

# **RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS PRACTICE AND EFFECT IN FOUR HISTORICAL EXAMPLES**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the fact that religious freedom is considered a basic human right, provided for in the South African constitution, the practise of religious freedom is often denied in certain countries and discouraged in others. The goal of this thesis is to examine four historical examples in which religious freedom was practised or denied, and the effect this decision had on the countries or people concerned.

The first example of Alexander's empire is a positive example of religious liberty. His practise of religious pluralism offered peace to the Greeks and Jews of Alexandria, and it prompted creative and intellectual pursuits that would have been impossible without religious freedom.

The second example is of Paul the Apostle's approach to positive religious engagement, as recorded in *Acts 17* of the *New Testament*. Paul models constructive religious debate as he engages with the Athenian philosophers.

The third example is of Constantine's pursuit of unity through religious prescription. In his bid for one empire under one God, he created both a divided empire and a divided church.

The final example is of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, who through the persecution of Jews and Muslims, caused the economic collapse of Spain and the division of the church within Spain.

This thesis provides historical evidence that religious pluralism benefits humanity and it is my hope that it will encourage religious and political leaders to uphold religious pluralism for the good of society and for the good of religion.



**Declaration:**

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, in the Classics section of the School of Languages and Literatures, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

Student Name:

Date:

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Signature:



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## Introduction

The following research uses four historical examples to examine the practice and effect of religious pluralism in society. Religious freedom is considered to be a basic human right (Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). This assumption is based on the premise that freedom, including religious freedom, is the birthright of humankind, and must be afforded to every person, and practised in such a manner that does not impinge on any other person's freedom (Kant 1886:202).

Religion is not simply a private concern but affects public and political life (Chambers *et al.* 2013:1). Religious liberty, or pluralism, allows for freedom of thought, belief and expression, within society. This in turn frequently gives rise to debate concerning truth and goodness, debate that often takes place in the public sphere (*ibid.*). The benefit of this for society, in the Western tradition at least, has been argued as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE when Pericles, the Athenian statesman, contrasted the freedom of Athens with the restrictive Spartan society (Thucydides 2:36-38).

An effective way of defining religious pluralism is to distinguish it from relativism. Relativism, as an ideology, is an attempt at reducing all religions to the same basic tenets - tenets that everyone can agree to.<sup>1</sup> The challenge this reduction poses, however, is that in order to achieve such religious homogenization, most religions lose their distinctiveness.<sup>2</sup> As such, relativism challenges the constitutional ideal of religious liberty.

Two separate clauses within the South African constitution defend the right to religious freedom: (a) "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion," and (b) "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes: (a) freedom of the press and other media and (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas" (1996: Chapter 2, 15:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Online Source: Religious Pluralism. (McGrath, A. 1992)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*



This liberty, as defended by the constitution, is the driving force behind religious pluralism. Whilst South Africa upholds the ideal of religious pluralism in theory (constitutionally), it often fails to uphold it in practice, particularly in the area of public debate. A fairly recent example was the criticism in the media of Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng for publicly arguing that the promotion of his religion, Christianity, would aid the moral upliftment of South African society.<sup>3</sup>

The furore this debate caused prompted me to consider historical examples in which religious pluralism was practised and appeared to benefit society, and examples in which the lack of religious freedom appeared to harm society. An example of the former is the ancient and cosmopolitan city of Alexandria. Following on from the pluralistic ideology established by its founder, Alexander the Great (Arrian 7.8-11), ancient Alexandria was a city that initially attempted religious pluralism, and out of this came a burgeoning civilization with cultural accomplishments such as the Great Library, the Septuagint, and the Museum (Schama 2013:99).

Another example of positive religious engagement occurred in first century Athens. In order to spread the Christian religion, Paul the Apostle, travelled through the major cities of the Graeco-Roman world engaging with religious thinkers (Tarn 1952:274). In *Acts 17* of the *New Testament*, Paul is presented as maintaining the practice of pluralism as he debates with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. He neither resorts to persecution, nor succumbs to relativism as he argues for his religion (Baynes 1946:14).

These two examples provide us with positive instances of religious pluralism at work. I also want to consider two historical examples in which religious pluralism was denied.

The third example I have selected took place more than two centuries after Paul. The religious landscape of the ancient Graeco-Roman world changed dramatically when the emperor Constantine institutionalised Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire

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<sup>3</sup> Online Source: Mogoeng denies trying to 'impose Christianity' on SA's law-making. (Rabkin, F. 2014)



(MacCulloch 2010:189). Constantine declared the Christian religion to be the state religion, thus denying the people of Rome religious liberty (Baynes 1946:14). I would like to examine the implications of this approach which stands in contrast to Alexandria, but also to Paul's experience with the religiously tolerant Athenians (Dodds 1965:133).

The final example I have selected is the religious intolerance displayed in the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain by the Spanish Catholic monarchs in 1492-1493 CE (Schama 2013:403). This act was preceded by a period of legislated religious intolerance, and followed by widespread religious persecution that affected the entire Spanish Empire, socially and economically (Altamira 1955:286).

Although the South African constitution values religious pluralism, the concept is often misunderstood and substituted for relativism; thus religious response to current affairs such as xenophobia, colonialism or white privilege is discouraged. An examination of the above historical examples can encourage a more robust practice of pluralism.

## **Goals of the Research**

The questions which the thesis will seek to answer are:

- a) To what extent were the intellectual creativity and cultural achievements of the early Ptolemaic period in the city of Alexandria in Egypt a product of the policy of religious pluralism adopted by the Ptolemies?
- b) How does Paul the apostle actively put religious pluralism into practice as he engages in debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens of the first century CE? What is the effect of Paul's religious pluralism?
- c) In what ways does Constantine's institutionalization of Christianity in the Roman empire in the fourth century CE demonstrate how the consequent denial of religious pluralism is inimical to human flourishing?



- d) How too does the institutionalization of Catholicism as the sole religion of Spain in the fifteenth century reveal how societies which deny religious pluralism suffer?
- e) How can the four historical examples (two positive and two negative) help us understand what religious pluralism entails and why it is essential for the flourishing of South African communities?

### **Research Methodology**

The research in chapters 1 to 3 will focus on ancient texts and thus I will use qualitative rather than quantitative methodologies. Each text will be carefully analysed and interpreted. The framework for my analysis of literary texts is historical-grammatical. The aim of the historical-grammatical method is an attempt to discover the closest meaning of the passage that the original author intended. This method places the text in its historical context by seeking to understand the social, religious and cultural milieux within which the text was written. The assumption of this framework is that the author wrote with intention, and that the author's original hearers would have largely understood this intention. As Hodder points out: "different types of text have to be understood in the contexts of their conditions of production and reading" (1998:11).

In addition, this method pays careful attention to the grammatical construction of the text. It involves the study, in the original languages, of word choice and syntax as an aid to understanding the author's intended meaning. For this reason I will refer to the original Greek and Latin texts as I examine the ancient historical time periods within this thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Once the texts have been understood I will use critical analysis to apply principles from history to current society. This will involve understanding how religious pluralism worked in the past and comparing and critiquing how religious pluralism is working in South Africa today.

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<sup>4</sup> I have completed two years of studies in Greek and two years in Latin.



Commenting on methodology, Silverman says, "In writing up qualitative research we need to recognise the contested theoretical underpinnings of ideologies" (2008:377). In the past thirty years, the historical-grammatical approach to literary criticism has been contested by the new hermeneutic or contextualisation (Carson & Woodbridge 1986:38). The basis of this contest is that texts receive meaning through the bias of their readers. West explains that, "The reader is no longer seen as merely a passive acceptor of the text but as an active, even creative, contributor in the interpretive process" (1991:23). West goes on to state that this new form of criticism introduced something of a crisis in the world of biblical and literary hermeneutics, with objectivity having now become ambiguous (Ibid.). However, whilst the new hermeneutic has been helpful in alerting readers to how our biases influence our interpretations of literary texts, interpreters can still work toward establishing authorial intent.

## **Outline of Research**

### Chapter 1: Religious pluralism and its effects on the ancient city of Alexandria.

In chapter 1, I will trace the establishment of cities in the ancient Greco-Roman world, focusing on Alexander's priorities and motivation in establishing Alexandria. I will then examine the archaeological and historical evidence that suggests that not only was Alexandria a city in which Jew, Greek and Egyptian lived and worked alongside each other, it was also a place in which much cultural and religious interaction, and sometimes fusion, occurred. Lastly, I will examine the positive fruits of this interaction.

### Chapter 2: The model of religious debate between Paul the Apostle and the Greek philosophers in Acts 17.

Before considering Paul's speech in Athens I will establish the historical reliability of the speeches recorded in the Biblical book of *Acts* and establish the religious context of first century Athens. I will focus on the beliefs of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers and how they would have differed from Paul's theology. I will then look at Paul's method of religious debate and examine how he uses literature and rhetorical techniques familiar to the



Athenians in order to engage positively with the Athenians. Lastly, I will discuss possible criticisms of Paul's method, and what we can learn from his method to improve current religious debate.

### Chapter 3: The consequences of the institutionalisation of Christianity by the Roman emperor, Constantine.

The Church Fathers, Eusebius in particular, welcomed the idea of human progress as pointing toward the ultimate triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire. This resulted in a kingdom-nationalism, that is, the belief that the kingdom of God is destined to reign politically on earth. In this chapter I will examine the view of Eusebius and how it paved the way for Constantine to marry the Christian religion and state, and to deny the pagan religions their former freedoms. I will then examine the effects of this inter-marriage for both the Christian and pagan religions.

### Chapter 4: The effect of the religious intolerance practised by the Catholic Spanish monarchs in 1492.

This chapter will examine the historical context within which King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella ruled Spain. I will look firstly at the coexistence between Judaism and Islam, within Spain, and also at the uneasy tension that existed between the Jews and Christians. This will lead to an examination of the reason for Christian insecurity, particularly towards the Jews, and the subsequent expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain. Finally, I will look at the Spanish Inquisition and the collapse of the Spanish Empire.

### Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I will attempt to distill lessons learnt, and make pertinent application to the current religious and political climate. In this final chapter I will pull together these observations, and apply them more specifically to the South African context.



## Chapter One: Religious Pluralism and its effects on the ancient city of Alexandria.

### 1.1. The establishment of cities in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

In his book, *The City in the Greek and Roman World*, Owens highlights the significant role that cities played in antiquity: “The importance of the city in the political, religious and social life of both the Greeks and the Romans cannot be emphasised too strongly” (1991:1). People that were not organised into cities were seen as barbaric. Thus, as early as Homer’s *Odyssey*, the poet describes the Cyclopes as uncivilised, precisely because they do not operate as a city. After describing them as, “a fierce, uncivilised people,” he goes on to say that, “The Cyclopes have no assemblies for making laws, nor any settled customs,” and, “each man is a lawgiver to his children and his wives, and nobody cares a jot for his neighbour” (9.112-115).<sup>5</sup> To Homer, the laws, customs and community that came from city life embodied civilization.

A similar idea is found in Thucydides. In the introduction to his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides says that Greece, “had no settled population in early times” (1.2).<sup>6</sup> As a result, he claims that the inhabitants were unable to build cities, accumulate resources, secure themselves or develop any sense of unity (1.2-3). In later periods, as cities were built, Thucydides says that these cities offered both commercial gain and protection (1.7).

Whilst cities grew out of a need for security, they also provided identity. Thucydides explains that as the early Greeks migrated due to instability or war, “the most powerful of them took refuge in Athens as being a stable society; then they became citizens, and soon made the city even more populous than it had been before”(1.2). Thus the concept of an Athenian identity developed, stamped by citizenship. Owens claims that this was the pattern for other Greek cities: “To the Greeks the *polis* was essentially a community of citizens, sharing common political, religious and social traditions” (1991:1).

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<sup>5</sup> Translated by Rieu 1963:142. Cf. the Phaeacians in *Odyssey* 8.1-260 who seem to possess a *polis* culture reflecting the period of the poem’s composition c.650 BCE.

<sup>6</sup> Translated by Warner 1972:35-39.



This need for identity, however, also resulted in prejudice. Hadas points out that from early on Greek chauvinism was deeply entrenched: "The ideal state is thought of as a Greek *polis*, with its traditional attitudes towards barbarians" (1959:14). These traditional attitudes are well represented in Aristotle's work. Aristotle states that nature has made males, females and slaves for different roles. However, the barbarians he argues do not see this: "among barbarians, no distinction is made between women and slaves because there is no natural ruler among them: they are a community of slaves, male and female. Wherefore the poets say, 'It is mete that Hellenes should rule over barbarians,' as if they thought that the barbarian and the slave were by nature one" (*Politics* 1.2.3-4).<sup>7</sup> To Aristotle, the barbarians' failure to recognise the fundamental distinction between how nature has ordered things, makes them a class to be ruled.

A similar sentiment is found in earlier, popular Greek writers. For example, Euripides expressed this idea in the words of his character Iphigenia: "Right it is that Hellenes rule Barbarians, not that alien yoke rest on Hellenes, mother. They be bondmen, we be freeborn folk" (*Iphigenia at Aulis* 1400-1401).<sup>8</sup> In two other plays of Euripides, *Helen* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the plots involve a Greek heroine outwitting a barbarian king. This fed the popular Greek view that Greeks were superior to barbarians.

Again, Herodotus (a Hellenised Carian) divided the world into Greek-speakers and others. And he noted that the tribes that the Greeks originated from (the Pelasgian people) only flourished when they began to speak Greek and when they stopped being barbarian: "Moreover it is true, as I think, of the Pelasgian race also, that so far as it remained barbarian it never made any great increase" (1.58).<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his history, Herodotus sets up this notion of "the Barbarian other." Barbarians are different, separate, and inferior to the Greeks. Using the Persian King as an archetypal barbarian, Herodotus describes King Darius as a man of great anger (7.1)<sup>10</sup> and King Xerxes as

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<sup>7</sup> Translated by Jowett 1885:2. Aristotle's views need qualification— 'barbarians', such as the Persians and Egyptians, possessed cities and the Persians ruled over the Greeks in Asia Minor.

<sup>8</sup> Translated by Way 1916:131.

<sup>9</sup> Translated by Macaulay 1890:26.

<sup>10</sup> Translated by Macaulay 1890:125.



a man of arrogant pride: “μεγαλοφροσύνης” (7.24).<sup>11</sup> Again, in Herodotus’ record of the speech of Themistocles, King Xerxes is described as “a man unholy and presumptuous” (8.109).<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the Spartans - the archetypal Greeks - are described as noble and superior. So Herodotus records Demaratus (the ex-Spartan king and now advisor to Xerxes) as saying that Xerxes was now attacking the “noblest kingdom and city of those which are among the Hellenes, and the best men” (7.209).<sup>13</sup> Thus, through popular writers, historians and philosophers, the concept of Greek superiority was entrenched in the Greek mind.

Alexander the Great, not Greek but Macedonian, however, seems unique in his apparent rejection of this notion. He valued the idea of the *cosmopolis* over the *polis*.

Writing in his *Moralia*, Plutarch argues that Alexander believed that mankind was one: “For Alexander did not follow Aristotle’s advice to treat the Greeks as if he were their leader, and other peoples as if he were their master; to have regard for the Greeks as for friends and kindred, but to conduct himself toward other peoples as though they were plants or animals” (*On the Fortunes of Alexander* 1.6).<sup>14</sup>

Ferguson argues that Alexander left Greece to conquer Persia under the influence of Aristotle and Isocrates. Aristotle taught him that Greeks were the true humans and the Persians were barbarians. Isocrates taught him that Greek unity would be attained through battling a common enemy: the Persians. According to Ferguson, however, these views did not stand true to Alexander’s reality: “Alexander, crusading against the barbarians with Homer under his pillow, came to find Greeks who let him down, and Asiatics whom he could respect as opponents, like Memnon, or trust as advisors, like Ada. Practical experience led to the rejection of Aristotle and Isocrates, and a policy of fusion” (1974:8).

A number of primary sources lend credibility to the view that Alexander developed a vision for unity amongst mankind.

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<sup>11</sup> Translated by Macaulay 1890:140.

<sup>12</sup> Translated by Macaulay 1890:277.

<sup>13</sup> Translated by Macaulay 1890:213.

<sup>14</sup> Translated by Babbitt 1936:399.



Firstly, Arrian, the Greek historian of the 2nd-century Roman Empire, records that in 332CE, Alexander visited the oasis Siwah in the Libyan desert, where he consulted the oracle of Ammon (*Anabasis* 3.4).<sup>15</sup> Ammon was the name of a Libyan deity and his oracle. The Egyptians identified this oracle with their supreme god, Amun, and the Greeks identified this oracle with their supreme god Zeus, and called it Zeus Ammon. Thus, this oracle represented a fusion of religious cultures; various people groups came to Ammon to hear from their god. In doing the same, Alexander displayed a willingness to unite with these people; to hear from the same oracle they heard from.

Secondly, in *Plutarch's Lives*, Plutarch records Alexander's view that god rules and rewards all races, not just the Greeks. After Alexander had listened to an Egyptian philosopher called Psammo, Plutarch says, "the saying of his [Psammo] that pleased him [Alexander] most was that 'All men are governed by God, for in everything that which rules and governs is divine'" (27.6).<sup>16</sup> Here, Alexander shows a willingness to listen to an Egyptian philosopher and to agree with this Egyptian's philosophy. Moreover what pleases Alexander most is the actual philosophy that god rules all mankind, not just the Greeks. Plutarch goes on to say, "Alexander's own maxim was more agreeable to sound philosophy: he said, 'God is the common father of men, but more particularly of the good and virtuous'" (ibid.). This maxim highlights Alexander's lack of racism: he believed god judged according to values, not culture.

Thirdly, in *Plutarch's Lives*, Plutarch shows that Alexander acted upon his philosophy of cultural fusion. Plutarch highlights Alexander's marriage to a foreigner, his provision of Persian wives for his officers and his inclusion of Persians into his army (70.2, 71.3).<sup>17</sup> Plutarch doesn't believe these acts were necessarily altruistic, yet he does believe Alexander was purposefully unifying different groups of people. Plutarch argues that Alexander, "accommodated himself more than ever to the manners of the Asiatics, and at the same time persuaded them to adopt some of the Macedonian fashions; for by a mixture of both he thought a union might be promoted much better than by force, and his authority maintained

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by Robson 1967:233.

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Langhorne 1920:470.

<sup>17</sup> Translated by Langhorne 1920:486-487.



when he was at a distance" (47.3).<sup>18</sup> Alexander upheld Asian traditions, the Asians upheld Macedonian traditions, and this resulted in unity, which ultimately upheld Alexander's rule.

Commenting in his *Fortunes of Alexander*, Plutarch highlights Alexander's policy of fusion. He claims that Alexander, "believed that he came as a heaven-sent governor to all, and as a mediator for the whole world"(1.6).<sup>19</sup> The terms used here describe Alexander in a divine, peace-keeping role. But Plutarch is not blind to the fact that Alexander's unity sometimes came through violence. He goes on to say that those people whom Alexander "could not persuade to unite with him, he conquered by force of arms"(ibid.). Yet, Plutarch still describes Alexander as a reconciler: "he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life" (ibid.).

Plutarch's *Fortunes of Alexander*, is not a straight narrative on Alexander's life. It is more a commentary and reflection on the man, Alexander. As such it is less a historical source and more a record of Plutarch's view point. However, it still highlights, whether from good motives or bad, that Alexander consciously mixed the Greek culture with the cultures of those he conquered.

Thus, whilst Alexander's motives for unity are mixed, his philosophy, life and aim increasingly focused on the fusion of different peoples. He saw this as both in accordance with good philosophy, and good military strategy.

## **1.2 The Establishment of Alexandria.**

As Alexander spread his empire, he built cities. One of the greatest of these cities was Alexandria in Egypt. From the first, Alexander intended Alexandria to be a working example of cultural fusion and religious pluralism. Arrian records that Alexander himself, "marked out the ground plan of the city, both where the market-place was to be laid out, how many

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<sup>18</sup> Translated by Langhorne 1920:478.

<sup>19</sup> Translated by Babbitt 1936:399.



temples were to be built, and in honour of what gods, some of these Greek, and Isis, the Egyptian" (*Anabasis* 3.1).<sup>20</sup> Alexander planned this city to allow for the worship of both Greek and Egyptian gods.

According to Owens, surviving archeological evidence suggests a combination of Greek and Egyptian architectural traditions in Alexandria (1991:68-69). Thus even in the plans of Alexandria, the aim was to promote the mixing and sharing of culture and religion. This aim may have largely been to endear Alexander to the Egyptian population – he was formally installed as a pharaoh – yet it still resulted in an unusual and fruitful fusion of cultures.

The city of Alexandria eventually grew to serve as the centre of the Hellenic world, beginning with the Ptolemaic period.

### **1.3 The Jews in Egypt.**

Large groups of Jewish immigrants settled in Egypt during the Ptolemaic era, especially around Alexandria. By the early first century CE, Philo records, "that the city had two classes of inhabitants, our own nation and the people of the country, and that the whole of Egypt was inhabited in the same manner, and that Jews who inhabited Alexandria and the rest of the country from the Catabathmos on the side of Libya to the boundaries of Ethiopia were not less than a million of men" (*In Flaccum* 6.43).<sup>21</sup> Philo also explains that two of the five quarters of the city of Alexandria were called Jewish as they were largely occupied by Jews (8:55).<sup>22</sup> Thus, Philo claims that the second largest religion and culture in Alexandria was Judaism.

The archaeological evidence supports Philo's claim. A great number of Jewish papyri, dating from the Ptolemaic era, confirm the existence of a large diaspora of Jews in Alexandria, many being refugees from the wars of Antiochus IV against the Jews (Bartlett 1985:20-21; Schama 2013:101).

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<sup>20</sup> Translated by Robson 1967:227.

<sup>21</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:70.

<sup>22</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:72.



These Jews seemed to retain their unique religious devotion, and yet to regard themselves as true citizens of their new land. Thus, Philo describes these Jews as, “looking indeed upon the holy city [Jerusalem] as their metropolis in which is erected the sacred temple of the most high God” (*In Flaccum* 6.46).<sup>23</sup> The Jews did not forget Jerusalem, regarding that city and its temple as the sacred dwelling of their God. And yet, Philo says that they regarded the lands they lived in as their true home: “accounting those regions which have been occupied by their fathers, and grandfathers, and great grandfathers, and still more remote ancestors, in which they have been born and brought up, as their country” (*ibid.*).

Although Philo wrote at a time when the Jewish peace and prosperity in Alexandria was ending, his remarks help us see how much religious freedom the Jews had previously been given in Alexandria. For example, Philo accuses Flaccus, the Alexandrian governor of allowing a mob to desecrate the Jewish synagogues. By doing this, Philo says that Flaccus will, “distress the ancient hereditary customs of the land” (*ibid.*). This indicates that the custom of the land was to allow the Jews to worship in their synagogues without interference. Philo confirms that during the reign of Augustus (27BCE-14CE), the emperor allowed the Jews to live in Alexandria, according to their own laws: “we, in conformity with our own laws which Augustus himself is in the habit of confirming” (6.50).<sup>24</sup> Yet, Philo makes it clear that this respect was reciprocal. Arguing against the desecration of synagogues, Philo says that they were used to honour the Roman empire and not undermine it: “Our houses of prayer are manifestly incitements to all the Jews in every part of the habitable world to display their piety and loyalty towards the house of Augustus”(6.49).<sup>25</sup> These comments of Philo create a picture of religious freedom within Alexandria: Jews, though great in number, were allowed to pursue their religion, whilst still seeing themselves as Egyptian citizens, and as respecters of Caesar.

The Romano-Jewish historian Josephus, strengthens this picture of religious freedom. Quoting Strabo, an early first century CE Greek historian, Josephus claims that there were so many Jews in Egypt that the Egyptians began to imitate the Jewish way of living, use the

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<sup>23</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:70.

<sup>24</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:71.

<sup>25</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:71.



Jewish laws, and that together, this nation enjoyed prosperity with the Jews (14.8.2).<sup>26</sup> Josephus continues to quote Strabo showing that the Jews in Alexandria were numerous and yet still retained their distinct religious and cultural devotion: “There is also an ethnarch allowed them, who governs the nation, and distributes justice to them, and takes care of their contracts, and of the laws to them belonging, as if he were the ruler of a free republic” (ibid.). The ethnarch helped rule this large body of Jews and helped ensure that these Jews had the freedom to be ruled in accordance with their religious laws (ibid.).

#### **1.4 Cultural fusion between Jews and Greeks.**

The question, then, is to what extent did the Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic world, and particularly in Alexandria, merely respect and allow for each other’s religion and culture, and to what extent they interacted and fused with each other? Schama notes that the Jews and Greeks of the Ptolemaic period were so different in their religion and culture: “Both were ‘august’ and, in their respective ways, ‘admirable’, but they did not mix. Greeks pursued self-realisation; Jews struggled at self-conquest. ‘Be obedient’ was the sovereign command of Judaism; ‘be true to your nature’ was what mattered to the Hellene” (Schama 2013:88). Thus it seems that the existence of a ‘Hellenised-Jew’ would be very unlikely.

However, much historical evidence suggests that during the two hundred years from Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt to the later Roman conquest, Hellenism and Judaism did co-exist and converge. For example, one of the oldest (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) continuous Hebrew texts was discovered in the Hellenised Fayyum region of the mid-Nile (Schama 2013:90). It contained the ten commandments from Exodus and the Shema prayer from Deuteronomy. The Shema was a daily prayer, and so it is likely that this text was used in a daily religious observance, by an Egyptian Jew, or community of Jews, living in a highly hellenised region.

Again, a large body of papyri, discovered in the region of Heracleopolis, South of Cairo, show that the Jews there were living under the Graeco-Egyptian law, whilst still upholding their

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<sup>26</sup> Translated by Whiston 1901:295.



Jewish Scriptural law.

One example of this is the papyrus, *P.Polit.Jud.* 7. This papyrus, dating from 134 BCE, was written by Dorotheos, a Jew of Heracleopolis, who was petitioning for the return of his niece to his custody. (The name Dorotheos already suggests cultural fusion as it is a Greek name meaning "God's Gift", referring to the almighty God that the Jews believed in and yet it is in the Greek language.) Dorotheos identifies himself as belonging to a politeuma (a Jewish community within Egypt) and he address the archons, who were the rulers within that community. The archons, from the Greek, ἄρχοντες, for leaders, acted as legal judges for the Jews. Dorotheos has taken in his brother's daughter Philippa, and yet his complaint is that his brother's wife has now stolen Philippa from him. Dorotheos petitions the archons for her return (*P.Polit.Jud.* 7,1-2.).

