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CONTRASTS AND CONTRADICTION

EUROPE'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

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QUOD DIXI

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PREFACE

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When German troops invaded our peaceful and neutral country in May 1940, I was six years old. We lived through the Second World War and the Cold War thereafter. Contributing to peace and reconciliation in Europe, in the world and between Christians, motivated me in my studies, my teaching, research and extracurricular activities. I also wanted to become a loving husband and father in a great family! The post-war years were marked by repair and renewal; we looked forward and preferred to leave the past behind. The Cold War required two years of compulsory military service.

It took us well into the 1960's before we began to look back to the horrors of the Second World War and in particular the Holocaust. The search for an answer as to why and how this could have happened, has dominated my life as a catholic scholar ever since. Anti-Semitism has deep roots in Europe's Christian heritage and is at the origin of many serious conflicts.

This valedictory book reflects on its history and consequences. It tries to find

answers to two more questions troubling me for a long life-time: Where to find the Christians who are true signs of contradiction? And why is Europe's Christian history so deeply marked by divisions, conflicts, and wars? I did additional research and brought in what I had learned in a long and active life, with no pretence to theological expertise. My reflections bring no scientific treatise, although written by a former scholar. My Valedictory Book includes relevant poems, stories, errors and ironies in history and personal experiences, often more telling than mere scientific analyses.

I am profoundly grateful to my dearest wife who, until the end of her life (on 19 February 2024) allowed me to continue reading and writing while taking care of her, as I did for all these years.

I like to challenge self-righteousness, fixed doctrine and organized forgetting in history, conscious as I am of living in a small corner of the evolving and expanding universe, in which even the Sun is not in the center!

Frans A.M. Alting von Geusau

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INTRODUCTION: IN HUMAN HANDS

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On the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, somewhat to the side, stands a small monument dedicated to the Ascension of Jesus. The Chapel of the Ascension, owned by the Islamic *Waqf* (Arab for “endowment”) of Jerusalem, is guarded by a young local boy, who, upon request, shows the footprint of Jesus on the rock. The rock, he says, contains the right foot-print of Christ; the section of the rock bearing the left foot-print was taken to the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in the Middle Ages. The guard explains that the footprints were left by Jesus as he ascended to Heaven. The rock is venerated by the Christian faithful as the last point on earth touched by Jesus Christ - quite a strong touch apparently as it left its imprint in solid rock!

Myth or Memory? We shall never know. The Ascension is recorded by Luke in his gospel (24, 50-53) and the Acts of the Apostles (1, 10-11). In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes that Jesus appeared “last of all to him” on the road to Damascus – that is to say, at least two years after the Ascension to Heaven.

Jerusalem was laid waste, the temple destroyed by the Romans in 66-70 C.E., and again in 135 C.E. “Holy places” were discovered in 326 C.E. by Queen Helena, mother of Roman Emperor Constantine, when it was no longer forbidden to worship openly, and when the ruler needed new religious symbols to enhance his stature. On his orders, the Holy Sepulcher Church was built on the Rock of Golgotha.

Ever since, Jerusalem and her memorials were constructed, destroyed, and reconstructed many times over, reflecting the long history of conflicts between – and within – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Just as much, they reflect the vanity of rulers, irrespective of their religion. Jerusalem is the Capital of Memory, where everybody has a past and nobody allows anyone else a future. “The air over Jerusalem is saturated with prayers and dreams – It’s hard to breath. Hatred is also a form of prayer, as is fear”, wrote Amos Elon.¹

The memorial chapel is an odd place. It is owned by those who don’t believe in Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension. It is located on the Mount of Olives, conquered and annexed by the State of Israel in 1967, following its victory over the armies of Jordan, Syria and Egypt in the third war for its survival (1947, 1956, 1967) – while its Jewish citizens are still waiting for the Coming of the Messiah.

In Jerusalem – holy Capital for the Jews, consisting of places holy to representatives of a variety of Christian Churches and the Islam – possession appears to be more important than the profession of one’s faith. The City reflects four tragedies of religious division – between Christians and Jews, Christians and Muslims, the Orthodox East and Latin West, and Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Descending from the Mount of Olives towards the old town of Jerusalem, one passes the place where Jesus is said to have shed tears over the city, and the garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed before being arrested. What is left of the Temple to the Jewish people is the Western Wall. On the Temple Mount, controlled by the Waqf, lie the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque. The Rock itself was the holy of holies to the Hebrew Temple, the Rock of Moriah on

¹ Amos Elon, *Jerusalem City of Mirrors*. Flamingo 1996. P. 62.

which Abraham did not sacrifice his son Isaac. For Muslims, it is the Rock from which Mohammed made his mystical return flight to heaven.

Descending towards Golgotha (now inside the Old town), one reaches the oldest Christian Holy Place, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Inside, Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian and Ethiopian Christians continue to quarrel with each other over parts of the building; the key to its entrance is held by a Muslim family to keep the peace among them. One wonders... Christians believe that the Sepulcher has been empty since the Resurrection of Jesus-Christ!

In April 1846, Catholic and Orthodox Easter fell on the same day. The dispute over who should be the first to announce Christ's Resurrection in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher turned into a violent brawl between the Latin Franciscan custodians and the Orthodox Greek monks. Forty people died. The fighting monks embodied not only the East-West Schism but also the empires behind them. Russian Tsar Nicholas I of Moscow (then called the "Third Rome") wanted to extend Russian control over the holy places in the City and over the Slavic people living in the Balkans. Imperial France supported the Holy See and the Franciscan custodians. Pope Pius IX restored the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847². The British Empire supported the Evangelists and the Jews who wanted to return to the Ottoman region of Palestine. The brawl was part of the growing conflict between the British, French, and Russian Empires over the future of the declining Ottoman Empire, leading to the Crimean War of March 1853.³

Rather than "The City of Peace" on earth, Jerusalem is instead the tinderbox of imperial dreams, wars, and violent conflicts between the deeply divided adherents to the belief in one God. Much must have gone horribly wrong if, after more than twenty centuries, Christian leaders are still fighting over the holy places, Islamic rulers still want to dominate the City, and Palestinians claim it as their capital.

