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Koinon:

The Self and the Commons in Mediterranean Theopolitics

Guillermo M. Jodra

Reale Collegio di Spagna

Tutor: Prof.ssa. Annarita Angelini

Coordinatore del Dottorato: Prof. Marco Beretta

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the tension between the self and the commons in the transitional phase from Classical to Late Antiquity. This period embodies the intersection of three worldviews converging in the Roman Empire. Right where political Laconophilia, metaphysical Platonism, and Judeo-Christian theology meet, a wave of communitarian projects along the Mare Nostrum redefine what it means to be human. The main product of this theopolitical climate is a renewed understanding of the commons built upon an innovative sense of individuality that does not necessarily result in political solipsism. An anti-individualist sense of individuality, the monastic self, capable of revealing the limitations of modern communitarianism and individualism at once.

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I

THE SELF & THE COMMONS

Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the tension between the self and the commons in the transitional phase from Classical to Late Antiquity. The period that begins with the inception of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC and ends with the death of Constantine the Great in 337 AD embodies the intersection of three worldviews converging in the Roman Empire. Right where political Laconophilia, metaphysical Platonism, and Judeo-Christian theology meet, a wave of communitarian projects along the Mare Nostrum redefine what it means to be human. The main product of this theopolitical climate is a renewed understanding of the commons built upon an innovative sense of individuality that does not necessarily result in political solipsism. An anti-individualistic sense of individuality.

In this context, I reclaim the concept of *to koinon* as a historically available balancing of *politeia* –the government of the city–, and *oikonomia* –the administration of the household– between the Classical and Hellenistic periods. *To koinon* –gr. τὸ κοινόν “commons, community, body politic” refers to the Mediterranean body politics studied by Emily Mackil (*Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon*), but also to the range of communitarian efforts that will lead to the Jewish *yahad* and the biblical *koinonia*.

Communitarianism rises tangibly during Second Temple Judaism (538 BC – 70 AD) and, particularly, during the prevalence of the Ptolemaic Kingdom

(323 – 30 BC). This is the time when the Western Semitic peoples who inhabited the Judean Desert and Upper Egypt redefined the concept of *yabad* as an attempt to translate the sense of the commons present in the Greek polities around them, effectively embracing the process of Hellenization. Right in the middle of the lengthy but dense historical period that demarcates this study, the ancient *koinon* was also to be interpreted by the first Christian thinkers as their very own *koinonia* –gr. “community, partnership, communion”– portrayed in Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47. By navigating the colliding traditions of Hellenistic Judaism, Roman law, and Mediterranean communitarianism, the protagonists of the *ecclesia primitiva* aspire to build, not a house or temple, but a universal city of brotherly love. Through the employment of the cultural device known as *interpretatio* –first *graeca*, then *latina*, and later *christiana*–, the aforementioned worldviews crystallize in a self-effacing theory of subjectivity which inherits critical elements from the Lacedaemonian, Athenian, Judaic, and Roman cosmovisions. This dissertation focuses on the formation of these innovative social bodies as they prefigure the irruption of the Christian *koinonia* and the monastic, communitarian self of the Middle Ages.

Theoretically speaking, this dissertation is inspired by the philosophical challenges of Antonio Escotado, Catherine Nixey, or Robert B. Ekelund Jr. and Robert D. Tollison to the framework established by Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben, whose contributions are leading contemporary discussions on the commons, not just in the Italian-speaking academia, but worldwide.

Departing from Espositian works such as *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, *Due. La macchina della teologia politica e il posto del pensiero*, and the recently published *Politica e negazione*, and as well Agamben's *Il regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, or *Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forme di vita*, the dilemma of the commons is approached from the perspective of the production of a political theology –*theopolitics* or, with Esposito, “macchina teologicopolitica” (*Due* 5)– unique to the needs of the Late Ancient world transformed by the incipient Christianity. A new world order whose redefinition of the individual-commons, self-other relations marks the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages and Modernity. A systematic reappraisal of this genesis will dispel contemporary myths about the nature of the individual, the modern autonomous subject, and the limits of collectivism.

To understand the fulfillment and transmission of those theoretical and practical needs, I study the appropriation of two types of ancient sources by early Christian thinkers. Firstly, the political utopianism of the classical world – especially the Laconophilia, or praise of Lacedaemonian politics, transferred by Plato and the Neoplatonists, but also Neopythagoreanism and Stoicism–. Secondly, the religious archetypes practiced along the coasts of the Mediterranean –mysteric cults, but above all the maverick *Lebensform* of the Essenes, as legated by Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus's utopia, and the direct sources found in the Dead Sea Scrolls–. By combining these materials into one coherent project, thinkers such as Saint Anthony, Saint

Pachomius, Saint Basil, Saint Syncretica, and Saint Augustine redefined the meaning of the self and the political in a way that shaped –and, if Esposito and Agamben are right, nowadays more than ever shapes– Western cosmovisions.

Concerning the studied corpus, the present study owes its approach to the pioneering figure of Pier Cesare Bori, whose forefronting of the Istituto per le Scienze religiose di Bologna crystallized in two indelible works, *Chiesa primitiva. L'immagine della comunità delle origini –Atti 2, 42-47; 4, 32-37– nella storia della chiesa antica*, and *Koinonia. L'idea della comunione nell'ecclesiologia recente e nel Nuovo Testamento*. Very recently, Carlo Lorenzo Rossetti has published *Platone, la democrazia e la Chiesa, ovvero le metamorfosi della koinonia*, which provides a valuable continuation through a critical reading of Platonic sources from an ecclesiological perspective. These works offer a deep understanding of Christian *koinonia* as the beginning of a new world, but the present study focuses instead on presenting it as a product of Antiquity. The product of the convergence of the most vibrating Mediterranean worldviews.

Additionally, this work should contribute to open dialogues in the field of Neoplatonism pioneered by scholars such as Werner Beierwaltes, Vincent Descombes, Nuccio D'Anna, or José Alsina. Particularly affined to my approach are the debates initiated by the Tübinger Platonschule (Hans Joachim Krämer author of *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*, and *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*, written by Konrad Gaiser) and the Scuola di Milano (Giovanni Reale, *Autotestimonianze e rimandi dei dialoghi di Platone alle dottrine non scritte*, and *Per una*

nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle Dottrine non scritte). Last but not least, I argue that the Neoplatonist connection allows us to reconsider the political theology –or economy– of early Christians from the perspective of a pulsating Laconophilia which, modeled by Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Plotinus, and others, would inspire the archetypical lifestyle of the Middle Ages: monasticism. A close reading of the two main monastic expressions, *anchoritism* –the suppression of the other– and *coenobitism* –the effacement of the self–, allows me to reconceptualize, in the vein of Agamben’s *Altissima povertà*, the tension between the individual and the collective, the self and the polis, the private and the public.

Pier Cesare Bori has magisterially studied the meaning of the original *koinonia* expressed in Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47. By analyzing the theopolitical sources of the Classical (508 – 323 BC), and Hellenistic (323 – 31 BC) periods, this dissertation focuses on the path that made that first community possible. From there, the influence of this primigenial community on the new monastic forms of anchoritism and coenobitism during the Roman domination of Greece (31 BC – 330 AD) is studied as a pivotal point to understanding Mediterranean –Eastern and Western– subjectivity and theopolitical thought to come. After the First Council of Nicaea celebrated in modern Turkey in 325 AD, the dichotomy between the self and the other will be irreversibly influenced by an increasingly consensual school of thought in the vein of Saint Athanasius. By the time of the Vulgate, which Saint Jerome started translating in 382 AD and

would continue to elaborate until his death in 420 AD, the movement will be in full motion. When Saint Augustine writes his masterpieces between 354 – 430 AD, this impulse has finally come to fruition, effectively becoming a beacon of times to come. If Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben have dared to highlight the theopolitical nature of Western thought, I invite the reader to explore the construction of the modern understanding of the body politic. A sense of *to koinon* that, based on the non-individualistic theory of the self crystallized in monasticism, will eventually become a global system that completes and systematizes the Stoics' ideal *cosmopolis*. If the Spartan *koinon* and the Qumranic *yabad* were conceived to be small, secluded communities, monasticism would progressively evolve from being an esoteric communitarian movement to, opting for universalization, becoming a theopolitically conceived world-city, or *theopolis*.

Over the course of these pages, I answer questions such as: What was the role of Hellenistic Jews and Neoplatonist Christians in the transmission of classical philosophy of the subject and the construction of the modern world? What is the part of Laconophilia in the development of Late Ancient utopianism? Was the modern subject invented, discovered, or none of the above? Is the self ever *myself*—a tautological proprietary of its own being—? Must the self be conceived in opposition to the other? Can we draw a genealogy of the self and the commons? And, most importantly, how can we rethink the individual and the commons today?

The concept of *to koinon* and all its variants allow us to rethink with Roberto Esposito a type of community, an intersubjective order, in which the individual is the measure, but not the telos of all things. A theory of the self and the other that is alternative to the modern divinization of an absolute self, but also one which nonetheless does not eliminate the self. Coherently, this arises as a critical ingredient in the construction of a new theory of the common built upon the proven historicity of the *communitas*-hypothesis where “I soggetti della comunità sono uniti da un ‘dovere’ nel senso in cui si dice ‘ti devo qualcosa’ ma non ‘mi devi qualcosa’” (Roberto Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, “Introduzione” xiii). Individuality without tautological individualism or, if we want, a community in which the self and the other are not opponents, but close allies.

Content

Five chapters structure this work: I) *The Self & Commons*, II) *Political koina*, III) *Religious koina*, IV) *Koinonia*, and V) *The Self is the Commons*.

The Other and the Self. The opening chapter reframes contemporary debates on individualism and the commons. It focuses on the failure –yet obstination– of the modern autonomous subject, as well as on the limitations of communitarian projects since Rousseau. A tense, yet not exclusive balance between the individual and the suprapersonal is theorized on the shoulders of

contemporary and ancient thinkers such as Benjamin Constant, Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, Saint Augustine, Saint Basil, and Plato.

Political koina. A revision of the political, religious, and philosophical sources upon which early Christian monasticism models its theory and praxis. Two primary sources are available: the political Laconism of authors in the Socratic circle, and the asceticism of religious groups like the Essenes. This chapter focuses on the first series. The role of Platonism as a privileged passage from Antiquity to the Middle Ages is stressed by focusing on the transmission of the Socratic-Platonic concepts of the soul, household, city, and cosmos. Apart from direct sources ranging from Xenophon to Plutarch, special attention is paid to the remarkable argumental fortitude of D. Dawson's *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*.

Religious koina. Religious sources include the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, the *Community Rule*, and the testimonies of Hellenistic Jew Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. Particular emphasis is placed on the Qumranic communities, the Essenes, and the innovations that occur during the Second Temple period.

Koinonia. A study of the contrasting paradigms of monasticism in the first four centuries of our era. The way of the individual, anchoritism, allows for an otherless approach to political virtue and metaphysical truth. Alternatively, coenobitism represents the production of a selfless, community-based subjectivity which denies the sufficiency of the ego. The rules and constitutions of the first monastic movements, including those of Saint Anthony, Saint Basil,

Saint Pachomius, Saint Macrina, and Saint Augustine incarnate the main pieces of this assembly.

The Self is the Commons. Apart from analyzing the universalization of the formerly local and private *koinon*, I argue that the theory of subjectivity constitutes that constitutes the theopolitical fulcrum of monasticism can be interpreted as an alternative to the possessive, individualistic subject of Modernity. Going back to Augustine's treatises, a mixed –Brian Stock refers to it as an “integrated self”– subjectivity arises as the legitimate protagonist of an alternative modernity in which the individual does not own the world through thinking, but opens itself to the other in search of completion and mutual service. The conclusion evaluates the projection of these debates into the Middle Ages and Modernity and the present opportunities for rethinking our subjectivities and commons.

The Self and the Commons

The commons or the self. The commons, tragedy or reverie? Common knowledge simplifies history by telling us that Modernity is the era of the individual, whereas everything that happened before is nothing short of certain dark ages where the self would have remained repressed or, according to many accounts, undiscovered. That is Jacob Burckhardt's celebrated account which, far from having vanished, to this day influences the theorization of the modern-premodern divide¹. A more nuanced prospect is bestowed by Benjamin Constant in his seminal 1819 discourse *De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes* (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns*). In this text, Constant draws a strict line between the subjectivity and liberty of ancients and moderns. While the former were markedly political beings willing to sacrifice their "personal" life for a cause, the latter are, says Constant, focused on the realization of their own personal projects. That is why he speaks of the

modern nations, where each individual –occupied with his speculations, his enterprises, the benefits he has or hopes for– doesn't want to be side-tracked from them other than momentarily, and as seldom as possible. Commerce inspires in

¹ Burckhardt's *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* is the Renaissance-studies equivalent of Edward Gibbon's work in Roman scholarship. The following passage still influences scholars who want to see in the Renaissance the discovery of humanity's previously hidden true essence: "Zu der Entdeckung der Welt fügt die Kultur der Renaissance eine Entdeckung noch größere Leistung, indem sie zuerst den ganzen, vollen Gehalt des Menschen entdeckt und zutage fördert. Zunächst entwickelt dies Weltalter, wie wir sahen, auf das stärkste den Individualismus; dann leitet es denselben zur eifrigsten, vielseitigsten Erkenntnis des Individuellen auf allen Stufen an. Die Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit ist wesentlich an das Erkennen derselben bei sich und andern gebunden" (*Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* 173).

men an intense love of individual Independence. (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 5) ²

Unable and unwilling to trust the regulatory inclinations of politics and other citizens, Constant advocates for a full embracing of an existential purpose, that of the modern individualistic self, which he takes for granted. This is not Constant's fault, though, as the modern autonomous subject had already become the Axiom of Modernity by 1819. From this perspective, it is only logical for him to exhort that

we must be far more attached than the ancients to our individual independence. When *they* sacrificed that independence in order to keep their political rights, they were sacrificing less to obtain more; whereas for us it would be giving more to obtain less. The aim of the ancients was to share social power among the citizens of a single country; that's what they called 'liberty'. The aim of the moderns is to be secure in their private benefits; and 'liberty' is their name for the guarantees accorded by institutions to these benefits. (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 6) ³

Constant's visionary taxonomy is enthralling and, for the most part perfectly relevant today. The problem with his argumentation is that, although we

² Constant's original says: "nations modernes, où chaque individu occupé de ses spéculations, de ses entreprises, des jouissances qu'il obtient ou qu'il espère, ne veut en être détourné que momentanément et le moins qu'il est possible. Enfin, le commerce inspire aux hommes un vif amour pour l'indépendance individuelle" (*De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes* 6).

³ The original is once again extremely enlightening: "nous devons être bien plus attachés que les anciens à notre indépendance individuelle; car les anciens, lorsqu'ils sacrifiaient cette indépendance aux droits politiques, sacrifiaient moins pour obtenir plus; tandis qu'en faisant le même sacrifice, nous donnerions plus pour obtenir moins. Le but des anciens était le partage du pouvoir social entre tous les citoyens d'une même patrie: c'était là ce qu'ils nommaient liberté. Le but des modernes est la sécurité dans les jouissances privées; et ils nomment liberté les garanties accordées par les institutions à ces jouissances" (*De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes* 7). Something fascinating happened: very fittingly, the English translator chose "benefits" as a translation for "jouissances". What a delectable, if extremely telling, combination of lapsus linguae and excellent knowledge of the two cultural traditions. We can almost feel Roland Barthes becoming Adam Smith.

pragmatically talk about paradigms of subjectivity in history, there is no such thing as a sequential succession of human variations. The paradigms of the ancient and the modern are just models that we use in order to understand and communicate the most explicative set of expectations, principles, and goals at a given time and place. That is naturally an abstraction, but not necessarily a negative one. What does indeed entail multiple problems is taking these explicative models as ontological successions of human types –or even races. The creation or invention of a new man is exactly what Jacob Burckhardt saw in the Italian Renaissance, but nothing really changed in the nature of those who, supposedly, woke up one day in the 15th century and started to feel, act, and think as moderns.

Historiography since at least Petrarch has accepted the disjunctively formulated quandary as an *aut aut* formula: It is either the commons, or the self. Accordingly, Modernity must be the triumph of the self over its state of oblivion or repression. But, is it?

The commons and the self. Can the commons be conceived without the self? And the self without the commons? The present chapter is an attempt at proving that the seams of history, the foundational moments of our historiographical divides, reveal a much more unfeigned relationship between the self and the commons. There is ample space in the allegedly anti-individualistic Middle Ages for the self, and the covetingly imagined Renaissance or Enlightenment of pure individualism entail decisive projects of

commons-formation. Moreover, the tension between the individual and the multitude must be studied by paying attention to the last heartbeats of Antiquity through which, around the 4th Century, the so-called Middle Ages were founded. I will specifically focus on the controversy regarding solitary or communal life in the Egyptian deserts, for it provides a privileged outlook on our nascent ideas on the person, self and subject. However, the path that leads to the birth of monasticism as we know it is a long road that will take us to the Judean Desert, Jerusalem, Athens, and Sparta.

Before the recent revival in communitarian studies led by Toni Negri, Silvia Federici, Massimo d'Angelis, Michael Hardt, Giorgio Agamben, or Roberto Esposito, few modern texts have had a broader impact on the knowledge of the commons that William Forster Lloyd's 1833 *Two Lectures on the Checks to Population*⁴. At least since that moment, a long development in the understanding of the self-commons relations arises in the public sphere. The contributions of diverse sources such as William of Ockham's particularist

⁴ The text makes a strong, almost Pascalian case for the minimization of risk through private management of property: "If a person puts more cattle into his own field, the amount of the subsistence which they consume is all deducted from that which was at the command, of his original stock; and if, before, there was no more than a sufficiency of pasture, he reaps no benefit from the additional cattle, what is gained in one way being lost in another. But if he puts more cattle on a common, the food which they consume forms a deduction which is shared between all the cattle, as well that of others as his own, in proportion to their number, and only a small part of it is taken from his own cattle. In an inclosed pasture, there is a point of saturation, if I may so call it, (by which, I mean a barrier depending on considerations of interest,) beyond which no prudent man will add to his stock. In a common, also, there is in like manner a point of saturation. But the position of the point in the two cases is obviously different. Were a number of adjoining pastures, already fully stocked, to be at once thrown open, and converted into one vast common, the position of the point of saturation would immediately be changed" (*Two Lectures on the Checks to Population* 5).

metaphysics, Pico della Mirandola's often misunderstood anthropocentrism, Descartes's and the Cartesians' redefinition of the body-soul divide, John Locke's theory of consciousness, or Kant and Rousseau's understanding of the modern self will transform the Western worldview in such a drastic way that whatever the commons and the individual used to mean, they had now been absorbed by the cosmovision of the modern autonomous subject.

Few have defined the vision of this new subject as accurately as C.B. Macpherson, whose seminal *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* defined the modern autonomous self as one that, above all, thinks of himself as a proprietor. This masterpiece from 1962 defines the modern individualistic subject as follows: "its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself" (*The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* 3). From this perspective, the commons will now always be a sort of limitation –or seclusion– of a self that has become the absolute measure of all things. The measure, and more importantly, the telos of all things. Proving MacPherson's analysis, Benjamin Constant asserts that "individual independence is the first need of the moderns; therefore (ii) they should never be asked to make sacrifices in order to establish political liberty. It follows (iii) that none of the numerous and over –praised institutions which hindered individual liberty in the ancient republics is admissible in modern

times” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 8). Even for those who opposed the rising individualism, such as Rousseau or Marx, the individualistic modern self will be a rock-hard axiom to challenge. In the last chapter of the present work I will refer to it as the Axiom of Modernity.

Roberto Esposito has magisterially exposed this sacrifice of the commons to individualism in his masterwork *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, where the philosopher ponders:

Gli individui moderni divengono davvero tali –e cioè perfettamente individui, individui ‘assoluti’, circondati da un confine che al tempo li isola e li protegge– solo se preventivamente liberati dal ‘debito’ che li vincola l’un l’altro. Se esenti, esonerati, dispensati da quel contatto che minaccia la loro identità esponendoli al possibile conflitto con il loro vicino. Al contagio della relazione [. . .] Colui che prima e con maggiore radicalità di altri ha portato questa logica alle sue estreme conseguenze teoriche è stato Hobbes (Esposito, *Communitas*, “Introduzione” xxi)

Thomas Hobbes only “fault” is being a dreadfully coherent reader of Descartes –as Spinoza would be– who took Descartes’s premises to their necessary conclusions. Despite the exaggerated anthropocentrism –or, more precisely, individualism and self-causation– that interpreters have seen in Descartes’s works, the truth is that the theopolitical interpretation of Hobbes derives an absolute concept of the self which would become the key to understanding the difference between premodern and modern individualities. According to Esposito, the modern self is a deliberately secluded one that sees the other as an obstacle. The other, owner of his own interests, is a competitor. A Hobbesian enemy of my own self-affirmative pulsion. Commerce, says Constant, allows

for this competition to be channeled in a healthy, productive fashion⁵. Notwithstanding, it is not economic competition what concerns me, but the ontological confrontation of the modern self-affirming subjects. Being self-realization the sole goal of this new self, all other individuals immediately become opponents in a race for the affirmation of their own tautological self.

This paradigm sees the other as one of two things, that is, an impediment, or something I can use to realize myself. This almost Lacanian sense of the other as an extension of the self-divinization –or self-love– is a given in sundry forms of modern liberalism and communism. Against this model of self-affirmation, Esposito defends the viability of a worldview in which the self is not the site of right-claiming, but the source of right giving. The *communitas* defines its members as those engaged in a mutual, voluntary act of service to the other, for “I soggetti della comunità sono uniti da un ‘dovere’ nel senso in cui si dice ‘ti devo qualcosa’ ma non ‘mi devi qualcosa’” (*Communitas*, “Introduzione” xiii). The question remains: What do asceticism, communitarianism, and monasticism –the main bibliographical corpora underlying this study– have to do with the idea of the self and the other reclaimed by Roberto Esposito? The answer is intimately connected to the

⁵ “Commerce inspires in men an intense love of individual independence. It supplies their needs, satisfies their desires, without any intervention from the authorities” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 5). That is why “Athens, as I have already pointed out, engaged in trade far more than any other Greek republic; so it allowed to its citizens infinitely more individual liberty than did Sparta or Rome” (5). This praise of commerce, even to the point of disregarding Athens’s other facets, is at the heart of Antonio Escohotado’s *Los enemigos del comercio*. The trilogy offers a history of private property and its critics.

aforementioned ontological competition for self-affirmation. Versus the model of exclusivist self-affirmation, these body politics demand and produce a particular type of subjectivity in which the individual is not suppressed, as it is an essential part of the group, but it is also a self that does not conceive itself as the ultimate existential goal. A paroxysm of many religious and political manifestation from Antiquity, the monastic self offers a first-hand look at a subjectivity which, like Esposito's, gives itself to the other without ever expecting anything in return. As such, monasticism represents a significant systematization of the communitarianism outlook present in the *communitas*.

When I speak of the theopolitical project of monasticism, I refer precisely to the subversion and renewal of the Roman structures. To the filling of the imperial system's cracks with some of the most radical institutions, ideas, and practices taken by Christian from the sources that the Hellenistic Jews, and even Plato and the Platonists had pioneered in the Mediterranean. My decision of focusing on the beginnings of monasticism is, then, one imposed by these materials. If we want to learn about the basic theopolitical structures developed by primitive communitarianism, we ought to concentrate on its most prototypical form-of-life. Monasticism sees itself as the closest that humans can get to the direct successors of the divine, be it the classical pantheon, the Jewish God, Christ, and by extension the imitation of imitators such as the Apostles. It is also seen as the path through which this way of life can be transposed to the general population without expecting everyone to embark on a life of

complete asceticism and community service. Although most monastic enterprises conceive themselves as a choice restricted to the few willing to renounce to everything for the sake of a greater good, it nonetheless sees itself as the avant-garde responsible of bringing the apostolic way of life to the world. At the heart of the Lacedaemonian, Platonist, Essenian, and Christian traditions is the praise of self-effacement. Often phrased in terms of mutual service and self-sacrifice, those who become monks, anchorites, or coenobites regard their gesture as an act of service to God, but also to mankind as a whole. I renounce to the world: I sacrifice my earthly passion for property and fame so that you do not need to do so⁶. The study of monasticism allows us to learn directly from the most radical, innovative theopolitical projects within the Abrahamic corpus and its impact on the Western theories of the self and the political. Those that as early as in the third century were prefiguring the coordinates of the medieval and modern worlds to come.

Contrary to the most exacerbated accounts that regard communitarianism –as in Sparta’s *agoge*– and monasticism –as in Saint Pachomius’s *Rule*– as self-mortifying devices devised to oppress the individual, these theopolitical manifestations rely on individuality to fight individualism. And they do so by instituting polities where the cosmological, the theological,

⁶ Because of this conviction, monasticism, even the humblest and honest one, seems to preserve a sense of “electedness” (or even moral superiority) that is wanted, at least as a horizon, for the whole body politic. The difference is that this “superiority” is not one of birth, but of commitment. This can again be found in the Spartan *agoge*, the teachings of the Second Temple intellectuals, or the works of the first Christians.

and the political reveal their primigenial unity. More and more scholars are resorting to monasticism and communitarianism, even in their most heterodox forms, as a way to understanding the competing paradigms of subjectivity and the social at play.

In order to chase reopen this discussion, I found a privileged foundation in the works of experts such as Susan Wessel (*Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity*), Eric Gregory (*Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*), Charles M. Stang (*Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"*), Joshua Parens (*Maimonides and Spinoza: Their Conflicting Views of Human Nature*), and Miles Hollingworth (*The Pilgrim City: St Augustine of Hippo and his Innovation in Political Thought*). Together, they provide a more nuanced reading of Antiquity and the Middle Ages that the one found in the soon to be discussed works of Edward Gibbon and the followers of the Dark Ages-interpretive paradigm. From Hollingworth and Gregory we can learn about the possibilities and limits of the political and the role of the subject, the tension between localism and universalism, and the sociopolitical role of justice and equality. Apart from dealing with the problem of free will and autonomy, Stang and Parens provide the sources to build a negative, apophatic, theory of the self in regards to individualism, very much needed in order to question self-centered individualism, whereas Wessel offers a way to read this self-effacing subjectivity in an affirmative, altruistic manner. Together, these invaluable contributions provide a comprehensive model of the self-commons

debate in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Apart from the work done in these fields, the combat for the self is also being waged in intellectual battlegrounds traditionally distant from the humanities, including political sciences and economy. Fascinatingly enough, monasticism encompasses all of these perspectives, for it is a theoretical, but also existential and political body of thought.

Monasticism, a theopolitical manifestation of some Abrahamic interpreters, allows to reconsider the problem of the self and the other, as well as that of the private and the common. One of the leading thinkers in this approach is William Harmless (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*), whose work offers both a solid starting point in the understanding of monasticism self-common relations, as well as a series of theoretical challenges waiting to be accepted. In an exemplary piece that I will later analyze in depth, Harmless summarizes the state of communitarian and religious studies claiming:

We also need a new synthesis, a comprehensive history that does better justice to the ‘many-ness’ of early monasticism, both within regions and between them; that integrates suppressed voices and roads not taken; that roots monks, monasteries, and movements in the intricacies of local politics and local social realities; that charts how chance intersections transmuted local experiments into international convergences. (*The Oxford Handbook of Early Christianity*, “Monasticism” 509) ⁷

⁷ “One urgent issue is a conceptual one: How do asceticism and monasticism fit together? In the last 35 years, scholars of early Christianity have produced brilliant and wide-ranging studies under the nomenclature of ‘asceticism’. This has helped uncover a vast array of pre-institutional, uninstitutionalized, and suppressed experiments in monastic living. But this research trend has sometimes, perhaps unconsciously, relegated ‘monasticism’ to the less

Monasticism as a hyperonym for various conceptions of the self and the commons united by the rejection of tautological, solipsistic individualism. Harmless's program for future research legitimates the present study as he continues to argue that:

While 'asceticism' has been much studied, sexual renunciation and, to a lesser extent, fasting have received the lion's share of attention. There has been insufficient study of the no less dramatic renunciation of family and dispossession of property. While modern scholars have written much on ascetic bodies, ancient monks stressed that the real struggle was not with the body, but the heart. Yet one sees few studies on asceticism of heart, few studies on humility or obedience or combating anger. Strictly speaking, asceticism was the negative pole of what ancient theorists like Evagrius called *praktikē*; its positive side was the quest for virtue. Early monks worried much about the slow, unswerving, unspectacular routine of cultivating virtues—charity, forgiveness, peace-making. Cultivating virtue may not sound very monastic; it may sound too much like ordinary Christian living. But early Christian monks were in the business of doing ordinary Christianity extraordinarily well. If we do not see this, we do not see them. ("Monasticism" 509)

I praise Harmless's vision, and I celebrate the inclusion of his text in the authoritative, yet divulgatory *Oxford Handbook of Early Christianity*, for its availability will assuredly spark new studies focused on revealing the battle for the heart. Although I cannot claim to solve any of these intellectual challenges, I can say that Harmless's lead is an inspiring one whose continuity deserves to be, at least, attempted. By accepting the indissolubility of the theopolitical –it

exciting, staid forms. Future scholarship may wish to re-evaluate realities behind the nomenclature, to understand how, within the wider umbrella of Christian asceticism, monasticism finds its proper specificity" ("Monasticism" 509).

happens equally in Sparta, Judea, or Aegyptus—. The monastic polities devise the commons as a path to reviving the so-regarded archaic civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, and Israel. The resulting community-ideal is what Giorgio Agamben has defined as *oikonomia*.

Agamben demonstrates that the separation of Church and State does not have anything to do with a departure of theology and politics. In his work entitled *Il regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, he proves that the essential sociopolitical concepts of the Western world are theological products. Because of this, a genealogy of the theocratic dimension of the political is imperative; and even more in the era of Church and State separation. Agamben's broad definition of the phenomenon of government, or *oikonomia*, which he ambitiously conceives as the "attività di gestione e di governo delle cose e delle persone" allows for this genealogy to unfold (*Il regno e la gloria* 305). He too provides a hint that guides us in the direction of seeing Christian monasticism as a synthesis of the Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Mediterranean world: "l'*oikonomia* ha permesso per secoli ai teologi di definire la novità centrale della fede Cristiana e, insieme, di far confluire in essa gli esiti del pensiero tardoantico, stoico e neopitagorico, che si era già orientate in senso 'economico'" (*Il regno e la gloria* 81-82)⁸. Along these lines, Roberto Esposito had

⁸ Despite the common opinion that it destroyed the Classical world, paganism and Judaism are unsurmountable elements in the construction of Christianity, which sees itself as both a continuation and a closely related alternative to them: "Al tramonto della cultura classica, quando l'unità del cosmo antico si spezza ed essere e agire, ontologia e prassi sembrano divider irrevocabilmente I loro destini, vediamo elaborarsi nella teologia Cristiana una dottrina complessa, in cui confluiscono elementi giudaici e pagani, che tenta di leggere –e, insieme, di

also concluded that the line of Western thought culminated by Hegel saw itself as a synthesizing machine: “il compito del cristianesimo sia quello di includere al proprio interno ciò che esso ha storicamente superato” (*Due* 5). This mechanism creates two “histories”: A legitimized history included by the *Aufhebung* machine, and an excluded one. From this perspective, given “il lessico dell’*ekklesia* paolina è economico e non politico e i cristiani sono, in questo senso, i primi uomini integralmente economici” (*Il regno e la gloria* 38). “Domestifying” the previous traditions, Christianity becomes the project of a world system in which the leading motive is not the race, the class, nor the lineage, but the belonging to a household which all are expected to join. This way, the new worldview paves the way to universalizing the government of the domestic, effectively replacing the Graeco-Roman sense of the polis, the league, and the state. It cannot come as a surprise to see how Eusebius begins his monumental *History* by declaring that, “My work will begin, as I have said, with the dispensation (*οικονομια*) of the Saviour Christ –which is loftier and greater than human conception– and with a discussion of his divinity” (*History* 1.8). The most influential historical relation to the development of the new religion focuses, then, on the *oikonomic* sovereignty of the Creator. From there, Jesus’s

ricomporre– questa frattura attraverso un paradigm gestionale e non epistemico: l’*oikonomia*. Secondo questo paradigm, la prassi divina, dalla creazione alla redenzione, non ha fondamento nell’essere di Dio e si distingue da esso fino a realizzarsi in una persona separata, il *Logos* o il Figlio; e, tuttavia, questa prassi anarchica e infondata deve potersi conciliare con l’unità della sostanza” (Agamben, *Il regno e la gloria* 81). “È su questa base che, in età cristiana, il termine *oikonomia* viene trasposto in ambito teologico, dove, secondo l’opinione comune, acquisterebbe il significato di ‘piano divino della salvezza’” (*Il regno e la gloria* 34).

followers would wind up conceiving the most creative ways to recreate this divine disposition and administration of the world. Agamben saves some incisive words for his analysis of this contribution when he discusses Saint Paul's role as a continuator of Christ's *oikonomia* and, subsequently, promoter of the new world-economy:

Caraterizzando l'*ekklesia* in termini domestici piuttosto che politici, Paolo non fa che seguire un processo già in atto; tuttavia egli imprime a questo processo un'accelerazione ulterior, che investe l'intero registro metaforologico del lessico Cristiano. Esempi significativi sono l'uso di *oikos* in *I Tim 3, 15* in cui la comunità è definite 'casa (non città) di Dio' (*oikos theou*) e quello di *oikodome* e *oikodomeo* (termini che si riferiscono alla costruzione della casa) nel senso 'edificante' di costruzione della comunità (*Eph 4, 16; Rom 14, 19; I Cor 14, 3; 2 Cor 12, 19*). (*Il regno 39*)

Agamben dissects the originality of what Christians assembled with the available sources taken from the Hellenistic, Jewish, and Mediterranean worlds. But he also continues by posing a challenge to future interpreters when he says "Che la comunità messianica sia rappresentata fin dall'inizio nei termini di un'*oikonomia* e non in quelli di una politica è un fatto le cui implicazioni per la storia della politica occidentale restano ancora da deliberare" (*Il regno e la gloria 39*). Reconstructing the genealogy of the genealogy is a feasible way to accept Agamben's challenge. To do so, I will hereby retrace the steps through which the domestic, economic sense of the communal found its path to Christianity. Instead of restricting the study to the already well-studied mysteric and religious sources, I follow Agamben's lead and propose an economic –in the

etymological sense of the administration of a household⁹. In a nutshell, Augustine's political philosophy transposed the foundational principles of monasticism to the realm of the state, thus turning the government of a household-type small community of brothers and sisters into a model for global sovereignty.

Paying close attention to Agamben's *oikonomia* and Esposito's *communitas*, this dissertation deliberates the implications of the early Christian theopolitical cosmivision as a product of the Hellenistic *koinon* and Judaic *yahad*. Since I am particularly interested in presenting the Christian *koinonia* as a product –as an end– that is also a cause –a beginning–, my analysis begins centuries before Christianity even existed, and finishes where most studies start, that is, when it becomes a well-established driving force by the end of the 4th century AD. To do so, I will ponder the production of a very specific concept of subjectivity wherein the individual and the common are two mutually dependent dimensions. A subjectivity that conceives self-negation –but not self-annihilation– as the only legitimate way to self-affirmation, which is only feasible as a part of a common body politic.

⁹ This should allow anyone interested to respond to the *oikonomic* aspects of Ekelund and Tollison, as well as Escobotado's critiques without fully buying the economic analysis of the religious phenomenon.

Selfness and Selflessness

How did we arrive at the contrast between the ancient and the modern theorized by Benjamin Constant? In order to overcome the limitations of our current optic, it is crucial to debunk the fallacies of the linear historiography of subjectivity which presents egocentrism as a logical sequitur of individuality. A genealogical approach exposes, instead, that the incompatibility between the self and the other is a construct caused by the identification of individualism and self-affirmation. Against Constant, there is room for a non-solipsistic individuality in modernity –though maybe not in the triumphant Modernity–. As there is for a non-anti-individualistic project in Antiquity. It is only when the self's goals are reduced to that of affirming itself that the other and the self become incommensurable. Such issues of incommensurability between allegedly subsequent paradigms can be avoided if we are careful when resorting to sequential uses of the *Aufhebung*-machine, which tend to present historical periods or theoretical models as linearly arranged hermetical entities. Essential instances of this linearity in the history of subjectivity, and that of Modernity itself, can be found in the influential works of experts such as Burckhardt and recently Greenblatt, whose fascination for the modern subject demands a logical premise which is difficult to maintain, that is: the interpretation of humanism as the production of a subject superior to the unfree medieval self. If the moderns are those who “invent” human freedom, and only those who define

human freedom their way are modern, those before –or after but diverging!– must be unmodern and contrary to freedom and individuality.

Should someone not buy Constant's definition of the human telos, that person shall be repudiated as archaic. But the truth is that when we speak of the modern subject, we are only referring to one of uncountable "modern" subjects. The affirmative subject conceived as its own cause, purpose, and telos. Although I will discuss it extensively in the final chapter, the working definition of the modern autonomous subject that I employ is found in Alain Renaud's 1989 *L'ère de l'individu*, where the French philosopher analyzes "the notion of the subject as entirely transparent to itself, sovereign, master of itself and the universe" (*The Era of the Individual* XXV). Among other contextually determined forms, I refer to this specific anthropological model as tautological modern subject, modern autonomous subject, or solipsistic individualist subject. Although the value of these works in the academic discussion is unmeasurable and they cannot be reduced to this axiomatic sequentially, the consequences of one such mechanism almost always lead to an unfair representation of the "premodern," the "medieval," or the "non-individualistic." All of which falls just short of purely derogatory terms. However, what if we could save the strong intuitions in some of these pro-individualistic works and assemble them in a less linear disposition? Despite how attractive the more or less subterranean presence of non-individualistic projects from Antiquity to our time may be, I am hoping to highlight the conflict, the contestation, and the simultaneity of

the contending models. The paradigm competition capable of exposing the historicity of our concepts.

Coherently, this study stresses the constancy of a struggle between individualistic and communitarian projects. Same as the American and the French constitutions from the 18th century embodied a compromise between the more libertarian and communitarian factions, it is not anymore acceptable to merely say that modern individualism replaced medieval collectivism: There were significant pushes towards the individual between the 4th and 15th centuries, as there were displacements in the key of the common in the era that followed. Athens and Sparta, Pharisees and Essenes, anchorites and cenobites, Ockhamists and Scotists, or Catholics and Protestants are just a few of the myriad of dyads that prove the coequality –and the persistence– of collectivist and autonomist projects throughout History. The fluctuation between the two determines which model becomes the ultimate –not the only one, but the most explanatory one in retrospect– worldview of a period and culture.

This is where Saint Augustine comes into play: Often retained as the “inventor” of individuality, he is also responsible for the most influential premodern systematization of communal life. The intersection between the *Rule*, the *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*, the *Soliloquies*, and *De Civitate Dei* unveils a philosophical system capable of simultaneously investigating the self like no one had done before while concomitantly vindicating the ideal of a life shared with the other. Augustine’s most decisive contribution is the production of a

subjectivity that affirms itself by negating itself. By merging the powers of the past –Greek philosophy, Jewish theology, mysteric cults, roman oratory...– into a unified, reconciling model, the Augustinian self realizes its potencies only when giving itself to the other. As a matter of fact, he discovers that we are always the other.

The Other and the Self

I have alluded to Esposito’s brilliant reflection on the Hegelian conception of the *Aufhebung*-machine that is History. There is no denying that the tendency of the *Aufhebung*-type explanations towards linearity has more often than not, and at least since the 13th Century, played in favor of the “modern,” effectively perpetuating the idea of the dark ages. But it is also true that critics of this ontology of ascending historical progress routinely fail to note that the opposed paradigm imperated for a much longer portion of human history. Many of the movements studied in this essay are, in fact, deliberate “regressions” to an idealized, Hesiodic past¹⁰. Sparta’s case is a special one, as they do not necessarily intend to return to their golden age, but prolong it and remain there forever. Be it as it may, there is something to be said about the myth of the Christian, medieval, or barbaric destruction of Antiquity.

¹⁰ Cfr. Alodia Martín-Martínez, “La edad media nunca existió: lectura quijotesca de la dorada época de las caballerías”.

The sequential use of the *Aufhebung*-device leads to a moralization of history no less problematic, if reversed, than the Hesiodic ideal of the golden age degenerating into coarser metals. For Christians, according to many the first major proponents of a progressive view of History derived from the realm of Judaism –or a certain Messianism in Judaism–, their arrival is marked as the superation of a flawed paradigm by a renewed, forward-looking vision. Ancient politics, beliefs, and lifestyles have worn down to the point of vacuity. A new percipience is not only needed but also, in so far as more “complete” because of its inclusion of revealed truth, withal superior. On the other hand, plentiful modern interpreters stemming from the idealized creation of “Antiquity” –one and only– during the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment will inevitably regard what came after the dominance of Greece and Rome as a regression.¹¹

We can refer to the latter theoretical stance as the theory of the *destructio Christiana*. The former, closer to the messianic perspective, could be termed the *salvatio Christiana* of Antiquity by the revealed truth. In the middle, I invite us to recycle a term often used by art historians and linguists: *interpretatio christiana*. Is the theopolitical plan of Christianity the salvation of a doomed, self-destructing Antiquity? Or does it represent the last blow against the most excellent period

¹¹ The big question here would be: What succeeded “Antiquity” happened to be Christianity, but given that any replacement of the considered “Classical” culmination of Antiquity would have necessarily been less Classical, would we also refer to this alternative sequence in such loaded terms as the Dark Ages or the Middle Ages? Or is it because, and only because, Christianity succeeded Rome in the role of ecumenical –in the etymological sense of known, extended-Transmediterranean world– worldview?

in human history, perennial Classicality? My methodological approach favors the third path of *interpretatio*.

The Greeks had been able to understand, select, and employ many of the traits of the cultures in the vicinity. We call this *interpretatio graeca*. So did the Phoenicians, who did not hesitate to merge and transform North African, Middle-Eastern, and Iberian deities and concepts—*interpretatio phoenicia* has been used at times—. The *interpretatio romana* was central to the expansion of the new power, and Rome took to a new level the Greek and Phoenician ideal of a network of poleis, as proven by the *Tabula claudiana* of 48 AD. All of these processes entail operations that cultural studies nowadays term as cultural appropriation, but I mentioned the use that archeologists and linguists make of the concept, because for them the recycling of preexisting cultural materials can be a factual reality independent of the moral dimension. The question is not so much whether linguistic or artistic change are good, but why and how they take place. And thereto in the case of philosophical change. The discussion about the intentions and consequences is a legitimate one, and one that exceeds my capabilities at the moment, but we can at least note that the methodological approach through which Christians deal with their past and present is almost entirely derived from the techniques and uses of the great powers of Antiquity. For example, when Hannibal Barca modeled his war campaign against Rome, he did so by following models taken from the cultures of other cultures combined with his own Phoenician and Hellenistic heritage: Alexander the

Great's personal campaign, and the mirroring of the now syncretic deity Herakles-Hercules-Melqart. Of course, Alexander had already thought of himself as a new Hercules, a role which he embraced with the help of, among other readings, Xenophon's *Anabasis*.¹²

How does this *interpretatio* help explain the confluence of *salvatio* and *destructio*? Hopefully, it will help expose the logical operations of the *Aufhebung*. For some, including most Christians and Moderns, *Aufhebung* should be translated as superation. It is true that many will think that the Middle Ages represent a deterioration, but Modernity is awaiting ready to pick it up where Ancients left it and willing to resume the upward trend towards perfection. For those closer to the legal use of the term, *Aufhebung* means cancellation, refutation, repealment, derogation, abrogation. Hegel needed both senses for his concept to make sense. I think that, even when desligated from the Hegelian philosophy of history, *interpretatio christiana* allows to see, not the salvation or destruction, but the struggle and debate of the process itself. Christians, as did Romans and many others, interpret the materials at hand to produce a new redistribution of meaning. A new worldview that some will consider a blessing, some a curse.

The efficacy of this approach can be tested by looking at the other major factor in the mind of the scholars who have studied the fall of Rome. Same as

¹² Even more laconophile facts arise when we realize that Annibal studied with a Spartan named Sosylus of Lacedaemon.

with Christians, often beheld as foreign forces invading the purity of the Graeco-Roman world, the Germanic peoples are in most cases shortlisted as one of the primary forces responsible for the destruction of the Ancient world. Once again, we run the risk of disregarding the discussion about the fractures and internal tendencies of the late Empire by just reducing it to the violent takeover of the Northern tribes. However, there is too a sort of *interpretatio germanica*.

The Germanic peoples coming from the North East were in most cases perfectly aware of the sophistication of the Roman legal system, their tributary model, religious practices, or even their social recreation customs. The Barbarian or Germanic Invasions brought the destruction of many of the Mediterranean and Roman institutions, ideas, and practices, but also a profound changes and continuities¹³. The legal code of Alaric the Second is, in absolute

¹³ Although the noble attempt at dissolving the moral component of the former is noted, it is quite problematic to euphemistically refer them as the *Völkerverwanderung* or Migration Period.. A close example is that of Spain, whose annals are full of similar events. In recent times, analogous attitudes to that of the *Völkerverwanderung*-theory have suppressed the martial dimension of the 8th-Century wars by transforming the Umayyad Conquest of the Visigoth Kingdom of Hispania into mere migratory movements from North Africa. There are many technical and demographical differences, but as a reference, these “migratory movements” were able to gain control of the Iberian Peninsula in seven years, whereas Romans had needed more than two-hundred years to achieve a similar goal. For being mere migratory movements, both the Germanic and Umayyad displayed an immense tactical superiority over their Roman and Visigoth counterparts. I believe there are other, more efficient ways to recognize the value of all civilizations involved in a power-shift than by hiding the bellic component of the conflict. The worst part is that this attempt actually distorts other migratory movements that are free from the military aspect. Even if dramatic and abhorrent, there is nothing censurable about the reality and presence of war and conflict in history. Ultimately, denying this factuality –the causes, the nature, and what we should learn from it– does not seem like the smartest long-term strategy if what we want is to prevent war. What would we be achieving if we just renamed the Battle of Adrianople in 378 AD as the Migratory Events of Adrianople? We would be missing the opportunity to explain that it was the migratory dilemma in the North

terms, a simplification of the refined Late-Imperial codification, but also an intelligent selection and adaptation of those elements relevant to the decentralized, privatized and feudalized reality of the 5th and 6th centuries¹⁴. In turn, even the Huns were well aware of the refinement of some of the Germanic peoples, which lead to the appropriation of sundry cultural traits. If, according to some of the theories of an intensely contested etymology, Attila the Hun was given a Germanizing name as a sign of social status and refinement, the adoption of Roman names by many of the Germanic members of the elite could also be seen as the Latinizing counterpart, including the palpable case of Theodoric I, King of the Visigoths between 418 and 451 AD. Destruction, appropriation, succession, improvement, replacement... A crucial difference between the Germanic and Christian realities exists. The Barbarians brought with them a mostly political model that then acquired the cultural capital of Rome's religion by converting to Christianity and adopting the Latin language and laws. Their importation of Germanic economic and legal principles, though,

and the South's inner crisis that eventually lead to, wether we like it or not, a battle as decisive as that of Adrianople.

¹⁴ Jesús Morales Arrizabalaga proves that “Muchos de los matices introducidos desde la jurisprudencia romana carecen de sentido en sociedades con relaciones personales, familiares, vecinales y económicas muy simplificadas. Por ejemplo, las versiones de reglas romanas que contiene el Breviario de Alarico II (a.506) me parecen mejores para la sociedad a que se dirige que sus correspondientes –mucho más extensas y complejas– contenidas en el Codex o Digesto de Justiniano. La simplificación, la limpieza de razonamientos colaterales, la búsqueda de un estilo directo son, para mí, más expresión de la capacidad de gobierno del rey godo que de su torpeza” (*Pacto, Fuero y libertades El estilo de gobierno del reino de Aragón, su mitificación y uso en narraciones constitucionales* 32).

reshaped the Roman reality into something that we came to know as feudalism. The very idea of Europe is a product of this *interpretatio*.

Conversely, Christianity is first and foremost a religious body. Faith with a central theopolitical project, but a religion before anything else. And a way of understanding language, I would add. Christians are not a class of well-established rulers coming from somewhere else. Neither are they a people, nor a nation interested in occupying other lands and cities. Actually, they are not even people *with* a nation. Whereas the worldview goes wherever the Germanic peoples and kings go, the Christian cosmivision is, despite its manifold local variations, a global one. This nationlessness and peoplelessness render it particularly mighty, as its goal is not to place German rulers on the seats of the former Roman rulers, but to turn all rulers into a purview that adds to, but does not replace each polity's national dimension. Once again, they learned this from the Roman model of expansion, which of course held martiality at its center, but whose ultimate success stems from its emphasis on bringing Roman words and ideas everywhere. Rome is the empire of the Latin language and the Roman values. From this point of view, the *interpretatio germanica* was something that happened as the vandals, goths, visigoths and others adjusted to their new reality after they conquered Europe. Thus they could amalgamate Mediterranean and Germanic aspects. Quite differently, the *interpretatio christiana* is the process which takes place before Christianity gains control over the territories and lands

it conquers. Only when Christianity has “understood” and interpreted Rome will Rome become Christian.

Destructio Christiana

The myth of the Dark Ages is much more than an illuminist construct. Its theoretical proposal has been in the making since at least the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the Roman context, few authors have shaped history in a more devisive manner than Edward Gibbon’s seminal *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published between 1776 and 1789. Despite the careful work of subsequent interpreters to improve, complement, and rectify his purview, the colossal piece continues to influence even the latest scholarship. Works such as Antonio Escotado’s *Los enemigos del comercio*, published in 2008, to Catherine Nixey’s 2017 *The Darkening Age* continue to embody Gibbon’s idea of the *destructio christiana*. That is, the obliteration of Antiquity’s greatness by the hands of the Abrahamic religions, and specially that of the Nazarenes. According to Gibbon’s and his followers, this idealized Antiquity was destroyed by foreign ideas arrived from exotic latitudes.

Antonio Escotado’s trilogy is presented as an unbiased moral history of private property and its critics. The first volume makes the enticing claim that modern, scientific communism shares most of its foundational principles with a series of movements derived from the Abrahamic beliefs of the Essens. Despite their initial minotary scope, the natural evolution into Christianity

would have impelled this foreigners to import the first critiques of private property into the Western world. The first volume's main argument can be succinctly summarized as: the only acceptable definition of liberty, that of the modern liberal interpreters from Locke and Hume to Constant, Popper and Berlin has been attacked by two paradigms, religious communism and scientific communism, who deny the fundamental preeminence of the individual, capitalist self. A fascinating requisite is supplied in the first section's title "De cómo la propiedad privada no fue discutida en Grecia y en Roma," where Escohotado argues that the great contributions of the Ancient world were undermined by the foreign ideals of the Essens, Christians, and other body politics that eventually led to Engels, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin¹⁵. While the main premise is questionable, the connection between religious and political communitarianism as alternatives to both the capitalist and the philosophical sides of the modern subject invites us to reconsider the political role of the theological, and viceversa.

Apart from making this welcome connection between religious and political communitarianism, Escohotado's book offers two great contributions

¹⁵ The second part of the present dissertation will refute this feeble claim by showing that private property was never an unquestioned given, not in Antiquity, not in the times that would follow. One of *Los enemigos del comercio's* deepest flaws is the unquestioned identification between an extremely partial interpretation of Greece, and the ancient world as a whole. In fact, when Escohotado talks about the Greek world, he is mostly referring, pars pro totum, to 6th and part of 5th-Century Athens. As long as they are not Platonists. So not even all Athenian thought and history serves his idealizing purpose. As a consequence, every other body politic and corpus of thought will be seen as unworthy, or blatantly offensive.

found in an otherwise unreliable package. First, he highlights the centrality of the discussions about the legitimacy of private property within the Church. He claims that there is an “Iglesia Pobre” and an “Iglesia Propietaria”. The one attacks individual liberties, while the other supports private property and a certain sense of liberal individuality (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.25). The book’s second greatest achievement is the strong vinculation between Platonism, Orphism, Zoroastrism, certain interpretations of Judaism such as that of the Essens, Laconophilia, and Christianity. Even though Escotado’s main purpose is to attack these worldviews, he does a very efficient job at identifying the cultural arteries emerged in Late Antiquity’s Hellenistic world. He says that these ideologies “Cultivan precozmente este sentimiento el misticismo órfico-pitagórico –apoyado sobre la maravillosa elocuencia de Platón– y la corriente profética israelita [. . .] Tan distintas en otros aspectos, ambas corrientes buscan un modo seguro de evitar castigos del más allá, y ambas lo encuentran en un rechazo de la riqueza” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.67). This dissertation’s third chapter will accept the challenge of finding connections between these paradigms while also refuting the assumption that the attack against private property is only a means to avoid the eternal punishment.

Conversely, Catherine Nixey’s *The Darkening Age* has been passed as a piece of scholarly work, but the author does not hide that “This is also narrative history: I have tried to give a sense of what it felt like to stand before an ancient temple, what it smelt like to enter one” (*The Darkening Age* xxxv-xxxvi). The

book on Late Antiquity with broadest media coverage in recent years happens to be one that prefers “to give a sense” of history using the methodology of fiction and narrative. It is perfectly legitimate to have opposed views on the meaning of historical facts, and the contributions or not of various schools of thought, but claiming to give a sense of history by only selectively resorting to primary and secondary sources entails several problems. The work suffers from decontextualized and selective use of sources, as well as from systematically relying on attributed emotions and feelings. Creating a narrative of how Romans could have “felt” or how I would have felt should I have been a subject of the Roman Empire in 313 AD is, however, a very different task than writing a history book with a new interpretation on the end of Antiquity.

Her methodological stance leads to frequent paradoxes and contradictions. For example, almost immediately after stating the subjective methodology that structures her book, the author ironically brings to context the Roman doctor Galen as an intellectual who was irritated by Christians and their ignorant beliefs based on subjective faith alone. Nixey relates “In Galen’s word, only the ill-educated believed things without reason. To show something, one did not merely declare it to be so. One proved it, with demonstrations. To do otherwise was for Galen the method of an idiot. It was the method of a Christian” (*The Darkening Age* 30). This happens after a preference for the “feel” of Antiquity –“a” feel, should be added– over historical data or the philosophical discussion of what Antiquity and Christianity meant. One of the

major omissions has to do with the fact that Christianity is presented as a causeless worldview, effectively attributing to Christians the doubtful privilege of owning many practices and ideas that are, in fact, the product of a long history of interactions along the Mediterranean. According to Nixey's idealized view of Antiquity, all the healthy and marvelous contributions of Antiquity are exclusive to "Classical culture," whereas all the negative elements are invented out of thin air by the sect of Christians. A major issue follows this theoretical axiom: What happens with those central aspects of Christianity that are direct adaptations of Jewish and even Graeco-Roman concepts and practices? Is it more acceptable for Romans to conquer and adapt pagan temples and institutions from other religions, that it is for Jews or Christians to conquer and transform pagan temples into their own facilities? If all we want to do is defend that Christianity alone is the poison that killed Antiquity, a fine decantation of what the "strictly Christian" may be is in order. A type of analysis that would probably need to focus on the theological innovations of Christianity that would make it more pernicious than Judaism or Zoroastrianism. But the truth is that we do not see this often and, in the case of Nixey's successful book, it is difficult to discern why some Jewish –or even Greek– attitudes and beliefs directly copied by Christians are, once the latter become a theopolitically relevant reality, more offensive than those of their ideological genitors.

Not devoid of risk, a sweeping argument could be attempted by saying that *all* Judeo-Christian elements are contrary to a very specific definition of

Classical Antiquity. A Classical Antiquity defined, precisely, as that which takes places between the 6th and 2nd centuries BC, as long as it is not Judeo-Christian. If this is how we want to define Antiquity, that is a legitimate theoretical stance. There is no need for me to stress that I think that the Mediterranean is a fascinating place precisely because it is the meeting point for a wide range of worldviews that constantly mesh and evolve in contact. That is why I actually think that the main difference between the Archaic and the Classical period is the expanded role of the Mediterranean, whose connecting capabilities lead from the partial isolation of Sumerian, Egyptian, and Judean cultures to the creation of a shared universe in which these and other theopolitical forces meet, fight and, at times, even collaborate.

Not just textual sources, but also archeological ones suggest that the theory of the discontinuity and the interruption is a product of Post-Humanism, Post-Enlightenment views on Antiquity. That these ideas are recent constructions is proven by the fact that the idealization of Classical culture is only half of an argument which only “works” if we assume that the Middle Ages are, in fact, *The Middle Ages*. That is, a period of darkness and barbarism located between two moments of unscathed human excelsitude. Christians, and even Hellenistic Jews before them, saw themselves as part of a culture that we happened to label as Classical. Their diverting worldviews did not refrain the members of the various Judeo-Christian sects from wanting to become a part of the imperating culture while simultaneously aspiring to correct, refute, or

even overrule it. This complexity and seemingly contradictory nature render the period particularly fascinating. To the question, are Jews and Christians part of Classical culture, we can only answer: Yes, and no. Judaism was solidly defined before the Greek poleis even dreamed of organizing themselves. This is something that Christians will, actually, use to their advantage, as they reclaim a heritage that is more “classical” than that of Romans and Greeks. It is only because of the repeated episodes of violence and seclusion that Judaism evolves in ways that make it more difficult to trace, but also harder to reify and reduce to a mere essence of what Jewish or Classical may mean. When the interactions between the already established Greek and later Roman worlds and Judaism become more dynamic, the indisociability of the two will become manifest. The case of Christians is analogous, as they do owe almost all of their contributions to those who preceded them. This is, again, palpable in archeological, literary, and philosophical terms. The profound differences between the Jewish and, say, 5th-Century Athenian philosophy do not prevent us from seeing that these worldviews are different, incompatible even, but also really similar and part of the same cultural substratum.

A strong case for the continuity between the Judeo-Christian and Classical paradigms can be found in the volume called *The Archeology of Late Antique Paganism*. This solid work by Luke Lavan analyzes the function of pagan statues in Late Ancient public space. Lavan condenses his main argument saying

that the connection between traditional iconography of imperial power and what came next can be described as:

Quite what this continuity meant in terms of religious allegiance is difficult to say [. . .] Christians may have tried to reinterpret unaltered images in new ways: but against the single example of *Dea Roma = Urbs aeterna Roma* from Abthugnos, there is otherwise only evidence of continuity in traditional practices [. . .] There was definitely no rupture in wider court art and no iconographic victory of Christianity in the 4th and 5th c. [. . .] it seems more likely that it was prominent lay Christians who felt unable to abandon these politically critical statues, partly on account of the complex traditional beliefs which they still entertained, alongside their Christianity. (*The Archeology of Late Antique Paganism* 469)

Hard rock notwithstanding, statues and palaces will eventually change as the *interpretatio* machine keeps spinning. But ideas are even harder than marble and Lavan's words of material and ideological continuity openly contradict *The Darkening Age's* primary purpose: "This book tells their story; it is a book that unashamedly mourns the largest destruction of art that human history had ever seen" (*The Darkening Age* xxxvii). Note the term "story" and not "history". Although they could just be interpreted as different positions on the same topic, the lack of sources behind many of Nixey and Escohotado's affirmations, as well as the intentional omission and selection of fragments of original sources suggests that this book commits the same errors that, according to Nixey, Christians made in their "war" against other religions (*The Darkening Age* 9). Escohotado claims to provide a neutral purview, while Nixey declares her own war against Christians: "Time and time again they [the fathers of the early Church] insisted that Christians were not like other religions. Christians were saved; others were not. Christians were correct; other religions were wrong.

More than that: they were sick, insane, evil, damned, inferior” (20). Nixey criticizes here the extremist position that Christians had during Late Antiquity against other religions. Ironically, the same vituperations and aggressiveness that they attribute to Spartans, Essens, and Christians is oxymoronically used against them. Escohotado insists on the intolerance –using a decontextualized concept that belongs to modern liberal thought– of the religious zealots as opposed to the magnanimity of their original persecutors. In lay terms, their thesis could be stated in the subsequent terms following the previous quote: Christians were wrong, other religions were less wrong, and some ancients were infallibly correct. Even more so, Christians were sick, insane, evil, damned, inferior, and responsible for the destruction of an unmatched Antiquity. Escohotado delineates this broad judgement by clarifying that, in his eyes, there was a true Christianity and, then, that of the Catholics: “Con el cisma entre cristianos y católicos emerge también la Iglesia como potencia agresiva” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.179). From this perspective, everything was fine and dandy until the arrival of this foreign body of thought. To sum up, *The Darkening Age’s* impressionistic approach does not contribute to its scientific rigor. *Los enemigos del comercio’s* alleged neutrality is a thrilling, if extremely biased, defense of liberal individualism and capitalism that claims to have found the root of all evil in the minority but aggressive worldview of those who put the other before the self –Spartans, Essens, Ebionites, Christians, some Muslims, and much later the proponents of scientific communism–. Escohotado does present a subtler

argumentation but the conclusion is not too distant, for both of them accept Gibbon's main premises: Christians legitimized and perpetuated the evil while suppressing the beautiful and free of Antiquity. Referring to Gibbon's work on the decline of the Roman Empire, Nixey tells us:

The Christians' belief in their forthcoming heavenly realm made them dangerously indifferent to the needs of their earthly one. Christians shirked military service, the clergy actively preached pusillanimity, and vast amounts of public money were spent not on protecting armies but squandered instead in the 'useless multitudes' of the Church's monks and nuns. They showed, Gibbon felt, an 'indolent, or even criminal, disregard for the public welfare.' (*The Darkening Age* 31)

When saying stuff like this, Escotado and Nixey persistently return to the same limited corpus revolving around Gibbon. Despite his display of erudition and myriad of valuable quotes, Escotado build his analysis of Antiquity upon very few sources –Gibbon, Aristotle, Rostovtzeff, Hume, and Troeltsch–, all of which present a very specific view that skillfully identifies individualism and commerce as the only sources of justice while effectively disregarding the alternative models offered by Sparta, Rome, Christianity, and others¹⁶. Nixey's methodology does allow her to include some sources of information in the endnotes, but quite often the provided information is wrong or false. The writer says that Gibbon's quote can be found in chapter 38, volume IV, page 163 of

¹⁶ A heartwarming example of this practice is found in his section about Sparta, where instead of quoting any of the sources that attempt to describe their political system, he swiftly reduces them to a gang of violent ignorants irrationally obsessed with the destruction of freedom and democracy. In the present dissertation I have tried to show that Aristotle's invaluable work is just one of many in a series of thinkers whose open discussion provides a less idealized take on Athens –whose greatness does not need falsifications– and the contributions of a Sparta that cannot be reduced to a group of zealots.

his work. But there is no chapter 38 in the fourth volume! The correct information is chapter 38, volume VI, page 291. The second endnote that she includes in this passage is also mistaken since she indicates page 38 when it is in fact 308. Fortunately, the chapter and volume are correct. This can happen to anyone, and I am sure that a myriad of errors will be found in this very essay, but there is a difference between human finitude and *mauvais foi*. The first often leads to inconsistencies, or even *bona fide* adulterations of content because at the end of the day everyone has a certain worldview that conditions our reading. But that is why we discuss, debate, and write. Very different is passing false or manipulated sources as valid scientific materials which are to prove a contested view. In this case, I sincerely think that we are just before a case of honest mistake –there will be many in this dissertation–, but I am not so sure about other instances.

One of the many cases of the second type of error that abounds in this book can be found in chapter five when Nixey deals with martyrdom in Christianity. After saying that “There is clear evidence that, far from persecuting Christians, Roman officials actively supported some of the most prominent” (*The Darkening Age* 69), affirmation for which she does not provide evidence at all, the reader encounters a very expressive quote about how exasperated romans were when dealing with Christian’s desires to die as martyrs. Nixey’s quote states: “‘Oh you ghastly people’ he said. ‘If you want to die you have cliffs you can jump off and nooses to hang yourself with’” (71). The endnote does

not indicate, however, the page, and only the title can be consulted in the bibliography. The problem is that the edition she quotes –translated by D. Dalryme, Edinburgh, Murray and Cochrane, 1790–, which can be easily found on Internet Archive, does not include the quote she is referring to. Instead, we encounter the following words: “Wretches, if ye must needs die, have you not crags and halters!” (17). What is the cause of this transformation? Human mistakes apart, I think that academic manners, rigor, and passion for the sources should prevail, specially when dealing with world-changing discussions such as the matter at hand.¹⁷

One of the book’s greatest contradictions has to do with the claim that most martyrs’ tales are not based on historical fact, only to selectively use them as sole sources to prove the magnanimity of Romans, who insisted on not to kill Christians by giving them a thousand of opportunities to retract from their faith (*The Darkening Age* 58). These tales “show that early Christians could accept the idea that Roman officials might seem keen –desperate, even– to stop them dying” (75). History can look very different when we use it at our convenience, and there is no easy way to reconcile the simultaneous refutation of sources for

¹⁷ The same occurs in the abundant cases of indirect quotations. This is perfectly acceptable when no other sources allow us to find the original words (such as in page 240, when she quotes an article by Alan Cameron as the source of the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*), but the number of times in which Escohotado and Nixey rely on indirect sources, often in a different context or even in opposition to the original statement, should render readers careful. For example, Nixey and Escohotado base most of their interpretation of Rome on Gibbon, whereas Escohotado seems to only pay attention to Aristotle in his description of the Greek world, which effectively omits all sources that could nuance Athens’s idealized picture or, of course, suggest that other Greek poleis such as Sparta, Corinth, or Thebes could offer something of their own apart from violence, ignorance, and fanaticism.

their alleged fictional component, while systematically using them as factual proof for our own argument.

An even more questionable case of scholarly slyness arises when Nixey “quotes” John Chrysostomos: “Just as hunters chase wild animals [. . .] not from one direction but from everywhere, and cast them into the net, so too together let’s chase those who’ve become wild animals and cast them immediately into the net of salvation, we from this side, you from that” (*The Darkening Age* xxxiii). No sign of the edition she quotes. No page, paragraph, or translator. Just a title: *Against Games and Theatre*. Should we compare different editions, we would learn that Nixey has used a version of Mayer’s and Allen’s edition adulterated to the point of rendering a product quite detached from the classical versions of the text. Moreover, a total elision of the relevant context leads the reader to believe that Chrysostom is exhorting the persecution of the infidel. But one does not need to inquire much to discover that the decontextualized sentences are in fact one of many of Chrysostom’s exhortations against carnal sin! The beast is the bodily passion that takes over the mind’s command. The hunters, reason and continence (“continentia”) struggling not to led astray. This instance is just one of the hundreds of intentionally truncated, decontextualized quotes from early Christians and Late Ancient authors in an attempt to present the clash between two worldviews and forms of life as the vile destruction of the noble, incomparably pure Antiquity by the hands of a sectarian group of art, culture, and decency haters.

The original context of this passage can be easily contrasted by referring to –and doing so while actually quoting the page and fragment– the 56th volume of the monumental *Patrologiae Graecae*, which includes Latin and Greek versions:

Quomodo et qua ratione? Si infirmos bona valetudine esse videamus: si doctrinae retia expandentes circumeamus quaesitum eos qui a feris capti sunt, et ex ipsis leonis faucibus eos abstrahamus. Ne mihi dicas: Pauci sunt ii qui a grege sunt avulsi. Etiam si decem tantum fuerint, non parvum hinc detrimentum: etiam si quique, vel duo, vel unus. Quandoquidem etiam pastor ille, ideo relictis nonaginta novem ovibus, ad unam cucurrit, nec rediit donec illam reduceret, et claudicantem centum ovium numerum, per restitutionem ejus, quae erraverat, complevit. (268)

Mark Vermes has successfully translated this passage for Roger Pearse (*Internet Archive*). Properly contextualized, it ponders:

How and by what means? If we could see those who are diseased becoming healthy. If we could unfurl the nets of our doctrine and go around seeking those who have been captured by wild beasts, and snatch them from the lion's throat. Do not say to me "There are only a few who have been taken from the flock." Even if there were only ten, it would be no ordinary loss. Even if there were five, or two or one. That famous shepherd left behind the ninety-nine sheep for the same reason, and ran after the one sheep, and did not return until he brought it back with him, and completed the defective number of one hundred through the restoration of that one which had wandered away. (np)

There is no place in this translation to hunters chasing wild animals, a metaphor used by Nixey to explain how Saint John Chrysostom "encouraged his congregations to spy on each other" (*The Darkening Age* xxxiii) and how "Fervent Christians went into people's houses and searched for books, statues and paintings that were considered demonic" (*The Darkening Age* xxxiii-xxxiv). In fact, what Saint John Chrysostom is trying to remark is how necessary it is to free those "captured by wild beasts", that is, by the same carnal pleasures that

he had been discussing for paragraphs: “Quomodo sermones de continentia auditurus es, ulceribus plenus tantisque vulneribus, animumque habens huic morbo servientem?” (268), which Vermes again translates as “How will you hear the sermon about temperance, when you are full of such injuries and wounds, and your intellect is the slave of your passion?” (Saint John Chrysostom, “Against those who have abandoned the church and deserted it for hippodromes and theatres” §276). In a way that predates Prudentius’s masterful allegorical work, the *Psychomachia*, Chrysostom speaks of the pain and injuries caused by passions and desires, which he skillfully identifies with the vigor and thrust of animals such as the lion or the wolf. He is not encouraging to hunt pagans as if they were wild beasts as Nixey tries to make the reader believe. Such misleading practice pursues its primitive purpose of convincing the reader in regards to the alleged destruction of Classical antiquity caused by Christians. As such, it is conceived as a response to the work of hundreds of scholars who in the last decades have worked to nuance the former sweeping-judgments about this 1500-year period.

A moment in Robert B. Ekelund and Robert D. Tollison, *Economic Origins of Roman Christianity*, embodies this scholarly fixation with clarity: “even though the term ‘dark ages’ has become somewhat passé given recent research concerning the significant economic growth, trade, and development that occurred over the course of the first millennium, we nonetheless use the term interchangeably with the ‘early medieval period’” (*Economic Origins of Roman*

Christianity xii). The alleged “monopoly of belief” (xi) to which Ekelund and Tollison devote their work is also used by Escohotado to oppose the “sociedad competitiva o abierta” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.22) to that of the open, Popperian society¹⁸. To do so, they both use terms extracted from Isaiah Berlin’s critique of positive freedom as the work of “system builders” (*Two Concepts of Liberty* 33), and Carl Menger’s *Untersuchungen über die Methode der Socialwissenschaften und der politischen Oekonomie insbesondere*. Escohotado reveals his Popperian affiliation when he criticises “closed societies” as those where the liberal concept of negative liberty formulated by Isaiah Berlin is not the priority: “Los pueblos educados son ricos, vivan donde vivan, mientras no resulten invadidos o vampirizados a distancia por sociedades cerradas” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.37). The point of view is pristine: only the liberal ideal of civil negative liberties can result from a cultivated society, while every other political and social model must be the product of ignorance, belligerence, of fanaticism.

