

CHRISTIANITY AND POWER: AN ANCIENT MISCONCEPTION

Cristianismo e Poder: um equívoco milenar ¹

*José Brissos-Lino **

Abstract

The history of civilizations is largely tied to the religious domain in its most diverse forms. From the most explicit to the most subtle, from the days of Constantine to the present day, from the West to the East and involving practically all expressions and branches of the Christian faith. This domain is verified in terms of content as well as form.

This thirst for power in both appearance and substance clearly shows how the essence of the Gospel was not properly assimilated by Christians throughout History, or at least was not more important than acquiring power in ancient times, whether through self-defense or as Camões would put it: “the vain glory of ruling.”

Keywords: Christianity, power, misconception

Resumo

A história dos povos é em grande parte a história do domínio religioso nas suas mais diversas formas, desde as mais explícitas às subtilezas, desde os dias de Constantino até hoje, do Ocidente ao Oriente e envolvendo praticamente todas as expressões e ramos da fé cristã. Domínio esse que se verifica tanto no conteúdo como na forma.

Esta ânsia pelo poder, tanto na aparência como na substância, mostra bem como a essência do Evangelho não foi assimilada pelos cristãos ao longo da História, ou pelo menos não terá sido mais determinante do que a oportunidade de ocupar o poder secular, seja com intenções de auto-defesa, seja tendo como motivação aquilo que Camões chamava a “vã glória de mandar”.

Palavras-chave: Cristianismo, poder, equívoco

* Director of the Master in Science of Religion at the Universidade Lusófona. Coordinator at the *Instituto de Cristianismo Contemporâneo* (ULHT). Researcher at CLEPUL (FL-Universidade de Lisboa).
jose.lino@ulusofona.pt

¹ This article is the result of the opening conference of the 1st International Congress of Contemporary Christianity, held in May 2018 in Lisbon.

Since its inception, one of the biggest and most critical challenges for the Christian faith has been the ability to understand its focus in the *oikoumene*, as well as understanding the *ekklesia* as a divine agent between men, referring to the construction of the Kingdom of God as the light that shines over the world, deters darkness, and the salt of the earth that preserves it from corruption.²

However, the church has systematically adopted a Pharisee stance, seduced by the Roman Empire. Constantine made an effort in stopping the persecution of Christians. However, he attempted to detour them from the Christian simplicity, sincerity of devotion, the purity of its principles summoned directly through Jesus of Nazareth in the name of a political alliance. As such, the Church then settled down to a power pact in a perfect convergence of interests, accepted the minimization of other contemporary religious expressions (from paganism to Judaism), and receiving privileges and perquisites that decisively discharged their distinctive marks of origin, far from the idea that "he had nowhere to lay his head."³

Many investigators believe that the moment Christianity became fashionable and a political convenience, the purity of the faith was bastardized and the wheat was definitely mixed with the weeds. Through generous heritage, they received temples, religious artifacts, priest clothing, religious symbolism, perquisites and social status. Also, a large part of the population deemed convenient to adhere to the official religion for political, cultural and social reasons without going through a metanoia (without ever converting from the pagan gods to the Christian God).

Indeed, at that time the Christian communities did not have a specific worshipping place, even though we knew since the Hebrew Tanakh that a physical center for worshipping Yahweh was important since "The Most High

² Matthew 5:13-16.

³ And Jesus said: "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20).

does not live in temples built by men”,⁴ and Apostle Paul, writing for the Church of Corinth in the 1st century, focuses on the spiritual temple.⁵ But now, in virtue of the Edict of Milan (313AD) of Constantine and the Edict of Thessaloniki (380dC) of Theodosius, the Christian people would receive the old pagan temples, as well as their respective religious instruments and even liturgical *gravitas*. All elements that were unknown to the Christians.

The original DNA would become unrecognizable due to the persecutions developed by the institutional Christianity which went from hunted to hunter, always in the name of the cross. As such, the Crusades were carried out. These were military campaigns which consisted in pillaging and conquering in the name of the faith, as well as the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which led to the unfortunate results that we know today. It led to the persecution of women with mental and emotional issues, nicknamed witches by the medieval mentality as well as combating the pre-reformers and protestant reformers. Thus, the evangelization of new lands was driven through with the motto “the cross and the sword” in an unusual partnership safeguarded by the concept of “holy war.”

