

VIOLENCE AND MISSION IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES: LESSONS FOR TODAY

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“Violence and Mission” is a massive topic. Although we could approach the topic by studying Patrick in the Far West, or of the Church of the East - the so-called “Nestorian Church” – in the Far East, I have decided to concentrate on violence and mission in that part of the “ecclesiastical cartography” which is best charted – the Roman Empire.¹ What happened in the Roman world in the fourth and fifth centuries in violence and mission has had immense consequences for the subsequent history of the Christian church throughout the world, which I believe may yield some lessons for today.

CONSTANTINE: MAKING CHRISTIANITY ADVANTAGEOUS

Let us begin with an event that to contemporaries appeared miraculous. In the early fourth century, the Christian movement was three centuries old. During these centuries it had been illegal; its members had been subjected to various disincentives; and there had been outbreaks of harrowing violence, the most recent of which occurred between 303 and 311.

How astonishing, then, that in 312 the emperor claimant in the West, Constantine, reported that on the eve of a decisive battle he had seen in the sky a vision of (depending on the account) the Greek letters *Chi* and *Rho* or the cross. And Constantine heard a voice: “In this sign conquer.”² For the rest of his reign Constantine not only stopped persecuting Christians – his predecessor Galerius had done that in 311 – but he also made Christianity a legal cult and he started favoring it. Constantine himself resisted receiving catechesis; he didn’t want bishops educating him. He deferred baptism until 337, just before he died.³ But almost from the beginning Constantine referred to himself as a Christian. Already in 313 he addressed bishops as “dearest brothers.”⁴

Whatever kind of Christian Constantine may have been, he put a stop to violence against Christianity. He was impatient with anyone who seemed to him to destroy the unity and peace of the empire; hence he was exasperated with “heretics” and “schismatics” who put their

convictions ahead of catholic unity. But even in dealing with these irritating zealots, Constantine advocated tolerance. Let us, he said, “cultivate patience . . . let nothing be done to reciprocate an injury; for it is a fool who would usurp the vengeance which we ought to reserve to God”.⁵ There must be no violence in mission. Similarly, with reference to those who were committed to polytheism: in an edict of 324 Constantine wrote: “What each man has adopted as his persuasion, let him do no harm with this to another. That which the one knows and understands, let him use to assist his neighbor, if that is possible; if it is not, let it be put aside. For it is one thing to undertake the contest for immortality voluntarily, another to compel it with punishment.”⁶ Constantine saw himself an advocate of religious toleration. Of course, he wavered; he made statements against Jews, for example, which are chilling – people who have committed “the murder of the Lord” and are “sick with fearful error”.⁷ And at times he looked on as his courtiers looted pagan temples, whose wealth came to the imperial fisc and were used to build Christian churches.⁸ But Constantine viewed himself, not as a wielder of violence in mission, but as a repudiator of violence in mission.

Constantine did more than end violence against Christianity; he made it advantageous to be a Catholic Christian. He associated publicly with the Church, giving it the cachet of the emperor’s approval. People interested in imperial jobs noted this. Now upper-class men, who hitherto had been resistant to Christianity, began to join the church. Furthermore, Constantine gave Christianity specific benefits. He provided imperial funding for the construction of church buildings, massive and modest.⁹ Under Constantine Christianity became a public *cultus*; in an edict of 323 Constantine ordered the seizing of the houses, *private* dwellings, of “all who muster heresies by private assemblies”.¹⁰ In Constantine’s empire there would be no “house churches.” Further, Constantine gave privileges to the orthodox, public Church: he made the Christian holy day of Sunday a day of rest for the entire urban empire; he gave bishops free use of the imperial post; he exempted churches from taxes and churchmen from public duties. Why these benefits to the Church? In an edict of 320 Constantine gave his reason: “That the churches’ assemblies may be crowded with a vast concourse of peoples.”¹¹ Mission, under Constantine, will take place not by force but by favor, not by violence but by advantage.

Under Constantine, the Christian Church grew numerically. It grew, in part, because it was now a legitimate religion, to which it was *advantageous* to belong.

THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES: ATTRACTIVE CHRISTIANITY

It had been different for the churches of the first three centuries. Of course, these churches were immensely varied; it is precarious to generalize about them. But I want to say a few things about them that I think the sources will justify. First, the churches prior to Constantine were growing. From the handful of messianic believers on Pentecost, the churches had come by Constantine's day to have approximately 6 million adherents – about 10 per cent of the imperial population.¹²

Second, the churches were growing despite disadvantages. Becoming a Christian was not a way to get ahead in professions; indeed, a person who was baptized became, in polite circles, a marginal figure, a “candidate for death.”¹³ Nevertheless, people became Christians because Christianity, despite disincentives, was *attractive*. One attraction was the Christian churches' reputation as places of spiritual power – places where people were set free from demonic powers which distorted lives, deprived people of freedom, and made people sick.¹⁴ A second attraction was the Christians' capacity to inculturate their message, to speak to the concerns of their contemporaries while maintaining their distinctiveness.¹⁵ The Christians called themselves *paroikoi*, “resident aliens”.¹⁶ They were resident, like other people, and comprehensible to them; but they were also aliens – distinctive from other people, and hence, in their differentness, intriguing. The Christians, the apologist Justin Martyr reports, attracted outsiders by their “consistent lives;” the non-Christians noted “the strange patience [nonviolence] of their injured acquaintances, or experienced the way they did business with them.”¹⁷ In a world in which people were afraid of death, the Christians were known as people who were unafraid to die; as Bishop Cyprian of Carthage put it, since “hope is of future things . . . no one should be made sad by death.”¹⁸ At a time when burial societies charged large amounts to provide a decent burial to their members, the churches provided free burial to their members, no matter how poor – this was the primary function of the catacombs.¹⁹ In a society

in which women were harassed by husbandly wilfulness, abortion, and the exposure of unwanted girl babies, the churches provided places of fidelity, the cherishing of life, and unexpected possibilities for women's ministries.²⁰ Around AD 200, a Christian apologist could make the astonishing claim: "We do not preach great things, but we live them."²¹ Why did the church grow? Because, according to an early fourth-century Egyptian church order, Christianity transformed lives: "the progress of those who have been illuminated is high and better than the common behavior of people."²²

Attractiveness - this, the early Christians were convinced, was the only way a faith could grow. At the beginning of the third century, the apologist Tertullian argued that true worship cannot be compelled: "It is no part of religion to compel religion" (*Nec religionis est cogere religionem*).²³ And, as the *Epistle to Diognetus* asserted, compulsion is contrary to God's nature. In sending Christ, God "willed to save man by persuasion, not by compulsion, for compulsion is not God's way of working."²⁴ Around 250 a catechist in Carthage asked Cyprian, his bishop, to provide a list of topics that every candidate for baptism should be taught. Cyprian provided 120 of these, one of which states simply, for all Christians to memorize: "That the liberty of believing or of not believing is placed in free choice."²⁵ There can be no violence in mission. On the eve of the Constantinian era, the philosopher Lactantius summarized the Christian approach: "There is no occasion for violence and injury, for religion cannot be imposed by force; the matter must be carried on by words rather than by blows, that the will may be affected [W]e do not entice, as they say; but we teach, we prove, we show".²⁶

As we have seen, this view of religious toleration is one that Constantine seems to have shared and sought to perpetuate. In the half-century that followed his death there were major changes in the Christian churches. Except for eighteen months under Julian in the early 360s, all the emperors were Christians. The churches grew rapidly; in the Easter season, in major cities, thousands of baptismal candidates, dressed in white, streamed to their first communions. Aristocratic males began to join the churches. Inculturation continued, with an "amplification" of worship and an accommodation of ethics.²⁷ There were occasional acts of violence – both, by Christians, in destroying buildings and images, and, by both pagans and Christians,

in acts of murder and intimidation. By 380s, depending on the area, between a third and a half of the populace of the Roman Empire belonged to the Christian church.

While these events were taking place, a debate was going on at the highest levels of society about violence and mission. Among emperors, Julian (361-3), born into a Christian family but a convert to paganism, tried to tip the balance back towards the traditional religions: giving both Christians and pagans freedom to worship, he gave the *advantage* back to the pagans. Julian wrote: "By the Gods I desire the Galileans neither to be killed nor to be beaten unjustly nor to suffer any other harm; however, I declare absolutely that the god-fearing [i.e., the pagans] must be preferred over them."²⁸ On the other hand, Valentinian I, the Christian who succeeded Julian as emperor, attempted to be religiously neutral, to "take his stand in the middle of a diversity of faiths";²⁹ but he was the first to apply to pagans the word *paganus*/pagan, which connoted marginality, a second-class status.³⁰ The debate also raged among the intellectuals. Firmicus Maternus, a philosopher who in the 340s had recently converted to Christianity, urged the emperors to persecute the pagans. He based his argument not on the New Testament, which had been central to the thinking of Christians, but on the Old Testament. Firmicus, citing Deuteronomy 13.6-10, noted that God had ordered the Israelites to stone people, even members of their own family, that had served the gods of the Gentiles. So now "the law of the Supreme Deity enjoins on you that your severity should be visited in every way on the crime of idolatry . . . He [God] bids spare neither son nor brother, and thrusts the avenging sword through the body of a beloved wife. A friend too He persecutes with lofty severity, and the whole populace takes up arms to rend the bodies of sacrilegious men."³¹ Mission should be carried out by violence, sanctioned by God.

