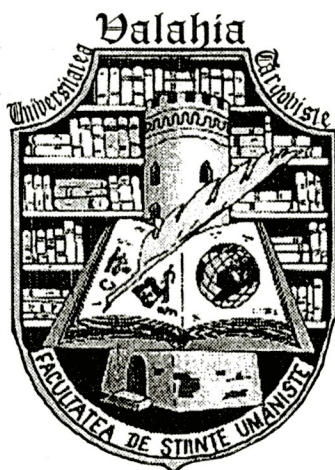


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# ANNALES

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## THE BISHOP'S ROLE AND PLACE IN THE OCCIDENTAL URBAN LIFE FROM HIS APPEARANCE TO THE SECOND HALF OF THE III<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

*Ramona Neacsu\**

Analyzed from different perspectives, the problem concerning the role played by the Catholic Church and by clergy in the continuity of urban life from Antiquity to the Middle Ages was for a long time debated. The specialists studied a very vast chronological space, starting with the Christianity implantation in the urban centers, to understand how all the productive forces of the city came to gravitate around the Church and how, in the very insecurely period of the great Barbarian invasions, the local episcopacies assumed the responsibility of defending the urban communities, for lack of a laic political force.

The initiation of the reasoning with this temporal moment is absolutely necessary if we want to understand how the Catholic Church ensured, in Occident, the urban continuity, and how Christianity substituted gradually for previous forms of organization, so that the whole urban life organized itself under its authority.

### **The Role of the City for the Roman Empire. The Importance of the Urban Administrative Organization for Christianity**

In the 1st century A.D., in the Roman world, the fundamental reality of the political life was represented by the city and, judiciary speaking, the Empire was no other than a federation of cities (Grimal 1973 II:433). Consequently, the Roman Empire consisted, in essence, of the union between a military dictatorship, of Latin tradition, and an association of cities which represented an inheritance, under a form either pure, or Romanized, of the Hellenist culture traditions (Dawson 1960:29). At first sight, the military aspect of Rome's masterwork is the one that strikes the most and still, in the history of civilization, the pure civil aspect of things, the urbanization process, played an even more important role. The Rome's essential mission was to introduce the city regime in the continental Europe and, through the city, the urban right concept and the civic tradition, supreme creation of the Mediterranean civilization (Dawson 1960:29).

Even with several centuries B.C. the city became, in the Greek and Roman Mediterranean world, the convergence point, the place in which concentrated the political and social force of the Hellenic, Latin, Samnite or Etrurian people, the rest of the territory falling in the urban center dependence (Lot 1927:132).

The foundation of colonies process was vast and constant. The Roman colony was a city founded after the image of Rome to whom it wants to resemble (Lot 1927:132). During the Republican Rome, the colony was a detachment of citizens who established in a recently subjected region, to supervise and to Romanize it. As Lot said, "it is a garrison, but it is a permanent one" (Lot 1927:133). Therefore, the motive at the foundation was a strategic one, and not economic, and only if the conditions allows it the colony becomes a commercial center (Lot 1927:134). The city was composed of the houses inhabited by

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soldiers, men who lived only by to land work (as it shows the etymology of the word colony < lat. “colere” – to cultivate). Also, the city was surrounded by a protective fortress and the colony’s artificiality explains the geometric plan of military camp (Grimal 1973 II: 444). There weren’t only colonies of veterans, like Cologne, Treves or Merida, but also the fortresses and the main garrisons of the legions which became centers of Roman influence and of urban life (Dawson 1960: 30).

The frame was not totally rigid, because the architects had the freedom to adorn and to develop the cities. After the Roman model they built the therms, theatres, amphitheatres, triumph bows, covered squares, the buildings in which were held the reunions of the municipal council, formed, after the model of Rome, as everything that served the social, politic and commercial functions.

