as he called her, his conjugal sister, Elizabeth: ‘I have seen in the Trinity that I must break the head of my first wife so that the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments can be accomplished. Is it not in fact

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<sup>563</sup> G. Arnold, *Unpartelische Kirchen – und Ketzer – Historie*. [Translator: German for *An Impartial History of Churches and Heretics*.]

said that the seed of the woman will break the head of the serpent? My first wife is the serpent or demon spoken of by the Scriptures; as far as you are concerned, you are the woman whose seed must break her head. To become a disciple of Christ, I must hate women, children, home and homeland. If I have crushed the serpent of disbelief, this is because I was forced to do so, because it isn't me who did it, but God who lives inside me and in whom I live.' Obligated to leave Nuremberg, Frey went to Strasbourg in 1532; Elizabeth joined him soon thereafter. Their imprudent schemes and badly hidden relations with the other sectarians of the locality soon attracted the attention of the authorities. They were imprisoned. Informed of the presence of her husband in Strasbourg, Catherine went there and beseeched him to return with her to Windsheim. Frey was inflexible. Seeing his obstinacy, the magistrate condemned him on 19 May 1534 to be drowned as a bigamist, which took place three days later at the Pont du Corbeau.

“According to Capiton,<sup>564</sup> he had to confess the following errors: ‘The Church and the sacraments are the inventions of the Devil. – All the prophecies of the Scriptures refer to me, to my first wife and second wife. My first wife is the Queen of the Kingdom of Disbelief; she is prefigured in the person of Saul. My second wife is prefigured in David; I myself in Jonathan. In the same way that David and Jonathan formed a perpetual alliance to chase away Saul, I am allied spiritually with Elizabeth so as to chase away Catherine. – The most perfect work that a believer can accomplish is to abandon his first wife and wed a second. – The faith that justifies the Christian and the love of one's neighbor consist in the constant affection of Elizabeth; this is a work that God produced in her, so that the loyal and pious Christian is improved and comes closer to his own origin. – Elizabeth is the mother of all believers; it is through her that the true Christian faith began on earth. – In the same way that Mary engendered Christ, Elizabeth will restore the image of Christ to humanity and for this reason she is as worthy of singing the *Magnificat* as the Virgin. – I am the leader of the Church; Christ accomplished in me all his previous promises; no divine promise will be accomplished after me. – I am

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<sup>564</sup> *Translator*: this would appear to be Wolfgang Fabricius Köpfel Capiton (1478-1541).

Christ following the eternal Word, the angular rock that the builders rejected. – I was sent by God to show mankind the image of Christ in my person, just as Moses had previously showed it in his person. All the mysteries of the divinity must now be unveiled, because the Last Days have come. – All the creatures that have fallen into perdition since the birth of Christ must be restored to their original perfection in me; I am the instrument by which God wishes to manifest his glory. – It is to the sublime school of God that Elizabeth brought these revelations; it is the Holy Spirit that gave birth to them in her heart. – The ordinary preachers of the Gospel have only been flatterers [*encenseurs*] of idols; they know, it is true, how to crudely square off the rocks and clear away the terrain for the future edifice, but they know nothing of construction. In their preaching they dishonor God and seduce their brothers because of their lack of faith, because they say that we are all sinners, and they refrain from fulfilling the holy and perfect law, which is to abandon wife and children and follow the Lord.”<sup>565</sup>

## Henry Niclaes

Founded in 1540 by Henry Niclaes [aka Hendrik Nicholis], the Family of Love – often wrongly defined as an Anabaptist sect – intended to reestablish the original human community in its innocence. Its organization included a bishop, whose authority was supported by twelve sages and four classes of priests. All gave their personal belongings to the sect, which included a quite large number of believers, principally in the Netherlands and England, where their existence was still attested to in the Seventeenth Century.

Born in 1502, Henry Niclaes claimed that he had his first visions when he was nine years old, while attending courses at a Latin school. At the age of 12, he worked for his family’s business and took it over upon the death of his father. Arrested in 1529 for Lutheranism, he went to Amsterdam where he stayed for nine years before being suspected of Anabaptism. In 1541, he lived in Emden where he engaged in a flourishing trade in wool. He frequently traveled to Antwerp, where his friend, the printer Christopher Plantin, was inspired by several of his texts.

At the age of 59, new prophetic visions and the publicity that he gave them earned him torture [by the authorities]. He fled to Campine, in the Overijssel, and then to London, which must have been a temporary exile because Niclaes

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<sup>565</sup> A. Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

opportunistically saved Plantin from ruin by transporting to Cologne the typographical materials that those who accused the printer of heresy had threatened to seize. Dissent within the group darkened his last years. He died in 1580. Nippold<sup>566</sup> attributed to him fifty pamphlets that were distributed clandestinely.

Niclaes' doctrines preached love, tolerance and mutual respect, and rejected the God of justice in favor of a God of goodness. From millenarianism he retained the pretense that he acted as the mediator of divine revelation and the herald of the new era in which antagonism among mankind would disappear.

His principal disciple was his servant, Hendrik Jansen, called Barrefelt, no doubt due to Barneveld, the place of his birth. Around the time of his break with Niclaes in 1573, he took the name Hiel, which in Hebrew means "one life in God." Having gained the friendship of Christopher Plantin, Hiel began to prophesy on his own, perhaps in England, where the Family of Love had existed for more than a century. Many of these adepts joined the Ranters. His religious doctrine was related to that of Hans Denck.

“The Father made himself human with us according to the inward man and constructed us according to the inward man in a Spirit with him. The soul of man is not a creature, but a part of the uncreated God.’ And he also called himself ‘a man whom God resurrected from among the dead, whom he filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit; a man enlightened by the Spirit of the celestial truth and by the veritable light of the perfect essence; a man deified with God in the spirit of his love and transformed into the being of God.’ According to him, Christ is only ‘the image of the being on the right [side] of the Father’; he must no longer be envisioned as a historical personage, but as a ‘condition’ shared by all those who live in union with God. From this metaphysical principle, he deduced that sin no longer exists in the heart of the born-again: his disciples and he ‘only said in their prayers the first three parts of the Sunday oration, because, for them, they did not sin insofar as they were born from God’; he derived from this idea both the uselessness and unimportance of religious ceremonies: ‘The Lovers live and die without either baptism or the sacraments,’ or rather they considered the baptism of infants to be a valueless act that some were free to neglect while others were free to practice. They thus distinguished themselves from the Anabaptists, to whom it was

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<sup>566</sup> *Translator*: this would appear to be Friedrich Wilhelm Franz Nippold (1838-1918).

no doubt fitting to link them historically. Henry Niclaes founded his doctrine on the theory of the three ages: ‘Moses only preached hope, Christ only taught faith, he himself announced the love that united all. The first entered into the square in front of the temple, the second into the sanctuary, he himself into the Holy of Holies.’<sup>567</sup>

The Puritan John Knewstub said of Henry Niclaes: “[He] turns religion upside down. He buildeth heaven here upon earth; he maketh God man and man God (...). [For his disciples] heaven was when men laugh and are merry, hell was sorrow, grief and pain.”<sup>568</sup>

### **Jan Torrentius**

Born in Amsterdam in 1589, Jan Torrentius [Johannes van der Beeck] – charged with Anabaptism and adherence to the ideas of David Joris and the Family of Love – was thought to be an accursed painter in Holland, which was liberal or, at the very least, liberated from Catholicism. A painter of still life and supposedly erotic images, he attempted to illustrate the hedonism celebrated by Dutch painting in the Seventeenth Century with, perhaps, less reservation than Jan Steen.

A member of an Adamite group<sup>569</sup> that practiced the pleasures of love and the table, he was arrested and subjected to torture. He denied all participation in the sect, but the “scandalous” character of his works earned him twenty years in prison.

Freed due to the entreaties of the Austrian ambassador, he took refuge in England. His return to Amsterdam brought new persecutions from the Protestants, which continued until his death in 1640. The government ordered that all his paintings should be collected and burned by an executioner.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>568</sup> C. Hill, *Le monde à l'envers*, Paris, 1977, p. 25. [*Translation*: since this is a French translation of a work originally written in English (Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, 1972), I have quoted directly from the original text, p. 27.]

<sup>569</sup> *Translator*: According to the Rosicrucian order A.M.O.R.C., Torrentius was a member of the Brethren of the Rosie Cross.

<sup>570</sup> *Translator*: at least one painting survived: *Still Life with a Bridle* (1614), which is a part of the permanent collection at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

## Chapter 44: Ironists and Skeptics

The fact that the most radical work of the Sixteenth Century (and well beyond), *The Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*,<sup>571</sup> placed itself completely outside of the theological context indicates quite well the degree to which the discourse of God had fallen into disuse. Religious language, over which the Church and the [various other] orthodoxies claimed to exercise control, ceded place to the ideological language in which the changing economy – turning the liberties of yesterday into the constraints of tomorrow – extinguished the blazes that it ceaselessly lit.

If it is true that the principle “He who controls meaning controls the world” has been verified, ecclesiastical power, which conceived no other revolt against it than that of those who were outside of meaning (the senseless, the crazy), began to lose, from the Renaissance on, the means of persuasion and terror that somehow or other bolstered the correct line of the dogma around which gravitated the spirit of beings and things, if not their very hearts.

Assuredly, the mockery, sarcasm and irony that whipped the austere and unhealthy ass of religion were not born from the tumults of the Sixteenth Century. The difference was that they were formulated in speech and not in writing. Penal history teems with reports such as the one that Jundt relayed in his study of popular pantheism:

“In 1359, the town council forever banished a certain Claushorn, surnamed Engelbrecht, the school director Selden, and Cüntzelin of Atzenheim because they rapped on a wooden chair and three-legged stool, and said, ‘Here is God; we would like to break his foot,’ and because they had erased the black points with which their dice were marked and said, ‘Here is God, we would like to burst his eyes.’ One of them even threw his knife at the sky and cried out, ‘I would like to strike God with my knife.’”<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> *Translator*: Written in 1548 by Étienne de La Boétie.

<sup>572</sup> Hegel, *Chroniken von Closener und Königshofen*, Leipzig, 1871, extracts in *Livre secret du magistrat de Strasbourg*, II, p. 1201; quoted by A. Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire, op. cit.*, p. 106.



The formidable network of awakening and moronic exhaustion that the printing press stretched between the towns and the countryside had placed in everyone's hands the two Testaments – completely filled with incoherencies, absurdities and infamies –through which God manifested his uncertain presence in society. By emphasizing the antitheses contained in the Bible, Hans Denck abandoned each person to the care of devoting himself (or not) to the convictions of a faith that was intimate and deprived of reason. A little later, those whom the Church called “freethinkers” because they threatened the power of its Spirit began to disclose in writing the ironies that were capable of dissolving the authority of the Book that, for centuries, had crushed terrestrial and voluptuous life under its weight of guilt, fear, ferocity and contempt.

Much in this mixture of audacity and pusillanimity remains poorly known.

### **Valentin Weigel**

Despite his weaker attachment to violence, Valentin Weigel (1533-1588) does not fail to evoke the parish priest John Meslier. A Lutheran pastor in Zschopau, Weigel led an existence [apparently] deprived of remarkable traits. But, after his death, it was revealed that he'd written a book, partially published in Halle in 1609, in which he reduced the sacred texts of the *Apocalypse* and the *Revelations* attributed to John to the name of the Beast, whose number [666] nourished visions of the Third Age. He considered Luther, the Pope, Zwingli and others to be Antichrists, and he thought the pastorate to be perfectly useless. Each man possessed in himself the divine spark that, embracing the body and the soul, rendered the Scriptures, grace, the clergy, theology and all historical religion to be null and void. The knowledge of God proceeded, not from the Bible nor from the sacraments, but from an inward conviction that one could not restrain.

### **Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert**

A polemicist, writer, engraver and humanist, Dirck Coornhert was among the principal representatives of the Renaissance in Holland. Versatile and courageous, [and this] in a country in which Protestant intransigence had succeeded Catholic intolerance, he led, despite persecution, an incessant fight in favor of religious freedoms and against the death penalty for committing heresy. A precursor of freethinking, he left to each person the care of depending upon his or her own conscience and founding secular morality on the respect for others and a certain stoicism. His belief in a perfection accessible to mankind brought down upon him charges of “Pelagianism,” a term already in disuse in the Sixteenth Century.

Born in Amsterdam in 1522, Coornhert was educated in the Catholic faith, which he never abjured, even when William of Orange took power; he especially kept to his evangelic principles. He traveled to Spain and Portugal, became familiar with biblical exegesis, and learned music and engraving. After his return to Amsterdam, he got married in 1540 and then moved to Haarlem, where he became a professional engraver. Around 1544, he discovered the works of Luther, Calvin and Menno Simons. In 1550, he wrote *Comedie van de rijcke man*, and shortly thereafter translated Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*.<sup>573</sup> Coornhert associated with Henry Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love, with whom he later quarreled, not without maintaining a certain nostalgia for an idyllic, original community. He was also enthusiastic about Sebastian Franck and the mystical fragments of the *Theologia Deutsch*. In 1560, Coornhert took exception to Calvin and Menno. Two years later, Calvin threw at him his *Response to a Certain Dutchman who, under the Guise of Making the Christians Completely Spiritual, Permits Them to Pollute their Bodies through Idolatry*.<sup>574</sup> In response to other texts by Coornhert on free will, Calvin was on his guard against "this man who pushes impiety to the extreme."

A notary at the court of Holland, Coornhert was successful at making himself suspect to both the Catholics and the Protestants. Following the riots of the Iconoclasts, in which his role has not been clearly established, he was imprisoned at The Hague in 1567. He used his detention to write short texts and pamphlets; he escaped in 1568 and was a secret agent for the Prince of Orange, despite the hostility of the Protestants, until 1572. He returned to Haarlem and, tasked with making a report about the "Beggars" led by Lumey, he denounced their brutalities and abuses of power, and thus attracted their hatred. Coornhert hid himself in Leyden, then Zamten. When Requesens, the Governor of the Netherlands, announced a general pardon in 1574, Coornhert was excluded from it. He didn't hesitate to address himself to Philippe II in the hope of recovering his confiscated goods, from whence came his reputation, which followed him, for "playing all the angles."

When Coornhert returned to Holland, the hostility of the Protestants towards him had grown and he did nothing to attenuate it. He defended the Catholic minority, which was oppressed in Holland; he produced many appeals for tolerance; he pronounced himself opposed to the death penalty for dissidents of all stripes; and he translated the writings of Sébastian Castellion. It was only because

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<sup>573</sup> Translation: *The Comedy of the Rich Man* and *The Consolation of Philosophy*, respectively.