At this, several leading Christian theologians recoiled. In Cappadocia, in the 360s, the missionary bishop Basil of Caesarea restated the Christian tradition. Mission cannot be carried out by violent means: "one must not use human advantages in preaching the gospel, lest the grace of God be obscured thereby."³² Two decades later, his friend Gregory of Nazianzus protested at early signs of Christian violence in mission: "I do not consider it good

practice to coerce people instead of persuading them. Whatever is done against one's will, under the threat of force, is like an arrow artificially tied back, or a river dammed in on every side of its channel. Given the opportunity it rejects the restraining force. What is done willingly, on the other hand, is steadfast for all time. It is made fast by the unbreakable bonds of love."³³ Asserting that violence in mission won't work, Gregory sounds like the early Christians.

CHRISTENDOM: MISSION BECOMES VIOLENT

But, in the final two decades of the fourth century, we come to a turning point. The Church and the Empire, closely allied, were leaving the Christians of the first three centuries behind. Throughout the fourth century the Christian church had grown tremendously; imperial advantage as well as Christianity's attractions had produced results. But Christianity was still not in a dominant position. One scholar has estimated that by 400 approximately half of the imperial populace was formally Christian.³⁴ Other scholars have studied the major city of Antioch, where Christianity had numerous adherents, but the Christians had to compete with strong Jewish and pagan communities.³⁵ In the Easter season in Antioch Christian converts submitted themselves for baptism, but there were also Christians who were irresistibly drawn to Jewish synagogues because there was reputed to be greater spiritual power there.³⁶ And there were always Christians who were attracted by the historic practices of polytheism. The religious market was relatively free, and marked by intense competition. Was this situation tolerable? Should Christianity continue its original approach, which assumed a co-existence, even a peaceful missionary competition, with its rivals? Was it indeed true, as Lactantius had written eighty years earlier, that "if you wish to defend religion by bloodshed . . . it will no longer be defended, but will be polluted and profaned"? Was the strength of Christianity in its inherent attractiveness – as Lactantius wrote, "we teach, we prove, we show"?³⁷ Or, in this new situation, was a new approach necessary? Should the Christian Church and its imperial sponsors move from *attraction*, coupled since Constantine with *advantage*, to something new – to compulsion, force, *violence*?

This is what the emperor Theodosius I decided to do. In 380, urged on by Bishop Ambrose of Milan, Theodosius addressed an edict to the people of Constantinople, stating that "all peoples . . . shall be

engaged in . . . that religion, which the divine Peter, the apostle, . . . transmitted to the Romans”, the Trinitarian orthodoxy which Pope Damasus now represented. These people were to be called “Catholic Christians.” All other people, even though they might call themselves Christians, Theodosius adjudged to be “demented and insane.” Their beliefs were to be called heresies; their meeting places were not to be called churches. And they were to be punished severely by both the Divine vengeance and also by “the punishment of our authority.”³⁸ In the course of the next decade, there was a flood of legislation that attempted to close down heretical groups. For example, an edict of 382 provided for “inquisitors” whose job it was to make sure that there are no “secret and hidden assemblies” where heretics might hang out.³⁹

In the 390s, Theodosius shifted the focus of his legislation to pagans. In a mandate of 392, he prohibited pagan worship, private or public. No longer would it be legal to offer incense to a household god or to examine the “quivering entrails” of a sacrificial victim; the building in which such worship occurred must be confiscated and added to the imperial fisc; and the worshipper must pay a crushing fine. Later edicts barred persons “polluted” by heresy or the “crime of pagan rites” from the imperial household, the army and the civil service.⁴⁰ Public life, including public religious activity, would henceforth be purged of heresy and pagan religion. Public life would be Christian, orthodoxly Christian.

