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The Crucifixion of the Logos: A Jewish Coup on the Roman Mind

LAURENT GUYÉNOT • MAY 18, 2026 • 5,500 WORDS • 127 COMMENTS



Somewhere in Asia Minor in the late 1st century AD, two philosophers, a Stoic and a Platonist, were sitting at the edge of a marketplace, surrounded by a dozen bystanders. They were debating about the *Logos*, the divine Intelligence that rules heaven and earth. The Platonist conceived the *Logos* as an intermediary principle between God and the physical universe. The *Logos*, he said, is the Mind of God, or the totality of the existing Forms or Ideas. The Stoic considered these distinctions arbitrary. Since God is by definition infinite, nothing is outside of Him. Therefore the *Logos* is not distinct from God, and neither is it distinct from the order or harmony (*kosmos*) of the world. He quoted Seneca's *On Benefits* (IV,7): "what is Nature (*Physis*) but God and divine reason, which pervades the universe and all its parts." Therefore *Theos*, *Logos* and *Kosmos* are three different aspects, or just different names, of the same reality.

At this point, a Jew among the listeners interrupted the philosophers to inform them that the *Logos* had actually come down from heaven in the form of the king of the Jews, crucified and resurrected in Jerusalem. Everyone burst out laughing.

The Jew's name was Yohanan. He went on writing a scroll that started with: "In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

Never in their wildest nightmares could our two philosophers imagine that, two centuries later, this scroll would become official holy scripture, and the belief that the *Logos* was "made flesh" as a Jew declared compulsory throughout the Roman Empire, under penalty of death.

But such is the story of the Christianization in a nutshell.

There is a cruel irony in the Christian appropriation of the *Logos*. It is commonly translated as “the Word,” but the Greek *logos*, from which our word “logic” derives, is closer to “reason”. Whether Stoics or Platonists, philosophers posited that each man’s rational soul was a direct participation to the divine Logos, which is why men have the ability to rationally understand God and the universe. When early Greek-speaking Christian apologists blamed philosophers for putting their faith in “reason” rather than God, they used the word *logos* (Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch). But the same authors worshipped Jesus and claimed that he was the true and complete Logos all by himself. They changed the meaning of Logos so radically as to claim that being saved by the Logos required faith rather than reason. The Logos, the divine source of man’s reason, has been hijacked by a religion that requires men to surrender their reason to blind faith in impossible stories. “The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God,” wrote Paul (1Corinthians 3:19). “It is straightforwardly credible because it is senseless ... it is certain because it is impossible,” wrote Tertullian (*De Carne Christi* 5.4). The philosophers’ *libido sciendi* was condemned as a mortal vanity, a concupiscence born of our corruption or of the Devil.

It is generally assumed that the Christian intellectuals who crafted the Logos Christology, starting with the author of the Gospel of John, were students of the Greek philosophers. That is not the case: they were students of a Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who died around 40 AD. Philo interpreted the Torah (and the book of Genesis in particular) through the Middle Platonism of his time. But he did so with the purpose of demonstrating that Jewish wisdom was older, higher and purer than Greek wisdom—a commonplace in Jewish Alexandrian literature. Linking philosophy to the Tanakh (which he read in the Greek translation), Philo identified the Logos as the “Angel of the Lord” or the “Eldest of Angels”, and also called it the “Son of God” or “God’s First-born”, as well as a “Second God” who governs the world in his Father’s stead. “And many names are his, for he is called the Beginning, and the Name of God, and his Word, and the Man after His Image, and he that sees, that is, Israel.” The Logos is “the Image of God”; so when Genesis 9:6 says that God created man in his own image, we must understand, Philo argues, that the Logos is also the archetypal, heavenly Adam, *of which the earthly Adam, who comes later, is a corruptible copy (a concept that found its way in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, chapter 5)*. Philo merged that concept of the Logos with the prophetic vision of the Son of Man descending from heaven in the Book of Daniel (7:13). Finally, Philo considers Moses as a near-perfect incarnation of the Logos, like a new Adam.**[1]**

