

THE “CHRISTIANISATION” OF THE PAGAN IDENTITY

ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVITY AND
THE “CHRISTIANISATION” OF THE PAGAN IDENTITY

By MARTIN MELKOUMIAN

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University © Copyright by Martin Melkoumian, September 2011

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2011) Hamilton, Ontario (Classical Studies)

TITLE: Aspects of Christian Religious Exclusivity and the “Christianisation” of the
Pagan Identity

AUTHOR: Martin Melkoumian, B.A. (University of Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Evan Haley

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 94

Abstract

Scholarship dealing with the phenomenon of Christianisation in the Roman Empire has overwhelmingly been Christian-centred, often ignoring the importance of the declining pagan communities in the fourth century A.D. During this period of cultural and religious transformation in the Empire, the construction of religious identity by the Church resulted in the need for pagan communities to adapt themselves to a Judeo-Christian understanding of religion, in order to establish their place in an increasingly Christianising society. Consequently, the isolation of pagans from, and their vilification within, the growing Christian world were factors that had aided the development of a pagan socio-religious identity which had not existed in previous centuries. Therefore, this paper will examine the question of what elements constituted the pagan identity in late antiquity, and, perhaps more importantly, how this identity had come to be formed.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1 – 8
<u>Chapter I</u> : The Power of Christian Religious Discourse	9 - 25
1.1 The Early Period	10
1.2 Fourth Century Christianity	11
1.3 The Church and Problems of Religious Syncretism	17
1.4 Ethnicity in Christianity	22
<u>Chapter II</u> : Religious Allegiance and Social Identity	26 - 46
2.1 Allegiance in the Imperial Cult	27
2.2 Christianity and the Formation of “religious allegiance”	32
2.3 Pagan Response and the Discourse of “Allegiance”	36
2.4 Julian’s “response” and the Concept of Conversion	42
<u>Chapter III</u> : Edicts and Prohibitions in the 4th & 5th Centuries	47 - 60
3.1 “Toleration” in Nicomedia, <i>Divinitatis Reverentia</i> in Milan	50
3.2 Anti-pagan Legislation	53
3.3 Law and Social Isolation	57
<u>Chapter IV</u> : Funerary Ostentation and Socio-religious Identity	61 - 81
4.1 Epigraphical Evidence	62
4.2 Purpose of Inscriptions	64
4.3 Onomastics	66
4.4 Doctrinal Language	69
4.5 Christian Funerary Ostentation	74
4.6 Ostentation and Identity Assertion	78
Conclusion	82 - 84
Bibliography	85 - 94

Introduction

Among the many vestiges left behind to us from the ancient world, perhaps none other is more significant and noteworthy than the social and religious influences of Christianity. What seemed to be a harmless and insignificant cult to the Romans in the middle of the first century A.D., had, by the later fourth century, come to dominate and define almost the entirety of the Empire's governing institutions, and consequently, not long after, the societies of the Mediterranean world. The enormous revolutionary change that was brought by Christianity into the Graeco-Roman world was most unprecedented in antiquity, as the religion effectively put an end to polytheistic religious traditions that had existed in the Mediterranean for millennia previously. Of all the outcomes of Christianity in the Roman Empire, one of the most striking was perhaps the fact that the religion founded a society based on religious orthodoxy, and on the idea of exclusivity based on belief; the Christian religion was simply unwilling, unlike its pagan rival-cults, to tolerate and coexist with different beliefs. It was this idea of exclusivity which had helped Christianity in changing so successfully the polytheistic societies of the Roman Empire. This issue of religious exclusivity will be the centre of this study, because I find it to be the most far-reaching element in the Empire's Christianisation process. Not only does the Christian perspective of beliefs tell us something about Christianity itself, but it also leads us to invaluable information about the society on which Christianity had imposed its changes; ultimately, this paper will focus more on that latter aspect of Christianisation.

Before Christianity had become a significant social force in the Empire, polytheism had dominated Mediterranean societies. Different cults and the divinities of each respective cult were accepted by almost all individuals in Graeco-Roman societies (perhaps only philosophers and the educated doubted or rejected the religious practises of the masses)¹, as there seemed to exist a mindset on the universality of divinities among cultures.² One can take the *Interpretatio Romana* as an example of the way in which syncretism (that is, the integration of foreign divinities into a Roman context) created an understanding between even worst enemies like the Romans and the German tribes.³ For the Romans, the essence of a god – Mars, for example – remained the same among all peoples (*gentes*), with the only difference being that of the god's portrayal or iconic conception. It was therefore merely a matter of culture and practise; even if a new deity was discovered, it would have simply been incorporated into the pantheon of the existing gods. This approach to religious worship and belief significantly eliminated ways in which clashes would have occurred between people with regard to the issue of belief, since they all (regardless of their particular devotion to a deity) accepted the beliefs of those around them and acknowledged the presence and involvement of their neighbours' gods in the universe as much as they did their own. Indeed, although there were cases in Rome where action was taken to outlaw certain new cults – such as the cult of Bacchus in the second century B.C., – the issue in the quarrel was not to do with whether or not the

¹ On Neo-Platonistic thought, see Wallis 1972, Wright 1980, Bowersock 1990, Tarrant 2011.

² See Cadotte 2007, and Rives 2007.

³ See Tacitus, *Germania* VII and IX for his observation on German pagan rituals.

god existed, but the nature of the ritual ceremonies of its adherents, which were socially unacceptable at the time.⁴

There was, however, one religious group prior to the Christians which did exhibit itself quite conspicuously as being unlike, and unwilling to be like, the cults around it. Judaism's presence in the Roman Empire verifies the fact that not all beliefs in the nature of deities were fundamentally the same in the ancient world. In fact, Judaism rejected all gods as false except for that of its own, and necessitated from its members a pronouncement and affirmation of this deity as the one true one. One aspect to note about this matter is the idea of Judaism's rejection of all gods as “false”, for it indicates that Jews were not simply obliged to select and worship the god in their holy book, while ignoring the others chosen and worshipped by people around them. Instead, it had to be emphasized to them that the other gods were not real, and that, as such, being the ones worshipping a god that does exist, they were engaging in a genuine and true religious experience.

It does not need to be mentioned that Christianity, being an offshoot of Judaism, adopted this already-existing idea of religious exclusivity and made it central to its own belief system. Unlike the more insular and ethnocentric religion of Judaism, however, Christianity's overarching and universal appeal allowed it to spread indiscriminately to all areas of society,⁵ generally beginning with the poor and ending with the imperial court. It was in the middle of Christianity's increasing dominance of the Roman Empire that a social transition emerged, in which the Graeco-Roman cultural traditions were being

⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 5.39 discusses the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* and its background.

⁵ The idea of the lack of ethnic reasoning in Christianity shall be discussed below in chapter I.

encroached upon and existentially challenged. The Christian establishment of the fourth century A.D., now seemingly holding an undisputed and irreversible political position, was certainly unwilling to compromise with non-Christians, and was now strong enough to demand society to conform to its values. With the association of Christianity with imperial power, it was almost inevitable that the exclusivity of the religion (which was a concept previously accepted solely among members worshipping in secret) became enforced upon the Empire's social fabric.

It should be noted that the growth of religious exclusivity in society did not yet mean that non-Christians were forbidden to worship, for it was not until the late fourth century and the Theodosian Code in the early fifth century that one sees a definitively systematic attempt to eliminate pagan worship. However, regardless of the lack of a major organized governmental persecution of polytheism, change was nonetheless taking place within the Empire. The dissemination, and, thenceforth, the perpetuation of the idea of religious exclusivity in social thought – a phenomenon coinciding with the progression of Christianisation, and the demographic shift toward the Christian side – ought to have contributed to the social stratification of individuals based on their religious convictions. This distinction or categorization of people based on orthodoxy must have been a mere social triviality in the prior polytheistic centuries, for to a society with no set standards on belief, there was no need to strive for orthodoxy. Yet the implementation of this system by Christians shows that they were in a position to dictate a standard of religious thought, and thereby cast out anyone who did not fit into it.

It is the focus of this essay to examine not only the various aspects of the Roman Empire's Christianisation, but also the ways in which the non-Christian communities lived and coped in a society where the government's and the Church's pressure for social and religious homogeneity made it increasingly difficult for them to participate inclusively. What I would particularly like to examine is not only the constraints placed by the Christians upon the pagan community, but additionally how the pagans had reacted to these social changes. As mentioned above, the strong Christian presence in the Empire during the mid to late fourth century ought to have progressively altered people's social mindset over successive generations (regardless of what religious beliefs they may have possessed) by creating a strong awareness of religious differences. Within such a society, where with a given religious group a certain mode of interaction was a necessity, it cannot be denied that strong religious identities had come to be formed within different communities.

However, before Christian religious attitudes had become the *Zeitgeist* (let us call it thus for now) in the Roman Empire, and came to control the religious discourse in wider society, they were developed among intellectual circles starting in the second century. In his controversial work, *Pagan and Christian in the Age of Anxiety*, Dodds outlines the theological and philosophical clashes between pagan and Christian intellectuals throughout the second and third centuries, ultimately pointing out the pagan adoption of some fundamental elements of Christian theology. It seems that the more pagan philosophers exposed themselves to Christian theological arguments, the more were their own views akin to those of their opponents. Dodds particularly emphasizes the

Neo-Platonist writer Hierocles, writing *The Lover of Truth*⁶ in the late third century, a work which to him illustrates the desire for an alliance of pagan intellectuals with the traditional “establishment” religions of the Roman Empire, thereby essentially making Neo-Platonism a religion in itself.⁷ It is quite interesting how Hierocles emulates his Christian rivals in desiring to identify and merge his philosophical views with an existing *religious* tradition, rather than keeping religiosity out of the debate altogether. What is peculiar about this is that Hellenic philosophy previously tended to frown upon the polytheistic beliefs of the masses; it often mentioned the existence of a Supreme Being when approaching theological issues, but hardly expounded positively on popular religious behaviour. This is why the idea of merging Hellenic philosophy with Graeco-Roman religion was a rather significant move in the non-Christian intellectual circles – one which would be perpetuated in the few decades after Diocletian and Constantine, being manifested most notably in Julian's reign.

One could delve into the many reasons as to why this phenomenon had occurred, but perhaps one likely possibility is the fact that Hierocles was writing during the latter half of the third century, a time when the persecution of Christians was at its height. Hierocles, in particular, writing during Diocletian's reign, and being himself involved in the emperor's court, ought to have experienced a significant amount of anti-Christian sentiment (and perhaps paranoia) among the ruling class, which could have influenced his work. In any case, at the latest, by the time of Diocletian's reign, there seemed to be significant religious antagonism present between the polytheistic and Christian upper and

⁶ This source is available to us only through Eusebius' criticism of Hierocles in *Against Hierocles*.

⁷ Dodds, 109.

educated classes – an antagonism from which the pagans emerged as a self-conscious group, with them acting like they were a part of an institutionalised religion similar to Christianity.

As influential as this hypothesis was when first published, questions challenging Dodd's assertion of a pagan identity in late antiquity generally focused on whether his formula could be applied to polytheists in late antique society as a whole,⁸ for it is this very issue that Dodds seems to have avoided discussing. Certainly, Dodd's arguments are indeed accurate in portraying the dynamics of the relationship between pagan and Christian intellectuals. Yet, although it would be wrong to assume that the interaction of these two religious groups was the same among the masses, there are nonetheless some fundamental similarities in the “awakening” of the pagan conscience in the upper and lower levels of society. I believe that ultimately the source of the emergence of the pagan identity simply lies in the pagans' coexistence with Christians, and that the issue is one of *how* religious identity was attained, not *if* it was. While in the case of the educated pagans it was, as Dodds points out, the adoption of a Christian style of religiously motivated philosophy and identity, for the lower classes, the issue was the adaptation to a growing religiously segregated society. Indeed in both scenarios, there is clearly one similarity, which is that the Christians end up being the ones taking the initiative, and dictating a social discourse to which the pagans conformed, rather than resisted.

As Sandwell points out in the beginning of her work, “...what it means to be a member of one religion can only be constructed in relation to what it means to be a

⁸ Smith 1984, Bowersock 1990, Lieu 1996, Sandwell 2007, Lim 2009.

member of another religion, [and] religious interaction is always a prerequisite for the existence of religious identities.”⁹ Certainly, it is from the side of the Christians that one sees in the fourth century a construction of identities, followed by their enforcement upon society. What this paper will try to examine is the ways in which pagans had responded to the attempt by Christians to dominate social and religious thought. Although, on the one hand, as mentioned above, pagans had accepted their place in society in the manner that was defined by the Church; this may have occurred in many ways, but perhaps the most probable explanation can be that the exposure of one generation of pagans after another to social Christianisation would have ultimately resulted in a pagan community that unconsciously adopted for itself a Christian-defined identity (which would have been increasingly becoming a social standard in the fourth century). On the other hand, however, there also seem to have been an independent assertion of this (unconsciously) newly-adopted identity by the pagans as a form of retaliation against their persecutors. It is as a result of these things that I would argue that throughout the mid to late fourth century, there may have very well been a pagan community empire-wide which can be classified more or less as a unified religious group (and a group that was to an extent aware of its own unity), sharing an identity quite similar to the commonality of identity shared among Christians.

⁹ Sandwell, 3-4.

Chapter I

The Power of Christian Religious Discourse

In the Roman Empire, the division of communities based on religious adherence was not a mere coincidence in the fourth century, but rather an emerging social phenomenon – and more importantly, a social mindset – which had come into being as a consequence of the (more or less successfully) coordinated efforts of the Church. This social construction by the Church seems to have been the result of an increasing dissemination of ideas inscribed in early Christian writings (prior to and during the fourth century) onto the wider Graeco-Roman society as a whole. What was particularly a defining feature of this “social construction” was the early Christians’ emphasis upon the ideological placement of communities in the Roman Empire within firm and separate religious boundaries. Why was there such a necessity for the Church to create this division among people who were ultimately all citizens of the Roman Empire? Indeed, after Constantine, the political and social favour enjoyed by Christianity ought to have been enough for the Church to fully surface from its previous underground dealings and hence become an integral member of Graeco-Roman society. Yet, when this opportunity was given to the Church with the advent of Constantine’s emperorship, the Christian institution that had appeared could not have been more emboldened than it was by a desire to impose upon society the very segregation which it had suffered for several centuries in the catacombs. Never in the history of the Greek or Roman civilizations do we see an attempt to enforce such constructed religious identities upon the people – and identities which, in the end, could not have been more adverse to and incompatible with

one another. What, therefore, had caused this particular situation to suddenly emerge? In order to gain some understanding and appreciation for this peculiar social and religious trend in the fourth century, it is important to examine some of the history behind the early Christian theological movement.

1.1 The Early Period

Much of the thought and attitude of the Church in the fourth century can be traced back to the very early days of Christianity in the Roman Empire, during the second century. From the very beginnings of Christianity, what seemed to have been the main problem encountered by Christians was the difficulty in differentiating their religion from Judaism (with which they were equated in the early days), as well as generally defining what it meant to be a Christian in a largely polytheistic society. Hence, as Boyarin states in his work, with regard to Judaism, for example, the Christians sought “to eradicate the fuzziness of borders, semantic and social, between Jews and Christians and thus produce Judaism and Christianity as fully separate (and opposed) entities...”¹⁰ What seems to have been important to the Christians was a strong assertion of their religious identity during the time of their relative obscurity; this very act, as Sandwell argues, was Christianity’s “way of bringing itself into existence.”¹¹

Among some of the earliest Christian authors, one such instance of strict religious differentiation can be discerned from the writings of Tertullian, in his treatise *De*

¹⁰ Boyarin 2004, 2. It is interesting how in the very early days of Christianity, the definition of heresy was often with regard to Judaism, as indicated by King 2003. A proper Christian was seen as being in between two sides of a scale: one being a show of excessive Judaism, and the other showing not enough of Christianity and thereby being labelled a “gnostic”.

¹¹ Sandwell 2007, 5. What particularly was common in the work of Tertullian (writing in the second century) was the attempt to define the behaviour to which Christians were obliged, in contrast to that of non-Christian members of society.

Idolatria, a work which is wholly an attempt to define Christian identity and characteristics by means of a comparison with non-Christians (particularly the pagans). For example, Tertullian works hard to point out certain behaviours of the Gentiles (*nationes*) as models of idolatry, which, according to him, Christians (that is, the faithful – *fideles*) ought not to follow. Some of his concerns were related to daily life, as he discusses certain manners of living by the Gentiles, such as the food that they ate, or the manner in which they dressed, and, of course, their partaking in public religious festivals¹² -- all of which was, of course, not becoming of a Christian. Throughout the second and third centuries, this was a common attitude that was conspicuous in the writings of Christian authors. Although, when considering what it meant to be a Christian, Jew, or pagan, they emphasized different characteristics and modes of behaviour, what is uniform in their works is a near-obsession for creating a limit to “Christian” action and belief, and consequently maintaining a systematic separation of those specific deeds from the other religions of the time.¹³

1.2 Fourth Century Christianity

Since, by the fourth century, the situation of Christians had changed with Constantine’s introduction of the religion into the imperial court, the powerful position of the Church, and the demographic increase of Christians in the empire – all of which brought the religion into the public spotlight –, Christian leaders and intellectuals were faced with quite a new task in their assertion of the Christian religious identity. No longer

¹² Tertullian, *De Idolatria* 13.