Instead of adopting the more nuanced approach of many great recent books by Susan Wessel, Charles M. Stang, Joshua Parens, Eric Gregory, or Miles Hollingworth in order to provide a more accurate depiction of the historical

¹⁸ Escohotado does talk explicitly about a cultural and political monopoly: “Los dominios del primer y único Emperador santo son ya explícitamente una jaula, en cuyo interior tanto civiles como militares deben vivir y morir haciendo aquello que sus respectivos padres hicieron. Dos tercios de los altos funcionarios siguen siendo paganos, pero dejar de perseguir la intolerancia y otorgar privilegios al cristianismo basta para que lo minoritario vaya dejando de serlo. Al crecimiento espontáneo de la secta se añade un creciente monopolio no solo cultural sino administrativo, y en pocas décadas aquello que al pagano le parecía catastrófico se transmuta en fruto maduro de la filantropía evangélica” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.181).

processes, these sweeping judgements reemerge time after time. For example, when one reads Nixey's take on the Library of Alexandria, one cannot do anything but believe that it was destroyed by Christians: "The remains of the greatest library in the ancient world, a library that had once held perhaps 700,000 volumes, were destroyed in this way by Christians" (*The Darkening Age* xxxii). Escohotado also *has* to mention the episode if he wants to discredit the medieval, but then he surprises us with a moment of sincerity:

Comentaristas recientes constatan que ni los obispos Teófilo y Cirilo ni el califa Omar dejaron órdenes escritos, sumiendo así el asunto en profundas brumas, pues Gibbon –su principal acusador en materia de ambas quemas– no acaba de aclarar cuáles fueron sus fuentes para afirmarlo. Pero, ¿qué paso con la Biblioteca? [. . .] Algo tuvo que borrar del mapa un volume tan extraordinario de documentos acumulados durante siglos, cuya pérdida mutila sin remedio una parte considerable de la memoria humana. A falta de pruebas documentales, el hecho puede atribuirse a las ratas, ayudadas por incendios ligados a mero descuido; pero no es verosímil atribuirlo a un saqueo de particulares, pues pronto o tarde esta conducta habría revertido en nuevas copias. Menos aventurado parece ligar la desaparición de esas obras con una auténtica revolución cultural, que se aplicó igualmente a borrar las huellas de su propia empresa [. . .] Aunque carecemos de datos puntuales sobre el incendio de 415, abundan informaciones sobre la revolución cultural misma, que es fundamentalmente una consecuencia de tomar al pie de la letra el dogma de la Encarnación. (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.189-90)

Are not desires and preconceived ideas replacing fact and scholarly inquire? We can learn a great deal about the way wherein these matters are often dealt. First, Nixey and Escohotado rely exclusively on Gibbon to accuse both Christians and Muslims of their criminal acts against the intellectual history of humanity. Second, neither Gibbon nor anyone after him provided sources capable of proving their words. Third, this lack of documental proof is irrelevant, because

something as monumental as the Library must have been the work of a cultural revolution. Fourth, Christianity, and then Islam, represents the cultural revolution of the time, so it must have been them burning the Library to the ground. The fragment is full of intolerable euphemisms that justify Gibbon's undocumentedness ("profundas brumas," "no acaba de aclarar," "a falta de pruebas documentales," "carecemos de datos puntuales"...), but the worst is yet to come as Escohotado betrays his Popperian (who is a much more brilliant philosopher of science than he is a political philosopher) stance when he incurs in a line of reasoning that deflects the onus probandi as it resorts to arguments that avoid all falsifiability. Christians and Muslims scorched the Library of Alexandria. And if not, says the Volterian voice, "il faudrait l'inventer".

Beyond all documental blanks and interested historical reconstructions, one cannot fail to be surprised by the fact that both Nixey and Escohotado disregard the fact that the library had already been damaged by the Romans, specifically by Caesar and Aurelian. There is no evidence of the existence of books in the Serapeum, that received the legacy of the library of Alexandria as a place that preserved culture in that period. What the bona fide reader of Escohotado and Nixey will take away is thus the seemingly unquestionable idea of Christianity –and later Islam– as a vile sectarian movement that hated Classical culture for the sake of it. A culture that they wanted to be reduced to ashes. How can one think differently if she affirms that "Only one per cent of Latin literature survived the centuries. Ninety-nine percent was lost" (*The*

Darkening Age xxxii)? No evidence, no source is provided for this assumption, only prejudiced thinking against Christianity and the medieval philosophical debates. Yet the juxtaposition of these statements leads the reader to believe that this loss was deliberate caused as a part of a larger destructive plan against humanity's cultural apex. The argument is far from new. It is, verily, as old as Judaism and Christianity. During the first few centuries of our era, apologists and polemicists struggled to find the place of Christianity in the Ancient –to us, not to them– world. Judaism and its intellectual heritage have long been retained as impure, mixed, foreign, and unworthy in the same Mediterranean regions that conceived them.

Similar arguments about the purity of the Classical world have been part of academic debates since at least Gibbon's work. The nature of the two powers and the role of Christianity in the destruction or salvation of the Classical world has stirred millions of pages over the course of the centuries. From the apologists to the popes, the medieval kings, modern revolutionaries, Napoleon, or contemporary Spain, all have debated the peculiar condition of a religion that embodies the theopolitical to the point of being chiefly responsible for our understanding of the modern State. Among all the fora in which the matter emerges, few have been more vehement than the discussions that for two-thousand years have taken place in Rome and Italy. Since Nixey makes some claims that have been central to Italian society since at least the 19th century, it may be worth listening to how the heirs of Rome have formulated them in the

aulic sphere. A look at Italy's modern history can reveal that the question is far from being settled. An openness that justifies the exemplary intellectual labor of Agamben and Esposito, who are not afraid of putting theology and politics in the same sentence.

The legal and theoretical status of Christianity has been a commonplace in Italian history since at least the conversations which led to the confiscations of 1849, the expoliations of 1870, and the subsequent laws of 1871. The *Questione romana* remained a burning issue for decades, at least until Benito Mussolini thought of himself as the only one capable of solving it. The young socialist composed in 1904 the ferocious *L'uomo e la divinità. Dio non esiste* (*Man and Divinity: God Does Not Exist*), which he later ordained to be eliminated. In a brief article entitled "Karl Marx nel 25° anniversario della sua morte," he confronts Christianity and Marxism as opposed negative and affirmative forces: "Sente che il cristianesimo –come dottrina della rinunzia– ribadisce le catene di una doppia schiavitù economica e morale e proclama nel *Deutsch Brüsseler Zeitung* (1849) che 'i principî sociali del cristianesimo sono sornioni e il proletariato è rivoluzionario'" (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini I*, "Karl Marx nel 25° anniversario della sua morte" 102). His attitudes towards the Christian faith are also revealed in another youth pamphlet composed in 1908, "La filosofia della forza," Mussolini appears as one of those partial readers of Nietzschean socialism whose philosophy of force claims for the superuomo to triumph over

the rabble and over God Himself: “Tuttavia il superuomo trionferà sulla plebe e su Dio” (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini I*, “La filosofia della forza” 174-84).

After being expelled from the Partito Socialista Italiano in 1914 and becoming the leader of the Partito Nazionale Fascista he founded, Mussolini faces the challenge of dealing with the Church and the Roman question from the seat of the president. Allegedly retracting from his anticlerical views of youth, Mussolini, already Duce, and the representatives of the Church sign the *Pacta Lateranensia*, or Lateran Pacts, on February 11th 1929. Soon thereafter, Mussolini addressed the parliament, boastfully claiming to finally have tamed the Church, a beast which had been haunting the legitimate Italian governments since the days of the Empire. According to the official relation, only he, the Duce, had been capable of restraining the subversive power of an institution which does not fit in the politics of an age that claims to have overcome the theopolitical –George Steiner’s brilliant treatise, *Nostalgia for the Absolute* proved decades ago what this suppression normally entails–. Through a series of renewed pacts aimed at a sui generis understanding of Church and State separation, Mussolini gained social support and created the impression of having rebalanced the two powers traditionally distributed according to the *Duo Sunt* principles, as expressed in the letter from Pope Gelasius I to Emperor Anastasius in 494. Had the dictator found the desired balance between Antiquity and Christianity? The mirage vanished just a few weeks later when a new

battering of the Church is set forth by the dictator, who on May 13th 1929 addressed Congress saying:

Tuttavia mi sia concesso di riprendere la formula ‘Chiesa libera e sovrana: Stato libero e sovrano’. Possiamo trovarci di fronte a un equivoco: è urgente quindi chiarire le idee. Questa formula potrebbe far credere che ci sia la coesistenza di due sovranità. Un conto è la Città del Vaticano, un conto è il Regno d’Italia, che è lo Stato italiano. Bisogna persuadersi che tra lo Stato italiano e la Città del Vaticano c’è una distanza che si può valutare a migliaia di chilometri, anche se per avventura bastano cinque minuti per andare a vedere questo Stato e dieci per percorrerne i confini. Vi sono quindi due sovranità ben distinte, ben differenziate, perfettamente e reciprocamente riconosciute. Ma, nello Stato, la Chiesa non è sovrana e non è nemmeno libera. Non è sovrana ‘per la contraddizione che nol consente’: non è nemmeno libera, perché nelle sue istituzioni e nei suoi uomini è sottoposta alle leggi generali dello Stato ed è anche sottoposta alle clausole speciali del Concordato. Ragion per cui la situazione può essere così definita: Stato sovrano nel Regno d’Italia, Chiesa Cattolica con certe preminenze lealmente e volontariamente riconosciute; libera ammissione degli altri culti. (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XIV. Dagli accordi del Laterano al dodicesimo anniversario della fondazione dei Fasci: 12 febbraio 1929-23 marzo 1931, “Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati il giorno 13 maggio 1929”*)

The leader of the PNF holds one clear goal: Stressing in front of the parliament the magnitude of his victory, which he presents as that of the political over the theological –parallel to that of the national over the foreign, as monotheism came from “Palestina”–. Mussolini thinks of himself as the reinstator of the imperial over the foreign, medieval forces that had led the country astray. Due to the seemingly too munificent terms of the Pacts, the leader feels the need to reattest that 1929 was the year in which the illegitimate control of Italy by the religious and the foreign, a control that had lasted for centuries, had finally been reduced to its natural sphere. The Concordate is, then, far from being an accord

of two hearts, but a submission of the Church to the State. The Church is to be governed by the terms of the Concordate, rendering it a body politic which is far from what the detractors claimed it to be, that is, free and sovereign. The “Chiesa non è sovrana e non è nemmeno libera,” it is not sovereign, and it is not even free. The State graciously allows it to exist in a model that, according to Mussolini, does not privilege it over “degli altri culti”. Withal, his attempt to demarcate the two realms in a way that reminds of the seminal *Duo Sunt*, where “There are two powers, august Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. Of these that of the priests is the weightier, since they have to render an account for even the kings of men in the divine judgment” (*Duo Sunt*; np). The duce cannot help but recognize the peculiar, privileged theopolitical nature of Italy in History, but does so by inverting the primacy of the *Duo Sunt*. This subverted duality is acknowledged by Mussolini, who reminds his audience:

Prima constatazione: l'Italia ha il privilegio singolare, di cui dobbiamo andare orgogliosi, di essere l'unica Nazione europea che è sede di una religione universale. Questa religione è nata nella Palestina, ma è diventata cattolica a Roma. Altra constatazione: nei primi otto secoli del cristianesimo non vi è traccia di principato civile nella storia della Chiesa: ci sono soltanto, specialmente durante e dopo Costantino, alcune proprietà più o meno vaste che formano il nucleo primigenio del Patrimonio di San Pietro. (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XIV. Dagli accordi del Laterano al dodicesimo anniversario della fondazione dei Fasci: 12 febbraio 1929-23 marzo 1931, “Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati il giorno 13 maggio 1929”*)

This more or less distorted genealogy of the Church and the Papal States allows Mussolini to prove that the only reason why the Palestinian sect became a

universal Church is that it happened to stumble upon the unparalleled political and ideological structures of Rome. The Church only eventually aspired to rule over the temporal because “Italian” –claiming direct continuation of a golden past is a common device in historical totalitarianism– rulers so permitted it.

This seizure of preexisting Roman structures as the main reason why Christianity went from sect to world religion is, then, an argument shared by scholars from the Enlightenment, the unfortunate genealogical reconstruction of fascism, and the critical eye of contemporary authors such as Nixey and Escohotado. The goals may be different, but the underlying idea is that the Classical world is a pure entity which was corrupted and interestedly dominated by an impure sect of foreign ideas¹⁹. More often than not, this idealization of Antiquity and disdain of the medieval derives in a genetic argument of racial superiority and contamination. The Nietzsche-connection is evident in the case of the young Mussolini, but the truth is that the association well exceeds –and largely distorts– the Nietzschean school of thought, extensively influencing present-day scholarship. The feared Dark Ages are what happens when the weak ideas of weak, foreign people poison the mighty individualism of a golden past. Mussolini, who feels closer to the emperors than to kings or popes, is

¹⁹ In the eyes of Escohotado, not even the 4th and 5th century can be considered as times of full-fledged democracy, restricting his praise to the time between Solon, Cleisthenes, and Pericles (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.52; also 58-60). Not surprisingly, he blames the Spartans for singlehandedly destroying the great democratic achievements of Athens. That same city that Thebans and Corinthians wanted to erase after its colonialist excesses. The same one which survived only because of the will of the Lacedaemonians.

determined to revive the imperial age. And that requires returning it to its Pre-Christian, pure state.

In his valuable study, *La Chiesa di Mussolini, i rapporti tra fascismo e religione*, Giovanni Sale reports that Mussolini's genealogical outlook presented in front of congress is the reason why he was convinced that "se il cristianesimo delle origini era diventato cattolico lo doveva soltanto alla potenza e all'estensione dell'impero romano: se fosse rimasto nella Palestina sarebbe stato una setta religiosa come tante altre e probabilmente col tempo si sarebbe spento, senza lasciare traccia di sé" (*La Chiesa di Mussolini, i rapporti tra fascismo e religione* XXX). It is only because of Rome's strength that Christianity, originally a Palestinian sect, becomes a global power.

The problem with Mussolini's argument starts with the alleged sequence. He assumes that Christianity only became Catholic –universalist– once it was imbued with the universalist push of Rome. Otherwise, he claims, the sect would have never left the desert and caves of Judea. His inability to understand the religion that his own beloved nation had come to embody is proven even by the most superficial reading of the New Testament. As opposed to the self-contained demarcation of most Mediterranean cults and even most Jewish manifestations, which have historically relied in restricted forms of proselytism –commonly, blood or close-range custom based– or no proselytism at all, Christianity sides in this case, not with Sparta's seclusionism, but with the inclusive expansionism of Athens, Macedonia, Carthage, Persia, or Rome. The

chronology of the voyages and letters written by the father of universalism, according to Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, refutes Mussolini's view. Well before even having had a chance to being exposed to Rome's universalism in 60 AD – 61 AD, Saint Paul had already preached in some of the most prominent poleis of the ancient world, including Damascus (37 AD – 40 AD), Antioch (41 AD), and Judea (58 AD – 60 AD). He had also written radically “Catholic,” universalist, letters to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Galatians.²⁰

An exciting note arises from one of the Pact's natural consequences. The PNF and the Kingdom of Italy recognized the historical role of the Church and conceded to institute a new incarnation of Papal States in the form of the Vatican, but that did not mean that, at least in the impression that Mussolini chooses to share with his parliamentary audience, Christians should be favored at all over the other religions. Explicitly mentioning that the Romanity of Catholicism will not lead to a favorable treatment, he interjects that this does not mean at all that the Synagogues should close: “Questo carattere sacro di Roma noi lo rispettiamo. Ma è ridicolo pensare, come fu detto, che si dovessero chiudere le Sinagoghe!” (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XIV*, “Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati il giorno 13 maggio 1929”). Who will

²⁰ Escohotado tries to solve the incongruence of Mussolini and other interpreters by claiming that true Christianity –which in his eyes aligns with arrianism and the Judeochristian thought less influenced by Greek culture– was replaced by a distorted understanding of the Gospels due to the presence of Hellenizing philosophical and theological ideas in Catholicism.

cleanse and control the dark, medieval forces of Christianity but an emperor? Many have attempted it, but only Mussolini can achieve to refound a new Roman Empire. In his eyes, fascism is, it has to be, the logical culmination to a millennia-long process:

Vi è stato il logico risultato di determinate premesse storiche, morali e politiche. Io ho continuato la strada che molti avevano percorsa fino ad un certo punto: essi non arrivarono in fondo, il Fascismo v'è arrivato! (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XIV*, “Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati il giorno 13 maggio 1929”)

Ultimately, Mussolini reveals the source of the empire's –and his– grandiosity:

“Se voi togliete dalla storia del mondo la storia dell'Impero romano, non resta che poco [. . .] Roma è sacra, perché fu capitale dell'Impero e ci ha lasciato le norme del suo Diritto e le sue reliquie venerabili e memorabili” (*Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XIV*, “Discorso pronunciato alla Camera dei Deputati il giorno 13 maggio 1929”). He does later recognize that Rome is also “sacred” because of the role of Christianity, but again, Christians only stopped being a sect and became universal because they learned from Rome.

Flauntingly praising the city's glory eventually lead to Mussolini's ultimate goal which is no other than becoming the Duce Fondatore dell'Impero. Although when he spoke in 1929 he was still the president of a Constitutional Monarchy (Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri del Regno d'Italia), he would eventually reclaim a title, Primo maresciallo dell'Impero, which after the African campaigns and starting on April 2nd 1938 would clash against the royal legitimacy in a race for the control of the “empire”. At the end of the day,

Mussolini's idealized interpretation of the Roman Empire, a pagan Roman Empire that has been healed from medieval and foreign parasites, is not dissimilar from that of modern readers who see the irruption of Christianity as a contamination and perversion of the Empire's noble mission and Antiquity's moral superiority over the following periods. Despite the persistence of these claims in contemporary scholarship, there have to be more nuanced techniques to analyze Antiquity and Christianity.

Otherwise, Christians are child-eating barbarians whose only goal was destroying the lofty Classical antiquity that they recognized as superior. That is why centuries of apologetics display how Christians obstinately commented on the sources of Ancient authors. Even in the case of the polemic texts, the fact that Christians attempt to detach themselves from the culture of their time proves that they were very much aware of being a part of it.

The transcendental clash between pure Antiquity and impure Christianity that Nixey and others present is just one more of the historical processes which take place during Late Antiquity. Judaism, Hellenism, Latinity, Christianity, and soon thereafter the Germanic views all meet around the Mediterranean in a series of decisive, complex struggles for power. The difference in the case of Christianity and Rome is that both projects collide, not just in the consuetudinary, biopolitical distribution of the sensible, but also in regards to their ultimate universalizing purview. It is this universalism –or need for totalization– that makes the conflict special. Centuries earlier, Sparta and

Athens had combated in similar circumstances, but the conflict could be resolved because the triumphant faction of the Lacedaemonians had no intention of becoming a totalizing power like that of Athens's expansionist League and Empire. Rome and the Christians, on the other hand, will eventually fight for the same space, as their universalism demands full commitment to one, exclusive, law and master. Judaism and many other cults had been tolerated and repressed at times, as happened in the case of other political powers. But it is only with Christianity that Rome faces a religion with political ambitions – Judaism had them indeed– that aspires, not to build a nation, but to overflow nations. The universalism of the Christian faith after Saint Paul –not haphazardly expressed in the Letter to the Romans– is perceived by the imperial forces as a threat to the imperial theopolitical balance. It is perceived as a rival empire to be. Whereas Hellenistic Judaism dreamed of healing the exodial wounds and reclaim what had been theirs, Roman Christians do not represent a theological or political threat, but a theopolitical one. In this sense, Roman traditionalists were right at interpreting Christian universalism as an alternative to the Empire. One that would eventually render it obsolete.

Interpretatio Christiana

What is the *modus operandi* of the *interpretatio christiana*? Werner Jaeger's analysis of Greek education in his monumental *Paideia* is complemented by the brief treatise on *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. As he argues, the "process

of the Christianization of the Greek-speaking world within the Roman Empire was by no means one-sided, for at the same time it meant the Hellenization of the Christian religion” (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* 5). The influence was thus mutual meaning that besides spreading on the Mediterranean, the Christians ended up using not only Greek literary forms, such as the epistle, following the model of Greek philosophers, but also the Greek language itself as a means to provide Christianity with new words and meanings: “With the Greek language a whole world of concepts, categories of thought, inherited metaphors and subtle connotations of meaning enters the Christian thought” (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* 6). Christianity was able to assimilate non-Christian knowledge to survive and to legitimize itself as a continuation of Classical culture. Jaeger remarks this idea stating that “even the word ‘conversion’ stems from Plato, for adopting a philosophy meant a change of life in the first place” (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* 10). Far from annihilating its past, Christianity preserves it by translating Classical ideas into its doctrine.

Three simple examples should provide an understanding of this interpretive machine: 1) the concepts of *persona*, 2) *enemy*, and 3) *province*. *Persona* is a working legal concept in the Latin world. But only when Christians rescue from oblivion the Greek word, *prosopon* –gr. πρόσωπον–, does it become the subject behind the mask. Not just the body, the atom of a species, but an individual with its own specific features and identity. A person. In an ambitious development, this allows Christians to solve technical problems such as who

owns the books, the walls, and whatever these may contain? This is not a futile question, as none of the members of the original religious community can legitimately access to private property. None of the monks as persons, but all of them as *persone giuridiche* or *juridical persons* –an expression that to this day remains fully operative in the Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian legal terminologies. This theoretical need propitiates the proliferation of a plethora of corporate entities such as consortiums, trusts, companies, societies and, in an extremely telling term, *incorporations*, as in the creation of a new body of business out of its members.

Regarding the concepts of enmity, it would seem that there is not much to say after Agamben's brilliant dialogue with Carl Schmitt's works. Instead, his reshaping of the key players, *inimicus* and *hostis*, does leave place to a third term that experienced the opposite process. The Greek concept of *diabolos* –gr. διάβολος– shows how Christians often took words from either the cultivated or the patrimonial lexicon and turned them into new notions. A *diabolos* in Greek is an enemy. Any enemy. Werner Jaeger proved decades ago how the employment of Greek philosophical concepts was instrumental to the triumph of Christianity. Coherently, once this *interpretatio* is set forth, the Greek and Latin equivalents after the Christian's influx will see their meanings restricted into a very specific enemy. The utmost enemy of mankind and God himself, that is, the Devil. These quick examples show the insistence of Christians in recycling existing institutions and words. Recycling that is not merely a re-cycling, but a

Deleuzian repetition through difference in which the former now serves a different purpose and opens a new door.

The third example is a most visible one. If *persona* tells us about the subtle introduction of broad concepts that contribute to a worldview and *diabolos* is a privileged example of theopolitically oriented linguistic change, the word *diocese*, also *diocess*, perfectly summarizes Christianity's procedures in regards to cultural subversion. Derived from *dioikein* –gr. διοικειν–, the term means, strictly, the administration of what is inhabited; the management of the house²¹. The enthralling history of this word attests how a Greek term is loaned into Latin, not as an exact synonym of a pre-existing concept, but in order to name an analogous but also new reality. And, by naming it in the receiving language, it incorporates it into the culture of Rome. Specifically, the *diocesis* –gr. διοικησις– became in Latin the replacement word for the former *provinciae* –*archeparchy* in Eastern Christianity–²². There is no certainty about the etymology of *provincia*, but

²¹ “Administration” represents a deeper synonym to “management”. While the latter, *maneggiare* in Italian but more than likely derived from an unattested vulgar Latin form, refers to “controlling with the hands,” *administrare* only later became to mean “control, perform, or execute a task”. Its original sense of “serving” has unfortunately vanished in most institutions, that now just see administration as, using the American Founding Father’s terminology, taxation and control without necessarily serving its “clientele” (another key term to the history of Rome, particularly in the clientelar confrontation between Pompey, Cesar, and Crassus which precedes the Civil War). The Church employs *administrare* in the sense of serving the people by “supplying or dispensing” the sacraments.

²² As per usual, Oxford’s dictionaries provide insightful etymological resources: “medieval Latin *diocēsis*, for Latin *diocēsis* a governor’s jurisdiction, a district, in later ecclesiastical Latin a bishop’s jurisdiction, a diocese, < Greek *διοίκησις*, originally ‘housekeeping’, hence ‘management, administration, government, the province of a (Roman) governor’, and in Byzantine Greek ‘a bishop’s jurisdiction, a diocese’, < *διοικειν* to keep house, to manage, administer, govern, < *δι-*, *δια-* through, thoroughly + *οικειν* to inhabit, occupy, manage” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “diocese”).

it is not uncommon to claim that this unit of political power comes from *provincere*, or defeating for and incorporating to the Empire. On the other hand, *diocesis*, refers to control, not by force, but through service and ministerium. It means taking care, supplying, and furnishing the household. In Greek, the political use of the word is first found in South Anatolia, so it is another purely Mediterranean product coming from one of the strategic regions in which monasticism, as most hybridizations between Judaism, Hellenism, and Latinity do flourish. The implementation of the dioceses in Rome responds to the Tetrarchy's desperate attempt of 305 AD by which Diocletian finally overcomes, as he had done in 284 AD, the imperial crisis of the late second century. Constantine, mostly responsible for the retheopolitization –not anymore Pagan and Jewish, but Christian– of Rome, would then turn the dioceses into key administrative units which Christians helped survive even after the fall of the empire and the waning of Antiquity. To this day, dioceses are the basic geopolitical units within the Church's organization. No matter how many times repeated, it is just incorrect to say that Christians theologized Rome, as the religious had always essential to the political understanding of the Roman body politic, from the divinity of the archaic kings and pharaohs to that of Julius Caesar, divinized as *Divus Iulius* in 42 BC, and the imperial lineage incoated by emperor Divus Augustus.

This is not new. The state formation in the Greek world also shares the same dynamic, in which religion played a crucial role in the creation of *koina*.

Emily Mackil addresses this same process in her detailed work, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the making of the Greek Koinon*. She argues that “religious communities existed prior to the formation of particular political communities, and the former had a deep impact on the creation of the latter” (*Creating a Common Polity* 149). Shared sanctuaries and common cults developed a sense of group identity that later assumed economic networks for their own benefit. The final stage of this three-step process towards the creation of the state.

Going back to the Roman context, it is always worth remembering that Caesar’s road to fame began when he was invested *pontifex maximus*, a life-tenured religious dignity. What Christians did do, though, is subverting the religious pantheon and the meaning of essential concepts such as *auctoritas* in order to use Rome’s structures to their advantage. From this more measured perspective, Christians did not theologize Rome, but retheologized it in a time in which the very nature of the Empire was in question. Unlike Gibbons, Nixey, Escohotado, and other enlightened interpreters that read this as a destruction of the classical world, Christianity’s deep reliance in Greek, Jewish, and Roman ideas, institutions, and practices suggests otherwise. The intimate connection to the classical is visible in the unmeasurable number of authoritative quotes of pagan authors by Christian apologists. Greece and Rome were part of their attempt to legitimize the new religion in a time in which Jews were being expelled and persecuted, and sundry Mediterranean poleis had lost their step.

The debate remains open, though: Did Christians destroy the Classical world, or did they build something from its ruins?

Be it as it may, these are just some instances that exposes the seams of the processes through which Anti-Nicene Christians went from celebrating private, secret cults inside the *domus ecclesiae* to a transformation of Rome's preexisting infrastructure in order to serve a different purpose. The new project, I must insist, is not any less or more theological than that of pagan Rome or Athens, since theopolitics are as old as Mediterranean cities are. This turn is a giant's step in the construction of the Middle Ages and Modernity.

A myriad of other Greek loanwords introduced into Latin by Christian thinkers includes *parousia* –gr. παρουσία, which is not any more political in the sense of a ruler's introductory parade, but the celebration of Christ's arrival–; or *parabole* –gr. παραβολή, not anymore any word, but that of God on Earth–. Finally, one could think of how *maiestas*, the legally recognized highness of the Roman emperor as a public authority, lost its relevance and started to be restricted to the only being worthy of this admiration, God himself –and in some traditions Mary as the subject of *hyperdulia* or highest adoration despite her human nature–.

The *interpretatio christiana* continues to traverse the same path of the Greek, Roman, Phoenician, and Jewish devices of cultural interpretation. This reflection helps us reach one of the essential declared purposes of this study. My study of the political phenomenon known as Laconophilia, together with

that of the religious polities risen during the Ancient period in the Eastern-Mediterranean is far from a random choice. I argue, instead, that these Greek and Eastern-Mediterranean polities provided Christians the elements to renew Roman purview from within. It is not just that Christians took over Rome and made its law serve the new God, as per Catherine Nixey's hypothesis in the recent *The Darkening Age*. They identified the limitations, the points of fracture of what had been a distinctly successful system and used their knowledge of the Greek and Jewish world in order to create a new type of polity. What they did, more than anything else, is inserting a new understanding of the subject in the pilot cabin of the old machine.

There is nothing new about this procedure. Interpreters called the Greek ability to absorb foreign cultural traits *interpretatio graeca*, a mechanism that the Romans inherited as *interpretatio romana*. This "translation" of cultural and theopolitical features was not foreign to Christians, who at the end of the day are as classical as their pagan counterparts. So it is not accurate to say, as we keep saying, that Christians turned the ancient world into a theocentric purview. They employed the exact same mechanisms that Grecians and Romans had been using for centuries to inculturate, appropriate, select, and use existing cultural elements. That is why the most creditable way to understand this process is by talking of *interpretatio christiana*.

The resulting world of the *interpretatio romana* would be Occident's most potent polity in history. That resulting from the *interpretatio christiana*, the shaping

of the medieval and modern world as we know it. The new worldview results in a body politic that combines the universalist pulsion of Rome with Athens's philosophical innovations, the ascetic virtues of Sparta, and the monotheistic principles of Judaism. An uncircumscribed polity that will attempt to expand the formerly localist intent of Mediterranean communitarian groups and city-states in a way that differs from Athens and Carthage's expansionism. A new world order built upon a rebalancing between the individual and the commons.

What does this incommensurability show us? First and foremost, it reveals that Roman law and Christian theology would have remained irreconcilable *ad infinitum* unless one of the forces introduced changes in its very core that allowed for the synthesis to materialize. We often say that medieval monarchies, and Abrahamic political thought in general, are the product of a politicization of the theological. The theological dogma would have been reinforced by a series of political institutions and devices aimed at solidifying a type of polis reflective of the religious ideals. This is the most common understanding of theocracy, and it is still visible in the prestigious

Oxford English Dictionary:

A form of government in which God (or a deity) is recognized as the king or immediate ruler, and his laws are taken as the statute-book of the kingdom, these laws being usually administered by a priestly order as his ministers and agents; hence (loosely) a system of government by a sacerdotal order, claiming a divine commission; also, a state so governed: esp. applied to the commonwealth of Israel from the exodus to the election of Saul as king. (*OED*, "theocracy")

What I want to reconsider here, on the contrary, is how Christianity owes much of its success to its ability to use preexisting political structures derived from Jewish, Roman, and Hellenistic polities. And, more importantly, how could they do so while introjecting the essential aspects of its worldview. It is not so much a cultural replacement, but a cultural reshaping, for ex nihilo cultural production seems like an utopian fancy. That is why we now have to discuss the presence of Philo-Spartan –via Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch– and Philo-Judaic, or more specifically, Philo-Hellenistic-Judaic, principles in the early theopolitical projects of Christians that led to the production of the modern self.

II
POLITICAL KOINA

Sources of Monasticism

After the Egyptian debacle recounted in the Exodus, Jewish political theology seeks to provide the *politeia* for a missing nation. Conversely, Christianity creates a “nation” for its polis. Instead of designing the theopolitical structures that should support the Jewish people –or, in Flavius Josephus’s terms, race–, Christian thinkers do not have a specific group, bloodline, or nation to administer. Theirs is not an outwards, but an inwards exodus. They did not exist before losing their nation, but they have come to realize that need some form of body politic to incarnate the new worldview. Thus, early Christians are messengers looking for a “nation.” And I say “nation” because theirs is neither the 19th-Century idea of Herderian nationality, nor veterotestamentary blood lineage: Christians are not children of the *patria*, but of the *Pater*. As such, Christianity is conceived from its very beginning as a universalist project to transcend all nations. The rite of passage does not have anything to do with the family, *gens*, or class in which one happens to be born, but with the theological conviction that humans are born in the image and likeness.

Although a galore of Anti-Nicene Christians presented themselves as independent from the ancient world and profoundly detached from their nations, cultures, and contexts, the truth is that all of them belonged to either the Roman tradition, Hellenic Judaism, or any of the more or less local Mediterranean cultures. As such, their political and religious edifice draws

vehemently from the very same existing models that they criticized. This, though, does not necessarily prove William Frend's sweeping judgment that "there is nothing, apart from Christ, that is original in the teaching of the New Testament" (*Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* 79). Although Pier Cesare Bori has convincingly refuted this hypothesis in the final pages of his *Chiesa primitiva*, I will hereby test this hypothesis again by studying the political theories to which Christians were exposed, subsequently moving to the existing religious practices at the time of Tiberius. Building upon the canonical ecclesiological works of Heinrich Seesemann (*Der Begriff Koinonia im Neuen Testament*), and Friedrich Hauck ("Koinon-im Neuen Testament"), Bori speaks of several "paraleli extrabiblici," and "paraleli veterotestamentari". This dissertation focuses on the first type, the extra biblical sources or parallelisms, which I attempt to classify according to the prevalence of the political or the theological²³. There is no clear differentiation between the two types of sources, but this artificial division may still be useful for the sake of tidiness.

Because of its hybrid nature, the incipient Christian sect learns from the practices and customs of existing religious polities along the Mediterranean. But not only. Apart from continuing the hermetic traditions of Pythagoreans, Orphics, and other groups such as the Essenes, primitive Christianity inhabits

²³ In her 1996 *The Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: The High Christology of Philippians 3:7-11*, Veronica Koperski provided what still is one of the most efficient summaries of Seesemann's contribution, who created a triadic taxonomy of the koinonia as "Mitteilsamkeit (giving a share in/contributing to), Teilnahme/Anteilhaben (having a share in), and Gemeinschaft (association/community)" (246).

a peculiar universe sitting half-way between Hellenism, Latinity, and Middle Eastern worldviews. Thus, their political planning is heavily influenced by the principles of Mediterranean utopian thought and thinkers from Plato onwards, as his works are particularly compatible also in theological terms. The impact of these mystical traditions and cults such as Pythagoreanism and Orphism has been widely studied, including the phenomenal work by Miguel Herrero de Jaúregui, *Tradición órfica y cristianismo antiguo (Orphism and Christianity in Late Antiquity)*. Because of this, I want to contribute by suggesting that apart from the cultural context provided by Hellenic Judaism, Neoplatonist philosophy, and Roman law, the specific case of the first Christian communities owes a great deal to the structure of some social bodies around the Mediterranean. Specifically, I am going to prehend the idealized reception of the Spartan constitutions and how it provided Socrates and Plato their essential political principles then inherited by both Hellenistic and Roman Christians.

Late Ancient Body Politics

In the fourth book of the *Republic*, Plato reflects on the purpose of politics and life saying that “in founding the city we are not looking to the exceptional happiness of any one group among us but, as far as possible, that of the city as a whole” (*Republic* 420b). Not the individual. Not a specific group, class, or gens. If only within its walls, the polis is a means to universalizing happiness –*eudaimonia*– and justice –*Dike*, also “judgment, virtue, divine justice,

natural justice”–. The elusive nature of this concept has, paradoxically, contributed to its endurance as *telos* or *Lebensziel* across civilizations, cultures, and traditions. One of the key texts stemming from a Neoplatonic background, Saint Augustine’s *Civitate Dei*, the *City of God*, defines *beatitudo*, the highest species of happiness, as the supreme goal of rational beings: “non est creaturae rationalis uel intellectualis bonum, quo beata sit, nisi Deus” (“there is no other good for the rational or intellectual creature save God only” [*City of God* XII.I.2]). Coherently, the purpose of the rational polity must be that of returning to the angelic state of the shared, communal good: “communi omnibus bono, quod ipse illis Deus est” (“the common good of all, namely, in God Himself” [*City of God* XII.I.2]). In recent times, nowhere has this happiness more prominently arisen than in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, whose reappropriation of *eudaimonia* as ultimate political goal eminently inspired the foundations of our world. Save for some variations that would result in the 1776 Pennsylvania State House *Declaration of Independence*, the draft proclaims: “We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness” (*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson I*, 243-47). Jefferson, Franklin and those present in Philadelphia at the time were reassured that, in the modern world, founding a city is not enough to pursue happiness. A nation is needed.

How does one found a city? Hobbes, Plato, Rousseau, Locke... Everyone has spoken about the types of polities and their beginnings. But few treatises have discussed this question in a more acute way than a literary work by contemporary Cuban author Alejo Carpentier. Published in 1953, *Los pasos perdidos* transports us to the rainforests where, an intellectual protagonist is bewitched by the wonders of the uncivilized world. The novel's no-turning-back point takes place when the protagonist, who is beholding the foundational opportunities of the outside of civilization, ponders: "Fundar una ciudad. Yo fundo una ciudad. Él ha fundado una ciudad. Es posible conjugar semejante verbo. Se puede ser Fundador de una Ciudad. Crear y gobernar una ciudad que no figure en los mapas, que se sustraiga a los horrores de la Época, que nazca así, de la voluntad de un hombre, en este mundo del Génesis" (*Obras escogidas*, "Los pasos perdidos" 330). Establish, found, create. "Mere" human verbs which embody, though, the peculiar nature of those speech acts studied decades ago by Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*), Martinich ("Sacraments and Speech Acts"), and more recently Agamben (*Il sacramento del linguaggio. Archeologia del giuramento*). Words which are words, plus something else. This includes sacraments, declarations, oaths and, naturally, foundations. Arisen from existing conventions, these speech acts have the ability to create new conventions. And there is no bigger convention than a city, which is precisely a set of those.

Yet, how does one create a city –or a nationless-nation– from scratch? Christians were not the first to do it, but prior to them, the idea had almost

always remained in the realm of utopianism since few traditions aspired to achieve their peculiar balance between the local and the universal. Proof of this deeply rooted ambition is the fact that fifteen hundred years later, the Spaniards arriving in the Dominican Republic, Peru, or California saw the event as an opportunity to, finally, be able to create cities free from all determinations and, as per Phillip the Second's American decrees, free from the vices of Western societies. It all first started in the form of small communities within the empire. Subsequently, increasingly regulated, yet still, independent communities arose. Then, after Constantine, the attempt at universalizing the project through the definition of a worldwide polity, the *Corpus Mysticum*, or political Body of Christ on Earth becomes apparent. According to Ernst H. Kantorowicz and Giorgio Agamben the modern concepts of monarchy and state derive from this mystical body of political knowledge. In the Renaissance, one last attempt at conforming this global-local system was conceived by humanists under the idea of the *Universitas Christiana*. This model, which represents the ultimate degree of nationless communalization, failed irremediably after the fragmentation of Christianity and the rise of the modern nation states. Ever since, transnational projects such as the European Union have always departed from the post-reformed, post-national premises of the 19th century, thus never really aspiring at achieving much more than a shared economic framework or, at best, a sort of shared Geist which nonetheless assumes the irreconcilability of the "preexisting" nations.

The ancient period determines the rising Middle Ages in most surprising ways. Luckily, the most influential communitarian political projects in the Mediterranean from which early Christians were able to learn have been studied by D. Dawson in his remarkable *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*. The bibliographical spectrum, which includes the contributions of Plato, the stoics, or the cynics, covers a range of mental experiments, idealized descriptions, and actual city planning. A transversal motive can be perceived: Even in the case of illustrious Athenian authors, most utopists regard Sparta as a sort of perfect worldly polity. This Laconophilia –the predilection for Spartan ideals and institutions– finds its way into the modern world via Socrates, Plato, and their readers. Familiar with Plato’s works, the Christians would take many pages from the Laconophile’s book in their longing for the heavenly city on Earth. This process shows that Laconophilia is not exactly restricted to the valorization of Lacedaemonian ideals just because of the historical success of Sparta, but suggests instead that some of the values of the Lacedaemonian society –humility, fraternity, equality, simplicity, permanence, continuity...– were strong enough to inspire the dreams of lawgivers, thinkers, and even theologians to come. This way, the Great Rhetra, foundational speech-act of Sparta, becomes much more than just the half-mythical, half-historical law of the city. It becomes the living proof of an ideal state conceived from top to bottom which, in its promise of an extremely close-knit community, continues

to spark radical alternatives to the statu quo. What, then, is the nature of the concept of *politeia* to which early Christians are exposed?

Political Sources of Monasticism: Before Socrates

Scattered evidence of communitarian endeavors can be gathered from the works of historians Xanthus of Lydia (5th century BC), Ephorus of Cyme (400-330 BC), and Theopompus of Chios (380-315 BC). Later on, the crucial contributions of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle turn the historical debate into a systematic reflection on the nature of the individual and the commons.

Like many authors from the period, our access to Xanthus of Lydia's works is indirect. Heavily quoted by Strabo, Pliny, Stephanus of Byzantium, around the year 450BC he composed an influential history, the *Lydiaca*, and at least one other treatise entitled *Magica*. A relevant fragment of the *Magica* is legated by Clement of Alexandria, who quotes it in his *Stromata* III.515²⁴. This apparently minor work reveals the indelible association between communitarianism and the religious: "Xanthus autem in iis quae inscribuntur *Magica*: Coeunt, inquit, Magi cum matribus suis et filiabus: et fas esse aiunt coire cum sororibus, et communes esse uxores, non vi et clam, sed utriusque

²⁴ According to Alberto Díaz Tejera, Xanthus's *Lydiaca* belongs to a class of pre-Herodotian and pre-Tucididean national histories, together with Dyonisus of Mileto's *Persica* (*Opera selecta* 286). I refer to Karl Wilhelm Ludwig Müller's edition for the *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum* (I.36-44).

consentientibus, quum velit alter ducere uxorem alterius” (*Magica* §28)²⁵. According to Xanthus, this polity of Magi, practiced one of the most radical aspects of utopian communism, a voluntary community of the bodies which interrupts the expectations and, according to Plato, limitations of the family. A radical sharing of goods and even renunciation to property could be inferred, but regardless of the model embodied by the Magi, there is little doubt that their administration prefigures that of the Therapeutae –also known as Essenes–, the Second Temple Jewish sect which would transmit classical communitarian thought into monotheism.

Apart from Xanthus, another major player in the transmission of ancient historiography is Diodorus Siculus’s, an eminent Greek-Italic historian who lived from 90-30 BC, *Bibliotheca historica* (xvi.76). This compendium of previous historical works helped save significant fragments that belong, among many others, to the *History* authored by Ephorus of Cyme. Famous for covering the decisive period between 480 BC – 340 BC, Ephorus’s relation of the Sacred War continues to inspire imaginative and heavily fictionalized revisions of the

²⁵ The elaboration of self-aware national histories is as burning of a topic today as it was in Archaic Greece, from Xanthus and Herodotus to Walter Benjamin. A feverish case in the Spanish-speaking world is Pedro Sánchez’s recently contested doctoral dissertation. In a manner not dissimilar to Xanthus’s historiographical practice, Spain’s current president vindicates the need to “Potenciar el aspecto comercial de la Marca España” (Pedro Sánchez, *Innovaciones de la diplomacia económica española: análisis del sector público (2000-2012)* 295), effectively coupling economic thrive to effective political projection. Sánchez’s words, the source of the controversy, are a verbatim record of an article published five years earlier by Jaime Cerviño and Jaime Rivera, entitled “La globalización de las marcas españolas: liderazgo y notoriedad internacional”.

age²⁶. A capital passage of his reaches our time thanks to Strabo's paleographical labor:

Sunt enim quidam de vagis seu Nomadibus Scythis qui equorum lacte vescuntur, *justitia omnibus hominibus superiores*: quorum et poetae meminerunt. [. . .] Subjicit deinde caussam, *quod quum exili utantur victu, neque sint quaestui dediti, sed invicem vitam degant justam, omnia habentes communia, et uxores et liberos ac cognatos: tum adversus exteros invicti sint atque inexpugnabiles, quod nihil habeant, cujus caussa servitutum sustinere velint*. Citatque Choerilum, qui in ponte rarium, quo Darius Hellespontum junxit, haec posuerit: 'Pastores ovium Scythica de gente creati Asida triticeam clarorum habitare coloni integritate Sacae'. Ephorus porro Anacharsidem, *cui sapientis nomen tribuit, ea de gente fuisse scribit, ac propter perfectionem, temperantiam ac sapientiam unum de septem sapientibus habitum*. [. . .] 'Ut quum forte rotam manibus solertibus aptam explorat figulus'. Verum id volui significare, communi quadam et priscorum et posteriorum fama creditum fuisse, *Nomadum eos, qui maxime ab aliis hominibus essent remoti, lacte vesci, opibus carere et esse justissimos*, neque id fuisse ab Homero confictum. Ineptus Ephorus, qui Anacharsin ancoram ancipitem invenisse putat, quum tamen Argonautae Anacharsin aetate antecesserint. (*History IV*, §76; *Ephori Fragmenta* 256; emphasis mine)²⁷

Strabo is a contemporary of Diodorus Siculus, which suggests that the historians of the late Republic and early Empire had good reasons to become invested in studying the pre-Socratic sources as a means to understanding their

²⁶ Polybius claims that the Ephorus's works constitute the first attempt at creating a world-history (33.2).

²⁷ Choerilus's passage quoted by Ephorus refers to some "pastores," or shepherds from the Hellespont area over which Darius the Great (550-486 BC) reigned. The Hellespont and the Black Sea, true fulcra between Asia and Europe, have historically been inhabited by some of the most radical –and peculiar– collectivist communities, such as the Morlaci or Morlachs. These communities of "pastores" from the time of Darius experienced a resurgence, this time in the form of Christian polities, parallel to the rise of the reformed religious orders in the urban world during the 14th and 16th centuries. The identity of the Morlachs, whose values strikingly resemble the laconism of the primitive Church, has been studied by Ela Cosma in "Vlahii Negri. Silviu Dragomir despre identitatea morlacilor" (Ioan-Aurel Pop, ed. *Silviu Dragomir. 120 de ani de la nastere*. Universitatii din Oradea, 2011). To this day, a reduced number of European citizens still identify themselves as Morlachs.

own transitional period. Coherently, Strabo's comment on the passage stresses Ephorus's use of classical sources and how they may contribute to the enterprise of describing a people of exiguous, measured and moderate persons who have it all in common: "quod quum exili utantur victu, neque sint quaestui dediti, sed invicem vitam degant justam, omnia habentes communia" (*History IV*, §76). Thus, the tension between the renunciation to family, goods, and will discussed in Plato can be traced back to both nomadic and settled peoples.

The third early figure relevant to ancient communitarianism is Theopompus of Chios (380-315 BC), not to be mistaken with Theopompus of Sparta²⁸. Paramount of 4th-Century Greek historiography, his description of the collectivity of the Etruscans has been the subject of arid discussions, since, were it accurate, it would constitute an extraordinarily early case of communitarianism in the Italic peninsula. Luckily, we can access Theopompus's relation through the extensive passages quoted by Athenaeus in *The Deipnosophists* 1.42; XII.517:

Theopompus vero libro tertio et quadragésimo ait: 'lege etiam institutum esse apud Etruscos, ut *communes sint mulieres*: has vero diligentissimam curam habere corporis, saepeque exerceri cum viris, saepe vero etiam inter se ipsas: nec enim turpe illis haberi, nudas conspici. Coenare autem illas non apud suos maritos, sed apud *quoslibet qui adsunt*; et propinare *quibuscumque libitum* esset. Esse autem eas impense bibaces, et adspectu admodum formosas. Alere autem *Etruscos omnes qui nascantur infantes*,

²⁸ Spartan king during the 8th century BC, according to Pausanias's *Description of Greece*. More interestingly, Plutarch reports that it was Theopompus of Sparta who introduced the figure of the ephors into the Spartan political system (*Lycurgus* 7). Similar accounts are legated by Aristotle (*Politics* 1313a.11.2), Plato (*Letter VIII* 354b), Laertius (*Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* I.68), and Xenophon's *Lacedaemonion Politeia*.

nescientes quo patre quisque natus sit. Vivunt autem et hi deinde eodem modo quo illi a quibus educati erant, computationes frequentius instituentes, et cum omnibus mulieribus consuetudinem habentes. Nec vero turpe apud Etruscos habetur, in *propatulo foedum* quid vel facere *vel pati: est enim hoc illis patrium*. Et tantum abest ut turpe id ducant, ut si herum petit aliquis quo tempore Veneri ille vacat, diserte huic dicant, eo nunc illum occupari, turpi verbo rem ipsam nominantes. Quum vero *una sunt sodales aut cognati*, hunc morem tenent. Primum quidem, postquam computare desierunt, quum jam cubitum ituri sunt, introducunt ad eos famuli, accensis adhuc lucernis, nunc meretrices, nunc pueros forma praestantes, *interdum etiam mulieres*: quibus postquam sunt fructi, rursus illis introducunt adolescentes vegeta aetate, qui cum ipsis lem habent. (222; emphasis mine)

Although this depiction of the Etruscans has been refuted by modern historians such as Barthold Georg Niebuhr's *The History of Rome* (I.141), the unavoidable realization is that, in order to "barbarize" these Italic peoples, Theompompus resorted to vituperation of their customs based on their communitarian habits. Specifically, their sexual communism. A form of public parenting and education that in some ways resembles the Spartan *agoge* inherited by Plato is also present. As such, we can see how the same traits –material, sexual, and spiritual communism– can and would be used to praise an idealized human polity, as well as to criticize the (anti)natural condition of such renunciations. With Christian authors, we will see that the spiritual and corporal communities are not seen as renouncing to nature, but as a superation of a false, self-imposed habit that we have come to perceive as natural. As such, the monastic and Spartan renunciation is seen as the only way of perfecting the self: The discovery of our true nature. One in which the immediate satisfaction of lowly passions,

the material ambitions, and the will to self-aggrandizement are rendered superfluous.

Political Sources of Monasticism: Socrates

The systematic approach to ancient communitarianism can be studied in the works of four authors directly linked to Socrates and the Academia: Plato (423 BC – 347 BC), Xenophon of Athens (430 BC – 354 BC), Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC), and Plutarch (46 AD – 120 AD). The Socratic-Platonic-Neoplatonist connection facilitates the understanding of an otherwise remarkable discussion over the course of four centuries. Doayne Dawson has successfully unveiled the connections between Socratism and Laconism that would eventually reach Christianity:

There is also the fact that the members of the Socratic circle tended to be Laconists of a sort, or several sorts. Plato tells us that Socrates himself frequently praised Sparta and Crete as examples of law-abiding constitutions (*Crito* 52e). We have met Critias and Xenophon. We will meet Plato. Antisthenes too is credited with certain sayings in praise of Sparta, as when he compared the Thebans after Leuctra to schoolboys who had beaten their master (Plut., *Lycurgus* 30). An allusion in Aristophanes' *Birds* (128Iff.) suggests that in 414 B.C. Socratics and Laconists were somehow associated. (*Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* 58)

Apart from Plato's and Aristophanes' references, the link between Socrates (470-399 BC) and Sparta is well known. The Athenian philosopher was almost forty years old when, as a hoplite, fought Sparta in the midst of the Peloponnesian Wars. The apparent paradox is the fact that a genuine Athenian

who did not hesitate to defend his city in his fragile years would, at the very same time, defend political ideals sympathetic to those of the Lacedaemonian League fronted by Sparta. Plato's dialogues contain several references to the master's military experiences and his valor defending Athens, but there is little doubt that the overarching politeia transferred by Socrates's brightest student belongs to the field of Laconophilia²⁹. Moreover, many Socratic and Platonist thinkers –with the great exception of Aristotle– further developed the Spartan political principles or, in the case of the Thirty Tyrants, implemented a government inspired in an idealized version of Lycurgus's Spartan Constitution during the years 404 and 403 BC³⁰. Until the very last days recounted in the

²⁹ “So I should have done a terrible thing, Men of Athens, if, when the commanders whom you chose to command me stationed me, at Potidaea and at Amphipolis and at Delium, I remained where they stationed me, like anybody else, and ran the risk of death, but when the god gave me a station, as I believed and understood, with orders to spend my life in philosophy and in examining myself and others, then I were to desert my post through fear of death or anything else whatsoever It would be a terrible thing, and truly one might then justly hale me into court, on the charge that I do not believe that there are gods, since I disobey the oracle and fear death and think I am wise when I am not. For to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing else than to think one is wise when one is not; for it is thinking one knows what one does not know: For no one knows whether death be not even the greatest of all blessings to man, but they fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils. (Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 17.28d-30b). “And that you may not think that I show you the example of a man who is a solitary person, who has neither wife nor children, nor country, nor friends nor kinsmen, by whom he could be bent and drawn in various directions, take Socrates and observe that he had a wife and children, but he did not consider them as his own; that he had a country, so long as it was fit to have one, and in such a manner as was fit; friends and kinsmen also, but he held all in subjection to law and to the obedience due to it. For this reason he was the first to go out as a soldier, when it was necessary, and in war he exposed himself to danger most unsparingly. (Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.1). Diogenes Laertius offers a dramatization of the moment in which Xenophon became a student of Socrates: “The story goes that Socrates met him in a narrow passage, and that he stretched out his staff to bar the way, while he inquired where every kind of food was sold. Upon receiving a reply, he put another question, ‘And where do men become good and honourable?’ Xenophon was fairly puzzled; ‘Then follow me,’ said Socrates, ‘and learn.’ From that time onward he was a pupil of Socrates” (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* II.49).

³⁰ This is the exact same context employed by Karl Popper in order to justify his prepossessed interpretation of Plato in his influential *Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde: Der Zauber Platons*:

Apology of Socrates and the *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, Socrates remained a genuine Athenian with, more often than not, equally genuine anti-Athenian political views. This paradox is perfectly visible in Plato's *Crito* where the master is said to prefer the governments of other cities, yet decided to fight for Athens and stay in his city even during the hardship of his trial:

But you preferred neither Lacedaemon nor Crete, which you are always saying are well governed, nor any other of the Greek states, or of the foreign ones, but you went away from this city less than the lame and the blind and the other cripples. So much more than the other Athenians were you satisfied with the city and evidently therefore with us, its laws; for who would be pleased with a city apart from its laws? (*Crito* 52e-53a) ³¹

“Plato lived in a period of wars and of political strife which was, for all we know, even more severe than that which had troubled Heraclitus. Before his time, the breakdown of the tribal life of the Greeks had led in Athens, his native city, to a period of tyranny, and later to the establishment of a democracy which tried jealously to guard itself against any attempts to reintroduce either a tyranny or an oligarchy, i.e. a rule of the leading aristocratic families. During Plato's youth, democratic Athens was involved in a deadly war against Sparta, the leading city-state of the Peloponnese, which had preserved many of the laws and customs of the ancient tribal aristocracy. The Peloponnesian war lasted, with an interruption, for twenty-eight years. (In chapter 10, where the historical background is reviewed in more detail, it will be shown that the war did not end with the fall of Athens in 404 B.C. as is sometimes asserted). Plato was born during the war, and he was about twenty-four when it ended. It brought terrible epidemics, and, in its last year, famine, the fall of the city of Athens, civil war, and a rule of terror, usually called the rule of the Thirty Tyrants; these were led by two of Plato's uncles, who both lost their lives in the course of the civil war. Even the peace and the re-establishment of the democracy meant no respite for Plato. His beloved teacher Socrates, whom he later made the main speaker of most of his dialogues, was tried and executed. Plato himself seems to have been in danger; together with other companions of Socrates, he left Athens. Later, on a visit to Sicily, Plato became entangled in the political intrigues which were spun at the court of Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, and even after his return to Athens and the foundation of the Academy, Plato continued along with some of his pupils to take an active part in the conspiracies and revolutions that constituted Syracusan politics. This brief outline of political events may help to explain why, Plato, like Heraclitus, suffered deeply from the instability and] the lack of security in the political life of his time” (*The Open Society and its Enemies: The Spell of Plato* 15).

³¹ The fragment continues pondering the advantages and risks of Socrates abandoning Athens: “And now will you not abide by your agreement? You will if you take our advice, Socrates; and you will not make yourself ridiculous by going away from the city. For consider. By transgressing in this way and committing these errors, what good will you do to yourself or any of your friends? For it is pretty clear that your friends also will be exposed to the risk of banishment and the loss of their homes in the city or of their property. And you yourself, if

Once again, Socrates embodies the complexity of Athens. Opposed to the way in which Athens had been conducted since at least the decline of Pericles's command, and sympathetic to the methods of government of other cities, Socrates still prefers to remain in the polis and face his Athenian destiny.³²

Political Sources of Monasticism: Plato

Karl Popper, an open enemy of Plato, believes that the Athenian's political thought is derived from his "serious attempt to reconstruct the ancient tribal forms of social life as well as he could [. . .] It could hardly be otherwise,

you go to one of the nearest cities, to Thebes or Megara—for both are well governed—will go as an enemy, Socrates, to their government, and all who care for their own cities will look askance at you, and will consider you a destroyer of the laws and you will confirm the judges in their opinion, so that they will think their verdict was just. For he who is destroyer of the laws might certainly be regarded as a destroyer of young and thoughtless men. Will you then avoid the well-governed cities and the most civilized men? And if you do this will your life be worth living? Or will you go to them and have the face to carry on—what kind of conversation, Socrates? The same kind you carried on here, saying that virtue and justice and lawful things and the laws are the most precious things to men? And do you not think that the conduct of Socrates would seem most disgraceful?" (*Crito* 53a-b).

³² Dawson analyzes the contradiction: "In the *Crito* Plato has Socrates expound a unique doctrine of social contract which obliges the citizen to obey all the laws of his city whether he agrees with them or not. In the same dialogue Socrates affirms that he has always preferred the laws of Athens to those of any other city. (Admittedly this is a puzzle, because in the very same passage we are told that Sparta and Crete were Socrates' favorite examples of well-governed cities. Obviously Socrates' admiration for Sparta is not supposed to contradict his admiration for Athens, but Plato does not tell us how to reconcile the two.) If Socrates was really a moral and political authoritarian, there is no truly satisfactory explanation for the egalitarianism of his methods, nor for the importance he seems to have placed on individual moral autonomy. It is much easier to understand why a skeptical Socrates would have believed in such values" (*Cities of the Gods* 61). And provides useful sources regarding the incompatibility or not between Athens and Laconophilia: "Did he mean Sparta was well governed but Athens still better governed? Or that Athens was worse governed than Sparta and yet more acceptable to him because its democracy allowed more freedom for philosophy? The first view is defended in Kraus' *Socrates and the State*, the second by Clifford Orwin in his exchange with Kraus in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*" (*Cities of the Gods* 104).

since Plato arrived at his picture by an idealized description of the ancient Cretan and Spartan tribal aristocracies” (*The Open Society and its Enemies: The Spell of Plato* 38-39)³³. Another open enemy of Socrates’s pupil, Bertrand Russell gets it right when he claims that “To understand Plato, and indeed many later philosophers, it is necessary to know something of Sparta” (*History of Western Philosophy* XII). Even if we set aside for a minute the pejorative use of terms like “tribal” and withal their anachronistically tendentious interpretation of Plato, both Russell and Popper assign Lacedaemonian politics a crucial role in the development of Plato’s political theories, as well as of a philosophical legacy which these liberal thinkers consider to be evil and doomed³⁴. Even from the perspective of their opponents, Plato and the Platonists serve indeed as the most vehement link between Socrates, the Greek world, Laconophilia, and the inchoate modern world of Christianity. Through significant figures such as Plotinus (205 AD – 270 AD), Porphyry (234 AD – 305 AD), Saint Augustine

³³ Doyne Dawson aptly refutes Karl Popper’s authoritarian reading of Plato. Readings such as Popper’s “slight the significance and originality of Plato’s communistic proposals, describing these as a mere imitation of Spartan practice or a rationalization of common oligarchical ideals of the time. Winspear called Plato’s communism ‘an idealization of actual conservative practice and institutions.’ Popper thought it represented Plato’s conception of a primitive tribal society, with some features borrowed from contemporary Sparta. One might expect them to recognize an exception to this reactionary pattern in Plato’s argument for women’s emancipation, but they usually did not. Some, like Winspear, dismissed Plato’s ‘feminism’ as a sham; others, like Popper, simply avoided any reference to it” (*Cities of the Gods* 64).

³⁴ Just a few pages later, Dawson once again demonstrates that most modern incoherences in the contemporary reading of Plato are caused by the imposition of our liberal, post-Christian and post-Cartesian framework upon a model in which the modern autonomous subject did not have any relevance (*Cities of the Gods* 68). Consequently, the application of liberal –modern individual based– theories of freedom such as those of Isaiah Berlin, Bertrand Russell, or Karl Popper can only lead to the unfair conclusion of unacceptable authoritarianism. A non-anachronistic concept of the self and the common is needed.

(354 AD – 430 AD), and Proclus (412 AD – 485 AD), core platonic doctrines would be accepted by Christianity and located at the heart of the new worldview. A theopolitical worldview whose concepts, according to Agamben and Esposito's last works, we are still inhabiting.

The central question in Plato's *Politeia*, or *Republic*, is neatly expressed in 369a-b, where it is said that "our argument should observe the origin of a state, we should see also the origin of justice and injustice in it"³⁵. The quality of a polity is measured by its degree of justice, and in order to investigate it, one needs to understand the genealogy of the state itself. This almost theogonical methodology has had a major impact, even in modern times, as visible in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, where present inequalities are attributed to past actions of appropriation in a line of reasoning very keen to Esposito's *Communitas*, who studies primitive appropriation as a violent end to an original state of commonality (18). Coherently, Plato often discusses the foundational principles of "the healthy city" (*Republic* 369b-372e), to the point of constructing a taxonomy of the conceivable forms of government:

'I am eager myself to hear what four forms of government you meant.' 'There will be no difficulty about that,' said I. 'For those I mean are precisely those that have names in common usage: that which the many praised, your *Cretan and Spartan constitution*; and the second in place and in honor, that which is called

³⁵ The fragment begins: "let us first look for its quality in states, and then only examine it also in the individual, looking for the likeness of the greater in the form of the less.' 'I think that is a good suggestion,' he said. 'If, then,' said I, 'our argument should observe the origin of a state, we should see also the origin of justice and injustice in it'" (*Republic* 369a-b).

oligarchy, a constitution teeming with many ills, and its sequent counterpart and opponent, democracy; and then the noble tyranny surpassing them all, the fourth and final malady of a state.’ (*Republic* 544bc; emphasis mine)

Four forms of government are singled out: Cretan/Spartan, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. Three of them refer to generic species practiced by a plethora of cities and states, yet the first one, alas the least bad, can only be defined by listing the idiosyncratic cities that practice it. Socrates and his environment must have transmitted that there is something in the constitutions of Crete and Sparta that makes them special. Even with Socrates’s *agraphia*, his pupils made sure to legate the fact of this exceptionality. For example, Xenophon will focus on providing a historiographical description of their institutions and idiosyncrasy, while Plato prefers to use these archetypes as foundations for the creation of the new, perfect state. A state that overcomes mere utopianism because it is based on existing, feasible models. Before we dive into Xenophon’s relation of the actual Lacedaemonian purview, it is essential to observe the philosophical arguments leveled by Plato to vindicate the praiseworthiness of these city-states.

The *Republic* and the *Laws* provide the best information on the matter. The third book of the *Republic* displays a debate regarding one of the most peculiar and essential traits of the Spartan cosmovision: their theory of property. Doyme Dawson’s *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* provides a very concise account of a book in which Plato “dares to envision a truly unified community in which individual properties and families are abolished, and in

connection with this to argue for what appears to be an almost modern attitude toward the social position of woman” (*Cities of the Gods* 64). The taxonomy is well known; producers, auxiliaries, and guardians structure a city in which the first –workers and artisans– produce and craft, the second protect with their bodies, and the last protect the city with their souls. Although rigidly structured, there is room in this paradigm for members of one class to transition into the more (and in some cases, as it was common in Sparta, the less) intellectual ones. At least ideally, birth, wealth and blood should not be the criteria for deciding where one belongs. Although a much more radical and classless system was practiced during the first centuries of Christianity, the Aristotelian influx combined with this precedent resulted in the philosophical support of feudalism that we tend to associate with the medieval. In the following chapter, I will stress that both interpretations are contained in this substratum, and it is only the fact that the more universalist one lost the battle that we think of Platonic-Christian-Medieval political theologies as collaborators of a rigid, birth-based class system.

The “lower” class satisfies the needs and takes advantage of the skills of those who are not willing to sacrifice everything for the city. They are expected to want and have personal properties. They are also not expected to want (or be able) to renounce to personal love and relationships, opting instead for a more traditional, private intersubjectivity. On the other hand, soldiers and philosophers are expected to give up personal satisfaction in favor of a more excellent, if more demanding form of communal devotion to the body politic.

Towards the end of the ancient world, monks and coenobites took a page from Sparta's book when they reasoned their renunciation to the world as the most radical way to devote the entirety of their lives to a cause.

The class of guardians is reserved for those who prove martial excellence and, once at a later age, also a philosophical one (*Republic* 540a)³⁶. In fact, according to Claude Mosse, it would not be absurd to simplify Plato's hierarchy into two categories: rulers –military and intellectual– and ruled (*Historia general del socialismo. De los orígenes a 1875*, “Los orígenes del socialismo en la Antigüedad”). This conflation is problematic since it interrupts the strong correlation between politics and metaphysics, between the strata of the city and the three parts of the soul³⁷. It does, however, recognize the fact that both the

³⁶ “And when they are fifty years old, those who have been preserved throughout and are in every way best at everything, both in deed and in knowledge, must at last be led to the end [. . .] For the most part, each one spends his time in philosophy, but when his turn comes, he drudges in politics and rules for the city's sake, not as though he were doing a thing that is fine, but one that is necessary” (*Republic* 540b).

³⁷ The isomorphism between the cosmos, the city, and the individual obsessed renaissance neoplatonists. A relevant study on the subject is Francisco Rico's, *El pequeño mundo del hombre*. Dawson, goes beyond and argues that this isomorphism is actually an identity relation: “In the fourth book we are told they show ‘justice in the city’ to consist in the harmony of different parts, which is somehow supposed to reflect the harmony of the just psyche. But then we are no longer speaking of the same thing but only of an analogy between two kinds of ‘justice,’ and a rather loose and obscure analogy at that [. . .] Socrates cannot mean that there is merely an *analogy* between justice or virtue in the citizen and justice or virtue in the city. He must mean an exact identity between these two things” (*Cities of the Gods* 66). Aristotle talks about three different souls. Plato does, in *Phaedo*, talk about two separate parts of the soul, which by the time of the *Republic* have become three. A subtler approach is present in Augustine's *Confessions*, where the saint takes the platonic motive of the chariot and turns it into a, using Prudentius terminology which would forever influence Christianity, *psychomachia*. This battle of the soul confronts different forces which are not anymore seen as separate entities or parts, but forces in tension seeking to control the entire self. Same as with the platonic city and soul, Augustine and everyone to come will set the balance between these forces –specially a balance ruled by the rational pulsions– as the only way to the self's peace.

auxiliaries and the guardians incur in very similar types of renunciation and self-sacrifice, as opposed to the more distant self-centered approach reserved to the producers. This situation reveals a common platonic gesture, the tension between egalitarianism and aristocratism, between classism and demanding more from the ruling classes. When discussing the class of guardians, it is said that they are the only ones expected to overcome egotism and surrender all ambitions of private property. An oxymoron shared with most sympathizers of laconism arises when he claims that classes do indeed need to exist, only to impose its restrictions on the leading ones in the very same manner adopted by the spartiates, the full citizens of Sparta's military class:

First, no one will possess any private property except for what's entirely necessary. Second, no one will have any house or storeroom into which everyone who wishes cannot come. The sustenance, as much as is needed by moderate and courageous men who are champions of war, they'll receive in fixed installments from the other citizens as a wage for their guarding; in such quantity that there will be no surplus for them in a year and no lack either. (*Republic* III.416d-417b)

Moderation and honor restrict private property. Even more importantly, property is seen as the counterpart of ethics and theology, since these are the levels which define what is "entirely necessary." This austere, almost ascetic dimension came to define the cultural contributions of Sparta, to the point of crystallizing in the adjectives "spartan" and "laconic" as signs of austerity. Additionally, the idea of private spaces "into which everyone who wishes cannot come" is effaced and substituted instead by a sense of communitarian, universal household, thus blurring the boundaries between the private and the public.

Between the house and the city. This accord, which proponents of monasticism from Acts of the Apostles 4:32 to Saint Augustine will name *homothymadon* (“singleness of spirit”), *concordia* (“agreement in the heart”), and *unanimitas* (“singleness of soul”), is constantly strengthened by the most profound sharing of consuetudinary practices³⁸. Life as a whole is then lived in common, as proven by one of Sparta’s most renowned institutions, the *sysitia* or community meals: “They’ll go regularly to mess together like soldiers in a camp and live a life in common” (*Republic* III.416d-417b). As Christians very quickly realized, life and soul can converge to create a tighter bond. In community-building, there is little distance from mess to mass.

An extremely restrictive system of property is in place. In an ode to Sparta’s currencyless arrangement, Plato’s *Republic* vindicates the illegitimacy of possessing precious metals, currency, or other goods³⁹. Much more important than the measure itself is the reasoning behind it. Property is not frowned upon just because, but because renouncing to it, guardians

³⁸ The Greek adjective present in Acts of the Apostles, ὁμοθυμαδον (gr. *homothymadon*), could be translated as “with singleness of spirit”. Karl Hermann Bruder collects eleven occurrences in his *Tamieion ton tes kaines diathekes lexicon sive Concordantiae omnium vocum Novi Testamenti Graeci*. This is key, since *thymos* is the very same term used by Plato in the *Republic* when describing the part of the soul prevalent in the class of the guardians –be it in their roles as *bellatores* or *oratores*–.

