

# PASOLINI'S *SAINT PAUL* AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN COMMUNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a survey of twentieth-century communist historical scholarship concerning early Christianity. It is inspired by the recent publication in English of Pier Paolo Pasolini's (1922–1975) screenplay *Saint Paul*. The historiography will be of interest to those concerned with the rise and fall of proletarian government. It focuses on the resistance to Roman imperialism, slavery and emperor worship that helped overthrow the Empire. It summarises left historiography concerning Christian resistance among Judean Ebionites, Montanists in Asia Minor, Donatists in North Africa, bagaudae in Spain, Gaul and Germany, and Arians in Italy.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is a survey of twentieth-century communist historical scholarship concerning early Christianity. It is inspired by the recent publication in English of Pier Paolo Pasolini's (1922–1975) screenplay *Saint Paul*.<sup>1</sup> The historiography will be of interest to those concerned with the rise and fall of proletarian government. It focuses on the resistance to Roman imperialism, slavery and emperor worship that helped overthrow the Empire. It gives particular attention to the communist treatment of the revolutionary movements against the Empire, including the Ebionites in

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1 Pier P. Pasolini, *Saint Paul: A Screenplay* (New York: Verso, 2014). Written between 1968 and 1974, the play was never produced as a film but the Italian text was published in 1977.

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 Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Early Christian History  
pp. 1–41

DOI: 10.1080/2222582X.2016.1219000  
Print ISSN 2222-582X | Online ISSN 2471-4054  
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Judea, Donatists in North African, the bagaudae in Spain, Gaul and Germany, and the Arians in Italy.

We argue that the communist historians have more to teach than what Pasolini offers. The Italian filmmaker had communist beliefs and for a number of years after World War II was a member of the Italian Communist Party (ICP).<sup>2</sup> His neo-realistic approach to art focused on working people and their search for social justice.<sup>3</sup> The play tells a valuable story, but because it ignores the work of communist historians, it ends up with a traditional ecclesiastical focus on Jewish-Gentile ethnic dissension in the early Christian community rather than on class struggle. Paul was a Jew but he became a leader in the so-called Gentile camp and a hero to Pasolini.

The play casts the early Christians in contemporary terms. It begins with the World War II period. Led by St. Peter, the Christians are part of the anti-Nazi resistance in occupied Italy and France, which parallels their resistance against the Roman occupation in the ancient world.<sup>4</sup> Paul is cast as a collaborator with the *Pétain and Mussolini* regime. He hunts out the Christians and sends them to their death in the concentration camps. However, while on a mission to Germany, he is converted. His attempts to join the resistance are rebuffed. The partisans do not trust him. Nevertheless, after the war and until his death in 1967, he works as a missionary to the gentiles in a Satan-dominated capitalist society. From the left perspective, this is where the play loses plausibility. Paul teaches rejection and death to the world, while advocating obedience to the established order. Slaves must not revolt but await the future judgment. A doctrine such as obedience would not result in Paul being repeatedly beaten up and jailed for being a subversive, as depicted in the play. Rather, the obedience doctrine in capitalist society brings fame and riches. It is communism, class struggle, anti-imperialism, trade unionism and full employment that is repressed in the capitalist courts, media and church. Pasolini's Paul advocates none of these.

2 Enzo Siciliano, *Pasolini: A Biography*. (trans. John Shepley; New York: Random House, 1982) 162; and David Schwartz, *Pasolini Requiem* (New York: Pantheon, 1992) 218. Alain Badiou in 'Foreword' in Pasolini, *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*, vii, maintains that for the filmmaker, the ICP was not sufficiently to the left.

3 On the neo-realistic movement that flourished after World War II see Inna N. Soloveva, *Kino Italii (1945–1960): ocherki*, [Italian Cinema (1945–1960): Essays] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo 'Iskusstvo,' 1961), 100–108; Zlata M. Potapova, *Neorealizm v italianskoi literature* [Neo-Realistic Italian Literature] (Moscow: Akademiia, 1961); Tsetsiliia Isaakovna Kin, *Mif, realnost, literature* [Myth, Reality, Literature] (Moscow: Sovetskij Pisatel, 1968).

4 Illustrative of the historical Christian partisans upon which the play is based is the Italian Catholic-communist, Giglia Tedesco. She served as the military commander of the resistance against fascism at Ponte Marmaro near Rome. Later, as a member of its central committee of the Italian Communist Party, she was elected to the 315-member Italian senate. She served as a senator for 20 years and for a time was the senate's vice-president. See Leonard Swidler and Edward James Grace, eds., *Catholic-Communist Collaboration in Italy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 10–11.

At the end of the play, Paul is acquitted in a New York court of a baseless charge which the Jewish Christians had instigated.<sup>5</sup> A short time later, he is assassinated on the same balcony and in the same manner as Martin Luther King. Unlike King, Pasolini's apostle did not agitate for civil rights, the garbage workers or the Vietnamese people. At one point, the playwright describes Paul as an Alan Ginsberg type, a mystic poet who thrived in the capitalist world.<sup>6</sup>

## LEFT HISTORIOGRAPHY

In communist historiography, the Jewish-Gentile split is not emphasized and Paul is not a hero. From the Soviet perspective, early Christianity had more to teach than what Pasolini offers. It was a topic which they along with East European and like-minded western scholars studied from the 1920s until the 1980s. While little of their work was translated to English, it is more available now because of machine translation.<sup>7</sup> Their focus is on working people, especially in relation to the Roman

5 In support of Pasolini is the University of Kent teacher, Ward Blanton, 'Afterword: Appropriation's Excess, Paul of Tarsus for an Age of the Capitalization of Mastery,' in Pasolini, *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*, 128. He maintains that Paul's Pastoral Epistles have a dual interpretation. Read according to Blanton's interpretation, Paul was an 'insurrectionist partisan'. Paul's more overtly anti-Roman writings were edited out by the time the epistles became part of the canon.

6 Pasolini, *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*, 92. Contrasting with Pasolini's historical analysis was the Lithuanian-American communist novelist Philip Bonosky (1916–2013), whose art did not thrive under capitalism. In his essay 'In the Mainstream,' *Mainstream* 15 (New York: January 1962): 9, Bonosky holds up Paul's antagonist, St. Peter, as a revolutionary, commenting that like Stalin who led the 1930s levelling of the Kulaks, '[t]he founder of Christianity was a Communist with eleven faithful Apostles, chief of whom struck a man and his wife dead for keeping back their money from the common pool instead of sharing it'.

7 Usable do-it-yourself translations are available. Cyrillic and other foreign alphabets can be scanned and turned into text files using optical character recognition (OCR) applications such as Cuneiform ([http://cognitiveforms.com/products\\_and\\_services/cuneiform](http://cognitiveforms.com/products_and_services/cuneiform)), Tesseract (<https://github.com/tesseract-ocr/tesseract>) or Abby FineReader (<http://finereader.abbyy.com>). These can then be translated with Google Translate (<https://translate.google.com/>). This will be speeded up by 2020 when Google Books has completed digitizing the world's 130 million individual book and journal titles. Starting in 2004, some 30 million are now completed, but no Cyrillic titles have yet been processed. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Books). The Russian State Library (Moscow) is independently digitizing its resources, with 8 million items completed as of 2009. See <http://rsl.ru/en>.

The editors of *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] (Moscow), which was established in 1937, have digitized some of their articles. It is the best source for early Christian communist scholarship. See <http://vdi3.igh.ru/index.php>. The complete list of their titles is 300 pages long and is available at <http://Annales.info/sbo/contents/vdi.htm>. East View Information Services (Minneapolis, Minnesota) has digitised another source, the complete run of *Voprosy istorii* [Questions of History] between 1926 and 1941. It began in 1926 under the title *Istoriik-Marksist* [Marxist Historian].

For Cyrillic transliteration the <http://translit.cc> system has been used in this essay in preference

Empire's decline and fall, as they believed this helps in understanding contemporary political theory. Contrasting with conservative accounts about the so-called 'Pax Romana', they study the era's class struggle. The Empire had a population of 50 million, of whom 20 percent were slaves.<sup>8</sup>

Illustrative of this class struggle is Nikolai Mashkin (1900–1950). He concentrated on analysis of the Empire's demise while he worked as an instructor at Moscow's Communist University for the Education of the Toiling Masses of the Orient and as an editorial board member of *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* (Journal of Ancient History). He summarises the conflicting social conditions which brought the Empire down as follows:

The following characteristics of the slave revolution may be pointed out: it was composed of a series of social movements, manifesting themselves most acutely at the frontiers of the Empire where the authority of the state was weaker and where there still existed remnants of the primitive communal organizations; the moving force of these insurrections were slaves with some support from the coloni; the insurgents furnished aid to the barbarians advancing upon the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup>

British historian Arnold Toynbee similarly contended that the fall of the Empire was due to the 'secession of the proletariat' and its alliance with the 'external proletariat'.<sup>10</sup> He saw a parallel between the Empire's fall and the pressure of internal and external Marxist forces in the political system of Western Europe in his own era.

Some of the Soviet scholars who took up early Christianity as a field of study are Natalia I. Golubtsova, Aleksandr P. Kazhdan, Mikhail M. Kublanov, Iakov Abramovich Lentsman, Giler M. Livshits, Khachik N. Momdzhian and Abram Ranovich (1885–1948).<sup>11</sup> They maintain that although the various early Christian

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to the Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system because the latter's diacritics and two-letter tie characters become garbled in some fonts.

8 William V. Harris, 'Demography, Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 65.

9 Nikolai A. Mashkin, 'The Workers Revolution and the Fall of the Western Roman Empire,' *Journal of General Education* 5(1) (1950): 70–74; Nikolai A. Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' [The Movement Of The Agonistae], *Istoriik-Marksist* [Marxist Historian] 47, no. 1 (Moscow: 1935): 28–52; and Livio C. Stecchini, 'The Historical Problem of the Fall of Rome,' *The Journal of General Education* 5(1) (1950): 57–61.

10 Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), vol. 5, 90, 167, 223.

11 Natalia I. Golubtsova, *U istokov khristianskoi tserkvi* [At the Beginning of the Christian Church] (Moscow: Nauka, 1957); Aleksandr P. Kazhdan, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva i ego sushchnost* [The Origin of Christianity and its Essence] (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1962); Mikhail M. Kublanov, *Novyi zavet* [New Testament] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Nauka 1968) and Mikhail M. Kublanov, *Vozniknovenie khristianstva* [The Emergence of Christianity] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Nauka, 1974); Iakov A. Lentsman, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, [Origins of Christianity] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958); Giler M. Livshits, *Klassovaia bor'ba v Iudee i vosstaniia protiv Rima: k probleme sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo stroiarimskikh provintsii*

groups and tendencies disagreed on a number of important questions of doctrine, they were united in their hatred of Rome, their hope for the collapse of the Empire and deliverance from Roman oppression, and their faith in the imminent coming of the god saviour and the establishment of the 'kingdom of god' headed by Christ.