2 After the Great Schism of 1054, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem belonged to the Orthodox Church. After the First Crusade, the Orthodox Patriarch was expelled. A Latin Patriarchate existed from 1099 – 1187, whereafter the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch came back.

3 Cf. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem. The Biography*. Weidenfeld&Nicolson. London 2011, p. 331ff. Jean-Francois Colosimo, *La Crucifixion de l'Ukraine*. Editions Albin Michel, Paris 2022.

Jews have been hated and persecuted for Jesus' Crucifixion in Christian Europe since the beginning of the Second Century, causing lasting divisions. But why? After all, it was the Roman Consul Pontius Pilate who, in response to mobs mobilized by the Sanhedrin, decided to have Jesus flagellated, humiliated, and crucified. Why the Orthodox and Catholic Churches persisted in this "error," with lasting consequences, is dealt with in Chapter 3. This two millennia old doctrinal error is at the root of this book; why could this happen? And what should these Churches learn from it? These questions are important. The division between Christians and Jews is at the origin of subsequent divisions, discussed in chapters 4 to 6,

The wars with Islam, since 632 CE, are still with us today and have been sources of violent conflict and cruel warfare throughout the centuries, the cruel 2023 war between Hamas and Israel being but the latest example.

When Constantinople became the Capital of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the vast and complex Christian world, stretching deep into Asia, was about to be forgotten and the first steps were taken towards the Great Schism between the Orthodox East and the Latin West, consummated in 1054. The depth of this division has been a source of wars up until our twenty-first century, with the Russian Putin's and Patriarch Kirill's "holy war" against Ukraine, Europe, and the West, being one of the darkest acts of aggression in modern history.

The next great division is the conflict within the Western world between the Latin Church and the Churches of the Reformation, initiated by Marten Luther in 1517. It resulted in more than a century of cruel warfare throughout Europe, ending with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. These divisions are further fueled by conflicts between national churches in each of the many different Christian denominations and by doctrinal conflicts within each of them. For more than 2000 years, all of this happened despite Jesus' command "to love one another" and His ardent prayer "that all may be one as You, Father, are in me, and I in You" (John 15, 17 and 17, 21).

Why?

“Everything Jesus said was plain and clear” [...]. To this day many of Christ’s words are incomprehensible because we are still moral and spiritual neanderthal men. The gospel arrow is aimed towards eternity, and that which we call Christian history is in many ways a series of clumsy and unsuccessful attempts to bring Christianity about.”

Alexander Men spoke these words at the inauguration of his new “Open University” in Moscow on September 8, 1990, the evening before his assassination in front of his own house. His remarks on Christian history underline the tragedy of religious divisions. The tragedy of his assassination underlines the deep crisis in post-Soviet Russia, where democratization was attempted in the chaotic 1990’s, and the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to recover and rebuild her churches. When KGB officer Vladimir Putin became prime minister and president, “Soviet” totalitarian repression resumed. The concept of a “Russian World,” proclaimed by the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, led to the war of aggression against Ukraine in 2014, and to World War following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

One may wonder how these tragic divisions could reflect the “good news” Jesus-Christ proclaimed according to the four gospels of St. Matthew, Marc, Luke and John.

When Jesus was presented in the Temple, Simeon blessed Him and his parents, prophesising: “*Look, he is destined ...to be a sign that is opposed*”. (Luk. 2)

Where do we find His signs of contradiction and witness Europe’s Christian heritage? This question is the one I open with in Chapter 1. We truly find it in the early Christian Church with the Apostles, St. Paul in particular. When the Church becomes the Official Church of the Roman Empire, the emphasis shifts towards doctrine and political theology.

The prophetic voice of Dostoyevsky resounds in Chapter 2, by way of his last novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), and leaves us with a most disturbing an-

swer: For the Grand Inquisitor, Jesus must never come back to bother his church. He must leave it in human hands. In Christian Europe, moreover, the wise warning, of the prophet Samuel, against choosing a king, was forgotten. In human hands, history is bound to reflect the fundamental dualism within each of us between good and evil, and the contrasts between rulers and the ruled population, between kings and their subjects. This contrast is sharpened by the third temptation (power over humanity), especially for the rulers following the model of the Roman Empire. This book is structured around these contrasts.

As it concerns the rulers, we focus on the great divisions: on the rejection of the Jewish People (Chapter 3); on the wars with Islam (Chapter 4); on the East-West Schism and the new doctrines of the Latin Church thereafter, and the troublesome rise of “the Third Rome” (Chapter 5); and on the wars of Reformation and Counter-reformation (Chapter 6). Throughout two millennia, the oftentimes violent divisions were nurtured by a political theology as it appeared since the fourth century, in an effort to formulate Church doctrine through a language of force and exclusion in the Ecumenical Councils. Almost unavoidably, political theology, through the Cain-doctrine, East-West Schism, Reformation and religious wars, led to the burning of jews, heretics, and books, to the inquisition and index, and ultimately to totalitarian ideologies (Chapter 7). In the twentieth and twenty first centuries, “Christian Europe” experienced (and continues to live through) the consequences. Millions suffered and perished due to the radical evil of the Totalitarian Regimes of Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar, of Lenin and Stalin’s Communism, Hitler’s National Socialism, and in the early twenty-first century, Putin’s kleptocratic version of totalitarian evil.