The blending of Jewish and Greek laws here is evident in two ways. Firstly, Dorotheos, uses the Greek system for his dispute: A Politeuma has been set up, with archons to decide on legal matters. Dorotheos appeals to the Greek notion of guardianship. He claims that his brother, "gave Philippa into my charge, as a member of my household" (ibid.). But secondly, Dorotheos uses his Jewish torah as the basis for his appeal. He argues that in looking after Philippa he was obeying the Jewish law. Thus he says that he cared for Philippa and her father when they were destitute, and he cared for her as an orphan when her father died (ibid.). Both these are clear commands from the Old Testament. For example, *Leviticus* says, "If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you" (25.35).<sup>27</sup> And *Exodus* says that the fatherless must not be abused (22.22).<sup>28</sup> Dorotheos is showing how, as a Jew, he is upholding these Torah principles. Thus Dorotheos, the Jew in Egypt, bearing a Greek name, writing in common Greek, using the Greek system to resolve his dispute, presents his petition using both Greek and Jewish law.

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<sup>27</sup> New International Version translation 1988:138.

<sup>28</sup> New International Version translation 1988:86.



Many other papyri reveal different legal situations to Dorotheos', and yet a similar approach to these legal situations. Together they show the existence of a group of cosmopolitan Jews in Egypt - Jews who could communicate in a foreign language; Jews who were happy to argue their cases using the law of their religion, and the law of their new homeland.

Commenting on these papyri, and their significance, Schama notes: "A rich archive of papyri surviving from Herakleopolis, south of Cairo – where, as elsewhere, the Jews constituted an autonomous, self-governing politeuma – reveals that while they had the right to use Torah law in matters of marriages, divorce or contracted loans, they did so only when it was likely to help their case"(2013:89-90).

A further text that indicates the fusion of Greek and Jewish culture is *The Letter of Aristeas*. The author of this letter, Aristeas, claims to be a courtier of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who reigned 283-246BCE. He addresses his letter to his brother, Philocrates, and describes the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek Septuagint. Scholars generally agree that this letter was not concurrent with the events it describes, and that the author was not a Greek courtier, but Jewish. However, scholars disagree on the author's agenda. For example, Thackeray argues that this letter is Jewish propaganda aimed at Greeks, to elevate the Jews: "The writer is clearly a Jew of Alexandria, not a heathen courtier as he professes to be, and his main object is to magnify the Jewish nation in the eyes of the Greek world by narrating the honour bestowed upon it by a Greek monarch and the praise accorded to it by heathen lips" (1904:2). Metzger, agrees with this view arguing that: "Most scholars who have analyzed the letter have concluded that the author cannot have been the man he represented himself to be but was a Jew who wrote a fictitious account in order to enhance the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures by suggesting that a pagan king had recognized their significance and therefore arranged for their translation into Greek" (2001:15). Whereas Hadas argues that this is Greek propaganda, written by a Jew in order to promote Hellenism: "When we realize that it was to his fellow Jews that he addressed his book, the other motive becomes clear. What this book is seeking above all to do is not to win the respect of the Greeks for the Jews, but the respect of the Jews for the Greeks" (1959:92).



The fact that these scholars disagree almost strengthens the point of *The Letter of Aristeas*. At times it seems to be promoting the Jews to the Greeks; at other times it seems to be promoting the Greeks to the Jews. No matter the author's agenda, his intended purpose still comes through: to highlight the common ground between the Jewish and Hellenistic religions. An example of this can be seen when the author claims to address Ptolemy. The author argues that Jewish slaves in Egypt should be emancipated because: "The God who gave them their law is the God who maintains your kingdom. They worship the same God - the Lord and Creator of the Universe, as all other men, as we ourselves, O king, though we call him by different names, such as Zeus or Dis" (16-17).<sup>29</sup> Here the author is arguing that the Jews and Greeks in fact worship the same God.

A little later the author records Ptolemy's decision, prompted by the chief librarian at Alexandria, to appeal to the high-priest Eleazar, in Jerusalem, to send scholars to Alexandria to translate the scriptures into Greek. The records of Ptolemy's appeal and Eleazar's reply are warm and respectful. Thus Ptolemy ends his letter saying, "If you will write to me concerning your wishes in these matters, you will confer a great favour upon me and afford me a new pledge of friendship, for all your wishes shall be carried out as speedily as possible" (40).<sup>30</sup> Eleazar then replies addressing Ptolemy in these words, "Eleazar the High priest sends greetings to King Ptolemy his true friend" (41).<sup>31</sup> Throughout these letters the language is full of praise and mutual respect, as though the author is at pains to stress that the highest Jewish leader and the highest Greek leader can see each other as equals.

Lastly, when the Jewish translators arrive with Eleazar in Alexandria, they enjoy a banquet with Ptolemy that turns into a long philosophical discussion. At one point in the discussion Ptolemy says to his philosophers, concerning the Jews: "It is my opinion that these men excel in virtue and possess extraordinary knowledge, since on the spur of the moment they have given fitting answers to these questions which I have put to them, and have all made God the starting-point of their words" (200).<sup>32</sup> The Greek king extols the wisdom and religion of these

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<sup>29</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>30</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>31</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>32</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.



Jews from Jerusalem. Schama states that this went a long way in uniting Greeks and Jews. It gave the former “confidence that not only were the Jews on a level intellectual footing with the Greeks, but that from the storehouse of their own venerable wisdom they might even have something to teach the Gentiles” (98).

Although there is much common ground between the Jews and Greek philosophers in these discussions, the Jewish answers given to the Greek questions do not seem to compromise the Jewish religion. When Ptolemy asks what is the highest good in life he receives the answer: “To know that God is Lord of the Universe” (195).<sup>33</sup> This reflects teachings found throughout the Jewish scriptures such as in the book of *Deuteronomy* : “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God”(7.9).<sup>34</sup> Or when Ptolemy asks how to face trouble with equanimity, he receives the answer : “If you have a firm grasp of the thought that all men are appointed by God to share the greatest evil as well as the greatest good, since it is impossible for one who is a man to be exempt from these” (197).<sup>35</sup> This sounds strikingly similar to the Jewish book of *Ecclesiastes* which claims that at different times mankind will experience good and evil (7.14).<sup>36</sup> And so it continues: the Jewish priests offer orthodox answers to Greek questions. Schama describes this banquet as, “a Greek-style symposium, albeit with kosher catering. The king asks courteously deferential questions about how best to reign, indeed how best to live, and receives decidedly Jewish answers” (2013:99).

Josephus attributes this fusion of Greek and Jewish ways to Alexander. He records how Alexander entered Jerusalem, and then, instead of conquering it, paid tribute to the Jewish high priest. When Alexander was queried on his actions, he said, “I did not adore him [the high priest], but that God who hath honored him with his high priesthood”(11.2.5).<sup>37</sup> Alexander then apparently offered a sacrifice in the temple to this Jewish God, and spent time discoursing with the Jewish priests. The next day he called a Jewish multitude together and according to Josephus promised them, “that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired. And when they

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<sup>33</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>34</sup> New International Version translation 1988:201.

<sup>35</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>36</sup> New International Version translation 1988:749.

<sup>37</sup> Translated by Whiston 1901:244.



entreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired" (ibid.). Thus it was Alexander's intention that in all his empire, the Jews could uphold their own religious laws. He even promised the Jews who chose to become his soldiers that within his army they could, "continue under the laws of their forefathers, and live according to them"(ibid.). According to Josephus, Alexander set the precedent of a Greek speaking leader who honored the Jewish faith, allowing religious observance, even within his Greek army.

Thus, Josephus, along with the *Letter of Aristeas*, and the Jewish papyri in Hellenised Egypt, seem to indicate that in and around Alexandria, under the initial influence of Alexander, a meeting and mixing of Jewish and Greek cultures began.

However, Gruen provides a compelling case for much of the content of the *Letter of Aristeas* to "not be confused with history" (1998:208). Gruen concedes that the translation of the Pentateuch most probably happened in Alexandria - evidenced by the fact that as late as Philo, an annual festival was still being celebrated on the island of Pharos in order to commemorate the completion of the task- and that Palestinian scholars may have been called in to execute the work.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Gruen argues that much of the story surrounding the translation of the Septuagint was fabricated: "the patronage of the Ptolemaic court, the involvement of eminent Greek literary figures, the diplomatic exchanges, the interrogation at the banquet – not to mention the still more fanciful details like Eleazer's lecture to Ptolemy's envoys on Jewish customs or the seventy-two days required for the translation by seventy-two elders. The yarn spun by the *Letter of Aristeas* is largely creative fiction" (1998:210). Gruen's theory for the purpose of authorship is that the letter was not aiming at cultivating synthesis between Judaism and Hellenism, rather it was an attempt at establishing the superiority of Judaism within a broader culture in which it found itself. Thus Gruen concludes: "The idea, prevalent in modern scholarship, that it promoted a synthesis between Judaism and Hellenism is inadequate... This narrative, like so many others, implies that Jews are fully at home in the world of Hellenic culture" (1998:221).

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<sup>38</sup> Gruen, 1998:210



Nonetheless, the fact that there was a meeting of cultures cannot be disputed. For in his *Introduction* (1998:xv) Gruen articulates this reality well: "Jews engaged actively with the traditions of Hellas, adapting genres and transforming legends to articulate their own legacy in modes congenial to a Hellenistic setting. At the same time they recreated their past, retold stories in different shapes, and amplified the scriptural corpus itself through the medium of the Greek language and Greek literary forms. In a world where Hellenic culture held an ascendant position, Jews strained to develop their own cultural self-definition, one that would give them a place within the broader Mediterranean world and would also establish their distinctiveness. Those twin objectives operated conjointly."

### **1.5 The Creative Fruits of Cultural Engagement.**

The meeting of these cultures resulted in a number of creative fruits, namely; the synagogue, the Septuagint, development in educational methods, unique literature, the Great Library, the Alexandrian Museum and Stoic Cosmopolitanism.

#### The Synagogue.

The synagogue was invented by the Hellenistic-Jewish world. Initially synagogues simply referred to gatherings for the reading of the Torah, but later came to refer to the buildings- specifically designed for worship- for Jews who lived far from Jerusalem.

The style of these Jewish synagogues reflected Graeco-Roman architecture. The book of *Sukkah* in the *Babylonian Talmud* records this description of the Great synagogue in Alexandria: "It has been taught, R. Judah stated, He who has not seen the double colonnade of Alexandria in Egypt has never seen the glory of Israel. It was said that it was like a huge basilica, one colonnade within the other, and it sometimes held twice the number of people that went forth from Egypt. There were in it seventy-one cathedras of gold, corresponding to the seventy-one members of the Great Sanhedrin, not one of them containing less than twenty-one talents of gold, and a wooden platform in the middle upon which the attendant of the Synagogue stood with a scarf in his hand" (51.19-25).<sup>39</sup> Important here is the

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<sup>39</sup> Online Source: The Soncino English translation. (1952)



comparison of the synagogue with a huge basilica, with double colonnades. Basilicas were ancient Roman buildings, with double colonnades, built as law courts or for public assemblies. Thus this Jewish synagogue, here referred to as “the glory of Israel” is in fact based on Roman architecture.

Commenting on the synagogue architecture, Schama says, “Nearly always they were built in what we would immediately recognise as classical Greek temple style: pedimented porticos, entablatures, colonnaded aisles and richly decorative mosaic floors” (2013:91). Some synagogue facades dedicated the building to ὁ Θεός ὁ ὕψιστος. Again this highlights the fusion of cultures as this Greek is a direct translation of the Jewish name for the God Most High: *El Elyon* (ibid.). Philo also mentions in his *On the embassy to Gaius* that a number of Jewish synagogues in Alexandria, before they were destroyed by the Roman emperor, Caligula, had inscriptions to Roman emperors (20.133).<sup>40</sup>

During the Hellenistic period synagogues flourished. Jewish writers testify to their number and splendor. Philo records that Alexandria had many synagogues throughout every part of the city, and that these synagogues were full of ornaments of, “gilded shields and gilded crowns, pillars and inscriptions”(ibid.).

Thus the synagogue, developed out of Jewish necessity in a Hellenistic world, became an example of cultural fusion that enabled the Jews to retain their religious devotion in a foreign land. And this necessity provided a model for Jews throughout the ages. So Schama, a Jew living in New York, says, “with the exceptions that none of them segregated the sexes, and their strong taste for mosaic floors – the original Judeo-Greek synagogue is recognisable as the prototype of our own” (2013:91).

#### The Septuagint: The Law into Greek.

In Alexandria, Greek became the common language for communication between the various people groups. This is possibly the reason, that the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, was commissioned.

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<sup>40</sup> Translated by Colson 1991:67.



The earliest writer to mention the production of the Septuagint is Aristobulus, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE Jewish philosopher. His works are lost but a few quotations of his were recorded in the writings of Eusebius. For example, in *Church History*, as Eusebius describes a number of Jewish philosophers, he mentions Aristobulus in passing as, “the famous Aristobulus, who was chosen among the seventy interpreters of the sacred and divine Hebrew Scriptures by Ptolemy Philadelphus and his father, and who also dedicated his exegetical books on the law of Moses to the same kings” (7.32.16).<sup>41</sup> Ptolemy Philadelphus reigned in Egypt from 283 to 246BCE and so according to Eusebius, the Septuagint was translated during this time.

As discussed above, the *Letter of Aristeas* describes in more detail the process of this translation. It was initiated by the king’s librarian, Demetrius Phalereus on behalf of the Alexandrian library (1913:9).<sup>42</sup> The king then sent a deputation, including Aristeas, to Eleazar, the high-priest in Jerusalem, to request a copy of the Jewish Law and seventy-two interpreters (1913:38-39).<sup>43</sup> Eleazar agreed and sent translators who began work that was recorded by Demetrius, and completed in 72 days (1913:307).<sup>44</sup>

Thus what seems clear is that the Septuagint was commissioned by a Greek-speaking Egyptian king on behalf of the Royal Library at Alexandria. From here the Hellenistic Jews could have obtained copies to read the scriptures in the common language of Greek. Some scholars have questioned whether the translation could have been executed by Palestinian Jews. For example, one 19<sup>th</sup> Century CE English translator of the Septuagint, Laurence Brenton, says that Palestinian Jews had up till then little interaction with Greeks, not enough to translate their Scriptures into the Greek language. Also, he argues that the Septuagint contains words and expressions which plainly denote its Alexandrian origin (1844:1).

One could argue that the Septuagint was translated by Alexandrian Jews in order to have the scriptures in their common language. However, the Jews had not long been in Alexandria at that time, and so possibly had not yet felt the need to forego the Scriptures in their original

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<sup>41</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:512.

<sup>42</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>43</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>44</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.



Hebrew in favour of the more common Greek. Also, there is no other record of any other versions having been made by Jews into the languages of other countries, countries in which they had resided for longer than in Egypt.

Thus, although the means and purpose of translation can be disputed, there seems no reason to question the account that an Egyptian king commissioned the translation of the Hebrew scriptures for the Royal Alexandrian library. In doing so, Alexandria made available, in the language of the day, the teachings of the orthodox Jewish faith. The scriptures became accessible to those who could not speak Hebrew. And the fusion of the Greeks and the Jews resulted not only in an opportunity for pluralism, but in the creation of a new and substantial literary work.

### Education

“The most significant characteristic of the Greeks is that no group of them settled anywhere without at once establishing a school, and organized education was the most important single factor in the process of hellenization and also in the resistance to that process” (Hadas 1959:59).

The Greek concept of education, embodied in the word, παιδεία, did not merely focus on training. Even Before, the Hellenistic period, education for the Greeks centered on attitudes, as well as accomplishments. This idea is reflected in Homer. For example, in the *Iliad*, Achilles’ childhood carer, Phoenix, says that his role in Achilles’ life was , “to teach you all these things, to make a speaker of you and a man of action” (9:442-443).<sup>45</sup> Achilles’ παιδεία consisted in learning to speak well and act well. On a wider scale, the first four Books of the *Odyssey*, show how Telemachus is learning to become a gentleman – someone who not only possesses wisdom but acts on it. For example, as he deliberates over voyaging in search of his father, Ulysses, Athena says this to him: "Today has proved you, Telemachus, neither a coward or a fool, nor destined to be such, if we are right in thinking that your father’s manly vigour has descended to his son – and what a man he was in action and debate” (2:270-272).<sup>46</sup> Athena

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<sup>45</sup> Translated by Rieu 1957:172.

<sup>46</sup> Translated by Rieu 1946:44.



is praising Telemachus' wisdom and courage, attributes he learned from his father who was wise both in action and debate.

This concept continued in education later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE under Plato's influence. At his Academy he taught not only skills and knowledge like maths and astronomy, but also philosophy. In Plato's *Letters* he states that the student should not only focus on his daily skills but he should also be, "beyond all else cleaving fast to philosophy and to that mode of daily life which will best make him apt to learn and of retentive mind and to reason with himself properly" (7.340).<sup>47</sup> In education, Plato did not separate philosophy, or reasoning with oneself, from knowledge and skills.

At this time, however, the Greek concept of education largely pivoted on personal instruction, not textbooks. Plato argued in his seventh epistle that his teachings should be acquired from long interaction with him, and not from reading his writings. One of the changes that happened in the Hellenistic period, is that Greek teaching became more textbook-oriented. Euclid, a Greek mathematician living in Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE began to record his mathematical proofs in textbook-like documents (Hadas 1959:67). This practice was then taken up by Epicurus, the Athenian philosopher, who began systematizing his knowledge into textbooks (ibid.). This concept was not new to the Egyptians. Their education had always been scribal and the trade of scribe was highly sort after. Scribes were seen to be the guardians of knowledge, and were often used in influential positions such as government (ibid.:68). And so it seems likely that Euclid, a Greek scholar living in Alexandria, was influenced by the Egyptian emphasis on recording knowledge. Thus, the Greek educational emphasis shifted from learning through a teacher, to learning through a teacher and his writings.

Cultural fusion also stimulated educational change in the Jewish tradition. Jewish education involved teaching the Torah. An extract from *Deuteronomy* highlights this: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you

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<sup>47</sup> Translated by Bury 1966.



walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates” (6.4).<sup>48</sup> The commands of God were taught to children, in every context – at home, in public, by day and by night. The responsibility lay on parents to instruct their children in these commands. The focus of Old Testament teaching was imparting knowledge, based on revelation.

At some point, however, the Jewish rabbis, adjusted this system. The *Mishnah* (the oral tradition of interpreting the *Torah*) was compiled and recorded in writing in 200CE. In the following centuries it was studied and discussed by rabbis. Eventually these discussions and comments were included with the *Mishnah* and together the document was referred to as the *Talmud*. The *Jerusalem Talmud* was compiled around 350CE, including comments from Palestinian rabbis, and the *Babylonian Talmud* was completed around 500CE including comments from Babylonian rabbis. However by the time both these *Talmuds* were recorded they had incorporated a Greek approach to education. The Socratic method of posing questions or difficulties and then answering them had been introduced. For example, in the book of *Shekalim*, in the *Babylonian Talmud*, under the topic of Priests giving monetary offerings, two rabbis give different opinions. One rabbi then uses the example of a priest misinterpreting the relevant passage in Leviticus. After that, some instructions on offerings are given (2.20-27). The system still involves instruction from the Torah, but it includes dialogue and discussion leading up to this instruction. And this is the pattern throughout. “The method that the rabbis used for reaching truth can only be described as a species of Socratic dialectic” (Hadas 1959:79).

The different educational emphases between Egyptians, Greeks and Jews, during the Hellenistic period, resulted in a philosophy of education that still influences us today. In much of the West, education still centers on instruction and memorisation (Jewish), dialogue and discussion (Greek), and recording and writing (Egyptian).

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<sup>48</sup> New International Version translation 1988:200.



## Literature

One of the fruits of cultural engagement in Hellenistic times was religious Jewish literature that was influenced by Greek ideas. Some of this literature remained outside of the orthodox body of Jewish writing, and some did not. An example of the first type of literature is *The Works of Philo*. Philo was a Jewish philosopher, who lived in Alexandria, from around 25BCE to 50CE. As previously mentioned, it is unclear whether Philo was trying to make Greek philosophy palatable to Jews or Jewish religion palatable to Greeks. But either way he was trying to unite the two and point out what he perceived as common ground. He often tried to show that Greek philosophers were borrowing from the Torah. For example, in his *Quis Rerum Divinarum*, after explaining from the Jewish creation account that the world is made up of opposites, he then concludes: “Is not this the thing which the Greeks say that Heraclitus, that great philosopher who is so celebrated among them, put forth as the leading principle of his whole philosophy, and boasted of it as if it were a new discovery? For it is in reality an ancient discovery of Moses, that out of the same thing opposite things are produced having the ratio of parts to the whole, as has here been shown” (43.213).<sup>49</sup> Here the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greek philosopher Heraclitus is said to have learnt his philosophy on the *Unity of Opposites* from Moses’ creation account in the Old Testament book of *Genesis*.

Again in *Quod Omnis Probus Liber*, after discussing the Greek philosopher Zeno’s point of view on wise and foolish speech, Philo says this: “But Zeno appears to have drawn this maxim of his as it were from the fountain of the legislation of the Jews (Gen. 28:1)” (8.57).<sup>50</sup>

In some ways, Philo’s writings are more an example of religious relativism, than religious pluralism. Heraclitus’ *Unity of Opposites* taught that opposites existed in all things, including God, and that these opposites caused constant change in the world, and yet remained in constant unity: “Graspings: things whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one” (Fragment B10).<sup>51</sup> However, the point of the creation account in *Genesis* seems to be to emphasise that God created the world, and that this creation was

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<sup>49</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:135.

<sup>50</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:518-519.

<sup>51</sup> John Burnet 1920.



good. The account begins with this point: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1.1); and the account ends with: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (1:31).<sup>52</sup> The introduction and conclusion frame the author’s point: God created and it was good. Throughout chapter 1 the repeated phrases are: “Let there be” and “it was good”. The emphasis is clear. So, although God did create using opposites - day and night, sun and moon, sea and land - it would be hard to argue that the author mentions these opposites in order to prove Heraclitus’ philosophical theory.

In his eagerness to reconcile Greek philosophy and Jewish religion Philo seems to have done justice to neither. This is common in his treatment of other philosophies also: “Philo’s adaptations may force the meaning of Plato unduly (but not nearly so much as he forces the meaning of Scripture)” (Hadas 1959:76).

Philo misinterprets both schools of thought and blends them. This is understandable in his context, and yet it seems that in so doing he takes away the power for these two religious philosophies to genuinely engage.

Another example of Jewish religious literature, influenced by Hellenistic thought, is the Old Testament book of *Ecclesiastes*. This book avoids relativism and yet is a good example of the fruits of cross-cultural and cross-religious engagement. Many scholars believe *Ecclesiastes* was written by a religious Jew in the Hellenistic period (Bartholomew 2009:54-55).

The influence of Greek thought can be seen in its format. Greek philosophers, like the Stoics, used the form of a diatribe to resolve philosophical issues. This form consisted of a question and answer format; raising and answering hypothetical questions; and then finally ending with the refutation of false ideas. *Ecclesiastes* follows this format. Furthermore the hypotheses the author raises are often from the most common schools of thought in Hellenistic Greece: Stoicism, Epicureanism and Cynicism. For example, the first hypothesis put forward is a cynical one, the meaningless of life: “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything

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<sup>52</sup> New International Version translation 1988:2.



is meaningless” (1.1-2).<sup>53</sup> He then goes on to discuss the meaningless of work, study, pleasure and justice. Later, the author raises a different hypothesis, this time an Epicurean one, the pursuit of pleasure: “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?(2.24-25).<sup>54</sup>

And then after discussing the structuring of creation he again concludes: “I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God (3.12-13).<sup>55</sup> And yet at the end of that section, the author again concludes that everything is meaningless.

The raising and contrasting of these two schools of thought continues throughout the book, and thrown in between are some obvious Stoical injunctions: “ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might”(9.10).<sup>56</sup> “If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest”(10.4)<sup>57</sup>, and “Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that or whether both will do equally well” (11.6).<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the book, the author raises these schools of thought and yet he never seems to find them entirely satisfactory. Work is meaningless (Cynical), and yet he encourages his readers to enjoy work (Epicurean), and he exhorts his readers to do work because it is part of man’s duty (Stoical). Yet the author can’t settle on any of these philosophies as the sum explanation for life. And thus he raises them, and engages with them, and yet he ends with a thoroughly orthodox Jewish statement: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or

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<sup>53</sup> New International Version translation 1988:744.

<sup>54</sup> New International Version translation 1988:745-746.

<sup>55</sup> New International Version translation 1988:746.

<sup>56</sup> New International Version translation 1988:751.

<sup>57</sup> New International Version translation 1988:752.

<sup>58</sup> New International Version translation 1988:753.



evil" ( 12:13-14).<sup>59</sup> It is as though the author sees that these various philosophies are helpful, and yet he still believes they must be viewed in light of the over-arching Jewish command: Fear God and obey Him. Commenting on the fact that this conclusion rejects the philosophies that *Ecclesiastes* has been considering, Hadas says: "This note has been explained by almost every modern critic as the addition of a devout editor who was disturbed by the heterodoxy of the book. Even such a note might have been uttered by the writer of a diatribe" (1959:144).

### The Great Library.

The *Letter of Aristeas* records that a large amount of money was given to the chief librarian, for the sake of acquiring and translating books for the Royal library in Alexandria: "Demetrius of Phalerum, the president of the king's library, received vast sums of money, for the purpose of collecting together, as far as he possibly could, all the books in the world. By means of purchase and transcription, he carried out, to the best of his ability, the purpose of the king. On one occasion when I was present he was asked, How many thousand books are there in the library? and he replied, 'More than two hundred thousand, O king, and I shall make endeavour in the immediate future to gather together the remainder also, so that the total of five hundred thousand may be reached'" (9-10).<sup>60</sup>

The Septuagint was one of these library projects, but other literature also flourished. For example, it was at this time that Manetho, an Egyptian priest living in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, composed his history of Egypt. He wrote in Greek, but gave a history of the Egyptian people, for the Egyptian people. His work exists in fragments, recorded in authors such as Josephus and Eusebius. However, in his *Chronica*, Eusebius claims that it was a large work - an account of Egyptian history that filled three books (44).<sup>61</sup>

Thus, under the Ptolemies, fresh knowledge was recorded, often at the direction of the head librarian. And at the library it was not just stored, but also copied and distributed: "Ptolemy I not only sought in the most modern spirit to organize the finding of fresh knowledge. He tried also to set up an encyclopedic storehouse of wisdom in the Library of Alexandria. It was not

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<sup>59</sup> New International Version translation 1988:754.