In communist accounts, this faith permeated the oldest Christian work that came down from the left, the Book of Revelation, written in its present form between 70 and 90 C.E. In it, there is no mention of a church organisation, mythology, dogma or ritual. It reflects the rebellious spirit of the masses, but also attests to another trend, a tempering of resistance with the idea of long-suffering and waiting on divine forces to overcome the antichrist and bring on the 'millennium'.<sup>12</sup> A proletarian historian, John Morris, remarks:

In a class by itself stands the last great product of Jewish Christianity, the *Apocalypse* of John, a paean of burning hatred against the Roman state and all it stood for, gloating over the impending destruction of the city by fire, bewailed by the kings of the east and the merchants, foretelling the rule of the saints on earth for a thousand years before the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>13</sup>

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[Class Struggle in Judea and Revolt against Rome: The Social Economic Problem in an Ancient Roman Province] (Minsk: Izdatelstvo Belgosuniversiteta imja V. I. Lenina, 1957); Giler M. Livshits, *Ocherki istoriografii Biblii i rannego khristianstva* [Essays on Biblical History and Early Christianity] (Minsk: Vysheish. Shkola, 1970); Khachik N. Momdzhian, *Kommunizm i khristianstvo* [Communism and Christianity] (Moscow: Znanie, 1974); Abram B. Ranovich, *O rannem khristianstve* [Concerning Early Christianity] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1959). Of these, the most useful would be a translation of Giler Livshits.

12 Ranovich, *O rannem khristianstve*, 183; Lentsman, *Proiskhozhenie khristianstva*, 133. Moscow State University instructor Viacheslav Petrovich Volgin (1879–1962) in *Istorija socialisticheskikh idej* [History of Socialist Ideas] (Moscow: Gosudarstv Izdatelstvo, 1928, 1931), vol. 1, 30 and the Italian Pasquale Masiello in 'L'ideologia messianica e le rivolte servili' [Messianic Ideology and the Slave Revolts], *Annali della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia* 11 (1966): 179–196, contrast early Christianity's proletarian perspective with the imperial Dionysiac cult and its temples that honoured saviour-creator deities such as Augustus (reigned 27 BC–14 AD). He declared himself *pontifex maximus* in 12 C.E. In this religion wealth (*ploutos*) and peace (*eirene*, Pax Augusta) were the ideal and the coming of the emperor was announced with soteriological symbolism as 'glad tidings' (*euangelion*).

13 John Morris, 'Early Christian Orthodoxy,' *Past and Present* 3 (1953): 10. See also, Kublanov, *Voznikovenie khristianstva*, 112. Samuel G. Brandon, *Jesus and Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 320, writes:

It is well to remember that Christian tradition has preserved, in the *Apocalypse* of John, the memory of another, and doubtless more primitive, conception of Christ – of the terrible Rider on the White Horse, whose 'eyes are like a flame of fire... He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God... From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of Kings and Lord of Lords'.

Frederick Engels commented on the similarity between the class struggle of the Christians against Rome and that of the workers against imperialism of his own day:

The early history of Christianity has remarkable points of contact with the modern working class movement. Like it, Christianity was in origin a movement of the oppressed . . . Both preach an imminent release from servitude and misery. Both were persecuted as enemies of the human race . . . of religion, of the family, of the social order. If you want a picture of the first Christian communities look at a local section of the International Workers' Association. I would like to see a veteran of the International who could read, for example, the so-called second epistle to the Corinthians, without his old wounds breaking out.<sup>14</sup>

The resistance of the Christian peasants against the ruling class brought persecution. The best-studied confrontations were those during the reigns of Decius (249–251), Valerian (253–260), and Diocletian (284–305). But antagonism dated from the first establishment of the religion among the Palestinian Jewish peasantry in the 40s and 50s C.E. and its spread within a few decades to other ethnic groups at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea and Alexandria.<sup>15</sup> Historian Vladimir Sergeev (1883–1941), who began his learning as the illegitimate son of a peasant woman, points out that the early Christian communities were distinguished by their simple organisation and an absence of clergy; the members organised non-Passover

14 Engels, quoted in Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity: A study in Christian Origins* (New York: International Publishers, 1972) 462.

15 Illustrative of the struggle was the torturing in 112 C.E. under Emperor Trajan (98–117 C.E.) of several female slaves. The women served as Christian deacons in the province of Bithynia et Pontus in Northern Turkey, an area that was in 'disorder'. The incident is discussed in Irina Sergeevna Svetsitskaya, 'Zhenshina v rannem hristianstve' [Women in Early Christianity], in *Zhenshchina v antichnom mire: sbornik statei* [Women in the Ancient World: A Collection of Articles] (eds. Liudmila P. Marinovich and Sergei I. Saprykin; Moscow: 'Nauka', 1995), 161, online at [http://www.sno.pro1.ru/lib/zhenshina\\_v\\_antichnom\\_mire/9.htm](http://www.sno.pro1.ru/lib/zhenshina_v_antichnom_mire/9.htm), accessed June 29, 2014 and Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?' *Past & Present* 26 (November 1963): 6–38, who quote the *Letters of Pliny the Younger (Epistulae X: 96–98)*. Historian Benjamin Isaac in 'Roman Religious Policy and the Bar Kokhba War,' *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (ed. Peter Schafer; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 39, remarks that such attacks resulted because the Christian and similar groups engaged in political conspiracy against the government: All foreign cults which attracted followers in the city of Rome and in Italy were resisted. The issue is emphasized in the address which Dio assigns to Maecenas. The latter is represented as advising Augustus 'to hate and punish those who are involved in foreign cults, not only for the sake of the gods – for if he does not respect them he will not honour any other being – but also because such people preferring new gods persuade many to adopt strange cults and these originate in conspiracies, factions, and political societies which do not profit the monarchy in the least'. [Dio 52.36.2] Dio's speech is explicit in his rejection of foreign cults: not only are they a threat to religion and religious values, but they are also a focus of political danger. We shall see below that this is precisely the argument which Trajan used for his prohibition of Christianity. The Jews were exceptional in being allowed to assemble for religious services while other foreign religions were forbidden to do so in Rome in the reigns of Caesar and Augustus.





**Figure 2:** Christian population c. 300<sup>19</sup>

## GROWTH: JUDEA AND GREECE

The academics Iakov A. Lentsman, Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev and Josif A. Kryvelev attribute the growth of Christianity to the social and political nature of Roman slave society.<sup>20</sup> The earliest Christian communities included in Judea the Ebionites, which translates as the ‘Poor’. Among their messianic beliefs was the rejection of slavery, imperialism, wealth, much of Mosaic law, animal sacrifice, the virgin birth, the atoning death, the physical resurrection and the Pauline letters. They maintained oral traditions about Jesus and later a shortened Aramaic version of Matthew’s Gospel. They celebrated a single annual commemorative meal (Passover) in contrast with more frequent Eucharists. Their membership included Simeon of Jerusalem, called the Zealot. He served as their second bishop and was crucified in 107 C.E. Another member was Thebutis. He led a faction to settle some 60 miles from Jerusalem at Pella in 66 C.E. Only after 150 C.E. were they called heretics by the so-called ‘apostolic fathers’.

Helping with the spread of the religion, as historian Kryvelev notes, was the fact that Jesus’ spirituality, which was based on a fraternal relation with the deity, was enticing to working people.<sup>21</sup> Jesus called on them to follow his egalitarian approach,

19 Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200–400* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 29.

20 Lentsman, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, 25; Lentsman, *Sravnivaia Evangeliia*, 177; Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev, *Proiskhozhdenie i klassovaia sushchnost khristianstva* [The Origin and Class Nature of Christianity] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennye izdatelstvo kulturno-prosvetitel’noĭ literatury, 1952); Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev, ‘Prichiny voznikovenija hristianstva’ [Causes of Christianity], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 81, no. 3 (1962), 78–95.

21 Josif A. Kryvelev, *Christ: Myth or Reality* (Moscow: Social Studies Today Editorial Board, 1987), 17.

which meant that not the landlord-imperialist system but the believer 'could freely decide the question of what was good and what was evil'. It was a revolutionary doctrine.

The progressive scholars Archibald *Robertson* and Samuel Dickey studied the Christian migration into the non-Jewish world among Macedonian workers in Greece.<sup>22</sup> Historian Richard Ascough points out that it was customary in the ancient world for working people who followed a particular trade, such as donkey-drivers, yoke-makers, purple-dyers, watermill operators, gardeners, coppersmiths, and silversmiths to belong to brotherhoods or 'trade unions.'<sup>23</sup> Each trade had its own religious cults, gods and associated festivals.<sup>24</sup> In the Macedonian town of Thessalonica there were few Jews and no synagogues. Christian Jews who lived and worked there belonged to the brotherhoods along with a mixture of other nationalities.<sup>25</sup> They were all-male organisations.<sup>26</sup>

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22 Archibald *Robertson*, *The Origins of Christianity* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), online at <http://www.ditext.com/robertson/christianity.html>, accessed June 14, 2015; Samuel Dickey, 'Some Economic and Social Conditions of Asia Minor Affecting the Expansion of Christianity,' in *Studies in Early Christianity* (ed. Shirley Jackson Case; New York: Century Co., 1928): 406, 414, online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015063162161;view=1up;seq=412>, accessed June 16, 2016;

23 Richard Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 317, 323; Richard Ascough, 'A Question of Death: Paul's Community-Building Language in 1 *Thessalonians* 4:13–18,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 514, 520.

24 See Ascough, 'A Question of Death,' 512, 518; Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community,' 318. The brotherhoods also celebrated the birthdays and marriages of their membership. When death came they owned sections of the local cemetery where they kept the memory of the deceased alive with regular festivals and communal meals. Their concern extended to care for their widows and orphans. Beliefs about eternal life and resurrection from the dead were not unique to Christianity. The leadership of the brotherhoods rotated on a regular basis with little distinction between the leader and the led.

25 Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community,' 312, 315.

26 *Ibid.*, 327.



Paul does not underplay but in fact highlights his own manual labor in the midst of establishing his *ethos*. Later Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue to live in a manner pleasing to God 'as you learned from us' (4:1) and exhorts them to 'work with your hands' (4:11). Despite the generally negative attitude toward manual labor in antiquity, in 1 *Thessalonians* Paul's language about work reflects a more positive attitude, a clear indication of where to locate the Thessalonians on the social map of antiquity.<sup>30</sup>

Added to its egalitarianism, another of Christianity's appeals was its mystical concern with what Stalin Prize-winner Bernard Bykhovskiy (1898–1980) and the Ukrainian Piama P. Gaidenko (b. 1934), paraphrasing Søren Kierkegaard, call the 'irony of existence' or 'absurdity of existence'.<sup>31</sup> While those like David Hume (1711–1776) maintained it was sufficient to treat the physical world as a brute fact requiring no further explanation, others like Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) and some among the early proletariat persisted, as cosmologist Brian Greene speculates, in asking the primordial existential question (PEQ), 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'<sup>32</sup>

Whatever attractiveness the religion had, by 100 C.E. there were not yet, as historian Robert Goldenberg puts it, 'two separate religions called "Judaism" and "Christianity." Rather, there was a far-flung Jewish people, among whom widely diverse interpretations of a shared religious heritage could be found, and there were small but growing numbers of people of gentile background who were attracted to one group of such interpretations. It took a very long time, several centuries in fact, before a more or less uniform "Judaism" and a slightly less uniform "Christianity" faced each other across a seemingly unbridgeable divide'.<sup>33</sup> Goldenberg states

30 Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community,' 314.

31 Piama P. Gaidenko, *Tragediia estetizma: Opyt kharakteristiki mirosozertsantia Serena Kirkegora* [Tragic Aestheticism: Søren Kierkegaard's World View] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970) and Bernard Emmanuilovich Bykhovskii, *Kierkegaard* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1976). In 1944 Bykhovskii received the Stalin Prize for his work in helping to edit along with Georgii Fedorovich Aleksandrov and others, the multi-volume *Istoriia filosofii* [History of Philosophy] (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1940–1943), which takes up the philosophy of faith.