<sup>574</sup> Translator: published in French in 1562.

of the influence of William of Orange that Coornhert was not condemned to life in prison. Chased from Haarlem in 1585, he went to Emden, where he published a work of Stoic inspiration in 1586. Banished from Delft after a stay of three months, he sought refuge in Gouda and died there on 29 October 1590.

In Coornhert one sees the passage from Christian morality to a secular morality that was enriched with ideas of tolerance and freedom of spirit. The influence of the mystics and Denck appeared in his language, which was stripped of sacred references and exhorted his readers to have respect for all individuals. Finally, his idea that mankind could attain perfection through a constant effort of will that was so strong that it could no longer sin resembled Pelage's theses and not – as one sometimes reproached Coornhert – the doctrines of the Spiritual Libertines.

### **Bernardino Ochino**

Over the course of his lifetime, the humanist Bernardino Ochino (1487-1564) adhered to nearly all of the religions and doctrines of his time. He did not wait for the signs of old age to affirm that the unique value of life (with all its vicissitudes) is found in terrestrial favors and flavors. Born in Sienna in the Oca neighborhood, from which he drew his name, he entered the Franciscan order and became a Capuchin preacher. He met Juan de Valdés and let himself be seduced by Luther's ideas. Ochino broke with Catholicism and went to Geneva, which tested Calvin's repugnance for tolerant spirits. Ochino then went to Augsburg, Strasbourg and Canterbury, where he vituperated the Pope. He wrote *The Labyrinth of Free Will or, to Speak Truly, Servile Will and the Means of Getting Out of It*. He distanced himself from [an attachment to] all systems and professed a discreet atheism, allied with a Rabelaisian quest for pleasure. At the time, one attributed to him – and no doubt falsely – authorship of *The Book of the Three Impostors*, which was imputed to other adventurers of his type, whose influence merits being better studied: [for example] Simon de Neufville (from Hainaut), who died in Padua in 1530, a disciple of the skeptic Christophe de Longueil, himself the teacher of Étienne Dolet.

At the age of 60, Ochino wed a young woman. His *Dialoghi XXX*, which celebrated the merits of polygamy, caused his expulsion from Zurich in 1563. He took refuge in Poland, then in Slavkov (Austerlitz) in Moravia, where he succumbed to the plague in 1565.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> R. Bainton, *Bernardino Ochino*, 1940.

## Noël Journet

Originally a schoolteacher from Suzanne, nearby Attigny, Noël Journet was among the disciples of Dirk Coornhert, whom he met during a visit to the Netherlands. Journet inscribed himself in the line of Hans Denck through his attention to the inconsistencies and absurdities in the Bible. The publication of his commentaries drew down upon him the denunciations of the Calvinists, who had him burned, along with his work, at Metz on 29 June 1582.<sup>576</sup>

Pastor Jean de Chassanion thought it was useful to refute the pamphlet, which thereby added his name to the annals of infamous informers and Journet's name to Reason's misfortunes.

*The Refutation of the Strange Errors and Horrible Blasphemies against God and the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Prophets and Apostles made by a Certain Miserable Person who for Such Impieties was Justly Condemned to Die and Who was Burned in the City of Metz on 29 June, the Year of Our Lord MDLXXXII, [written] by Jean de Chassanion, Minister of the Reformed Church of Metz* quoted the following statements, among others:

“Moses was an enemy of humankind, a captain of murderers and brigands. He gave the orders to his people to sack [the place] when they entered Canaan, to kill the women and all the male children whom the downfall of the Madianites had spared; Moses also only preserved the virginal girls (*Nb* 31:17-18; *Dt* 7:2).

“Jacob was a deceiver. He notably used striped sticks to influence the color of the lambs and to thereby increase his portion of the livestock (*Gn* 30:37-42).

“Moses did not write the *Pentateuch*, given that his own death is related at the end of it (*Dt* 34).

“*Deuteronomy* was drafted in the land of Canaan, because it says, *Dt* 4:47, that the children of Israel possessed the land of the two Amorean kings *beyond* the Jordan.”

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<sup>576</sup> R. Peter, “Noel Journet, détracteur de l'Écriture sainte (1582),” in *Croyants et sceptiques*.

Other affirmations more surely brought upon him the sanctions of the judicial system. In fact, he declared that the magistrates were all “tyrants and thieves,” that the great ones [*les tailles*] were “true tyrants” and that “a woman no longer married according to her tastes can take another husband so as to avoid bawdiness.”

## Geoffroy Vallée

Geoffroy Vallée owed his renown and premature death to a pamphlet entitled *The Beatitude of the Christians, or the Scourge of Faith*. Born in Orléans around 1550, the “beautiful Valley,” as his libertine friends called him, allied the search for the pleasures of existence with a taste for publicly critiquing the things that hindered and perverted them. He pushed imprudence as far as signing his name to a pamphlet that was directed, not only against all the religions, but against all the beliefs, which were all founded on fear, according to him. Sometimes distributed under the title *De arte nihil credendi*,<sup>577</sup> this text was accused of committing divine high treason. Arrested on the orders of the Provost-Marshal Nicolas Rapin, Vallée soon after benefited from the support and friendship of the libertine aristocracy, though this did not save him. This was the same libertine aristocracy that, in the Seventeenth Century, boasted people like [Jacques Vallée] Des Barreaux (whose great-uncle was Geoffroy), Claude Le Petit, Bélurgety, Théophile de Viau, Blot, and Cyrano de Bergerac – free spirits who often drove to despair [those who issued] the prohibitions against the simple aspiration to live well.

The defense [in Geoffroy’s trial], adopting an old argument of the Church, invoked the “senseless” character of the writing and its author. Rapin would have been inclined to a relative leniency if the Bishop of Nevers, Armand Sorbin, had not personally intervened to demand the execution of the young man. On 9 February 1574, Geoffroy Vallée, 24 years old, was hanged and then burned. The Jesuit [François] Garasse [later] rejoiced at the “beautiful sacrifice to God at the Place de Grève, where he [Geoffroy] was burned half-alive.”<sup>578</sup>

Geoffroy Vallée was dedicated to the execration of “this [religious] faith, since they want lodged within it all that we are, for all of our lives, and even when we die they sing the Credo to us.” He successively examined the Catholic faith,

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<sup>577</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “The Art of Believing in Nothing.”

<sup>578</sup> F. Lachevre, *L’Ancêtre des libertins du XVII siècle, Geoffroy Vallée, brulé le 9 février 1574, et la “Béatitude des chrétiens,”* Paris, 1920.

“from which comes all evil” and which forged the fear of the devil and executioners, and the faith of the Huguenots, with their “false intelligence (and) their fears and baton blows, which, if you do not believe [that faith], you cannot be saved.” The faiths of the Anabaptists and the libertines hardly fared better. Even atheism didn’t find a place [in his heart], because “I enjoy my sensual pleasures without God; in God I only have torment.” Atheism did not reject the fear that was inherent in all beliefs. “All the religions,” he wrote, with a great lucidity, “have removed from man the ecstasy of the body in order to make him ever more miserable.”

In sum, the important thing wasn’t believing or not believing, but being without fear: “He who is in fear, whatever that fear is, cannot be happy.” Thus one must banish the fear inherent in all the faiths in order to have “reason in one’s head, without seeking it outside oneself or in the sword.” Here Vallée attained a radicalism of which the libertines of the Seventeenth Century, the atheists of the Eighteenth Century and the freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries were ignorant. (Note that the interest of such humanists as Paracelsus, [Heinrich Cornelius] Agrippa von Nettesheim, Guillaume Postel, Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno and Lucio Vanini exceeds that of the history of philosophy.)

## **Chapter 45: Levelers, Diggers and Ranters<sup>579</sup>**

By decapitating King Charles (1649), the English Revolution removed God from public affairs. Cromwell's instauration of a new republic that was profitable for the interests of the small landowners and the bourgeoisie revived with the breath of freedom the fire of working-class insurrection that had not ceased to smolder since the days of John Ball. More than anywhere else, the legends of Robin Hood and the beloved brigand had, in England, illustrated the idea – widely held, all things considered – that robbing the rich to soften the misfortunes of the poor reestablished the natural obligations of solidarity.

The development of Protestantism as the ideology of emerging modern capitalism broke the old structure of the religious myth, at the same time that the barriers and enclosures created everywhere by feudalism and the predominance of the agrarian economy gave way to the free circulation of commodities. Despite the fact that it remained inflexible in its principle of indenturing [its followers to] the masters of the heavens and the earth, religion proceeded towards the status of an ideology in which it was reduced and marginalized by nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism. Opening itself to the bourgeois virtues of formal tolerance, and doing so despite the high and mighty, the Protestant religion increased the diversity of the sects like so many chains enclosed in a single ring, forged in a divine spirit of guilt and repressed pleasures.

Such was the vengeance of the Judeo-Christian religions that, stripped of the weapons of divine justice and theocratic language, they impregnated the ideologies that were the most hostile to their playacting rituals with the odors of sacrifice, sin, mortifying compulsion and voluntary servitude.

### **Levelers and Diggers**

At the moment that, according to the formula of Winstanley, “the old world . . . is running up like parchment in the fire,”<sup>580</sup> the Levelers and the Diggers

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<sup>579</sup> Please note that the six of the author's footnotes “fell off” their respective pages in the French original. Rather than trying to restore them, I created them from scratch.

<sup>580</sup> C. Hill, *Le Monde a l'envers*, Paris, 1977, p. 15. [Translator: this is the French translation of Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, London, 1972.

inscribed themselves less in a religious current than in the framework of social and economic revolution.

The favors given to the small landowners by Cromwell led to increases in the price of land rent, which condemned tenant farmers to hire themselves out as day laborers or shepherds. Starting in 1649, the Levelers, under the leadership of John Lilburne (1614-1657), formed the leftwing of Cromwell's troops.

“Whilst food prices reached famine levels, the Levelers demanded re-election of Agitators and recall of the General Council of the Army. ‘We were before ruled by King, Lords and Commons, now by a General, a Court Martial and House of Commons; and we pray you what is the difference?’ At the end of March [1649], Lilburne, Overton, Walwyn and Prince were arrested. A Leveler pamphlet, *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, appealed to the soldiers ‘to stand everyone in his place, to oppose all tyranny whatsoever,’ particularly that of the lawyers, enclosed lords of manors and the Army Grandees who have rejected social reform and have done nothing for the poor.

“Next month mutinies broke out in the Army when men who refused to volunteer for service in Ireland were demobilized without payment of arrears – exactly what had driven the Army to revolt two years earlier, though then with the acquiescence of the generals. In May more serious revolts broke out among troops in Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire, and there were rumors of civilian support from the Southwest, the old Clubmen area. Cromwell and Fairfax, acting with great rigor and determination, overwhelmingly defeated the mutinous regiments at Burford on 14 May. The period of crisis for the military regime was over. Frightened conservatives rallied to its support, as the lesser evil. Oxford University and the City of London hastened to honor Fairfax and Cromwell. The sermon preached on the latter occasion appropriately denounced those who aspired to remove their neighbor's landmark. Leveler conspiracies continued (...): but none of them offered a serious threat to the regime so long as the repeatedly purged Army remained securely under the control of the generals.

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Rather than translate Hill back into English, I have quoted directly from the original, p. 14]



“Nevertheless, the early months of 1649 had been a terrifying time for the men of property. It was for some time not so obvious to contemporaries as it is to us that the defeat at Burford had been final and decisive. As late as November 1649 Ralph Josselin tells us that men feared to travel because of danger from robbers, and the rich even felt insecure in their own houses. Poor people, he added the following month, ‘were never more regardless of God than nowadays.’”<sup>581</sup>

Isolated from the political scene, in which they figured less through popular support than through a democratic aspiration that animated their speeches and manifestoes, the Levelers revealed, by withdrawing, the presence of rural agitators who were engaged in struggles against the local powers and who were determined to establish collective ownership of the farm lands. The movement of the Diggers was characterized by a clear rejection of religious obedience.

In April 1649, in Walton-on-Thames, six soldiers invaded the church and announced the suppression *en bloc* of tithes, ministers of agriculture, magistrates, the Bible and the “Sabbath.”<sup>582</sup> Not far from there, day laborers attempted to dig the fallow lands, thereby signifying their seizure of the commons. They chose Sunday in a deliberate attempt to annul the government of time that the Church had arrogated for itself since the Sixth Century.

With the Diggers, the social revolution rejoined the tradition of the incendiaries who annihilated God in his temples and ministers. Ever since 1630, England had experienced a wave of church destruction that prolonged the iconoclasm of the Netherlands in the preceding century, but with more consequence, since the Bible was quite often also condemned to the fire or execration. As Clement Writer, a draper from Worcester wrote in his *Fides divina* (1657): “No testimony that is fallible and liable to error can possibly be a divine testimony.”<sup>583</sup>

The number of Diggers grew rapidly around Gerrard Winstanley, a small, ruined merchant who became a salaried farmer at Walton-on-Thames.

A vision enjoined him to spread the news that “the earth should be made a common treasury of livelihood to whole mankind, without respect of persons.”<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88 and 89. [Translator: C. Hill, pp. 108-109.]

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90. [Translator: C. Hill, p. 109.]

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207. [Translator: C. Hill, p. 265.]

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91. [Translator: C. Hill, p. 112.]

Winstanley's agitation invaded the south and center of England, where the Diggers dug, added manure to and seeded the communal fallow lands. While Winstanley produced many pamphlets between 1649 and 1650, John Lilburne, the leaders of the Levelers, condemned the "erroneous tenets of the poor Diggers" and "repudiated any idea of abolishing property."<sup>585</sup>

"For Winstanley, Jesus Christ was the Head Leveler. Winstanley's thought incorporated many Leveler ideas: it goes beyond them, beyond the vision of the small proprietor, in its hostility to private property as such.

"In the beginning of time the great creator, Reason, made the earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes and man, the lord that was to govern this creation. . . . But not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another. . . . But . . . selfish imaginations . . . did set up one man to teach and rule over another. And thereby . . . man was brought into bondage, and became a greater slave to such of his own kind than the beasts of the field were to him. And hereupon the earth . . . was hedged in to enclosures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made . . . slaves. And that earth, that is within this Creation made a common storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonored, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so. . . ."