³⁹ “We’ll tell them that gold and silver of a divine sort from the gods they have in their soul always and have no further need of the human sort; nor is it holy to pollute the possession of the former sort by mixing it with the possession of the mortal sort because many unholy things have been done for the sake of the currency of the many, while theirs is untainted. But for them alone of those in the city it is not lawful to handle and to touch gold and silver, nor to go under the same roof with it, nor to hang it from their persons, nor to drink from silver or gold” (*Republic* III.416d-417b).

would save themselves as well as save the city. Whenever they'll possess private land, houses, and currency, they'll be householders and farmers instead of guardians, and they'll become masters and enemies instead of allies of the other citizens; hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against, they'll lead their whole lives far more afraid of the enemies within than those without. (*Republic* III.416d) ⁴⁰

By limiting property, Plato conceives a devoted ruling class analogous to the successful spartiates. Owners, fathers, mothers, and siblings will always, delineates Plato pragmatically, prioritize their own closer “possessions” to the neighbors’. We can call this proximity pessimism since, according to Plato, political projects lose force as they gain distance from a very immediate circle of influence and interest. To counter this limitation of the human ability to commit to what is not beheld as own, the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus and Plato (and then most Christians) question the limits of what is personal by educating the entire group in the commonality of all life. Everyone will defend everyone equally because there are no personal predilections.

Centuries later, Saint Theresa of Jesus will become obsessed with redacting a religious rule capable of preventing “private love” to arise, only esteeming “general love” as worthy (*Constituciones X*)⁴¹. These cannot but remind

⁴⁰ The remainder of this fragment advocates for state lodging as a measure against the dissolution of common interests in a sea of partiality and egotism: “Then they themselves as well as the rest of the city are already rushing toward a destruction that lies very near. So, for all these reasons, I said, ‘let’s say that the guardians must be provided with houses and the rest in this way, and we shall set this norm as a law, shall we not?’ ‘Certainly,’ said Glaucon” (*Republic* III.417b).

⁴¹ The complete section is fascinating: “Ninguna hermana abrace a otra, ni la toque el rostro ni en las manos, ni tengan amistades en particular, sino todas se amen en general, como lo mandó Cristo a sus apóstoles muchas veces [. . .] este amarse unas a otras en general y no en particular importa mucho” (*OC* 853, “Visita de Descalzas”).

us of the words uttered by the Spartan admiral Callicratidas, Lysander's successor in command and relationships with Persia. It is in that context that Plutarch captures the navarch's memorable response: "When Cyrus sent on money to pay the soldiers, and special presents for himself as a token of friendship, he took the money only and sent back the presents, saying that there was no need of any private friendship between him and Cyrus, but the general friendship which had been contracted with all the Spartans would serve also for him" (*Moralia* III, "Sayings of the Spartans" 222). The end game is, in all cases, making sure that the members of the community do not, in words of Plato, "lead their whole lives far more afraid of the enemies within than those without" (*Republic* III.416d). For the Greeks, this meant building a strong city-state. For Christians, declaring war to the inner enemies within the soul while founding a worldly city of brotherly love.

Back to the ancient world, an even more committed version of this approach was practiced by the elite squad leading the only city capable of deposing Sparta from its supremacy. The Sacred Band of Thebes was, indeed, composed by a group of friends-lovers-mentors-tutors who did not see each other as mere comrades, but as souls worth dying for. The tenacity of this band was achieved through the suppression of external bonds and the intensification of internal codependence, admiration, and love –be it *storge*, *philia*, or *eros*–. Centuries later, the proponents of the new Christian religion (who also see themselves as soldiers) will aim to establish new bonds based on an even more

excellent type of love: *agape*. Through this universalized, self-effacing form of love, they dream to reach the ultimate state of peace and fraternity.

This pessimism of proximity is, as opposed to Popper and Russell's interpretation, one of many signs of Realpolitik in Plato, whose seemingly utopian excesses are often the result of direct observation and were in most cases proven feasible by Christian communitarianism. Indeed, this applicability in the context of the particular body politic of the religious orders does not translate to state politics, but the social body of a Greek city is closer to a religious order than to a modern nation state. Furthermore, medieval and renaissance world projects like the Carolingian empire, the Universitas Christiana, or the idea of Hispanidad prove that this worldview can indeed be scaled into a much more ambitious scope. In any case, the ultimate goal of this return to what is conceived as the most natural state of communal property is beheld as the only path to modeling a unified, harmonious city in which all individuals share a collective project.

This discussion points at the philosophical principle in the background: under no circumstances will Socratic thinkers accept worldly or material possessions as expressions or sources of Eudaimonia. Such a general idea had been present in Plato's thought since the *Apology of Socrates*, where he stated that "Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the State" (*Apology* 30b). The Socratic voice of the *Apology* commends all good citizens not to be concerned "for your

bodies or for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls” (*Apology* 30a). Sentences like these expose the theological substratum of this conviction. Often interpreted as an escape from the material world, Spartans, Platonists, and Christians will all favor the richness of heart –which is always individual and communal– over what they perceive as the privative wealth of the material world.

The theological, even moral, dimension of Plato’s political laconism shines when he aligns the main types of conceivable possessions: “For there are in all three things about which every man has an interest; and the interest in *money*, when rightly regarded, is the third and lowest of them: midway comes the interest of the *body*; and, first of all, that of the *soul*” (*Republic* V.743; emphasis mine). Soul, body, money. Those are, according to Plato, the three potential human desires. Predating the Spinozian wise man, intellectual satisfaction – “*amor Dei intellectualis*” (*Ethica more geometrico demonstrata* V)– is the only acceptable for the philosopher, who coincidentally must be the ruler. The intermediate motives are those of the body, vigor, exuberance, and strength, all which well fit the not too intellectual, not too capricious needs of the guardians. Lastly, we find the ancient equivalents of television and junk food, that is, the evanescent and voluble impulses which drive the actions of irrational beings. This moralistic interpretation of the types of property is based on an anthropological, classist model which Christians starting with Augustine overcame through a subtle trick also present in Plato’s *Republic* and *Phaedo*:

Instead of claiming that some souls are more or less rational and worthy than others, they opt instead for an explicative model wherein a constant struggle within the soul opposed different factions who fight to control the person in its entirety. This agonistic concept of the soul is the most profound philosophical contribution offered by Plato to his Christian interpreters. Even when Saint Augustine censures the Platonists in *The City of God's* VIII book, he does so by claiming that no pagan did inhabit so close to the Christian principles as Plato. An idea that would allow the latter to solve many of the incoherences and fractures present in the master's worldview. And do it, we will see, in a more humane, universalist way.

Even the self-declared legal positivists have a hard time escaping from the imbrication of morals and politics. Against this, which even today is retained as either a sophistic construct or an impossible for the human mind, Plato does not hide the conviction that metaphysics, theology, aesthetics, ethics, and politics are all one single entity. By unfolding a complex system of conventions and investigations, all these disciplines together are mankind's modest attempt at deciphering the code of existence. As such, it just makes sense that the quality of a state should be measured according to its ability to prioritize the highest species of souls and, within every soul, the highest possible form of conduct. That is why he is convinced that

the state which we are describing will have been rightly constituted if it ordains honors according to this scale. But if, in any of the laws which have been ordained, health has been

preferred to temperance, or wealth to health and temperate habits, that law must clearly be wrong. (*Republic* V.744)

The goal of the polity must be intensifying as much as possible the level of rationality and soulness, then health and corporality, and finally attenuating the control exerted by the gullible, visceral passions. The moral dimension of the Laconophilia inherited by Plato is, by means of this process, ready and willing to be incorporated in the worldview of the new Christian sect.

Even in the case of earthly goods, the proponents of these schools of thought are impelled to be imaginative in the pursuit of non-egotistic forms of property and life. The popular saying embodies the spirit of the polity.

Education and administration, politics and daily lives, need to follow it:

‘If by being well educated they become sensible men, they’ll easily see to all this and everything else we are now leaving out—that the possession of women, marriage, and procreation of children must as far as possible be arranged according to the proverb that friends have all things in common.’ (*Republic* IV.423e)

The beauty of this principle would inspire radical projects of commonality from the cynic communes to the millenarism of Thomas Münzer, who died proclaiming that all things must be had in common (“omnia sunt communia”). What most do not realize is that the very core of the new orthodoxy, the political theology of the Middle Ages, owes this seemingly utopian aspiration a great deal. Orthodox thinkers from Augustine (*Rule*) to Aquinas (*Summa*) and Theresa of Jesus (*Constituciones*) discuss over the centuries the desirability of bringing the pure community of goods and lives to the center of the Christian state. It begun with Anthony and Basil in the desert communes, extended towards the religious orders, and then into the heart of the modern state.

In spite of how attractive having all things in common may be, several elements in this passage, especially the definition of property, appear in terms blatantly unacceptable to us. Nobody should ever own a person, but it has not always been like that. Recent relations would say that only the Enlightenment brought this conviction to the Western world, but the illegitimacy of owning a person is yet one more innovation popularized increasingly more significant sectors in Greece, Christianity, and medieval political thought. This rejection caused much distraught to Roman Christians, who progressively refused to accept the *gens* system of the empire.

Probably the greatest experts in the matter, Jennifer A. Glancy –author of the already classical *Slavery in Early Christianity*– and Chris L. de Wet – *The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought*–, provide insightful cues on how to interpret the role of Christianity in Antiquity’s evolving attitudes towards social classes and slavery. The central argument of the most recent work, Chris L. de Wet’s *The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought* resumes Glancy’s analyses and suggests that, although Christians often questioned the institution and the ideas supporting slavery, their participation in Antiquity’s traditions prevented them from fully reaching the abolitionist anthropological conclusions logically derived from the biblical principle of the *imago Dei*. Glancy’s Butlerian perspective focuses on the biopolitical of the bodies, arguing that Christianity collaborated with slavery in its promotion of a subjected life to God, and of endurance of hardship as a

value. De Wet expands the argument brilliantly focusing on the doulology – from gr. δουλεία, “bondage, slavery”– of the new religion. From this perspective, Christianity would have prolonged and in a way reinforced Antiquity’s views on slavery by exalting the virtues of God’s servants. This is rephrasing of Nietzsche’s views on Christianity’s praise of weakness is also present in Escotado’s book.

But Christianity progressively redefined *douleia* to the point of not anymore meaning slavery, but veneration. This is the exact same term that the Church will use to theorize the treatment that saints deserve: veneration. Only God deserves adoration, but the saints, and in front of them all the Virgin Mary, are worthy of *dulia*. In fact, the only human being to deserve more than this veneration is Mary, for whom the concept of hyperdulia, or high-veneration, was developed.

Chris L. de Wet measuredly maintains that “we find no evidence that early Christianity wholly rejected slavery” (*The Unbound God* 2). Paul most likely wanted slaves to use opportunities for manumission” (*The Unbound God* 2-3)⁴². “Christian monastics responded with uneasiness to slavery, but even in this case slavery was not fully abandoned [. . .] The rejection of wealth was a typical characteristic of early Christian monasticism, and for some, it also meant the rejection of slaveholding” (*The Unbound God* 5). The question that one expects

⁴² Also seen in “a large part of Christianity’s negligible effect lay in its inability to enunciate a mode of behavior sufficiently distinct from earlier Roman practices” (Geoffrey Nathan 43; quoted in Chris L. de Wet, *The Unbound God* 8).

Glancy and De Wet to ask would be: Was anyone at all fighting against slavery? Because if Christians were the only ones doing it on a systematic scale, even a partial success from the start seems like a substantial achievement. De Wet himself provides valuable (and balanced, uncommon when talking about such a delicate matter) arguments and documentation to follow the history of this problem into the Middle Ages and Modernity. For example, big steps are made as soon as Constantine, Christianity's first opportunity to intervene in large-scale legal matters, promoted

The most significant further development regarding Christian manumission practices is the institution of *manumissio in ecclesia* (ecclesiastical manumission) by two edicts of Constantine, from 316 and 323 CE. These decrees gave Christian churches the authority to manumit slaves, who then received full citizenship. (*The Unbound God* 4)

It is difficult to see this and not think that there is something in the Christian worldview that naturally rejects something as central to Antiquity as slavery, held so dearly by most of Athens and Sparta's main, even democratic, thinkers. De Wet rightfully attests that abolition was neither quick nor complete, but this has to do with one of the main themes of this dissertation: Anti-Nicene Christians, and even those in the time of Augustine and beyond are, above all, ancients becoming something else. Even though it is obvious that the Bible's *imago Dei* principle has to lead to a rejection of the attribution of divine functions that slavery is, as nobody can own someone else, the concept of *persona* had to be constructed in order to have the theoretical tools to fight this. Roberto Esposito realizes that the theopolitical "macchina" "ha bisogno di un ulteriore

dispositivo costituito dalla categoria di ‘persona’” (*Dne* 7). Without the idea of something connatural to every single member of the species independent from legal and political context, how can the deeply rooted practice of slavery be combated? I study this clash against established powers and structures in the sections on religio licita and Christian antitraditionalism, but in order to delegitimize slavery, Christians had to reach several milestones first. Or, even more precisely (and reconciling this view with De Wet’s analysis), it is not until this happens, that Christians realize how contrary to their doctrine slavery, or any sort of birth-based discrimination is, as it is not the person’s, but God’s responsibility. The veil is only lifted through the reformulation of human dignity as we know it through the concept of *persona*, the disattribution of divine functions to human rulers or individuals –their refusal to accept the emperor’s godly nature, essential to late Rome and derived from Eurasian forms of government starting with the divinization of Egyptian pharaohs–. Finally, the liberation from the need to appear as good ancients –that is, the final separation from Jewish, Greek, and Roman laws–. De Wet acutely underlines that ancient slavery, which Christians could not eradicate (but, again, was anyone else trying?), evolved into feudal serfdom. Although feudalism is intimately related to the superposition of Germanic legal principles upon the remains of Rome’s befalling codification, the collaboration between the not-anymore-new religion and medieval private right does prove De Wet’s point that Christianity only partially eradicated slavery while also contributing to a sort of idealization of

servitude. With just one caveat, that the redefinition of *dulia* and *servitude* are based on a type of self-effacement that being, based on the dignity of the *persona* is actually contrary to slavery, this will, hopefully, also prove my point that there is a tension between antitraditionalism and traditionalism, between anomaly and nomaly, between change and statism, between *kosmeia* and *akosmeia* that underlies the very heart of Christianity. As I have previously declared, the present study sides with the attitudes of a primitive monasticism, that only at times led the general efforts of the Post-Constantinian Church.⁴³

As their worldview unfolds, the anthropological conclusions of human dignity begin to circulate from, at least, the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. Often we hear that Gregory represents an isolated case in a mostly pro-slavery context. What these accounts fail to mention is the fact that Gregory was a brother in one of the first Christian communities, the one founded by Saint Macrina and Saint Basil, which in turn happen to be both his spiritual and blood siblings. Their natural family incarnates the early history of the Church, as it provided martyrs, legislators, monks, theologians, as well as brothers and sisters. But it is the spiritual that most mattered to them.

⁴³ The eventual integration of the Christian worldview within the feudal cosmovision, as well as the ideological collaboration with the installation of a feudally hierarchized class system are tangible examples of how mainstream Christianity has historically oscillated between being a subversive radical movement against authority, to representing a most powerful source of authority. Both poles can be true to the religion's principles, but monasticism –understood as the institutionalization of a self-effacing form of life– will always supedite all authorities to the primordial mission of the *imitatio Christi*.

Basil's community is a monument to the achievements of the Cappadocian Fathers in which not only everyone had to work for a community which proved the viability of a polity without classes or slaves, but also where slaves from all parts were accepted with the same rights and obligations as anyone else. Long before Saint Francis and Saint Claire of Assisi's social leveling in the 12th and 13th century, for whom a princess was worth the same as a serf, monasticism embodied an advanced mode of thinking within monotheism in which all individuals are strictly equal. So when Gregory of Nyssa deprecates slavery as an illegitimate attribution of heavenly potestas, he is not just expressing an individual opinion, but claiming that what Saint Basil and others had achieved in such a brief period of time can, and should extend to society as a whole. Gregory's against-the-grain thinking does not oppose monasticism and the avant-garde of Christianity, but the very ancient worldview which these monks were trying to refute.⁴⁴

Thus, by going back to the motto of friendly commonality, Plato does not only refresh the Lacedaemonian institutions –which, as most models at the time, relies on the abhorrent institution of slavery to function–, but also

⁴⁴ This illegitimate attribution of heavenly powers impelled, as well, the arrest of Christopher Columbus by Queen Isabel la Católica in 1500. This almost unknown episode, a mere anecdote in the context of the anthropological discussions of the *Leyes de Indias* –the first regulations, the Valladolid Debate in 1521, the *Leyes Nuevas*...–, shows that the leader of this world empire refuted the acceptability of slavery which was being vindicated by many conquerors. Moreover, she did it by means of a “cédula” published in 1500, document that deauthorized all individuals who claimed slaves in the Americas arguing that all citizens –vassals– are the “property” of the kingdom; therefore, no individual, not even the personal body of the queen itself, can claim to own a souled body.

prefigures one of Christianity's deepest contributions to the history of subjectivity: The individual person as site of dignity and rights, crafty solution which allows monks to renounce property as individuals while still "having" the basic needs covered as members of the coenobium or religious order. In the following chapters, I will analyze the way in which early Christians solve one of the darkest elements of the Greek and Platonic paradigms, that of slavery and birth-based classes. The Spartan attitude towards this ideologeme can be found in one of the most moving passages of their literature, as Lycurgus "made it clear how much instruction contributes for better or worse, saying, 'So also in our case, fellow-citizens, noble birth, so admired of the multitude, and our being descended from Heracles does not bestow any advantage, unless we do the sort of things for which he was manifestly the most glorious and most noble of all mankind'" (Plutarch, *Moralia* III, "Sayings of the Spartans" 353). But even the archaic and noble home of the equals who called themselves the *homoioi* would forget about its egalitarian spirit as soon as it did not have to do with their full citizens, or *spartiates*. In fact, one of the immediate causes of the Peloponnesian War was the invasion of the Messenia region by the Athenians. And the reason why Messenia was key to the Spartan polis is that it represented Sparta's most direct source of land—the same land that, paradoxically, the property-deprived spartiates owned as part of their citizenship rights— and *helots* in the Peloponnese. The helots represent a central, yet highly unstable class that falls somewhere between the medieval laboratores and the ancient and modern

conceptions of slavery. Despite how natural its insertion in the polis was for centuries, conceptually speaking, the institution of slavery is tremendously challenging to reconcile with the egalitarian principles of the Spartan project, as it distinguishes between true and partial Spartans. The anthropological reasons that explain how this theoretical conflict could remain operative for such a long time are analogous to the cultural codes that allowed the hometown of democracy, Athens, perpetuate a class system also based on their dependence on slavery. Christians were indeed inhabitants of their time, but as their doctrine settled and their influence grew, the same incompatibilities that had not stopped Spartans or Athenians from coexisting with slavery eventually led them to find an alternative path to support the structure of society. We will discuss, too, the reasons behind the renunciation to this new ideal of universal dignity and the eventual support of classism provided by late medieval Christianity. Let us, however, go back to Plato.

The discussion going back and forth between limited property and absolute dispossession present in the Platonic corpus prefigures a long-winded debate in the bosom of Christian monasticism. Is it preferable not to own anything at all, or is some form of property –individual or communal– necessary? Also, can one really not own anything?

Whereas radical, the *Republic* vindicates Lacedaemonian communism vindicates as the only acceptable form of life for the ruler, the *Laws* present a

much more moderate approach to property. A partial recanting from the absolute dispossession of the *Republic* is visible when Plato accepts that:

It would be well that every man should come to the colony *having all things equal*; but seeing that *this is not possible*, and one man will have greater possessions than another, for many reasons and in particular in order to *preserve equality in special crises of the state*, qualifications of property must be unequal, in order that offices and contributions and distributions may be proportioned to the value of each person's wealth, and not solely to the virtue of his ancestors or himself, nor yet to the strength and beauty of his person, but also to the measure of his wealth or poverty. (*Laws* V.744; emphasis mine)

Plato now sustains the chimeric nature of unrestricted communism. The aristocratic model present in the *Republic* shatters in favor of an almost social democrat state in which private property acts as a warranty for social justice. Predating Eduard Bernstein's *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* approach by a couple thousand years, Plato gives up on equality and presents a sort of controlled disparities as the only viable solution to "preserve equality in special crises of the state, qualifications of property must be unequal" (*Laws* V.744). The rest needs those who have more; they should, therefore, contribute more through a system of bracketed taxation almost identical to what we now have in most countries. This progressive tax system, though, is the pragmatical solution to a profound change in Plato's perspective: equality is not anymore a pure theopolitical telos, but a mere reference towards which the city should strive. Thus, inequality is permitted. Accepting that no state can overcome inequality, Plato opts to, at least, limit and control it. This diminishment in ambition will not be accepted by the proponents of

communitarian monasticism, who will try to go back to the ideal of perfect, absolute equality. More interestingly, they do not lock the ideal to a specific property system, as they will attempt to achieve it through radical, limited, or even no communism at all.

The innovations and corrections present in the *Laws* are not devoid of limitations. The Aristotelian discourse seems to have found its place in a way that, we will see, would greatly help the parents of monasticism ascertain which models of property are preferable; yet the deradicalization of the *Laws* allows for the perpetuation of social classes. Even though medieval theology would, via Aristotle, legitimize the existence and inviolability of classes, this never goes uncontested in a worldview for which every single human soul is, because of its very created nature, as worthy as all others.

Dawson's measured account of the tension between the *Republic* and the *Laws* introduces the latter saying that "The *Laws* (ca. 350 B.C.) describes a more practical Utopia purporting to be a constitution for a new colony, in the tradition of Hippodamus and Phaleas" (*Cities of the Gods* 74). If "total koinonia in all property, women, and children" as presented in the *Republic* is not attainable, or at least has not been attained, it may be worth looking at actualized models such as the Spartan one. A model that falls under the second category of almost perfect, yet historically materialized states in which communitarianism is still really strong. After that, a pragmatic implementation of only some forms

of commonality occupies Plato's third tier as presented in the *Laws*⁴⁵. Even the social roles have been relativized⁴⁶. Instead of annihilating the roots of inequality, Plato is now willing to settle with a moderate state without extremes: "there should exist among the citizens neither extreme poverty nor, again, an excess of wealth, for both are productive of these evils. Now the legislator should determine what is to be the limit of poverty or wealth" (*Laws* V.744). An almost social democratic intent is enticing in so far as it considers extreme poverty and extreme wealth to be equally harmful to the social body, but there is little room here for the ambitious planning of the *Republic*. Instead of searching the perfect city dreamed by Lycurgus, Plato will be happy if he can

⁴⁵ "A three-tiered model is considered adequate: it should include a design for the absolutely best constitution, one for the second best, and one for the third best. 1. The best constitution of all is that in which there is, as far as possible, total koinonia in all property, women, and children [. . .] The Athenian Stranger does not know whether such a city exists [. . .] 2. The second-best constitution is that which most nearly resembles the first but at the same time is capable of being put into practice [. . .] It resembles Sparta in having a public educational system, a system of common meals, and bans on commerce and currency. It resembles many new colonies in equalizing landed property among citizens [. . .] The second-best city is therefore a paradigm like the first, but of a more realistic sort [. . .] 3. The third-best city is to be described later; but Plato, who did not live even to finish the *Laws*, never got around to this. Evidently he meant a plan for putting the recommendations of the *Laws* into practice in existing cities [. . .] It means the attempt to put the second-best model into practice even in established cities [. . .] It was suggested to him by the "low-utopian" discussions that had been going on for some time among Laconophile aristocrats, but he [Plato] introduced into this discussion a new element of moral and philosophical reflection. To judge from the available evidence, the older Laconism, led by his cousin Critias, had in theory aimed to produce militaristic and communistic oligarchies based closely on contemporary Sparta; and at its most theoretical and Utopian level, which it apparently reached in the work of Phaleas, it was still a practical reform program. To a large extent Plato had broken with this tradition, both its values and its methods" (*Cities of the Gods* 74).

⁴⁶ "To which end there should be four different standards appointed according to the amount of property: there should be a first and a second and a third and a fourth class, in which the citizens will be placed, and they will be called by these or similar names" (*Laws* V.744).

materialize something that resembles the Sparta of his time. Dawson explains this shift in a superb fragment:

In the *Republic* the two levels are never separated into different plans; they are different stages in the construction of Utopia. The paradoxical quality in the *Republic*, which has given rise to such divergent interpretations, arises from the fact that it contains both a low Utopia and a high Utopia, which Socrates claims to unite into a single city, but which to many seem imperfectly joined. Those who wish to see in the *Republic* a totalitarian blueprint look at the first city; those who want a universal humanistic vision prefer the second. The two visions are finally separated in the *Laws*, where the aged Plato constructs an unequivocally low Utopia of his own. (*Cities of the Gods* 775)

The Spartan connection keeps reappearing as we read Plato. For example, it is said that the great Lycurgus purportedly decided not to leave his constitution in writing, for that would fail to encapsulate the mythical, oracular origin of the law⁴⁷. The proper name of the Spartan Constitution is, in fact, the *Great Rhetra*. The “great proclamation,” as noteworthy expert in the matter Mait Koiv translates it, shares its etymology with Greek roots for speaking *-eiro-* and

⁴⁷ Fragkaki, M. “The Great Rhetra”. *Rosetta* 17 (2015): 35-51. Plutarch (*Life of Lycurgus* VI.1-10) and Tyrtaeus 3a; 7.12.6). This condition extends to the lawgiver himself, who in many accounts is hagiographically introduced as the one who decisively bonded Sparta and the gods; according to Plutarchus’s narration in his *Parallel Lives*, the fame reached way beyond the city limits. Only thus we can understand when “Aristotle says that the honours paid him in Sparta were less than he deserved, although he enjoys the highest honours there. For he has a temple, and sacrifices are offered to him yearly as to a god. It is also said that when his remains were brought home, his tomb was struck by lightning, and that this hardly happened to any other eminent man after him except Euripides, who died and was buried at Arethusa in Macedonia. The lovers of Euripides therefore regard it as a great testimony in his favour that he alone experienced after death what had earlier befallen a man who was most holy and beloved of the gods. (*Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus” 31.2-3). Thus, both the Great Rhetra and his transcriber are treated “as to a god”.

public speaking *–rhe–*, as found in “rhetoric” or “rhetor”⁴⁸. In an analogous vein, Thomas R. Martin recounts that:

The Spartans were sticklers for obedience to the law (*nomos*) as the guide to proper behavior on matters large and small. When the ephors entered office, for example, they issued an official proclamation to the men of Sparta: ‘Shave your moustache and obey the laws.’ The depth of Spartan respect for their system of government under law was symbolized by their tradition that Apollo of Delphi had sanctioned it with an *oracle called the Rhetra*. A Spartan leader named Lycurgus, they said, had instituted the reforms that the Rhetra institutionalized. Even in antiquity historians had no firm information about the dates of Lycurgus’s leadership or precisely how he changed Spartan laws. All we can say today is that the Spartans evolved their law-based political system during the period from about 800 to 600 B.C. *Unlike other Greeks, the Spartans never had their laws written down*. Instead, they preserved their system from generation to generation with a distinctive, highly structured way of life based on a special economic foundation. (*An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander*, “The Laws of Sparta” 6; emphasis added)

Likewise, contemporary currents in the reception of Plato like those pioneered by the Tübinger Platonschule or the recent expansion into the Scuola di Milano conducted by Giovanni Reale, together argue that the true teachings of the Academia were not to be written, serving at most the dialogues as propaedeutical materials or even class-notes. The case for Plato’s orality is solidly presented by Reale’s *Autotestimonianze e rimandi dei dialoghi di Platone alle dottrine non scritte*, who presents direct proof of the exegesis vindicated by Hans

⁴⁸ Orality and customs as the strongest signs of political virtue and traditionalism will be recovered by the Romans, whose *mos maiorum*—the unwritten traditional customs—were always reclaimed as a counterbalance to the toppling power of the *res novae*—a fascinating term encompassing all changes—. Augustus’s unparalleled political mastery has everything to do with his ability to change everything without seemingly changing anything. His revolution is one disguised as reverential traditionalism and conservatism.

Joachim Krämer (*Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*), and Konrad Gaiser (*Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*). One of the most enticing conclusions of these interpreters is the revitalization of the role of Plotinus and Proclus, who instead of just being mystical readers who stretched Plato to their own interest, can be considered as direct continuators of the academic oral doctrines. From this perspective, the introduction of Aristotelian, stoic and ascetic principles by Christian Neoplatonism could be a direct evolution of Plato's thought in its most essential, oral form. This transmission, we will see, is crucial in order to understand how the largely platonic form of laconism present in the early monastic practices and rules could, at the same time, refute platonic dogmas such as the community of women and children; a necessary step in order to conform to the incipient Christian theological system.

This discussion regarding the *agrapha dogmata* –the unwritten doctrines– of both the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus and Athens's prominent thinker Plato welcomes the already classical analysis of *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle Dottrine non scritte*, where Reale pondered the possibility of an esoteric corpus of platonic teachings that would represent the hidden core of the master's theories. Out of the materials analyzed in his *Autotestimonianze*, it is worth quoting the widely commented *Seventh Letter*:

I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching of me or of others, or by their own discoveries-that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real skill in the matter. *There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject.* (Plato, *Seventh Letter* 341b-c; emphasis mine)

Even if we nuance or question Plato's words in the seventh letter, this non-medical agraphia is the result of a conscious, voluntary project⁴⁹. Be it a philosophical stance against the fixed and perishable nature of writing as opposed to the lively effects of face-to-face –soul-to-soul– conversation, or an actual esoteric dimension to his teachings, truth is that his questioning of scriptural knowledge would inspire a myriad of Neoplatonist schools, including the transcendental Accademia Neoplatonica lead by Marsilio Ficino. The reluctance to the written characters expressed in this document is well known, especially the passage in which Plato argues that “no man of intelligence will venture to express his philosophical views in language, especially not in language that is unchangeable, which is true of that which is set down in written characters” (*Seventh Letter*). Not surprisingly, some of the last words ever written by Saint Augustine as prologue to his *Retractationes* explain: “Scribere autem ista mihi placuit, ut haec emittam in manus hominum, a quibus ea quae iam edidi revocare emendanda non possum,” or “Writing this pleases me, as I wanted to place this book in the hands of men to whom I cannot ask to return the books I published in order to amend them” (*Retractationes*, “Prologus” 3; my translation). In the realm of textuality, only more text can clarify and respond to older writings. However, there is an aspect that often goes unnoticed

⁴⁹ According to Richard Stevko, this would be the only way to proceed according to Socrates truly agraphic existence (*Origins of Secret Societies* 121).

regarding the *Seventh Letter*, the communitarian philosophy of language expressed by the master:

For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a *life lived together*, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself. (*Seventh Letter* 341c-d emphasis mine) ⁵⁰

Christianity does mingle with esotericism from Origen to Ficino's very own Accademia Neoplatonica, the true culmination of Neoplatonism's esoteric and mystical dimensions. It would not, however, take long for mainline Neoplatonism as represented by the Church to establish that transparency and universality are precisely the features that distinguish their tradition from any other sect.

After open rejections to the classical culture like those displayed by Saint Macrina and Saint Basil, Augustine represents the Church's official reconciliation after Origen's *Contra Celsum*. Origen had finely criticized the elements of ancient education which led to arrogance and hedonistic ornamentation while saving the power to convey the truth of the astonishing systems of thinking and communication devised by the ancients. From there,

⁵⁰ "Yet this much I know-that if the things were written or put into words, it would be done best by me, and that, if they were written badly, I should be the person most pained. Again, if they had appeared to me to admit adequately of writing and exposition, what task in life could I have performed nobler than this, to write what is of great service to mankind and to bring the nature of things into the light for all to see? But I do not think it a good thing for men that there should be a disquisition, as it is called, on this topic-except for some few, who are able with a little teaching to find it out for themselves. As for the rest, it would fill some of them quite illogically with a mistaken feeling of contempt, and others with lofty and vain-glorious expectations, as though they had learnt something high and mighty" (*Seventh Letter* 341d-e).

Augustine invites Christians to learn from the classics, but do so in a critical manner capable of using their tools to serve a universalist, benefactor program. His *De doctrina Christiana* is responsible for the universalization of the Origenist stance and, subsequently, the legitimation of classical and pagan sources in the bosom of Christianity. The move is largely responsible for the preservation of ancient philosophy, a theoretical corpus to which medieval authors uninterruptedly belonged. Interestingly enough, this patristic shift in order to free Platonism from its esotericism and imbue it with universalism provided the tools for 16th century Catholicism to defend the oral traditionalism of the Church against the *sola scriptura* approach of Luther. One of Trent's main argument would, precisely, be that the letter needs this spirit of oral tradition ("much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together," says Plato) since the message is a Living Word: a scriptural revelation animated by the shared existence of the human community. Esoteric or universalist, this polity building through language is precisely that which Brian Stock defines as *textual communities*.

Political Sources of Monasticism: Xenophon

No other source provides as much as information as Xenophon's *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, *Hellenica*, and *Memorabilia*. There is no hazard in

the fact that the two most prominent students of Socrates, Plato and Xenophon himself, are responsible for the most developed Laconist political projects.⁵¹

According to Michael Lipka's rigorous study, the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, whose authorship we can reasonably attribute to Xenophon, must have been written before 371 BC (*Xenophon's Spartan Constitution* 9-13)⁵². Except for the efforts of Plutarch and some fragments scattered around the Greco-Roman corpus, we owe our knowledge of the Great Rhetra to Xenophon. Why did he decide to set in stone the otherwise orally transmitted constitution of an almost mythical state? We have discussed the influence of Socrates and the Laconist circles, but Xenophon also attributes it to the direct observation of his world: "It occurred to me one day that Sparta, though among the most thinly populated of states, was evidently the most powerful and most celebrated city in Greece; and I fell to wondering how this could have happened. But when I considered the institutions of the Spartans, I wondered no longer"

⁵¹ "Xenophon at times suggests that the only possible or necessary definition of virtue was the living example of Socrates himself (*Mem.* 4.4.9: 1.2 passim) and has Socrates argue that virtue is useless without practice (3.9.1-3). The identification of virtue with ascetic self-discipline he particularly associates with Socrates' disciple Antisthenes, one of the most prolific writers among the older Socratics. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Antisthenes is a practical moralist whose main theme is simplicity of life. Among other proto-Cynic maxims he was supposed to have said that virtue is self-sufficient for happiness, provided it is equipped with the strength of Socrates (Diogenes Laertius 6.11)—perhaps the earliest use of the word *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, to imply independence from society as a high moral ideal" (*Cities of the Gods* 60).

⁵² Other essential works on the subject include Leo Strauss's "L'esprit de Sparte et le gout de Xénophon;" Pierre Chambry's "Notice sur la République des Lacédémoniens;" Gerald Proietti's *Xenophon's Sparta: An Introduction*; Stefan Rebenich's *Xenophon Die Verfassung der Spartaner*; as well as Lipka's own *Xenophon's Spartan Constitution* and "Xenophon on Government".

(*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* I.1). Although it is difficult to believe that Xenophon based his work on a mere occurrence, especially knowing that many Socratics were also interested in the subject, the labor of research and reconstruction may very well have been his own initiative. Immediately thereafter, Xenophon the Athenian gives credit of the Great Rhetra to the individual now widely associated with the final form of the “text”:

Lycurgus, who gave them the laws that they obey, and to which they owe their prosperity, I do regard with wonder; and I think that he reached the utmost limit of wisdom. For it was not by imitating other states, but by devising a system utterly different from that of most others, that he made his country pre-eminently prosperous. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* I.2)

Two main aspects shine here. First, Xenophon admires the excellence of what he found during his inquiries on the figure of Lycurgus, who he considers to be a most memorable lawgiver. Second, he praises the disposition of the Spartan people in following for so many centuries the laws of the old world. This valorization of the rule and its following by the denizens will be key in the Platonic and Hellenistic experiments, as well as, adopting a wholly new dimension, a Christianity whose polity’s success depends exclusively on the trust of and love to the words of God himself. If Xenophon thinks that it is difficult, yet laudable to abide by the laws of a distant founder, what would have he thought about following those of a divine, invisible one?⁵³ Last but not least, the philosopher underlines the originality of the Spartan worldview, whose

⁵³ This was the exact analysis presented by Lucian in *The Passing of the Peregrinus*, where God, or satirically Peregrinus, is described as the Christians “original lawgiver”.

triumph is largely the product of having the courage to traverse their own path without being tempted by the blossoming of Athens and other powers. In the eyes of the laconophiles, the authenticity of the Lacedaemonian system proved to be right; what most did not seem to realize is that by importing the Spartan system into Athens or other cities, they would be breaking the very nature of the model they praised⁵⁴. If he intends to praise the “customs established by Lycurgus at Sparta that are contrary to those of the other Greeks” (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* VII.1), how could he do it by inviting the reader to imitate them?

Xenophon’s commendation of the *Spartan Constitution’s* aligid moment arrives when he dissects the reasons behind the absolute idiosyncrasy of the Lacedaemonian perspective. Not only the eternal, but also the positive, legislative one. The most famous fragment comments the extraordinary views on property held by the spartiates, which allow him to praise the motives behind this theory of having:

In other states, I suppose, *all men make as much money as they can*. One is a farmer, another a ship-owner, another a merchant, and others live by different handicrafts. But at Sparta Lycurgus *forbade freeborn citizens to have anything to do with business affairs*. He insisted on their regarding as their own concern only those activities that

⁵⁴ This authenticity is presented by the Pseudo-Xenophon as a sign of Greekness, whereas Athenians practiced a much more syncretic approach to life: “the Greeks rather tend to use their own dialect, way of life, and type of dress, but the Athenians use a mixture from all the Greeks and non-Greeks” (*Athenian Constitution* II.8). A memorable case is the process of orientalization experienced by Alexander the Great as its epic journey towards the East – according to the myth perpetuated by Eunapius’s *Lives of the Sophists*, largely inspired in Xenophon’s very own *Anabasis*–. The problem of the existing differences between the cities of Macedonia, Greece, and Persia still begs to be discussed.

make for *civic freedom*. Indeed, how should wealth be a serious object there, when he insisted on equal contributions to the food supply and on the same standard of living for all, and thus cut off the *attraction of money* for indulgence' sake? (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* VII.1-6; emphasis added)

Xenophon and most laconophiles understand that Lycurgus disincentivized possession as a form of distinction, not because of wealth itself, but because of a hidden dichotomy. We could explain it quoting a million authorities, but nowhere has it been expressed in a more synthetic way than in Saint Matthew's gospel: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). With the exception of a polytheistic pantheon, the situation is identical for Lycurgus' and his progenies. Our citizens will aspire to love wealth as in gold and currency, or wealth as in fraternity and service to the health of the body politic. There is no place in Lycurgus, Plato or Xenophon for Adam Smith's views, but this does not mean at all that the individual is eliminated. The individual is, verily, absolutely crucial to this worldview: Only that it is never understood as his own telos, but as the protagonist in the service to the other and the group. Suppressing the incentives that a richness-oriented system has to offer allows Lycurgus to design a model in which the value of the individual is not derived from personal possessions, but from the amount and quality of service provided to the community. From the laconic perspective, only those individuals who learn to disregard mammon can exercise the desired "civic freedom". Given their distrust in terms of the individual's force of will to stop this natural inclination towards egotistic appropriation, they chose not to change their objectives or accommodate it in within a different social mesh (like Adam Smith

would do), but to ban it altogether. This dramaticism has understandably scared and disgusted interpreters from Athens to the contemporary liberal West. Yet it shows, in the specific case of Sparta but even much more so in the elements which Christians were able to save from this model –in the creation of egalitarian communities and polities–, that utopias are not always utopias. That not all failed utopias fail.⁵⁵

Proof of this is the redistribution system described in the sixth section of the *Constitution*. This is probably one of the most inspiring passages:

A similar plan of borrowing is applied to horses also; thus, a man who falls ill or wants a carriage or wishes to get to some place quickly, if he sees a horse anywhere, takes and uses it carefully and duly restores it. There is yet another among the *customs instituted by him which is not found in other communities*. It was intended to meet the needs of parties belated in the hunting-field with nothing ready to eat. He made a rule that those who had plenty should leave behind the prepared food, and that those who needed food should break the seals, take as much as they wanted, seal up the rest and leave it behind. The result of this method of going shares with one another is that even those who have but little receive a share of all that the country yields whenever they want anything. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* VI.3-5; emphasis mine)

Horses, food, and basic necessities... Here we have a few concrete examples that detail the famous Spartan system of property. This system could look like redistributive model, but it is actually a distributive one. The spartiates do indeed own land, and there are major differences between them and those who do not

⁵⁵ “Are Failed Utopias Failed?” was the title of a brilliant talk by Víctor Pueyo Zoco at the American Comparative Literature Association 2018 Convention. There is no need to say that none of my dissertations or current intellectual endeavors would have been possible without our uncountable hours of fruitful conversation and indelible friendship.

belong to the ruling class, but property is not regarded as a natural right of the individual. It is, instead, derived from the polity itself. The radical renunciation to property by the ruling class of the spartiates (and we will have to talk extensively about what happens to the other classes and what Christians have to say about it) has one simple goal: creating the conditions for the overcoming of egotistic appropriation and for the proliferation of sincere commitment to the city and love to their neighbors. This is achieved by the means of this habitus, of these consuetudinary practices, but also through the institution of a special connection between the denizens and their law.

Indeed, Spartans relate to their purview in a special manner that seems foreign even to contemporary 5th and 4th century Athenians. The law is not just *nomos* –human law–, but also *themis* –natural, absolute law–. Although the term is not foreign to Athens, in the Periclean world it cannot resound without a certain archaism analogous to Plato’s reading of *Dike* as both justice and divine order, or proportionality. Themis, daughter of Uranus and Gaia, is the goddess of law. Acute scholars such as Malcom Schofield (“Euboulia in the Iliad”), Hugh Lloyd-Jones (*The Justice of Zeus*), or Moses I. Finley (*The World of Odysseus*) have reflected on the role of Themis and, above all, the impact of her commands –*themistes*– in Greek history.

Malcom Schofield is concerned with the idea of *euboulia*, or proper judgment or advise as related to the Boule, that is, the council. On the other hand, *themistes* are the mandates of the gods that, often interpreted like laws,

help guide that judgment. Lloyd-Jones defines a themistes as a “declaration of a divine command or of a command advised by a god” (*The Justice of Zeus* 116 note 23), also stressing the incommensurability between the worldview in which these divine commands were conceived and our modern, post-Lockean perspective, from which they “are thought by the Greeks to come from god, but to the armchair anthropological observer they appear as ‘customs, usages, principles of justice’” (6). In a well-known passage of his most famous work, *The World of Odysseus*, Moses I. Finley tackles the nature of the goddess herself stating that “Themis is untranslatable. A gift of the gods and a mark of civilized existence, sometimes it means right custom, proper procedure, social order, and sometimes merely the will of the gods (as unveiled by an omen, for example) with little of the idea of right” (*The World* 78). Although this analysis conflates Themis –the willing– with themistes –the will– a bit too much, truth is that it reveals the inenarrable nature of the mandate. This mythical foundation of the law is, as in the mentioned studies, often reserved to the archaic period in Athens, but in the Spartan case it is still the best approach to understanding Xenophon’s surprise: Even for 4th-Century Spartans, there is something more than the will of a human lawgiver to the law.

For some reason, though, most experts seem to leave the discussion aside for the footnotes instead of devoting a full analysis to the tension between *nomos* and *themis*. A full study on the subject would be as needed as fascinating, but in the meantime, it is worth stressing that the profound Spartan reverence

towards their law can be explained in non-anachronistic terms by resorting to the contrast between the human and the divine law, being the commands of Themis a practical nexus between the two dimensions. A point of contact that very well gives account of the semi-mythical foundations of the Great Rhetra as dictated by the divine⁵⁶. From this perspective, the good law, *eunomia*, must have some of *euthemia* too. This explains the sense of obedience that fascinates Xenophon:

In other states the most powerful citizens do not even wish it to be thought that they fear the magistrates: they believe such fear to be a badge of slavery. But at Sparta the most important men show the utmost deference to the magistrates: they pride themselves on their *humility*, on running instead of walking to answer any call, in the belief that, if they lead, the rest will follow along the path of eager obedience. And so, it has proved. It is probable also that these same citizens helped to set up the office of Ephor, having concluded that *obedience* is a very great blessing whether in a state or an army or a household. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* VIII.2-3; emphasis mine)

Conceived as the most perfect application of divine law, the resemblances between the Christian vow and the Spartan praise of obedience can hardly surprise us. Even the most powerful of earthly emperors owes full submission to the heavenly master(s). So do the kings of Sparta, and so will European monarchs since the principle was formulated in the Letter of Pope Gelasius I to Emperor Anastasius in 494, the transcendent *Duo sunt*, and whose ideas were

⁵⁶ The oral condition of Greek constitutionalism is not exclusive to Sparta. Aristotle refers to poetry as the source of the decisive Solonian constitution: “The truth of this view of Solon’s policy is established alike by common consent, and by the mention he has himself made of the matter in his poems. Thus: I gave to the mass of the people such rank as befitted their need, I took not away their honour, and I granted naught to their greed” (*The Athenian Constitution* I.12).

fully installed at least as early as in Charlemagne. And they make a value out of this, to the point of being proud of their humility, austerity, obedience... Moreover, this theological foundation of politics translates the rhetoric of obedience and humility into one that will fascinate the world of Christianity; Xenophon attests that “they pride themselves on their humility”, a humility which will become the number one virtue and value of all Christians (VIII.2-3). The path to reach it prefigures exactly the idea of *ascesis* etymologically understood as “exercise” or “training”, especially as self-disciplined through hardship. This is one of those passages whose description of consuetudinary practices and habits would fascinate biopolitical interpreters:

Instead of softening the boys’ feet with sandals he required them to *harden* their feet by going without shoes. He believed that if this habit were cultivated it would enable them to climb hills more easily and descend steep inclines with less danger, and that a youth who had accustomed himself to go barefoot would leap and jump and run more nimbly than a boy in sandals. And instead of letting them be pampered in the *matter of clothing*, he introduced the custom of wearing one garment throughout the year, believing that they would thus *be better prepared* to face changes of heat and cold. As to the food, he required the prefect to bring with him such a moderate amount of it that the boys would never suffer from repletion, and would know what it was to go with their hunger unsatisfied. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* I.3-6; emphasis added)

Modesty, humility, contention, balance, health, and temperance are all values often associated with those in need, especially from the late Roman or late medieval perspectives of the ruler as site of excess, but at least since Sparta and Plato, Judaism and Christianity make of these values something much more prevalent than just some desirable attitude. They become the very heart of the

modern life ideals. From the aforementioned biopolitical perspective, the institutionalization of certain practices and habits –*habitus* is both the garment and the repetition of practices, as theorized by Agamben (*Il Regno e la gloria*), and Pierre Bourdieu (*Le Sens Pratique*)– constitutes the ultimate mechanism in the production of subjectivity. As such, Spartans and the subsequent laconophiles succeed not only at devising a smooth assembly line of apt subjectivities for the polis (which the entire *Republic* of Plato aims to be), but even more importantly, a narration that exalts the very values it produces. That is how the Lacedaemonian Constitution –and then the Christian ones– succeeds at recursively legitimizing and perpetuating a form of life.

In this exact context, Giorgio Agamben recently published a collection of conferences articulated around the Greek notion of civil war: *stasis*. The destructive-productive, contingent-necessary nature of the stasis is memorably expressed in Xenophon’s work when he ponders the role of strife in the Lacedaemonian world:

Here then you find that kind of *strife* that is dearest to the gods, and in the highest sense *political* –the strife that sets the standard of a brave man’s conduct; and in which either party exerts itself to the end that it may never fall below its best, and that, when the time comes, *every member of it may support the state with all his might.* (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* IV.6; emphasis added)

In the Greek world, this again reminds us of the Sacred Band of Thebes and the bonds through which the incipient ruling city was able to conform its spearheading army.

Xenophon's compilation of the Spartan Constitution contrasts swiftly with the Pseudoxenophonian *Athenian Constitution*, which independently of its authorship cannot be disregarded, since it very tangibly expresses the antidemocratic tension in 4th-Century Athens. The apocryphal text begins inquiring about the reasons that led Athenians to choose their present constitution. From that perspective, the essay's narrating voice begins vituperating that:

they have chosen to let the worst people be better off than the good. Therefore, on this account I do not think well of their constitution. But since they have decided to have it so, I intend to point out how well they preserve their constitution and accomplish those other things for which the rest of the Greeks criticize them. (*Athenian Constitution* I.1)

The third person pronoun would be relevant had this been written by a foreigner, but given the circumstances, it is even more telling that some Athenian would use it to refer to his own people. The remainder of the work analyzes the "well preserved" democracy of Athens, meticulously detailing why the Athenian understanding of the people leads to its "rabblification".

Towards the end of the first fragment, the Pseudo-Xenophon unveils his main argument against the Athenian model: "For the people do not want a good government under which they themselves are slaves; they want to be free and to rule. Bad government is of little concern to them" (*Athenian Constitution* I.8). This is how Laconists see it: The government of the rabble does not want

to make everyone good and free, but make them strong⁵⁷. In the end, the Pseudo-Xenophon attacks the very essence of the Athenian paradigm, openly opposing democracy to good government: “It is possible to discover many ways to improve the constitution; however, it is not easy to discover a means whereby the democracy may continue to exist but sufficient at the same time to provide a better polity” (*Athenian Constitution* III.9). From this perspective, the people must choose between having a democracy or having a good government capable of producing a good body politic. A democracy can only go so far, and the Pseudo-Xenophon, as well as many laconophiles, think that that far is not too far. In very similar terms to what Marxists would say of Bernstein’s non-revolutionary –conformist– social democracy, no subtle change is going to fix this mess. The alternative is a perpetuation of a system flawed from the start. Or is it? Aristotle seems to think very differently.

Political Sources of Monasticism: The Aristotelian Alternative

Although Plato had the deepest impact on early Christianity, one does not need to wait for Averroes or the rise of the University of Paris in the 13th century to see that Aristotle also had major contributions to make. His questioning of Plato’s *Politeia* very early on introduces some of the “corrections”

⁵⁷ Immediately before, it confronted the virtues of the ideal ruling class to those of the rabble: “But they know that this man’s ignorance, baseness, and favour are more profitable than the good man’s virtue, wisdom, and ill will. A city would not be the best on the basis of such a way of life, but the democracy would be best preserved that way” (*Athenian Constitution* I.7).

that Christians would later on implement to their concept of community. In fact, key Platonists such as Plotinus and Proclus are responsible for picking and choosing the most relevant doctrines not only from Plato, but also Aristotle and the Stoics. Aristotle's influence displays a slow build up; whereas early authors such as Justin Martyr quote Plato as a direct precursor and Aristotle seems to be one more of the possible authorities with which to legitimize Christianity, the Middle Ages will see his influence rise to the apex of the Averroist and Aquinian schools.

Aristotle deserves his own place in the Socratic tradition: While he is undoubtedly part of a golden lineage of philosophers congregated in Athens during the time of Pericles, Socrates, and beyond, the magnitude of his contributions make of him a star of his own. His legacy in the context of the laconist controversy confirms his role as both a continuator and also a profound counterpoint to Plato. More importantly, many of Aristotle's objections to Plato's political outlook that did not gain traction in its immediate environment of disenchantment with Athenian democracy would be swiftly appropriated by Hellenist, Roman, and Christian authors that would eventually elevate him to the mainstream level.

We know for a fact that Aristotle collected constitutions. This peculiar recreation helped him draw comparative studies and, for example, share with his mentee Alexander the Great the virtues and deficiencies of most poleis of the Magna Graecia. If he had the opportunity and skills to critically put

alongside the foundational documents of the oecumene, where did Aristotle stand in the Athens-Sparta debate? We ought to remember the taxonomy presented in the previous chapter, where Aristotle stated that “There are three possible systems of property: either all the citizens must own everything in common, or they must own nothing in common, or some things must be common property and others not” (*Politics* 1260). Absolute common property, absolute individual property, and mixed property. A fourth type, no property at all, will be introduced to the discussion by early proponents of monasticism. Against the total lack of commonality resulting from a purely individualistic system of property, he claims: “To have nothing in common is clearly impossible for the state is essentially a form of community, and to begin with there is bound to be a common locality: a single city occupies a single site, and the single city belongs to its citizens in common” (*Politics* 1260). It seems, then, that all forms of human association must practice at least some form of shared property, “But is it better for a city that is to be well ordered to have community in everything which can possibly be made common property, or is it better to have some things in common and others not?” (1261a). The question is, what should the extent of the common be? And, more deeply, is the individual previous to the common, the other way round, or none of the above?

Aristotle’s main reluctance has to do, not with the fact of common property itself, but with the platonic inclusion of humans –or more specifically

human bodies— as part of the commonality⁵⁸. The community of “children, wives and possessions” which Plato had derived from the Spartan elites is here acutely criticized. Among the limitations of the specific community of wives (and husbands), Aristotle claims that Socrates himself does not provide the elements for the implementation of the measure, imagining it to be ideal yet unreachable⁵⁹. All these caveats are just part of Aristotle’s main objection, that is, the limitations he attributes to the “ideal of the fullest possible unity of the entire state, which Socrates takes as his fundamental principle” (1261a). Drawing a distinction between the nature of the city, the household, and the soul, the Peripatetic warns about how the Socratic ideal can go too far:

Yet it is clear that if the process of unification advances beyond a certain point, the city will not be a city at all for a state essentially consists of a multitude of persons, and if its unification is carried beyond a certain point, city will be reduced to family and family to individual, for we should pronounce the family to be a more complete unity than the city, and the single person than the family. (*Politics* 1261a)

⁵⁸ Charles Kahn’s studies on the dialectical nature of the Platonic craft are compatible with the attribution, by Plato on the text itself and Aristotle as a reader, of actual Platonic doctrines to Socrates himself: “For example, it is possible for the citizens to have children, wives and possessions in common with each other, as in Plato’s *Republic*, in which Socrates says that there must be community of children, women and possessions. Well then, which is preferable, the system that now obtains, or one conforming with the regulation described in the *Republic*?” (Aristotle, *Politics* 1260b-1261a).

⁵⁹ “Now for all the citizens to have their wives in common involves a variety of difficulties; in particular, (1) the object which Socrates advances as the reason why this enactment should be made clearly does not follow from his arguments; also (2) as a means to the end which he asserts should be the fundamental object of the city, the scheme as actually set forth in the dialogue is not practicable; yet (3) how it is to be further worked out has been nowhere definitely stated. I refer to the ideal of the fullest possible unity of the entire state, which Socrates takes as his fundamental principle” (Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a).

There is a risk, Aristotle claims, for the city to become a family and, even worse, an individual. Warning the reader against the nepotistic peril of systems such as oligarchy and plutocracy, in which the few will tend to favor those closest to them as mistrust aggrandizes. In the worst scenario, a polity governed like an individual ends up becoming an actual individual. Against this potentiality, Aristotle bangs his fist on the table dissuading that “even if any lawgiver were able to unify the state, he must not do so, for he will destroy it in the process” (*Politics* 1261a). But do Plato and Aristotle mean the same by “unification”? What are its goals and limitations? And how is this achieved anyway? There are some nuances that ought to be introduced.

In his trendsetting work, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Ernst H. Kantorowicz analyzed how the Christian concept of *persona* – the attribution of dignity to individuals for the mere fact of being alive– allowed during the Middle Ages for political and theological thinkers to develop a double nature conception of power: The person of, for example, Charles of Habsburg, and the royal body of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. This milestone in the theorization of political theology provides an understanding of the acute reservations proffered by Aristotle centuries prior to the emergence of national monarchies. A recent study by Jennifer Rust studies the duplicity of the body in the political theology of authors such as Carl Schmitt, Henri Lubac and Ernst Kantorowicz, which are among Roberto Esposito’s and Giorgio Agamben’s biggest influences (“Political Theologies of the *Corpus Mysticum*.”

Schmitt, Kantorowicz, and de Lubac”). In an attempt to dispel the authoritarian corollaries of Schmitt’s work, Kantorowicz rescues Lubac’s terminology of the *corpus mysticum* and ventures an allegorical interpretation of the ruler’s body, thus allowing for a de-divinizing approach to the sovereign. This is extremely helpful regarding late medieval and modern thought, but as all of these authors point out, the deification of the ruler can be dated around the 13th century; meaning that the late ancient and early medieval Christians worked under a different paradigm. In fact, this apotheosis is not foreign to the ancient world, being one of the aspects of public culture in the Roman world that Christians were not willing to accept⁶⁰. Apotheosis, a central element of the imperial phase, shows once again the indisociability of theology and politics, as impersonated by the

⁶⁰ The *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*, edited by McGovern, defines “apotheosis” as “The elevation of a person to the rank of a god after their death. Known as either apotheosis or deification, the elevation of a person to the rank of a god after their death is closely related to the ancestor worship found in a number of ancient cultures. The Egyptian pharaohs, who were already regarded as divine beings while alive, were believed to complete their apotheosis upon death. The custom of according divine status to a deceased person is, however, most commonly associated with the later Roman Empire. This Roman tradition began with the Senate’s deification of Julius Caesar after his assassination in 44 bc. In ad 14 the Emperor Augustus was similarly honoured, as were many future emperors”. In this regard, Christians felt a lot closer to Seneca than Caesar and it was not uncommon for them to refuse partaking in the practices of public apotheosis and parousia. *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*: “The transliteration of a Greek word that can mean either ‘presence’ or ‘arrival’, ‘parousia’ is used in Christian theology to refer to Christ’s future return in glory (the ‘second coming’). Parousia, creating community: “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (Romans 15:2). The theological reasoning provides an original returning to the Greek etymology in which the *ousia* that *appears* is not the substance, the body of the prince, but that of the Prince of Heaven (“παρουσία presence < παρα- para- + ουσία essence, substance” [OED, “parousia”]). As opposed to the arrival of the earthly –yet deified– prince “The term is drawn directly from the NT, where it is used to refer to the eschatological ‘coming of the Son of Man’ [. . .] In his letters Paul clearly understands this return as signaling the final vindication of Christ’s lordship and the realization of the Christian hope of resurrection to eternal life in communion with Christ” (*Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, “parousia”).

pontifex maximus, and only then emperor, Julius Caesar. The Christian reconceptualization of apotheosis is not an isolated case, as they also took the Greek notion of *parousia* and imbued it with theopolitical meaning.

Political Sources of Monasticism: Plutarch

The increasing hybridity of Late Antiquity can be seen in the figure of Plutarch (46 AD – 120 AD), whose Greek heritage is neatly mixed with the Latinity which he embraced later in life. After acquiring his philosophical outlook from Ammonius of Athens, whose teachings combined Aristotelianism and Platonism, Plutarch composed the unmistakable *Moralia* and *Parallel Lives*, where he devoted several books to the great navarch Lysander, lawgiver Lycurgus, and the so-called *Sayings of Spartans* and *Ancient Customs of the Spartans*.

The impact of Plutarch's work has been measured by Bertrand Russell in a moment of his *History of Western Philosophy*, where he is presented as the culmination of Plato's Laconophilia:

Sparta had a double effect on Greek thought: through the reality, and through the myth. Each is important. The reality enabled the Spartans to defeat Athens in war; the myth influenced Plato's political theory, and that of countless subsequent writers. The myth, fully developed, is to be found in Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus*; the ideals that it favours have had a great part in framing the doctrines of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and National Socialism. The myth is of even more importance, historically, than the reality; nevertheless, we will begin with the latter. For the reality was the source of the myth. (*History of Western Philosophy* XII)

Putting Rousseau, Nietzsche, and National Socialism (Carl Schmitt? Joseph Goebbels? None of the above?) in the same sentence should be enough of a

warning for the careful reader. Their ideas of the self and the common are, if not incompatible, at least very distinct. Rousseau leans towards radical communitarianism but does it from the perspective of the individual autonomous subject of Modernity. Nietzsche criticizes the self-imposed limitations of one such subject and advocates for a sort of non-ascetic radical individualism (also, Nietzsche influenced by Plato?). Since National Socialism does not think nor can be discussed in such a generic form, we can pinpoint some of its theoretical foundations in the figure of Schmitt who, as proven extensively by Giorgio Agamben and Chantal Mouffe, is a strong proponent of a new type of Hobbesian polity that does not rely in the Rousseauian autonomous subject. Be it as it may, unnuancedly having Plato and Plutarch in the same sentence as these thinkers seems problematic. Without incurring in major anachronisms, how can we conflate their theories of subjectivity and politics? After Ockham, Descartes, Locke and Rousseau, it becomes really difficult to conceive a political model that does not rely on the ideology of the modern autonomous subject, a protagonist not present in Plato or Plutarch. In fact, one of the key things that this dissertation aims to prove is how this incommensurability leads to the production of original, yet not reversible, models of the common in modern times. The “serious” Laconophilia present in Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch evolves through Neoplatonism into a less elitist, more universalist worldview in the works of Basil, Augustine, Aquinas, Petrarch and Dante long before than in the ones mentioned by Russell. The

other one, that of the survival of the fittest and the nostalgia of slavery, is the product of a wistful idealization of the ancient underdog by modern authors around the time of the Enlightenment. The first one, uninterrupted continuation between the ancient and the medieval, results in monasticism, and later in the medieval and modern monarchies –the dream of the *Universitas Christiana*–. The second, which does not represent a continuous exegetical tradition, reemerges in the romantic revision of force and martialism by the Enlightenment, Romanticism and contemporary fascism.

Plutarch's colorful depiction of the Spartan way of life is responsible for posterity's most widespread views on martialism, equality (and inequality), education, and customs. The topic of the strong common bond is decisively stressed in the "Instituta Laconica" section of the *Moralia*, to the point of becoming after this work the value most deeply associated with Sparta as a polis. According to Plutarch, this bond is owed to the discipline and equality achieved through a shared, tradition-oriented appreciation of the founding law. "For they had confidence one in another, as the result of their ancestral discipline," he says (*Moralia* XVII.12). It is often claimed that Sparta is a body politic frozen in time and there are more than a few arguments to claim so. Plutarch interprets the intentions of Lycurgus in a key moment of his *Parallel Lives*:

When his principal institutions were at last firmly *fixed in the customs of the people*, and his civil polity had sufficient *growth and strength to support and preserve itself*, just as Plato says that Deity was rejoiced to see His universe come into being and make its first motion, so Lycurgus was filled with joyful satisfaction in the magnitude and beauty of his system of laws, now that it was in

operation and moving along its pathway. He therefore ardently desired, so far as human forethought could accomplish the task, *to make it immortal, and let it go down unchanged to future ages.* (*Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus” 29.1-6; emphasis added)

All the necessary elements for interpretation are here: Perenniality of the divine law, divinity of the Great Rhetra, and immortalization through customs and habit. Lycurgus is a demiurge that devises an almost divine law, gives it to a people, and makes sure of its permanence through the installation of deeply-rooted customs. From this perspective, Lycurgus’s plan does indeed seem like one of time-suppression. The Spartan paradox, however, is that of an extremely self-preserving, almost self-perpetuating polity that nonetheless develops a radical sense of historicity.

While the Egyptians and Athenians worked under a cyclical model of time that allowed them to conceive progress while still very highly regarding tradition. Judaism’s complexity is largely responsible for developing our Western understanding of temporality, since it allows for a deeply rooted traditionalism to be combined with progressive, messianic, and cyclical elements⁶¹. For reasons that have more to do with Russell’s and Popper’s

⁶¹ G.J. Whitrow’s work, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* is to this date the most informative work on the subject. The prevailing sense of temporality in Ancient Greece can be seen starting in the archaic age, but becomes a matter of philosophical discussion in the Presocratic discussions on the origins of the world and physics. Time as a concept in Egypt and the founding civilizations. The case of Egypt and Mesopotamia is a bit more evanescent, since we do not really have philosophical treatises to help us exegesize; powerful studies include Francoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie’s *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000BCE to 395 CE*, or Patricia A Bochi’s concise “Time in the Art of Ancient Egypt: From Ideological Concept to Visual Construct”. Regarding Judaism and temporality, Michael A. Knibb has written a fantastic article entitled “Apocalypticism and Messianism” (*The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 403-33); together with Martha Himmelfarb’s *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel*, modern scholarship provides an

contemporary political animosities, Sparta's traditionalism is not seen as a source of healthy balance as in the other cultures, but as a highly reactionary one. Yet the city's staticism is not only compatible, but an essential element to the Lacedaemonian understanding of temporality.

Accustomed as we are to conceiving time as an arrow (Jewish messianism as present in the Dead Sea Scrolls and, later, the person of Christ are responsible for this development), it just seems counterintuitive to imagine a sense of temporality defined by its perpetuation. The chapter on Lycurgus out of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* argues that "The aim, therefore, of all his arrangements and adjustments was to make his people free-minded, self-sufficing, and moderate in all their ways, and to keep them so as long as possible" (*Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus" 31.1). The problem, though, is more ontological than gnosiological, as it would not have surprised thinkers of the eternal substance such as Parmenides, Socrates, or Plato (Spinoza's case could be discussed, as there is room in his *substantia* for change, yet change—or the appearance of it—is just one more attribute of God's eternity). I think with Plutarch that this is one more reason why Plato was so aptly predisposed to incorporate the Lacedaemonian perspective into his system. "His design for a civil polity was adopted by Plato, Diogenes, Zeno, and by all those who have won approval for their treatises on the subject," continues Plutarch in his *Parallel*

archeological perspective in line with the very much alive discussions derived from Walter Benjamin's *Thesen Über den Begriff der Geschichte*.

Lives (“Lycurgus” 31.2). It is not that change and becoming are unexisting but that, seen from eternity’s optics, they are revealed to just be a product of our finite understanding. Christians would also toy with this staticism of change, as the idea of a created reality works particularly well if all developments are just seen as the unfolding of an already prewritten code. Ages later, 16-Century theologians went back to discussing the compatibility of this code of existence with the possibility of free will, as popularized by Erasmus –who claims that there must be some room– and Luther –whose interpretation leans towards the absoluteness of God’s plan–. But there is one aspect brilliantly highlighted by Plutarch that unveils an even deeper connection between the modern world shaped by Platonism and Christianity, and the ancient one of Hellenistic Judaism and Laconophilia: the permanence of the ideal law –or code– acquires its sense from the radical mortality of the human observers. All Spartans must perish, but they partake of something that aspires to be perennial. This leads naturally to a concept of historically accumulated tradition not dissimilar to the one implemented by Plato and Anti-Nicene Christians. This is how we can understand the prominent role of language, honor and customs, even artistic ones, as tradition-building tools in the production of a political mythology:

They were no less seriously concerned over their music and their songs. These contained a stimulus to awaken a spirit of pride and to afford an inspiring and effective impulse. Their language was simple and plain, consisting merely of praise of those who had lived noble lives, and had died for Sparta, and are now counted among the blessed, and also censure of those who had played the coward. (*Moralia* XVII.14)

Martialism, asceticism, and communitarianism are just steps in the solidification of as close as possible to an eternal law on Earth. The commonly exaggerated stubbornness of Spartans is just an outsider's perspective that only sees the sacrifices and not the goal of those sacrifices. War or self-effacement are not destinations, but time-tested paths towards the production of a harmonious – even extremely so– body politic that transcends individual egotism and interests⁶². Same as religious asceticism and mortification have often been misinterpreted even by those who practice them –focusing on the means while forgetting the reason–, the self-preserving attitude of Lycurgus's Sparta is difficult to digest from individualist, expansionist, or globalist points of view – its internationalist derivation was a Christian innovation skillfully borrowed by modern continuators of Rousseau such as Marx himself–. For naturally colonizing polities such as Athens or Persia, it is difficult to understand why a city would want “no contact with foreign things” (*Moralia*, XVII.19-20). Yet for

⁶² The martial facet of Sparta is, once again, a means to fostering “concord and harmony” among the population, effectively becoming *a* body politic. Interesting enough, this is not as deprived of creativity and art as often thought, since language and music serve the same purpose: “Moreover the rhythmic movement of their marching songs was such as to excite courage and boldness, and contempt for death; and these they used both in dancing, and also to the accompaniment of the flute when advancing upon the enemy. In fact, Lycurgus coupled fondness for music with military drill, so that the over-assertive warlike spirit, by being combined with melody, might have concord and harmony. It was for this reason that in time of battle the king offered sacrifice to the Muses before the conflict, so that those who fought should make their deeds worthy to be told and to be remembered with honour” (Plutarch, *Moralia* XVII.16). It is not that art and creativity are banned from the polis but, very much like Saint Augustine would defend as the Christian rhetorical project in *De doctrina Christiana*, they receive their legitimacy from the function they serve. Capricious ornament has no place in Sparta or the monastery, but language and the arts can serve a purpose, be it praising God in Bach's *Matthäus-Passion*, making better persons, or exalting various polities in the discourses of Lysander, Cicero, or Lactantius.

Spartans and Laconophiles, autarchy –as first theorized by Xenophon– is the only rational corollary to a system built around the conviction that the present law is an uninterrupted continuation of the original, divine-inspired one transcribed by Lycurgus from the oracles.

It is worth remembering that Antonio Escohotado has recently argued that Spartans were expansionist brutes and peaceful merchants. A brief look at the sources will tell us that Sparta, fierce controller of Messenia, did not have the resources, the numbers, and in the case of naval warfare the skills to actually submit the Greek world as much as it has been said. Their solidity relied much more on their aura of prestige, be it as a deterrent or as an alliance-facilitator, than in factual military control. If we want to be accurate, I would suggest speaking of control –which Sparta did indeed exert on several regions of the Greek world– more than of expansionism, which much more closely resembles Athens’s model after the Persian Wars. This slightly more nuanced view should also be complemented by the fact that Athens did rely heavily on the metals and the grain coming from regions such as the exuberant Thrace, for it was the block of these routes who drastically helped Brasidas and then Lysander turn the tables.

Accidentally or not, Escohotado overlooks one of the essential features of the Athenian society which he so starkly praises. Against all historical evidence and without documental proof to support it, he claims that there is no expansionist impetus in the Athenian worldview, only peaceful commerce and

trade: “Como no alimentan ambiciones de expansion territorial, han ido fundando colonias costeras para comerciar con pueblos tan variopintos” (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.46). Asserting that Athens did not harbor any expansionist ambitions would require scholars and readers to deny the existence of Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War* and Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, disregard the existence of the Delian League, omit the increasingly demanding insistence on the payment of the *phoros*, or unsee the transition from the League to the Athenian Empire as the *phoros* becomes a matter of war-subsidies against half of the Greeks instead of the original fraternal contribution in resources and fighters against the Persian Empire¹. Athens’s expansionism was perennially captured by Thucydides in Chapter 5 of his masterpiece: “The Melians are Spartan colonists who, unlike other islanders, would not submit to Athenian domination: at first they remained neutral and took no part in the war, but later were forced into an openly hostile stance when the Athenians tried to coerce them by ravaging their land” (*The Peloponnesian War* V.84). Not just expansionism, but what is without question the most savage act of the entire Peloponnesian War is carried out by the Athenians as Melos resisted and, eventually, capitulated: “the Melians volunteered surrender to the Athenians at their absolute discretion. Of the Melian population the Athenians executed all the grown men who came into their hands and enslaved the children and women. Later they colonized the place themselves sending out five hundred settlers of their own” (*The Peloponnesian War* V.116). I chose Melos because they

embody the darkest side of a war they never wanted, but the active presence of Athens and its fleet around the Greek world makes Escotado's interpretation undefendable.