Philo had an enormous influence on virtually all Christian writers from Paul through Justin to Origen. “In fact,” writes James Royse, “the Christian utilization of Philo was so extensive that it was inconceivable to some that Philo had not actually become a Christian; and so we find stories of Philo’s conversion to Christianity, and occasional references in manuscripts to ‘the Bishop Philo’.”**[2]** According to Erwin Goodenough, there can be no doubt that Justin, for example, borrowed his Logos Christology from Philo: “as a Logos doctrine it is still recognizably the Logos of Philo which Justin has in mind, though popularized, diluted, intensely personalized, and represented as incarnate in the historical Jesus Christ.”**[3]** There is an element of deception here, for Justin never mentions Philo’s name. Justin was born in Neapolis (today Nablus) in Samaria; he claimed to be a Gentile, but he shows in-depth

knowledge of Judaism in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, and there is a suspicion that he was an early case of crypto-Judaism.

Whatever the case may be, it should be clear, from the above considerations, that the Logos Christology is of Jewish inspiration. It is Hellenistic only in the sense of being rooted in Hellenistic Judaism, which is a branch of Judaism, not of Hellenism.

Homoousians vs. Homoians

Given the influence of Philo of Alexandria on early Christology, it is no surprise that the Christological controversies were particularly intense in Alexandria. It was the bishop Alexander of Alexandria and his young deacon Athanasius who imposed their view at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Bear with me as I briefly retell that story, a turning point in Western intellectual history—a Jewish coup on the Gentile mind.

The main issue discussed at Nicaea was Alexander's dispute with the presbyter Arius, who maintained that the Son was inferior to the Father who engendered Him. Alexander and Athanasius insisted that the Son was coeternal with the Father and that both were of the same *ousia* (a word often used by Philo, meaning "substance" or "essence"). It was not enough that Jesus be the Son of God for those monotheistic monomaniacs: he had to be "true God from true God," otherwise Christians would be worshipping a second god. Alexander and Athanasius won the day, and Arius was exiled by imperial decree with some unyielding followers.

However, many bishops who had been bullied into signing the Nicene creed later recanted. At the initiative of the bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, a consensus arose for rejecting the use of the Aristotelian and unevangelical term *ousia*, and instead declaring the Son simply "similar" (*homoios*) to the Father—while still admitting, against Arius, that the Son existed of all eternity. But the fanatical Athanasius—he is described by Harold Drake as "passionate, eloquent, and ruthless", and as having "the skills of a tough infighter and street politician"—had succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria three years after Nicaea, and he would not compromise.[4] By 335, Constantine had become weary of his arrogance and violence (he was accused of instigating riots and murders), and exiled him in Trier—as far as possible from his Egyptian base. Constantine received baptism from Eusebius of Nicomedia, and died shortly after, in 337. He was succeeded by his three sons, who were only two left three years later: Constantius ruled in the East, and Constans in the West, from Milan.

Athanasius took advantage of Constantine's death to sneak back to Alexandria and rally his supporters, but he was again banished by Constantius, who maintained his father's Homoian (or Homoean) orthodoxy. However, he took refuge in Rome and gained the support of its bishop Julius (not yet "the pope"), who resented being sidelined from the discussions agitating the Greek-speaking part of the Empire.

When Constans fell victim to a coup in 350, Constantius defeated the "usurper" and restored the unity of the Empire. A council was convened at Sirmium (today in Serbia) in 357, which affirmed that "the Father is greater than the Son in honor, dignity, splendor, majesty, and in the very name of Father, as the Son Himself testified: 'He that sent Me is greater than I.'" In

360, Constantius presided personally over a council in Constantinople, which issued the following statement:

As for the term “essence” (*ousia*), which was adopted by the fathers without proper reflection, and being unknown to the people caused offense, because the scriptures do not contain it, it was resolved that it should be removed and that in the future no mention should be made of it at all, since the holy scriptures have nowhere made mention of the essence of the Father and Son. Nor should the term “hypostasis” be used concerning Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We declare that the Son is like (*homoios*) the Father as the divine scriptures declare and teach.[5]

After Constantius’s death and the brief reign of his “apostate” cousin Julian (361–63), the Empire was split again between two brothers, Valentinian and Valens, who were satisfied with the decisions of the Council of Constantinople of 360.

