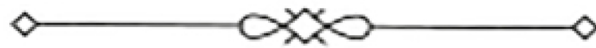


JOSÉ AFONSO MOURA NUNES

Trilogy of the Path

VOLUME
II

CHRISTIANISM



*from jewish sect to
official religion of the empire*

4th edition

BELO HORIZONTE

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I - INTRODUCTION

Preamble

This book has immediate origins in the third part of the book *The Best of Us*, published in Belo Horizonte (Editora Asa de Papel, 2015, 1st Edition) and in São Paulo (Fonte Editorial, 2016).

With the two editions, of 1,000 copies each, sold out, we decided to revise the book, update it, and break it into two:

- *Jesus of Nazareth: The Best Among Us* - a compilation of the best and most current, published in Brazil and Portugal, on the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth: life, message, and circumstances. The book contains an **Addendum**: "From Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith" - a summary of the second part of the book previously published. This new book was published by Ramallete Publishing in January 2019.

- *Christianism: from Jewish sect to official religion of the empire*. The sources of information about Jesus and his message; the Gospels and Letters as expressions of the life of distinct communities; the paths taken by Christian communities until the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire; expansion, diversification, and community mishaps.

The present book contains a short **Addendum**: "Who Founded Christianity?".

Relevance

Knowing the first four centuries of the social movement that came to be called Christianity is essential not only to understand the development of Christian practices and doctrines today, but also Western civilization as we know it. For Marxist historian Karl Kautsky (1854-1938): *"Whatever one's attitude toward Christianity, one cannot but consider it one of the most gigantic phenomena in human history. The fact that the Christian Church has lasted nearly two thousand years and still remains full of vigor, and in many countries more powerful than the State, cannot but provoke enormous admiration. Therefore, everything that can contribute to the understanding of this colossal phenomenon, and the study of the origins of this organization, has extreme importance, actuality, and practical significance."*

Information Sources

What are the Christian and non-Christian sources of information about Jesus? How have the Christian sources been read, from a technical-scientific point of view? Since the Letters and the Gospels are the main sources of information, what oral and written narratives preceded them? What do we know

of the Gospel - proclamation of the Good News - before the Gospels? How did the first 27 preserved Christian writings - almost all from the 1st century -, that came to make up the New Testament, come down to us? How does each of the Gospels reflect and intend to animate the life and faith of its respective community?

Genesis and growth of Christianity

Jesus of Nazareth probably died on April 7th of the year 30. Four to six years later, a young Jewish Hellenistic man dies, stoned, proclaiming that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of his people. He belongs to a group of Jews who call themselves **followers of the Path** (Acts 9:2; 11:26; 19:23; 24:14), pejoratively referred to as **Nazarites** ("bumpkins") and **Christians** ("messianists"). They live as a new Jewish sect (Acts 24:5), like the Pharisees, Scribes, Essenes, etc., but they are persecuted by the local elite.

How do these groups/assemblies/churches evolve? How does separation from Judaism take place? What is the way of life and what are the rituals of the communities? How does the process of institutionalization - professionalization, de-feminization, priesthood, and hierarchization - take place? *"By the end of the second century, the movement achieves enough visibility that the Roman authorities view it as something distinct from Judaism."* (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 153, own translation)

Patristics: affirmation of identity and defense of orthodoxy

Gaining visibility, Christian groups gather around teachers. Christianity becomes a school, a training, a catechesis. It defends itself on the theoretical level and in lifestyle, in the form of social service, or *"acting in small groups, identified by their long beards, their simple and poor clothing, their life of poverty, their contempt for luxury. Some of them live on the street and sleep on the beaten floor in some public place. In certain cases, they constitute the critical conscience of society: they say what others cannot, will not, or dare not say."* (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 153, own translation)

Christianism and the Empire

Discrimination, incrimination and persecution, sporadic and systematic - facts, reactions and consequences.

The end of persecutions and the state strengthening of the Christian religion, when the empire Christianizes and the empire imperializes Christianity.

