

Politics and Christian Civilization

Roman Transition to Christendom

Great Confrontation power of Ancient World and ideology of Rome v New Christian perspective and all its political ramifications. Jesus known as King of the Jews. A political title and a political death. Jews appealed to Ceaser and presented Christ as a revolutionary.

Rebel leader of Jews who expected deliverance from Rome under his leadership. Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to the King.

Pharisees, Sadduces and Scribes wanted Him dead = threat to unity and leadership of nation.

“But one of them, named Caiphas, being the high priest that year, said to them: You know nothing. Neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this he spoke not of himself: but being the high priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation” (John 11:49).

High Priest spoke truth without realizing it – on political level he meant saving their own skins, on unrecognized spiritual level Jesus death is better because without it Israel would perish – salvific. (foreshadows papal infallibility).

The Message appealed to poor. First Christians = slaves and poor.

Christ himself poor and one of the so called “wicked artisans”. **Son of a carpenter gives birth to many new ideas that would cause a paradigmatic shift in culture:**

New message = Dignity of all persons and of virtue possible for all.

New message = God loves all men whom He assists to live a good life.

New message = Slavery is abuse of man's dignity

New message = Work has dignity never seen before – it was servile now **service** is seen as ideal and highest of virtues not lowest. God is a Creator and man a co-creator all work of hands is dignified

New message = All are good not just wealthy

New message = Introduction of democracy based on human rights and respect of human dignity

New message = Truth could be discovered by all men. Faith/grace made this possible.

New message = Revelation congruent with reason. Gives rise to new science of theology. No longer natural theology but supernatural and link between moral and spiritual.

New message = Leaders must serve

New message = **Most important is the** new law or precept of love = **AGAPE**. To love as God loves, Divine Love Made possible by faith –and illumination to know and Grace and Sacraments which lead to discipline, purgative way, followed by action leading to communion and unity within Body of Christ

Agape was unknown in Ancient World. Knew of human erotic love (*eros*) love such as you have for your brother or mother (*philia*). But not love for enemies. Rare that a good man will die for a good man, but never for a bad one.

The ancient ideal was military valor and manliness. Not gentleness and meekness, which were considered emasculating and disgusting.

Best man was morally virtuous. But, the highest ideal of moral virtue was Stoic justice, duty and valor.

Christ asked for and demanded more than justice and valor = but they are not good enough = Charity is greater than justice. Example: Pharisee and poor at door. Love gives from heart more than is asked. Justice = outside while inside rotten. Charity is interior and exterior

New law of love by which human race was to be judged. Not by justice:

“Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and covered thee? Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee? And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me” (Matt 25:34).

“IF I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing....

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child. We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know I part; but then I shall know even as I am known. **And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity”** (1 Corinthians 13).

Faith and hope are temporal charity is eternal

New law becomes a universal mandate binding all nations. Never before was such an idea expressed.

Love not just a good idea but a divine law mandated by one claiming to be a king and son of God who would rule the universe according to this law.

Idea of **agape** or divine love different from **felios** or love of brother. Love one another as you love self and as I love you. I love you = divine love = lay down your life for each other.

Felios characterized by reciprocal self-gratification. The one who loves expects to be loved in return. Or one loves to enjoy the pleasure of loving.

Peter denies and affirms Christ 3 times as a confession of his love:

" When therefore they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter: Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith to him: Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith to him: Feed my lambs. He saith to him again: Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? He saith to him: Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith to him: Feed my lambs. He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved, because he had said to him the third time: Lovest thou me? And he said to him: Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee. He said to him: Feed my sheep" (John 21:15).

Church established. Drew primarily from 3 elements in society 1. Poor; 2. Wealthy Women, 3. Men of Valor moved by witness of Christian death.

Stoicism strong among conservative military element revolted by bestiality of Roman leaders and decline of Roman society: (Nero squeal like stuffed pig) – (Marcus Vinicius, Quo Vadis)

Age of persecution = Nero, Diocletian. Threat to Roman way of life and to its God's.

Whoredom, Circus, Blood Sport in amphitheatre, gladiators, emperor's wives. Stood in sharp contrast to Stoicism and to this new religion Rome in decay = blame Christians.

Seneca - Stoic counselor of Nero

“Seneca, as his aged frame, attenuated by frugal diet, allowed the blood to escape but slowly, severed also the veins of his legs and knees. Worn out by cruel anguish, afraid too that his sufferings might break his wife's spirit, and that, as he looked on her tortures, he might himself sink into irresolution, he persuaded her to retire into another chamber. Even at the last moment his eloquence failed him not; he summoned his secretaries, and dictated much to them which, as it has been published for all readers in his own words, I forbear to paraphrase. “

Tacitus: Annals, Book 15



After the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410, St. Augustine wrote, The City of God = established New Kingdom in Church warring with city of World until the end of time. Defend charge against Christians. Romans own practice has resulted in decay and inevitable destruction.

Extensive evidence of Rome's decadence cited in The City of God. The following will suffice for our purposes:

“The Great Mother has surpassed all her sons, not in greatness of deity, but of crime. To this monster not even the monstrosity of Janus is to be compared. His deformity was only in his image; hers was the deformity of cruelty in her sacred rites. He has a redundancy of members in stone images; she inflicts the loss of members on men. This abomination is not surpassed by the licentious deeds of Jupiter, so many and so great. He, with all his seductions of women, only disgraced heaven with one Ganymede; she, with so many avowed and public effeminates, has both defiled the earth and outraged heaven. Perhaps we may either compare Saturn to this Magna Mater, or even set him before her in this kind of abominable cruelty, for he mutilated his father. But at the festivals of Saturn, men could rather be slain by the hands of others than mutilated by their own. He devoured his sons, as the poets say, and the natural theologians interpret this as they list. History says he slew them. But the Romans never received, like the Carthaginians, the custom of sacrificing their sons to him. This Great Mother of the gods, however, has brought mutilated men into Roman temples, and has preserved that cruel custom, being believed to promote the strength of the Romans by emasculating their men.”



Cybele the Mistress Animals and protectress of cities holds a tympanum, which alludes to ecstatic dances performed by her devotees. Her eyes were colored glass.