In our view, the simplistic essence of Christianity was not retrieved ever again. The gears of History would not stop its pursuit of power with the church developing its repressive tools.

Moreover on the logic and quality of the theology of the Inquisition, it is enough to reflect on what Frei Bartolomeu Ferreira wrote as censor of the Holy Office on the first publication of *Os Lusíadas*, where he even closes his eyes on the episode of the Island of Love (Canto X). However, that does not stop him from adverting the readers: "(...) as it is a poetic text, Camões mentions

⁴ “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things? (Acts 7:48-50).

⁵ “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

pagan gods in order to ornament his work, but these characters are fictitious. Further on, the 'Fabula dos Deoses' is mentioned, where he later declares that those same gods are demons! If we apply reasonable logic to this text, we can conclude that: 1º- gods are fictitious; 2º - gods are demons; 3º. - thus, demons are fictitious.”⁶ A wonderful theory for those who would burn people on town squares, accused of dealing with demons...

But the protestant Reformation could not liberate itself from that temptation of associating the pulpit with the crown. Luther only managed to stay alive after the rupture with Rome because of his political support. In his idea, the State and Church would be divinely operated institutions, which would not make sense for the people to have direct participation in politics or ecclesiastical matters.

Protestantism and its clergy would continue to defend the vertical principle of governing, with Germany strengthening its State powers over the population while maintaining the same dogmatic discourse of the medieval Church and theocratic conception, expressing an aspiration of standing next to the State. Not even the illuminist ideals managed to promote a profound change in behavior in the people due to the relevant religious influence and secular popular tradition.

20th Century

The Great War had tremendously nefarious effects throughout the entire European religious horizon. According to BURLEIGH (2005) in a piece that defends the thesis of the separation of religion and politics between the French Revolution and WWI, he points out the national and international bellic conflicts, the resulting economic effects and the desperation of the people as deciding factors that might have created a new path for new “political religions” that threatened to eradicate faith completely, such as the Bolshevik regime in

⁶ LINO, Brissos. The Inquisition in the “Lusíadas”. *Salmo Presente*. Setúbal: IEC, 1996. pp 62-63

Russia or even worse, the domestication of the Church's role in fascist and Nazi regimes: "The Great War, the regional wars and the following economic consequences made way for en masse desperation, to which the solution found was authoritarianism manifested in different ways. In some countries, authoritarian regimes were successfully planted through sinister movements that reached the most atavistic levels of the human psyche, although Italy transitioned from a democracy to fascism. These political religions threatened to eradicate Christianity completely, such as what the Bolsheviks intended to do to Russia, or even worse, offered to settle in new fascist and Nazi systems which adopted many of the exterior shapes of the old European religion (p.460, our translation).

Humiliated by this defeat, the Germans were forced to comply with Weimar's policies. In 1933 Hitler wins the elections in Germany and ascends to power. Influenced by the German philosophical ideas of the 20th century, the new chancellor would invoke feelings of humiliation and nationalist pride. He would call for unity, defend the Aryan race and combat Jews, blaming them for the capitalist system, killing Jesus Christ and all the evil in the world. He kept them from working in public services, as well as confiscating their goods and forbidding Jewish marriages. An ideology that he had acquired long before his rise to power, as a way of promoting his political propaganda, even in the sacrifice of historical truth: "It was totally wrong to discuss the liability of war, being that Germany was not the only one responsible for this catastrophe. The right thing to do was to throw all the blame towards the enemy, even if that was not according to the truth, as was the case".⁷

In the religious domain, the so called "German Christians", in the voice of Hermann Grüner, would declare that the German people would ascend through their Führer, defending that Christ would be with them due to Hitler's rise to power. Pastor Julius Leutheuser even stated: "Christ came to us through

⁷ HITLER, A. *A minha luta*. Vol. I, Lisboa: Glaciar. 2016, pp 261-262.