32 Gennadii Georgievich Maiorov, *Teoreticheskaia filosofiiia Gotfrida V. Leibnitsa* [The Theoretical Philosophy of Gottfried Leibniz] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Moskva. Unversitet, 1973). Brian Greene in *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 345, comments about the PEQ, 'Humans throughout history have had a passionate drive to understand the origin of the universe. There is, perhaps no single question that so transcends cultural and temporal divides, inspiring the imagination of our ancient forebears as well as the research of the modern cosmologist'. Related to the PEQ was the issue of what historian William Sampson in *The Coming of Consolation: How God Gets Through to Us* (Westminster, MD.: Christian Classics, 1986), 2, 6–8, called its personality.

33 Robert Goldenberg, 'Review of Daniel Boyarin's Dying for God,' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92, no. 3–4 (January–April, 2002): 586. It took a while, as Goldenberg points out, for the rabbis to see 'Christians' as other (and vice versa), but by the 300s when the classic rabbinic texts were reaching their final form, it had become important to distinguish between Judaism and Christianity and to keep people from wandering between them. Goldenberg writes:

further that the earlier, more fluid situation is hard to reconstruct, in part because later writers, loyal to one or the other of the surviving 'traditions,' often tried to obscure the earlier reality.

In line with the fluidity between Christians and Jews, some scholars argue that Christian Jews were part of the revolutionary forces in the Judean Wars in 66–73 C.E. and 132–5 C.E., the latter being led by John of Giscala, Simeon Bar Giora and Bar Kochba. Historian Samuel Brandon speculates about the involvement of Christian-Jews in the 66–73 C.E. war:

Organized thus to prepare their compatriots for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, which was to be achieved by the return of the Risen Jesus as Messiah, the Jewish Christians were closely allied to the Zealots in sympathy and purpose; indeed some of their adherents were probably also professed adherents of Zealotism. When the Roman yoke was finally repudiated in 66 C.E., and this act of faith seemed so signally to be blessed by God in the defeat of Cestius Gallus, there is every reason for supposing that the Jerusalem Christians wholly identified themselves with their people in this fateful struggle for the freedom of Israel.<sup>34</sup>

As described by historian Iosif Davidovich Amusin (1910–1984), when the Essene sect was destroyed as a result of their involvement in the First Jewish War, part of them joined what he calls like-minded Jewish Christian communities.<sup>35</sup> The two

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Until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there was no clear difference between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity'. That is, significant numbers of people saw no difficulty in simultaneously identifying with both religions. Of course, earlier efforts had been made to separate the two: by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the so-called Apostolic Fathers had begun to speak of the need to avoid 'Judaism' in all its varieties, and the canonical Gospel of John notoriously seethes with hostility toward the ill-defined 'Jews'. Abundant though less well-known evidence, however, reveals Christians continuing to join the religious activities going on in synagogues (much of this evidence consists of vehement denunciation of such behavior by church-leaders). More surprisingly, we also see the existence of early rabbis who were interested in the teachings ascribed by his followers to Jesus and were not necessarily inclined to write off such teachings as in principle beyond the pale.

34 Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 219, see also, 42–44, 203–205, 244), which continues:

Doubtless the Christians expected, as did their fellow-Jews, that now the Messiah would come, and for them he would be the Risen Jesus, invested with divine power and glory. What happened to them in the fierce and bitter struggle to defend their holy city and Yahweh's chosen shrine from the relentless assault of the heathen can well be surmised. As Josephus has so graphically recorded, the whole population was involved in the suffering and the slaughter, women and children as well as the fighting men.

See also, Livshits, *Klassovaia borba v Iudee*; and Lion Feuchtwanger, et al., *Iudeiskaia voina* [Jewish War] (Moscow: Zhurnalno-gazetnoe ob edinenie, 1937).

35 Iosif Davidovich Amusin, *Kumranskaia obshchina* [Qumran community] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Nauka, Glavnyj redaktor vostочноi literatury, 1983) and Amusin, *Teksty Kumrana. Vypusk 1: Pamjatniki pismennosti Vostoka XXXIII* [The Texts of Qumran. Volume 1: Monuments of Eastern Literature XXXIII] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Nauka, 1971). See also Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev and Mikhail M. Kublanov, *Nakhodki v Īudejskoĭ pustyne* [Found in the Judean Desert] (Moscow. Gosudarstvennye. Izdatelstvo Politicheskaja Literatury, 1964).

sects shared beliefs like the condemnation of slavery and the prohibition on trading because it led to covetousness and cheating. They both avoided luxury and forbade oaths. They subsisted on pastoral and agricultural activities and handicrafts.

For Tissa Balasuriya (1924–2013), a Sri Lankan advocate of liberation theology, resistance to Roman imperialism was a shared doctrine of the early Christian and Jewish working people.<sup>36</sup> He comments, ‘[t]he liberation which God wrought for his people was a *political liberation*... Only a revolutionary breakaway from slavery would take his chosen people onto the road to freedom and a more just society. *Moses and Aaron were violent revolutionary leaders*’.<sup>37</sup>

In conflict with its revolutionary elements, as Christianity evolved, the merchant and landlord class in some communities gained influence and temporised. According to left historians, this stage is seen in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul.<sup>38</sup> His Epistles

36 Tissa Balasuriya in *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 169, compared the socialist and capitalist nations, with the latter coming up short:

It is indeed a strange irony that among the poor countries of the world it is principally in the socialist and Marxist-ruled areas that food, clothing, housing, and employment are effective. On the other hand, it is the peoples who are the chief agents of world exploitation who also recite the Our Father most often.

37 Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, 11. Other historians such as Louis Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient world: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Abram Borisovich Ranovich, *Ocherk istorii drevneevrejskoj religii* [An Essay on the History of Ancient Judaism] (Moscow: Ogiz, Gosudarstvennoe antireligioznoe izdatelstvo, 1937) and Vasily Vasilievich Struve, ‘K istorii prebyvaniya Izrailya v Egipte’ [On the History of Israel in Egypt], *Evreyskaya starina* [The Hebrew Olden Time], 11 (Leningrad: 1924) 45–64, observe that the Judaism out of which came Christianity succeeded in winning many adherents, whether fully-fledged proselytes or ‘sympathizers’ and had political and ethical traditions that elicited strongly positive responses from the non-Jewish proletarian population. Jews were a vigorous presence in the ancient world, and they were strengthened by the revolutionary nature of their tradition. The activist, Milt Felsen in *The Anti-Warrior: A Memoir* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 137, summed up the tradition, ‘The Ten Commandments are communism and breaking them is capitalism.’ The liberation theologian Marc Ellis in *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Challenge of the 21st Century* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 117, puts it another way: Jews are historically working class. Their God is the *Exodus* liberator of slaves. For this God, it is idolatry to be ashamed at being on the periphery, un-rewarded with money and status. He continues, *ibid.*, 90: ‘There is no doubt that parts of the Jewish community have their own recently acquired idols: capitalism, patriotism, and national security.’

38 See Lentsman, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, 161; and Liubov Emeliakh, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianskogo kulta* [Origin of the Christian Cult] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1971). Josif Kryvelev in *Christ: Myth or Reality*, 13–15, analyses landlord manipulation of ‘the image of Jesus as a common man and a martyr, poor, forgiving and indifferent to worldly goods’. He comments: For them it is important to emphasize those features of Christ’s personality in which he appears not as a wandering preacher who suffered and was humble and full of mercy, but as the ruler not only of the hearts and minds of people but also of their earthly fate, a principle of strength and power that is superior to all earthly powers. As Christ’s deputies on earth, they possess this superhuman strength and power...It was not always advantageous for the church to speak of Christ’s mercy,

emphasised that every earthly authority is established by god and must be obeyed. Children must obey their parents, wives their husbands, and slaves their masters (*Ephesians* 6:5).<sup>39</sup> A radical break with Judaism was expressed and the Jews for the first time were accused of killing Christ (2 *Thessalonians* 2:15).

Also in conflict with the early Christianity of the first century when all the members were considered equal and there was no special governing apparatus was that from the 150s the organisation of some churches became more complex.<sup>40</sup> In them, the well-to-do Christians, who had donated money or who represented those who had, occupied the post of bishop or deacon, charged with managing the community's property and economic affairs. The bishops and deacons stood increasingly aloof from the mass of believers. To justify their privileged position, a doctrine was worked out according to which a special 'grace' bestowed by god gave these officials the exclusive right to perform religious rites, to be the mentors of the other members of the community, and to decree principles of doctrine. In this way a church organisation was formed that was divided into clergy and people.

## RESISTANCE IN ASIA MINOR: MONTANISTS

In communist historiography, the strengthening of ties between separate landlord-dominated communities facilitated the formation of a top-down church bureaucracy which sought to ally itself with the slaveholding state. This conservative tendency was opposed by many within these churches.<sup>41</sup> The resisters (Ebionites, Novatianists, Montanists, Gnostics, Nazarenes) were labelled heretics.<sup>42</sup> This was because, as a rule,

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let alone nonresistance to evil. Church officials referred to this only when the oppressed and exploited became restive and it was necessary to pacify them... This transformation of Christ in the practice and ideology of the Church was found unacceptable by many believers in the past, as it is still unacceptable to many believers today.

39 As translated by Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), 1–12, the anonymously authored *Revelation of Peter* (130 C.E.), pictures disobedient slaves as condemned to the lowest level of hell. In a parallel fashion, the scholars Moise Solomonovich Belenkii in *Chto takoe Talmud* [What the Talmud Is] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963), online [http://propagandahistory.ru/books/M--S--Belenkiy\\_CHto-takoe-talmud/11](http://propagandahistory.ru/books/M--S--Belenkiy_CHto-takoe-talmud/11), accessed June 29, 2014 and Mikhail Iosifovich Shakhnovich, *Socialnaja sushhnost Talmuda* [The Social Essence of the Talmud] (Moscow: Ateist Rjazgostip, 1929), view the Talmud, which is a collection of Jewish dogmatic, religious, ethical and legal tenets compiled between 300 B.C.E. and 400 C.E. as teaching that the social order and slavery were inalterable and advising patience along with intolerance toward adherents of other faiths.

40 Iakov Lentsman in *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, 164–167, 222–223 and his *Sravnivaia Evangeliiia*, 177 and Abram Ranovich in *O rannem khristianstve*, 60, discuss both the egalitarian nature of the Christian community and the transition from this, as reflected in the earliest Christian catechism, the *Didache*. Completed by 150, the travelling Christian prophets, rabbis and apostles of early Christianity are shown as being replaced by professional priests and bishops.

41 Lentsman, *Sravnivaia Evangeliiia*, 176.

42 The American cleric Thomas McGrady popularised the proletarian theology of early Christians

they advocated the principles of primitive Christianity and retained their uncensored oral and written gospels.<sup>43</sup> The proletarian historian John Morris comments about the egalitarian governing structure among the Montanists:

The Montanist movement in Phrygia, in central Asia Minor, was unshakably orthodox in theology. It differed from tradition in rejecting the authority of urban communities and their bishops, modeled on the tradition of civil government. The supreme authority of the Montanist 'prophets', who included several women, assisted by subordinate traveling Bishops, has some resemblances to the structure of the Celtic church, centuries later, based on a tribal peasantry. Montanism was the first of a series of peasant movements, whose schism lay in points of policy and organization rather than of theology.<sup>44</sup>

As a Montanist Berber leader in the second-half of his life, Tertullian (160–225) in 220 censured those clerical authorities who were relaxing ethical discipline against political collaboration, adultery and fornication.<sup>45</sup> Using the *Book of Revelations*, he condemned imperialist Rome, 'So, again, Babylon, in our own John, is a figure of the city of Rome, as being equally great and proud of her sway, and triumphant over the saints and "drunk" with the blood of martyred "saints"'.<sup>46</sup> From the Christian Montanist perspective, with the state religion being a cult rendered to demons, as Tertullian put it, recruits freed themselves from Satan through an exorcism that was preliminary to their Baptism.