A noble goal, one might think. How does one get there? By laws, influence, and violence. An imperial letter of 428 spoke of “a thousand terrors of the promulgated laws”.⁴¹ There were indeed many laws, terrifying laws, and they certainly had some effect. Bishop Augustine of Hippo commented, with satisfaction, “For long Christians did not dare answer a pagan; now, thank God, it is a crime to remain a pagan.”⁴² But laws had to be enforced, and the empire had an administrative staff that by our standards was tiny, and very few police. So the enforcement of the laws depended on local elites. These landowners could influence their people – people who depended upon them for jobs, security, advancement. Augustine recognized that people would approach the church for baptism “to derive some benefit from men whom he thinks he could not otherwise please, or to escape some injury at the hands of men whose

displeasure or enmity he dreads.”⁴³ Of one local potentate Augustine commented: “If such a proprietor became a Christian, no one would remain a pagan.”⁴⁴

But laws and influence were not enough. Throughout the fourth century some people, such as Augustine, were genuinely attracted to the Christian faith. But others – including whole cities - were reluctant to change their heretical and pagan commitments. How could they be converted? The story of Gaza in Palestine shows one way.⁴⁵

According to a work of hagiography written in the 420s – Mark the Deacon’s *Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza* – in the last decade of the 390s there was a cluster of Christians in Gaza huddled in two small churches. The pagans predominated in Gaza; they had eight temples, the largest of which, the Temple of Marnas, the “Cretan Zeus,” was one of the cult centers of the ancient world. In 395 the Christians of Gaza elected Porphyry as their bishop. Porphyry performed miracles of rainmaking and healing, but these attracted only a minority of pagans. So Porphyry, who “wanted to convert the multitudes of Gaza”, appealed to the emperor in Constantinople for military support.⁴⁶ His first appeal got nowhere. Emperor Arcadius made promises of help, but resourceful pagans deflected this by paying large bribes to an imperial administrator. So Bishop Porphyry and the bishop of the neighboring diocese, John of Caesarea, went together to Constantinople to appeal to the reluctant emperor Arcadius through the formidable empress Eudoxia. The empress prevailed, and the emperor sent to Gaza a “zealous Christian,” Cynegius, and a “great band of soldiers and civil officers” to destroy Gaza’s temples by force and fire. When the pagans, who included some of Gaza’s leading citizens, protested, the soldiers “beat them with clubs and staves.”⁴⁷ The climax came with the torching of the great Marnion, on whose cleansed site a new church was built. Some Christians chanted psalms and shouted, “Christ has conquered.” A number of people presented themselves for baptism, and the troops clubbed others into submission. Many Christians, according to Mark the Deacon, were troubled by this. They, hesitantly it appears, told Bishop Porphyry that pursuing mission by violence was not the Christian tradition: it was not right for the bishop to receive “those who came out of fear, but those whose purpose was good.”⁴⁸

Bishop Porphyry, articulating the change in Christian thinking that was under way, had an answer for his critics. God, the bishop responded, is patient; God “endures our forwardness with longsuffering,” and God’s preference is to persuade. “But when we are not persuaded, desiring in all things like a good and merciful master to keep us and not to thrust us away, he [God] lays upon us his fear and his teaching, calling us to acknowledge what is right for us.” God, the early Christian tradition to the contrary, uses violence. Porphyry proceeded to prove this by quoting from several Psalms, including the following rendering of Psalm 37.34: “When he [God] slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God.” Even if people “come doubting, in time God will soften their hearts.” Many pagans did not experience a softening of their hearts, and Gaza remained an embattled city. There were ongoing tensions between pagans who resisted and the imperial troops who, according to Mark the Deacon, used “no little terror.”⁴⁹

In North Africa a few years later, the great Augustine of Hippo dealt with similar issues in his conflict with the Donatists, schismatics whom he was attempting to attract into the Catholic fold. Should a Christian use violence in mission? In correspondence with Vincentius, a Donatist leader, Augustine admitted that earlier he had not thought so, but he had changed his mind. “My first feeling . . . was that no one was to be forced into the unity of Christ, but that we should act by speaking, fight by debating, and prevail by our reasoning.” Augustine was a product of the early Christian tradition. But Augustine had changed because he, like Porphyry, had concluded that God himself uses force. Augustine cited not the Old Testament but the New. On the Damascus road God had forced Paul to repentance; in Jesus’ parable (in Luke 14.15ff), God had forced people to attend the messianic banquet. God uses violence, and violence works. “I have,” Augustine said, “yielded to the facts . . . My own city . . . which had been wholly Donatist . . . was converted to Catholic unity by the fear of imperial laws.” This has been beneficial. Some people now say: “This [orthodox Christianity] is what we wanted all along, but thanks be to God who has given us an opportunity to act at once, and has cut off all our little delays and postponements!”⁵⁰