Adolf Hitler”. Beyond many claims of support, the lyrics of sacred songs were rewritten and dedicated to the Nazi regime, such as “Silent Night”, which was written as: “Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, and all is bright / Only the Chancellor steadfast in fight / Watches o’er Germany by day and by night / Always caring for us.”

Hitler seemed to gather some sympathy coming from German Protestantism, which would recognize his “promotion of germanity”⁸, honesty, rigor and a patron of the “defense of German essence”⁹, in particular the language and liberty. However, Hitler would profoundly dislike that same Protestantism because they would “violently oppose any attempt to salvage the nation from the claws of their mortal enemy, the reason being their somewhat dogmatic approach to Judaism.”¹⁰ The hatred of Jews was always present in hitlerian ideology since 1925 (date of the first publication of *Mein Kampf*) although he is suspected of being the grandson of a Jewish man.

In 1933, the German church was lead by supporters of the regime and strived to unite the various German churches, but the courtship between churches and State did not last long. Even if they sympathized with Nazism, the Christian communities would not accept absolute power, which lead to Hitler separating from them and creating the Minister for Church Affairs in 1935. However, in 1934 Martin Niemöller created a front of protestant pastors in order to oppose the “Nazi Christian” maneuvers, which resulted in the creation of the so called Confessing Church through the Barmen Declaration. This document written by Karl Barth was a summoning of German churches so they would separate from any State affairs and focus solely on the Christian Faith.

Right before the end of the war and after suffering repression from the government and state church, as well as eight years in prison, Martin Memöller

⁸ *Idem*, p 191.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p 191.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p 191.

and other living leaders confessed being mistaken regarding the Nazi regime, with the exception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor that knew Barth as a theology professor in Berlin, that headed Niemöller as the leader of the ecclesiastical resistance against the regime. During the time that he lived in England, he became an upfront critic of National Socialism, returning to Germany in 1939, a month after escaping the USA where he was received by Niebuhr in the same year. He explained to Niebuhr he did not want to lose the honor in being a part of Germany's suffering. As such, he wanted to partake in the difficult task of rebuilding the country, as was expected. He was arrested by the Gestapo, accused of militancy against the regime and was hanged a few days before the German surrender to the Allies.

The German Christian churches were interested in National Socialism due in particular to the discourse of Nazism, which claimed it would bring a new era for humanity, even though it did the exact opposite. The country was rising from the ashes of the previous wars with the creation of jobs and national independence, striving for its long lost glory. Those who saw the government true intentions were exiled and those who stayed were persecuted due to their race, philosophy, ideals, political affiliations and even theology. Barth and Tillich for example had to exile themselves, Bultman persisted in lecturing albeit always under the pressure of the State. The evangelical churches were seduced and misled, but Catholicism also had their issues.

Church and State

The official chronicles registered at times the existence of losses caused by religion to the State, but it also happened vice versa. There are some times where the religious field raises complaints on the government's intervention in their matters, or that the State resorts to religion to legitimize their way of governing. However, even if politics in general do not want to become the country's official religion, Christianity has been many times seen as a threat to

political objectives from both sides of the Atlantic. Luther hoisted the theory of two governments established by God: religious and political. While the political government would care for the well-being of its citizens, the religious government would have a more ethical and moral approach whether about God or the State.

In this case should not the Nazi discourse be, for example, in harmony with the ecclesiastical interests of the time? With the populations in perfect order, disciplined and obedient, the nation would be aware of progress and would overcome the established chaos. According to SANTOS (2011): "That philosophy would synergize with Auguste Comte's Positivism. But he was not the first to think so; this was also the vision of Constantine, who despite being 'well-intentioned', emphatically showed the existence of two parallel powers."

Religion and Politics

In the mentality of the nonreligious man (as well as the anti-religious man) when discussing the different manifestations of faith, what pops up is the cliché that the so-called religious wars have devastated Europe for centuries, which paints religion as something of very little interest for progress and peace. But if we are willing to analyze such so-called "religious" wars, one readily comes to the conclusion regarding the real reason for these and for all wars. The main motivation is not a question of religions, conquest of territories, access to the sea, oil or other natural resources, not even of political ideologies, but merely Power. Religion is, therefore, only one of many pretexts for power.