¹³ Lieu 2004, 62-146. For more information on the subject of social boundaries from a sociological perspective, see Barth 1969. On the ancient concept of “boundaries” on a metaphoric level and how they are intertwined with the idea of the ancient frontier, see Rouselle 1995, and Whittaker 1994.

was the Christian identity relevant merely to a small group, but now, after having been presented to the masses as a legitimate and accepted religion, the centrality of Christianity in society demanded that the Church address more vigorously the problems of “Christian” identity.¹⁴ In terms of the discussion of the Christian identity, what one sees is essentially solidification and a propagation of what was outlined by the early Christian writers. In addition to this theoretical aspect of the formation of the Christian mindset, of course, one also sees a slow implementation in society of these very religious divisions that are discussed in the early as well as the fourth century documents. I will now examine some of the writings of a controversial fourth century Christian Father, John Chrysostom, and the ways in which he contributed to the religious discourse of the time.¹⁵ Having done that, I will then deal with one important factor in the rhetoric of the Christians – ethnic reasoning – which I believe was crucial in legitimising the Christian assertion of their identity, as well as in creating the strict religious divisions in the Roman society from the fourth century onwards.

As one analyses John Chrysostom’s sermons, it is important to keep in mind how his audience would have been greatly different from that of any priest during the time of Tertullian, since he would have been preaching to a much larger group of people. One main feature of his sermons that stands out is his strong assertiveness in his demands for proper Christian behaviour, which is largely discernible through his excessive repetitions of certain ideas. As Sandwell states, “because Christians were losing their position as a

¹⁴ Markus 1990, 27-44. Also see MacMullen 1984, 74-85 for a discussion of the challenges facing the bishops in preventing their congregations from participating in “unholy” pagan public or private rituals. Markus 1990 ch. 8 also delves into this. This subject will be touched on below.

¹⁵ For general information on Chrysostom’s life, see Liebeschuetz 2011, Hartney 2004, Mayer and Allen 2000.

persecuted minority, excluded from mainstream society, they had to work harder to define what it meant to be Christian.”¹⁶ It was perhaps because of his awareness of this very situation that Chrysostom was so firm in his preaching as compared to his predecessors; in many ways, he was involved in the process of socially establishing the Christian religion for the long term by working to change the way people thought and acted in their daily lives. In order to direct and secure his audience’s allegiance to his own religion, Chrysostom, being inspired by the preceding Church fathers, seems to have taken another step in developing the already-existing divisions between Christians and non-Christians, by establishing the dichotomy of “Christian vs. Greek”. Whether he did this because he truly believed in such a division (especially the latter category of “Greek”) or because he saw it fit to propagate this dichotomy for any reason is not clear, but the point is that this rhetoric had created an artificial division within society which did not previously exist in any objective and meaningful way.¹⁷

Of course, in addition to this, it is important to point out that Chrysostom, with rhetoric adopted from his predecessors and perfected for his own use, assumes that the two (polar-opposite) identities were fixed and permanent, in that each identity is strictly defined by certain actions and beliefs of a person. Chrysostom’s aim was, therefore, to create a society in which religious interaction was undertaken between individuals who were all placed in one or another of these identities.¹⁸ In other words, for Chrysostom, Roman society was expected to function based on the dichotomy of “Christian vs. Greek”,

¹⁶ Sandwell 2007, 6.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

which determined one's role and operations in society through his pre-defined categories. The following example from one of his sermons may clarify this concept more by demonstrating how, according to Chrysostom, religious identity ought *not* to function in society: "I hate and I turn away from such a woman for this reason above all others, because she uses the name of God as an insult and because, while she says she is a Christian, she displays the actions of a Greek."¹⁹

It may be quite significant to note the identity dynamics (particularly in the city of Antioch, where he gave many of his sermons) exemplified by this short portion of his speech. In many ways, what is primarily the issue in the example of the woman in the passage, or, generally, in Chrysostom's rhetoric, is the question of what constitutes a religious identity. As can be seen from this discussion thus far, since Christian writers had always been preoccupied with the idea of religious orthodoxy and behaviour, it is clear that they would have judged an individual's behaviour to be a reflection of his or her religious identity. To put this in a broader sense, the most conspicuous element of religions that Christians like Chrysostom seem to have been interested in was the visual representation and manifestation of belief in a specific act of worship. With this approach, creating religious categories would have been an easy exercise, since it allowed the Church to neatly place individuals into groups and consequently dictate the relationship between them. Taking this into consideration, it is therefore not surprising that for Chrysostom, one of the most visible features of paganism – animal sacrifice – became the

¹⁹ John Chrysostom *Catecheses ad Illuminandos*, 2.5 (PG 49.240).

defining marker of being a “Greek”.²⁰ It should be noted, however, that there is evidence that by the third and the fourth century the importance of blood sacrifice in pagan rituals seems to have declined,²¹ which would mean that Chrysostom was not necessarily so focused on or concerned about the true state of the pagan religion of the fourth century, but instead was aiming to use stereotypes of his time about pagans. It would have been very striking to hear him refer to idolatry and human worship, for example, as a “Greek impiety” (*helleniken asebeian*)²², as such an attribution would have worked well to establish a divide between the Christian and pagan groups.

By listing and denigrating such “Greek” behaviours, Chrysostom and indeed other Church leaders were able to consequently indicate, as an alternative, what the appropriate Christian deeds were. In addition to describing the activities to be avoided, Chrysostom was also interested in outlining the correct way of belief for a Christian, and in the same argumentative style of negatively portraying the “Greek” way of thought he defined the Christian one. Most appropriately quoting I Corinthians 22-4, Chrysostom describes the crucial differences between Christians, Jews, and “Greeks”, and thus reinforces his religious categories: “For Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, which for the Jews is a stumbling block and for Greeks a foolishness, but

²⁰ S.R.F. Price 1999, 33. Reference to Chrysostom’s association of the Greek religion to sacrifice, demons, idols, amulets, etc: *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 7.14-16. Of course, one can also look at the Christian/Greek division through class differences too, as Bowersock illustrates through Eusebius’ writing, for the verb often used to describe the actions of pagans was *hellenizein*, meaning “to live as a Greek” but also implying “to be civilized in a Greek way”, or “to speak Greek” (Bowersock 1990, 10) – all suggesting that perhaps an individual’s wealth and status in society often directly correlated to his or her religious affiliation. Hence, “to live as a Greek” may have become a way of describing a privileged lifestyle that was uncommon to the poor Christian masses.

²¹ Consult Veyne, 1986 for a detailed discussion on this subject.

²² John Chrysostom *Homiliae in Genesis*, 13.9 (PG 53.107).

for those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, is Christ the power of God...”²³ What is especially revealing in his comparison of Christians and Greeks is Chrysostom’s criticism of wisdom, which he considers a non-Christian trait and an indication of a way of life that ought not be Christian. Instead, he insists upon another way of seeing the world “with the ‘eyes of faith’ [which] Chrysostom asserted...[was] an essential feature of being Christian that enabled Christians to believe in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.”²⁴ In this passage, Chrysostom interestingly (comically, even) focuses on the Christian ability to believe in Christ’s resurrection as an argument to distinguish Christians from the wisdom of the “Greeks”. In other words, because the “Greeks” denied the resurrection by means of “wisdom, reason and rationality as modes of understanding”²⁵, they were unable to believe in the phenomenon in the way Christians do. Therefore, it seems that Chrysostom wanted to emphasize that a Christian does not merely have different opinions about the world while also acknowledging those of others, but instead that he undergoes an experience (something supernatural, perhaps) that makes him see the world differently and to be uncompromisingly certain in the truth of the experience. To illustrate this, Chrysostom uses himself as an example: “I for instance, feel differently upon these subjects from an unbeliever. I hear ‘Christ was crucified’ and...I admire his loving kindness...the other hears and esteems it weakness...”²⁶

²³ John Chrysostom *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 4.5 (PG 61.33).

²⁴ Sandwell 2007, 69; *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* 12. The “eyes of faith” idea would be implicitly contrasted with the views of the “Greeks” in *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 7.1, who denied Christ by emphasizing “wisdom”, rationality, and other forms of understanding.

²⁵ Ibid. For the passage in Chrysostom discussing this matter, see *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 7.1 (PG 61.33-5).

²⁶ John Chrysostom *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 7.2 (PG 61.55).

1.3 The Church and Problems of Religious Syncretism

Of course, as seen from the passage quoted above about the Christian woman in Chrysostom's sermon, conforming to strict religious identities was not so easy. What can be stated with certainty is that during the time of his preaching, Chrysostom without a doubt encountered many instances of religious identity which contradicted his rigid standard, as he would have seen behaviour in people which did not fit in with his dichotomy. This is certainly the case in the example above, for the woman about whom Chrysostom speaks does not seem, in his mind, to be fully a Christian, as the sincerity of her proclamation of her adherence to Christianity is undermined by the "Greek" or pagan conduct of her actions and deeds.

Such instances of religious confusion are understandable, considering that the society which Chrysostom and the Church were trying to Christianise was steeped in pagan/polytheistic traditions. There seemed to have been little vigilance among the general population to maintain a strict orthodoxy, and this was why individuals who were "Christian" could have called upon various deities along with the Christian god without a thought of hesitation. In fact, the ambiguities of these people's religious activities are quite daunting because very often their deeds could have been attributed to either the Graeco-Roman religions or to Christianity; a depiction of a man with a spear riding on a horse may be interpreted from the Graeco-Roman as being Alexander or from the Judeo-Christian side as being Solomon, for there was no clear distinction.²⁷

²⁷ Fulgham 2001: 144-7.

It is therefore not surprising that one sees these hybridities occurring during the transition of Roman society from pagan to Christian, and the Church fathers would have realised that it would take them considerable effort and time to alleviate these problems, and successfully convert the social mindset with regard to the issue of orthodoxy and religious conduct. What the entire vast array of religious syncretism (the combination of elements of Christianity with those of “Greek” or Graeco-Roman religions) was creating was a destabilization of the clear ideological religious boundaries that the Church had striven to impose.

To provide a better idea of the complexities and problems of adhering to the concept of a strict Christian/Greek divide, it would help to briefly discuss some of the religious items and methods of this destabilization. In many ways, amulets would have played an important role in creating ambiguities in religious identities, and the manner in which they were used by individuals fits well with what Chrysostom was referring to when he was chastising the woman in his sermon. One can find parallels between this woman’s behaviour and evidence found from the town of Anemurium in modern Turkey, a dwelling place which held, by the fourth century, a relatively large “Christianised” population. It was in this town that material evidence demonstrates a widespread hybrid religious culture; that is, although the population had called itself “Christian”, there was a common use of “amulets, phylacteries, rings and bells to ward off the evil eye and demonic powers...”²⁸ In Antioch, as well, we particularly have a phylactery (that probably would have belonged to a Christian) bearing an inscription in Greek which asks

²⁸ Sandwell 2007, 267. Also see J.B. Russell’s essay in Maguire 1995 on the use of “magic” in the Christianising societies of late antiquity.

for the protection of a man by the name of Thomas.²⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus also often mentions the use of amulets by Christians in a number of sections of his work, as he describes the excessively superstitious aspect of this activity.³⁰ Even John Chrysostom himself scolds his audience for buying amulets from pagan “sorcerers” or those skilled in witchcraft, and for consequently using these items to keep away evil spirits or protecting their children from illnesses, etc.³¹ As Greenfield states, in his study of Byzantine demonology, whenever Christians engaged in this kind of behaviour, “they cannot really be said to refer to the God and the angels of Orthodox belief...[for the Christian divinities] are reduced to virtually the same level as the demons.”³² Although this is a sound theological reason for the disapproval of such activities by the Church, I would add that another of the Church’s problems was the corruption and the tarnishing of the *image* of the Christianity that its leaders had in mind; the outward and public display of one’s faith in a correct manner (that is, according to what was officially proclaimed) seemed to be of the utmost importance for the Church’s legitimacy and credibility. This can be seen in the Church’s disapproval of amulets that even contained verses from the Bible, or other elements which were clearly Christian.³³ In this case, once again the idea was that Christians had to behave according to the obligations of their religion, as understood by their Church leaders.

²⁹ Heintz 2000, 166.

³⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus., 19.12.12; 19.12.19; 29.2.3; 29.2.26.

³¹ John Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* 8.7.5 (PG 48.938); *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios* 12.13 (PG 61.106); *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas* I (PG 61.623).

³² Greenfield 1988, 273.

³³ In addition to Chrysostom, there were other Church fathers who strongly complained about Christians wearing amulets in which Christian (not pagan) material was inscribed. Jerome, *Homiliae in Matthaem* 23.5-7 (PL 26.175); Augustine, *Tractatus in Joannis Evangelium* 7.12 (PL 35.1443).

One can see a similar problem among the Christian community when it comes to Judaism, as well, as Chrysostom describes a group which he calls *Ioudaizontes*, or Judaizers, whom he considered to be corrupt half-Christians, since their behaviour also exhibits certain Jewish religious tendencies.³⁴ These Judaizers (who seemed to have lived mostly in the eastern half of the empire, particularly attested in Antioch) would have caused quite a problem for Christians, not merely because they were partly Christian, but more so because they would have challenged the Church's assertion that Christianity was a distinct religion from Judaism.³⁵ This is why it was imperative that the Church take extra steps in identifying Judaizers and contrasting them with the true and genuine Christians for the purpose of pointing out what it meant to be a Christian. Therefore, as it may already be evident, although Chrysostom extensively mentions the actions and beliefs of non-Christians, ultimately his purpose for doing so was out of a desire to define what it meant to be Christian, since by explicating and maligning the "outsider" he was able to delineate the limit of Christian behaviour.

Perhaps it was in response to these ambiguities among the Christian population that the Church placed great importance on the public behaviour of its members (in addition, to orthodoxy, of course) – this would explain why Chrysostom does not cease to mention proper Christian behaviour in his sermons. It is not surprising that Chrysostom and the Church largely desired to advertise the Christian religion in the society of the time, for the primary goal of the Church was to gain as many converts as was possible; in many

³⁴ John Chrysostom *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.4.8 (PG 48.849).

³⁵ Sandwell 2007, 82. For more information on this group, and whether it was truly a hybrid Christian community the way Chrysostom describes it or if it was a separate Christian sect altogether, see Wilken 1983.

ways, it most likely would have seemed important and quite appropriate to try to maintain the enormous momentum that was propelling Christianity in the fourth century. This was why Christianity had to be portrayed as a religion superior to all others, for when non-Christians witness the deeds of Christian individuals, being impressed with Christian piety they ought to be tempted to convert out of admiration and respect – or so was the plan. Chrysostom chided his audience with regard to things like mourning the dead, for if seen by Jews or “Greeks”, considering the Christian view on the afterlife, they would be the subject of laughter and ridicule.³⁶ Furthermore, seeing such hypocritical actions, a non-Christian would assume that the Christians were not serious men, as they commit the same errors that they ascribe to everyone else.³⁷ The following passage sums up Chrysostom’s outrage quite fully: “when they see some of those drawn up on our side, who name themselves Christians in what they say and in address, stealing like themselves, claiming more than their share, being envious...they consider our way of life to be deception and all of us to be guilty of these things.”³⁸ This ostentatious display of Christian behaviour is in many ways a rare example of the subtle communication between the religious groups of Roman society, for in the message that Christians desired to send out to pagans and Jews (although, directed more so toward the former group), through the constant comparison and differentiation, was that Christianity was an exclusive religion, irreconcilable with Graeco-Roman polytheism.

³⁶ John Chrysostom *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos* 4 (PG 63.43).

³⁷ John Chrysostom *Homiliae in Genesis* 7.5 (PG 53.63).

³⁸ *Ibid.* 7.10 (PG 53.68-9).

1.4 Ethnicity in Christianity

Beside the relatively visual comparison and contrast between the groups of pagans, Jews and Christians, which has been examined in this chapter, there seemed to have also been another more profound theoretical and ideological aspect to the way in which Christians had established religious identities from the reign of Constantine onwards – this was ethnic reasoning. Although, as Buell explains, Christianity had in the fourth century argued for being universal and open to all peoples – that is, the claim that the religion rejects “race” (*genos*) as a condition for the Christian religious identity – early Christians nevertheless utilized ethnic reasoning (“modes of persuasion that may or may not include the use of specific vocabulary of peoplehood”³⁹) to legitimise and confirm themselves as “Christian”, and hence part of a *genos*. Membership in the religion, and the possession of Christian faith, would have been “the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity.”⁴⁰ At first, it may seem contradictory and difficult for one to identify a specific ethnicity in a claim of universalism; however it is important to approach the very idea of “universalism” not as it may be understood in today’s society, but as it had been perceived by early Christians. Ultimately, of course, what I wish to argue is that the self-portrayal of Christians as a race was another method of reinforcing the categories of religious identity in Roman society.