<sup>60</sup> Translated by Charles 1913.

<sup>61</sup> Translated by Bedrosian 2008.



simply a storehouse, it was also a book-copying and book-selling organization. A great army of copyists was set to work perpetually multiplying copies of books” (Wells 1922:151).

### The Museum.

Around 30BCE the historian and geographer, Strabo, visited Alexandria. This is the description he gave of the museum: “The Museum is a part of the palaces. It has a public walk and a place furnished with seats, and a large hall, in which the men of learning, who belong to the Museum, take their common meal” (17.1.8)<sup>62</sup>. The museum was not like a modern museum. It was essentially a place for scholars to meet – a place for them to work, to walk, to eat, to interact and to study.

Ptolemy I funded both the museum, and the scholars of the museum. From this enterprise, came a golden age of discovery. At the museum, Euclid developed his geometric proofs that are still studied today. Eratosthenes, the mathematician and geographer, developed a formula to measure the circumference of the earth. Hipparchus, the astronomer and developer of trigonometry, made the first map of the stars. Hero, the mathematician and engineer, developed the first steam engine. Herophilus, the physicist, became one of the greatest anatomists, and came to be regarded as the father of anatomy (Wells 1922:151).

Commenting on the museum and library, Wells says: “Here then we have the definite first opening up of the intellectual process in which we live to-day; here we have the systematic gathering and distribution of knowledge. The foundation of this Museum and Library marks one of the great epochs in the history of mankind. It is the true beginning of Modern History” (ibid.).

However, Wells states that after Ptolemy II there was a decline in what the Museum produced. He connects this decline to the fact that the Ptolemies chose and funded the Museums’ scholars. That worked well while the Ptolemies had Greek influence. But as the Ptolemies progressed they were less influenced by Greek thought and they became more Egyptianised, influenced by Egyptian priests and religion that did not value enquiry to the

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<sup>62</sup> Translated by Hamilton 1857:229.



same extent as the Greeks (ibid.). Strabo records that the museum had its own priest (17.1.8)<sup>63</sup>. Perhaps this is an example of when the dominance of one religion in an educational institution squashes intellectual enquiry.

#### Stoicism and Stoic Cosmopolitanism.

One of the philosophies that flourished in the cultural fusion of the Hellenistic age, even though it pre-dates the Hellenistic age, is Stoic Cosmopolitanism. Plutarch, in his *On the Virtue of Alexander*, attributes the idea to the Greek philosopher, Zeno: “Moreover, the much-admired Republic of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, may be summed up in this one main principle: that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity”(1.6).<sup>64</sup> This is the essence of Stoic Cosmopolitanism: that mankind is not divided by cities and communities, but rather mankind is united in one cosmopolitan community – a community that transcends race. Plutarch goes on to argue that Alexander gave flesh to this idea of Stoic Cosmopolitanism. As he conquered the world, he united all mankind into one community (1.6).<sup>65</sup>

Laertius, in his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, states that Stoic Cosmopolitanism was explored further by Chrysippus, the pupil of Zeno (1.10).<sup>66</sup> Chrysippus was a Greek Stoic philosopher who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, mostly in Athens. According to Cicero, in *On the Nature of Gods*, Chrysippus believed that “divine power is placed in reason and in the spirit and mind of universal nature, that the world with a universal effusion of its spirit, is god, that the superior part of that spirit which is mind and reason, is the great principle of nature, containing and preserving all things...and to those men likewise who have attained immortality” (1.15).<sup>67</sup> For Chrysippus, humans and nature and the entire world were united by a guiding principle. This principle involved mind, reason, god and the common nature of things. Mankind was part of the common polis or community, when they lived in agreement with this principle. Membership did not depend on race.

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<sup>63</sup> Translated by Hamilton 1857:229.

<sup>64</sup> Translated by Babbitt 1936:399.

<sup>65</sup> Translated by Babbitt 1936:399.

<sup>66</sup> Translated by Yonge 1851:10.

<sup>67</sup> Translated by Yonge 1888:224.



Later Roman Stoics thought citizenship of the common polis was based on rationality. For example, Seneca, a first century Roman Stoic philosopher, says that there is only one thing that makes a man human: “It is his spirit. And the perfection of his reason in that spirit” (Letter 41).<sup>68</sup>

The fruition in some ways of this Stoic cosmopolitanism can be seen in the New Testament writings of the apostle Paul. Writing his *Epistle to the Galatians* in around 50CE, he says, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (3.28).<sup>69</sup> Citizenship of the common polis here is based on mankind’s relationship to Christ Jesus. The Jewish Old Testament promise of God’s blessing used to apply only to Abraham’s seed – the Jews); but now it applies to Jews or Greeks, slaves or freemen, male or female. But just like Chrysippus, and Seneca who went before him, there is still a condition to citizenship in the cross-cultural polis.

### **1.6. The Decline of Alexandria’s Pluralism.**

Philo’s writings testify that the pluralism of Alexandria came to an end. In his *Against Flaccus*, written when Gaius Caligula was emperor, he reports that the Alexandrian governor, Flaccus, gave license to Alexandrians to desecrate and destroy the Jewish synagogues (6.42)<sup>70</sup>, deprive the Jews of their rights under the law (8.53)<sup>71</sup>, evacuate them from their living quarters and destroy their houses and businesses (8.56-57)<sup>72</sup>, and kill whole families (9.65-68)<sup>73</sup>. The major decline in the situation in Alexandria for other religions seems to have come with the decline of the Ptolemaic-Greek empire and the rise of the Romans.

“These conflicts intensified with the arrival of the Romans in Egypt in 30 BCE, as a consequence of their contestation of the Jews’ civil rights granted to them by the previous

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<sup>68</sup> Translated by Campbell 1974:88.

<sup>69</sup> New International Version translation 1988:223.

<sup>70</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:69

<sup>71</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:72.

<sup>72</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:73.

<sup>73</sup> Translated by Yonge 1855:74.



rulers” (Bartlett 1985:20-1). The pluralism taught and lived by Alexander and his successors the Ptolemies, that flourished in Alexandria had come to an end. The age that allowed three very different religions and cultures - Jews, Greeks, Egyptians - to live, work and thrive alongside each other, was no longer. But the fruits of this pluralism continue to influence and enrich our modern world.

## **1.7. Conclusion.**

In his preface to *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution Of The Hellenistic Age*, Green points out the parallels between the Hellenistic age and our current world:

“As my work proceeded, it acquired an unexpected and in ways alarming dimension. I could not help being struck, again and again, by an overpowering sense of *déjà vu*, far more than for any other period of ancient history known to me” (1990: xxi).

One of the striking parallels Green highlights is the issue of religious fundamentalism. Religion and its place in society will always be an issue. Even with the recent rise of a hard-line secular movement seeking to eradicate religion altogether, it is plausible to assume that religion (in its various forms) is here to stay. There have been two serious attempts to eradicate religion in the 20th century alone - and both failed. The first was in China where the political leadership eradicated virtually all religion and still did not destroy it. Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism all made a resurgence. The second took place in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union generations of people were forcibly raised to be secular, yet, today a large percentage of Russians identify as Christians.<sup>74</sup>

After the decline of Alexandria’s cosmopolitan age, the Western world endured a long period void of religious liberty. This is why the drafting of the American constitution, with its provision for freedom in faith, was such a turning point.

Simon, in a lecture on the topic of Religion and Civil Society argues that the American constitution was, “an unprecedented break from 1,500 years of political history since the time

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<sup>74</sup>Online Source: Russians Return to Religion But Not to Church. (*The Pew Forum*, 2014)



Constantine ordained Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire in 312 A.D.”

In preparation for the drafting of the Constitution, James Madison, America’s fourth president (1809-1817), argued in his *Memorial and Remonstrance*: “Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence”.<sup>75</sup>

It is speculation as to how much of this Alexander had formulated in his thinking with regard to religious liberty, but what is clear is that he provided the foundation for what became a pluralistic society. Even though religious fundamentalists were present they were not allowed to rule. And this provision of religious liberty and cultural fusion resulted in some remarkable developments. As Hadas rightly claimed, “The fusion of cultures which the drive to Hellenize achieved marks a major turning point in the history of civilization” (1959:2-3).

In the same way today, society needs religious liberty. Religious liberty is much more than just liberty for the religious. It is also liberty for the non-religious. It allows people to adhere to their own religions and yet to engage with contradictory philosophy - as does the writer of *Ecclesiastes*. It allows people to gather and record knowledge from all cultures, regardless of their beliefs, as did the scholars of The Great Museum. Like the Stoic Cosmopolitans, it allows people regardless of their background to be part of the brotherhood of humanity. But in order to practise religious liberty, we need guidelines for religious engagement. In the next chapter I will look at the model for religious engagement offered by Paul the apostle and the Athenian philosophers.

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<sup>75</sup> Online Source: *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*. (Madison, J. 1785)



## Chapter Two: The Model of Religious Debate Between Paul the Apostle and the Greek Philosophers in *Acts* 17.

### 2.1 The Historical Reliability of the Book of Acts

Before considering Paul's speech in Athens, it is important to establish the historic reliability of the speeches recorded in the Biblical book of *Acts*. Tradition attributes authorship of *Acts* to Luke, the physician and companion of Paul. Paul in his letter to the *Colossians* refers to Luke as a beloved companion and as a doctor: "Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς" (4:14).<sup>76</sup>

Also accepted in the traditional view is that the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles* are to be read as a pair. Three facts are cited as evidence in support of this. Firstly, both books are dedicated to the same recipient, namely Theophilus. Secondly, reference is made in the preface of *Acts* to the author's former book about the life of Jesus. And thirdly, both books are written in the same Greek literary style. Commenting on this similarity, Schnelle, says, "the extensive linguistic and theological agreements and cross-references between the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts* indicate that both works derive from the same author" (1998:259).

In his book on Luke, Strelan notes that scholars differ regarding the authorship of *Luke*. Some view the book as compiled by a different Luke, or as compiled by an anonymous author (2008:99). However, Strelan goes on to show that a number of reputable *Luke-Acts* scholars argue that both books must be attributed to Luke the physician for three reasons. Firstly, some manuscripts of the gospel have texts claiming that Luke is the author. Secondly, some of the church fathers attributed this gospel to Luke. And thirdly, the writing has evidence of being written by a doctor and a companion to Paul, both of which fit the description of Luke (2008:99).

In his commentary on *Acts*, Stott argues that since both works derive from the same author,

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<sup>76</sup> Greek texts are from Nestle, E. & Aland, K. 1991. Translation is my own unless otherwise stated.



and are to be read as a pair, the introduction to *Luke* should be taken as the introduction to *Acts* also. He argues for this from historical precedent saying, “it was the custom in antiquity, whenever a work was divided into more than one volume, to prefix to the first a preface for the whole. In consequence, *Luke* 1:1-4 is the real preface to *Acts* as well as to the *Gospel*” (1990:22).

Stott then argues that the first few verses of *Luke* make a number of claims about the historical reliability of both *Luke* and *Acts*. Firstly, Luke claims to be recording actual events that took place in a specific location. He calls these events, “τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων” (the things that were accomplished among us)(1.1). ‘πεπληροφορημένων’ could just refer to the occurrence of events, but it could also refer to the fulfillment of events. In which case, Luke is appealing for the historicity of his book by reminding his readers that these events were not random but were foretold in the *Old Testament* – an argument which would hold more weight with his immediate audience than it does today.

Secondly, Luke claims to have heard about these events from actual eye-witnesses. He says in verse 2 that the information was given to him by “οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου” (the ones who were eye-witnesses and servants of the word, from the beginning). Luke was only an eye-witness to later events in *Acts*. So here he is claiming to have received his information from the apostles, who were with Jesus and the early church from the beginning.

Thirdly, not only did Luke receive information from eye-witnesses, he also carefully investigated, “παρηκολουθηκότι”, all that he did hear (1. 3). Luke here claims to be critical in his research.

Fourthly, in verse 3, Luke claims to have recorded this information in a manner that is “καθεξῆς” (orderly). He states in verse 1 that others have written accounts before him, so it is probable that he uses their accounts also, for example the gospel of *Mark*, but he also affirms that his account is an orderly version.

Fifthly, Luke’s record would have had readers who could investigate his claims, and check



their reliability. Luke addresses the writing to Theophilus (1.3), although he would have shared it with others. And Luke assumes that Theophilus would use what he has written to make his faith certain (1.4). Stott concludes that what Luke claims in this preface is that, “the events which had been accomplished, witnessed, transmitted, investigated and written down are (and still are) to be the ground of Christian faith and assurance” (1990:23). In other words, the records were trustworthy enough to be relied upon, and to be acted upon.

One internal reason for accepting the historicity of Luke’s records in *Acts* is that Luke claims to have been a traveling companion of Paul. A number of times in *Acts*, Luke uses the first person plural to indicate that he was with Paul (16.16, 20.13, 21.1). Being an eye-witness would have helped Luke to record Paul’s travels, doctrine and preaching more accurately. Also, Luke spent over two years in Israel, arriving with Paul in Jerusalem (21.17), and only leaving with Paul when they departed for Rome (27.1). In between, Luke had ample time to gather geographical, cultural and historical information for the first few chapters of *Acts*, which were set in Jerusalem. This information he compiles with the care that a historical document requires. As biblical scholar, Harnack, concludes: “The geographical and chronological references and notices in the book show the circumspection, the care, the consistency, and the trustworthiness of the writer” (1909:112). Sherwin-White agrees, arguing that Luke’s background knowledge in *Acts* is extensive: “His historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct. One walks the streets and market-places, the theaters and assemblies of first-century Ephesus or Thessalonica, Corinth, or Philippi, with the author of *Acts*” (1963:120).

However, concerning the *Acts* speeches, is Luke trustworthy? That is, does Luke’s record accurately reflect what Paul said at Athens? Foakes Jackson, in his commentary on *Acts* argues that Luke has composed the *Acts* speeches himself, possibly using sources. Thus he concludes, “Whatever these speeches may be, it cannot be disputed that they are wonderfully varied as to their character, and as a rule admirably suited to the occasion on which they were delivered” (1931:16).

Other biblical scholars, for example Bruce, argue that Luke aims to record as faithfully as possible what Paul said in his speeches. He argues that Luke follows the tradition of Greek



historical writers like Thucydides (1942:6). In the beginning of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides explains how he has recorded speeches: “In this history I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation” (1.22).<sup>77</sup> As a historian, Thucydides aims to record speeches faithfully. He tries to remember the precise words, and he questions informants who heard the speeches for the precise words. Yet, when he cannot remember them he sticks as closely to the general sense of the words, making sure they fit the context. This is a helpful comparison to Luke’s speech writing as it is unlikely that Luke, as he travelled with Paul, would have been able to record Paul’s speeches verbatim. However, from what has been observed concerning Luke’s carefulness with historical detail in the rest of *Acts*, it makes sense that he would try to be careful in recording speeches also.

Bruce acknowledges that some historical writers, such as Josephus, freely composed speeches for their historical figures (1942:7). However, this was usually to show off their writing skills. Polybius, another Greek historian, indicates that it was common practice for historians to show off their writing skills by composing eloquent speeches. He objected to this by stating, “A historian should leave these things to tragic poets, and should focus exclusively on what was actually done and said, even if some of these facts are rather unexciting. History and tragedy do not serve the same purposes” (2.56).<sup>78</sup> The fact that Polybius compares historians to tragic poets indicates that the Greek historians who did make up speeches, did it to display their rhetorical abilities.

Bruce then argues that if the aim in composing speeches was to show off your writing skills then this is another reason why Luke’s speeches seem to be genuine records: “For an author who could write such idiomatic Greek as the Prologue to the Third Gospel, the Greek of some

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<sup>77</sup> Translated by Warner 1972:47.

<sup>78</sup> Translated by Waterfield 2010:120.



of the speeches in Acts is surprisingly awkward” (1942:8). Furthermore, Bruce cites studies in which Luke’s records in his gospel are compared with Mark’s gospel. Scholars show that Luke uses *Mark*, or the same sources as Mark, and that Luke’s use of these sources, particularly when he quotes sayings or discourses, is very accurate (1942:8). Thus Bruce concludes that if Luke’s gospel speeches can be shown to be faithful then we need not doubt his *Acts* speeches: “If Luke comes off so well in reports of speeches where his fidelity to his sources can be tested, we should not without good reason suppose that he was less faithful where his sources are no longer available for comparison” (1942:8).

## 2.2 The Religious Context of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Athens.

Around 50CE, Paul the Apostle’s missionary journey through the Greek-speaking world brought him to Athens. The New Testament book of *Acts* records that whilst in Athens, Paul was greatly distressed to see that, “κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν” (the city was full of idols) (17.16).<sup>79</sup> In response, Paul began to reason both with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue, and with all people in the marketplace (17.17). It is unlikely that the Jews and God-fearing Greeks literally had idols in their synagogues and so it seems reasonable to assume that the idols that distressed Paul were not only physical idols but also religious beliefs that stood in contradiction to his. This raises the question: what were the dominant religious and philosophical beliefs of first century Athens?

In 1949 Latham wrote the following as an introduction to his translation of Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things*: “If you woke up one morning to discover that some miracle had transported you to Athens in the early years of the third century B.C., you would find yourself in a social and spiritual atmosphere not altogether unfamiliar. The political ideals of the city-state - liberty, democracy, national self-sufficiency – had lost their appeal in a world dominated by large-scale despotisms and shaken by economic crises and social unrest. The old gods retained their temples and their sacrifices, but had ceased to inspire a living faith. The master minds of the preceding century, Plato and Aristotle, seemed to have no message for the rising

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<sup>79</sup> Acts 17.16 also appears to echo the opening lines of Achilles Tatius of Alexandria’s *The Adventures of Leucippe and Cleitophon* (1.1.2).



generation – no medicine for the prevailing mood of disillusionment, scepticism, and fatalism” (1976:7).

According to Tarn, this political unrest and philosophical realignment that Latham is referring to, shaped the Hellenistic period, and resulted in a move from Aristotle, Plato and the old gods, to the philosophies of Stoicism, Scepticism and Epicureanism (1952:1).<sup>80</sup>

Latham aptly explains how each of these three new schools had their respective appeal: “In this setting, if you are one of those who believe that civilization with all its conventional values has been debunked, you would find congenial company among the followers of Diogenes the Cynic, whose simple and self-centred life in the tub had demonstrated how many valued assets of mind and body it is possible to do without. If you are a puzzled seeker after the Unknown God, you would find yourself no less at home among the Stoics, the devout company who gathered in the Painted Portico to hear that impassioned prophet Zeno of Cyprus proclaim his doctrine of submission to an all-wise Providence. And, if you are by temperament a rationalist, ready to welcome the assurance that modern science has disposed, once and for all, of the fairy-tales that pleased our grandparents and the bogeys that frightened them, then sooner or later you would find your way to that peaceful garden where Epicurus preached his gospel of salvation by common sense” (1976:7).

Tarn goes on to explain that a gradual change took place in the Hellenistic period leading up to the early Roman empire. Aristotle’s school lost influence, Plato’s school focussed on combating Stoicism and so in a sense lost its own identity, Epicurus’ school only appealed to a minority, but Stoicism swallowed up Skepticism and by incorporating some aspects of popular religious belief, became “the distinguishing philosophy of the earlier Roman Empire” (1952:325).

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<sup>80</sup> The notion that there was a general loss of belief in traditional gods and forms of cult is one that is rejected by most modern treatments of paganism written within the last 40 years. See, for example, Beard, M.; North, J. and Price, S. 1998. *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167-210.



### 2.3 The Beliefs of the Athenian Philosophers: Epicurean philosophy, Stoic philosophy and Paul's theology.

Luke specifically mentions that Paul engaged with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Thus it is important to understand the basics of their teachings and how they related to Paul's.

#### Epicureanism

Much of our knowledge of Epicureanism comes from Diogenes Laertius who recorded parts of Epicurus' letters (now lost), and summarized most of his teaching. Epicurus (341-271 B.C.E.) and his followers were essentially materialists. Epicurus argued that observations on our world should be made by using our sensations and our feelings; he did not believe that anything could be made from that which did not already exist; and he taught that everything that existed was made of body and space, what he called atom and void (*Vitae Philosophorum*, 10.38-39).<sup>81</sup> This he stated had been the case from everlasting and would go on into eternity (10.43-44).<sup>82</sup> Death for man was then just the breaking up of elements into their basic building blocks and as such it need hold no fear of pain (10.139).<sup>83</sup>

The goal, then, of Epicureanism was tranquility, and tranquility was achieved through pleasure. However, the pleasure was not necessarily sensual. It was more a freedom from pain. Again, this freedom from pain was not simplistic. Epicurus realised that sometimes humans needed to endure pain, to enjoy greater pleasures, and sometimes they needed to use pain to train themselves to be content with simple pleasures (10:129-130).<sup>84</sup> A helpful example Epicurus uses is of food, arguing that if you train yourself with hunger then simple food is a great pleasure: “μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἀποδίδωσιν ἡδονήν” (bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure) (10.131).<sup>85</sup>

One method of achieving tranquility that Epicurus advocated was to avoid false beliefs, that is, beliefs that he thought would cause pain. Epicurus divided these mistaken beliefs into false

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<sup>81</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 569.

<sup>82</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 573.

<sup>83</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 665.

<sup>84</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 655.

<sup>85</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 657.



views on the gods and false views on death. He encouraged people to believe in God, or the gods, but to believe about them correctly. The gods were immortal and blessed, and as such did not get angry, neither did they get involved in the affairs of men (10:124).<sup>86</sup> Concerning death, Epicurus believed that it was the ending of all consciousness (ibid.). At death humans simply ceased to exist (10:125).<sup>87</sup> Thus humans need not fear death because once unconscious there is no pain or suffering (ibid.). So Epicurus concludes: “οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατεληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηδὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν” (For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly apprehended that there are no terrors for him in ceasing to live) (ibid.).

In many ways there would have been no obvious common ground between the Epicurean philosophers and Paul's Christian theology. Paul believed in a God who had created the world (*Romans* 1.20), and this creation involved forming things from what had not previously existed (*Genesis* 1.1-2). Paul did not only believe in the material but also the spiritual and the invisible (*Ephesians* 1.3, 2.2). He believed that man's judgements should not be based on his sensations and feelings, but on God's law (*Romans* 2.12-15). And he believed that God's glory- and not man's pleasure- was man's greatest goal: “Ἐἴτε οὖν ἐσθίετε εἴτε πίνετε εἴτε τι ποιεῖτε, πάντα εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ” (Then whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God) (*First Epistle to the Corinthians* 10.31).

Again, rather than believing the gods were aloof from man, Paul believed that God became involved in the affairs of man to the extent that he became man in Jesus Christ: “ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς” (in him dwells all the fulness of God bodily) (*Colossians* 2.9). And lastly, Paul believed that at death there was not a nothingness, but a judgement and a future resurrection of the body (*Romans* 2.16 & *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 15.50-55).

Some common ground between Paul and the Epicureans would have been the belief that pain can sometimes train one to experience greater good in life (*Romans* 5.3-4); and also the

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<sup>86</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 651.

<sup>87</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925: 651.



promotion of the self-controlled enjoyment of physical pleasures (*First Timothy* 6.17 & *First epistle to the Corinthians* 10.31).

### Stoicism

Zeno of Citium (c.334-262 B.C.E.) was the founder of Stoicism. Later well-known Stoics were the ethicist, Epictetus (55-135 C.E.), and the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 C.E.). Again, in his *Vitae Philosophorum*, Diogenes Laertius records a helpful summary of much of the Stoic's teaching.

The Stoics believed that there were two principles at work in the universe – the active and the passive (*Vitae Philosophorum*, 7.134).<sup>88</sup> The passive principle was matter, and the active was reason. Reason was inherent in matter, or nature, thus when people acted in agreement with nature, they were in essence acting in agreement with reason (*ibid.*). The study of nature, then, allowed Stoics to live in accordance with nature more effectively.

Furthermore, there was no place for chance in the world, according to Stoicism. Because the universe was ordered, according to reason, human's lives were also ordered. Reason ran through everything as the organizing principle. Thus, Laertius claims: “Τὸν δὴ κόσμον διοικεῖσθαι κατὰ νοῦν καὶ πρόνοιαν”(The world, in their view, is ordered by reason and providence) (7.138).<sup>89</sup>

This concept of reason was not separate from the Stoic conception of god. The Stoics referred to Reason as god. In fact, god was also the same thing as Fate, and might be called by many other names, Zeus being only one of them (7.135).<sup>90</sup> God was the creator, who was alone in the beginning, and who was eternal (7.134-136).<sup>91</sup> God was also perfect and contained no evil (7.147).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:239.

<sup>89</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:243.

<sup>90</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:241.

<sup>91</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:239-241.

<sup>92</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:251.



The Stoics stressed that god did not take on a human shape and yet were eager to connect god to the old Olympian gods (ibid.). Thus god is described as Poseidon because his rule stretches to the sea, and as Hephaestus because god has creative fire (ibid.). In this way the Stoics allegorised the Olympian gods to help them explain the ruling principle of god.

The Stoics also embraced a pantheistic view of god. According to Laertius, Zeno and a number of other Stoic philosophers, declared that the substance of god was the whole world and the heavens (7.148).<sup>93</sup> Thus their term for nature was interchangeable with god. God or nature was what held the world together, what caused new terrestrial life to be born, and what preserved life for certain periods (ibid.).

Concerning ethics, the role of mankind was to live in accordance with the guiding principles of nature. Thus, men were to purge themselves of desires which were not in accord with nature. So for instance, death was natural. Therefore to be afraid of death would bring unnecessary misery. Reason was also seen to dictate what good works one should give oneself to. For example, it is reasonable to care for one's parents, friends and country. This is what the Stoic is expected to do (7:108).<sup>94</sup>

The Stoics recognised that just as there were physical diseases, so there were mental diseases, and these they should shun. Among these mental diseases they listed the love of fame, the love of pleasure, envy, and the desire to quarrel (7:115).<sup>95</sup> Yet they also encouraged people to actively pursue three emotional states. Laertius records the following: “Εἶναι δὲ καὶ εὐπαθείας φασὶ τρεῖς, χαράν, εὐλάβειαν, βούλησιν” (They say that there are three emotional states which are good, namely, joy, caution, and wishing) (7:116).<sup>96</sup> Joy could include delight or cheerfulness; caution involved modesty and reverence; and wishing encouraged friendliness or respect (ibid.). The wise man would shun the love of pleasure but he would give himself to joy. Or he would avoid fame and the praise of others, but this would not mean that he did not think to be respectful to others (7:117). Thus although the wise man was

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<sup>93</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:253.