During the first two centuries of the Empire it was accomplished the rapid development of the urban life and of the economical prosperity in the new provinces, in the same time with the spreading of the Greek-Roman world’s social and intellectual concepts. The local particularities tends to erase themselves: a similar ideal, identical concepts are spreading everywhere, less under the action of a persistent central power, than tanks to the multiplying of Rome’s image, that is the provincial cities (Grimal 1973 II: 438). In Galls and Spain, as well as on the Rhine and Danube, took place a fast development of the agricultural colonizing and of the commercial prosperity and even the most far off regions, like Great Britain and Dacia, were initiated in the superior civilization of the Mediterranean world (Dawson 1960: 31). All the parts of the Empire were united, socially speaking, by common laws and civilization, and materially speaking, by a vast road system, which made the communications safer and richer than they ever were, until the XVIIth century (Dawson 1960: 31).

This process of flowering in the economic, commercial, social, politic and cultural urban life made the Roman Empire history to know very few rebellions inspired by the “national” feeling, and they always failed. That’s why the rhetor Aelius Aristides, praising Rome in an official speech, at the middle of the IIInd century, could underline that the whole Empire formed an ordered ensemble of free cities (Grimal 1973: 438). Even in the IIInd century the Empire seems a federation of cities which recognize the hegemony of the most famous of them, Urbs Roma (Lot 1927: 135).

The synthesis phenomenon between the local traditions and the Roman civilized elements couldn’t confer the social factor but a variegated character. Gradually, the city came to shelter the most varied peoples and religious cultures, and from here derived the irresistible need of the citizens to gather around one or more centers, in specific districts, which often exceeds the initial limits of the city (Grimal 1973 II: 446). A good example is the city of Djemila (Cuicul), founded by Traian in 97 A.D., on the place of a former small Numidian city, at the intersection of the road that goes from Cirta (Constantine) to Sitifis (Sétif) and of the southern road, which goes to Lambèse. Around the theatres and therms developed new districts, in which, under the Severus rule, it was built a new forum. South of the Severian district installed, not after long, a Christian one, with its basilicas, baptisteries and episcopacy palace.

The whole social body is affected by this phenomenon and atomized in a great number of small units (Cizek 1986: 200). In communities gathers those who resemble: those with the same ideas and interests, who live in the same “isle” (building with cheep rooms for rent), who frequent the same “popina” (public house), who obtain the daily necessary water from the same pipeline, or who live in the same district (Cizek 1986: 201).

Between these social small units, the colleges, "collegia", have a special place, because they gather, in all the Empire cities, those who have the same profession or preoccupations. Next to the most famous ones – the commerciants, the handicraftsmen or sportsmen, in which even the slaves have access – appeared even the colleges of some religious cultures. For instance, Flavius Josephus mentions, in *Judaic Antiquities* a Judaic college (Cizek 1986: 202).

The communities were well structured and the activity meticulously organized, the unity of the job or of the confession being stronger than the differences of fortunes. Their members held general gatherings, had money from their own monthly donations, had their own holidays and protective divinities, but they had to participate actively at the life of the city and at the imperial cult (Cizek 1986: 203).

Because of the liberties they offered, the communities had an enormous influence over the citizen's life. The plebean environments were for them what water is for fishes (Cizek 1986: 203) because they moulded easily after the public reactions and desires, and very often becomes its spokesman. In fact, "collegia" substitutes for the ancient "civitas" (Cizek 1986: 203).

The frame of ethnic and confessional freedom, and also economic and commercial, was very favorable for the Christianity to establish into the city, finding in the form of the community the ideal organizational structure. Only moulding on this preexisting background, the Christianity knew how to adapt itself at the urban life, and in the same time to maintain the freedom and originality of the cult.

### **The Roman Traditional Religion Decline. The Premises of the Christianity's Appearance in the Urban Environment**

If economically, commercially, politically and socially speaking we are dealing with a general development, the religious field greets a profound crisis, manifested mainly in the emptiness, in substance, of the Roman Pantheon. Of course it subsists, apparently untouched, and the ancient ceremonies continue to be fulfilled after tradition. But, with its nebulous gods, colourless myths, prayers formulated like contracts, and cold as a procedure, with the lack of metaphysical curiosity and the indifference to the moral values, with the shortness of the action field – reduced at the city interests and at the development of a policy – the Roman religion froze the faith with its coldness and its prozaimism (Carcopino 1979: 159-160).