"Winstanley told lords of manors that:

" . . . the power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the Creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thieve, yet you hold that cursed

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<sup>585</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 119. Note that while Hill attributes the first quote to Lilburne, *A Whip for the Present House of Lords* (February, 1647-8), which is included in *The Leveler Tracts, 1647-1653* (Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 449, the second quote is actually Hill's own summary.

thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers, and that sin of your fathers shall be visited upon the head of you and your children to the third and fourth generation, and longer too, till your bloody and thieving power be rooted out of the land.’

“Winstanley extended the Leveler justification of political democracy to economic democracy:

“‘The poorest man hath as true a title and just right to land as the richest man. . . . True freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth. . . . If the common people have no more freedom in England but only to live among their elder brothers and work for them for hire, what freedom then have they in England more than they can have in Turkey or France?’

“Winstanley transcended the Leveler theory of the Norman Yoke, that all we need is to get back to the laws of the free Anglo-Saxons. ‘The best laws that England hath,’ he declared, ‘are yokes and manacles, tying one sort of people to another.’ ‘All laws that are not grounded upon equity and reason, not giving a universal freedom to all but respecting persons, ought . . . to be cut off with the King’s head.’ But the England’s rulers had not completed the Revolution [...].

“Winstanley must have been expressing the opinions of many disappointed radicals when he wrote in 1652:

“‘Therefore, you Army of England’s Commonwealth, look to it! The enemy could not beat you in the field, but they may be too hard for you by policy in counsel if you do not stick close to see common freedom established. For if so be that kingly authority be set up in your laws again, King Charles hath conquered you and your posterity by policy, and won the field of you, though you seemingly have cut off his head.’”<sup>586</sup>

Winstanley went even further when he demanded the suppression of the prisons and emphasized that all laws must be corrective, not punitive. He

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<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107. [*Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 132-134.]

was, before the philosophers, one of the first to demand that reason be substituted for divine providence (which had been especially profitable for the exploiters) in the government of societies.

“‘What is the reason,’ Winstanley asked, ‘that most people are so ignorant of their freedoms, and so few fit to be chosen commonwealth’s officers? Because,’ he replied, ‘the old kingly clergy . . . are continually distilling their blind principles into the people, and do thereby nurse up ignorance in them.’ Many of them had taught that Charles I was the Lord’s Anointed. Priests ‘lay claim to heaven after they are dead, and yet they require their heaven in this world, too, and grumble mightily against the people that will not give them a large temporal maintenance. And yet they tell the people that they must be content with their poverty, and they shall have their heaven hereafter. But why may not we have our heaven here (that is, a comfortable livelihood in the earth) and heaven hereafter too, as well as you? . . . While men are gazing up to heaven, imagining after a happiness or fearing a hell after they are dead, their eyes are put out, that they see not what is their birthrights, and what is to be done by them here on earth while they are living.’

“A traditional Christian, who ‘thinks God is in the heavens above the skies, and so prays to that God which he imagines to be there and everywhere, . . . worships his own imagination, which is the devil.’ ‘Your Savior must be a power within you, to deliver you from that bondage within; the outward Christ or the outward God are but men Savors.’ Winstanley himself came to use the word Reason in preference to God, ‘because I have been held under darkness by that word, as I see many people are.’ We must be careful ‘lest we dishonor the Lord in making him the author of the creatures’ misery,’ as hell-fire preachers do. Winstanley spoke of their God in terms which came near to William Blake’s Nobodaddy – unless we are to suppose he held a completely Manichean dualism, which is unlikely. Winstanley told ‘priests and zealous professors’ that they worshipped the devil. He spoke of ‘the God Devil.’ ‘The outward Christ, or the outward God . . . sometimes proves devils.’ He told his opponents in Kingston court that ‘that God whom you serve, and which did entitle you lords, knights, gentlemen and landlords, is covetousness.’ This God gave men a claim to private property in land. He ‘appointed the people to

pay tithes to the clergy.’ It is this God-Devil that the state Church worships. ‘We will neither come to church nor serve their God.’<sup>587</sup>

Close to the partisans of Jakob Böhme who, around 1640, began to appear in England, Winstanley refused to venerate any other Christ than the symbol of the resurrection of man in himself. Eden was humanity seeking to reconstruct the innocent conditions destroyed by covetousness and appropriation. However, if Winstanley believed that sin was a lucrative invention of the clergy, he never adopted the views of the Ranters, who revoked sin in the name of pleasure and the natural liberties that it founded.

During the punitive expeditions against the Diggers, many sects – such as the Seekers and the Quakers – recuperated their popularity and stripped them of their subversive practices, and rapidly acceded to the status of Churches due to their selective tolerance for whoever did not threaten the foundations of religion and the established order.

## **The Ranters**

Luther and Calvin removed from sin the insurance policy that the Roman Church had imposed on it by means of confession and redemption. Sin, which the payment of a licensing fee no longer offset, remained all the more daunting for the creature who was exposed to the libidinous temptations of the Evil One.

In the tradition of the Free Spirit, the Ranters affirmed the absolute rejection of all guilt through the imprescriptible right to enjoy the benefits of existence.

“At one Ranter meeting of which we have a (hostile) report, the mixed company met at a tavern, sang blasphemous songs to the well-known tunes of metrical psalms and partook of a communal feast. One of them tore off a piece of beef, saying ‘This is the flesh of Christ, take and eat.’<sup>588</sup> Another threw a cup of ale into the chimney corner, saying ‘There is the blood of Christ.’ Clarkson called a tavern the house of God; sack was divinity. Even a Puritan enemy expresses what is almost a grudging admiration for the high spirits of the Ranters’

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<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112 and 113. [*Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 140-142.]

<sup>588</sup> Note that the phrase “This is the flesh of Christ, take and eat” recalled Claushorn and his friends, who were banished from Strasbourg in 1359. Such was the ordinary treatment of God when joy and drink untied language from the religion that had bound it.

dionysiac orgies: ‘they are the merriest of all devils for extempore lascivious songs, . . . for health, music, downright bawdry and dancing.’<sup>589</sup>

Spontaneously rediscovering the pleasantries that, in 1359, got those three jokers [*joyeux drilles*] banished from Strasbourg, a Ranter affirmed: “If I should worship the sun or the moon, or that pewter pot on the table, nobody has anything to do with it.”<sup>590</sup> Captain Francis Freeman, a great lover of ribald songs, declared that he saw God in a table and a candlestick.

Captain Underhill restored theological speculations to their terrestrial origins and meanings with as much lucidity as humor when he explained that “the Spirit had sent into him the witness of free grace, while he was in the moderate enjoyment of the creature called tobacco.”<sup>591</sup>

Some Ranters denied the existence of Christ or, affirming themselves to be Christ or God, joyously authorized themselves all forms of license.

If God existed, Jacob Bauthumley proclaimed, he was in himself and every living thing, in ‘man and beast, fish and fowl, every green thing from the highest cedar to the ivy on the wall.’ ‘He does not exist outside the creatures.’ God is in ‘this dog, this tobacco pipe, he is in me and I am in him.’<sup>592</sup> In the Eighteenth Century, a similar spirit animated Christopher Smart’s poetic work *Jubilate Agno*.<sup>593</sup>

Active between 1649 and 1651, the Ranters were not constituted as organized groups and none of them took the title of leader or master thinker. They contented themselves with leading joyous lives and having clear consciences. It was unfortunate that a Scottish peasant named Jack was hanged in 1656 for denying the existence of heaven, hell, God and the Christ, because the Ranters, in their taste for [the pleasures of] terrestrial existence, made it their duty to avoid martyrdom through prompt retractions.

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<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159. [*Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 200-201.]

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.* [*Translator*: C. Hill, p. 200: “Quoted by Masson, *Life of Milton*, III, p. 525.”]

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.* [*Translator*: C. Hill, p. 200.]

<sup>592</sup> J. Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, 1650, p.4. [*Translator*: C. Hill, p. 206. Note that the third quotation is from Edward Hide, *A Wonder, Yet No Wonder* (1651), pp. 35-41, who was an opponent of the Ranters.]

<sup>593</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Rejoice in the Lamb,” written between 1759 and 1763, while Christopher Smart (1722-1771) was in a mental asylum.

## Abiezer Coppe

Originally from Warwick, a student at Oxford and then a preacher in the army, Coppe was 30 when he gained his reputation as a Ranter. In 1649, he published *Some sweet sips of some spirituall wine* and, with the same taste for alliteration, *A Fiery Flying Roll*.

Here, there was no lying prophecy dictated by God. The message emanated from “my most excellent majesty and glory (in me) . . . who am universal love, and whose service is perfect freedom and pure libertinism.” Coppe proclaimed: “Sin and Transgression is finished and ended,” because God, “that mighty Leveler,” prepares to “lay the Mountains low.”<sup>594</sup>

At first, Coppe was among the radical wing of the Levelers. He called for cutting “the neck of horrid pride,” which was the cause of all spilled blood. Bishops, kings, lords and the great ones of this world must disappear so that “parity, equality and community” could assure the reign of “universal love, universal peace and perfect freedom.”

The “betrayal” of the Levelers accentuated for him the feeling of the necessary unity between individual pleasure and the struggle in solidarity against the powerful. He recounted how, in the middle of the street, he hurled his contempt at the men and women of high [social] rank, taking exception to the coaches and their occupants. “Hide not thyself from thine own flesh,” he wrote, “from a cripple, a rogue, a beggar, . . . a whoremonger, a thief, etc., he’s thine own flesh.”<sup>595</sup>

Addressing himself to the rich, he threatened them:

“Thou hast many bags of money, and behold I come as a thief in the night, with my sword drawn in my hand, and like a thief as I am, – I say deliver your purse, deliver sirrah! deliver or I’ll cut thy throat!

“I say (once more) deliver, deliver, my money . . . to rogues, thieves, whores and cutpurses, who are flesh of thy flesh, and every whit as good as thyself in mine eye, who are ready to starve in plaguey Gaols and nasty dungeons. . . .

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<sup>594</sup> C. Hill, pp. 166-168. [*Translator*: C. Hill, p. 210. See also Abiezer Coppe, *Selected Writings*, London, 1987, pp. 16 and 20.]

<sup>595</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 211.

“The plague of God is in your purses, barns, houses, horses, murrain will take your hogs, O (ye fat swine of the earth) who shall shortly go to the knife, and be hung up in the roof except . . .

“Did you not see my hand, this last year, stretched out? You did not see. My hand is stretched out still. . . . Your gold and silver, though you can’t see it, is cankered. . . . The rust of your silver, I say, shall eat your flesh as if it were fire. . . . Have all things in common, or else the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have.”<sup>596</sup>

But at the same time, Coppe perceived in the happiness of serving his pleasures a guarantee of peace and protection against violence: “Not by the sword; we (holily) scorn to fight for any thing; we had as lief be dead drunk every day of the week and lie with whores in the marketplace, and account them as good actions as taking the poor abused, enslaved ploughman’s money from him.”<sup>597</sup>

In 1650, Parliament condemned to the flames *A Fiery Flying Roll*, judged to be full of “many horrid blasphemies,”<sup>598</sup> and sent Coppe himself to prison in Newgate. In exchange for his release, he drafted a partial retraction, and then another, more complete one whose malicious reservations suggested the action’s lack of sincerity. (Note that Coppe did not deprive himself of the choice to be ironic in the manner of Jacques Gruet or Noël Journet: “God forbids killing but tells Abraham to slay his son; [he forbids] adultery, but tells Hosea to take a wife of whoredom.” He proclaimed that it is “the community which is sinful,” but added, “if the flesh of my flesh be ready to perish, [and] if I have bread, it shall or should be his.” Forced to recognize the notion of sin, he declared “the laying of nets, traps and snares for the feet of our neighbors is a sin, whether men imagine it to be so or no; and so is the not undoing of heavy burdens, the not letting the oppressed go free, the not healing every yoke, and the not dealing of bread to the hungry . . . whether men imagine it to be so or no.”)<sup>599</sup> After the Restoration, prudence enjoined Coppe to change his name. He became a physician and was esteemed in the small town of Barnes, in Surrey. He pushed humor as far as having himself buried at [the cemetery of] the parish church.

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<sup>596</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 211. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 38.

<sup>597</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 211. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 24.

<sup>598</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 212. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 111.

<sup>599</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 212-213.



## Lawrence Clarkson

A wandering preacher, born in Preston, Clarkson – raised as a Puritan – very quickly acquired an equal repugnance for all the sects and the clerical profession: “Thousands better than your parish priests have saluted the gallows. It is more commendable to take a purse by the highway than compel any of the parish to maintain such that seek their ruin, whose doctrine is poisonable to their consciences.”<sup>600</sup>

A Leveler in 1647, he rallied to the Ranters and maintained that – God being in all living things and in matter – all action came from him and nothing was a sin in his eyes, not even the crucifixion of Christ. There is neither heaven nor hell beyond mankind. He publicly declared, “I really believed no Moses, Prophets, Christ or Apostles.” “There is no such act as drunkenness, adultery and theft in God. . . . Sin hath its conception only in the imagination. . . . What act so ever is done by thee in light and love, is light and lovely, though it be that act called adultery. . . . No matter what Scripture, saints or churches say, if that within thee do not condemn thee, thou shalt not be condemned.”<sup>601</sup>

“None,” he wrote, “can be free from sin till in purity it can be acted as no sin, for I judged that pure to me which to a dark understanding was impure.”<sup>602</sup>

Clarkson lived joyously in sweetness and love, traveled the country in the company of Mrs. Star, sought adventure with other women, but was “careful for moneys for my wife,” and amused himself in an assembly of Ranters among whom “Dr. Paget’s maid stripped herself naked and skipped.”<sup>603</sup>

Arrested in 1650, he asserted his rights as “a freeborn subject,” was condemned to exile and pardoned, no doubt following a retraction. From then on, he settled down, studied magic and astrology in order to join Muggleton’s sect,<sup>604</sup> which was one of the many groups that has continued to exist in the fog of millenarianism and the apocalypse.

## Jacob Bauthumley

A shoemaker like Böhme, Bauthumley fell into the hands of the authorities in 1650 for having published *The Light and Dark Sides of God*. Accused of

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<sup>600</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 214.

<sup>601</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 214-215.

<sup>602</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 216.

<sup>603</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, *Ibid*.

<sup>604</sup> *Translator*: Lodowicke Muggleton (1609–1698).

blasphemy, he was punished by having his tongue pierced by a red-hot poker. Milton admired him and shared many of ideas.

