

Worship and Sacrifice in Antiquity. Between Eucharistia and Ambrosia

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Abstract Saint Ignatius and Saint Polycarp saw a firm connection between orthodox Christian belief and orthodox Christian organization, liturgy and conduct. The continued combination of these in the minds of its representatives made orthodoxy formidable during the first two centuries. In the first phase of the primary Church, down to A.D. 100, we can recognize differing patterns of ministry and cult reflecting the influence of James in Jerusalem and the Hellenistic communities outside Palestine. Saint Ignatius wrote with such confidence that he represents a longstanding apostolic tradition. In the primary Church the main struggle was not between charismatics or non-charismatics, all baptized Christians were potentially men of the Holy Spirit, but between residential and itinerant ministries. In each Christian community there was a residential ministry, consisting of bishops, priests and deacons, each with precise functions, that administered current affairs, taught and celebrated the Liturgy.

The age of the first centuries, when we can talk about the early church, can be regarded as one of the most fascinating periods in the history of Christianity. We talk about times when the Holy Apostles and then their disciples saw with their own eyes and told converts about the life and words of the Savior Jesus Christ. The tradition was still alive in front of their eyes and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and of the apologists and breathes the Apostolic fragrance of the 1st and 2nd centuries. Authors such as Saint Clement of Rome, Saint Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna can boast with the apostolic vein received from Jesus Christ's disciples. Ancient writings such as the Didache (The Teaching of the 12 Apostles to the Gentiles) or the Epistle of Pseudo- Barnabas give valuable testimony about the tradition and worship of the early Church. It is enough to recall that in the first two centuries Christians communed almost every day, so beautiful was the experience of those who called themselves "saints" or "brothers".

Talking about the worship of the early Church, the Apostolic Fathers do not separate it from the Christian faith and from the Church organization. St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna see a close connection between the Christian faith, the person of the bishop as a representative of Christ among Christians, the Holy Mass and the sacraments. Reading apostolic writings we can see the commitment of the Christian writers of the first centuries to the Christian faith, already defended against the Gnostics and heretics, whose church is considered not true. Because of this vision, of complementarity between worship, faith and organization and keeping in mind the fact that Christ is the head of the Church, we can have an opinion about the tremendous faith and spiritual power of the Christians of the early Church.

All Christian writings from the first centuries speak of the existence of the three higher clergy steps, bishops, presbyters and deacons. Bishops, priests and deacons mentioned in the apostolic and post-apostolic writings had the most significant role in Christian worship. By the end of the first century we can talk about two models of Christian worship, a Palestinian-Aramaic, based in Jerusalem, which was based on apostolic elements, especially those of St. Jacob, brother of the Lord and the other in the Diaspora, called Hellenistic -Roman, with reference cities Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus and Corinth, encompassing elements of Greek-Roman culture, especially on the core left by the Apostle Paul. The worship of the Church in Jerusalem was a special one, given the fact that in Palestine there were many Judeo-Christian communities, and even the Apostles observed certain Jewish holidays and

religious ceremonies, waiting for a continuous conversion of the Jews. After the apostolic Council in the year 50, there increased the tension between Christian and the Judeo-Christian communities. Christian worship took another development outside Palestine, especially in communities founded by St. Paul, the "Apostle of the Gentiles."

The cultural matrix of the Christianized peoples has influenced the development of Christian worship, an influence that will be seen later in places like Syria, Egypt, Armenia, Ethiopia and North Africa. St. Ignatius of Antioch is one of the first Christian authors who showed the genuine mystical bond between bishop, as the Primate of the Christian community and Savior Jesus Christ. According to Ignatius, the Christian bishop is the guarantee of preserving the true faith and the true celebrant of the Eucharistia, to the dangers of Gnostics and heretics, as he writes to the Christians of Ephesus:

"If I, in a short time, had a connection like this with your bishop, not human, but spiritual, the more I blest you that you are so united to him, as the Church is united with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is united with the Father, so that all agree in unity. Let no one be deceived! If someone is not in, where the altar is, he lacks the bread of God. If the prayer of one or two has such power, the more the prayer of the bishop and the whole Church. He who does not come to the assembly is presumptuous and has already separated himself; for it is written, God opposes the proud. Let us strive, but not resist the bishop, so that we can be obedient to God. The more one sees the bishop keeping silent, the more he should respect him; we need to welcome the one that the Master of the house sends to administer his home as the One who sent him. It is clear, therefore, that we must look upon the bishop as the Lord Himself"¹.

St. Ignatius of Antioch is the first apostolic author who speaks about the connection between the bishop and the Christians, which he compares with the way in which the Father and the Son posses the Sole Divine Being. The Unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is seen as the true model of Christian unity, because division does not come from God. Also from the bishop of Antioch we have the first descriptions of early Christian worship and Eucharistic sacrifice. The Christian who respects the bishop and maintains a living connection with him respects Christ, who sent the Apostles and by extension, their followers to preach the gospel to all nations.

In an epistle to the Christians in Magnesia, St. Ignatius of Antioch deepens conception about the connection of the bishop with the members of the Christian community. The bishop of Antioch mentions the three steps of the higher clergy, his testimony being among the first to clarify the role and importance of the clergy in the early Church:

"So, because among the above mentioned people I have seen, in faith, your entire community and I loved it, I urge you to strive to do everything in union with God, with the bishop, who is instead of God, as the Primate, the priests who are instead of the council of the Apostles and deacons who are so dear to me, entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages, and finally showed Himself. All of you resembling God in your actions respect one another; nobody should physically look at his neighbor, but always love each other in Jesus Christ. Let there be nothing between you that you can divide you, but unite yourselves with the bishop and with the first among you, according to the perfect teaching. As the Lord did nothing, either by Himself or by the apostles, without Father, with Whom he was connected, so you should do nothing without the bishop and without priests; you should not even try to think that it is blessed to do something by yourself, but in common: one prayer, one request, one mind, one hope in love, in the joy of the righteous, which is Jesus Christ, and there is nothing better than Him"².

The most important thing, in the conception of the Antioch martyr, is the unity of the Christians in Magnesia, a unity which is possible only in union with God, around the Bishop, the Primate of the Christian community. Each clerical stage of the early church clergy is closely linked not only with the "saints", but also with the Holy Trinity, bishops, priests and deacons praying to God along with the Christians for the whole world. St. Ignatius urges Christians of Magnesia not to commit even a single prayer without a bishop and without priests, as the heretics and Gnostics separated from the Church,

¹) St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians*, V, 1-3, VI, 1, în colecția P.S.B., vol. 1, *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, trad. de Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1978, p. 159.

²) St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians*, VI, 1-2, VII, 1, P.S.B. 1, p. 166-167.

by performing their rites and mysteries of "initiation". The Magnesians are given the most eloquent example of humility and obedience: Jesus Christ did not do anything without the will and love of the Father, that is why all are encouraged to keep the union and example of love of the Holy Trinity.

The theme of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the close link between worship, faith and love of the Trinity are mentioned in the Epistle to the Trallians, of St. Ignatius Theophorus. The Bishop of Antioch is convinced that no part of Christian worship, in the beginning and in a period of searching and crystallization time, can be performed without bishops, priests and deacons, or without God's people, according to the apostolic pattern and the Savior's words and life:

*"When you obey the bishop as Jesus Christ, it seems to me that you live not by man, but by Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that, by believing in His death, you can escape death. It is therefore indispensable, as you do, to do nothing without the bishop, but to also obey the clergy as Apostles of Christ, our hope, in Whom we will be found if we live like that. Deacons, as ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, must also please everyone in every way. For they are not servants of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. Therefore they must stay away from accusations as they would stay away from fire. Also, all must respect the deacons as Jesus Christ; also respect the bishop, who is the image of the Father, and the priests as the council of God and as a congregation of the Apostles. Without of them one cannot speak about the Church. I am convinced that you think the same about it. I have received the proof of love and I have with me in your bishop, whose demeanor is a great lesson and his gentleness is power; I reckon that even Pagans respect him."*³⁾

In the Epistle to the Philadelphians, of St. Ignatius Theophorus, we find the first mention of the early church about performing the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Bishop of Antioch speaks of the true communion of Christians with the body and blood of Christ, a communion performed at a single altar, around the bishop, together with the priests and deacons:

*"Strive then to attend one Eucharistia; for one is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one is the cup for union with His blood; is one altar, as one is the bishop, together with the priests and deacons, those who are servants along with me; for what you do, you should do it by God"*⁴⁾.