The missionary Rudy Kriegisch, in commenting on the early treatise *Apostolic Tradition (Egyptian Church Order)*, notes that those who followed it were required to denounce Satan's kingdom, which in their era was the Roman Empire. From their perspective, this made them revolutionaries, seeking to overthrow the established satanic order.<sup>47</sup> Associated with their levelling baptismal beliefs were their martyr

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such as Papias, Irenaeus, St. John the Revelationist, Melito Bishop of Sardis, Cerinthus, Marcus, Lactantius and Nepos. See Toby Terrar, 'Catholic Socialism: The Reverend Thomas McGrady,' *Dialectical Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (1983): 220; Terry Sullivan, *The Church of the Empire versus the Christian Church of North Africa: 312–430 AD* (Denver: Radical Christian Press, 2012), 141; and Grant, *The Climax of Rome*, 215.

43 Lentsman, *Sravnivaia Evangeliiia*, 176–177.

44 Morris, 'Early Christian Orthodoxy,' 12.

45 In Tertullian and those who followed Montanism's views, God but not bishops could forgive adultery, murder and similar trespasses, which meant sinners were permanently excommunicated. See Geoffrey Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 55.

46 Lentsman, *Proiskhozhenie khristianstva*, 115. See also, Ranovich, *O rannem khristianstve*, 123–134, 309–312, 344–350, 369–372.

47 Rudy Kriegisch, 'Do You Give Up the Glamour of Evil?' *African Ecclesiastical Review*, February, 22, no. 1 (1980): 23. Among some of the Latin-language groups, the principal terms used in the exorcism rite, *Satana, angeli, pompae* and *opera* [Satan, his angels, his pomp and works] were being used by 150 C.E. Kriegisch quotes the *Apostolic Tradition*, which made the following regulation: 'And when the day draws near on which they are to be baptized, let the bishop himself exorcise each one of them, that he may be certain that each is purified'. Historian Henry Kelly in *Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 267,

cults. The martyrs had rejected emperor worship and their relics were paraded about in defiance of the government.<sup>48</sup> Their burial locations became places of veneration and celebration. Historian Ramsay MacMullen comments:

From the first century on, in the east, those who had given their lives for their faith were seen in a particular light, as in some sense or degree superhuman; and so in the cemeteries they received special veneration from a much wider circle than their family. The fact is first attested at the time of the Book of Revelation... Facilities for picnics or meals in homage to them, inviting their help, are mentioned. In confirmation we have archeological evidence within the frame of which we see the Christians at worship.<sup>49</sup>

When viewed from the worker perspective, the formation of landlord-controlled church organisations brought ritual and dogma that was favourable to the established order and that was increasingly complex.<sup>50</sup> To create a unified doctrine, the temporisers designated a canon for the New Testament and both rejected and redacted works that reflected the democratic tendencies in primitive Christianity and its rebellious spirit.<sup>51</sup> In the imperial church, the ruling doctrine was not blessedness attainable by the poor, as was often stressed in the early stage of Christianity, but blessedness obtainable by all believers in Christ who performed church rituals, submitted to church discipline, and showed humility and patience. The original community gatherings and suppers were turned into worship services. Rituals became not only increasingly complicated but assimilated rites of the ancient religions. In this way were worked out the basic Christian sacraments, holy days, and liturgy, which have survived with slight modifications to this day.

Aleksandr P. Kazhdan notes that working people in Asia Minor, North Africa and Western Europe found positive those such as the Goths in the 300s and 400s, who professed the Arian (Christian-Jewish unitarianism) heresy. Divisive beliefs weakened the Empire. Such beliefs prevented Christianity from being a monolithic force that could be co-opted by the ruling class.<sup>52</sup> For Eleana M. Shtaerman (1914–1991) so-called ‘brigandage’ was in the same positive category as heresy. Working

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remarks on the tendency of capitalist clerics who, disputing the implications, downplay Satan and redact exorcism from the Baptism ritual.

48 Ramsay MacMullen in *The Second Church*, 107, in discussing the martyr cults, observes:

The customs were taken over for the saints from the traditional family rites: staying up late, often all night, and eating, drinking, and dancing in a celebratory fashion, exactly as non-Christians had always done in honor of their own dead and as they continued to do so in the same cemeteries. Such behavior was a common target of the clergy's reprobation from the mid-third century on.

49 *Ibid.*, 25.

50 John Morris, ‘Celtic Saints,’ *Past and Present* 11 (1957): 7.

51 Lentsman, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, 26.

52 Aleksandr P. Kazhdan, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva i ego sushchnost* [The Origin of Christianity and its Essence] (Moscow: Vysshaya shkola, 1962) and his *Ot Khrista k Konstantinu* [From Christ to Constantine] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Znaniye, 1965). See also, Lentsman, *Proiskhozhdenie khristianstva*, 169, 261.

people looked on the slave-owners as the real brigands. Shtaerman writes about the relation of brigandage to nationalist and class struggle:

The outbreaks of 'brigandage' (latrines) were for the most part an elemental expression of the opposition of the common people to their oppressors, a form of class struggle by the oppressed ... The local population gave the 'brigands' their support. The Roman state sent special forces which were to prevent the spread of disorders; they were charged with the maintenance of peace and order in their district, i.e., they were to help the Roman authorities and protect the property of the wealthier inhabitants. In the province of Asia, for instance, the *ειρηναρχαι* (peacekeepers) performed the function from the first half of the second century, being charged with the fight against 'brigandage' ... The whole history of the Roman Empire is full of rebellions in the provinces. The Romans tried to gain the co-operation of the local nobility ... Rebellion in the provinces began to lose its character of a general struggle by the conquered against the Roman conquerors, and take on the character of a struggle by the oppressed and exploited against the rich and powerful. The frontier provinces were swept by these rebellions, and in them we find the first signs of the people allying themselves with the 'barbarian' neighbors of the Empire in their attacks.<sup>53</sup>

The Czechoslovakian, Pavel Oliva, points out that as a result of the eastern brigands, the Roman government sent a special military force there beginning in 150 C.E. By 200 C.E., such special forces were deployed in all the provinces.<sup>54</sup> Not surprisingly, in 378, the resisters in Asia Minor gave support to the Visigothic (Germanic) Arian brigands who defeated the Roman army at Adrianople, Turkey, and killed the emperor.

## NORTH AFRICA: DONATISTS

As in Asia Minor, the Empire's North African colony was, from the communist perspective, a centre of class struggle during the post-Caesar era.<sup>55</sup> This was a

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- 53 Eleana Shtaerman, *Krizis rabovladelcheskogo stroia v zapadnikh provintsiiakh Rimskoj imperii* [The Crisis of the Slaveholding System in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire]. (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1957), 76–81. See also, Liudmila Petrovna Marinovich, Elena Sergeevna Golubtsova, Iliia Sholeimovich Shifman, Aleksandra Ivanovna Pavlovskaja, *Rabstvo v vostochnykh provintsiiakh Rimskoj imperii v 1.–3. vv.* [Slavery in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire, First to Third Centuries C.E.] (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).
- 54 Pavel Oliva, *Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire* (Prague: Československá akademie věd, 1962), 114–115, 118; see also, Alexander Dmitrievich Dmitriev, 'Dvizhenie latrones kak osobaja forma klassovoj bor'by v Rimskoj imperii' [The Brigandage Movement as a Special Form of Class Struggle in the Roman Empire], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 38, no.4 (1951): 65; and Eleana M. Shtaerman, 'Iz istorii ideologicheskikh techenij II–III vv' (From the history of ideological currents in the second to third centuries), *Eos* 48, no. 1 (1956) 505–528.
- 55 See the Czech Republic's Jan Burian, 'Z novejsi literatury k dejinam Afriky v pozdnerimské dobe' [Of the Newer Literature on the History of Africa in the Late Roman Period], *Listy filologické/Folia philologica* 81, no. 2 (Prague 1958): 270–272; and German Germanovich Diligenskii, 'Novye knigi po istorii Severnoj Afriki' [New Books on the History of Northern Africa], *Vestnik drevnei*

response, as Nikolai Mashkin points out, to the fact that six Romans owned half of Africa.<sup>56</sup> Christianity had its African origins in the synagogues located in port towns. There were various views on Christian thinking, such as the ideas of Valentinus, Marcion, Hermogenes and Prodicus. Among the early converts to Christianity was an Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts* 8:26-40) who had come to Jerusalem to worship.

As time passed, class division arose within the Christian community. Mashkin quotes Cyprian (200–258 C.E.), a popularly-elected Carthaginian bishop between 248 and 258, as condemning the property-owning Christian leaders ‘who forget their pastoral duties’ and deified the Romanisation of Africa.<sup>57</sup> Cyprian opposed the slave system and the village market days at which Roman merchants encouraged gullible subsistent farmers to enter into usurious economic relations. Because of unpayable debt, they ended up enslaved. In Cyprian’s view, the living conditions deteriorated with the market system, with Roman administrators serving only the landlords and opposing the Roman and Berber workers, slaves and coloni.<sup>58</sup> For his part in opposing emperor worship, Cyprian was executed by officials of Emperor Valerian I’s government. Engels maintained that ‘because working people voice their interests, needs and demands in eschatological religious guise, this does not change the fact that it is class struggle. Christianity was a mass revolutionary ideology’.<sup>59</sup>

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*istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 55, no. 1 (1956): 116–120. Among the Berber revolutionaries of the pre-Christian era, Tacfarinas (d. 24 C.E.) led a decade-long guerrilla war between 15 and 24 C.E. in Tunisia against Roman colonialism. They disrupted the grain supply and brought about civil disorder in Rome. Similarly disruptive in Egypt were the Bucolian rebellions in 152–156 C.E. and in the 170s C.E., the latter rebellions led by the priest Isidore. They defeated the Roman legions, captured Lower Egypt, and rushed to Alexandria. See Alexander Dmitrievich Dmitriev, ‘Bukoly’ [The Bucolics], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 18, no. 4 (1946): 95–97; Oliva, *Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire*, 119.