To begin with, it may be appropriate to discuss some examples of the ways in which Christian ethnic reasoning had been implemented in the development of religious

³⁹ Refer to Buell 2005, 2, for the way Christians had identified themselves as a “people” different from “Romans”, “Greeks”, and “Egyptians.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

identity – particularly in martyr narratives. In one of the earliest Christian documents of North Africa, *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, we see the manner in which Christians and pagans are contrasted with one another through the language of ethnicity. The document describes twelve Christians in Carthage c. 180 A.D. who are condemned to death for not recognizing the emperor’s divinity; what is particularly interesting is the short debate between one of the condemned Christians (who acts as a speaker for his group), Speratus, and the proconsul, Saturninus:

Speratus said: “We have never done wrong; we have never lent ourselves to wickedness. Never have we uttered a curse; but when abused, we have given thanks, for we hold our own emperor in honor.” Saturninus the proconsul said: “We too are a religious people, and our religion is a simple one: we swear by the Genius of our lord and the emperor and we offer prayers for his health – as you also ought to do.”⁴¹

An intriguing aspect of this exchange is the use of “We” by both individuals, giving a sense of their reference to a collective group of which each is a part. Particularly, Saturninus’ reference to himself as a “people” displays how religion was in many ways closely related to ethnicity and race. In addition to this, and perhaps what is most significant in this passage, is Saturninus’ demand that the accused Christians “ought” to offer prayers for the health of the emperor; that is, that these Christian people should act like the Roman people. The reason why this last part of Saturninus’ words is important is because it indicates that ethnicity and race *could be changed* by means of a religious conversion; that is, “early Christians and their contemporaries could imagine a change in

⁴¹ *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 2-3.

religiosity as an ethnoracial transformation.”⁴² This “fluidity” and “mutability of ethnicity”, as Buell calls it⁴³, is reinforced by the concluding statements of Saturninus during the trial:

“Whereas Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus...[he lists the names of some of the condemned], and the others have confessed that they have been living in accordance with the rites of the Christians [*ritu Christiano*], and though given the opportunity to return to the usage of the Romans [*Romanorum morem*] they have persevered in their obstinacy, they are hereby condemned to be executed by the sword.”⁴⁴

Buell correctly argues that the text (which is Christian, and not pagan – this ought to be remembered) “not only indicates that practices are the means by which one identifies Christians, but also positions them as a non-Roman people.”⁴⁵ Much like what we have seen earlier on in this chapter, there is the similar tendency to contrast religious actions, although in this particular example we see a stronger emphasis on the actions being associated with a certain *genos* of people in general.

Yet where does the universalism of Christianity fit in all of this? The way in which early Christianity’s “universalism” can be perceived is as both an indicator of ethnicity as well as something that creates the inclusive nature of the religion. However, the former – universalism as a characteristic of the Christian *genos* – is certainly placed above in priority over Christianity’s ethnic inclusivity. Clement of Alexandria affirms this

⁴² Buell 2005, 140-1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁴ *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 14.

⁴⁵ Buell 2005, 58. One can also see how there is a sense of 'before-and-after' effect being created by Saturninus' wording, since the accused seemed to have been previously “Roman”, but are not “Christian”. Interestingly, a reference with a similar sort of phrasing can be found in Achior's tale, about the conversion of a number of Chaldaeans into Judaism, and which also recalls his own transformation from an Ammonite to a Judaeon (Judith. 5:6-8; 14:10).

concept with the following words: “...those coming from a Greek background, and those abiding by the law, who attain the faith, are united together into a unique race [*genos*] of the saved [*laos*] people.”⁴⁶ Clement does not necessarily dissolve the categories of Greeks and Jews when placing them into the category of the Christians, but instead defines Christians as a make up of people who were formerly of various backgrounds, and all of whom were “saved” after their conversion.⁴⁷ Therefore, what seems to arise in the end is a group of individuals who, regardless of their traditionally-established ethnic backgrounds, attained a new ethnic identity as members of Christianity – all of which differentiated them from the rest of the religious groups in their society.

⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.42.2.

⁴⁷ Buell 2005, 139.

Chapter II

Religious Allegiance and Social Identity

The previous chapter was mainly based on the discussion of the way in which Christians had utilized contemporary perceptions of religious groups in their society to construct clear barriers between individuals based on their worship of particular deities, as well as the manner in which they had approached this worship – that is, the ritual, or ceremony. In the midst of this, perhaps what was most important for the Church (and what was also a great challenge) was creating a community that was most devoted and firm in its adherence to scripture (although, often to a certain interpretation of scripture by preachers), so that there would be a uniform understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. In many ways, the creation of strict standards which defined one as a Christian was an effective way of creating exclusivity in identity, consequently placing emphasis on the idea that a Christian is unlike the others, and ultimately resulting in the divisions in identity based on such religious criteria.

The latter part of Chapter I ended with an examination of a passage from the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, where my main concern was the way in which the accused Christians had refused to yield to the cult of the emperor – specifically, the worship of his Genius⁴⁸ –, and were consequently condemned to be executed. Whereas previously I looked upon this passage with the intent of pointing out the discourse of “race” (*genos*) in the exchange between the proconsul and Speratus, in this chapter I would like to turn my attention to the fact that, in a very different way, it provides an example of the struggle

⁴⁸ *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 2-3.

for allegiance – and in particular, *religious* allegiance – as it portrays two individuals steadfast in their loyalty toward their religious traditions.

Therefore, by largely focusing on the concept of religious allegiance in this chapter, I will try to explain how the religious division of society by the Church resulted consequently in communities which were not merely composed of individuals who were passive with regard to their religious beliefs, but groups of people who felt a strong affinity (and perhaps an obligation) toward their religious identity. This would then lead to the reinforcement of my general thesis on the emergence of a “pagan” identity, for I am of the assumption that in any social group, the introduction of allegiance toward a given symbol or an idea representing a way of thought or action is a very powerful agent in the creation or intensification (that is, a strong growth in self-awareness) of a cultural group.

2.1 Allegiance in the Imperial Cult

It should be noted that the Christians were not necessarily the first in the Roman Empire to introduce the concept of religious allegiance, for it had been somewhat present in the practise of the imperial cult from Augustus onwards. By this I mean to say that within the phenomenon of the imperial cult, there were similar notions of displaying one’s allegiance to something through religious means – and in this particular case, allegiance to the emperor, and therefore the Roman state.⁴⁹ In order to understand this better, it will be necessary to enter into a brief discussion of what the political and religious implications of the imperial cult were, before comparing it all to the situation in the fourth century, when Christianity was the politically dominant force in the Roman

⁴⁹ For more detailed discussion on the topic of the imperial cult, see Gradel 2002, Rupke 2007, Taylor 1975, Scott 1936, Price 1984.

Empire. It should be pointed out that the kind of “religious” allegiance seen in the imperial cult is not exactly the same as what one witnesses during the tetrarchy and afterwards; nor by any means will it be asserted that the Church had remoulded the imperial cult, and replaced the originally pagan elements of the phenomenon with Christian ones. There were, however, certain elements of the imperial cult which could not have been abandoned by the Christianised administration, which was subsequently compelled to adapt them to the new religious circumstances of the fourth century. One particular aspect of the imperial cult which had to be reckoned with under in the Christian Empire was the role and image of the emperor in matters of religion. The introduction of the image of the emperor into traditional religious practises – that is, those of the Graeco-Roman religion – was a significant step undertaken by Augustus which would revolutionize the religious experience of the Roman Empire. As Price points out, the imperial cult was highly dependent on the traditional religious system, and so it was remodelled on the cult of the gods, as the emperor himself became similar to a deity of the pantheon of gods.⁵⁰ In a similar way, during the Christianisation process in the empire, the emperor played a key role as an important figure representative of the Church.

Considering the context of this chapter, perhaps the first question to be asked about the nature of the imperial cult is whether or not it was more a religious or political phenomenon? According to Price, the imperial cult seemed to have primarily been political in nature, regardless of its religious elements; that is, the religious elements of the imperial cult served to politically benefit the power of the emperor. However, this

⁵⁰ Price 1984, 234.

does not mean that religion in the imperial cult was meaningless, for in examining the relationship of the religious and political systems in the phenomenon, Price points out that religion played an important role in developing the emperor's power. In his study, Price is primarily concerned with the diplomatic approaches of the empire's subjects (particularly the Greeks) to their emperor and how the "divine language"⁵¹ that they had used in their references to the emperor can be interpreted as an example of the various power dynamics of the imperial cult. To Price, "both diplomacy and the imperial cult were ways of constructing the emperor, and the religious language was used in both contexts"⁵², which thereby allowed religion to be utilized as a very effective tool for the consolidation of the emperor's power.

Certainly, what seems to have occurred in the diplomatic sphere of the imperial cult was not simply that the emperor was dictating the manner in which he was to be addressed by his subjects, but additionally his subjects seemed to have supplemented this expectation by themselves behaving in ways which aggrandized the emperor, while aiming ultimately to secure his favour. Thus, the imperial cult was to a great extent a phenomenon in which the emperor, being the focal point of the cult, was constructed as a result of a complex subject-ruler relationship; it involved not only the emperor manipulating his own image as a divine ruler, but also the response of his subjects to his displays of symbolisms of divinity.⁵³ One can clearly see the progression and evolution of

⁵¹ Ibid., 243: for example, "Emperor Caesar Sebastos son of a god..." Additionally, one may see inscriptions with formulations such as "the ruling divine emperors" (*ton kratouton theon Sebaston.*) as, e.g., in Asar Tepe, a settlement near Hypaepa (*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes* IV 1349).

⁵² Ibid., 235.

⁵³ Ibid., 242. One can see how this is evident in certain communities in Asia Minor which would make appeals to the emperor by referring to their forum decorated with the statues of former principes

the imperial cult throughout the first to the third centuries A.D., as the phenomenon closely correlated with the gradual increase in the hierarchy and central control of the empire's government; that is, the further the centuries dragged on, the more instances we have of terms which “sanctified” the emperor. Some examples may be seen in certain addresses to the emperor such as *theios* (divine), *theiotatos* (most divine), or reference to the emperor's *theiotes* (divinity)⁵⁴. One can particularly see this sort of “sanctification” of the emperor from a document in the early fourth century, where a petition of the Lycians against the Christians is brought forward to the three emperors of 312 (Constantine, Daia, and Licinius):

Since the gods, your kinsmen, have demonstrated in their actions their love of mankind, O most divine kings (*theiotatoi*), who are concerned with their worship, always taking pains on behalf of the safety of you, the all-conquering masters, we considered it was well to take refuge with your immortal kingship and to make petition that the Christians...⁵⁵

The reference to an emperor's *theiotes* is also quite evident in Greece during the reign of Diocletian, where a governor assures that Diocletian's divinity would allow for his price edict to perpetually remain as law.⁵⁶

One would have hardly been able to imagine such references to the emperor in the first or even the second century A.D., as such language would have been deplored among the elites or the senate. However, by the third century the situation was significantly different, and the imperial cult seems to have developed into a highly ritualised and

(*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* VII 305, I 26-7).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 245-6. See, e.g., *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae* IV 2236.

⁵⁵ *CIL* III 12132; translated text attained from Price, 124.

⁵⁶ *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* XXVI 1353, 9-11. One can find the use of *tei theioteti* in the dative case in reference to Diocletian in line 10.

formalised phenomenon – once again, constructed both by the ruler and his subjects.

Ultimately, the question about the imperial cult which most concerns this chapter lies in whether the phenomenon should be understood as a form of religious allegiance prior to the Christian period. The two primary forces at play in the imperial cult were, as already mentioned, political power and religious ritual, where the performance of the latter would reinforce the former. In other words, the religious practises in the imperial cult (exhibited by the empire's subjects) were the means by which the emperor was reassured of his superior position in the empire's hierarchy – for the cult, in many ways, endowed him with religious power. In spite of this, however, to call the imperial cult a form of *religious* allegiance is contentious, since the term seems to imply that within the realm of religion in pre-Christian Roman society there existed contending or opposing religious groups, to one of which the empire's subjects assured their loyalty via their participation in the imperial cult; this could not have been the case. Certainly, the imperial cult displayed loyalty to the state, but for the emperor to assert that it be directed toward anything beyond himself (and the state) – such as to “Polytheism” as a religion – is quite absurd, and would probably have seemed very unpragmatic.⁵⁷ If, in fact, the motive of the Roman imperial government was to have a guarantee of loyalty from the assurance that the people are polytheists, this would have in no way helped the emperor, since polytheism was no institution and hence had no political power in itself. If the *Augusti* wanted to

⁵⁷ One may be misled to view the persecution of early Christians, for instance, and the demand that they denounce Christ for the sake of the Roman pantheon of gods, as an attempt by the authorities to exact from their Christian subjects an affirmation of genuine belief. This is unlikely since the state would not have been so much interested in the beliefs or practises of Christians as their loyalty. Therefore, instead of trying to equate the persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries with, for instance, the Catholic Inquisition of the Early Modern period, it would be more accurate to take the Roman state's effort for the affirmation of pagan gods more simply as an oath.

benefit from religion, they needed to insert themselves into it – and thus they did.

Otherwise, it would have most likely seemed nonsensical to use the imperial cult for the purpose of maintaining the people's allegiance to the gods, since there was nothing in society hindering people from believing in them, nor anything placing the general belief in the gods under any peril. Therefore, the imperial cult can be understood as allegiance that is in *manner* religious but directed to the emperor, not to a religious institution.

2.2 Christianity and the formation of “religious allegiance”

What started out as a phenomenon that was essentially political in nature (the emperor incorporates himself into the pantheon of gods, to which accomplishment his subjects consequently respond in a religious manner), and what had been solely centred around the emperor, ultimately became something much more profound. The imperial cult may not have been directly responsible for the situation that arose in the fourth century, where allegiance to religions was much more important, but it may have created the perfect environment for the Church to closely associate itself with the imperial government. In many ways, we can imagine that there would have been a problem starting in the first several decades of the fourth century with regard to what was to be done with the tradition of the imperial cult in the imperial court. The emperor could no longer claim to be divine under the Church's watch, and his previous utilisation of religion for the maintenance of imperial stability could not be realised in the traditional manner.⁵⁸ However, this could not have meant that an imperial tradition now centuries

⁵⁸ Although emperors hesitated to call themselves *divi* in the Christianised empire, there nonetheless seems to have been little complaint about losing the title since the Church, instead of the senate, was quite willing to provide them the possibility of becoming *sancti* (Momigliano 1987, 104-5). Interestingly, the last eastern emperor to have *divus* in his name was Anastasius I (491-518) – Charanis 1974, 38.

old simply withered away, and that a political tool previously so useful was discarded. Furthermore, it probably would have been an acceptable norm by this period in Roman society that the emperor and his power in some way were connected with religion; it is hard to believe that this mentality could have been easily abandoned in the early fourth century when Christianity made its official debut in the reign of Constantine.⁵⁹ As a result, because the emperor was now Christian, what seems to have taken place was the assumption of the previous role that religion had played in the imperial government by the Church. The most significant aspect of this transition, however, was that because the Church (unlike the pagan cults) was an institution separate from the imperial bureaucracy, wielding a significant amount of power and influence in society, its union with the government must have further legitimised its power in dictating religious obligations to the populace. In the end, it seems that the allegiance of the people, originally expressed directly toward the emperor by religious means (in the imperial cult), turned into a process where displaying one's allegiance to the emperor also implied loyalty toward the Church (which represented the people's religion). Consequently, the religious display of the imperial cult seems to have evolved into a phenomenon where individuals had to show an *adherence* toward the religion with which the emperor associated himself, in addition to the state itself.

⁵⁹ In fact, as Momigliano indicates, court rituals functioned very much in the same fashion as they had in prior centuries – particularly the *adventus*, for example. Many court practises seem to have been maintained, and the emperor remained very much the centre of the attention in the court until around the mid fifth century, when one sees changes like the introduction of the patriarch (e.g. Leo I) in the process of coronation – yet another example of the Church's assumption of the state's religious power (Momigliano 1987, 106-7).

In this situation, one can clearly see how the exclusivity of Christianity, that stemmed from the foundations of the religion, would have to become the fundamental mechanism of social organization; to be a Christian seems to have now become not merely a religious affiliation indicative of one's membership in the *ecclesia*, but also a label that defined people with regard to their place and associations in society.⁶⁰ This is why the *ostentation* of one's religious beliefs seems to have become important. In many ways, we can discern this from Augustine's account of Marius Victorinus, who was a convert to Christianity.⁶¹ Although Victorinus had pronounced his Christianity, he was not considered to be a Christian by his friend and priest, Simplicianus, who did not approve of Victorinus' relations with his pagan peers. One should be weary of the exaggerations made by Augustine in his portrayal of pagans, when Simplicianus is depicted to think of Victorinus as performing “the evil rites of the devils' haughtiness”⁶² (when referring to Victorinus' un-Christian actions in light of his proclamation for the religion), but the exchange between the two men should nonetheless be noted. Upon Simplicianus' disapproval of Victorinus' Christianity, and after stating that he would never consider him as a Christian until he sees Victorinus in church, the latter responds with the question, “Are Christians made by walls?” This is Victorinus' defence against the suspicion that he is a non-believer, which he attempts to allay by arguing that one does

⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that there seemed to be instances of the Church's involvement in state affairs in the earlier 4th century, particularly in the matter of citizenship. In other areas of legislation, it is at least not until the Byzantine period that we see the emperor, for example, signing a legal (but still religious) document guaranteeing his doctrinal obedience to the Church; the first instance of this available to us is that of Anastasius I, who was even crowned by the patriarch in 491 A.D. Charanis 1974, 38; Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 130.