In this, Augustine was developing a theory of “just persecution.” His aim was benevolent. *Cogere intrare* – compel them to come in, into the church where they will be surrounded by therapeutic activities – severe reproof, eloquent sermons, persuasive teaching - which will “carve pathways to their hearts” and bring about their salvation.⁵¹ Augustine’s justification of persecution, like his justification of war and his justification of oath-swearing, was rooted in his sense that he knew what was good for other people to such an extent that he could bend the rules and twist others’ arms. Augustine’s rationalization of the use of force changed mission; violence, justified by the most formative theologian in Western history, could now be a legitimate instrument of mission.

So Augustine “yielded to the facts” and concluded that violence works. Was he right? This would be tested in the century of Augustine’s pronouncement – the fifth century. In it there was a great deal of violence. Imperial rescripts show that the emperors, like the bishops, were overwhelmingly preoccupied with a succession of ecumenical church councils which attempted to determine orthodox theology, especially Christology. These councils, as Ramsay MacMullen has demonstrated in a new book, were characterized by violent language – but also by violent behavior by the clergy and mayhem in the streets. MacMullen puts the total number of people killed as a result of the struggles over the ecumenical councils, across a couple of centuries, at 25,000 people.⁵²

But, outside the theological debates and the strong-armed behavior associated with them, there was much unclarity. Some local officials energetically enforced the imperial policies against pagans and heretics; others ignored them. All kinds of anomalies were present. A sample of these is the case of Volusian, a Roman aristocrat whom Augustine attempted to convert to Christianity in 412 when Volusian was in North Africa. Volusian resisted. The teachings of Jesus, he contended, “were not adaptable to the customs of the state.”⁵³ Nine years later, Volusian, still a pagan, was top administrator in Rome – Urban Prefect. The emperor Constantius II, ordered him to expel the Pelagian “heretic” Caelestius from Rome. Volusian complied. Nobody, he decreed, must provide a “lurking place” in their homes for Caelestius: “whoever shall have supposed that a person accused by divine and human laws ought to be hidden at his house needs must

incur punishment.” A pagan persecuting a Pelagian, at the command of an “orthodox” Christian: what a seething brew of confusion religiously-sanctioned violence brought to the Roman empire!⁵⁴

But in the fifth century it seemed obvious that violence works: the proportion of the society that was baptized and active in the state-sanctioned church activities steadily increased. As the number of Christians mounted, inculturation was taking place – the insertion of Christianity into the wide variety of ethnic groups that characterized the Roman empire. Inculturation is always necessary. As Andrew Walls has reminded us, it requires a sensitive balancing of two principles – the pilgrim principle and the indigenizing principle.⁵⁵ It is fascinating to watch this happen; to see Christianity come to be at home in Roman circles, both aristocratic and peasant; and to watch Christians appropriate elements of pagan behavior. A sample: in upper Egypt, the great fifth-century abbot Shenoute tells of his encounter with a local Christian. To Shenoute’s dismay, the Christian had tied fox claws, which were reputed to have healing properties, to his painful legs. He insisted, “It was a great monk who gave them to me, saying ‘Tie them on you [and] you will find relief.’”⁵⁶ This was inculturation. Another example of inculturation was Christianity’s justification of violence as a tool of religious policy. Fox claws for healing and violence in mission are both examples of the indigenizing impulse which adapts to culture.

So the church was growing and theologians decided that violence works. But questions remained. Were people changed? In the early centuries, Christians were known as people who, though misguided, were admirable, exemplary. Now Christians were often just like everybody else. A typical word for them was hypocrite.⁵⁷ Augustine described them as “depraved persons who in mobs fill the churches in a bodily sense only.”⁵⁸ In church services, where people were required to be present, Chrysostom reported that they engaged in various forms of misbehavior – roaming about during the services, causing an uproar, acting as if they were in the forum or barbershop, bolting for the door as soon as possible.⁵⁹ Augustine was aware that paganism continued to flourish, in rural areas and in people’s inner commitments: “It is easier to close temples than it is to close people’s hearts to the idols.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as the fifth century progressed, imperial legislation progressively heightened the

pressure of compulsion; it narrowed the rights of Jews and cramped the existence of pagans and heretics.⁶¹