[According to Bauthumley,] the light of God manifested itself in its presence in every creature and every thing: “Not the least flower or herb in the field but there is the divine being by which it is that which it is; and as that departs out of it, so it comes to nothing, and so it is today clothed by God, and tomorrow cast into the oven.” “All the creatures of the world . . . are but one entire being.” “Nothing that partakes of the divine nature, or is of God, but is God.” God does not love one man more than another: all are the same in his eyes. God “as really and substantially dwells in the flesh of other men and creatures as well as in the man Christ.” There where God dwells is “all the heaven I look ever to enjoy.”<sup>605</sup>

Sin belongs to the dark side of God. It is an absence of light. “The reason why we call some men wicked and some godly is not any thing in the man, but as the divine being appears more gloriously in them. . . . God is no more provoked by sin to wrath than he is allured to blessing by any holiness.” And Bauthumley specified, “according to the counsel of his will, they did no more that crucified Christ, than they that did embrace him.”<sup>606</sup>

Bauthumley denied the existence of hell and the personification of the Demon. The resurrection was a purely inward act and did not take place in the beyond.

[Like Coppe,] he also ended up a respectable citizen of his native town, Leicestershire, where he was a bookseller.

## **Thomas Webbe**

The Rector of Langley Burhill, Webbe seems to have solemnly promised not to receive tithes from his parishioners. His popularity, already assured by a measure that no Church tolerated, found itself greatly increased when he proclaimed from the pulpit that he hoped to live quite a long time in order to see “no such thing as a parsonage or minister in England.”<sup>607</sup> Before he’d propagated similar remarks, the French parish-priest [Jean] Meslier had taken the useful precaution of dying first.

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<sup>605</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 219.

<sup>606</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 219-210.

<sup>607</sup> *Translator*: All quotes attributed or referring to Thomas Webbe come from C. Hill, p. 227.

During the 1650s, Webbe was accused of having constituted “a Babel of profaneness and community.”<sup>608</sup> An admirer of Coppe, he said a remarkable thing in a letter to Joseph Salmon: “The Lord grant that we may know the worth of hell, that we may for ever scorn heaven.”

In 1650, the notables – looking to get rid of him – charged him with adultery, then a crime punishable by execution on the gallows. He was acquitted. He claimed [according to a witness] to “live above ordinances and that it was lawful for him to lie with any woman.” One attributed this witticism to him: “There is no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage.” His enemies managed to get him banished.

### **Coppin, Pordage and Tany**

Richard Coppin was part of the moderate wing of the Ranters; he was satisfied with a pantheism in which theology had the upper hand over the refusal of social and moral imperatives. “God is all in one, and so is in everyone,” he wrote in *Divine Teachings*. “The same all which is in me, is in thee; the same God dwells in one dwells in another, even in all; and in the same fullness as he is in one, he is in everyone.” Resurrection consisted of leaving the grave, which was in us and in the Scriptures, in order to be reborn as “the new man [who] sinneth not.”<sup>609</sup>

Coppin refused the Church in the name of his own experiences of the Lord. Referring to the decree of 1650, which abolished the obligatory nature of Sunday services, he spoke of “the antichristian law of compelling men to church.”<sup>610</sup> Arrested in 1655, Coppin was condemned to six months in prison.

The Vicar of Reading, then the Rector of Bradfield, John Pordage – a disciple of Jakob Böhme – drew the attention of the authorities in 1655 for propagating the Ranters’ opinions. He denied the historical existence of Christ, believed in the presence of God in each person, refused [the notion of] sin, held marriage to be a harmful institution, and announced the imminent disappearance of Parliament, the magistracy, the government of England and all the higher powers, which “he cared no more for . . . than this dust beneath his feet.”<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> *Translator*: note that the French translation with which Vaneigem is working or, at the very least, the present volume, relays this phrase as *une vraie Bible d’impiété et de communisme* (“a true Bible of impiety and communism”).

<sup>609</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, pp. 220-221.

<sup>610</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 222.

<sup>611</sup> *Translator*: C. Hill, p. 225.

His friend Thomas Tany, called Theaureaujohn, estimated that no man could lose his salvation. But he went further than that and maintained that all religion was “a lie, a fraud, a deceit, for there is but one truth and that is love.” He also demanded that the people’s lands were rendered to the people. In 1654, Tany made an exemplary gesture, one of rare audacity. With a beautiful critical concision, he burned a copy of the Bible at Saint George’s Fields, “because the people say it is the Word of God, and it is not.”<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> *Translator: C. Hill, p. 226.*

## Chapter 46: The Jansenists

While Holland and England, both of which were won over to the formal freedoms of the bourgeois revolution, engendered a multitude of sects whose language (though still drawing upon theological artifices) decreasingly hid their ideological texture, the Catholic countries, which were prey to the intense troubles of the Counter-Reformation, once again found in monarchal and pontifical absolutism the guarantee of a Catholicism that was restored to its temporal and spiritual powers.

Indulging in the Constantinian parody of the divine right, Louis XIV persisted in hiding (under the pomp of a Church in which Bossuet acted like Lully)<sup>613</sup> a tormented spinelessness that was corroded by the sourness of prestige. The sun, with which he crowned himself in the manner of a mediocre person, only dispensed its light upon the courtiers of literature and the arts, apt to dilute their genius in the artifice of panegyric. On the other hand, obscurantism did not spare free spirits such as Cyrano de Bergerac, the peasants reduced by famine and the rapacity of the tax collectors, or the Protestants condemned by the thousands to the galleys. This was the reign of the bigots, who threw the poet Claude the Small upon the pyre for having celebrated the art of fucking while the sovereign warmed the bed of his ancillary couplings with remorse.

The quarrel of Jansenism thus inscribed itself in the archaic framework of theological disputes and the political tradition in which the temporal masters claimed that they should be legislators in spiritual matters.

### Michel Baius

Born in 1515 in Meslin-l'Évêque in the Hainaut region, Michel Baius (or de Bay) was a fervent Catholic and Doctor at the University of Louvain who combated Lutheranism and Calvinism, which had become widespread in the Netherlands by basing themselves on the Scriptures that the Protestants erected as the supreme authority.

With his friend Jean Hessels, Baius set against Calvin – for whom mankind, irremediably bad, was completely in the hands of a capricious God – a manner of

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<sup>613</sup> *Translator:* Jean-Baptiste de Lully (1632-1687) was an Italian-born French composer, attached to the court of Louis XIV. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was a French bishop and theologian.

softening the [otherwise harsh] doctrine that went back to Augustine of Hippo. For Baius, nature was originally good, but eminently corruptible. Adam sinned freely and, through his sin, lost the control he had exercised over his senses. Ever since then, mankind had felt the attraction of concupiscence so vividly that it had not been able to resist it.

Calvin drew from the Augustinian notion of predestination the idea that, saved or damned by God's will alone, the [human] creature had no other choice but to assume the burden of his misery in a constant torment in which all pleasure was obscenely dissonant. But predestination also put within reach of all the argument that everything was permitted because God mocked every human creation. Hardly suspected of debauchery and licentiousness, Baius simply opened the door of theological free will on the desperate maceration to which devout Protestants dedicated themselves.

At first, the conceptions of Baius and Hessels did not shock the Cardinal of Granville, who was the Governor of the Netherlands, nor the papacy, since the two theologians participated in the Council of Trento.

Even when Pius V reacted in a Papal Bull that condemned seventy-three propositions advanced by Baius, the latter – whose name had not been mentioned – remained the Chancellor of the University of Louvain and submitted a retraction in good graces.

Among his adepts were a theologian from Louvain, Jacques Janson, and the Bishop of Ypres, Cornélius Jansénius, who promised to wash Baius's reputation clean of suspicions of heterodoxy, which were unmerited in their eyes.

Meanwhile, the Jesuit Lessius revived the quarrel in the milieus that were eagerly waiting for theological speculations to which they attributed public interest but that the majority of the people – already sufficiently encumbered by the constraints of Mass, the sacraments and ecclesiastic rituals – easily dispensed with.

Lessius estimated that sinners lost nothing of their means to accede to the eternal life of the heavens. He agreed with the opinions of the Spanish Jesuit Luis Molina (1536-1600), for whom the divine presence did not hinder mankind's free will in its choice between good and evil.

In the wooden language of theology, what expressed the discord between the theses expounded by Molina in *The Concordance of Grace and Free Will* and Jansenism, unless it was in fact the dissent between the Christian presence that governed the world at the cost of necessary compromises and an eremitic Christianity that sought in retreat (far from the world) the feverish and anguished

arrival of an intransigent God? As Molière illustrated the situation, it was Tartuffe against the misanthrope of Port-Royal.<sup>614</sup>

### **Cornélius Jansénius**

Born in 1585 near Leerdam in Holland, Cornélius Jansénius studied at Utrecht and Louvain, where his teacher was Baius' disciple, Jacques Janson. Jansénius was friends with Duvergier de Hauranne, the future Abbot of Saint Cyran. He devoted himself passionately to the study of Augustine of Hippo and the theses that he opposed to those of Pelagius. After a stay in France, he returned to Louvain; he believed he had discovered in Hippo's philosophy arguments that would properly rehabilitate Baius. It is not easy to disentangle the motives that incited him to confront pontifical thunderbolts and the powerful party of the Jesuits. His affection for Jacques Janson? The hope of shining in the faraway reflection of the pyres? A rigor that corresponded to his taste for asceticism and that incited him to condemn the discreet license of the confessors who mixed devotion with the perfume of the boudoir and practiced in theological fashion a kind of psychoanalysis well before there was such a thing?

"The more I advance," Jansénius wrote to Duvergier de Hauranne, "the more the affair frightens me (...). I do not dare to say what I think about predestination and grace out of fear that, when all is said and done, what has happened to the others will happen to me" (that he would be condemned).<sup>615</sup>

Jansénius had the thoughtfulness to die from the plague in Ypres shortly after he sent a letter to Pope Urban VIII that declared he was disposed to approve, improve or retract his statements "according to what would be prescribed by the voice of thunder that comes from the clouds of the Apostolic See."<sup>616</sup>

His posthumous work, the *Augustinus*, published in 1640, was condemned by Urban VIII two years later.

The Father of Avrigny summarized Jansénius' doctrine in his *Chronological and Dogmatic Memoirs*.

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<sup>614</sup> *Translator*: Written by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-1673), *Le Tartuffe, or l'imposteur* was banned by Louis XIV in 1664.

<sup>615</sup> Abbé Pluquet, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des égarements de l'esprit humain par rapport à la religion chrétienne, or Dictionnaire des hérésies, des erreurs et des schismes*, Besançon, 1817, II p. 213.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*

“That since the fall of Adam, pleasure is the unique spring that moves the heart of man; that this pleasure is unavoidable when it comes and is invincible when it has come. If this pleasure is celestial, it brings virtue; if it is terrestrial, it causes vice; and the will necessarily finds itself led by the stronger of the two. These two delights, the author says, are like the two plates on a balancing scale; one cannot rise without the other one descending. Thus, invincibly but voluntarily, man does good or evil according to whether he is dominated by grace or cupidity.”<sup>617</sup>

Here is proof – if proof was needed – that the roots of all that constituted controversial religious matters resided in the tormented attitudes of individuals when they were confronted by the pleasures of a life that was denied them by virtue of the mandates of heaven and the Spirit, which were the dreadful abstractions of the earth and the body, respectively.

The Church’s obsessive fears were not caused by the scandalous licenses to which pious Jansénius was improbably given access, but by the determination imputed to the man, which, though it was turned towards the most devout asceticism, removed the utility of dogma and clergymen from the government of beings and things.

Jansenism moreover quite rapidly took shape from within a Calvinism that had been transplanted into a society that had still not delegated its powers to free enterprise and the devotion to money sanctified by God.

John Duvergier de Hauranne saw his mission in the propagation of the doctrine of his friend Jansénius. His rigor was more pleasing because the enjoyment of pleasures chilled by remorse had led to the complacency of disappointment. He won the sympathies of the Arnauld family, especially Pascal and Nicole, which was enough to support the monastery of Port-Royal and erect it as the bastion of Jansenism.

When John Duvergier died in 1643, the “Great Arnauld” succeeded him and took over the leadership of the movement, which he treated as if it were a family affair. It is not useless to dwell a little upon this clan, which brandished before the court [of France] and [the Church of] Rome a theological arsenal whose fire-power seemed to result from the unpleasant relations that divided the members of a brotherhood that was as holy as it was tormented.

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<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.



## The Arnauld Family

Originally from Herment, in Puy-de-Dôme, Antoine Arnauld (1560-1619) was born to a Protestant father whom Saint Barthélemy convinced to convert to Catholicism. Antoine settled in Paris in 1577 and professed a disdain for the glory of weapons and the conquest for royal favors, and so made religion his field of battle. From him came a breed of lawyers and scholars whose Puritan rigor, taste for authority, propensity for revolt and solid business sense would have turned towards Calvinism if Jansenism had not furnished a better opportunity.

A counselor to Catherine de Medici after he studied at the University of Paris and the recipient of a law degree from Bourges while studying under Cujas, Antoine Arnauld then entered the bar and applied himself with ardor to several polemics against the Jesuits. A Gallican and nationalist, he mocked their “blind obedience to a Spanish General,” defended the University of Paris against them, and was opposed to their return after [Jean] Châtel’s attack against Henry IV caused them to be banished from France.

Antoine’s wife, Catherine Marion (who became a nun at Port-Royal in 1641), gave birth to twenty children, among whom were Catherine, Jacqueline-Mary-Angélique, Jeanne-Catherine-Agnès (author of a book called *Letters*), Anne, Mary, and Madeleine, who belong to the Abbey, as did Robert and Antoine, the twentieth child, who became known as the “Great Arnauld.” Henri Arnauld became the Bishop of Angers, thereby providing his family – always at the frontiers of heresy – with the pledge of his orthodoxy.

The last child of Catherine Marion, the Great Arnauld (born in 1612), was seven years old when his tyrannical and brutal father died. The child was educated by his mother or, more exactly, by Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, the celebrated Abbot and spiritual director of Saint-Cyran, who presided over the destiny of Port-Royal. Yet the world seduced little Antoine; jurisprudence attracted him; he frequented the literary circles of Madame de Rambouillet; and he became affected and imitated [Vincent] Voiture. But his fate had been decided: he belonged to theology. Enrolled at the Sorbonne in 1633, he studied Augustine under the spiritual direction of Saint-Cyran. The latter, for whom “nothing is as dangerous as knowledge,” imposed ordeals on the young man: fasting twice a week, praying and reading the Holy Scriptures on bended knees.