This interpretive leap of faith that Escotado and others demand would also require us to forget the fact that Sparta's main goal at the end of the war is the de-imperialization of Athens as an attempt to return to the model of the city-states, that is, the poleis. A demand which, by the way, was imposed by the Spartans against the will of their allies, the true victims of the Peloponnesian War, who wanted to see Athens –which they saw as an external invader and abusive ally– obliterated from the face of the Earth. Xenophon's *Hellenica* offers a healthy counterbalance to Escotado's excessive martialization of Sparta and laundering of Athens's mistakes:

the ephors called an assembly, at which the Corinthians and Thebans in particular, though many other Greeks agreed with them, opposed making a treaty with the Athenians and favoured destroying their city. The Lacedaemonians, however, said that they would not enslave a Greek city which had done great service amid the greatest perils that had befallen Greece, and they offered to make peace on these conditions: that the Athenians should destroy the long walls and the walls of the Piraeus, surrender all their ships except twelve, allow their exiles to return, count the same people friends and enemies as the Lacedaemonians did, and follow the Lacedaemonians both by land and by sea wherever they should lead the way. (*Hellenica*, II.II.17-22)

But, above all, visions such as Escotado's impel us to disregard events unjustifiable as the Siege of Melos in 416 BC, one of Athens's less noble acts of war. The well-deserved praise of Athenian culture results here in a case of

favoritism or deliberate omission which disregards all historical sources, starting from Thucydides's foundational *Peloponnesian War*.

What I have been trying to suggest here is that we can learn from Athens's greatness without having to falsify its failures and mistakes. And, contrary to some interpreters, I believe that this is also what has yielded the best results in the study of the so-called Dark Ages. Otherwise, we will just aprioristically disregard bodies of knowledge and culture for the sole reason of our initial, unnuanced theoretical assumptions. From this perspective, Sparta's predilection for autarchy makes perfect sense. From their outlook, the city's law was "finished" by Lycurgus, and it is the city's duty to extend in time that foundational moment of perfection. That is why the historicity and course of time in Sparta is one of constantly self-becoming eternity. Romans will call this return to the origins *mos maiorum*.

Given this belief, more often than not supported by the solid presence of Sparta in the Peloponnese, any changes cannot but be seen as deteriorations of an already perfect polis –in its deepest etymological sense of completeness–. This explains Sparta's initial reluctance to declaring war against Athens, only doing so after the pressure from allies such as Corinth and the risk of defection increase. The radical social experiment promoted by Lycurgus can only persevere through the domination of a select number of ancillary territories that supply Sparta with the necessary goods and workforce, combined with a system of alliances based on the city's prestige. Although slavery and submission of

other peoples are almost never underlined as problems from the Ancient Greek perspective (and Mediterranean in general, for that matter), primitive Christians nonetheless fascinated by the values of Lacedaemonian asceticism and self-effacement soon started to realize the incompatibility of the new Christian worldview and slavery as an essential element of the classical poleis. Their rehashing of Laconophile values via Plato was aimed at achieving an analogous sort of ideal body politic capable of achieving the same level of communal harmony without relying on the domination of other polities. As such, the Christian interpretation of the Lacedaemonian principles present in Plato and the religious communities of the Mediterranean transcends the usual model of locally secluded, often esoteric communities and makes the case for a universalist enterprise.

Revised the general project, we can discuss the consuetudinary details attested by Plutarch. How is the body politic depicted by Plutarch? Does it differ substantially from the version presented by his Greek-speaking counterparts? And, what is the state of Laconophilia in the first and second centuries of our era? As expected from the historiographical tradition he helped solidify, Plutarch places particular emphasis on the weight of common education, agoge, as a means towards the communalization of all things. Only if all are equally responsible they can be equally regarded. Virtue and commitment to the shared values are a precondition for becoming one with a social body that in most aspects predates the Christian concept of the *corpus mysticum*, or unity of the

Church in the body of Christ (as studied by Lubac, Kantorowicz, Rust...). The ultimate function of agoge is the communalization of all things through the obedience to a common purview that is elevated to the paroxysm of a shared existential purpose:

Moreover, the young men were required not only to respect their own fathers and to be obedient to them, but to have regard for all the older men, to make room for them on the streets, to give up their seats to them, and to keep quiet in their presence. As the result of this custom each man had authority, not as in other states over his own children, slaves, and property, but also over his neighbour's in like manner as over his own, to the end that the people should, as much as possible, have all things in common, and should take thought for them as for their own. (Plutarch, *Moralia* XVII.10)

Commonality of goods often centers all debates on Mediterranean utopianism, but that of education and authority would have a much more lasting impact on Western culture, from the privatization of the law during the feudal period to the establishment of modern national states as, etymologically, body politics built out of those who by birth *–nasci–* are bound to one same law. Before Christians devised the ingenious concept of *persona*, the right to citizenship was not necessarily a given derived from birth, since only those belonging to a particular *gens* –using the Roman term also present in the Vulgate– were granted this status. Moreover, in Sparta not even the leading class of the spartiates was able to take anything for granted. Even those educated to join the ranks of the elite band of commanding soldiers and politicians could easily lose their citizenship rights. Lack of courage in war, inability to administer the common property, of unwillingness to live as absolute equals were common reasons for

civil demotion. Plutarch expresses it very concisely when he links virtue to rights attesting that “Whosoever of the citizens would not submit to the discipline to which the boys were subjected had no participation in civic rights” (*Moralia* XVII.21). Although this commonality of education and obedience has a deeper impact on Western society, the system of property is still one of Sparta’s most appealing idiosyncrasies, always capable of attracting the interpreters’ attention.

Plutarch describes it memorably:

The selling of anything was not permitted; but it was their custom to use the neighbours’ servants as their own if they needed them and also their dogs and horses, unless the owners required them for their own use. And in the country, if anyone found himself lacking anything and had need of it, he would open an owner’s storehouse and take away enough to meet his need, and then replace the seals and leave it. (*Moralia* XVII.22)

No to personal property, yes to shared use. Maybe surprisingly, the way in which Plutarch formulates the passage allows for private property to exist, being usufruct what it is in common. Strictly speaking, what is forbidden is not property, but accumulation⁶³. Lycurgus and other analogous political planners

⁶³ I am neither referring to any type of accumulation, nor restricting it to the modern one, but thinking instead of the process which Marx defines as *ursprüngliche Akkumulation*, or primitive accumulation: “A certain accumulation of capital, in the hands of individual producers of commodities, forms therefore the necessary preliminary of the specifically capitalistic mode of production. We had, therefore, to assume that this occurs during the transition from handicraft to capitalistic industry. It may be called primitive accumulation, because it is the historic basis, instead of the historic result of specifically capitalist production. How it itself originates, we need not here inquire as yet. It is enough that it forms the starting point. But all methods for raising the social productive power of labour that are developed on this basis, are at the same time methods for the increased production of surplus-value or surplus-product, which in its turn is the formative element of accumulation. They are, therefore, at the same time methods of the production of capital by capital, or methods of its accelerated accumulation. The continual re-transformation of surplus-value into capital now appears in the shape of the increasing magnitude of the capital that enters into the process of production. This in turn is the basis of an extended scale of production, of the methods for raising the productive power of labour that accompany it, and of accelerated production of surplus-value. If, therefore, a

from the Mediterranean conceive their polities in a way than, be it through banning of private property or the installation of communal one, *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* is prevented. It is not exaggerated to say that Sparta's martial disposition is aimed at "protecting" –the word is important, since egotism and self-interest are seen as threats– the law and city from primitive accumulation. Only by not allowing certain individuals to channel –concentration and centralization– all capital can they future-proof the polity from privatizing models such as imperial oligarchy, feudalism, and capitalism. Notwithstanding the paradoxical reverberation, the Lacedaemonian understanding of oligarchy is an anti-privatizing one. And it is one such because it praepones a communal form of subjectivity to individualism (and, in the most interesting Neoplatonist developments including Augustine, does so while simultaneously valorizing the centrality of the individual). The individual is not deprived from value, but he finds it in the community.

Thus we arrive in the heart of the Spartan model according to Plutarch: the love for their own law and the role of limited property in the prolonged success of the polis. The commonplace view on Spartan property owes much

certain degree of accumulation of capital appears as a condition of the specifically capitalist mode of production, the latter causes conversely an accelerated accumulation of capital. With the accumulation of capital, therefore, the specifically capitalistic mode of production develops, and with the capitalist mode of production the accumulation of capital. Both these economic factors bring about, in the compound ratio of the impulses they reciprocally give one another, that change in the technical composition of capital by which the variable constituent becomes always smaller and smaller as compared with the constant" (*Das Kapital* I.25). The following part, "Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation," I.26 in the English edition, 1.7.24.1.741-797 in the German, contains some of the most valuable paragraphs of the work.

to Plutarch's formulation when he expounds that "there was no need whatever of making money, which involves a toilsome accumulation, nor of busy activity, because of his having made wealth wholly unenvied and unhonoured" (*Moralia*, XVII 41). The ethical reading of property is clear and explains how posterity, by the means of monks, saved the moral values of austerity and altruism while also discarding unacceptable elements such as the ancient world's reliance on slavery. Once again, even the fierce economic model of the polis is suppeditated to the spiritual, ethical project of unanimous concord:

It was not, however, the chief design of Lycurgus then to leave his city in command over a great many others, but he thought that the happiness of an entire city, like that of a single individual, depended on the prevalence of virtue and concord within its own borders. (*Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus" 31.1-3)

The principle of autarchy arises once again, but the walls and borders are conceptual, not stone ones. A crucial isomorphism between the body polity and the person is drawn: Both ought to aspire to reach eudaimonia, and to do so both need to exist in virtue and concord. Conversely, the body of the self and that of the city—as well as the cosmos—should govern themselves harmoniously. This harmony or unanimity obsessed both Laconophile and Christian authors, who set all the stakes on the success of their social bodies on the fact that they become a coherent whole. Be it the balance between the Hippocratic humors or the soul's parts and the social roles in the Platonic *Republic*, all levels of unity are believed to need equilibrium to thrive and persist. Saint Augustine will unify the Platonic project in three works that draw the human equivalent of the divine nature studied in *De Trinitate*: the balance between the struggling forces of the

soul in the *Confessions*, the members of the social body in the *City of God*, and the dimensions of language in *De doctrina Christiana*. Even though it may not seem as ambitious as his theoretical works, I believe that it is his *Regula* where all this pieces come together as he designs a new type of monastic society that would define the ages to come. A vision that, I will argue, allows for a way out of the feudal-capitalist connection by taking us back to the Lacedaemonian understanding of the self and the common. To the self as the common.

The book on Sparta's fore-fronting lawgiver culminates in a beautiful section where the tendentially perennial condition of the Great Rhetra is genealogically presented. The passage is worth its length:

Accordingly, he assembled the whole people, and told them that the provisions already made were sufficiently adapted to promote the prosperity and virtue of the state, but that something of the greatest weight and importance remained, which he could not lay before them until he had consulted the god at Delphi. They must therefore abide by the established laws and make no change nor alteration in them until he came back from Delphi in person; then he would do whatsoever the god thought best. When they all agreed to this and bade him set out on his journey, he exacted an oath from the kings and the senators, and afterwards from the rest of the citizens, that they would abide by the established polity and observe it until Lycurgus should come back; then he set out for Delphi. On reaching the oracle, he sacrificed to the god, and asked if the laws which he had established were good, and sufficient to promote a city's prosperity and virtue. Apollo answered that the laws which he had established were good, and that the city would continue to be held in highest honour while it kept to the polity of Lycurgus. This oracle Lycurgus wrote down, and sent it to Sparta. (*Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus" 29.1-6)

The remainder of the story is even more theatrical. Lycurgus asks his fellow citizens to swear fidelity to the Great Rhetra at least until he returns, since substantial changes should not be implemented without the oracle's

consultation. Almost immediately, Lycurgus fasts to death. While alive, he brought the law from the gods to the people. Now that he has passed away, his death ought to seal the perpetuity of the Great Rhetra.

It is not a *Deus absconditus* that deprives humans from accessing him, but a human demiurge that chooses to break all communications between the two worlds once the divine message has been transmitted in its entirety. As opposed to the Christian and especially the Jewish message –which neverendingly demands interpretation–, the Great Rhetra was once “correctly” interpreted by Lycurgus, and so it should stay without room for further exegesis. Sparta will be on the gods’ side for as long as they do not venture out of the donated law.

Yet, how feasible can one such polis be? Regarding the utopian nature of a communitarian project like Lycurgus’s, Plutarch is convinced that “he gave, to those who maintain that the much talked of natural disposition to wisdom exists only in theory, an example of an entire city given to the love of wisdom” (*Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus” 31.2). That is right. The lovers of wisdom are no others than the *philosophers*. The very same leading class selected by Plato to conduct the future in his politeia. Because they impose it on themselves first, they are the warrants of equality, communality, and mutual service. This homonimia is so strongly rooted that not only in front of their peers, but even in the eyes of the gods, Spartans do not vindicate anything other than what their virtuous life may merit: “calling on the gods for aid ought to be accompanied by effort and action on one’s own part, or else they should not be invoked

(*Moralia*, XVII.29). Instead of a preferential treatment, it was customary to conceive personal effort as an extension of the city's, "And their prayer is that the gods give them fair and honourable requital for their good deeds, and that is all" (*Moralia* XVII.27). It would not be until Aquinas that we saw such a nuanced taxonomy of the species of divine intervention, fortune, providence, and free will. In the case of the Spartan "favor" of the Gods, they do not ask for gratia data or undeserved grace, but only for a chance to overcome fortune through personal effort.⁶⁴

Plutarch then focuses on an aspect that had gone unnoticed until now. If the Spartan system is so notable and worth of imitation, why did it fail eventually? And, even more important, why did this happen exactly after the city reached the peak of its Mediterranean relevance? If Sparta never wanted the war that crowned it as the ruling city of the Hellas, their fall is even more subject to mythological interpretation. An omen, indeed, was present since the very beginning of the city's golden age from the age of Lycurgus circa 800 BC to the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC. Plutarch transmits the words of Apollo himself, as when he sanctioned the Great Rhetra he also warned "that the city would continue to be held in highest honour while it kept to the polity of Lycurgus" (*Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus" 29.6). In a paroxysm of poetic justice, it is because of alterations like the second tenure of Lysander, the same that allowed Sparta win

⁶⁴ Augustine writes two treatises on the concept of grace which equipped later thinkers with the tools to defend and attack free will even under the most difficult circumstances, as in the Luther-Erasmus debate.

the Peloponnesian War, that ended up subverting the Lycurgan Rhetra. As Sparta regained the trust of its allies, it was also tempted to expand its tentacles in a colonialist manner not too different from the Athenian one that they had been fighting. Moreover, the almost secluded, keep-it-to-themselves ethos of the city was imbued with new customs, expectations, and needs. Sparta's military success, and therefore proof of its apt agoge-based planning, brings its collapse as mythical city. By opening themselves to the world, they lost the unanimity that allowed them to rule it.

Plutarch's theory, based on Sparta's own oracles, is once again an ethical one. The selflessness that favorably determined Sparta's success derived in the same self-centeredness that they so strenuously avoided:

As long as the Spartan State adhered to the laws of Lycurgus and remained true to its oaths, it held the first place in Greece for good government and good repute over a period of five hundred years. But, little by little, as these laws and oaths were transgressed, and greed and love of wealth crept in, the elements of their strength began to dwindle also, and their allies on this account were ill-disposed toward them. (*Moralia* XVII.42)

The spell breaks when we realize that the triumph of Sparta's communitarian vision inevitably results in the strongest individualism. In an equally enticing and influential fragment Plutarch says: "when money was amassed for the Spartans, those who amassed it were condemned to death; for to Alcamenes and Theopompus, their kings, an oracle had been given: 'Eager desire for money will bring the ruin of Sparta'" (XVII.42). Plutarch thinks that it is precisely the Lacedaemonian model of equality through education and property what had been keeping the city together. The radical equality of the *homoioi* had been the

foundation of Sparta's political scope, but now private interests were becoming stronger and stronger. Whereas Athens kept going back to Alcibiades as a personal hero, the Spartans were reluctant to extend their hero's mandate from one to two years. And, when they broke Lycurgus's anti-individualist rules, the Spartan unity began to crumble, as it was based on the non-personalization of success or failure. In theoretical terms, what Lycurgus was trying to prevent was the election of leaders through *acclamatio*, as explained by Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, or Agamben. Praeponing personal desires to the needs of the city is exactly the "vice" that Lycurgus had seen in other peoples and tried to avoid for his own. As a consequence, the mythical aura of the Rhetra vanishes to the point of not being observed:

So it was, until they ceased altogether to observe the laws of Lycurgus, and came to be ruled despotically by their own citizens, preserving nothing of their ancestral discipline any longer, and so they became much like the rest, and put from them their former glory and freedom of speech, and were reduced to a state of subjection; and now they, like the rest of the Greeks, have come under Roman sway. (*Moralia* XVII.42)

Of course, faithful laconophiles see this fall as the confirmation of Lycurgus's model. It is individualism that destroys the city and the martial, shaped by agoge polis is the only path to building a healthy polis. Nostalgic interpreters such as Plutarch himself will interpret this as the glaring evidence telling us to return to Sparta's old ways. But here I am more interested in exploring an alternative reading of the events that led to the end of Sparta. Together with the first proponents of religious communitarianism along the Mediterranean coasts, I will argue that primitive Christian monasticism saw itself as the opportunity to

universalize the productive aspects of the Great Rhetra while also overcoming its limitations. Yet, how could a global community that does not rely on seclusion, slavery, or martialism be imagined? The religious sects found along the coasts of the Mediterranean were able to answer this question.

III

RELIGIOUS KOINA

The Religious Sources of Monasticism

Is there such a thing as a birthplace of religion and politics? Religion, as politics, flourishes in the Mediterranean. That is the thesis defended, among many others, by Fritz Graf in “What is Ancient Mediterranean Religion?”. This essay is available as a chapter of *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, a fantastic introductory volume edited by Sarah Iles Johnston. For what it is worth, the present dissertation defends that while politics and theology may not be exclusively Mediterranean products, their theopolitical imbrication is.

Fritz Graf presents a balanced reading of what we know about ancient Mediterranean religions. He claims that the sea allowed for a “constant contact” that “resulted in both assimilation and in dissimilation” (*Religions of the Ancient World* 14). Somewhat poetically claims that “Inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean, it seems, thus could travel wherever they wanted and almost always meet the gods they knew” (11). What they saw could differ in the role and details of those deities, but the fundamental theological structures are shared even between the most distant regions to which the Mediterranean allows access. According to Graf, this ease of communication, shared environment, and tendency to mixture play a key role in the development of the basic political structures, too:

All of the major players, even when speaking very different languages, were inhabitants of city-states, sharing a rather similar outlook on the world and comparable ideals and lifestyles. Whether ruled by a priest, a king, a group of aristocrats, or the city council and the citizens’ assembly—all were living in urban centers that usually were walled, had a main temple and (when

ruled by kings) a palace, with a high degree of commercial exchange and a rural hinterland controlled by the city; further outside were the nomadic pastoralists in the deserts of Syria and Judea or the mountains of Anatolia and Persia [. . .] religious terms, this meant that each city had its own pantheon, its own calendar of festivals, and its own mythology; alliances or political dependence on another power could express themselves in additional cultic elements that did not fundamentally alter the overall appearance of the cults. (*Religions of the Ancient World* 6) ⁶⁵

I have extensively discussed the importance of the singleness of heart, the unity of authority, and concord among the citizens as major values in the history of Laconophilia in particular, and Mediterranean politics in general. Graf offers here a genealogy of this tendency-towards-concentration at the very origin of the most developed Mediterranean cultures and, in turn, of the civilized world as we know it. All the cities that “made it” display similar systems of concentration of power and authority⁶⁶. What is even more important, they all develop methods to homogenize the social body by creating a shared identity. From this perspective, it could be argued that it is not so much about what or who is praised or followed, but how. For Spartans it will be the law; Plato calls it divine justice (gr. δίκη, “justice, judgment, virtue”); the Essenes are obsessed with blessed immortality, as much as Neoplatonists are with the unity of God;

⁶⁵ The omitted fragment is also quite revealing: “The cities in turn had grown on the foundation of agriculture that defined the region since the Neolithic revolution and set it against the nomadic pastoralists. The city-states might be united under a powerful ruler, as they were under Egypt’s god-king or the Hittite or Iranian conquering warrior caste; they might be conquered and sometimes destroyed by a powerful neighbor; or they might flourish by establishing changing coalitions: this only marginally affected their function as unities that were more-or-less self-sufficient” (*Religions of the Ancient World* 6).

⁶⁶ He claims that not only the theopolitical structures, but also their linguistic ones are at the base of this development: “The relative homogeneity is mirrored in the history of the writing systems” (*Religions of the Ancient World* 6).

Christians will have to come up with their own type of unity, which we know with the term *imago Dei*, that is, the adamant conviction that all human beings, not just those within the community or the city, are born with connatural dignity as they are created in the image and likeness of something more perfect.

The different religious and political structures to support them are paths trying to reach the same destination. Similar arguments can be found in *The Cambridge History of Religions*, put together by William Adler, Marvin A. Sweeney, and general editor Michele Renee Salzman, who also writes an enlightening introduction. Finally, Marvin W. Meyer authors *The Ancient Mysteries: A Source Book: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World*, which also makes the same case. Michele Renee Salzman puts it clearly when she expounds: “For some time, there was a tendency to dismiss pre-Christian religions because they did not comport with a Protestant understanding of piety; this led to a tendency to view public cult worship as formulaic and to a devaluation of ritual” (*The Cambridge History of Religions* 2). Changes in methodology have allowed for a better understanding of what the phenomena of the religious may have meant in the ancient world. But few happenings have contributed more to developing this understanding than the events of 1946 to 1948, when thanks to local shepherds the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the Qumran caves.

The Hellenistic period, often defined as that which covers from 323 to 30 BC, embodies the very spirit of this dissertation, as Jewish culture under

Roman law merges with Greek influences. This hybridization constitutes the immediate substratum upon which Christianity was built, thus drawing from all three sources. A monumental study directed by Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins gathers all things Dead Scrolls into a period-setting work entitled *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Some of the oldest testimonies we have of religious communities are found in these manuscripts. Departing from the pivotal Dead Sea Scrolls, I will briefly touch on the most decisive bits of knowledge at our disposal.

Second Temple Communitarianism

The Judean Desert is the home of the Qumran caves, the location in which some of the oldest biblical and parabiblical manuscripts have been found. Theology, politics, history, and religion meet in this paramount Mediterranean wilderness where the Egyptian, Jewish, and Hellenistic worldviews converge. Few archeological sites in the world pose a greater defy to our understanding of theopolitical identities, deeply questioning what it means to be Eastern, Western, Northern, or Southern. At the heart of this location, we discover the rules regulating a certain community or association which has been called the *yahad*. Largely responsible for the valorization of this hybridity, Bruno W. Dombrowski argues that the Qumran community can legitimately be seen as a *koinon*, that is, as a Hellenistic body politic (“היהה in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis”). Stressing the fusion of

previously competing cosmovisions, Dombrowski emphasizes the central role that this *koinon* had in the history of communitarianism, asceticism, and monasticism:

An understanding of the ‘ecclesiology’ of the Qumran Association within the framework of tradition, as a link between sociological ideas and terms of Hellenistic Egypt and similar ones as contained in the Gospels and in the letters of Paul, would also account for slight variations in the choice of words regarding DSS and NT-literature, differences frequently overlooked all too readily. (“היהודי” in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis” 307)

Can Qumran be regarded as the single point of contact between Judaism, Greek culture, and future Christianity? Certainly not, but its privileged location and the fact that all signs point to the polity described in the Dead Sea Scrolls to have been that of Qumran, or at least a sister community make of the Qumran *koinon* and the closely related Essenes the ideal entry point for understanding the religious sources of monasticism.

At some point during the eighth century BC the primitive settlement or hamlet was founded in Qumran. The archeological sites reveal that the community remained isolated until the First Temple was destroyed in year 586 BC, subsequently being abandoned after the debacle. After the exodial phase, new evidence attests that the area was reinhabited by new communities around the second century BC and all the way up to the Jewish-Roman persecution and wars during the first century AD. The Qumran *yabad* embodies one or more communities which separated from Israel in order to “return to the Torah of

Moses” (*Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1QS 5.1f, 6.13f, 5.5)⁶⁷. From this perspective, the members of this highly regulated polity saw themselves as the recuperators of the original Jewish life. Particularly vital for the history of communitarianism is the constitution of a specific group known as the Essenes, or Therapeutae. The Essenes occupied the region for around three hundred years roughly coincident with the second half of Second Temple period. From around 200 BC to 70 AD, the Essenes lived a strictly communitarian life erected upon Hellenistic, Egyptian, and primitivist Judaic principles. What is, then, their connection to Qumran?

For some scholars, the *yahad*, or Qumran Association, was a small community derived from a larger movement (Florentino García Martínez, and Adam van der Woude, responsible for the famous “A ‘Groningen’ Hypothesis of Qumran Origins and Early History”). For others such as John Collins, it is the Essenes who encircle the Qumran community, which would represent an overarching movement in Hellenistic Judaism (“The Yahad and ‘The Qumran Community’”). In her recent, erudite study, Alison Schofield reviews all these major schools of thought and then invites the reader to apply Robert Redfield’s

⁶⁷ Some authors, including Norman Golb (*Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?*) and Rengstorff (*Khirbet Qumrân and the Problem of the Library of the Dead Sea Caves*), argue that the Qumranic thought was not one separated from Jerusalem. Instead, the Association would have been a more or less integrated group from Jerusalem whose documents were stored in the commercial pathway of Qumran. For others like Doncell (“The Archaeology of Khirbet Qumran”) or Hirschfield (“Early Roman Manor Houses in Judea and the Site of Khirbet Qumran”) Qumran was not even a strategic point, but a house or fortress in no way related to the religious communitarianism described in the scrolls there found. For more information regarding this debate, cfr. *From Qumran to the Yahad: A New Paradigm of Textual Development for The Community Rule*, specially pages 220-26, written by great Qumranic scholar Alison Schofield.

pioneering anthropological model of the great and little traditions as exemplified by his studies of Mexico (*The Little Community*, *Talk with a Stranger*, or *The Cultural Role of Cities*). Departing from Reidfield's optic, Schofield is able to overcome the isolationist interpretations of the Qumran community and consequently argue that the smaller and the greater communities developed dynamics of dependence and autonomy (*From Qumran to the Yahad* 48). Although the presence of religious communities in the area has been questioned at times, most scholars seem to agree that this *yahad* or *koinon* did exist. Were the Essenes the settlers of Qumran? Or did the people of Qumran constitute a different *koinon* documented by some erudites named the Essenes? Maybe this group formed a derivative product, maybe it represented the overarching project in which the Essenes were integrated, or maybe none of these options. Even more profoundly, one could ask: Is the *yahad* documented by the rules found in the Dead Sea Scrolls the Qumran *yahad*, also known as the Dead Sea Sect, at all? Luckily, Alison Schofield's analysis effectively renders obsolete, or at least reduces the importance of, the discussions about the exact location of the communities, as they all must have belonged to a network of little and greater nodes. Coherently and for the sake of tidiness, I will follow the studies of Bruno W. Dombrowski, Alison Schofield, and others when talking about the Qumranic *yahad* as one documented phenomenon and, closely but probably separately, the Essenes as other very well documented body politic. The profound resemblances between the ideas that third-party authors such as

Josephus or Philo has historically attributed to the Essenes and the motives found in the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest, at least, that some direct or osmotic relationship must have existed. These resemblances allow for a joint presentation, but a sufficient number of differences invite us to not deny their own entity. Hopefully, future archeological and paleographical studies will shed even more light on the Essenes-Qumran connection, but the existence of autonomous documentation for each one suggests to take the cautious road and present them as, at least, differentiable realities belonging to a general wave recuperating the protogenic forms of Judaism. Well aware of the irreversibility of the Hellenization, the Qumran-Essenic communities lived a highly regulated life inspired by what they considered to be the authentic interpretation of Jewish life, but also learning from their immediate surroundings in order to present a viable alternative to the main currents of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The importance of the Dead Sea sects for the history of subjectivity, communitarianism, and monasticism cannot be overstated. In his pioneering philological and philosophical analysis, “היהודי in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis,” Bruno W. Dombrowski proves that the imbrication of Hellenism and Judaism simultaneously affects the realms of the theopolitical, cosmological, and lexicological. The new reality is consciously addressed by the dwellers of Qumran, who modeled their own Judaic polity after the template of the Greek *koionon*. The resulting body politic is the aforementioned *yabad* which, according to Dombrowski, is essential to

understanding why Christianity was so successful in the region. It is not that the form of life promoted by Christianity just happened to fit the worldview and expectations of the Judean and Egyptian deserts' peoples, but that this primitive Christian *koinonia* was conceived following the existing polities in which Jews had constructed fully functional, Greece-worthy, theopolitical *poleis*. The Qumran sect and the Essenes are living proof of autonomous body politics produced by the definitive imbrication of the theological and the political. Given their will to separate from mainstream Judaism and given the distance from the primigenial Jewish life of the Old Testament, Christians see in these *theopoleis* –if I may– the closest referent for their yearned Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus in John 18:36. It will not be until Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Bruno W. Dombrowski explains the relevance of having a direct model for the Christian *theopolis*, conceived as the ultimate synthesis between the Jewish *yahad* and Greek *koinon*:

Struggling with certain consequences of the Hellenization of the 'Holy Land,' the Qumran Association obviously adopted a number of basic Greek ideas and features. Despite their 'Israelitic'-Jewish background the Qumran Association represent a Mystery Group based on a completely common life and shaped after the Polis pattern, a religious *koinon* which mainly served private ends. I have ventured, therefore, to word which was most frequently used for their self-designation ought to be considered a Hebrew translation of (τό) κοινόν. It is the noun היהוד. If this is so, in fact, then we would have in היהוד a translation far superior to the Phoenician attempt, although the etymology of κοινός, has not yet been firmly established ("היהוד in 1QS and τό κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis" 296)

Yahad is the Qumranic attempt at defining a Judeo-Hellenistic koinon. The resulting commons would be the dream of Pan-Abrahamic thinkers such as Eusebius or Justin Martyr, as they reflect the convergence of Moses and Plato, Judea and Greece. Dombrowski's fine paleographical analysis unveils that, by bringing to the Jewish sphere the political coordinates of Greece, the Qumranic yahad began to think of itself as a "deliberating body" and a "council of the community" (297). He bases his study on the opening fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls, manuscript 1QS: "for they all are in the community of truth and benign humbleness and faithful love and beneficent thinking of one towards the other, in the holy council, and sons of the council which lasts through the aeons" (1QS 2.24f). The model of Greek politics impulses a deprivatization of the Jewish communities within and without orthodoxy. Although there are still many instances of the veterotestamentary lexicon of race, blood and lineage, the groups organized around the Qumran caves see themselves more as an association or sect than a race. They are still the elected group (1QS 3.14 and 11.9ff), but the fact that it is humility, love, and "beneficent thinking" that consolidate the community, the Hellenization of these politics helps envision an alternative cosmivision to that of the chosen lineage. Dombrowski subsequently argues that given the "commonly known degree of Hellenization of Palestine and Diaspora Jewry," it is not sufficient to attribute the deprivatization of these communities to internal developments exclusive to the Jewish cult ("היהודי" in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish

Synthesis” 300). The Hellenization of Judaism is key to understanding the idiosyncratic place inhabited by a primitive Christianity risen at the intersection of Greek, Jewish, and Roman polarities:

We should rather assume that a Hellenization also with regard to the social-religious self-understanding and terminology did, in fact, take place already in the Qumran Association and that this early kind of Hellenization of Jewish ideas and speech greatly facilitated the later synthesis of Jewish and Hellenistic ideology, so characteristic for the early church. In the wake of the recognition of, so to say, two waves of more or less Greek influences into Judaism the explanation of basic concepts of the early Christian ecclesiology as partly resting on a pre-Christian synthesis of older traditions as particularly contained in the Priestly Code and of Hellenistic ideas would become feasible. (Dombrowski, “יהיה in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis” 300).

The religious association or community has become an *oikos*, a household defined by the relations of *κοινωνία* among its members. The temple becomes social body, and vice versa. This hybridization of traditions resulting in transversal theopolitical concepts is most visible in the case of the Hypsistarians, a diffuse series of Judeopagan polities spread along the Black Sea or the Pontus in Asia Minor. Despite their chronological and geographical limitations, their worship of Hypsistos –*the highest god*– proves the ongoing synthesis between Hellenism and Judaism, and their viability would later facilitate the arrival of Christianity. Their cult of an absolute being also prefigures a series of other prisca-theological, transversal cults like the self-declared rational religion of the Enlightenment or many German idealists⁶⁸. Same as the concordances between

⁶⁸ Although the idea of only one theological system being true, with all the different manifestations just being human attempts at grasping the absolute, is as old as religion itself,

Egyptian and Greek cosmovisions had allowed for the convergence of their cults in the figure of Hermes Trimegistos –*Thrice Great*– during the Ptolemaic Kingdom period initiated by the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, the compatibility between some essential Greek and Jewish doctrinal elements fostered the appearance of equally hybridizing cults like that of the Qumran Association, the aforementioned Hypsistarians, or the Therapeutae also known as Essenes. It is this last group that would draw most attention among the first Christians, who saw in their communitarian polity a historical argument for the creation of a universal polis modeled after the City of God. The fact that the Essenes practiced most of the theopolitical principles present in Lacedaemonian and Qumranic contexts provided Christians a strong argument for understanding themselves as the culmination of this hybridization, to which they added major contributions inherited from their contact with Rome. This is how the Christian *theopolis* is born. But the debates on the physical and metaphorical nature of the Second Temple preceded it.

Qumran and the Second Temple

The community of Qumran was one of the first to propose themselves as an alternative to the Jerusalem Temple, even to the point of opposing to the

we owe the concept of *prisca theologia* to the humanist synthesis of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, who worked extensively to reconcile the kabbalistic, medieval, mystical, and a wide range of theophilosophical approaches in order to serve the truest, Catholic manifestation of the single truth.

priestly practices there developed. However, instead of building a physical temple aimed to replace the one in Jerusalem, as other sites like Mount Gerizim and Leontopolis did, Qumran took a different path when proclaiming their idea of the temple. Brilliant thinker and scholar Timothy Wardle argues in his unparalleled *The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* that “the sectarians at Qumran came to view their community as a metaphorical temple, a substitute sanctuary in which pleasing sacrifices could be offered to God sans the blood of animals” (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* 139). They even considered the rituals performed in Jerusalem as illegitimate and proposed “personal and communal prayer, righteous living, and worship of God as substitutes for the sacrifices in the temple” (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* 156-57). As a result of these philosophical divergences, the sectarians separated from the Jerusalem Temple not only with respect to rituals and practices, but also concerning the nature of the community that inhabited Qumran. The Temple of Jerusalem was viewed as the site of the Jewish electedness. A chosen people, is the direct continuation of the covenants that God successively established with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Revisiting the idea of the covenant’s restoration, Qumran believed that “in the new age, priests would once again offer sacrifices at a restored temple” (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* 144-45). This view implies that the Temple of Jerusalem as it existed at that time, including its biopolitical rituals and religious practices, could no longer be the place of the chosen people, hence

the different alternatives of a renewed body politics that Qumran and other locales begun offering at the time. As Wardle rightly points out, the sectarians at Qumran “looked forward to a new, renewed temple. Second, they turned their minds to the heavenly temple and cult. Third, they viewed their community as a replacement for the temple” (150). This new polis that Qumran was creating consisted not of physical buildings and perceivedly old-fashioned rituals, but rather of individuals joint together thanks to their shared religious views and communal practices in their attempt to fulfill the Word of God. The sense of community thus emerges out of the peoples that came to share a communal way of life marked by an awareness of the possibilities of living together. Whereas in Jerusalem, it is the Temple –the building and its rituals, same as Athens is the long walls and the boule– what provides the sense of community, in the case of Qumran it is the community who metaphorically creates the temple. Hence, the existence of the notion of “temple of men” that appears in several *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Wardle refers to this interesting expression as the “idea that the members of the community are the building blocks of a temple” (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* 160), in an almost Hobbesian understanding of the Leviathan. Yet this notion is not at all new. The Greeks also referred to the same idea: The people are the polis, the walls are the polis, the law is the polis, or even the Athenian fleet is the polis.

All these possible sites of citizenship and belonging appear in the case of Qumran, who departs from the best intellectualist Judaic tradition and

combines it with a nitidly biopolitical ideal of consuetudinary regulated practices. While in the case of Athens it was normally the walls and the fleet that embodied the city, in Sparta we find, once again, a striking resemblance to the Qumranic and monastic ideal. Paul Rahe comments in his *The Spartan Regime* some excerpts of a poem by Alcaeus of Mytilene that “contended that ‘warlike men are a city’s tower of defense’” (*The Spartan Regime* 37)⁶⁹. The identification of the members of the community with architectural structures also appears, as Wardle remarks, in the depiction of the Qumran community as a temple (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* 161). The construction of a community whose members are understood as bricks being part of a metaphorical building inevitably take us to the *Sayings of Spartans* compiled by Plutarch in his *Moralia*. Sparta does not need walls, because as “He [Antalcidas] used to say [. . .] the young men were the walls of Sparta, and the points of their

⁶⁹ Plutarch’s “Sayings of the Spartans” are full of moments of Spartan confidence, or arrogance, in regards to their overflowing martial and moral confidence. We know, for example, that Antalcidas “used to say that the young men were the walls of Sparta, and the points of their spears its boundaries” (*Moralia* III, “Sayings of the Spartans” 301). Their heightened sense of virility allowed Agesilaus to utter some grin-inducing famous words: “Somebody in a foreign land pointed out to Agesilaus the city wall, high towering and exceedingly massive in its construction, and asked Agesilaus if it looked grand to him. ‘Yes,’ said Agesilaus, ‘grand indeed, not for me though, but for women to live in’” (*Moralia* III, “Sayings of the Spartans” 270-71). Similar words are attributed to Agis, who commented on the Corinthian walls inquiring “What women live in that place?” (*Moralia* III, “Sayings of the Spartans” 289). This is relevant because it comes from, probably, the less misogynistic polis, since the Spartan virile life also largely applied to the world-renown Spartan women. Women would join the divine nudity of the processions “So that they, by following the same practices as the men, may not be inferior to them in bodily strength and health or in mental aspirations and qualities” (*Moralia* III, “Sayings of the Spartans” 363).

spears their boundaries” (Plutarch, *Sayings of Sparta*, “Antalcidas” 7). Such is the community built by the Essenes.

The Essenes

For the sake of the exposition, I have chosen to organize the sources of monastic communitarianism in two categories, political and religious. Out of Emily Mackil’s three categories of the commons presented in *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon*, I have seemingly paid less attention to the economic koinon because, with Agamben, I believe that Christianity is itself a theopolitical, *oikonomic* worldview. *Creating a Common Polity* provides exemplary critical tools in the path to understanding the tension between the individual and the communal in the Ancient world. The author analyzes three different types of communities, “Cultic Communities,” “Economic Communities,” and “Political Communities”. An exhaustive study of the Ancient world should take advantage of Mackil’s work and devote additional attention to the economic sources of monasticism; specifically, to two aspects that I have already outlined: Athens’s expansionist model of colonialism embodied by the Delian League’s *phoros* and the role of the fleet; as opposed to Sparta’s conservation of the Lycurgan ideal, and the place of Rome and Judaism in this spectrum.

In this line of thinking, a brave and controversial attempt at explaining Rome’s Christian economic model can be found in Robert B Ekelund’s and

Robert D. Tollison's *Economic Origins of Roman Christianity*, as well as *The Marketplace of Christianity*, by the same authors plus Robert F. Hébert. Their reading of religious institutions as companies that operate in terms of monopoly and free market far exceeds the more modest aspirations of this essay, but a renewed dialogue between the macroeconomic and the consuetudinary economic practices taught by Jesus and the apostolic koinonia will need to take place if we intend to complete the picture. Since I am focusing on the biopolitical dimension of the lived economy, especially in terms of private property and communalization of the polis's basic goods, this will have to wait for now.

Even if I am impelled to temper the macroeconomic implications of the apostolic koinonia, I have chosen to keep at least two of Mackil's taxa in order to facilitate the discussion. But even the quickest look at either reveals that the political and the religious are almost never severed, and the economic is as theopolitical of a component as any. The classic distinction between *bios theoretikos* and *bios politikos* can be perfectly traced across the board. Thus, the difference lays on the sequence of priorities: theology as the foundation of politics, versus politics as the foundation of theology. If little, the divergent approach between the two interpretative families here suggested becomes visible once we pay attention to the lexicon employed by the religious communities of the Mediterranean.

We have access to the Qumranic and Essenian contributions through both paleographical and exegetical sources. They range from the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, to the interpretative work of Philo of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Flavius Josephus. The law of Sparta was retained as a divine product and it is not accidental how Philo of Alexandria defines the lifestyle of the Essenes as a praxis, as a political act that relates to an eternal law which demands to be lived: “the Essenes, who in all respects selected for their admiration and for their special adoption the practical course of life, and who excel in all” (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §1). Yet one can immediately see the centrality of the *bios theoretikos* when Philo summarizes his study on the Essenes or Therapeutae saying: “This is then what I have to say of those who are called Therapeutae, who have devoted themselves to the contemplation of nature, and who have lived in it and in the soul alone” (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §89). The tension between *bios theoretikos* and *bios politikos* is then reinstated in the closing line of the treatise when he defines the Essenes as those who exist “being citizens of heaven and of the world” (§90). The reference to citizenship in the context of contemplation and the soul could not be more telling.

As one can expect, Christians will take advantage of this tension between contemplation and action. In fact, the history of the new religion admits to be interpreted from the perspective of which one of the two forces prevailed at a given time and author. If there is one aspect that legitimizes this dissecting

approach, though, that is the different type of self-awareness displayed by each group. While the laconophiles base the foundation of the ideal city in its divine nature, religious sectarians see the construction of a perfect polity as a means towards reaching the divine. In Sparta, the gods defend the integrity of the city. For the Essenes and Christians, creating a virtuous city is a condition for them to reach earthly perfection and deserve the heavenly one in the eyes of their Master. Philo of Alexandria then clarifies the balance between *bios theoretikos* and *bios politikos* as found in the Mediterranean religious groups surrounding the Essenes:

Having mentioned the Essenes, who in all respects selected for their admiration and for their especial adoption the *practical* course of life, and who excel in all, or what perhaps may be a less unpopular and invidious thing to say, in most of its parts, I will now proceed, in the regular order of my subject, to speak of those who have embraced the *speculative* life. (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §1.1)

Philo of Alexandria is perfectly aware of his place and role. Philosopher, indeed, but also a historian who desires to base his analysis, not on his own capricious will, but on data:

I will say what appears to me to be desirable to be said on the subject, not drawing any fictitious statements from my own head for the sake of improving the appearance of that side of the question which nearly all poets and essayists are much accustomed to do in the scarcity of good actions to extol, but with the greatest simplicity adhering strictly to the truth itself, to which I know well that even the most eloquent men do not keep close in their speeches. (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §1.1)

The great expert in the apostolic koinonia, Pier Cesare Bori, lists the experience of the Therapeutae (or Essenes) and the reception by Philo and Eusebius as

essential substrata in the construction of the modern sense of communitarianism (*Chiesa primitiva* 89-90). At this point, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD) becomes more than an acute scholar, as he is an essential stop on our way to the apostolic koinonia, for he personally embodies the ontological crossroads of Late Ancient Hellenistic Judaism.

The reception of communitarian Laconophilia and Platonism by Christianity can be analyzed by paying attention to the contributions of Philo, author of a crucial source for the study of Second Temple communitarianism: *On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants*. In that same piece, Philo says about his intellectual pathfinders that they were “men who were imbued with the true spirit of philosophy both in their dispositions and in their discourses, Plato and Xenophon” (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §57). We can hardly be surprised that the great expert in the communitarianism of the Hellenistic Jews was also an admirer of Plato and Xenophon, who in turn were admirers of Lycurgus. Philo’s weight in history cannot be underestimated, as he serves like a true fulcrum between Classical and Late Antiquity, as well as between the Graeco-Roman and the Christian worldviews. Luckily, Eusebius realized very early on that Philo had to become a central figure in this school of thought. He comments on his strategic place in the Roman Empire in his *History*:

Under this emperor, Philo became known; a man most celebrated not only among many of our own, but also among many scholars without the Church. He was a Hebrew by birth but was inferior to none of those who held high dignities in Alexandria. How

exceedingly he labored in the Scriptures and in the studies of his nation is plain to all from the work which he has done. How familiar he was with philosophy and with the liberal studies of foreign nations, it is not necessary to say, since he is reported to have surpassed all his contemporaries in the study of Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy, to which he particularly devoted his attention. (Eusebius, *History* II.4.2)

Hebrew, Platonic, Pythagorean, Egyptian, Hellenistic... All the same elements that defined Christianity converge in Philo before they do anywhere else. Independently of the nature of these contacts –sequential or parallel–, the thought of this philosopher represents a living link between ancient mystical cults, Greek philosophy, and monotheism. While Flavius Josephus provides the most accurate historical description of the Essenian Lebensform, Philo was able to see things about them who nobody else saw. The most important being his interpretation of the Therapeutae’s attitudes on property, and their individual-communal balance.

On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants portrays the sect of the Essenes or Therapeutae in a familiar fashion. Had we not read Plutarch, Xenophon, or Plato beforehand, the communitarian vision of this Second Temple community could appear as the manifestation of a radical cult. The surrendering of property as a first step towards the ascetic redefinition of the self was common in the mystical cults of the Mediterranean, where surrendering all past identifiers was often seen as a rite of passage in the acquisition of a new, sacralized identity. But one such transformation was also common practice in the poleis under Lacedaemonian influence, where private property was regarded as an obstacle between the individual and the community. For the Essenes, says Philo, “an

undue care for money and wealth causes great waste of time” (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §16). In a long-winded analysis, Philo explains the theopolitical role of property and disappropriation:

Because of their anxious desire for an immortal and blessed existence, thinking that their mortal life has already come to an end, they leave their possessions to their sons or daughters, or perhaps to other relations, giving them up their inheritance with willing cheerfulness; and those who know no relations give their property to their companions or Friends. (*The Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §10)

Philo then comments on how some ancient philosophers like Anaxagoras and Democritus surrendered all possessions by letting them go to waste. Instead of just destroying material possessions, the Essenes, as Christians later will, prefer to use those now unnecessary goods to serve those in need. The Therapeutae, by “giving presents from their possessions instead of destroying them, so as to be able to benefit others and themselves also, have made others happy by imparting to them of the abundance of their wealth, and themselves by the study of philosophy. (“On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §16). The Essenes bequeath their property in the direction of relatives and friends, Christians will use it to serve anyone and everyone, for charity –or *agape*– is defined as absolute self-less love.

Together with Philo of Alexandria, who passed away in 50 AD, the great Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (37 – 100 AD) constitutes the greatest source of Essenian wisdom. Josephus is the author of two essential texts from the first century, entitled *The Wars of the Jews*, and the *Antiquities of the Jews*. Analogously to Philo, Josephus embodies the intersectional facet of Hellenistic Judaism, for

he too represents a meeting point of all ancient cultures. His historiographical work gives account and explains the relevance of the Second Temple period, whose destruction by the Romans he narrated in first person in *The Wars of the Jews*. A genealogy of the Therapeutae's sect is available there:

For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of which are the Pharisees; of the second, the Sadducees; and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called Essens. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essens reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. (*The Wars of the Jews* II.VIII.2)

Josephus has already said everything that we needed to know: The Essenes are rightful Jews, but they have developed a lifestyle based around a more ascetic and communitarian interpretation of the Jewish mission. *The Wars of the Jews* will be central during my conversation on Roman-Judeochristian relations, but now that we have reconstructed the genealogy of this sect, I want to focus on the *Antiquities of the Jews*, for it is here where Josephus depicts the historical relevance of the Essenes in the history of Judaism.

A capital fragment of *Antiquities of the Jews* begins by attesting that “The doctrine of the Essens is this: That all things are best ascribed to God” (§18.1.5). Coming from a religious group, this may look like a seemingly futile statement, but what the Essenes represent is the explicit will to return to the basic principles of Judaism. Three centuries later, the first Christian monks will seek in monasticism the same type of return to the humble origins. Moreover, the renewed theocentric vow of the Therapeutae or Essenes comes as a package of

newly implemented philosophical innovations that will eventually mark the divergence between the Temple of Jerusalem –the centralized, official cult of the chosen people–, and the Temple of Men –the will to renew Judaism, even when that means going back to the old, unadulterated ways–. This is where Hellenistic Judaism reveals its synthesizing power:

They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices because they have purer lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men. (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* §18.1.5)

Timothy Wardle has magisterially studied the increasing theoretical bifurcation between the Jerusalem Temple and a growing multitude of groups who seek to renew Judaism by flexibilizing its customs, incorporating productive doctrinal elements from surrounding Hellenistic cultures, or even by returning to the very origins of Judaism. That is why Josephus writes his *Antiquities* in an attempt to present a modern, yet highly venerable, manifestation of Judaism that is both tied to its heritage and capable of dialoguing with the Roman society. One of Judaism's most recent innovations is the group of the Essenes, whom Josephus has described as a community of unparalleled manners and virtues. Their teachings synthesize the best veterotestamentary theological background with the concepts devised by the Greek philosophers, effectively creating a new worldview which they then ascribe to the founders of Judaism. The following paragraph sounds almost identical to Xenophon's and Plutarch's depictions of

the idealized community of Sparta, as he claims that “they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue” in a degree that “hath never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians” (§18.1.5). The Essenes are not just a highlight of Jewish thought, but also of the Classical world as a whole.

Josephus conveys:

This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another. They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them. They none of them differ from others of the Essens in their way of living. (§18.1.5)

All of the central elements of the Spartan constitution are present in the Jewish community of the Essenes. Their synthesis of Mosaic and Hellenistic virtues makes them a pinnacle justice, equality, and freedom in Antiquity. If a cultivated author like Josephus came to praise this seemingly marginal group, it is easy to imagine why first Christians, who were a product of this environment, shared so many critical elements with the Essenes.

Flavius Josephus is very well aware of the communitarian, cultic nature of the Essenes. The reason why I ascribed them to the religious sources of monasticism category comes from Josephus, who describes that “The Essens also, as we call a sect of ours, were excused from this imposition. These men live the same kind of life as do those whom the Greeks call Pythagoreans”

(§18.1.5). Yet the Essenes are much more than a cultic band. In the capital *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus provides the most insightful description of their idiosyncratic existential *habitus*. We learn that the Essenes “neglect wedlock,” “are despisers of riches,” and in fact have “one patrimony among all brethren” (*The Wars of the Jews* §II.VIII.2-7). All of these traits remind us of the Spartan continence, which also resurfaces when the perfectly Christian principle to “observe justice towards men, and that he will do no harm to any one” is complemented by a mandate that Spartans could hold dear, but Christians aware of the Gospel’s exhortation for universal love will necessarily abhor “he will always hate the wicked” (*The Wars of the Jews* §II.VIII.7). This shows that the Essenes kept one central aspect of Judaism intact, and that is the veterotestamentary sense of identity. Displaying an intimate harmony with the polis-based model of theopolitics, the Essenes, like the Spartans, venture into radical social experimentation to the point of restricting private property, regulating human interactions, and profoundly reshaping the underlying model of subjectivity at the heart of the worldview. But all of these marvelous aspects only apply to those within the community.

To those outside, especially those who affront or threaten their lifestyle, the Essenes will respond in a way that much more closely resembles the Spartan protectionism of the polis than the Christian reinterpretation of the veterotestamentary *lex talionis*: “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”

(Matthew 5:39). Finally, the sectarian condition of the Essenes is stressed when Josephus reminds how the members “will neither conceal anything from those of his own sect, nor discover any of their doctrines to others” (§II.VIII.7). This is the same esoteric component present in many of Plato’s works and mystical cults along the Mediterranean. Christianity, on the other hand, will quickly attempt to transcend the private celebrations and personal patronage, aspiring from the start to becoming a universalist project. Even if that means turning the other cheek.

Either, Or. Citizenship and Koinonia

The nascent worldview faced the double challenge of blending in an existing world, whose coordinates are defined by the prevalence of the Roman and Jewish laws. For at least four centuries, apologists and polemicists tackled the major issue of presenting Christianity as a reality that is compatible with the existing world order, while also proving the radical incommensurability of the enterprise⁷⁰. Their success is proven by the Edict of Milan and ulterior expansion of the religion, but also by the fact that, to this day, traditions such as messianic Judaism still depict Christ as being the Jew par excellence. This culmination of the Jewish mission by the Christians is theologically known as

⁷⁰ A valuable reflection on the matter is *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church*, by Michael J. Kruger. Particularly enriching is the chapter “A Peculiar Identity: The Sociological Make-Up of Second-Century Christianity” (11-39), where the expert focuses on the hybridity (compatible-incompatible) nature of Christian civil identity.

supersessionism, which posits the completion or succession of the veterotestamentary plan by Christians. This the optic from which the capital passage of Romans 13:3-10 can be best interpreted: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”. Be it fulfillment or replacement, at least from Maimonides a messianic Jew view of the dual-covenant –of the two ways as viable and parallel– has inspired, and challenged, the boundaries of monotheism.⁷¹

What was the prevailing view of the Jewish-Christian relations right after the Hellenistic period? An extremely early, if controversial Second Temple text, the *Son of God* fragment collected as a part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, sets the tone of the interactions to come. Written circa 100 BC, it reveals how deeply messianism ran, and helps explain the success of Christ’s word among the Jewish peoples. Its apocalyptic message already shows the imbrication of Judaism and Hellenism, making explicit reference to a deity –or antideity– to come: “his son will be called The Great, and be designated his name. He will be called the son of God they will call him the son of the Most High” (*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, “Son of God” I.9-II.1-6). If important sectors of the Hebraic

⁷¹ Cavan W. Concannon’s *When You Were Gentiles: Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence* is a key step to understanding the apostles’ construction of identity and the presence of racial, cultural, and theoretical traits. Also the chapter “Paul, Torah, and Jewish Identity” in John J. Collins’s work *The Invention of Judaism: Torah and Jewish Identity from Deuteronomy to Paul* (159-83). Even Saint Paul, number one thinker responsible of propagating the new worldview, presents Christ’s message not as a substitution, but as a “fulfillment” of the old Law, once again, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:3-10).

world were expecting some sort of hypostasis or reduplication of God arrived through a true parousia, it is not difficult to imagine Christ's and the apostles' words very efficiently satisfying those theological needs. From a more cynic point of view, one could even say that the prophecies of the *Son of God* and the like were opportunities awaiting to be profited by someone to properly unlock them.

Once Christianity bursts forth, the apologists take advantage of this connection in order to belabor the legitimacy of the new creed. But it was not just Jews that Christians needed to convince, as most Jews were already Hellenistic or Romanized Jews. Thereby, the budding cult had to also satisfy the expectations of the prevailing empire. From its inception, the double nature of the Jewish-Roman world that saw it grow determined the hybrid, theopolitical nature of Christianity. It will not therefore surprise any readers the emphasis placed by apologists on the civility of Christ, who is now presented, not just as a complying Jew, but a model Roman citizen from the province of Judea. This portrayal as exemplar denizen of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, becomes around 2nd century a key instrument towards the legitimization of Christianity as it combats the widespread view, which post-Enlightenment academia has still not fully overcome, of the new cult as the Empire's scourge. Subsequent attempts at "Christianizing" Jewish and Classical sources. This approach has never really ceased, as Dante's *Dvina Commedia* relation to Virgil proves. Even to the point of declaring anonymous, or unaware Christians those

in circle one, including Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle. But there is also a constant effort at “Judifying” and “Classicizing” Christianity, as seen in the monumental *History* of Eusebius, the argumentation of Fathers of the Church such as Justin Martyr and Tertullian or, should someone want to stretch it, even the genealogical study of Greek and Jewish sources carried out by this very dissertation. What these attempts aim to (over)compensate is the fact that, for the longest time, the teachings of Christ irremediably clashed with both the imperial and the religious establishments: their laws and traditions. Martyrdom, the catacombs, and the multiple syncretic efforts (in both its positive and pejorative senses) are just some instances that expose a burning tension at the heart of the known world –*oecumene*– under the rules of Tiberius and Herod.

Christianity, or more precisely Christian life, incites acts and attitudes of wonderment and reprobation since its very inception. Provokes following at once. Also persecution. In this climate of extreme polarization between unconditional obeisance and zealous censure, the first three centuries of the new millennium are marked by secrecy, prohibition, and martyrdom resulting from the incommensurability between preexisting and Christian views on religion, politics, and authority. The legal framework from which this new sect is interpreted is key to understanding this process, which began with Christ’s trial before the Sanhedrin, continued with Saint Stephen’s “foundational” martyrdom, and would not change substantially until the Edict of Milan.

Since its inception, discord stemming from their rebellious worldview heaps up between Christians and their kinsmen. Of all doctrinal elements, apart from the obvious irreconcilability in the field of eschatology, the model of community presented in Acts of the Apostles seems to have raised a particularly acute sense of divisiveness. The *koinonia* of the apostles incarnates the antitraditionalist views of Christians regarding the source of political and religious authority. Whereas most other cults, willingly or forcefully, were able to find a way to adapt themselves to the civil expectations of the *urbs* and, above all, the *civitas*, the Christian cosmivision does not allow for authority to be split and shared: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). This imperative, which was shrewdly interpreted by Lactantius –and centuries later Kierkegaard–, necessarily leads to an incompatible form of *civitas* derived by Augustine from the divine city; a *civitas* in which the affiliates are not affiliated by *philia*, but through *agape*. Thus, not being strictly affiliates. In fact, Lactantius himself perceived this already in the 4th century, when he talks about the illusion of maintaining the old gods while also praising the new one:

But someone will say that this supreme Being, who made all things, and those also who conferred on men benefits, are entitled to their respective worship. First, it has never happened that the worshipper of these has also been a worshipper of God. Nor can this possibly happen. For if the honor paid to Him is shared by others, He altogether ceases to be worshipped, since His religion requires us to believe that He is the one and only God. (*Divine Institutes* I.19).

Lactantius refreshes the topos of the *mos maiorum* –the uses of the elder– versus the *res novae* –change, progress, revolution, novelties...–. The attained perspective after several centuries of attempted coexistence allows him to criticize the barbaric and roman theological systems for their superstition and fetishism, an error that “is altogether derived from their ignorance of the principal and chief good” (*Divine Institutes* I.20). This is key because Lactantius reverts the terminology originally used against Christians by pagans (“superstitions novae et maleficae,” said Suetonius), which in his time would have effectively backfired and was being used to criticize pagans themselves: Only that these are not new and mischievous superstitions, but old and mischievous ones that need to be extirpated. And none more effective ways to achieve it than by replacing *philia* with *agape*, that is, by serving just the one master that demands unconditional and total love to Him and our neighbor. Around a hundred years before Lactantius, who wrote mostly in the late 3rd century and early 4th century, Tertullian (160 AD – 220 AD) makes explicit reference to the replacement of the Spartan *sysitias* and Athenian *agapae* recounting that “Our dinner indicates its nature by means of its name; it is called by the Greek word for love” (*Apologeticum* 39.16). This subversive form of selfless love does not comply with the prevailing social contract. Tertullian is very well aware of this: “This assembly of the Christians may properly be called illegal, if indeed it is like the illegal gatherings [. . .] we harm no one, afflict no one” (*Apologeticum* 39.16). It is, in fact, not social in so far as the brothers and

sisters are not *socii*, but something else described in the New Testament: “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts of the Apostles 4:32). At least until the officialization of Christianity as the only legitimate creed, the right of divine citizenship and that of the empire were mutually exclusive. If the *oecumene* is the known, habitable, or culturally legible world, and the *koine* is the shared world – or more specifically the sayable world of a linguistic community–, then Christians must constitute their very own *koinonia*. The allegiance owed to this “singleness of heart” demanded by such a community is profoundly incompatible with their belonging to any other group. To understand the nature of the *koinonia*, we must first fathom the worldview that it was destined to oust and, eventually, succeed.

Christian Antitraditionalism

The most well-known episode of public bigotry corresponds to the executions that took place after the Great Fire of Rome. Following the events of 64 AD and unable to appease the bloodthirst of his outraged denizens, Nero offered his very own house, the opulent *domus aurea*, as a stage for a vaguely justified retaliation. The reasoning behind this measure is not strictly religious and the opprobrium brought upon Christians had mostly to do with the fact that the entire city blamed itself for having failed to please the pantheon –that

is, for not having been able to maintain the *pax deorum*⁷². Luckily, we have

Tacitus's lengthy *Annals* at our disposal:

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed. (*Annals* 15.44)

Although asystematic in its approach, this first multitudinous extermination

already contains all the key elements of reprobation that would deluge the first

⁷² Christopher Haas analyzes the persecutions of 257-258 AD in terms of an abated population self-ashamed for not having been able to preserve the *pax deorum* by pleasing the gods: "Imperial Religious Policy and Valerian's Persecution of the Church, A.D. 257-260" 139-40).

four centuries of our era⁷³. The key can be found in the original Latin expression for “hatred against mankind”: *odio humani generis*.⁷⁴

When Romans, who consider religion and politics to be two dimensions of the same social body –let’s not forget that Caesar’s road to fame begins when he is invested *pontifex maximus*–, say *odio humani generis*, they are referring to the Christians’ repudiation of tradition which in turn denaturalizes and decivilizes men at once⁷⁵. The pantheon, the nation, and all imperial authorities were, so it was perceived, being subverted by the antitraditionalist, anticivic thrust of the new religion⁷⁶. As Tertullian (155 AD – 240 AD), the Carthaginian Father of

⁷³ Although it is a deservedly contested source (his approach, for example, to the Inquisition is achingly undocumented), John Fox’s *Book of Martyrs* lists Nero’s as the first major persecution. María Elvira Roca Barea has recently published an archive-based refutation of most of Fox’s ideological accusations: *Imperiofobia y leyenda negra*.

⁷⁴ The original passage uses terms that the Church would later on level against its enemies, as in the well know labelling of Attila the Hun as *flagellum Dei*: “quos per *flagitia* invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat [. . .] igitur *primum correpti* qui fatebantur [. . .] *odio humani generis* convicti”.

⁷⁵ The connection between “atheism” and “incivility” is already present in the trial of Socrates. Plato and Xenophon reflect on the attitude of Socrates towards the divine and its impact on education: “The indictment against him was to this effect: Socrates is guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities: he is also guilty of corrupting the youth. First then, that he rejected the gods acknowledged by the state –what evidence did they produce of that? He offered sacrifices constantly, and made no secret of it, now in his home, now at the altars of the state temples, and he made use of divination with as little secrecy [. . .] For, like most men, indeed, he believed that the gods are heedful of mankind, but with an important difference; for whereas they do not believe in the omniscience of the gods, Socrates thought that they know all things, our words and deeds and secret purposes; that they are present everywhere, and grant signs to men of all that concerns man. I wonder, then, how the Athenians can have been persuaded that Socrates was a freethinker, when he never said or did anything contrary to sound religion, and his utterances about the gods and his behaviour towards them were the words and actions of a man who is truly religious and deserves to be thought so” (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1-20).

⁷⁶ This bypassing of authority is the exact same phenomenon that would earn the Jesuits’ the prohibition of their religious order across the globe. Their fourth vow of obedience to the pope could not be tolerated and is one of the major causes of the animosity towards the order. On the other hand, the attempts at legitimizing the teachings of Christ were a common trope of apologetics to the point that it is the point of view made official by Eusebius’s narration of

the Church and apologist from the second century magisterially puts it: “The truth we profess, we know to be a stranger upon earth, and she expects not friends in a strange land” (*Apology for the Christians* I). Thus, the major difference between the often tolerated Jewish cult –specially between 48 BC and 63 AD (according to Seth Schwartz, the end of this period is marked by the “The Jewish revolts, 66-135 CE” [*The Ancient Jews* 75-97])– and that of Christians is the fact that despite some noble attempts coming from the apologists, the latter did not succeed at compatibilizing and adapting to the existing traditions, for its very nature is that of subverting authority by proclaiming a new one⁷⁷. More

the Church’s first steps: “But although it is clear that we are new and that this new name of Christians has really but recently been known among all nations, nevertheless our life and our conduct, with our doctrines of religion, have not been lately invented by us, but from the first creation of man, so to speak, have been established by the natural understanding of divinely favored men of old [. . .] That the Hebrew nation is not new, but is universally honored on account of its antiquity, is known to all. The books and writings of this people contain accounts of ancient men, rare indeed and few in number, but nevertheless distinguished for piety and righteousness and every other virtue [. . .] What then should prevent the confession that we who are of Christ practice one and the same mode of life and have one and the same religion as those divinely favored men of old? Whence it is evident that the perfect religion committed to us by the teaching of Christ is not new and strange, but, if the truth must be spoken, it is the first and the true religion” (*History* 4.4-5, 15). Presenting Christians as, properly, Judeo-Christians provides the movement with one of the most respectable legitimations through heritage and authority. The tension is patent, though, because Christianity has to present itself as both something really old and radically new.

⁷⁷ One key exception is discussed by Suetonius in his *Divus Claudius*. Just one year had gone by after the gallic emperor had pronounced his celebrated speech, the *oratio claudii*, instigating the senate to open the doors of the imperial powers to the citizens from the provinces, effectively conceiving the inclusive, culture-based model of expansion that we would come to associate with Rome’s success. He defends this decentralized model by saying that “I do not conceive it needful to repel even the provincials who can do honor to the senate”. The contradiction between this inclusive oration and the expulsions of Jews by him promoted in 49 AD is, though, only apparent: independently of their cult, only those who submit to roman law, authorities and traditions are suitable as roman citizens. The longwinded debate on the historical meaning of a “Chrestus” at the heart of the revolts that led to the expulsion has not been resolved. In any case, be it Jews or Christians, Rome is in most cases a welcoming empire, as long as the traditions are upheld and cherished (William Stearns Davis, ed. *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources* II.186). Its model of territorial and political inclusion given the acceptance by the colonized of some essential cultural aspects is analogous to the

precisely, even when authors such as Justin Martyr defend the suitability of Christians as citizens of the Roman empire, they could never abide by the demands of imperial divinization. According to the *First Apology's* argumentation, Christians did care about the well-being of the polis, but the increasing theologization of the human ruler necessarily became an issue. Palpably, the celebration of the city had been progressively emphasized in the figure of the emperor himself. Bruce W. Winter aptly reminds that “Because Augustus’ birthday was seen, in effect, as the ‘beginning of all things’ for the empire, New Year’s Day had been changed to commemorate his auspicious birth (*Divine Honours* 288). The custom of apotheosis by which Romans invested emperors in divine attributes could have never been accepted by Christians⁷⁸. Proof is the resistance to accepting that the theopolitical concept of equites could be a prosopopoeia of the emperor⁷⁹. It is precisely this antitraditionalist

evangelical system of expansion practiced by the Spanish Empire, or the cultural homogeneization of contemporary United States.

⁷⁸ Fascinatingly enough, the very same Christianity which rejected to legitimate imperial power according to criteria of divinization would commit in the advent of the Middle Ages to the construction of a framework capable of vouching for the divine lineage of medieval kings. A most patent example is the extraordinary genealogical effort undertaken by king Alfonso X of Castile: the 13th century masterpiece entitled *General estoria* in which he outlines the divine origin of royal *potestas* by installing himself in the biblical bloodline. The classic study regarding these matters is still Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies*, where he ascertains the intimate connections between the *corpus mysticum* of the Church and that of the medieval monarchies.

⁷⁹ “Nel diritto romano, la prassi rimediabile non scritta che si instaurava tra i giuristi per la soluzione delle controversie; si trattava di un concetto in divenire, non statico, che esprimeva la capacità di risolvere un problema relazionandosi alle esigenze economico-sociali e al contesto culturale” (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, *Thesaurus* “Aequitas”). Additional sources include Lars Ostwaldt’s *Aequitas und Justitia. Ihre Ikonographie in Antike und Früher Neuzeit* and, Aldo Schiavone’s classic *Ius. L’invenzione del diritto in Occidente*.

attitude that most deeply differentiated Christianity from paganism and Judaism, whose reverence for inherited customs and beliefs helped solidify a mostly respectful relationship between the two. But Christians incarnate the radical other: One that thrives in its otherness and, even more so, under persecution. Tertullian defended them arguing that:

Not one Christian blushes or repents, unless it be for not having been a Christian sooner. If a Christian goes to trial, he goes like a victor, with the air of a triumph; if he is impeached, he glories in it; if indicted, he makes no defense at bar; when interrogated he frankly confesses, and when condemned returns thanks to his judges. What a monster of wickedness is this feature of wickedness belonging to it? Nothing of fear, or shame, or artifice, or repentance, or the desponding sighs of criminals attending on it. What a strange-natured evil or reverse of wickedness is this! that makes the guilty rejoice, and ambitious of accusation, and happy in punishment. (*Apology I*)

In quite a Nietzschean manner, romans interpreted this confidence in the value of arduousness as a blind act of defeatist subversion; as some morally and civilly incompatible pride in downtroddenness. Those who did not respect neither tradition nor authority could never assimilate to the expectations of the city. Equally important, if succinct, is historian Suetonius's account in *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Enumerating Nero's legal innovations, reports that "he likewise inflicted punishments on the Christians, a sort of people who held a new and impious superstition" (*The Lives*, "Nero" XVI). The key clause, *superstitionis novae et maleficae*, points at the main factors behind the irreconcilability: the religious nature of the conflict, the perceived iniquity of their morals and, even more intriguingly, the novelty of this worldview. The presence of evil, immoral cosmovisions and cults was nothing new for romans, but the possibility of one

such based on the obliteration of tradition did indeed astonish them. The well-established progressive –oriented towards the future– vision of Christians could never reach a state of congeniality with the existing, tradition-oriented beliefs. Rome valued the past so much that they say, in fact, that Augustus’s greatest success as emperor was presenting his radical reforms while keeping up the appearance of conservatism. Almost nobody was able to achieve this balance, and Christians were no exception.