Perhaps the most remarkable words about the connection between performing the liturgical worship, the Holy Eucharistia, in close connection with the bishop, are to be found in the Epistle to the Smyrnaeans written by St. Ignatius of Antioch. The Christians in Smyrna are urged to obey and follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed and fulfilled the Father's will. No Christian must break the link with the bishop, according to the bishop of Antioch. Moreover, Ignatius is categorically stating that only that liturgy and Eucharistia should be considered good, valid, which is performed by the bishop or one allowed by the Bishop. To St. Ignatius we owe the term "Catholic (Universal) Church", talking about the bishop's Eucharistic presence among the faithful. The Antioch martyr believes that all Sacraments of the Church can be performed only in communion with the bishop and the one who dares to perform a prayer or ministry in the Church without the knowledge and blessing of the bishop actually serves the evil spirits:

*"All of you should follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the priests like the Apostles; respect the deacons as God's command. Let no one do anything belonging to the Church without the bishop. The Eucharistia should be considered good, which is made by the bishop or one the Bishop allowed. Where we see the bishop, there is should be the gathering of believers, as where Jesus Christ is there is the catholic (universal) Church. It is not allowed either to baptize, or to make the repast without the bishop; for what Bishop approves is pleasing to God, so that everything that is performed can be safe and well founded. We must, therefore, wake up and, as we long as we have time to go back, repenting to God. It is good to know God and the bishop. He who honors the bishop is honored of God; he who does something without the knowledge of the bishop serves the devil"*⁵⁾.

In addition to a clear hierarchy, traditional, already mentioned by the Apostle Paul and confirmed by the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, some Christian authors talk about ministers and itinerant missionaries, also partially mentioned by the Apostle the Gentiles. An uninformed reader of the book

³⁾ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians*, II, 1-3, III, 1-3, P.S.B. 1, p. 170-171.

⁴⁾ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians*, IV, 1, P.S.B. 1, p. 179.

⁵⁾ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans*, VIII, 1-2, IX, 1, P.S.B. 1, p. 184-185.

of Acts of the Apostles and other works of the early church would be tempted to believe that there were tensions between the charismatic and ordinary Christians. The early church did not make any differences between charismatics and other Christians, because all believers baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity were called to a spiritual life in the Holy Spirit. The unknown author of the writing Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles) mentions the charismatics, giving advice to the Christians how to distinguish a true servant of God from a false one. Moreover, this writing, considered by some experts as the oldest Christian document of the early church, probably written between 65-70, contemporary of the Gospels written by the Apostles Mark and Luke and before the Gospel of St. John the Apostle, contains numerous references about the Christian worship in the apostolic age. Among these references, the unknown author of the Didache describes the manner of performing the Baptism in the early Church. Baptism is done in the name of the Holy Trinity, following the commandment of the Savior, in fresh water. The author recommends performing baptism by triple immersion, and if there is not enough water at hand, then it can be done by pouring. The catechumen and the priest are urged to fast before Holy Baptism, because of the respect and importance of this Mystery initiation into Christianity:

"Concerning baptism, you must baptize like this: after you said all of the above mentioned things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in fresh water. And if you do not have fresh water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot in cold water, then in hot water. If you do not have enough either one or the other, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Before baptism, the one who baptizes and the baptized should fast, and a few others if they can. But command the one who is to be baptized to fast for a day or two before" ⁶).

The same unknown author of the writing Didache, strongly rooted in the apostolic tradition and proving good knowledge of the worship of the early Church, talks about fasting in the 1st century. To the surprise of those who dispute the ascetic nature of Christian worship and church life, in the mid 1st century, only three decades after the Ascension of the Savior, the fasting on Wednesday and Friday was mentioned, and the Lord's Prayer had to be uttered three times a day:

"Your fasting should not be as those of the hypocrites, that they fast on Mondays and Thursdays; however, you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. Do not pray like the Pharisees, but as the Lord commanded in His Gospel! So pray ye: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread every day and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever. Three times a day ye should pray so" ⁷).

In the writing Didache we find mentioned the oldest references to the Liturgy of the early church. The author gives excerpts from the liturgical anaphora probably of the Church of Jerusalem, recalling ancient and important prayers. Those wishing to take part in the Eucharistic table are advised to stay away, only the baptized should come, which means that enough catechumens wanted to commune. Referring to the consecration of the bread into the body of Christ, New Testament the author uses the term "breaking bread", which indicates the age of the writing:

"And concerning the Eucharistia, so perform ye the Eucharistia: First concerning the cup: We thank Thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David, Thy servant, which You shared with us through Jesus, your Son. To Thee be the glory forever. With regard to the breaking of bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge that You shared with us through Jesus your Son. To Thee be the glory forever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so should Your Church be gathered from the ends of the world in Your kingdom. Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharistia but those who have been baptized in the name of God. Because concerning that, the Lord said: Do not give dogs what is sacred" ⁸).

⁶) Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), VII, 1-4, P.S.B. 1, p. 28.

⁷) Didache, VIII, 1-3, P.S.B. 1, p. 29.

⁸) Didache, IX, 1-5, P.S.B. 1, p. 29.

After performing the Eucharistic epiclesis in the primary liturgy used in the East, in Jerusalem and in Antioch, in the Aramaic and in the Syriac tradition churches, prayers of thanksgiving had an important role. One of the oldest liturgical prayers of thanksgiving is given in the same old writing, Didache. In addition to the dogmatic elements, this prayer of thanksgiving has an eschatological character, and the author urges the readers to allow the prophets to thank help you as much as they want, a sign that improvised prayers had an important role in the early church:

"Once you have communed, thank like this: Thank Thee, Holy Father, for Thy holy name, which you dwelt in our hearts and for the knowledge, faith and immortality which you have made known to us through Jesus, your Son. To Thee be the glory forever. You, mighty Lord, You created all for Thy name. You gave food and drink to people to enjoy, to thank Thee, and You gave us new through Thy Son, spiritual food and drink and eternal life. First of all, thank Thee for being mighty. To Thee be the glory forever. Remember, Lord, Thy Church, as to deliver it from all evil and to perfect it in Thy love, and gather this holy Church from the four winds into Thy kingdom, which Thou hast prepared. For Thine is the power and the glory forever. Let grace come and this world pass! Hosanna to the God of David! If anyone is holy, let him come! If not, he should repent! Maran atha, Amen. Allow prophets, however, to thank as much as they want" ⁹).

At a time contemporary with the Apostles, the oldest Christian writing mentioned the celebration of Sunday by the Christians. Sunday was a day of celebration and Christians gathered for the "breaking of bread" for performing primary liturgy. The author advises participants in the liturgy to confess their sins before communion and to reconcile with their enemies to be clean when approaching the Holy Eucharistia:

"When you come on the Sunday of the Lord, break bread and thank, after first confessing your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Everyone who is fighting with his fellow must not come together with you until they are reconciled, lest your sacrifice should be defiled. For this is what the Lord said: In every place and time pure offerings will be brought to me; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is great among the nations" ¹⁰).