Reactions within Christianity: monarchism and humanism. *"As a result of the events of the fourth century, for the next thousand years and more, if one wanted to be a temporal king, it was necessary to accept Christ as eternal King."* (BROWN, quoted by RIEGER, 2009 p. 44, own translation)

Topicality of the theme

The academic world, both lay and confessional, does not know about Jesus of Nazareth, the origin and development of the social movement that became a religion, Christianity¹, which, in three centuries, strengthened the Jewish monotheism - the oldest monotheistic religion (18th century B.C.) - and supplanted the hegemony, at least in the West, of paganism/polytheism, whose first pictographic records, according to Reza Aslan, date back 40 thousand years.²

Catholicism, in Brazil, has been giving way to a plurality of evangelical denominations at an impressive growth rate: one denomination per hour has been registered in the IRS in recent years.³ Still, it is notorious the ignorance of Catholics and Evangelicals, in general, about the origin and history of their religion, whose ultimate foundation, as Christians, is Jesus of Nazareth.

As a follow-up and complement to the book **Jesus of Nazareth: The Best Among Us**, this is not a "pious" book, or a theological book; much less a confessional one. It is intended to be a history book, written by and for non-specialists.

Aware that there is no single, univocal, impersonal, impartial, or neutral view, I hope to be providing readers, in a simple way, with a set of systematized and plausible information.

*José Afonso Moura Nunes (*1937)*

Retired Professor of Research Methodology and Technique - UFMG

¹ "It is not without reason that there are no professorships and research centers on early Christianity or Jesus of Nazareth in Brazilian public universities." (CHEVITARESE, 2009, p. 70, own translation)

² "It is in the Upper Paleolithic, between 40 and 10,000 years ago, that they begin to see the flowering of full religious expression, including evidence of complex ritual behaviors." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 30, own translation)

³ "[...] from January 2010 to February 2017, 67,951 entities registered with the IRS under the heading of "religious or philosophical organizations, an average of 25 per day. When taking into account only new groups, which are not branches of those existing, the number is 20 per day." (GRILLO, Marco. *O Globo*, 23 Mar. 2017, own translation)

II - INFORMATION SOURCES

1. Non-Christian primary sources

One of the readers of the "Best Among Us" project (www.omelhordenos.com.br) once asked, "What are the reliable sources that prove the existence of Jesus?" He then stated, "The **Bible** is full of contradictions in its pages and its facts do not match the historical time of mankind."

About the statement, the answer is simple and short: in fact the **Bible** is full of contradictions - not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament - and its counting of time has no scientific pretension. The **Bible** is a religious book, intended for spiritual and religious purposes, not a history book. To seek scientific proof for some of the historical facts narrated is to ignore the narrative character and to assume a concept of history that did not exist at the time.

The Sacred Scripture is full of contradictions because it is full of life. (LELOUP, 2002, p. 144)

The reader's question demands special attention. "There is no better known Jew of his time than Jesus of Nazareth"-a statement that any modern historian would subscribe to. However, it is important to be aware of the observations of modern historians. Mircea Eliade, Romanian, an expert in the history of religions, states:

"There is no doubt that Jesus' preaching and perhaps even his name would have been lost in oblivion without a singular and incomprehensible episode, external to faith: the resurrection of the tortured man." (ELIADE, 2011, p. 295, own translation)

"When Eastern and Western civilizations were ruled by the truism that without imperial force sacred rule was of little value, a reversal of assumptions was exposed, with luminous insistence and clarity by an obscure preacher from Nazareth, and the doctrine of the power of the powerless began to attract the allegiance of millions." (SHAMA, 2015, p. 155-156, own translation)

There is considerable agreement among exegetes about the "repeated statements in the gospels that Jesus' fame spread over wide territories and among very many people, which carried a certain amount of exaggeration. Early Christian traditions may have sweetened Jesus' fame following conventions in place for other charismatic figures of the time.(BRUTEAU, 2011, p. 22-23)

John P. Meier, whose works are noted for their scientific rigor, warns:

"Some writers of the time, at least, maintained direct or indirect contact with the Christians; none had been in contact with the Christ worshiped by these Christians. This only serves to remind us that Jesus was a marginal Jew, at the head of a marginal movement, in a marginal province of the vast Roman empire. One would be surprised that any Jew or pagan would have known or mentioned him in the first century or early second century." (MEIER, 2003, p. 64, own translation)

The first and most important "witness" to the life and actions of Jesus is the Jewish aristocrat, politician, military, and historian Joseph Ben Mathias (37-100 AD), known as Flavius Josephus. In his works **The War of the Jews** - begun in the years immediately following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. - and **Jewish Antiquities** - written in Rome around 93/94, Flavius Josephus mentions Jesus.

There is consensus among historians on the authenticity of Flavius Josephus' reference to the stoning in Jerusalem, in the year 62, of James "brother of Jesus, called Christ". James, leader of the Jerusalem community, strict observer of the Law, *"was executed by the high priest Ananus, probably because he was doing what he did best: defending the poor and oppressed against the rich and powerful."* (ASLAN, 2013, p. 229, own translation). About his long paragraph about Jesus, called *"Testimonium Flavianum,"* there are many controversies.

According to Pagola, the most important testimony, after suppressing the touches added by Christian copyists in the Middle Ages, goes like this:

"At that time Jesus appeared, a wise man. He was the author of admirable deeds, a teacher of people who gladly receive the truth. And he attracted many Jews and many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him before did not cease to do so. And to this day the tribe of Christians, so called because of him, has not disappeared." (JOSEFO, quoted by PAGOLA, 2011, p. 591, own translation)

Philo of Alexandria, a philosopher/historian who died around 40/45 and who wrote about the period when Jesus lived, does not mention it.

Although some of the Dead Sea manuscripts, discovered in 1947 and subsequent years, are from the time of Jesus, they do not mention him.

Chronologically, the first pagan to mention Christians was Pliny in 111, then Tacitus in 115, and then Suetonius after 122.

Pliny the Younger, imperial legate of Bithynia, sends a letter-report to Emperor Trajan. The Emperor's reply, in the year 112, defines for the first time the legal position of Christianity in the empire.⁴

Tacitus deals with the burning of Rome in 64 AD and confirms that Christ was executed at the time when Pilate held the office of Governor of Judea.

Suetonius, in addition to Nero's persecution (A.D. 64), refers to an incident in A.D. 49 involving Christian missionaries, who, by preaching "Christ," caused a commotion, probably in the Jewish quarter of Rome.⁵

⁴ Pliny writes to the Emperor that he "applied tortures to two deaconesses, but found nothing in Christianity but low and extravagant superstition." Trajan - one of the noblest figures on the imperial throne - recommends prudence and moderation. His is the famous formula: "It is preferable to acquit a criminal than to condemn an innocent one." (FRANGIOTTI, 2017, p. 34, own translation)

⁵ The reference of the Roman historian Suetonius (69-141 AD), for some critics, is doubtful. Although the non-Christian sources are very poor in their elements and difficult to evaluate, by their indirect character they confirm the existence of the historical character Jesus Christ. (ZILLES, 1999, p. 23)

All three agree that Christianity was superstition: *"depraved, unruly and contagious"* (Pliny); *"pernicious"* (Tacitus); *"new and evil"* (Suetonius).

"Of these three early pagans, strangers to Christian environments, only Tacitus gives us a succinct but clear account of Christ, his movement, and his execution, and tells us how, despite that sentence, the movement not only continued, but expanded from Judea to Rome itself." (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 50, own translation)

According to Pagola, the references of the historian Tacitus (50-120), the writer Suetonius (around 123) and Pliny the Younger (61-120) have an important documental value, because they are neutral observers and even hostile to the Christian movement. They do not doubt, at any time, the existence of Jesus. They provide a schematic picture of him: Jesus came from Judea, was executed under Tiberius by Governor Pontius Pilate, and at the time of writing is worshipped by his followers "as a god. The data are fully in line with what the Christian sources say (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 591)