56 Mashkin, ‘Dvizhenie agonistikov,’ 30.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 29–31.

59 Mashkin, *ibid.*, 31, quoting Frederick Engels, *Krestjanskaja vojna v Germanii* [The German Peasant War] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennye izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1932), 32. Complementing its interest in class struggle, the left takes up the doctrine of historical stages in discussing early Christianity. Sociologist Kevin Anderson in ‘Marx’s Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies and Gender,’ *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 4 (2002): 91–94, online at <http://www.kevin-anderson.com/marx%E2%80%99s-late-writings-on-non-western-and-precapitalist-societies-and-gender>, accessed October 20, 2014, maintains that even if one believes that history progresses through various stages such as primitive communism, feudalism and capitalism, working people at whatever stage deserve study. Anderson reviews Marx’s multilinear later writings on the class struggle in the Roman Empire, the communal property of the proletarian family and their rejection of paterfamilias, thus being an embryo of communism. Also of interest is Teodor Shanin, ‘Marx, Marxism and the Agrarian Question: I Marx and the Peasant Commune,’ *History Workshop Journal* 12, no. 1 (1981): 118–119, who in discussing historical stages in relation to Roman history, questions those such as Erwin Marquit, author of ‘Memoirs of a Lifelong Communist,’ online at <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~marqu002/memoirs.html>. 2014): 547, 578, accessed October 20, 2014. Marquit advocates unilinear and modernist concepts

Following the example of Cyprian, the Berber Christians waged an insurgency that lasted for a century between 330 and 430. They called themselves the 'agonistae', that is, fighters for the true faith and 'the leaders of the saints'.<sup>60</sup> Their enemies, which included those Catholic bishops who sided with the Empire, called them 'circumcelliones' because they included fugitive slaves who circulated around (circum) and played the main part in the movement.<sup>61</sup> Also involved were artisans, lower clergy and rank-and-file soldiers who turned against their generals. In the areas which they liberated, their agrarian reform programme abolished debt slavery, burned out landlords and usurers and destroyed court records. Because of their unity, the movement proved to be stronger than the Roman military and grew over time. It culminated in the 430s when they joined forces with the Vandals to permanently eliminate Roman rule.<sup>62</sup>

Ideologically, the agonistae were connected with Donatism, a rigoristic African movement named after Donatus (died 347 C.E.), an early Catholic bishop who sided with the peasantry. Their leaders included Bishop Optatus at Thamugadi, 'before whom the landlords trembled', as Mashkin puts it.<sup>63</sup> Historians G. E. de

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of 'premature communism', 'irresistible laws of history' and 'stages of history following each other with the inevitability of clockwork'. Such minimisation of working people in history is used as a license to tear down as in the USSR what working people have achieved. According to Marquit's neo-liberal 'communist' analysis, the Judean Wars, the Roman Empire's downfall and Abraham Lincoln's slave emancipation were premature, just as the Vietnamese peasantry's defeat of American technology and the establishment of Soviet, Chinese and Cuban communism were. Of interest also is the discussion of the Soviet philosopher Oleg G. Drobnitsky, *Ponjatje morali: istoriko-kriticeskij ocherk* [The concept of morality: An historical-critical essay] (Moscow: Nauka, 1974) concerning unilinearism. He argues in discussing the dialectic of freedom and necessity, that if the human will is viewed as a 'final principle' not preconditioned by anything, then a break conflicting with the requirements of scientific explanation is introduced into the chain of causality linking phenomena.

- 60 Mashkin in 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 5, writes concerning the derivation of the term 'agonist': They were called agonistics because they fought (*propter agonem*). As the apostle says, 'I have fought the good fight'. (2 Tim. 4:7). Those who pursued their occupations against the devil and overcome him Christ called warriors'. See also, Nikolai A. Mashkin, *Istorii ai drevnego Rima* [History of Ancient Rome] (Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1947), 72.
- 61 Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 35; Alexander Dmitrievich Dmitriev, 'K Voprosy ob Agonistikakh i Zirkumzellionakh' [On the Problem of the Agonistici and the Circumcellions], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 25, no. 3 (1948): 66–78; and Hans-Joachim Diesner, 'Spätantike Widerstandsbewegungen: Das Circumcellionentum,' *Aus der byzantinistischen Arbeit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* 1 (1957): 106–112.
- 62 Nikolai A. Mashkin 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 35, comments that 'the entire population of the estates arose against their masters and devastated their possessions. This was possible because they were under the protection of the agonistie'. See also, *ibid.*, 37, 44; Jean-Paul Brisson, *Gloire et misère de l'Afrique chrétienne* (Paris: Laffont, 1949); and Jean-Paul Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique Romaine de Septime Severe à l'invasion vandale* (Paris: De Boccard, 1958).
- 63 Mashkin, *Istorii ai drevnego Rima*, 72. See also, Hans-Joachim Diesner, 'Konservative Kolonen,

Ste. Croix, German Germanovich Diligenskii, Terry Sullivan, Andras Mocsy, *Hans-Joachim* Diesner of the German Democratic Republic and Pavel Oliva describe their proletarian morality, which focused on love of one's enemy, pacifism, holding property in common and the rejection of emperor worship, wealth, military service, adultery, abortion, gluttony, narcissism, blood sports and gambling.<sup>64</sup>

On the ideal of both resisting and loving their enemy, Terry Sullivan comments, '[t]he question is whether the "Donatist" Church preached and substantially practiced love your enemies, turn the other cheek. There is good evidence that they did'.<sup>65</sup> On this subject, Mashkin discusses the 'legion' of Donatists, including clergy, who resisted but refused to take up the sword.<sup>66</sup> They followed, as Mashkin relates, the New Testament doctrine in Matt. 26:52 that those who use the sword will perish by it. While the Romans killed them nonetheless because they were rebels, they and their allies ultimately levelled the Romans.<sup>67</sup>

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Sklaven und Landarbeiter im Donatistenstreit' [Conservative Coloni, Slaves and Peasants in the Donatist Struggle], *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 36, no. 7 (1962): 214–219.

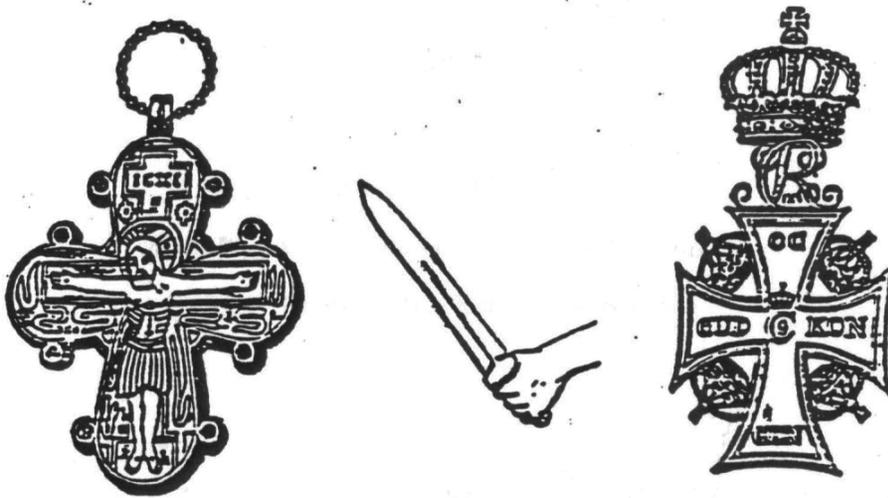
64 Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 474; Andras Mocsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia: A History of the Middle Danube Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 323–333; Oliva, *Pannonia and the onset of crisis in the Roman Empire*, 69, 118–19, 132–33. Terry Sullivan, *The Church of the Empire*, 3, 85–87, 142–144; German Germanovich Diligenskii, 'Voprosi istorii narodnikh Dvizenii v. Pozdnej Rimskoju' [Problems Concerning the History of Popular Movements in Roman Africa], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 60, no. 2 (1957): 85–106; German Germanovich Diligenskii, *Severnaia Afrika v IV–V vv.* [North Africa in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries] (Moscow: Nauka, 1961); Hans-Joachim Diesner, *Kirche und Staat im spätrömischen Reich* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, 1963).

65 Sullivan, *The Church of the Empire*, 87.

66 Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 40.

67 Left historians condemn pacifism when it does not undertake to eliminate the imperialist social-economic and political conditions that give rise to war. The pacifism preached by those like Paul and the parallel failure to support communist and worker parties is, as Lenin put it in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij* [Complete Collected Works] (5<sup>th</sup> ed., Moscow: Gosudarstvennye Izdatelstvo politicheskaja. Literaturny, 1958–1965), 26, 165, put it, '[o]ne of the means of duping the working class'. The scholar Larry Garner in 'The Western Left, the Soviet Union and Marxism,' *Science and Society* 75, no. 1 (January 2011): 91, studies the Soviets' militant anti-imperialism and anti-militarism as seen in their support for anti-colonial movements and disadvantaged people all over the world and in their official anti-militarist culture, which in films and literature never glorified war or minimised its horrors. In contrast, capitalism needs war and colonies for profit. David Lane in *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism: Full Employment and the Labour Process in the USSR* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 3, 8, 215, points out that with no capitalists in the USSR, only workers, it did not seek profit, but to live within its means. Its full-employment economy was what gave it legitimacy. This was a 'sacred element in Soviet social policy', as Lane, *ibid.*, 215, puts it. He explains that the planned labour shortage in the Soviet system kept labour costs high and gave workers strength against management. Problems of efficiency, shortages and growth rates were secondary. Lane, *ibid.*, 214 remarks further:

The Soviet economy was one of full employment with the highest rate of paid employment known



**Figure 4:** Struggle against Imperial Church Symbolism.<sup>68</sup>

Prominent among the defenders of the Roman occupation military was the imperialist bishop of Hippo, Augustine (354–430). He maintained that the Donatist peasantry were not martyrs but had committed mass suicide. He complained that their graves had become sights of Donatist-Christian celebrations.<sup>69</sup> At the height of the American anti-communist period in the 1950s, historian Hugh Nibley (1910–2005) described in Ciceronian language the psychology of the Roman slave-owners and their clergy, who for him were surrogates for American imperialism:

The great landowners [of the Roman Empire] appreciated civilization and culture very highly, but their political outlook was narrow, their servility was unbounded. But their external appearance was majestic, and their grand air impressed even the barbarians. For the other classes they had neither sympathy nor understanding. Their fault was not they would enjoy the good things of the earth, but that they would enjoy them exclusively: 'The earth is the mother of us all,' said the starving field and factory-workers, 'for she gives equally; but you pretend that she is your mother only'. Their ideal was Cato, whose forthright and

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in history. There was an absence of a 'reserve army' of the unemployed. Public ownership and labour shortage was an inherent part of the planned economy. There was no incentive to increase the profit of capital by reducing labour costs or by imperialism. This is because there was no capital.

68 Sullivan, *The Church of the Empire*, front cover. Left to right the Dagmar crucifix, a Roman sword from Trajan's column and the 'God and King' cross of the Dannebrog Knights. It symbolises the Christian struggle against the church of the Empire.

69 Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 41; see also Hans-Joachim Diesner, *Studien zur Gesellschaftslehre und sozialen Haltung Augustins*, (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1954).

uncompromising dedication to his own interests, whose unflinching devotion to self and steely resistance to any enervation impulse of sympathy for others had about it something of sublime integrity. Skimming the cream of the world's natural resources on their vast tax-free estates, these men thought of themselves as natural-born leaders of men; they oozed the virtue and loyalty of the prosperous: why should they not be loyal to Rome? They *were* Rome! Under the early emperors 'the state's sphere of activity had been curtailed to an astonishing degree; the state simply secured peace and law in the world and then turned it over to private exploitation'. Deeply loyal to a system that gave them everything, the great owners could not understand why all others should not be just as loyal. They were shocked at slaves not being faithful. Nor could they, who soon learned that the secret of survival was absolute servility and had made an art of groveling to secure their broad acres, have any patience with those who refused to play the game.<sup>70</sup>

Vladimir Sergeev outlines the Emperor Constantine's efforts to use Christianity to help him prop up the dying slave system.<sup>71</sup> Reigning from 306 to 337 C.E., in 313 he made Christianity a state religion with the clergy being state employees and with, as viewed by the resisters, the emperor being the deity, emperor worship being the doctrine, the liturgy being based on court ceremonies, the episcopal courts exercising civil jurisdiction and the bishops being slave owners.<sup>72</sup> As a result, graft-dominated

70 Hugh Nibley, 'The Unsolved Loyalty Problem: Our Western Heritage,' *Western Political Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (December, 1953): 649–650.