But the Nicene party remained influential. From his cities of exile (he was exiled five times), Athanasius wrote and distributed countless letters attacking the Homoians, whom he always called “Arians” (unfairly, since “there is no evidence that Homoean Christianity had any direct connection with Arius’ teachings at all,” according to Peter Heather).[6] His most influential treatise, the *Letter Concerning the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea*, is a defense of the council in 32 chapters. The Nicene party reconquered the high ground under the young Western emperor Gratian (367–383), who appointed Theodosius in the East.

That was the end of the 40-year period of Homoian imperial orthodoxy. Gratian and Theodosius declared Nicene Christianity the only legal form of Christianity (Edict of Thessalonica, 380). Athanasius was canonized, and all his enemies were purged. The Homoian creed was called the “blasphemy of Sirmium”, and the Homoousian formula was confirmed and complemented at the Council of Constantinople convened by Theodosius in 381.

The triumphant Nicene Church became wealthy and powerful. This was the age of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, Martin of Tours, Priscillian of Avila, and other prolific authors whose literature has become the sacred patrimony of the Church, while the writings of their opponents fell victim to cultural cleansing. Of the victorious clerics, Peter Brown writes:

These men were ultras. They were known for their uncompromising loyalty to the Nicene Creed. ... They were prepared to dismiss the ecclesiastical establishment set in place by Constantine and his son Constantius II as an antiquated and hubristic tyranny. ... Although they were few in number, they were notable for their connections with persons of wealth and power.[7]

The Christianization of Knowledge

This story is the background of a profound transformation in the cognitive makeup of Europeans. That transformation is the subject of Mark Letteney's book, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge UP, 2023).

Letteney analyses the thinking and documents the intrigues of the Christian radicals led by Athanasius of Alexandria. As we just saw, they were marginalized by the aging Constantine, his sons and their successors, only to win back imperial favor under Gratian and Theodosius. Ultimately, they were able to purge the Church of their enemies and to impose, not only their dogma, but their concept of truth and their method for finding it: “a set of scholarly practices contrived for theological disputation became generalized and central during the late fourth through the mid-5th century as a result of Nicene Christian dominance.”**[8]** The aggregation and distillation of authoritative traditions, rather than the use of reason, became the standard procedure for acquiring knowledge, even in secular matters. “The Christianization of the empire did not only affect public discourse on what could be true, but also how scholars went about proving the points,” according to Letteney. “Nicene Christians, ascending to positions of power, changed the way that an entire scholastic culture approached the creation, verification, and dissemination of facts.” Within a few decades, “Christian book culture became Roman book culture.”**[9]**

The new method consisted in making truth subservient to authority. At the foundation of knowledge stand the scriptures. Being declared inspired by God, they are “the truth” by definition. Then comes the interpretations of scriptures by the early Fathers, which have to be assembled and sorted, a process Letteney calls “aggregation”. Interpretations that are rubber-stamped as “inspired by the Holy Spirit” are the ones to be trusted. They in turn need to be distilled into dogmatic formulas, which are promulgated and made legally binding. If, as inevitably happens, those dogmatic formulas are subject to conflicting interpretations, then new authoritative voices have to assert their correct interpretation. And so on. “The assumption of aggregation, distillation, and promulgation as central scholarly tools spread from the wake of the Council of Nicaea, first among Christians and eventually across the entire spectrum of Theodosian Age scholarly production.”**[10]**

What is ironic—and unnoticed by Letteney—is that the Nicene party, the driving force of this corruption of the human logos, was also the party with the weakest scriptural argument: it is obvious that the Homoians were right in accusing the Homoousians of doing violence to the Gospels when making Jesus fully God. The triumphant Christian method of attaining knowledge was a culture of deceit from the start.