The need of religious inspiration was deeper than the city's official cults, fitted no more than to quiet down the soldiers over the wars risks and the peasants over the bad weather damages. Of course, the citizens never stopped to show interest toward the god's holidays, subsidized by the public finances. But we must not cherish illusions over the feelings inspired by celebrations. For instance, thinking about the famous dances and parties which accompanied every year, on the shore of Tibru, the holiday of Ama Perenna, if we would deduce from here a shining sincerity of the worship toward this Latin god, it would be as imprudent as considering, in our days, the Catholic extension and vigor, at Paris, after the Parisians affluence at the New Year's Eve (Carcopino 1979: 160).

The scepticism was general: it won common people who became indifferent toward the Roman divinities with "pedes lanatos" (Carcopino 1979: 161), and the influential ladies, "stolatae", who didn't care a pin about Jupiter (Carcopino 1979: 161).

And still, in the cities the faith didn't even diminished. In fact, because of the education which didn't had left anything rational, the intensity of faith grew, but changed its direction and object. It left the official polytheism and took refuge into the urban colleges where were celebrated the Oriental gods mysteries which invaded the city. This transformation is due to the Hellenic influence over Rome, and through it the Oriental dogmas revelation and the precepts of the Greek philosophers came to intersect (Carcopino 1979: 166). Because of the collaboration between the Oriental mystics and the Roman wisdom, on the ruins of the traditional Pantheon borned new beliefs. In the middle of paganism formed an original economy of people's ransom by the double effect of their merits and of the divine help, no matter the nationality or the social condition (Carcopino 1979: 174). All these cults are naturists and biological, announcing the survival of bodies, philosophical religions and gnosés that promise the immortality of the souls and speak about descendings in Hell and returns, about innovating "circles" in a time that can be calculated after the man's measures (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II:240). The popularity of these cults is also ensured by their peaceful coexistence in the same city, the rivalry being smaller than the understandings and affinities. They all send hope messages (Carcopino 1979: 169).

The Anatolian cults were naturalized into the Empire by the reform of the Cibele and Attis goddess liturgies, issued by the Emperor Claudius. Proscribed under Tiberius, the Egiptian cults were admitted in public by Caligula. The temple of goddess Isis, destroyed by a fire, in 80 A.D., was rebuild by Domitianus with an impressive luxury. At the middle of the Ist century, Hadad and its associate, Atargatis, the Syrian goddess to whom Nero, after he denied all the other gods, presented his homage, had a temple in Rome. Here and in Capua were built sanctuaries for Mithra (Carcopino 1979: 168).

From the natural depravations of the naturist cults and under the convergent impulse of the Greek speculation and the Roman discipline, the Oriental mysteries knew how to underline an ideal and to rise up toward those high regions of the spirit where the meeting between a total knowledge, a perfect virtue and a victory over the physical evil, sin and death, appears in a total brilliance (Carcopino 1979: 172). The Oriental cults knew how to incline the cosmic perspectives, inherited from the Greek thought, toward the soul of the world which is a shining and eternal intelligence, worshiped in the ancient times in the Iranian cults of the Light (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 240-241).

This transformation is very profound and important, considering the Roman specific polytheism. But, unconsciously, they were prepared for it by the interest they shown, from the very times of the Tarquins, to the Sibilian books. The Sibile's worship demonstrates that the Romans placed next to the divine "saying" ("fatum") – perceived by auguries, haruspices, oracles – the written "book" of man's and Emperor's fates. Outside time there were formulas that must be interpreted in connection with the transient event, but that confers to this event the outstanding character of a date or epoch, the oneness of a man (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 218). Everybody is expecting a god or a divine man to save the world, to return it to the Golden Age, concept so important in the Sibilin millenarism. The Sibiles are dividing the history of the world in "centuries", the first of Saturn and the last of Apollo.