The author of the oldest writings of the early Church could not omit mentioning the clerical steps, as they were known at mid 1st-century. Besides bishops and deacons Didache also mentions the charismatics in the early Church, that is the prophets and teachers. Christians are urged to read and follow the advice of the Gospel, especially through prayer and almsgiving, which shows that the cultic life was seen in close connection with the spiritual life in the apostolic period:

"Ordain unto you bishops and deacons, worthy of the Lord, meek men, not lovers of silver, true and tried; for they fulfill the ministry of prophets and teachers. Do not despise them, because they are honest among you, together with the prophets and teachers. Reprove one another, not in anger but in peace, as it is written in the Gospel; none of you should speak or listen to him who sins against another until he repents. Your prayers, alms and all your deeds so do, as it is written in the Gospel of our Lord" ¹¹).

Since the mid-1st century, besides itinerant missionaries, there was a clear and steady leadership of the Church, in local communities, a leadership exercised by bishops, priests and even deacons where communities were smaller and more isolated. We know leaders of major communities of the first century, such as Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, cities where there was a tradition at the end of the first century, to be elected venerable bishop of these great Christian communities. It was a real honor to be elected as the head of a community esteemed in the early Church, mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea in the Episcopal lists in the Church History. At least until the beginning of the second century, itinerant missionaries enjoyed a higher esteem among Christians, because most of them were charismatics. Local churches such as Rome, Alexandria and Antioch could boast of having been founded by the Apostles and disciples of the Apostles:

⁹) Didache, X, 1-6, P.S.B. 1, p. 29-30.

¹⁰) Didache, XIV, 1-3, P.S.B. 1, p. 31.

¹¹) Didache, XV, 1-4, P.S.B. 1, p. 31-32.

"At the end of the eighth year of Nero's reign, the first who was bishop in Alexandria, after evangelist Mark, was Avianos" ¹²⁾.

After the passing away of the last disciple of Jesus Christ, the popularity and the role of itinerant missionaries began to decline. The age of apostolic pioneering and charismatics capable to convert crowds only by working miracles had almost passed. The consciousness of the contemporaries and of posterity required Christian communities led by personalities like St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr and St. Irinaeus of Lugdunum. In this apostolic atmosphere, disciples learned tradition from their "their spiritual masters". Reading the Epistle to the Polycarp of St. Ignatius of Antioch, we meet the first advice given by a disciple of the Apostles, to another spiritual disciple. The Antioch martyr who had personally heard and seen Apostles preaching the gospel and teaching tradition, gives the disciple Polycarp, a venerable man of the Church since his youth, advice on apostolic succession and pastoral tact that a bishop should have in preserving Holy Tradition and in performing Christian worship:

"Please, on behalf of the grace with which you have been invested, follow your path and urge everyone to save themselves. Defend your place, with all bodily and spiritual care. Take care of union, for nothing is better than that. Carry them all, as the Lord carries you. Bear them all in love as you do. Occupy yourself with unceasing prayer. Require more skill than you have. Keep watch with sleepless spirit. Talk to each, in the likeness of God. Carry the diseases of all as a perfect athlete. The greater the labors, the greater the gain" ¹³⁾.

St. Ignatius of Antioch warns Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna of the danger posed by the docetic and Gnostics heretics that distorted not only Christian doctrine but also the worship of the Church, devoutly preserved by the disciples of the Apostles. Caring for widows occupy an important place in the fatherly advice of the Antioch bishop, which demonstrates that in the early church not only worship itself was important but also the agape, the deacon ministry intertwined with worship. Polycarp is urged to perform more often the Holy Liturgy together with the Agape Mass to be able to take better care of widows and slaves, who must not be immediately released, at the expense of the Christian community, because not everyone would be grateful:

"Do not be afraid of those who seem worthy of belief, but learn strange doctrines. Stay hard as an anvil that is hit. The great athlete is the one who wins although he is hit. We, especially, ought to bear all for God, for Him to bear with us. Be more zealous than you are! Read the times! Wait for the One who is above time, the yearless one, The Unseen, the One seen for us, The Untouched on The Unsuffering one, the Suffering one, the one who has endured everything for us. Widows should not be neglected! After Lord, you be their caregiver! Let nothing be done without your approval or you do not do anything without God. Do not do that! Be firm! Service meetings should be more frequent. Call each by their names. Do not despise the slaves, but they should not be arrogant, but should work more for the glory of God, to acquire from God a better liberty. They should not want to be free at the expense of the congregation of believers, lest they should be slaves of lust" ¹⁴⁾.

The concern for preserving unaltered the worship of the early Church and Holy Tradition can be seen by reading the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Most see a duty to defend the true faith, against the heretics, the Gnostics and Judaizers in the first two centuries. A true Eucharistia was considered one performed by a bishop, in communion with the other bishops, a preserver of tradition and true faith. Christians in the early church were urged not to take part in the meetings of heretics. St. Clement of Rome is among the top Christian authors who show concern for the unity of the church around the bishop and the presbyters. According to the Bishop of Rome, the clergy chosen by the whole community ought to be listened to and respected because of the apostolic succession and the divine grace received through ordination. They praised the priests who served with humility at the Holy Shrine and devoutly brought the gifts of God through Christian worship:

¹²⁾ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Istoria bisericească*, II, XXIV, 1, trad. de Pr. Prof. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, în col. P.S.B., vol. 13, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1987, p. 96.

¹³⁾ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Polycarp*, I, 1-3, P.S.B. 1, p. 187.

¹⁴⁾ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Polycarp*, III, 1-2, IV, 1.3, P.S.B. 1, p. 188.

*"And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there will be arguing for position of bishop. For this reason, having perfect knowledge, they put those bishops that we spoke of previously and told them that, upon their death, other tried men should continue their service. We think, therefore, that it is not right to be expelled from their ministry those who were made bishops by the Apostles or in the meantime by other worthy men, with the approval of the whole Church and who served the flock of Christ without blemish, humbly, quietly, carefully, which all have born witness to, for a long time. That no small sin will be ours, if we remove the bishops who brought God's gifts righteously and devoutly. Blessed are priests who have gone before and had a fruitful and perfect end; they must no longer be afraid that someone will remove them from their appointed place. For we see that you have removed some that have an improved life from the service they have blamelessly honored."*¹⁵).

The leaders of Christian communities in the apostolic and post-apostolic periods imposed themselves in the eyes of contemporaries, by their irreproachable conduct, by their writings addressed to kindred sister Churches and care and loyalty shown to the Christian worship and dogmas. Often Apostolic Fathers made a duty out of their apologetic behavior, to defend the Christian faith and worship of the Church against the heterodox, represented by the Gnostics, docetics and Judaizers. The bishop of the early Church was the successor of the Apostles, the representative of the community before God, while performing the Holy Liturgy, on behalf of all Christians in his city. A zealous bishop, such as St. Polycarp of Smyrna was not shy to call the heretics antichrists and servants of the devil, which distorts the true Christian faith and changes worship of the Church:

*"Anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is antichrist; who does not confess the testimony of the Cross is from the devil, and he who turns God's words to his lusts and says that there's no resurrection, nor judgment, that is the first-born of Satan. Therefore, leaving the vanity of many false teachings, let us return to the word that we were taught from the beginning, vigil in prayer, asking in our prayers posts to God, who sees all: do not lead us into temptation, for the Lord said: the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"*¹⁶).

