Divine Anger and Favour in the Roman tradition

Several Roman writers regarded the security and prosperity of their communities, as well as the order of the entire universe, as connected with the scrupulous fulfilment of religious duties. This order, called *pax deorum*, included peace and harmony in society as well as in the universe. Natural catastrophes and public disasters were explained as caused by divine anger that was provoked by either religious misbehaviour or neglect (*religio neglecta*). In Greco-Roman thinking, religious misbehaviour – impiety towards the gods (*asebeia, impietas*) – was in correlation with the transgression against the *res publica*. According to the renowned Roman ethos, known to us especially through the dialogue in Cicero, *De natura deorum*, it was the *religio* of the *maiores* that brought Romans their triumphs, achieved the greatness of the

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2 See, e.g., Cic. *dom.* 1.1, on the maintenance of the state by the prudent interpretation of religion. Cf. Livy (5.51–54) who stated that Jupiter’s temple was the foundation of the greatness of Rome.

3 E.g., according to Livy (22.9.7–11), after the Romans had been defeated by Hannibal in the battle of Lake Trasimeno in 217 BCE, Fabius Maximus interpreted the defeat as caused by the neglect of the gods. Cic. *nat.* 2.8 lists consequences of neglected religion. Heck 1987, 30–37, 182 speaks of the tradition of *exempla religionis neglectae* in Roman literature. Another notorious example of the neglect of the gods was Claudius, who threw the sacred hens into the sea during the first Punic war and therefore lost his navy in the sea battle (Cic. *nat.* 2.8).

4 Scheid 1985, 29–32; Liebeschuetz 1979, 56–57, 92; North 2010, 44.
Empire and guaranteed success in the future. The circumstances of the state were dependent on the practice of religio.\(^5\)

### Christian apologists and Divine Anger

The Roman ideas of divine wrath and divine favour have been conveyed to us by Christian apologists – and often probably in a simplified and distorted form, as a straw man that was easy to be refuted.\(^6\) A classic example is Tertullian's complaint of how Christians are treated as the scapegoats for all misfortunes: “If the Tiber floods the town or the Nile fails to flood the fields, if the sky stands still or the earth moves, if famine, if plague, the first reaction is 'Christians to the lions!'”\(^7\)

Tertullian replied to these charges, relativizing the contemporary hardships and arguing that there had been misfortunes in Roman history long before the existence of Christians.\(^8\) However, Christian apologists often reacted to these charges within the same framework of divine favour and anger, linking the correct religion and the welfare of the Empire with each other. They declared that the piety of Christian prayers had protected the world.\(^9\) For instance, Origen assured them that Christian prayers guaranteed military success.\(^10\)

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5 Cic. nat. 2.8. In Cic. nat. 2.7–8, one of the interlocutors, Balbus, argues that the reason for the strength and success of the Roman people is its unique religiosity and that the greatness of Rome is the reward from the gods for the Roman pietas. In Cic. nat. 3.94, it is stated that religio was a better fortification for Rome than the walls (Diligentius urbem religione quam ipsis moenibus cingitis); cf. Cic. harusp. resp. 19. Cf. Polyb. 6.56.6–8, who claims that the greatest advantage of Roman society seems to be in the gods. See Wlosok 1970, 53–56.

6 E.g., the ideas conveyed by Tert. apol. 25.2 on the greatness of Rome as the reward from the worship of the gods and by Min. Fel. 25.1 on the Empire as enlarged and reinforced, not virtute but religione et pietate.

7 Tert. apol. 40.1–2: … omnis popularis incommodi a primordio temporum Christianos esse in causa. Si Tiberis ascendit in moenia, si Nilus non ascendit in rura, si caelum stetit, si terra movit, si fames, si lues, statim “Christianos ad leonem”. Similar charges are reported by Tert. nat. 1.9; Cypr. Demetr. 1–2; Arnob. nat. 1.1; 1.9: Non pluit, inquit, caelum et frumentorum inopia nescio qua laboramus; 3.11; 4.24, and even in the early fifth century by Aug. civ. 2.3: pluvia defit, causa Christiani.

8 E.g., Tert. apol. 40.3–8. A similar approach of relativizing contemporary misfortunes was used by Augustine (see below, n. 50).

9 E.g., Aristid. apol. 16.7. Christian apologists represented Christianity as the only useful religion: Melito of Sardis (in Eus. eccl. 4.26.5–11) declared that it was ‘our philosophy’ that had started the era of peace and prosperity in the Roman Empire and Athenagoras of Athens (leg. 37) stated that Christianity was the only religion that guaranteed peace and order in the Empire. See Fiedrowicz 2000, 194, 198; Perkins 2009, 40.