⁶¹ Augustine, *Confessions*. VIII. 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, VIII. 2.4.

not need necessarily to display publicly one's belief, since to him Christianity is ultimately a private matter, and one of orthodoxy – for it is what one believes and not does that matters.⁶³ To Simplicianus, of course, this is a problem, since regardless of the assurance that he receives about his friend's Christian belief, such a claim becomes problematic if he continues to be mimicking and accepting pagan rites (*quae imitator superbis acceperat*). Ultimately, perhaps due to a falling out with his pagan peers or because he did not want to be held suspect by Christians around him any longer, Victorinus gave in with “*eamus in ecclesiam: christianus volo fieri.*”⁶⁴

Of course, this is but one example from an account that must have been largely fictitious and which is full of religious pomp. Yet what can be discerned from it is the idea that displaying one's religious affiliation was very important for the reinforcement of the label that one received in society. This must have been particularly true for the Church and its administrators, who tried to create a clear idea of what it meant to be Christian (as discussed in chapter I), even though the populace at large would not have been so complicit, and would have easily turned to “pagan” ways without realizing the wrong in their actions. However, regardless of the initial inability of the Church to wholly instill Roman society with its views on religious boundaries and on the display of orthodoxy, there nonetheless would have been a growth among the people of a familiarity with and

⁶³ In reality, however (in fact, Augustine's explanation does not seem incorrect), the reason why Victorinus continued to perform these “rites” was probably because he “did not want to lose the respect of his peers, those proud idolators...”

⁶⁴ Augustine gives no reason at all as to why Victorinus' relationship with the pagans was strained; he very quickly moves past the reasoning with “*subito et inopinatus*” -- that it was sudden and took Victorinus by surprise.

understanding of these concepts, for they would have continued to be circulated by the Church as Christianisation carried on.

2.3 Pagan Response and the Discourse of “Allegiance”

Having discussed the way in which the Christians had created a political and social environment where religious allegiance played a big role in the status of a given individual, it will now be appropriate to go into detail about what kind of a response one may have seen from the pagan communities to this social change. What I wish to make clear in this section of the chapter is not simply the pagans’ response to the concept of religious allegiance, but more so *how* they had gone about addressing their identity as ‘pagans’. I would like to conclude in the end that although pagans did start to view themselves as a social group bound by common religious traditions, this same shared sense of identity among them was nonetheless one which was dictated by the religious discourse constructed by the Christian Church. Thus, the polytheists’ acceptance of the ‘pagan’ identity seems to have been to a large extent a result of the social phenomenon of religious allegiance⁶⁵, since as a consequence of this, communities were divided on the grounds of religious loyalty or disloyalty, thereby resulting in the rise of separate antithetical identities that were urged on by the Church.

When we look at ‘pagan’ religious allegiance during the fourth century, Libanius can be seen as one example of an individual who elucidates pagan attitudes toward religion. In many ways, he represents a religious mentality that is very different from, and

⁶⁵ North 2005, 137, claims that although the religious differentiation was evident to people like Libanius (in other words, those of the upper class), the question of categorization would not have been important to ordinary followers of Graeco-Roman religions. I, on the other hand, believe that the pagan masses ultimately had no choice but to concur with this manner of thought, as in time they would inevitably adopt a divided (and “Christian”) perspective of religion.

also opposed to (as Sandwell points out), individuals like John Chrysostom – whose views I have discussed in Chapter I. Thus, while Chrysostom emphasized mostly clear-cut religious identities and the consequent social and political loyalties associated with a particular belief, Libanius seemed to have viewed religious identity and allegiance in a more ambiguous and less primitive manner. It should be pointed out that, as much as Sandwell asserts that Libanius' views on religious identity differed from those of the Church, it is nonetheless hard to deny that Libanius' writings (like his orations to Theodosius)⁶⁶ display a similar antagonistic attitude to religious groups and religious identity. It is true that his writing does not approach the degree of strict delineation of religious belief in Chrysostom's writing, but Libanius still opposes and condemns Christian actions, while simultaneously positioning himself quite conspicuously on the other side of the religious spectrum as a pagan.⁶⁷

In the following examples, one can see how Libanius positions himself against the Christians, while speaking of his views as those shared by a collective group of people. Libanius refers to those who share his beliefs as “those on our side” (*ten merida ten hemeteran*), “those who honour the things of the gods” (*tous ta ton theon timontas*), and quite interestingly (because of its similarity to the Christian rhetoric about the truth of their god), those “having recognition of the ones truly ruling heaven” (*ten gnosin ton hos*

⁶⁶ *Orations* 19, 20, 30, 33.

⁶⁷ *Orations* 19.25, 20.3, 22.5. In these orations, he speaks to Theodosius about the Riot of the Statues in Antioch in 387 A.D., and is outraged at the unruliness of Christians who took part in the event. Of course, he does not explicitly say the word “Christians” or “Galileans” (realising that he must beware of the fact that his reader is a Christian emperor), but refers to them more subtly. In *Oration* 30 too he makes a similar complaint to Theodosius about the way in which groups of Christian monks were on a rampage in the countryside vandalising and looting temples, and harassing rural pagans and their property.

alethos ton ouranon echonton).⁶⁸ By extension, he and his brethren engage in the “matters of the gods” (*ta ton theon*), or “worship of the gods” (*he ton theon latreia*), and “divine rites” (*hiera theia*)⁶⁹, all of which things are characteristic of Libanius’ religious beliefs. Of course, much like his Christian rivals, he does not hesitate to elaborate on his religious opponents by placing them on the opposite side of the scale, and thus presenting his belief and theirs as polar-opposites and irreconcilable. Although Libanius “does not once use the words ‘Christian’ or ‘Christianity’ ...[nor] the other current terms for Christians, such as ‘Galileans’”⁷⁰, it should be remembered that Libanius always wrote with his audience (often being Christian) in mind, so it should not be surprising that he does not specifically refer to the Christians by name when he expresses his indignation at the religion and its members. Instead, he uses terms like “the irreligious” or “impious ones” (*hoi dussebeis*), “the polluted ones” (*hoi miaroi*), “the uninitiated” (*hoi amuetoi*), or the label classically utilised by pagans centuries earlier – *hoi atheoi*.⁷¹ In addition to this, Libanius further exhibits distaste and hostility toward the Christians by referring to them as the “enemies” of the gods and temples, or “men who intimidate [the pagans, presumably]” (*androi phoberoi*), and “our opponents” (*hoi hemin enantioi*).⁷² This last set of instances particularly shows not only his attitudes toward the Christians alone, but can also be understood as how he views them in relation to those possessing his polytheistic beliefs. In many ways, through the use of such all-encompassing terms, we can see that Libanius’

⁶⁸ Libanius, *Oration* 14.42; 30.26; 18.125 (respectively).

⁶⁹ Ibid. 24.21; 18.22; 1.219 (respectively).

⁷⁰ Sandwell, 92.

⁷¹ Libanius, *Orations* 18.287; *Epistle* B.147.

⁷² Ibid., *Epistles* N.120.3 and B.154.3; N.143.4; N.103.5. For more references, see “doxan de peri theon ouk alethe” ([having] a false idea about the gods), *Orations* 18.122.

awareness of his position in society as a polytheist – a stance that was significantly in conflict with the position of the Christians – consequently seems to have given him a perception of all polytheists as being part of a social group that existed in contradiction with the Christians. The language that he uses in categorizing Christians in opposition to pagans, or vice-versa, is very much a reflection of his perception that both groups were more or less consolidated units in society.

Although, we must always bear in mind that Libanius' writings represent a perspective from the aristocracy, where there would have existed a different kind of confrontation between pagans and Christians than what would have been the case among the masses. Unlike the lower classes, aristocratic pagans would have certainly been more aware of Christian doctrine and would have understood the Church's position about the pagans more thoroughly. This is not to mention their knowledge of the ambitions of the Church and the potential anti-pagan sentiments and plans of Christian emperors, all of which would have resulted in the elite polytheists' greater awareness of their own commonality, thereby creating solidarity in the midst of persecution.

Yet what indeed would have been the case with regard to the pagan lower classes? In some ways one can relate the situation of elite pagans to that of the masses, but it should be made clear that among the latter group the interaction with Christians would have differed in certain ways. Surely the issues of religious doctrine would have been far less clear to ordinary people, and since they had no insight into the court (and by extension, into the workings of the Church) there would have generally been a great lack of awareness of various Christian doctrinal views – especially those arising out of the

ecumenical counsels, for instance. This does not mean, though, that the pagan masses did not know how to distinguish between their beliefs and those of the Christians. Although in the fourth century (and certainly in the fifth as well) there was significant confusion about how individuals were meant to properly act “Christian”, often resulting in a hybrid form of pagan and Christian worship and belief (chapter I),⁷³ there must have nonetheless been a good understanding among pagans and Christians of where they stood in society and in their communities when it came to religious affairs.

It is a very difficult affair, however, to try to reconstruct the extent to which the religious identities propagated by the Church played a daily role in the self-perception of pagans (and some Christians too) – there is very little direct evidence of this. On the one hand, it would surely be excessive to say that Roman society in the fourth century had approached the issue of religion exactly in the way the Church has desired – that is, conforming to the strict boundaries advocated by preachers like Chrysostom. It is doubtful that more than a limited number of people had even espoused so strict and divided a perception of religious identities and communities. However, at the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that since Christianisation would have significantly affected society by altering the idea and role of religion in it, such a phenomenon would not have been inconsequential in changing people's understanding of religious identities – particularly when one considers generational differences. An interesting example of the generational gap can be seen from Augustine's *Sermo XXI*, preached in 404, in which he

⁷³ Another example of this could be seen in the ecclesiastical history of Philostorgius, who explicitly criticized Christians in Constantinople who prayed and sacrificed to the statue of Constantine. Momigliano 1987, 104.

contrasts the Christian members of his congregation to their pagan parents. Augustine claims that in the time of his congregation's parents, incense was offered in temples filled with people, whereas in his time it was the churches that were full of people.⁷⁴ Of course, one should imagine that much of what he says in the sermon about pagans is somewhat sensationalised, for surely he would have wanted to dramatise the “glorious” transition from the old heathen forms of worship to the “true” religion. This is not to mean that Augustine should be dismissed, for in the crux of what he says is an important observation of a momentous religious and social change in the Roman Empire. Moreover, from another source, we can get an idea of the way in which family members in a given household could have clashed over differences in religious belief in the account of Perpetua in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, where her father and brother unsuccessfully attempt to turn her back to their pagan ways.⁷⁵ This may be an early account (the first decade of the 200's), but it is nonetheless applicable to the time period we are dealing with; in fact, considering the greater religious divisions in the fourth century, it would not be surprising if instances of intra-familial conflicts over the issue of religious differences were common.

Therefore, although one ultimately cannot associate the views of Libanius to those of the pagans among the lower classes, it would be equally wrong to dismiss his perception of the pagan-Christian antagonism as applicable solely to the aristocracy. Instead, it is much more realistic to assert that whatever ideas were espoused by the pagan

⁷⁴ *Sermo* 21.16 (Dolbeau 1996). See Cameron 2011, 67 for a short discussion of this.

⁷⁵ *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3.1-3; 4.1-2; 5.1-6; 6.2-8. For in-depth scholarship on Perpetua's life, and her significance in the Early Church, see Streete 2009, Farina 2009, Allender 2005.

aristocracy on the matter of religious identities and religious (dis)loyalty were also to an extent harboured by the masses, and that together their perspectives were reflections or products of the emerging social attitudes of the times. This may beg the question, however, of whether the fourth century had witnessed some sort of pagan religious movement in the Roman world which would have resulted in an awareness of and then an advocacy for a pagan identity by prominent pagans. One can surely make such a case with the emperor Julian, who may be seen as a champion of paganism and a coordinator of a kind of pagan revival and retaliation against Christianisation. I want to argue, however, that this was not the case, and that Julian should be viewed quite exclusively from the rest of our sources.

2.4 Julian's "response" and the Concept of Conversion

To better understand Julian the Apostate, perhaps it would be beneficial to give a quick sketch of his early years, from adolescence until his accession to the imperial throne, with particular emphasis, of course, paid to the role of religion in his life.⁷⁶ In the context of this chapter, the major issue with regard to Julian's life is his "conversion" away from Christianity – the religion he was brought up with – to polytheism. The reason why I am most interested in the process of conversion (and especially into paganism) in the Christianised(-ing) Roman Empire is the implication this may have had in terms of religious identity and allegiance: the abandonment of the practising of Christianity for the worship of traditional Graeco-Roman deities would entail a movement across the

⁷⁶ For more detailed biographies and commentaries on Julian's life, see Bowersock 1978, Murdoch 2003, and Tougher 2007. On his religious policies, see Athanassiadi 1992, 109-11 and 181-91; Smith 1995, 198-218; and Bradbury 1995.

religious boundaries that were being established in society at the time. The case of Julian is also quite interesting because he is a rare example of an individual who acted counter to the trend of the time, since in the fourth century one would have mostly seen pagans turning to Christianity, and not vice-versa. In addition to this, Julian exhibits a very strong fervour toward the old religion that he adopts, in such a way that his desire to restore paganism in the Empire by means of institutionalising it (essentially trying to structure paganism into a system not unlike the Church) indicates the great influence of Christian religious discourse on Julian's perception of his own religious identity, as well as that of others.

When approaching the pagan sources that document Julian's life, we need to be wary of the fact that many of them are written in retrospect, and therefore may be very much exaggerated for the purpose of dramatizing the emperor's turn toward polytheism. The documents about Julian are full of Neoplatonic imagery, such as the following account written by Libanius, detailing Julian's stay at Nicomedia in 349, where the young emperor-to-be apparently realised the "error" in his worship of the Christian god:

For there was hidden in that place a spark (*spinter*) of prophecy that had barely escaped the hands of the impious. As a result, Sire, you were soothed by the prophecies as you first began to seek out hidden lore, and you held in check your excessive hatred (*sphodron misos*) of the gods...Then you quickly threw aside your error, released yourself from darkness and grasped truth in place of ignorance, reality in place of falsehood, our old gods in place of that recent one and his wicked rites.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Oration* 13.11-12. It can be assumed that the "spark of prophecy" is referring to an oracle in Nicomedia; Nock speculated so in *Conversion* 157. Also, interestingly, Athanassiadi 1981, 31, claims it was something like a cell of theurgists.

It is not clear what exactly had been responsible for that “spark of prophecy”, but we can assume that it was his study of Hellenism that drove him to question his Christian upbringing. Libanius asserts that in Nicomedia there occurred the beginning of Julian's journey toward the belief in the true gods, for some epiphany had urged him to move to Pergamum where he began an excessive study of Neoplatonism, after which time he went to Ephesus to be initiated as a theurgist by one Maximus.⁷⁸ Julian himself also provides a similar kind of description about his pagan awakening in a letter to the Alexandrians, sent in response to the request of bringing the Bishop Athanasius back from exile. The emperor responds quite angrily to this:

Yet you have the audacity not to adore any one of these gods; and you think that one whom neither you nor your fathers have ever seen, even Jesus, ought to rank as God the Word...if you heed my admonition, do ye lead yourselves even a little towards the truth. For you will not stray from the right road if you heed one who till his twentieth year walked in that road of yours [presumably, Christianity], but for twelve years now has walked in this road I speak of, by the grace of the gods.⁷⁹

There are definitely few instances where we see such strong reverence from pagans with regard to their gods, particularly when one considers how Julian at the same time lashes out at the Christian god. It is also particularly interesting how Julian creates a strong dichotomy when discussing his conversion from one to the other, indicating how in his mind Christianity and paganism are mutually exclusive.

When discussing Julian's attitude toward religion, A.D. Nock interestingly claims

⁷⁸ Smith 1995, 182.

⁷⁹ *Epistula* 47, 434C & D.

that Julian's writing was “saturated with Christian thought”⁸⁰, and that his conversion to paganism was essentially following a Christian model, such as that of Augustine. Nock supports this statement by defining conversion as a process where one type of a belief is replaced by another, after which an individual would exclusively adhere to the new belief, while feeling a strong sense of error and repulsion at his former ones.⁸¹ Certainly Nock's work is not without much criticism since the time of its publication. Smith, for instance, accuses Nock of generalizing the process of conversion by assuming that it entailed some sort of personal identity crisis like that which Julian experienced, then applying this special case to all others, and implying that religious change commonly involved such a turbulent transition.⁸² Regardless of the mistake that Nock makes, however, I am still inclined to agree with the central premise of his statement – that Julian was thinking in “Christian” terms (or to be more precise, in a way that was heavily influenced by Christian attitudes toward religion), not only because he was brought up as a Christian during childhood, but also because the Roman Empire was heavily Christianising at the same time.⁸³

When considering the idea of conversion on a wider social level, one may indeed argue that Julian's dramatic conversion is an example of an acceptance of a belief by an individual who was greatly aware of religious differences, and saw them as contradictory. The process of religious conversion, for that reason, is an indication of an assumption that there exist various forms of religious belief or behaviour, the boundaries of which cannot

⁸⁰ Nock 1933, 157. For criticism of Nock's claim of “saturated with Christian thought”, see Smith 180-2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 185, 218-9.

⁸² Smith 1995, 181. On this view, also see MacMullen 1984, 4.