As it became standard procedure, it was transposed into every domain of knowledge. From then on, “statements of universal truth were predicated on a collation of sources and on the aggregation of previous opinions about the subject at hand.”**[11]**

1. [T]his peculiarly Christian structure of knowledge did not long remain solely the purview of theologians. A manner of thinking about truth—including a fundamental interest in universal truth itself as a worthwhile pursuit—found its way from the rarified air of theological disputation into other domains of knowledge. Across the ideological and intellectual landscape of the Theodosian empire, scholars searched for universal truths in their own areas of expertise, and they did so using a method of aggregation, distillation, and promulgation that was initially conceived to settle a thorny theological dispute. Christian and Traditionalist scholars alike took up this method in works of law, history, and miscellany. ... The proliferation of a scholastic regime that began as a theological tool through “secular” domains is an aspect of Christianization. It shows us how dominant modes of thought can be ported from one field of inquiry to another.[12]

As an example of the mindset shaped by Nicene totalitarianism, Letteney mentions the monk Vincent of Lérins from Gaul, who died around 445. He wrote for himself two aides-mémoires on “how and by what certain (so as to say general and common) rule I might distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of depraved heresy.” Surveying the field of “men eminent in sanctity and in learning,” he came to the conclusion that he could detect heresy and remain pure in his own faith with reference to two resources: first, the “authority of divine law” and “second, the tradition of the Catholic community.”[13]

This can be contrasted with the way non-Christian philosophers went about their own search for truth, by trusting their direct access to the Logos. Letteney takes as example the Neoplatonic Proclus, “one of the few outspoken Traditionalists in the orbit of the court of Theodosius II.” He begins his *Ten Questions Concerning Providence*, written around the death of Theodosius II (c. 450), with an apology that seems a direct critic of the Christian methodology:

Let us, then, interrogate ourselves, if that is all right, and raise problems in the secrecy of our mind and thus attempt to exercise ourselves in solving these problems. It makes no difference whether we discuss what has been said by previous thinkers or not. For as long as we say what corresponds to our own view, we may seem to say and write these views as our own.[14]

Proclus is the last Platonist whose works have survived. When Emperor Justinian closed the Academy in 529, the remaining members sought protection under the Persian king Khosrow I, carrying with them whatever precious scrolls they could. The works of Proclus himself would probably have disappeared if not for one of his late-5th- or early-6th-century disciples who wisely wrote under the name Dionysius the Areopagite, borrowing the identity of a character converted by Paul in Athens according to Acts 17:34, thereby deceiving the guardians of Christian orthodoxy with their own criteria of truth. During the Middle Ages, this pseudo-

Dionysian corpus was taken to have almost apostolic authority and, because it incorporates a great number of Proclus's metaphysical principles, allowed Proclus to pass as a proto-Christian, and his work to be smuggled into Christian libraries.

The Mosaic Distinction vs. the Socratic Distinction

Letteney notes that the new paradigmatic concept and practice of truth imposed by the Christian literati are strikingly similar to the Talmudic mindset that developed in the Jewish world during the exact same period (the Palestinian Talmud was compiled in Galilee between the late fourth century and the early fifth century). This comes almost as an afterthought to Letteney, and rather than investigate the causes of this similarity, he simply takes it as evidence of “the ways in which a peculiarly Theodosian structure of knowledge inflects the Palestinian Talmud.”

By placing the Palestinian Talmud in its Theodosian scholastic context, we may recognize it as a particularly Roman and Theodosian project. The correlation suggests that practices developed within a Christian empire, proffering Christianized intellectual practices across the scholastic landscape, came to inflect even the scholarly production of “rabbis [who] proclaimed their alienation from normative Roman culture in every line they wrote,” as Seth Schwartz rightly argues. **[15]**

I doubt that Letteney has correctly understood which of the two cognitive frameworks—Jewish or Christian—influenced the other. To describe the Talmud as a “particularly Roman project” stretches credulity. It is theoretically possible that the authors of the Talmud were influenced by Christian doctrinal controversies during the Theodosian age, since, according to Jacob Neusner, “Judaism as we know it was born in the encounter with triumphant Christianity.”**[16]** However, Letteney is referring here to a Jewish literary tradition known as the midrash, which developed in the schools of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva in the early second century, a period when Christian apologists were still using Jewish exegetical methods, as illustrated by Justin of Nablus's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (c. 160).