10 Orig. c. Cels. 8.69–70.
Furthermore, Tertullian threw the accusations back, arguing that the misfortunes of the Romans were caused by their neglect and reluctance to worship the true God. This in fact had provoked the anger of the Christian God whereas the prayers of Christians had mitigated the divine wrath. To enhance his argument Tertullian stated that natural disasters were signs of God’s anger incited by the persecution of Christians. Similarly, Cyprian of Carthage announces that the Christian God is irritated because Romans do not turn to him and, therefore, he punishes them for their wickedness.

Greek and Roman charges against Christians during the Tetrarchic reign

The *pax deorum* argument was used against religious dissidents in the reign of the tetrarchs. Among these religious dissidents were Christians but they were by no means the only group under suspicion; Manichaeans also had their share of the mischief of the Roman administrators.

In an imperial proclamation of 312, Maximinus Daia links the worship of the traditional gods with the welfare of the Empire and consequently explains the adversities as a result of the blind error, delusion, impiety etc. of Christians. All the misfortunes have originated from Christianity: “And all these calamities have taken place because of the destructive error of the empty vanity of those impious people when it prevailed in their souls and, we may almost say, weighed down the entire world with disgrace”.

In Maximinus Daia’s declaration, the destruction and damage brought forth by Christian error is contrasted with the beneficent providence of the gods. The traditional rites are depicted as salutary and imperial piety as bringing remedy. Maximinus paints an idyllic picture of the welfare that the divine favour brings forth: there is no longer a lack of crops, no war, no corrupted atmosphere,
neither tempests nor hurricanes, and no earthquakes. People will take enjoyment from “the harvest flourishing with waving heads in the wide fields and at the meadows glittering with plants and flowers”, thanks to the abundant rains and the restored mildness and gentleness of the atmosphere. Furthermore, it is declared that “the most powerful and terrifying Ares [war] has been propitiated by our piety (eusebeia), our sacrifices (hierourgia) and our veneration (time) [of the gods]”.

The benefit of the state is also found in the proclamation of Emperor Galerius (the so-called edict of Serdica) in which Galerius justifies both his actions against Christians and his withdrawal from these actions with the well-being of the Empire.

Christian replies and counter-charges during the Tetrarchic reign

Christian apologists refer to other early-fourth-century accusations against Christians in which the welfare of the community and the correct practice of religion were linked together. Arnobius reports concerning the ideas of the violated pax deorum:

Ever since Christians have appeared in the world, the world has gone in ruins, humankind has met many forms of misfortunes, the heavenly gods themselves have been expelled from the earthly regions and they [the gods] have abandoned their usual care with which they used to guard our affairs.

Arnobius replies to these accusations with two different approaches. The first method is to make a retorsio, that is, to throw the accusation back at pagans and their gods. When speaking of the food shortage and damage of crops, Arnobius writes:

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16 In Eus. eccl. 9.7.3; 9.7.7 – 11.
17 In Eus. eccl. 9.7.11.
18 Lact. mort. 34.1: rei publicae semper commodis atque utilitate. At the end of the declaration (34.5), Galerius announces that Christians are asked to pray for the well-being of the emperor, the state and themselves so that the state would be kept unharmed (ut undique versum res publica praestetur incolumis).
19 Arnob. nat. 1.1: Postquam esse in mundo Christiana gens coepit, terrarum orbem perisse, multiformibus malis affectum esse genus humanum, ipsos etiam caelites, derelictis curis sollemnibus quibus quondam solebant invisere res nostras, terrarum ab regionibus exterminatos. See also Arnob. nat. 1.3.1: … dicitur invectam esse labem terris, postquam religio Christiana intulit se mundo … (all translations are mine). In a manner similar to Cyprian, Arnobius (nat. 1.2.3) explains the miseries as resulting from the old age of the world.
It is you that are the cause of all miseries, you agitate the gods, you incite them to
 inflict the lands with all calamities and also to make new misfortunes every day.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, it is the anger and indignation of the gods that actually cause the miseries
and terrors.\textsuperscript{21} The second method is to argue for the existence of the divine
providence that indiscriminately (\textit{aequaliter}) brings the harvests, rains and winds
for the good and evil, the just and unjust.\textsuperscript{22}