Truly, were the Crusades not only an opportunity for pillaging? What were the wars that followed the religious Reformation in Europe, which began in the sixteenth century, but power struggles between Catholics and Protestants in order to determine as many territories as possible where each prince could officially impose his religion upon the people?

What was the birth of Anglicanism but the desire of the monarch of the House of Tudor, Henry VIII, to free himself from the power of Rome? What was the foundation of the Society of Jesus but part of the effort and strategy of the Counter-Reformation, which aimed to combat and try to eradicate Calvinism and strengthen the power role, such as the institution of the Inquisition and the Index?

What was Jacobinism, in the vertigo of the French Revolution, but the determination to nullify or reduce the powerful influence of the Catholic Church on the state? Why did the constitution of the United States of America inscribe religious freedom, in the consecration of its independence, thus separating the churches from the state, but to remove the dominion of the British sovereign, symbolic head of the Church of England?

Historical examples are innumerable, and in each of them, if we are to look at the phenomenon with intellectual honesty and greater depth, we will invariably find reasons for Power. Does anyone believe that the Northern Ireland conflict was really due to religious reasons? Or between Muslims and Animists in Sudan, or between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria? The essence of war is always a matter of power, despite any religious or doctrinal arguments invoked for convenience, and the inevitable emotional involvement that these situations always provoke.

Religion and Culture

When we speak of religion, we speak inevitably of culture and, above all, of worldview. The way we see the world, society and the human being results in our ethos. Our uses and customs are associated with our beliefs, ideas and convictions.

If a Christian wants to live according to his faith, he understands that he should love his wife "as himself," according to Pauline theology, but also with the general teaching of the Gospel that goes much further by proposing

to love thy neighbor and even thy enemy. But how many Christians attribute to women the same dignity they require for their own principle, even when their husbands humiliate them, hurt them, harass them in many ways, and kill them when businesses pay them less than men for equal work, or when companions disrespect them, believing they have a kind of divine right to be unfaithful to them, but do not grant them reciprocity?

In view of this, how can Christians criticize the traditional treatment given to women in some areas of the Islamic world, or the submission of women to the male gender in the mindset of a certain Orient?

Whoever has read what countless of the Church's high dignitaries wrote about women throughout history cannot help but shiver. Considered to be inferior, perhaps soulless, demonic, the woman was largely obliterated from the historical records of the West, except as a breeder, courtesan, witch, prostitute, and little else. Very little is known of women writers, artists and scientists throughout history, written for centuries only by men.

But this is just one of many examples of how the principles of professed faith find no practical translation in everyday life and in culture. We can therefore conclude that the religious man does not always develop living practices consistent with the teachings of his religion. Which brings us to another question: can we say in this case that the Christian tradition is more important than religion, in the sense that it can impose on the religious man behaviors and thoughts that are often spurious to the doctrine he professes?

Religion and Tradition

We can always ask whether it is religion that creates tradition or vice versa. We believe both statements are partially true. If religion is making a tradition, the truth is that when Christianity came to the Iberian Peninsula, pagan cults had settled there many centuries ago. Moisés Espírito Santo, renowned researcher and religion sociologist, dedicates his life to studying these

phenomenon and concluded that much of the pagan tradition was assimilated into Christianity for the sake of convenience: “The rule for succession of religions (when one opposes through force) is through syncretism, a mixture of cults and symbols. The Old Testament God was often misinterpreted with the Sun, which was the old god of the Hebrews; Our Lady of the Catholics inherited the prerogatives of many versions of *Magna Mater*; the miracle saints originated from secondary gods from the pagan pantheon (catholic theology even says that old religions “foreshadowed true religion”). Thus, many paganisms were converted to Christianity imposed by force, between 313 and 380 ... for the purpose of replacing religious power. (Power may change it by decree but not societies and cultures).” (pp. 37, 38).