Ultimately, the disagreement on such central issues as the nature and provenance of authority could only be solved by negating one of the two. Even the most genuine apologists and sincere defenders of the romanity of Christians could never accept the divine condition of the earthly ruler⁸⁰. For better or worse, the predicament only seemed to allow for a radical, exclusive solution, and despite still being a minority towards the end of the 4th century, Christians

⁸⁰ Independently of many Christians’ efforts at presenting themselves like compatible citizens of the Roman empire, the ultimate eschatological foundation of the new religion is simply incompatible with that of the old ones. Eusebius devotes most of Books I and II of his *History* to legitimizing Christinity as an anciently rooted cult, only to immediately thereafter say that the other religions are the most cruel form of oppression: “Thus, under the influence of heavenly power, and with the divine co-operation, the doctrine of the Saviour, like the rays of the sun, quickly illumined the whole world; and straightway, in accordance with the divine Scriptures, the voice of the inspired evangelists and apostles went forth through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In every city and village, churches were quickly established, filled with multitudes of people like a replenished threshing-floor. And those whose minds, in consequence of errors which had descended to them from their forefathers, were fettered by the ancient disease of idolatrous superstition, were, by the power of Christ operating through the teaching and the wonderful works of his disciples, set free, as it were, from terrible masters, and found a release from the most cruel bondage. They renounced with abhorrence every species of demoniacal polytheism, and confessed that there was only one God, the creator of all things, and him they honored with the rites of true piety, through the inspired and rational worship which has been planted by our Saviour among men” (II.3.1-2). Centuries later, the questioning of mankind’s ability to produce perfect rulers will be at the heart of Luther’s challenge to papal infallibility.

had the upper hand. It could have gone either way, but the matter was coercively settled in 381 and 393 AD when Theodosius I overturned the order and strived for the reversal of roles that Christians had been claiming since 313 AD. This fulfilled Lactantius's dream of enriching roman politics by refounding them upon the principles of Christianity (*Deaths of the Persecutors, Divinae institutiones*).⁸¹

Tacitus's expression, "hatred against mankind," encapsulates very neatly all four accusations leveled against primitive Christians by both Jews and romans, that is, their antitraditionalist views on property, class, castes and, authority. Fronting all inherited ideas on property, Christians followed the apostolic lifestyle convinced that the good society is that of those who "had all things common". Instead of adapting to preexisting social strata, they accepted and preached "to all men" in a proselytising manner. But this universalist program systematized by St. Paul also destabilized the solid caste and *gens* system, genetic and racial legitimations of social classes, since Christians strived to achieve an elusive "singleness of heart". Unlike the members of other faiths,

⁸¹ Lactantius dreams of fraternally uniting all men: "Even had he desired to christianise the State, the difficulties before him would have prevented it. The Christians were by no means in the majority. The West especially, his own sphere of operations, was strongly Pagan; and its anti-Christian habits and traditional prejudice survived for the best part of the next hundred years. If there were Christians who, impatiently, demanded a reversal of roles and repression of the Pagans they found no welcome at the court. Whatever the emperor's personal preferences, he maintained the Pagans in the posts they occupied; and he continued to be the Pontifex Maximus of the Pagan Cults. So bound up with the old religion was the imperial office, that to have abolished the pontificate at that moment would have been to strip himself of vast prestige and authority; to have transferred the office to another would have been almost an abdication. Tertullian had plainly said that no man could become emperor and remain a Christian, and for the next sixty years the Christian Emperor proved him right to this extent, at least, that he retained and exercised the supreme headship of the Pagan Cults" (Philip Hughes, *A History of the Church* I.6).

they could not serve two masters. Just one. This is why foundational texts such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written at some point between 70 and 131 AD), the *Two Ways* and the overarching *Didache* (circa 1st century AD) refer with almost identical phrasing to the immorality of duplicity: “thou shalt not be double-minded nor double tongued, for to be double tongued is the snare of death” (*Didache* 2.4), and “You will not be double-minded or two faced, for a double tongue is a snare of death” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 1.11)⁸². Because of this, the authority and traditionalism of both the Jewish and the imperial laws were circumvented by a new autonomist faction—in the strict sense of giving itself its own law—in which “all that believed were together”. Together as believers, thinkers and denizens of a new entity described in Tacitus as, again, “a most mischievous superstition”. Perceived as not only outsiders, but a burgeoning threat to the very structure of the law, Christians are conceptualized as those who simultaneously live inside and outside the world. And no crime is as reprehensible as that of not being in the world of the city, which in Rome is the materialization of all tradition. That is precisely why, using the Great Fire of 64 AD as an excuse as good as any, the entire city gazed at those “criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment”. The unexpected consequence,

⁸² According to scholars such as Aaron Milavec (*Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*), as well as *The Didache: Faith, Hope, Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50-70 C.E.*, and Hubertus Waltherus Maria van de Sandt (*Matthew and the Didache*), this text could have been authored in the environment of St. Matthew at some point during the 1st century. This discussion also prefigures the medieval debates on Averroes’s double truth.

Tacitus himself sees this acutely, would be the “feeling of compassion” that the martyrdoms spurred. What was, then, the road that led to this first persecution?

Religio Licita

When the First Triumvirate collapsed in 53 BC and Crassus’s ambitious campaign of Alexandrian emulation led him to death, a period of seven years confronted the remaining heads of the Triumvirate, Caesar and Pompey, in what would end up being one of the most thrilling and decisive military campaigns in history. After chasing Pompey across the known world, Caesar arrives in Egypt, where Pompey had been treacherously murdered by his former ally and friend, Lucius Septimius. Even after having nominally won the civil war, Caesar, unsatisfied with the anticlimactic finale, did not halt his pursuit deciding instead to disembark in Alexandria. In a widely novelized episode, Caesar became both the host and the prisoner of pharaohs Cleopatra and Ptolemy.

The subsequent Siege of Alexandria (47 BC) unfolds the events narrated by Caesar in the eminent *Commentarii de Bello Civili*, which ends in a purely modern fashion with a well-known cliffhanger: “Haec initia belli Alexandrini fuerunt” (“These things were the beginning of the Alexandrian war” [*Cayo Julio Cesar II*, 284]). The testimony of the pseudo-Caesar who authored the apocryphal tome on the Egyptian campaign is strengthened by those of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who presents the key figures of Hyrcanus II, and Antipater I the Idumaeon (*Antiquities of the Jews* XIV.10; cfr. Migne, *Patrologie*

x.59). A decisive force in the liberation of Caesar and the city, the Jewish ethnarches ingratiated themselves with the ultimately victorious faction of emperor Caesar when he was about to lose everything for which he had been fighting since 49 AD. The chief figure, Antipater I, replaced the previous ethnarches Hyrcanus II and, by committing his people to the Caesar, became the first Roman Procurator of Judea. The most famous continuator of this dynasty would be his son, soon thereafter crowned king Herod I.

The events of the *bellum civile* and the loyalty proven by, although nominally, Hyrcanus II and, de facto, Antipater I incited Caesar to promulgate several decrees fortifying the position of Jews in their new Roman, global context. Carefully transcribed by Josephus Flavius, these decrees attest how the peoples of Judea were granted Roman citizenship (*Antiquities of the Jews* XIV.10.2)⁸³. Both as a gesture of gratitude and a strategic masterpiece, the emperor legally assigned Hyrcanus II the control over the city of Jerusalem and its beliefs. Moreover, the city was lavished with a singular, privileged fiscal regime, that smoothed the way for a mostly tolerant acceptance of Judaism as, de facto, a *religio licita*. But the most meaningful privilege is the one with which Caesar concludes the decree:

Accordingly, when I forbid other Bacchanal rioters, I permit these Jews to gather themselves together, according to the

⁸³ “I also ordain that he and his children retain whatsoever privileges belong to the office of high priest, or whatsoever favors have been hitherto granted them; and if at any time hereafter there arise any questions about the Jewish customs, I will that he determine the same. And I think it not proper that they should be obliged to find us winter quarters, or that any money should be required of them” (*Antiquities of the Jews* XIV.10.2).

customs and laws of their forefathers, and to persist therein. It will be therefore good for you, that if you have made any decree against these our friends and confederates, to abrogate the same, by reason of their virtue and kind disposition towards us.
(Antiquities of the Jews XIV.10.8)

Acquiring roman denizenship, the beneficial fiscal regime, and the personal prebends ascribed to Hyrcanus II were already great conquests, but this unassuming paragraph has been interpreted as proof of the legal status of Judaism in the empire, that of *religio licita*. Even though the term lacks legal heft, the fact is that the shared respect of tradition and the ability of Jews to blend in the roman lifestyle resulted in a sort of cultural détente after Caesar.

A vivid instance of this temporary understanding between Jews and Romans is depicted by Bruce W. Winter in his *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses*. In the time of the public space of the urban market central to any Roman city saw the theological, the political, and the economic scenify one coherent body politic. The materiality of the agora or forum fostered the development of “a significant link between imperial cultic activity and daily commerce because the buying and selling of all commodities could only be legally undertaken in the official market in any city” (*Divine Honours for the Caesars* 7). The site to this econotheopolitical convergence after Caesar is the figure of the emperor himself, as only those who had made their offerings to the emperor received the distinctive mark that allowed to trade and make use of the market’s facilities. The divinization of the ruler is then a daily rite of passage required for those who desire to access the public space of commerce and politics. Bruce W. Winter ponders how the new decrees of the imperial age

“applied to all inhabitants, but the effect was especially felt by Christians because non-participation resulted in summary execution” (288). But not all citizens were governed by the same regulations. In fact, Winter attests that “The Jews did not participate because they had negotiated with the Romans to offer up a daily loyalty to the empire in their sole temple located in Jerusalem. However, the first Christians had no temple or sacrificial system” (*Divine Honours for the Caesars* 5). During the period of tolerance and mutual understanding, the Jews of Rome managed to circumvent some of the most offensive traits of paganism and the Roman political expectations, including the ever-increasing imperial divinization. On the other hand, Christians, who lacked the negotiation leverage and the heritage of their Jewish counterparts, were constrained to decide between adjustment betraying their own principles, and autonomy but persecution. The radicalness of the movement’s first steps would progressively fade and, as Christianity gained negotiating power and established their own cult’s network of influence, the terms of the conundrum would eventually lead to a sort of compatibilization –the same attitude that the proponents of monasticism will criticize for being too accommodated and conformist–. But in the meantime, it was Jews who had to negotiate with the empire.

Peace, or a transitory illusion of peace, would not last long, but the fact that Caesar followed Alexander’s steps had to mean that if Jews had been able to mostly coexist with Greeks and Macedonians, they would also be an apt fit

for Roman citizenship. The great Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, recounts the series of partial successes on their end by connecting Greece to Rome⁸⁴.

The second book *The Wars of the Jews* offers a vivid description in which

Alexander [the Great], upon finding the readiness of the Jews in assisting him against the Egyptians, and as a reward for such their assistance, gave them equal privileges in this city with the Grecians themselves; which honorary reward continued among them under his successors, who also set apart for them a particular place, that they might live without being polluted [by the Gentiles], and were thereby not so much intermixed with foreigners as before: they also gave them this farther privilege, that they should be called Macedonians. Nay, when the Romans got possession of Egypt, neither the first Cæsar, nor any one that came after him, thought of diminishing the honours which Alexander had bestowed on the Jews. (*The Wars of the Jews* II.18.7)

So for at least as early as in times of Alexander, and then Caesar, the Jewish people was able to skillfully navigate the theopolitical complexity of their poleis and manage to gain the status of citizenship. A major concern was never solved, and that is the absolute, and legitimate, reluctance of the followers of the book to have their God assimilated to Jupiter, as it happened with most cults integrated in the empire. This firm refusal to having their theological foundations “translated” by the means of the almighty *interpretatio romana* – which, as the *interpretatio graeca*, translates cultural elements into a form that is

⁸⁴ Bruno W. Dombrowski points out that Josephus is also key to note that neither the term יהיה nor the Greek concept which it translates, *to koinon*, are “neither the term *hayyahad* has yet been attested in any other ancient Hebrew writing later than DSS nor was the Greek original to *koinon* for Palestine until Josephus wrote his *Vita* (after 100A.D.). It could well be that for nomistically minded Jews who finally dominated Jewish religious life both *hayyahad* and to *koinon* too strongly smacked of mystery group and heresy, as introduced to Palestine by the Qumran Association or similar social bodies and still present in their daily present in their end of Jewish political semi-freedom in form of the more orthodox, so to say, re-Judaized, Essenes who doubtless represented a filial group of older bodies such as the Qumran Association” (“יהיה in 1QS and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis” 307).

digestible for the Roman culture, thus integrating them by assimilation—. But the Mosaic people had seen this multiple times in their long history. They knew that assimilation meant dissolution, and their monotheistic conviction could not ever be reconciled with the syncretic assimilation of Yaveh to Jupiter (and eventually the emperor). This theopolitical balance shatters after the three *tumultus iudaici*, or the Jewish Revolts that took place in 66 AD – 73 AD, 115 AD – 117 AD, and 132 AD – 136 AD. Rome saw Judaism as becoming more of a political entity, whereas Hebrews saw Rome as deauthorizing them in religious matters. The revolt resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple and, following the events of the Third Revolt, the substitution of Jerusalem with the newly founded Aelia Capitolina⁸⁵. This marked the beginning of the greatest diasporic movements under Rome.

On the other hand, the very same Christians who stemmed from and shared with Judaism most of its traditions for centuries, remained averse to capitulating to the idea of becoming, not a full worldview, but just one private dimension of existence. The possibility of finding the theopolitical balance was for them as desired as unachievable. Even thousands of years later, the experience of the subsequent diaspora which resulted from the deterioration of

⁸⁵ “And thus, when the city had been emptied of the Jewish nation and had suffered the total destruction of its ancient inhabitants, it was colonized by a different race, and the Roman city which subsequently arose changed its name and was called *Ælia*, in honor of the emperor *Ælius Adrian*” (IV.6.4). This ordeal can also be interpreted as the ultimate triumph of the *interpretatio romana*, which after centuries of attempted homogeneization of the Jewish and pagan pantheons, dedicates the recently refounded city to Jupiter, now fully identified with the biblical God.

the bilateral relations with the empire strengthens the cosmovision of contemporary Jews, who still today have to dialogue with the rules of different nations and regimes. When the Jewish theopolitical structure begins to be seen as too religious or too political, though, conflicts with almost every state and creed have followed. Simultaneously, the Christian cosmovision could have hardly been pleased by the “mere” status of *religio licita*, siding in this with the Jewish reclamation of religious and political authority. If Judaism lost its ground in the Greek and Roman world, Christians were never able to gain it. At least until they changed their approach and, instead of trying to become befitting Roman citizens, realized that Rome was not anymore in a position to impose the same traditional pantheon and laws. If for the first three centuries the coordinates of the Christian worldview had irremediably clashed with the existence of divinized figures such as the emperor’s, the fourth century will bring to the table the possibility of, not a Romanization of Christians, but a Christianization of Rome. Three centuries of martyrdom separated Christians from this horizon.

The Public Good. Citizenship and the Two Powers

Philip Hughes states in his canonical *History of the Church* that “The motive for the new policy is no longer the restoration of the old Roman ways but simply ‘the public good’” (*History of the Church* I.6). The thing is, they are the same. Rome’s strong traditionalism and veneration for its not-so-ancient past

allow her to grow, expand, conquer, and culturally replace without losing sight of the overarching project. Thus, the history of the city is often marked by forward-thinking phases succeeded by traditionalist exabrupts trying to balance change with tradition. One of the most recent, yet deepest running traditions conformed during the imperial phase are the public offerings to the emperor, now considered a divinity. After Caesar, whose *pontifex maximus* role placed him at a privileged role in the interaction with the gods, is not enough for most emperors to manage the divine. They have to become it.

The emperor is expected to receive divine treatment and deference. This includes sacrifice and offering, which as we have seen were just unacceptable to Christians for two reasons that reveal their opposition to both Jewish and Roman laws. First, Christians see themselves as those who overcame the limitations of the Law, including sacrifice, circumcision, and most identity-building practices of the Jewish race. Second, no matter how much they are willing to adapt to the daily practices and regulations of the Empire, the most fundamental monotheistic features of the new religion prevented Christians from even pretending that the emperor could be considered a deity. This does not mean that people did not fake their reverence towards this earthly power in times of persecution, but shows at least that the official position of the primitive Church was consistent with its later developments: There can only be one God, and any other being who claims that power is usurping his legitimate authority and denying the very meaning of Christ's arrival.

Tertullian is perfectly aware of this when he reminds pagans: “‘You do not worship the gods,’ you say; ‘and you do not offer sacrifices for the emperors.’ Well, we do not offer sacrifice for others, for the same reason that we do not for ourselves, namely, that your gods are not at all the objects of our worship [. . .] We do not worship your gods, because we know that there are no such beings” (*Apology for the Christians* X)⁸⁶. According to Roberto Esposito’s *Due*, Tertullian is the first author to attribute full integrity to the concept of *persona*, which arises firstly in “*economia salvifica elaborata da Tertuliano –il primo a conferir statuto dogmaticamente compiuto alla categoria cristiana di persona*” (*Due* 8). From this perspective, how could Christians after Tertullian divinize an emperor which in the eyes of the Creator is as valuable as any other *persona*? The accusation that Christians face is key to our purpose, as the words Tertullian uses are two grave types of public crimes, *sacrilege* –profanity and atheism in some translations– and *lese-majesty* –or treason–: “So we are accused of sacrilege [sacrilegii] and treason [et maiestatis rei convenimur]. This is the chief ground of charge against us” (*Apology for the Christians* X). Both offenses pertain to the realm of disauthorization of legitimate powers, namely the pantheon and the emperor. Sacrilege was far from being a new legal concept, but *maiestas* is a different story. Before the solidification of the imperial period,

⁸⁶ The translation is flimsy at best, so it should be contrasted to the Latin text: “Deos, inquit, non colitis, et pro imperatoribus sacrificia non penditis. Sequitur ut eadem ratione pro aliis non sacrificemus, quia nec pro nobis ipsis, semel deos non colendo. Itaque sacrilegii et maiestatis rei convenimur” (*Apologeticum* X).

the only conceivable crime against the state was a sort of religious-cultural treachery known as *perduellio* (present from the very foundation of the city in the *Twelve Tables*; Marcian D.48.4.3), its offender was to become a public enemy of the state judged by a special tribunal, the *duoviri perduellionis*. It was the only common path through which citizens would have to face the *carnifex*, or public executor. This category was quite an imprecise hotchpotch of offenses which referred to diverse attacks to the integrity of the city's culture and authority, as in the case of the *adfectatio regni*, common name for the charge of tyrannical aspirations or even overthrow. Paradoxically, the same category aimed at preventing the unlawful concentration of power in an illegitimate subject was used by the emperors who, as we know from Caesar's experiences, that only with the rise of the emperors became precised in the form of the *crimen maiestatis*. More precisely, it is the development of this specific legal type that began the process of separation between the emperor and his citizens, elevating the former over his subjects in ways intolerable to the republic. So it is not that the divinity of the emperor demands special legal treatment, but the unilateral implementation of privileged legal treatment that contributed to divinify his figure.

The emperor was a theopolitical entity who demanded sacrifice and veneration, but in the eyes of Christianity –at least before the 8th century and the developments in the history of modern, God-vested national monarchies such as Charlemagne's–, only God has, properly speaking, *maiestas* (*Maiestas*

Domini, technically). This is different than the sovereign immunity expressed in the *Duo sunt*, where the pope extends an offer of mutual respect between the two legitimate powers by saying that “If the ministers of religion, recognizing the supremacy granted you from heaven in matters affecting the public order, obey your laws, lest otherwise they might obstruct the course of secular affairs” (*Duo sunt*, np). So when it is said that the Middle Ages is the period in which the theological took control over the political, we could not be more imprecise. Gelasius represents the highest religious authority on Earth yet he, given the common agreement at the time which granted theological power a superiority to political one, he decides not to interfere. He, in fact, promises that all priests will abide by terrenal law and even pay taxes. The European medieval is not the stage of religion controlling the political, at least not any more than in any other polis from Antiquity of Modernity. Instead, what is actually happening is that the theopolitical dynamics of Christianity are rescuing institutions and structures from the Classical period and turning them into members of the new body of Christ, the *corpus mysticum*.

The return of (some form of) *maiestas* to the earthly ruler in the Middle Ages is one neat example of this process. One that shows that the medieval was a lot more classical than the Enlightenment wanted to see, and also exposes the moment in time in which the radicalness of the original project starts to give place to a re-hierarchization of the theopolitical. The universalization of Lacedaemonian, Platonic, and Essenian values which marked primitive

Christianity and its antitraditionalist, equalizing enterprise will then be restricted to the life inside the convents and monasteries. Much later, the revival of communitarianism of the 14th-16th centuries will be seen as the Church's last major attempt at universalizing this form of life. According to the original manifestations of Christianity and the aforementioned attempts at returning to them, every single human is equal because all ought to admire the *Maiestas Domini* of the only one capable of being fully human and fully divine at once. Not even the most powerful emperor, not even the pope as prime minister of the earthly divine, could deserve the veneration of the king of kings.⁸⁷

Against the accusations of sacrilege and lese majesty, Christians must prove the impossible: how can they be proper citizens if the two official sources of authority will always be unacceptable in their attribution of divine attributes to human or mythical beings. Tertullian spends a fair amount of time refuting the pagan gods by showing that they are mythical narrations of recent –the contraposition to Judaism's longevity and heritage is vital– invention. Finally, Tertullian levels an argument that will be of particular usefulness to Constantine and Theodosius, that is, the fact “that the Christians are not the only men who

⁸⁷ And, again, the one single exception in history is the person of Mary, for whom theologians had to construct the ad hoc concept of *hyperdulia* –high-veneration– in order to recognize her unique role as the ultimate strictly human mediator in history. Because of his role as ultimate mediator in absolute terms, Christ and all the persons of the Trinity deserve *latria*, or adoratio. Paradoxically, Christians were often prosecuted for the opposite of their official doctrine, as not unfrequently did Romans see them as idolaters, when the Church's orthodoxy claims that no believer should fall idolatry by adoring any other beings. From a theological perspective, Christianity's committed fight against *superbia*, or pride, suggests that they regarded the divinization of the emperor as a case of unacceptable *egolatria* followed by public idolatry by pagan citizens.

act in defiance of your laws” (*Apology for the Christians IX*). Against the common accusation of social disruption and incivility, Tertullian had argued not only that Christians could be apt denizens, but also that the alleged offenses were widespread even across the most undiluted pagans. This *tu quoque*, so-do-you argument was not well received among pagans, who still expected Christians to comply to the empire’s public manifestations. At the end of the day, *religio* still meant exactly the two things that Michele Renee Salzman pointed out: public cult and positive obligation or rule.

If Jews had managed to adapt to Rome, why could not Christians, which seem to be a small variation of the same theme, not abide by the same laws? The approach followed by Hyrcanus II and Antipater I had indeed begotten a sort of compatibilism between the Jewish and the Roman laws. It is exactly upon this political approach that Josephus erects its compatibilist Jewish-Roman apologies. Christians could not remain indolent before the calamities endured by their Jewish counterparts and, in almost all cases, ancestors. Particularly valuable are Eusebius’s words on the matter, as he decisively influenced Christian historiography for centuries. His presentation follows a two-step sequence, first presenting the atrocious treatment given to the Jews by Rome, only two argue that they lost public favor after having executed Christ in Judea. Eusebius quotes Josephus as a most authorized Jewish authority saying:

Josephus again, after relating many things in connection with the calamity which came upon the whole Jewish nation, records, in addition to many other circumstances, that a great many of the most honorable among the Jews were scourged in Jerusalem itself

and then crucified by Florus. It happened that he was procurator of Judea when the war began to be kindled, in the twelfth year of Nero. Josephus says that at that time a terrible commotion was stirred up throughout all Syria in consequence of the revolt of the Jews, and that everywhere the latter were destroyed without mercy, like enemies, by the inhabitants of the cities. (*History* II.26.1-2)

The end of this fragment is key, as Eusebius brilliantly refers to the epicenter of the problem: religious dissidents are in Rome public enemies of the city. Religious dissidents are not religious dissidents, but political enemies of a society built upon theopolitical principles of public commitment to the law. As such, when Jews begin to pose a problem, not even Caesar's generous donations and legal regime can defend them from a tide of traditionalism that erases the possibility of compatibilism. Other cults were respected just because they did not represent a threat to the theopolitical unity of Rome. They were either too private or too superstitious to put it at risk. Too prestigious of a theopolitical body to be disregarded, not even the most sacred place of Jerusalem is free from persecution. In fact, both Josephus and Eusebius note that Rome deciding to strike precisely there reveals the religious –theopolitical, we should say– nature of the conflict. Then he goes onto quoting one of the most visceral passages in Josephus's *The Wars of the Jews*; truly a doubtful achievement, considering the number of terrible episodes that Josephus is impelled to narrate. Chapter 18 is entitled "The calamities and slaughters that came upon the Jews" and it begins reminding that "the people of Cesarea had slain the Jews that were among them" (*The Wars of the Jews* II.18.1), only to continue with the passage that stirred Eusebius's compassion:

the Syrians were even with the Jews in the multitude of the men whom they slew; for they killed those whom they caught in their cities, and that not only out of the hatred they bare them, as formerly, but to prevent the danger under which they were from them; so that the disorders in all Syria were terrible, and every city was divided into two armies encamped one against another, and the preservation of the one party was in the destruction of the other; so the day time was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear, which was of the two the more terrible; for when the Syrians thought they had ruined the Jews, they had the Judaizers in suspicion also; and as each side did not care to slay those whom they only suspected on the other, so did they greatly fear them when they were mingled with the other, as if they were certainly foreigners. Moreover, greediness of gain was a provocation to kill the opposite party, even to such as had of old appeared very mild and gentle towards them; for they without fear plundered the effects of the slain, and carried off the spoils of those whom they slew to their own houses, as if they had been gained in a set battle; and he was esteemed a man of honour who got the greatest share, as having prevailed over the greatest number of his enemies. It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied, and those of old men, mixed with infants, all dead, and scattered about together: women also lay amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness; you might then see the whole province full of inexpressible calamities, while the dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was every where greater than what had been already perpetrated. And thus far the conflict had been between Jews and foreigners. (*The Wars of the Jews* II.18.2-3)

Few moments in the history of Late Antiquity are this capable of so plainly unveiling the absolute imbrication between the theological and the political. Jews, as Christians and members of other cults strong enough to make Rome's traditionalism feel threatened, are not slaughtered because their beliefs are considered false or harmful, but because those ideas make them foreigners. Legally, they have been citizen since Alexander and Caesar's patronage, but in the second half of the first century they are perceived as the other within. As, oxymoronically, foreign countrymen.

Eusebius then realizes something that Flavius Josephus had said at the beginning of his heartbreaking discourse in *The Wars of the Jews*. When Pilate is sent to Judea by Tiberius, he makes his “parousia” carrying the ensigns of the emperor as a sign of the impending replacement of the Jewish law by the imperial one.

Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Cæsar that are called *ensigns*, into Jerusalem. This excited a very among great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. (*The Wars of the Jews* II.9.2)

Pilate is envoyed there to end with the special regime that Judaism had sported in Rome since Caesar, and in the region since Alexander (whose donations were interrupted by the pharaohs in the well-known episodes of the Old Testament), so his figure represents a scourge shared by Christians and Jews. Eusebius reads Josephus’s discontent regarding the person of Pilate and expresses a sense of Christian solidarity when he remembers “Josephus, who likewise indicates that the misfortunes of the whole nation began with the time of Pilate, and with their daring crimes against the Saviour” (Eusebius, *History* II.6.3). Immediately thereafter, Eusebius takes advantage of the situation and takes the former’s discourse into a new, now markedly Christian dimension: “Josephus, at least, has not hesitated to testify this in his writings, where he says, ‘These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, that

is called the Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man” (*History* II.23). Jews and Christians lost all possibility of reunion when, surrendering to the temporal powers of Pilate and Tiberius, Jews lost sight of what made them special. This is the way in which Eusebius tries to understand the tribulations that those who had been their brothers had to endure for centuries. The problems for Romans, Christians, and Jews began when the theopolitical balance of Judaism gave in to that of Rome, eventually shattering their own idiosyncrasies and condemning Judaism to a long ostracism, and sentencing Rome to death as a body politic.⁸⁸

The diversity of cults and ideas was not a mirage of Roman society, but it only existed in so far as the integrated ideas did not subvert the basic ideal of citizenship. In this regard, Rome’s strictly public and ritual oriented religion allows for a type of private-public balancing as the pragmatism of Richard Rorty and other contemporary thinkers. At home you may as well be an Orphist, a Jew, or a pastafarian, as long as when you are outside you are only a citizen. Although Judaism has in too many occasions been forced to hiding its practices and becoming Cryptojudaism, it is not its natural state. As a result, Christianity displays a paradoxical composition: it is a worldview that demands to be

⁸⁸ The main sources are Josephus and the *Documenta Tumultus Iudaici Tempore Traiani Imperatoris*. Eusebius also speaks extensively about the wars: “many other tumults which were stirred up in Jerusalem itself, and shows that from that time seditions and wars and mischievous plots followed each other in quick succession, and never ceased in the city and in all Judea until finally the siege of Vespasian overwhelmed them. Thus the divine vengeance overtook the Jews for the crimes which they dared to commit against Christ” (Eusebius, *History* II.6.3-8).

universalizing and public, yet in order to survive the first three centuries of persecution it must remain in the private houses –the *domus ecclesiae*– before it gains the strength to go fully public. Judaism, on the other hand, will be forced to evolve from a public, state (or, in the old terminology, race) building nation to a diasporic lineage. A diasporic lineage that acquires foundational, theogonical dimensions in the sacred book of the Exodus, where the Jews are expelled from Egypt. According to the relation,

the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: ‘Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.’ (Exodus 1:6-10)

This is the beginning of the flock –race, temple, and nation at once– led by Moses and Aaron. Thus, independently of recent conflicts between Zionism and Diaspora, the exodic dimension of Judaism is an essential one to understanding its own history. This explains the recent conflicts regarding the national (or not) nature of Judaism, which were legally settled on 19 July 2018 with the approval of Israel’s Nation-State Bill⁸⁹. The tension, therefore, is one between a centered, or a decentered theopolitical view.

⁸⁹ The medieval discussion applies perfectly to this new context. The Nation-State Bill of Israel in 2018, is an example of theologization of the political, or politization of the theological? Maybe it is one theopolitization of the theopolitical, that is, of recognizing that the two are at the heart of many polities.

Conversely, the theopolitical challenges of Christianity are the tensions between temporal and eternal authorities, as well as between the private and the public. Eventually, Christianity will grow unto a theopolitical entity, a *corpus mysticum*, which by year 494 will distinguish the political and the theological much more starkly than any other polity from the past, as recognized in the *Duo sunt* letter written by the pope, Gelasius I, to emperor Anastasius. Even Christ himself advises his followers to pay the emperor's tribute, as in the famous sentence "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Soon thereafter, Saint Paul will establish the terms of this compliance to all legitimate powers:

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same [. . .] Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake [. . .] Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:3-8)

Cryptochristianity has been historically frowned upon since at least Augustine's invective against the Christian passing as Priscillianists in his *Contra mendacium* (*On Lying*), whereas Cryptojudaism has a long, more ambiguous tradition in the diaspora. Additionally, the fixation with social order and civility led in the roman empire to a self-complacent, ritualistic form of religious experience of the external cult –the first sense of *religio*–, of the appearances. Fostering the mere embracement of visible habits while not really caring about the actual ideas allows for an extremely flexible and inclusive type of religion as shared cultural

manifestations and practices –to which Jews often successfully adapted–, but the level of internal and external commitment demanded by Christians resulted in the fact that, once they happened to have the upper hand, they could not tolerate a merely formal adhesion to their rites. Christianity is as much rite as it is idea, whereas paganism is mostly rite, and some forms of Judaism like the kabbalah are mostly idea. The troubled, yet often relationship between the two laws proves that compatibility is possible, while also showing that compromises do not tend to last too long. Towards the third decade of our era, the theopolitical equilibrium starts to shake as Jewish law increases its presence in the political sphere, and Roman law begins to demand stricter compliance to public manifestations of imperial religion.

The World Against. Difference and Martyrdom

Christianity was not widely beheld as a distinctly demarcated cult until the end of the second century. Prior to that point, both its moderate numbers and the fact that they still shared many of their customs with mainline Jews prevented the movement from being singled out. Despite this fact, the visibility and idiosyncrasy of their beliefs, hyperbolized by their proselytism and will to publicly display their martyrdom, resulted in very early, yet asystematic attacks such as that of Nero in 64 AD.

Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and

having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us, although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us. (III.17.1). Not unlike the madrasahs or even the University of Bologna, the Church is born out of the private houses –*domus ecclesiae*– of the instructors. The Dura-Europos church, the oldest of which we have knowledge, represents private efforts working towards the publication of reality. This oikonomia, the house, and diocese, its administration provides the small-scale model for the upcoming Roman substitute for the Empire’s *provinciae*. It is only around the second century that, via the testimonies of Pliny and Trajan, we identify a top-level mindful discussion on the matter. But this period of relative anonymity ended in 249 AD when Decian issued the very same decree that led Saint Paul of Thebes to escape the city and became the *Ureinsiedler*, that is, the protohermit. By testing the citizens’ aptness to ritual sacrifice, the emperor was able to actively segregate Christians. In fact, veneration to the emperor and sacrifices in his honor had to be performed before Roman authorities in order to get certificates that attested the loyalty to the empire. This is something that not all religious groups had to deal with. Jews were exempt from worshipping pagan idols, gaining a status of a *religio licita* (*The Jews under the Roman Rule* 539), whereas Christians were considered a group apart from the Roman society, which was sensed as a threat to the common welfare of the Empire.

Shortly thereafter, Valerian redoubled this effort in 257 and 258 AD, years in which he forbade several of the most ostensible Christian customs and rituals, also directing a violent attack against influential converts belonging to the higher classes of the metropolis¹. Christopher J. Haas notes in his enlightening study that these measures displayed a radical departure from the 253 AD – 256 AD congratulating policies by which he had restored “a measure of peace and stability to all the empire’s inhabitants, including the Christians [. . .] In the summer of 257, Valerian suddenly reversed his policy and instituted a persecution directed against the Christian hierarchy” (“Imperial Religious Policy and Valerian’s Persecution of the Church, A.D. 257-260” 135-36). The traditionalist impulse under Valerian impacted the political, economic, and religious sphere. Haas hits the mark once again when he underlines that “Valerian’s entire religious policy reflected his concern to revive the worship of the traditional gods and to restore the *pax deorum* [. . .] Valerian’s religious policy was even more traditional than that of his persecuting predecessor, Decius” (140-41). Against the alleged *odio humani generis* with which Tacitus’s account described the Christian worldview, Valerian presents himself as the “Restitutor orbis” and “Restitutor generis humani” (*The Roman Imperial Coinage*, “Valerian” 45, 117-18, 149, 171-172, 220). Moved by an irrational, eschatological hate towards earthly affairs, Christians have attempted to annihilate civility and mankind, so it must be the emperor’s role to retribute it.

Following a moderate remission in the virulence of the campaigns, Diocletian's efforts at reinforcing the traditional values of the empire found in Christianity a suitable cynosure. The edicts issued between 297 AD and 304 AD tested the resilience of the new sect, which in an astonishing turn of events would become a licit religion in 313 AD, thanks to Constantine and Licinus. This last phase was named the Great Persecution, for the years immediately before Constantine saw in fact the most systematic and virulent persecution against Christians. It is also the exact time at which most anchorites, cenobites and desert exiles leave the cities looking for a desert from which to create a new polis. Not all edicts promulgated by Diocletian targeted directly Christians, but they did have an effect on their lives indirectly. Is it possible that economic reforms could have had some influence in the responses that early Christians gave to deal with their uncertain situation in the empire?

In 301 Diocletian created the *Edict on Coinage*, in which "imperial coinage was to be re-tariffed so that it would have double its face value" (*The Roman Empire at Bay* 327) in order to resolve the problem of inflation. The origin of this problem resides in the fact that many previous emperors had coined their own currency devaluating its value. This produced an uncontrolled situation in terms of prices, value and salaries, which Diocletian tried to resolve with a second edict, called the *Edict of the Maximum prices*. David S. Potter discusses these edicts in his work *The Roman Empire at Bay*, where he includes a quote of an original source of the edict: "we hasten to apply these remedies long

demanding by the situation, satisfied that no one can complain that our intervention against evil-doers is untimely or unnecessary, trivial or unimportant". In so doing they "exhort the loyalty of all, so that the regulation for the common good may be observed with willing obedience and due scruple" (*The Roman Empire at Bay* 328). These words allude to two different notions: on one hand, the empire requires loyalty from all individuals; on the other hand, this loyalty, which emerges from the imperial intervention that everyone needs to obey, guarantees the welfare of the society. That loyalty is no other thing than the fulfillment of the laws, including the obligation to worship Roman gods, something that Christians knew they were not able to fulfill. Although the original purpose of these kind of economic reforms were not always to target early Christians and their religious actions, they did have an impact on them. Lactantius, for example, comments on the social consequences, illustrating the virulence and anger that followed the alteration of prices and values:

Since he [Diocletian] had created an immense increase in prices by his various iniquities, he tried to enforce a law on the prices of goods for sale: there was much blood shed over small and cheap things, nor did anything go on sale, and the price increase flamed all the worse, until the law was dissolved through its own necessity after many deaths. (Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* §7.6-7; *The Roman Empire at Bay*)

Lactantius' words attest to the tense situation that the empire was suffering.

Under these extreme circumstances, in which attempts to control economy and commerce were failing, Diocletian's government "was out of control prior to the beginning of the persecution" (*The Roman Empire at Bay* 328). Two years

later, Diocletian proclaimed the persecution edict of 303. Potter compiles the terms of the edict in the following six statements:

1. Churches should be destroyed.
2. Christian scriptures were to be burned.
3. Christian officials were to lose the privileges of their rank.
4. Christians were deprived of the right to answer legal actions against them.
5. Christians could not file actions against those who assaulted them.
6. Imperial freedmen who were Christians should be reduced again to slavery. (*The Roman Empire at Bay* 330)

The sudden feeling of threat that Christianity caused in Diocletian can be traced to an issue of military discipline, that is, the fact that Christian soldiers refused to sacrifice to Roman gods. Diocletian's mistrust was supported by one of his potential successors, Galerius, who, according to Potter, could have had "a particular strong dislike of Christians" (331). The effects of the edict were sensed soon. Local authorities wanted to make sure that the edict was followed and officials wrote declarations that explain how these confiscations and arrests are taking place. Potter includes a very interesting declaration made by a lector to the civil authorities at Oxyrhynchus. It is worth transcribing the whole paragraph:

Whereas you gave me orders in accordance with what was written by Aurelius Athanasius, procurator privatae, in virtue of a command of the most illustrious magister privatae, Neratius Apollonides, concerning the surrender of all the goods in the said former church and whereas I reported that the said church had neither gold nor silver nor money nor clothes nor beasts nor slaves nor lands nor property either from grants or bequests, excepting only the unworked bronze which was found and delivered to the logistes to be carried down to the most glorious Alexandria in accordance with what was written by our most illustrious prefect Clodius Culcianus, I also swear by the genius of our lords the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, the Augusti, and Constantius and Galerius, the most noble Caesars, that these

things are so and that I have falsified nothing, or may I be liable to the divine oath. (*P. Oxy.* 2673; translated by John R. Rea)⁹⁰

The Roman official declares that the church did not have any material goods nor property or lands, except a bronze. These words, found in a non-Christian source, and what is more, in an official Roman document, proof the nature of the early Christian church that is being examined in these pages: The lack of private property and, consequently, the exhortation to share everything in common. These precepts were so foreign for Roman authorities that the official needs to explicitly say, in order to prevent him from being accused as a thief, that he has not stolen any goods from the church he was confiscating, because there was none.

In contrast to the Decian edict, that of Diocletian did not require to obtain a certificate, but “stated that people who did not sacrifice would have their property confiscated” (*The Roman Empire at Bay* 343). The response of the early church to these restricting actions promulgated by successive edicts was obvious: if one of the punishments was to have all property removed, Christians proposed to lack property, a response hosted by the biblical scriptures. In the same way, a prerequisite to participate in commercial activities was to honor and sacrifice to the Caesars, which Christians faced by avoiding selling and buying in the markets, as stated by Tertullian (*Divine Honours for the Caesars* 286). Since

⁹⁰ An English translation can be found in the same David S. Potter’s volume that has been guiding these pages, *The Roman Empire at Bay*. The original document can be found in the website *Papyrology at Oxford*. It belongs to the *Imaging Papyri Project*, a digitized database of ancient manuscripts of Greek and Latin authors.

they proposed all property to be common, there was no need for trading and accumulating and, consequently, they were able to obey both the divine and the Roman law. This is something that not all religious groups had to deal with. Whereas Jews were exempt from worshipping pagan idols, gaining a status of a *religio licita*, Christians were considered a group apart from the Roman society, which was sensed as a threat to the common welfare of the empire (*The Jews under the Roman Rule* 539). Even before Decian's edict was promulgated, Tertullian's *Apologeticum* 39.20 attests the existence of harmful allegations against Christians, indicating that the hostility that many of them suffered due to their faith was not the product of an unmeditated unilateral decision.

These accusations and suspicions against Christians were institutionalized after Decius' edict, and official persecution began. Whereas hostility was previously aroused in local terms, arrests, tortures and executions were now promoted by the emperor himself, although the fulfillment of the various edicts varied from region to region. Africa and the East of the Mediterranean Sea suffered the most virulent persecution, which coincides with Winter's statement in his work *Divine Honours for the Caesars* on the extension of emperor's cultic movement: in the East a long and old tradition of worshipping rulers as gods already was present in the mind of the society (9). Not only pharaohs but also lawmakers such as Lycurgus had been worshipped as divinities. The shift towards the veneration of the Roman emperor was not such a contrastive transition as it could have been in the West. The fervor for the

emperor would then have been consequently higher in the East, so official interventions against Christians acquired a stricter and intense nature in this region.

The union of political and religious power in the figure of the emperor was not an option to be contemplated in the Christian mind, which means that Christians could accept political subordination but not religious subordination to the roman authority. They were not allowed to sacrifice to pagan gods, although that implied to be subjected to sanctions like “confiscation of property and exile or death” (Joseph Plescia, “The persecution of the Christians” 25). These words illustrate the three paths that Christians could pursue in their life as persecuted people. The first one, mentioned in previous pages, was managed by declaring the absence of private property. What could then be confiscated if there is nothing to confiscate? The second one, exile, was practiced by those Christians that did not want to go so far as those who committed apostasy, called *lapsi* among other Christians, that is, those who relapsed into heathenism. Exile was a much better option in the case of North Africa and the East side of the Mediterranean. The desert was the perfect place for those who chose this option. Finally, death was the fate of those others that did not renounce to their faith, following the obligation established by the church from the Apostolic times to confess: “Christian faith under all circumstances and avoiding every act of denial” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Lapsi”). Martyrdom in the early times of Christianity is a very studied concept, but scholars have not come to an

agreement when determining the extent of this phenomenon. While the *Acts of the Martyrs* is a well-established compilation of both official and non-official records—that is, testimonies by eye-witnesses later transcribed—, some argue that most of these recountings are purely fictional.

A very graspable work of this trend is Candida Moss's book *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. She affirms that “the traditional history of Christian martyrdom is mistaken. Christians were not constantly persecuted, hounded, or targeted by the Romans. Very few Christians died, and when they did, they were often executed for what we in the modern world would call political reasons” (14). This argument disregards the essential imbrication of what we currently call political reasons and religious motives, all of which were inevitably intertwined in the Roman world. Let us not forget that Julius Caesar first relevant responsibility after his early military campaigns and proconsulate in Hispania was a religious one. He was appointed *pontifex* in 63 BC when he was thirty-seven years old. Ten years later, he became the *pontifex maximus* in charge of Rome's religious affairs. For him to become the political dictator we would need to wait until 49 BC and 48 BC, years in which his new role was tenured. Caesar reflects the culmination of a convergent process that in the figure of Augustus will lead to a completely unitarian theopolitical paradigm. If one wants to speak separately about the religious and the political in Rome, an extremely nuanced approach is necessary. The theopolitical is also at the heart of many of Rome's first steps; for example, the

Italian historian Giovanni Brizzi has argued in his magniloquent *Annibale* that many of Rome's initial hindrances were due to the prevalence of the old nobiliary and chivalrous values of the traditional moral code. During the rigorist periods of the Republic and Empire, this archaic substratum will be reclaimed as a means towards the recuperation of the religious law's severity. Consistently, in the best of cases, if someone wants to sever the political and the religious in historical Rome, the operation will become quasi unfeasible hard after the theopolitical concentration of Caesar and Augustus.

Beyond this theopolitical condensing in the late Republic and early Empire, the different edicts promulgated during the rigorist phases refer explicitly to the identity between the religious and the political. In the case of Decius, the most relevant edicts in this regard, the impositions speak for the unity of the empire not only in the political, but also in the realm of the religious and theological. Once again, the two planes were embodied in the figure of the emperor. For a limited period of time, the Jews did enjoy a religious exemption which allowed them to honor the emperor autonomously, as part of their own rites and celebrations. Why was that exemption not granted to Christians, with whom they shared so much? In the piece entitled *The World of the Early Christians*, Joseph Kelly argues that although Romans had their own religion, "they saw no need to impose it on others. They tolerated other religions as long as these posed no threat to the empire" (80). If the threat that Romans sensed was caused by the fact that Christians rejected to worship pagan gods and the

emperor, which Jews also could not accept, what is the cause of the disparate treatment of Jews and Christians? Tertullian explicitly addressed this challenge asserting that Christians did pray for the emperors and Roman authorities, that is, that they were suitable participants in the veneration of the emperor, only in their own way, as Jews did. We have discussed the somewhat shaky status of *religio licita* granted to Judaism as a historical sign of gratitude, but also as a recognition to their civility and the heritage of their own religious structures, at times even being recognized as their own nation state. But their worldview was easily recognizable due to the comprehensive series of biopolitical practices involved in a Jewish life, which means that the oldest Abrahamic religion could be kept under control without delving into intricate investigations. Moreover, a long tradition of open support to those in power had existed in the heart of Judaism, as Flavius Josephus remembers that the Essenes, archetype of the model Jewish citizen, always will be “assistant to the righteous; that he will ever show fidelity to all men, and especially to those in authority” (*The Wars of the Jews* §II.VIII.2-7). This explains Josephus’s own existential passages, as he would eventually join the ranks of Rome, coherently applying the principle of defending the worldly authorities as divine mandates.⁹¹

However, Christianity’s nationless and people-less nature, dogmatically inclined to accepting everyone as a new member of the community regardless

⁹¹ A measure to control Jew population was precisely the *Fiscus Judaicos*, the Jewish Tax. After the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, Roman Emperor Vespasian imposed these tax, which was abolished around the 3rd century.

of their origin or ethnicity, constituted a biopolitical habitus not so easy to identify. Even less so during their first years of existence, as the practice of many of the later discarded customs of their Jewish ancestors had not yet been abandoned. Anyone could be a Christian. Furthermore, from the moment that Christianity began to be perceived as something independent from Judaism, Romans started to consider it a *superstitio*. The first volume of *Religions of Rome* clarifies the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio* in Roman terms. *Superstitio* could refer to either “‘irregular’ religious practices (‘not following the customs of the state’) and excessive commitment, an excessive commitment to the gods [. . .] far from being a false religion, could be seen as an extremely powerful and dangerous practice which might threaten the stability of *religio* and the state” (217). Christianity was thus doubly guilty of these charges, as not only did they refuse to follow central customs of the state, the honors to the emperor as a divinity as well as the service to the pantheon –although, according to Tertullian, they were willing to fulfill with this requirement in their own way–, but they also were perceived as being so strikingly committed to God that they were ready to offer their lives for Him. Martyrdom was a Christian response that reflected an excess that Romans would necessarily perceive as superstitious and, therefore, civilly unacceptable.

It should be noted that the term *martyr* sported a different sense during the first years of Christianity. Although this word currently alludes to those that die for their faith, originally it was also used to refer to those people that were

witnesses, particularly of Christ. Martyrs were those who met him in person and anyone who, as Christian witnesses, would attest the truth of Christ alike. If we follow this wider definition, martyrs would be not only the ones that die but also the ones that are willing to die rather than to deny the truth of Christ. A lax use of the concept could indeed render all first Christians to be considered as martyrs, further increasing the historical impact of this social label.

These kinds of stories that narrate the life and death of martyrs become very popular in Christian circles and were used in Church liturgies. One of the most famous texts, and also one of the oldest, is the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, which portrays the martyrdom of a mother and her baby, together with a pregnant slave, in a Carthaginian prison under the authority of Septimius Severus. The harshness of this travail is also present in one of the most vivid, and visceral descriptions accounts of this phenomenon which we receive via Eusebius:

they record the events which befell the rest of the martyrs, and describe the great firmness which they exhibited in the midst of their pains. For they say that the bystanders were struck with amazement when they saw them lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view; and then laid upon sea-shells and certain pointed spits, and subjected to every species of punishment and of torture, and finally thrown as food to wild beasts. (Eusebius, *History* 4)

After this, all there is left is three roads: Dealing with the sword and the lions, hiding from them, or building a new city. In the field of rhetoric, this corresponds roughly to polemicists, apologists, and theologians, who employed diverse techniques in order to find a place within the empire for the new

religion. The mission had partially come to fruition even during the time of the persecutions, being a moderate success of Christianity within the elites at the source of the unfortunate events. But the path of adaptation to the preexisting Roman structures would soon reveal itself insufficient. The goal of Christianity was not the mere replacement of the social elites. By doing so, it would have become a syncretic product, it always was, but one that would just be facelifting the essential structures of the ancient world. As the compatibilist stance began to show its cracks, the calm work of scholars and monks became more important than ever. The worldview they had been sculpting for centuries had to offer a transformational alternative to paganism. Even more so, its success depended on its ability to also subvert the imperial system.

Many had chosen to leave behind the cities in order to found new poleis along the Mediterranean. Many abandoned all traces of civilization whatsoever, only to inhabit in caves, deserts, or even on top of pillars. But even more of them realized that the salvation they were longing could not be achieved in isolation. For them, Christ had not come for the first time bringing just a message, but a message in a community. This is how the scholarly and monastic interpreters of the apostolic koinonia shaped the concepts of self and the commons for times to come.

IV
KOINONIA

Selfness and Otherness. Defining Monasticism

The Eastern and North African regions of the Roman Empire embraced the cult of the emperor in a fervent manner. A combination of supercompensation by those in weaker social positions and the religious context of those areas also resulted in local rulers being expected to display their veneration to the powers that be even more intensely than in the metropolis. As a result of the stricter divinizing policies of Africa and the East, data indicates that a substantial number of public enemies chose –or were chosen– ostracism as the only way to preserve their Christian beliefs at the source of the strife with the current theopolitical climate. Religious ostracism, though, does not always involve the physical abandonment of the city, for it is possible for some to subtract themselves from society without leaving behind the walls of the polis. In many cases, however, Christians chose to break with the establishment and build instead a city of their own. Some ventured out on their own and became anchorites, like Saint Anthony. In many cases, even those who had planned to become solitary hermits eventually wound up founding communities of their own. Such is the history of the first systematic proponents of monasticism, comprising anchorites and coenobites. Yet, how does one define monasticism?

Monasticism is a most clearly theopolitical form of life. Its ideals and practices, its *habitus*, fulfill the needs of both earthly and spiritual citizenship. A look at one of the most authoritative reference works in the field, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, provides us with a solid overview. Specifically,

William Harmless's contribution, the article entitled "Monasticism," very aptly summarizes the common places regarding the matter at hand:

Christianity had ascetic commitments from its very foundation, in the words and deeds both of Jesus and of Paul. When it surfaced into legitimacy in the 310s, Christianity's deep-seated ascetic impulses surfaced as well. The movement called monasticism left an indelible impression upon Christian faith and practice in the medieval West, the Byzantine East, and beyond. Two classic forms of monasticism emerged early: the anchoritic, or solitary life of the hermit; and the coenobitic, or life within a structured community. Monastic life required, from the outset, stark renunciations: of family, property, marriage, and career. Early monks typically joined ascetical disciplines – fasting, vigils, poverty, lifelong celibacy – with a life of manual labor. (*The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, "Monasticism")

Notwithstanding the etymology of the term, monasticism is not just the form-of-life – a *Lebensform* in Wittgenstein's sense – of the μοναχός (gr. *monakhos*), that is, of the "solitary". Solitary life was not new. Asceticism was not new. Even community asceticism was not a recent invention. So, why do we refer to a form-of-life that may equally be communitarian or isolated using the term for "solitary"? And, what makes monasticism a new type of existence different from asceticism and other preexisting practices? Monasticism is based on renunciation. We say *monakhos* because the individual singles out his self. It is not the life of the individual, but the individuality of life. Independently of its number, the monastic individual decides that the self is not his number one telos. The *other* is –be it the neighbor, or the capitalized Other–. Monasticism is

a theopolitical form-of-life based on, strictly speaking, radical magnanimity or altruism⁹².

Monasticism is said to have been first conceived in the Egyptian deserts.

The Egyptian tradition is owed to Saint Mark, according to Eusebius:

Mark was the first that was sent to Egypt, and that he proclaimed the Gospel which he had written, and first established churches in Alexandria. And the multitude of believers, both men and women, that were collected there at the very outset, and lived lives of the most philosophical and excessive asceticism, was so great, that Philo thought it worthwhile to describe their pursuits, their meetings, their entertainments, and their whole manner of life. (*History of the Church* II.16.1-2)

The common author of Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles then mapped the early beginnings of the Church following these criteria and presenting it as the universalist enterprise emphasized in the Pauline epistles. To all of these direct sources, asceticism and self-effacement for the sake of the other are regarded as the earthly culmination of Christ's universal love mandate. Only when self-love is overcome can one truly love the other.

⁹² As far as we know, the world is a neologism introducing semi-cultivated lexicon from post-classical latin *-alteri-huic-* into French by Auguste Comte in his 1852 *Catéchisme positiviste*. The philosophy of science and epistemological sides from the Comte of the *Systèmes* have definitely eclipsed his truly enthralling facet of self-declared master of the "religion universelle". He introduces the term blaming egotism for all of humanities' travails: "La prépondérance habituelle de l'altruisme sur l'égoïsme, où réside le grand problème humain" (*Catéchisme* 61). Albeit mostly forgotten, the study of Comte's theopolitical works, the *Catéchisme* and the *Système de politique positive* would be very valuable. A reading of Comte clearly proves how his dechristianized-Christianity –in the vein of the cult of the Être Suprême during the French Revolution– transmits the laconophilic values of asceticism, renunciation, and, now with his very own neologism, altruism. The strict restrictions and educative path that he imposes on priests are identical to the Spartan, Platonic, and monastic ones analyzed in this dissertation. Although altruism has the advantage of being a strict antonym to egotism, magnanimity is a more historically accurate concept, as it refers to the idea of having an ample soul, that is, of being in command of the soul through self-effacement putting the other before the self.

In this road to self-effacement, the desert is a central motive to the history of monotheism, not just because of its presence in the regions of Egypt, Judea, or the Arabian Peninsula, but because of its predisposition to being imbued in the same profound iconographical value present in Paul, Mark, or Luke. A desert is a place which is also a no-place. It is a utopia, but even more so in the Foucauldian sense of *hétérotopie* as a difference-producing entourage (“Des espaces autres”), or even in Marc Auge’s idea of the *non-lieu* conceived as a non-relational space where the self dissolves in the void (*Non-lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*). For the history of subjectivity and monasticism, the desert is an opportunity for the self to unveil its otherness. Or its nothingness.

Horizon, sun, dunes, and sand are all elements that foster a questioning of the very existence of life itself, as it seems to cease once we enter the desert⁹³.

That is exactly why, in order to punish the generation of disbelievers in the Old

⁹³ We know that Saint Pachomius’s teacher, Palemon, recommended the founder of regular monasticism to take advantage of the pedagogical qualities of the desert, whose lack of shade teaches never to cease vigiling, and whose sand reminds the futility of human ambition. If vigil was required and Pachomius started to fall asleep, Palemon “Against this weakness and temptation he enjoined him, on such occasions, to carry sand from one place to another, till his drowsiness was overcome” (Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints V*, “St. Pachomius” 205). This is a radical precedent of the more pragmatist, but equally edifying *ora et labora* instituted by Saint Benedict. Weber talks about the work ethics of Protestantism in his classic *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, but the exaltation of labor has always been present in Christianity. The difference between, say, Benedict or Pachomius and Calvin is the role of the individual and the destination of the labor’s fruits. Whereas for the former labor is virtuous because the individual serves a different purpose, the traditional Weberian reading of Lutheranism and Calvinism sees individual effort as a tangible path towards individual salvation. Although both see labor as serving something higher, for the latter authors it is not seen as the annihilation of the self in God’s hands, but as a temporal way to test God’s willingness to save, to affirm the holiness of that individual.

Testament, the Jewish people is sentenced to wander for forty years. The desert reaffirms the value of life, cleansing it through annihilation:

Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against me [. . .] After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die. (Numbers 14:29, 14:34-35)

The wilderness –hb. *יְשִׁמוֹן*? or *Jeshimon*, recently *Yeshimon*, “wilderness,” but also “solitude, desolation, desert”– is inhabited by death, or by those who want to , or have to experience annihilation. The complexity of the Hebrew concept of *Jeshimon* is quite aptly captured by Saint Jerome, who contextually translates it inflecting the appropriate forms of “solitudo,” “desertum,” or even “Jesimon” taken as a proper noun. If the veterotestamentary God mandates death in the desert as a race-purifying trance, the neotestamentary example set by Christ’s forty days in the desert interiorizes and individualizes this experience⁹⁴. Matthew dictates: “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred” (Matthew 4:1-2)⁹⁵. The Old Testament desert teaches to

⁹⁴ And does it in quite a Foucaultian way, too, as it neatly fits his definition of modern power as theorized in *Surveiller et punir*.

⁹⁵ Regarding fasting and nourishment, the religions of the book are profoundly linguistic, verbal: “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:3-6).

trust God in a radical, Abrahamic manner⁹⁶. In the New Testament the desert is the ultimate trial, not for the race or people of Judea, but for every individual following the example of Jesus⁹⁷. It is the place where the self's inclinations can be revealed and, for those described by Kierkegaard as knights of faith, overcome. Its extreme conditions exaggerate the inner conversations of the soul while also showing the banality of daily endeavors such as material ambition and human grudges, both of which will become dunes in the desert. The desert would therefore become the predilect site of those hoping to overcome the limitations of the self by imitating the self-negating life of Christ. This is why,

⁹⁶ Kierkegaard spent his entire life obsessed with the rationality-irrationality of Abraham's ordeal. It is the main argument of his flagship *Frygt og Bæven (Fear and Trembling)*. The knight of faith is an even rarer specimen than Spinoza's wise man. Kierkegaard, in fact, does not think there are any left. The last description of this extreme type of heroism presents one of Kierkegaard's beautiful contrasts: the radical individuality of the knighthood, yet its universal accessibility for those willing to, big caveat, sacrifice everything like Abraham: "The knight of faith is obliged to rely upon himself alone, he feels the pain of not being able to make himself intelligible to others, but he feels no vain desire to guide others [. . .] The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humanity, which is worth a good deal more than this silly participation in others' weal and woe which is honored by the name of sympathy, whereas in fact it is nothing but vanity. He who would only be a witness thereby avows that no man, not even the lowliest, needs another man's sympathy or should be abased that another may be exalted. But since he did not win what he won at a cheap price, neither does he sell it out at a cheap price, he is not petty enough to take men's admiration and give them in return his silent contempt, he knows that what is truly great is equally accessible to all" (*Fear and Trembling* 151). The sola fide principle is clearly expressed in Kierkegaard's prelude description of Abraham: "That man was not a thinker, he felt no need of getting beyond faith; he deemed it the most glorious thing to be remembered as the father of it, an enviable lot to possess it, even though no one else were to know it" (*Fear and Trembling* 38).

⁹⁷ "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:8-10).

even though we know that monasticism is not a strictly desertic movement, its efforts are still well represented by what the desert has meant in history.

Challenging and going well beyond the outlook that reduces monasticism to its desertic demarcations, William Harmless's work proves that the classical relation of the movement as the product of one or two Egyptian fathers, if beautiful, is imprecise in its geographical, onomastic, and even doctrinal sense⁹⁸. Making use of plenty of newer sources, Harmless presents a much more nuanced account in which a series of local traditions along the Eastern Mediterranean regions –Egypt, of course, but also Lebanon, Turkey, Syria...– developed similar practices between the first and fifth centuries of our time. His approach is not too different from Fritz Graf's, who in his informative article "What is Ancient Mediterranean Religion?" explains the cultural climate of the Mediterranean as a sort of "osmotic similarity" (5). This allows him to overcome linear arguments while preserving the shared aspects across most Mediterranean cultures and polities⁹⁹. Independently of the favored

⁹⁸ Dawson refines the argument in a slightly different direction, arguing instead that the desert did play a role in the development of monasticism: "the move into the desert insulated them from pagan and heretical influences and sealed their alliance with the bishops, with whom they could not compete. Rigorous measures were taken to keep monasticism uncontaminated by the older type of asceticism" (*Cities of the Gods* 282).

⁹⁹ The sea, its context, and the ever growing dynamics of interaction all condition the appearance of the cultural phenomena at the base of our societies: "Political geography is not irrelevant for the history of religion. The existence of large, more-or-less unified regions, which characterized the eastern Mediterranean from the late 3rd millennium onward, made inland communication relatively easy [. . .] This argues for a relative homogeneity—or at least an osmotic similarity—of cultural space, which has an important consequence for historical methodology: whenever we spot parallels and agreements in ritual and mythology, diffusion, however complex, is as likely an explanation as is parallel origin" ("What is Ancient Mediterranean Religion?" 5).

terminology, both William Harmless and Fritz Graf succeed at proving that these ideas, practices, and lifestyles were neither totally new, nor completely isolated from the world or each other.

Harmless's taxonomization of the different shapes and manners in which these incipient communities arranged themselves, though, sacrifices some explicative force in favor of attaining nuance. Talking about anchoritism and coenobitism, he argues that:

These two narratives provide glimpses of the wide-ranging experiments in monastic lifestyle: desert solitaries, of course, but also virgins walled up in tombs, clusters of ascetics dotting the Nile marshes or ringing populous villages, and even whole towns, like Oxyrhynchus, teeming with monks. Both works highlight John of Lycopolis, a hermit-prophet, who, from his cell's window, dispensed oracles to crowds of pilgrims and oversaw a community of attendant monks. (*The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, "Monasticism" 495)

While no one can question that the traditional distinction between anchoritic and coenobitic systems does not give account of intermediate models such as those of "John of Lycopolis and Barsanuphius of Gaza who doubled as prophetic oracles and abbots of attached communities" (507), Harmless's valorization of the differences between the models seems to dilute one important fact: all of these hybrid types of monastic life are, at the end of the day, elements ranging from the purest forms of absolute seclusion, to the most radical projects of communitarian life. These two extreme forms, embodied by the traditional senses of anchoritism and coenobitism, aim to become one with God, the absolute Other, by suppressing either the *others* –anchoritism–, or the *self* –coenobitism–. In between the effacement of the other and that of the self,

a myriad of historically essayed lifestyles prove that the choice between the two is not an absolute fact proven by reason or the Scripture, but also not a fully exclusive dilemma: there are paths to arrive in which the self and the other collaborate on their way to the Other.

Walled virgins, column inhabiting hermits, secluded daughters of the nobility, or dark corridor roamers, all share the conviction that the complete renunciation of solitude is the most direct road to perfection. On the other hand, independently of the setting (deserts, cities, mountains, caves, riverbeds...) and the format, the members of all communitarian projects are united by their trust on the role of the other as a step towards God. Near, isolated monks that leave their reclusion in order to preach, communities that save some time for seclusion, or all the picturesque societies conceived through history only represent how individuality and commonality are conjugated in diverse ways as a means to, almost always, the same end. The fact that a secluded hermit leaves his cave for feeding the feeble, or the sisters of some coenobium can only see each other once a week does not change the base foundation of their lifestyles, only that the former breaks isolation and the latter their union as their own ways to compensate for the perceived limitations of their systems. That is precisely why for thousands of years, disagreement in terms of how –or if– possessions, time and separation, personal interactions, or even meals and food should be articulated has allowed for an endless list of solutions to arise. Not only does this evidence not change the fact that all monastic experiments

are defined by their own specific balancing of selfness and otherness, but in fact reveals how acutely conscious their practitioners have been since the very inception of monasticism. This open reflection about the selfness-otherness problem shows that different solutions can be acceptable, and even fruitful. I will hereby try to analyze why did some models flourish at a given time, and how is it that the proponents of some of these lifestyles construct such different paradigms, even to the point of being built upon and resulting in radically incompatible worldviews.

Against the World. The Origins of Mediterranean Monasticism

Talking about the origins of monasticism, William Harmless debunks the exclusive paternity of Saint Anthony's and Saint Pachomius's contributions, presenting instead a nuanced purview: "Modern textbooks routinely – but *inaccurately*– speak of Antony as 'the first monk' and 'the founder of Christian monasticism'. He was neither, as we shall see," also adding that "Textbooks routinely contrast Antony the hermit with Pachomius, whom they routinely –and *inaccurately*– describe as the 'founder of coenobitic monasticism'" (*The Oxford Handbook*, "Monasticism" 494). Confronting this historical relate, he argues that "Pachomius was an organizational pioneer who, between 330 and 345, established a remarkable confederation of large monasteries, known as the *koinonia* ('fellowship'), in Upper Egypt and composed the first known monastic rule" (494). This slightly more measured account also has the

advantage of revealing that, contrary to common belief, the desert elders were not outsider ignorants obsessed with mortification. Their practices and foundations prove, in fact, that many of them were cultivated thinkers perfectly aware of their context, their precedents, and in most cases, their originality or lack thereof¹⁰⁰. This, of course, means that the alternative lifestyles they developed were far from being created *ex nihilo*. They were in fact the evolution –radicalization and universalization– of preexisting community ideals such as those of the Pythagoreans, the Essenes, and even non-religious groups such as the communes conceived by stoics, cynics, and Platonists following the Spartan model –which, via Lycurgus, is itself inspired in a profoundly idealized interpretation of the archaic golden era.¹⁰¹

It would seem that the hagiographical nature of Saint Anthony's and Saint Pachomius's narrations would weaken their importance, but it actually serves to raise several enlightening questions, such as why were they “chosen” as the historical representatives of all *monakhoi*, or why was this vast Mediterranean tradition pinpointed as having been originated in 4th century

¹⁰⁰ “They show that Antony, far from being illiterate, was conversant with Greek philosophy and favoured Origenist views, including Origen's bold hypotheses on the pre-existence of souls” (*The Oxford Handbook*, “Monasticism” 500). “Not even Athanasius claimed that Antony was the first. He portrays the young Antony apprenticing himself to an ‘old man’ who had ‘practiced the solitary life from his youth’ (*Vit. Ant.* 3). That, if true, pushes back monastic origins to the mid-third century at the very least” (500). The full argument is based on David Rubenson's works, who “argues that the *Letters*, not Athanasius's *Life* or the *Apophthegmata*, give us the most accurate image of the historical Antony [. . .] In other words, Athanasius's portrait of the God-taught illiterate is inaccurate; so too is the *Apophthegmata*'s portrait of a theology-free Antony” (“Monasticism” 500).

¹⁰¹ Dawson theologically names this period “The Time of Cronus”.

Egypt. The answer is simple: The context, formation, and contributions of Anthony and Pachomius embody the intersection of all Mediterranean cultures and ideas, and they do it by subsuming all options under the choice for the self or for the other. It is because of the way in which Anthony reimagined solitude and Pachomius theorized togetherness that their two models are justly considered to represent the beginning –or at least the fully self-aware beginning– of a new worldview.

If the culture is not geographically isolated –Egypt became the epicenter because it represents the intersection of East-West, North-South, Rome-Greece, Judaism-Paganism...– and, if innovative, the worldview is not a capricious act of improvisation, we will need to study the transmission of classical ideas into the Middle Ages by means of these new theorizers of the self-other conflict. Not haphazardly, the period between Greece’s apogee and the end of Antiquity –roughly from the 5th century BC to the 5th century AD– is divided by the hundred years from Caesar’s Alexandrian campaign to the Jewish-Roman Wars, phase in turn divided right in the middle by the irruption of Jesus, whose aura would shape the world to come. What follows is an analysis of the reception and redefinition of inherited Mediterranean traditions by the earliest proponents of Christian scholasticism and monasticism.

Before the Desert. The Negative Self

The Book of Numbers had portrayed a desert capable of killing an entire generation of unfaithful. In the eyes of maverick Judaic communities such as the Therapeutae, going back to the desert voluntarily represents an act of utter awareness of their heritage. Instead of waiting to betray God and earning themselves another deserts extinction, they desert the world creating one of their own in which to self-impose a desert of their own through which to avoid failing God. Later on, Christ will voluntarily embark on his own desert epos: testing –for this what temptation means– his own worthiness before committing to his new life. With monasticism, I have referred to the broad range of practices and lifestyles aimed by the first Christians at testing the self of a person. Looking themselves in the mirror of their great Mediterranean ancestors –Jewish, Egyptian, or Greek– the pioneers of monasticism embark on a fight against the limitations of the self with magnanimity, or altruism, as their main horizon.

Jesus begins his new life through baptism, but it is only after the forty days spent in the desert that he fully becomes the Christ. The temptations test his commitment to the ultimate self-annihilation. In my first dissertation, I wrote extensively about a technical concept in the theopolitical sphere which, although somewhat obscure, provides us with the tools to understand the actual impact of the negative paradigm of subjectivity consolidated by Christ. Based on the model of the Mediterranean sources herebefore mentioned, the biblical

text and the life of its second half's protagonist inaugurate a new paradigm of subjectivity in which the previously uninstitutionalized self-effacement as an act of love to the others becomes the fulcrum of a new, individualized but not individualistic worldview. Thus begins the era of the *mors mystica*, or theoretical negation of the self to construct a communal subject.

As often, Roberto Esposito saves some enlightening words when analyzing the works of Georges Bataille, he remembers “che solo la morte, e la morte sola, costituisce la verità dell'uomo in un senso diverso e opposto alla logica sacrificiale hobbesiana perché fondato nn su quello che divide gli uomini, ma su quello che essi hanno in comune: ‘ciò che lega l'esistenza a tutto il *resto* è la morte” (*Communitas* 132). This is the exact same motive present in most medieval *captationes benevolentiae*, the shared “gift” of mortality as a force capable of uniting the diverse. There is nothing accidental in the fact that death has for centuries been called the great equalizer.