Lactantius discusses the divine reward and retribution in his works \textit{Institutiones divinae}, \textit{De mortibus persecutorum} and \textit{De ira Dei}.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{Institutiones divinae}, Lactantius projects the divine vengeance, \textit{iudicium Dei}, onto the Last Judgment.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, in \textit{On the Deaths of the Persecutors}, he describes God’s
vengeance on the Roman persecutors of Christians. This is a reply to the Roman
tradition according to which the gods will punish religious negligence and
offences: in Lactantius’ version, it is the Christian deity who will avenge and has
already avenged offences made to Christians.\textsuperscript{25} In \textit{De ira Dei}, Lactantius
discusses the divine anger, refuting the views of both Stoics (God does not feel
anger) and Epicureans (gods are not interested) and connecting God’s anger
with divine justice. There must be God’s anger, he argues and then states,
“Hence, there can be no religion where there is no fear”.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Arnob. \textit{nat.} 3.11: \textit{miserarum omnium causa vos estis, vos deos impellitis, vos excitatis
infestare omnibus malis terras et nova quaeque cotidie struere.} Pagans irritate their own gods
by insulting them with their vile myths and shameful ceremonies.
\item[21] Arnob. \textit{nat.} 7.38: \textit{Si ergo his datis calor omnis numinum indignatioque frigescunt
vertunturque in prospera ea quae videbantur adfère terrores: manifestum est haec omnia non
sine caelitum fieri voluntate, et quod ea tribuantur a nobis, inaniter et cum tota inperitia
reprehendi.} Furthermore, Arnobius (\textit{nat.} 4.24) argues that all the miseries originate from
the beliefs that pagans held in former times about their gods.
\item[22] Arnob. \textit{nat.} 3.24.3: \textit{Non fervorem genitalem solis deus, noctis et tempora, ventos pluvias
fruges cunctis subministrat aequaliter bonis, malis, \[iustis\], in\[iustis\], servis, pauperibus,
divitibus?} I have added the correction made by Simmons 1995, 190.
\item[23] In the fifth book of \textit{Institutiones divinae}, Lactantius ponders the problem of God’s
justice: why does the Christian deity let his people suffer in the persecution? Lact.
\textit{inst.} 5.22.18–24 replies that the number of God’s people is increased in the persecution:
\textit{ut dei populus augeatur.} Cf. Tertullian, who discusses the issue with similar answers:
\textit{Scap.} 5 and \textit{apol.} 50, esp. 50.13: \textit{semen est sanguis Christianorum.} For the discussion, see
Heck 1987, 197–198. Lactantius discusses the divine justice with ancient philosophers,
e.g., referring to Seneca’s \textit{De providentia} (\textit{inst.} 5.22.11–12).
\item[24] Lact. \textit{inst.} 5.23.2
\item[25] Lact. \textit{mort.} 1 and 52. See Heck 1987, 217, 220–221 on the reminiscences of the Roman
\textit{exempla} tradition, esp. to Cic. \textit{nat.} and \textit{Milon.} 83–86.
\item[26] Lact. \textit{ira} 11: \textit{Adeo religio esse non potest, ubi metus nullus est.}
\end{footnotes}
The Constantinian shift

What happens to the welfare argument after the Constantinian shift? Christian emperors also appealed to the correlation between the practice of proper religion and the welfare of the Empire. This is obvious in the famous letter of Licinius and Constantine, often incorrectly termed the ‘Edict of Milan’. In the letter, the emperors proclaim their agreement on mutual religious policy and state that, with their policy, they aim for the welfare and public security of the Empire and the profit of humans. They declare that they grant both to Christians and to all others the freedom to follow whatever religion each one wishes. Then they state explicitly that this is done “in order that whatever divinity there is in the seat of heaven may be appeased and made propitious towards us and towards all who have been under our power”.

Thus, it is accentuated that the divinity is propitiated and made well-disposed (placatum ac propitium possit existere). The customary goodwill and benevolence (solitum favorem suum benivolentiamque) of the divinity are maintained when no one is denied freedom of religion. Furthermore, at the end of the proclamation, the emperors hope that the divine goodwill that they have enjoyed so far will continue to ensure public happiness (cum beatitudine publica). It is noteworthy that this appeal to maintaining the divine favour is in line with the traditional pax deorum thought pattern and is particularly reminiscent of Maximinus Daia’s proclamation mentioned earlier. Thus, it is still argued that the peace and well-being of the Empire can be guaranteed by keeping the divine forces propitious.

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27 Lact. mort. 48.2: ... Cum feliciter tam ego [quam] Constantinus Augustus quam etiam ego Licinius Augustus apud Mediolanum convenissetus atque universa quae ad commoda et securitatem publicam pertinere, in tractatu haberemus, haec inter cetera quae videhahmus pluribus hominibus profutura, vel in primis ordinanda esse credidimus, quibus divinitatis reverentia continebatur, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem quam quisque voluisset, quod quicquid est divinitatis in sede caelesti, nobis atque omnibus qui sub potestate nostra sunt constituti, placatum ac propitium possit existere; see also Eus. ecc. 10.5. For the proclamation of 313, see Kahlos 2009, 56–58 with further bibliography.