Early in the sixth century – just beyond the period of my title - the Christian policy of force came to a climax under emperor Justinian I. In a famous edict of 529⁶² Justinian indicated that he was aware that many people in his empire, who had been baptized, had returned to what he called the “error of unholy and abominable pagans”; these people who were “guilty of concealing sacrifices” were to be subjected to “extreme punishments.” Similarly, Justinian recognized that people, in order to get jobs or rank or property, had submitted themselves to be baptized, but had left their families or households “in the pagan error.” These people were to be punished; their property was to be confiscated; and they were prohibited to share in the life of the state, for “they clearly have not obtained holy baptism by pure faith of their own accord.” Finally, Justinian’s edict made a sweeping requirement: anyone who had not been thought worthy of “venerable baptism” should with their wives and children and households now present themselves for catechesis and baptism; and all children “of young age immediately and without any delay should obtain salutary baptism.” With this final coercive act, the baptism of everyone, the mission of the church was complete. Of course it wasn’t; for centuries people continued to engage in pagan worship stealthily, on the sly.

What I have been talking about in this essay is a paradigm shift. Christian mission changed when it came to be coupled with violence.⁶³ We move from Christianity – faith in Jesus Christ - to Christendom – a society which seeks the Lordship of Christ over all of society by coercive means. We move from Christianity which spreads because it is attractive to Christianity which spreads because it is advantageous and compulsory. And this movement changes mission fundamentally. It represents a paradigm shift – a “Christendom shift” – which, I have argued, represents a tragic distortion of the *missio Dei*.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

So, from Mission and Violence in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, what lessons can we draw for today?

1. We must deny that mission and violence always go together. Many people view Christianity as intrinsically intolerant; for them, the “coercive Christian is the normative Christian.”⁶⁴ They say this for good reasons. They can point to a lot of violence in mission, not only in the fourth/fifth centuries but across many centuries. We need to listen to this critique and take it seriously. But a lesson from this essay is that Christian mission is not intrinsically violent. We can recall that Christianity’s early mission was non-violent; indeed, that it was precisely an early Christian, Tertullian, who coined the phrase “*libertas religionis* – religious liberty”.⁶⁵ Up to the time of Constantine, the only voices – polytheist, Zoroastrian, Jewish – “which can be found raised in favor of freedom of belief as a universal principle (rather than a political expedient) are those of Christian authors.”⁶⁶ Violence by Christians in mission has been real, but this was not Christianity’s original vision; it represented a turning, a distorting, which shaped subsequent Christian mission. Violence in mission is not Christian; it is Christendom.
2. We must concede that violence and mission often have gone together. We must face into, not look away from, the violence of Christians in mission, in the fourth and fifth centuries and thereafter. I propose that we concede that powerful, influential Christians lost their way. Christians lost sight of Jesus, who instead of forcing his disciples to follow him, said to them, “Do you also want to go away?” (Jn 10.67) Christians also lost sight of the approach of the Christians of the earliest centuries. The Christians’ vision of Jesus, distorted by pride and ambition, was an over-compliant inculturation into the dominant values of their time. We must face this. We must have a clear-sighted realism in our view of the Christian past. This clarity of vision is hard to achieve. An example from my period, the mission of the early church, has to do with the way Christians use the word “persecution.” Christian scholars typically use the word “persecution” to describe the ill treatment that Christians suffer at the hands of non-Christians. If we want to see clearly, we must also use the word “persecution” for violence that Christians have directed at others – pagans, heretics, Jews, and other groups - from Constantine and Theodosius onwards. I invite you; look at the entries for the word “persecution” in

standard reference works. My search has not been exhaustive, but I have found only one encyclopedia, the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, which has an entry under “persecution of the pagans”.⁶⁷ We Christians are a persecuted tradition, and originated the concept of religious liberty. But this essay has demonstrated that we also, in our unfaithfulness, are a persecuting tradition. Others fear us with good reason.