The problem of evil

The problem of evil will be the fundamental problem of post-war intellectual life in Europe – as death became the fundamental problem after the last war wrote Hannah Arendt in 1945. She reflected on the two cruel World Wars, started and mostly fought in “Christian” Europe. The fundamental problem of evil directly addresses the Gulag and the Holocaust, an evil with deep roots in European history. How could it possibly be that, in a continent impregnated

ed by Christian Civilization, such evil could grow almost unchallenged in the twentieth century, and again in the twenty-first century? We have looked at the many faces of evil: from outright torture, sadism, genocide and murder, to complicity, diplomatic silence, collaboration, amnesia, indifference, looking away or profiting from it.

When writing about evil, we refer to something that did not necessarily happen. The Gulag, the Holocaust and the Ukrainian genocide could have been avoided. The “good” could have prevented, or at least contained, the “evil”. Given its deep roots, the Christian content of European Civilization is directly at issue. The answer to the question is most disturbing and became a leading question in writing this book. From the second century onwards, Christian thought has been dominated by anti-Judaism, challenged only within the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1960’s. That is: sixteen centuries of evil, presented as official church doctrine. Anti-Judaism stands at the origin of anti-Semitism and many conflicts, divisions and conflagrations thereafter, none of them unavoidable.

With the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, presided over by Emperor Constantine, the question of orthodoxy in the new faith was politicised and thus became a source of exclusion, violence, and oppression.

The politicisation of the Good News in a new political theology, can be called the original sin of the Christian Churches. This sin may well be responsible for “the centuries of blindness (that) have cloaked our eyes.”⁴ The evil it has caused becomes visible in how Jews and so called “heretics” have been mistreated from the fourth century onwards, and in the endless wars fought in “Christian Europe”, including the current Third World War.

Signs of Contradiction

Christian Churches, nevertheless, did offer guidance and means for living the faith and practicing the mission to be a sign of contradiction. In the Chapters 8-11, I selected a few major examples “from below” through which a true Chris-

⁴ Words from Holy Pope John XXIII, quoted in Chapter 3 *infra*.

tian Civilization could evolve, prosper and survive. The first one deals with the Christian Family as a sign of contradiction in Chapter 8. The second one is the conversion of the Word of God into the sacred spaces of beautiful churches and into holy life in Chapter 9. In the following two Chapters the theme is Creed and Creativity: Saints in Chapter 10, from Catharina of Alexandria and with St. Benedict as the central person and Patron of Europe, to Edith Stein and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Chapter 11 describes how the faith in Christ has been a continuing source of creativity in education, the arts, in literature and in science; from Dante, Michelangelo, Bach and Beethoven, Copernicus and Darwin, to Teilhard de Chardin in the twentieth century. Such personal and inspired creativity proved irrepressible, even by “true” doctrinal power. Chapters 8 – 11 are uplifting counterpoints to chapters 3 – 6. They have no pretence to be historical; they offer witnesses of faith and provide edifying stories that I found most inspiring. In Chapter 12, we look at our twenty-first century, yet again a time of world war in Europe and the Middle-East.

The quote from Alexander Men can serve as a reminder: What “we call Christian history is in many ways a series of clumsy and unsuccessful attempts to bring Christianity about.” From the highest authority figure to the simplest citizen, “without a history” we must, in humility and mercy, accept our own faults and fallibility. In human hands, nobody is infallible. The claim to infallibility, to being the only true or orthodox church⁵ and top-down revelation, breeds self-righteousness, vice, organised forgetting, intolerance and war. A Church claiming it can’t err, risks locking itself up in its own truth and it might take centuries, if it happens at all, for such a church to recognize its own errors and sins. In the Orthodox Churches, political theology was sustained by the symphony between state and church. In the Latin Church, political theology caused the creation of an Ecclesiastical State, the claim to supreme power after the East-West Schism, and the centralisation of Church authority after the loss of the Ecclesiastical States in the Nineteenth Century. The *aggiornamento*, launched by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, initiated remembering, reform and renewal. All Christian Churches still must come to terms with their own original sin of political theology and its consequences.

5 *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, as the full doctrinal sentence was.

After the half century of “radical evil,” the time had come in the Roman Catholic Church for an Ecumenical Council greater than doctrine, a Council which would shift the emphasis from the political theology of imposition and exclusion to a charismatic theology of *aggiornamento*, witness, inclusion, and mercy.

Salvation and the problem of power over men and women in the thought and words of Romano Guardini

For European Christians, learning from history is based on our recognition that we are – in Romano Guardini’s words – redeemed by way of Jesus’ Crucifixion, and not by way of the institution of God’s Kingdom on earth. As he wrote: “The first unlimited possibility has been lost. Salvation now becomes identified with sacrifice. Thus God’s kingdom does not come as it was meant to, in open history-revolutionizing fulfillment; it is to remain to the end of time suspended in the process of coming – its acceptance or rejection, progress or retrogression depending on the response of the individual or group in every period of world history.”⁶

The institution of God’s Kingdom is reserved for Jesus’ “Second Coming” at the end of times. In the meantime, we Christians live in the end-time in which the third of the three temptations continues to “hold captive forever the conscience” of mankind: “The devil then took him up a very high mountain and displayed before him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, promising: All these will I bestow on you if you prostrate yourself in homage before me.”⁷

Romano Guardini devoted two of his shorter works to the problem of power in the modern and postmodern world.⁸ From “*Power and Responsibility*”, I quote from the third chapter, in which he pinpoints the four major dangers of power:

“**First** and most obvious is the danger of violent destruction. There still seem to be people who set their hopes on war. The destruction of human

6 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*. P. 245. Regnery Publishing 2012. Cf. Chapter 1 above.