Worship in the early church was faithful to the legacy of the Holy Apostles. Every major Christian center had its own tradition of worship, prayers were often improvised, depending on the needs of the Christian community, but liturgical anaphoras looked much alike, a sign of common development, to a point. Towards the end of the Epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome mentions a beautiful prayer in the liturgical use of the Church of Rome in the late 1st century. The prayer mentioned by St. Clement of Rome is among the oldest liturgical prayers of thanksgiving and remembrance. Christians in Rome prayed for the Roman emperor and for the welfare of the Roman Empire, aware that the peace and quiet of the Roman state were necessary for proper coexistence between Christians and pagans. This prayer summarizes the mission of worship of the early Church: God ought to be given thanks for everything, His help is required for all people and His mercy to all His creatures is mentioned:

"To hope in your name, the beginning of all creation, who have opened the eyes of our heart so that we know Thee, the Highest of the High, The Holy one, who rest among the saints, you who humiliate the pride of the proud, you who waste the advice of the nations, you who raise the lowly and humble the high, you who make rich and poor, you who kill and bring life, the only Benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh, you who look into the depths, you who see human works, aid those in peril, the Savior of the desperate one, Creator and Protector of every spirit, you who multiply all nations on the earth and of all have chosen those who love You, through Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, through whom you taught us, sanctified and honored us, we pray thee, Lord, be our help and our supporter. Save those of us who are in distress; have mercy on the lowly, raise the fallen, show yourself to those in need, heal the sick, turn around the ones who are lost of your people; satisfied the hungry, free the enslaved ones among us, raise the weak, comfort the weak hearted, so that all nations may know thee, that thou art the only God and Jesus Christ, is Thy Son, and we, thy people and the sheep of thy pasture. You, the through the work of thy power, have made known the composition of the

¹⁵) Saint Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, XLIV, 1-6, P.S.B. 1, p. 68-69.

¹⁶) Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, *To the Philippians*, VII, 1-2, P.S.B. 1, p. 211.

eternal world. You, Lord, have built the world, You who are faithful in all nations, right in Thy judgments, marvelous in strength and majesty, wise to build up and knowledgeable in founding those you built, Good in the visible things and Faithful to those who believe in you. Gracious and merciful One, forgive us our iniquities, injustices, our sins and mistakes. Do not count the sins of thy servants and handmaidens, but cleanse us with Your truth and guide us to go in the holiness of heart and so that we can do god deeds and please you and our leaders. Yes, Lord, show thy face on us for the best in peace, and cover us with Thy mighty hand, save us from all sin with thy high arm and get rid of those who hate us unjustly. Give us understanding and peace, to us and to all who inhabit the earth, as thou hast given to our fathers, when they called Thee with devotion, in faith and truth, so that we can obey Thy Almighty and Blessed name, our leaders and rulers of the earth. You, Lord, you gave them possession of the kingdom by thy great and untold power, so that we, knowing the glory and honor given to them by thee, could obey them, in nothing resisting Thy will. Lord give them health, peace, understanding, good order, to rule without hindrance the command you have given them. For Thou, Lord, Heavenly King of ages, you who give to the sons of men glory and honor and power over the things that are on earth, O Lord, justify their thoughts toward what is good and pleasing before You, so that they, leading in peace and gentleness and devotion the command you have given them, may benefit from thy mercy. You, Who alone are powerful enough to give us these and other goods, we praise you through Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Defender of our souls, through whom we bring thee glory and majesty now and forever, Amen" ¹⁷).

The present study treats, with modesty, also what happened to the pagans, the conversion from their ancestors' religion to a new one, of which pagans heard, from unreliable sources, only bad things. The action of conversion to Christianity took place in pagan circles in the heart of the Roman Empire. The pagan lifestyle was affected by the change to Christianity, so that the former pagan changed not only his religion, but also his way of life, that having the largest impact among his neighbors and friends.

Pagan religion is a complex of systems and practices, non-unitary and difficult to decipher today because there no Greek-Roman worship remained until today. All we know is based on ancient sources, where we rarely find detailed descriptions of pagan worship. Before turning to a brief analysis of paganism, let us note that we are often prejudiced about pagan religion, derived from the Christian apologist writings. For example, in many Christian writings pagan religion is mixed with incest and polygamy. There were very few denominations with a sexual component and they did not have many adherents, at least in the period of which we speak, the centuries II-V¹⁸).

Cannibalism and human sacrifices made by some pagan cults are also mentioned in the Christian apologist writings. In the same period that this paper treats, human sacrifices were no longer practiced, the Roman law prohibiting such practices. It is true that human sacrifices were found in the religion of Etruscan, Punic and Celtic peoples, but they did not have a central role, but were occasionally practiced.

If we eliminate these exotic aspects of the pagan religion, which were often countered by Christian writers, what remains of pagan religion? How should a scientist today look at a practicing a pagan in the antiquity? Concerning the non-Christian sources describing pagan religion, they depend on those who drafted them. Religious formation of pagan authors also influenced their writings about the pagan religion, implicitly affecting our contemporary perception of paganism. Usually pagan writers were not ordinary people, they formed the elite of pagan society, people like Plutarch and Apuleius. Unlike their contemporaries, they had a superior education, a vast culture, so their pagan faith differed from that of ordinary people. Most pagans of the upper class were not very religious people, and that is seen in their writings. The upper classes represented about ten percent of the total population of the Roman state. Those who accepted Christianity easily were exactly those in the lower classes of Roman society, that the people most attached to pagan religion¹⁹).

¹⁷) Saint Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, LIX, 3-4, LX, 1-4, P.S.B. 1, p. 76-78.

¹⁸) R. MacMullen, op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁹) R. MacMullen, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*, in rev. *Vigiliae Christianae*, nr. 37, 1983, p. 182.

In the pagan religion, faith in immortality had an important role. Homer's writings show that man has a soul, and after death that goes to the Elysium fields. The philosopher Plato spread the idea that life cannot be destroyed. We can say that the pagans were not strangers to the concept of eternal life, even if it otherwise imagined. In Seneca's writings, *Ad Marciam de consolatione*, the author speaks in interesting terms, for a pagan, about eternal life and about the soul after death. In addition, we see an interesting description of Marcia's son, who died at the age of adolescence, but who lived virtuously, which means that pagans led a moral life:

*"...it is true that souls that are quickly relieved of the relationship with the people usually find their way to the gods very easily; because they carry a much lighter weight than the earthly one. Freed before becoming too burdened, before becoming too perverted by earthly things, they fly back much lighter, to the source of their being... Tell me, Marcia, when you saw in your son, young as he was, the wisdom of an old man, a mind victorious of all sensual pleasures, honor, guiltless, seeking wealth without greed, seeking to honor without irony..."*²⁰).

Usually, at pagan funerals, speeches were uttered, but not by a pagan priest, but by the best orators and teachers of oratory of that locality employed by the family. In the speech, which followed a certain pattern, issues related to death were also touched upon: the soul of the dead is immortal, it goes to rest in the Elysian Fields, where it will meet with famous heroes Achilles, Menelaus, Hercules and others. The soul of the dead is therefore in good company, which should be a comfort to the family. Then those present prayed for gods to have mercy on the soul and to protect it in the underworld²¹).

Looking at this picture of a pagan funeral, we see that the pagans were not strangers to the concept of immortality and afterlife, just that, for them, these things had other meanings. Knowing these facts and comparing them with the Christian concept of the apologists, according to which the pagans worshiped stones and wood, we can see that sometimes Christians exaggerated in mocking pagan religion. Of course there were excesses in the pagan world, but ancient society like that, it was difficult to be a balanced man under the religious and cultural conditions of the time.

When someone told you that your dead relative might be in the company of Achilles and Hercules, if you were a religious pagan, you would have felt flattered. It was, however, the best and the most optimistic option, because not everyone thought and acted alike. Other authors, such as Plutarch, noted that a soul could find peace in the afterlife, through Dionysian initiations. The wealthy ones carved on their sarcophagi verses of great ancient poets, which referred to the Elysian Fields or the kingdom of Hades, because not all went to the good spots. There are also Dionysian inscriptions on several sarcophagi²²).

In other pagan writings, there is also a negative version, the pagan world not being unified in conceptions because many ancient authors denied the existence of eternal life. There are also many pessimistic funerary inscriptions, where from it results that life ends in death or the spirit of the deceased remains in the grave. For a contemporary Christian it is hard to accept such pagan thinking, but we must not forget that although paganism provided a variety of religious beliefs and a multitude of practices, it was poor in providing a solid doctrine, such as the Judeo – Christian one and in providing the certainty of eternal life, as Christianity offered. Undoubtedly most Christian historians put this on the fact that Christianity is a revealed religion. The Roman Empire before the impact with the Christian religion was different than how we are tempted to imagine, being full of contradictions and rich in religious colors and initiation practices²³).