<sup>94</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:215.

<sup>95</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:221.

<sup>96</sup> Translated by Hicks 1925:221.



passionless, this did not mean he was apathetic (ibid.).

Paul must have agreed with much of this Stoic belief. He certainly agreed that one's body and passions should be trained so that they were subject to what was right. In *First Corinthians* 9.27, He says, “ἀλλ’ ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ” (but I discipline and subdue my body). He also applied this attitude to his thought life and encouraged people to control their thinking so that it ran with what was right (*Second Corinthians* 10.5). He definitely agreed that God ruled the world and that nothing was outside of his wise providence (*Romans* 8.28). So perhaps the most striking contrast between Paul and the Stoics was their concept of God. In his letter to the *Romans*, Paul built a strong view of a creator God who was separate to his creation, and who was grieved when people blended their worship of Him, with that of his creation (1.23). And even though God was working in this creation, he was separate from it enough to be angry with it (1.18). Paul also argued that aspects of this world ran contrary to God's nature and not in accordance with it. A notable example of this is death. In *Romans* 5.12 Paul argues that death is not a part of God's good creation, but rather it entered the world through sin: “δι’ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος” (through one man sin entered the world and death through sin).

## **2.4 Paul's Method of Religious Engagement – Acts 17.**

Paul's method of religious engagement stands in stark contrast to much religious debate in today's society. As discussed above, Paul's views, and the views of the people he engaged with in Athens, were contradictory. Yet Paul appears to have engaged on a common cultural ground, and a common religious ground, with his hearers, before trying to engage on issues on which they would differ. He did not do this out of a purely intellectual interest, either. Right in the beginning of this passage in *Acts* 17, the author records that Paul, on seeing the idols of Athens, was, “παρωξύνετο” (17.16).<sup>97</sup> Louw and Nida define this word as “provoked, angered or irritated” (1993:763 Volume 1).<sup>98</sup> Clearly, Paul's emotions were aroused, and yet

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<sup>97</sup> The Greek text for Acts 17 is from Nestle-Aland. The translation is my own, using Louw and Nida as a Lexicon where necessary.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Gingrich, Danker and Bauer 1979:629 (s.v. παρωξύνω). According to Keener (2014:2574), “The strong term (παρωξύνω) used here for Paul's disturbance over idolatry appears only twice in the NT but is fairly common (about fifty times) in the LXX, often for God's righteous anger, including several times for God's anger



he still managed to respond in reasonable debate: “διελέγετο” (17.17). He debated with Jews and Greeks who were worshiping in the synagogues and with anyone who was by chance in the marketplace (ibid.).

At this point a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers came across Paul. Their response to him is also enlightening. Because he was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection, they assumed he was promoting foreign gods and they described him as “σπερμολόγος” (17.18). The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible translates this word as “babbler” (1998:161). It can also mean foolish babbler or ignorant show-off (Louw and Nida, 1993:225 Volume 2). Either way, the Athenian philosophers are clearly not impressed by Paul. Yet it stands as testimony to the spirit of open debate in Athens at that time, that they chose to hear him further.<sup>99</sup> Verse 19 records that the philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus and there asked him to explain his religious teachings. They described Paul’s teaching as “ξενίζοντα” (strange things), and yet they still wished to understand “θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι” (what these things mean) (17.20).

Some biblical commentators have argued that Paul was not invited to share his views at the Areopagus, but that he was ordered to appear before a type of council that met there to explain his views on foreign gods (Gempf 1994:1093). Although the word ἐπιλαβόμενοι (17.19) can give the impression that Paul was forcibly taken to the Areopagus, this interpretation doesn't seem to match the tone of the passage. For example, the Athenians then say, “δυνάμεθα γνῶναι”, which is a polite request, usually translated as, “May we know?” (NIV 1998:161 and RSV 1992:374).<sup>100</sup>

This interpretation would also fit with verse 21 which records that open religious discussion was the practice for both the Athenians and the foreigners living in Athens: “Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ πάντες καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι

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towards Israel’s idolatry (Deut 9:18; Ps 105:28-29 106:28-29 ET]; Hos 8:5).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Atkinson 2016:55-6 for the pluralistic nature of Athens at this time.

<sup>100</sup> Keener (2014:2603) points out that the fact that Paul was “led away” can suggest a trial scene: “In view of the charge’s similarity to the charge against Socrates, it is reasonable to see the mention of him being “brought” to a court as an allusion to Socrates’s analogous situation.”



καινότερον” (17.21). It's unclear whether this verse is meant as a criticism of the people of Athens. The NIV certainly translates it in a way that sounds critical to modern ears: “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (17.21).<sup>101</sup> Regardless of the intent, verse 21 again shows that Athens was a place where various religious and philosophical ideas could be heard and discussed.

At the Areopagus, Paul then begins his discussion of Christian doctrine by establishing common ground with his hearers. In verse 22 he acknowledges that the men of Athens are also religious, as he is. He even seems to compliment them by saying that they are religious in all things: “κατὰ πάντα ὥς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ.” The NIV translates this as, “in every way you are very religious” (1998:161). According to Keener some scholars are skeptical about the positive connotation of this phrase. “The term δεισιδαιμων in other settings could mean “superstitious” (negatively)” as easily “religious” (positively). Although it does not mean “superstition” as unambiguously as the Latin *superstitio*, Stoics rejected as hurtful the sort of fear that, for them, the term designated” (2014:2627).

Nevertheless, the reason Paul gives for making this statement is that as he passed through Athens, he observed the Athenians’ objects of worship (17.23). The word used for observe is ἀναθεωρῶν. It can have the sense of ‘observe’ and ‘reflect upon’ (Louw and Nida, 1993:14 Volume 2).<sup>102</sup> In which case it indicates that Paul is trying to understand the Athenians’ religious views before engaging with them. It is also interesting that he refers to the Athenians’ σεβάσματα (objects of worship). He chose to use this word, a neutral word, rather than a word with negative connotations, such as idols (εἰδωλα). Even though εἰδωλα is the word that Luke used to describe Athens in verse 16.

Paul then goes on to say, in verse 23, that he found an altar inscribed, “Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ” ( to the Unknown God). There was a Greek legend, alluded to in Plutarch’s Lives (5.12.4)<sup>103</sup> and recorded in Diogenes, that seems to account for this altar. It concerns the Greek poet and

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<sup>101</sup> New International Version 1988:161.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Gingrich, Danker and Bauer 1979:54 (s.v. ἀναθεωρέω)

<sup>103</sup> Translated by Langhorne 1902:63.



prophet Epimenides. In his work, *Vitae Philosophorum*, Diogenes deals with Epimenides in Book 1. Epimenides was a Cretan, living around 600BCE (1.10.2).<sup>104</sup> Diogenes claims that as a young man, Epimenides fell asleep in a cave for 57 years, during which time he did not age (ibid.). As a result, Epimenides, “was considered by the Greeks as a person especially beloved by the gods”(1.10.3).<sup>105</sup> Thus, when Athens was overcome by a plague, and ordered to purify their city by the Pythian priestess, the men of Athens immediately sent for Epimenides (ibid.). Epimenides came, and according to Diogenes, he went to the Areopagus and released a flock of black and white sheep. The men of Athens followed these sheep and wherever the sheep lay down, a sacrifice was made to the local deity (ibid.). This act stopped the plague. Diogenes concludes by saying, “and owing to this one may even now find in the different boroughs of the Athenians altars without names which are a sort of memorial of the propitiation of the Gods that then took place” (ibid.).

Diogenes recorded this account around the third century CE, yet stories of Epimenides were circulated amongst writers long before this. In his *Laws*, Plato mentions Epimenides, the Cretan prophet, who offered sacrifices in Athens (1:642)<sup>106</sup>, and Aristotle, in his *Athenian Constitution*, refers to Epimenides, the Cretan, who purified the city of Athens (1.1)<sup>107</sup>. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that if Paul knew Greek poetry, then he also knew other Greek writings, and so he would have probably known this account of Epimenides in Athens. If he did, his reference to the altar of the unknown god is poignant. He is calling to the Athenians’ mind, their need for a (sheep-like) sacrifice to the gods in order to escape the judgment of the gods, something they understand from the story of Epimenides. This would open the way for Paul to explain the crux of his Christian doctrine: that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God, offered to God, to turn aside forever the final judgement of God. Therefore Paul is using the common ground of a Greek story to connect his hearers with his Christian belief.

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<sup>104</sup> Translated by Yonge 1853:50.

<sup>105</sup> Translated by Yonge 1853:51.

<sup>106</sup> Translated by Bury 1961:61.

<sup>107</sup> Translated by Kenyon 1912:2.



However, even if Paul does not know the story of Epimenides, he still uses this Greek altar to further his argument. In verse 23 Paul says, “ὁ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν”. The NIV translates this verse as, “So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you” (1998:161). But this seems a harsh interpretation. The words ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε (worship without knowing) seem to indicate that Paul thinks that the Athenians are already worshipping an unknown God, now he wishes to explain who that unknown God is. Instead of accusing the Athenians of being wrong, he argues that they need to go further in their understanding.

Paul then labours the point that the God he is proclaiming is the God for all people. In verse 24 he describes God as, “ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος” (The God who made the world and all things in it, the Lord of heaven and earth). Paul is stressing that the God he preaches is not a local divinity, like Epimenides sacrificed to. He is the creator and ruler over everything. This God gives everyone (Jew, Greek and foreigner living in Athens) life and breath and all things: “ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα” (17. 25). Also, Paul is highlighting the unity of cultures: all things come from one God to all men. He points this out again in verse 26: “ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων” (he made from one, all nations of men).

However, in this section Paul is not only engaging with the Greek idea of many gods, he is also addressing the Greek practice of physically representing their gods. Paul argues that if this God made the whole earth, then he cannot live in temples made by human hands: “οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ” (17.24). Nor can He be served by human hands (17. 25). The Greeks of Athens, like the Jews, would worship their gods in the temples and serve their gods in the temples with physical objects and rituals. Paul is engaging with Athenian practice, but is arguing that the God of all creation should not be worshipped in the way that the Athenians have been worshipping.

Paul then draws this point to a close by explaining that God created all men from one so that all men would seek him, reach out to him and find him (17.27). Paul is disagreeing with the Athenians, and he is pointing out what he sees as their errors, yet he is still positive in his engagement with them. He is encouraging his hearers to seek God; he is encouraging his



hearers that God is not far from any of them (ibid.). And, in verse 28, as a final encouragement to seek God, he uses a quote that is probably from a Greek poem: “ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν” (for in him we live and we move and we exist).

Harris (1906) convincingly argues that this line is an extract from a lost poem by Epimenides entitled *Minos and Rhadamanthos*.<sup>108</sup> The existence of this poem is attested to by Diogenes (1.10.6),<sup>109</sup> and Harris discusses two ancient Christian texts that quote this poem as a commentary on the biblical text of Acts 17:28. One 4<sup>th</sup> century CE text entitled *The Garden of Delights* that contained many comments from the Syrian church fathers, has the following commentary on Acts 17:28: “‘In Him we live and move and have our being.’ The Cretans used to say of Zeus, that he was a prince and was ripped up by a wild boar, and he was buried: and lo! his grave is with us. Accordingly Minos, the son of Zeus, made over him a panegyric and in it he said:

“‘A grave have fashioned for thee, O holy and high One, the lying Kretans,  
who are all the time liars, evil beasts, idle bellies;  
but thou diest not, for to eternity thou livest, and standest;  
for in thee we live and move and have our being’” (Harris 1906:309-310).

Harris argues that these last four lines are Minos’ words, from the poem by Epimenides, entitled *Minos and Rhadamanthos*.

If Paul is quoting the above poem from Epimenides, it is striking for a number of reasons. Firstly, Paul is again connecting culturally with the Greeks by quoting their poetry, as he argues in defense of the Christian religion. But secondly, he is applying a poem about the Greek god, Zeus, to the Christian God that he is preaching. Again he seems to be pushing the Greeks- beginning with common ground- to go further. In reference to Zeus, the Cretans have lied by saying that he can die. Rather this poem claims that Zeus lives forever, and that in Zeus humans live and move and exist. Paul is now applying this belief about Zeus to his argument.

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<sup>108</sup> On the attribution to Epimenides and the evidence from the Syriac paraphrase of Isho’dad, see Keener 2014:2657-9.

<sup>109</sup> Translated by Yonge 1853:51.



The Cretans were wrong: God does not die. Some Greek poets understood: God lives for ever and we get our life from and in him. This point would have appealed to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers who were listening to Paul. They had long since abandoned the idea of the Greek gods who were like mortals, who could die. As Faber points out: “From archaic to classical times the worship of the Olympian gods was real and meaningful, whereas in Paul's day scepticism and a faith in pantheism had undermined the traditional Greek religion and had thrown into question the belief that gods were anthropomorphic and ought to be worshipped as such” (1993:1).

Paul then goes on in verse 28 to quote another Greek poet, “τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἑσμέν” (for even we are his offspring). He emphasises that this point is being made by one of the Greeks’ own poets (17. 28). The poet is easier to identify as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Stoic, Aratus, as his works are still extant. The verse that Paul quotes is from Aratus’ poem, *Phaenomena*:

“From Zeus let us begin;  
him do we mortals never leave unnamed;  
full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men;  
full is the sea and the havens thereof;  
always we all have need of Zeus.  
For we are also his offspring;” (*Phaenomena* 1.1-5).<sup>110</sup>

Again it is worth noting that Paul applies a quote about Zeus, to the Christian God. This is not mere relativism: Paul saying that all gods are the same, be it Zeus or be it Jehovah. Yet it is a definite acknowledgment that the Greeks held to some ideas about God that Paul agreed with. Paul starts with these common beliefs before he tackles stranger ideas, like the resurrection (*Acts* 17.31).

Again this quote would have appealed to his Stoic listeners who had adopted a type of pantheistic view of God – the streets, the markets, the sea and the heavens are full of God. As Faber highlights: “The Stoic philosophers, mentioned in verse 18 as one party with whom

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<sup>110</sup> Translated by Mair 1921:381.



Paul discourses, taught that Zeus is not a god in the form of a human being but a force which permeates all animate and inanimate things" (1993:1). And yet, this line of Greek poetry does not contradict the Christian view that God is spirit and is everywhere. The crux of Paul's argument is based on Aratus' idea that humans are God's offspring. If they are, then surely God cannot be an idol, surely God cannot be made of wood or silver (17.29). So Paul uses the Greeks' own poet to combat the Greek idols he sees in Athens. As Wilson rightly argues: "Paul confronted the philosophers there, but he did not do so by insisting the Athenians drop their entire heritage – he knew their history well enough to appeal to it in support of his case" (2009:67).

Paul then concludes his exchange in verse 30 by saying, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (17.30).<sup>111</sup> This translation uses the word ignorance for τῆς ἀγνοίας (17. 30). But ἀγνοίας is from the same root word used in verse 23 to refer to the altar of the unknown God. So it is more likely that Paul is saying the Athenians have had times of unknowing in which they have worshipped gods that they do not know or understand (17.23), and have worshipped God with only partial knowledge (17.27-28), but now those times of unknowing are no longer necessary. And so now God commands the Athenians to turn away (μετανοεῖν) from these times of unknowing. Paul's final point is that all mankind will be judged by Jesus who was resurrected from the dead (17.31). This verse again emphasises that Paul was not a relativist – he does believe in a judgement by God. The response of Paul's hearers varies from ridicule (17. 32), to curiosity (ibid.), to belief (17. 33).

## **2.5 Paul's Speech as Diatribe.**

Hadas argues that Paul's speech in Acts 17 follows a Greek formula known as diatribe. He says that the influence of the diatribe is "palpable in, and was most widely and effectively propagated by, the most famous missionary sermon of all, St. Paul in his address to the Athenians on the Areopagus" (1959:144). The diatribe was not a strict form. It was an oral discourse, usually on philosophy or ethics, invented by Stoic and Cynic popular preachers

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<sup>111</sup> New International Version translation 1998:162.



(1959:142). Diatribes were often characterised by interjections or questions, and even by placing opposing views alongside each other (1959:143). Hadas claims the diatribe, "makes free use of any striking ethical statements that might be in the air, whatever school they may derive from" (1959:144). Paul's use then of Greek philosophy and poetry, in making his Christian case, is an example of diatribe.

This form of speech became very fashionable in the Hellenistic age (1959:142) and was adapted for use by almost all writers on ethics in the Greco-Roman period (1959:143). Considering Paul was preaching in first century Athens in *Acts* 17, it makes sense that he would use this popular form to communicate with his hearers. The fact that he does is evidence of Paul's wisdom with regard to public religious debate. He was willing to adapt the form of his message, without compromising the content.

Hadas goes on to argue- using Eduard Norden's book *Agnostos Theos*- that the *Acts* 17 speech fits into a well-defined type, "in its occasion, 'text', and individual motifs and expressions" (1959:145). In its occasion, Hadas states that several religious teachers, not connected to Paul, travelled through Athens on missionary journeys. These same religious teachers, like Paul, chose a local monument to use as their text, and then rebuked their listeners for associating deity with the material world. The same four motifs of Paul's speech - addressing ignorance, worshiping God in Spirit and not through physical objects, a call to repentance, and mention of the resurrection – are found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE religious texts of *Poimandres*, *Odes of Solomon*, and *the Sermon of Peter* (1959:145).

An interesting parallel text that Hadas cites is a first century CE letter wrongly attributed to the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus. It reads as follows: "But you ignorant men, first teach us what God is in order that you may be believed when you speak of impiety. Where then is God? Is he shut up in the temples? You, I suppose are pious when you set God in darkness? A man would consider himself slandered if he were called 'stone' and is it a true description of God to say that he is formed of rock? You uneducated men, don't you know that God is not something made by hand, and has no base large enough, and has not merely a single precinct, but that the whole universe is his temple?" (Hadas, 1959:146). Whilst this letter is certainly using motifs common to Paul's speech, the tone appears harsher. Paul addresses his audience



as “men of Athens” (17.22)<sup>112</sup>, not as “ignorant men”. Contrast Paul’s statement that God, “is not served by human hands” (17.25)<sup>113</sup>, to the sarcastic tone in which this letter makes the same point: “Where then is God? Is he shut up in temples?” Again Paul’s comment to the people of Athens, “in every way you are very religious (17.22)<sup>114</sup> contrasts to the mocking tone of, “You, I suppose are pious when you set God in darkness”. This comparison highlights the fact that not only did Paul use a standard form to reach his listeners, but he used it in a constructive and winsome manner.

Summing up the comparison between Paul’s speech, other literary texts, and examples of diatribe, Hadas says, “To say that the author of the discourse adapted standard forms is by no means to impugn his earnestness and his sincerity; it would be much more remarkable if a literate man addressing a literate audience did not use the forms associated with his subject” (1959:146). Paul used a standard type of discourse in order to gain the hearing of a group of people who thought very differently to him. This is a helpful tool for profitable religious debate today too. If religious leaders could learn to communicate in ways that were accessible to other religious leaders, and non-religious leaders, the opportunity for respectful yet rigorous debate could be greatly increased.

## **2.6 Criticisms of Paul’s Approach at Athens.**

Various scholars, through the centuries, have critiqued Paul’s method of engaging with the people of Athens. Rothschild begins her book, *Paul in Athens*, by summarizing the views of some scholars who claim that Paul’s preaching in Athens cannot be regarded as orthodox Christianity: “scholars concur that the speech is too brief and hardly ‘Christian.’ It possesses few specifically ‘Christian’ terms. Although Jesus’ name plays an important role in Acts, Jesus is not mentioned in Paul’s Areopagus speech apart from a single parenthetical reference. Some interpreters are even convinced that the speech extols the pagan god, Zeus” (2014:2). However, these scholars are operating on a number of unhelpful assumptions about Christian preaching. First, that Christian preaching must always be couched in Christian terms. If Paul

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<sup>112</sup> New International Version translation 1998:161.

<sup>113</sup> New International Version translation 1998:161.

<sup>114</sup> New International Version translation 1998:161.



was trying to communicate to people who did not have a background in Christian terminology or Old Testament terminology or Jewish ideas, then surely he would avoid terms that they did not understand? The way Paul communicates Christian doctrine to Jews is different to how he communicates to Greeks. This does not necessarily mean he is communicating two different messages.

The second assumption is that every attempt at Christian preaching must cover every aspect of Christian doctrine. Because Paul didn't focus in on Jesus does not mean he was not laying the groundwork for speaking about Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul did cover some basic Christian doctrine: God as creator, as ruler, as judge. Within this framework, Jesus' death and resurrection will make more sense - when Paul gets to it. Learning to speak in terms that listeners can understand, and learning to be wise in what aspects of doctrine to raise and discuss are crucial for good religious debate.

But the third and most unhelpful assumption is that Christian preaching cannot acknowledge common ground with other religions. Paul points out areas of agreement between Greek poets and Christian doctrine. This is different to promoting the concept of Zeus. Clement of Alexandria summarizes Paul's approach more helpfully: "Whence it is evident that the apostle, by availing himself of poetical examples from the Phenomena of Aratus, approves of what had been well spoken by the Greeks; and intimates that, by the unknown God, God the Creator was in a roundabout way worshipped by the Greeks; but that it was necessary by positive knowledge to apprehend and learn Him by the Son" (*Strom.* 1.19).<sup>115</sup> Clement sees Paul as approving what the Greeks had spoken well, and as acknowledging that they had in some way been worshipping God. But Clement also saw Paul as impressing upon the Greeks the need to know God properly through Jesus. The approach is positive, and at the same time, not relative.

Clement's view is not foreign to orthodox Christian scholars. The Oxford professor, C.S.Lewis, argues that much of his prior reading in Greek and Roman mythology, set him on the road to

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<sup>115</sup> Translated by Wilson 1867:413.



understanding Christianity. Describing his conversion, in *Surprised By Joy*, he says, "The question was no longer to find the one simply true religion among a thousand religions simply false. It was rather, "Where has religion reached its true maturity? Where if anywhere have the hints of all Paganism been fulfilled?" (1972.187). Lewis argues that other religions point to the fulfillment of religion in Christianity. Again, this is not a relativist claim - that all religions are essentially the same - yet it is a claim that acknowledges common ground. The Roman and Greek writers that Lewis had studied prepared him to investigate Christianity. He describes them as "the childhood of religion" and a "prophetic dream" (1972.188).

Another obvious criticism of Paul is that although he might be debating in a wise manner with the Athenians, the Bible has examples of Paul arguing with other religious leaders in ways that can hardly be described as positive. Schama notes that Paul did not deal wisely with the Jews of his day. He suggests that Paul raised the idea that resulted in the Christian persecution of Jews - the idea that the Jews were God-killers: "When Paul moved the heart of Christian theology from Christ's life to his death, it made the implication of the Jews in his killing not just unavoidable, but central to the new religion's teaching. And since Christ was inseparably of the same substance as God the Father, that made their crime decide" (2013.210). Schama argues that other Jewish apostles did not create a division between the Judaisers and the Christians in the same way as Paul did. So he says that, "The Jewishness of James and Peter inclined them to want to present Jesusism as a type of Judaism, steeped in and prophesied by the Hebrew Scripture and reinforcing rather than abandoning the Torah" (2013.209).

The charge that Paul did not always deal as gently with other religions as he did with the Athenians must stand. *Acts* alone has examples of this. In *Acts* 15.1, Paul disputes sharply with a group of Jews who were teaching that followers of Jesus still had to be circumcised. The word used in verse 2 is *στάσεως*, which has the connotation of strong dissension.<sup>116</sup> Then in *Acts* 23 Paul appears before the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin. As he begins his defense of his teaching, the High Priest orders him to be struck. Paul responds in verse 3 by calling the High Priest a "τοῖχε κεκοιμημένε" (a white-washed wall). Although it must be noted that Paul does apologise afterwards (23. 5). Again, at the end of *Acts*, Paul shows his exasperation with

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Gingrich, Danker and Bauer 1979:764 (s.v.3)



the Jews by calling them blind and deaf (28:26-27).

These three instances are not examples of controlled religious debate, and they seem to contradict Paul's own advice to Timothy that a minister of the Christian faith should be kind and avoid quarreling with people with whom he disagrees (*Second Timothy* 2:24). However, they do raise the issue: Is it necessary at times, in religious debate, to give offense in order to make your case? For example when Paul sharply differs with the Jews over circumcision in *Acts* 15, he is not seeing it as a mere dispute over custom. He sees it as defending the heart of his faith: circumcision can no longer be regarded as a means to making oneself right with God. Or when Peter (whom Schama regards as being pro-Judaism) accuses his Jewish listeners of killing Jesus, he is not promoting the view that Jews committed deicide. He is making the case that Jesus died by human hands, but that this was God's plan for salvation (*Acts* 2). Perhaps, in debate, there is room for offense to be given if it is necessary to the argument. And then the response need not be to take offense but to consider the truth of the debater's claims.

## **Conclusion**

However, having seen at the beginning of this chapter (Cf.2.2) that Paul was greatly distressed by the nature of the idolatry he observed in Athens, he nevertheless restrained his emotions and pursued reasonable debate. He did so by seeking out common ground- both culturally, as well as religiously- in order to effectively engage his interlocutors. Even when taunted by being called a 'babbler', he remained steady in continuing the pursuit of reasonable engagement. His example in Athens proves that robust, as well as uncompromising debate, is not only possible, but effective.

Whilst Paul, as a Christian, promoted healthy religious engagement in order to further his gospel message, many other religious leaders have tried to extend their beliefs through legislation. In the next chapter I will examine the effects of this in the Roman empire under Constantine.



### **Chapter 3: The Consequences of the Institutionalisation of Christianity by the Roman Emperor, Constantine.**

The third century church father Eusebius viewed history as a development from bestiality to civilization, with the growth and spread of Christianity being the catalyst for this development. As such, Eusebius perceived the emperor Constantine's conversion to be heralding the pinnacle of mankind's ascension. Naturally, this resulted in a type of Kingdom Nationalism - the belief that the kingdom of God is destined to reign politically on earth. Within this context, pluralism was viewed as counter-productive, and thus paved the way for Constantine to marry the Christian religion and the state. In doing so his followers believed that he was serving both the church and the world.