7 Cf. (Matthew, 4, 8-9) Chapter 2, *supra*.

8 *Das Ende der Neuzeit; Die Macht*. In English translations: *The End of the Modern World and Power and Responsibility*.

life and talents, of economic and cultural goods which a new war would involve, surpasses understanding, still worse would be the spiritual losses. The last remnants of spiritual-ethical order, of respect for man, of character and inner security, would crumble. The result would be a long-lived attitude of belief solely in violence and trickery: nihilism fulfilled.”

Warfare has been a permanent feature in European history. Peace and a decent world order never materialized, not even after two devastating wars in the twentieth century and the invention of the atomic/nuclear weapons of mass-destruction.

Second, “Not so directly tangible, but looming on all sides is another danger. Man is acquiring ever more power over man, an ever profounder influence over him physically, intellectually, spiritually; but how will he direct that influence? One of the most terrible lessons which those whose cultural roots reach back before World War I had to learn, was that in concrete existence the spirit is much weaker than they had supposed. They were convinced that its influence was direct, hence that it must inevitably triumph over violence and cunning. “The human spirit cannot be suppressed for long.” “Truth will prevail.” “The real values will win in the end.” At the very least, this idealistic notion of the spirit’s immediacy and protective faculties was false.

Those who entertained it had to learn the hard way how far the power of the state with its public-conditioning organs reaches, and to what terrifying degree it is possible to cripple the spirit of the Individual, confuse the norms of the valid and the just.

Instead of “everything turning out all right,” the dignity of truth and the loftiness of justice; human dignity; the inviolability of man’s spiritual and physical being; freedom of the individual, of personal enterprise; the right to private opinion; freedom of speech; the trustworthiness of public servants, not only in regard to the letter of their instructions, but also to the spirit behind them; the freedom of science, art, education, medicine each to be answerable to its own deepest purpose, which of these was not de-

stroyed? Have not violence and deceit become established practice?

And let us have no illusions: these things took place not only in the temporary confusion of anarchy, but within the studied pattern of theoretical and practical systems, carefully prepared.

Can, then, the spirit fall sick? [...] On what does its health depend? Plato, and later the fullness of Revelation. St. Augustine, already made this clear: the health of the spirit depends on its relation to truth, to the good and the holy. The spirit thrives on knowledge, justice, love, adoration; not allegorically, but literally. What happens when man's relation to these facets is destroyed? Then the spirit sickens. And not, instead, as soon as it errs or lies or is guilty of an injustice. It is difficult to determine just how many of these "exposures" to disease the spirit can withstand before it succumbs to that inner blindness, that destruction of all proficiency, which are symptoms of overarching spiritual decline.

However, this much is certain: once truth *as such* loses its significance; once success usurps the place of justice and goodness; once the holy is no longer perceived or even missed, the spirit is stricken indeed. What occurs thus, is no longer a matter for psychology; then no therapeutical measures help; the only thing that can save is conversion, metanoia.

Seen from this vantagepoint, how heavily do they weigh, the twelve-year experiment in Germany and the one almost four times older in the East? Yet one of these systems did last twelve years, and what brought it down came not from within but from without. The other⁹ has outlasted decades, growing mightily all the while. We dare not underestimate the historical power of such experiments; still less, as the whole fabric of our present-day life, with its rationalization and mechanization, its techniques of forming public opinion, and its control of education, is a tempting preparation for outright imitation. It can be an attractive temptation, even when specifically accepted and expressed Ideas apparently oppose it, for usually it is the enemy who dictates the methods, and methods are often stronger than ideas."

9 The "other" refers to the totalitarian Soviet Union.

Indeed, the European spirit has been stricken by complicity in evil policies. The list of complicities is a very long one, from active execution to passive indifference.

A third danger is the hold that bare power and violence has over existence. There are things that can well be controlled by rational power: everything connected with inanimate nature, for instance. As soon as we progress to animate nature, it is another story; intuition and sensitivity immediately become essential. And when we reach the human order, all that has to do with education, welfare, culture, and civil services, we find ourselves in territory where everything, to remain human and be spiritually successful, must first pass through the “personal center,” that inmost core of the responsible human heart. The true, the good, and the righteous are realizable only if accepted by living people with internal, genuine conviction, and to bring this about requires reverence, encouragement, and patience. He must respect their freedom, stir their initiatives, awaken their creative centers. Working with the impulses of living persons, he must freely accept all their false starts and detours. The greater a man’s power, the stronger the temptation to take the shortcut of force: the temptation to nullify the individual and his freedom, to ignore both his creative originality and his personal truth; to achieve the desired end simply by force, dismissing what cannot be forced as not worthy of consideration. In other words: the temptation to erect a culture on rational and technical grounds alone. Even spiritually, man is malleable, once dialectics and mass-suggestion, propaganda and *Weltanschauung* or historical perspective, even legal testimony are undertaken not with respect for truth, but to support predetermined ends.”

A fourth and final danger is that which power holds for those who wield it. Nothing corrupts purity of character and the lofty qualities of the soul more than power. To wield power that is neither determined by moral responsibility nor curbed by respect for the other, results in the destruction of all that is human in the wielder himself.”¹⁰ Power corrupts; totalitarian power corrupts totally.

10 Romano Guardini, *Die Macht*. Würzburg 1955. Excerpts from: *Power And Responsibility A Course of Action for the New Age*, Translated by Elinor C. Briefs. Henry Regnery Company Chicago 1961, pages 58ff.