After being ordained a priest, the young man entered Port-Royal one year later (in 1641), resolved to “flee the conversations of the world like they were poisoned air.” One says that he pushed the love of mystery to the point of denouncing as false a thesis that he judged to be too intelligible. *On Frequent Communion* (1643), which was published the year that Saint-Cyran died, brought him to the head of the Jansenist current and aroused the hatred of the Jesuits, who

schemed to incarcerate him in the Bastille. During the twenty-five years that his retreat lasted, the Great Arnauld engaged in polemics against the Jesuits ([writing] *New Heresy in Morality* and *The Moral Practice of the Jesuits*), which furnished Pascal with the material for his *Letters Written to a Provincial*. Returned to grace in 1669, the Great Arnauld became friends with [Nicolas] Boileau[Despréaux] and [Jean] Racine, and violently attacked Calvinism, thereby joining his brother, Henri, the Bishop of Angers, who applauded the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

When politics took a hostile turn at Port-Royal, the Great Arnauld fled to Mons, Tournai and Brussels, where he died in 1694. A letter from his friend, the Abbot of La Trappe, showed the esteem in which he was held: “At last, Monsieur Arnauld is dead. After pushing his career as far as he could, it had to come to an end. Whatever else one says, these questions are now closed.”<sup>618</sup> To Abbot Bremond, he was “a theological machine-gun in perpetual movement, but completely empty of interior life.”<sup>619</sup> It took little time to see that Arnauld’s grandeur resulted from an accumulation of pettiness.

A similar tissue of gossip and eloquent refusals of the world animated the life of Robert, called Arnauld d’Andilly. His *Memoirs* served his own glory more than that of the God he claimed to venerate: “I have never had ambition, because I have had too much of it.” The empire of the absolute nevertheless agreed with his tastes for intrigue and influence peddling. A madrigal that he offered in the manner of the *Guirlande de Julie*<sup>620</sup> showed that he wedded devotion to gallantry without too much difficulty. Saint-Cyran made Robert his universal legatee on the condition that he retired to Port-Royal. Robert then used all kinds of pretexts to delay the date of his retirement. He schemed at becoming the private tutor of the Dauphin; he published *Stanzas on Diverse Christian Truths*; he wrote a poem on the life of the Christ; and produced his *Letters*, in which he took care to include endorsements from the Jesuits. All in vain. The charge that he so coveted escaped him and disappointment finally pushed him to Port-Royal, where he hastened to send six of his daughters (out of his fifteen children). The news of his retirement, orchestrated for so long, made him a celebrated person and Jansenism fashionable.

In 1664, the dispersion of the community caused Robert to go into exile in Pomponne, where one of his sons lived. Having been an odious father, he seemed

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<sup>618</sup> *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, article “Arnauld.”

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>620</sup> *Translator*: The *Garland of Julie* (1641) was a collectively written group of madrigals, commissioned by Charles de Sainte-Maure in order to woo Julie d’Angennes.

execrable to his daughter-in-law, who saw him die without experiencing displeasure in 1674. He had translated Augustine's *Confessions*, Saint Theresa's works and Flavius Joseph's *History of the Jews*.

Born in 1591, Jacqueline-Mary-Angélique, the second daughter of Antoine, was of a completely different nature. Her brutal frankness broke with the caution of Robert and the Great Arnauld, people who were much closer to Tartuffe than to Moliere's *Misanthrope*. Intelligent and lively, she preferred marriage to the Abbey, which was imposed on her from the age of seven. "You would like me to be a nun," she said. "I would quite like that, but on the condition that I am the Abbess." At the age of nine, she made her profession of faith, but not without specifying that she "felt free in front of men, and committed to God." Her involuntary vocation was always a horror: "I was cursed when men, not God, made me the Abbess and when the monks of the Cîteaux Abbey consecrated me at the age of 11." Her father had to remain on the other side of the grill when visited by her. When he [in response] treated her like a parricidal monster, she stated: "My parents made me a nun at the age of nine, when I did not want to be one; today they want me to damn myself by not observing my rules."

While one after another of her sisters entered Port-Royal, she became fervent as if overcome by a somber and desperate ecstasy. Named Abbess in 1642, she wedded the cause of Jansenism and did not hesitate to treat Pope Innocent X as a deceiver when he condemned the five propositions of *Augustinus* in 1653. God was the weapon of her vengeance against the men who banished her from the world. This passionate woman, whose intelligence and sad but fiery sensuality merited a destiny that was better suited to her hopes, died in 1661, while Pope Alexander promulgated new condemnations [against Jansenism] in a formulary that the clergy had to sign.

Motivated more by hatred of the Jesuits than by religious conviction, a popular current lauded the Jansenists. It applauded their rebellion against Rome and their insolence in the face of a monarch who was as vain as he was petty, and whose military defeats continued to besot him.

Reduced to silence by the threat of corporeal punishment decreed by Louis XIV, the Jansenists went to Holland, from which they poured pamphlets. A Jansenist Church founded in the Netherlands continued to exist until the Nineteenth Century. In France, where the fight was taken up by Pasquier Quesnel, the condemnation of his propositions in 1713 by the Papal Bull *Unigenitus*<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> *Translator*: named for the first word in its opening phrase, *Unigenitus dei filius* ("Only-begotten son of God").

confirmed the end of a movement that passed away less on its own than due to the decline of theology, that is, the language of God.

Stripped of its celestial arguments, the rigor of morality revealed the effects of repression through the hysterical manifestations that produced neither religious homilies nor political speeches. The burial of Deacon [François de] Pâris (a model of Jansenist fervor) in the cemetery at Saint-Médard in Paris brought about graveside convulsive outbursts and miraculous recoveries that exhilarated the Parisians. An edict that prohibited convulsion-inducing assemblies gave rise to the following celebrated inscription: “In the name of the King, do not make miracles at this place.” In 1787, Bonjour – the parish-priest of Fareins, nearby Trévoux, who continued the tradition of the convulsionists – crucified his mistress on the cross of his church in the hope of producing new miraculous recoveries.

From the Great Arnauld to Bonjour, Jansenism fulfilled the destiny that modernity had reserved for the heresies: to become sects at the same time that the Churches and the thunderbolts that Jansénius ingenuously brought forth from the Holy See entered into the ideological spectacle, where – subverted by the great apparatuses of the State and their violations of consciousness – they lived an existence that was more and more marginal, until one day they no longer appeared underneath the cover of the folkloric rites that concerned birth, marriage and death, and, secondarily, trips on Sundays.

## Chapter 47: Pietists, Visionaries and Quietists

### The Pietists

Born from the preaching of the Lutheran Pastor Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705), Pietism was part of the tradition of Hans Denck, for whom faith – or its absence, because only private conviction was important – had nothing to do with the sacraments, priests or pastors, nor even with the allegedly sacred texts.

Under German and English Pietism, there also smoldered the thought of Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), the shoemaker from Gorlitz (in Silesia), whose doctrine was part of the Hermetic tradition and the subtle alchemy of individual experience.

Without entering into an analysis of Pietism's rich and dense conception, it is possible to emphasize the point at which Pietism's God, dissolved into nature, more perfectly annihilated the idea of God than did atheism, which was content to reduce God to a social function presented everywhere in the exercise of power and authority as an abstract government of beings and things. If, for Böhme, the symbols of the divine still wore the tattered rags of theology (Christ, the Trinity, grace), they were no less surely distributed as symbols of a life identified – as in the thought of Marguerite Porete and Simon of Samaria – with an eternal flux in which the “amorous” conjunction created the beings and things that mankind re-created in its turn.

The universe manifested itself at every instant in the inseparable coupling of material energy and energetic matter, in the desire in which in the androgyny of interlaced lovers and the *mysterium magnum*<sup>622</sup> of pleasure and creation rejoiced.

The radical wing of Pietism expressed, most often through the vehicles of visions, revelations and apocalypses, the feeling of a diffuse sexuality in search of an experience in which the unity of the individual and the world was accomplished.

It happens that the very vehicle of these visions threw the illuminati into the interplay of political influences in which his or her claims to rule the future attracted the reprobation (if not worse) of the authorities.

Jean Albert Adelgreiff had a sad experience. The seven angels who mandated him to reform the conduct of the rulers did not prevent him from being burned at Königsberg in 1636. Czar Peter, called Peter the Great, preceded in the

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<sup>622</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “great mystery.”

same manner against the unfortunate Quirinus Kuhlmann, condemned to the pyre in Moscow in 1689.

The theosophical alchemist Paul Felgenhauer spent a large part of his life in prison or wandering Europe due to successive banishments. His *Dawn of Wisdom*, in which was figured the Aurora and the *Sophia* dear to Böhme, fixed sometime in the [Seventeenth] Century the beginning of the millennium, which didn't end up happening. With the same probable certitude, Paul Nagel foresaw the collapse of the papacy in March 1623.

Others, such as the worker Elias Eller (1690-1750), assured prophetic determinations in matters of destiny with more skill. Eller, while looking for work in Elberfeld, seduced a rich widow with whom he founded one of the Pietist communities in which exaltation and prayer propelled faith in the divine presence well beyond the domes of the temples and the other places “contaminated by papist or Protestant [*parpillots*] cockroaches.”

Anna von Büchel, the daughter of a baker, plunged her adepts into ecstasy through luxuriant visions in which she dialogued with Jesus Christ in a very intimate fashion. Since Elias Eller occupied the carnal place of Jesus in her heart, her husband took offense and accused Anna von Büchel of perpetrating a hoax and making sacrifices to Satan. Eller got him locked up as a lunatic and married the prophetess, whose revelations he recorded in a work entitled *Hirtentasche* (*The Shepherd's Sack*).

Figured as the Mother and Father of Zion, this couple undertook to make Jesus reborn in the womb of Anna. He first appeared in the unfortunate form of a girl. A second child, male this time, soon thereafter died, not caring about his triumphs to come. Anna succumbed in her turn.

Elias Eller entered into a third marriage. His adepts were numerous in Rehmsdorf, where he was named mayor. He died in 1750, well liked by the citizens. We do not know if he lived in harmony with his desires or only in a cunningly calculated mix of holiness, honorability and libertinage.

Johann-Willem Petersen (1649-1727) was inspired by Jakob Böhme and Valentin Weigel, and provided his pious communities with the effervescence of millenarian preaching and the exaltation of visionaries who catechized the crowds. His religious ardor sometimes took on the colors of a mystical sensuality.

“Assuredly, the Spirit of prophecy was not partial to anyone in particular. There were a swarm of clairvoyants who fluttered around the leaders of the sect: Madeleine Elrich, Christine-Régina Bader, Adélaïde Schwartz and Anne-Marguerite Jahn. As in any well-regulated troupe, each one had her role: Anna-Maria was the ‘Pietist singer.’ Anne-Eve Jacob was ‘the sucker of blood.’ There were other

stars who, naturally, had more important roles. Jean-Guillaume Petersen had the privilege of having divine illuminations, and he also had the advantage of being married to a woman, Eleonore von Merlau, who also had visions. She composed works that the celebrated Pietist published under his name. Guillaume Postel also had some influence on Petersen's thought. Petersen also referred to a book by an English countess, whose name he did not mention, and who composed *De principiis philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae*,<sup>623</sup> a work that is not without depth and which was inspired by Jewish Kabala.

“According to Petersen, when the reign of a thousand years had established itself in heaven and on earth, the Jews would convert and, returning to Palestine, they would reestablish their ancient kingdom. Petersen refrained from setting the date of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Moreover, one observes that the ‘end of this age’ did not designate a universal conflagration, but the ‘end of the current age.’ Contrary to a certain tradition, the woman of the *Revelations* who would give birth (ch. 12) was the Jewish nation, which would give birth to Christ despite the efforts of the infernal Dragon, the monster that would be killed by Saint Michael, the protecting angel of Israel. Rosemonde-Julienne von Asseburg was one of the ballet dancers of the troupe of Pietist Sibyls. Leibniz judged her visions to be quite respectable, on a par with those of Saint Hildegard [of Bingen], Saint Bridget [of Sweden], Saint Mechtilde [of Hackeborn] and other holy ladies. Leibniz was also the publisher of several of Petersen's works. The influence of Madame Petersen was considerable in Germany and England.”<sup>624</sup>

For Johann Georg Gichtel and Eva von Buttlar, the *Sophia* of Böhme and the ancient Gnostics was illustrated by the two figures (less antithetical than they might appear at first) of the future Eve and the current Eve, the femininity in itself of a faraway princess and the femininity for itself of a nearby tumultuous sensuality (but this was also the case with certain exalted Pietist “suckers of blood” and the *pneuma* that was identical with *sperma*).

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<sup>623</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “On Ancient and Recent Philosophical Principles.”

<sup>624</sup> P. Vuilliaud, “Fin du monde et prophètes modernes,” *Les Cahiers d’Hermès*, Paris, #2, 1947, p. 112.

In his study of The English Disciples of Jakob Böhme, Serge Hutin devoted several pages to Gichtel.

“Johann-Georg Gichtel (1638-1710), the son of a counselor to the court of Regensburg, had shown mystical tendencies since his childhood. As an adolescent, he wanted, in imitation of Christ, ‘to annihilate’ his carnal self: renouncing all pleasure, he vowed perpetual virginity. A Lutheran, he was rapidly disappointed by the dryness of official Protestantism and turned towards the Catholic religion, which also soon disappointed him. This young man, more and more sinking into a solitary and exalted devotion, was also passionate about studying and spent entire nights immersed in Greek, the sacred Eastern languages, and theology. After successfully enrolling in the College of Theology at the University of Strasbourg, he nevertheless had to give in to his tutors, who obliged him to follow his father and become a magistrate: willy-nilly, he became a lawyer at the imperial High Court of Spire. But this important function did not monopolize his attention for long: fleeing from pressing feminine solicitations, Gichtel returned to his native town in great haste. Enrolled in the bar at Regensburg, he happened – while at a library – to meet Baron Justinian Ernst von Weltz; the two men became close friends on the spot. Weltz (1621-1668) was a rich illuminati who wanted to found a missionary society, the *Christerbauliche Jesusgesellschaft*,<sup>625</sup> the objectives of which would be the realization of Christian unity and the conversion of the entire world to the Gospel; he associated with Gichtel and together they submitted their project to the Evangelical Assembly of the Lutheran Church. At first the Assembly welcomed the proposal and the Baron deposited in a bank in Nuremberg the sum – enormous for the times – of 30,000 *riksdallers*. But the theologians, upon becoming aware of the chimerical and nebulous character of the project, quite quickly manifested their disagreement. To disencumber themselves from the two associates, who began to create a scandal in the Rhineland, the apostolic delegate from Mainz proposed to them that they go convert the Indians of South America; Weltz and Gichtel went to Holland, but refused to get on the boat at the last minute.