"The almost total silence of Jewish literature regarding Jesus is far more astounding. Of the 15,000 pages of the Talmud, a monumental compilation of Jewish scholarship, only 15 mention Jesus. Most frequently, culminating in accusations of charlatanism or doubting the idea of the virgin birth by inventing Mary's copulation with the soldier Pantera, who would have raped her. The extreme rarity of this information denotes a censorship effect, yet the censorship is twofold: the Jews did not want to quote their triumphant competitor and the Christians would not tolerate the Talmud mentioning the name of their Lord." (Daniel Marguerat, Protestant exegete and historian, quoted by BESSIERE, 1993, p. 14, own translation)

The writings of Flavius Josephus aroused great interest among Christians, who, early on, began to quote and use him: Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome and others. Christians saw in Flavius Josephus a complement to the scriptures and especially to the New Testament. Like the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles, Josephus speaks of Herod and his descendants, the procurators of Judea, Pontius Pilate, Felix [...] Even more, he speaks of John the Baptist, Jesus, and James (FERREIRA, 1986, p. 6).

Flavius Josephus and the documents discovered at Qumran are the two main sources of information about the historical environment in which Christianity was born.

"Prior to the 1947 discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran - the greatest manuscript discovery of the 20th century - most of the 1st century comparative material for the study of early Christianity came from Greek and Latin sources.

One of the most striking examples of the clarification that the Qumran texts can bring to the New Testament literature is in the linguistic and verbal formulas. The New Testament was written in Greek: Jesus, however, spoke Aramaic, and all the first disciples were Jews from Galilee or Judea who spoke some Semitic language. The Qumran texts provide us, for the first time, with the original Hebrew

(and occasionally Aramaic) of a number of New Testament words and phrases." (SHANKS, 1992, p. 195, own translation)

There is a text circulating on the Internet, the original of which is in the Vatican Library, which proves its authenticity. The text is said to be a letter from Pilate's predecessor as governor of Judea, Pubus Leutulus, to Caesar Augustus Tiberius. The letter speaks of the distinguished bearing of Jesus, a man who knows all the sciences [...]. And of the beauty of his mother: "the most beautiful woman living in this country [...]". All very beautiful, but totally false.

"The value of extra-Christian sources, independent of each other, about Jesus is twofold. First we should note that both opponents and observers neutral or sympathetic to Christianity leave no room for doubt. Moreover, non-Christian references make it possible to check individual data and facts from the Jesus tradition of early Christianity." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 105, own translation)

A good portion of Jewish thinkers and historiographers endorse, without any fear, Salo W. Baron's thesis that all attempts to deny the real historicity of Jesus are simply unscientific." (SCHLESINGER/PORRO, 1979, p. 37)

2. Christian secondary sources

The New Testament, the main source of information about Jesus and the first Christian communities⁶, is traditionally presented in 27 books considered authentic (canonical), starting with four longer books, called the Gospels⁷.

"It is rarely taken into account that the twenty-seven books of the NT reflect an extraordinary level of literacy and rhetorical skill inherent in the inner circle of leaders of the incipient Christian movement [...] they reflect a significant knowledge of Greek, rhetoric, and general Greco-Roman culture." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 19, own translation)

However, well before the Gospels, there was already a first group of Christian writings, which are the letters of Paul, written between the year 50 and his death, around 64 or 67. Of the 13 epistles attributed to Paul, seven are effectively his (Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Philippians; 1 Thessalonians; and Philemon), three are probably his, and three certainly are not (CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 91). They were known and circulated among the first Christian communities, a fact mentioned in the Second Epistle of Peter. The first document of the New, or Second Testament, to come down to us was *Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians*, written in Corinth in the winter of 50-51.

"It is curious to note that the first document of Jesus' disciples that has come down to us is a letter written by three hands. Dictated by Paul, a learned Pharisee from Tarsus, to Silvanus, the editor,

⁶ The neologism "Christian" is from the late 1st century. SCROGGS, 2012, p. 57.