Koinonia

For decades, the most authoritative sources on the origins of the apostolic koinonia were the texts authored by Heinrich Seesemann (*Der Begriff Koinonia im Neuen Testament*), and Friedrich Hauck (“Koinon-im Neuen Testament”). Published in 1933 and 1938, these texts went a long way in providing solid philological parallelisms to the formation of the first Christian community. Following their lead, Pier Cesare Bori, the historical director of the

prestigious Istituto per le Scienze religiose di Bologna, begun his exemplary career in the seventies with the publication of the compact *Koinonia. L'idea della comunione nell'ecclesiologia recente e nel Nuovo Testamento*, which he outdid once he wrote the laudable *Chiesa primitiva. Limacine della comunità delle origini – Atti 2, 42-47; 4, 32-37 – nella storia della chiesa antica*. Following the steps of these masters, Carlo Lorenzo Rossetti just authored the suggestive *Platone, la democrazia e la Chiesa, ovvero le metamorfosi della koinonia*. These masters' exegeses are is built upon the pivotal Acts of the Apostles 2:44-46:

all that believed were together and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (King James)

omnes etiam qui credebant erant pariter et habebant omnia communia possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus erat. cotidie quoque perdurantes unianimiter in templo et frangentes circa domos panem sumebant cibum cum exultatione et simplicitate cordis (Vulgata)

παντες δε οι πιστευοντες ησαν επι το αυτο και ειχον απαντα κοινα και τα κτηματα και τας υπαρξεις επιπρασκον και διεμεριζον αυτα πασιν καθοτι αν τις χρειαν ειχεν καθ ημεραν τε προσκαρτερουντες ομοθυμαδον εν τω ιερω κλωντες τε κατ οικον αρτον μετελαμβανον τροφης εν αγαλλιασει και αφελοτητι καρδιας (Stephanus)

All the central elements to the history of monasticism are present in these two verses: togetherness, community, property, sharing, concord, unanimity... All of them refer to the ultimate concept of koinonia, or communion.

The creation of the Christian koinonia represents the culmination of the *interpretatio christiana* that I have suggested to adopt the work of Werner Jaeger

in *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. In a procedure not unlike Jorge Luis Borges's Pierre Menard, the same letters uttered before and after the First Coming of Christ mean totally different things. Or, more fascinatingly, identical yet incommensurable things. *Koinonia* will still always refer to a community or communalization of some sort, but the apostolic experience will transform it irreversibly into a communion type of community. More than sharing meals or fighting side to side, the biblical communion creates an identity that well exceeds the mere addition of the parts. Inspired by the example of Christ's body, the apostolic *koinonia* allows –demands, actually– for individuals to remain individual as they become part of the commons. Even more so, according to the theological developments that will culminate in the figure of Saint Augustine, only when individuals realize that in isolation we are not strong enough to complete ourselves, the individual is affirmed only in the commons.

This mutual service as a means to the superation of human finitude is the inspiration of the apostolic *koinonia* and its monastic mirroring. According to Pier Cesare Bori, the rise of monasticism is the result of an oppressive climate within the Roman Empire that was tackled by Christians through the development of a certain “nostalgia delle origini,” which he pertinently criticizes for being an imprecise interpretation of the first Christians' attitudes (*Chiesa primitiva* 178). In turn, the way in which the apostolic *koinonia* was built around the ministry of Jesus also responded to a dual pulsion: A reactionary return to the roots of Judaism, and a radical subversion of their world. This progressive-

conservative, or traditionalist-antitraditionalist tension is essential to understanding why the nostalgic component is not sufficient, as the forward-looking push of Christianity is even more of an essential force. The will to revive “l’antica comunità di Israele” shows that the apostolic koinonia can be interpreted as

la realizzazione dell’ideale, deuteronomistico appunto (e del primo Isaia), di una comunità, teocratica ed universal, guidata dal messia, in cui non vi sia più povertà, gli empi siano estromessi, regnino la gioia, il timore di Dio, sotto l’opera dello Spirito. Questa comunità è unanime nella confessione di fede nella signoria del Cristo, come Israele nella confessione dell’unico Dio. (*Chiesa primitiva* 184).

This is an extremely suggestive interpretation, which I have tried to substantiate in this study. The tension between “fedeltà al passato e rinnovamento creativo” constitutes the central motive of Christianity (*Chiesa primitiva* 197-98). From Pier Cesare Bori, I too incorporate the main thesis presented in the third chapter of his *Chiesa primitiva*, where he focuses on Eastern monasticism, which he condenses as follows: “piegarsi ad accettare il compromesso con l’Impero, supplendo alle deficienze della società civile con la carità e la beneficenza e/o ritirarsi dal mondo, per dar vita a un progetto radicalmente alternativo, ma praticabile solo da una minoranza: la fraternità monastica” (*Chiesa primitiva* 117). The options are: To remain within the ideological walls of the Roman Empire while trying to supplement it with the new Christian values and practices, or to create a new polis from scratch. What those who left civilization behind did not expect is that precisely when they abandoned it, they became the model of the new civilization that was being built.

Theology and Communitarianism after the Council of Jerusalem

The nomenclature can be refined if we realize that the apostles –gr. *αποστολος*, “messenger”– are Christians in the strict sense of following Christ, his life and words –capitalized *Logos* or *Verbum*, if we want–. Towards the end of the first century and thanks to the endeavors of such apostles, Christians will become Christians in the sense of following the message conveyed by the life of the Son of Man. A life that never again will appear unmediated, as it has become uncapitalized *logos* or *verbum* in the hands of direct, or almost direct witnesses. One of the most fascinating features of the Abrahamic religions is their ability to convince the world that their finite, human messengers are carrying an infinite, more-than-human message. A trait that Christianity radicalizes by relying, not just on human interpreters such as the evangelists, Moses, Aaron, or Muhammad, but by God himself becoming human. The paradox remains, though, as Christ does not write his message, but lives it. This verbalization of life –whereas Judaism had succeeded at verbalizing the world– is key to understanding the birth of monasticism, whose proponents understand as a way of communicating a message through actions¹⁰². Through the most consuetudinary daily practices.

¹⁰² As in most cases, few works are more influential in the field of Christian rhetoric than Augustine’s own *De doctrina Christiana*. Perfectly relevant to this question, there he offers a Christian version of the Latin saying *facta non verba* by claiming that, for Christians, life’s actions are words themselves in imitation of Christ. So if God’s *Verbum* becomes fact and flesh, humans ought to aspire to having their lives become words too. *Facta verba sunt*, if we want.

The discussion on monasticism is academically circumscribed to its systematic beginnings at the end of the second century. Here, on the other hand, I have argued that maybe not monasticism, but definitely the “monastic values” can and should be studied in the context of Ancient Greece and the Mediterranean, as herebefore attempted in the case of the Lacedaemonians and the Essenes. Even so, a missing element deserves to be mentioned, that is, the monastic attempts conducted during the age of persecution. Beginning with the immediate apostolic legacy, I propose taking two roads: the rhetorically infused scholarly discussions of the theologians who reflect on the apostolic *koinonia* and, on the other hand the practices and vocational works of the first adherents of monasticism. The first line of *scholastic interpreters* includes major players such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, as well as Ambrose. The second, the *monastic interpreters*, will have us talking about Anthony, Pachomius, Macrina, Basil, and Syncletica, together with the Desert Elders and the contributors to the *Apophthegmata*. Both a scholar and a monk, Ambrose’s mentee Saint Augustine of Hippo incarnates the two tradition’s ultimate convergence and represents a vital fulcrum between Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Scholastic Interpreters: Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr (100 AD – 165 AD) was a Christian apologist who, as one can easily infer from the epithet historically apposed to his name, was martyred.

One of his leitmotivs was the firm conviction that many Greek philosophers, whose works he had mastered, were unknowing Christians. In Justin's view, this applied particularly well to Socrates and the stoics, but it is Plato who Justin believes to be the closest to his own doctrines. It is often said that Christians favored Platonism since the start because of its befitting metaphysical model, but Justin helps prove the point that the laconophilic values of asceticism and sacrifice transmitted by Plato were also key to his Christianization, as the ideal life for the philosopher conceived by Plato is nitidly monastic.

Justin Martyr is, in fact, one of the first to talk about what theologians later referred to as *virtuous pagans*, that is, individuals that were never evangelized, but conducted Christian-like existences and virtuous lives for which they do not deserve to be condemned. If a thinker defends ideas that fit the new worldview but because of chronological, political –specially in cases of repression–, or geographical distance, he was never exposed to the gospels, are his ideas contrary to Christianity? To the modern reader, this necessarily reminds of Kant's epitomic discussion on the dilemma between good actions –in the sense of outcomes– and good intentions, as presented at the beginning of the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*'s first section, “Es ist überall nichts in der Welt, ja überhaupt auch außer derselben zu denken möglich, was ohne Einschränkung für gut könnte gehalten werden, als allein ein guter Wille”

(4:393)¹⁰³. Likewise, Justin Martyr asks his fellows: Why cannot we accept that one can be a good Christian without *being* a Christian? He expounds, for example, that some essential theological principles such as the Last Judgment were nitidly present in pre-Christian thinkers such as the stoics¹⁰⁴. This allows Justin to present his main argument in an apologetical manner:

If, therefore, on some points we teach the same things as the poets and philosophers whom you honour, and on other points are fuller and more divine in our teaching, and if we alone afford proof of what we assert, why are we unjustly hated more than all others? (1 *Apology* 20)

Tertullian will say that Christians should not be pigeonholed because the things of which they are accused are widespread across all the empire's classes and groups. Justin, on the other hand, does not exactly resort to the *tu quoque* argument of Tertullian, but goes onto arguing that Christians are, in fact, similar to the official doctrines of Antiquity. Tertullian says that everyone violates the law, Justin assures that everyone abides by it. Thus, he arrives to the conclusion of his apology:

For while we say that all things have been produced and arranged into a world by God, we shall seem to utter the doctrine of Plato; and while we say that there will be a burning up of all, we shall seem to utter the doctrine of the Stoics: and while we affirm that the souls of the wicked, being endowed with sensation even after death, are punished, and that those of the good being delivered

¹⁰³ “There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* 4:393).

¹⁰⁴ “And the Sibyl and Hystaspes said that there should be a dissolution by God of things corruptible. And the philosophers called Stoics teach that even God Himself shall be resolved into fire, and they say that the world is to be formed anew by this revolution; but we understand that God, the Creator of all things, is superior to the things that are to be changed” (Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 20).

from punishment spend a blessed existence, we shall seem to say the same things as the poets and philosophers; and while we maintain that men ought not to worship the works of their hands, we say the very things which have been said by the comic poet Menander, and other similar writers, for they have declared that the workman is greater than the work. (1 *Apology* 20)

In a key historical moment of transition from the ancient to the modern, Justin declares that his Christian condition does not prevent him from sharing ideas and ideals with classical poets and philosophers, among which he held a particular predilection for Plato. On the contrary, if Plato, Menander, or Zeno's ideas are accepted, why should Christians be persecuted for holding the same ideas? This is just one of countless passages by early Christians in which the arguments of interpreters from Edward Gibbon (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) or more recently, Catherine Nixey (*The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World*) fall apart as we see that Christians did see themselves as continuators, as a non-differentiated part of Antiquity and the classical world. One can argue that the result was more destructive, or more salvative, but there is little doubt that thinkers such as Justin Martyr claimed the classical heritage as theirs. In fact, Justin argues that the Grecians themselves owed a great deal to his Jewish ancestors, starting with the prophet of prophets Moses:

And that you may learn that it was from our teachers –we mean the account given through the prophets– that Plato borrowed his statement that God, having altered matter which was shapeless, made the world, hear the very words spoken through Moses, who, as above shown, was the first prophet, and of greater antiquity than the Greek writers. (1 *Apology* 59)

Should Justin be right, saying that Christians leaned towards Plato because of the predisposition of his metaphysical purview to being “biblified” would not be different from saying that Plato was more apt for this purpose than other philosophers because he was more “mosaic”. This is of course a stretch on Justin’s end, as we would still need to explain why Plato among all the philosophers was influenced by the prophecies of Moses. With no horse in the race, but for the sake of argumentation one could say that Socrates’s and Plato’s worldview is more compatible with the Jewish one because Judaism, Laconophilia, Parmenides, and the different sources from which they drew their foundational elements are all defined by a firm belief in the perennality of the law, and in seeing mankind’s duty as that of trying to get as close to it as possible through self-effacement and love to the Other.

The Christianization of Plato’s metaphysics is a recurring theme, and Justin Martyr is one of the first authors to openly declare Christianity’s debts towards classical philosophers. He does it, though, by saving the “Abrahamicness” of Plato by arguing that the most interesting contributions of classical philosophers are philosophical developments of Mosaic motives. For example, Justin derives Plato’s theory of being from Moses himself by claiming that “Plato and they who agree with him, and we ourselves, have learned, and you also can be convinced, that by the word of God the whole world was made out of the substance spoken of before by Moses. And that which the poets call Erebus, we know was spoken of formerly by Moses“ (1 *Apology* 59). This is a

highly strategic move which allows him to simultaneously legitimize the use of pagan sources like Plato –since, according to his own relation, he is not truly pagan, but pre-Christian–, and defend the originality of the new religion as one that continues, but also renews the Mosaic-Classical worldview. Such is the *modus operandi* of the *interpretatio christiana*.

Departing from this principle, the work of Justin Martyr, a major contributor to the development of a properly Christian *interpretatio* –a set of cultural translation and appropriation tools–, continues in the form of a palimpsest between Judaism and Hellenism which remarks the similarities between Jewish, Classical, and Christian thought. The most shocking instance of this purview can be found in the *Apology* when Justin Martyr theorizes what has been termed Plato’s doctrine of the cross. Plato’s reference to the *stauros* (gr. σταυρός) allows Justin to initiate a long discussion about the prefiguration of his religion’s main motive, which he indefectibly connects to the philosopher’s cosmological design:

And the physiological discussion concerning the Son of God in the *Timæus* of Plato, where he says, *He placed him crosswise in the universe*, he borrowed in like manner from Moses; for in the writings of Moses it is related how at that time, when the Israelites went out of Egypt and were in the wilderness, they fell in with poisonous beasts, both vipers and asps, and every kind of serpent, which slew the people; and that Moses, by the inspiration and influence of God, took brass, and made it into the figure of a cross, and set it in the holy tabernacle, and said to the people, *If you look to this figure, and believe, you shall be saved thereby*. Numbers 21:8 And when this was done, it is recorded that the serpents died, and it is handed down that the people thus escaped death. Which things Plato reading, and not accurately understanding, and not apprehending that it was the figure of the cross, but

taking it to be a placing crosswise, he said that the power next to the first God was placed crosswise in the universe. And as to his speaking of a third, he did this because he read, as we said above, that which was spoken by Moses, *that the Spirit of God moved over the waters*. (Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 60)

This is a prime example of the *interpretatio* by which Christians took advantage of existing works and principles to legitimize their own, derivative but deviating worldview. Interpretation is always rereading, but also production. When Plato explains in almost Pythagorean terms his cosmological design as a four-fold shape, Justin and the apologists to come see him drawing a cross in the sky¹⁰⁵:

This entire compound he divided lengthways into two parts, which he joined to one another at the centre like the letter X, and bent them into a circular form, connecting them with themselves and each other at the point opposite to their original meeting-point. (Plato, *Timaeus* 36bc)

The world is structured around a center and the four sectors demarcated by the two lines of the cross-shaped coordinates. Although this is not the stauros, which in fact was mostly conceived as just a straight pole and not the intersection of two, Justin Martyr does not hesitate to say that Plato is referring to something that he can only intuit. Where the Grecian sees a chi, Justin, as those who are witnesses of Christ, see a cross. The Cross.

¹⁰⁵ The importance of the Pythagorean tetractys is not to be disregarded. Maybe the most suggestive source for the comparative study of metaphysical symbologies is the influential study of Mexican thinker Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, where all societies are classified as those directed by the number three –triadic–, and those that structure their worldview following the number four –tetradic. Another mystical symbol based on this number is the kabbalistic tetragrammaton, who in my opinion has never been more suggestively employed than in Jorge Luis Borges's *La muerte y la brújula*. The years in which these seminal works were written are marked by the strive to understanding and redefining the meaning of what it means to be Iberoamerican. As a part of this search for their own roots, a deep revision of foundational symbolisms imported to and also developed in the American continent was carried out.

What follows is even more striking. Plato, one of history's greatest philosophers and a major influence of his, was just wrong "not accurately understanding, and not apprehending that it was the figure of the cross" (Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 60). This appropriation and utilization of existing motives is probably universal—one can think of the Incas and Aztecs interpreting the arrival of the Spaniards from the coordinates of their own theogony, as if they were Viracocha and Quetzalcoatl, as well as the use that the Europeans made of these deities—, but it plays a central role in Christianity's primitive redefinition, or destruction, of the classical world. Plato's alleged theory of the cross is just the most graphic example out of a myriad of ideas present in works from classical authors that Christians dissected, thus contributing to their transmission, in an attempt to find—or find the authorities from which to produce—arguments that support their developing worldview. The immediately preceding passage, for example, would influence the Christian theories of the soul for centuries.¹⁰⁶

This reading beyond the authors themselves is as dangerous as productive, often working through attribution of intentions or even blatant substitutions. Justin's stretch is on the brink of falsification, but there is a

¹⁰⁶ For example: "he made the soul in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject" (Plato, *Timaeus* 34c), or "The body of heaven is visible, but the soul is invisible, and partakes of reason and harmony, and being made by the best of intellectual and everlasting natures, is the best of things created" (*Timaeus* 36e-37a) This transmission of principles will be expanded in the section on early coenobitic subjectivities.

different way to understand it for those who are not willing to accept that Plato, Socrates, or Virgil were unknowing Christians. And that is: as long as one accepts that the Classical world was itself intimately shaped by the cosmological principles of Judaism and the Mediterranean theopolitical substratum of Judea, Egypt and so forth, it is not outrageous to follow Justin's argumentation and understand that when he says that Plato is talking about the Cross of Christ, he is saying that the same cosmological motive present in Plato was present in the Old Testament. Or, even more precisely, what Justin Martyr would be doing is highlighting the fact that both Plato and Moses drew from the same sources. This more nuanced perspective allows for the genealogical or prefigurative (anagogical, in exegetic terminology) to be overcome, focusing instead on the shared substratum between Judaism and Classical philosophy that will legitimize the Christian appropriation of all sources. This is precisely why I have argued that Christians draw from Spartan or Greek sources as much as they do from Judaic, Roman, Cappadocian, or Sumerian ones. In this process, the new religion finds its legitimacy to produce a new worldview out of the very same worldviews that it intended to replace.

Second and third century apologetics developed a tense, yet fruitful relation with classical culture, paganism, and ancient law. Most of the Church Fathers were professors of rhetoric –Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Augustine– while the others, including Ambrose, Hillary, and Jerome were, at least, scholars trained in the same curriculum that their religious beliefs impelled

them to criticize. After Origen and Augustine, the matter is settled as a conflict of goals and purposes, but not of tools and means. Classical culture could and should be used by Christians in order to promote their cosmovision. But, how realistic is an instrumental view like this? Do Christians really think that they can just “use” classical culture to serve an entirely different endeavor? Independently of the reading that we make of the Antiquity-Middle Ages transition –be it one of destruction of a golden era, restoration of a distant apex, or continuation of the same–, in this study I have argued that neither ancients nor Christians could stop, at least for a few centuries, being part of a same continuum in which the Christian is not much more than a reorganization of the ancient. This dissertation’s leitmotiv, the transmission of ascetic and laconophile communitarian values from Antiquity to the new religion by the means of Platonism will be present in all the early Christian authors to come. Proof of this is Justin Martyr’s extremely early testimony, just a few decades after the events recounted in Acts of the Apostles, where he described the exemplary Christian communities in a way that at this point will sound very familiar:

we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all. (1 *Apology* 14)

Property, enmity, classes, collegiality, universalism... All the key elements from the original koinonia eminently studied by Pier Cesare Bori are present in Justin's relation. The communities organized by the apostles, the very same ones conceived around the ascetic and self-effacing values of Essenes, Stoics, or Spartans find in Justin and most thinkers to come their theoretical consolidation. If Acts of the Apostles was a description of how those around Christ decide to live and confront existing customs, Justin's *Apology* became the official voice of those who decided that self-effacing, but not self-destructive altruism was the way to overcome the increasing individualistic derives of the Empire during and after the Hellenistic period. The fact that Justin Martyr composed an apology proves that the new worldview aimed to become more than a sect, a world system. This would change over time, but at least at the beginning and later in some reduced circles, the ideal life for the new cosmovision was one that followed the principles listed by Justin: Disappropriation, altruism, mutual love, and familiarity in the construction of a tendentially universal system that sees itself not just as a polity, but as a political body. *A corpus mysticum*.

Scholastic Interpreters: Lucian of Samosata

Lucian of Samosata (125 – 180 AD), traditionally labeled as a member of the Second Sophistics, provides a most valuable testimony from outside the primitive Church. Known for legating us some of the earliest humoristic works

of art, his satire and criticism make of him a sort of Hellenistic Hume. His life coordinates, born by the Euphrates in a Hellenistic, Romanized world allow him to understand the new religion's nature and logical consequences even before Christianity was able to come to major theoretical agreements through Origen, Constantine, Augustine and, decisively, the Council of Nicaea.

Same as we can learn valuable information about Socrates's impact through the reading of Aristophanes's *Clouds*, Lucian authorship of *The Passing of Peregrinus* provides a coeval view on the perceivable impact of Christianity on its immediate surroundings. What interests us the most is Lucian's acute description of the cult's communitarian tendencies, which as we know were not always well received. Lucian associates renunciation of property equally to Cynicism and to Christianity. Not haphazardly, he describes Christians as a sect who believe everything to be common (*Cities of the Gods* 273). A certain Peregrinus, or Proteus, is introduced to the reader as pagan who, after committing the serious crime of patricide finds a way out of temporal law by joining a Christian community. The parodic component is set in motion when the ingenuous band of Christians, ready to accept anyone independently of their background, welcome Peregrinus. The patricide's name, Peregrinus, literally means "foreigner, traveler," in clear reference to Christianity's messianism and the dogma of the parousia," as a new savior arrived to redeem yet once again

the world¹⁰⁷. The book musters a vivid awareness of the time's syncretism. Peregrinus is also known as Proteus, in open conversation with Greek mythology, but he claims to be the "head of the synagogue" in a Christian environment. Moreover, Proteus's is not a full-fledged parousia, arrival, but just a "passing". Like the emperor in the provinces, he is not there to stay or change the foundation, but to earn himself the people's acclamation. From this perspective, the lasting effects of Christ's first –and eventually second– arrivals are questioned.¹⁰⁸

Who is this savior that happens to walk by? The author of *The Passing of Peregrinus* says that, having built a career out of "charlatanism and notoriety-seeking," Proteus deceived Christians into calling him "the new Socrates" (12). This seemingly innocent gesture reveals that the presence of Socratic ideas in

¹⁰⁷ This is the colorful description provided by Lucian: "It was then that he learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And –how else could it be?– in a trice he made them all look like children, for he [Proteus or Peregrinus] was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 11). Then, Proteus's questionable curriculum vitae follows: "Then at length Proteus was apprehended for this and thrown into prison, which itself gave him no little reputation as an asset for his future career and the charlatanism and notoriety-seeking that he was enamoured of [. . .] Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud, and excellent Peregrinus –for he still went by that name– was called by them [Christians] 'the new Socrates'" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 12).

¹⁰⁸ Peregrinus's patricide can be read in theogonical terms as a new Zeus killing Chronos. The Freudian component of this pseudo-Oedipus could also be a fine criticism of Christianity's still unconsolidated doctrine of the Trinity, in which the Son comes from the Father but *is* the Father, a major challenge to ancient (and modern) understanding. Lucian's fraud-deity choses to solve the philosophical difficulties of hyposthatic cosmogonies and of the mystery of Trinity by just killing the father.

the *ecclesia primitiva* is not just the wishful thinking of seemingly intellectual orphans like Justin Martyr. On the contrary, it proves that not only Christians are claiming the Platonic heritage, but also that their fellows are noticing how a philosophical system that had been largely replaced by the Hellenistic models of the Stoics, Hedonists, and Cynics, found in the new religion a way to reinvent itself. This recovery, which in turn transmits all the laconophile values hereinbefore studied, is simultaneously seen as a reactionary and an extremely antitraditionalist act. In claiming the ancient heritage of Socrates and Moses, Christians are bypassing all current authorities, effectively delegitimizing the powers that be.

Proteus is able to deceive his community to the point of making them believe antinatural, irrational principles. Once again, these absurd ideas resound with a familiar, Lacedaemonian tone:

The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore, they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk. (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 13)

As it needs to be the case with good comedy, Lucian's exposition reveals more about the past, present, and future of Christianity than most serious accounts do. Communal property, mutual love, forgiveness, the power of words, and

even some theological dogmata are quite precisely delineated. Something that neither Socrates, nor Plato, nor any Christian apologist would accept, though, is the association between Christ's message and that of the sophists. The comparison between Christ and Socrates, if asymmetrical, can be acceptable to Christians because of Socrates's consonance between message and life. But it is precisely against the First Sophistic that Socrates and Plato argued, and against the Second that the Anti-Nicene Christian polemicists fought.¹⁰⁹

Despite the exaggerations and attributions, the implications of the primitive *koinonia* are mapped out brilliantly. Lucian has understood Christianity to the point of warning Christians about the fact that their unquestionable love for the other and renunciation to self-interest can, and will lead to situations in which anyone willing to take advantage of their cosmivision will seize their communal property, take advantage of their brotherhood, and use their ideas to his own will. By doing this, Lucian is actually exposing one of the most challenging aspects of the theopolitical model devised by the Spartans, Plato, the Essenes, or now the Christians: their *poleis* require unrestricted commitment to a shared *telos*. Conceived as a household's *oikonomia*, if the *polis* is not able to bring the family together under a homogeneous communal

¹⁰⁹ The ultimate accusation to the sophist, the same leveled by Christians, is that of seeking vainglory through the use of language: "it was not fitting to pity a man so desperately in love with glory beyond all others who are driven by the same Fury. Anyhow, he was being escorted by crowds and getting his fill of glory as he gazed at the number of his admirers, not knowing, poor wretch, that men on their way to the cross or in the grip of the executioner have many more at their heels" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 34).

purpose, the body politic will act like one in which the legs of the corpus mysticum walk in different directions to the point of dismembering themselves¹¹⁰. This extremely demanding requirement of a homogenized body politic is also the same motive for which liberal, individualism-based thinkers such as Russel, Berlin, or Popper will openly reject all communal based planning strategies, who they can only think from a post-Cartesian, post-Marxian perspective. Unable to reconcile the individual with the common telos, the city dies at his own oikos. Against that, Berlin and company will argue that the duty of the polis is not to provide a common telos, but to warrant that each individual can pursue whichever individual telos as long as it does not violate the few shared basic principles of the state. But strong communitarianism does work sometimes. Lucian knows it, and Proteus is decided to take advantage of this, showing what happens when all, but one, believe in the power of the commons.

The shadow of his despicable crime haunts him, but instead of facing his demons, Proteus embarks on a road of imposture and impersonation which according to the epoch's ethos presents Christianity as just one more sect guided

¹¹⁰ This is when Giorgio Agamben finally unfolds his taxonomy's full scope: "La coloratura fortemente domestica del vocabolario della comunità Cristiana non è, naturalmente, un'invenzione paolina, ma riflette un processo di mutazione semantica che investe tutto il vocabolario politico a lui contemporaneo. Già a partire dall'età ellenistica e poi più decisamente nell'età imperiale, vocabolario politico e vocabolario economico entrano in un rapporto di reciproca contaminazione, che tende a rendere obsolete l'opposizione aristotelica di *oikos* e *polis*. Così l'ignoto autore del secondo libro del trattato pseudoaristotelico sull'*Economia* affianca all'economia in senso stretto (definite *idiotike*, private) una *oikonomia basilike* e perfino una *oikonomia politike* (un vero e proprio non-senso nella prospettiva di Aristotele). Nella *koine* alessandrina e nella Stoa la contaminazione dei paradigm è evidente" (*Il Regno* 38).

by a histrionic pretender. The crooked protagonist becomes exactly what he despised:

But observe what a plan our clever Proteus discovered to cope with all this, and, how he escaped the danger. Coming before the assembly of the Parians—he wore his hair long by now, dressed in a dirty mantle, had a wallet slung at his side, the staff was in his hand, and in general he was very histrionic in his get-up—manifesting himself to them in this guise, he said that he relinquished to the state all the property which had been left him by his father of blessed memory. When the people, poor folk agape for largesses, heard that, they lifted their voices forthwith: ‘The one and only philosopher! The one and only patriot! The one and only rival of Diogenes and Crates!’. (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 15)

Diogenes and Crates of Thebes, crucial cynical roles, model this self-proclaimed philosopher and savior. Proteus’s presence is a true *reductio ad absurdum* of religious naiveté and social criticism of dishonorable use of rhetoric. In a severe passage, Lucian mocks one of the central forces in the apostolate and monasticism: The *imitatio Christi*, that is, the human attempt at living a life like Jesus’s. The negative of influence of such imitatory models is criticized by daring the audience to ponder, “would you desire your children to become imitators of such a man? You will not say so” (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 24). In its ideal form, this imitation is actually a reliving of Christ’s existence, and so it is seen by ascetics and monks trying to live a life that it is now their own. Monasticism will go beyond mere imitation, to the point of this reliving-Christ’s-life being the realization that no one can own their own life, as it is always given as a gift without consulting the individual that receives it.

Proteus's ordeal reaches unheard levels when he demands not to be called anymore Proteus, but Phoenix¹¹¹. Once again, Lucian purposefully distorts Christianity's hybridization –or syncretism, as it preserves the derogatory sense that Christians themselves would use– of diverse mythologies, pantheons, and cultures, this time even transcending the strictly Mediterranean sources by drawing from Asian iconography. The phoenix is the only being capable of reliving its own life. Coherently, according to the medieval bestiary, the phoenix represents Jesus as that who will return to life.

The farce culminates when the death of Proteus is announced in providential, heavily symbolic terms that resemble the biblical ones, but also resonates in terms of North African and Eastern Mediterranean traditions such as the Canaanites, the Phoenician, and the Carthaginian. Specifically taken from these is the motive of the mystical suicide by jumping into a pyre, which in the Mediterranean tradition is represented by Moloch Baal and Melqart's dynasty. Through *interpretatio phoenicia* and *interpretatio graeca*, the thenonym becomes Melqart and is later associated with other such as Melicertes, or even Heracles himself. This is a prime example of theocracy, or deity convergence. In its primigenial Moloch Baal form, it embodies the unity of power and fire, something that Lucian combines perfectly with the then known signs after

¹¹¹ "I have heard that he no longer deigns to be called Proteus but has changed his name to Phoenix, because the phoenix the Indian bird, is said to mount a pyre when it is very far advanced in age. Indeed, he even manufactures myths and repeats certain oracles, ancient, of course, to the purport that he is to become a guardian spirit of the night; it is plain, too, that he already covets altars and expects to be imaged in gold" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 27).

Christ's passing: "when the pyre was kindled and Proteus flung himself bodily in, a great earthquake first took place, accompanied by a bellowing of the ground, and then a vulture, flying up out of the midst of the flames, went off to Heaven, saying, in human speech, with a loud voice: 'I am through with the earth; to Olympus I fare'" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 34). Most of Lucian's readers will remember the earthquake unchained right after Jesus's death, as narrated by Saint Matthew. The nitidly Mosaic nature of this prophetic discourse is mimicked both by the evangelists and their critics:

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. (Matthew 27:51-54)

As if the earthquake following Jesus's crucifixion were not enough for Proteus, Lucian layers multiple other omens as the passing of fowls in analogous manner to what succeeded after Plato's death. Through this deliberate stretching of iconological motives, Lucian's poetic voice is now ready to conclude the narration in a satirical way that medieval authors will learn to master, such as in the case of the humor laden false-prophet Pero-Grillo ideated by a certain Spanish author named himself The Evangelist¹¹². "They were wonder-struck and blessed themselves with a shudder, and asked me whether

¹¹² See Alodia Martín-Martínez, "La *Profecía* de Evangelista: pronósticos y perogrulladas al servicio de la crítica social y religiosa".

the vulture sped eastwards or westwards; I made them whatever reply occurred to me” (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 34). Lucian takes advantage of the final shock to remind us that, in his perspective, the sacred words of Christians and others are just occurrences, effectively demoting them from divine Logos or Verbum to mere verba. By the way, in a last sign of perfect anti-magnanimity, Proteus demanded his possessions to be returned to him as he abandoned the community. What does Tertullian, the next thinker in this string of developments, have to say about the ascetic and self-effacing values hereinbefore studied?

Scholastic Interpreters: Tertullian

Tertullian, 155 – 240 AD, was a Christian author widely known for his apologetic writings in defense of Christianity and against heresies. Born in Carthage, North Africa, his sudden conversion took place around 197 AD. There is no much information about his life besides the brief references found in his own writings, but one of his statements reveals the inclusivity that he felt Christianity should embrace: “men are made, not born, Christians” (*Apologeticum* 18). Regardless the background or origin that one might have, Christians accept the new member of their community as an equal; that is, as part of the same body. This sense of unity and community, already examined among the Spartans or Essenes, is nitidly expressed in Tertullian works: “We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the

bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications” (*Apologeticum* 39). Additionally, Christians not only yearn for unity among the members of their own community, but they also long for achieving this same unity with other spheres of society. Authorities, though pagan, play a crucial role as guarantors of the wellbeing of the society, and thus deserve to be in Christian prayers: “We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation” (*Apologeticum* 39). Christians do not pray *to* the emperor and their ministers, since they are not Gods, but they pray *for* them although they do not belong to their community. Tertullian’s words about the welfare of the (Roman) world he inhabits speak for the Christian intention to desire the common good, which contradicts Gibbon’s thought on the egoism and ingratitude that Christians showed towards Roman authorities.¹¹³

Tertullian also devotes some words to describe the sense of property in Christian circles: “There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is

¹¹³ These are his words: “This indolent, or even criminal, disregard to the public welfare exposed them to the contempt and reproaches of the Pagans” (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* II.308).

no compulsion; all is voluntary” (*Apologeticum* 39). The resemblance between this paragraph and that by Flavius Josephus describing the community of Essenes is quite shocking. Words speak for themselves: “Nor do they either buy or sell any thing to one another; but every one of them gives what he hath to him that wanteth it, and receives from him again in lieu of it what may be convenient for himself; and although there be no requital made, they are fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please” (Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* II.8.4). Both refer in the same order to the lack of buying and selling, as well as the intention to give others what one possesses, without expecting anything in return, since they share everything in common, excepting women: “These gifts are, as it were, piety’s deposit fund [. . .] the family possessions, which generally destroy brotherhood among you, create fraternal bonds among us. One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives” (*Apologeticum* 39). By these words, Tertullian shows a very clear and early formulation of the apostolic koinonia. The *Acts of the Apostles* explicitly alludes to unity (“one in heart and mind”, note the similarity with Tertullian’s “one in mind and soul”) as well as the lack of personal property as two of the precepts that disciples of Jesus must follow in their life. Even though the apostolic community still did not have a profound influence in the public sphere of society, Tertullian’s *Apology* reveals an early systematization of the phenomenon that runs from the bonds that exist within a group of people directly linked to Jesus’ life to a

political model of communitarianism. Not in vain, both Tertullian and Irenaeus were the first commenters of the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Scholastic Interpreters: Marcus Minucius Felix

Besides defending themselves against the accusations of sectarianism, wickedness, and perversion, Christian apologists were also committed to formulating and defending affirmative political and social structures. Yet these propositions remain unavailing as long as they fail to gain credibility in the eyes of non-Christians, which is in turn shut by the myths surrounding the new religion. The double, refutatory and affirmatory venture of Christians is quintessentially embodied by 3rd-Century apologist Marcus Minucius Felix.

Most remember Minucius Felix, who passed away in 250 AD, as the great disputant of the most affectively-loaded accusations faced by the new cult. He believed that the affirmative enterprise of Christianity would never be taken into consideration for as long as the citizenship kept thinking that they were eating babies, worshiping the genitals of their elders, or jactantly embracing incestuous, promiscuous practices that subverted the prevailing concepts of sexuality and the family¹¹⁴. Probably written at the beginning of the third

¹¹⁴ The origin of this accusation probably resides in the appellative “brother” or “frater” that Christians used to employ when calling other members of the Christian community. Tertullian explicitly refers to this situation in his *Apology*: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, *how they love one another*, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another” (*Apologeticum* 39).

century, his apology takes the form of a dialogue –or, in an Augustinian and Petrarchean fashion, two overlapping monologues pronounced by the two parts. The discussants are a pagan named Caecilius and a Christian known as Octavius, mediated by a literary reduplication of Felix himself. Caecilius commences his arguments by praising the value of Roman paganism, subsequently relating a plethora of iniquitous stories about violent rites and lubricious habits practiced by Christians. Later on, in Octavius’ turn to refute these arguments, the Christian responds to the accusation of drinking blood by stating that “No one can believe this, except one who can dare to do it [. . .] To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of homicide” (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 30). Octavius systematically claims that these myths concerning Christianity are in fact contrary to Christian doctrine, which explicitly bans actions not completely repudiated by other spheres of society, such as assassinating, lying, or causing any damage to other people. Accusations of incest and promiscuity are also refuted by the Christian contender by claiming that “we maintain our modesty not in appearance, but in our heart we gladly abide by the bond of a single marriage; in the desire of procreating, we know either one wife, or none at all. We practise sharing in banquets, which are not only modest, but also sober” (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31). In clear consonance with the ancient banquets of commonality, Octavius recognizes the sharing aspirations that Christians have in terms of property and community of goods, but he distances himself from the Spartan-Platonic model as far as the community of women is

concerned. Fidelity to one's spouse –heavenly or earthy– is basic Christian doctrine, so incest or any other form of relationship among relatives are indisputably blacklisted. This differs from the Lacedaemonian precepts regarding the sharing of bodies, with which in turn does share the commitment to the frequent celebration of edifying banquets called *syssitias*, which through a redefinition of the Greek concepts of love, Christians turn into *agapae*.

The other intimidating challenge of early Christianity is the urge to legitimize its place within the Ancient culture. Christianity is a new phenomenon, but it draws from ancient sources that are creatively, and sometimes problematically, recovered following the aforementioned methodology known as *interpretatio christiana*. The explicit, almost obsessive allusions to Plato and his ancient fellows were common practice among Christians. In Minucius Felix's dialogue, this reveals a social phenomenon: It is the Christian Octavius who refers to Classical philosophers as authoritative sources, whereas Caecilius, the pagan who supposedly would feel more connected to that pagan heritage, presents a speech graspingly lacking in ancient knowledge. This close reading exposes a clear attempt on behalf of Marcus Minucius Felix to show the profound debt that Christians with to Antiquity¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁵ Octavius alludes to Plato in a number of times, always praising his clarity of mind and correctness. In addition, when speaking in chapter nineteen about what previous philosophers thought about God, Octavius mentions Thales the Milesian, Diogenes of Apollonia, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Antisthenes, Xeuxippus, Democritus, Strato, Epicurus, Aristotle, Heraclides of Pontus, Theophrastus, and Zeno, and Chrysippus, and Cleanthes, Diogenes of Babylon, Xenophon the Socratic, Aristo the Stoic, and, of course, Plato.

Even more so, he suggests that it is not pagans, but Christians who are keeping the Classical wisdom alive.

In the eyes of Minucius Felix, this is possible because the Classical philosophers and the new religion share a common body of thought most visible in the convergence between Plato and Christians. Even their concepts of divinity, essential to the alleged divide between the two paradigms, can be reconciled if we pay attention to the ancient's notion of God's creative nature: "Therefore in his *Timaeus* Plato's God is by His very name the parent of the world, the artificer of the soul, the fabricator of heavenly and earthly things, whom both to discover he declares is difficult, on account of His excessive and incredible power; and when you have discovered Him, impossible to speak of in public. The same almost are the opinions also which are ours. For we both know and speak of a God who is parent of all, and never speak of Him in public unless we are interrogated (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 19). This theopolitical stance which presents Christians like the true continuators of an Antiquity being destroyed by pagans will have a discernible influence on the historical purview of Saint Augustine and, with him, the Christian philosophy of history to come.

Analogously to Minucius Felix, Saint Augustine would also claim a great degree of concordance with Plato. Although the saint affirms in his *City of God* that Platonism is no longer necessary, since it has been overcome and perfected by Christianity, even in his mature works there is a broad agreement with the Neoplatonic doctrine in terms of blessedness, goodness, and love, although he

recognizes the crucial difference by which Ancient philosophers confer a great importance to the performance of sacred rites in honor of many gods, which is contrary to the uniqueness of God proclaimed by Christians (*City of God*, VIII.12-13). Furthermore, he professes a clear preference for Platonists over other philosophical doctrines by affirming that “It is evident that none come nearer to us than the Platonists” (*City of God* VIII.5). However, not only Plato and consequently his followers deserve Saint Augustine’s admiration. Both Socrates’s and Sparta’s ideals are wholly present in the bishop’s words as the precepts Christians should follow: The defense of meagre food and humble raiment, the skeptic attitude towards earthly possessions, or the commitment to building autonomous communities based on a strict communalization of the soul.¹¹⁶

Marcus Minucius Felix is a key link in the chain that connects Platonism and the theological foundations of the new religion. Following his steps, Saint Augustine would go through a vehement Platonist phase that he would eventually close, but never fully abandon, as Plato’s methodology and tools will accompany him during his entire career. The author of *Octavius* even included

¹¹⁶ Saint Augustine succinctly remarks the law of the Lacedaemonians when he remembers: “Moreover, if the Romans had been able to receive a rule of life from their gods, they would not have borrowed Solon’s laws from the Athenians, as they did some years after Rome was founded; and yet they did not keep them as they received them, but endeavored to improve and amend them. Although Lycurgus pretended that he was authorized by Apollo to give laws to the Lacedaemonians, the sensible Romans did not choose to believe this, and were not induced to borrow laws from Sparta. Numa Pompilius, who succeeded Romulus in the kingdom, is said to have framed some laws, which, however, were not sufficient for the regulation of civic affairs” (*City of God* II.16).

explicit references to Plato's vituperation of the poets and hollow mendacity of their verses. Those who create false words offend the intrinsically verbal nature of God, arisen as new Logos, which is why according to both they deserve political ostracism: "And for this reason Plato rightly expelled from the state which he had founded in his discourse [Plato's *Republic*], the illustrious Homer whom he had praised and crowned" (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 22). The verbal, logical dimension of Christianity became more and more central as the dogma consolidated, effectively incorporating elements from the Greek theories of language, reason, and divinity.

Scholastic Interpreters: Cyprian

We have finally arrived in the age of emancipation and persecution. Cyprian, born 200 AD, was bishop of Carthage and a martyr who died under the Valerian persecution in 258 AD. We have access to his existential strife thanks to Pontius the Deacon, who composed a biography entitled *The Life and Passion of Saint Cyprian*. His writings, related to his pastoral ministry, shape the political systematization of the apostolic koinonia initiated by Tertullian. Cyprian makes use of strictly political terms, revealing that the theopolitical expansion was a necessary conclusion of the apostolic community. According to Dawson, Cyprian "seems to be the first orthodox writer who explicitly links the 'communism' of the New Testament to the philosophical teaching that all property is common by nature, in the manner of the Carpocratians" (*Cities of the*

Gods 280). Cyprian achieves the legitimation of radical communitarianism through the recourse to a classical motive: the excelsitude of ages past.

Cyprian's works present, according to Pier Cesare Bori, one of the neatest, most strictly ecclesiastical readings of the primitive communities. Instead of focusing on the individual imitation of Christ, or the universal Church, Cyprian's localist project takes a page from the Essenes' book, completing a fruitful appropriation of the "testo della Didaché, e alla concreta pratica associativa del giudaismo antico e del giudeo-cristianesimo" (*Chiesa primitiva* 89-90). In this regard, he constitutes a crucial link between the Second Temple communitarian endeavors studied by Timothy Wardle, and the early *koinonia* of the apostles. That is exactly why Bori can conclude that Cyprian's prefiguration of monasticism owes its foundational principles to the local communities of the Hellenistic-Judaic-Early Christian world. A type of association that was defined by its bottom-to-top localism: "Il discorso cipriano riguarda perciò l'intera chiesa locale" (*Chiesa primitiva* 89-90). This is how the universal House of God was built out of the Qumranic Temple of Men. A household pioneered by the monastic efforts and culminated by the theopolitical dimension of the modern state.

Cyprian refers to the time of the apostles as that of the "greater virtues" since, the new believers "sold houses and farms, and gladly and liberally presented to the apostles the proceeds to be dispensed to the poor" (*On Works and Alms* VIII.25). He quotes the central section of the *Acts of the Apostles*, 4:32,

in order to argue that those who have all things in common “become sons of God by spiritual birth” (VIII.25). This Hesiodic type of ontological bucolism is not strictly conservative –Sparta is–, but arcadian as it pertains the reconstruction of an idealized, pre-civilized age of unobstructed natural freedom. According to this account, the radicalness of the apostolic koinonia was precisely achieved by their superation of the present world through the reinstatement of a Lebensform that dates back to Adamic times. Christ’s First Coming is then interpreted as the denunciation of mankind’s vacuity of manners and customs, followed by the exemplification of a more authentic type of existence. The primitive koinonia is humanity’s attempt at imitating Jesus’s life in accordance to the Creator’s natural expectations. The communalization of earthly goods is then just a step in the road to reinstating the unaffected genesiactal community.

In order to achieve this, a radical redefinition of what it means to be human is needed. If the koinonia is the authentic state of nature that has been buried under a layer of false customs, the elimination of those socially acquired uses must reveal something implied in the genesiactal relate: independently of our apparent differences, all humans are equal because we all come from the same seed. This will quickly become a central dogma of the incipient Church. Together with Cyprian, we encounter a crucial reference to how men are not born, but made, Christians –as Tertullian had explained–, in this case, by a “spiritual birth” or conversion. All humans are susceptible of joining the perfect

koinonia, which will actually only be perfect when all are a part of it. Once devolved Christians, all individuals will be members of an egalitarian community in consonance with God's plan. In the meantime, Christians receive the mandate to practice equity and charity, even when enmity is involved, in imitation of God's same sense of *aequitas divina*, which is presented as an omnipotent alternative to the feigned *aequitas* self-attributed by the Roman emperors as incarnations of justice and equity on Earth:

this is to imitate by the heavenly law the equity of God the Father. For whatever is of God is common in our use [. . .] Thus the day equally enlightens, the sun gives radiance, the rain moistens, the wind blows, and the sleep is one to those that sleep, and the splendour of the stars and of the moon is common. In which example of equality, he who, as a possessor in the earth, shares his returns and his fruits with the fraternity, while he is common and just in his gratuitous bounties, is an imitator of God the Father. (*On Works and Alms* VIII.25)

The liberality of God equally spreads over all human beings, so in return they must practice the community of goods, since this is what divine law proclaims¹¹⁷. Whereas the equity of an emperor is dependent on the contingencies of the law, the divine equity of the Creator grants that all things

¹¹⁷ Carpocratians, the gnostic sect from the second century, considered this equity in very similar terms, mentioning the light that enlightens the Earth, as well as the fruits that God makes available to anyone, something that was lost when private property was taking shape: "The light of the sun, which is the cause of the daytime and the father of light, God pours out from above upon the earth in equal measure on all who have power to see. For all see alike [. . .] Common nourishment grows for all beasts which feed on the earth's produce; to all it is alike. It is regulated by no law, but rather is harmoniously available to all through the gift of him who gives it and makes it to grow [. . .] He [the Creator] did not make a distinction between female and male, rational and irrational, nor between anything and anything else at all; rather he shared out sight equally and universally [. . .] But the abolition, contrary to divine law, of community of use and equality begat the thief of domestic animals and fruits" (Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 3.2.6-7; quoting Epiphanes, the Carpocratian writer).

in nature are to be measuredly, charitably, and communally enjoyed. Although communitarianism should be the rule for everyone, reality does not always coincide with theoretical precepts on the theme. It is hard to effectively define how many Christians were involved in this kind of revolutionary practice, which ranged from total renunciation to property, to alms-giving and personally sponsored Maecenatism or patronage. As accounted by Pontius in Cyprian's biography, the martyr kept all the commandments of the divine law "By distributing his means for the relief of the indigence of the poor, by dispensing the purchase-money of entire estates" which brought him two benefits: "the contempt of this world's ambition, than which nothing is more pernicious, and the observance of that mercy which God has preferred even to His sacrifices" (Pontius, *Life of Cyprian* 2). If we follow Cyprian's actions, material communism within the Church could have started as a phenomenon paradoxically carried out in an individual manner by Christians, which only later became a consolidated practice among those who wanted to devote their life to the other, as in the case of monasticism.

Scholastic Interpreters: Lactantius

Continuing the labor of other early Christian authors, Lactantius also presents his writings in an apologetic way, establishing the truth and reasonableness that Christianity holds in comparison with pagan religions. Lactantius, 250 AD – 325 AD, suffered first-hand the consequences of the

Diocletian's first edict against the Christians in 303 AD . Most Fathers of the Church were indeed rhetors and professors –which clashes against the idealized image of the wise ignorant Christian teacher–, and after having carried out duties as a professor under Diocletian's government, led him to a state of poverty to the extent that “at times lacked the necessities of life” (Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 736). He later became an advisor of Constantine and tutor to his son thanks to his dexterity in the fields of rhetoric and his vast knowledge of the canonical authors, now classics. He used these skills to better introduce Christianity to pagans, earning the title of “Christian Cicero” among humanists that recognize in his works a graceful and elevated style (Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 736). Not only his style derived from classical sources, but also his erudition owes a profound debt to classical poets and philosophers, who he includes as intellectual references in his writings: Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Thales of Miletus, Pythagoras, Antisthenes, Cleanthes, Anaximenes, Chrysippus, Zeno, Aristotle, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, Octavius, among others, are quoted as distinct authorities in the matters he discusses. His major work, *The Divine Institutions*, written between 304 and 311, “was the first attempt at a systematic exposition of Christian theology in Latin” (Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 736). Divided in seven books, it is considered a supplement of the contributions by Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Cyprian (*Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, “Introductory Notice to Lactantius” 6), which do not address Christian thought in a comparably systematic way.

Lactantius discusses profusely the idea of communitarianism that Plato had addressed in the *Republic*. As with Cyprian, Lactantius considered the community of property as a metaphor of a generous charity that existed in better times, not an authentic sense of sharing everything in common. This is the beginning of a millennia-long debate on the Church's views on property in which thinkers have leveled biblical arguments to defend libertarian capitalism, Stalinist communism, cantonism, corporatism, socialdemocracy, and all conceivable models.

Even more critical are Lactantius's critical attitudes against Classical antiquity. Well aware of the Christian debt towards Plato, that does not prevent Lactantius from criticizing doctrinal aspects of the philosopher that had been determined to be contrary to the Scripture. As Marcus Minucius Felix had refuted in his *Octavius*, Lactantius ferociously criticizes one of the elements central to the Spartan and Platonic koinon: sexual communism and the dissolution of the family. Effectively linking economic elitism and social licentiousness, Lactantius refutes the legitimacy of the community of the bodies, which will progressively become a community of souls. The community of women within the highest social class had been for the Laconophile Plato an essential trait of his polis's godly equity and communitarianism:

They [Plato's ruler class] must possess all things in common. This is capable of being endured, as long as it appears to be spoken of money. But how impossible and how unjust this is, I could show by many things. Let us, however, admit its possibility. For grant that all are wise, and despise money. To what, then, did that community lead him? Marriages also, he says, ought to be in

common; so that many men may flock together like dogs to the same woman, and he who shall be superior in strength may succeed in obtaining her; or if they are patient as philosophers, they may await their turns, as in a brothel. Oh the wonderful equality of Plato! Where, then, is the virtue of chastity? Where conjugal fidelity? And if you take away these, all justice is taken away. (*Divine Institutes* 3.21).

Bertrand Russell vaunts in his courage for not reverencing the authority of Plato. His *History of Western Philosophy* was published in 1945. Lactantius wrote the *Divine Institutes* during the first decade of the fourth century. Unlike Russell, Lactantius is capable of fiercely attacking Plato's doctrines while proportionately attributing him a central role in the history of thought and Christianity. Although he despises some of Plato's proposals, Lactantius is magnanimous enough to recognize that not only can we learn from our enemies, but even owe them what we are. The case of Christianity and its oscillating attitudes towards Plato is paradigmatical, as there is no question about the philosopher's contributions to their doctrine, even when the appropriation of his views is hindered by unsurmountable discrepancies such as that of the role of the family. The sort of justice that Plato affirms his city would hold thanks to the broadest sense possible of community sounds like gibberish for Lactantius if one such state lacks the most essential type of renunciation, even more so that that of private property: the victory of rationality over the lowly passions that, if unshackled, turn humans into egotistic, self-realizing creatures. At the base of this combat against blind egotism, Lactantius and the Christians will elevate the physiological continence of the ascetics to the degree of biopolitical device in the quest to equality. If we let the vegetative and sensitive souls to take

command, the rationality of communitarianism yields way to the self-interested forces of blind nutrition, reproduction, and immediate satisfaction. Against this, Lactantius offers a critical reception of Sparta and Plato, theologically cementing corporate property –or other viable alternatives that reproduce the apostolic *koinonia*– while inflexibly rejecting the community of the bodily functions. Paving the road to celibacy, his defense of chastity and conjugal fidelity represent one of the most profound divides between the new religion and the communitarian sources of Antiquity. Lactantius legates the conviction that the community of women is against nature in Christian doctrine, and, according to him, against the rationality of even the most degenerate forms of sovereignty¹¹⁸. The emancipation of Christianity is already visible, as it would be for Rome and the impending persecution that was about to start, and demonstrates that the sect is really close to becoming a fully-fledged Church. This transition from the private to the public sphere explains the mutable attitudes towards Christianity during the second half of the third century.

¹¹⁸ These are his words: “But if you were to give the sovereignty to this man of such justice and equity [that described by Plato, that is, complete community including women], who had deprived some of their own property, and given to some the property of others, he would prostitute the modesty of women; a thing which was never done, I do not say by a king, but not even by a tyrant” (Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 3.21).

Scholastic Interpreters: Ambrose of Milan

Ambrose of Milan, 337 AD – 397 AD, is another vivid example of the influence that classical authors exerted upon the Christian Father's writings. Catalogued as one of the Latin doctors of the Church together with Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great, his work *On the Duties of the Ministers* derives from Cicero's *On Duties*. Dawson discusses Ambrose's idea that the communism held by Stoics has a biblical origin, specifically the Genesis and the Edenic state that Adam could enjoy before the Fall. Furthermore, "only Christians believed that *all* things should be used in common, and only Christians put this doctrine into practice in the primitive church and the monastery" (*Cities of the Gods* 285). Following this point of view, Ambrose's works reveal a reciprocal process of influence: He draws from classical sources and, at the same time, is set on exposing the inspirational role of biblical principles in present in the thought of philosophers like Cicero and the Stoics. On the verge of the Christianization of the person, Ambrose does indeed suggest that at least some of the ideas can be Christened, as it is the case of these philosophers' ideas regarding the use and benefit of natural resources. As Ambrose himself asserts, "the Stoics taught that all things which are produced on the earth are created for the use of men, but that men are born for the sake of men, so that mutually one may be of advantage to another. But whence have they got such ideas but out of the holy Scriptures?" (Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers* 1.28.132-33). Additionally, instead of generous patronage, Ambrose

proposes a radical dispossession of the goods as a return to an original state of community and equity that was interrupted when some people started to accumulate richness, that is, when private property started to shape economic and social relations. To give to the poor, imitating the perfect Father and His equal distribution of fruits for everyone to enjoy, is not an act of charity but an act of justice; giving back what once was for the common use to all:

Mercy, also, is a good thing, for it makes men perfect, in that it imitates the perfect Father. Nothing graces the Christian soul so much as mercy; mercy as shown chiefly towards the poor, that you may treat them as sharers in common with you in the produce of nature, which brings forth the fruits of the earth for use to all. Thus you may freely give to a poor man what you have, and in this way help him who is your brother and companion. You give silver; he receives life. You give money; he considers it his fortune. Your coin makes up all his property. (Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers* 1.11.38).

The poor thus become equal members of the Christian community as sharers of those fruits and goods that God had equally distributed to all. Consequently, when everything is common to all and there is no private property, the necessity to accumulate, or carry out monetary transactions is rendered irrelevant by the recovered state of Adamic equality: “Let love of money be destroyed, let lust die. The holy man says that he has never been engaged in business” (*On the Duties of Ministers* 3.6.37). This radical dispossession appears in the primitive Church and its adherents. Saint Ambrose of Milan was the mentor of the great Augustine, so his vision experienced an unparalleled continuity through his pupil’s works. However, it was not just theologians and apologists who were reflecting on the

potential roads towards the reinstatement of the apostolic koinonia. It is time for us to delve into a less scholarly branch of Christianity: monasticism.

Monastic Interpreters: Anchoritism and Coenobitism

For a long period of time, monasticism represented the anti-intellectualist face of Christianity. The first four centuries prefigure the basic distribution of roles within the Church, traditionally assigning different measures of *bios theoretikos* and *bios politikos* to theologians, missionaries, regular, and secular clergy. Monasticism governed by a rule falls naturally under the category of regular clergy, but depending on the order's charisma, their adherents will focus on practical or intellectual service. The distinctions, though, are far from hermetic. For example, this discussion was very well alive in the Spanish Renaissance, where a most visible case of border-crossing when Saint Theresa of Jesus "hired" the recently graduated Saint John of the Cross to provide the order of the Discalced Carmelites –declared continuators of Elijah and the Mount Carmel hermits in modern Israel– with the intellectual heft that the new direction of the order demanded. As a result, two of the most prominent intellectuals in the history of Spain wound up being a part of one of the most service oriented, humble religious orders ever to exist, effectively proving that the scholastic and the monastic are but regions of a spectrum.

In the case of the first monastic texts, a noticeable lack of literality and erudition makes us realize that there were, in fact, not too many allusions to the

Bible. As Dawson claims, “Many monks knew the Bible by heart, but it was a text for endless recitation, not for discussion” (*Cities of the Gods* 282). It commonly affirmed that proponents of this early monasticism arrive in the apostolic koinonia from life and experience, without counting with a deep theological background. I would add that it is not that they lacked formation, for many came from erudite environments, but that they deliberately chose not to play the game of the academics, as proven by Augustine’s first work, *Contra academicos*. By disregarding the scholarly side of theology, these monks were trying to imitate the unlearned composition of the apostolic koinonia and the primitive ecclesia of Acts, now conceived as a monastery. Dawson once again points out in the right direction when he explains that “On the one hand, there was a long-established Christian ideal of community, best summarized by the phrase ‘household of God’ [. . .] And on the other hand there was a violently ascetic ideal that required the rejection of all households and all normal society” (*Cities of the Gods* 284). Monasteries provided the opportunity to reject one’s own life –family, properties, fame...– as a sign of dispossession in order to imitate Christ and thus be part of an alternative kind of life: the monastic community.

Is this renunciation, that is, the negation of the self implied in the monastic practice, a death in life equivalent to the martyrdom during the periods of persecution of Christianity? Imitating Christ in a time of persecution is relatively easy. When one’s minority beliefs are considered unlawful and persecuted, one does not need to deviate too much in order to negate the self

and merit martyrdom. Not unlike Sparta's idealization of war as the ultimate self-sacrifice for the sake of the city, dying like the master because of one's beliefs niftily assimilates this mortal life to the archetype of perfection in sacrifice. What happens, though, when society is not there to inflict it? Asking someone to understand his own death as an essential part of life is not the same as asking us to endeavor it by seeking death ourselves. But the mandate is clear: "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). Moreover, if the world does not erect wooden crosses anymore, where will Christians find theirs? Asceticism had existed for centuries, but monasticism takes the self-effacing subjectivity to an entirely new level in which the negation of the self came to fill the void left by the soon-to-end persecution.

The most renowned monk, Saint Anthony the Great, expressed it summarily when he exhorted the first anchorites: "For if we so live as people dying daily, we will not commit sin" (*The Life of Anthony* §19). Lions and swords may temporarily cease to slay them, but for Christians the ultimate enemy, single cause of the first capital vice of *superbia*, will always be within. Martyrdom or not, the self must be overcome through living life in a Socratic manner: constantly remembering mortality. The *abneget semetipsum* exhortation formulates a concept of death even in the absence of death. *Mors mystica*, or mystical death offers a philosophical anthropology perspective on what the role of human existence is –giving ourselves to others–, as well as a practical habitus to be

followed¹¹⁹. Being annihilated by the enemy is seen as honorable from Sparta to the Dead Sea, but even more meritorious is achieving the command to annihilate our own self. The reflexive particle of *semetipsum* refers exactly to the self mastering the self. It is precisely because of this command that, at the beginning of the 4th Century, Christ's followers had to precise the ways in which to inflict themselves the imperative mystical death. For a lack of an external death, asceticism, mortification, seclusion, and reclusion are the most readily available tools in their attempt at materializing this death in life. But alleviated severity does not mean inclusion: their ideas are still largely incompatible with the prevailing social order. Because of the incommensurability of their cosmovision, Anti-Nicene Christians are still strangers in their own hometown. Like Jews had been for centuries, they become the other within the same even in times of religious toleration. As such, they continue their proselytistic mission hoping to one day establish a polis that resembles the attributes of the celestial one. Until then, they feel more isolated in the heart of the city than in that of the desert, which represents the opportunity and imperative for a fresh start. They have been given some space, but how does one found a city? The impulse to seize this occasion is the exact context of the dawn of the 4th Century. The responses are mainly two: inside the soul, and within our souls. Those who

¹¹⁹ I have addressed this notion in the several previous studies: "Habitarse al hábito. Propiedad, igualdad y comunidad en las *Constituciones* de Santa Teresa de Jesús". *Ciberletras* 39 (2017); and "La imposibilidad autobiográfica en el *Libro del buen amor* y *Las confesiones*". *eHumanista* 34 (2016).

opted for strict solitude referred to themselves as anchorites. The others, also leaving the city behind only to create a new one are known as cenobites.

Monastic Interpreters: Anthony and the Path of Solitude

The Lacedaemonian polis confronts Athenian colonialism. The Qumrad yahad relives the primigenial Jewish community. The apostolic koinonia aspires to provide a new, true interpretation of what a biblical existence should be. If the models that inspire monasticism are all small-scale communitarian efforts, why does it first develop as an individual, eremitic movement? Had Christians lacked the example of the 1st-Century communities formed immediately after Christ's ministry, the path to follow could have remained open to a coin's flip decision. But it did not: Christianity was from the start a group endeavor. Around two hundred and fifty years separate the Apostles from the rise of monasticism and, since the koinonia has not been fully eliminated by the persecutors, the archetype is still available for future Christians to imitate. So, why embrace anchoretic monasticism if they were trying to live a life like Christ's? Doyne Dawson formulates an enticing hypothesis:

there was emerging by ca. 250 a premium on asceticism, and a new spiritual elite following a 'philosophical life' distinguished mainly by total or near-total renunciation of property. This ideal was supported by a novel configuration of New Testament passages, which brought the call to sell all into close connection with the primitive church [. . .] Christian monasticism began when some of these individual ascetics withdrew physically from the Christian households and communities that had sheltered them, and from all normal participation in society. This movement

began with certain displaced Egyptian peasants in the last quarter of the third century. The most famous of them, Anthony, started out with a conversion experience that must have typical for Christian ascetics: after meditation on the way that the apostles and the first believers had renounced all their property, he entered a church at a moment when the call to sell all was being proclaimed as part of the gospel reading, and decided to follow it. (*Cities of the Gods* 281)

The following reasons are highlighted by Dawson as causes fostering the initial individualizing push of monasticism: property, asceticism, philosophy, biblical exegesis, personal experiences and, above all, the situation of the Christian communities during the second century. I have argued that Judaism and Christianity recklessly fought for integration in the Roman and Hellenistic worlds, while simultaneously having to claim their idiosyncrasy and, eventually, incompatibility. In the case of the young religion, the long coveted status of *religio licita* dreamed by the apologists turns out to be a curse more than anything else: when Christians are tolerated and abandon the apostolic life –that of the catacombs, the deserts, the martyrs...– to become fully-fledged Roman citizens, they are also renouncing to the radicalness that made them special in the first place. Moreover, once the persecution begins to respite, the original tension that made early Christians true inheritors of the Jewish exodial attitude –strong in weakness, united when persecuted– begins to fade away. Thus, the origin of monasticism is common to that of many of the independent movements herebefore studied, as it represents a rigorist return to how a golden past is imagined in a time from which it cannot be accessed.

The assimilation to Rome proves to be a delicate subject. When apologists began to be believed as they proved that Christians could indeed be perfectly congruous citizens, some Christians realized that complete integration could only be achieved at a price. The theopolitical compatibility between the various laws seems to be a surmountable obstacle, but the biopolitical consequences of this amalgamation result in Christians perceiving a relaxation of their old ways, which they progressively abandon as they join the Late-Imperial lifestyle. At the forefront of this abandoning of old manners, the total acceptance of individual property and the attenuation of the communal aspect of the sect indicate a change: the close-knit period of the *domus ecclesiae* and the *tituli* quickly becomes the institutionalized, public assembly that we know as the Church. Few authors have studied this moment more profoundly than Kim Bowes, whose *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* proves the centrality of the primitive, private dimension of the Church. Her masterful discourse on the meaning of the *private* shows, though, that the Late-Ancient and Christian understanding of the private is quite other than the one coined by the modern empiricists conceive it.

Bowes first defines the term “private” in the Roman religious world as “any rituals, structures, or groups which were not funded through the public treasury AND not directed towards the well-being of a politically constituted unit” (*Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* 21). Christianity is thus considered a private practice since it is not part of the cults

sanctioned by the state and, consequently, it does not have any public structure or institution. The first religious practices developed in private homes hosted by aristocrats, as attested by some letters that Jerome wrote noting this phenomenon¹²⁰. The city was full of dangers and temptations, and the home was the only safe place where purity could be preserved. Jerome refers to many women, like Anicia Faltonia Proba, that offered their houses as a place to practice asceticism and prayer. According to Bowes, Jerome seems “to describe a wholly new kind of living space, indeed, the first ‘monasteries’” (*Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* 98). Although the private cult was encouraged by the early Church, it also implied a number of dangers in terms of practices that the Church was not able to control. Morality and lack of corrupting activities can only be guaranteed under collective and public worship, hence the eventual preference for communal prayers and rituals associated with episcopal leadership.

¹²⁰ Research is often restricted to the Doura Europos house church, but apart from Bowes’s excellent work, the two volumes published by L. Michael White in 1996 and 1997 are still capital studies in the field. The first volume *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* focuses on the architectural equivalent of the ideological *interpretatio christiana*, through which not only the words and concepts of Antiquity, but also its physical structures evolve to fit the new worldview. This perspective is vastly different from the Catherine Nixey’s interpretation of historical periods as destruction of the former or, more precisely, of Christianity as a destructive force whereas all other periods and worldviews are evolutive, contributing ones. White’s second volume, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in Its Environment* provides the most exhaustive understanding of the Christian *oikonomia*, the government of the household, that provided the theoretical framework for the aforementioned essays by Bowes and Agamben.

Monasticism is a radical, individual initiative to live a life like Christians were “supposed” to live it. If their contemporaries are willing to live like pagans and the cities have become, not the place to preach an alternative cosmovision, but opportunities to be polluted by pagan practices and climb up the Roman hierarchy, then those who feel connected to the apostolic community will need to refute, or abandon it. By the end of the third century, Christians did not have the power to subvert the city, so some of them decided to create their own independent poleis, firstly in private houses and later outside the city, even if that meant following the apostolic example in solitary.

Modern communitarianism has attempted to solve the debilitation of the commons through descendent debilitation of the individual as a means to reinforcing group identities. Marx’s *Die deutsche Ideologie* or Mussolini’s early socialist texts strive in this direction¹²¹. But monasticism in its primitive, etymological sense, provides a refoundation of the commons through separation from the city. This does not necessarily mean, as William Harmless argues, that monasticism can only be found in the deserts, caves, and mountains. One can be within the walls of the polis while also being profoundly detached from it. Although secluded monasticism –or, strictly speaking, monastic monasticism as in anchoritism and hermitage– never ceased to be a fruitful

¹²¹ The presence of Marx in Mussolini is not exclusive, as he also takes many pages from Nietzsche’s books. In fact, the vehement communism of his early political writings is balanced by the individualist vision presented in the 1908 brief essay on the will to power, entitled *La filosofia della forza*.

option, it is remarkable how since its very inception in times of Saint Anthony, the solitary life immediately produced a new communal existence. *Coenobitism* – gr. κοινόβιον “shared life” or “life in common”, combination of κοινός “common” and βίος “life, lifestyle” – is the type of monasticism most closely related to the Lacedaemonian and Judean sources.

Few have understood the stakes of the anchoretic-coenobitic choice as profoundly as Saint Synclética, who is perfectly aware of the electiveness of these paradigms of subjectivity: “For many it is profitable to live in a community. And over others it is helpful to withdraw on their own [. . .] It is possible for one who is in a group to be alone in thought, and for one who is alone to live mentally in a crowd” (*The Life and Regimen of the Blessed and Holy Synclética* §97). However, the most famous example of that individual subversion of the power of the city is crystallized in the life of Saint Anthony. Avva Antoni, was born in 251 AD in the great Upper Egyptian city of Heracleopolis Magna, key site before and after the Romanization of the region. The Upper Egypt area has, in fact, been considered the birth of monasticism as we know it, even if scholars such as William Harmless have enriched and nuanced the texture of this affirmation. Egypt is, as it has always been, at the crossroads of the North and the South, the East and the West. Its place as center of the oecumene would only eventually be ever so slightly displaced to Jerusalem due to the impact of Abrahamic monotheism. Even during the Middle Ages, for which Jerusalem and Rome are always the center, Egypt would always have a special place in the

heart of Jews and Christians, whose history of liberation begins with the Great Exodus. After the arrival of Christ, Egypt will become a fruitful site of social experimentation in the modelling of a life-lived-like-Jesus's.

We know learn Anthony and his solitary life thanks to *The Life of Anthony* written by Athanasius around 357. Anthony was originally a wealthy Christian man that felt the call of God in Church, when he heard Matthew's words concerning a rich man that sold everything he got and gave it to the poor. He sensed those words were addressed to him specifically and followed the biblical scriptures. After having sold his properties, he became the disciple of an old man in order to learn how to practice the solitary life. He was thus not the first eremite but, as William Harmless argues in his work *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, "what made Anthony unusual, according to Athanasius, was not his ascetic lifestyle, but where he practiced it: no longer at the fringe of one's home village, but in 'the great desert'" (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* 60). One of the most famous episodes of his ascetic life deals with temptations, in which several demons attack him as in a wrestling fight capable of fascinating Salvador Dalí. Despite his struggles, he continued with his anchorite existence, spending most of his life in the desert, devoted to solitude, silence, prayer and manual labor. He eventually became himself a master followed by many disciples that configured a community of monks (*Life of Saint Anthony* §14). He died at the age

of 105. In order to impede his veneration, he asked to be buried by two disciples in an unknown place.