Thus, the names of Catholic saints were attributed to pagan gods, in an attitude that may be considered religious opportunism, renaming the objects of devotion, but maintaining the festivities pre-existing in the popular cult, now in a new garb. A sort of upgrade to the operating system without touching the contents. Could we consider that paganism has become Christianized, or has Christianity been paganized? Opinions differ.

It is curious that Christians, having been martyred for a long time under the yoke of the Roman Empire, having fought against doctrinal influences, both Judaizing and Gnostic, and even internal heresies, ended succumbing to a certain pagan tradition.

Religion and Spirituality

But religion cannot only be Culture or Tradition. Faith implies a given spirituality which in turn gives way to a particular praxis. What you believe in should be associated with your *modus vivendi*. If the faith one has does not affect the practical life and values of the believer, then it is nothing more than a civilizational reference, a mere cultural affirmation, or a relic of family, ethnic, or community tradition.

Curiously, the whole history of Christianity unfolded from the earliest times according to a pendulum system. The emphasis always shifted between two poles: on one hand, the strengthening of the institutional church, the rigid liturgy, the ecclesiastical hierarchy. On the other hand, personal devotion, communal sense, the testimony of life, and sanctification. Monasticism, scholasticism, pietism, papacy, puritanism, nineteenth-century liberal theology, the modern Pentecostal movement, and charismatic groups are some of the many possible examples of such pendulum movements.

The pendulum of history usually moved from one end to the other, and vice versa, probably because both dimensions are indispensable to the Christian faith, either personal devotion, personal experience of faith, or ecclesial organization, or collective experience of faith and doctrine. The calls to personal devotion (German Pietism, English Puritanism, Methodism, and Pentecostalism) are succeeded in history by the lack of adequate response of the institutional churches to the intrinsic need of the religious man. The faithful need a spiritual experience, a life of faith and not just a liturgy or a symbolic one. They need a relationship with the divine and not only an order of worship or a catechesis that is not heartfelt.

The monasteries arise out of necessity to flee to a corrupt society and a corrupt Church, where God could rarely be sighted. And a good part of Christian-inspired religious sects probably arose not only on the initiative of mentally and emotionally unstable, allegedly enlightened individuals, but also as a reactive attitude to something that actually went wrong in the churches.

The word and testimony of Christ

The misconception between Faith and Power was particularly persistent from the 1st century according to the general account of the Gospels. It is enough to think of the attitude of one of Jesus' disciples in Gethsemane, besieged and wanting to defend him, he drew a dagger - a weapon commonly

used by hardened assassins - and cut off an ear from Falco, the poor servant of the high priest.¹¹ But the evangelist Matthew reports that: “And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear” (Luke 22:49,50), but the Master rebuked him,¹² and Luke recounts that he immediately corrected the situation by healing the wound immediately.¹³

We can also reflect on the attitude of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who sought to persuade Jesus to sit her two sons in the places of highest honor in his coming kingdom,¹⁴ and thus provoked the wrath of the other disciples.¹⁵

Also, consider the position of James and John who at one point lost their patience and asked Jesus whether it would be good for fire from heaven to come upon the unbelieving Samaritans.¹⁶

All these manifestations of haughtiness in the chambers of power were contrary to the philosophy of the kingdom of God in the form of beatitudes that Jesus of Nazareth proposed since the genesis of his public ministry in the well-known Sermon on the Mount, an ethical program that was surprising for its time and that was showcased what was to come.

His famous speech would oppose violence, praising the peacemakers, the builders of peace, combat the injustice against the poor, give hope to the ones who suffered, giving some sense to human suffering, bring encouragement to whoever was sad and solidarity to the unjustly persecuted.¹⁷ All this was

¹¹ When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him: Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

¹² “Then said Jesus unto him: Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52-53).

¹³ “Then said Jesus unto him: Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52-53).

¹⁴ “And he said unto her: What wilt thou? She saith unto him: Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. (Matthew 20:21).

¹⁵ “And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren” (Matthew 20:24).