28 Lact. mort. 48.2–3; 48.11.

29 The connection is also pointed out by MacMullen 1969, 93–94: “The Edict, then, in its peculiar emphasis on the motives of toleration, would be responding to Maximin Daia’s propaganda”; cf. DePalma Digeser 2000, 122.
The defence of traditional cults: Libanius and Symmachus

In the course of the fourth century, the discussion of divine anger and favour continued. In the altered circumstances, the worship of the traditional gods was under threat and was gradually forbidden in imperial legislation. This is the context for the speech for the temples that the Antiochene rhetorician Libanius addressed to Emperor Theodosius I in 390. Libanius argues that the security and accomplishments of the Roman Empire derive from the favour of the gods. He attributes the growth and glory of the Empire to the worship of the traditional gods. He asks whether the Christians’ God had helped the Romans to attain supreme power over the world or, rather, whether it was the old gods who had guided the Romans. Libanius lists *exempla* of divine support from myths and history, thus following keenly the *exempla* tradition. Then he argues that, if the stability of the Empire depends on the sacrifices, performing them will benefit the whole populace.

The most renowned appeal for the continuing support of the traditional Roman religion is Symmachus’ *relatio* 3 addressed to Valentinian II in 384. This *relatio* has been discussed meticulously by several scholars. Therefore, I will just point out that Symmachus was fundamentally anchored in the Roman *exempla* tradition and his opponents, Ambrose of Milan and Prudentius, were attached to the tradition of the disputes concerning the *pax deorum* and the charges against Christians. Symmachus appeals to the utility of the traditional cults for the Empire and repeats the old charges of failure of crops and drought against Christians. If the gods are neglected, they send severe calamities.

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30 Liban. or. 30.31. The examples of Agamemnon, Heracles, the battles of Marathon and Salamis are mentioned. The old gods as the protectors of the Empire appear already in the beginning of the speech (30.4–5). For Libanius’ speech, see Criscuolo 1995.

31 Liban. or. 30.34. It is intriguing that Libanius argues for the protection of the traditional gods with a conditional ‘if’.


33 See Symm. *rel*. 3.6 on learning from the historical *exempla*: *corrigit enim sequentem lapsus prioris et de reprehensione antecedentis exempli nascitur emendatio*.


35 Failure of crops: Symm. *rel*. 3.15–17. The essence of Symmachus’ ideas in *rel*. 3.8 is that the traditional cults must be supported in order to achieve and maintain the Roman greatness. As long as the traditional religion was practised, the Empire was safe and sound. Vestals are the guarantee of public welfare: Symm. *rel*. 3.11: *saluti publicae dicata virginitas*. Gualandri 1995, 243–245 shows that Symm. *rel*. 3.15–17 is filled with Vergilian reminiscences that make the imminence of the divine anger even more effective.

36 For this thought pattern, see also Symm. *ep*. 2.7.3 *Di patrii, facite gratiam neglectorum sacrorum! Miseram famem pellite! Quamprimum revocet urbs nostra, quos invita dimisit!*
The Christian reply and turnover: Ambrose and Prudentius

Ambrose refutes these charges: he explains the Roman success by the Roman virtues, that is, by explaining that the victories were due to the strength of the Roman warriors.\(^\text{37}\) The success and failure are not achievements of the gods but a normal human issue. Even before the appearance of Christianity, he argues, the gods had not protected Romans from calamities such as the defeats by Brennus and Hannibal. Ambrose refers to the insinuations according to which Emperor Gratian’s violent death was the punishment of gods, possibly for his anti-pagan legislation, and he refutes the idea, stating that human affairs do not always have the same success but are in constant variation and change.\(^\text{38}\) Furthermore, disasters such as famine were natural phenomena. Here Ambrose appears clearly as ‘secularizing’ and ‘demythologizing’ the idea of divine favour and anger.\(^\text{39}\) He refutes the notion of divine reward and retribution and this refutation is part of Ambrose’s rhetorical strategy in the dispute with Symmachus.

However, Ambrose himself employs the image of divine retribution elsewhere in his works; there, his rhetorical strategy is different. In *De fide* Ambrose interprets military defeats, especially that at Adrianople in 378, as God’s punishment for Emperor Valens’ Homoian Christianity (‘Arianism’). Ambrose states that the reason for the divine wrath (*divinae indignationis causa*) is evident: the confidence in the Roman Empire has been broken where the belief in God has been Overthrown.\(^\text{40}\) Ambrose connects the religious dissidence (‘heresy’) and barbarian assaults, paralleling the ‘sacrilegious voices’ [of heretics] and ‘barbarian attacks’ (*sacrilegis pariter vocibus et barbaricis motibus*). He asks how the Roman State could be secure with such guardians.\(^\text{41}\)


\(^{38}\) Ambr. *ep.* 18.34: *quia non eodem semper successus habent, sed variant status et mutant vices.* Ambrose fortifies his argument of the variability of human fates with the *exempla* of Pompey, Cyrus, Hamilcar and Emperor Julian.