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<sup>625</sup> *Translator*: German for “the Christian Edification Society of Jesus.”



“Having left the Baron, and returned to Regensburg, Gichtel, after fervent prayers, experienced an ‘illumination’ that put him into direct contact with the Divinity: submitting himself in advance to all the ordeals that Christ had him undergo, he completely abandoned himself to the superior ‘Will’ that had ‘annihilated’ his own. Losing all prudence, he publicly denied the necessity of outward worship, in which he now saw a daunting obstacle to the inward communication of the soul with God; and, even more maladroitly, he violently expelled the pastors from the town. The pastors him brought before the tribunals as ‘seditious,’ an ‘enthusiast’ and an ‘Anabaptist.’ At first imprisoned in Nuremberg, Gichtel then languished for three weeks in a somber dungeon in Regensburg. Condemned for ‘anti-social heresy,’ he was excommunicated, excluded from the sacraments and all the ceremonies of the Lutheran Church, and was even sentenced to be executed; after the intervention of the burgomaster of the city, his death sentence was commuted into perpetual banishment: deprived of his position, his goods and his status as a citizen, the visionary was chased from Regensburg (February 1655).

“At first Gichtel wandered through southern Germany, where charitable people provisionally housed him. Then he went to Vienna, where he had influential relatives, and obtained a position at the imperial court, at which he was assailed with many worldly temptations (riches, honors . . .); seeing how he was favored in the capital, his persecutors in Regensburg became afraid and restored his fortune to him. But Gichtel, having made the irrevocable resolution to renounce all the goods of this world, vowed extreme poverty: he gave his money to his oldest sister (who quickly squandered it), abandoned his official functions, gave up his luxurious clothing for a coarse frock made of leather, and left on foot for Holland.

“After being detained in Zwolle by the Lutheran authorities, who suspected him of being an Anabaptist, Gichtel established himself in Amsterdam, where he was thenceforth forced to live on the subsidies of diverse protectors – his religious convictions expressly prohibited him from plying any trade whatsoever.

“In 1669, he became ‘the spiritual husband of the Virgin Sophia’: she manifested herself to him, became his ‘wife,’ revealed to him the last

explication of all things and enjoined him to institute the ‘priesthood of Melchisedeq,’ to found the ‘New Church,’ the Church of the Last Dispensation; all books had to be rejected, with the exceptions of the Bible – interpreted theosophically – and the works of Jakob Böhme. After this great ‘illumination,’ Gichtel united around him a small group of disciples who desired to live – according to his own example and the model of Christ – a life of perfect purity: this was the community of the *Brothers of the Angelic Life*, a small sect that still subsists secretly in Germany.

“According to Gichtel, the Reformation destroyed Catholicism without substituting anything better in its place, and so a *veritable Reformation* would have to be instituted: this Reformation would have to consist precisely in putting into practice the theosophy of Jakob Böhme. (...)

“To put this new dispensation into practice, Gichtel established the ‘priesthood of Melchisedeq,’ a community of ‘saints,’ ‘Brothers of the Angelic Life,’ and ‘soldiers of Christ.’ These brothers and sisters – because women were admitted into the community, with rights equal to those of the men – had to strive to return to the state of *angelic perfection*, lost by Adam during the Fall; it would thus be possible for them to regain the primitive androgyny of man: ‘ . . . in heaven, there is neither man nor woman.’

“Seeking to free themselves from all human imperfections by leading lives of contemplation and continuous prayers, they had to imitate the perfect existence of Christ in all points.

“‘The Christ,’ Gichtel said, ‘taught us that if we want to be his *disciples*, we must renounce all terrestrial desires, choose and follow that choice: and this instruction was addressed, not only to the apostles, but to all Christians. The first Christians *practiced* this commandment and thus testified that they loved Christ and that they upheld His law.’”<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> S. Hutin, *Les Disciples anglais de Jakob Böhme*, Paris, 1960, pp. 16-19.

In the consecration of Melchisedeq, Gichtel's frenzied asceticism rediscovered the Essenism that had been the original, true Christianity.

“In the same way that the priests of the Old Testament, to perform their worship, had to keep themselves pure, holy, immaculate and chaste – so that the Anger of God was not aroused by them, and so that they could stand before God in the Sanctuary – the priesthood of Melchisedeq of the New Alliance demanded these sacrifices even more, because complete divine service required a total renunciation of all terrestrial love.”<sup>627</sup>

Unlike the Stylites and the Anchorites, whose repression of sexuality was allied with a hatred of the self (they called sexuality the absolute evil of Satan), Gichtel extracted from his libidinal energy – transmuted into mystical visions – not the horrors of diabolical temptation, but a kind of ravishing succubus, which was nothing other than the *Sophia* of the Gnostics and Böhme. Gichtel himself recounted the flashes of his ethereal orgasms.

“I saw in my heart a white light, around my heart a large serpent, twisted three times upon itself like a tress; in the middle, in [great] clarity, Christ appeared in the form described by John (*Revelations*, 1, 13, 14, 15).

“When the soul has walked for some time with its Beloved (*Sophia*) in the garden of roses, when she has provided flowers, the Fiancé (Christ) takes the soul completely beyond the body. She then appears like a ball of fire (...) she plunges into a sea of fire: this happened to me five times over the course of five consecutive days, during my evening prayers; I saw that she was in a mass of a crystalline blue, like the firmament, but it was an igneous water that the soul, by crossing it, made choppy with little waves of fire; I cannot express the delicious taste and impression.

“(...) After a black cloud appeared, a white one followed and out of it came the noble, heavenly Virgin Sophia of Jesus (...), her loyal companion and friend, whom he (Gichtel) had loved until then without knowing her. And she appeared to him in his spirit, face to

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<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

face; God had thus sent (...) his eternal Word Jesus in virginal form, to serve him (Gichtel) as consort and wife. . . . O how lovingly she embraced his soul! No woman frolicked more affectionately with her husband than Sophia did with his soul. And what he experienced in the course of such a union he would equally desire that other souls enjoy, because words cannot express the inexpressible sweetness, even if it were permitted. . . .”<sup>628</sup>

In his correspondence with Colonel Kirchberger, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin evoked the love of Gichtel and his Sophia:

“‘Sophia, his beloved, his divine Sophia, whom he loved and whom he had never seen, made her first visit on Christmas Day, 1673; he saw and understood this virgin who was dazzling and celestial as the third principle. In this interview, she accepted him as husband and the wedding was consummated with ineffable delights.’ Married to Sophia, who ‘made him hope for spiritual offspring,’ living with her ‘in the luminous inward depths,’ Gichtel engaged in daily conversations with her: ‘Sophia also possessed a fundamental language [*un langage central*], without outward words and without vibrations of air, and which did not resemble any human language; nevertheless, he understood it as easily as his mother tongue.’<sup>629</sup> Through revelations concerning the soul and nature, she directed him to publish the works of Jakob Böhme.

“Raadt, a scholar associated with Gichtel, fell in love with Sophia and imposed ‘spiritual circumcision’ on himself and his wife so as to merit seeing this entity. ‘She will let fall several rays of her image on the terrestrial qualities of their souls.’ Around Gichtel was soon formed the Society of the Thirty, all lovers of Sophia and beneficiaries of her favors, which caused him to remark ‘how much the astral spirit desires to enjoy the nuptial bed of Sophia.’ Dissent appeared among the Thirty in 1682, but a young wholesaler from Frankfurt named Uberfeld, who later published Gichtel’s letters, went to find him and decided to remain as a disciple. ‘Upon his arrival, Sophia manifested herself in the third principle to the two friends in the most glorious

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<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>629</sup> L.-Cl. de Saint-Martin, *Correspondance inédite*, Paris, 1862.

way.’ Uberfeld took Sophia as his wife and ‘he was elevated to the most sublime heights.’

“It was confirmed that Sophia, the immaterial wife, was polygamous, sharing herself among all her chosen ones, on the condition that they were initiated: ‘No soul, not even a good one, can possess Sophia.’ She could even be the celestial spouse of a woman, since the first vision that the English mystic, Jane Leade, had was one in which Sophia manifested herself physically. Saint-Martin said of the wedding of Gichtel and Sophia: ‘Everything in it had the stamp of truth. If we were close to each other, I would also have a story of marriage to relate to you, one in which the same step was taken by me, although in another form.’”

At the same time in France, [Nicolas-Pierre-Henri de] Montfaucon de Villars – in his *Count of Gabalis*, published in 1670 – approached *cum grano salis*<sup>630</sup> the problem of libertine relations with beings issued more from the mysteries of nature than from the heavens: “The most beautiful (woman) is horrible compared to the least Sylph.” The air, water, fire and earth were full of superb creatures whose favors were enjoyed by the initiate. “They only require of men that they abstain from women whose faults they cannot tolerate (and) permit us to love them as much as it pleases us.”

In *The Amorous Devil* (1772), and in the same gallant manner, Jacques Cazotte treated ideas already in fashion among the Gnostics and the Alexandrine Hermeticists, and that the Byzantine monk Michael Psellos had expounded in the Eleventh Century in his *Peri energieas daimonon*.<sup>631</sup>

While Gichtel extinguished the excesses of a repressed sexuality in esoteric couplings, other Pietists married the heavens to the earth in less disincarnated, if not less spiritual weddings.

In Germany, colleges of piety multiplied; these were congregations in which religious hysteria made use of an audience that was ready to unhinge itself unreservedly. Such assemblies survived in great numbers in the Churches and sects of the United States, where television successfully exhibited the neurotic disorders of ecstasy.

Founded by Eva von Buttlar, the Christian and Philadelphian Society ascribed to Böhme and Gichtel’s Sophia the traits of a terrestrial and generous

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<sup>630</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “With a grain of salt.”

<sup>631</sup> *Translator*: Greek for “On the Operation of the Daemons.”

sensuality. Von Buttlar herself had wed a French refugee, a dance professor at Eisenbach. She left him to throw herself into Pietism. Having founded an association in which piety excited her passionate nature, she got herself recognized as the Sophia, at once the New Eve and an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The heavens, over which she ruled, provided her with two lovers. She named one God the Father and the other God the Son. She believed that marriage was a sin and preached the holiness of love freely given and received. [In November 1704,] in the name of maintaining public order, the Lutherans obtained from the police whom she had troubled [possession of] the paradise in which Eva von Buttlar and her adepts had practiced the teachings of God according to [Charles] Fourier well before Fourier himself began imparting them.

The counts of Wittgenstein opened their domains to all those whose beliefs condemned them to persecution. Eva took refuge there, but her crime appeared inexpiable. Sophia and “God the Father,” condemned to death, managed to escape from the authorities and no doubt consoled themselves about their lost paradise in prudent clandestinity.

At the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, Pietism evolved towards the *Aufklärung*.<sup>632</sup> Two workers, the Kohler brothers, mixed apocalyptic diatribes together with the first accents of a proletarian insurrection that they announced for Christmas Day 1748. One was executed, the other imprisoned. They prefigured [Wilhelm] Weitling, a contemporary of the young Marx, who mocked his archaisms. Weitling proposed a general insurrection of the proletariat whose iron lance – constituted by criminals released from prison and transformed by their divine mission – would introduce into the cadaver of the old world the ferment of the egalitarian millennium. It is not certain that such a beautiful project would have involved more fatal results than the quite rational program of the Communist parties.

A wandering preacher who was persecuted everywhere, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau (1670-1721) also found among the counts of Wittgenstein an asylum from which he led the fight for tolerance and the abolition of the death penalty.

A radical Pietist, Gottfried Arnold was the first to approach the history of the Church and the [various] heresies in a spirit that was disengaged from theological prejudices, if not religious prejudices as well. For him, the sincerity of conviction took precedence over doctrine, and nothing was condemnable among the diversity of opinions and practices as long as they did not attack life or the dignity of individuals.

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<sup>632</sup> *Translator*: German for the “Enlightenment.”

The human meaning that slowly revoked the heavenly obedience required by the [various] religions could not, perhaps, have been any better expressed by Hölderlin: his “Diotima”<sup>633</sup> was a sensual and amorous Sophia, and she exorcised the torments of a Pietist education by attributing the poetic source that creates and re-creates the world to the marvelous designs of childhood.

## The Quietists

The Church of Rome reserved for the monastic communities the pursuit of contemplation and the privilege of assuring direct transmission between humanity and God through the use of prayer. The course of the world could thus be pursued under the ferule of the spiritual and temporal powers without the ardors of faith being able to claim (at an inopportune moment) that they could move institutional mountains.

The people were not happy with feeding these congregations of loafers who made money in the form of gifts [*corvées*], taxes and tithes from the care they took for souls. The people later demonstrated their displeasure by joyously sacking the abbeys and monasteries.

By expelling the monastic orders, the Reformation gave free reign to those who desired to give themselves the luxury of dialoguing with God without being preoccupied with maintaining their terrestrial subsistence.

The form of visionary Pietism known in the Catholic countries under the name of Quietism aroused the reprobation of Rome and the public powers in the Seventeenth Century.

An inhabitant of Lille, Antoinette Bourignon [de la Porte] (1616-1680) was overtaken by an extreme devotion at an early age, but it entailed a strictly Catholic obedience. A sudden illumination persuaded her to confer the light of divine inspiration upon the world.

In the name of the powerful movements of the soul, she condemned the outward forms of religious organization. Kolakowski noted her “repulsion for her mother, which appeared in her childhood, and later her hatred for women and obsessive fear of sexual matters.”<sup>634</sup>

Bourignon’s speculations on original androgyny did not lack piquant aspects:

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<sup>633</sup> *Translator*: Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), a major lyric poet. ‘Diotima’ appears in his novel *Hyperion*, published in 1799.

<sup>634</sup> Kolakowski, quoted by J. N. Vuarnet, *Extases féminines*, Paris, 1991.

“He had in his belly a vessel from which small eggs were born and another vessel full of a liquor that would make these eggs fecund. And when the man became excited by the love of his God, the desire that he had for other creatures to praise him, to love and adore this great majesty was spread – by the fire of the love of God – over one or several of these eggs with inconceivable delights; and this egg or eggs, made fecund, then exited from the man through the canal in the form of an egg and, shortly thereafter, from this egg there hatched out a perfect man. Thus, in the eternal life, there will be a holy and endless procreation, quite different from the one that sin has introduced by means of women, [a holy procreation] by which God will form people – in conformity with the new discoveries of anatomy – by drawing from the flanks of Adam the viscera that contain the eggs that women possess and from which people are still born.”<sup>635</sup>

Serge Hutin comments:

“This womb was ripped out of Adam during the bipartition of the original androgyny that resulted from the Fall.