71 Vladimir Sergeev in 'Ocherki po istorii pozdnerimskoi imperii,' 68, no. 5 (1938b): 97, writes, 'The rise of class contradictions in connection with the crisis of slavery brought the greatest of tensions in ancient society, as the state sought by all means to prolong its existence.'

72 Constantine and his ecclesiastics wanted Jesus to be a king, a god and a narcissist, not a worker. This was because religion should be about kings and gods, not work and working people. To the extent he could have his way, he wanted to monopolise Jesus like he monopolised everything else. Sergeev in 'Ocherki po istorii pozdnerimskoi imperii,' 67, no. 3 (1937): 77, describes the emperor worship:

Everything that had any relation to the person of the emperor was called 'sacred' (*sacrum* or *sacratissimum*). The external expression of the power of the princeps since Diocletian, differed little from the eastern kings with their tiara and purple clothes with precious stones. Bright red colours, silk and precious stones were insignia of the emperor and the court. At the court were introduced strict ceremonies with a special form for each rank, bows, kissing the hands and feet. Emperors were praised in solemn hymns. Eulogies were pronounced in honour of complete subservience to them. Subjects of the Roman emperor upon meeting with him fell to their knees, covered their faces and uttered praise. The rare public meetings and appearances of the emperor were held with much fanfare.

Sergeev in *ibid.*, 76, also argues that the ruling class taught that:

the emperor was 'born of god and creator of gods' (*diis genitus et deorum creator*), the representative of the divine on earth, 'as if he was in the body of god' (*tamquam praesens et corporalis deus*). The imperial constitutions of the 300s and 400s A.D., which are preserved in the codes of Theodosius and Justinian held the view that the state was the personal property of the emperor and that he was the sole source of law.

See also, Nibley 'The Unsolved Loyalty Problem,' 636, 641–642. Hugh Nibley, *ibid.*, 642, observes that the 'the Christian Emperor was hailed at his coronation as *dominus noster praesens et corporalis deus* [the Lord our God is present and physical], and Christian and pagan orators

councils of bishops condemned Donatism and the other anti-imperialist sects.<sup>73</sup> Working people in response boycotted the government religion.<sup>74</sup>

In his study of the early ecumenical councils beginning with Nicea (325 C.E.), historian Josif Kryvelev first summarises their decisions, which focused on the nature and will of Jesus. He concludes with the observation that the councils had more to do with class struggle than with the search for truth. He comments:

This controversy over theological fine points probably reflected not so much a search for truth as the real relationship that existed between the interest of rival groupings. For the ruling elite it was important that its points of view should be upheld at all times so that it would appear infallible. Quite real material and political interests depended on this. Thus, in opposition to the groups whose ideological banner was Nestorianism, it was said that in Christ two natures, one human and one divine, were indivisibly and inseparably united. At the same time it was necessary to oppose the Monophysites by insisting that these two natures were not 'fused' together. In the end one had little choice but to accept the 'mysterious' discrepancy.<sup>75</sup>

Soviet historiography points out, as noted, that Donatist Christianity, in emphasising class-based ethics, contrasted with the religion of the councils and state-supported clergy that focused on rituals and mysticism in which the clergy became entertainers. For example, Augustine treated baptism as a magical road to salvation. He used the doctrine of original sin to justify substituting ritual in place of taking a stand

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competed in proclaiming the long-awaited blessed age of the prophets and the Sibyl'.

73 Nibley, 'The Unsolved Loyalty Problem,' 636. Terry Sullivan in *The Church of the Empire*, 131, summarises the graft issue as follows: 'Constantine decreed that new converts should receive a white robe and 20 pieces of gold. He decreed far more substantial rewards for those upper class Romans who came into the Church at the higher levels'. Included in the graft was money that Constantine paid in 331 for Eusebius to produce 50 government-approved bibles for the church of Constantinople. See also, Lee McDonald and James Sanders, eds, *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002): 414–415.

74 Ramsey MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200–400* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 101, in his study of the archeological records, writes about the era's low church-attendance figures:

Out of some 255 churches in some 155 towns and cities, wherever the remains survive for the record, the expected attendance ranged between a mere 1 per cent and 8 per cent of the general population. Such are the figures we have seen at Alexandria, Constantinople, Rome, Antioch, many little Syrian centers, Salona, Philippi, Oxyrhynchus, Carthage, Cirta, Tipasa, Nola... They can be checked in the three greatest of these centers, where we have reliable lists of the fourth-century churches. By no estimate of their total seating or standing capacity could they have accommodated great crowds, compared with the whole urban population... No great efforts were made to multiply the number of churches. Need could be measured by those contemporaries who were best suited to do so, namely, the local bishops. They were guided in their planning by their experience of normal attendance, not by their lack of construction funds, and, as the fourth century draws to its end, and so into the fifth, we can see them sometimes cutting back the laity space in favor of the clergy, to make room for a more ample chancel, a solea or an ambo.

75 Kryvelev, *Christ: Myth or Reality*, 10.

with the Berber peasantry.<sup>76</sup> The Donatists fought to maintain the rite unchanged, which incorporated opposition to the established order.<sup>77</sup> Infant baptism was at best superstition and contrary to their practices as they had evolved in Africa in the course of two centuries. In their struggle against Rome, the Donatists fought for maintaining their Punic language, not Latin or Greek, and the popular electing of their bishops, lower clergy and church leaders, rather than allowing top-down appointment as practiced by the cathedral clergy. Most importantly, they refused state subsidies, unlike the landlord clergy who had no popular support and survived because of their presence on the Roman payroll.<sup>78</sup>

To sum up about the African resistance, the Donatists, as studied in left historiography, defended the independence of their religion from the state, and contended that true faith was preserved only in Africa. This justified ideologically the separatist tendencies of the various groups of the population hostile to the big landowners, officialdom, and the clergy of the state-aligned church, all supporters of the Empire and its practices. The popular struggle of the peasantry, as symbolised in Figure 4, ultimately levelled the Empire, in what Soviet scholars call 'social revolution'.<sup>79</sup> Landlord property, including that of collaborating bishops, was confiscated and redistributed to the workers, resulting in material and spiritual advancement.

76 Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 32.

77 In 250 C.E. Emperor Decius (201–251), during his short reign from 249 to 251, as part of repressing the resistance, ordered the clergy of the various religions to sign a loyalty statement (*libelli*) to the state cult. Christians who signed were viewed as demon worshipers by their communities and expelled. When later the traitors sought re-admission, a dispute arose. The collaborators minimised their betrayal and said they did not need rebaptism. The majority, which included Bishop Cyprian, maintained they had to go through the lengthy baptism preparations to prove their repentance and have themselves exorcised of Satan, his angels, pomp and works.

78 Mashkin, 'Dvizhenie agonistikov,' 32–33, 36. In addition, historian Nikolai Mashkin, *ibid.*, 38, notes that the official mission of the imperial officials Paul and Marcarius (Markarios) to distribute alms to the churches of the emperor was met with the Donatist response, 'Quid imperatori cum ecclesia?' ['What is the emperor to the church?'].

79 Mashkin, *Istorii ai drevnego Rima*, 284. The same author in 'Eschatology and Messianism in the Final Period of the Roman Empire,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 10, no. 2 (1949): 225–227, notes that while the ruling class used popular religious cults, including Christianity, to justify its authority, '[n]ot all the population were favorably inclined toward Roman rule. The majority suffered exploitation'. As a result, as has been outlined, the masses had their own cults and also read their ideologies, interior class psychology and economic needs into the popular religions.

## RESISTANCE IN SPAIN, GAUL AND GERMANY: BAGAUDAE

As depicted in communist historiography, the Celtic peasants in Gaul (northern Italy, France, Belgium) and Spain, like their Berber counterparts, resisted Roman imperialism. Eleana Shtaerman finds that the burden of Roman taxes and the cruelty of the usurers repeatedly caused revolts by the indigenous population.<sup>80</sup> John Morris records that Bishop Irenaeus (130–202) of Lyon, France, in 180 C.E., preached about the labour theory of value in the New Testament with which he defended the expropriation of landlords. He taught:

It is just that men should receive the recompense for their suffering in that creation in which they have suffered. The problem is like that of the captivity of Israel in Egypt. If a free man is forcibly abducted and slaves for many years for another, so that he increases his substance, and then runs away with a small proportion of the great 'acquisitio' of wealth which his labor has created, it is not he who is to blame, but the unjust employer, whose wealth was gained through the labor of others.<sup>81</sup>

Along similar lines Vladimir Sergeev maintains that the ecclesiastical writer Lactantius (250–325) preached a 'philosophy of history' based on the *Book of Revelations* that focused on the fall of the Roman Empire:

Christianity was strengthened with the number of converts growing rapidly, despite the persecution that took place in the 200s under the emperors Decius, Valerian and Diocletian... The ecclesiastical writer Lactantius wrote a whole 'philosophy of history' that indicates the depth of the crisis of the slave system. The death of the Roman Empire, says Lactantius, is inevitable due to immutable laws of social life. Everything created by human hands must perish: the Egyptian, Syrian and Persian Empires. The Roman Empire is next. Its end is drawn in the darkest colors: war, civil strife, internal struggle, discord, jealousy, confusion, infectious diseases, hunger.<sup>82</sup>

Among the revolts in Gaul which left historians sometimes relate to the bagaudae and Christian movements was that led by Maurice (250–282). He was a black Christian

80 Eleana M. Shtaerman, 'Drevniaia Galliia: Obzor Poslevoennoj Burzhuznoj Istoriografii' [Ancient Gaul: Review of Post-War Bourgeois Historiography], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 35, no. 1 (1951a): 209–215; Eleana M. Shtaerman, 'Rabstvo v III–IV vv. n.je. v zapadnyh provincijah Rimskoj imperii' [Slavery in the third and fourth centuries AD in the western provinces of the Roman Empire], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of ancient history] 36, no. 2 (1951b): 84–104; Eleana M. Shtaerman, 'K voprosu o krest'janstve v zapadnyh provincijah Rimskoj imperii' [On the Question of the Peasantry in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 40, no. 2 (1952): 108. Historian Shtaerman's study begins with revolts in 52 B.C.E., 12 B.C.E., and 21 C.E., with the largest being led by Civilis in 69–70 C.E.

81 Irenaeus quoted in John Morris, 'Early Christian Orthodoxy,' 11.

82 Sergeev, 'Ocherki po istorii pozdnerimskoj imperii,' *Istoričeskij marksist* [Marxist Historian] 67, no. 3 (1938a): 65.

African general who while stationed in Gaul refused to lead his legion against the bagaudae revolutionaries because, as one account puts it, '[h]e discovered that the bagaudae were also Christians'.<sup>83</sup> As a result he and 6,000 of his Christian troops were executed by Augustus Maximilian for insubordination. A basilica was built on the site of their martyrdom.