¹⁶ “And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said: Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? (Luke 9:54).

¹⁷ Luke 6.

counter-culture in that society and era due to it being a rupture in the social and religious *praxis*.

With this action program, Jesus risked being considered by the people as a lunatic, completely divorced from reality. He proposed what we call today a nonviolent resistance in an era where Jewish feelings would revolve around resentment and rebellion against the oppressing Roman Empire, as we can verify in the recurring uprisings.

But the Sermon on the Mount was not so much a program of action in its essence, as a form of revelation of the character of God that Jesus sought to announce from the first moment of his public ministry. But this collided even more with the concepts of divinity that came from the times of the Old Testament prophets and the Torah, who drew the God of their ancestors with warmongering traits of conquest and dominion.

The "Lord of Hosts," the "Almighty," the one who asserted "revenge is mine," is now transformed into a resigned peacemaker and sufferer into the collective imaginary of the Israelites in the name of the promise of future compensation offered by a prophet misaligned with the priestly class of the time of Jerusalem, but also with any other religious-political sect like the Pharisees or Sadducees.

God and Caesar

Jesus of Nazareth left clear instructions as to his basic political position. For him, temporal authority has a place in the lives of Christians and communities, as does spiritual authority, both moving in distinct, uncontrolled plains. The apostles stimulate the believers in to intercede in prayer to God for the benefit of authorities ¹⁸ (In the case of Paul) and "honor the king" (in the case of Peter and Paul). ¹⁹ However, this structural distinction between both

¹⁸ I Timothy 2:2.

¹⁹ I Peter 2:17.

sources of power was only reached in modern times, as the mutual temptation for interference were always stronger and more effective.

The act of paying taxes implies the acknowledgement of a State, a sovereign nation, and as such, a legitimate power that is accepted today in democratic societies. It is also expected to practice a civic, mutual duty in terms of governing for the benefit of the people.

By suggesting to pay taxes to the empire (to Caesar), Jesus removed himself from any revolutionary intents in terms of disobedience or violence, but at the same time traced a dividing line between political power and religious faith, showing that these fields move side by side, but in autonomous universes. On another occasion he came to defend the same principle by declaring that his kingdom - the so-called kingdom of God - was not of this world. That is, it could not fit into the established order of being of supernatural and non-human origin.²⁰

Washing of the Feet

The evangelical picture of the washing of the feet to the disciples on the part of Jesus of Nazareth is touching, eloquent and even subversive, because it subverts the established order. It was the less-skilled slave of the house who was in charge of washing and massaging the visitors' feet, massacred by the dust, heat, and irregularities of the rugged roads of the region at that time. But the disciples had to be given a clear example of humility, loaded with symbolism, because they refused to admit the hypothesis that soon a man like their Master would be arrested, tortured, and killed.²¹

Religious triumphalism was already afloat despite the message of the Sermon on the Mount. It seems that the so-called triumphal entry into Jerusalem, a few days before, had dulled their reasoning. How is it that someone

²⁰ “Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

²¹ Matthew 16:21.

who was acclaimed by the people in such a luxuriant way would now humbly kneel and wash the feet of his followers? Perhaps they did not realize that Jesus of Nazareth had not entered the city on a white horse in the manner of the conquerors, but in a poor and humble colt.

Peter did not understand the gesture of the washing of the feet and refused it initially, until Jesus warned him that the act was part of the process, and that if he excluded himself from the same process he would lose his discipleship ("you have no part with me"),²² to which he promptly responded by shifting his position. Regarding the teaching of Jesus on how to pray the Our Father prayer, what Jesus might have meant with this action was to not establish a ritualistic and repetitive practice to be copied without end, but rather present a devotional model in the first case and *diaconia* (service) in the second, especially through the inherent symbolic strength.

Conclusion

According to PAGELS (1989, p168) Augustine's moral doctrine of original sin justified the association between the Church and the Roman State, for the man marked by sin could not self-govern, and for this reason society would need hierarchy and order. COELHO (sd) tells us: "... Augustine's theory of sin not only confirmed secular power, but also affirmed the imposition of Church authority as essential for the salvation of humanity" (p. 12).