\(^{41}\) Ambr. *fid.* 2.16.140: *totum illum limitem sacrilegis pariter vocibus et barbaricis motibus audivimus inhorrentem? Quid poterat nobis vicinia tam feralis invehere? Aut quem
Probably around 402–403, that is, almost twenty years after Symmachus’ appeal, we get a similar impression from Prudentius’ argumentation against Symmachus. Prudentius argues that Roman achievements are the result of their moral virtues, referring to the battle of Pollentia in 402 in which the Romans led by Stilicho defeated Alaric’s Goths. Then he states that Rome was not saved from the mythical attack of the Gauls on the Capitol in 390 BCE by the vigilance of Juno’s geese (non pervigil anser) but by the crude strength of men (sed vis cruda virum).\footnote{Prud. c. Symm. 2.703–707; 2.703–706: Depulit hos nimbos equitum non pervigil anser, / proditor occulti tenebrosa nocte pericli, / se vis cruda virum perfractaque congredientum / pectora … For Prudentius and the battle of Pollentia, see Pollmann 2011, 181–182 and Döpp 1980, 65–81.}

However, Prudentius does not ‘demythologize’ the religious explanations of historical events and Roman victories but rather just makes a turnover: he rejects the pagan explanation of divine support and replaces it with a new Christian explanation of divine support. It is the Christian deity that favours and helps Romans, not the old gods. Prudentius asks whether it was by Jupiter’s auspices (love … auspice) that granted such a great reward for valour that day. Then he answers that the Romans were led by the young emperor Honorius – whom he calls Christipotens, powerful in Christ – and the commander of the army Stilicho; they both had on their side the one God, Christ (Deus unus Christus utrique).\footnote{Prud. c. Symm. 2.708–711: Numquid et ille dies Iove contulit auspice tantum virtutis pretium? Dux agminis imperique / Christipotens nobis iuvenis fuit, et comes eius / atque parens Stilicho, Deus unus Christus utrique. Cf. Claudian, who in De bello Gothico (26).52–53 speaks of the divine favour that Rome enjoys (certa secundis fide deis) and in (26).100–103 appeals to the protection of Jupiter. Paulinus of Nola (c. 21.19–20) ascribes the attacks of Goths to God’s anger and the Roman victory in Fiesole in 407 to Christ (potentia Christi munera). For the reactions to the Roman victories from the Goths, see Consolino 1995, 323–324.}

Thus, the strength of the Romans was still in religion, but it was now the new religion.\footnote{As Pollmann 2011, 184–185 shows, there is a clear connection between military and political success and adherence to the right religion in Prudentius’ reply to Symmachus, but nonetheless also an important eschatological dimension.}

One divine explanation is just replaced by another one. The \textit{pax deorum} has been transformed into \textit{pax Dei}.\footnote{E.g., in \textit{perist.} 2.417–420 Prudentius declares that Christ has made Rome the political and military lord of the world: qui sceptr a Romae in vertice / rerum locasti, sanciens / mundum Quirinali togae / servire et armis cedere.}
Debating the sack of Rome and other misfortunes

Symmachus’ concern for the continuation of traditional cults was shared by other contemporary writers in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries who painted the closure and devastation of temples, as well as prohibitions of sacrifices and other rituals, as the beginning of the cosmic catastrophe. The order of human society and the stability of the universe were seen as shaken to their foundations. As we may deduce from the reports in Augustine’s works, especially in the *City of God* as well as Orosius’ *History against pagans*, it was almost commonplace to ascribe the sack of Rome in 410 and other calamities to Christians.

What was under issue, as Wolfgang Liebeschuetz puts it, was whether Christianity “could mobilize divine support for Rome as effectively as the traditional gods of Rome had done”. In the manner of Ambrose and Prudentius, Augustine seems to demythologize the divine favour and anger, for instance, in the manner of Tertullian, by relativizing the sack of Rome not as a unique incident but one among other similar phenomena. However, the idea of divine reward and retribution appears in his argumentation, albeit in a more sophisticated form than in the earlier writers. Augustine states that the fates of earthly kingdoms are dependent on divine favour, but that the purposes of divine providence are incomprehensible for humans. Moreover, Augustine turns the charges against Christians around, when reporting on the claims of pagans, according to whom Radagaisus’ defeat of the Romans was because he made sacrifices to the gods while the Romans did not. Augustine states that God used the barbarian attacks as a punishment for the Romans. God flogged