#### **3.1 Introduction to Eusebius.**

Eusebius of Caesarea (263 – 339 CE) is known as one of the most important historians of the Christian Church. His *Church History* covers the history of Christianity's first three centuries, from Christ's birth, death and resurrection to Emperor Constantine's legalization of Christianity. Within this work, Eusebius refers to numerous important documents, monuments, events, acts and extracts. He records lineages of Roman Emperors, and the various key bishoprics in the Christian Church, particularly those in Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome.

#### **3.2 Eusebius' Purpose in Writing *Church History*.**

In chapter 1 of Book 1, Eusebius states his purpose in writing *Church History*: "It is my purpose to write an account of the successions of the holy apostles, as well as of the times which have elapsed from the days of our Saviour to our own; and to relate the many important events which are said to have occurred in the history of the Church; and to mention those who have governed and presided over the Church in the most prominent parishes, and those who in each generation have proclaimed the divine word either orally or in writing. It is my purpose also to give the names and number and times of those who through love of innovation have run into the greatest errors, and, proclaiming themselves discoverers of knowledge falsely so-



called, have like fierce wolves unmercifully devastated the flock of Christ. It is my intention, moreover, to recount the misfortunes which immediately came upon the whole Jewish nation in consequence of their plots against our Saviour, and to record the ways and the times in which the divine word has been attacked by the Gentiles, and to describe the character of those who at various periods have contended for it in the face of blood and of tortures, as well as the confessions which have been made in our own days, and finally the gracious and kindly succor which our Saviour has afforded them all. Since I propose to write of all these things I shall commence my work with the beginning of the dispensation of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ" (1.1.1).<sup>117</sup>

Already Eusebius's agenda is clear. Not only does he wish to record the progress of Christianity from Christ through the apostles, to the church rulers, writers and preachers, but he also wants to highlight those who have turned against Christianity, notably the Jews, and praise those who have defended it, of which whom the greatest will be Constantine.

Eusebius is often referred to as the "Father of Church History", but as the above quote highlights he had a purpose beyond the objective record of events. As Grant, a modern historian of the early church period, asked, "Did the Father of Church History write history?"<sup>118</sup>

Mendels, cited by Ferguson, is equally skeptical. He describes Eusebius's Church History as a "media revolution" and suggests that, because of his style of weaving short entries into a broader scheme, the author was "one of the fathers of the journalistic genre".<sup>119</sup>

Barnes' rather scathing assessment is that "Eusebius is an inelegant and repetitious writer, and he was neither a precise thinker nor a theologian of any significance during his lifetime" (2010:189).

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<sup>117</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:151.

<sup>118</sup> Online source: The Problem of Eusebius. (Ferguson, E. 2001)

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*



Ferguson, a specialist in early Christian studies, refers to Eusebius as a propagandist: “This is the man who called Emperor Constantine, ‘most beloved by God,’ described the fourth-century church as being brought to ‘a state of uniform harmony,’ and called Jews ‘a people who had slain the prophets and the Lord himself.’”<sup>120</sup>

However, Ferguson does allow that Eusebius’s writings are, “foundational for our knowledge of the church in its first three centuries. And this foundation stands firm despite noticeable cracks.”<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, editors Attridge and Hata, in their introduction to *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism*, state: “Eusebius was not a Thucydides or Polybius and his work serves a number of apologetic and polemical aims... Nonetheless, the History is certainly significant as a source of information about the early Christian movement” (1992:27). The editors go on to acknowledge that, “Eusebius was a careful collector, with access to good sources of information about the early Christian movement” (ibid.).

In essence, Eusebius provides us with a helpful record of the early church, albeit biased. However, since it is unlikely that any historian is able to write without bias, the onus is on the reader to detect the bias of Eusebius and to study his history in the light of this.

### **3.3 Eusebius as a Pioneer of Christian Historiography.**

In his analysis of Greek and Roman literature in the early Roman empire, the historian Dihle notes the following: “According to literary rules in the Late Classical age, historiography was a part of high literature which is why the historiographer had to do more than just plainly describe the results of his research. His subject matter demanded a high standard of presentation, even if the author’s true aim was to give a complete, faithful account of events and their causal connections. This demand had several consequences, one being that documents cited as historical evidence could never be quoted literally, but only in a style

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*



which was in keeping with that of the narrative” (1992:424).

This historical practice explains why Eusebius feels free not only to record history but also to interpret it. Commenting on this, Dihle states that Eusebius, “displays a considerable rhetorical-stylistic artistry, producing ornate and elegant prose in introductions, summaries, assessments of great men, and also narrative passages” (ibid.).

Having said this, Dihle goes on to argue rightly that Eusebius’ text did meet the demands of the historiographical tradition also: “But the documents on which he bases his account – for example, synodal resolutions, Imperial edicts or rescripts, or Christian literature of a narrative, apologetical, or theological kind – are quoted extensively in the original wording. This method traditionally belonged to grammatical-antiquarian literature which made do without any artistic elaboration of language” (1992:424). Dihle suggests that Eusebius combined these two principles of recording history into a new genre of historical writing, and in so doing preserved large portions of historical writing that were otherwise lost to history (ibid.). Thus, in contrast to some of the scholarly skepticism expressed above, Dihle places Eusebius in the context of ancient historiography.

### **3.4 Eusebius as Church Apologist.**

In order to appreciate Eusebius' important contribution to the literature of late antiquity we need to understand the stance he was writing from. Eusebius’ perspective is that of a 4th century Christian strongly committed to his faith. As a result, his history cannot be seen as objective. Fortunately however, its biases are not subtle and as such, are easy to detect.

One overarching bias is that Eusebius presents ecclesiastical history within the framework of a universal historical plan. His aim is to show that all history was working towards the furtherance of the church and so Eusebius essentially uses history to defend his religion.

Droge argues that Eusebius does this intentionally: “Eusebius unashamedly attempts to present Christianity in the best possible light, but does so with a unique perspective of history. For Eusebius, the truth of Christianity was inextricably linked to history” (1992:492).



Essentially, Eusebius presents God as ordering the history of the Roman empire in order to further the growth of Christianity and the church. Dihle points this out saying, “The dominant idea is that divine providence has ordered the coincidence between the birth of the Roman Empire and the birth of God's Son as a man, because the global, peaceful order established by Augustus was the condition for the unhindered spreading of the message of salvation. This notion could already be found in Luke and it had kept reappearing in many Christian writings since then. In the eyes of Eusebius' contemporaries, the Christianisation of the Empire under Constantine was an impressive confirmation of this assumption" (1994:423-424).

### 3.5 An Example of Eusebius' Apologetic Use of History.

A significant criticism, that Eusebius used history to refute, was that Christianity was a new religion and as such could not be taken seriously. Certain opponents of Christianity had charged that “it was recent [νέαν] and outlandish [έκτετοπισμένην], appearing no earlier than yesterday” (1.2.1).<sup>122</sup> In other words, the objection was that if Christianity is the only true religion, why did it appear so late in history? Many ancient thinkers agreed that nothing could be both new *and* true.

Two of the most outspoken critics of Christianity were the Greek intellectuals, Celsus (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) and Porphyry (232-305 CE). Both argued that Christianity, being a new religion, could neither contribute to nor advance civilization (Droge 1992:492).

Celsus' argument is recorded by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*. Origen is outlining an argument using the Bible plot-line to prove that the earliest prophets were not necessarily the greatest prophets. As part of his argument he records Celsus' question: “To explain these matters and to reply to Celsus' question about the advent, ‘Is it only now after such a long age, that God has remembered to judge the human race? Did he not care before?’” (4.8).<sup>123</sup> Celsus' use of sarcasm suggests that his hearers would have thought this an absurd idea too – that God would take so long to finally make himself known. Later, Origen interacts with this claim again

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<sup>122</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:153.

<sup>123</sup> Translated by Chadwick 1965:189.



recording Celsus' mocking suggestion that the God of the Bible was like Zeus, as portrayed in a comedy, who on waking from a long slumber suddenly decided to deliver the human race from evils (6.78).<sup>124</sup> The point is clear: if the church wanted the ancient world to take Jesus' claims seriously, he should have come to earth a long time ago.

This same argument is allegedly raised by Porphyry in his treatise *Against the Christians*, which is alluded to by Augustine in his letters. Augustine first provides a response to accusers who doubt the resurrection, before turning to those who question the claims of Christianity because of the timing of its appearance.

Here Augustine says that his accusers claim to have taken the following view from Porphyry which he sums up in these words: "If Christ says he is the way, the grace, and the truth, and he places in himself alone the approach of believing souls to him, what did the men of so many centuries before Christ do? To pass over the times before the kingdom of Latium, let us trace the beginning of the human name from Latium itself, in Latium, before the foundation of Alba, there was a cult of gods. In Alba, religion and worship were equally in honor. In the long stretch of centuries- not a few- Rome itself existed without the law of Christ. What became of the innumerable souls, who were entirely guiltless, if he in whom they could believe had not yet lent his presence to men? The world, also as well as Rome, was devoted to the religious rites of its temples. Why did he who is called the Savior hide himself for so many ages? But let them not say that the human race was saved by the ancient Jewish law, since the Jewish law appeared and flourished in a small part of Syria, a long time after, and still later it made its way into Italian lands, after the reign of Gaius Caesar, or probably during his reign. What, then, became of the souls of Romans or Latins who were deprived of the grace of Christ not yet come until the time of the Caesars?" (Letter 108).<sup>125</sup>

The argument is straight-forward: the Christian claims are unfair; how can the world take a god seriously who kept himself hidden for so long?

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<sup>124</sup> Translated by Chadwick 1965:391.

<sup>125</sup> Translated by Parsons 1953:154.



In response to these prevailing criticisms, Eusebius tried to convince his readers that Christianity was not a new religion, but an ancient one- worthy of their consideration. Thus, Eusebius claimed that Christian doctrine was not new or strange (1.4.15).<sup>126</sup> Rather, he described it as unique and true, and argued for, “the real antiquity and divine character of Christianity” (1.2.1).<sup>127</sup>

To prove this claim, Eusebius took the historical Jesus, born during the reign of Augustus, executed during the reign of Tiberius, and connected him to the Logos, the divine word of God, existing before creation, and active throughout history( *ibid.*).

As proof, Eusebius cites a number of scriptural passages, the most crucial being the opening lines of the Gospel of John: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν (In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God. All things were through Him and without Him was no single thing” (1.2.3; cf. John 1:1, 3).<sup>128</sup> Eusebius uses this passage to unpack the Logos theology of the Old Testament, for he goes on to declare that: “This, too, the great Moses teaches, when, as the most ancient of all the prophets, he describes under the influence of the divine Spirit the creation and arrangement of the universe. He declares that the maker of the world and the creator of all things yielded to Christ himself, and to none other than his own clearly divine and first-born Word, the making of inferior things, and communed with him respecting the creation of man. Says he:

"For God said, Let us make man in our image and in our likeness” (1.2.4).<sup>129</sup>

Eusebius’ point is that while the incarnation may only have happened less than three centuries before, Christ, as the eternal Logos, has been active since the dawn of history. Indeed, it was Christ who was the agent of creation.

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<sup>126</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:45.

<sup>127</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:11.

<sup>128</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:13.

<sup>129</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:153.



In addition, Eusebius attempted to explain why the incarnation occurred at the time it did, and not earlier. In this explanation, Eusebius shows his view that mankind was moving from bestiality to civilization. So Eusebius argues that the gospel came late to the world because, “The life of the ancients was not of such a kind as to permit them to receive the all-wise and all-virtuous teaching of Christ” (1.2. 17).<sup>130</sup> By inference the people under the rule of Caesar Augustus were more civilized as they did receive the wise and virtuous teaching of Christ.

It is not that Eusebius doubted the perfection of the first man and woman. Rather he argued that after their rejection of God they, “...fell into this mortal and perishable state,” and then their descendants filled the earth and with few exceptions they, “entered upon a certain brutal and insupportable mode of life” (1.2.18).<sup>131</sup>

Eusebius then describes in detail how brutal this life of mankind was, claiming that people, “thought neither of city nor state, neither of arts nor sciences. They were ignorant even of the name of laws and of justice, of virtue and of philosophy” (1.2.20).<sup>132</sup> Essentially they were animals who could not think above their basic bodily needs. He goes on to refer to them behaving “...like wild and fierce beasts, destroying, by an excess of voluntary wickedness, the natural reason of man, and the seeds of thought and of culture implanted in the human soul” (1.2. 19).<sup>133</sup> Not only did they suppress reason and beauty, they also failed to suppress wickedness: “They gave themselves wholly over to all kinds of profanity, now seducing one another, now slaying one another, now eating human flesh, and now daring to wage war with the Gods and to undertake those battles of the giants celebrated by all; now planning to fortify earth against heaven, and in the madness of ungoverned pride to prepare an attack upon the very God of all” (ibid).

Eusebius then argues that in response to primitive man, God sent judgments of floods, plagues, famines and wars (1.2.20).<sup>134</sup> However, these did not deter or improve mankind and so God began to send the pre-incarnate Christ to man, but only in small measures: “Then,

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<sup>130</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>131</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>132</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>133</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>134</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.



when the excess of wickedness had overwhelmed nearly all the race, like a deep fit of drunkenness, beclouding and darkening the minds of men, the first-born and first-created wisdom of God, the pre-existent Word himself, induced by his exceeding love for man, appeared to his servants, now in the form of angels, and again to one and another of those ancients who enjoyed the favor of God, in his own person as the saving power of God, not otherwise, however, than in the shape of man, because it was impossible to appear in any other way" (1.2.21). Eusebius is accomplishing two goals here. Firstly, he is arguing that mankind- at this point in history, was not yet civilized enough to receive the full revelation of Jesus. As we will see - that must wait until the establishment of the Roman empire. But secondly, he is arguing that Christ is not new – he was appearing to people all through history.

Eusebius then turns to the development of the Hebrew nation and here records progress in the development of mankind. He describes the Hebrews as having, "seeds of piety" and as devoting, "themselves persistently to the worship of God", and yet God, "did not grant them a complete knowledge of the mysteries themselves" (1.2.22).<sup>135</sup> The Hebrews then began to improve other nations through their law: "as a result of their influence the dispositions of the majority of the heathen were softened by the lawgivers and philosophers who arose on every side, and their wild and savage brutality was changed into mildness, so that they enjoyed deep peace, friendship, and social intercourse" (ibid.). In short, Eusebius dismisses all the surrounding cultures of the Hebrews, describing them as savage and brutal, until they were improved by the Hebrew law to become men of peace and friendship.

This history lesson is essentially building to the climax of human civilization, which Eusebius regards as the Roman empire: "Then, finally, at the time of the origin of the Roman Empire, there appeared again to all men and nations throughout the world, who had been, as it were, previously assisted, and were now fitted to receive the knowledge of the Father, that same teacher of virtue, the minister of the Father in all good things, the divine and heavenly Word of God, in a human body not at all differing in substance from our own" (1.2.23).<sup>136</sup> Here Eusebius' two arguments merge again. Firstly, mankind, having moved from bestiality to

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<sup>135</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>136</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:157.



civilization, which happened to coincide with the inception of the Roman empire, was finally fitted to receive the knowledge of Christ. Before this time they were depraved and so unable to receive God's full disclosure. Secondly, this Christ who did finally appear, was not new but was actually the pre-existing Logos, or word of God.

It is interesting to note that Eusebius describes Adam and his descendants as animals: "they passed their lives in deserts, like wild and fierce beasts" (1.2.19).<sup>137</sup> Clearly, Eusebius did not see the beginning of mankind as a perfect era. Droge rightly argues that this is in contrast to many ancient writers who did. The example Droge uses is of Hesiod who in his *Works and Days* gives a mythological account of early man describing him as blessed and free from toil, plague and war. This state is the Golden age and what follows is the decline of mankind through five ages (1992:496).

On the contrary, Eusebius believed in the gradual development and progress of humanity. Although he does refer to the blessedness of life in the Garden of Eden, he does not regard this time period as part of the sweep of history: "For in the beginning, after the first life in blessedness, the first man, despising the command of God, fell at once to this mortal and perishable life, and exchanged the former divine delights for this earth with its curse" (1.2.18).<sup>138</sup> The fall introduced the mortal life and the life on earth, and thus it was the fall that began history. In contrast to Hesiod who charted the decline of humanity, Eusebius argued for society's progress, climaxing in the age of the Roman Empire, and Christianity.

According to Droge, Eusebius' presentation of humankind's primitive condition as "bestial" (θηριώδης) was not unique to him; it was a common term in Greek accounts of the history of culture (1992:497). Droge supports this claim with a fragment attributed to the fifth century BCE Greek philosopher Democritus which states that "the first men to be born led an unordered and *bestial* life" (ibid.). Also, the *Sisyphus*-fragment of the poet-politician Critias, a contemporary of Democritus, contains the remark that "there was a time when the life of man was unordered, *bestial*, and the slave of force" (ibid). The use of this term might suggest

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<sup>137</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:156.

<sup>138</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:21-23.



that Eusebius was trying to appeal to an already popular view of history, as he made his argument for the supremacy of both Christianity and the Roman empire.

Eusebius' argument for the progress of history was also not unique to him. For example Lucretius in his *On the Nature of Things*, records a similar viewpoint in Book V. Whilst arguing for a young earth, one of his points is that the earth cannot be old, because it is still improving: "That is why even now some arts are still being perfected: the process of development is still going on. Many improvements have just been introduced in ships. It is no time since organists gave birth to their tuneful harmonies. Yes, and it is not long since the truth about nature was first discovered, and I myself am even now the first who has been found to render this revelation into my native speech" (5.359-372).<sup>139</sup>

In the beginning of the world, Lucretius described mankind as beast-like, unable to think practically or morally, unable to advance and to serve the common good of humanity (5:954-70).<sup>140</sup> He then records mankind's progress through inventions and culture, through organization and the arts (5:1136-1140).<sup>141</sup>

Lucretius concludes Book V with the following paragraph: "So we find that not only such arts as sea-faring and agriculture, city walls and laws, weapons, roads and clothing, but also without exception the amenities and refinements of life, songs, pictures, and statues, artfully carved and polished, *all were taught gradually by usage* and the active mind's experience as men groped their way forward step by step. So each particular development is brought gradually to the fore by the advance of time, and reason lifts it into the light of day. Men saw one notion after another take shape within their minds until by their arts they scaled the topmost peak" (5:1457-1467).<sup>142</sup>

According to Rist, Lucretius' ideas are taken directly from Epicurus. After looking at some details of Epicurus' descriptions of physical phenomena, Rist states: "Of more relevance to

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<sup>139</sup> Translated by Latham 1976:181.

<sup>140</sup> Translated by Latham 1976:200-201.

<sup>141</sup> Translated by Latham 1976:206.

<sup>142</sup> Translated by Latham 1976:216.



our present enquiries is the Epicurean account of the later stages of the development of our earth and the development of civilization upon it. For this our chief source is the fifth book of Lucretius, but there is no reason to doubt that, in general, apart from the question of the old age of the present world, the poet is recording genuinely Epicurean teachings" (1972:70). Although Rist does concede that "much of this material may go behind Epicurus to Democritus" (1972:70).

Interestingly, Rist notes Lucretius' view of the progress of mankind from animal-like behaviour to civilization, but Rist argues that, "Lucretius is not interested in the question of whether the human race progresses or retrogresses in any theoretical or ideological sense. He is trying to *describe* in what ways early men were similar and in what ways they were dissimilar to the men of his own day" (1972:71). In this way, Lucretius would differ from Eusebius, as Eusebius built the strength of his argument on the positive progress of history.

However, although Lucretius may not have been interested in the ideological questions surrounding the progress of humans, he certainly assumed that there was progress. As Rist shows: "One aspect of the development of civilization is worth special attention. In the letter to Herodotus, Epicurus suggests that originally men were only capable of reacting to events. Only later did they begin to reason in advance in order to anticipate the impact of nature" (1972:72).

Rist notes that one of the major advances in mankind's progress centered on the development of language (1972:72). Droge shows that the fourth-century BCE Athenian orator, Isocrates, made an explicit connection between speech and mankind's progress, "In his *Nicocles* (5-9), Isocrates praised *logos* or "speech" as the primary agent that led humankind from barbarism to civilization: "Not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and generally there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech (*logos*) has not helped us to establish" (1992:497). Isocrates' use of the word *logos* here is striking. Essentially, he views the development of man, from beast to superior being, as largely attributable to *logos*, or speech. Eusebius uses this concept and tweaks it. He too argues that man has improved, and that *logos* was involved in that improvement, but he applies the term



*logos* to Christ. Christ is the speech, the eternal word, the divine *logos*. He appeared through the ages, planting the seeds of true religion among men and thus preparing them for the civilization, the Roman empire, into which the full *logos* could be born: Jesus Christ, the final *logos*.

Thus, Eusebius, using the existing ancient argument for the progress of history, turns it to his advantage. Now, he has a response to those who dismissed Christianity as a historical novelty: The Logos of God was always there, but mankind was not yet ready for it. In addition, the progress of history strengthens Eusebius' argument that under the Roman Empire, Christianity would finally triumph. Droge highlights this saying, "In his view the movement away from a bestial and nomadic existence entailed a movement toward monarchy and, in particular, the monarchy of the Roman Empire. For Eusebius, it was no mere happenstance that the birth of Christ coincided with the establishment of the Roman Empire under Augustus. According to Eusebius, the destinies of the church and the empire were bound together in the providence of God" (1992:498).

The idea that the Roman Empire had ushered in the Golden Age was not new to Eusebius. The Roman poet, Virgil, compared Augustus Caesar and his rule to the rule of the gods: "And there in very truth is he whom you have often heard prophesied, Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified, and founder of golden centuries once more in Latium, in those same lands where Saturn once reigned; he shall extend our dominion beyond the Garamantians and the Indians in a region which lies outside the path of the constellations" (*Aeneid* 6.791-795).<sup>143</sup> However, where Eusebius differed is that he connected the Golden Age of Rome to the divine. In essence he argued that God established the empire so that Jesus Christ could be born, the message of Jesus Christ could spread easily, and ultimately under Constantine, this message could flourish and rule.

Wengst confirms this view saying, "Virgil and Aristides, Augustus and the Antonine emperors, mark out the period which even in antiquity and thereafter all down history produced comments of the utmost admiration. This is at the same time the period of the ministry of

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<sup>143</sup> Translated by Jackson Knight 1956:171.



Jesus, the rise and growth of the church. Later Christian authors saw an intrinsic connection between the birth of Jesus Christ and the time of peace under Augustus, between the growth of the church and the growth of the Roman empire" (1986:7).

According to Eusebius, the connection between the Roman empire and the spread of Christianity, had been made by other authors. Thus, Eusebius states that, in 175CE, the second-century apologist and Bishop of Sardes, Melito, wrote in his *Apologia* to the emperor: "For our philosophy formerly flourished among the Barbarians; but having sprung up among the nations under thy rule, during the great reign of thy ancestor Augustus, it became to thine empire especially a blessing of auspicious omen. For from that time the power of the Romans has grown in greatness and splendor. To this power thou hast succeeded, as the desired possessor, and such shalt thou continue with thy son, if thou guardest the philosophy which grew up with the empire and which came into existence with Augustus; that philosophy which thy ancestors also honored along with the other religions. And a most convincing proof that our doctrine flourished for the good of an empire happily begun, is this that there has no evil happened since Augustus' reign, but that, on the contrary, all things have been splendid and glorious, in accordance with the prayers of all" (4.26-27).<sup>144</sup>

Here, Melito is arguing that the empire has been blessed by Christianity and the proof of this is that the Roman empire has flourished since Augustus' reign. Thus, Melito, like Eusebius, sees the fate of Christianity and the empire as being intertwined.

Another example is of Origen, who died in 254CE. He relates the biblical Psalm 72:7 ('In his days the righteous will flourish, prosperity will abound till the moon is no more')<sup>145</sup> to the birth of Jesus under Augustus and saw that the message of peace that came through Jesus could only be furthered if it was brought into a peaceful Roman empire: "It is quite clear that Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus, the one who reduced to uniformity, so to speak, the many kingdoms on earth so that he had a single empire. Accordingly, how could this teaching, which preaches peace and does not even allow men to take vengeance on their

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<sup>144</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:335.

<sup>145</sup> New International Version translation 1988:647.



enemies, have had any success unless the international situation everywhere had been changed and a milder spirit prevailed at the advent of Jesus?" (*Contra Celsum* 2.30).<sup>146</sup>

Thus Origen highlights the significance of the birth of Christ coinciding with the *Pax Romana* of Augustus, combining political and salvation history. Dovetailing this was the popularly held belief, amongst the early Christians, that Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue* was a certain prophecy of the coming of Christ, a view that Constantine himself propagated (*The Oration of Constantine* 19).<sup>147</sup> Bourne states: "That Vergil should have been held in high esteem by the early Christians is not surprising, if we consider that he was the preeminent classical poet in the minds of all during the early centuries after Christ, and that there was a tendency to see in him a close approach to Christian ideals" (1916:400).

Like Eusebius, Origen and Melito connected God's plan with history: Christ's incarnation was orchestrated once secular affairs had improved under the Roman empire, and then the mission and expansion of Christianity, again under the Roman empire, brought about further progress. Droge makes an interesting connection between these views and later Christian views associated with Constantine: "Thus, the belief in progress, usually deemed so typical of the Constantinian and post-Constantinian eras, was actually present before the political reality of a Christian empire" (1992:498).

### 3.6 Kingdom-Nationalism.

However, Eusebius did not just see Christianity as a religious movement that had begun under Augustus and flourished under Constantine. If he had then his view, in essence, would not have conflicted with religious freedom or pluralism. But instead, Eusebius came to see Christianity as a "nation" (ἔθνος), distinct from Greeks and Jews. "For when the advent of our Savior, Jesus Christ, recently shone forth on all men, it was confessedly a new race (νέον ἔθνος) which has thus appeared in such numbers, in accordance with the ineffable prophecies of the date, and is honored by all by the name of Christ" (1.4.2).<sup>148</sup> Thus, Eusebius saw

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<sup>146</sup> Translated by Chadwick 1965:92.

<sup>147</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:1095-1096.

<sup>148</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:39.



Christians as a new race or nation, large in number, gathered under Jesus Christ.