According to Sergeev, the inception of the bagaudae movement, which thrived in Gaul for 200 years, was a 20-year insurrection beginning in 186 that was led by Maternus. He was a deserter from the Roman army. He ~~and~~ led runaway slaves, coloni (emigrants), ruined farmers and military deserters in attacks on the provinces' largest cities. He levelled landlords.<sup>84</sup> E. A. Thompson writes:

It is only possible to explain the unusually rapid growth of the rebel army, and the considerable territory it covered, if we assume that the local people helped the rebels, particularly those classes of the population that suffered most from Roman oppression.<sup>85</sup>

Along the same lines, A. D. Dmitriev commented on the relation between Maternus's rebellion and the bagaudae resistance, 'this [rebellion led by Maternus] was an important uprising among the poverty stricken and oppressed masses of Gaul, the beginning of the Bagaudae movement'.<sup>86</sup>

In time, the Western resistance was aided, beginning in 250 C.E., by the pressure of the Arian-Christian German peasantry migrating into Gaul. In 258, when the Empire was in a difficult domestic and foreign position, Gaul as well as Britain and Spain seceded. The Romans re-seized power in 273 but then were attacked by the bagaudae. From the communist point of view they weakened the slave system and helped bring about the Empire's downfall.<sup>87</sup> Commencing in 283–284 C.E. in the

83 Gayraud Wilmore, *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 104.

84 See N. N. Belova, 'Socialnye dvizhenija v Gallii v I–II vv' [Social Movements in Gaul in the First and Second Century], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 42, no. 4 (1952): 47, 53 and Oliva, *Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire*, 123.

85 Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain,' 12–13. Nibley, 'The Unsolved Loyalty Problem,' 635.

86 Alexander Dmitrievich Dmitriev, 'Dvizhenie bagaudov' [The Bagaudae Movement], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 12, no. 3–4 (1940): 103.

87 See Aleksandr R. Korsunskii, 'Dvizhenie bagaudov' [The Bagaudae Movement], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 62, no. 4 (1957): 71–87; Korsunskii, *Gotskaia Ispaniia* 254–259; Masiello, 'L'ideologia messianica e le rivolte servili,' 179–196; Dmitriev, 'Dvizhenie bagaudov,' 101–114; Sergeev, 'Ocherki po istorii pozdnerimskoi imperii,' 67, no. 3 (1938a): 67, 79; Rigobert Günther and Aleksandr R. Korsunskii, *Germanen erobern Rom: Der Untergang des Weströmischen Reiches und die Entstehung germanischer Königreiche bis zur Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1986); Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*; Juan Carlos Sánchez León, *Los Bagaudas, rebeldes, demonios, mártires: revueltas campesinas en Galia e Hispania durante el Bajo Imperio* [The Bagaudae, Rebels, Demons, Martyrs: Peasant Revolts in Gaul and Spain during the Late Empire] (Andalucía, Spain: Universidad de Jaén, Jaeén, 1996a), 84–107. The Germanic Arian Heruli people are described as similar to the bagaudae.

Lugdunum (Lyon) region, bagaudae armies also led uprisings in France in 364–67, 407–417, 435–437 and 442 C.E.<sup>88</sup>

In Spain, the Empire was never able to gain control of the mountainous northern and north-western regions, where the Galician and Basque peasantry retained power. In 409, the Arian-Christian Vandals, Alans and Suevi invaded. It took a Roman counter-offensive 20 years to force them into Africa in 429. Soon afterwards came bagaudae revolts in 441–443, 454 and 456. In 449, under the leadership of Basilius, they captured the city of Terazona in the province of Saragossa and killed a compromising local bishop, Leo, in his church. The only source for the murder is a single paragraph in the Latin-language chronicle by Hydatius (400–469), also known as Idacius, who was bishop of Aquae Flaviae in Galicia.<sup>89</sup> The scholar Richard W. Burgess translates the passage:

As a demonstration of his singular daring, Basilius assembled a group of Bacaudae and then killed federate troops in the church at Tyriasso. Even Leo, the bishop of the same church, was wounded there by those who accompanied Basilius and died in that place.<sup>90</sup>

Of interest concerning the bishop's murder is an alternative interpretation by the formerly Yugoslavian academic, Smail Cekic. He translates Hydatius to mean that Bishop Leo may have sided with the bagaudae and given them sanctuary in his church, and in retaliation was killed along with them by imperial forces, that is, federate Visigoths from southwest Gaul. He summarises:

88 León, *Los Bagaudas* (1996a), 18–20.

89 Hydatius, 'Hydatii Episcopi Chronicon' [Bishop Hydatius's Chronicle] paragraph no. 25, online at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/hydatiuschronicon.html>, accessed June 16, 2015. It reads in Latin:

Basilius ob testimonium egregii ausus sui congregatis Bacaudis in ecclesia Tyriassone foederatos occidit: ubi et Leo ejusdem ecclesiae episcopus, ab eisdem qui cum Basilio aderant, in eo loco obiit vulneratus.

See Elaine A. Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain,' *Past and Present* 2 (1952): 16–17; Elaine A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 184; Korsunskii (1969: 258); Aleksandr R. Korsunskii, *Gotskaia Ispania: ocherki sotsialno-ekonomicheskoi i politicheskoi* [Gothic Spain: Essays in Socio-Economic and Political History] (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1969), 258, online at [http://www.krotov.info/history/05/korsuns/korsu\\_00.html](http://www.krotov.info/history/05/korsuns/korsu_00.html), accessed June 29, 2014; Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev, 'K voprosu o haraktere social'nogo perevorota III–V vv. v Zapadnoj Rimskoj imperii' [On the Question of the Nature of the III–V Centuries of Social Revolution in the Western Roman Empire], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 47, no. 1 (1954) 33–44.

90 Richard W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydratius and the Consularia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 99.

From these data we can conclude the following: first, that the bishop, as a Christian, was in communication with the bagaudae, who were also Christians. He may have been a participant and supporter of the movement, and secondly, bagaudae came to the church to seek refuge from the Roman army, where the bishop of the church tried to provide protection.<sup>91</sup>

According to León, later generations of the peasantry established popular martyr cults in memory of the bagaudae who died in the struggle. Calling them 'saints', they celebrated feast days, named their children after them and invoked them in their current struggles. For the landlords and merchants, such religion was heresy.<sup>92</sup>

On the Rhine, the bagaudae established the Burgundian (Armorican) state in 406.<sup>93</sup> Several months prior to the Armorican revolt, the British bagaudae defeated the Roman military. They then succeeded from the Empire, which included levelling the landlords and central government. In establishing self-governing villages and cities, they also abolished the Roman legal system. British historian Elaine Thompson maintains that it was the British who set the example for the Armoricans. She writes:

The British example was at once followed by the Armoricans and other Gauls. Bearing in mind that Armorica extended as far east as the Seine and that the rebels may have included people living even to the east of the Seine, it would be incorrect to say that the British revolt must have been confined to, or centered on, the southwest of the island.<sup>94</sup>

The bagaudae allies, the Visigoth (German) peasantry, obtained a portion of Aquitania from Rome in 418. Subsequently, the German rebels seized one portion of Gaul after another.

In Spain as studied by Aleksandr R. Korsunskii, the followers of Priscillian (340–385), who came from the same slave, tenant and worker origins as the bagaudae, taught a theology of liberation that opposed those in the clerical hierarchy who sided with Rome and what they viewed as emperor worship.<sup>95</sup> In the 400s they overthrew landlord control in Galicia, Lusitania and other regions, where their prophets, apostles and doctors (teachers) were part of self-governing communities with Celtic-language churches and apocryphal literature that were characterised by equality of men and women, no distinction between clergy and laity and a simple life-style including austerity in food, clothing and shelter. Their monks taught mystical prayer,

91 Smail Cekic in *Pokret Bagauda* [The Bagaudae Movement] (Sarajevo: Fakultet politickih nauka, Sarajevo, 2002), 167.

92 León, *Los Bagaudas* (1996a), 95, 96; and Juan Carlos Sánchez León, *Les sources de l'histoire de Bagaudes: Traduction et commentaire* (eds. J. Annequin and E. Geny; Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 603; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996b), 70–73. Online at [http://www.persee.fr/doc/ista\\_0000-0000\\_1996\\_edc\\_603\\_1](http://www.persee.fr/doc/ista_0000-0000_1996_edc_603_1), accessed October 16, 2015.

93 Thompson, *Romans and barbarians*, 31, 36; León, *Los Bagaudas* (1996a), 19; Cekic, *Pokret Bagauda*, 151–158.

94 Elaine A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the end of Roman Britain*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984), 32; see also 33–37.

95 Korsunskii, *Gotskaia Ispaniia*, 199, 257.

fasting, renunciation of sex and property, and promoted bible study and liturgical celebrations in the home, rather than in churches, similar to the present-day base Christian communities.<sup>96</sup>

In the Danube region, there were a number of popular wars against the Empire.<sup>97</sup> During the Marcomannic Wars (166–180 C.E.), the local population joined the attacking neighbouring Germanic (Gothic) peasants in insurrection against the Empire. Pavel Oliva writes: ‘It appears that the local inhabitants went over in large numbers to the side of the attacking ‘barbarians’ in the Marcommannic Wars’.<sup>98</sup> Because of resistance to Roman economic exploitation, the slave system never dominated in the Danube region.<sup>99</sup>

## ITALY: ARIANS

Finally, in the Empire’s Italian stronghold, the culture of worker militancy among Christians is studied by Eleana Shtaerman, Pavel Oliva, Aleksandr I. Nemirovskii and Vladimir Sergeev, as well as more recently by liberation theologians like James

96 Ibid., 232, 252–259. Salvien of Marseille (c. 400–480), a priest who was born in northeast Gaul at Trier, is illustrative of the clergy who took the side of the peasantry. In his history of the era, *De gubernatione dei* (God’s Government), written in the 440s, he turned Augustine’s *City of God* on its head. For him the overthrow of the Roman government and destruction of the landlords was not negative, but a positive achievement of the working people. He praised the resultant self-governing communities that held property collectively, similar to the Ebionite and monastic communities. He found no fault with the Arian Christianity that was popular among the German peasantry. It was those who made wealth their god that Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei* (trans. Eva Matthews Sanford; New York: Columbia University Press, 1903), 81, attacked, as in the following passage:

Who obeys his order to be content with a single tunic? Who thinks the command to walk unshod possible or even tolerable to follow? These precepts then I pass over. For here our faith, in which we trust, falls short—so that we judge superfluous the precepts the Lord intended for our benefit. ‘Love your enemies’, said the savior, ‘do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you’. Who could keep all these commandments.

97 Among the uprisings that the Christians later imitated was the three-year-long Great Illyrian Revolt led by Bato the Daesitiate, which took place in 6–9 C.E. This involved some 800,000 Pannonian and Dalmatian peasants. To amass enough troops to fight them, Emperor Augustus had to purchase and emancipate thousands of slaves.

98 Oliva, *Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire*, 120; see also, *ibid.*, 259, 274, 285–286, 305; and Endre Toth, ‘The Long War,’ in *History of Transylvania* (eds. Laszlo Makkai, Andras Moesy and Zoltan Szasz; Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2001), 88–89.

99 Shtaerman, ‘K voprosu o krest’janstve v zapadnyh provincijah Rimskoj imperii,’ 108; Juliya Konstantinovna Kolosovskaya, ‘K istorii padenija rimskogo gospodstva v Dakii’ [On the History of the Fall of the Roman Domination in Dacia], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 53, no 3 (1955): 64–68, 77; Irina Timofeevna Kruglikova, *Dakiia epokhu rimskoi okkupatsii* [Dacia in the Epoch of Roman Occupation] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), 103–108.