46 E.g., Ammianus Marcellinus (19.19–20) was worried because imminent portents were no longer taken into consideration and placated by expiation rituals. Eunapius of Sardis (*v. soph. 8.1.11 Giangrande = 482 Wright*) tells us that, as the shrines in Greece were devastated in the 390’s, there were not a few who in their sorrow committed suicide. For the discussion, see Barnes 1982, 71; Fowden 1993, 42–43, 48.
47 Echoes of the charges against Christians and demands for renewal of cults are found in Aug. *serm. 60.6.7; 81; 296.7; ep. 98.1; cons. ev. 1.32.50; 1.33.51; serm. 26.63 Dolbeau* debaring on the utility of pagan cults.
48 E.g., Oros. *hist. 6.1.23*: the Christian emperors made an end to sacrifices and closed temples and therefore pagans thought that the gods had forsaken them.
50 In the formulation of O’Daly 1994, 67, Augustine’s argumentation is that “pagan religion does not save cities any more than Christianity causes their ruin”. For Tertullian, see n. 8.
51 E.g., Aug. *civ. 4.34.*
(flagellavit) the Romans in this way and showed that sacrifices to demons (that is, the old gods) were useless, even in keeping safety in this world.\footnote{Aug. civ. 5.23: victis supplicatoribus daemonum nec saluti rerum præsentium necessaria esse sacrificia illa monstravit. For the background of Augustine’s debate with Roman traditional religion, see Marcone 1995, 5–14.}

Augustine and Orosius were by no means the only writers to deal with the issue. In the anonymous early-fifth-century Syrian treatise \textit{Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos}, the writer refers to an often-posed question: whether Hellenism (that is, the traditional cults) appears more pious (\textit{hosioteros}) since, as long as it prevailed in the towns, all the towns and the country enjoyed prosperity and wealth; they needed not suffer from wars; and after the Christian doctrine replaced Hellenism, there were great losses. The writer of the treatise replies with mixed strategies. On one hand, the writer refutes the influence of the old gods, stating that towns and countries had been crushed even in those times when Hellenism prevailed. Furthermore, he argues for the divine providence that governs the world as it wishes: God sends prosperity and desolation as he deems useful. On the other hand, the writer also argues for the favour of the Christian God: he states that no one can show any city to have fallen down after the triumph of Christianity. After the triumph of Christianity there have been fewer wars in the world than before.\footnote{Pseudo-Justin, \textit{Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos} 126, \textit{PG} 6. The treatise belongs to a genre of question-answer literature. It was earlier falsely attributed to Justin but later it was assigned either to Diodore of Tarsus (by Adolf von Harnack) or Theodoret of Cyrrhus (by Franz Xavier Funk). Winkelmann 1998, 152–153 raises doubts about its authorship by Theodoret. For the work as an early fifth-century work from Syria, see Papadoyannakis 2008, 115–127.}

A few Late Antique historians refer to the demands for the revival of old practices in the middle of the crisis with the Goths. Both the sixth-century pagan historian Zosimus and the fifth-century church historian Sozomenus mention that in 408, as Alaric’s Goths were threatening the city of Rome, the senators (Sozomenus) or the city prefect Pompeianus (Zosimus) planned to revive traditional rituals, that is, to ascend to the Capitol and let priests offer sacrifices (Sozomenus). Zosimus claims that this happened with the connivance of the bishop of Rome, Innocentius I, who, according to Zosimus, “considered Rome’s safety (\textit{ten tes poleos soterian}) more important than his own convictions”. The bishop, however, consented only to rituals made in secrecy (\textit{lathra}), thus not in public. Ultimately, the senators did not dare to ascend to the Capitol and perform sacrifices in public.\footnote{Zos. 5.40–41; Soz. \textit{eccl.} 9.6–7. Both writers follow Olympiodorus’ lost account. Sozomenus does not mention the connivance of Innocentius. Noethlichs 1998, 13; Barnes 1982, 70; O’Daly 1994, 65–75; Burgarella 1995, 190; Cameron 2011, 190–191.}
damage done to traditional cults lead the Empire into ruin. As a result, the Empire was weakened and barbarians inhabited it.\textsuperscript{55}

Many Christian writers attributed the fifth- and sixth-century calamities to the immorality of the whole contemporary society.\textsuperscript{56} The most illustrative examples are Orosius and Salvian of Marseille. Orosius explains the history of humankind as a series of divine punishments inflicted for human wrongdoings, for instance, attributing the sack of Rome to the anger of God with the sinful Romans.\textsuperscript{57} Salvian ascribes the miseries of the Romans altogether to the corruption of Christians, the moral decay of the state and the continuation of pagan cults and festivals by Christians. In Salvian’s opinion, Christians deserved punishment for their sins as a community, not only as individuals.\textsuperscript{58} Descriptions of divine anger and self-chastisement of the whole community were already present in Eusebius’ early-fourth-century account, in which the church historian explained the beginning of the tetrarchic persecution as the consequence of the abundant freedom that Christians enjoyed under the reign of Gallienus before the time of the tetrarchs. As a result, Christians fell “into laxity and sloth” as well as into internal rivalries. The hypocrisy and

\textsuperscript{55} Zos. 4.59. The decay of the Empire: Zos. 1.57.1；2.33.4；3.32.1；4.21.3. Zosimus (4.18.2–4) writes that Athens was saved from the earthquake in the mid-fourth century because Nestorius, the high priest of Eleusis had performed the proper rituals. Furthermore, Zosimus (5.41.1) claims that the town of Narnia was saved from the attack of Alaric’s Goths thanks to the prayers and ancestral ceremonies made to the divinity. Burgarella 1995, 190；Noethlichs 1998, 2；Cameron 2011, 110.