This idea was not new. Droge points out that a number of other ancient texts pre-dating Eusebius, refer to three races – the Greeks, the Jews and the Christians. For example the *Preaching of Peter*, the second-century apologist, Aristides, and the *Epistle to Diognetus* all refer to Christians as a “new race” (καὶνὸν γένος) in distinction from Jews and Greeks (1992:500).

Thus, Eusebius is not alone in perceiving that Christians comprise a distinct race or nation. However, the development of this idea of a separate nation under God, into an unhelpful nationalism that excludes pluralism, is a small step. Christians begin to be seen as a nation, and begin to turn against other nations. Freeman in *The Closing of the Western Mind* argues that this is what happened in the early church: “Almost all the early Church Fathers wrote a work entitled ‘Against the Jews’. It seems to have become a part of an assertion of Christian identity, almost a ritual which had to be gone through to claim credentials as a Christian theologian” (2002:133). Freeman rightly highlights the obvious danger: “It was only much later when Christianity achieved political power that hostility to Jews was to become an openly destructive force” (ibid.).

The development of this dangerous nationalist thinking is evident in the writing of Eusebius. He moves from identifying Christians as a new nation under God, to identifying the entire Roman empire as a nation under God. Thus, he argues that once the gospel had been preached to other nations there was suddenly the development of: “a new nation; a nation confessedly not small, and not dwelling in some corner of the earth, but the most numerous and pious of all nations, indestructible and unconquerable, because it always receives assistance from God. This nation, thus suddenly appearing at the time appointed by the inscrutable counsel of God, is the one which has been honored by all with the name of Christ” (1.4.1).<sup>149</sup> Here Eusebius refers to the Roman empire as a new nation and equates the empire with the name of Christ. He finds it unthinkable that one could name another religion and still be part of the empire. Also he directly connects the triumph of the empire with God’s

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<sup>149</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:163.



assistance. These sentiments could easily arouse discrimination against other religions: if the success of the empire depends on the Christian God, then no-one should worship other gods.

Eusebius developed this idea more fully later. He argued that because Constantine converted to Christianity, the Roman empire is under God's blessing: "And indeed unto Abraham, who was thus before his circumcision a justified man, there was given by God, who revealed himself unto him (but this was Christ himself, the word of God), a prophecy in regard to those who in coming ages should be justified in the same way as he. The prophecy was in the following words: "And in thee shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed." And again, "He shall become a nation great and numerous; and in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." It is permissible to understand this as fulfilled in us. For he, having renounced the superstition of his fathers, and the former error of his life, and having confessed the one God over all, and having worshiped him with deeds of virtue, and not with the service of the law which was afterward given by Moses, was justified by faith in Christ, the Word of God, who appeared unto him. To him, then, who was a man of this character, it was said that all the tribes and all the nations of the earth should be blessed in him" (1.4.12-13).<sup>150</sup>

Here, Eusebius is applying the blessing of Abraham directly to the empire of Rome. He says that it is permissible to see this blessing as fulfilled under Constantine's rule. In other words, Rome has become a great nation, that will bless all the nations of the earth. This is because Constantine is the one who renounced superstition, confessed the one God, and was justified by faith in Christ. As a result, the nation of Rome will prosper under God.

The idea of harmonizing Christianity with the Roman empire was not new. Eusebius records that the Bishop Melito apparently wrote to the emperor Marcus Aurelius appealing for the right treatment of Christians. Melito asks the emperor to rethink the accusations against the Christians and to renounce the edict against them. He argues that Christianity had in no way weakened the empire which continued to grow despite the presence of Christianity (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.26).<sup>151</sup> Thus, early on, the incredible expansion of the Roman Empire

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<sup>150</sup> Translated by McGiffert 1890:164.

<sup>151</sup> Translated by Lake 1926:387-391.



was recognised, and Christians were trying to harmonize with it.

In addition, Christians had been persecuted by the empire. Eusebius goes on to record that Melito had claimed that Christians had suffered robbery, injury and death at the hands of adversaries and for no just cause other than being part of the church (ibid.). Thus, Eusebius may have had good motives in his defense of Christian nationalism. Surely he wished to harmonize Christianity with the Roman empire and he wished to avoid a return to some of the unjust persecution Christians had faced in the past. However, the danger of identifying one nation with one religion is that it destroys religious freedom, which in turn inevitably leads to the loss of justice for others.

### **3.7 Constantine: The Establishment of a Worldwide Christian Empire is Seen as the Fulfillment of Prophecy and the Consummation of History.**

As already established, later Christian authors saw an intrinsic connection between the birth of Jesus Christ and the time of peace under Augustus, between the growth of the church and the growth of the Roman Empire.

The seeds for this were sown early. For example, they are already evident in the first century text of 1 *Clement*. The time immediately after the death of Domitian (96CE) is the most probable period for the composition of 1 *Clement*.<sup>152</sup> At the end of the letter is a lengthy prayer. The prayer contains a petition for peace: “Give concord and peace to us and to all that dwell on the earth” (60.4).<sup>153</sup> Commenting on this verse Wengst explains, “If this is peace for all the inhabitants of the earth, then it is political peace; and for the time of Clement that must mean the peace which actually exists, the *Pax Romana*” (1986:106-107). ‘Peace and concord’ is typically political terminology (Wengst 1986:21). Thus, when Clement prays for peace and concord he is praying for God to sustain the *Pax Romana*. Clement is concerned for the peaceful and secure existence of the Roman empire.

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<sup>152</sup> In chapters 5 and 6 the author regards the Neronian persecution in Rome as an event that has already taken place.

<sup>153</sup> Translated by Lake 1975:115.



The prayer also contains the following phrase: “Guide our steps to walk in holiness of heart to do the things which are good and pleasing before thee and before our rulers” (60.2).<sup>154</sup> This part of the prayer reveals a decidedly positive view of the political leadership. Similarly in 60.4 the prayer beseeches: “Grant that we may be obedient to thy almighty and glorious name, and to our rulers and governors upon the earth.”<sup>155</sup> Thus it is clear that obedience to God and obedience to rulers, runs parallel. The theological justification for this merging of authority becomes even clearer in 61.1: “Thou, Master, hast given the power of sovereignty to them (our rulers) through thy excellent and inexpressible might, that we may know the glory and honour given to them by thee, and be subject to them, in nothing resisting thy will.”<sup>156</sup> Failure to submit to Roman rulers, is failure to submit to God.

Thus Roman rule is viewed not only as a good thing, but as a gift from God. In 61.3 there is praise of God as the one “who alone art able to do these things and far better things for us.”<sup>157</sup> In other words, to extend the depth and breadth of the *Pax Romana*, is to extend the rule of God (the Christian God).

It is no surprise then to read Eusebius blending the concept of political ruler, with God’s agent of peace and righteousness, as embodied in Constantine. For example, in Book 9 of *Ecclesiastical History*, he records Constantine’s battle with Maxentius, and in so doing presents the emperor Constantine as God’s agent. He describes Constantine as pious and beloved of God (9.9.1).<sup>158</sup> But not only is Constantine favoured by God, he is directly acting on God’s will. Eusebius describes him as “stirred up by the King of Kings, God of the universe and saviour” (ibid.). He is stirred up to fight, “the two most impious tyrants and when war was formally engaged, God proved their ally” (ibid.). Eusebius believes God sent Constantine to war, and that God fought on Constantine’s side.

Eusebius then draws the parallel between Constantine and Moses. Constantine was someone who could restore liberty to the Romans, in the same way that Moses gave liberty to the Old

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<sup>154</sup> Translated by Lake 1975:115.

<sup>155</sup> Translated by Lake 1975:115.

<sup>156</sup> Translated by Lake 1975:115.

<sup>157</sup> Translated by Lake 1975:117.

<sup>158</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:359.



Testament people of God (9.9.2-3). Later, he directly connects Constantine's defeat of Maxentius with Moses' defeat of the pursuing Egyptian army (9.9.5).<sup>159</sup> And Eusebius argues that this victory was because of, "the God-sent power that was with Constantine" (ibid.). He then records Moses's song of victory from Exodus 15:11, saying that this same song was sung by Constantine (9.9.7).<sup>160</sup>

Eusebius goes on to cement his argument that the triumph of Constantine cannot be separated from the rule of God by saying that, "Constantine, by his very deeds, sang to God, the Ruler of all, and Author of his victory" (9.9.8).<sup>161</sup> And although the Roman people, "received him as their deliverer, their saviour, and their benefactor" (9.9.9), Constantine claimed rather that, "his help was from God" (9.9.10), and that God was, "the author of all their good fortune" (ibid.), the one who had done wonderful things for them (9.9.11).<sup>162</sup> There is no doubt in Eusebius' mind that Constantine's victory was orchestrated by God: God's rule is synonymous with Constantine's rule.

### **3.8 Constantine: Christian Emperor.**

It is helpful to place Eusebius' praise of Constantine in context. Christians had previously experienced persecution under the Roman empire and their transition to liberty was hardly believable. That is surely one significant reason as to why Eusebius celebrates this new dispensation under Constantine: "Let us now cry aloud the new song since after those terrible and gloomy spectacles and narratives we were accounted worthy now to behold and to celebrate in panegyric such things as of a truth many righteous men and martyrs of God before us desired to see upon earth and saw them not" (10:4).<sup>163</sup> Commenting on this Cameron says, "Anyone who reads Eusebius can sense the sheer excitement felt by men like him at this unexpected, and from their point of view, clearly divined inspired reversal" (2006:539).

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<sup>159</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:361.

<sup>160</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:363.

<sup>161</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:363.

<sup>162</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:365.

<sup>163</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:393.



There must have been a great tension experienced by Eusebius. For on the one hand he had clearly adopted the view that God was using the Roman empire to 'Christianize' the world. On the other hand, the church had experienced 250 years of sporadic and localized persecution under the empire.<sup>164</sup> For much of its existence the church was considered "an illegal and suspect religion whose members were subject to arrest, condemnation and, in many cases, death" (Frend 2006:503). Some of the persecution was carried out by the emperors themselves (particularly in the third century).

Although Christians were perceived as enemies of the empire and of the values for which it stood, in the first half of the third century, the tide began to turn in Christianity's favour. This was partly due to the fact that some Christians were now rich, or of high pedigree. Writing at about 248 Origen tells "of the multitude of people coming in to faith, even rich men and persons in position of honour, and ladies of high refinement and birth" (*Contra Celsum* 3.9).<sup>165</sup>

Frend similarly states: "In Alexandria, Clement's *Protrepticus* (c.190) is the first open attempt to convert educated Greek-speaking citizens to Christianity. Defence of the faith was no longer based solely on scriptural proof-texts showing that Jesus was Messiah, but on demonstrations that Christianity was the true philosophy. This was a significant change in Christian apologetics from the second to the third century, corresponding largely to a change in the composition of the membership of the church" (2006:512).

In Rome, new catacombs were coming into existence and the church was quickly growing into a substantial charity organization. Eusebius mentions that during the time of the excommunication of Novatus, a presbyter of the church at Rome, there were "above fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress" (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.43.11).<sup>166</sup> The implication is that they were receiving support from the church.

Prior to Constantine, Eusebius had experienced an emperor who was friendly towards the Christians. Valerian (emperor from 253 to 260) is described as receiving Christians "at the

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<sup>164</sup> From the Neronian persecution in 64 CE to the conversion of Constantine c.312.

<sup>165</sup> Translated by Chadwick 1965:134.

<sup>166</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:119.



beginning in the most friendly and intimate manner” ( 7.10.3).<sup>167</sup> But this favorable scenario did not last long. The teacher and ruler of the synagogue of Egyptian magicians persuaded Valerian that the Christians were a threat to the empire (7.10.4).<sup>168</sup> Fierce persecution ensued in an attempt to destroy the church, financially and socially. Christian services were forbidden and church buildings were confiscated. These persecutions, however, came to an end with Valerian’s capture. He was the first Roman Emperor to be captured as a prisoner of war and was put to death by the Persians in June 260. For the next forty three years the church enjoyed peace and multiplied. So much so that when Maximinus entered Rome in 311, he discovered that nearly all the inhabitants were Christians (9.9.15).<sup>169</sup>

By now the Christians, a growing part of Rome’s population, would have understandably been exasperated by the continuing persecution. And given their view, expressed by Origen and Eusebius, that the Roman empire had been divinely ordained for the spread of the gospel, the door was now open for a Christian ruler to bring justice and peace to a higher level. In other words, Rome was being prepared for the blended narrative of the *Pax Romana* with that of a Christian empire.

### **3.9 Towards a Christian Empire.**

When “Constantine entered Rome on 29 October 312”, writes Barnes, “crowds thronged the streets in greeting and congratulated their liberator with a joy which almost all genuinely felt. Constantine came in triumph and as a Christian” (1981:44).

But how Christian was the newly triumphant emperor? Cameron provides a helpful summary of the evidence we have for Constantine’s conversion: “Constantine is remembered for his alleged vision of a cross in the sky immediately before he went into battle against Maxentius. This version depends on the later and highly embellished story in Eusebius's *De vita Constantini*, which he claims came from the emperor himself (VC 1.28-32). Accounts nearer in time to the event also attribute his victory to divine assistance, though with some confusion

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<sup>167</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:151.

<sup>168</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:151.

<sup>169</sup> Translated by Oulton 1942:371.



as to the form this aid actually took. While in Lactantius' version Constantine is told in a dream to mark his soldiers' shields, apparently with a *chi-rho* sign (Lactant. *Mor.*43.2), a contemporary panegyrist offers a pagan account (Pan. *Lat.* 12 [313]). On the arch of Constantine of 315, the emperor is said to have delivered the city from the grip of a tyrant 'by divine inspiration' (*instinctu divinitatis*), a phrase which carefully leaves the identity of the divinity unspecified. None of these accounts tells this as a conversion experience, although Eusebius claims that Constantine now had to inquire from clergy what the sign meant, and even which divinity his father had honoured (VC 1.27.2-3,32.1-3)" (2006:542-3).

A paucity of information with regard to Constantine's personal conversion has led to much diversity of opinion on the topic. The testing of his religious conviction, however, was on display in the administration of the empire that followed. Slowly, but steadily, his identification with Christianity emerged<sup>170</sup>. And he never deviated from his decision to support the church. Scott in his global history, *Ancient Worlds*, argues that Constantine was a pragmatic ruler seeking toleration within the Roman World in order that he might better lead it (2017:284). However, even Scott points out that this toleration was aimed at encouraging unity within the church, not unity amongst various religions. Presiding over the meetings at Nicaea, that were called to deal with church divisions, Constantine says: "Christ enjoins him who is anxious to obtain forgiveness to forgive his brother" (2017:284). Constantine wanted to identify with the church and so the church needed to unite.

But becoming sole ruler of a vast empire, not surprisingly, did not happen without any dirty political work. In fact, the nearly two decade dispensation between Constantine's appointment to the tetrarchy in 306, all the way until the end of 324, contained a series of civil wars. According to Cameron it was "a confused period of intermittent warfare and alliances, for which we have no complete narrative history, and which can be reconstructed only with difficulty, with the help of numismatic and legal evidence" (2006:541). When we do trace the outline of Constantine's politicking, we see him as aggressively ambitious, seeking divine help when expedient to him.

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<sup>170</sup> For a detailed analysis of Constantine's steady transitioning of the empire towards being Christian, see J. Curran, 'Constantine and the Ancient Cults of Rome: The Legal Evidence', *Greece and Rome* 43 (1), 1996, 68-80.



This ruthlessness is evident in the history of the *tetrarchy*. The 'leadership of four' had been established by Diocletian in 293 after a period of the assassination of many emperors. The purpose was to bypass the need for approval of emperors by the Senate, and also to serve in blocking attempts by the military to elevate popular generals to the purple. In 306 and 307 the tetrarchy was made up of Diocletian ruling the east, with Maximian his equal and co-emperor in the west. They each carried the title of *Augustus*, signifying that they were the emperors. The two *Caesars*, sometimes also referred to as emperors, were subordinate to them. They were Galerius in the east, and Constantius in the west.

Between 309 and 313 most of the claimants to the imperial office were killed in various civil wars, or had died. Constantine forced Maximian's suicide in 310 and Galerius died from an incurable disease in 311. Maxentius was defeated by Constantine at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 and subsequently killed. Lucinius then pursued Maximinus who killed himself at Tarsus in 313 when Lucilius' army broke through the Cilician Gates. It was at this point that "the Great Persecution ended in the East after a full decade of intermittent, but brutal, enforcement" (Barnes 1981:162). By 313, therefore, there remained only two emperors: Constantine in the west and Licinius in the east. The tetrarchic system was failing, although it took until 324 for Constantine to finally defeat Licinius, reunite the two halves of the Roman Empire and declare himself sole *Augustus*.

Eusebius' painting of characters to suit his agenda is clearly exposed by Barnes who comments: "When Licinius was an ally of Constantine, he was a paragon of virtue and piety. But when he turned against Constantine and his divine protector, his good deeds were excised from the historical record and he became a monster of depravity and lust" (1984:29).

Thus Cameron concludes somewhat skeptically: "The Christian accounts of Constantine's rise to power are deeply tendentious; if there was a tetrarchic 'system', it had been destroyed by Constantine himself" (2006:542).

Once the tetrarchy had been done away with Constantine quickly began to issue edicts regulating religious affairs. "God, he said, had directed his own rise to power and given him victory, and the persecutors had met deserved ends; Christians who had suffered were to be



reinstated and receive back confiscated property; even the imperial treasury was to be compelled to make restitution where it was due” (Cameron 2006:543).

Eusebius preserved one of these edicts<sup>171</sup> which although drafted in letter form, according to Barnes, is “a deliberate, public statement of imperial policy” (1981:209). Constantine’s strongly religious sentiment dominates the edict. The letter begins:

“To all who entertain just and sound sentiments respecting the character of the Supreme Being, it has long been most clearly evident, and beyond the possibility of doubt, how vast a difference there has ever been between those who maintain a careful observance of the hallowed duties of the Christian religion, and those who treat this religion with hostility or contempt. But at this present time, we may see by still more manifest proofs, and still more decisive instances, both how unreasonable it were to question this truth, and how mighty is the power of the Supreme God: since it appears that they who faithfully observe His holy laws, and shrink from the transgression of His commandments, are rewarded with abundant blessings, and are endued with well-grounded hope as well as ample power for the accomplishment of their undertakings. On the other hand, they who have cherished impious sentiments have experienced results corresponding to their evil choice. For how is it to be expected that any blessing would be obtained by one who neither desired to acknowledge nor duly to worship that God who is the source of all blessing? Indeed, facts themselves are a confirmation of what I say” (VC 2.24).<sup>172</sup>

Note Constantine’s distinction between those who observe the Christian religion and are blessed, and those who cherish impious thoughts and so suffer evil. Even within an official document, he is underscoring the gap between the Christian and the pagan in the empire. Scott argues that Constantine was careful to appease the empire’s pagans by acts such as retaining a pagan diviner in his service or keeping his pagan religious title of *Pontifex Maximus* (2017:278). Undoubtedly, Constantine mixed some pagan practices in with his Christian practices. However, this mixing does not constitute a policy of religious tolerance, especially

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<sup>171</sup> Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus, to the inhabitants of the province of Palestine (VC 2.24-42).

<sup>172</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:859.



in light of the deliberate divisions Constantine drew between Christian and pagan, even within official documents.

Constantine's attitude soon led to the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. A first step in this direction was the promotion of Christians to offices of government. According to Eusebius: "After this the emperor continued to address himself to matters of high importance, and first he sent governors to the several provinces, mostly such as were devoted to the saving faith; and if any appeared inclined to adhere to Gentile worship, he forbade them to offer sacrifice. This law applied also to those who surpassed the provincial governors in rank and dignity, and even to those who occupied the highest station, and held the authority of the Prætorian Præfecture. If they were Christians, they were free to act consistently with their profession; if otherwise, the law required them to abstain from idolatrous sacrifices" (VC 2.44).<sup>173</sup>

Official appointments were now reserved for Christians and "as for pagan magistrates, whether provincial governors, *vicarii* of dioceses, or praetorian prefects, [they] were forbidden to sacrifice before commencing official business" (Barnes 1981:210).

This restraint however was not limited to officials and soon Constantine began to purge paganism from the people of the empire. Thus, Eusebius records: "Soon after this, two laws were promulgated about the same time; one of which was intended to restrain the idolatrous abominations which in time past had been practiced in every city and country; and it provided that no one should erect images, or practice divination and other false and foolish arts, or offer sacrifice in any way" (VC 2.45.1).<sup>174</sup> This first law was designed to inhibit the practice of other religions, but the second law was designed to actively promote the growth of the Christian church. According to Eusebius: "The other statute commanded the heightening of the oratories, and the enlargement in length and breadth of the churches of God; as though it were expected that, now the madness of polytheism was wholly removed, pretty nearly all mankind would henceforth attach themselves to the service of God. His own personal piety

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<sup>173</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:879.

<sup>174</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:880.



induced the emperor to devise and write these instructions to the governors of the several provinces: and the law farther admonished them not to spare the expenditure of money, but to draw supplies from the imperial treasury itself. Similar instructions were written also to the bishops of the several churches; and the emperor was pleased to transmit the same to myself, being the first letter which he personally addressed to me" (VC 2.45.2).<sup>175</sup> Here, the command is given to spend the empire's money on the promotion of the church.

Barnes speculates that this "change was so sudden, so fundamental, so total [it] shocked pagans. There were probably complaints and protests to the emperor, perhaps even formal petitions" (1981:210). Constantine then issued a justification of his policy, which still survives. According to Barnes, this document does not allow for religious tolerance. Although he permits pagans to retain their temples, and forbids conversion by force, throughout the edict Constantine uses harsh language towards pagans and their practices. Barnes argues that, "In this document Constantine defines a policy which he was to maintain until his death. Christianity is the emperor's religion, and Christians can expect him to give them preferential treatment. Pagans may retain their temples, shrines and sacred groves, but sacrifice, divination, and the dedication of new cult images are all illegal- precisely the activities which constituted the essence of the traditional religions of the Roman Empire. Also prohibited were certain sorts of attacks on Christianity; Porphyry had overstepped the permissible bounds, and Constantine ordered all copies of *Against the Christians* to be burned, prescribing the death penalty for any who furtively retained the work" (1981:212).

Constantine's lack of religious tolerance is clearly evident above. At times his policies seemed to imply religious tolerance, but this was largely pragmatic; he would not risk rebellion or civil disobedience. The evidence for such a claim lies in the fact that there is no evidence of the Christian emperor making any serious attempt to enforce the prohibition of sacrifices. From 324 onward Christianity was the established religion of the Roman Empire, and of its ruler. Paganism was now expected to conform to Christian patterns of religious observance.

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<sup>175</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:880.



One interesting move Constantine made to cement his empire as distinctly Christian was the founding, on 8 November 324, of a new capital city. This was to be a Christian city, in which Christian emperors could rule without being tainted by surrounding pagan practices. The city became known as Constantinople, the capital of the East Roman empire and it had its own senate, and importantly its own hippodrome for entertainment. According to Barnes, the amusements, “lacked any taint of overt paganism, and the spectators at the horse races had ample opportunity to applaud their imperial benefactor as a Christian emperor” (1981:212). However, Cameron tempers such a clear-cut reading of Constantine’s accomplishments when she states: “As late as the 330s he allowed the erection of a temple for the imperial cult in Umbria, but only in sanitised form. Yet the weight of tradition bore hard on him, and there were few unambiguous symbols of Christianity on his coins. Equally, the inauguration ceremonies for Constantinople in 324 and 330 seem to have incorporated elements of ancient Roman tradition, even though Eusebius claims that the new city named after the emperor was Christian through and through (cf. *VC* 3.48). The reality was more complex than Eusebius acknowledges: Constantine’s ‘New Rome’ developed on the site of an older and non-Christian city, and it seems to have been planned as much as a seat of imperial power as a Christian capital” (2006:543).

Having broken the state’s sanction of traditional paganism over the Roman empire, one would have expected the newly Christianized empire to flourish; according to the Christian authors, that is. But Constantine was now plagued by a new problem: disunity. Immediately after the ceremonies of 8 November, Constantine received news of theological bickering that was dividing the East.

Eusebius describes this bickering as a spirit of envy, that was designed to destroy the blessing Christians were experiencing under Constantine’s rule. Starting small amongst the ‘saints’, the division, which was doctrinal, spread to the bishops and eventually, “a mighty fire was kindled as it were from a little spark, and which, originating in the first instance in the Alexandrian church, overspread the whole of Egypt and Libya, and the further Thebaid. Eventually it extended its ravages to the other provinces and cities of the empire; so that not only the prelates of the churches might be seen encountering each other in the strife of words, but the people themselves were completely divided, some adhering to one faction



and others to another. Nay, so notorious did the scandal of these proceedings become, that the sacred matters of inspired teaching were exposed to the most shameful ridicule in the very theaters of the unbelievers" (VC 2.61).<sup>176</sup>

This doctrinal dispute became known as the Arian controversy, and according to Eusebius it divided church leaders and members and encouraged pagan ridicule of Christians, at a time in which Eusebius was expecting Christian growth, not harmful division. In response Constantine legislated an end to all heretical sects. The opening of this legislation indicates his anger towards those he regarded as heretics: "Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus, to the heretics: Understand now, by this present statute, you Novatians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulians, you who are called Cataphrygians, and all you who devise and support heresies by means of your private assemblies, with what a tissue of falsehood and vanity, with what destructive and venomous errors, your doctrines are inseparably interwoven; so that through you the healthy soul is stricken with disease, and the living becomes the prey of everlasting death. You haters and enemies of truth and life, in league with destruction! All your counsels are opposed to the truth, but familiar with deeds of baseness; full of absurdities and fictions: and by these ye frame falsehoods, oppress the innocent, and withhold the light from them that believe" (VC 3.64).<sup>177</sup>

Cameron provides an apt paragraph to draw this chapter to a close: "Constantine did not restrain his anger at Christian division or his strong conviction that polytheism represented the darkest kind of error. The letter to Arius and Alexander (332/3) denounces Arius as 'the mouthpiece of Satan'. Constantine was, however, a pragmatist. The fact that he did not take stronger measures against pagans does not prove that he had a policy of toleration; rather, it is indicative of the simple fact that non-Christians comprised the vast majority of the population" (2006:550).

Eusebius' account of Constantine's funeral provides a picture of the tension that remained between Christianity and traditional Roman religion. The ceremony was Christian, but

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<sup>176</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:896.