⁷ "The Gospels are primary sources, insofar as they reflect the situation in which their authors - members of certain early Christian communities - found themselves, insofar as they express the beliefs current in those communities. They do not [...] provide concrete evidence about the events they narrate [...] they highlight only the meanings that, at the time of their writing, were attributed to the actions, pronouncements, and death of Jesus [...] [thus they constitute] "an amalgam of primary and secondary layers." (WINTER, 1998, p. 30; 35, own translation)

a trusted man in the Jerusalem community, signed also by Timothy, born in Lystra, or Derbe, in Asia Minor, of a Hebrew mother and pagan father. The letter is written in Corinth, a city of about three hundred thousand inhabitants, most of them slaves, where Paul lived for a year and a half" (ROSSI, 2017, p. 14, own translation).

"The recipients are impoverished and suffering people, living on the outskirts, in "extreme poverty" (2 Cor. 8, 2) in Thessalonica, the most important port city and commercial center of Macedonia, which would then have had about 40,000 inhabitants, about two-thirds of whom were slaves, whose life expectancy was just over twenty years." (NACANOSE, 2017, p. 17-18, own translation)

*"In the letter, written from the heart, he asks and encourages the newly founded community to live a life of thanksgiving and brotherly love. In it Jesus is designated 22 times **Kyrios** (Lord), the specific title of the emperor, in a message of resistance to the empire."* (CARVALHO, 2008, p. 17-19, own translation)

We know of two of the four or five letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian community, with whom he lived for more than 18 months. The response of the community, mentioned in Paul's first letter, and many other letters have been lost.

The first three Gospels are very similar, which is why they have been called synoptic. Konings, in his book **Synopsis of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and Source Q**, presents an explanation for the philologically proven literary kinship of the first three Gospels:

"In the 30s-60s A.D. there would have crystallized, first in oral preaching, then in writing, small units and brief collections of sayings of the Master Jesus and also of his main activities, especially the miracles that proved the authority of his word. Among these collections, one could be identified from its use in Matthew and Luke: the source that German scholars called Logienquelle, or Quelle (= Q), the "Source of the Sayings" (of Jesus), containing sayings of John the Baptist and of Jesus. It did not contain the account of the passion, death and resurrection, which, on the other hand, was properly known by oral preaching and Eucharistic celebration.

Around 65-70 AD, Mark is said to have written down the narrative tradition concerning Jesus. This was the first written gospel among those that have been preserved. After the destruction of the Temple, around 80, Matthew and Luke would have written their gospels, independently of each other, but using the same literary sources, namely the two mentioned above: the Gospel of Mark and the Quelle (Q).

In addition to the two literary sources (Mk and Q), Matthew and Luke each present particular subject matter, which may come from particular traditions or from the respective evangelists' own redactional activity." (KONINGS, 2005)

Next, the same author presents a summary of the chronology of facts and documents of the first fifty years after Jesus' death in the year 30 (KONINGS, 2005, p. x.):

- 30 - 50: Gospel (good news) transmitted in oral preaching;

- 51 - 52: Paul's first letters;
- 50 - 60: written collection of the words of Jesus (*Quelle*);
- 65 - 70: Gospel of Mark;
- 70: destruction of Jerusalem;
- 80 (+ or -): Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

*The source or **Quelle** Gospel, written in Greek, was certainly composed in Palestine, before the destruction of Jerusalem. It contains only sayings and parables, it does not collect accounts of any kind, nor the Passion narrative or the appearances of the risen one. These sayings were probably collected by itinerant missionaries of the early years, who continued Jesus' lifestyle and preaching, and who had a great interest in knowing his teaching. The Q source is today the object of preferential attention of many authors and constitutes one of the most exciting chapters of modern research on Jesus.* (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 588)

Strictly speaking, according to Crossan, *"the Q Gospel - dating from the 1950s of the 1st century - is a hypothetical document whose existence is persuasively postulated to explain the amount of non-Markan material (from Mark) found with similar order and content in Mark and Luke. This postulate does not have the massive consensus that Markan priority has, but it is certainly an important conclusion of scholars."* (CROSSAN, 2004, p.152)

The Gospel of Luke is part of a work that encompasses the Gospel of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles. In the prologue of the Gospel, Luke says that before him many had already written about Jesus.