3. Christians who are involved in God’s mission must engage in missionary repentance. We need to find ways to say sorry for the times that Christian mission has been backed up by violence. How can we do this? In personal encounters with people of other faiths and traditions, we can say sorry verbally; our witness must be rooted in repentant humility. And we can say sorry by practical gestures as well. Here are a few suggestions. Let us say sorry for the ways that Christians have coupled mission with violence by refusing to accept the advantages of association with the military in our mission today, even when to do so may accomplish goals more quickly; let us function from a vantage point of marginality, precariousness, weakness. Another suggestion: let us say sorry by welcoming adherents of non-Christian religions into our countries, including their missionaries, and by going to bat for their freedom of practice when others, including other Christians, want to discriminate against them. In other words, let us, humbly, repentantly, invite representatives of other faiths into friendship, into collaboration where possible, and into a peaceful competition of missionary faiths. Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life, life in abundance” (John 10.10). Lactantius the fourth-century apologist said, “We teach, we prove, we show.” So what does the life of our congregations and parishes teach, prove, and show? In comparison with other faiths, does our faith bring abundant life? I believe it does, and that we Christians have nothing to fear from the presence of other missionary faiths in our midst. But let us remember what we have seen in this essay: where Christians resort to advantage and compulsion, our attractiveness will wither.
4. It is right to be suspicious of the role of the state in the mission of the church. Christendom attempted to be an alliance of the church and state in the service of Christ the King. As such this alliance impacted mission, both domestically and globally. The

emperor Constantine I may have opened the door to this alliance, but subsequent Christian monarchs – Theodosius, Clovis, Charlemagne, Elizabeth I of England – embodied it. We must ask: if mission is to succeed, is it essential for the state to espouse Christianity? Is it indispensable for paradigmatic rulers to become Christians and identify with the faith? What should we pray for? In the early 1990s, when I was in Japan, Christians were praying for conversion of crown prince Naruhito, who had married princess Michiko, who had been educated in a Catholic school. What difference would it make for the churches in Japan, whose growth has been stymied, if the emperor became a believer? More recently, I have read that people are praying for conversion of Hu Jin-Tao and other leaders of the People's Republic of China. What difference would it make to the church in China if the leader of the ruling party – the one who sets the fashion, who opens the way to advancement – becomes a Christian? Do we really know what we are praying for? What happens to Christianity when it is associated with an army? How about Japan after World War II, when General MacArthur urged American church leaders to send “thousands of missionaries” to the country?⁶⁸ Or today, in Iraq and the Middle East – what is the impact upon God's mission of American military activity in the region? Does it aid the *missio Dei* when the gospel is associated with America's national policy?

5. We Christians can relax, for the welfare of the church is in God's hands. We humans cannot, by violence, secure the welfare of the church. When we attempt to do so we mess things up. The accessions and recessions of the Christian movement across the centuries are beyond human control; and God seems to work most powerfully when humans are weakest. Lamin Sanneh, whose view of the world church is broad, has observed that “the contemporary religious resurgence [in many countries] is taking place in spite of state weakness, and often in spite of state suppression, rather than because of state support.”⁶⁹ To Christians who know their Bible, this should not be surprising. Mission theologian Paul of Tarsus knew that violence could not be an instrument of God's mission; nor could violence stifle God's mission. “Whenever I am weak,” he confessed, “then I am strong . . . Power is made

perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12.9-10). Supremely it is Jesus of Nazareth who demonstrates this. Listen to him: “The Son of Man came not to be served (to be advantaged), but to serve; (not to pursue his mission by means of violence) but to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45). This is the heart of the Christian message; it also is the heart of God’s mission.

¹ Jonathan J. Bonk, "Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28.4 (2004): 153-158.

² Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 44.3-5; and Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* (henceforth VC) 1.32.

³ For a discussion of Constantine’s progress towards baptism, see Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom, Christian Mission and Modern Culture*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999, chap 3.

⁴ P.R. Coleman-Norton, ed. *Roman State & Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to AD 535*. London: SPCK, 1966, I, 59.

⁵ Letter to Optatus of Milevis, in H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 221.

⁶ Eusebius, VC 2.60.

⁷ Eusebius, VC 3.17-20.

⁸ Sozomen, *HE* 2.5, cited by Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100 - 400)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 49-50.

⁹ Richard Krautheimer, "The Constantinian Basilica," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 21 (1967), 128.

¹⁰ Eusebius, VC 3.64-5).

¹¹ *Codex Theodosianus (CT)* 16.2.10.

¹² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 6.

¹³ Gustave Bardy, *La Conversion au christianisme durant les premiers siècles*. Paris: Aubier, 1949, 170.