The interpretation of ancient inscriptions is not always uniform, it can raise controversy. Some pagan texts talking about immortality proved to be, ultimately Christian²⁴). In other cases,

²⁰) Seneca, *Ad Marciam de consolatione*, XXIII, 1-2, in col. Loeb Classical Library, *Moral Essays. Volume II*, trad. de John Basore, Harvard, 1932.

²¹) W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven, 1983, p. 241.

²²) R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 54.

²³) L. Robert, *Hellenica. Recueil d'epigraphie, de numismatique et d'antiquites grecques*, vol. 11-12, Paris, 1960, p. 471.

²⁴) Ibidem, p. 423.

interpretation of the inscriptions was forced in the desired direction, see pagan inscriptions in Gaul, where researchers have argued that they are about immortality, when in fact it was not the case²⁵). Unfortunately, many authors operate with clichés, treating Christian and non-Christian sources, so many conclusions are erroneous, misleading the unsuspecting reader.

For the Roman citizens of the upper classes, although religious devotion was not as passionate as that of the masses of plebeians and slaves, the belief in immortality had other meanings, more stylized than in the case of the common people.

A patrician who believed in the afterlife saw the after places as belonging to the gods and being extremely beautiful. In these places of the gods' beauty pain, illness and ugliness vanished. Educated Romans regarded the soul after death as being pure, spiritual, totally detached from matter and rotting flesh. That idea was interesting, but then when it came into contact with the Christian idea of resurrection of the bodies together with the souls, it bore contradictions, misunderstandings and grievances²⁶).

Both among the upper and the lower classes, there was the ideal of the beautiful places in the afterlife, where the gods, heroes and the happy ones lived, in the Olympus. Olympus was an old place, present for many centuries in the Greek religion and culture. It's hard to mention who the artisan of Olympus was. It is clear that the great ancient Greek authors reported to him, Mount Olympus being the home of gods. the wealthy rather than the poor aspired to Olympus. Other realms of the underworld were somewhere else than Olympus and below it. Not all ancient writers agreed that Zeus ruled Olympus. Some authors imagined an abstract character which Plato and other philosophers conceived as a bodiless figure, without physical needs, perfect in all aspects. There were contemporary researchers who saw in the character described by ancient authors The Unknown God of the heathen, the creator of Olympus and of the seen and unseen. So it is concluded that there is a kind of monotheism in paganism²⁷).

For a Christian it may seem strange, but certain aspects of pagan religions can lead to monotheism in the Henotheism or general polytheism of the time. This idea of an abstract and bodiless god was more appreciated among the patrician class, for humble men preferred a multitude of deities, each of which being able to help in certain areas of practical life²⁸). There is the question of terminology since we cannot find in the writings of the time terms that approach monotheism, such as the Highest One, or The One, The Only, the Creator. Let us not forget that the Judeo-Christian terms were totally unknown to Greek and Roman authors, that is why we can only infer some names, but the interpretation is questionable²⁹).

When addressing the issue of monotheism in paganism, it requires attention, as the best term would be Henotheism, although many contemporary specialists favor the first term. Although there was the wonderful idea of an abstract, disembodied deity lacking anthropomorphic passions, the pagans had a multitude of deities, each with their own role, their temples and their responsibilities, generally according to the needs of the people. If a god took care of animals, he was invoked in all the villages of a region by shepherds and livestock owners who have created a specific cult of that god, with practical functions. And such examples can go on, for the Greek-Roman Pantheon was very rich. In some Greek and Roman regions and in some historical periods we can meet dominant deities that can be embedded in a henotheist system³⁰).

Ancient people, be they Greeks, Romans or other nationalities, were, in their majority, religious, practitioners, curious, superstitious, but believers in a particular god, which could be different from city

²⁵) J. Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'exile; recherches sur la naissance, l'enseignement et l'épreuve d'une foi épiscopale au milieu du IV-ème siècle*, Paris, 1971, p. 40.

²⁶) I. Kajanto, *On the idea of eternity in Latin epitaphs*, in rev. *Arctos*, nr. 8, 1974, p. 59.

²⁷) A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trad. de J. Moffat, New York, 1908, vol. 2, p. 140.

²⁸) G. Bardy, op. cit., p. 175.

²⁹) R. MacMullen, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*, p. 189.

³⁰) H. S. Versnel, *Religious mentality in ancient prayer*, in vol. *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, Leiden, 1981, p. 12.

to city or region to region. When a city had no important god, and in a neighboring city a miracle happened, the inhabitants of the first city hastily adopted the deity of the neighboring city, for the miracle wrought there³¹).

The ancient man was not indifferent to the gods, even if he could honor them all. He knew not the true God, for great men like Noah, Job, Melchizedek and Jethro in the Old Testament were unique, but he strove to honor the deity who helped him the most or who seemed most acceptable. So, even if not all pagan gods were honored in all cities by all people, each god was honored somewhere by someone³²).

In a recording of the judgment of the bishop of Alexandria Dionysius, during the persecution of Emperor Valerian, pagan gods and the God of Christians are mentioned. Dionysius' statement is interesting, showing mercy to pagans worshipping their gods, though his position is a deeply Christian:

*"After being brought before Dionysius³³), Faustus, Maximus, Marcellus and Heremon, the deputy governor (of Egypt – or note) spoke: I have talked to you about kindness and compassion that our lords show you. They have entrusted you with the power either to remain undisturbed if you want to get back to what is according to nature and worship the gods who protect us all, or conversely, to abstain from what is contrary to nature. What do you say to this? I expect you not be ungrateful to the goodness of your rulers, as they urge you to all that is best. Dionysius answered: Not all honor all gods, but all worship those whom they recognize to be God. Regarding us Christians, we honor and worship only one God, Creator of the whole world, the one that has given dominion to the beloved by God the Augustus Valerian and Gallien and to him only we pray without ceasing for this kingdom to remain unshaken "*³⁴).

The pagans believed that everyone has the right to honor whatever God he wants and they cared about this diversity, that is why the Christians' monotheism and exclusivity offended many. Some pagans, even if they admitted the existence of a supreme deity, believed that God may be honored even if other gods are present in people's lives. For someone raised in the cultural environment, it is difficult to accept such behavior, but we must not forget that the pagans were not raised in Judeo-Christianity. The ancients believed that every village and every city is protected by a god, diversity showing itself here³⁵).

For pagans the monotheistic system, or better said the henotheistic one, had a pyramid design, in which there were many gods, of which only one, the one at the top of the pyramid was the supreme god, the bodiless and passionless one, while other gods served various aspects in the world. The lower part of the pyramid can be found in the gods governing the daily life of the pagans. They were meant to help and protect people even in the most mundane moments of life.

In the lowest part of the pyramid were the demons, for the ancient pagans believed in demons, certainly not as they appear in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the ancient conception of the two worlds, the world of gods and the world of the demons could not be separated. The weakest people that were closer to the demon realm than to the realm of the gods, had to ingratiate themselves to the demons. On the other hand, Hellenes and Romans believed that demons could be manipulated by magic. People of the lower classes felt closer to the world of demons than the upper classes. The demons were present in pagan life, either taking the form of animals or taking an almost human form. They were called upon in time of need, especially by those who wanted to get revenge on their enemies. Demons were the answer to the existence of the evil in the world, because the ancient people could not attribute evil to gods³⁶).

Several ancient authors attributed to demons even natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, epidemics and other disasters. These pagan ideas are also found in Christian literature. The great religious writer Origen has a whole paragraph dedicated to the fight of demons

³¹) R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 83.

³²) Idem, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*, p. 190.

³³) Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria between 247-265.

³⁴) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Istoria bisericească*, VII, XI, 6-8, P.S.B. 13, p. 280.

³⁵) R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 142.

³⁶) Idem, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*, p. 188.

against humanity, in his work *Despre principii*. Origen is aware of demons' involvement in history and in the world of men:

"Let's see what the Scriptures tell us about how hostile powers and the devil himself fight against humans, provoking them him and urging them to sin" ³⁷).