⁸³ Julian's “Christian” thinking is very evident in the way Libanius describes the emperor's awakening, the *spinther* – an experience very much akin to the Christian idea of revelation.

be traversed freely, and that if one desired to move from one into another there would need to be an abandonment and renunciation of the former in order to enter the sphere of the latter. Julian's conversion, however, should be perceived with some skepticism since it is an example of a single individual, and one among the elite as well; the "conversion" that occurred among the masses would have been far less sensational in that there would have been less of a crisis of identity as in Julian's case. This is why I place conversion in quotations, for there is no reason to believe that ordinary people in the Roman Empire had such difficulty in adopting Christianity; there certainly would have been little philosophy involved in their consideration of paganism, as pagans would have most likely simply viewed their religious practises and beliefs as a tradition of things which were always performed and passed down, rather than as some specific creed. This makes it generally difficult to imagine that on a wider social level there existed anything like a pagan religious movement under Julian, since the actions and ideas that Julian exhibits can only be indicative of his personal views and desires.⁸⁴ Instead, perhaps what is a more significant point to make is not whether or not there was an organized pagan religious movement in late Roman society, but rather that in either case the society itself was imbued with an understanding of religion as separated among groups of people, each of whom lay a claim to one collective belief on the condition that at the same time they do not do so to another.

⁸⁴ One can say that aristocrats like Libanius were also exhibiting signs of a pagan social movement by their fervour for Julian's agenda. However, this is probably unrealistic since the pagan aristocrats who would have written at the time of Julian would have probably felt compelled to praise his religious reforms due to his position on the throne.

Chapter III

Edicts and Prohibitions in the 4th & 5th Centuries

To continue with the main theme of this paper, it will be important also to discuss the effects of Christianisation on pagans from a more practical angle. In many ways, perhaps out of all the possible stages of Christianisation of Graeco-Roman society, one of the more potent in asserting Christian dominance was the state's institutionalisation of anti-pagan legislation. Whereas, prior to this, the pagans in the Roman Empire had mostly to deal with pressure from rapidly growing Christian communities and the Church, they now had to face the onslaught of successive state laws incrementally curbing their public and private religious freedom. Of course, considering the earlier discussion of the role of the Church in political affairs, and its aggressive aim to Christianise the Empire (see chapter II), it would not be surprising that once Christians had been given enough time to establish and foment their presence in the imperial court, they would ultimately attempt to enforce social change from their newly-attained positions of power. Surely by the middle of the fourth century, it would have been well understood by the government and inhabitants of the Empire that the role played by Christianity was of paramount importance, and that the increasingly dominant position of this new state religion would not be compromised.

It was in this environment that the perceptions of Rome as a state and imperial power seem to have begun to change. According to Prudentius, a Christian poet of the latter half of the fourth century,⁸⁵ Rome had maintained all of its former legendary

⁸⁵ Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-c.408), born in the Ebro valley in north-eastern Spain. His poetry

splendour and military capacity, but it now seemed to have been almost handed over to the custody of the Christian god. The Christian perception of possessing Rome for themselves was very much centred on the idea of inheritance, for as if its new heirs, they sought to place themselves – and God – into the cultural and religious narrative of Rome’s history. Prudentius writes:

Rome, the former mother of temples but now given over to Christ, under Laurence’s leadership⁸⁶ you have prevailed and triumph over barbarians’ rites. You had already subdued proud kings, reined in nations and now you impose on monstrous idols the yoke of your empire. One glory alone among all her prizes the city of the toga lacked, to conquer foul Jupiter by the taming of savage paganism, a glory won not by the mere brute strength of a Cossus⁸⁷, a Camillus or a Caesar but by the not unbloody struggle of the martyr Laurence.⁸⁸

In a similar way, Prudentius continues on with the idea of Christians as the natural (and surely, the intended) successors to Rome’s power:

...you [Christ] have placed Rome’s sceptre supreme over all things...so that you could tame the habits and practices, speech, character and worship of disparate peoples under one system of laws; see how all mankind...although unlike in their practices before, now shares the same language and beliefs. This was resolved so that the rule of the Christian name might all the more bind all lands together with a single bond.⁸⁹

mostly includes themes of martyrdom, as he frequently touches on the subject of Spanish and other martyrs. For more information on Prudentius, see pp. 160-82 of V. Edden, “Prudentius”. Ed. J. Binns in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, London: Routledge, 1974.

⁸⁶ Saint Laurentius was a deacon of the church in Rome, and was executed in the persecutions which followed the AD 258 edict of Valerian, aimed against the Christians. A century later, a basilica was built in his honour by Pope Damasus. Croke, 6.

⁸⁷ Cornelius Cossus, a less known hero and consul of the early Republican period of Rome. He triumphed over Veii in 428 BC, giving Rome a significantly more advantageous position in central Italy than previously (Livy, *AbUrbe Condita* IV. 19-20).

⁸⁸ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* II. 1-20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* II. 413-435.

One could level an argument against this text claiming that Prudentius was merely writing a sensationalised religious poem; however it is probably likely that the Church and its succession of allied Christian emperors would have tried to justify the role of Christianity (a religion once viciously persecuted)⁹⁰ within Rome's state traditions. In many ways, it was religious attitudes like these that would have played a large role in establishing the ultimate prohibition of pagan rituals by legal means. All of this is not so surprising, since it is not very hard to imagine that the new Christian imperial establishment, along with the Church, would have perceived the Christianisation of Graeco-Roman society as something of an enlightenment and evolution – a progression towards a pious society, perhaps. Much like Prudentius seems to insinuate, under the auspices of the Christian god, the Empire is perfected.

Prudentius, however, was the product of nearly a century of Christianisation, since by the time he wrote his *Peristephanon* (c.395 AD), religious circumstances in the Roman Empire were largely in Christianity's favour. As mentioned before, in the late fourth century major changes would have especially taken place in society's religious attitudes, which stemmed from rising Christian demographics and the social dominance of the Church – all of which took some decades to unfold. In contrast to the beginning of the century, Christianity enjoyed privileges and powers that perhaps would have been unfathomable to the victims of Diocletian's Great Persecution – not to mention to all the pagans Empire-wide. Yet how did this transition unfold, particularly from the legal

⁹⁰ It should be remembered that especially throughout the first half of the fourth century, Diocletian's and Galerius' persecutions (284-305 and 305-311, respectively) would have still been in vivid memory. Therefore, witnessing Christians move so quickly from being the persecuted to the Empire's rulers would have been hard for some to comprehend, and understandably would have required Christian authorities to explain this transition.

viewpoint? Since legislation enacted in the fourth and fifth centuries is perhaps one of the most illuminating sources we have for understanding Christianisation in a very practical sense, I will now attempt to paint a picture of what the effects of pro-Christian legislation would have been, and how successive state laws enacted for the purpose of granting Christianity religious supremacy would have affected the pagans.

3.1 “Toleration” in Nicomedia, *Divinitatis Reverentia*⁹¹ in Milan

The Edict of Toleration (311 A.D.), an agreement between Galerius and Constantine which, of course, was not called so at the time of its enactment, was the first step in the ascendancy of Christianity in the Roman Empire – at least in the legal sense. Unlike the Edict of Milan a couple of years later, it is shorter in text, and in tone possessing not a small amount of contempt for its Christian addressees. Indeed, also unlike the Edict of Milan, there is little mention of other religious groups, as the edict of 311 is solely concerned with the Christians, who are scolded for their unreasonable obstinacy during the recent persecutions, and continued disrespect for Graeco-Roman religious traditions which even their own ancestors would have observed.⁹² Yet it is almost pathetic to read how the edict comes to a close with sudden reconciliation and the

⁹¹ *...haec inter cetera quae videbamus pluribus hominibus profutura, vel in primis ordinanda esse credidimus, quibus divinitatis reverentia continebatur, ut daremus et christianis, et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem.* Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 48.2-6. *Divinitas* in this context could be translated as “the divine”, and is unlikely meant to be a singular “divinity” in the sense of a specific divine entity. Since *divinitas* is an abstract noun, it most likely ought not be linked to the singular *deus* referred to later on in the edict. It would be presumptuous to assume that the *deus* is necessarily referring to the Christian god, and instead may probably be an attempt by Constantine and Licinius to reconcile the various beliefs of the Empire by encompassing them all into this one *deus* – an entity which seems to have more in common with the Neo-Platonic supreme deity, rather than the monotheistic Christian one.

⁹² “...by some means or other, so strong a spirit of self-will had possessed these same Christians and such stupidity had seized them that they refused to follow the principles of the men of old, which their own ancestors has perhaps been first to establish...” Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 34.

granting of “the most merciful clemency” (*mitissima clementia nostra*), after most of the document had been essentially a defamation of Christians. One feels the sense that the imperial government, and especially Galerius, started to realise under growing pressure (whether from the aristocracy, or the unrest of the general masses, or perhaps his co-emperor) that they needed to come to terms with the reality that Christians were a permanent part of the Empire’s social fabric.⁹³ The Edict of Toleration, therefore, gives a glimpse into an administration that seems to have been left with no other option but to grudgingly accept the failure of its policy of religious persecution. Perhaps taking a lesson from Diocletian’s unsuccessful endeavours, the imperial court realised the futility in trying to eliminate Christianity (or even to compel Christians to pay respects to state gods), and decided to take a more conciliatory approach by letting Christians cling to their persistent religious habits, “provided that they do nothing to contravene public order.”⁹⁴ This new attitude from the administration, however, would ultimately initiate a chain of events that would reverse the religious order of the Empire.

With the defeat of Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, Constantine, along with his eastern co-emperor Licinius, agreed on an edict that had extended reconciliation with Christians to a new level. The Edict of Milan of 313 seems to have been specifically directed to provincial governors,⁹⁵ who were to carry out the

⁹³ What Constantine had felt about Christianity in 311 is difficult to decipher. It could be likely, though, that he was passively sympathetic to the religion and, simply for the sake of social stability, may have desired to press Galerius to end the persecutions.

⁹⁴ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 34.4: *Ut denuo sint Christiani et conventicula sua componant, ut ne quid contra disciplinam agant.*

⁹⁵ Croke, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-century Rome*, 13. This is why one encounters honorific titles like “Your Devotion”, and others.

general goal of nullifying any previous laws hostile to public Christian worship, and compensating to the victims for ills during the persecutions:

Wherefore it is right that Your Devotion should know that it is our pleasure that all provisions on the subject of Christians contained in letters previously sent to your office, which seemed entirely perverse and alien to Our Clemency, be entirely removed, and that now each individual among them who holds the aforesaid wish to practise the Christian religion should freely and without interference hasten to do so without encountering anxiety or annoyance to himself.⁹⁶

It should be noted that although this edict attempts to be inclusive of all beliefs in the Empire⁹⁷, the main focus is on Christianity, as it clearly receives special treatment from the imperial administration. In effect, Constantine and Licinius try to signal a guarantee that Christianity would, in their eyes, be viewed on an equal footing with the rest of the pagan cults, and that the policies of the administrators in the provinces ought to reflect this wish. However, what is generally interesting about this edict is the extent of compensation that is offered to the Christians, such as the restoration of their places of worship and assembly. This effectively meant that those who received or bought the property (presumably pagans) were not compensated, as they were forced to relinquish it without any kind of appeal. Thus, the Edict of Milan seems to be slightly more than merely a proclamation of the equal status of the Empire's religions, but rather a general recompense (almost in atonement) as Christianity receives an unusual amount of favour.

⁹⁶ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 48.2-6.

⁹⁷ For instance, "...we grant to Christians and to all others full permission to follow whatever religion they please, so that whatever divinity exists in the celestial seat may be pleased..."

3.2 Anti-pagan Legislation

Of course, initially neither of the legislations in 311 and 313 would have been in any way important to pagans, since there is virtually nothing in the edicts that affected their position in society, and because for the most part pagans were of little concern to the emperors. It was not until the later century that one sees laws definitively aimed to diminish, and ultimately eradicate, pagan worship. The beginning of the Christian persecutions of paganism was already evident near the middle of the fourth century, during the reign of Constantius II (337-361). Unlike his predecessor, Constantine, who tried to maintain a delicate balance between his toleration towards pagan cults while being Christianity's patron, Constantius took a much harsher stance on dealing with the pagan religions by taking the first step of punishing their practises.⁹⁸ We can see how aggressive some of the legislation was, like the one below enacted c.356 AD, as it illustrates the general trend of anti-pagan laws to come:

It is decreed that in all places and all cities the temples should be closed at once, and after a general warning, the opportunity of sinning be taken from the wicked. We decree also that we shall cease from making sacrifices. And if anyone has committed such a crime, let him be stricken with the avenging sword. And we decree that the property of the one executed shall be claimed by the city, and that rulers of the provinces be punished in the same way, if they neglect to punish such crimes.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ It should be noted, however, that Constantine did not take kindly to some pagan practises, like witchcraft, divination, astrology, and magic – much like even pagan emperors previous to him, – allowing these “superstitious” elements only as long as they “have not plotted against men’s lives or...have perverted modest minds with lust.” *Codex Theodosianus* IX.xvi.3 (c.317-324).

⁹⁹ *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.x.4.

Not only do we see a threat of persecution toward those who may be involved in the practise of paganism, but also anyone within the provincial administration who might not enforce the prescribed ban.

The ferocity with which Constantius demanded the end of pagan worship can also be seen in his demand to one praetorian prefect, Madalianus, in 341:¹⁰⁰ “Let superstition cease. Let the madness of sacrifices be exterminated; for if anyone should dare to celebrate sacrifices in violation of the law of our father, the deified Emperor,¹⁰¹ and of this decree of Our Clemency, let an appropriate punishment and sentence immediately be inflicted on him.”¹⁰² In some ways, one can sense that perhaps Constantius’ initial attempts, like this one, to force conformity from the pagan masses by legal methods may not have been so successful; it surely would have been unrealistic to expect pagans to quickly abandon practises which they, and their ancestors, had performed for centuries. The following pieces of legislation provide a glimpse into some of the more nuanced problems that Constantius would have had to deal with, in light of his absolutist and relentless policy of persecution. In the first scenario, recorded in 342, the emperor focuses on the issue of games, athletic contests, and plays being held within the confines of the temples.¹⁰³ He begins by reiterating the importance of uprooting “superstition” (mainly sacrifices), but orders that temples “remain intact and unviolated”¹⁰⁴, and draws a line in terms of what behaviour would be appropriate inside temples (artistic and sport events),

¹⁰⁰ His full name is Lucius Crepereius Madalianus, as outlined in the *PLRE* I, 530.

¹⁰¹ Presumably, Constantine I. However, from the sources available to us, there seems to be no law enacted by Constantine that forbade sacrifices.

¹⁰² *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.x.2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* XVI.x.3.

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps this was a common occurrence which Constantius tried to control, for the sake of public order.

thereby trying to create a compromise between his espoused Christian doctrine and “the traditional amusements of the Roman people.”¹⁰⁵ After some years, however, it seems that Constantius and his policy-makers understood the difficulty in actually supervising behaviour in temples and then prohibiting individuals from sacrifices, or any other undesirable activities. Thus, in the law of c.356 mentioned above (enacted about 14 years after the one in 342), we see decrees which essentially overrule the toleration that was given to individuals visiting temples for recreational, and not religious, purposes. Indeed, what one witnesses throughout the fourth century is something like an attempt by the imperial authorities towards a “monopoly on knowledge”, as Baudy points out,¹⁰⁶ by setting parameters as to what and how people ought to think. Of course, I am not only referring to the anti-pagan decrees in the Theodosian Code, but also to the Ecumenical Councils, which outlined a very specific interpretation of the Bible and persecutes even Christians who do not conform to it.

The difficulty in “rooting out” pagan religious practises is also evident in the fact that during the reigns of the emperors succeeding Constantius (excluding Julian), new laws of a similar nature to Constantius’ were enacted by Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian. Once again, we see prohibitions on “ungodly prayers or...[indulgences] in magical preparations or funereal sacrifices”¹⁰⁷, “practices of the astrologers”¹⁰⁸, “forbidden

¹⁰⁵ ...populo Romano praebeatur priscarum sollemnitas voluptatum. Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Dorothea Baudy, “Prohibitions of Religion in Antiquity” in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*. Eds. Clifford Ando and Jorg Rupke. 112. Baudy’s is an impressive essay outlining how religious persecutions throughout antiquity were often based on the fear of conspiracy, as a result of which authorities took steps to control religious thought through the use of absolute power – a trend which reached its peak during the Christian persecution of pagans in the fourth century.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. IX.xvi.7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. IX.xvi.8.

sacrifices by day or night...[approaching] a shrine or temple for the performance of a crime of this kind”¹⁰⁹, “[polluting oneself] with sacrificial animals...[slaughtering] innocent victims, [wandering about temples or [looking] up to images created by the work of man”¹¹⁰, in addition to a plethora of other minuscule pagan activities.¹¹¹ In some ways this illustrates the general tenacity of pagan belief, and the difficulty in trying to outlaw an entire way of life for a large portion of the Empire’s population. An episode in Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae* gives some idea of the still-imposing influence of the pagan masses in Rome even around the year 359 AD. Ammianus records that in that year much of Rome “was plagued repeatedly by violent mobs” frequently protesting the shortages of grain in the city; in this particular case, the shortage was due to the late arrival of the ships as a result of prolonged storms at sea. In response to the violence and increasing pressure, the prefect Tertullus¹¹² made “a sacrifice in the temple of Castor and Pollux at Ostia”, after which the seas calmed and allowed the ships to enter the harbour.¹¹³ If this story is true, it would give us an important glimpse into some of the reality of the enforcement of the anti-pagan legislation by demonstrating the largely ineffective nature of the repeated imperial decrees against pagan worship and behaviour.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. XVI.x.7.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. XVI.x.10.