<sup>177</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:982.



Constantine was recognised as 'divine' (VC 4.65-73).<sup>178</sup> This expression of diverse views was not, ironically, the result of a healthy pursuit of toleration (never mind pluralism), but rather a reflection of religious uncertainty.

### **3.10 Conclusion.**

Eusebius had an idiosyncratic interpretation of human history. He read the Bible as foretelling the whole course of human history, with the triumph of the Christian church, and even the Christian Roman empire of Constantine, as the pinnacle of mankind's ascension.

He believed there was special affinity between monarchy and monotheism. He was convinced that an eschatological reign of peace would be realized once Constantine was in possession of the throne. The Christian emperor appears to have bought into the same narrative. As such his political aim was never for plurality, but unity, more specifically Christian unity. However this was never fully realized. Surely this is because religious unity is difficult to legislate- as the issue of orthodoxy always then becomes a question of which strand receives the right to determine orthodoxy.

It is unsurprising then, that at the conclusion of twenty one pages of documenting the emperor's struggle with maintaining ecclesiastical politics, Barnes paints a sad picture of a frustrated and beaten ruler: "Constantine might have been able to impose genuine unity if he had been willing to use force to compel acceptance of his own views. He did not try. Instead, he recommended, exhorted, cajoled, and threatened- ultimately, in vain. Perhaps he judged the Church too powerful to be coerced. Whatever the cause, the effect is clear: when Constantine died in 337, the eastern Church was even more bitterly divided than when he rescued it from persecution" (1981.244). As Cameron points out: "The term the 'peace of the church', used by Christians to denote the ending of persecution, is something of a misnomer in light of the violent quarrels which followed during the rest of the fourth century and after" (2006:538).

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<sup>178</sup> Translated by Richardson 1890:1052.



Constantine managed to turn the church from an illegal and suspect religion whose members were subject to arrest, condemnation and in some cases, death, into a “public institution with a legal presence and official recognition” (Cameron 2006:538). This resulted in Christians no longer fearing persecution- unless of course, one was heterodox. We would expect that the persecution experienced by Christians would result in a legacy of religious liberty. Instead, however, “defence of the age-old established religion of guardian deities watching over the Roman empire and the people of provinces gave way to the guardianship of a single God, whose demands were ever more exacting. This God desired complete and unreserved commitment to divine doctrines. Those who dissented felt the power of God’s wrath exercised in his name by the state. One form of persecution gave way to another, a legacy which has lasted until our own day” (Frend 2006:523).

One has to acknowledge that the triumphant vision that Eusebius, Constantine and others looked forward to, and worked towards, expressed in Origen’s dream of the Roman emperor ruling as God’s vice-regent on earth, with the image of Psalm 72:7 in the background, never materialized.

It is true that Constantinople became the capital of the eastern and Orthodox empire and that this empire (what came to be known as Byzantium) eventually passed orthodoxy onto Europe. It is also true that Constantine brought together the Christian church and the Roman state in such a way that it would significantly shape the rest of western history as we know it. But in the process, pluralism was suffocated, and as a result all religions suffered. The Pagans and Jews were socially and economically discriminated against, and the Christian religion faced unprecedented factionalism and disunity. It is hard to see how the kingdom-nationalism of Constantine benefited any religion, including Christianity.

However, Constantine’s Kingdom-Nationalism is an idea that has recurred throughout history. In the next chapter I will look at a more recent example of it in the Catholic Monarchs of Spain.



#### **Chapter 4: The effect of the religious intolerance practised by the Catholic Spanish monarchs in 1492.**

Lewis, in his introduction to *The Jews of Islam*, offers two stereotypes that dominate most of what has been written on tolerance and intolerance in the Islamic world. “The first depicts a fanatical warrior, an Arab horseman riding out of the desert with a sword in one hand and the Qur’an in the other, offering his victims the choice between the two” (1984:4). Lewis claims that although this picture was made famous by Edward Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, it is not only false, but impossible: “Unless we are to assume a race of left-handed swordsmen. In Muslim practice, the left hand is reserved for unclean purposes, and no self respecting Muslim, then or now, would use it to raise the Qur’an” (1984:4).

The second image is equally absurd. It is “that of an interfaith, interracial utopia, in which men and women belonging to different races, professing different creeds, lived side by side in a golden age of unbroken harmony, enjoying equality of rights and of opportunities, and toiling together for the advancement of civilization” (ibid).

Lewis goes on to provide a helpful analogy. In the latter version it would resemble something like modern America (a land which upholds religious pluralism by law and practice) only better; in the former it would be like Hitler’s Germany (where the genocide of non-Aryan races and non-Christian faiths took place) only worse. Lewis concludes that “both images are of course wildly distorted; yet both contain, as stereotypes often do, some elements of truth” (ibid). Furthermore, what we must bear in mind is that “for Christians and Muslims alike, tolerance is a new virtue, intolerance a new crime” (ibid).

In this chapter I will trace the relationship that existed between the Jews, Christians and Muslims of Spain, beginning with the Visigoth invasion (410CE) and ending with the Catholic expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1492. I will then make brief observations on the effect of this religious intolerance.



#### **4.1 A Shattered Visage.**

Eusebius' dream of an ever expanding Christian empire never materialized. MacCulloch comments: "So it appeared in the 390s that the future lay with a Christian empire under strong rulers like Theodosius and strong bishops like Ambrose: a culmination of God's plan for the world and the beginning of a golden age, the vision of Constantine's historian Eusebius of Caesarea finally realized. This turned out to be a mirage" (2010:300).

The reason it never materialized was probably because the Western Empire was overwhelmed by a series of invasions of 'barbarians' from beyond the northern frontier. The most decisive event was the capture and sack of Rome itself by a Visigoth army led by Alaric in 410CE (MacCulloch 2010:301).

#### **4.2 The Visigoth Domination.**

At the request of the Roman government, the Visigoths entered Hispania in 418, almost completely wiping out the Silingi and Alans. The Romans recovered ninety percent of the Iberian peninsula until 439. In 484 the Visigoths established Toledo as the capital of their monarchy (Altamira 1955:79).

Successive Visigothic kings ruled Hispania as patricians who held imperial commissions to govern in the name of the Roman emperor. In 585 the Visigoths conquered the Suebic Kingdom of Galicia, thus controlling almost all Hispania (ibid). The highly Romanized Visigoths introduced mainstream Christianity to the Iberian peninsula. The Romans continued to run the civil administration and Latin continued to be the language of government and of commerce (Altamira 1955:78).

#### **4.3 The Law of the Judges.**

Known in Spanish as *Libro de los Jueces*, the 'Law of the Judges' is a set of laws first promulgated by King Chindasuinth (642-653). The code was drafted in his second year of rule (642-643) and only survives in fragments. In 654 Chindasuinth's son, Recceswinth (649-672),



published the enlarged law code, which was the first law code that applied equally to the conquering Goths and the general population, of which the majority had Roman roots, and had lived under Roman laws (Altamira 1955:81).

The code abolished the old tradition of having different laws for Romans (*leges Romanae*) and Visigoths (*leges barbarorum*), and under which all the subjects of the Visigothic kingdom would stop being *Romani* and *Gothi*, instead becoming *Hispani*. All subjects of the kingdom were now gathered under the same jurisdiction, eliminating social and legal differences, thus fostering assimilation of the various people groups (ibid.).

#### **4.4 The Jewish Presence in Ancient Hispania.**

From ancient times many Jews lived in Spain and in south Gaul. According to Peters, in Jewish usage Iberia was termed *Sefarad*- a term borrowed from Obadiah 1:20- literally the farthest northern point of Jewish migration in Syria, used figuratively for any refuge remote from Palestine (1995:9). The Jews were apparently characterized by industriousness in manual labor and in trade. Some were noted for their culture in religious and other fields (Altamira 1949:85). Schama draws particular attention, through the ages, to the cultural excellence of Jewish poetry (2014:279).

Generally, under Roman Christian rule, the rights of the Jews were respected. This was largely due to the doctrines of the Catholic Church upheld by St. Isidore (560 – 636CE) and other high-ranking members of the clergy who counseled that “the Jews should be converted to Catholicism only by means of sermons and persuasions, and that in no case should force be utilized to make them change their religion” (Peters 1995:9).

Some kings (Sisebut, Chintila, Recceswinth, and Egica) defied this doctrine, mostly for political reasons. However, when they did so they were censured or checked by the Bishop and by the Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Councils of Toledo. “When the Visigoth monarchy came to an end, an important Jewish population, in addition to those Jews who had been converted to Catholicism on different occasions, continued to live on the peninsula” (ibid).



#### **4.5 The Introduction of Islam- 'Al-Andalus'.**

In 711CE Muslim forces invaded Spain, arriving at Gibraltar from North Africa. Seven years later (718) Islam had conquered the Iberian peninsula. Only a small area in the mountainous north-west of the peninsula managed to resist the initial invasion.

Most of the Iberian peninsula was under Islamic domination for a period of nearly 500 years (roughly 720 -1200). They called it 'Al-Andalus', the land of the Vandals. Their numbers were reinforced at intervals by new waves of conquest from North Africa. But, according to Wheatcroft, "...the Muslim conquerors were few in number – no more than 20,000 in the first waves – and thereafter provided only a thin veneer, rather like the Visigoth ruling class, set atop a large Catholic Christian population" (2004:69).

This Muslim layer was itself divided between Berbers, native inhabitants of North Africa and new converts to Islam, and Arabs, an ancient tribe who looked down on the Berbers, and often took the best land and richest cities in Spain for themselves. This split naturally presented a continuous challenge to Islamic unity: "This division, although obscured by the outward success of the Muslim governing institutions, was a constant and destabilizing force within the Islamic culture of Spain. Islamic Spain appeared a strong and unified power, but this was only partly true. There were many fracture lines within the structure. Some were tribal, for the Arabs were always prone to quarreling among themselves. The Berbers were restive and often rebelled against Arab pretensions. And as soon as central authority diminished, the political units fragmented" (ibid).

Wheatcroft suggests that it was because of this tribalism that there were only three periods of enforced unity in over five centuries of domination (2004:69). The first period was under the Emirate, which became the Caliphate of Cordoba in the tenth century. The second and third periods were under the domination of the Moroccan dynasties of the Almoravides and the Almohades during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, respectively. However, these three episodes were surrounded by long years of disunity and civil war. The first period is the most important for the point of this chapter.



#### **4.6 The Progressive Culture of the Umayyads.**

Córdoba in Southern Spain, initially dominated by the Umayyad Emirate (756-929), became the capital of its own state in January 929 when Abd-ar-Rhaman III proclaimed himself caliph. The Caliphate of Córdoba (929 -1031) was ruled by a family dynasty known as the Umayyads.

The caliphate was not only renowned for its military strength. "The Moslem people loved learning," says Altamira, "and were zealous in encouragement of education. A proof of this was their establishing in Spain primary schools with a curriculum that included reading and writing with the Koran as text, poetry, letter-writing and grammar. In the higher schools, which we today would call universities, were studied, the religious traditions and commentary of the Koran, grammar, medicine, philosophy, law or jurisprudence, and literature, the latter course including history" (1955:123-4).

According to Altamira the library of the Caliph of Cordova came to number 600,000 volumes. Over 50 public libraries were established in Al-Andalusia. Agents were apparently employed to purchase or copy ancient and modern books for the caliph's collection. Education was, as a result, very general throughout the caliphate and illiteracy was very low (1955:123-124).

In fact, while the rest of Europe was struggling through what is popularly known as the Dark Ages, much of the science and literature of ancient Rome was preserved due to the efforts of scholars in Córdoba, Seville and Granada. Greek and Roman works, translated by Syrian and Persian scholars, formed the foundation of Muslim learning. Wheatcroft explains that the Muslims of Spain also incorporated into their culture aspects of science and art that they observed in Asian cultures. Thus he concludes that the Muslims, "transformed themselves into the most cultured people of Europe, in the dual sense, as goes without saying, preservers of the classic and importers of the eastern Asiatic learning and at the same time contributors of new ideas and discoveries. Hence, from a very early period and from many of the Christian peoples of Europe, scholars came to Spain to study there in erudite Moslem circles branches of learning which could not be acquired elsewhere" (Ibid).



#### 4.7 Other Religions Under Islam.

Naturally the conquerors took over the cities, as well as the most fertile land. In *Al-Andalus* this was mostly in the south, where Muslims found themselves ruling a large majority of Christians. These Christians were known as *Mozarabes*, meaning 'arabized' and they formed a majority in the Muslim cities, and in some parts of the countryside (Wheatcroft 2004:71).

By the ninth century three main religions made up the population of Al-Andalus; the Muslim conquerors, Arab or Berber; the Christian *Mozarabes*; and the Jews. Because the Jewish population had suffered severe persecution under the Visigothic kings, the Muslim conquest represented something of a release from oppression.

Lewis argues that the relation between Muslim state and non-Muslim subjects and neighbors can be traced back to the Prophet. The *Qur'an* and the Muslim tradition record how Muhammad dealt with the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Najran and the pagan Arabians. For pagans, the choice was Islam or death, but not so for other monotheistic religions: "For Jews and Christians, possessors of what were recognized as revealed religions, based on authentic though superseded revelations, the choice included a third term: Islam, death, or submission. Submission involved the payment of tribute and the acceptance of Muslim supremacy" (1984:10).

There was much overlap between Islam and Christianity right from the start. Both religions were monotheistic, both revered the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament and both religions prayed, fasted and gave alms. The Muslims honoured the Virgin Mary, devoting one of the chapters of the *Koran* to her (*Sura* 19), and the *Koran* has numerous references to Jesus and his teaching (Fletcher 2003:18).

Thus Fletcher concludes, "In the written traditions of Islam, therefore, there is an embedded cordiality towards Christianity. In practice, of course, this was not always observed" (2003:20-21). For example, churches and monasteries were destroyed in the Muslim invasion of Palestine. However, after the invasion, Christians and Jews were allowed to practise their religion, under certain conditions. They were referred to as *dhimmi* (protected people) and



as such had to pay an annual poll tax, and identify themselves by wearing a sash. They were also not allowed to build new synagogues or churches, participate in public religious practices, or attempt to convert Muslims to a different faith (Fletcher 2003:21).

Lewis summarises the relationship between the Muslim state and the subject non-Muslim communities in terms of a *dhimma* (a pact). “By terms of the *dhimma*, these communities were accorded a certain status, provided that they unequivocally recognized the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of the Muslims” (1984:21).

This covenant of protection was made with conquered Peoples of the Book, which included Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and sometimes Zoroastrians and Hindus. Restrictions and regulations in dress, occupation, and residence were often applied. In return, Islam offered security of life and property, defense against enemies, communal self-government, and a form of freedom of religious practice.

Interestingly, Muslims preferred Christians over Jews. According to the ninth-century Arab author al-Jahiz, this was because the Jews, unlike the Christians, had actively opposed the Prophet in Medina. Also the Christians occupied important positions as government officials, courtiers, physicians of the nobles, perfumers and bankers, while Jews were normally dyers, tanners, cuppers, butchers, or tinkers (Lewis 1984:59-60). Schama notes that the Jews were reminded constantly of their inferiority in the sight of Muslims through a number of laws: public religious demonstrations were forbidden, synagogues could not be built higher than mosques, Jews could not carry weapons, give evidence in court or ride a horse (2014:242-243).

Fletcher also points out that there was an overriding practical reason for the Islamic leadership to remain on friendly terms with the Christian populations of the lands they conquered: “Not only did the conquered peoples vastly outnumber their conquerors; in addition, only Christians commanded the necessary administrative expertise to make government possible. Plus...they needed revenue” (2003:21-22).



Arguing that Christians were able to rise within a caliphate government, Fletcher quotes a narrative about the travels and mishaps of a party of English pilgrims to the Holy Places in the year 723. These pilgrims encountered a native of Spain, presumably a Christian, who held a responsible position in the central government of the caliphate (2003:23).

After the death of the Prophet, the rule of Islam increasingly extended across a vast territory. Within each newly acquired territory were often established religious communities (mostly Christian, some Jews and Zoroastrian) and established legal and administrative systems (mostly Roman and Persian) governing how these communities were treated. According to Lewis, "In the early centuries of Islamic rule, there was little or no attempt at forcible conversion, the spread of the faith being effected rather by persuasion and inducement. The rate and scale of conversion are difficult to assess from the available evidence, and some scholars have argued that as late as the Crusades, non-Muslims still constituted a majority of the population. It is clear, however, that large numbers of Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians adopted the Muslim religion and became part of Islamic society" (1984:16-17).

The Jews played a crucial (but subordinate) role in these kingdoms, performing tasks that the Christians could not or would not do, mostly financial and professional. However, "although Jews were needed, they were excluded from high public office, as were Jews elsewhere in Christian Europe" (Peters 1995:9).

Altamira is of the view that Jews even flourished in Al-Andalusia: "The Jews in Spain, who at that time were to be found chiefly in the Moslem territories, likewise distinguished themselves in cultivation of poetry, philosophy, and medicine. In practice of this last they enjoyed great prestige and were often consulted by Christians themselves" (1949:125).

But the Muslims were not that interested in their subjects. According to Fletcher, the Muslims did not settle in their conquered territories but lived in garrisons as an army of occupation. "One senses that they were not much interested in their subjects. People of the Book were useful, indispensable indeed, as taxpayers and administrators and artisans, but that was as far as it went. Their wider culture was not matter for investigation" (2003:28).



Under this wide-spread conquest, Christianity slowly moved from the majority religion to the minority. Lewis argues that unlike the Jews, Christians were not used to being on the losing side and so chose to convert to Islam: "For many Christians, the transition from a dominant to a subject status, with all the disadvantages involved, was too much to endure, and large numbers of them sought refuge from subjection by adopting Islam and joining the dominant faith and community. Judaism in contrast survived. Jews were more accustomed to adversity" (1984:17-18).

As Islam expanded it brought rule to new areas of varied religions: Buddhists and Hindus in Asia, animists in Africa south of the Sahara and of Ethiopia. Lewis suggests that the Muslim approach to these religions was less respectful: "For the Muslim, they were polytheists and idolators, and were therefore not entitled to tolerance" ( 1984:18). However there were certain basic religious principles to be applied to ruling subjects. Lewis maintains that the Islamic Caliphate imbibed the Middle Eastern principle of ethnic and religious pluralism that had existed since antiquity (1984:19). This principle was not one of equality, but it did permit peaceful coexistence.

Wheatcroft believes that in general over the first three centuries of Islamic rule different religions and cultures managed to live side by side. Christians often converted and cultures began to share characteristics in common, Jews often adopted Arabic, while the Berbers even abandoned their native dialects, and yet, " the communities remained distinct: they preserved their customs and observed their own laws. This was the unique and paradoxical Spanish accommodation to which Americo Castro later gave the name *convivencia*, 'living together'" (2004:72).

Schama agrees that this was often the pattern under Muslim rule. Speaking about Fustat, the first capital of Egypt under Muslim rule, built immediately after the Muslim conquest of Egypt, he states: "Symbiosis is a big word - it assumes true, organic, and functional interdependence, which may be overstating it - but in comparison, especially, with medieval Christian societies, it is quite true that, in crucial defining ways, Jews and Muslims did indeed live with rather than just rub up against each other" (2013:252).



Schama quotes the *Geniza Documents* as proof of this living together in Fustat. These documents reveal that sometimes a Jew lived above a Muslim-owned shop or vice versa, often Jews lived in streets devoted to certain professions and not all of these professions were filled by Jews, Jews shared workshops with Muslims, and Jews and Muslims were often business partners (2013:254).

Whilst Schama is speaking directly to what took place in North Africa, it seems fair to assume something similar existed in Spain.

Taking all of this evidence together it seems that Islam in power treated other monotheistic religions to which Islam was connected with a form of tolerance. Although it did discriminate against other religions by identifying the religions and prohibiting their spread and public promotion, it very rarely persecuted other religions. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were, “not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in conquered Spain, between exile, apostasy, and death” (Lewis 1984:8).

#### **4.8 Reconquest - Christianity Spreads South.**

Ever since the beginning of the Islamic domination of Iberia, there had been a series of campaigns by Christian states to recapture territory from the Muslims. These are known as *Reconquista*. During the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, however, Christianity in northern Iberia spread southwards, managing to annex territory that had since the first quarter of the eighth century been under Islamic rule. Muslim territories were conquered by Christian armies and Muslim populations fell subject to Christian sovereigns.

Fletcher summarises this reconquest: “In the Iberian Peninsula the territorial expansion of the Christian monarchies at the expense of their Muslim neighbours continued intermittently throughout the twelfth century. Steady progress was checked first by the Almoravids and then by a second wave of Moroccan zealots, confusingly similar in name, the Almohads, in the second half of the century. A decisive victory at Las Navas de Tolosa by Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1212 exposed southern Spain to Christian conquest. Cordoba fell into Castilian hands in 1236, Seville in 1248. Meanwhile in Portugal, where Christian dominion had been



carried to the line of the Tagus with the conquest of Lisbon in 1147, the Algarve was absorbed during the first half of the thirteenth century. By 1250 the only precariously independent Islamic state left in the Peninsula was the emirate of Granada” (2003:65).

There were different opinions on the obligations of Muslims who found themselves under non-Muslim rule. Some took a lenient view. Lewis claims, “If a non-Muslim government was tolerant, that is, if it allowed Muslims to practice their religion and obey their laws and thus live a good Muslim life, then they might stay where they were and be law-abiding subjects of such a ruler” (1984:23). On the other hand, some believed that if the Christian government is tolerant, then all the more reason to depart, since under a tolerant Christian government the danger of apostasy is much more real.

Lewis highlights that the *Reconquista* and the Crusades increased religious antagonism and weakened the position of Jews and Christians under Muslim rule, yet he notes that it was never to the degree one would expect: “Even so, in this as in many other things, Islamic practice on the whole turned out to be gentler than Islamic precept—the reverse of the situation in Christendom”(1984:24).

#### **4.9 Anti-Jewish Sentiment.**

In the newly reconquered Christian empire, anti-Jewish sentiment increased. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the previous tolerance toward Jews which was encoded in Royal laws, changed to intolerance and often aggressive persecution. The antagonism between Christians and Jews became stronger even than between Christians and Muslims. This friction raised political issues and heightened political ideals: “The Catholic Kings were keenly aware of this prevalent antagonism and of the dangers it engendered. On the other hand, they clung to the ideal of the religious unity of Spain” (Altamira 1955:288).

MacCulloch attributes some of this antagonism to the habit of warfare that was formed during the years of the reconquest and the crusades. “Constant medieval warfare against Islam (and the Judaism which it sheltered) gave Spanish Catholicism a militant edge and an intensity of devotional practice not found elsewhere in western Europe” (2010:585).



This inherent aggression towards Jews was also actively encouraged. In 1378 Archdeacon Ferran Martinez of Ecija near Seville, preached a series of well attended and well received anti-Jewish sermons. He referred to synagogues as 'houses of the devil' and in 1391, encouraged a mob to attack the Jewish quarter (Wheatcroft 2004:103).

This was not an isolated attack. In 1391 a number of riots broke out in different parts of Iberia, directed against Jews. As a result about half the Jewish population of Iberia converted to Christianity- an event unprecedented in history.

Then in 1412, the Valencian Dominican Vincent Ferrer preached publicly against the Jews, pointing out their close connection with Muslims, and making clear that both religions should be barred from contaminating Christians (Wheatcroft 2004:104).

Vicious attacks often prompted Jews to accept baptism and resulted in mass conversion. This however did not reduce the tension between religions instead, according to Wheatcroft, it heightened it: "During the fifteenth century, the prominent Christian states in Spain began to develop a new theory of the infidel. In this view, Judaism, and by extension, Islam, carried a genetic taint and thus no convert of Jewish or Muslim stock could ever carry the True Faith purely, as could someone of 'untainted' Christian descent" (2004:104). Thus a new anti-Jewish movement began, directed this time also against the "New Christians," or *conversos*, as they were called. The 'Old Christians' described themselves as the 'pure' (*limpios*); the assumption being that the Jewish converts were impure (Wheatcroft 2004:105).

Schama notes that Spain now saw its purification as the next step in becoming a truly Christian Kingdom, ready for the Last Days and the return of Christ: "If the banner of Christ was to be lifted from the dust of Constantinople, it must fly over a Spain cleansed of Muslims, Jews and the quasi-Jews who masqueraded as converts. In this way the Jewish question moved to the centre of this struggle for self-definition in the time of its gestation as a supremely Christian kingdom, the next instrument of the coming of the Last Days" (2013:400).



These sentiments that were naturally prevalent continued to be incited by sermons and publications, such as 'The Fortress of Faith' (*Fortalitium fidei contra Christianos hostes*) by Alonso de Espina. Espina encouraged the Holy Inquisition. Unity in purity was the message, and he encouraged Spain to fight the battle against the Jews and the Muslims, a battle which would bring on the Last Days and the Second Coming.

Espina's publication demonised the Jews as child abductors and murderers and his preaching made clear that, "the new Crusade, launched by Pope Calixtus III, could never be accomplished without a thorough cleansing of the kingdom – of the Muslims of Granada to be sure, but also of the Jews who had to be expelled entirely from Spain. If they remained there was no hope there was no hope of making authentic converts since they would always be prey to the 'Judaizers' who were everywhere" (Schama 2013:400).

According to Wheatcroft the sentiments Espina stirred up, boiled over into a number of battles. Campaigns broke out in Granada. In an encounter near Lorca in 1452 more than 800 Moors were killed and the Christians lost 40, with two hundred wounded. The Christians' leader, Alonso Fajardo, took revenge by mounting a raid on Lorca. He slaughtered the Muslim inhabitants and then moved onto another village. "He recorded laconically: 'I took Mojacar where such great deeds were done that the streets ran with blood'" (2004:109).

In 1461 Pope Pius II authorised an Inquisition, but the King of Castile, Enrique IV, who earlier embraced the idea, changed his mind.

One of the major issues for Christians in Spain remained the Muslims in Granada. Wheatcroft argues that prophecy had always been influential in Christian Spain and that this was now applied to the issue of Granada: "It was remembered that King Pelayo in his Asturian cave at Covadonga had foretold that God would eventually come to the aid of His people, and that was taken to mean that God willed the reconquest of Granada" (2004:109).

More than ever before, omens began to attach themselves to Prince Ferdinand and Princess Isabella, heirs to Aragon and Castile, respectively. In fact, Wheatcroft states that many Castilians believed that Isabella the Catholic (*La Catolica*) had been born miraculously, for the



'Redemption of Lost Kingdoms'. Others called her a second Virgin Mary. "Ferdinand and Isabella were seen as the chosen agents of the Divine plan" (Wheatcroft 2004:110).