Dissolution of the modern worldview

The third chapter of *Das Ende der Neuzeit* deals with the dissolution of the modern worldview.¹¹ The core problem on which life or destruction depends, writes Guardini, is the problem of power over men and women – not the increase of power, but its restraint, its true use. With the growth of power, mankind is again confronted with chaos. To cope with it, three virtues are required: a serious commitment to the Truth (Jesus-Christ); courage in challenging human chaos and untruth; and asceticism, that is, self-control over one's own power. Guardini's apocalyptic, eschatological vision in the last paragraphs was strongly influenced by the fear for the use of atomic weapons and the further expanding totalitarian Soviet repression,¹² in the early years of the Cold War. This was well before the era of East-West *détente* and the *aggiornamento* in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960's, in which Europe learned to live in the illusion of the longevity of East-West *détente* and Europe's division.

The last decade of the twentieth century, following the peaceful end of the Cold War and Europe's East-West division and despite the violent civil war in former Yugoslavia, was a brief period of hope. Such hope was also expressed in Pope John-Paul's impressive program for celebrating the year 2000.

In Europe and the West, the brief period of hope also showed its darker sides in excessive privatization of public life, globalization for profit, the rise of aggressive, intolerant secularism, and the dismissal of history as irrelevant and obsolete. The notion of the "common good" lost out against private profit, competition, and self-enrichment. Christian principles and family virtues came to be seen as remnants from a bygone era, which should be abolished in the name of postmodern gender ideologies and modern values beyond good and evil.

As I quoted Guardini above, with regards to the second danger of power: "once truth as such loses its significance; once success usurps the place of justice and goodness; once the holy is no longer perceived, the spirit is stricken indeed, ...

¹¹ Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*. Würzburg 1950. English translation: *The End of the Modern World*.

¹² Cf. also: Karl Jaspers, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen. Politisches Bewusstsein in unserer Zeit*. München 1958.

then no therapeutical measures help; the only thing that can save is conversion, metanoia.” Without such conversion Europeans are too weak in spirit to resist the evil powers rising again in the twenty-first century; as we have been seeing all too well ever since Putin came to power in Russia.

In the early twenty-first century, the problem of power came back with a vengeance. The first one was the disruption caused by Islamic terrorism since 9/11, (the destruction of the world trade towers in New York) and the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The second one was the ascent to power of former KGB officer Vladimir Putin and his cohort of kleptocrats in Russia, and his war against Ukraine in 2014, followed by a full invasion in 2022. The third one is the extremely violent war between Hamas and Israel since 7 October 2023.

As Hannah Arendt wrote:¹³ totalitarian evil happened, therefore it can happen again.

As it does.

¹³ Cf. Chapter 7

PART I

MISSION AND
TEMPTATIONS

CHAPTER 1

SIGN OF

CONTRADICTION?

Simeon said to Mary, the mother of Jesus after he had blessed God: “This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed” (Luk. 2)

Jesus defied all expectations on the coming of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible. He was born from a virgin mother. Mary’s husband Josef was quite upset by her pregnancy and even by the birth of her son in his ancestral town of David. Jesus was born in a dark manger, then set alight by a choir of angels from heaven (Luk.2). Josef, quite troubled, stayed apart from mother and child, as the Orthodox Icons on the birth of Jesus teach. In Matthew’s Gospel, only the visit of the Magi to “the infant king of the Jews was mentioned (Math.2).

Next to nothing the Gospels report on His life before He turned thirty. All four Gospels record what He taught during His three years of public life. He performed many miracles and healed many who were sick, but was also constantly on the run, according to one of the most beautiful stories written about His

life.¹⁴ When Jesus, in the third year of His public life, was arrested and crucified, His disciples at the time showed little courage to defend or follow him: Judas betrayed him; Peter, the rock on whose faith He was to build His Church, renounced Him. The others, with the exception of John, fled from the scene of capture. Jesus, the Messiah was arrested, flagellated, and crucified.

The Crucifix is itself the paramount sign of contradiction. Used by the Romans as an instrument for cruel and humiliating execution, Jesus turned the Crucifix into a sign of charity and victory over death and invited us to follow Him, as the way, the truth, and the life.

The disciples thereafter did not believe in His Resurrection and locked themselves up. Apparently, they left their hide-out to the Mount of Olives some forty days after Jesus' Resurrection.

"While they were with Him they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He answered them 'It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' No sooner had he said this than he was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud which took Him from their sight." (Acts 1,6-9)

They still did not understand! True faith, courage, and close presence throughout were manifested only by two women: his mother the Holy Mary and Maria Magdalena.

Thereafter, they went back to the upstairs room where they were staying. There, in this room, we read in the acts, something absolutely extraordinary happened to them, through which these frightened men were transformed into true apostles.

"And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it

¹⁴ Alexandre MEN, *Jésus, le Maître de Nazareth*. Nouvelle Cité 1999. French translation from the original: *Syn Tchélouetcheski*. Moscow 1992.

filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.” (Acts 2, 1-4)

It was at Pentecost that His twelve disciples received the Holy Spirit. The descent of the Holy Spirit, as it turned out, was a life-changing event, so much so that those outside of the Upper-room could hear the noise. They assembled in great numbers “from every nation under heaven.” Peter stood up with the eleven apostles and addressed the crowd, and each of them could hear the message in his or her own language, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (2, 19-36).

His address was truly extraordinary. Just imagine: a simple fisherman, illiterate, from Galilee, who had renounced Jesus a few weeks ago. He now stands up before a huge crowd and, speaking as a learned preacher, proclaims Jesus as the Messiah! It was the Holy Spirit who turned him and other fearful men into true apostles of Jesus-Christ the Messiah.