In that period, it was Christianity that was just beginning to extract itself from its Jewish matrix, and the process was still not over in the Theodosian age. Until the late fourth-century age, as Rodney Stark reminds us, Christian communities were still “containing many members of relatively recent Jewish ancestry, who retained ties of family and association with non-Christian Jews, and who therefore still retained a distinctly Jewish aspect to their Christianity.” **[17]** John Chrysostom, who became archbishop of Constantinople in 397, complained that Christians were still imitating the Jews. So if the argumentative method of the Nicene intelligentsia is so similar to the Talmud, it only confirms that Christianity was not only born, but grew up in a Jewish intellectual environment, and that the “Christianization of knowledge” was in fact a Judaization of the Western spirit. Arguably, the Nicene ultras' rejection of the

Homoian compromise arose from a Jewish monotheistic obsession: it was imperative that Christ and God be one, lest Christian worship be directed at some other being than God.

What Letteney calls “the Christianization of knowledge,” German Egyptologist Jan Assmann would see as an effect of the “Mosaic distinction,” meaning “the idea of an exclusive and emphatic Truth that sets God apart from everything that is not God and therefore must not be worshipped.”**[18]** In *The Price of Monotheism*, Assmann contrasts the Mosaic distinction with what he calls the “Parmenidean distinction,” in reference to its supposed pioneer Parmenides in the 6th century BC, or more simply the “Socratic distinction”, after its most famous advocate. By this term, Assmann means the revolutionary concept of knowledge introduced by the Greeks, spread by Alexander’s conquest, and adopted by the Romans:

In drawing a line between “wild thought”—the traditional, mythic modes of world production—and logical thought, which submits to the principle of noncontradiction, this constraint on thinking places cognition, validation, and knowledge on an entirely new footing. The new concept of knowledge introduced by the Greeks is no less revolutionary in nature than the new concept of religion introduced by the Jews and represented by the name of Moses. Both concepts are characterized by an unprecedented drive to differentiation, negation, and exclusion.

But more is at stake than a mere analogy between those two concepts: they are themselves incompatible modes of cognition, and from their incompatibility emerged the opposition between faith and reason that became constitutive of the Helleno-Judaic Christian culture.

The new [Greek] concept of knowledge has as its corollary that it defines itself against an equally new counterconcept, that of “faith.” Faith in this new sense means holding something to be true that, even though I cannot establish its veracity on scientific grounds, nonetheless raises a claim to truth of the highest authority. Knowledge is not identical to faith, since it concerns a truth that is merely relative and refutable, yet nonetheless ascertainable and critically verifiable; faith is not identical to knowledge, since it concerns a truth that is critically nonverifiable, yet nonetheless absolute, irrefutable, and revealed. Prior to this distinction, there existed neither the concept of knowledge that is constitutive for science nor the concept of faith that is constitutive for revealed religion. Knowledge and faith, and therefore science and religion, were one and the same.”**[19]**

If Letteney had read Assmann, he might have realized that the new concept of truth and knowledge promoted by the Nicene party and set against the Greek logos, was not a new concept at all, but the introduction into Roman culture of the old Judaic mindset. He would

then have recognized that if the Talmudists and the Nicene Fathers thought in similar ways, it was because the latter were fundamentally Jewish in their mental structure.