From 1482 the war for Granada was waged in earnest, as was the Spanish Inquisition. In the summer of 1478 a national council of the Spanish Church had been held in Seville. Their objective was how to achieve national purity. A programme of reform was declared. Inquisitors were appointed by Isabella and Ferdinand, and approval gained from Pope Sixtus. Work had begun in earnest in 1480 and between 1481-1488 thousands of 'Judaizers' had been reconciled to the church. Around seven hundred defectors, however, had been burned alive.

A second aspect of national purification involved the completion of the holy work of the Reconquest: "The old ideas of 'Imperial' Castile were revived, while prophecies appeared in Aragon that Ferdinand would drive the Moors completely from the land of Spain and indeed, out of North Africa" (Wheatcroft 2004:110).

In 1483, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, expelled the Jews altogether from Andalusia, which was considered the province most plagued by Judaising (Schama 2013:403). It was agreed that Jews and Muslims could be driven out of the cities they had called home for a thousand years, the places where "*convivencia*, cultural coexistence between Islam and Judaism, between Arabic and Hebrew philosophy, science and literature, had been most richly produced" (Schama 2013:403).

Ferdinand then turned his attention fully to Granada and on 2 January 1492 he received, "the keys to the city from its last Muslim ruler" (Fletcher 2003:141).

However, the Catholic monarchs, despite the efforts of the Inquisition, had found it impossible to purify the church and thus had concluded that the Jews needed to be isolated from the 'old christians'. This conclusion led to the Alhambra Decree.



#### 4.10 The Alhambra Decree.<sup>179</sup>

The *Alhambra Decree* (also known as the 'Edict of Expulsion') was an edict issued on 31 March 1492, by the Catholic Monarchs ordering the expulsion of practising Jews from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and its territories and possessions by 31 July of that year.

As can be seen from the opening lines of the decree, the Catholic Monarchs had rulership over a vast area: "(1) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Seville, Sardinia, Cordoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaen, of the Algarve, Algeciras, Gibraltar, and of the Canary Islands, count and countess of Barcelona and lords of Biscay and Molina, dukes of Athens and Neopatria, counts of Rousillon and Cerdana, marquises of Oristan and of Gociano..."

Although the exact number of people who expatriated themselves is not known, according to Altamira it was enough to, "undermine seriously the national economic life"(1949:288).

The very act that was meant to preserve Spain in fact caused its deterioration. Just as the Kingdom Nationalism of Constantine caused the deterioration of the Roman Empire, so the Kingdom Nationalism of the Spanish Monarchs caused the deterioration of their empire.

However, the religious intolerance of the Alhambra decree did not just have adverse economic effects, it caused untold suffering amongst the Jews it displaced. In their desire for religious purity, the Catholic Monarchs committed a crime against humanity. Schama summarises this suffering eloquently: "No historian, certainly not this one, constrained by the niceties of prose, can recover the horror, dismay, fear and pathetic agony of the Jews who heard the implacable death sentence now imposed on communities which had indeed seemed their 'Jerusalem in Spain', where the language turned into Ladino, had flowered; where rabbis had studied and written; where songs liturgical and songs loving had been composed, chanted and sung; where dough had been kneaded, confections cooked; where rejoicing had been danced on Purim and Simchat Torah; where wine had been knocked back

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<sup>179</sup> See Appendix for: *The Alhambra Decree*.



at a circumcision, brides and grooms had stood beneath the *huppah* and signed the flower-decorated Aramaic nuptial contract, the *ketubah*; where doctors had brought potions and comfort to the sick of all religions; where scribes and illuminators had created things that testified to the infinite creative power of humanity, to Soria, Segovia, Burgos, Toledo, Salamanca, Saragossa, beloved Girona, Tudela of Halevi's birth . . . all now to be emptied, the Jews who had made homes in exile now to be exiled from that exile" (2013:410).

Schama goes on to quote the Catholic priest, Andres Bernaldez, who was an open Jew-hater, and yet even he and his fellow Christians were moved as they observed the Jewish suffering: "They went along the roads and over the fields . . . in much travail, and misfortune, some falling, others standing up, some dying, others being born, others still falling sick, and there was not a Christian who did not feel sorrow for them and wherever they went they [the Christians] beseeched them to be baptised and some in their misery would convert and remain, but few, very few did so" (2013:412).

#### **4.11 The Expulsion of Muslims**

Even in the face of this Jewish suffering, the ideal of religious purity- and thus repression- remained powerful in Spain. Fletcher highlights two interesting cases as they pertain to Catholic-Muslim relations. The first concerns the Spaniard John of Segovia who prepared a translation of the Koran in Arabic, Latin and Castilian, hoping to initiate intellectual debate between Muslims and Christians. The Muslim scholars of Granada, however, refused to engage with him out of fear- an interesting example of how the Spanish approach to religion had destroyed the freedom of academics. Furthermore in response to these conciliatory policies initiated by John and his pupils, the Archbishop of Toledo, Cardinal Cisneros, insisted rather on a policy of forced baptism of Muslims. Thus the freedom to discuss religion was set aside (Fletcher 2003:146-147). The second is of an academic and cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa, who was asked by his friend, Pope Pius II to write something in support of his crusading plans. Fletcher states that the Pope, "must have been dismayed at what he got. The work entitled *Cribratio Alcorani* [The Sieving of the Koran] is dedicated to the proposition that if the Koran is intensively studied in the proper spirit ('sieved') it will be found to be compatible with the teachings of Christianity as found in the New Testament. Beneath discrepancies and



differences there lay a shared basis of belief" (Fletcher 2003:147-148). Pope Pius II did not listen to his friend. Again, the voice of reason and academic freedom was squashed in favour of religious (Christian) triumphalism.

The approach of both Cardinal Cisneros and Pope Pius II was to force conversion of Muslims and in fact forced mass conversions of Muslims in Granada took place under Queen Isabella's supervision (Wheatcroft 2004:139). However, the same suspicion of these Muslim converts to Christianity was upheld; the distinction between old true Christian and new fake Christian was again highlighted; and these Muslim converts were seen as a threat to Spain's purity and were thus also expelled between 1608 and 1614 (Wheatcroft 2004:138).

Prior to this expulsion, two terrible wars took place between Old Christians and Muslim converts, in 1499-1501 and 1568-1570, respectively. It is possible that both these wars, as well as the expulsion, could have been avoided. Wheatcroft highlights an interesting aspect of the conflict in Granada, comparing the approach of Talavera, the archbishop of Granada, and Cisneros, the Primate of Spain. Talavera proposed that well-trained clergy who spoke the language of the Muslims in Granada could win them to Christianity through respectful persuasion. Cisneros argued that the Muslims must be forced to convert and then be kept under control by means of the inquisition (2004:140). Cisneros won the debate and his method of religious intolerance ultimately led to two cruel wars, and the loss of a Muslim homeland. But what is again interesting is that it did not lead to any strengthening of the Christian faith. Whilst Paul's method of open religious debate won converts to Christianity, Cisneros's method of repression did not. Describing Cisneros and his clergies' methods, Wheatcroft says, "They waged a largely fruitless battle to turn token Christians into true Christians" (2004:140).

Not only did these methods weaken Christianity, they also ultimately weakened the Kingdom of Spain. Altamira traces the economic rise of Spain during the 1500s, highlighting the flourishing textile business, the productive work of skilled artisans, the growing sheep and cattle industry, the accumulation of money gained from international trade, and most encouragingly the high rate of employment. He then says, "All this wealth very soon melted away, chiefly in consequence of the wars" (1949:391). Amongst these wars being the war



waged against the Muslims. In addition, Altamira documents that at the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain was in poverty and industrial decline. This he attributes to the expulsion of the Muslim converts (*moriscos*): “That recession was due largely to the expulsion of the *Moriscos*, a hard-working and highly skilled people” (ibid).

#### 4.12 Conclusion

Pagden places the triumphalism of this Spanish Empire in perspective. He starts with reference to Charles V, King of Spain (1516–1556), and successor to Ferdinand, “The empire of Charles V was not only Roman, it was also Holy. Throughout his life Charles saw himself as the defender of Christendom against all its enemies, both external and internal. And his heirs, down to the final disintegration of the Spanish empire at the end of the eighteenth century, would remain loyal to this image. In this, too, Charles was conscious of his place as the successor to Augustus and Constantine, for Roman imperialism had also marched under the banner of religious devotion” (2001:71).

Essentially, the Spanish empire that repressed and destroyed the Muslims and expelled the Jews, was acting in line with the Kingdom Nationalism that had existed through the centuries. Augustus claimed the favour of the gods on his Roman empire and claimed deity for himself, Constantine built his Roman empire on the Christian God and claimed to be defender of the church, Ferdinand and Isabella built their Roman empire on Catholicism and claimed to be defenders of the true faith. The irony is that as they sought to defend the true faith, they ended up destroying it: “Christianity had become something none of its founders could ever have imagined, or wanted” (Pagden 2001:73). The Christianity that was forced on people had ceased to reflect true Christianity. This is a good example of how all religions suffer without religious liberty – the Christian religion, which destroyed the other religions in Spain, was itself destroyed.

Pagden does however highlight that even in these times of religious compromise there were men of faith who debated with the rights of conquerors to deal cruelly with adherents to different religions. He gives an encouraging example of a Spanish missionary on the American Island of Hispaniola, who preached to his Spanish congregation on the errors of their attitudes



to conquered peoples saying of the native people, “‘Are these not men?’ he asked. ‘Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as yourselves?’” (2001:75).

Surprisingly, the order of the *Alhambra Decree* was only declared void by the Spanish Government 476 years later, on December 16, 1968. Since then Modern Spain has apologised in a variety of ways for the religious intolerance of its past. For example, the *New York Times* reported on the symbolic prayer meeting that took place 500 years after the Jewish expulsion in a Madrid synagogue between the Israeli Prime Minister Chaim Herzog and the Spanish King Juan Carlos, in which Carlos invited Jews to return to their Spanish homeland.<sup>180</sup> And in 2000, the Guardian reported that Pope John Paul II had apologised for the Catholic persecution of Jews.<sup>181</sup>

In the West today, it is easy to agree to the ideal of religious pluralism, and these apologies reflect the acceptance of religious freedom as a worthwhile ideal. However, the history of Spain proves this ideal. The Catholic Monarchs turned their back on religious freedom, in pursuit of a unified Spain; they turned their back on religious tolerance in pursuit of religious purity; they turned away from justice to war and displacement. And what they gained was the ultimate economic failure of their country, and a weak copy of their former religion. When they rejected religious pluralism, they lost not only their prosperity, but also their faith.

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<sup>180</sup> Online Source: *500 Years After Expulsion, Spain Reaches Out to Jews*. (Riding, A. 1992)

<sup>181</sup> Online Source: *Pope Says Sorry for Sins of Church*. (Carroll, R. 2000)



## Conclusion

This thesis has argued that religious liberty is good for society. In seeking to defend this position, I have examined four historical examples.

In chapter 1 Alexander's empire was presented as a positive example of accommodating religious difference. Alexander's intentional combining of diverse peoples and affording them the liberty to practise their own culture and religion, resulted not only in liberty and peace for the Greeks and Jews, but also in creative and intellectual pursuits that would have been impossible without that religious freedom.

In chapter 2 I examined Paul the Apostle's approach to positive religious engagement, as recorded in *Acts 17* of the *New Testament*. I presented Paul as a positive example of maintaining the practice of pluralism- whilst not resorting to persecution, nor succumbing to relativism. His examples proves that robust yet constructive religious engagement and reasonable debate is possible and effective.

In chapter 3 I examined Constantine's pursuit of unity through religious prescription. In his bid to make the Roman empire great, Constantine aligned the state with the kingdom of God and developed a kingdom-nationalism. In driving out competing religions, however, Constantine ended up with an empire of schisms, under one religion. The result was a divided empire and church.

In chapter 4 we saw the Catholic Monarchs of Spain repeating a similar mistake. In attempting to create a strong uniform empire by way of forcing Jews and Muslims to convert to the Catholic faith, the long-term results were far from favourable: the economy soon collapsed and divisions were fostered in the church once again. Hence we have a second stark example of religious prescription not only resulting in injustice for the 'other', but also negatively affecting the health of the dominating empire, the state of the economy and the dominant religion itself.

With regard to the South African context, a form of religious restraint has been imposed on us before. During apartheid the official state religion was Christianity, a religion practised in



state schools and assemblies. In President P.W. Botha's 1985 address at the opening of the National Party Natal Congress<sup>182</sup>, he stated that what united South Africans was their religion: "I believe that the majority of South Africans as well as independent states, which form our immediate neighbours, have much in common apart from our economic interests. We believe in the same Almighty God and the redeeming grace of His Son, Jesus Christ." Yet in the same speech Botha claimed that South Africa upheld religious freedom: "We believe and wish to uphold religious freedom in South Africa. This is a country of religious freedom. We believe in democratic institutions of government and we believe in the broadening of democracy." This address was at a time when black people were denied the vote and access to quality education or work. Botha's understanding of democracy was as weak as his understanding of religious freedom and perhaps both were good indicators of the future collapse of Afrikaner Nationalism.

The constitution of the new South Africa stresses religious freedom and this bodes well for our future- if we choose to practice it well. However, the historical example of religious pluralism as modeled by the apostle Paul and the Athenian philosophers is a pertinent reminder for South Africa. P.W. Botha assumed that he and his government upheld religious freedom, and it is possible that the new South Africa might equally assume this. Paul had freedom to debate with people of other religions. As a Jew, he had made an effort to understand Greek philosophy and to communicate his Christian faith in a way that Stoics and Epicureans could understand. Religious leaders in South Africa can learn from Paul and the Athenians. Religious fundamentalists need to communicate in ways that people from other religions can understand and appreciate; it is possible to do this without compromising religious orthodoxy. Furthermore, South Africa needs to encourage open religious debate, even on issues that are deemed to be in the secular sphere, such as education or economics. We do not need to be afraid of religious engagement. It can be executed well.

We need to work at positive religious engagement because pluralism is essential for human flourishing. Furthermore, shared public space will be an on-going concern. According to Goheen and Bartholomew (2008:122), Islam is currently experiencing remarkable growth in

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<sup>182</sup>Online Source: *Address by State President* (Botha, P.W. 1985)



the world: "Islam grew from 12.4 percent of the world's population in 1900 to 19.6 percent in 1993. This resurgence of Islam, which began in the 1970s, now directly affects some one-fifth or more of humanity and has significant implications for the rest of the world." Jenkins predicts that by the year 2050, twenty of the world's twenty-five largest nations will be predominantly or entirely Christian or Muslim (2011:166). Goheen and Batholomew explain the significance of this by arguing for the inevitability of religious conflict: "Nine of these countries will be wholly or mainly Muslim, eight others wholly or mainly made up of Christians, and the remaining three will be deeply divided between the two faiths. No less than ten of the world's twenty-five largest states could, by the middle of the twenty-first century, be the site of serious conflict between adherents of Islam and Christianity" (2008:122). In light of such a prediction it is crucial that different religious groups and ideologies develop the ability not only to coexist, but to engage and stimulate each other.

Reno argues for this positive approach to religious engagement in an article entitled *Islam and America*<sup>183</sup>. He begins by highlighting the plight of American Muslims: "Muslims in America, by contrast, are vulnerable. I've heard a number of people express hostility and the conviction that Muslims cannot be loyal American citizens. Anti-Shari'a laws prohibiting judges from consulting Islamic laws have been passed in several states—in spite of the fact that at present there isn't the slightest danger of Shari'a usurping our secular legal code. Trumpian hyperbole during the campaign stoked those suspicions."<sup>184</sup>

Reno then refers to a book by Jackson entitled, *Islam and the Black American*, in which Jackson makes a case for Muslim endorsement of the American political system and its liberal-pluralist vision. Jackson maintains that Muslims are able to do so if they make the important distinction between liberal pluralism as a cultural ideal on the one hand, and a set of political arrangements, on the other. Jackson apparently provides evidence from Islamic sources to show that, even in circumstances where Muslims had surpassing political power, there was support for practical acceptance of pluralism and civic accommodation of "non-Muslim beliefs and behaviors that violated Islam."<sup>185</sup> Reno points out that this practice is similar to

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<sup>183</sup> Online Source: *Islam and America*. (Reno, R.R. 2017).

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*



the Catholic use of *natural law*, or the Protestant idea of *common grace*: “Just as Christians rightly enter into public life, seeking to leaven [their] laws with the wisdom of Scripture and church tradition, not asserting claims on the basis of church authority, but arguing for them in the give-and-take of civic discourse. Muslims should do the same, seeking to bring forward policy proposals ‘that are grounded in the vision and values of Islam.’”<sup>186</sup> It is just this sort of positive public engagement of different religions that could serve society and help it to flourish as it once did in Alexandria.

In conclusion, Reno argues that Islam is not the problem in the United States, rather it is “Christian virtues gone mad. The greatest threat to the future of the West is the post-Christian West.”<sup>187</sup> By this I understand him to mean that the threat to the West is the shut-down on positive religious engagement, in the name of Christianity.

Pagden argues that because empires are artificial creations they can only be held together by force and ideology: “They [empires] are created by conquest, and conquerors have always attempted to keep those they have conquered in subservience. This has been achieved by a mixture of simple force and some kind of ideology” (2001:8). The South African apartheid government tried religious prescription, as did Constantine and the Catholic Monarchs. The new South African constitution allows for the ideology of religious liberty, as did Alexander. But in order for it to work, we need the approach of Paul and the philosophers in Athens, and not *Christian virtues gone mad*.

In the Introduction to this thesis I referred to Kant’s appeal to freedom- including religious freedom- as being the birthright of humankind (1186:202). Freedom must be afforded to all people, and practised in such a manner that does not impinge on any other person’s freedom (ibid.). Religion is not a private concern but affects public and political life. Religious pluralism allows for freedom of thought, belief and expression, within society- which in turn- frequently gives rise to debate concerning truth and goodness, debate that often takes place in the public square. Thus if we want to gain the benefits of religious pluralism, then we need

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<sup>186</sup> ibid.

<sup>187</sup> ibid.



to learn from those who have practised liberty well in the past, and avoid the values and principles of those who have sought domination through coercion. In fact, we have little choice, for As Madison observed: “Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence”.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Online Source: *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*. (Madison, J. 1785)



## Appendix

*The Alhambra Decree* (translated by Edwards, P.)<sup>189</sup>

(1) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Seville, Sardinia, Cordoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaen, of the Algarve, Algeciras, Gibraltar, and of the Canary Islands, count and countess of Barcelona and lords of Biscay and Molina, dukes of Athens and Neopatria, counts of Rousillon and Cerdana, marquises of Oristan and of Gociano, to the prince Lord Juan, our very dear and much loved son, and to the other royal children, prelates, dukes, marquises, counts, masters of military orders, priors, grandees, knight commanders, governors of castles and fortified places of our kingdoms and lordships, and to councils, magistrates, mayors, constables, district judges, knights, official squires, and all good men of the noble and loyal city of Burgos and other cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric and of other archbishoprics, bishoprics, dioceses of our kingdom and lordships, and to the residential quarters of the Jews of the said city of Burgos and of all the aforesaid cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our aforementioned kingdoms and lordships, and to all Jews and to all individual Jews of those places, and to barons and women of whatever age they may be, and to all other persons of whatever law, estate, dignity, preeminence, and condition they may be, and to all to whom the matter contained in this charter pertains or may pertain. Salutations and grace.

(2) You know well or ought to know, that whereas we have been informed that in these our kingdoms there were some wicked Christians who Judaized and apostatized from our holy Catholic faith, the great cause of which was interaction between the Jews and these Christians, in the cortes which we held in the city of Toledo in the past year of one thousand, four hundred and eighty, we ordered the separation of the said Jews in all the cities, towns and villages of our kingdoms and lordships and [commanded] that they be given Jewish quarters and separated places where they should live, hoping that by their separation the situation would remedy itself. Furthermore, we procured and gave orders

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<sup>189</sup> Online Source: Jewish History and Gentile Memory: The Expulsion of 1492 (Peters, E. 1995).



that inquisition should be made in our aforementioned kingships and lordships, which as you know has for twelve years been made and is being made, and by many guilty persons have been discovered, as is very well known, and accordingly we are informed by the inquisitors and by other devout persons, ecclesiastical and secular, that great injury has resulted and still results, since the Christians have engaged in and continue to engage in social interaction and communication they have had means and ways they can to subvert and to steal faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith and to separate them from it, and to draw them to themselves and subvert them to their own wicked belief and conviction, instructing them in the ceremonies and observances of their law, holding meetings at which they read and teach that which people must hold and believe according to their law, achieving that the Christians and their children be circumcised, and giving them books from which they may read their prayers and declaring to them the fasts that they must keep, and joining with them to read and teach them the history of their law, indicating to them the festivals before they occur, advising them of what in them they are to hold and observe, carrying to them and giving to them from their houses unleavened bread and meats ritually slaughtered, instructing them about the things from which they must refrain, as much in eating as in other things in order to observe their law, and persuading them as much as they can to hold and observe the law of Moses, convincing them that there is no other law or truth except for that one. This proved by many statements and confessions, both from these same Jews and from those who have been perverted and enticed by them, which has redounded to the great injury, detriment, and opprobrium of our holy Catholic faith.

(3) Notwithstanding that we were informed of the great part of this before now and we knew that the true remedy for all these injuries and inconveniences was to prohibit all interaction between the said Jews and Christians and banish them from all our kingdoms, we desired to content ourselves by commanding them to leave all cities, towns, and villages of Andalusia where it appears that they have done the greatest injury, believing that that would be sufficient so that those of other cities, towns, and villages of our kingdoms and lordships would cease to do and commit the aforesaid acts. And since we are informed that neither that step nor the passing of sentence [of condemnation] against the said Jews who have been most guilty of the said crimes and delicts against our holy Catholic faith have been sufficient as a complete remedy to obviate and correct so great an opprobrium and



offense to the faith and the Christian religion, because every day it is found and appears that the said Jews increase in continuing their evil and wicked purpose wherever they live and congregate, and so that there will not be any place where they further offend our holy faith, and corrupt those whom God has until now most desired to preserve, as well as those who had fallen but amended and returned to Holy Mother Church, the which according to the weakness of our humanity and by diabolical astuteness and suggestion that continually wages war against us may easily occur unless the principal cause of it be removed, which is to banish the said Jews from our kingdoms. Because whenever any grave and detestable crime is committed by members of any organization or corporation, it is reasonable that such an organization or corporation should be dissolved and annihilated and that the lesser members as well as the greater and everyone for the others be punished, and that those who perturb the good and honest life of cities and towns and by contagion can injure others should be expelled from those places and even if for lighter causes, that may be injurious to the Republic, how much more for those greater and most dangerous and most contagious crimes such as this.

(4) Therefore, we, with the counsel and advice of prelates, great noblemen of our kingdoms, and other persons of learning and wisdom of our Council, having taken deliberation about this matter, resolve to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them. And concerning this we command this our charter to be given, by which we order all Jews and Jewesses of whatever age they may be, who live, reside, and exist in our said kingdoms and lordships, as much those who are natives as those who are not, who by whatever manner or whatever cause have come to live and reside therein, that by the end of the month of July next of the present year, they depart from all of these our said realms and lordships, along with their sons and daughters, menservants and maidservants, Jewish familiars, those who are great as well as the lesser folk, of whatever age they may be, and they shall not dare to return to those places, nor to reside in them, nor to live in any part of them, neither temporarily on the way to somewhere else nor in any other manner, under pain that if they do not perform and comply with this command and should be found in our said kingdom and lordships and should in any manner live in them, they incur the penalty of death and the confiscation of all their possessions by our Chamber of Finance, incurring these penalties by the act itself,



without further trial, sentence, or declaration. And we command and forbid that any person or persons of the said kingdoms, of whatever estate, condition, or dignity that they may be, shall dare to receive, protect, defend, nor hold publicly or secretly any Jew or Jewess beyond the date of the end of July and from henceforth forever, in their lands, houses, or in other parts of any of our said kingdoms and lordships, under pain of losing all their possessions, vassals, fortified places, and other inheritances, and beyond this of losing whatever financial grants they hold from us by our Chamber of Finance.

(5) And so that the said Jews and Jewesses during the stated period of time until the end of the said month of July may be better able to dispose of themselves, and their possession, and their estates, for the present we take and receive them under our Security, protection, and royal safeguard, and we secure to them and to their possessions that for the duration of the said time until the said last day of the said month of July they may travel and be safe, they may enter, sell, trade, and alienate all their movable and rooted possessions and dispose of them freely and at their will, and that during the said time, no one shall harm them, nor injure them, no wrong shall be done to them against justice, in their persons or in their possessions, under the penalty which falls on and is incurred by those who violate the royal safeguard. And we likewise give license and faculty to those said Jews and Jewesses that they be able to export their goods and estates out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land as long as they do not export gold or silver or coined money or other things prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms, excepting merchandise and things that are not prohibited.

(6) And we command all councils, justices, magistrates, knights, squires, officials, and all good men of the said city of Burgos and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our said kingdoms and lordships and all our new vassals, subjects, and natives that they preserve and comply with and cause to be preserved and complied with this our charter and all that is contained in it, and to give and to cause to be given all assistance and favor in its application under penalty of [being at] our mercy and the confiscation of all their possessions and offices by our Chamber of Finance. And because this must be brought to the notice of all, so that no one may pretend ignorance, we command that this our charter be posted in the customary plazas and places of the said city and of the principal cities, towns, and villages of



its bishopric as an announcement and as a public document. And no one shall do any damage to it in any manner under penalty of being at our mercy and the deprivation of their offices and the confiscation of their possessions, which will happen to each one who might do this. Moreover, we command the [man] who shows them this our charter that he summon [those who act against the charter] to appear before us at our court wherever we may be, on the day that they are summoned during the fifteen days following the crime under the said penalty, under which we command whichever public scribe who would be called for the purpose of reading this our charter that the signed charter with its seal should be shown to you all so that we may know that our command is carried out.

(7) Given in our city of Granada, the XXXI day of the month of March, the year of the birth of our lord Jesus Christ one thousand four hundred and ninety-two years.

I, the King,    I the Queen,

I, Juan de Coloma, secretary of the king and queen our lords, have caused this to be written at their command.

Registered by Cabrera, Almacan chancellor.



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