Athanasius explains in detail Anthony's ascetic lifestyle: "he practiced the discipline with intensity," which he refers to the monastic discipline of self-affirmation through self-denial. Anthony accustomed himself "to more stringent practices" which included eating "once daily", sleeping on a mat or the bare ground and mortifying the body (*Life of Saint Anthony* §7). One of the most important remarks that Athanasius makes clear in his account of Anthony is the idea of the ascetic practice as a means so that he could "acquire knowledge of his own life" (§7). This would obsess Saint Augustine, who devotes the best books of his *Confessions* to an analogously intimate metaphysical inquiry. Anthony also expresses this idea in his letters, "He who knows himself, knows God" (*Letters of Anthony* 3), which Augustine would flip upside down: only when we know God can we know ourselves. Far from being an act of selfishness and individualism, knowledge of oneself provides the opportunity to "examine one's inner self, to seek the roots of sin within it, to take responsibility for it" (*The Desert Movement* 23). By purifying soul and body Anthony sensed the presence of God, His love, and, in return, he could give that same love to others. Knowing oneself is thus the best way to serve others in the most virtuous and pure way possible.

As we shall see in the literature of the Desert Fathers, despite the solitary nature inherent in the eremitic life, the contact with others is unavoidable.

Anthony's words attest to this: "For if we so live as people dying daily, we will not commit sin [. . .] as people who anticipate dying each day we shall be free of possessions, we shall forgive all things to all people" (*Life of Anthony* §19). This excerpt has relevance not only in the sense of its content –the need to live as you were about to die, to be free of possessions, forgiveness– but also in the words he chooses. Anthony includes himself in a community, hence the use of the first-person plural as subject. Additionally, he makes explicit reference to forgiving all people, which should not be contemplated if one were to live alone, with no contact to others. Forgiveness implies a relation to people despite the solitary nature of the eremitic life.

Beyond the Self: The Path of Community

As briefly mentioned above, the end of martyrdom produced a new tension in the life of the first Christians that were still eager to follow the path marked by Jesus. This unleashed a new way of life by which, when death was not to be imposed from the outside, Christians needed to seek the *imitatio Christi* within themselves. Even when it implied a contrary position to religious and imperial authorities of the period. Therefore, the individuals who rejected the turbulent life of the city, including all properties involved in their old life, opted a tough path that not too many were willing to take. Even within this group of individuals who went into the Egyptian desert to imitate the harshness that Jesus

suffered, there were different types of lives, depending on the grade of involvement with other members of the community.

In the desert regions of Lower Egypt some monks found the perfect place for their purpose of rejecting the urban pleasures in order to follow Jesus's path. Many men and women became part of a new vital movement in this area, concentrating into three main places: Niria, Cellia, and Sketis. These early Christian communities that held a monastic and ascetic life are mainly known thanks to a number of sources, being the *Apophthegmata Patrum* the most important one for the monasticism that arose in the fourth and fifth century in Lower Egypt. This text compiles a collection of sayings and stories that express the wisdom and teachings to be transmitted in these early monastic communities. Graham Gould points out in his study, entitled *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, that the *Apophthegmata* is concerned "with the sayings and doings of Egyptian monks, whether those who stayed in Egypt or those who, like Silvanus, went elsewhere" (10). These sayings, which were transmitted orally and later transcribed, reflect, according to Gould, an awareness "of its own identity" as a monastic way of life, different from that of Pachomius. The monasticism of the Sayings refers to a semi-anchoritic form of life rather than coenobitic, although both forms have "a common origin in the ascetic traditions of fourth century Egypt" (14-15). Despite its apparent similarities, the *Sayings* reflect a monastic life where solitude and communitarianism could be part of the monk's life alike.

The text alphabetically-organized anthology of the *Sayings* compiles the names of the main speakers, the protagonists of the stories, and the names of the monks who transmit it. These *Sayings* reveal a sense of unity and continuity within the community, although a palpable decline of habits and customs can be perceived gradually affecting the members of the group after the diaspora in which many of the monks had to flee Sketis, the site where they inhabited, when it was devastated by the barbarian invasion. Thus, the purpose seems to be the instruction on the old virtues of the monastic life as a reminder of the first moral precepts of the community that eventually spread out in different places.

For Gould the *Sayings* “represent a pattern of life which was very varied, in which monks could live alone or in small groups, in permanent or in changing patterns of relationships; in which no doubt the options of complete solitude and permanent, ordered community, though they were known, were rarer than a wide range of intermediate possibilities” (140). This semi-anchoritic community shared common meals or *agapae* and practiced hospitality, so the picture of the Desert Elders living a secluded life of solitude and isolation is not exactly accurate. The *Sayings* mention in several occasions these communal meals, that were seen by some monks as a breaking with the ascetic regime that they wanted to develop. This coincides with Gould’s main thesis: A communal life could be combined with a life of penitence, asceticism and solitude, being the agape and the hospitality some instances of sharing and contact with others. Furthermore, “flight and solitude, though for some the goal of monastic

training and an option to be chosen among the different available patterns of life, could be seen not as the aim of a perfect monk, but as something to be chosen for reasons –consciousness of his own inability to live with others– which reveal once again the concern of the Desert Fathers with the problems of bad relationships” (165). Living together had thus advantages and disadvantages that the monk needed to evaluate to carry out a perfective life. Far from encouraging a life of isolation, these teachings show concern with the personal relationships that emerged within the monastic life. Relationships that involved conflict, tension or bad habits were obviously rejected, which does not mean that all relationships were avoided. Therefore, as Gould points out, “the construction of a properly functioning monastic community, founded on good relations between individuals, must have been inherent in the goals of the Desert Fathers from the start” (184). This is also Thomas Merton’s goal.

Merton wrote *The Wisdom of the Desert* in 1960. His work does not try to be a scholarly study imposing readers with paleographical novelties, but a brief, intentionally accessible anthology for the modern reader interested in the peculiar forms of life practiced by the Desert Elders. His propaedeutical, more than lofty purpose allows Merton to concisely crystallize those aspects of monasticism relevant to post World War II subjectivities in the verge of the Second Vatican Council of 1963. Of particular interest is Merton’s reception of the Laconophile and Essenian communitarian values which, now heavily mediated by the *ecclesia primitiva*, still shape the Western understanding of the

self and the other in the 20th century. Merton's compilation reads as a transversal summary of what two thousand years of religious orders can do to inform a magnanimous, self-effacing conception of subjectivity in times of paroxysmal individualism.

This purview is complemented from the scholarly perspective by Alexander Ryrie, whose excellent *The Desert Movement: Fresh Perspectives on the Spirituality of the Desert* constitutes an essential study in the philosophies of the deserts. According to Ryrie, the idea of renunciation to which all monks committed when entering in the monastic community. They “had to start by making a clean and decisive break with their old life. To begin with they had to give up or give away all their possessions” (*The Desert Movement: Fresh Perspectives on the Spirituality of the Desert* 40). This first step towards a perfective life is reflected in many of the *Sayings* and seems to be a constant along these teachings. Thomas Merton shares many relevant passages that speak to this regard:

A certain brother, renouncing the world, and giving the things he owned to the poor, kept a few things in his own possession [. . .] Abbot Anthony said: Those who renounce the world and want to retain possession of money are assailed and torn apart by devils just as you are (*The Desert Movement* 32-33).

Abbot Theodore of Pherme had three good books [. . .] And the elder replied, saying: Those things that you do are good [Theodore profits by reading them], but better than all else is to possess nothing. When he had heard this, he went off and sold the above-mentioned books, and gave their price to the poor (*The Desert Movement* 33).

Poverty, along with tribulation and discretion, were three of the most important values of the ascetic life. Monks did not only get rid of all their

property but they also gave their goods to the ones in need. This once again evokes Cyprian's words when he proposed a radical dispossession of the property that, in an act of justice, would return to those who have nothing as a way to redistribute the goods that God gave equally to all. In addition, the lack of possessions helps in promoting harmony and peace, for when there is nothing to argue about, disputes simply make no sense.¹²²

One of the values that the Sayings also incorporate is the idea of solitude. The refusal to have contact with others was an option contemplated by these monks as a way to keep a distance between them and the mundane temptations that others could bring with their mere presence. The importance of being alone with oneself is vital for those who are aware of their inability to be with God and with men at the same time. Ryrie includes one of these Sayings attributed to Arsenius in his work: "God knows that I love you, but I cannot live with God and with men [. . .] I cannot leave God to be with men" (*The Desert Movement: Fresh Perspectives on the Spirituality of the Desert* 32). This idea is reinforced by other famous saying referring to the solitary prayer that every monk should practice in their cells:

Abbot Anthony said: Just as fish die if they remain on dry land so monks, remaining away from their cells, or dwelling with men of the world, lose their determination to persevere in solitary

¹²² One of the *Sayings* that Merton compiles in his work refers to this idea: "There were two elders living together in a cell [. . .] Come on, let us have at least one quarrel, like the other men [. . .] I will take this brick and place it between us. Then I will say: it is mine. After that you will say: It is mine. This is what leads to a dispute and a fight [at the end one ends up saying] Well then, if it is yours, take it! Thus, they did not manage after all to get into a quarrel" (*The Desert Movement* 67).

prayer. Therefore, just as the fish should go back to the sea, so we must return to our cells, lest remaining outside we forget to watch over ourselves interiorly (*The Desert Movement* 29).

The cells become safe places that prevent the monk from having non-wished experiences that can affect their ascetic life. However, as Gould argues, they also practiced activities such as meals in assembly, which reveals a desire for a communal experience that coenobites will take to higher extent: “Once in the Valley of the Cells, a feast being celebrated, the brethren were eating together in the place of assembly” (*The Desert Movement* 39). In fact, as Ryrie writes, the monks used to come together on Saturdays and Sundays for communal worship, the *synaxis* and Eucharist, which exposes the patterns of a semi-eremitic or semi-anchoretic lifestyle. Gould also points out several references to relationships between individuals when arguing the nature of these communities. Thus, charity, hospitality or humility imply the existence of others to whom the monk addresses his or her good purposes¹²³. What is more, the structure of the *Sayings* itself discloses a specific dynamic, that of the abba or amma and the disciples, that obviously mirror the kind of relationships established among the members of these early monasteries.

¹²³ For example: “A brother asked one of the elders: What is humility? The elder answered him: To do good to those who do evil to you (*The Desert Movement* 53-54).

Monastic Interpreters: Pachomius

The desert is still considered the fountain of the first monastic movements capable of spreading all over the regions surrounding the Nile, Lower and Upper Egypt alike. Although both areas shared many similarities, above all the practice of asceticism, “this was approached in very different ways in the two systems, the eremitic and the coenobitic. In the one [which occurred in Lower Egypt], the individual monk, after a period of training under an abba, was free to decide his or her own way of life, discipline and movements; in the other [in Upper Egypt] most of life was governed by a system of rules, the keeping of which was an essential part of the monastic ascesis” (*The Desert Movement* 60-61). We see thus a gradual movement towards a more organized and regulated sense of community: from eremites, who represent the solitary lifestyle, to semi-anchorites, who live a life of solitude but display some communal practices, to finally the most systematized form of communal life of coenobitism.

Apart from Saint Anthony, who, though spending most of his life in solitude in the desert, gathered several disciples, the other early Egyptian contributor to monasticism is the figure of Saint Pachomius the Great. Born in the Egyptian, not the Greek, city of Thebes in 292 AD, until his death in 348 AD Pachomius developed pioneering monastic practices that resulted in the elaboration of the first regulated communal lifestyle systematized by a Christian author. The book known as *The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* recounts

the precise moment in which Pachomius transits from individual to communitarian asceticism:

When he saw the brothers gathering around him, he established for the following rule: Each should be self-supporting and manage his own affairs, but they would provide their share of all their material needs either for food or to provide hospitality to the strangers who came to them, for they all ate together. They bought their share to him and he administered it. They did freely and voluntarily. (*The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* §11)

Although Anthony had shared his form of life with others also interested

in the ascetic approach to existence, Pachomius's formal regulation effectively renders the word monasticism an oxymoron. Monasticism is not anymore the science and life of the *monakhos*, the solitary, but a hyperonym for ascetic life, be it solitary or communitarian. How is this possible? Would it not become necessary to coin a term for communal asceticism complementary to monasticism understood as individual asceticism? That would seem the reasonable thing to say, but there is a reason why both types of monasticism, eventually precised with the terms anchoritism and coenobitism, form a coherent unity in the eyes of Christianity. The answer is present in Pachomius's life itself.

The narration of the life of Pachomius stresses one crucial element often missing from the exegesis: "Each should be self-supporting and manage his own affairs" (§11). Contrary to common belief, monasticism is different from others types of communitarianism in so far as it not only does not suppress individuality, but takes it to the spotlight. Communitarian without selves is a historical reality, but it is one that, I have argued, does not stem from

monasticism, being instead a necessary byproduct of Modernity's self-affirmative individualism. From the perspective of the modern autonomous subject, that studied by Renaut or Berlin, if the goal of existence is the self-realization and self-mastery of a self-caused self, how could the other fit in this endeavor? The other is an obstacle to self-realization, unless we negate the self and absolutize the other. That is what modern communitarianism does, only being able to control individualism by eliminating the individual in its entirety. Monasticism, conversely, does not need to eliminate the individual because its very definition of the individual is an anti-individualist one. Contrary to post-Rousseauian communitarianism, monasticism does not confront individualism from the perspective of the individual. It is not one or the other. How is this possible?

More or less non-hierarchical manifestations of communitarianism have indeed existed since the advent of Modernity, but few movements have reached the point of becoming influential, socially-structuring political projects beyond very limited communities. Those capable of transcending the neighborhood have often been top-to-bottom, but one such imposition always leads to undesired consequences. Both models have advantages and weaknesses. The spontaneous finds trouble creating a communal identity capable of uniting peoples with different existential outlooks, as it is frequent for this interpretation of communitarianism to rely on contextual traits shared by its members. The archetype of this bottom-to-no-top model is the hippie

community, which unites like-minded individuals with shared existential goals in a form that refuses to build structure and hierarchy. Various forms of cantons, religious groups, and sects embody this bottom-to-no-top version of modern communitarianism. The key is that, although deeply communal, it is the individual that, attracted by the values and practices of a movement, “shops” for the right community and joins it as a means to fulfilling his own individual—although shared—objectives. Inhabiting the other extreme of the spectrum, a nitidly top-to-bottom communitarianism provides a highly structured alternative to individualism. It is almost too easy to find archetypes of this often hard-regulating, vertical alternative to individualism. Most forms of fascism, nationalism, theocentrism, and communism embody well the coordinates of this paradigm.

Bottom-to-no-top cantonism offers a soft regulation of individualism based on the individuals’ will to share a project with others. Top-to-bottom communitarianism hard-regulated individualism by turning into an individual-less polity. The driving force here is the will of a class, a region, an elite, or some form of group to fight individualism because of its unacceptable moral implications, to the point of considering that it has to be forcefully extirpated from the social body. Incapable or unwilling to do this, hippies and sectarians opt instead for extirpating themselves from society.

By combining the hard-regulating and the soft-regulating forces of Lacedaemonian politics and Mediterranean religious communitarianism,

monasticism offers a sort of non-hierarchical hierarchy; a pragmatical hierarchy of equals in which the position in the ladder does not reflect the true position in the ladder towards the Divine. Moreover, monasticism shows that individualism does not even need to be tamed, controlled, or eliminated after the fact if the individual is defined from the start as an intersubjective endeavor. The monastic self is not a given. It is not a granted site of rights that I can demand. And it is definitely not a property. It is a project in which all individuals together, bound by mortality and the imago Dei ontology, have to trust and rely on each other if they want to overcome the severe limitations of the isolated self. This is a highly ideological principle, as the modern subject proves that a self-sufficient anthropology is conceivable. But it is also a historically determined ideologism derived by natural selection. Why do the Sumerians, Egyptians, or later the Greek poleis become pioneer civilizations? Because mortality is less mortal when shared with others. The hunter is more ambitious and proficient when group-hunting, capable of aspiring to larger preys and higher rates of success. The gatherer is more efficient, the household more fruitful, and the polis more stable if more than one individual collaborate. In theological terms, Judaism contributed greatly to systematizing the ontological lack of the individual, who will always be a mere nothingness while on Earth. The chosen race or people needs to trust not only God, but also each one of its members. Christianity will take this idea and expand it beyond the chosen people and into whoever may want to join it. This is how Saint Pachomius's

communitarianism reveals its full meaning: “Each should be self-supporting and manage his own affairs, but they would provide their share of all their material needs” (§11). The self and the other are nothing compared to the entity of an empire of the greatness of God. But together, they are a bit less nothing. Furthermore, a life in community better follows the biblical precepts:

The men of the *Koinonia*, who have a good way of life together with the excellence of the toils they impose on themselves, are superior to those of men who lead the anchoritic life [. . .] They are also far superior to those anchorites, for they walk in the obligingness the Apostle walked in, as it is written: ‘By the love of the Spirit, be servants of one another in a kindly spirit and in all patience (Gal 5, 13). (*The Boharic Life of Pachomius* §105)

Contrary to the anchoritic life of solitude, Pachomius proposes that the best way to fulfill the divine command of love and service to the other is to obviously have a communal life in which one can experience a real sense of *koinonia*¹²⁴. As in other monastic communities, those founded by Pachomius also required the renunciation to property and the acceptance of a life of poverty. Knowing that not everyone was really willing to commit to the strict rules of the monastery, those who wanted to be part of the community needed to pass a period of trial that strongly reminds us of that of the Essenes, if only more relaxed:

When someone comes to the door of the monastery, wishing to renounce the world and be added to the number of the brothers, he shall not be free to enter [he is tried for a time: he remains outside, he is known by the monastery...] Can he renounce his

¹²⁴ Marilyn Dunn analyzes the pachomian communities and their association with others. She argues that “Far from being a desert phenomenon, Pachomian monasticism was based on an association with villages, towns, the Nile and the fertile land around it” (*The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* 32).

parents and spurn his own possessions? [. . .] The clothes he brought with him shall be given to those in charge of this matter and brought to the storeroom. (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, “Precepts” 49)

After being accepted into the monastery, they only possessed a mat, three garments, a pair of shoes and a coat (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, “Jerome’s Preface” 4). However, they did not have this clothing to their disposal but had to keep it in a common storeroom. As the Fathers of the Church were claiming, coinage was not considered a Christian practice and thus the monks of the Pachomian monasteries were not allowed to have “not even a few coins” (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, “Precepts” 81). The monks also followed a strict ascetic lifestyle although those who were sick were exempted from it during their period of illness: “The sick are sustained with wonderful care and a great abundance of food. The healthy practice a greater abstinence [. . .] All eat together” (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, “Jerome’s Preface” 5). Communal meals were also a practice in these monasteries, a way to share and sit in assembly with other brothers. In fact, punishments consisted of being separated from the other monks during seven days (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, “Precepts and judgements” 1), which coincides with that new conceptualization of the collective practice as something preferable to individual rituals and worship. The negative assessment that Pachomius expresses regarding the anchoritic life makes now sense if we consider this rule. Being alone is used as a negative experience that inevitably takes the community to a point of no return in terms of association and collectivity.

This predominance of the sense of the community over the sense of the individual, although without annihilating it, provides a better understanding of the role of each monk in the community as a whole. Rules, and even more, the law of God must be followed in detriment of the thoughts of one's heart (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, "Precepts and institutes" 17). Monks were instructed not only in good manners, that is, the asceticism, but also on knowledge and wisdom: "There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the scriptures. (One should learn by heart) at least the New Testament and the Psalter" (*Rules of Saint Pachomius*, "Precepts" 140). Emulating the lives of the saints, practicing virtues such as patience, virginity, purity of body, gentleness, humility, and love to others, even enemies, all of them traditional values of the Christian life, are strongly encouraged by Pachomius. He notoriously includes one of the most famous beginnings of Christian literature in his instructions: "My son, listen and be wise, accept the true doctrine, for there are two ways" (*Instructions of Saint Pachomius*, "Instruction concerning a spiteful monk" 1). This is also found in the first part of the first century treatise called *Didache*, whose first part is entitled "The Two Ways" due to the use of these words as a means to initiate the instruction. As previously mentioned, these same words can also be found in the *Community Rule* elaborated by the sectarians at Qumran. But Pachomius was just the beginning of something greater than all its members.

Monastic Interpreters: Macrina the Younger and Basil

An extremely colorful episode in this course is accounted in the 4th century by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Cappadocian Father who apart from being a central theologian in the history of Christianity, came from one of the most representative families of Late Antiquity. Brother of Peter of Sebaste, Naucratus, Saint Macrina, and Saint Basil, Gregory of Nyssa depicts a moment in which the classically trained Basil returns to the family household inflamed with the vanity of the rhetors that Plato and Saint Augustine criticized in their attacks to the first and second sophistic. When Basil arrives to Caesarea, the haughtiness of the cultivated circles has made him forget the humility taught to him by the example of his grandfather's martyrdom, as well as the asceticism of Macrina, his mother, and Macrina the Younger, his sister:

the great Basil, returned after his long period of education, already a practised rhetorician. He was puffed up beyond measure with the pride of oratory and looked down on the local dignitaries, excelling in his own estimation all the men of leading and position. (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of St Macrina* 966b-d)

Although the doctrine of the capital sins was simultaneously being developed by the helenopontian –modern Turkey– Evagrius Ponticus, Macrina was able to immediately discern what was happening to her brother, who had been possessed by pride. Classical education, she thought, leads to the vainglory of those who like the emperors and the ancient wise men think that the individual is enough to grant the verity of our convictions. Guided by what Macrina perceives as delirium of omniscience, Basil seems to have lost touch with reality

and with his home education. Yet Macrina only needs a few words to change Basil's life in a more profound way than any academic could have:

Macrina took him in hand, and with such speed did she draw him also toward the mark of philosophy that he forsook the glories of this world and despised fame gained by speaking, and deserted it for this busy life where one toils with one's hands. His renunciation of property was complete, lest anything should impede the life of virtue. (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of St Macrina* 966b-d)

The example that Macrina had set out for the family household, in which no social or genetic differences between individuals were considered relevant, inspired Basil joining the incipient monastic movement and becoming, we will see, the father of organized coenobitism.

If Basil's *Long Rules* represent a very early culmination of radical communitarianism, just a few decades later Saint Augustine will also author an even more influential *Rule*. Basil had followed Macrina and rejected the loftiness of the educated in a very Socratic-Lacedaemonian manner. Building upon Origen's argumentative progress, Augustine will consolidate the importation of tools, ideas, values, and practices from Antiquity to Christianity. More precisely, he contributes to save some, and abandon other aspects of the ancient world. Towards the end of the 4th century, it is clear that Christianity is an entirely hermetic model replacing Antiquity, but a product of the very same classical world that it succeeded.

Macrina's family shows the intermediate step between classism and total equality. Before frontally abolishing class distinctions, as Basil did, Macrina's household started by dissolving it. She convinced her mother to give up all the

privileges of the rich ladies and embrace a communitarian life setting everyone as an equal member. Eventually, Macrina “adopted a number of girls orphaned during a local famine. What began in the 350s as family asceticism became by 380 a burgeoning monastic community” (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* 431). Macrina was a great influence over Basil and his writings, as it was also Eustathius of Sebaste, Basil’s monastic mentor and, according to Harmless “the real founder of monasticism in the region” (430). The break with his master came after a theological dispute on the nature of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. However, Eustathius’s influence over Basil had already been fruitful. He articulated his vision of monasticism in a collection of treatises called *Asceticon*, whose major part compiles a number of guiding principles on monastic spirituality entitled *Long Rules*. Here, Basil despise the anchoritic life due to its solitary nature, praising instead the goodness of the communal lifestyle:

Community life offers more blessings than can be fully and easily enumerated [. . .] Consider, further, that the Lord by reason of His excessive love for man was not content with merely teaching the word, but, so as to transmit us clearly and exactly the example of humility in the perfection of charity, girded Himself and washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:5). Whom, therefore, will you wash? To whom will you minister? In comparison with whom will you be the lowest, if you live alone? [. . .] So it is an arena for the combat, a good path of progress, continual discipline, and a practicing of the Lord’s commandments, when brethren dwell together in community [. . .] It maintains also the practice characteristic of the saints, of whom it is recorded in the Acts: ‘And all they that believed were together and had all things in common’ (Acts 2:44) and again: ‘And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all

things were in common unto them.’ (*Regular Life*, “The Long Rules” §7)

Communitarianism not only follows the biblical precepts but also it is the only form of life that allows the monk to fulfil the most important instruction: Charity toward one’s neighbor. As he himself clearly states, “He who loves the Lord loves his neighbor in consequence [. . .] he who loves his neighbor fulfills the love he owes to God, for He accepts this favor as shown to Himself” (*Regular Life*, “The Long Rules” §3). The love for the neighbor is not incompatible with asceticism and retirement but rather they are intrinsically intertwined.

Renunciation to the mundane world in order to imitate the life of Jesus implies a self-denial, as Jesus himself instructed. Basil is aware of this: “Could anyone, immersed in these cares, ever fulfill that command: ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself’ (Luke 9:23). For we must deny ourselves and take up the Cross of Christ and thus follow Him. Now, self-denial involves the entire forgetfulness of the past and surrender of one’s will” (*Regular Life*, “The Long Rules” §6). Only by total renunciation of the previous world the monk can commit to his new life devoted to God and the other, subjecting personal preference to the safeguard of his superiors as a sign of showing “no affection for anything in this world” (*Regular Life*, “The Long Rules” §41). Asceticism, which involves dispossession of property, negation of the self and obedience, is one of the means to reach a perfective life. However, life is not complete if one does not practice charity, that is, love for the other, which

implies living in a monastic community with other monks. One that lives alone cannot devote himself to others, so, for Basil, anchoretic life is not the correct path to the true Christian doctrine that encourages love and having all in common.

Although Basil was not the first to found monastic communities in the Cappadocian region, he was the first to systematize the life of the monk who was willing to renounce his previous self and practice a communal life with others with similar desires. The importance of Basil's Rules lies in his unique combination of asceticism and service to others in order to serve God. As Harmless points out, "Basil took care to harness the energies of ascetic communities and fit them better into the structure of the larger church. His monks combined a life of prayer and a life of service to the poor" (429). Basil's rule contemplates the two sides of the coin: The self, subjected to the ascetic discipline, and the other, the one to love.

Augustinian Communitarianism

Few authors display the thoughtfulness to compose a retrospective take on their own corpus. Even fewer have the chance to do it. But sometime around 426 AD, Saint Augustine of Hippo decides that having already written ninety-three works is the perfect occasion for a self-reflective gaze at his own intellectual path. Thus he composes his *Retractationes* or *Retractionum*, which do not entail so much of a recanting, but an honest self-criticism and self-

refinement of his former selves. As such, they could coherently, but somewhat over-literally, be translated as the *Retreatises* or *Retreatments*, since he deals again with old problems. Going back to one's own work, even the most recent one, is a daunting task, but Augustine tackles it in a gesture of honesty infrequent, yet somehow common to many great thinkers, including Plato, Wittgenstein, or, more recently, Hilary Putnam. Always ready to astonish posterity, Augustine would still create six more works after his *Retractationes*, amounting to a total of one hundred books plus letters and other documents.

Why is Augustine's self-critical methodology relevant? Little had he hesitated in the *Confessions* or *Soliloquies*, when deeply censuring his former beliefs and customs was in order. But the exhaustive review, in most case nuance, minor recantation in others, exposes something unexpected: Augustine's careful revision of his own labor leaves out only one of his works, and that is the *Rule* (or *Rules* often summarized under the *Regula Sancti Augustini* taxon). Despite being one of the most influential texts he authored and being followed for hundreds of years by communities across the globe –which makes it, probably, the most biopolitically impacting segment of his corpus–, the *Rule* never makes it to the podium of the saint's top works. Yet the profound investigation of the human soul in the *Confessions*, or the future-proof theopolitical projection of the *City*, acquire their full meaning, revealing themselves as part of a plan to change humanity –starting with the man in the mirror–. The *Rule* is a humble, unassuming existential invitation capable of condensing the depth of

Augustine's ambitious thought into a pocket-sized package. Briefer than a breviary, the fact that some of its versions were indeed extracted from letters further proves the point that Augustine did not see the *Rule* as a piece of literature worth listing in the *Retractationes* recapitulation. The *Rule* was, however, a deceptively simple act of generosity with which Augustine dreamed of guiding through the same existential journey that he had experienced. His major works question the nature and meaning of everything, from God to the self. The *Rule* is the culmination of Augustine's magnanimity, as he invites readers to walk together with the help of a friendly hand. This text, I will argue, offers a privileged look into the Augustinian understanding of the self and the other, the private and the public, the individual and the commons.

The story of Augustine's communitarian aspirations begins right after he learned to question the inherited, Classical worldview that he had acquired during his academic days of youth and intellectual ostentation. As he was beginning to wonder about a new life he decided, together with a group of close friends in Milan around 386 AD, to seek for purpose through a radical existential reinvention. Augustine narrates the story of this irreversible decision in the sixth book of the *Confessions*:

And many of us friends conferring about, and detesting the turbulent turmoils of human life, had debated and now almost resolved on living apart from business and the bustle of men; and this was to be thus obtained; we were to bring whatever we might severally procure, and make one household of all; so that through the truth of our friendship nothing should belong especially to any; but the whole thus derived from all, should as a whole belong to each, and all to all. (*Confessions* VI.14)

A glimpse at the cause and plan of this more than enough to realize, together with William Harmless, that monasticism is far from being the invention of one or two major names. Were Augustine and his circle of friends following the rule of Saint Pachomius? Living a life as conceived by Saint Anthony the Great? Yes, and no. Yes, because, as George Lawless has proven, copies of Anthony's *Life* were read and discussed in the circle formed around Saint Ambrose of Milan during the year 386 (*Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* 10). Those in the orbit of Saint Ambrose are known to have studied and embraced the practices of Anthony, Pachomius, and above all, the model presented in Acts of the Apostles and Saint Paul's letters. So there is, yes indeed, a direct access to the sources. But also no, for the growing weight of coenobitism at the time was also facilitated by the shared origins of the apostolic *koinonia*, which allow for this communitarianism to rise even in case of no contact with the Egyptian elders. George Lawless again attests that "lack of evidence for a monastic code to guide the bishop's clerical community from the date of his episcopal ordination in 395/6 suggests that Acts 4:32-35 constituted, in effect, its basic rule of life" (*Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* 160). This openness of the monastic ideal at its inception explains why, in William Harmless's terms, the new lifestyle is not just the product of one or two authors and their followers. Even the recently converted Augustine had a monumental model to follow in the very foundational texts of the new religion, namely the apostolic relation of Acts, which constitutes a coherent theopolitical system. Augustine's embracing of the

somewhat distant *koinonia* shows that the rise of monasticism is an organic process in which various peoples crescently, dissatisfied with their Graeco-Roman and Mediterranean present, begin to embody a series of practices and ideals unfolding as a reaction against the mainstream beliefs of the late days of Antiquity. As a consequence, Augustine did not just derive his communitarian principles from the literary corpus of Christianity, but also from the practices attributed to the first Christians, who in his eyes were able to break the chains of their present and venture into a new, independent life as a community. What is, then, the inception of the first Augustinian attempt to conform a *koinonia*?

The motivation is clearly stated as caused by their “detesting the turbulent turmoils of human life”. This includes pagan life, as well as relaxed or spurious forms of Christian life –unfortuitously, Augustine wrote dozens of works refuting coeval currents and movements–. I have argued that the success of the apologists, who by the third and fourth century had already managed to reconcile important sectors of public opinion with Christianity, was actually – and paradoxically– responsible for a shift in the Christian lifestyle defined by its adaptation to Roman *habitus*. It is precisely when Christians manage to legitimate their worldview in the eyes of Rome that the very beliefs and practices that had stirred the controversy commence to fade as Christians abandon their primigenial radicalness. George Lawless explains the origins of monasticism through in a similar manner when he affirms that “the excesses of Roman society in the long run became the turbulent ambience which agitated the

emergence and growth of the ascetic and monastic milieu of later time” (*Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* 8). There is nothing random about this judgment, as the perceived turbulence –which is in Lawless and Augustine’s usage a moralizing term– is exactly the term used by Augustine in the *Confessions*. The students of Saint Ambrose and him were increasingly disappointed by the “*turbulentas humanae vitae molestias paene*” and, as a consequence decided to distance themselves from the “*turbis otiose*”. Even today, a turb is a “crowd, swarm, heap; a troop” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “turb”), and the product of such a disorganized gathering is the turbulence censured by Augustine and his friends¹²⁵. Originally confined to express their cosmovision in the secrecy of the catacombs’ walls, as Christianity surfaces and becomes accepted, the original vision inevitably evolves. According to more rigorist interpreters, it does not only change; it melts away.

From this perspective, the crescent intermingling between the doctrine of the *ecclesia primitiva* and the outside world is the source of most of the sects

¹²⁵ Susan Wessel’s extraordinary *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* carefully delineates two attitudes towards the turbulent world of passions. The negative, ascetic one is defined as: “Coming to terms with this darker side of the passions was the work of the monks and nuns who practiced a common asceticism in the monasteries and nunneries beginning in the fourth century. Similarly for the men and women who withdrew to the farthest reaches of the desert to practice a solitary asceticism from as early as the third century. They too were troubled by the moral implications of an inner turmoil that must have seemed like the unending chatter of turbulent emotions” (5). The affirmative reading of passion is the opportunity that suffering brings to mankind, as it becomes an instance in which two or more can become one through a sharing of pain and suffering. This shared or mutual feeling, too, is a central element of monasticism.

and heresies to which Augustine spent much of his time refuting¹²⁶. Each one of those movements can be explained through the application of external principles or concepts to the inner core of Christianity, or vice versa. Apart from all the specific exegetical divergences of the various heresies, this derive also includes general attitudes such as the remission of the radical, primitive koinonia, the acceptance of property, the remission of proselytism, as well as the increasing syncretism both in the realm of the theological and the political. In its most extreme case, some Christians started to consider that one of the original doctrinal incommensurabilities between the two paradigms, the divinity of the emperor, could perhaps be tolerated and reduced to a cultural discrepancy. Others, including the proponents of monasticism that will abandon the cities—or, more precisely, the urban lifestyle, as one can become a *monachos* within the walls of the earthly city— towards 250 AD, will set forth a paradigm shift that will eventually elevate the radicalness of the primitive, apostolic koinonia to the category of world system. Such is the birth of the monastic self.

On our way towards the *Rule*, the *Retractationes* constitute a privileged paramount from which this renunciation can be observed as a key step in

¹²⁶ To the point that he feels the need to justify his negative labor by highlighting the affirmative side of it: “Sed ne quisquam nos aliena tantum redarguisse, non autem nostra asseruisse reprehenderet, id agit pars altera operis huius, quae libris duodecim continetur, quamquam, ubi opus est, et in prioribus decem quae nostra sunt asseramus, et in duodecim posterioribus redarguamus adversa” (*Retractationes* II.43.2) He says this so that he cannot be reprehended for his commitment to both refuting the dialectical oponents and affirming the Christian outlook.

Augustine's development. As he comments the motives that lead him to author his first work, *Contra academicos*, he remembers that he had written his initiation book "Cum ergo reliquissem vel quae adeptus fueram in cupiditatibus huius mundi vel quae adipisci volebam, et me ad christianae vitae otium contulissem," that is, "Having then abandoned all I had desired and obtained in this world, and having devoted myself to the *otium* of Christian life" (*Retractationes*, I.1; my translation). I chose not to translate the word *otium* because we run the risk of reducing it to "free time," "absence of labor," or of omitting it altogether. Although of uncertain origin, the concept of *otium* has been studied widely and it is legitimately translated as "leisure," "freedom from business," or even "peace". Different inflections of *otium* are still present in many Romance languages, from Spanish "ocio," Italian "ozio," Portuguese "ócio," to Catalan "oci". Its antonym, *negotium*, is even more known and widespread, including Indo-European languages beyond the Romance branch. Ever so present in the idea of "negotiation," it is even operative in English via cultisms such as "negocyc" or "negoce". But *Negotium* is more than just the absence of the absence of work. The problem is nitidly delineated by this simple conceit: the definition of *otium* as that which is not business incurs in a conceptually regressive leap, as we define a words antonym using other antonym.

Understanding the contraposition between worldly and Christian life is essential if we aspire to grasp the radicalness of Augustine's communitarian mission, which is much more than a mere renunciation to the world. If business,

or *negotium*, is that which is *nec otium*, we find ourselves recursively defining it as businessless. “Busy” – Old and Middle German *bison* and *bisnen*, “to run around wildly, to bolt (especially of cattle)” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “busy”)– refers to a plenitude, a presence that we associate with the timely occupation of work and habit. That is why we ought not talk to someone who is busy –full of some other occupation–, or enter a busy venue –full of some other presence–. Contrarily, the base term, *otium*, is defined in the Augustinian example as a double negative, that is, as that which its antonym is not. The natural consequence of this displacement is the loss of *otium* affirmative entity. But Augustine is perfectly aware of this forgotten dimension of life. When he says that he started writing as he distanced himself from the world of consuetudinary affairs and embraced the particular *otium* of Christian life, he is not confessing any sort of sloth –which he does many times in many other places, by the way–. Neither is he despising the value of work and effort in favor of a businessless existence. What he does, in fact, is demurring to accept the meaning of life and work that his fellow Romans, pagans and Christians alike, had embraced in the last four hundred years. A form of life, a *habitus*, which posed differences in the quality of human souls, to the point of naturally justifying the subjection of many and the divinization of one. A Lebensform, too, which started to more closely resemble the official uses and customs that Christ’s existential magisterium had questioned than those of Christ himself.

The Augustinian *otium* is the affirmation that not all work is the same. The demonstration of a businessless form of occupation. A life of effort, work and labor, that does not serve the earthly ideals of material –and fameful– accumulation. That is why, seizing the opportunity to change his ways inside out, the young Augustine self-portrayed in the sixth chapter of the *Confessions* chooses to abandon both *otium* and *negotium*, those of the century, in order to embrace a different existential path. By instituting an apostolic manner of living, the early Augustinian circle that the *Confessions* chronicles had already decided to “firmaveramus remoti a turbis otiose vivere, id otium sic moliti,” resolving not to be a part of the turbulent “otiose” living and forsaking the daily “otium” and bustle of society. It is not that Augustine leaves the secular business behind only to venture into a life of leisure. He and his friends renounce to both *negotium* and *otium* in the commonly accepted rendering. That is so because they embrace the Christian *negotium*, which necessarily begins by forswearing the most precious passions of their secular counterparts: private property and personal fame.

The Lacedaemonian and Essenian substratum arises swiftly as Augustine details the foundational principles of his first, experimental koinonia:

conferremus in medium unamque rem familiarem conflaremus ex omnibus, ut per amicitiae sinceritatem non esset aliud huius et aliud illius, sed quod ex cunctis fieret unum, et universum singulorum esset et omnia omnium, cum videremur nobis esse posse decem ferme homines in eadem societate essentque inter nos praedivites. (*Confessions* VI.14)

we were to bring whatever we might severally procure, and make one household of all; so that through the truth of our friendship nothing should belong especially to any; but the whole thus derived from all, should as a whole belong to each, and all to all.
(*Confessions* VI.14)

The terminology present in this passage lays somewhere between the *Vetus Latina* and the *Vulgata*, and constitutes an apt, extremely influential translation of the koine terms employed in Acts of the Apostles and the works of the Desert Elders. The three problems of property, the commons, and the singular appear as one coherent discussion.

Despite the lack of projection and eventual failure of Augustine's initial communitarian endeavor, the communalization of property appears as an unquestionable foundation of the intersubjective. The circle of friends is expected to put their properties, and all they may produce, in the medium effectively building "unamque rem familiarem conflaremus ex omnibus," a single familiar entity incorporating the contributions of all individual members. Derived from the apostolic understanding of the common-self relations, this commonality needs both the individual and the intersubjective. At this point in Augustine's development, the bond is not based on interest, but on a sort of Aristotelian friendship. This force makes that "per amicitiae sinceritatem non esset aliud huius et aliud illius," through the bond of friendship, they will not say that this is mine and this is yours, but only all is ours. This all for all principle will later in his lifetime be refined into what I consider to be Augustine's most decisive contribution to the history of intersubjectivity: the bond, not just of friendship, but of *unanimity* and *concord*. Given the theological principle of the

Fall and the *imago Dei*, Augustine is convinced that our personal differences are what make us one. It is because we are individual and unique that the essential fact of mankind's shared mortality shines its light on the meaning of existence. Consequently, a theopolitical theory of the common is imperative to overcome our mortal insufficiency. A commonality, however, capable of fostering the personal relationship with our own mortality and the Creator's gifts. Swiftly erasing individualism and panpsychism at once, Augustine designs a communalization of life –and property– built upon the truly important communalization of the soul –*una-anima*– and the heart –*con-cordia*–. Not the single soul of panpsychism, but a communalized soul.

This conception of the selfness-otherness equilibrium allows for an infrequent preservation of both dimensions, whereas most theopolitical endeavors of Antiquity and Modernity tend to favor one or the other, to the point of suppression. There is as little room for the commons in modern individualism as there is for the individual in many, old and new, communitarian projects. Against this, Augustine conceives a community of souls and hearts that erects a singleness without erasing the individuality of its members. Quite the contrary, it is an understanding of the commons based on the radical dignity of the individual person –and all persons are, by *imago Dei* definition, equal (or capable of being equal, as humanists such as Pico della Mirandola will nuance) in the eyes of the Creator–. That is exactly what Augustine legates in his *Rules*.

Towards the *Rule*

When I said that the *Rule*, formally known as the *Regula Sancti Augustini*, was missing from Augustine's self-reflective account in the *Retractationes*, I meant that the three to nine documents that have been identified with the *Rule* were absent. Many times did the saint offer existential advice to his friends, neighbors, and even enemies, but the deliberate omission in the *Retractationes* indicates that Augustine did not regard those as a finished, publishable piece of work. In his crucial study, George Lawless asks the pertinent question "is it legitimate to ask how Augustine could regard the *Rule* as a composition destined for publication in the same manner as his other writings?" (*Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* 128). According to this expert, its absence is justified by the fact that "The *Rule* is, after all, basically a domestic document which was designed for a single house" (128). We learned that Pachomius had not had any intention whatsoever to establish a community, being those gathering around him who instigated the desire and need to organize themselves around the master. Likewise, in Augustine's *Rule* "there is no provision in the text for establishing other foundations and no mention of any connection with any other monastery" (128). This domestic, *oikonomic*, sense of the Augustinian endeavor is precisely the reason why Giorgio Agamben has been able to demonstrate that Christians were "i primi uomini integralmente economici" (*Il regno e la gloria* 38). The first to devise a comprehensive view of theopolitical governance of existence. Thus, domestic should not be read as a limitation of

the *Rule's* political impact. Quite the contrary, it most effectively paves the way towards the oikonomization of the Mediterranean that would eventually lead to the medieval worldview of the *Corpus Mysticum*, the body theopolitic, as the protagonist of a *universitas Christiana* dreaming to materialize the heavenly polis of the *City*. The fact that we have to work with material extracted from letters and other documents suggests that what we call the *Rule* is, in fact, Augustine's final legacy. An open ended legacy, too.

How do we, then, know what the *Rule* is? Even though it is a most influential text in the history of the religious orders, its lay nature is proven by the fact that, although it has shaped the existence of millions of people through the ages, the scholarly debate has preferred to focus on other Augustinian texts. Different versions have been followed and practices for over fifteen hundred years, paying more attention to the lively *habitus* there presented than to the genesis and formation of the text itself. Then, ages later, the decade of 1980 brought a profound renovation of our understanding of the *Rule*. The monumental effort of Luc Verheijen, who continued his 1967 *Règle de Saint Augustin* in the form of *Nonvelle approche de la Règle de Saint Augustin*. Verheijen's colossal achievement, he studied three hundred and seventeen texts, eventually allowed Tarsicius J. Van Bavel (*The Rule of Saint Augustine*) and George Lawless (*Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule*) to elaborate some of the works that, to this day, sum the scholarship on the Augustinian *Rule*, or *Rules*.

The paleographical component of the *Rule* has been demarcated by Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, whose propaedeutical *The Rule of Saint Augustine* lists the nine documents that may legitimately fall under the *Rule* taxon. Following Verheijen's invaluable contributions, Van Bavel studies three main texts, the *Regularis informatio*, the *Praeceptum*, and the *Ordo monasterii* (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* 3). Together to these pieces, George Lawless selects nine taxa derived from Luc Verheijen's labor: The *Ordo monasterii*, the *Praeceptum*, the extended *Praeceptum longius*, and the later *Regula recepta*; to which he adds the five female rules, including the *Obiurgatio*, *Regularis informatio*, the *Epistula longior*, the *Ordo monasterii feminis datus*, completed by the *Epistula longissima* (*Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* 65-72). The materiality of the text, we will see, simultaneously causes confusion and renders this work one of the most unique texts of the Late Ancient period.

Praised theologian, political thinker, and rhetor, I must add with George Lawless that "Augustine's persevering response to a monastic calling, as he conceived of it in his own terms and in his daily life, is possibly the most underrated facet of his personality" (*Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* 161). But Augustine's communitarian entrepreneurship was not always the success story that we have come to accept. His experience in Milan was, in fact, quite a disastrous one. An experiment that impelled him to profoundly review the possibilities and limitations of monasticism in the increasingly complex world of the late fourth century. Some of the issues arisen during this initial adventure

will take him to places where Plato and the Spartans had been for a long time, including the need to determine the role of the individual, the meaning of the common, and even the value of personal bonds. He recounts, “But when we began to consider whether the wives, which some of us already had, others hoped to have, would allow this, all that plan, which was being so well moulded, fell to pieces in our hands, was utterly dashed and cast aside” (*Confessions* VI.14). Augustine’s first communitarian experiment is, then, one driven by noble will, but not by theoretical knowledge. The biblical model was there waiting to be interpreted and adapted to the new world, but a deeper understanding of why the apostolic koinonia had been conceived in its specific coordinates was imperative for Augustine to grasp the Christian meaning of the commons. The new koinon is not just asceticism and renunciation, it involves the interruption of a concept of humanity and the establishment of a new one articulated around a renewed concept of love. George Lawless refers to this transitional period explaining that “Surrender of sexuality, property, and power was an outcome of Augustine’s restless search for another lifestyle during his two unsettled years as a professor of rhetoric at Milan. And once he found this lifestyle, he had to share it with others” (*Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* 155). Eleven or twelve years, the time between his arrival to Milan around 385 and the production of the *Rule* in 397, is how long it took this master to understand such a seemingly simple matter. When he did arrive at a clear vision about what the Christian koinon meant, though, it was for good. His interpretation of the

Christian community sets forth a fresh historical period articulated by a new concept of what it means to be human. Although the project would never be concluded by the saint, it is fair to say that he took the teachings of the Classical world, the Apostles, Anthony and Pachomius and synthesized them into the first systematic presentation of the monastic subject.

Ruling the Monastic Subject

The *Rule* is a self-explanatory text. Its purpose is clearly stated in the first of the principles it formulates when Augustine paraphrases the apostolic koinonia: “Before all else, live together in harmony (Ps. 67:7), being of one mind and one heart (Acts 4:32) on the way to God” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §1.2). I said it was the first principle, but the aforementioned passage in fact constitutes the second article, being the prelude one a simple but vehement exhortation to the communalization of existence. After that, a series of principles delineate Augustine’s mature understanding of the self and the commons.

Tarsicius Van Bavel puts it clearly when, in regards to the sources of the Augustinian *Rule*, he claims that “The fundamental ideas of the Rule are built up around the ideal of the Jerusalem community from Acts 4:31-35. Love and community here have pride of place: a good community life is nothing other than the practice of love” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §7-8). The same apostolic koinonia that had been modeled in dialogue with the Hellenistic and Judaic

models of communitarianism available during the first century. As the Jerusalem koinonia it imitates, the Augustinian koinon is part Platonist, part Qumranic, and part Lacedaemonian. Or, more accurately, it is a product of the same environment that produced those movements.

All the essential components from the apostolic koinonia are present here: property, commonality, proportionality, mutual service, shared responsibility, generosity, obedience, and unanimity in love. The concomitances between Acts of the Apostles, the Qumranic mandates, or the Spartan law reach the point of literality when Augustine focuses on the ever essential problem of property: “Among you there can be no question of personal property. Rather, take care that you share everything in common [. . .] each person should be given what he personally needs” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §1.3). Once again, this is not the rejection of private property as an economic model per se. Like his predecessors in Greece, Rome, Egypt, or Judea, Augustine bans private property because as an economic system it relies on a paradigm of subjectivity that is diametrically opposed to the monastic subject that he dreams of creating. I have said that the *Rule* generalizes the findings of the *Confessions*, turning Augustine’s own transformation into a feasible model for other humans to follow as they all, together, follow the colossal example of Jesus. But it may very well be said that the *Confessions* had just been a partial, still incomplete presentation of the necessarily communal subject towards which Augustine always strived. The ultimate finding is the exhortation to mutual service and

unconditional love found in the *Rule*. The individual process of discovery of the *Confessions* is not the original form of a later developed communal subject, but an individualized instance of the initial discovery as Augustine joins the ranks of Christianity: The search for the communal subject from his early days in Milan.

On top of these aspects common to all communitarian projects of Antiquity, Augustine emphasizes particularly the radicalness of the existential leap that monks are about to take, devoting several articles to the incommensurability between their past lives and the new one. Almost at the initium of the document, he reminds everyone, the wealthy and the humble, that they are renouncing to claim property over the two central elements of the worldly affairs: material possessions and personal fame. Becoming a monk means that “Those who owned possessions in the world should readily agree that, from the moment they enter the religious life, these things become the property of the community” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §1.4). Coherently, but radically, Augustine’s social leveling applies both ways, for “those who did not have possessions ought not to strive in the religious community for what they could not obtain outside of it” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §1.5)¹²⁷. The cession

¹²⁷ Quoting the memorable passage in 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Augustine expands this idea in the mighty *City of God*: “For the love of money is the root of all evil” [. . .] Like a good servant, Job counted the will of his Lord his great possession [. . .] But as to those feeblers spirits who, though they cannot be said to prefer earthly possessions to Christ, do yet cleave to them with a somewhat immoderate attachment, they have discovered by the pain of losing these things how much they were sinning in loving them [. . .] For when the apostle says, “They that will be rich fall into temptation,” and so on, what he blames in riches is not the possession of them, but the desire of them [. . .] They who were making such a use of their property [rich in

of properties –or, in terms that Esposito and Rousseau could maybe hold dear, the *disappropriation* of the original appropriation– is central, but it is just half of the profound redefinition which future monks undergo as they join the community. Even more difficult than surrendering the things we own is to cede the most intimate property, which is that of the self.

The materiality of the Augustinian *Rule's* text is identical for both men and women, the only difference being the transposition of the grammatical gender required by the Latin language. According to Lawless, this is not just a *rara avis*; it is a philosophical hapax, as, “Augustine’s Rule stands alone, so far as I am aware, in the entire history of western monasticism as the single legislative text which does double duty since it met the needs of both men and women” (*Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* 156). Little needs to be added to the hypothesis that Augustine was ready to overcome the cultural differences –the natural ones are part of the Creation, and good as such– between men and women constructed by the Ancient world. These cultural constructs had not been foreign to him, but the twelve-year period in which his understanding of monasticism matures prepares him to pose that, if women and men are different, they are identical in the eyes of the Lord. As such, a comprehensive theory of the subject must be capable of stressing the shared ground and

good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate] have been consoled for light losses by great gains, and have had more pleasure in those possessions which they have securely laid past, by freely giving them away, than grief in those which they entirely lost by an anxious and selfish hoarding of them [. . .] our Paulinus, bishop of Nola, who voluntarily abandoned vast wealth and became quite poor, though abundantly rich in holiness (*City of God* I.10).

homogenizing the unity across all souls. Augustine did not venture to apply this to the entire human species, but he did indeed essay this in the experimental field of monasticism. That is exactly why I have said that, because of its atypical conditions, the monastic enterprise constituted a privileged field for philosophical innovations. By devising the nature of the monastic subject, male and female alike, Augustine was effectively defining a new paradigm of subjectivity. This is what I have referred to as the monastic self.

The Augustinian *Rule* is, above all, a theopolitical machine producing subjectivities. The truly heroic disappropriation is that of the illusion of our own possession. The chiasmic exposition continues advising the humble: “Nor should they give themselves airs because they now find themselves in the company of people whom they would not have ventured to approach before” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §1.6). And the wealthy, “let those who appear to have had some standing in the world not look down upon their brothers” (§1.7).

Benjamin Constant and most modern thinkers identify the individualistic subject of Modernity with an awareness of individual dignity. A dignity that, not just as citizens, but as members of the species, we are granted by natural law. Although useful, this hermetism between a premodern and a modern paradigm of subjectivity ultimately becomes a moot distinction. What I have tried to prove, instead, is that the range of theories of the subject was present before and after the alleged dawn of Modernity. The difference is that while the definition of the self was not as stable in Antiquity, the paradigm of the

autonomous subject becomes the axiomatic perspective of Modernity. This does not mean that it is invulnerable or immutable, but that the strength it acquired has legitimated it to present itself as a natural given. Against this, Saint Augustine, who was very well aware of the existence of a spectrum of subjectivities with which the self had to deal, realizes in his mature stage that only by excluding the individualistic pulsions of the self can one build a community. Few have put it more beautifully than Miles Hollingworth, whose *Pilgrim City* proves that the Augustinian political ideas “become the preeminent alternative to the kinds of moral and political arguments that do not take full account of a man’s limitations as a rational creature” (208). Proving that there is no place for escapism in the monastic theopolitical project, he states that to embrace this finitude is to “die to their old lives in the actual present” (208). Every other attempt to strengthen the communal after the fact, when the individualistic individuals have joined or constituted it, will reveal itself futile. That is why he requires to abandon our former selves upfront.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ We can interpret Van Bavel’s reading of the *Rule* in these terms when he says in a valuable fragment that “the almost total absence of emphasis on ‘asceticism’: that is, leading an ascetical life in the material sense by denying oneself food and drink, or by self-chastisement. The accent shifts more to life in community as a victory over self-seeking. What the Rule asks is that attention should be directed to the upbuilding of relationships of love. Pachomius, Basil and Augustine all laid great stress on community life. The reason for this was that they were convinced that the orientation to one’s own self and individualism formed the greatest obstacle to the realization of the gospel. For them the first community of Jerusalem plays the role of an ancient dream which becomes an ideal for the present and for the future. We could characterize the Rule of Augustine as a call to the evangelical equality of all people. It voices the Christian demand to bring all men and women into full community. At the same time it sounds an implicit protest against inequality in a society which is so clearly marked by possessiveness, pride and power. According to Augustine, therefore, a monastic community

There is a reason why I have insistently talked about communitarianism over asceticism and mortification. Asceticism is just one of the two dimensions of the *imitatio Dei* after the remission of the persecutions. When martyrdom ceases to be a socially imposed exit, Christians need to find an alternative way to experience their own version of the Passion. Asceticism is just one of these paths since, as Susan Wessel has proven, the care of the other and the special attention to the one in need is the strongest affirmation of the Christian endeavor. And a life in common is the surest path to *compassion*, that is, to a passion shared with the other¹²⁹. The production of subjectivity in the *Rule* becomes the central motive when Augustine explains his own methodology in a deeply metaliterary gesture not unlike his reflections in the *Soliloquies*: “love puts the interests of the community before personal advantage, and not the

should offer an alternative by striving to build up a community that is not motivated by possessiveness, pride and power, but by love for one another” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* 7-8).

¹²⁹ “That Christ had suffered ‘in himself’ evoked the mingling (‘synkrisis’) not only of the divine and human natures in Christ but also of the divine and the human between Christ and human beings. The fluid boundaries between the divine and the human suggested that the suffering Christ endured on the cross and elsewhere happened both to his human nature apart from God and to the mixture of God and man. The significance of Christ having modeled our abandonment in every part of him lay in the experience of human suffering he acquired” (*Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity*, “The suffering Christ” 63). Regarding the role of suffering as an opportunity for love and humanization, Susan Wessel has written a moving analysis of the utmost extreme condition: “We have seen that Gregory Nazianzen thought the lepers’ experience of suffering made them uniquely suited to feeling compassion for all the failings of the human condition. With their broken bodies, they were similar to Christ, who, in becoming a human being, ‘bore our weakness, humbled himself to the point [of assuming] our lump, became poor in this flesh and earthly tabernacle for us, felt distress and suffered pain [‘malakistheenai’] for us that we might become rich in divinity [. . .] Like the lepers, Christ was weak, humble, poor, and suffering” (*Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity*, “The suffering Christ” 60-61). Another great study of the central role of passion is Erich Auerbach’s *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*.

other way around” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §5.2). Asceticism, the negation of individualistic pulsions, is a necessary step, but not a goal. The abolition, or more precisely the dislegitimation of the subjectivity associated with this economic model, of private property is a radical one, but it also just a step instead of a goal in itself. The change of worldview is. And changing the subject is the only way to get there.

V

THE OTHER IS THE SELF

Theopolis. The Body of the World

Eighteen days before passing away, Napoleon Bonaparte writes one of his illuminating letters of captivity in Sainte-Hélène. One of the most poignant *récits de captivité*, entitled “Conseils de Napoléon a son fils. 17 avril 1821,” reveals an often forgotten dimension of his worldview, as he confides to the most intimate of interlocutors that “Les idées religieuses ont encore plus d’empire que ne croient certains philosophes; elles peuvent rendre de grands services à l’humanité” (“*Correspondance de Napoléon I. Oeuvres de Napoléon I. A Sainte-Hélène*, XXXII.378). This letter, dictated just one week before certifying his testament, reveals Napoleon’s late theopolitical principles. It explains, as well, some of the most controversial decisions through which he had disappointed his former revolutionary fellows, including the concessions in education made to the Church, from the 1801 Concordat to the befriending attempts of his last days. Exactly when he is dictating his last letters, the great emperor requests to die within the Church.

Religious ideas have, despite of what philosophers may say, great “empire”. Authority, power, control... Empire. The theological still, luckily we still have the word, *imperates*. The grandiose prince of the political, Napoleon Bonaparte, reminds his own son, the King of Rome Napoleon II, that the political alone, when deprived from the theological, may not be enough. Not even for him. In this letter, Napoleon not only accepts the religious foundation of modern politics, but also recognizes that these religious ideas can still be of

great service to “l’humanité”. The question, though remains, is the religious necessary because of its intrinsic service to mankind, or because it is the element missing from Napoleon’s perfect plan to control the entire theopolitical spectrum?

Napoleon’s récit addresses his only fully legitimate son, who died when he was just twenty-one years and could never pursue his father’s words in the new political context. But Napoleon’s nephew, Napoleon III did listen to his uncle’s words, which profoundly impacted the Constitution of 1848 signed when he was still known as Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, president of the Second Republic of France. 1848 represents the return of the idiosyncratic views on religion favored by some of the most radical members of the Robespierre-circle. Against the partisans of mere dechristianization, the leading Montagnards propose a new religion destined to perfect the revolutionary endeavor and serve the new nation. Paradoxically, the same new body politic of the Revolution conceived by most as the superation of the theological had just become the confirmation of the theopolitical nature of the modern national state. The same will happen in England, Germany, Spain, and even Italy. But, how did we arrive at the theopolitical modern state?

Following the Spartan laws of Lycurgus, the constitutional dreams of Plato in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, and the radical communitarian endeavors of emerged during the time of the Second Temple, monasticism started as a modest attempt at creating small regulated communities. Anthony and the

desert elders were in fact thinking of individual or almost individual hermitages from which they could start a dialogue with God without having to combat the tumultuous bustle of society. Even Pachomius, author of the first regulated community, wanted to remain in isolation when others started to gather around him. Anthony had transcended his own original plan by giving others advice and support that helped them redefine their lives. Pachomius went even further when he composed the first instructions for a regulated community. But it was Basil who, comparing the advantages and weaknesses of the solitary and communal paradigms, wrote the most ardent defense of a life shared with others. Anchoritism would never cease to fascinate religious and pagan thinkers, but Basil's praise of coenobitism went a long way in shaping the future political coordinates of the new religion. By the time when Augustine writes his various rules, Christianity will have confidently sided with communitarianism. Only that their new social role had revealed the limitations of the primigenial monastic model inherited from the Essenes and the Greek poleis, originally conceived as mostly secluded independent body politics. After the fourth century, Christianity will concentrate on devising how to universalize the local principles of house and the city. This is how the humble groups of Essenes and later monks will pave the way to the creation of ecumenical, globalizing systems of world theopolitics.

The Essenes devised a new interpretation of the Jewish Temple that allowed for a less material, more abstract formulation of what constitutes the

electedness of the chosen people. The temple was not just anymore the physical space found in Jerusalem, but an invitation to restoring the primigenial covenant and, with it, the foundational Lebensform of the first Abrahamic peoples. This defiant interpretation was not always received well, as Christianity's broadening of the Essenian principles also would not. One of the essential apologists writing in the second and third centuries, Tertullian, was very well aware of the stakes:

This assembly of the Christians may properly be called illegal, if indeed it is like the illegal gatherings; it may properly be condemned, if needed it is not dissimilar to outlawed association, (that is to say) if anyone brings charges against it on the same grounds by which complaints are leveled against the factious clubs. To whose injury have we ever come together? This is how we are when assembled and when apart, all together and singly; we harm no one, afflict no one. When decent and good people assemble together, when the pious and the chaste congregate, it should not be called a faction, but a *curia*. (*Apologeticum* 39.16)¹³⁰

The community, the *koinonia*, defies the theopolitical unity of the Roman Empire to the point of being considered “*illicita*”. As opposed to many other cults, including Judaism at times, tolerated by the powers that be, Christianity was not regarded as a *religion licita*. In this essay, I have argued that this was due to the divergent views on property, authority, family, and citizenship.

¹³⁰ Most times I have only quoted Tertullian's *Apologeticum* in English, as the translation by Sidney Thelwall is the one included in the seminal volume edited by Arthur Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene fathers. Translations of the writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325*. (Buffalo, The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1896). Specifically, I have quoted the third of ten volumes, entitled: *Volume III. Latin Christianity: Its founder, Tertullian. I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*. In this case, since the Latin terminology was key to the argumentation, I quoted from L. Michael White's *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture. II: Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in its Environment*, who provides a bilingual edition of many essential fragments.

Despite of what the idealized depictions of Antiquity keep trying convey, this confrontation was not just in the imaginations of the Christians. In fact, the somewhat asystematic persecution of the first two hundred and fifty years became serious enough to motivate a paradigm change not unlike that experienced by Judaism after the Jewish Wars and the eventual fall of the Temple. For Christians, who did not have a Jerusalem to be ravaged, the end of the third century marked a quick but profound redefinition of their worldview that by the time of Constantine allowed them to gain control over the theopolitical machine of the Empire. I have argued that this had to do with Christianity's refusal to becoming an ancillary –private– religion, risking it all by presenting themselves as a comprehensive alternative to the existing powers, religious and political. This happens exactly when the apologetic phase of the first centuries leaves way to the affirmative production of a worldview, which I have claimed to be intimately related to the rise of monasticism as an overarching paradigm of the cosmos, the polis, and the self.

Where did this new cosmovision come from? Abraham, Greece, Judea, and Egypt, whose body politics where universalized by the first Christians. Of the Lacedaemonian city, Benjamin Constant said that for many of the communitarian thinkers of his time, “Sparta’s combination of republican forms and the same enslavement of individuals. That they appeared to him to be the ideal of a perfect republic” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 7). What is important here is how they are referring to the honorable

city of the Peloponnese as a political convent. I think he is right, too, when

Constant remembers:

I know that some writers have claimed to detect traces of it among some ancient peoples, in the republic of Sparta, for example, or among our ancestors the Gauls; but this is wrong. What Sparta had was in no way a representative government –it was a *monastic aristocracy* [. . .] Their authority was as much religious as political; Thus their power, far from being simply a barrier against tyranny, sometimes itself became an intolerable tyranny. This was true of all the magistrates in the ancient republics, including ones selected by the people. (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 1)

Sparta is a particularly visible theopolitical body. A monastic aristocracy that

Christians will attempt to universalize. A key fragment from Xenophon’s

Constitution of the Lacedaemonians will help me make the case for this universalizing

process:

The law by which Lycurgus encouraged the practice of virtue up to old age is another excellent measure in my opinion. By requiring men to face the ordeal of election to the Council of Elders near the end of life, he prevented neglect of high principles even in old age [. . .] He observed that where the cult of virtue is left to voluntary effort, the virtuous are not strong enough to increase the fame of their fatherland. *So he compelled all men at Sparta to practise all the virtues in public life. And therefore, just as private individuals differ from one another in virtue according as they practise or neglect it, so Sparta, as a matter of course, surpasses all other states in virtue, because she alone makes a public duty of gentlemanly conduct. For was not this too a noble rule of his, that whereas other states punish only for wrong done to one’s neighbour, he inflicted penalties no less severe on any who openly neglected to live as good a life as possible?* For he believed, it seems, that enslavement, fraud, robbery, are crimes that injure only the victims of them; but the wicked man and the coward are traitors to the *whole body politic*. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* X.1-9; emphasis added) ¹³¹

¹³¹ We could translate it literally as “each and every one of them”. Strong’s seminal study of the New Testament shows that the term is particularly prominent in Acts of the Apostles and

The central term, δημοσία (gr. *dēmosia*), is translated as “public life”. This substance of the people, or being in the community, condenses the main reason why I have invited us to read the Spartan constitution as an available model for monasticism: What matters is the body politic, the individual *in* the group. The other key concept, πάνταςπάσας (gr. *pantaspasas*), is a peculiar modifier used several times in the New Testament to the individuality of the member of a group. It is all about the community, but the community is all about the individual. Towards the end of Xenophon’s fragment, he wonders why, despite being praised by almost all political thinkers, no other body politics has chosen to imitate the lifestyle of the Lacedaemonians:

And he laid on the people the duty of practising the whole virtue of a citizen as a necessity irresistible. For to all who satisfied the requirements of his code he gave equal rights of citizenship, without regard to bodily infirmity or want of money [. . .] it is most astonishing that all men praise such institutions, but no state chooses to imitate them. (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* X.1-9)

Restricted to select social sectors, the radical equality boasted by the spartiates constituted the highest privilege of being, not superior, but equal to others. This was a limitation to the Spartan system that no other poleis nor religious group managed to overcome. Xenophon cannot understand why others have not chosen to imitate the illustrious Lacedaemonian constitution. In this dissertation, I have argued that, except for a few unfortunate examples, analogous body politics were only attempted in the field of the religious

the Gospels: “2. with nouns which have the article, all the, the whole [. . .] with a plural, all (the totality of the persons or things designated by the noun)” (*Strongs NT 3965* πᾶς).

communities. During the Second Temple period and beyond, the political imitation of Sparta is rendered irrelevant, but the values of communitarianism and sacrifice for the body politic became even more important than ever. This is how, even if not under direct genetic influence, the various communitarian projects of Late Antiquity share strikingly resembling purposes and manifestations. Ultimately, I have argued that monasticism's universalization of the communitarian and egalitarian values of Sparta and the Qumran communities allowed the primitive ecclesia to overcome the restricting nature of the ancient body politics. As such, the adherents of monasticism see themselves as the universalizers of the polis –Sparta– and the covenant –Second Temple.

Athens and Rome had seen the limiting nature of the independent body politics in the realm of economy and war, but it is with Christians that they begin to be seen as a theopolitical limitation. As an anthropological obstacle, too, for it prevents freedom and equality to be conceived equally for all. As a result of Christ's ministry and the newly developed theological doctrine, Christianity is impelled to shatter the ancient boundaries of the national, religious covenant, family, and status. In this regard, Paul A. Rahe has argued in *The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy*:

For those within the Lacedaemonian citizen body, the social and economic arrangements were far more egalitarian than any known elsewhere in Greece [. . .] As a polis that placed greater emphasis on fostering civic virtue than did any other community in Hellas, Sparta was –even by Greek standards– extremely aristocratic. At the same time, however, Lacedaemon was a

republic. Ultimately, she referred all fundamental decisions to a popular assembly, and she selected her most powerful magistrates from the entire citizen body by a procedure akin to the lot. In this respect, she was –by those same Greek standards– extraordinarily democratic. (60)

The limitations imposed by the “within” of this explanation are almost unsurmountable, for it effectively restricts the virtues of Sparta –both its rights and severe moral expectations– to the reduced group of the social elite, or spartiates. I do believe, though, that if one can contextualize such a major fact, there is some truth to the otherwise problematic “measurement” of liberty across all the ancient poleis. Spartans, the selected ones at least, were part of a radical body politic of full commitment to each other. But I have not presented Sparta as the ultimate model, nor something anyone would want to dream to revive today, as it has cyclically happened through the centuries. What we can save from Sparta is the egalitarian and communitarian approach to the construction of a body politic. Even more so, we can learn from Lycurgus’s visionary production of the theopolitical through the conception of a highly regulated subjectivity. Once devoid of its aristocratic connotations, this anti-individualistic self will provide an essential model for the egalitarian endeavors of Christianity. For them, too, a virtuous life devoted to the other will be worth more than class, race, status, or origin.

Alan F. Segal’s *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* provides a privileged paramount from which this divide between Antiquity and the Middle Ages can be beheld when he argues that “The breakdown of ethnic boundaries in Christianity was a consequence of both its antinomianism and its

emphasis on conversion” (163). This reflects exactly Pier Cesare Bori’s thesis that Christianity is simultaneously innovative and nostalgic or, in the terms I have used in the discussion on Rome’s reception, profoundly traditionalist and antitraditionalist at once. Christians look way back in order to bypass the powers from their present. To delegitimize the powers that be, they reclaim the heritage of Moses and Socrates, before whose image the contingent authorities of Rome are exposed as circumstantial. Not unlike the Essenes, the first Christians confront the Jewish authorities by vindicating their connection to the primigenial covenant. Not unlike the Spartans’ insistent recourse to Lyrcurgus’s foundational Rhetra, Christians defend the divine nature of the law and mankind to demand the foundation of a universal city which destroys the walls of the poleis and the empire. This is most clear than anywhere else in the central passage of Acts of the Apostles, the effective foundation of monasticism:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (*Acts* 4.32-35).