They pay greater heed to the wonders. Some signs predicted Caesar's death. Others made people believe in Octavius's unearthly essence. In 43 A.D. the wonders are numerous: the lightning strikes the temple of Jupiter , on the Capitolium. Minerva Custos's statue from the Capitolium is collapsing. On the sky appears lights and fires.



During the war from Mutina, Diana's statue perspires blood and milk. Some "Romulian" eagles fly over Mars's field exactly when Octavius speaks to his soldiers, on his first consulate (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 224).

Gradually, the transcendental idea of redemption extends from the Oriental cults to all the religious formations of the Roman Antiquity. Even in the linguistic field we can see the change. For instance, the Latin word "salus" which, in the past, had only a material sense of physical health, until the II<sup>nd</sup> century receives a moral and eschatological meaning that assumed the soul's liberation from earth and its eternal happiness. The urban colleges begin to name themselves after the epithet that express the great hope: "collegium salutare" (Carcopino 1979: 174).

The emperors themselves, no matter how eager we see them, in the I<sup>st</sup> and II<sup>nd</sup> centuries, after the monuments and coins, to be assimilated with the Olympians or the ancient Latin divinities, don't believe anymore that the apotheosis awarded according to protocol by the Senate is enough to bring them the supernatural salvation, desired by all the other people (Carcopino 1979: 174). Antonius Pius shows, through the language of his coins reverse, that Faustina, his wife died at the beginning of his rule, rised to the sky in Cibeles pageant, under the protection of the Mother of Gods, the Lady of Salvation: "Mater deum salutaris" (Carcopino 1979: 174).

Therefore, unconsciously, it was created the favorable frame of the appearance of Christianity, the religion of Jesus who answered the whole society's needs and desires.

### **The First Christian Communities. The Evolution of the Ecclesiastic Hierarchy Until the III<sup>RD</sup> Century**

The religion meant to conquer the Roman Empire and to establish forever into the Occidental life had a pure Oriental origin, but its Orientalism wasn't that of the cosmopolitan world of religious syncretism, in which the Greek philosophy mixed with the ancient Oriental traditions. It was that of a national tradition unique in history and profoundly individualist, guarded very well from both the Middle East influences and the Occidental ones - the Hebrew tradition represented by the Law and the Prophets (Dawson 1960: 46)

The primitive Church considered itself the second Israel, the heiress of the kingdom promised to the People of God, and exactly this sense of historical continuity and of social solidarity will make her the only possible rival and substitute of the Empire's official religion (Gilson 1995: 147-149).

Many factors could explain the unusual upsurge of Christianity: the universal vocation of the new religion (Cizek 1986: 324); to the polytheism of the Greek-Roman gods and to the diffuse henotheism of the Oriental religions, it opposed the doctrine of a unique, sovereign and paternal God (Carcopino 1979: 178); like the pagan mysteries it gave, in the name of its sacred books, an answer to the origin of all things and to the man's destiny, but the Savior, instead of loosing himself, ambiguous and imperceptible, in the labyrinth of mythologies, appeared in the miraculous reality of Jesus earthly life, God's son (Carcopino 1979: 178); the first Christian communities and the clergy had a very rigorous organization (Cizek 1986: 324); a skilful propaganda - for instance, the birthday of "Sol Invictus" (Mithra) will become that of Christ (Marrou 1999: 107). The celebration of the birth of Christ appears in Rome at the 25 of December, a little before

336. It seems that the Christian religion gave a whole new meaning to this pagan holiday, dedicated to Sol Invictus...Isn't Christ the true Sun of Justice?

Also, Christianity offered solutions to the worst of the sins that underline Rome's civilization, and renewed old lost virtues (Carcopino 1979: 179). Still, the most important is the bold social doctrine, at least in the epoch of the first communities, which will make Christianity very popular among the poor (Cizek 1986: 324). In a time when the individual became the passive tool of an universal and omnipotent State, it was not exaggerated to underline the Christianity's position because, alone in this world, it was capable to resist the giant mechanism of the universal submission (Dawson 1960: 49).