The fourth and last canonical Gospel is that of John, which appeared at the end of the first century, probably in the region of Syria. It is very different from the Synoptics and brings a philosophical-theological reflection on the person and mission of Jesus.

"It is a magnificent poetic-philosophical meditation, rich in imagery, putting into Jesus' mouth a complex theology that, we can be sure, he did not articulate literally. Jesus did not make statements like 'Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, nor is the reader expected to believe that he actually did. John employs the mode of literary convention used by ancient historians like Tacitus [...]" (EAGLETON, 2009, p. 35, own translation)

The most accepted view is that John did not use, nor did he know the earlier Gospels.

Outside of the four Gospels, the New Testament provides very little about Jesus. Simply because of its volume, the most likely source of information is Paul, the only writer of New Testament material who, as is well known, belongs to the first generation of Christians. Since the core of his theology is the death and resurrection of Jesus, the facts and words of the earthly Jesus simply do not have much of a presence in his epistles.

In current historical research, the testimony of other so-called apocryphal gospels has gained relevance, which the discovery of new manuscripts has brought to the forefront: the Gospels of Thomas, of Peter, of Egerton, the Secret Gospel of Mark. *"Of the Judeo-Christian gospels of the Hebrews, the Egyptians, and the Nazarites, all lost, we preserve only quotations in the Fathers of the Church."*

There are apocryphal Gospels that contain abundant and gratuitous miracles that often come to resemble fantastic literature, in sharp contrast to the sobriety of the four canonical Gospels. Jesus appears as a child prodigy, sometimes capricious and vindictive (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 98). Among the apocryphal Gospels are the Gnostic Gospels, which contain private revelations and unpublished interpretations about the "logos" and transform Jesus into a divine being imprisoned in flesh and blood, who needs to leave this world in order to achieve salvation.

The Gospel of Thomas - which came to light only in 1945 - is considered by specialists today to be the most interesting writing among the apocrypha. It is a compilation of 114 sayings of Jesus: wise or prophetic words, parables or brief dialogues. *"Other Gospels have become known very recently: the Secret Gospel of Mark (1973); the Gospel of the Savior (1999); the Gospel of Judas (2006). In sixty years, four new gospels have emerged."* (AUGLIAS, 2011, 270, own translation)

"From the Gospel of Peter, whose existence was known from patristic texts, a large fragment with an account of Jesus' passion was discovered in 1886-1887. A smaller fragment was discovered in 1993 and contains a dialogue between Peter and Jesus. Its dating is controversial: experts prefer to date it to the first half of the second century, while Crossan traces our text back to an early 'Gospel of the cross', to which he gives a later date, around the first century" (BARBAGLIO. 2011, p. 69, own translation)

Friar Jacir de Freitas Faria, a specialist on the subject, referred to 88 apocryphal texts of the Second Testament in a round table discussion about Jesus of Nazareth in a show on TV Minas. The dating of the apocrypha of the ST, according to him, *"goes from the first to the sixth century of the Common Era. Most of them, however, were written between the second and fourth centuries."* (FARIA, 2003, p. 20; 124, own translation)

The selection of authentic and inauthentic documents was complex, contentious, and time-consuming. In the third century there was already a Canon that included most of the 27 books. The current canon was defined at the African Synod of the year 399 and by a letter of Innocent I of the year 405. In the East, the Church hesitated for a long time to accept the book of Revelation. There is no consensus among the branches of the Christian faith today as to what should be considered canonical and what should be apocryphal.

The quantity and quality of source documents that contain information about Jesus, his life, his message, as well as about the first Christian communities is remarkable. Jesus is, in fact, the best known, most documented Jew of his time. Pagola, in a footnote to his book **Jesus, Historical Approach**, says: *"Of Buddha, who died around 480 B.C., we have only legendary writings written at least half a*

millennium after his death. Of Confucius, a contemporary of Buddha in China, we are left with two sources of scant credibility, which are four hundred and seven hundred years distant from the time when the Master lived". (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 587, own translation)

According to Norman Geister, quoted by Tim Lahale in a 2009 work, [...] of all ancient literature, the New Testament is the best authenticated document. There are more New Testament manuscripts, more close and reliable copies of the original (autograph) manuscripts of the New Testament, than any other work written in ancient times. (GEISTER, in LAHAYE, 2009, p. 31, own translation)

Some important remarks about sources, their understanding and use. The following observations are mainly based on WITHERINGTON (2005, p. 20; 60;183; 212 and DUNN (2009, p. 12; 19; 60).