The Alexandrian author examines the places of the Old and New Testament, where demons intervene in history and in people's lives. Then he talks about the threefold temptation of the Savior, concluding that people have to fight an invisible war against the rulers of the darkness:

"Through all this the Scripture teaches us that we have many unseen enemies that war against us and against which we must also fight. Because of this, the simplest of those who believe in Jesus Christ, imagine that all the sins committed by men are caused by these hostile powers who harass the minds of sinners, because, in this unseen battle the hostile powers usually win that, so to speak, if there were no devil, no man would sin" ³⁸).

Other authors also mentioned the pagans' belief in demons, among them the Latin apologist Tertullian, who mentions that in his writing *Apologeticum*:

"Indeed, we say that there are some spiritual beings. But the name is not new. Philosophers also know that there are demons, since Socrates himself expected everything from his demon's judgment. There's no wonder as soon as it is said that since childhood he was inseparable from a demon, which always removed him from good things. The demon is known by all poets; even illiterate people often employ him in curses. People pronounce Satan's name, the prince of this evil people, out of a kind of own instinct with the same voice that curse with. Regarding angels, Plato did not deny them either. And the magi stand proof as confession of both" ³⁹).

Perhaps the Carthaginian apologist exaggerates certain respects, but his testimony remains important, because he himself converted to Christianity at a mature age and he knew well the pagan conception and practices:

"But about how, from the angels who willingly became evil, came the wicked race of demons, cursed by God, with the founders of this nation and their leader, which I mentioned, there is written in the holy books. Now it will suffice to talk about their actions. All praise is submitted for the human to perish. These evil spirits from the beginning were set for human destruction. They, of course, cause to our bodies diseases and other great disorders, unexpected and extraordinary disorders of the soul, using violence" ⁴⁰).

St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher wrote, before Origen and Tertullian, about the demons involvement in people's lives. The Greek apologist believes that demons also worked through people faithful to them, as Simon Magus, trying to deceive people and lead them to perdition:

"Wicked demons were not pleased to say, before the coming of Christ, that Zeus had his so called sons, but after the revelation of Christ and His coming among men, knowing through the prophets everything that had been spoken of earlier about Him and seeing that He is believed and expected by all nations, as we showed before, revealed others: Simon and Menander of Samaria, who working all sorts of miracles with the help of magic, deceived many and have them even now in this state of deceit" ⁴¹).

In the same apology, St. Justin shows that demons can harm people and make them slaves of passions and sins. The Greek apologist claims that a true Christian cannot be overcome by the nation of demons, but a Christian pities them:

"Wicked demons will not convince anyone that the fire penalty is not reserved for the impious ones, as they were not able to do hide Christ who came into the world. But they can do only one thing: that

³⁷) Origen, *Despre principii*, III, 2, I, trad. de Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, în colecția P.S.B., vol. 8, *Scrieri alese. Partea a treia*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1982, p. 214.

³⁸) Ibidem, III, 2, I, P.S.B. 8, p. 217.

³⁹) Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, XII, 1-2, trad. de Prof. Nicolae Chițescu, în colecția P.S.B., vol. 3, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, p. 73.

⁴⁰) Ibidem, XII, 3-4, P.S.B. 3, p. 73.

⁴¹) St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, *Apologia întâia*, LVI, trad. de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, în colecția P.S.B., vol. 2, *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1980, p. 63.

those who live in irrational way, for those who are full of passions and who are brought up in bad habits and are slaves of the good views about them, to hate and kill us. But not only we do not hate such people, but as you know, we pity them and we really want them to change" ⁴²).

In his writing against Celsus, Origen shows that evil angels are fallen angels who seek to lead people to perdition. The Alexandrian writer believes that names of demons should not be given to pagan gods or men, but only to angels fallen from grace who became adversaries of God:

"Instead, as one who did not read our Holy Scriptures, Celsus answers on our behalf, that we say that the angels that come from God on earth to do good for people, are another way of being, then he continues as follows: In our opinion, no doubt, they are demons. He does not see that the demon name is not an indifferent name, like the names of people, among whom there are both bad and good people; but there's no name chosen like that of gods, which is not given to the ugly demons, to the statues, to the animals, but is given by those who know the works of God to those who are truly deified and happy. Instead, the demon name is always given to the wicked ones, who are attached to the body, clumsily, wandering and destroying people and drawing them from God and from the things of the heavens above to the things here on earth" ⁴³).

Even though Christian writers exaggerated certain information to which they had access, it is clear that the pagans had knowledge of demons, and some of them even invoked them. It is noteworthy that the same Greeks and Romans could not attribute evil deeds to good gods, so that demons were responsible for all the evils in the world. We do not know what the Pantheon looked like at the time of the respectable Homer. In the I-IV centuries, the religious situation had changed for the Romans and Greeks, just as it had changed for all pagans. Since the 2nd century, the pagans' practice and the religious services in temples were no longer the same as in the time of Homer⁴⁴).

The classical gods, Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Ares, were replaced, starting with the 2nd century, with the gods imported from Egypt and the East, so that in the fourth century, when Christianity knows freedom, paganism lost its identity. Grandchildren had no longer the religion of their grandparents, even if both were pagans and Christianity began to be favored by the Roman emperors who had become Christians⁴⁵). Shortly before the advent of Christianity, there was an atmosphere of religious tolerance in the Roman Empire, without any rivalry between different pagan cults.

From the gods, pagans expected only good things and blessings: help in time of need, prosperity, good harvests, foretelling the future and, above all, health. There was no pagan cult in which the priests did not seek help from divinity for health. Outside the Judeo-Christian world, unique through their dogmas, morals and worship, in the pagan, vast, diverse and complex world, these were the people's expectations from the gods. Practical things were the most appreciated and the dogmatic, abstract part of the Greek-Roman Pantheon mattered less. Ordinary people were not keen on theoretical knowledge about gods, they sought their actual help in life⁴⁶).

Unlike the Jewish and the Christian worship where people met daily with God in prayer, the pagan worship had no such values. Pagans did not feel the need of gods to be part of their daily lives. No particular loyalty to the gods was urgently required. A pagan dissatisfied with a certain deity may choose without any problem another god that suited him. The nature of the relationship between man and the pagan god was totally different from the Christian's or Jew's relationship with God. While a Christian loved God and his relationship with him was a special one for the entire life, and prayer became a conversation of a son with his father, in paganism there was no such thing⁴⁷).

⁴²) Ibidem, LVII, P.S.B. 2, p. 63-64.

⁴³) Origen, *Împotriva lui Celsus*, V, V, trad. de Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, colecția P.S.B., vol. 9, *Scrieri alese. Partea a patra*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1984, p. 318.

⁴⁴) W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities. The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai*, în rev. *Society for New Testament Studies*, nr. 42, Cambridge, 1981, p. 169.

⁴⁵) G. Bardy, op. cit., p. 187.

⁴⁶) R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284*, New Haven, 1974, p. 113.

⁴⁷) Idem, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 74.

Pagans did not love their god, the relationship with pagan gods was pragmatic. The gods needed veneration of the people, the people waiting in exchange practical help in time of need. To get the help of the gods, a pagan brought an offering to the temple, according to possibilities, or the promise of offerings, if he was poor. Depending on the offering to the temple, the pagan expected help. There were rare cases when a religious pagan expected to be helped only for his faith in that deity, which was implored.

To see how the pagans perceived their relationship with the gods, here's an excerpt from the writings of Cato the Elder, *On Agriculture*, which states what kind of offering a pagan must bring for his cattle to be healthy:

"The offering for the cattle to be healthy you should bring as follows: bring an offering to Mars Silvanus⁴⁸), in the forest, for each cattle in the herd: three pounds of meat from the back⁴⁹), four and a half pounds of meat from the leg, four and a half pounds of meat and three wine sestarios⁵⁰). You can put the meat in a vessel, and the wine, also in a vessel. Either a slave or a free man can bring this offering. After the offering was brought, consume the offering on the spat, at the place of sacrifice. A woman cannot take part in this offering, nor can she see how it is made⁵¹). You can bring this offering every year, if you want"⁵²).