Theologically speaking, the Church was founded in the Holy Friday, when Jesus redeemed the world with his death on the cross; the Old Alliance stops and begins the New Alliance of redemption. Historically speaking, the Church was founded in several stages. It begins when Jesus calls his Apostles, when he establish Peter as the stone for the Church, when he sets up the sacraments (Hertling 1998: 5), when the Apostles will begin, after the Resurrection, their mission entrusted to them by their divine Schoolmaster (Cairns 1992: 73).

Of course, we find the first Christian community at Jerusalem. At the Ascension Day it didn't had more than 500 people – those present at the Savior's appearance in Galilee. Only part of them actually lived in Jerusalem, because in the religious circle gathers 120 people (Hertling 1998: 6). After Peter's preach, are baptized 3000 people, mostly from Jerusalem. Little after that, the community had 5000 men, so that the total ammount of those who believed in Christ must have been up from 10 000 to 15 000, an impressive figure, if we consider that the Holy City had in the first century no more than 50 000 inhabitants (Hertling 1998: 6-7). The Christianity will rapidly infiltrate in Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Middle East and the Semmitic Orient, to spread afterwards in Occident (Cizek 1986: 324).

In Rome Christianity appeared through the Jewish colony brought here by Julius Caesar and which, from the very beginning of the Empire caused so much troubles, that Tiberius had to take measures against it in 19 A.D. The colony was so numerous, that the emperor could send in Sardinia, only once, 4000 Jews (Carcopino 1979: 175). Confounded initially with a Jewish sect, the Christian community was, under the rule of Nero, developed enough so that this emperor to blame it for setting fire to the city in 64 A.D. and to apply the first of the persecutions, without causing many damages (Carcopino 1979: 175).

The first Christians were, mostly, people of little instruction and weak culture from the most humble strata of the city (Dawson 1960: 73). At its beginning the Church was nothing but a gathering of believers, divided in small obscure groups, gradually organized after the civil society model (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 107).

From the beginning, the Christians used common places for the reunions, at first private houses. We can't say for sure when these houses stopped being, architectonically speaking, simply "rooms", and transformed into "churches". In time, these rooms were enlarged, adorned with columns and archways, so that they could be identified from the outside (Hertling 1998: 47-48).

The Christians had a life similar to that of the other citizens of the Empire and nothing is more wrong than the wide spread oppinion over the Christianity of catacombs, like they would have had some sort of underground life (Hertling 1998: 70). The catacombs were simply cemeteries, and not places for gatherings. The Christians lived

with their families, accomplished their duties like any other citizen, and for the religious functions they gathered in small churches inside the city, and not outside it (Hertling 1998: 71). Moreover, the safety of the catacombs was smaller than that of the houses from the city, because such places were permanently in the attention of police and public. The whole Antiquity didn't transmit not even one information regarding the celebration of Liturgy into the catacombs. In change, we have many informations about celebrations in houses from the city (Hertling 1998: 48).

The remarkable upsurge of the Church is understandable: it had its own organization and hierarchy, initiation and discipline rules. It addressed to all those who didn't found satisfaction in the existing order, to the poor and oppressed, to the unprivileged, and especially to those who revolted against the spiritual vacuum and the corruption of the dominant materialist civilization, to those who felt the need of a new spiritual order (Dawson 1960: 47). In this way, the Church attracted towards itself all the forces that tended to detach themselves from the surrounding civilization. Its action was profound and a lot stronger than any other movement of political or economical dissatisfaction. The Christianity preaches about selfabandonation, fairness in transactions, submission to the politic and judicial authority (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 105). Most important, it spoke about social equality. The path of these preaches have been already prepared by facts: the number of the prisoners of war diminished, the slaves liberation increased, same as the free employed work. The slaves of the pagan temples were converted in slaves of the Christian Church. But most of all it wasn't enough considered the fact that the general evolution of the economic and social status of the human groups gradually attenuated the limits that separated the free men from the slaves, and the bureaucratism attached by the controlled economy drew nearer the social strata, in a general submission to the Emperor and State (Bloch, Cousin 1985 II: 102).