“These considerations were tied to a very original Christology: the Word was engendered by Adam when he was in the hermaphroditic state of innocence. The work of Jesus in his terrestrial incarnation was to teach mankind the means by which it could recover the favor of God and return to its perfect condition before the Fall.

“To be saved, one had to completely detach oneself from terrestrial things and become aware of the fact that they have disappeared and that God alone remains, the person having been annihilated in Him; the only qualification required for teaching the Truth is thus the perfect union of the soul with God.

“Antoinette Bourignon thus described the birth, after the end of this world, of the *New Jerusalem*, the celestial dwelling of the just; and she showed how, after the [Last] Judgment, the earth would be transformed into an infernal prison in which the individual wills of the

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<sup>635</sup> Quoted by S. Hutin, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 and 28.



damned would be given over to a merciless struggle; but divine mercy would finally triumph and deliver the damned.”<sup>636</sup>

Traveling the world [of Europe] so as to propagate her vision of an inward and purely spiritualized reality, Antoinette Bourignon had the chance to escape the fate of her friend Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651-1680) and his contemporary, Simon Morin (1623-1663).

A visionary and [self-avowed] reincarnation of the Messiah, Simon Morin had the misfortune of living under the rule of a devout king, to whom he was denounced by a mediocre writer named [Jean] Desmarets, Sieur de Saint-Sorlin. The latter feigned to place himself among the ranks of Morin’s proselytes, obtained from him an exposition of his chiliastic doctrine and delivered it to the authorities. Louis XIV had Morin burned along with his writings in 1663. In 1647, Morin published his *Thoughts of Simon Morin*.

As for Quirinus Kuhlmann, Vuilliaud summarized his destiny in a few words: “The pyre was his throne.”<sup>637</sup>

At the age of 18 and at the end of a serious illness, Kuhlmann had a vision of God, who invested him with the mission of revealing his message to all the nations. Kuhlmann then left Breslau, his native town, and traveled through Germany and Holland, where he became enthusiastic about the works of Jakob Böhme.

According to Serge Hutin,

“in Amsterdam, Kuhlmann came to know another young visionary, Johannes Rothe, who was as exalted as he was; both joined the community of the ‘Angelic Brothers,’ but, quickly coming into conflict with Gichtel, they founded their own society.

“After Rothe’s arrest, Kuhlmann led an wandering existence, aimlessly traveling according to his prophetic ‘inspirations.’ In 1675, he went to Lübeck; he wanted to go to Rome to dethrone the pope, but finally embarked for Smyrna, where he proclaimed the imminence of the definitive Reformation. Persuaded that he would be its craftsman, and that the ‘spiritual kingdom’ would at first be established in the East, he went to Constantinople, where he tried in vain – through the intermediary of the Dutch ambassador – to obtain an audience with

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<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>637</sup> P. Vuilliaud, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

the great vizier (1678). He then went to Switzerland, England (he visited London in 1679, and translated his books into English), France (he was in Paris in 1681) and Germany.

“Finally, he left for Russia with the goal of establishing the ‘Kingdom of God’ there; he took two wives, frequented the strangest Russian sects and attempted to convert the Muscovites to his mission. Peter the Great had him imprisoned as a dangerous heretic and conspirator; on 4 October 1689, Kuhlmann and his friend Conrad Nordermann were burned alive in Moscow.”<sup>638</sup>

In a certain way, Peter Poiret (1646-1719) was situated at the hinge between the first and second generations of Quietism. Born in Metz, he was a Calvinist minister in Heidelberg and Deux-Ponts. His reading of texts by Tauler, Thomas à Kempis and especially Antoinette Bourignon converted him to Quietism, which reduced existence to the pure contemplation of an inward God and the ecstasies of the depthless soul. Chased from the Palatinate by the war, he took refuge in Amsterdam, then went to Hamburg to meet Antoinette Bourignon and spent eight years there studying the mystics. Persecuted by the Lutherans, he went to a place near Leyden in Holland, where he died in 1719. He published the works of Antoinette Bourignon and the works of Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte-Guyon, better known as Madame Guyon, who gave Quietism some respectability.

### **Madame Guyon**

In 1675, the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696) published *A Spiritual Guide Intended to Led the Soul to Perfect Contemplation and the Rich Treasury of the Peace of the Heart*. Well received by the Catholic milieu, the book was suddenly condemned as Quietist and, in 1679, Pope Innocent XI pushed cruelty as far as throwing its author into the prison of the Holy Office, where he eventually died. The crime committed by the unfortunate Molinos was only that he revived the memory of the *Alumbrados* of the Sixteenth Century, even though he toned them down by attributing to them a great spirituality. Molinos advocated maintaining the soul and the body in an absolute inaction in order to let God express himself in each person without the obstacles of conscience and [moral] imperatives. Molinos excluded the idea that the faithful should break with the

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<sup>638</sup> G. Bartsch, preface to a reprinted edition of the *De tribus impostoribus*, Berlin, 1960.

observance of religious duties, but he conferred so many privileges upon the annihilation of the soul in ecstasy that the functions of Church, the sacraments and works of piety were greatly reduced.

Molinos' principal accuser, the Bishop of Naples, claimed that the people who authorized divine quests did so to revoke his [personal] authority and to follow their inclinations freely. And no doubt this was not pure calumny, since the satisfactions of nature excelled at giving good reasons to those who combated them.

Molinos' doctrine found echoes in France, where Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte, the widow of a certain Guyon, recommended the annihilation of the soul to the point that all prayer disappeared, except for the entreaty: "Thy will be done!"

Violently attacked by Bossuet, Madame Guyon obtained the protection of Fenelon, the Bishop of Cambrai. Condemned to prison, then exiled, she did not repudiate any of her opinions. Accused by Pope Innocent XII, Fenelon abjured.

No more than the "Guérinets" (the adepts of the parish-priest Guérin), of whom Racine spoke in his *Summary of the History of Port-Royal*,<sup>639</sup> neither Madame Guyon nor Fenelon used the illumination acquired by prayer to take Jesuitical liberties with asceticism. But it is probable that the simple people made more handy use of the divine graces and ecstasies that are so common in love. At the time, songs that lampooned the Quietists were in circulation. One of their refrains related the miraculous effects of devotion:

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<sup>639</sup> "This was the time when two famous nuns from Montdidier were introduced at Maubuisson by one of the visitors, to teach, he said, the secrets of the most sublime oration. The Mother of the Angels and the Angelic Mother were not close enough to the will of the fathers, and they were often reproached for knowing no other perfection than that which was acquired by the mortification of the senses and the practice of good works. The Mother of the Angels, who had learned at Port-Royal to resist all novelty, observed these two young women closely; and it happened that, under the jargon of pure love, annihilation and perfect nudity, they were hiding all of the illusions and horrors that the Church had condemned in Molinos. These women were indeed from the sect of the illuminati from Roye, whom one calls the Guérinets, for whom Cardinal Richelieu had made such a careful search. Since the Mother of the Angels gave notice of the peril that the monastery was in, these two nuns were confined very strictly by order of the court; and the visitor who protected them was forced to withdraw from the affair."

As for my body, I abandon it to you, / My soul being my only care.  
When the soul gives itself to God / One can leave one's body to one's  
friend.

It is true that, at the time, the virtuous Bossuet, in a cassock, practiced the charming perils and disgraces of love with Mademoiselle Mauléon. In a society that was suffocated by the devout party and the prudishness of a pitiful monarchy, it was necessary that the pleasures of the senses were exalted in the shadow of the confessional, since it was dangerous to rally to the joyous revolt of the libertines such as Saint-Pavin, Blot, Claude the Small and Cyrano de Bergerac.

## Chapter 48: The End of the Divine Right

In the profusion of its diverse tendencies, the triumph of Protestantism – in which the economic mechanisms that chaotically governed historical evolution burst the skin of the God that had clothed them in his myth – put an end to the notion of repressive orthodoxy and, consequently, the existence of “heresy.”

The sects had given the [Greek] word *hairesis* the neutral meanings of “choice” and “option.” They then entered into the currents of opinions that, following Destutt de Tracy and Benjamin Constant, became known as “ideologies.”<sup>640</sup> The decapitation of Louis XVI, a monarch by virtue of divine right, removed from God the ecclesiastical head at which – like a monstrous cephalopod – were articulated the secular arms that were tasked with imposing his writs of mandamus. The French Revolution deprived the Church of its penal authority; until then, princes and priests had been the intermediaries that imposed its laws.

The jubilation that, around the end of the [Eighteenth] century, brought down the churches and monasteries began to express itself openly in works in which the derision of sacred things showed quite well that religion merited the impertinent pikes of jibes more than the death blows delivered by philosophical reason. The execution of the knight [Jean-François Lefevre] de la Barre recalled that the Church was still capable of biting cruelly, but this was the last crime prescribed by the obedience of civil law to religious power.

Nevertheless, if Diderot only received a short period of imprisonment as punishment for his insolence, the anti-religious thinkers of the beginning of the Eighteenth Century still had the keenest interest in being careful and circumspect. The case of the parish priest Jean Meslier is too well-known to be discussed at length here.<sup>641</sup> Let us recall that this parish priest from Étrépigny lived the life of a man who fulfilled the duties of his position, though he did have a disagreement

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<sup>640</sup> *Translator:* Antoine Louis Claude Destutt, Comte de Tracy (1754-1836) is generally credited with coining the word “ideology.” Henri-Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (1767-1830) was a pioneering analyst of it.

<sup>641</sup> *Translator:* briefly mentioned in Chapters 28, 44 and 45 of the present work, Jean Meslier (1664-1733) was an otherwise unremarkable Catholic priest who, in turns out, wrote a massive atheistic book called *Common Sense* (also known as *Meslier’s Testament*). It was only discovered after his death. Voltaire edited and wrote a preface to its second edition.

with the lord of the town and a forbidden love affair with his servant. His *Testament*, discovered after his death, uprooted God from society and the universe by extirpating him along with hierarchical power and the exploitation of man by his fellow man, which were the foundations of God's fantastical existence. This text, mutilated by Voltaire, was only distributed in its unabridged version later on, but the celebrity of Meslier himself preceded the publication of his work, thanks to his celebrated formula: "Humanity will only be happy when the last priest has been hanged with the guts of the last prince."<sup>642</sup>

### **Thomas Woolston**

The humorous irreverence and misfortune of Thomas Woolston proceeded from a misunderstanding. Even if we do not underestimate its corrosive humor, his *Discourse on the Miracles of Jesus-Christ* tried to demonstrate the points at which the Scriptures only had an allegorical meaning. Such had already been the opinion of Origen, Denck and Weigel; today it is the sentiment of the theologians who are appalled by the everyday derision of the religion of present-day [commodity] consumption.

Born in 1669 in Northamp, and later a student at Cambridge, Woolston acquired renown as an erudite and punctilious man of the Church. Written in Latin, his dissertation on a letter from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius about Jesus put into doubt a fabricated document, as many such documents were, with the sole goal of authenticating the historical Jesus.

Another one of his works expounded his thesis on the necessity of allegorical interpretations of texts that were supposed to be sacred. Intervening in

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<sup>642</sup> *Translator*: here Vaneigem has relayed a shortened version of the formula, which is generally said to have been *Je voudrais, et ce sera le dernier et le plus ardent de mes souhaits, je voudrais que le dernier des rois fût étranglé avec les boyaux du dernier prêtre*: "I would like, and this would be the last and most ardent of my wishes, I would like it that the last king was strangled with the guts of the last priest." It appears that, in any case, this formula does not appear in the text of the *Testament* itself but in one of the many abstracts of it that circulated during the French Revolution. Note well that, on 17 May 1968, during the occupation of the Sorbonne, Vaneigem and the other members of the Situationist International sent out telegrams to various world leaders that included the following declaration: "Humanity won't be happy until the last capitalist is hung with the guts of the last bureaucrat," or, depending on the intended recipient, ". . . until the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist."

the quarrel between Collins and the theologians about the foundations of Christianity, he wrote an ironic work titled *The Moderator Between an Infidel and an Apostate*.

Published in 1727, his *Discourse on the Miracles of Jesus-Christ* caused a quarrel with his friends and exposed him to the persecutions of all the religious minds of the day, whether they were conformist or not. Condemned to a year in prison and a fine that he could not pay, he aroused the democratic sentiments of a number of his fellow citizens. Samuel Clarke solicited his release in the name of the freedom of thought claimed by England. The authorities consented, on the condition that Woolston refrained from publishing anything shocking. He refused to exchange repudiation for freedom, which he estimated to be the spring of natural rights. On 27 January 1733, he died, saying, "This is a struggle which all men must go through, and which I bear not only patiently but willingly."<sup>643</sup>

He addressed an acerbic dedication to the Bishop of London, his prosecutor; it rendered homage to him "with as much justice as you are due, because of the prosecution that you have wisely brought against the *Moderator*, as against a nonbeliever who here renders to you his very humble thanks, and who declares himself to be an admirer of your zeal, wisdom and conduct."<sup>644</sup>

His *Discourse [on the Miracles our Savior]* ridiculed the Scriptures. He was astonished that Jesus-Christ had permitted demons to enter into a herd of pigs and cause destruction. "Where was the Goodness and Justice of his so doing?" With respect to the healing of a woman who lost some blood, he remarked: "And what if we had been told of the *Popes* curing an *Hemorrhage* like this before us? What would *Protestants* have said to it? Why, 'that a foolish, credulous, and superstitious Woman had fancy'd herself cured of some slight Indisposition; and

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<sup>643</sup> *Translator*: rather than translate Woolston back into English, I have quoted directly from the original source.