If Cato took very seriously the offering to the god Mars, recommending it for the health of the cattle herd, other pagans, more ironic and pragmatic, addressed gods in a more than familiar manner. Moreover, the respect that Jews and Christians had for God is not found in pagan religion. The love and loyalty of a Christian to God are replaced by fear and pragmatism in pagan religion. In the port of Ostia, an inscription is preserved on one of the walls, made by a bold merchant:

"Hermes, good friend, bring me profit!"⁵³).

If the bold addressed Hermes that way, a poet like Ovid is respectful to the same god. The familiarity of ordinary people with the gods was not always shared by the pagans of the upper classes. The superior culture of a patrician put its mark on his religious life:

"Mercury, son of the Pleiades, explain to me, by your mighty scepter: You have often seen the stygian halls of Jupiter. Bearer of the caduceus⁵⁴), come to my prayer. Learn, therefore, the reason of the name: the god himself discovered it"⁵⁵).

Another ancient author, Plautus, recalls the man's relationship with the gods as a pragmatic one based on profit and not on purely religious grounds, in his play, *Persa*: *"The gods throw some profit in the way of the man whom they favor"⁵⁶).*

Beyond the small help, in daily life, the gods were called to help in serious matters such as the battles fought by the Roman state, or invasions of barbarian peoples. When the Roman Empire was in crisis, offerings were brought everywhere, in all pagan temples. At critical moments in the life of the Romans, they ran for divine help which they claimed to feel fully. If we look at the welfare of the Roman state and ever-increasing power of the Romans, between centuries 3 BC and 3 AC, we find that the pride of the Roman pagans in this regard is justified.

At a certain moment, however, the pagans' claim was matched by that of the Christians, Christians and pagans claiming that the Roman state was protected and helped by the prayers made by each. But Christian exclusivity disturbed the pagans, who did not understand why Christians did not accept that the pagan gods could also protect Rome, as they had done before the dawn of Christianity. Significant

⁴⁸) Mars was not only the god of war with the Romans, he also had other characteristics, as it results from the writing of Cato.

⁴⁹) About 1,5 kg of flesh, in the current metric and weights system.

⁵⁰) About 1,5 litre of wine, in the current system.

⁵¹) Women were not even allowed to see a sacrifice to Mars, for the animals.

⁵²) Cato cel Bătrân, *De Agricultura*, 83, în vol. *Roman Farm Management: The Treatises of Cato and Varro*, by Marcus Porcius Cato, New York, 2006, p. 36.

⁵³) R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, Oxford, 1960, p. 231.

⁵⁴) Caduceus or kerykeion in Greek, was a staff with two winged snakes, the symbol of the god of commerce, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, protector of merchants, robbers and thieves.

⁵⁵) Ovidius, *Fasti*, V, 6, ed. by A. J. Boyle and R. D. Woodard, ed. Penguin, 2000, New York, p. 128.

⁵⁶) Plautus, *Persa*, IV, 3, în vol. *Plautus: The Comedies*, ed. by D. R. Slavitt, Baltimore, 1995, p. 57.

in this regard is an excerpt from *The Speeches of Libanius*, the great pagan teacher of St. John Chrysostom who becomes the advocate of the protection of the gods to the Christian Emperor Theodosius the Great:

"People were protected first in villages and communes, there became accustomed to the protection of the gods, and felt soon how beneficial to mankind the gods' favor is: therefore, as we can assume, the same people raised statues and temples for the gods, as they could in those early days. And when cities began to rise because of the development of the arts and sciences, there were many temples on the slopes of the mountains and in the plains: and in every city, near the walls were erected temples and religious buildings, as the beginning of the rest of the city. For, from such the protectors (the gods – our note) they expected the greatest guard: and if you look at the whole history of the Roman Empire, you will find that everywhere it was so... And with the help of these gods, the Romans fought and they conquered their enemies; and conquering them, have improved their lives and made them happier than they had been before their defeat; they have removed their fear and made them partakers in the benefits of the Empire" ⁵⁷).

The same Libanius writes Theodosius the Great about the importance of religious diversity and its maintenance, within the freedom that each of his subjects must have. The great orator of Antioch believed that the Romans had always honored the gods whenever they got help. He believes that sacrifices should not be prohibited, but allowed everywhere, for every god brings an extra blessing to the Roman state:

"And many other wars could be mentioned, which were fought successfully, and then peace was obtained, by the favor and guidance of the gods. But what is most important to remember, those who seemed to reject this form of religious worship honored it against their will. Who are they? They are those who have not ventured to prohibit sacrifices in Rome. But if this whole business of sacrifices would be a vain thing, why was not banned this useless thing? And if it were harmful, conversely, why not more? But if the stability of the Empire is in the sacrifices made, it is good to recognize to the beneficial opportunity to bring sacrifices everywhere; and demons⁵⁸) in Rome be allowed to give even greater privileges, as well as those from the countryside and other cities... For a demon protects the scepter of Rome, another protects the city its patrons over, another protects the State and gives it happiness. Let, therefore, be temples everywhere" ⁵⁹).

During the time of the Emperor Theodosius, there were still many influential pagans, especially in the western part of the Roman state. Among them were the senators in the old Rome, who confronted their king himself when he asked them to give up pagan religion. Theodosius brought a financial argument to the Roman senators, arguing that the Empire is too exhausted to finance a longer so many pagan temples and sacrifices:

"Emperor Theodosius after these successes⁶⁰), went to Rome, where he proclaimed his son Honorius emperor and appointed Stilico commander of his forces there, leaving him as a protector for his son. Before his departure, he summoned the Senate and the Senators confirmed their firm adherence to the old rites and customs of their country and could not be persuaded to join those who were inclined to despise the gods. In a speech, (king – our note) advised them to give up old mistakes, as he had told them, and embrace the Christian faith, which promises forgiveness of all sins and transgressions" ⁶¹).

Zosimus the historian reports that no Senator agreed with the position of Theodosius I, stating that they were not ready to give up old habits and religion present at their city's founding date. Roman senators were not prepared to give up a 1200 years old religion, according to their statements. Senators reproached the king the abolition of the old laws regarding pagan sacrifices:

⁵⁷) Libanius, *Oratio Pro Templis*, 30, in vol. *Libanius: Selected Orations*, vol. II, colecția Loeb Classical Library, nr. 452, translated by A. F. Norman, 1977, p. 109.

⁵⁸) By the term "demons" Libanius understands certain Greek-Roman gods and spiritual beings inferior to gods.

⁵⁹) Libanius, *Oratio Pro Templis*, 30, Loeb Classical Library, nr. 452, p. 111.

⁶⁰) Against his rivals, Eugenius and Arbogastes.

⁶¹) Zosimus, *Historia nova*, IV, 59, in vol. *Zosimus: New History*, ed. Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Melbourne, 1982, p. 178.

"But none of them (the Senators – our note) was persuaded nor denied the old ceremonies, which had been left as a heritage by each building in their city and preferred an irrational approval of paganism to Christianity; as they (Senators – our note) said, they had lived observing the old ceremonies for nearly twelve hundred years, in a place where the city has never been conquered and, therefore, if they changed the old laws for others, they could not predict what might happen. Theodosius therefore told them that was the treasury was too exhausted by expense made by sacred rites and sacrifices, and therefore he (the king – our note) should abolish, among other institutions and ceremonies⁶²), because he finds them neither praiseworthy, nor can he reduce stringent military expenses"⁶³.