Walsh.<sup>100</sup> They find that among Italy's immigrant slave communities were those with egalitarian religious ideologies that taught hatred of the landlord and merchant class. They were in constant rebellion both ideologically and as a way of life. Walsh remarks:

A Palestinian Jew living under the Pax Romana, in the reign of Augustus or Tiberius, might imagine the future in a variety of ways. The apocalyptic vision of *Daniel 7* might serve: in the beast from the Sea one could recognize the current embodiment of the force arrayed against Yahweh and his people, the Roman Empire. Yahweh would crush the occupying power and restore 'authority, splendor, and kingship' to his people. Or Yahweh might raise up an anointed one, from the House of David, in whom the still-outstanding promise of everlasting kingship would be realized. Or Yahweh might raise up a 'savior', like Gideon, who would lead Israel in Holy War against the nations (read Romans) and while he was at it deal with the 'wicked', the unfaithful Jews who collaborated with the Romans in imposing crushing burdens on the poor. Or he might raise up a prophet to declare such a Holy War and to recall the people to covenant fidelity.<sup>101</sup>

The East German Franz Bömer's study of Greek and Roman slave religion reaches a similar conclusion.<sup>102</sup> He does not base his analysis on the dominant mythology,

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100 Eleana M. Shtaerman, 'Rabskie kollegii i familii v period imperii' [Slave Collectives and Family Names in the Empire Period], *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] 33, no 3 (1950): 82; Aleksandr I. Nemirovskii, *Istoriia rannego Rima I Italii: Voznikovenie klassovogo obshchestva i gosudarstva* [The History of Early Rome and Italy: The Emergence of Class Society and the State] (Voronezh: Izdatelstvo Voronezhskogo universiteta, 1962); Vladimir Sergeevich Sergeev, *Ocherki po istorii drevnego Rima. Dopushcheno v kachestve ucheb* [Essays on the History of Ancient Rome: Approved as a Textbook] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe. Sotzialno-ekonomicheskoi izdatelstvo, 1938c): vol. 2: 627, 635; James P. Walsh, *The Mighty from Their Thrones: Power in the Biblical Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Pavel Oliva in *Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire*, 121, comments about the insurgency during the reign of Commodus (180–192):

There was even a rebellion in Rome itself under Commodus, when shortage of grain brought the people together; they marched to the Emperor's residence on the outskirts of Rome and demanded the dismissal of the Emperor's favorite, Cleander, commander of the Imperial Guard. There were bloody battles between the soldiers and the people. According to the vivid description given by Herodian, the imperial cavalry drove the people back to the city gates, killing many, but in the streets of Rome the tables were turned, and the cavalry came in for a hail of stones and titles from the roofs, where the angry people were ensconced. There were great losses on both sides and it is said that the Roman infantry joined the people 'out of hatred for the cavalry'. Herodian goes so far as to call this episode 'civil war'.

101 Walsh, *The Mighty from Their Thrones*, 147. James Walsh's class conscious biblical scholarship, as he alludes to in the book's first paragraph, owed to his life as an industrial labourer in Ford Motor's coke ovens at Dearborn, Michigan during the 1960s.

102 Franz Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* (Wiesbaden: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1963), 4, 547–67. See also, Osip L. Vainshtein, 'Jetnicheskaja osnova tak nazyvaemykh gosudarstv Odoakra i Teodorpha,' [Ethnic Basis of the so-called State of Odoacer and Teodorpha], *Istoriik-Marksist* [Marxist Historian] 70, no. 6 (December 1938): 134–158.

thinkers, public worship and religion of poets, which is the legacy of the anti-slave class. Rather, he mainly looks at tomb inscriptions. He finds that most slaves in Italy were foreign-born from France, Germany, Africa and the Near East. Along with their production methods, as depicted in Figure 3, they kept their native egalitarian, liberation-oriented (soteriological) cults, festivals, languages, burial societies and ceremonies, despite landlord prohibitions against them. They rejected Rome and Greece's throne-and-altar state religions and divinities, which they equated with the loss of their freedom. In the state religions foreigners were considered animals and slaves were not eligible for membership. In contrast, the slave religions taught mystical unity and brotherhood. Within their communities they made vows, voted and conducted liturgies.

In describing Jewish-Christian worker militancy in Rome, Abram Ranovich writes about the 49 C.E. rebellion they fomented. It resulted in them being banned from Rome.<sup>103</sup> A decade later in 64 C.E. during the reign of Nero (37–68 C.E.), who reigned from 54 to 68, they were reported as admitting to their involvement in burning much of Rome to the ground.<sup>104</sup> Of the city's 14 districts, 3 were completely devastated and only 4 completely escaped damage. The Book of Revelations 17:5 and 18:10, 17, commented that the 'mother of whores,' as it called Rome, had boasted of being 'eternal', but was overthrown in a single hour. In combating the militancy, the senate took measures as studied by Michael Parenti, such as outlawing professional guilds, except those of ancient foundation, since many of these were subversive political clubs.<sup>105</sup> For Vladimir Sergeev a revolutionary resistance continually surfaced, which saw nothing for itself in conquering and killing or what Rev. 17 and 18 called dazzling and alluring wealth. This was one of the causes for the worker militancy that 'placed the economy and ruling Roman society in a state of permanent economic crisis and eternal social ferment and disorders'.<sup>106</sup>

Within a century after the Christians came to Rome, the government had co-opted some of their leadership, including Bishops Callixtus (217–222), Urban (222–

103 Ranovich, *O rannem khristianstve*, 242. See also, Acts 18:2 and the Roman historian Suetonius. The latter in his work, *Diuus Claudius* [The Divine Claudius], § 25, as quoted in *Diuus Claudius* (ed. Donna Hurley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 176–177, writes, 'Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius, reigned from 41 to 54 AD] expelled them from Rome'. See also, Leonard Rutgers, 'Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century CE,' in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. Karl Donfried; Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1998), 105–106.

104 Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

105 Michael Parenti, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome* (New York: New Press, 2003); John F. Fuller, *Julius Caesar, Man, Soldier, Tyrant* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1998), chapter 13.

106 Vladimir Sergeev, *Mirovye krizisy: (vypusk 2) Grazhdanskaia voina v drevnem Rime v II–I vv.* [World Crises (Volume 2): Civil war in ancient Rome in the first and second centuries] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennye publikovat, 1924), 80.

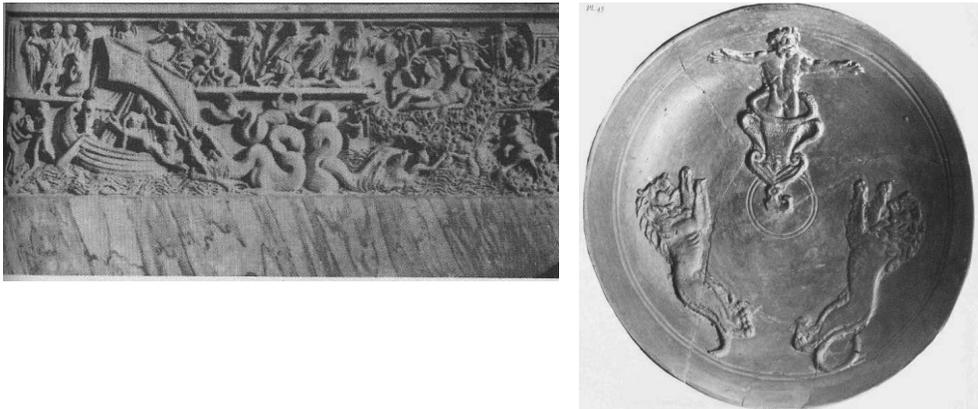
230) and Pontian (230–235). In resisting these individuals, the people elected a rival leader, Hippolytus of Rome (170–235 C.E.), who was a student of Irenaeus. Because of his stand against imperial politics, he was eventually executed by the government.

In the left accounts of the resistance, which by the 250s was called the Novatianist movement used the apocalyptic doctrines found in Scripture. Like the Donatists in Africa, they included Daniel and Jonah in the Old Testament and Revelations in the New Testament to encourage revolt against the Empire. There were rebellions led by Bulla Felix in 207–208 C.E. during the reign of Septimius Severus (ruled from 193 to 211), the Aurelian mint workers revolt under the leadership of Felitissimus in the 270s, in which some 7,000 Roman soldiers were killed and that of Proculus of Albenga (d. 281), leader of 2,000 armed slaves on the Genoese Riviera.<sup>107</sup>

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107 Vladimir Sergeev in 'Ocherki po istorii pozdnerimskoi imperii,' 67, no. 3 (1938a) 60–61, remarks on the revolutionary nature of Bulla Felix's life:

The revolutionary movement took place in Italy and in the provinces. One kind of protest against the existing system were predatory raids. In all parts (of the Empire there were many stray elements: slaves who escaped from their masters, coloni, soldiers, stragglers from their units, and those elements constituted whole armies. Most famous was Bulla Felix, who lived under Septimius Severus. He formed in northern Italy a detachment of 300 men and began to make open raids on rich people and imperial officials. After all attempts to catch him failed, the emperor sent a whole army against him. But it was all in vain: Bulla was 'seen and not seen, caught and not caught, grabbed and not grabbed', so great was the skill and art of the revolutionary. Finally, he was caught, brought to Rome and submitted to interrogation by Papinianus, a famous praetorian prefect lawyer. When asked why he was doing the robberies, he replied, 'Why are you head of the Praetorian? Bulla is no exception'. He was implying that the emperor was himself no more than a bandit.



**Figure 5:** On the left, early Christian tomb depicting the Old Testament tale of Jonah's deliverance.<sup>108</sup> On the right, a similar theme depicting Daniel's deliverance.<sup>109</sup>

Not surprisingly from the view of the left, when invading German (Gothic) Christians led by Alaric (320–410 C.E.) captured Rome in 410, they had the help of the local slaves who opened the gates. As Mashkin comments, the invaders pushing into Roman territory were 'receiving support from the exploited masses'.<sup>110</sup> Some 40,000 slaves were liberated.<sup>111</sup>

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, communist historiography maintains that the study of early Christianity is useful to those interested in the rise and fall of worker societies. It takes the bottom-up perspective of the working people, widows, orphans and slaves. Pasolini's *Saint*

108 Michael Grant in *The Climax of Rome: The Final Achievement of the Ancient World AD 161–337* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) 142, picture no. 65, states 'the tombs of the early Christians stress not Christ's Passion but Old Testament tales of Deliverance: such as the story of Jonah, seen here with the Sea-Monster'.

109 J. W. Salomonson, *Voluptatem spectandi non perdat sed metet: Observations sur l'iconographie du martyre en Afrique romaine* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1979), 56.

110 Mashkin, *Istorii ai drevnego Rima*, 72.

111 A half-century after the Goths, there was another levelling in 455 by the Vandals. They were led by the Arian Christian, Genseric (389–477), who was the son of a slave. The American socialist Daniel De Leon (1852–1914) named his son after the Vandal leader. This was because, as historian Carl Reeve in *The Life and Times of Daniel De Leon* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 6, writes, 'As legend had it, a Goth named Genseric had forced the Pope to kiss his toe'. Genseric had found favour earlier with the Donatists in 429. This was because he levelled the Roman landlords and their clergy in Africa, including St. Augustine who died from starvation and stress as a consequence of the siege at Hippo.

*Paul* dwells on this to such an extent that it was too controversial for the establishment media to produce it as a film. Nevertheless, from the left perspective, it was the religion of working people that taught class struggle and that had a role in levelling the Empire. From this perspective, Pasolini's play would have been more useful had this been the focus.

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