<sup>644</sup> *Translator*: because Vaneigem doesn't indicate from which dedication (to which book) he is quoting, I have had difficulty finding the original source. But Woolston's *A Discourse on the Miracles of Our Savior* (1727) includes "A Dedication to the Right Reverend Father in God, Edmund, Lord Bishop of London," which concludes with the following words: "And what Pity is it, that *Infidels* likewise are not to be quell'd with your Threats and Terrors! which (without the Weapons of sharp Reasonings, and thumping Arguments, that others are for the Use of) would transmit your Fame to Posterity, for a notable Champion for Christianity, as certainly as, that your judicious Prosecution of the *Moderator* for Infidelity is here remember'd by, My Lord, The Admirer of Your Zeal, Wisdom and Conduct."

the crafty *Pope* and his Adherents, aspiring after popular Applause, magnified the presumed Cure into a Miracle.”<sup>645</sup>

He added: “I am charmed that it is not said in the Gospels that he [Jesus] had taken money from these brave people, for having exercised his trade as a fortune teller; had this been said, our doctors would not have failed to found upon such an example a right to demand tithes, salaries and pensions as payment for their divinations.”<sup>646</sup>

Woolston ridiculed the curse hurled by Jesus against a fig tree that dried up one night without him taking into account the interests of the thus-wronged owner. He mocked the resurrection and the fact that Jesus appealed to Lazarus in a loud voice, “as if he had been as deaf as a dead Man.”<sup>647</sup> Like Jacques Gruet, Thomas Scoto and Herman de Rijswick, Woolston characterized the Savior “as impostor full of deceit.”<sup>648</sup>

Woolston’s caustic spirit did not attack the authority that the Constantinian Church had invested in the mythical Jesus-Christ without also aiming at all the truths that had been so quick to send those who did not kneel down before them to the pyre or prison. Woolston defended the memory of Servetus against Calvin. His refusal of a freedom purchased at the price of an enslavement to received ideas rested upon a model of dignity that struggled for tolerance, at a time when many others, such as Voltaire, were content to raise their voices when the danger had passed and their [personal] glory was not in peril.

Woolston’s spirit, disencumbered from the qualms of faith, sharpened itself upon Holbach’s *Portable Theology* and especially upon the works composed by the Abbot Henri-Joseph du Laurens (1719-1797), whose *Matthew the Accomplice, or the Diversity of the Human Spirit* was among the most amusing texts that ridiculed religious prejudices. (Note that one of his characters says the following, which contains a large part of the mystery of faith: “You have taken a great step

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<sup>645</sup> *Translator*: rather than translating Woolston back into English, I have quoted directly from his *Second Discourse on the Miracles of Our Savior*.

<sup>646</sup> *Translator*: because Vaneigem doesn’t cite the source for this remark (it does not come from the *Discourses*), I have been unable to locate the original and, in this instance, have been forced to translate Woolston back into English.

<sup>647</sup> *Translator*: from the *Fifth Discourse on the Miracles of Our Savior*.

<sup>648</sup> *Translator*: though I have not been able to find this exact phrase in any of Woolston’s *Discourses*, I have been able to find descriptions of Jesus as a “juggler Impostor,” “an Impostor and false Prophet,” “a Deceiver, Impostor and Malefactor,” etc.



towards mystical love if you have previously exercised all the faculties of your soul over those of a lover.”)

### ***The Book of the Three Impostors***

A mythic book if there ever was one, the *De tribus impostoribus*<sup>649</sup> haunted the imaginations of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance before offering bibliophiles occasions for research and passionate quarrels.

If there ever existed such a manuscript, circulated hand to hand, with all the attractions of peril and prohibition, its content probably added nothing to the thesis that its title proposed with such pleasing concision: three impostors have led the world – Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. Is it necessary to discover authors for such a formula, the obviousness of which would impose itself sooner or later, if only furtively, on anyone disturbed by the chaos and conflicts that afflicted society and the order of things? Goliards, ribald students, shameless priests, bishops and popes who were less concerned with faith than with prestige, peasants tyrannized by the aristocracy, bourgeois entangled in fiscal injustice, workers and unemployed people seeking for a little food and money in the streets day and night, women scorned or treated like Satan’s creatures – who, one time or another, had not spit upon the holy figures erected everywhere like bloody totems of monotheism and its ministers?

Even a slightly exhaustive study of mindsets from the Fourth to the Eighteenth Centuries would show the point at which religious belief – perhaps more so in certain orthodoxies than in many heretical engagements – was generally only a prudent or comfortable cover under which the torments and fleeting satisfactions of passion were unleashed. (Note that, in 1470, a police ordinance in Nuremberg concerning foreign beggars conceded to them permission to exercise their trade on the condition that they knew how to recite the Pater, the Ave Maria, the Credo and the ten commandments.)

In the preface to his reprint of *De tribus impostoribus*, Gerhardt Bartsch retraced the history of this text, which, in all probability, existed as a short statement of its provocative assertion before acceding to the typographical reality of a book.[11]

Abu Tahir, a philosopher belonging to the Qarmatian current that, from the Ninth to the Tenth Centuries, rejected and ridiculed the credibility of Mohammed and Islam, said, “In this world, three individuals have corrupted mankind: a

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<sup>649</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “The Three Impostors.” Cf. Chapter 28, footnote 16 of the present work.

shepherd (Moses), a physician (Jesus) and a camel-driver (Mohammed). And this camel-driver was the worst trickster, the worst prestidigitator of the three.” This idea, adopted by Ibn Rachd, better known as Averroës, suggested to the West the existence of a work as elusive as the opinion that it illustrated: the *Liber de tribus impostoribus, sive Tractatus de vanitate religionum* (the *Book of the Three Impostors, or the Inanity of the Religions*).<sup>650</sup> (In the words of Averroës: “The Jewish religion is the law of children, the Christian religion the law of impossibility and the Muslim religion the law of swine.”<sup>651</sup>)

A professor at the Sorbonne and an admirer of Aristotle, Master Simon of Tournai (1130-1301) proclaimed – without, it seems, being otherwise disturbed – that “the Jews were seduced by Moses, the Christians by Jesus and the Gentiles by Mohammed.”<sup>652</sup>

The scholar [Bernard de] La Monnoye, who was among the first to study the question, cited the accusation made by Gregory IX against Frederic II, for whom religion was a simple instrument of domination. For a long time, the book [*The Three Impostors*] appeared (there was no proof) to have come from his pen, or from that of his chancellor, Pierre de la Vigne.

According to Alvarus Pelagius, Thomas Scoto denounced the imposture of the prophets. Herman de Rijswick referred to it in his confession. Putative authors were not lacking: Arnaldus de Villa Nova, Michel Servetus, Jacques Gruet, Fausto Longiano (whose *Temple of the Truth*, now lost, dismissed all the religions), Jeannin de Solcia, the Canon of Bergamo (who was condemned on 14 July 1459 for affirming that the three impostors “governed the world as they wished,”<sup>653</sup> and all of the following: Ochino, Campanella, Le Pogge, Cardan, Pomponaccio and even Spinoza. (Note that I have found no trace in the works of Antoine Couillard of the remark that was denounced by Drujon: “Jesus-Christ founded his religion on idiots.”))

Studying the printed copy dated 1598, which he found at the Library of Vienna, Bartsch established that it had in fact been back-dated. Without presupposing the existence of an earlier copy in manuscript, he confirmed Presser’s thesis that the book – published around 1753 – was the work of Johannes Joachim Müller (1661-1733), grandson of the theologian Johannes Müller (1598-

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<sup>650</sup> Mosheim, *Histoire de l’Eglise*, p. 151; P. Marchand, *Dictionnaire historique*, vol. II.

<sup>651</sup> J. Nevisan, *Sylvae nuptialis libri sex*.

<sup>652</sup> *Collectio de scandalis ecclesiae*, Florence, 1931.

<sup>653</sup> Rainaldus, *Annales ecclesiastiques*, t. XIV.

1672), who was the author of a study entitled *Atheismus devictus*.<sup>654</sup> Taught about the existence of the mythic book [*The Three Impostors*], Johannes Joachim undertook to give it a reality, and – not without mischievousness – fixed its date of publication at 1598, the date of his grandfather’s birth.

In its modern version, *De tribus impostoribus* contains allusions to the Jesuits; it sets the “eternal truths” of each religion against the others. It emphasizes the incoherencies of the sacred texts and reaches this conclusion: there is no other God than nature, and no other religion than the laws of nature.

### **Matthias Knutzen**

A poet of atheism and the struggle against religious obscurantism, Matthias Knutzen (1646-1674) played an exemplary and impassioned role in the history of the emancipation of mankind under the *Ancien Régime*. His theses inspired the French encyclopedists, even though – with the exception of [Jacques-André] Naigeon – they were resolved not to mention him.

Born in 1646 in Oldenmouth, in Holstein, he was the son of an organist. Upon the death of his parents, he was welcomed by Pastor Fabricius, who took care of his education, but failed – so it seems – to inculcate in the boy the obedience and austerity of the morals that were pleasing to God. His studies of theology in Königsberg ended up winning him over to atheism.

At the age of 21, he returned to his hometown without a strong desire to preach there. In 1668, he enrolled at the University of Copenhagen, where he wrote *De lacrimis Christi*<sup>655</sup> (now lost). Upon his return to Oldenmouth, he scandalized the good people by taking the floor in front of an assembly of peasants in Tönning and calling for rebellion against the Protestantism of the pastors and the absolutism of the princes. Banished by the city council in 1673, he took refuge at Krempen, in Denmark, and again took up his diatribes against the wealth of the consistories. Chased from Krempen, he traveled through Germany, where he publicly preached atheism and struggle against the aristocracy. On 5 September 1674, he deposited at the principal church of Jena the manuscript of *Ein Gespräch zwischen einem Gastwirt und drei ungleichen Religionsgasten* and the Latin

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<sup>654</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “Atheism Overthrown” or “Defeated Atheism.”

<sup>655</sup> *Translator*: Latin for “The Tears of Christ.”

text *Amicus Amicis Amica*.<sup>656</sup> These anonymous pamphlets, which were also sent to the principal authorities, aroused excitement in the city.

Knutzen narrowly escaped the repression and went to Cobourg, where he distributed his *Amicus*, which he diligently recopied. He did the same in Nuremberg. He returned to Jena under the pseudonym of Matthias Donner. He spread the rumor of an international sect, the “Conscious” [*les conscientaires*], of which he was the initiator. This sect only existed in his will to propagate individual freedom and revolt against all forms of power. And in fact his pamphlets – clandestinely printed by his disciples, whose existence he probably knew nothing about – made it into France, where they counted among the first texts that opened in the feudal citadel a breach into which the French Revolution threw itself. His traces disappeared in 1674 and the common opinion is that he died in Italy. One of his letters, falsely date-lined Rome, was published in French by [Maturinus Veyssière] La Croze’s *Interviews on Diverse Subjects in History* in Cologne in 1711.

“Above all,” Knutzen wrote in *Amicus*, “we deny God, and we hurl him down from his heights, rejecting the temple and all its priests. What suffices for us, the Conscious [*conscientaires*], is the science, not of one, but of the greatest number (...). The consciousness that nature, the benevolent mother of the humble people, has accorded to all men, in place of the [various] Bibles.”<sup>657</sup>

## The Fall of God

As Knutzen wanted, the French Revolution hurled God down to earth, where he agonized for two centuries and survived in the spirit of the great [political] ideologies that supplanted the European religions. At the end of the Twentieth Century, the collapse of both [the religions and the political ideologies] brought into universal discredit the residues of all celestial thought, whether it was sacred or profane, theist or atheist, religious or secular.

The decline of an intellectual conception of the living (one that turned against it) was completed amidst an indifference that contrasted with the fury that

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<sup>656</sup> *Translator*: German for “A Conversation between an Innkeeper and Three Different Religious Guests” and Latin for “A Friend of the Friend of A Friend,” respectively.

<sup>657</sup> G. Bartsch, *Ein deutscher Atheist und Revolutionar Demokrat der 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1965. One of Knutzen’s letters, falsely dated Rome, was published in French in the *Entretiens sur divers sujets d’histoire* of La Croze, in Cologne, 1711.

presided over its critique. The hatred of the “calotte-wearers” [les “*calotins*”] that was expressed through the sacking of churches and monasteries in both the towns and the countryside, and was a prelude to the Revolution, was legally confirmed in the Civil Constitution of the clergy, an act of bureaucratization that marked the end of religious power over the citizenry, for which undivided Statist repression was substituted.

Promulgated in 1790 by the French Revolution, the Civil Constitution of the clergy offered only a few points in common with the [relatively limited] provisions that subjected the ministers of the Anglican Church to royal power. More than just the prerogatives of the pope, it was the ascendancy of religion itself that was revoked. The refusal of Roman authority proceeded from the destruction of the divine rights of kings.

Supported by the new exigencies of the economy, philosophy triumphed over a “religious obscurantism” that in fact did not stop haunting it and that perpetuated in [apparently] enlightened mindsets the bloody stupidity that tore the individual away from what was most alive in order to identify him or her with the frozen truths of science, politics, sociology, ethics and ethnic groups. The flag replaced the cross and was then burned in its turn. Although the collapse of Jacobinism and Bonapartism gave the Church of the Nineteenth Century considerable power, Catholicism and Protestantism – worn away by social modernity – did not cease to decline. At the dawn of the Twenty-First Century, they only survive as folklore recounted on Sundays.

In the towns as well as in the countryside, the first months of the revolutionary effervescence decided the fate of the clergy. The [Church] dignitaries, closer to the aristocracy than to the people, shared the discredit of the *Ancien Régime*. Some of them chose prudence and conciliation. Others, espousing the convictions of their parishioners, took pride in representing them at the National Assembly. From their zeal came the image of “Citizen Jesus,” which demonstrated the astonishing capacity of religious values to adapt, even to the point of developing a theology of liberation.

Some dignitaries refused to swear allegiance to the Civil Constitution and preferred exile or clandestinity; others made pledges and betrayed them at an opportune moment; and still others took careers (full of risks) as local-government officers. Their discomfort grew to the extent that Jacobinite centralism displeased the provinces and countryside, and aroused liberal insurrections and Catholic peasant revolts.

After eight months of silence, Pope Pius VI condemned the Civil Constitution as “heretical and schismatic.” He was soon hanged and burned in effigy in the Tuileries Garden. Nevertheless, the parish priests gained in political character what they lost in sanctified virtue. Those who, in the manner of Jacques

Roux, took the side of the Enragés succumbed to Jacobin persecution. The refractory ones were pursued, and those who swore allegiance were held to be hypocrites. The high clergy skillfully navigated in order to safeguard their privileges. A symbol of the two centuries to come, [Charles Maurice de] Talleyrand[-Périgord] – unscrupulous enough to take oaths and to consecrate other bishops who swore allegiance – survived the Revolution, Bonapartism, Empire, the Restoration and the monarchy through the use of skillful mimicry.

His exemplary modernity, his art of chipping away at the sacred in accordance with the necessities of politics, presaged the destiny of Christianity itself, which was condemned to become socialized before it succumbed to the indifference that market society propagated in matters of opinion at the end of the Twentieth Century.

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<sup>658</sup> *Translator's note*: wherever possible, I have corrected obvious spelling errors in this bibliography, of which there were a great many.

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