Still, the Acts (1-8) of the Apostles limit themselves mostly to Apostles Peter and Philip. Beyond the Four Gospels, nothing can be found on the other apostles, who presumably went out to proclaim the Gospel to “the ends of the earth.” What happened to them and their mission to proclaim Jesus the Messiah? In the Calendar of the Catholic Church, all, except St. John, are venerated as martyrs for the new faith, but we don’t know for sure where they went to proclaim the Gospel. Is our ignorance the outcome of an organised forgetting, as in the case of the Nestorians? Or did none of the Apostles, besides Peter and Paul, evangelize? From the four Gospels and the Acts, we learn a lot about St. Peter, his character and his election by Jesus as the leader of the Apostles.

The four gospels were written in Greek. The Gospel ascribed to Mark was written in Rome, probably between 66–70 AD; the Gospels attributed to Matthew and Luke around AD 85–90 AD and the Gospel ascribed to John in the early second century. Despite the traditional ascriptions, the true authors are unknown. Most scholars agree that none were written by eyewitnesses. Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramean.

After the Acts, we lose track of Peter, until Eusebius tells us that he was crucified in Rome, probably in the year 67 A.D., well over 30 years after his Pentecostal address. From the two James brothers, we know that one was stoned to death. The other brother – the first bishop of Jerusalem – was beheaded shortly before the siege of Jerusalem. St. John lived longer than any other apostle, became bishop of Ephesus, and was banned to Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation, before he died early in the second century. The other apostles may have proclaimed the Gospel as far as the Persian Empire, China, India, Ethiopia, and around the Black Sea.

In Eusebius' History of the Church, the "Holy Apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered over the whole world" at the time of the Jewish War. "These things [the war] happened to the Jews in requital for James the Righteous, who was a brother of Jesus known as Christ, for though he was the most righteous of men, the Jews put him to death." According to Eusebius, the siege "under Vespasian was the penalty laid upon the Jews by divine justice for their crimes against Christ."¹⁵ St. Augustine shared this assessment. "[But] the Jews who killed him and refused to believe in him, to believe that he had to die and rise again, suffered a more wretched devastation at the hands of the Romans and were utterly uprooted from their kingdom, where they had already been under the dominion of foreigners", and they were dispersed all over the world.¹⁶

In the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we encounter a certain man named Saul, "still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains." As he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly surrounded him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul replied: "Who are you, sir?" The reply came: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." This Appearance of the Risen Lord, some two years after His Ascension to Heaven, transformed persecutor Saul into Apostle Paul. The Letters he wrote

15 Josephus, *The Jewish War*. As quoted by Eusebius, *The History of the Church*. Penguin Books 1989, p.61. His own assessment on p.41.

16 In *The City of God*. Book XVIII, Chapter 46. (On p. 827 in the English translation, Penguin Classics 1984.

in the last decade of his apostolate to the Churches he had founded, together with the Four Gospels of Matthew, Marc, Luke and John, became the primary source of the faith of the Christians. Jesus selected his most influential Apostle separately, from Heaven rather than at the time of His life on earth in Galilee or Jerusalem! Paul and Barnabas were sent on mission by the Holy Spirit directly from Antioch. Paul met Peter (Kefas) only three years later and for a very short time; he also briefly met James, the brother of John, before he was beheaded by Herod. (Acts 12,2). It took another fourteen years before Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem again.

St. Paul, the apostle of the gentiles.

Karen Armstrong¹⁷ might be right with her conclusion that the Christians – as they were first named in Antioch - would have been little more than a Jewish sect, had there been no Apostle Paul. It was Paul who preached the Gospel to the gentiles in parts of the Roman Empire, and not only to the Jewish communities. In doing so, St. Paul was the first disciple who took the mission “to be a sign of contradiction” literally to heart. He contradicted the Jerusalem Christian community by preaching the Gospel to the gentiles, and he contradicted Roman polytheism by preaching the belief in one God throughout the Empire. The letters he wrote to the faithful in the cities he visited between 50 and 58 AD are the oldest, most reliable sources of the new Christian faith. All of them were written before the Jewish War and before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and his soldiers in 70 A.D. The Gospel of Marc, according to modern exegesis, almost literally quotes from a lost source, referred to as Q (from the German *Quelle*). The *Didache* (the Teaching), containing Christian doctrine on the Decalogue and discovered in 1875, may well have been another source written before the Jewish War.¹⁸

The dates mentioned above are important. Before the Jewish War, the new Christians were persecuted primarily by the Jews. The war marked the es-

¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *St Paul The Misunderstood Apostle*. London 2015. My paragraph on St. Paul is based on her fascinating biography of St Paul relying on the seven letters attributed to him.

¹⁸ Ben H. Swett published an English translation with comments on 30 January 1998 in which he concludes that the *Didache* was written before 49 A.D. See: Website: *Early Christian Writings*.

trangement between Hellenic Jews and Christian- Jews.

Soon thereafter, the latter were scattered all over the world and came to consider – in accordance with very Old Testament concept of Yahweh – the destruction of Jerusalem as God’s punishment. At the same time, the early Christians were convinced that the “End of Times” had come, and that the return of Christ would occur in their lifetime.