¹¹¹ The reigns of Valentinian and Valens, however, were to prove to be not so harsh for paganism in the Empire. After the brief privileges given to pagan cults by Julian, the emperors to succeed him were tolerant of pagan worship to some degree. Gratian, in comparison, was much more similar to Constantius in his policy of persecution.

¹¹² Tertullus 2, *PLRE* I, pp.882-3.

¹¹³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XIX.10.1, 4.

3.3 Law and Social Isolation

Regardless of the initial failures of the emperors, the enactment of these laws in the fourth century would have surely come with the expectation that in time the law would ultimately phase out pagan practises for good. It would be unrealistic to assume that the imperial government was not aware of the growing acceptance of Christianity among the masses, an awareness that would have resulted in the expectation that eventually the sheer number of Christians would create communities in which the state's laws would naturally be reinforced, and which would consequently discourage all the notorious public (and private) "superstition" in the cities. Of course, at the very centre of influencing public opinion about pagan worship would have been the Church and its priests, charged with the mission of effectively moulding religious discourse and, based on its doctrine, enforcing it upon the public, thus creating religious divisions in society.¹¹⁴ It would be difficult to imagine how, in the midst of such powerful forces – the Church's powerful social influence, and the state's aggressive laws, – the pagans would not have perceived themselves as imperial subjects relegated to a separate and isolated sphere in society based on their religious devotions.

The seeming fusion of Roman state law and ecclesiastic law also may have played a large part in the continued seclusion of pagans in society by further defining the Roman state as a Christian one. We can see the beginnings of this phenomenon taking place

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, there is also mention of a certain Christian brotherhood of which the members were called *Parabolani*, stemming from the Greek verb *paraballesthai* (to throw beside, or to risk), who seem to have been charged with the duty of pious public works and acting as the bishop's bodyguards. There is only mention of them in the East, where their numbers in Alexandria, for instance, were decreased to 500 in 416 A.D., due to their apparent incitement of riots, and then again increased to 600 two years later – as evident from *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.ii.42-43. In Constantinople, we also see their reduction from 1100 to 950 (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* I.ii.4).

already late in Constantine's reign, particularly with regard to the manumission of slaves: "Those who with pious mind [*religiosa mente*] grant deserved freedom to their dear slaves in the lap of the Church shall be held to have made this grant by the same legal right as that by which Roman citizenship has customarily been granted with the proper legal formalities..."¹¹⁵ What is significant about this case is how Roman citizenship – what once would have been a rare privilege from the state known to few, – is fused with the initiation into the Christian religion. The Church takes on two vital social-legal roles here, both of which would have previously been solely associated with the state's power. For one, it operates as a guarantor of freedom for the slave; the ritual of baptism acts not only as the religious transformation of the individual into a Christian and a believer of the one true God, but also into a free man, thereby performing the function of what would have formerly been secular institutions. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the Church's involvement in the process of granting Roman citizenship is a monumental step in the evolution of the legal process in the Roman Empire, and is clearly indicative of the extent to which the Church had, and would, come to dictate various aspects of Roman identity.

The combination of the Church's and state's persecution of pagan worship, as well as the transformation of the Empire's identity into a Christian one would have easily resulted in the gradual social isolation of the pagans. When, at last, Theodosius prescribed Catholicism as the sole religion of the Roman Empire in 380, he essentially created religious obligations which bound all non-Christian communities to a dictated and

¹¹⁵ *Codex Theodosianus* IV.vii.1.

uncompromising set of religious norms. In a sense, Baudy is correct in trying to link the Christian religious policies of late antiquity with trends that we see in the Middle Ages or the Early Modern Period, where similar forms of persecutions would take place against Heretics, Jews and other non-Christians all over Europe.¹¹⁶ Perhaps we cannot completely equate the persecution in these various periods of history without bearing in mind the important distinctions between each one, but certainly we could identify a common habit in them all – that is, the gradual segregation of the unaccepted group. Although in the Medieval period the segregation of Jews, for instance, was far more institutionalised when compared to anything that we see in late antiquity in respect to the pagans, there is nonetheless an attempt by the Church (and the state, by association) at the isolation of the non-Christians. I do not think that it is unreasonable to assert that this form of treatment of any social group would consequently result in an intensification of a given group's sense of identity, especially in relation to the one which is dictating its norms from its superior position of power. The debate over the altar of Victory in the senate house in the late fourth century¹¹⁷ is one example where prohibitions of the most fundamental traditional rituals of Rome by Christians would have resulted in a conflict between Rome's traditional and new identities; the former being championed by pagans, who would have seen themselves as obliged to maintain century-old traditions, and the latter trying to fit into Rome's history while also redefining the *present* Rome and emphasizing

¹¹⁶ Baudy, 100-3.

¹¹⁷ For general information on this subject, see White 2007, pp.79-98. Also, see pp.184-5 and 341-2 in Cameron 2011 for a discussion of the debate between pagans and Christians over the altar and statue of Victory, and his criticism of past scholarship on the subject. Cameron asserts that the biggest issue in the conflict between pagan and Christian senators was not the statue of Victory itself (which the Christians were willing to tolerate), but rather the altar over which the pagan members would drop grains of incense before the start of each senate meeting.

this recent period of the city's history. Hence, the "victim" mentality that is developed under such circumstances would certainly play an important role in the actualisation of the persecuted group's identity – although, an identity that would most likely be largely influenced by those in power.

Chapter IV

Funerary Ostentation and Socio-religious Identity

Thus far, this paper has mostly dealt with the more theoretical aspects of the relationship between the Christians and pagans in the late Roman Empire (such as the social discourse on religious identities and the phenomenon of religious allegiance). In this chapter, however, the purpose will be to delve into the subject of ostentation (or outward display) of religious identity, which I hope would consequently strengthen my previous claims for the unprecedented circumstances of the pagan community in the Empire from the fourth century onwards. Therefore, chapter IV will deal with an examination of one possible historical source of religious ostentation – that is, epigraphy – in order to see what can be derived from the various forms of inscriptions left behind by both religious communities. Once again, as in previous chapters, one cannot simply consider evidence from the pagan and Christian communities unilaterally, but rather must understand how evidence from one group can shed light upon the religious culture and behaviour of the other. Among the epigraphic evidence to be examined, the primary emphasis will be on funerary material (which is almost always epitaphs inscribed by individuals of the middle and lower strata), which, I believe, above all other forms of inscriptions, illustrates most effectively the state of society in which they were produced. In addition to this, I have particularly chosen funerary inscriptions because for both the Christians and the pagans, approaches to dealing with death were a major indicator of each group's respective religious identity.

4.1 Epigraphical Evidence

Before we begin the examination of the issues concerning this chapter, it would perhaps be beneficial to briefly discuss some noteworthy changes that took place within the epigraphical material coming out of the fourth century and onward. Some attention, therefore, ought to be dedicated to late antique Christian (or “Paleo-Christian”, if one wishes) inscriptions. Much like in all other spheres of society and politics, Christian influence within the Roman Empire permeated the epigraphic habit as well, by adding distinctly “Christian” elements to the method of inscribing. The growth in a substantial mass of Christian epigraphic material in the 3rd century (a corpus which expands enormously in the subsequent centuries and comes to encompass the major regions and cities of the Empire) presents a good deal of evidence for the scholar in the examination of the general cultural change in late antiquity. According to conservative estimates, the number of surviving Christian funerary inscriptions is placed at slightly over 50, 000¹¹⁸, with more being added every year from all over the former imperial territories. Almost half of this number comprises of inscriptions which were found in Rome (mainly in catacombs, and cemeteries), which leaves many important parts of the Empire much less represented.¹¹⁹ It is important, however, to remember that these inscriptions were found among late antique epigraphic material in general, including pagans ones as well.

¹¹⁸ Galvao-Sobrinho, C.R., “Funerary Epigraphy and the Spread of Christianity in the West”, *Athenaeum* (Pavia, Italy), 83 (1995), 435. As his source, he lists Cabrol-Leclercq's, *Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et liturgie*, s.v. “Inscriptions latines chretiennes.” It is also important to note that Galvao-Sobrinho writes in 1995, therefore by today's date, as a result of more excavations and other stray finds, the number of Christian epitaphs has certainly increased significantly.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed outline of the specific number of Christian inscriptions available to us (the location in which they were found, and the material on which they were inscribed), see Galvao-Sobrinho's article, pp. 437-447.

The reason why pagan inscriptions are noteworthy during the period of the rise of Christian epigraphy – especially with regard to funerary practices – is because the two are at times very difficult to distinguish and differentiate from one another in many respects. This, of course, presents many problems in identifying when the break occurred in the inscriptional style of the two religious groups, and what particular elements of inscriptional methodology in the fourth century may allow one to label an inscription as “Christian” or “pagan”. As Galvao-Sobrinho states, “...we want to determine when the movement [Christianity's expansion] turned away from paganism and turned into an irreversible, large-scale trend as distinct from isolated cases.”¹²⁰ To an extent, from a scholarly point of view like that of Galvao-Sobrinho, the creation of a division between pagan and Christian cultures as evident from epigraphy would be useful. However, at the same time, it is perhaps also necessary to concede that the customs of the pagan and Christian communities of the fourth and fifth centuries (especially the former) were on some level inseparable from one another. As this chapter will demonstrate, as much as there may have been distinctions between the two groups' inscriptional methods, certain elements of pagan funerary inscriptions always remained in Christian ones up until the practise of inscribing was altogether abandoned in the early Medieval period.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ibid., 435.

¹²¹ It seems that before the fourth century, the only way to distinguish between a Christian inscription and a pagan one is through context. It should also be noted that one ought to approach pagan inscriptions prior to the fourth century with caution, as it would be a mistake to label all of them as “pagan” and thus collectively compare them to Christian ones. In addition, inscriptions set up by pagans were never static, and were always changing in style throughout the imperial period.

4.2 Purpose of Inscriptions

When comparing Christian funerary inscriptions to pagan ones, it also seems unavoidable to consider the purpose or goal behind each group's engagement in the practise. This is because upon examination of the inscriptional manifestations of the Christian community, one certainly has the sense that Christians perceived that their inscriptions functioned in another way. It goes without saying that the frequent pagan evocation *Dis Manibus*¹²² was eliminated by Christians, and their inscriptions at times became significantly truncated in comparison to the pagan counterparts of, for example, the first century A.D.¹²³ For example, the inscribing of the deceased's names radically changed from the classical *praenomen-nomen-cognomen* structure to merely the *cognomen*, with the former two elements having been dropped. Nevertheless, with regard to names on funerary material, in addition to the *cognomen* one also may encounter some which were derived from the *gentilicia* and the *praenomen* also.¹²⁴ Adding to these changes, there is also a clearly identifiable doctrinal aspect to Christian funerary inscriptions, which needs our attention in the examination of not only the idea that is expressed (in an epitaph, for example), but also of the specific words that were used – many of which were derived from earlier pagan inscriptions.

¹²² Note that there are indeed instances of *D.M* at the beginning of some Christian epitaphs. However, these letters stand for *Deo Magno*, and are usually combined with the Greek *Chi* and *Rho* (representing Christ, hence needing to be read in the dative case – *Christo*), and then an *S*, standing for *Sacrum*. Altogether, it is read as: *Deo Magno Christo Sacrum*, after which comes the remainder of the epitaph. See example no.55 in Orazio Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy*, (Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1974), 100.

¹²³ Often one would find only several words in an entire epitaph.

¹²⁴ Since the scope of this chapter is meant to cover several main aspects of Christian and pagan epigraphy, and so does not have too much space to focus on onomastics in late antiquity, it would be best to consult Kajanto's excellent works: *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, (Helsinki-Helsingfors, 1963); and "The Emergence of the Late Single Name System" in *L'onomastique latine, colloques internationaux du CNRS 564 (Paris 13-15 Octobre 1975)*, (Paris, 1977), 422.

Before one analyses these various elements of Christian epigraphy, it may be useful to address the question of why the Christians needed to create funerary inscriptions. Indeed, why were funerary inscriptions set up to begin with – regardless of whether they were Christian or pagan, – and what was the relationship between those who wrote the inscriptions and those who read them?¹²⁵ Bodel provides a good answer to these interesting questions:

In a world in which reading out loud was normal – a fact not refuted by recognition that the ancients could and often did read silently – any inscription motivated a voiced communication[...]Thus epitaphs sometimes invoked a contrast between the silence of the gravestone and the 'voice' given to their inscribed words, whether activated or merely imagined by the reader. Tombstones that urged passersby to pause and read their texts often invited not only contemplation but conversation.¹²⁶

The last sentence refers to a particular one of Bodel's points, who earlier mentions how 'dynamic' the ancient reading experience may have been, as opposed to the rather passive interaction of modern readers with their texts. If what Bodel states is true, and the reader of the inscription is meant to be engaged in some form of a relationship with the written words – or as he states a few pages later, that the reader could be informed of “particular acts [which] have been duly performed,”¹²⁷ – then such a situation is certainly not very frequently the case with Christian inscriptions. Unless one examines large Christian monuments found in basilicas or in public areas of a city or town, the majority of evidence from inscriptional funerary practices of the Christian masses seem very much to

¹²⁵ A study of this issue could also lead one into examining the extent of literacy in the ancient world, but of course, this would be outside of the scope of this chapter.

¹²⁶ Bodel, John., “Epigraphy and the ancient historian” from *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient history from inscriptions*, 16-18.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

lack Bodel's idea of a “conversation” between the passerby and the tombstones. Instead, Christian tombs solely present information about the deceased person; if any “conversation” does take place in Christian funerary inscriptions, it is more between the author, or dedicator, of the inscription and the deceased person, not the passerby. Christian epitaphs often involve a private and intimate interaction, and even if this does possess some “public” aspect, it would altogether serve a very different purpose from that mentioned by Bodel – as will be discussed later on.

4.3 Onomastics

The practice of inscribing names is one of the most conspicuous aspects of Christian funerary inscriptions, which differentiate them from traditional “pagan” ones. As mentioned above, the traditional Latin naming system had disappeared in late antiquity, or at least was no longer of any significance as to be of any use in the society of the time. It seems that the first attribute of the Latin name to become obsolete was the *praenomen*, as it became replaced by the *cognomen* as the main name identifying an individual:

The *praenomina* had early lost a great deal of their importance [beginning at the end of the republic, and disappearing certainly by the 2nd century] through the fact that their number had eventually been limited to 30, of which only 16-18 were in common use...[it] was further restricted when it became the rule to give all sons their father's, and all freedmen their master's *praenomen*.¹²⁸

It should be remembered, moreover, that this change took place more profoundly among the masses; that is, there seem to be inscriptions on which there were progressively less

¹²⁸ Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, 3.

praenomina inscribed. The case with the aristocracy was different, of course, as one can almost always see the *praenomen* being a part of a reference to a noble. Whether this means that the *praenomen* was not used at all on a daily basis is not certain, but it is a likely probability – especially during and after the 3rd century, and among the non-aristocratic masses.

A more significant and noteworthy transformation that took place in the naming system was the disappearance of the *nomen*. In many ways, this may be something one ought to have expected, for the *gentilicium* had a particular role in the social order of the old pagan society. For instance, it acted as an indicator of one's citizenship, providing a status in society which differentiated one in rank and privilege from others. More generally, it associated an individual to the Roman state. It would not be unreasonable to assert that the value of the *nomen* started to wane particularly post-*Constitutio Antoniniana* of A.D. 212, when all 'free men' of the Empire were given citizenship¹²⁹, thereby resulting in a situation where, for the most part, the *gentilicium* no longer allowed an individual to identify himself as being part of a special place in the social hierarchy. If one assumes that the *nomen* was truly thus inseparable from, and exclusive to, an individual's association with the state, and that these circumstances continued into late antiquity, then certainly by the fifth century, when Roman citizenship was essentially meaningless, the disappearance of the *nomen* would not be surprising.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 16-17. Kajanto gathers a list of *nomina* with names related to emperors, and out of the 898 in total, the most frequently occurring one was *Aurelius*, with 411 instances, to which *Flavius* was second with 149 instances. The name 'Aurelius', of course, cannot be a coincidence since Caracalla himself inherited that name.

Since the *nomen* was also an important element in the institution of slavery in the ancient world, it is plausible that the gradual decline in slavery throughout late antiquity resulted in further uselessness of the name. The progressive disappearance of slavery, of course, was in part due to the doctrine propagated by the Church,¹³⁰ which resulted in the eschewing of social divisions that were fundamental to the old Graeco-Roman society. It goes without saying, though, that the system of slavery was not eliminated instantly, as it continued to exist for some time after Christianity came to dominate society and politics. The only difference was that in their funerary inscriptions, Christians had the habit of not mentioning the names of slaves (although there are some instances where the servitude of a man or woman is indeed indicated).¹³¹ It seems, therefore, that the gradual elimination of slavery was enough of a change in society to help foment a slow disappearance of social distinctions between individuals of lower rank.¹³² Thus, one sees the disappearance of two of the three names in the traditional Latin naming system, which left behind only the *cognomen*, as it was the only name which acknowledged any form of a person's unique identity by evoking his or her individuality. The former two had far more to do with one's place in the social order, which by the fourth century and onwards was not the same as it had been 200 years earlier.

¹³⁰ As Lactantius states, "...*apud nos inter pauperes et divites, servos et dominos interest nihil.*" Lactantius. *Divinarum Institutionum*. V. 14, 15.

¹³¹ Marucchi, 224-7. This section lists Christian inscriptions which include a reference to a slave.