\textsuperscript{56} According to Lambert 1999, 120–121, interpreting events as manifestations of God’s punishment was “the almost universal practice of ancient Christians”. People who either anger or please God are either visibly punished or rewarded. This resembles the traditional \textit{do ut des} thinking of Romans. Cf. Sidon. ep. 3.1.2–3 on a man who had donated an estate to the church being rewarded by God with a legacy.

\textsuperscript{57} Oros. \textit{hist}. 2.1.1；7.15.5；etc. Other examples are Carmen de providentia Dei often attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine (\textit{VC} Suppl. 10, ed. Marcovich) and \textit{De perversis suae aetatis moribus epistola} sometimes attributed to Claudius Marius Victor (\textit{PL} 61, 969–972). Furthermore, the church historian Philostorgius attributes calamities to divine wrath (esp. 12.9, in which he states that they result “not from natural causes, as the children of Hellenes suppose”, but are the scourges of divine anger; for portents and calamities, see 10.9；10.11；11.7；12.8–10, \textit{GCS}, ed. Bidez/Winkelmann), and John Malalas habitually refers to natural disasters such as earthquakes as ‘the anger of God’; for the discussion, see Emmett Nobbs 1990, 262；Gaddis 2005, 31.

\textsuperscript{58} Salv. \textit{gub}. 6.2；6.6；6.11；8.2. For Salvian, see Lambert 1999, 115–130. As Lambert 1999, 116 points out, Salvian directed his work against Christians who doubted God’s justice, not against pagans (Salv. \textit{gub}. 1.1；3.5). According to Lambert 1999, 117–118, especially in books 7–8 Salvian explains the political and military decay of the Roman Empire as “the result, not of God’s neglect, but of his deliberate judgment”. This is because of “the failure of most Christians to live according to the standards of morality”. E.g., Salv. \textit{gub}. 6.52；6.66–71；6.75.
dissimulation rose to such heights of wickedness that they called forth divine judgement.\textsuperscript{59}

**Religious dissidents and divine anger**

Thus, on the one hand, Late Antique Christian writers could ascribe the anger of God as resulting from the decadence of the whole community. On the other hand, Late Antique authors also employed ideas according to which religious misbehaviour and dissenting religious groups such as ‘pagans’ and ‘heretics’ contaminated the entire community around them.\textsuperscript{60} The pollution that they created was thought to draw God’s wrath upon the community and the entire empire.

The connection between the right religion, divine favour and the welfare of the Empire was postulated in the early-fifth-century imperial legislation: for instance, in the decree of 409, the *salus communis* was identified with the benefit of the church (*pro utilitatis catholicae sacrosanctae ecclesiae*).\textsuperscript{61} In the ruling of Theodosius II in 438, the emperor complains that the fight against the *paganorum et gentilis immanitas* has not been successful and that the thousand threats of decreed laws have not had any effect. Theodosius states that the abnormalities in nature – the succession of the seasons has been changed – are the result of pagan perfidy. The spring is not as lovely as usual, the summer is barren of its harvest, and the winter is unexceptionally harsh and has doomed the lands with the disaster of sterility. Nature must be punishing such impiety in its own manner.\textsuperscript{62} Thus, we see the traditional circle of cause and effect turned

\textsuperscript{59} Eus. *eccl.* 8.1.7–8. Eusebius’ account of the softening influence of ‘the peace of Gallienus’ upon the Christian church reminds us of the Roman historian Sallust, who in *De coniuratione Catilinae* (10) paints a murky picture of the softening of Romans during the time of peace after the Punic wars.

\textsuperscript{60} Pagan cults and especially sacrifices were thought to contaminate the community. For the pollution of sacrifice, see Kahlos (forthcoming). The contaminating influence of incorrect religion is apparent in *Const. Sirm.* 6 (in 425): *Sane quia religiosos populos nullis decet superstitionibus depravari, Manichaeos omnesque haereticos vel schismaticos sive mathematicos omnemque sectam catholicis inimicam ab ipso aspectu urbium diversarum exterminari debere praecipimus, ut nec præsentiæ quidem criminorum contagione foedentur.*

\textsuperscript{61} *CTh* 16.5.47 (in 409): *pro salute communi, hoc est pro utilitatis catholicae sacrosanctae ecclesiae.* For a discussion on the linkage between ‘heresy’ and welfare, see Humfress 2000, 129–131.