Saul was a particularly zealous Pharisee who persecuted the Christians before the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, some two years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. After His resurrection, so we read in Paul’s First letter to the Corinthians, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, to more than five hundred of the brothers, and last of all, “he appeared to me too, as though I was born when nobody expected it.” (1 Cor. 15.5-8). Paul became an apostle through the grace given to him. For Paul, “the most important thing about his experience was that he actually *did see* the Lord, and that Jesus appeared to him in exactly the same way as he had appeared to the Twelve.”¹⁹ His encounter with Jesus was a revelation and not just a vision. Thenceforth, Paul did not go to Jerusalem to meet the other apostles, but instead went off to Arabia, so he writes in his letter to the Galatians. No less than three years later, he went up to Jerusalem (only) to meet Cephas [Peter], just for fifteen days. It was not until fourteen years had passed, that he travelled to Jerusalem again. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul clearly went his own way in preaching the gospel of Jesus. As Karen Armstrong writes: “In his letters, he was not writing for the Everyman and never intended to make a general ruling applicable to everybody, but was always addressing a specific problem in a particular congregation. Nor was he legislating for future generations of Christians, since he expected the *Parousia* in his own lifetime.”²⁰ His letters apply what was revealed to him and what he had learnt in the years of withdrawal.

According to St. Paul, “Jesus’s death and resurrection had transformed history and changed the fate of all peoples, regardless of their beliefs or ethnicity. He had turned “the prevailing norms of the political world on their head.” Hence

¹⁹ Karen Armstrong, *op.cit.* p.27. In this paragraph I rely on her fascinating biography.

²⁰ *Op.cit.* p. 73.

Paul's passion to change the world and challenge Roman society and the Jewish people.²¹ Freedom, following liberation from the bondage of sin, was the theme of his message to the Galatians. Paul urged them to resign their submission as well as the Greco-Roman religion, to stand firm and to refuse to submit to the yoke of slavery. He challenged the fundamental social assumptions of his time by writing that "there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male or female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus."²²

"Where the emperor cult [in the Roman Empire] deified power and wealth, the cross had revealed an entirely new set of divine values." Paul "stressed discontinuity, but in doing so he violated some of the most fundamental values of his time." He depicted God "declaring his solidarity with those whom Roman law ignored" and allied himself with the victims of oppression."²³ In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul "scrupulously advocated equal rights for men and women in marriage."²⁴

Finally, Paul practised what he preached. He worked long hours as a tent maker to earn his living, thus contradicting the prevailing attitude of the upper classes in society that an apostle like him should be able to live without working.²⁵ By working and living in solidarity with common labourers, Paul gave them dignity.

St. Paul has truly been the first who practiced and preached what it means to follow Christ and to be a sign of contradiction to the world. Although he was not one of the twelve, he became the apostle of the gentiles and brought the Christian faith to Western Asia (what is now Turkey), to Greece, Rome and Spain.²⁶

After (three and) fourteen years, St. Paul's relations to St. Peter were rather complicated, as Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians (2, 1-21). He and Barna-

21 Op.cit. p.52,105.

22 Op.cit.p. 55.

23 Op.cit.p.71,75.

24 Op.cit. p. 81. The passages to the contrary in the letter to the Romans and in the letter to the Ephesians are not from St. Paul but added later and by others.

25 Op.cit.p.33-34.

26 According to St. Clemens, second Pope, in his letter to the Corinthians.

bas came to Jerusalem for the Council of Jerusalem to deal with the controversy over circumcision of gentile converts. Additionally, Peter came to Antioch, where he was censured by Paul: “But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of all: ‘If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” Thereafter, Paul continued his own way as the apostle to the Gentiles, leaving Peter as the apostle to the circumcised. In so doing, St. Paul did not reject or condemn the Jews. In his letter to the Romans, he concludes his three chapters (9-11) on the place of Israel with the following prediction and promise: “and thus all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come out of Zion, he will turn away godlessness from Jacob; and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’” In respect to the gospel, they are enemies on your account; but in respect to election, they are beloved because of the patriarchs. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. (11,26-29.)

From apostle to apostolic and church fathers

In the three centuries between the death of St. Paul and the rise to power of Emperor Constantine the Great, the Christian Faith developed and rapidly spread as a counter- culture in the Roman Empire. Our best source regarding this period is Eusebius’ *History of the Church*. For a long time, Antioch was the most important centre of the new faith. The Christian faith, for a variety of reasons, had the character of a counterculture.

They were “strangers” in the Roman Empire and, as a consequence, subject to persecution for their refusal to honour the emperor or sacrifice to the pagan gods. Persecutions were intermittent rather than permanent, local rather than Empire-wide, targeting people like Christian soldiers, rather than populations. Many Christians wanted to become martyrs to their faith and to die and be resurrected like the Christ they had decided to follow. The most widespread persecutions took place in the army of Emperor Marcus-Aurelius during the second century, under Emperor Decius in the third century, and throughout the whole empire under Emperor Diocletian, the immediate predecessor of

Emperor Constantine. These persecutions were excessively cruel and violent.

In the early days of the Christian era, religion and politics were not separate but intimately connected parts of social life. The unity of purpose and doctrine was essential for the new faith's survival amidst a pagan society. The truth of the Christian faith required virtue to grow and spread; it required bishops, learned men and scholars to explain the signs of contradiction. Living in virtue is admired by the world and feared and respected by rulers; it is something Christians have frequently been persecuted for.²⁷

Christians could be recognized through three principal characteristics: 1) Christians are called to spread the faith - through example and evangelization; 2) they are taught to continuously renew themselves – through repentance, reconciliation, reform, contrition and conversion; and 3) they are inclined to continuously dispute the “true” way to follow Jesus, as we can already read from the outset in the Acts of the Apostles. Evangelization is the first mission of every Christian, and it is a worldwide, universal one. A faith that is no longer spread, is condemned to die. Contrary to the Islam, Christian evangelization began peacefully from the bottom up rather than through violent conquest. Self-renewal is the outcome of charity, humility and forgiveness as fundamental virtues in daily life.