Whether it is for this type of reasons or for others, the truth is that the millennial misconception of the Church has always been the idea that it is better to be persecutor than persecuted, it is better to be with power and even riding the horse of power than outside him and subject to strange powers. But this is a false idea, for the Church has always purified herself in the crucible of persecution, just as gold is freed from impurities in the scorching heat of the

²² "Peter saith unto him: Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him: If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.(John 13:8).

furnace, and always grew weary when it sat on the velvet chairs of ephemeral power.

These two thousand years of history prove to society that whoever would consider themselves Christian would never sit in the carpeted halls of power, would never accept the perquisites of those in power and would care even less in participating in political games of interests. On the contrary, they would always prefer to be with the people exercising their prophetic mission, proclaiming another kind of kingdom that goes beyond all that is material, visible and palpable, but as real as this kingdom.

According to NIXEY (2018): "It is believed that when Constantine ascended the throne, ten percent of the empire was at best of Christian faith" (p. 152), but this did not prevent the leaders of this minority from unleashing a persecution not only to the followers of pagan cults but also to their arts, philosophy and sciences.

The history of civilizations is largely tied to the domain in its most diverse forms. From the most explicit to subtle, from the days of Constantine to the present day, from the West to the East and involving practically all expressions and branches of the Christian faith. This domain is verified in terms of content as well as form. Let's observe two cases as very simple examples.

There are religious dignitaries who continue to use a title of aristocratic and medieval nature, such as D. António. The "Dom" comes from Dominus (from the latin, owner), but whoever does not want to be a wolf should not wear its skin.

Another situation that is verified in other branches of modern Christianity is the use of the title "bishop" in a hierarchic sense, as well as other terms such as: pastor, elder, presbytery or superintendent which mean all the exact same religious occupation which has no hierarchy and is merely functional. They are different words for the same spiritual function of one who

cares for a Christian community. Or the title of "apostle", which in its origin refers to a specific spiritual ministry, and never to a hierarchical position.

This thirst for power in both appearance and substance, clearly shows how the essence of the Gospel was not properly assimilated by Christians throughout History, or at least was not above acquiring power in ancient times, whether through self-defense or as Camões would put it: “the vain glory of ruling.”²³

Bibliography

_____. *Bíblia Sagrada*. São Paulo: Sociedade Bíblica Trinitariana do Brasil, 1994.

BURLEIGH, Michael. *Earthly Powers*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.

BRISSOS-LINO, J., 2013. https://www.academia.edu/21864591/O_poder_e_o_fundamentalismo_no_di%C3%A1logo_inter-religioso (consultado em 19/4/18).

CAMÕES, Luís de. *Os Lusíadas*. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores.

COELHO, Fabiano de Souza. *Christianity and power in Late antiquity: Agostinho e a controvérsia com Juliano de Eclano*. 1288-3621-1-SM (consultado em 9/4/18).

LINO, Brissos. The Inquisition in the “Lusíadas”. *Salmo Presente*. Setúbal: IEC, 1996. pp 62-63

HITLER, Adolf. *A minha luta*. Lisboa: Glaciar, 2016.

NIXEY, Catherine. *A Chegada das trevas: como os cristãos destruíram o mundo clássico*. Porto Salvo: Desassossego, 2018.

PAGELS, E. Adam. *Eve and the Serpent: Sex and Politics in Early Christianity*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

SANTO, M. E. *Cinco mil anos de cultura a Oeste*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2004.

SANTOS, R. A., Cristianismo e poder político: tudo a ver? *Falando de Teologia e História*. <http://falandodeteologiaehistoria.blogspot.pt/2011/03/cristianismo-e-poder-politico-tudo-ver.html> (consultado em 3/4/18).

²³ CAMÕES. Luís de. *Os Lusíadas*, Canto IV, estância / estrofe 95: “Ó glória de mandar! Ó vã cobiça. Desta vaidade, a quem chamamos Fama! Ó fraudulento gosto, que se atíça. C'uma aura popular, que honra se chama!”