The Socratic distinction is the foundation of Hellenistic culture, itself the matrix of Roman civilization. The Mosaic distinction is “the foundation of Israel’s identity,”[20] but Christianity also stands on it. The Mosaic distinction is the “jealousy” of the Hebrew God, which has not been tamed by fatherhood in Christianity. It was directed against the cosmic God of the philosophers as much as against the anthropomorphic gods of the temples (on Greco-Roman philosophical monotheism, check Peter Van Nuffelen and Stephen Mitchell, eds., *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire, 1–4th cent. A.D.*, Cambridge UP, 2010).

Even though truces and even alliances were forged during the Middle Ages between Christian theology and Greek philosophy (on the basis of Aristotle), the long-term result of their struggle was to strip philosophy of the right to address metaphysical questions autonomously. Sadly, philosophy responded by going to war, not only against theology, but against the very idea of God. This is, in my view, one of the great tragedies of the West.

The Jewish Resurrection

The Jewish foundation of Christianity goes deeper than Nicene, of course. It is not false to say that, as a man born from a divine father and made immortal by death, Jesus falls into the category of the Greek heroes or demi-gods; but if we scrutinize the Christian version, we discover something far more Jewish.

What makes the Christian faith fundamentally Jewish is the very essence of it, the core message that Jewish missionaries preached to gentiles in the first two centuries. In one word: resurrection (*anastasis*). “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1Corinthians 15:13-14). The resurrection of the dead is a Jewish belief that appeared around the 2nd century BC, but is essentially rooted in the materialistic anthropology of the Torah. According to Genesis 3, death was the result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, rather than a part of human “nature” as intended by God. Men and women were created by God physically immortal, but became mortal by the first ancestors’ transgression, and no spiritual immortality was introduced to make up for physical mortality. Death simply means breathing your last and “returning to dust” (Genesis 3:19). It follows that a life after death can only be imagined as a resurrection of the body. This will happen in the Last Days, when the curse of the Garden of Eden will be reversed, and death conquered. That motif nowhere appears in Hebrew scriptures before the Book of Daniel, in ambiguous terms: “Of those who are sleeping in the land of dust, many will awaken, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace.” (12:2). The resurrection of the dead at the end of days became a central motif of pharisaic Judaism.

Paul was a Pharisee. Although he wrote in Greek, using Greek concepts, he understood Genesis 3 literally: “it was through one man that sin came into the world, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race” (Romans 5:12). Paul proclaimed that Jesus had overcome death by his resurrection, so that Christians could also be resurrected, when Christ returns. Since he expected that to happen very soon, he guaranteed his converts

that, if they were still alive by then, they would simply live forever. His most explicit statement on that matter is found in 1Thessalonians 4:14-17:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have fallen asleep. At the signal given by the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord forever.

As Paul clearly indicates, you cannot know this by reason alone. You know it from the authority of scriptures. Since Resurrection is the very essence of the Christian faith, Resurrection was the death blow to the Greco-Roman logos, the true miracle of human evolution. By accepting the Jewish Resurrection, Rome sold its soul to the Jewish god of irrationality.

European civilization as a palimpsest

Generally speaking, there was no independent philosophy throughout the Middle Ages, since philosophy (including "natural philosophy," now called "science") was declared subservient to theology. That was especially the case in the West, where Hellenistic erudition did not exert the same counterweight as in the East. In the first half of ninth century, the bishop Amalarius of Metz was questioned about his unorthodox views by a commission headed by the theologian Florus of Lyon: "They asked him where he had read these things. Then he, quite clearly restrained in his speech, responded that he had neither taken them from scripture nor from the teachings handed down from the universal Fathers, or even from heretics, but rather he had read them in his own mind (*in suo spiritu*)." To which the assembled fathers replied in unison: "Here in truth is the spirit of error (*spiritus erroris*)!"[21]

It was, in reality, the spirit of philosophy. That spirit never died. Philosophy simply fell into a deep sleep. "Having pricked its finger on Christian theology, philosophy fell asleep for about a thousand years until awakened by the kiss of Descartes," Anthony Gottlieb wrote in *The Dream of Reason*. [22] The allegory is excellent, except for Descartes in the role of Prince Charming: the Platonic Academy of Florence was created almost two centuries before his *Discourse on the Method*. It was the Renaissance that awakened the Greco-Roman Sleeping Beauty, and **founded Western civilization**.