¹³² The granting of Roman citizenship would have virtually eliminated the privileges provided by Roman citizenship. Additionally, during the economic crisis of the third century, one saw a general faltering of the traditional social hierarchy, with the *honestiores* gaining more power and wealth, at the expense of the *humiliores* falling further into deeper poverty – all of which resulted in the homogenisation of the formerly varying economic groups among the lower classes. Alföldy, 159-60; see idem 175-6 for an interesting discussion of the development of the colonate in the third century, and 176-8 for the concept of social stratification and an elaboration of the third century socio-economic changes for both the *honestiores* and *humiliores*.

The dropping of the *gentilicium* was also a matter of practicality as well, as Kajanto states by referring to the work of Nogara, “...Christianity facilitated it [the break-up of the Latin naming system], for being a restricted community, the Christians did not need a complicated onomastic system to know each other.”¹³³ However, in the same discussion, Kajanto tries to refute the claim by Nogara by stating that the omission of the *nomen* would have been visible already “in the same period prior to the *pax [Romana]*”, and states that post-Constantinian epitaphs were far more elaborate and 'pagan-like' by lacking the “ardour of the early Christians”.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, it should be noted that the early imperial omission of the *nomen* cannot in any way diminish the fact that the *praenomen* and *nomen* were no longer *institutionally* valid names in society as a result of Christianisation. I would agree with Nogara in that even though Christian epitaphs may have become more ornate once the Church gained control, there was never a revival of the *nomen* to the extent of which it was used earlier. If anything, the use of the *nomen* by Christians may have simply been a public formality, much like the pagans had used the essentially obsolete *praenomen* in the second century A.D.

4.4 Doctrinal Language

One of the clearest indications of a Christian epitaph is the expression of ideas which are related to the religion itself – a practice that dominates Christian epigraphy in general. Since, for Christians, the afterlife was a concept central to their beliefs, it is no

¹³³ Kajanto, 15. Paraphrased from B. Nogara, *Il nome personale nella Lombardia durante la dominazione romana*, Milano, 1895. It is also interesting to examine the work by Grossi Gondi F., *Trattato di epigrafia cristiana*, Roma 1920, where he asserts that the prevalence of the cognomen among Christians was based on the idea of equality. Although this is somewhat farfetched, nonetheless the religion surely would have had a significant effect on class hierarchy of the old Graeco-Roman society.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

wonder that in funerary inscriptions this element is emphasized so thoroughly. We do not see the same phenomenon taking place on the pagan side, as they did not view death as anything worth expecting or hoping for, although certain exceptions may be made depending on the particular religious orientation of a pagan – like the 'mystery' cult of Mithras, which involved similar beliefs about the afterlife as Christianity. Otherwise, there is nothing that can be compared to the frequency of doctrinal references of Christians.

Some of the most common attributes which can be found in Christian epitaphs are the use of words such as *pax* in combination with very static verbs which describe the state of the deceased person. Such as:

*Macellinus dia[conus] [fe]cit Aur. Zinzio subd[iaco][no] filio suo, qui vixit a[n][n]os XXV. dormit in pac[e]*¹³⁵

*Hic iacet in pace Flabanella / ancilla dei qui vixit an / nus pl(us) m(i)n(us) XL*¹³⁶

*Victoria/nus fidelis in / pace vixit an/nos XXXV*¹³⁷

It is also possible to find *in pace* without a verb attached to it; in this case, it is assumed that the reader would supply something like *dormit* in his reading of the epitaph. Such is the case in the following example, as it would make more sense to take the *in pace* as referring to the girl's state of peace in death, and not that she lived 5 years and 12 days in peace:

*Iovinae filiae / dulcissimae quae / vixit annis V dies XII in pace*¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, vol. 1, 1202. Henceforth, abbreviated to as *ILCV*. Also in *CIL* XIV 1943. Found in Portus Ostiensis.

¹³⁶ *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, vol. 10, 27414. Henceforth, *ICUR*.

¹³⁷ Ennabli, *Les inscriptions Funeraires Chretiennes de la basilique dite de Sainte-Monique a Carthage.*, (Rome: Ecole Francaise de Rome), p.164, no. 41.

It should be noted that *pax* is not exclusively found in Christian inscriptions, for there are instances of this word on inscriptions by Jews and pagans as well.¹³⁹ However, the word was never used in the same way by pagans, purely due to the fact that death was not the same thing to them as it was for the Christians, “thus they would [commonly] write *pax ossibus tuis*, meaning the same as *sit tibi terra levis*.”¹⁴⁰

In addition to *iacet* and *dormit* in the above examples, one may also frequently encounter *requiescit* or simply *quiescit*. Although occurring randomly in any give location of the Empire, these provide some evidence which suggests a local or regional preference for the use of one or the other. As Handley illustrates, in early medieval Spain, “the two most common formulae were those which used the words *recessit*, and *requievit*. By comparison, in Gaul, these formulae were very rare. In Gaul the most commonly used formulae revolved around *requiescat*, followed by *quiescit* and *iacet*.”¹⁴¹ In a slightly different sense, one can also find a similar phrase in a brief prayer in which peace is wished upon the deceased in the afterlife. In this case, *in deo* is often combined with a verb in the subjunctive mood, expressing a wish, as in:

*Agape vivas in deo, Aemiliane Romane / vibatis in deo*¹⁴²

*Regina vibas / in domino / Zesu*¹⁴³

The above mentioned types of inscriptions are important because they indicate not only the essential world view of early Christianity, but also the seeming necessity for

¹³⁸ *ICUR*, vol. 10, 27098.

¹³⁹ Marucchi, 55.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴¹ Mark A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300-750*. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), 8.

¹⁴² Marucchi, 83-4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

Christians to indicate their beliefs on epitaphs for the awareness of others. One can see this being illustrated in a letter of Sidonius Apollinaris, who narrates a story of a procession in Lyon which gathered at the tomb of Syagrius¹⁴⁴ in the cemetery of St. Justus: "...the leading citizens resolved to go in a body to the tomb of Syagrius...Conversation ensued, pleasant, jesting, bantering...certainly everyone could have told freely any story worth relating and worthy in its sentiment."¹⁴⁵ Within such an environment, one can imagine how epitaphs in the cemetery would have been easily read by those who were present. In some ways, it must have been something like an intimate gathering of fellow Christian members of the community in the city of Lyon. As Handley observes, "in these circumstances the peace and repose of the dead were to be emphasized. Such repose implied salvation and piety, it implied that the deceased was a Christian and that he, or she, had led a Christian life."¹⁴⁶ Clearly, this indicates that epitaphs and inscriptions were not only meant for family and friends, but had a wider public audience (although the latter was most likely secondary in importance to the deceased's loved ones).

Yet beyond the idea of the afterlife, what was it that differentiated Christian epitaphs from pagan ones? It will be important now to examine a few key words that may be easily omitted or brushed aside. Christian inscriptions particularly contain frequent use of the word *depositio* or *depositus*, often abbreviated as *DEP*, when mentioning the burial of the deceased person, as in the following example:

¹⁴⁴ He seems to have been Afranius Syagrius of Lyon, who was the *magister officiorum* in 379 A.D., the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul in 380-2, and consul in 381. See *PLRE* II p.1042.

¹⁴⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters*, V.XVII.

¹⁴⁶ Handley, 8-9.

*Anastaso ben[em]erenti \ [i]n pace depositus III idus Octobr[i]s militans bestearu
dominicu¹⁴⁷*

Another inscription begins with a Greek alpha, followed by the common overlapping *chi-rho* symbol, then an *omega*, after which the text reads:

*bene merenti | Valeriae, quae | vixit annos | XXXVII deposita | XIII kalendas |
Martius post con | sulatu Gratian| I et Dagalaifi¹⁴⁸*

This is indeed similar to what can be found on pagan inscriptions, where the word *situs* describes the state of the dead, but there is a major difference in context. The pagan *situs* contains a far more static notion of death, in that it evokes the feeling of “abandonment in that place [the grave] for all eternity.”¹⁴⁹ This perspective is very much consistent with the gloomy and dull concepts of the pagan death and afterlife; with the exception of some of the 'mystery' cults, the idea of a life after death was never anything attractive to pagans. On the other hand, *depositus*, used by the Christians, had the implication of an eventual return for the object that was given into keeping (this is strictly the literal sense of the word).¹⁵⁰ This, of course, in Biblical terms, refers to the day of resurrection. Unlike for modern Christians, this event perhaps cannot be overestimated in its importance for their Roman counterparts, since the idea was that a believer’s body would literally rise again, after having been given to the care of the earth.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, as Marucchi notes, “in the

¹⁴⁷ *ILCV*, vol. 1, 599 (= *CIL* VI 8556). Rome.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 2943. Rome. Note that symbology was critical in Christian inscriptions, as it most likely aided immensely in the conveying of ideas to a populace that was vastly illiterate. This topic, however, is worth another paper altogether.

¹⁴⁹ Marucchi, 56.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Handley, 9. “For many early Christians the resurrection was a literal one; a resurrection of the body and not simply of the spirit. Thus many believed the resurrection could only take place if the body remained

oldest inscriptions...the word *depositus* is not found; it begins to be general in the third century. In the fifth century we begin to find the word *situs* on Christian inscriptions, but not in the pagan sense.”¹⁵²

Another aspect of the doctrinal language used by Christians includes references to certain pillars of their religion, such as the unity of God, the divinity of Christ, and the Trinity. It is through many of these types of inscriptions that one cannot but be motivated to conclude that Christians saw it as imperative to voice their beliefs in public. The ostentatious nature of these doctrinal inscriptions is evident in the following two inscriptions:

*In nomine dei Gorgon / in pace cum parent / et mensis n vi etde / qui vixit annos
duo.
... / oro a bobis / fratres boni / per unum deum / ne quis titulum / meum
molestet.*¹⁵³

The glorifying act of an individual's belief in the one God is quite clear in these inscriptions, and there is no equivalent to such a demonstration of faith among pagans.

4.5 Christian Funerary Ostentation

At this juncture, the overall implications behind the changes in the style of Paleo-Christian inscriptions ought to be discussed in some detail. This would require a return to the question asked earlier about the purpose behind Christian inscriptions, which I will

intact.”

¹⁵² Marucchi, 56.

¹⁵³ Marucchi, 88 no.25, and 90 no.33. Both from the Cemetery of S. Hermes, Rome. It should be noted that the former inscription of the two does indeed seem to read *n vi etde*, which is quite unusual and difficult to decipher. It is uncertain whether this was a mistake on the part of the inscriber, or if the letters are meant to be abbreviations for some phrase.

answer by examining some of the circumstances of late antiquity. In many ways, the society in which Christians had lived from the 3rd century onward was one which saw their rise, as they grew from a small minority in the East to become the most powerful and largest religious group most definitely by the sixth century. According to Galvao-Sobrinho, the rise and the eventual triumph of Christianity is the key to understanding some of the reasons behind their setting up of funerary inscriptions. His research and conclusions heavily rely on the epigraphical habit of inscriptions gathered throughout various regions of the Empire over a number of centuries, starting from a brief moment prior to Constantine, and ending with approximately the 600's.¹⁵⁴ Although at times one feels that he is drawing too much out of mere statistics, there may be some plausibility and fundamental truth to what he suggests.

As discussed in previous chapters, due to the fierce religious struggle between Christians and pagans in late antiquity, it seems that it was often very important for them both to maintain a clear cultural and religious divide from one another. Each group's zeal to differentiate itself from the other consequently led to deeds and traditions which reflected this schismatic mentality. Funerary traditions were no exceptions to this, as it goes without saying that faithful Christians felt a great degree of repugnance to be buried anywhere near the ground of deceased pagans, "over whose tombs [they believed] superstitious rites were practised."¹⁵⁵ From their perspective, cremation – which would

¹⁵⁴ Galvao-Sobrinho, 463-6. The last four pages of his article include graphs of collected inscriptions, the statistics of which form the basis of his argument.

¹⁵⁵ Marucchi, 50. Although as Mark J. Johnson points out, there were instances where pagans and Christians shared tombs, simply because the process of Christianisation was a gradual one, and during it, there was a point where one finds a significant amount of blending of the two seemingly opposing cultures – Mark J. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?" *Journal of Early*

have been seen as a most heathen practice – was forbidden, as one would otherwise not be able to rise again in the end of days. The assessment of this process of separation as evident in funerary inscriptions is very important.

As Galvao-Sobrinho asserts, “Behind the seemingly innocent act of recording a name on stone stood the play of the powerful forces that were giving shape to a new society. Only later, with an urban population already Christianised, in less divided communities, would the motivation of writing epitaphs become less acute and the practice decline.”¹⁵⁶ What he refers to in the second sentence is closely connected to his interpretation of a statistical compilation of inscriptions into a graph entitled, “The epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire”¹⁵⁷, where the sudden rise in inscriptions (bear in mind that this refers to *all* forms of inscriptions, and not only funerary ones) in the fourth century, after a sharp decline throughout the third, could be understood as indicative of a Christian population that was highly motivated to express its identity through the writing of epitaphs. This is one reason why, in later centuries, inscriptions decline significantly and become almost obsolete, for once the pagan opposition had been eliminated, there was no longer a fervent necessity for Christians to proclaim and reaffirm their religious identity in public. Yet, if this is true, what specifically was it that gave Christians such motivation?

Christian Studies, Vol 5, 1, Spring 1997, 37-59. It should be mentioned that in Roman law, there was “no legal basis for the forced separation of pagan and Christian burials. Nor is there any concrete evidence from patristic writers that such an action was universally banned in the early Church.” Johnson, 37.

¹⁵⁶ Galvao-Sobrinho. 458.

¹⁵⁷ He particularly refers to: S. Mrozek, *Epigraphica* 35 (1973) 113-8; R.MacMullen, *AJPh* 103 (1982) 233-46; E.A. Meyer, *JRS* 80 (1990) 74-96; G.D. Woolf, *JRS* 86 (1996) 22-39.

Clearly, funerary ostentation was not a significant aspect of the Christian faith itself, and there was little encouragement to engage in it from Church leaders in late antiquity. If there was any mention of it, such instances were rare from anyone of importance – such as the Fathers. However, a few of them do have something to say about it, although it should be noted that there is no consensus among them, indicating that funerary ostentation was not too important an issue. If anything, it was a very 'usual' practice in their eyes: Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, thought of it as being unnecessary and excessive, since sepulchral marble on which epitaphs were written ought to be used for more useful purposes¹⁵⁸; Sidonius Apollinaris, in the Western half of the Empire, seemed to show the practise more respect, as he erected an epitaph on his grandfather's tomb in hopes of averting future violation of it¹⁵⁹; finally, Augustine insisted that they did little to actually help the deceased, and that they merely served to remind the living of the dead.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, the increase in Christian funerary inscriptions could not have been driven by aristocratic or ecclesiastic circles, but rather was most likely a phenomenon that must have independently arisen among non-aristocrats, who took this initiative on their own. This would suggest that the masses had a special notion of the function of funerary inscriptions, and were eager to play a role in this process.

Because the style of epitaphs was so unregulated by Church authorities, it becomes quickly clear from their intimate and often sentimental messages that this was a deeply personal matter for the individuals writing them. Indeed, perhaps the main

¹⁵⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistula Canonica*, *Patrologia Graeca* 45, col. 233.

¹⁵⁹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 3.12.4.

¹⁶⁰ Saint Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 4. *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (CSEL). 41. See also Galvao-Sobrinho, 448.

motivating force to inscribe was the close relationship between the author and the deceased. Almost any given Christian funerary inscription contains some wish or prayer by the living (family member, or friend) for the peace of the deceased in the afterlife, indicating that this was, in addition to the ostentation of the faith, and thereby, a social differentiation of the commemorated person, a mode of communication with the dead. Galvao-Sobrinho emphasizes the enthusiasm of this experience: “What is striking...is the effort to record one [en epitaph]; the effort of people with little or no literacy who obviously could not afford to pay for an engraving.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, the process of inscribing a funerary message allowed even the lowest individual in the hierarchy of society to voice him- or herself, and be recognized in public, in addition to also communicate to a loved one, whom he or she proudly portrays as a devout believer. Moreover, one cannot forget that most probably due to the Christian idea of resurrection and joyous afterlife, this may have given those still alive a great deal of hope for reunion with their dead family members – a perspective that was not necessarily shared by pagans.

4.6 Ostentation and Identity Assertion

Thus far, this chapter has mostly been an analysis of Christian funerary material, with focus on differences in the style of inscribing. What we ought to particularly pay attention to in this examination is the phenomenon of religious ostentation, as discussed above, in which practise we can observe a potential influence on social thought and attitudes in late antiquity. In many ways, the display of one's religious affiliation on tombs is yet another example that coincides with the general shift in attitudes toward

¹⁶¹ Galvao-Sobrinho, 450.

understanding the role of religion in late antique society, as constructed by the Church. Whereas in previous centuries, funerary inscriptions would have contained material concerning which there would have been a general consensus by the mostly-pagan populace (e.g. the afterlife), in the fourth and fifth centuries there were two differing and irreconcilable views of the matter. As stated earlier, the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, which included the Church's influence over general religious thought and a demographic shift toward a greater Christian populace, brought about conditions where religious differences were perceived more conspicuously than before.