I have discussed Marx several times, but I deliberately failed to mention that Christianity’s response to the societies of their time as found in Acts comes in a surprising package: the koine term for Acts is no other than Πράξεις. This is not the Marxian *praxis*, but one built upon a totally different paradigm of subjectivity. A premodern type of subjectivity, if desired, but one whose

installation allows the proponents of monasticism and ancient communitarianism to entirely avoid some of the basic limitations of Post-Cartesian political thought and Post-Rousseauian, Post-Marxian communism. Because the monastic self is not defined after the irruption of the modern autonomous subject, the protagonist of this ancient communitarianism is not one that thinks of himself as the cause, purpose, and telos of existence. Cyprian had explained it in his *On Works and Alms* by saying that the members of the community “become sons of God by spiritual birth” (25). Following the progressively more abstract formulation of the Temple by the Essenes, early Christians break one ontological category after category to arrive in a paradigm of subjectivity that satisfies the universal message of Christ as presented by Saint Paul. A message beyond nations, classes, and lineages. After having refuted the blood-based categories of antiquity –which Christianity will paradoxically help to reinstate during the feudal period–, the foundational act of subjectivity cannot be an innate one, but what each individual chooses to do with their own finitude. Tertullian explicitly refers to this situation in his *Apology*: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another” (*Apologeticum* 39). Through the biopolitical dimension of habitus and virtue, the apostolic koinonia presents an alternative to the birth-based categories that structured other body politics. It, in turn, universalizes the Lacedaemonian and Qumranic

understanding of the commons. Tertullian refers to the ancients' surprise "because we use the name brothers among ourselves they are indignant for no other reason" (*Apologeticum* 39.8). Christians are those who call each other brothers and sisters. A household which all are expected to join. All are welcome—and in fact expected—to join this koinon, for all creatures are brothers and sisters equal in the eyes of God. Not *gens*, blood, or wealth, but love and mutual service are the defining factor of the commons.

In this regard, it is worth summoning Ernst Troeltsch's point of view, as it is essential to Pier Cesare Bori's study of koinonia. According to this famous protestant theologian's point of view, Christianity brought a new type of union outside that of society which bypassed the existing political coordinates (*Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* I.15). The primitive koinonia is in a way a traditionalist movement, only that, unlike the illustrious bloodline that Jews boast—and from which Christian apologists such as Eusebius constantly claim to stem—the tradition of Christ is one yet to be built. If Judaism had subverted the retrospective—looking towards the past, or the back—cosmovisions of Antiquity by supplying its own dose of messianism as present in the fascinating *Son of God* manuscript 4Q246 belonging to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Church cut all ties with that past by looking at it directly—at the most ancient of pasts—, only to aim towards the future. Thus, the progressive worldview of modernity is created as a means to recreating the perfect state before the Fall. Although Romans and Jews did not always know that their

traditions were incompatible, this search for the roots helped Christianity achieve some compatibility with the existing powers. But Ernst Troeltsch skillfully balances this by stating that, together to this traditionalist –yet atypical, since it is closer to a certain Genesisitic primitivism– attitude, the doctrines of the new sect were also “profondamente separate nel loro interno da tutta la vita sociale, sottometersi pazientemente alle condizioni esistenti e servirsene, ma al tempo stesso contrapporre ad esse una vita di comunità assolutamente nuova e di tipo affatto diverso” (Troeltsch 96; quoted in Bori, *Chiesa primitiva* 117). In a very similar fashion Pier Cesare Bori concludes that Christians were able to “piegarsi ad accettare il compromesso con l’Impero, supplendo alle deficienze della società civile con la carità e la beneficenza e/o ritirarsi dal mondo, per dar vita ad un progetto radicalmente alternativo, ma praticabile solo da una minoranza: la fraternità monastica” (*Chiesa primitiva* 117). Because they chose to create a different body politic outside the existing currents, the proponents of monasticism effectively created a new world system.

This worldview was dominated by the monastic self, which despite being qualitatively different to the ancient subject described by Constant, is more often than not omitted or just ventilated as premodern. But none of them are the sole cause of this distortion, which is in fact a product of a décalage between the paradigms of subjectivity operative within primigenial Christianity and the post-Cartesian world. The rise of the modern autonomous subject, the master-of-himself and hero of rationality, will condition the way in which premodern

self-effacement can be interpreted. To understand the profound consequences of this not-exactly-ancient and not-exactly-modern model of subjectivity, I will first ponder the implications of talking about subjectivity after Descartes and the triumph of the individualistic subject. Only from there will we be in a position to discuss the true impact of the monastic self.

The Axiom of Modernity

Contrary to common belief, the communal incarnation of monasticism, coenobitism –and Christianity in general– should not necessarily be conceived as individuality-erasing devices. The modern interpretation of this cosmivision as a sheep-herding, identity-suppressing ideology is present in the Enlightenment and, manifestly, Nietzsche, who contributed to establishing this view as a tenet of contemporary thought

Jean-Jacques Rousseau embodies all the aspects of modern communitarianism labeled by Benjamin Constant as individual-obliterating commonalism. Despite bringing several capital ideas to the table, including a revision of the impropriety of property and a questioning of the modern sense of political agency, I believe that there is a telluric incoherence in the thought of Rousseau as a whole. He is as obsessed with the modern autonomous subject as he is with its suppression. Constant carefully argued that:

The more illustrious of these philosophers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was a sublime genius, animated by the purest love of liberty; but by transposing into our modern age an amount of

social power, of collective sovereignty, that belonged to other centuries, he provided deadly pretexts for more than one kind of tyranny. (*On the Liberty of the Ancients* 6)

Rousseau is the leading thinker of a regressive mode of thinking that, despite its noble ideals of direct political participation, can only bring chaos and authoritarianism to a time in which the size of cities and the changes in subjectivity advocate for a representative political model. That is, at least, what Constant and the proponents of liberalism defend. Against them, those who dream of the same direct political action found in Antiquity –or their recreation of Antiquity–. Benjamin Constant is spot on when he argues that this attitude leads to an incongruous corollary: Ancient liberty can never work in the era of the individualistic, modern subject. And, once again and together with contemporary interpreters like Russell, Popper or Berlin, Constant is right in saying that a liberal representative conception of the non-intrusive State is the least offensive form of liberty for the modern subject. What none of them seem to remember is, though, that the arrival of the individualistic subject is not a necessary unfolding of the human spirit. It also not an irreversible development.

Modern individualistic subjects themselves, Constant and his cohorts assume the presence of their theory of subjectivity as an almost natural given. Constant does indeed present it as a historical development derived from commerce and the transformation of the urban world, but there is a reverberation of inevitability that contaminates the argumentation. The paradigmatic shift in the history of subjectivity is presented in a teleological manner as *notwendig*, understood in the idealist sense of ontologically inevitable,

or *zwangsläufig*. Ancient liberty can only bring chaos and pain because we are not anymore ancient subjects, but self-centered individuals. Despite this, Constant is notably more coherent than Rousseau, as he does not ever try to hide the fact that unregulated individualism, private property, and leisure are for him the pinnacle of Modernity. This theoretical honesty in a time of transformations had faded by the time Isaiah Berlin or Popper wrote, as they already assume this meaning of the self as the only viable one. The modern individualistic subject has become the Axiom of Modernity.

The pragmatic efficacy of liberal unregulatedness, especially in the honest formulation of Constant, has proven to be a viable, satisfying model for many sectors of society. Supported by capitalism, representative democracy, and a private understanding of religion, the modern state is capable of satisfying a large number of people through what has been theorized as progressively self-amending paradigm. Predating Berlin, Popper, and Russell, Benjamin Constant vows for a non-intrusive State that is nonetheless controlled, just not as controlled as in ancient times, by the citizens. But the citizens of today are more concerned with their own individual satisfaction. Moreover, “Every time collective power tries to meddle with private speculations, it harms the speculators. Every time governments offer to do our business for us, they do it worse than we would and at greater cost” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients* 5).

Although by no means new –at the end of the day, *minister* means that who serves– this service to the denizenship is one of the greatest principles of

parliamentarism. Even when not as present as in ancient times, the subjection of the political sphere to the citizens is granted by, paradigmatically, principles like those formulated in the controversial Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. And, truth be given, if we accept the self-affirmative sense of the self presented by Constant –he does not really need to defend it, as by the time he writes it is almost already the axiom of Modernity–, we need to follow the lead of Eduard Bernstein’s *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* and, paying attention to Constant and Berlin, aspire to tweak liberal capitalism unto its state of least intrusiveness. But one of Constant’s dialectical opponents, Abbé de Mably had warned his fellow compatriots forty years before the French Revolution of something that Rousseau and Marx would take very seriously: conformism is a loaded gun. “On murmure d’abord contre les abus, mais on les supporte tant qu’ils ne sont pas extremes, et cette condescendance même les accrédite” (*Des droits et des devoirs du citoyen* 559). Tolerating inequality because it is not extreme, or because we do not feel it, means to effectively sanction it. The unintrusive State wanted by Constant can indeed serve many, but two hundred and fifty years later we cannot say that it has succeeded in serving all.

Equality, the silent given of modern individualism, is but a dream. Constant claims to speak for *all* moderns, when he asserts that “we can’t any longer enjoy the liberty that the ancients had, consisting in constant active participation in collective power. *Our* liberty has to consist of the peaceful

enjoyment of private independence” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 5). But is it realistic to claim that every individual after Petrarch or Descartes wants this? He presents this type of liberty as a mandate, as a must because the modern individualistic subject that underlies Constant’s analysis has become, by then and for most, the axiom of Modernity. But there is nothing axiomatic about this contingent development in the history of subjectivity.

And when so many are still facing inequality and injustice, it is difficult to celebrate something like a percentual improvement of wealth. In the eyes of Mably, Rousseau, Engels, or Marx, temperance in matters of life and death is but a dilation of justice. The incremental model of justice in which we are asked to wait until everything gets better is a powerful fit to the modern subject, but maybe its limitations are ultimately unsurmountable. Maybe Bernstein’s Smithsonian dream of a self-correcting socialdemocracy of increasing social coverage has reached its self-imposed limit. Do we want to change the economy? Change politics? Change social issues? In that case, we must change the subject.¹³²

¹³² Rousseau seems to suggest that self-investigation is the first step towards justice, but he is just not capable of transcending the individualistic paradigm of subjectivity, so he just perpetuates the very same egotism that he dreams of refuting: “La plus utile et la moins avancée de toutes les connaissances humaines me parait être celle de l’homme, et j’ose dire que la seule inscription du temple de Delphes contenait un précepte plus important et plus difficile que tous les gros livres des moralistes. Aussi je regarde le sujet de ce *Discours* comme une des questions les plus intéressantes que la philosophie puisse proposer, et malheureusement pour nous, comme une des plus épineuses que les philosophes puissent résoudre. Car comment connaître la source de l’inégalité parmi les hommes, si l’on ne commence par les connaître eux-mêmes? Et comment l’homme viendra-t-il à bout de se voir tel que l’a formé la nature, à travers tous les changements que la succession des temps et des choses a dû produire dans sa constitution originelle, et de démêler ce qu’il tient de son propre

The Affirmative Self ¹³³

The self is reshaped by the community, but the community is also transformed by the incorporation of new selves after they have left behind the individualistic inclinations of the cities. I have argued that Mediterranean communitarianism prefigured the irruption of a new understanding of the self-other relationships: the monastic self. Contrary to the distant opinion of Benjamin Constant or Karl Popper, the ancient concepts of subjectivity did not inextricably suppress all traits of individuality. What they did not satisfy, of course, is the expectations of their very specific understanding of individuality. Not partaking in our modern individualistic views of self-realization does not mean, at all, that the ancients were obsessed with leveling uniqueness and forcefully suppressing the originality of their citizens. Even in the radical social experiments of Mediterranean communitarianism, there is room for the commons and the self to coexist.

Monasticism stresses the mutuality of these two poles, but even the pioneering endeavors of the Essenes were much more nuanced than the plain image we tend to convey about the alleged self-suppressing tendencies of Antiquity. Philo of Alexandria's profound understanding of the subjectivity at

fonds d'avec ce que les circonstances et ses progrès ont ajouté ou changé à son état primitif?" (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* 134).

¹³³ The following section presents an evolved version of some pages and notes from my first dissertation, *Mors Mystica*, defended at Temple University in 2018.

stake, explains perfectly how the revision of the individual is as essential of that of the communal:

during six days, each of these individuals, retiring into solitude by himself, philosophises by himself in one of the places called monasteries, never going outside the threshold of the outer court, and indeed never even looking out. But on the seventh day they all come together as if to meet in a sacred assembly [. . .] and then the eldest of them who has the most profound learning in their doctrines, comes forward and speaks with steadfast look and with steadfast voice, with great powers of reasoning, and great prudence, not making an exhibition of his oratorical powers like the rhetoricians of old, or the sophists of the present day (*Works of Philo*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants” §30-31)

The Christian obsession with taming the first capital vice of *superbia* is not a random development. It is their biggest contribution at trying to change the paradigm of subjectivity through the domination of the egotistical inclinations of mankind. At the end of the day, that was Satan’s biggest affront.

Where Philo or Saint Anthony read the superation of egotism, the moderns, the moderns of Constant and Berlin, will see an aversion to the newly freed –or idolized– individual. “For if we so live as people dying daily, we will not commit sin,” exhorts Anthony (*Regular Life: Monastic, Canonical, and Mendicant Rules*, “The Life of Anthony” §19). This founding principle of monasticism, which combines the memento mori attitude with the war against the self’s comfort zone is often regarded as the beginning of a thousand years of repression of the natural passions. That is how Nietzsche or the 1960’s will read it, but the repressive nature of monasticism is a product of interpreting it from the optic of the very same individualistic subject that monasticism (and Plato, and Lycurgus, and the Therapeutae...) tried to prevent from substantiating.

Only when the theoretical coordinates of those worldviews –all based on the exaltation of the other before the egotism of the self– collapse, they appear as contrary to reason and nature.

Although he did not cause this clash, as he writes from this side of the absolute subject's development, Friedrich Nietzsche did indeed decisively contribute to linking the Christian understanding of subjectivity with an alleged repulse towards individuality, identity, or even freedom. Present across works such as *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, *Der Antichrist*, or *Ecce Homo*, it is nowhere as visible as in the work which Nietzsche conceives as both a *reductio ad absurdum* of asceticism and his affirmative proposal for a new, yet ancient subjectivity. *Also sprach Zarathustra* presents an outsider misunderstood by a society that represses the self in a destructive manner. Forced to leave society himself, Zarathustra is a martyr who scorns monks and mystics calling them "Prediger des Todes", that is, preachers of death. In his eyes, these fraudulent messengers have been teaching that "Du sollst dich selber töten! Du sollst dich selber davonstehlen!" (*Also sprach Zarathustra* 36), or "Thou shalt kill thyself! Thou shalt steal thyself away!" (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 57). Against this fundamental violation of the individual's natural aperture, Zarathustra claims that the old laws must die and let the new ones, more accordingly fitting the

primigenial state of nature repressed by the Judeo-Christian world of the golden archaic era.¹³⁴

Starting with Plato, Laconophiles have been called out as reactionaries due to their admiration of this archaic, primigenial stage often interpreted as the era of purity, or the epoch of heroes. Surprisingly enough, in the case of Christians, their claiming of a golden heritage is, like I extensively discussed in regards to *religio licita*, a way to reconcile with the obvious Mosaicness at the heart of the new religion, but their forward-oriented outlook prevents them from falling in the trap of a blinding praise of the past at the expense of the present. Paradoxically, it is common for those who blame Laconophiles for this idealization of the past to idealize Classical Antiquity themselves as a pure body of culture that was destroyed by the foreign ideas that lead to the Dark Ages. Although weakening or destruction of something authentic –the only worthy of being called “Classical”– is something that critics from Nietzsche have constantly argued, my study of mysticism, traditionally seen as the most escapist form of religion, suggests that not even the most intellectualist forms of religious expression lead to a refusal of the world. And when it so happened, as in Miguel de Molinos’s works, the Church was quick to point out its

¹³⁴ This almost Genesisic myth of original immaculacy crosses borders and cultures, to the point of also playing a role in the very same Enlightenment supposedly directed at criticizing the reactionary, archaizing views of their predecessors. A critical example is found in Rousseau’s first major work, the *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, and his masterworks from the seventies, *Du contrat social*, as well as *Émile, ou de l’éducation*, where the (medieval) culture built by humans has deleted all traces of primal freedom.

incompatibility with the necessarily service-oriented purview of the Christian mission. The *imitatio Christi*, the fact that God decided to be Jesus in this world, will always lean orthodoxy towards a temporal, bios-politikos-type enterprise. Central byproducts of monasticism such as the mendicant or the hospitaller orders –responsible for our modern *ospedales*–, are tangible evidence of an attempted balance between the *bios theoretikos* and the *bios politikos*. In the case of Judaism, which harbors ancestral traditions of intellectualism and idealism, it could be argued that the mystic who were to reach the absolute would irreversibly depart from this world. But even in this colossal scenario, which very few kabbalists or mystics would think this is even feasible, we are always anchored in our mortality-given finitude.

The irreconcilability between the two paradigms of subjectivity constitutes an impassable barrier. Nietzsche and the enlightened write after the irruption of Ockham, Descartes, Locke, and Hume. Even in the case of those 19th-Century thinkers responding to the *Kritiken*, their cosmovision is already modeled after Immanuel Kant's. By 1789 it is almost impossible not to think of ourselves as autonomous subjects. Alain Renaut's definition of this modern subject operates perfectly in this context. In his incisive *L'ère de l'individu*, he reminds us that “the notion of the subject as entirely transparent to itself, sovereign, master of itself and the universe” (*The Era of the Individual* XXV). The *persona* has become *subject*.

When Nietzsche censures Christians for being preachers of death, he refers to claims like the biblical *abneget semetipsum*, ascetic self-effacement, or Saint Anthony's aforementioned principles of monasticism as daily mastery of the individualistic passions of the self. The problem is that from the perspective of the modern autonomous, the memento mori conflicts with the increasingly more absolute ambitions of the modern subject. What is this subject's pilgrimage towards the absolute?

Written in 1784, the treatise entitled *Was ist Aufklärung* represents Immanuel Kant's most celebrated answers to the question about the meaning of the Enlightenment.

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Muthes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Muth, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung. (*Was ist Aufklärung*, np)

The text is marked by a happy neologism, *Unmündigkeit*. Usually translated as “minority of age”, the scope of the word is much deeper, because the state that the Enlightenment, in words of Kant, tries to overcome is that of the inability for the *Mündigkeit*. This German legal principle, derived from the medieval concept of *Munt*, or protection, refers to the protection of one's own care, including moral responsibility, the ability to defend oneself and the will to make decisions. In feudal structures, protection is not limited to minors, but vassals are, in the eyes of this legal principle, minors, as they are unable to provide

protection, sustenance, and moral discernment. This is crucial because such an influential passage is always read as the shift from an embryonic or incomplete state to one of maturity and completion. In contrast, a more contextualized reading reveals that the shift that Kant talks about is not only that of adulthood –*Volljährigkeit*, or “the property of complete age”– but the overcoming of social relations based on tutelage and exogenous protection –*Handlungsfähigkeit*, or “capacity for action”. The new man is, then, much more than an adult. He is the master –and owner– of his own fate.

The direct response to Kant found in Fichte’s seminal *Wissenschaft der Lehre*, especially in its 1794 edition, clearly musters that, if coherent, the Cartesian subject must become absolute to the point of replacing God. Same as Hobbes and Spinoza had unfolded the Cartesian principles, German idealism takes Kant to where Kant himself never got. A foundational proponent of German idealism, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), formulates the principle of the absolute ego –das absolute Ich–, which can be understood as the systematic support of the modern subject in its broadest terms. Not only does it prelude much of the nineteenth-century intellectual movements, but also the egocentric proposal (the “I” as the center of everything) and even egotist (“I” is everything) of Fichte supports the construction of romantic heroes for whom the universe is nothing but themselves. How does Fichte justify the centrality of the self? After reading Kant and visiting him in 1791, Fichte takes charge of the Kantian legacy and aspires to reconcile, once and for all, the empirical and

noumenal dimensions of being. Unfulfilled in the *Kritiken*, the transcendental Kantian enterprise that, to a large extent, represented the philosophical sum of the Enlightenment (1784's *Was ist Aufklärung?*) is resumed again in 1794 by the system that would protect and promote many of the nineteenth-century ideas: the absolute subjective idealism of the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre*. Seeking an unquestionable principle that allows him to solve the Kantian antinomies –and, basically, explain everything–, Fichte goes back to the foundational “cogito, ergo sum” by Descartes to argue that the thinking proposition of the syllogism is redundant: thinking is not necessary to show that “sum, ergo sum” (I §1, 49)¹³⁵. Erecting his conceptual building from a non-tautological tautology with a format analogous to $A = A$ (I §1, 1), the German philosopher considers that he can solve the subject-object tension by subsuming everything under the category of the ego. In one of his most famous paragraphs, which it shows the autofoundational character of that self, he states:

The self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. The self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists,⁷ and conversely, the self exists and posits its own existence by

¹³⁵ Fichte's explanation shows how conscious he is of being the next, and last, link in the chain of attempts to formulate a self-sufficient autonomous subject: “That our proposition is the absolutely basic principle of all knowledge, was pointed out by Kant, in his deduction of the categories; but he never laid it down specifically as the basic principle. Descartes, before him, put forward a similar proposition: *cogito, ergo sum*–which need not have been merely the minor premise and conclusion of a syllogism, with the major premise: *quodcumque cogitat est*; for he may very well have regarded it as an immediate datum of consciousness. It would then amount to *cogitans sum, ergo sum* (or as we should say, *sum, ergo sum*). But in that case the addition of *cogitans* is entirely superfluous; we do not necessarily think when we exist, but we necessarily exist whenever we think. Thinking is by no means the essence, but merely a specific determination of existence; and our existence has many other determinations besides this” (*Foundations* I, 100; 1794 version). The fact that he is examining Descartes and Kant demonstrates the circle of which he, extolling the self-sufficiency of the “I am,” partake.

virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the ‘I am’ expresses an Act, and the only one possible, as will inevitably appear from the Science of Knowledge as a whole. (*Foundations* I, 96; 1794 version).

This priority and radical centrality of the self is the foundation that explains, in Fichte’s opinion, everything that is possible. While it is true that words as ambitious as his today seem excessively grandiloquent (“an Act, and the only possible”) and even naive (he himself will adopt a much more cautious position only a few years later, with the publication of the third edition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1804), the truth is that both its theoretical influence and the construction of an idealistic, romantic and political imaginary give a good account of the interest that his “absolute Ich” generates at the beginning of the new century. What else but I’s that are self-sufficient are the heroes of Modernity? I speak of a modern autonomous subject in order to emphasize the self-regulating impulse of the post-Cartesian paradigm. Or, more precisely, the illusion of self-regulation. A subject that ultimately becomes an absolute subject.

This is the absolute subject. Etymologically, learned loanword equivalent to “absolved”, meant finished, immaculate. But something happens during the exact same time in which Christianity is growing that makes the term become even more of a political term, ultimately defining that which has severed from its ties. Free, independent; but also disconnected¹³⁶. After William of Ockham’s

¹³⁶ Same as it occurred with “perfect” (which first meant “complete,” but then became moralized to the point of signifying “unimprovable”), the word *absolutus* originally meant “complete,” only to later acquire the connotations of “independent”: “classical Latin *absolutus*

solid case for the ontological particulars, individuality acquires increasing cultural value to the point of, by the 17th and 18th centuries, representing the ultimate anthropological value for thinkers departing from Descartes's blueprint such as Locke, Hume, Stuart Mill, or Kant. Where the ancients would have seen disconnection and isolation, the moderns started to see independence and autonomy.

As its creaks start to unveil themselves after the Enlightenment, modern subjectivity collapses, but does not entirely cease to operate. Despite the constant as this ideology of the self has been able to survive all of the 19th and 20th-Century critiques, and for the most part, it still structures our cosmovisions. Even those of its detractors that, from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, or in this case the history of late Ancient subjectivity, have attempted to debunk the fallacy that the individualist self is the only possible understanding of the world. Even in those case, it is just mighty difficult not to think of ourselves as beings with natural –not conventional– rights aimed at our own satisfaction and realization, forgetting that this view is a recent invention, as Foucault would put it: “l’homme n’est qu’une invention récente, une figure qui n’a pas deux siècles, un simple pli dans notre savour, et qu’il disparaîtra dès que celui-ci aura trouvé une forme nouvelle” (*Les mots et les choses*, “Préface” 15).

complete, finished, perfect, pure, unqualified, unconditional, unambiguous, (in grammar) in the positive degree, in post-classical Latin also independent, free, unrestricted (6th cent.), (of space or time) independent of any observer and any phenomena (1687 in Newton: see quot. 16871 at sense A. 2c), use as adjective of past participle of *absolvere*” (*OED*, “absolute”).

The ideologism denounced by Foucault is the view derived from idealizers of the modern subject, normally through a praise of alleged individualism in Humanism and the Enlightenment, as in the seminal works authored by Jacob Burckhardt. For Burckhardt, whose extremely influential reading of the modern individual as an absolute self-master who freed humanity from the self-imposed constraints of the past, it is only around the 16th century that, thanks to humanism, the individual was finally “free”:

To the discovery of the outward world the Renaissance added a still greater achievement, by first discerning and bringing to light the full, whole nature of man. This period, as we have seen, first gave the highest development to individuality, and then led the individual to the most zealous and thorough study of himself in all forms and under all conditions. Indeed, the development of personality is essentially involved in the recognition of it in oneself and in others. (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* 308).

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What Burckhardt and modern followers of this view such as Stephen Greenblatt seem to disregard is that the subject that it is now said to be free is only free and

¹³⁷ “Zu der Entdeckung der Welt fügt die Kultur der Renaissance eine Entdeckung noch größere Leistung, indem sie zuerst den ganzen, vollen Gehalt des Menschen entdeckt und zutage fördert. Zunächst entwickelt dies Weltalter, wie wir sahen, auf das stärkste den Individualismus; dann leitet es denselben zur eifrigsten, vielseitigsten Erkenntnis des Individuellen auf allen Stufen an. Die Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit ist wesentlich an das Erkennen derselben bei sich und andern gebunden” (*Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* 173). It is not uncommon to base this analysis on a reading of works like the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, written by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in 1486, whose fragment §20 states: “Tu, nullis angustis cohercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam prefinies”, which could be translated as: “You, by no restricted limit, can determine yourself according to your free will, in whose hands I have placed you”. The problem with this partial reading of humanism is that, exaggerating the individual power, it avoids a capital fact. Who endows the human being with free will? Although the power of humanistic self-affirmation is emphasized, the works of Petrarch or Pico himself never hide the debt and responsibility of the acquired free will, because not even the renewed anthropocentric paradigm forgets the source of this free will. A sense of Christian self-negation in favor of the neighbor and the divinity is evident within humanism. The individuality of Christian humanism offers an alternative to feudalism: one that cannot be exclusively individualistic.

complete from within the coordinates of the very same concept of subject that they are theorizing¹³⁸. Only the *auto-nomous* –self-regulated–, *absolute* –complete, independent, separated–, and *auto-telic* –its own purpose and goal– is a worthy subject, per its own paradigm. These finalities are built upon some theoretical axioms of the modern age, such as the self-transparency, self-mastery, and self-causality of a subject conceived as pure self-affirmation. Above all, the modern subject presents himself –whereas the premodern subject is not necessarily gendered, the Enlightened subject is a rational male subject– as one that chooses when, where, and how to live. The modern subject is his *own owner*.

Freudians, feminists, postmodernists, and Nietzscheans have worked for a long time on trying to dispel this already long-lasting myth, but more often than not the critique is leveled from within the same paradigm of the absolute subject. The historical perspective needs to supplement these views by revealing

¹³⁸ This image seems exaggerated, but it is not in comparison to the opinion held by Stephen Greenblatt in his recent *The Swerve*. This book presents itself as the explanation of the causes of Modernity, which Greenblatt identifies to the Renaissance recovery of Lucretius. In addition to this, the influence of Greenblatt's previous works –whose notion of self-fashioning has extraordinarily permeated many studies on identity during the Middle Ages and Modernity–, suggests that everything that happened before the recovery of Lucretius (was there ever one?) should be interpreted an obstacle or an attempt to restrict freedom: “Independence and self-reliance had no cultural purchase; indeed, they could scarcely be conceived, let alone prized. Identity came with a precise, well-understood place in a chain of command and obedience. To attempt to break the chain was folly. An impertinent gesture—a refusal to bow or kneel or uncover one's head to the appropriate person—could lead to one's nose being slit or one's neck broken. And what, after all, was the point? It was not as if there were any coherent alternatives, certainly not one articulated by the Church or the court or the town oligarchs. The best course was humbly to accept the identity to which destiny assigned you [. . .] But to prize a person for some ineffable individuality or for many-sidedness or for intense curiosity was virtually unheard of. Indeed, curiosity was said by the Church to be a mortal sin. To indulge it was to risk an eternity in hell” (16). This viewpoint is ubiquitous in modern and premodern studies.

the contingency of the modern paradigm of the subject. Even the earliest critics of this absolutizing subject, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, will have a hard time fully departing from the now so deeply chiseled coordinates of the individualistic –post-personal, if we want– theories of the subject. Nietzsche vows for a return to ancient individuality and virility but does so from an individualistic perspective that would have hardly fit in the ancient, community-based systems of honor and power. Marx roots for the common, but his commons are built of individual, absolute subjects closer to Leibniz’s monads than to Greece’s citizens. Freud unveils the inner complexity (and miseries) of a subject whose “essence” presupposes the tenets of a monadic subject which by the time he writes it is simply a given: *Es*, *Ich*, and *Über-Ich* are just the layers of the modern subject.

Only after the production of the modern autonomous subject can monasticism be interpreted as preaching death. From within its paradigm, what monks, Spartans, Platonists, or Jews are selling is, in fact, how impoverished life is rendered when one decides to keep it to himself. Renouncing to otherness is the true death, and continually remembering mortality is not the cessation of the self, but that of individualism. As we saw, according to the New Testament dogma, the foundational self-effacement of Jesus brings the death of Death itself. Paradoxically, the proponents of monasticism read the egotistic affirmation of the self as, precisely, its annihilation. For the monastic self, only in the other may we find ourselves.

The Self is the Commons

Asceticism, regulation, and renunciation to material possessions are just steps in the construction of a non-individualistic sense of individuality. What I am actually interested in pondering is the relations between private property, individuality, and commonality regarding a foundational subjectivity dilemma: Do I own myself?

Navigating between the isolation of uncontrolled individualism and the annihilation of freedom by blind collectivism, the Platonic-Augustinian tradition allows for a model in which, as an individual, I *am* a self. But I am not *my-self*¹³⁹. Drawing intensely from political and religious sources such as Spartan political ideals or the beliefs of Hellenistic Jews such as the Essenes, the Socratic paradigm activated by Plato is able to define, especially in Augustine, that I am never really *myself* until I decide to give my self to the other. Only in this self-negation finds the self affirmation.

For the moderns, an individual that is not a subject is an absurdity. That is why Constant says with Condorcet that pretty much everyone before them did not have a notion of dignity for they did not speak from the paradigm of modern individualism. Per this simplistic account,

the ancients had no notion of individual rights. Men were, so to speak, nothing but machines whose gears and cog-wheels were regulated by the law. The same subjection was a feature of the great centuries of the Roman republic: the individual was in a way

¹³⁹ This is the conclusion of a modest article that I wrote on Saint Augustine and Juan Ruiz, “Yo no es mío, la imposibilidad autobiográfica de las *Confesiones* y el *Libro del buen amor*,” as well of my first dissertation, *Mors Mystica*.

lost in the nation, the citizen lost in the city. (*On the Liberty of the Ancients* 3)

The gesture is simple: those who operate from a non-individualistic, non-liberal, non-modern understanding of what it means to be human cannot possibly grasp the absolute dignity of the self. Due to that, their illusion of freedom will be but a cover for the most severely regulated private existence. In fact, Constant believes that “Among the ancients, therefore, the individual is nearly always sovereign in public affairs but a slave in all his private relations” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients* 2). Those who devote their lives to others are serfs of the system. Mere cog-wheels. Slaves. But those who prioritize their own interests are regarded as perfect citizens and worthy individuals. Because they write from this side of the axiom of Modernity, everything that happens between Classical Antiquity and Modernity moderns is conflated into a fifteen-century void disregarded by Constant, and most modern interpreters who, like Hegel, prefer to walk with Siebenmeilenstiefel, that is, seven-league boots. This ideological mistake renders the subjectivity of the monastic self invisible, as are all other non-prevalent forms of subjectivity essayed during millennia. Naturally, not all Late Ancient and Medieval subjects are monastic, but the radicalness of the concept and the centrality of the resulting worldview legitimate adding an intermediate step to fit between Benjamin Constant’s archetypal division of history. The monastic subject is neither ancient, nor feudal, but also not modern in the individualistic sense. It is an alternative to all of them that crystallized out of the communitarian, self-relativizing efforts of Late Antiquity.

One of Marx's least commented successes is his ability to prove through his dissection of the modern world system that capitalism is the direct evolution of feudalism. Not a solution *ex nihilo* arrived out of nowhere to save the world from the Dark Middle Ages, but the only logical consequence of "The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former" (Marx, *Das Kapital* I.26). There one detail that might easily escape our sights, though. At this point, Marx speaks of "der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft," since capitalism and the society it produces can still be differenced. Later on, this is very clearly in the works of liberal antiplatonists such as Russell, Popper, or Berlin, capitalism will have become the only possible society. The term *hervorgegangen* was aptly translated with the paraphrasis "grown out of," but to clear any doubts, the German original shows that Marx is talking about capitalist structures having their very origin in feudal ones. It is not just capitalism replacing feudalism, but the former being a continuation –the only "acceptable" once the ideology of the individualist subject triumphs– of the latter. The passage says: "Die ökonomische Struktur der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft ist hervorgegangen aus der ökonomischen Struktur der feudalen Gesellschaft. Die Auflösung dieser hat die Elemente jener freigesetzt" (*Das Kapital* 742). Capitalism is where feudalism took us. Alternatively, a non-feudal medieval worldview leads to different conclusions. The monastic self inhabits the edge of feudalism, Antiquity, and Modernity to create an alternative modernity. Yet,

how can we define it? Saint Augustine does it for us when he explains the ultimate purpose of his *Rule*:

The intention behind all this is that no one will seek his own advantage in his work. Everything you do is to be for the service of the community, and you are to work with more zeal and more enthusiasm than if each person were merely working for himself and his own interests. For it is written of love that *'it is not self-seeking'* (1 Cor. 13:5); that is to say, love puts the interests of the community before personal advantage, and not the other way around. (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* §5.2)

The *Rule* is maybe the most representative text of the monastic self paradigm.

From the perspective of the absolute modern subject, the self-negation for the sake of serving the other will always be received as an irrational form of self-destruction. Conversely, for the proponents of monasticism, self-negation is the most effective form of self-affirmation, as it only negates the egotistic tendencies of the self and, by giving itself to others, allows the person to be completed. The monastic self-effacement is, more accurately, a relativization of the self which is not anymore considered the finality of existence.¹⁴⁰

This incommensurability can be explained by the inherent distrust to the individual sufficiency in gnosiological and political matters common in ancient Mediterranean thought. Brian Stock expresses this philosophical divergence when he argues that for the ancient tradition synthesized by Saint Augustine, the “denial of the autonomy of the self was a matter of faith. For Augustine, it

¹⁴⁰ The most thought-provoking study on the matter is Charles M. Stang's *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"*. In particular, the fifth chapter, entitled “No Longer I: The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite,” inspired most of my two dissertation's ideas on apophatic theology. Stang's groundbreaking work opens the door for a systematic, apophatic understanding not just of the infinite, but also of humanity.

was also a consequence of a philosophy of language,” a linguistic ontology that recognized “the possibility of self-knowledge but denied us the capability of attaining it on our own” (*After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* 21)¹⁴¹. This tradition is exactly the one studied in this dissertation, as it relies on a “legacy of ancient Greece and Israel that was transformed during the patristic period as the source of what we now call individuality” (*After Augustine* 60). Stock’s argument is key to arguing that the self-effacing paradigm embodied by monasticism and inherited from Greece and Israel is neither the end, nor the enemy of individuality, but its very source. Conversely, the individualistic interpretation of the individual carried out by modern authors is just one possible path to travel, and in no case the only proper form to understand the human phenomenon.

¹⁴¹ A surprising resemblance can be found between the Judeo-Christian gnoseological principle enunciated by Brian Stock, and the conviction of modern thinkers after the Enlightenment. In a famous letter written by Goethe, he confesses that one of the reasons why he feels that only the pre-Christian communities of Hellenistic Jews in Asia Minor could embody his religious aspirations: “Des religiösen Gefühls wird sich kein Mensch erwehren, dabei aber ist es ihm unmöglich, solches in sich allein zu verarbeiten, deswegen sucht er oder macht sich Proselyten. Das letztere ist meine Art nicht, das erstere aber hab ich treulich durchgeführt und, von Erschaffung der Welt an, keine Confession gefunden, zu der ich aber in meinen alten Tagen von einer Secte der Hypsistariier, welche, zwischen Heiden, Juden und Christen geklemmt, sich erklärten, das Beste, Vollkommenste, was zu ihrer Kenntniß käme, zu schätzen, zu bewundern, zu verehren und, insofern es also mit der Gottheit im nahen Verhältniß stehen müsse, anzubeten. Da ward mir auf einmal aus einem dunklen Zeitalter her ein frohes Licht, denn ich fühlte, daß ich Zeitlebens getrachtet hatte, mich zum Hypsistariier zu qualificiren; das ist aber keine kleine Bemühung: denn wie kommt man in der Beschränkung seiner Individualität wohl dahin, das Vortrefflichste gewahr zu werden?” (*Goethe-Briefe: mit Einleitungen und Erläuterungen* VIII.334). Like Stock and Augustine, though, he wonders how could a single individual ever grasp the highest substance –the Hypsistos– without the help of others or Other (“wie kommt man in der Beschränkung seiner Individualität wohl dahin, das Vortrefflichste gewahr zu werden?,” or “how does one, given the limitedness of his individuality, can even begin to know the Highest?” [my translation]).

The monastic subject is not an absolute –disconnected– one, but the exact opposite. Even in its simplest anchoritical form, it offers an intersubjective take on individuality. In its fully unfolded stage, the modern subject needs to negate the other in order to affirm himself. On the other hand, the negative subjectivity of Mosaic, Lacedaemonian, and Platonic affiliation, requires the individualistic –self-centered, egotistic, prideful...– forces of the self to be effaced so that he can fully commit to the other. And only through this commitment to the other, realize the self. Drawing from these sources, Christianity expands the ideal of self-less love through the concept of *agape*, that is, unrestricted love for what is other –and alterity can be that of the Other, the others, or even that within the self which impels us to go beyond our own walls.

By producing a model of subjectivity that prepares but also resists the individualistic derives of Modernity, Saint Augustine as the culmination of early monasticism had attempted a different approach to that found in Nietzsche or Freud. Augustine exposes the inner struggle and the complexity of the human subjectivity from the perspective of an individual that does not assume being his own cause or owner. It is from this optic that the “preaching of death” ought to be interpreted. That is why Foucault’s genealogical enterprise is here to remind us that man is just a recent invention. Other perfectly viable, and even historically tested, understandings of what it means to be human are possible. The monastic self here studied is one of those alternatives.

When Saint Anthony vindicates the imperative of the *memento mori*, he does not do it to diminish the value of life, but to stress it according to the expectations of monastic subjectivity. A life that is not measured in terms of individual self-realization despite the others, but in terms of realization in the other. “As people who anticipate dying each day we shall be free of possessions, we shall forgive all things to all people” (*Regular Life*, “The Life of Anthony” §19). It is not that premodern authors had not discovered true individuality, but that they conceived it as a key element in the construction of commonality. More often than not, even the most community-oriented programs of Modernity tend to be erected upon the premises of an individual subject that remains unchallenged. Since this accounts for the failure of most modern communitarian enterprises, resorting to alternative understandings of subjectivity from a historical perspective will provide the tools to building a modern (not just a revival of ancient forms) communitarianism that does not depend on satisfying the requirements of the modern individualistic subject.

Adamant that the self is not enough to brave the consuetudinary storm of life, much less to grasp the great mysteries of existence, the only coherent attitude for the proponents of monasticism consists in taking the individual as a dimension of the collaborative common. That is why Spartans do not place all power in an individual, not even in a (single or double) king, or why Jesus did not select just one disciple and Pachomius did not just legate his principles to one cellmate. Even though the figure has been extensively debated for

millennia, not even the Pope is alone, as he governs perched on the shoulders of the giants that Constitute the Church¹⁴². Just one is never going to be enough, and the others are needed to compensate our own deficiencies, mutually being compensated by theirs. Now that the two relevant paradigms of subjectivity are on the table, it is time to return to Nietzsche's idea of monasticism as being a death-preaching cosmivision.

The difference may seem subtle, and it was indeed lost in translation many times as convinced Christians exaggerated the unworthiness of the individual when they should actually have read the insufficiency of the individual, as that is the primitive view that continued into orthodox authors such as Augustine, Benedict, Francis, or Aquinas. But Pachomius, the first monastic regulator, proves that the new subjectivity was a communitarian, yet personalizing one from the get-go:

When he saw the brothers gathering around him, he established for the following rule: Each should be self-supporting and manage his own affairs, but they would provide their share of all their material needs either for food or to provide hospitality to the strangers who came to them, for they all ate together. They bought their share to him and he administered it. The did freely

¹⁴² This argument was leveled in 1521 by the Roman Church as a last attempt to reconciling Luther's legitimate concerns with the communitarian, non-individualistic theory of biblical exegesis that had imperated for centuries. When Charles V met Luther at the Diet of Worms, he asked him how could he be sure about his interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, if he was just one Augustine monk confronting millennia of self-correcting biblical hermeneutics. The confusion arises when we realize that an almost exact argument could be used from within Catholicism in order to supplement Luther argument against papal infallibility. Whereas Luther bases his censure on his *quinque solae*, Catholics could ask themselves: If we are defending a discursive doctrine of exegesis against the *sola scriptura* principle and claiming the primitive Church as a warranty of the long collaborative tradition –alleged path to overcoming the individual's radical finitude– that would prove Luther's individual inviable, how would one go about proving the infallibility of the Popes? This issue remains to pose a problem.

and voluntarily. (*Regular Life*, “The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples” §11)

Pachomius is not anymore thinking about secluded hermits or mortifying ascetics. His rules will instead lay the foundation for a transpersonal conception of subjectivity. He systematizes the tools to produce the monastic subject which I have been chasing since the beginning of this study. A combination of the communal values derived from poleis like Sparta and the ascetic attitude of previous groups in the orbit of Pythagoreanism and heterodox Judaism, monasticism will now synthesize those principles and do so, not with esoteric intentions, but as a part of a globalizing endeavor. The monastic subject is most visibly embodied by the religious orders, but given that Christ’s exhortation to imitate him by negating ourselves is universal, all subjects are expected to incorporate the practices that shape the new self. What is, then, the resulting product?

By self-effacing subjectivity, monasticism means the effacement of *superbia* or, even more precisely, the overcoming of *superbia* through the suppression of individualism. In its original sense, the Christian worldview is not against the individual, but against individualism¹⁴³. In fact, the proponents

¹⁴³ Although there are certainly later developments that will interpret it as the suppression of the individual, they are later developments which separate themselves from the Mediterranean sources herebefore studied. An example is the distance between what the Council of Trent intended to do by pushing the publicity of religion as a tool against the privatization of faith, and the way in which it was interpreted as an opportunity for strict biopolitical control of daily practices. The exaggerations in mortification or superstition have been censured by the Church since the early days, including Aquinas long diatribes on the matter, but that never stopped multiple folk understandings of Christianity from emerging. Once again, here I am just interested in the prevailing views of the *ecclesia primitiva* that would become official with the arrival of Nicaea and, short thereafter, Augustine’s synthesis.

of monasticism deposited so much trust on the individual, that they had to create the entirely new concept of the self.

The service to the other, and the process of self-negation are the ultimate, only legitimate, forms of self-affirmation for monasticism. We cannot save anyone else. But by serving all, we may save ourselves. At this point, the hard rock bottom of the monastic worldview can be perceived directly. Serving others is not a moral imperative of the natural law, nor an ethical mandate derived from conventional treatises of human rights. It is a theological imperative.

What I have tried to show is that the questioning of the individualistic self and the commitment to the service of the other have not always been a matter of Christian eschatology. Although Christianity's systematic theology equips this idea against the erosion of human mutability, the presence of identical exhortations in the Spartan constitution, the Jewish Law, and the Platonist utopias, as well as its resurgence in all of the Medieval and Renaissance religious orders, the debates on human dignity during the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, or the Enlightenment's discussions on the value of life as found in Rousseau, Tocqueville and others suggests that this is indeed a central motive in the history of theopolitics. Benjamin Constant opposed the ancient paradigm of direct political agency at the expense of individual liberty to the modern ideal of individual satisfaction at the expense of political intervention. The history of communitarianism invites us to reframe the problem: communitarianism is not

necessarily opposed to individuality. And premodern theopolitics do not necessarily suppress the individual, as most modern interpreters wanted to see in Antiquity or the Middle Ages. What the models I have studied do overcome is the conception of the individual as its own existential telos. This form of communal, yet individual subjectivity was best defined by Saint Augustine:

Those who live in unity in such a way that they form but one person are rightly called ‘mono’, one single person. They make true to life what is written, ‘of one mind and one heart’, that is, many bodies but not many minds, many bodies but not many hearts. (*Sermon on Psalm 132*, 6) ¹⁴⁴

Does this sound like Rousseau, the *contrat social*, and the *volonté générale*? Constant, Russell, and Popper have lucidly noted where these concepts usually take us. What is then, the difference between Rousseau and, say, Augustine’s understanding of the homogeneity of the social body? The presence of the modern individual subject in Rousseau’s works. The subject who is asked to cede his political agency by the means of the *contrat* is the same one that, at the beginning of the *Les Confessions*, claims to omnisciently know himself. Like the Heauton Timorumenos, Rousseau knows humanity inside out. His subject is, in a Cartesian way, self-transparent. Diametrically opposed, the Augustinian

¹⁴⁴ Van Bavel has rightfully asserted that “In this word [“monk”] we discover the Greek word *monos* which means ‘one’. This term belongs to the vocabulary of the Jewish-Christian morality of simplicity of heart. Simple persons are those whose hearts are undivided, who avoid dissipation in their life and activities; they are of one piece, and they know how to bring unity into their lives by dedicating themselves totally to the service of God [. . .] The concept of unity retains its central place; for him, however, it is no longer in the first instance a matter of unity within one’s own heart, but of unity with others. Others are to be loved in such a way that there can no longer be any question of multiplicity, only of unity” (*The Rule of Saint Augustine* 43-45).

Confessions present an individual who confesses his incapability to see through his own skin. The opacity of the Augustinian self is a theological axiom, as only God can completely see through the walls of the human body. But other humans can see more than we do. We are opaque to ourselves, but translucent to others –and fully transparent in the eyes of the divine–. In Rousseau, nobody will see my body better than I have. In Augustine, anyone can see more about myself than myself. This ultimately reveals that *myself* is not the tautology dreamed by the moderns. Only under the circumstances of the autonomous subject *myself* is, properly speaking, *my self*.

I have said that the presence of the individualistic autonomous subject in Rousseau and his contemporaries is axiomatic. The Augustinian subject found in and after the *Confessions* is not any less axiomatic or, more precisely, dogmatic. But for Augustine, the self-questioning person is a product, is his point of arrival after having challenged all paradigms of subjectivity in the *Confessions*. Only then it becomes the assumed protagonist of his later works. For Rousseau, as for his dialectical opponent Constant, the individualistic subject is a given of Modernity. It is what makes modernity Modernity. For Augustine, who was at least as aware of the possibility of an individualistic autonomous subject as Constant and his fellows, it is the easy road of thinking ourselves as self-sufficient in order to justify our disregard to the others.

The monastic *unanimitas* is not a *volonté générale* because the subject that operates in each paradigm is radically opposed. It would seem that the monastic

self is just but an ancient version of the modern communist subject, but there is an insurmountable abyss between the two. The former was never an individualistic subject, whereas the latter has to go out of its way to stop being one. Under the semblance of a modern understanding of communism, Augustine is actually dialoguing with the same Pachomian tradition that had inspired the birth of coenobitism. The aforementioned passage reveals now the importance of the Pachomian example: “Each should be self-supporting and manage his own affairs, but they would provide their share of all” (*Regular Life*, “The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples” §11). Yet, what is the theoretical foundation to a communitarianism that is not defined by anti-individuality, but anti-individualism. The individual is, in fact, essential to the superation of individualism.

A profoundly different concept of the individual is needed for individualism to be overcome without collaterally losing the individual. That is what modern communitarianism does, only being able to control individualism by eliminating the individual in its entirety. Monasticism supersedes late ancient communitarianism in the production of a communal self capable of remaining nonetheless individualized. Saint Augustine explains this in the context of the apostolic *koinonia*, but even more so as an ontological requirement of the soteriological eschatology of Christianity:

for the glory with the desire of which the Romans burned is the judgment of men thinking well of men. And therefore virtue is better, which is content with no human judgment save that of one’s own conscience. Whence the apostle says, ‘For this is our

glory, the testimony of our conscience.’ And in another place he says, ‘But let every one prove his own work, and then he shall have glory in himself, and not in another.’ (Saint Augustine, *The City of God* V.12)

In her brilliant essay, Susan Wessel has pondered the relevance of such Christian mandate in the late ancient and medieval development of the new religion. The existential principle becomes a comprehensive theory of subjectivity which is in turn transformed into a fully-fledged political theory. The cosmological dimensions of Creation ordain that “In Christ the Logos, the universal principle of creation harmonizes with, but does not obliterate, the particular logoi of individual modes of existence. The goal is rather to make particular creatures ‘harmonious and self-moving in relation to one another and to the universe’” (*Passion and Compassion* 182)¹⁴⁵. This is how the monastic self reconciles the individual and the commons. I said “reconciles,” but the essential finitude of the human species according to monasticism actually renders this reconciliation superfluous: there is nothing to reconcile because the self and the other were never separated. They are just the letters, words, and phrases in the Book of Creation. The neo-testamentary mandate then appears as a logical consequence of this ontology. Finally, we have arrived to the point in which the monastic understanding of the self as the commons reveals itself as a viable alternative to both modern communitarianism and individualism. Roberto Esposito has

¹⁴⁵ Wessel thinks that this theopolitical attitude is also the most fitting ontological one: “The person who loves God and neighbor unites herself not only with God but also with the integrative logoi shared by all human beings, because she is thus united, she is much more likely to make ethical decisions and to live a moral life” (*Passion and Compassion* 182).

rightfully criticized the use of the community as something created by the individual. By praeponing the individual, which the axiomatically presuppose, to the happening of the commons, the modern proponents of communitarianism are but reinforcing the triumph of the modern individualistic subject. For them, the community is just the space where the individual subjects meet and confirm each other's existence as individuals¹⁴⁶. But for Augustine and the proponents of monasticism, there is no self before the *koinonia*, for they have abandoned all traces of selves past in order to, together, build a new one.

Augustine's comment on the need to give ourselves to others without expecting anything in return is a political application of the existential principles formulated in one of the New Testament's most crucial episodes:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6:1-7)

¹⁴⁶ "Perciò la comunità non può essere pensata come un corpo, una corporazione, in cui gli individui si fondano in un individuo più grande. Ma non va intesa neanche come in reciproco 'riconoscimento' intersoggettivo in cui essi si specchiano a conferma della loro identità iniziale. Come un legame collettivo venuto ad un certo punto a connettere individui prima separati. La comunità non è un modo di essere –o, tantomen, di 'fare'– del soggetto individuale. Non è la sua proliferazione o moltiplicazione. Ma la sua esposizione a ciò che ne interrompe la chiusura e la rovescia all'esterno –una vertigine, una sincope, uno spasmo nella continuità del soggetto" (*Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, "Introduzione" xiv-xv).

All men to love each other because all are equally finite. No one can save someone else, but we can, at least, serve and support them. Incidentally, this service is the fastest way to our own salvation. For the proponents of monasticism, we do not own *our-selves* during our time on Earth, but we can definitely earn our *own* salvation.

CONCLUSION

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How can the commons be thought after the modern subject? Even more so, can they be thought at all? Or do we need to renounce to either the individual or the communal in order to have a coherent worldview? Communist thinkers since the 19th century have denounced the suppression of the commons by liberalism and its appropriation by capitalism and individualism, whereas liberal and capitalist thinkers have argued that communism suffocates the individual through the imposition of suprapersonal policies and existential endeavors. There is truth to both sides of the conflict and I believe that the reason of this unavoidable negation –the self *or* the other– is caused by the ontological coordinates introduced with the triumph of the modern autonomous subject.

Benjamin Constant's decisive eulogy of individualism asserted that "we care much more about individual liberty than the ancients did, we shall defend it against attacks with much more skill and persistence, and we have means for doing this that the ancients did not" (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 11). There is one major problem, though. When Constant says that "we care," who is he speaking for? This almost threatening claim against those willing to limit the individual aligns neatly with the coordinates of the modern subject as defined by Renaut and Macpherson. Renaut had focused on the Cartesian, gnoseological dimension of this new self. Macpherson, on the other hand, acutely listed in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individual* the characteristics of this new axiomatic understanding of subjectivity:

i. What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others. ii. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest [. . .] v. Human society consists of a series of market relations. vi. Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for others. vii. Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves. (*The Political Theory of Possessive Individual* 263-64)

From the perspective of this specific definition of the modern subject, whose self-affirmation is the first and ultimate goal, the other is necessarily seen as an impediment. And, when redirected towards the other from within the paradigm, this self-affirmation results in the negation of the individual self. But this disjunctive model, *the other or the self*, is not the only viable one. In fact, a paradigm that does not rely on the modern autonomous subject as central element could very well redefine the self and the common in a non-exclusive manner. Monasticism and its sources have demonstrated that it is possible to harmonize individuality and commonality.

The liberal critics of Rousseau, Marx, and other communitarian models developed after the triumph of the autonomous subject have legitimately pointed out that there is no room in communitarianism for a strong sense of individuality. That is why, in his famous conference entitled *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Isaiah Berlin pejoratively referred to the thinkers of the commons as

“system builders”¹⁴⁷. They are those who dream of having a unified human telos or endeavor, something that the modern subject at the heart of Berlin’s proposal could never tolerate. That is why Benjamin Constant’s manifesto lists elements that seem almost directly extracted from the *Rule* of Augustine, the Qumaranic *Community Rule*, or the elusive Spartan *Constitution*: “No-one has the right to tear / the citizen from his country, / the owner from his possessions, the merchant from his trade, / the husband from his wife, / the father from his children, / the writer from his studious meditations, / the old man from his accustomed way of life” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 9). As we can see, Constant defines liberty according to the things that nobody has the right to do to me. The liberal liberty is the negation of some negations.

At the heart of Constant and Berlin resides the axiom of Modernity—the triumphant one, anyway—that “human goals are many, not all of them commensurable” (*Two Concepts of Liberty* 33). Updating Benjamin Constant’s influential premises to the aftermath of communism and fascism, Isaiah Berlin renews one of the strongest arguments traditionally employed by liberalism and capitalism. For them, Constant and Berlin, freedom can only be coherently

¹⁴⁷ “All of that would only cause trouble and fatigue to modern nations, where each individual—occupied with his speculations, his enterprises, the benefits he has or hopes for—doesn’t want to be side-tracked from them other than momentarily, and as seldom as possible. Commerce inspires in men an intense love of individual independence. It supplies their needs, satisfies their desires, without any intervention from the authorities. This intervention is almost always [. . .] I don’t know why I say ‘almost’ [. . .] this intervention is *always* a trouble and an embarrassment. Every time collective power tries to meddle with private speculations, it harms the speculators. Every time governments offer to do our business for us, they do it worse than we would and at greater cost” (*On the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* 5).

described as a negative one, for “I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body interferes with my activity” (*Two Concepts of Liberty* 15). The other, the commons, market regulations, or interventionist states are seen as interferences not because they are evil, but because they conflict with the most essential principle of the absolute modern subject as theorized since the Cartesians to Locke or Fichte. That is the unquestionable modern “wish on the part of the individual to be its own master” (*Two Concepts of Liberty* 22). Once this has been established as an axiomatic truth, how could one dare to formulate a different understanding of the self-other connection?

Isaiah Berlin is perfectly aware of the reasons why his proposal can be the only one to succeed in this day and age. Once the self-affirmative telos of the modern autonomous subject is accepted, the least invasive, least irrational model has to be the one offered by liberalism and capitalism. Since they understand freedom in a negative way too, these systems provide the structure that least offends the autonomous subject’s will to self-affirmation. The triumph of these ideologies has little to do with their contributions to secularization, social leveling, or the overcoming of poverty and war. It is also not causally related to a firm belief in democracy and representation. Their success is owed to the fact that capitalism and liberalism are designed to least invade the now sacred territory of the individual. Coronated as new unquestionable –even by those who question it– subject of the new world, the autonomous subject is least affronted by the liberal understanding of freedom as a negative property.

Being free means “leave me alone.” Isaiah Berlin acutely explains this in one of the most fateful paragraphs written in the last century:

Pluralism, with the measure of “negative” liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of “positive” *self-mastery* by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer, because it does, at least, recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and *in perpetual rivalry with one another*. To assume that all values can be graded on one scale, so that it is a mere matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our *knowledge that men are free agents*, to represent moral decision as an operation which a slide rule could, in principle, perform. To say that in some ultimate, all-reconciling, yet realizable synthesis, duty is interest, or individual freedom is pure democracy or an authoritarian state, is to throw a metaphysical blanket over either self-deceit or deliberate hypocrisy. It is more humane because it does not (as the system builders do) deprive men, in the name of some remote, or incoherent, ideal, of much that they have found to be indispensable to their life as unpredictably self-transforming human beings. In the end, *men choose between ultimate values*; they choose as they do, because their life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are, at any rate over large stretches of time and space, *a part of their being and thought and sense of their own identity; part of what makes them human*. (33; emphasis added)

Negative freedom is much less ambitious than its affirmative counterpart, but it is also a lot easier to regulate and maintain, as it “only” needs to make sure that individuals remain within the limits of their individuality without ever dreaming to impose their project to others. Otherwise, those who do attempt to build something which transcends the (self-imposed) limits of individuality – the chief type of property for the autonomous subject, who before than anything else is an owner of himself–, risk to be called “system builders” by Isaiah Berlin. The thing is, however, that Berlin is absolutely right. He never

questions his definition of individuality because, by the time he writes his acclaimed conferences, it has not been subject to discussion for a long time. It had long become the Axiom of Modernity.

Berlin warns us against communitarianism, the communitarianism that he and his contemporaries have experienced because from his perspective Marx and his comrades will always threaten to eliminate the most essential pulsion of “the individual to be its own master” (*Two Concepts of Liberty* 22). The communitarianism that Berlin has in mind is that announced by Marx and Engels in *Die deutsche Ideologie*: “communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism” (*German Ideology* I.5; Marx and Engels’s *Collected Works* V.47). Communism, or any other communitarian project, can only be conceived in modern times as a top-to-bottom operation. After centuries of being told that our own individual will and mastery were the ultimate horizon, how would anyone convince all to surrender such precious property in order to create something common, something that negates our most valuable property? This is the reason why, after the triumph of the self-affirmative paradigm of subjectivity, force and verticality have been habitual means to impose the commons. If one, only one, of the world leaders decides to not continue with the plan to establish communism –or fascism, or any other conceivable

construct—, the entire universalist project will crumble. The last two hundred years prove the negative analysis of Isaiah Berlin and Benjamin Constant right.

There is, though, a colossal elephant in the room. Constant, Berlin, Russell, Popper, and all the critics of this system-building are, in fact, criticizing one very historically determined understanding of the commons. But the commons of Marx, noble or evil aspirations aside, are just one notion of the self-other equilibrium. Most importantly, most modern manifestations of the communal conceive their universe without truly challenging the ontological model of subjectivity that conditions them. This is exactly what I have attempted to counterpoise in this dissertation. Only by exposing the historicity of the modern self-affirmative subject conceived as a master of himself can the self and the other, the commons and the individual, be imagined in a distinctly alternative way. Otherwise, we will just be building systems destined to annihilate one of the two levels and, if we are to do so, we may as well stick to what Berlin suggests and at least have an adequate institutionalized system of not-too-affrontive egotism.

The limitations of a communitarianism that does not question the self-affirmative subject are perfectly visible in Marx's later works. Marx's corrections introduced in *Kapital III* ultimately reveal the individualistic, or more precisely, individual-centered understanding of labor and leisure. The somewhat wearied phrases of *Kapital III* do prove that writing about the individual after Descartes or Locke becomes a daunting challenge. When Marx recognizes that work

belongs to the realm of necessity and leisure to that of freedom, a primal, axiomatic cosmovisual element surfaces: work understood as a dignification of individuals through their service to the common is not anymore the most excellent and essential telos of human existence. The realization of the self is achieved in the unobstructed fulfillment of leisurely, atelic endeavors. Although I fully subscribe Jan Kandiyali's words when he says that the role of the leisurely has been exaggerated. It is, nonetheless, true that many of Engels and Marx's works used to present an idealized image of labor not too distant from that of the Benedictine motto *ora et labora* (*Karl Marx's Individualistic Conception of the Good Life* 90-95)¹⁴⁸. With a key difference: For the monk, labor is sacred because it connects the service on Earth to that to God, but it is easy to see how it would eventually lose its appeal for Marx, who mostly sees it as a noble activity that should not result in exploitation.

Eduard Bernstein and his followers showed the world that exploitation can be limited or even suppressed under a capitalist regime. Although what has happened historically is that we just relocate misery to the periphery and hide it from our rose-colored sight, it could be conceivable from a logical point of view. That is why, letting the axiom of Modernity transpire, Marx eventually favors the non-laborious and the leisurely as the realm where the individual must achieve realization. This is exactly what commodity capitalism and social

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. also the "Introduction" to his recent volumen *Reassessing Marx's Social and Political Philosophy: Freedom, Recognition, and Human Flourishing*.

democracy propose. The problem is that even the most consequential proponent of communitarianism in modern times was not able to sever the theoretical ties and free his model from the demands of the self-affirmative subject. As long as realization is seen as self-realization, the Marxist purview is bound to progressively allow for more and more room for a self-centered individuality, which eventually leads to non-revolutionary social democracy¹⁴⁹. But this is not the only way to think the self. Nor the commons.

Spartan agoge and Athenian paideia designed a world in which no occupation was higher than serving the polis¹⁵⁰. Similarly, Judaism envisions a

¹⁴⁹ There is not a more striking moment in Escotado's work as the flabbergasting declaration found in page 52: "La concordia presupone cierto grado de prosperidad, finalmente concretado en ingresos individuales y las instituciones democráticas pierden sentido o se desvirtúan cuando la renta retrocede" (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.52). If this supposed to be a defense of democracy, it is difficult to imagine a worse ally. The fragment reveals two absolutely essential facts: 1) Escotado and many of the authors from which he draws his ideology see capitalism –or, somewhat euphemistically, commercial success– precedes democracy to the point of being its ultimate prerequisite; 2) democracy does not work if there is no welfare and, more precisely, individual welfare. In the context of the Peloponnesian War, but not only, Escotado is quite directly telling us that democracy is only viable in times and contexts of wealth, which says very, very little about the solidity of the political model that he believes to be praising. Even more interestingly, this argument provides, too, the perfect legitimation for those contrary to the liberal idea of negative freedom –Constant, Berlin, Popper, Russell, Escotado...– to come up with a political device capable of doing its best under any economic circumstances. How do we convince others to embrace something that only works when things are going well? What will happen to them, to use, when they do not? I am glad that Jefferson, Tocqueville or Constant had much better arguments to defend democracy, because otherwise we would be having a drastically different conversation. In regards to our discussion, this fragment is enough to predispose the critical reader to, at least, hear what the critics of Escotado's version of History have to say.

¹⁵⁰ The incommensurability between the modern liberal paradigm of negative freedom and that of Antiquity reaches unsustainable levels in one of Escotado's multiple invectives against Sparta: "alardear de no haber conocido nunca la tiranía tiene algo de sorprendente considerando que nunca conoció la libertad. Su único poeta, Tirteo, que presenta al Estado como educador del ciudadano en la virtud, identifica *demos* con ejército y la formación cívica a la vida cuartelera [. . .] quizás ninguna [cultura] despreció tab olímpicamente cualquier ocupación pacífica" (*Los enemigos del comercio* I.62). Russell, Popper, Escotado... For all of

life of full commitment to the most excellent idea of God, which Christianity adopts and presents as a disjunctive between two mutually exclusive lives: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). One has to choose between serving the egotistic passion for property and fame, or something else. For all of these worldviews, the commons are neither a step nor a tool towards individual realization, but a destination. Monasticism fights individualism by combining service to the city and the divine into one unified package. It just so happens that the individual is completed and affirmed in its dedication to the others.

That is why Spartan generals did not retreat, or why out of the eight Athenian *strategoï* sent to save Conon at the Battle of Arginusae in 406 BC, only six returned to Athens. They could not accept the dishonor—and ulterior judicial process, truth to tell—of not having been able to rescue their fallen peers due to a sea storm. This is how Pericles the Younger and other important heroes of Arginusae were condemned to death. And that is despite having successfully defeated the Spartan-led army, ensuing which they were executed following one of many cases of questionable communitarian-oriented thinking. The polis was more important than the lives of those who fought to defend it. This is the same problem that Berlin and the liberals will identify in Marx’s works. If modern liberalism tends to suppress the other and communism tends to suppress the

them Plato is the father of absolutism and any concept of liberty different from that of Isaiah Berlin, a violation of humanity’s very essence.

self, how can they be even put in the same phrase today? And, do we really need to have the two?

Roberto Esposito has once again something crucial to say: “La piega mitologica che tutti i filosofi della comunità sperimentano come l’irriducibile punto cieco della proprio prospettiva consiste nella difficoltà di assumere –e sostenere– il vuoto del *munus* ad oggetto di riflessione. Come pensare il *puro rapporto* senza riempirlo di sostanza soggettiva?” (*Communitas* xxxiv). The void of the common is always presented from the point of view –the great fallacy of Modernity– of a beholder self-crowned as absolute subject¹⁵¹. All the key philosophers studied by Esposito in *Communitas* –Hobbes, Kant, Rousseau, Heidegger, Bataille– cannot help but “ridurre la generalità dell’incomune nella particolarità di *un* sogetto comune” (xxxiv). He explains that the commons become subjected and subjectified when we substantiate in the form of a people, a land, a race, or any of the essences commonly employed to define through difference –what we are, what we are not–¹⁵². He does not hesitate to

¹⁵¹ Alodia Martín Martínez’s works debunk the fallacy of Modernity’s “true perspective” by revealing that linear perspective is a theoretical construct parallel to that of the self-caused, self-affirmative modern autonomous subject.

¹⁵² “La comunità viene murata all’interno di se stessa e separata dal suo esterno” (*Communitas* xxiv). The difference-identity machine operates everywhere, but no historical case shaped the Western world as the walled city of Athens. This device has been magisterially studied by Jesús Ezquerro Gómez in “Pólis y Caos. El espacio de lo político,” a brilliant article on the meaning of the polis and the city, the self and the other. There is one episode of the Peloponnesian War, though, where the identification between the polis and the walls becomes problematic, as the crisis of the Thirty Tyrants leads the commanders of Athens’s famous fleet to effectively secede from the city. Or, more precisely, reclaim the city for the democrats against the oligarchs within the walls. For a period of time, then, the political body of Athens –the second body of the sovereign, in Kantorowicz’s terms– is not that of the actual city, but of its triremes. Even

claim that the modern proliferation of these “comunitarismi, patriottismi, particolarismi che della *communitas* costituiscono non solo qualcosa di diverso, ma la piú evidente negazione” (xxv). These bodies are just communities in appearance, arrangements that in fact reveal the failure of the commons. They are what happens when the “improprietà del comune” is appropriated by a subject¹⁵³. This is the precise context in which the modern *immunizzazione* takes place. Immunization in Espositian terms is the appropriation, individuation, and separation of reality from the commons. The modern understandings of the intersubjective, as it implies the autonomy of the subject, “vivono *nella e della* rinuncia a convivere” (xxiii). The essence of modern theopolitics which derives from the self-affirmative subject, be it liberal or communitarian, fatefully leads to an ineluctable renunciation of the commons. The self owns itself before even joining the commons. Conversely, the monastic self can only dream of owning itself after having given its life to the others. It is either the self or the other, but not the commons.

Only by challenging the axiomaticity of the modern tautological subject can the self and the other be reframed. I have argued that the monastic

the Spartans fighting Athens will regard the army and the fleet as the legitimate site of the Athenian polis, which has transcended its walls.

¹⁵³ “Ne risulta che *communitas* è l’insieme di persone unite non da una ‘proprietà’, ma, appunto, da un dovere o da un debito. Non da un ‘piú’, ma da un ‘meno’, da una mancanza, da un limite che si configura come un onere, o addirittura una modalità difettiva, pero colui che ne è ‘affetto’, a differenza di colui che ne è, invece, ‘esente’ o ‘esentato’” (Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, “Introduzione” xiii).

commons are made possible by the conception of a subjectivity that is not a subject. Or at least no subject in the modern sense of self-caused, self-affirmative, and self-centered hero. Derived from Lacedaemonian, Mosaic, and Egyptian sources, the monastic self is defined by its service to the others and the Other. This Other is not conceived as an external warrant of what society or the others may owe me, but as the affirmation of the individual in the very moment in which the words “I owe you” are uttered. This is the communitarian sense of the individual proposed by Roberto Esposito, a paradigm in which “I soggetti della comunità sono uniti da un ‘dovere’ nel senso in cui si dice ‘ti devo qualcosa’ ma non ‘mi devi qualcosa’” (*Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, “Introduzione” xiii). Thus he goes from the possessive individualism that claims “You owe me,” to the “I owe you” of the koinon. Together with Esposito, Saint Augustine and the proponents of monasticism conceive an alternative koinonia in which the individual is affirmed, not just by saying I *owe* you, but I *love* you. And, why not, I *love* you? The original proponents of monasticism ardently longed for the fire and loves of a blazing, divine love. To owe, to love, and to love. Those are the three operations of the communitarian monasticism. A monastic self who does not want nor demand anything from others or society, for it gives itself to the others in a community- and individuality-building act of self interest. To change the world one needs to change the subject. Otherwise, the theopolitical order will inexorably remain the same.

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