Despite what Christians are often told, the conflict between the Church and the Academy (meaning Philosophy) during the Renaissance was by no means a conflict between the belief in God and atheism. Atheism was almost non-existent in the debates of the 15th century, as it had been in Antiquity. Atheism did make some headway in the following century, but humanists like Erasmus and Thomas More considered it as worse than religious fanaticism. Scientists

believed in God, and this was still the case in the seventeenth century: Isaac Newton, the greatest scientific genius of his time, was intensely religious.

However, the idea of God held by these men of learning was moving further and further away from Christian doctrine and closer to Greek philosophy: it was not the God of Moses, who utters arbitrary rules, commands and dogmas, but the God of Plato, of the Stoics and of Cicero, whose Logos governed the world and inspired human reason. The life of the French mathematician Blaise Pascal is a dramatic illustration of this dialectical tension between two ideas of God. Pascal was a genius of great renown. But in 1654, at the age of 31, he had a mystical experience and renounced the “God of the philosophers” in favor of the God of the Gospels. He stopped contributing to science and died of a neurological disease at the age of 39. Pascal embodies the struggle between Reason and Revelation that is the central theme of the Western drama.

Another good metaphor for it is the [Archimedes Palimpsest](#). It is a prayer book copied on parchment in Constantinople in the 13th-century Greek. In 1906, Danish scholar Johan Ludvig Heiberg found beneath the visible text two works of Archimedes that were thought to have been lost, and the only surviving original Greek edition of his work *On Floating Bodies*. Archimedes of Syracuse (c.287–c.212)! No other Hellenistic genius compares to him. “It was a passage in Archimedes which led Copernicus to the hypothesis of the heliocentric universe,” Louis Rougier reminds us in [The Genius of the West](#), and “it was Archimedes who taught Leonardo da Vinci, Benedetti and Galileo to use mathematics in their studies of nature.”**[23]** Think about it: monks condemning to eternal oblivion works of Archimedes, and modern science bringing them back to life.

Western civilization is a palimpsest: what has been written over can still be recovered: we are fundamentally Greco-Romans, not Judeo-Christians.

Notes

[1] Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues* 146, and *On Flight and Finding*, 101, quoted and summarized from Jean Daniélou, *Philo of Alexandria*, Cascade Books, 2014, pp. 134, 169, 67, 123, 167 and Marija Todorovka, [“The concepts of the Logos in Philo of Alexandria”](#), *Živa Antika* 65 (2015), pp. 37-56.

[2] James R. Royse, *The Spurious Texts of Philo of Alexandria: A Study of Textual Transmission and Corruption*, Brill, 1991, p. 1.

[3] Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, Frommann, 1923, p. 175.

[4] Harold Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, John Hopkins UP, 2000, p. 4.

[5] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Harvard UP, 1993, p. 148.

- [6] Peter Heather, *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion*, Knopf, 2023, Penguin Books, p. 158.
- [7] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, Princeton UP, 2014, p. 50.
- [8] Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations*, Cambridge UP, 2023, p. 101.
- [9] Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 5, 99.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- [11] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 225–226.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- [16] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine*, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. ix.
- [17] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, Princeton UP, 1996, p. 65.
- [18] Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, p. 1.
- [19] Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford UP, 2010, pp. 13-14.
- [20] Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- [21] Florus of Lyon, *Opuscula adversus Amalarium*, 119.82a, quoted in Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World*, Oxford UP, 1988, kindle l. 32. Geary, however, translates “in his own heart”, where [the Latin text](#) says *n suo spiritu*.
- [22] Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason: A History of Western Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance*, W.W. Norton & Co, 2016,, p. 359.
- [23] Louis Rougier, [The Genius of the West](#), Nash Publishing, 1971 (an abridged edition of the French version, *Le Génie de l'Occident*, 1969). Speaks of a holocaust of books, pp. 65-66.