The fact that religious ostentation on funerary material was a phenomenon mostly dictated and driven by ordinary Christian communities (and not necessarily the higher authorities within the Church) tells us that the understanding of religious differences and the necessity for separation based on these differences was an important part of the Christians' social perceptions. Their inscriptions on tombs were simply a reflection of their espoused beliefs – it was a display of faith – which were consequently exhibited to the wider public, whether to fellow Christians or to pagans. Therefore, perhaps it would not be too unreasonable to assume that in the midst of such a divisive and schismatic religious atmosphere, the pagans would have felt that their form of funerary inscriptions would have equally asserted their religiously, and differentiated them from the opposite side. Indeed, if Christianisation had the power to affect the traditional attitudes and behaviour of pagans (as discussed in previous chapters), there is no reason to utterly reject the idea that a similar phenomenon would have occurred in regard to religious ostentation – whether funerary or anything else, in fact. For example, as in the Christian

case, the opening, *In Nomine Patris*, was a phrase clearly indicative of Christian belief to the reader, *Dis Manibus* on pagan inscriptions would have functioned in the same manner by emphasizing that the deceased individual was not merely a pagan, but also that he was not a Christian. References to pagan deities on fourth century tombs would have been particularly significant in the social context of that period, as in the following:

*D(is) M(anibus). | Aur(elio) Satrio | qui uixit a\nn(os) VIII m(enses) III | et
Aur(eliae) Max\imae quae uilx̄it ann(os) VI m(enses) III fili(i)s piissimis
Aur(elius) Flau(us) et Cer(es) par(entes) et Isi(idis) uic(tricis) Vr(aniae? et)
Sa(apis) Con(servatoris) allu\m(n)is s(u)is P. Hipetiu(s) | - - - -*¹⁶²

Simpler inscriptions would have carried the same idea as well, like these:

*D(is) M(anibus). | Hic | positus est | T. Aurelius Au\relianus | filius |
p(i)entissimus | uixit | annis VIII.*¹⁶³

*Vrsus | mortuus | ann(or)um XVIII | mater Pia | fecit et | posuit be\ne mere\nti
filio.*¹⁶⁴

Unlike the former two, the latter inscription is somewhat ambiguous at first, since it lacks any sort of formulaic religious evocation or references to deities, thereby creating some confusion as to the religious orientation of the author and the deceased. At the same time, however, it equally lacks Christian elements as well, which would otherwise have been very conspicuous (e.g. *defunctus/depositus* instead of *mortuus*, the addition of *pax* or *in pace*), which would have easily made the inscription very distinguishable as a pagan one.

¹⁶² *L'année épigraphique* 2006, 1010. Found in Dalmatia, second quarter of the fourth century.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1011. Dalmatia, sometime during the tetrarchy.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1020. Also Dalmatia, in the third century.

It should be noted that the style of fourth century pagan inscriptions really cannot be differentiated from their counterparts in past centuries – there is very little to contrast, – and therefore it is not exactly the epigraphic habit that gives us a glimpse into aspects of pagan identity. Instead, it is the presence of these inscriptions in a changed world – a Christianising one – which results in the wider society perceiving and redefining the identity of those who made them. In other words, the outward display of faith by pagans in the fourth century and onwards would not have been without the acknowledgement of their social position as a specific religious group – a position which did not truly matter until the Church's and, consequently, the state's, gradual enforcement of unambiguous religious divisions.

Thus, the conscious awareness of religious differences between Christians and pagans (and the consequent rejection of one another's beliefs) could have resulted in each group associating any of their respective religious practises as an assertion of identity. If this was not the case, one would not see such mutual exclusivity with regard to cemeteries. Other than a few exceptions, Christians and pagans seemed to have had little interest in sharing burial ground, which may very well be an indication of animosity between the two sides based primarily on religion. This is not to mention the general religious separation one would have witnessed in the various metropoleis of the Empire.

Conclusion

In the context of this paper, the term “Christianisation” should not only be understood as a general process of conversion, in which the traditional institutions of the society of the Roman Empire had been transformed to centre around the Christian religion. In addition to this, it is important also to understand the wider effects of this phenomenon on groups other than simply the Christians. Indeed, undeniably, the main attributes of Christianisation were the growth of the Christian population empire-wide, and the attainment of political power by the Church, through which it influenced the imperial court. The increase in the Christian population and the social expansion of the Church had a significant and transformative impact on the society of the Empire, to such an extent that Rome’s foundational pagan past was ignored in place of its Christian future.

In the midst of this change stood the pagans themselves, witnessing a wave of fervent monotheistic ideas of the Church sweep aside their religious traditions, while simultaneously dictating to them a religious identity that effectively placed them outside of society’s norms. In this way, Christianisation can also be said to have played a role on a more ideological level by not only transforming individuals in terms of their faith and doctrinal belief, but additionally by altering people’s self-perception. The powerful social position of the Church allowed its preachers to create a religious discourse in society which was dominated by Christian-centred perceptions of the ideas of religion, the supernatural, the concepts of good and evil, and morality, all of which consequently developed from being part of mere ideology to actual social policy that lasted for decades, impacting successive generations of Christians and pagans. Therefore, the place of pagans

in a society dominated by Christians was very much reflective of the Church's general social construct, the aim of which was a clear identification and categorization of religious belief, followed by a consequent segregation of the identified religious groups.

Of course, along with such a separation of groups into clear-cut religious entities would have also come the issue of allegiance. The segregation of Christians and pagans – not only in terms of a division into abstract collective groups, but more concretely with regard to space (e.g. cemeteries) – resulted in a strengthening of group mentalities, which thereby resulted in each respective group's awareness of, and conformity to, their outlined religious identity. Therefore, within the context of a society that is comprised of groups with conflicting and hardly reconcilable religious views, it should not be surprising that allegiance based on religion would have played an important role in shaping the relationship between pagan and Christian communities in the fourth century.

However, perhaps contrary to what would be expected, the pagan answer, or response, to the rapid encroachment of Christianity was very limited on the whole. There were certainly cases of fierce theological debate among the intellectuals of the pagan community, but among the masses there was little in the sense of an organized resistance to Christianisation (apart from Julian's failed endeavours).¹⁶⁵ After Constantine, the pagans seem to have been unable to do much to stop the prohibition of their public rituals, the closing, vandalism, or outright destruction of temples, and to generally reverse the trend of Christianity's ascendancy. Instead, what we see is the pagans trying to adapt to

¹⁶⁵ In agreement with Cameron's (2011) introduction, I would not count the Battle of the Frigidus in 394 A.D. as a "pagan revolt" incited by Eugenius and Abrogast, simply because, as Cameron explains, this event in history has been, without proper evidence, often sensationalized by historians as being a symbolic battle between two religions, when in fact this was probably hardly the case.

their circumstances by adopting the new social position prescribed to them by the Church and, by extension, the state. It was thus that the pagans would have likely come to see themselves as a collective religious group, distinct and separate from the Christians based on their belief in the supernatural. There seems to have been no active attempt by pagans to assert their identity in society – they were neither organized enough, nor would have had the audacity to so forcefully express themselves under Christian emperors. The assertion of identity by pagans was rather a passive one, and one which was significantly influenced by perceptions of it in the wider society.

It should be remembered, though, that the group dynamics one would have witnessed in the religious conflicts of late antiquity should not be equated with later periods in history or with modern examples of religious conflicts. This is because in the latter two cases, the religions in question and their respective perceptions of the world have developed and entrenched themselves in their societies after many centuries. By comparison, in late antiquity, the institutionalisation of the Christian religion had only begun to take root, and was by no means as fundamental to late Roman social thought and tradition as it was, for instance, during the period of the Reformation. Yet, nevertheless, the aggressive policies of the early Church against non-Christians and Heretics, as well as the influential position that it, as a religious power, maintained at the political level together with the state (with which it would, in tandem, enforce its authority) would set an example for ages to come.

Bibliography

- Alföldy, Géza. *The Social History of Rome*. Trans. David Braud and Frank Pollock.
Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975.
- Allender, Caitlin. *What would you die for? Perpetua's Passion*. Baltimore: Apprentice House, 2005.
- Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Later Roman Empire*. trans. Walter Hamilton. London: Penguin Books, 1986.
- L'Année Épigraphique*. Mireille Corbier. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006.
- Athanassiadi, P. *Julian : An Intellectual Biography*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Acti e Passioni Dei Martiri*. Translated by G. Chiarini, G.A.A. Kortekaas, G. Lanata, S. Ronchey. Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1987.
- Augustine, *Confessions*. Translated by Garry Wills, New York: Penguin Group, 2006.
- *Vingt-six Sermon au peuple d'Afrique*. traduction par François Dolbeau. Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996.
- *Tractatus in Joannis Evangelium*.
- Baudy, Dorothea. "Prohibitions of Religion in Antiquity" in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*. eds. Clifford Ando and Jorg Rupke. München: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006. 100-114.
- Benko, Stephan. *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

- Barth, F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Organization of Cultural Difference*.
London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1969.
- Bodel, John. *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient history from inscriptions*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Bowersock, G.W. *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*. Michigan University Press, 1990.
- *Julian the Apostate*. London: Duckworth, 1978.
- Bradbury, Scott. "Julian's pagan revival and the decline of blood sacrifice", *Phoenix* 49: 311-56.
- Buell, Denise K. *Why This New Race – Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Boyarin, D. *Border Lines: the Partition of Judeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004.
- Cadotte, Alain. *La romanisation des dieux : l'interpretatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire*. Leiden : Brill, 2007.
- Cameron, Alan. *The Last Pagans of Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Codex Theodosianus*. ed. T. Mommsen and E. Meyer. Berlin: Weidmanns, 1905.
- Corpus Iuris Civilis*. ed. T.Mommsen and P. Krüger. Dublin: Weidmanns, 1970-.
- Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (ed. Th. Mommsen *et al*, 1863-).
- Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*. Eds. Hoelder, Pichler, Tempisky. Vienna: 1866-1939.
- Charanis, Peter. *Church and State in the Late Roman Empire*. Kentron Byzantinon Epegnon: Thessalonike, 1974.

Chrysostom, John. *Adversus Iudaeos*.

----- *Catechesis ad Illuminandos*

----- *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas I*

----- *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*

----- *In Epistolam Primam ad Corinthios*

----- *Homiliae in Genesis*

Clauss, Manfred. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*. Munich: Edinburg University Press, 2000.

Clement of Alexandria. *Les Stromates*. traduction par Patrick Descourieux. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999.

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1863-.

Croke, Brian, and Jill Harries. *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome: A Documentary Study*. Sydney University Press, 1982.

Cumont, Franz. *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

De Rossi, Johannes Baptista. *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*. Vol. 9. Civitas Vaticana : Pontificium Institutum Archaeologiae Christianae, 1992.

Diehl, E. *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*. Vol 1 and 2. Berlin: Weidmanns, 1961.

Dodds, E.R. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Dorothea Baudy, "Prohibitions of Religion in Antiquity" in *Religion and Law in*

- Classical and Christian Rome*. eds. Clifford Ando and Jorg Rupke. München: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006, 100-114.
- Edden, V. "Prudentius". ed. J. Binns in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, London: Routledge, 1974.
- Ennabli, Liliane. *Les inscriptions Funéraires Chrétiennes de la basilique dite de Sainte-Monique à Carthage*. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1975.
- Eusebius of Caesarea. *Contre Hiéroclès*. trans. Marguerite Forrat. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986.
- Evagrius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*. Translated by Michael Whitby. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.
- Farina, William. *Perpetua of Carthage*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2009.
- Fox, Robert Lane. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Viking, 1986.
- Fulgham, M.M. "Coins used as amulets in late antiquity", in *Between Magic and Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society*, ed. S. Asirvatham, C.O. Pache and J. Watrous. New York and Oxford: 139-203.
- Galvao-Sobrinho, C. R. "Funerary Epigraphy and the Spread of Christianity in the West", *Athenaeum* 83. (1995): 431-467.
- Gradel, Ittai. *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.
- Greenfield, R.P.M. *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*. Amsterdam: A.D. Hakkert, 1988.
- Handley, Mark A. *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300-750*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003.

- Hartney, Aileen. *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*. London: Duckworth, 2004.
- Heintz, F. "Magic tablets and the games of Antioch", in *Antioch: The Lost City*, ed. C. Kondoleon. Princeton: 163-8.
- Herbert, Peter E. *Selections from The Latin Fathers*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1924.
- Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae* I-IV (ed. G.Mihailov, 1958-70).
- Jerome, *Homiliae in Matthaem*.
- Johnson, Mark J. "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?" *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol 5, no.1, (Spring 1997), 37-59.
- Jones, A.H. M. *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*. Vol I and II. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.
- Jones, A.H.M., J.R. Martindale and J. Morris, eds. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, vol I: A.D. 260-395*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Julian. *The Works of the Emperor Julian*. Volumes 1-3, translated by Wilmer Cave Wright. London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1913.
- Kajanto, Iiro. *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*. Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1963.
- "The Emergence of the Late Single Name System" in *L'onomastique latine, colloques internationaux du CNRS 564 (Paris 13-15 Octobre 1975)*. Paris, 1977.
- King, Karen. *What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. trans. J.L. Creed. Oxford : Clarendon Press,

1984.

----- *Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*. Ed. Eberhard Heck et Antonie Wlossock. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Libanius. *Autobiography and Selected Letters*. Volume II, translated by A.F. Norman. Cambridge: The Loeb Classical Library, 1992.

----- *Selected Works*. Volumes 1-3, translated by A.F. Norman. London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1977.

Liebeschuetz, J. H.W.G. *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: clerics between desert and empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

----- *Decline and Change in Late Antiquity: Religion, Barbarians and their Historiography*. Cornwall: Ashgate Variorum, 2006.

Lieu, Judith. *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Lieu, Samuel and Dominic Montserrat. *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views, A Sourcebook History*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Lim, Richard. "Christianization, Secularization, and the Transformation of Public Life." in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, edited by Philip Rousseau, 497-511. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009.

Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita*. trans. B.O. Foster. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950-63.

MacDonald, Margaret Y. *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- MacMullen, Ramsay. *Christianizing the Roman Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- MacMullen, Ramsay and Eugene N. Lane, ed. *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E. A Sourcebook*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Markus, R.A. *The End of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Marucchi, Orazio. *Christian Epigraphy*. Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1974.
- Mayer, Wendy and Pauline Allen. *John Chrysostom*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- McLynn, Neil. "Pagans in a Christian Empire." In *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, edited by Philip Rousseau, 572-587. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009.
- Mitchell, Stephen and Geoffrey Greatrex. *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*. London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo. *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.
- Murdoch, Adrian. *The Last Pagan: Julian the Apostate and the Death of the Ancient World*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2003.
- Nock, A.D. *Conversion: The old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Nogara, B. *Il nome personale nella Lombardia durante la dominazione romana*, Milano, 1895.
- North, J.A. "Pagans, polytheists and the pendulum", *The Spread of Early Christianity in the First Four Centuries AD: Essays in Explanations*, edited by W.V. Harris, 125-

43. Leiden: 2005.

Paryri Graecae Magicae. trans Preisendanz. B.G. Teubner, Leipzig and Berlin, 1973-.

Patriologia Graeca (Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca), ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1860-1964.

Patriologia Latina (Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina), ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1844-65.

Pharr, Clyde. *The Theodosian Code*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.

Price, S.R.F. *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

----- *Ritual and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Prudentius. *Poetry and the cult of the martyrs: the Liber peristephanon of Prudentius*. ed. Michael Roberts. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Rives, James. *Religion in the Roman Empire*. Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2007.

Rouselle, A. *Frontieres terrestres, Frontieres célestes dans l'antiquité*. Paris: Presses Université de Perpignan, 1995.

Rupke, Jorg. *A Companion to Roman Religion*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Russell, J.B. "The archaeological context of magic in the early Christian period", in *Byzantine Magic* ed. H. Maguire. Washington D.C.: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Salzman, Michele. *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

- Sandwell, Isabella. *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Scott, Kenneth. *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians*. Arno Press, 1975.
- Sidonius Apollinaris. *Poems and Letters*. Trans. W.B. Anderson. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936.
- Smith, Robert C., ed. *Pagan and Christian Anxiety: A Response to E.R. Dodds*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- Smith, Rowland. *Julian's Gods: Religion and philosophy in the thought and action of Julian the Apostate*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Street, Gail Corrington. *Redeemed bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (ed. J.J.E. Hondius *et al.*, 1923-).
- Tacitus. *Germania*. trans. J.B. Rives. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Tarrant, Harold. *From the Old Academy to later neo-Platonism: studies in the history of Platonic thought*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011.
- Taylor, L.R. *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975.
- Tertullian, *De Idolatria*.
- Tougher, Shaun. *Julian the Apostate*. Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Vaage, Leif E., ed. *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity*. Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006.
- Veyne, P. "Une évolution du paganisme gréco-romain: injustice et piété des dieux. Leurs ordres ou 'oracles'", *Latomus* 45: 259-83.

- Wallis, R.T. *Neo-Platonism*. New York: Scribnet, 1972.
- Watts, Edward. *Riots in Alexandria*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- White, Cynthia. *The Emergence of Christianity*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007.
- Whittaker, C.R. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*.
Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Wilken, R.L. *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1983.
- Wright, W.C.F. *The Emperor Julian's relation to the new Sophistic and Neo-Platonism*.
New York: Garland Pub., 1980.
- Zangenberg, Jurgen. and Michael Labahn. *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City*. London: T&T Clark International, 2004.