Therefore, the preaching of equality by the Christians couldn't but attract the most vibrant forces of the city, the most active ones, slaves, handicraftsmen, commerciants. Even more than the civil wars or the Barbarian invasions, this internal contradiction provoked the decadence of the ancient civilization (Dawson 1960: 48).

To understand the progress of Christianity, it is enough to analyse its results: from the Apostle's times, with great rapidity the geographic map covers with the names of the new Christian communities. In the IIIrd century it is quite difficult to find a city of some importance without finding Christians in it (Hertling 1998: 10).

How the Christianity managed to resist the syncretism of the Orient and Greek-Roman cults? No doubt it survived and imposed itself in the contemporary society, because it possessed an ecclesiastic system and an authority principle which distinguish it from all the other religious groups (Dawson 1960: 51). It was said that Jesus didn't founded a church and he only propagated ideas. But if it was so, then how, when and why appeared the episcopacy? It is very hard to imagine how a disorganized mass of Christians could have given itself an organization from the inside, without interventions from outside and how such an "evolution" could have had identical results in the most different places (Hertling 1998: 9). It is important to say that we lack any information regarding such communities lead by a college or a corporation, without a hierarchical rule. In his letters, Saint Ignatius from Antiochie, written in the first years of the IIInd century, we find a bishop in every community, accompanied by priests (Hertling 1998: 9).

At the end of the Ist century, Clement the Roman, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, presents himself so clearly as "monarchic" bishop, that many critics

considered that he created this office. Still, it is clear that he didn't do that because, in John's "Apocalypse", written toward 100 A.D., for the first mentioned by Justin the Martyr in 155-160 (Moreschini, Norelli 2001: 105), we find the local leaders from Pergam or Tiatira, who are individuals, and not colleges. Moreover, we know the oldest episcopacy lists from the most important churches, like Rome, Antiochie, Alexandria, which reaches the Apostle's times. Irineu of Lyon quotes an episcopacy list from Rome in which are mentioned, after the "Apostles", Linus, Anaclet and Clement, the last one knowing personally the Apostles (Moreschini, Norelli 2001: 121). Such lists were made until the half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century exactly to testify and to guarantee for the uninterrupted succession, starting with the Apostles (Hertling 1998: 9).

Therefore, even when the Apostles were alive, there was a double hierarchy: a local one and a universal one. The universal jurisdiction is exercised by the Apostles in common (the apostolic council) or individual (Peter, Paul, John), or by men authorized by the Apostles, like Titus in Crete, or Timothy in Ephesus. This ones exercised, in their names, the local jurisdiction. At the death of the last Apostle, the local representatives became, automatically, diecezan bishops (Hertling 1998: 8). The concept of divine apostolic authority offered the ecclesiastic order the base in the post-apostolic period. The overseers (episcopoi) and the eldest (presbiteroi) who ruled the local churches were considered the Apostle's successors (Dawson 1960: 51), and, for the Church not to decay, Peter's office received the task of maintaining that "communio universalis" and the role entrusted to him by Christ, into the Church (Hertling 1998: 8). This fact is very important for the future evolution of the Christian church, because on the interpretation of the fragment from **Mathew's Gospel** (**The Bible**, 1995, 16:18-19), in which he speaks about Saint Peter's authorizing by Christ, is based the whole episcopacy and popish authority, offering the scriptural base of the papal jurisdiction and of clergy's claims in the Middle Ages (Canning 1996: 30). From this fragment it was understood that Christ created a Church and shared, inside it, the jurisdiction with Peter, as an answer to the later recognition of his Teacher's divinity (Canning 1996: 30).

This is the theoretical foundation of the episcopacy authority. How really worked in the Christian Antiquity the process of an episcopacy's creation?

At first, in the I<sup>st</sup> century, there weren't any parishes, as we understand them today. Each community choose its own bishop, who was invested by the other bishops. If somewhere else formed a new community, it received its own episcopacy (Hertling 1998: 216). By nature, the Christians were submissive and the persecutions never arised serious riots. To them, submission to the imperial authority was traditional (Lot 1927: 45), the declared hostility of these men being almost absent. The passive opposition was more favorable: they were bad citizens because they refused to take care of earthly things and, if they didn't elude the military service, were weak soldiers.