Disputes pertaining to the “true” way to follow Jesus occurred as early as in the age of the Apostles, who were all Jews. Luke, the Apostolic and Church fathers were not.

The transition, represented by this contrast, had far-reaching consequences for the development and formulation of Christian doctrines:

First, most of the fathers lacked knowledge of the original text of the Hebrew Bible, the Midrash (commentaries on the Bible), and their interpretations in Jewish theology, and were not very interested in them. Their idea of God came from Greek philosophy.

²⁷ Cf. Peter Bamm, *Welten des Glaubens*. 1959.

Secondly, the early Christians firmly believed that the return of Christ and the end of times would occur in their lifetime. They lived accordingly, without planning for the future. What the early sources disclose is “the combination in the same minds, of an intense apocalyptic expectation that history will end and of the willingness to live with the prospect of a continuance of human history – both of these finding expression in an increasing emphasis on the centrality of Jesus.”²⁸ The concept of Jesus as a Rabbi became an embarrassment in the second century and an obscurity thereafter. He had become a turning-point in history, moving away from His Jewish origins.

Thirdly, they organized themselves in local churches with a bishop, but more in the sense of communities than of institutionalized churches. From the mid second century onwards, the monarchical episcopate (i.e., the rule by a single bishop as the structural requirement of defence against heresy and Judaism) led to a doctrine of “correction and fulfilment”.

With it, the tradition was born from the appropriation of the Jewish tradition by the Christian Church. The “Old Testament” henceforward came to be claimed as the Church’s own, including the exclusive right to its proper interpretation.²⁹ The “Old Law” had to be abolished. Out of this appropriation developed the Cain-Doctrine, which we shall further explore in Chapter 3.

The Apostolic Fathers were those who had been taught by one of the apostles themselves. St. Clemens wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians outside the New Testament. St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna, both disciples of St. John, were both martyred. Church Fathers belonged to the next generations, variously distinguished between Greek and Latin Fathers, and between the ante-Nicene fathers, and the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers. The two distinctions reflected the growing distance between the Greek East and Latin West, and the transition from persecution to prominence. They all wrote in opposition to Judaism and other heresies.

Justin the Martyr, born in the early second century and martyred in 166 A.D.,

28 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries. His place in the History of Culture*. New Haven and London 1985 at p. 25.

29 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Development of Doctrine*. Volume 1. “Praeparatio Evangelica.

was one of those virtuous gentile Christians. He considered it his task to seek and proclaim the truth as a philosopher. As H. Chadwick wrote: “A thoughtful Christian of A.D. 150 contemplating the tiny of his community and the magnitude of the forces entrenched against its revolutionary program could not fail to conclude that by any natural criterion of judgment the prospects for the Church were less than rosy. Justin remains cheerfully extrovert, confident that Christianity is the divinely planned way and will therefore win.”

He was an early advocate that the Christian apologist must, first of all, present accurate information about his faith. If Christianity is true, it has nothing to fear from scrutiny.

When, at the end of his First Apology, Justin describes Baptism and the Eucharist, there is a “clearly implied thesis that, contrary to the natural expectations of his pagan readers, these rites are not black magic, and indeed could hardly be more innocuous and morally improving. The false charges of unmentionable vice provided a justification both for the mob violence and the official attitude of the persecuting government.”³⁰

Incarnation and the Christian concept of history

As Christopher Dawson writes: “The doctrine of the Incarnation which is the central doctrine of the Christian faith is also the center of history, and thus it is natural and appropriate that our traditional Christian history is framed in a chronological system which takes the year of Incarnation as its point of reference and reckons its annals backwards and forwards from this fixed center” – as we and the world still do today.

“Thus the Christian conception of history is essentially unitary. It has a beginning, a center, and an end. This beginning, this center, and this end transcend history; they are not historical events in the ordinary sense of the word, but

30 H. Chadwick, *Justin Martyr's Defence Of Christianity*. A lecture delivered in the Library series of public lectures. John Rylands Library. Oxford University. P. 275-297. <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/.../datastream>. English translation of Justin's works can be found in: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. ANFO 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. On p. 244 ff.

acts of divine creation to which the whole process of history is subordinate.”³¹

At this point, we must emphasize the contradiction between the Christian (and Judaic) view of history and the prevailing Greek, and Roman views of history at the time. The Christian/ and Judaic view of history is linear rather than cyclical; history moves from creation to the end of times. Within this view, a human being is unique, created once and for all, moving from conception, earthly birth and death to eternal life. His or her life has a purpose. Their dignity, therefore, is the foundation of life, faith and society.

There is an interplay between the history of salvation and world history. There is a history of mankind and a history of the human person; there is a fundamental dualism in the historical process, rooted in the human faculty to pursue the good or do evil.

For us Christians, learning from history is based on our recognition that we are – in Romano Guardini’s words – redeemed by way of Jesus Crucifixion, and not by way of the institution of God’s Kingdom on earth. As he wrote:

“The first unlimited possibility has been lost. Salvation now becomes identified with sacrifice. Thus God’s kingdom does not come as it was meant to, in open history-revolutionizing fulfillment; it is to remain to the end of time suspended in the process of coming – its acceptance or rejection, progress or retrogression depending on the response of the individual or group in every period of world history.”³²

The institution of God’s Kingdom is reserved for Jesus’ “Second Coming” as we can read in Lucas 21. 25ff. :

“And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect; hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.”

³¹ Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*. ISI Books 2002. On p. 247 in the Chapter on “The Christian View of History p.247,249.

³² Romano Guardini, *The Lord*. P. 245. Regnery Publishing 2012.