against pagans. Theodosius even ends by stating that the revered majesty of the supreme deity must be appeased.\textsuperscript{63}

In the argumentation against ‘heretics’, the unity and peace of the church and the tranquillity of the Empire were seen as correlated with each other. For example, in the heat of the Nestorian controversy, Cyril of Alexandria uses this link as a rhetorical tool when persuading Emperor Theodosius II to decide for the Alexandrian, that is, Cyril’s interpretation of the doctrine, and to turn against Nestorius. In his oration to the emperor, Cyril depicts the imperial rule as closely connected to the correct version of the Christian faith. Those rulers who do not take care of the correct doctrine will perish. The division within the church is a threat to the stability of the imperial power.\textsuperscript{64}

The religious unity and correct form of religion were argued to be a matter of state security and the emperor was regarded as the guardian of this religious purity and unity. This reminds us of the traditional role of the Roman emperor in the preceding centuries: the emperor was considered the warden of \textit{pax deorum}. This is apparent in Emperor Theodosius II’s announcement that ‘the condition of our state’ depends on piety towards God and that “there is a close connection and affinity between the two”. The emperor states that, in fact, these are linked and they develop each other through their mutual progress (\textit{prokope}). Therefore, it is imperative to keep the condition of the Empire free from trouble and rivalry.\textsuperscript{65}

Similarly, Celestine, the contemporary bishop of Rome, writes to Theodosius that religious issues determine the welfare of the state: the emperor should be more concerned about the ecclesiastical peace than about the security of the lands of the Empire.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{lege suae natura decretum. Quod ne posthac sustinere cogamus, pacifica ultione, ut diximus, pianda est superni numinis veneranda maiestas.} For this decree, see, e.g., Noethlichs 1998, 17 and Millar 2006, 121.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Novellae} of Theodosius II, 3.8.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Cyrilli oratio ad Theodosium imperatorem} = \textit{ACO} 1.1.1 pp. 42–72; p. 43–44. Cyril’s opponent Nestorius was rumoured (Socr. \textit{eccl.} 7.29) to have likewise appealed to the logic of divine retribution and reward. Nestorius was claimed to have uttered to Theodosius II: “Give me the earth cleansed of heretics, and I will give you heaven in return. Help me in destroying heretics and I will help you in defeating the Persians”. For the rivalry over Emperor Theodosius’ favour, see Wessel 2004, 90 and Millar 2006, 36.

\textsuperscript{65} Theodosius, \textit{Sacra ad Cyrillum et ad singulos metropolitas} 3 = \textit{ACO} 1.1.1 pp. 113–116; pp. 114–115; trans. Festugière 1982, 173. Similarly, Theodosius writes to Symeon the Styliste, explaining the dissensions and rivalries as the principal cause for “the present misfortunes”. He declares that all the affairs of the Empire will be progressed when the members of the church and the correct faith will be united. Theodosius, \textit{Sacra ad Symeonem Stylistam} = \textit{ACO} 1.1.4 p. 5; trans. Festugière 1982, p. 471.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Epistula Caelestini ad Theodosium imperatorem} = \textit{ACO} 1.2 pp. 25–26 (= \textit{ep} 19.2): \textit{Maior vobis fidei causa debet esse quam regni ampliusque pro pace ecclesiarum elementia vestra debet esse sollicita quam omnium securitate terrarum. Subsequentur enim omnia prospera, si primitus quae deo sunt, cariora serventur.}
Concluding remarks

The thought pattern according to which calamities, natural disasters and military defeats had a religious cause was shared by Christians and non-Christians alike.\(^6^7\) This idea of divine anger and favour is by no means an idiosyncrasy of the Greco-Roman and Christian worlds but is also found in other cultures, especially, but not exclusively, pre-modern cultures. We can speak of a ‘moralized universe’ in which the circumstances of this world are dependent on the moral quality of humans. Thus, the moral failures, whether individual or collective, are thought to bring forth divine punishment.\(^6^8\)

Both the Roman belief in *pax deorum* and the Christian idea of divine reward and retribution depended on correct worship in the community and the Empire. The idea of religious deviance calling down divine punishment on the community as a whole could be used against religious dissidents – Christians and Manichaeans in the third and early fourth centuries, and ‘pagans’, Jews and ‘heretics’ during the later Roman Empire.\(^6^9\)

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\(^6^7\) For the continuation of the thought pattern in the Byzantine Empire, see af Hällström 2008, 244–245.

\(^6^8\) The expression “moralized universe” is used by Scribner 1996, 43, who analyzes sixteenth-century Germany, but I think the term depicts the Greco-Roman and Christian world views as well. Gaddis 2005, 31 speaks of a “moral universe”.

\(^6^9\) Gaddis 2005, 34 even states that both thought-patterns created the preconditions for official intolerance.


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