¹⁴ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, XX; Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*. Symposium Series, 12. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984, 104-142.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this point, see Graydon F. Snyder, *Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition: The Impact of Jesus on Jewish and Roman Cultures*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999, chaps 6-13.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the early Christians’ use of *parokoi*, see Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*, Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Studies, 32. Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd, 1995, 12n.

¹⁷ Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 16.

¹⁸ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.45, 58.

¹⁹ See the documents for pagan burial societies in Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene N. Lane, eds. *Paganism and Christianity, 100 - 425 C.E.: A Sourcebook*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 66-72; cf. Aristeides, *Apology* 15; *Apostolic Tradition* 40.

²⁰ Tertullian, *Ad Uxor* 2.4, and comment in Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, ch 5.

²¹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 38.6.

²² *Canons of Hippolytus*, 19.

²³ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 2.2.

²⁴ *Epistle to Diognetus* 7.4.

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- ²⁵ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.52.
- ²⁶ Lactantius, *Div Inst* 5.20.
- ²⁷ For "amplification" of worship, see Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*. 2nd ed. Leighton Buzzard: Faith Press, 1975, 93.
- ²⁸ Coleman-Norton, I, 119.
- ²⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 30.9.5, cited by Peter Brown, "Christianization and Religious Conflict." In Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, XIII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 645.
- ³⁰ *CT* 16.2.18; for comment, Coleman-Norton, I, 324n.
- ³¹ Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, 29.
- ³² Basil, *Moralia*, 70.12, 13, 26.
- ³³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *De Vita Sua* 1293f.
- ³⁴ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 86.
- ³⁵ Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983.
- ³⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 Against the Jews* 3.
- ³⁷ Lactantius, *Div Inst* 5.20.
- ³⁸ *CT* 16.1.2
- ³⁹ *CT* 16.5.9.
- ⁴⁰ *CT* 16.5.42; 16.10.21
- ⁴¹ Coleman-Norton, II, 429.
- ⁴² Augustine, *Enarr in Ps* 34/2.13.
- ⁴³ Augustine, *First Cat Instr* 5.9.
- ⁴⁴ Augustine, *Enarr in Ps* 54.13.
- ⁴⁵ The following account is based upon G.F. Hill, ed. *Mark the Deacon, The life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913. Compare the destruction of the pagan temple of Aulon in Syria under Bishop Marcellus of Apamea (Sozomen, *HE*, 7.15).
- ⁴⁶ Mark, *Life of Porphyry* 19, 30, 33.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.50, 63.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72, 78.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73, 99.
- ⁵⁰ Augustine, *Epistle* 93.
- ⁵¹ Frederick H. Russell, "Persuading the Donatists: Augustine's Coercion by Words." In William Klingshirn and Mark Vessey, eds., *The Limits of Ancient Christianity (FS Markus)*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, 122-124.
- ⁵² Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- ⁵³ Augustine, *Ep* 136.
- ⁵⁴ Coleman-Norton, II, 374. For further comment on Volusian's career, including his eventual conversion to Christianity, see Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999, 65-70.
- ⁵⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, 18-20.
- ⁵⁶ David Frankfurter, "Popular Religious Practices in Fifth-Century Egypt." In Richard Valantasis, ed., *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000, 474. For many other examples, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, ch 4.
- ⁵⁷ Eusebius, *VC* 4.54.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *First Cat Instr* 7.12.

⁵⁹ These references from John Chrysostom's sermons are cited in Robert F. Taft, "'Eastern Presuppositions' and Western Liturgical Renewal." *Antiphon* 5.1 (2000), 14.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Ep* 232.

⁶¹ A rescript of 393 stated that Judaism was "not a sect prohibited by the laws" (CT 16.8.9), but subsequent laws tightened the screws on the Jewish communities (e.g. CT 16.8.21 and CT 16.8.22). Laws cramping the life of the pagans and heretics include CT 16.10.25; *Sirmondian* I 12, 6; CT 16.5.57.

⁶² *Codex Iustinianus (CI)* 1.11.10

⁶³ Alan Kreider, "Beyond Bosch: The Early Church and the Christendom Shift." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29.2 (2005): 59-68.

⁶⁴ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 405.

⁶⁵ Tertullian, *Apol* 24.5.

⁶⁶ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 23. See also Peter Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity." In W.J. Shiels, ed., *Persecution and Toleration*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 16.

⁶⁷ Karl Leo Noethlichs, "Heidenverfolgung." *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 13 (1986): 1149-1190.

⁶⁸ William B. Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952, and Japanese Religions*. Leiden: Brill, 1972, 281-283.

⁶⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 9-10.