An interesting episode occurred in the year 408, in terms of the pagan influence in Rome. In that year, the Visigoth King Alaric I⁶⁴) invaded the province of Italy for the second time, but did not attack Ravenna, where Honorius resided, but Rome, the great city, which attracted the migrating tribes. In September 408, Alaric besieged Rome, cutting off all supply routes. Christian historian Sozomen mentions how religious pagans in Rome wanted to offer sacrifice to ask pagan gods for help, though Alaric, according to the majority of testimonies, was an Aryan Christian:

"After the death of Stilico⁶⁵), Alaric, leader of the Goths (Visigoths – our note), sent a deputation to Honorius to negotiate peace, but to no avail. He (Alaric – our note) advanced to Rome and besieged it, and placing a large army of barbarians on the banks of the Tiber, prevented transport of all supplies to the city from the port⁶⁶). After a long siege, and dreadful famine and disease had ravaged the city, many slaves and many barbarians, after generations (the citizens of Rome – our note) between walls, deserted to Alaric. Those Senators who were still adherent to pagan superstition proposed sacrifices to be made in the Capitoline temple and other temples; and some of Tuscany, who were called by the prefect of the city, promised to chase the barbarians, with thunder and lightning; they boasted that they had done a similar thing in Larne, a city of Tuscany, where Alaric went on his way to Rome, and did not conquer it"⁶⁷.

Pagans and Christians often quarreled on Divine Providence on Rome and there exist tens written records. Religious pagans insisted in believing and strongly confessed that pagan gods were the ones who had guarded the eternal city since its founding. All military political and economic successes of the Roman state were caused by the gods. Christians did not agree with to this view of the pagans, arguing that it was God who cared for Rome, even when the Romans did not know what Christianity was. God cares for the Roman state and kings, even if they are pagans. This controversy between Christians and pagans lasted for almost three centuries. When the history was hostile to Rome, pagans believed that the gods have turned away from them, because they felt neglected. While Christians were of the opinion that due to immoral life and sorrow brought to God, a divine punishment may come across a city or across a state.

Even if they believe that God's blessing poured over the Roman state not for the pagans' deeds, Christians did actually pray for the welfare of the Roman Empire, for the kings' health, pagans themselves, and for all citizens of the Roman state, be they free or slaves. It is natural, therefore, for a bit of jealousy to appear because of this spiritual effort. In most Christian writings, dating from 2nd-4th centuries, the authors are convinced that the prayers of the Christian churches, God cares for the world and the Roman state, a thing which was actually true.

⁶²) It is obvious that the emperor referred only to institutions and pagan ceremonies, thinking about a restriction by law of paganism.

⁶³) Zosimus, *Historia nova*, IV, 59, p. 179.

⁶⁴) Alareiks in Greek, Alaricus in Latin, was born in 370 and died in 410.

⁶⁵) Flavius Stilico, great Roman general, Magister militum pro Occidente and patrician, lived in the Western Roman Empire, between 359-408. He was one of the last capable Generals of the Roman state.

⁶⁶) It is the Roman port at the Mediterranean Sea, Ostia, wherefrom supplies were transported on the river Tiber to the capital of the Roman Empire.

⁶⁷) Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IX, 6, in vol. *Sozomen: Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Kessinger Publishing, New York, 2004, p. 298.

After 313, the care of the Christians for the Roman state, the remembrance of the king in prayer and faith in divine providence for Roman Empire was rewarded, for the first time by emperor Constantine the Great. After his victory over Licinius, Constantine gave a series of edicts of Christian inspiration. Because they also influenced the pagan population, they wrote to the king himself, explaining the reasons for his choice:

"Therefore, after through the power of the Savior God, all were subjected to him; after, before the whole world, he admitted to whom he owed certain fulfillment; after having testified to Him and not himself, as the true cause of his victories, the king acknowledged all of them in some decisions made in Latin and Greek letter, sent and published by him in each province. The value of these texts can only be understood only by taking heed to their content. There were two scripts: one addressed to the Churches of God (Christians – our note); the other was addressed to the world of the city that was not part of the Church (the pagans – our note). The latter seems to me fit to insert in my story, so that, because of it, the writing will be kept and be known by our posterity, supporting the truth of my words" ⁶⁸).

Addressing the pagans, the king speaks like a true Christian, though he had not yet received Christian baptism. In his words one feels his commitment to the Christian religion. To show the pagans how good it is to be a Christian, Constantine recalls the care of God and how many gifts await those who want to become Christians, that is the pagans who will convert will be helped by the God of the Christians, because this God cared both for the Roman state and the king himself:

"To all who rightfully loved to wisely ponder about the Holy Lord, it has always been clear and unmistakable how far from the close result of the blessed Christian teachings were those people who fought against it and who strenuously insisted to address their contempt. Today, however, and especially as a result of acts of perpetration full of shine, it has been shown how useless was the doubt and how much strength is in the power of the great God, so that to those who faithfully honor his wonderful law and do not dare to break any command, it can answer with abundant gifts, endowing them with special strength and hope in all their deeds, while the prosperity of the wicked will match their souls. Who, then, will be able to share in any good if they do not want to confess to God, Who is the cause of all good and if they do not want to bring him due honor?" ⁶⁹).

To impress the pagans, whom he addresses, emperor Constantine discusses his personal religious experience. Constantine is convinced that God chose him to rule the Roman Empire and to promote the Christian religion. For a pagan, the personal example of the king mattered a lot. Since your king, which until yesterday you thought to be a pagan, told you that God chose to become ruler of the Roman State to replace the old faith with the new one, what else could you say? If you were a convinced pagan, the king's words would not have impressed you. If you were a pagan of convenience, the king's confession would have made you think:

"Therefore, being so great and so nerveless the wretchedness in whose straps mankind was caught, and the state affairs being, like a creature touched by the plague, in danger of death and being felt the need for saving care, what way of relief God thought of, what escape from that deadlock? He wanted me to fulfill his will, he searched me and found me according to His will, so that, starting from the great British sea and from the lands where the sun must go down, I could take out and destroy, with the help of a power greater than myself, the danger that kept them all in its power; so that, taking heed of my useful deed, the human race could return to service of the Holy Law; and again, so that, under the guidance of the Almighty, the blessed faith could spread in the world" ⁷⁰).

If the testimony of Eusebius refers to the initiative of Emperor Constantine to attract pagans to Christianity, telling them of the providence of God of Christians to the Roman people, there were miraculous conversions to Christianity of some pagans. One of the best known cases is that of Justin philosopher, pagan by birth and great admirer of ancient philosophy. His conversion wonderful is told by himself in his *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon* writing:

⁶⁸) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Viața lui Constantin cel Mare*, II, 23, 1-2, trad. de Radu Alexandrescu, colecția P.S.B., vol. 14, *Scrieri. Partea a doua*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1991, p. 103.

⁶⁹) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Viața lui Constantin cel Mare*, II, 24, 1-3, P.S.B. 14, p. 103.

⁷⁰) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Viața lui Constantin cel Mare*, II, 28, 1-2, P.S.B. 14, p. 105.

"Even only for the miracles they have worked (Jewish prophets – our note), they can be regarded righteous when they glorified the Creator of all, God the Father and proclaimed the Christ who was to come from Him, and who was to be His son. That has not been and is not done by false prophets, who are filled with the unclean and wandering spirit and who, although they dare to work some miracles, to the astonishment of the people, praise instead, wandering spirits and demons. Pray, therefore, above all, for the doors of light to open to you, for all these cannot be seen or understood by all, if God and His Christ do not allow one to understand . Saying this and many other of their kind, which is have not the time now to enumerate here, he left⁷¹), commanding me to follow these things and I have not seen him since. And suddenly a fire was lit in my heart and I was seized by great love for prophets seized me and those men who are friends of Christ"⁷²).

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⁷¹) He is the old venerable, venerable-looking man, who Justin met, miraculously while he was walking on the sea shore.

⁷²) Saint Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher, *Dialog cu iudeul Trifon*, VII, VIII, trad. de Pr. Olimp Căciulă, colecția P.S.B., vol. 2, *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1980, p. 100.