Starting with the II<sup>nd</sup> century, during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, the episcopacy walks toward power (Hertling 1998: 216). At the end of the II<sup>nd</sup> century in every city of some importance there was an episcopacy center which begins to outrun the limits of a simply sacred edifice. Before anything, these bishops were writers, orators (in those times the two professions were still overlapped), preachers, religious thinkers (Marrou 1999: 102). The bishop has a more important place on the social plan. He is the one who takes care of the poor from his community in such a measure that there is no more private charity left (Hertling 1998: 54). In the II<sup>nd</sup> century, the **Apostle's Didascaly** said that the private alms are harming the bishop because people would believe that he no longer takes

care of his poor. If a believer found out about a grave situation, he must announce his bishop and to offer his help. The bishop must not make public the help as such, but must only tell the poor that he is their well-doer. Therefore, when we hear about persons who gives their fortunes to the poor, usually that means that they entrusted their money to the church fund for the poor (Hertling 1998: 54). The bishop isn't taking care only for the Christians in his community. It appears that Tertulian named, at the end of the II<sup>nd</sup> century, "Contesseratio hospitalitas", or "The Association of Hospitality by Identity Cards" (Hertling 1998: 37). When a Christian left, he received from his bishop a recommendation letter, some sort of passport with whom in any Christian community he would have went, was well received and housed for free, This early reality was an advantage not only for the laics, but also for the bishops themselves, because they could send letters all over the Empire (Hertling 1998: 37). This system was very favorable for the development of the economical relations between the Christian communities from different cities and, therefore, for the evolution of episcopacies. Gradually, the Church begins to gather more and more money, appearing, in this way, a very disputed problem. Where the money came from? How much did they spend and how big was the fortune of Church?

People tried to calculate how much the Roman Church had to spend for the maintenance of the 15000 registered poor men and of the 150 priests (Hertling 1998: 56). In Antiquity, the subsistence means cost a lot less than in a normal period in our days, but other things, like clothes, were very expensive. In comparison with the American dollar, the Roman Church had each year at its disposal tens of thousands of dollars, even during the persecutions (Hertling 1998: 56). The big churches, like Cartagena, were even able to help the less fortunate ones. The money came from the monthly payments in the alms fund. Also, the priests with high positions used to donate to the Church their private goods and the Church assumed the responsibility of their maintenance. Later there will be adopted laws regarding the fortunes of the priests. Also, we must mention the donations made by the rich Christians and even by pagans, sometimes affable functionaries.

Permanently, the ecclesiastic administration, especially that of the big cities, was well endowed with financial means. In the II<sup>nd</sup> century, when Marcion from Sinope entered the Roman priests order, he entrusted his fortune, in 139 A.D., to the Church from Rome. When he was discovered and excommunicated for his heresy, he got back his 200 000 sesterces (Moreschini, Norelli 2001: 189).

How was it possible for the Church, or Christian individual communities, to possess imobiliar goods in the same time in which were in force laws of persecution or in which the Church was not a judiciary recognized person. And still, at the beginning of the III<sup>rd</sup> century, the Church had in the city not only cementeries and sacred edifices, but also a productive landed property. The edifices of cult were modest, but from the II<sup>rd</sup> century we can see churches. For instance, in 202 A.D. the Christian church from Edessa was very badly damaged by a flood. During the emperor Severus Alexander, the community from Rome had a trial with the association of "Ostiers" because of a urban field; the emperor decided favorably for the Christians (Hertling 1998: 79).

It is sure that at the beginning the goods were registered under the name of some individual Christians. It was assumed that in the III<sup>rd</sup> century the state already dealt with some Christian communities organized in corporations, but this thing would have been possible only after an agreement with the authorities and it is impossible that they would

mistake so much to consider the bishops as leaders of these corporations (Hertling 1998: 80). A more plausible explanation is that, in Antiquity, the State didn't considered that it was its duty to take care, for a long time, of the judicial relations between the citizens. Today every citizen needs a document issued by the State only to exist from the judicial point of view. In Antiquity, not only that anybody could exist without great difficulties, but also he could buy, possess and sell, donate and inherit without a judicial title from the State (Hertling 1998: 80). In this way it was possible the existence of a collective patrimony.

Gradually, the Church becomes a strong social and financial force into the city, and begins to organize it under its authority.

### **The Relations Between the Christianity and the Greek-Roman Culture**

The opposition, for a long time analysed, between the Classicism and Christianity, wasn't that profound after all. It wasn't about the long symbiosis that connected the Classic art and literature from the ancient polytheism, but about the fact that, generally, this culture presented itself like a rival of a new religion because it also pretended to resolve, in its own way, the problem of man and life (Marrou 1997 II: 139). This antagonism expressed especially in the Christian's refuse to take care of earthly matters was, from the very beginning, superficial. It is natural that the official representatives of the Classical tradition considered Christianity an enemy of civilization. The "Aurea mediocritas" of the savants couldn't have but few connections with the martyr's fanaticism, who condemned all the forms of life and announced the imminent judgement of the whole world (Dawson 1960: 73).

The background of Christianity's appearance cut from the very beginning, yet unknown, the roots of the opposition, explaining, one more time, why this religion choose to infiltrate into the city. By nature, the Christianity is a scientist religion who requires a minimum of literary culture and who couldn't exist in a barbarian environment (Marrou 1997 II:133). In the first place, it is a religion of the Book: it is based on a written Revelation, the Sacred Books of the religion of Israel, to whom adds, gradually, those of the New Testament. In this context, one fact is clear: although it appeared in Palestine, the Christianity received its specific form in the middle of the Greek-Roman civilization from which it got an unmistakable mark. Preached even in China or Bantu, the Gospel can't forget that it was first written in Greek. It is an essential fact like for Buddhism is its appearance in Indy, or like the Arabian language is for the Islamic Coran (Marrou 1997 II: 136).

Even a religion that is aware of its absolutist ambitions can't elude the influence of the civilization in which it developed, phenomenon more profound because it was unconscious.

For instance it would seem natural for the first Christians, so eager to detach themselves from everything pagan, to create a school of religious inspiration, distinct of the classic pagan school. But, remarkably, they didn't, because, aware of the need to have access to the literary culture, the Church allowed its youth to learn at the traditional Hellenistic type schools (Marrou 1997 II: 140).

The primer barely finished, the child learned how to read the list of gods. Weren't the Classical texts those borrowed from poems in which impiety competed with

immorality? (Marrou 1997 II: 140). And still, the Christians couldn't imagine another way of educating their children.

Therefore, the Christians of the first centuries undertook as something natural the fundamental values of the Greek-Roman civilization and only adapting itself on this background the Christianity came to answer the needs of the epoch and to obtain the later proportion. From the II<sup>nd</sup> century the seeming differences begun to follow an assimilating current ungrasped even by those who conducted the spirits, current that prepared the Church to receive, consciously, the Classical tradition and to form a new Christian civilization (Dawson 1960: 74). The main character is still the bishop because he has the difficult task of preparing the perfection through his preaches and catechism treaties (Marrou 1997 II: 132).

It is hard to be aware of the vastness of this problem because the Occidental culture was so much impregnated with the Classical tradition, so that we can't perceive, in its plenitude, the influence of this tradition in the centuries that followed Rome's fall. Still, it is clear that, spread by the cosmopolitan civilization of the Roman Empire, it survived the fall of Rome incorporated into the intellectual inheritance of the Church (Dawson 1960: 69).

Only in this way it was possible for the Christianity to adapt on the Roman urban structure, and to answer the society's needs and desires. Gradually it placed under its authority the entire life of the city and perpetuated, in the intellectual inheritance, the Greek-Roman traditions and the civic principles after Rome's falling.

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