1. They are products of a long and collective process.

"The four gospels represent the end product of a long process of development that took place over more than 60 years of Christian preaching, catechetical instruction, teaching, worship, and theological reflection on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.... also reflect different moments in the faith and life of the early Church. " (RAUSCH, 2006. p. 53,54, own translation)

"There are four stages through which the canonical Gospels have passed: the life and teaching of Jesus in Aramaic; the Aramaic eyewitness testimony of that life and teaching; the translation of that testimony into Greek; the selection, arrangement, and editing of these Greek texts into Gospel form. " (BAILEY, 2016, p.20, own translation)

2. They narrate the "remembered Jesus."

"What we have in the Gospels is the 'Jesus remembered' by those who had known eyewitnesses more thoroughly, or who had kept in touch with the witnesses. They were written while there was a living memory of eyewitnesses who could be consulted about the events. "

The role of the communities was to validate the veracity of these traditions and to resignify them for the moment in which they lived.

3. These are oral transmissions passed into writing.

The texts were created to be read out loud, usually to a group of people, and were mostly mere substitutes for oral communication. For the audience to hear the text correctly - WRITTENINCAPITALLETTERSWITHOUTDOTSANDCOMMASWITHOUTPARAGRAPH ("The only way to decipher such a set of letters was to pronounce them aloud: written in capital letters without period and comma and paragraph") - required an expert messenger, familiar with Greek writing, who knew the content of the text beforehand.

The Synoptic Gospels would be a testimony of model and technique of oral transmission.

4. Written to persuade, excite, captivate, respond to community interest and needs.

As the Christian movement expands to all kinds of people and ethnic groups, the texts had to be *"orally captivating and persuasive, so as to ravish even more people."*

One has to be aware, in an oral culture, of the role of religious rhetoric. Ephesians, for example, is not a letter, but a homily, to a series of Pauline churches, designed to *"engage the audience in love, wonderment, and praise in homage or some subject."*

5. The difficulty lies not in the lack, but in the nature of the sources:

The difficulty lies not in the number of Christian sources - not few and also not so distant in Jesus' time - but in their nature. "They are testimonies of the faith of believers of the first generations, interested not in minutely reconstructing the past, but in making sense of the present, referring, however, always to that past experienced as charged with meaning." (BARBAGLIO, 2001, p. 76, own translation)

All the writings of the New Testament are re-readings of Jesus' facts and teachings in the light of the certainty of his resurrection.

6. There is no biography of Jesus.

It is necessary to note that the written Gospel memory simultaneously refers us to several different vital contexts: to the context of Jesus and his movement, as well as the context of community re-readings and re-significations.

We find ourselves before different narratives that want to interpret the past, imaginatively refiguring it to give meaning to personal-community existence in a given context and moment. This imaginary is "a representation that organizes the traces left by the past and proposes itself as being the truth of what happened. Faced with the dilemma of sources - narratives that propose different truths about the same event, an analysis that allows the construction of a credible or plausible version of what may have been is worthwhile, considering the different contexts and realities, as well as different objectives of the texts. (REIMER, 2013, p. 58-59)

None of the Gospels is a biography of Jesus of Nazareth. Of the 34 to 36 years of Jesus' life, we have only sparse and disorganized episodes from a historian's point of view, relating to one, two or three years. The narrative of Jesus' childhood in Matthew and Luke is considered highly symbolic and theological. Exegetes consider midrash, a literary genre that consists in "investigating" what the "full meaning", or "topicality" of a biblical text or theme might be. (KONINGS, 2005, p. xi)

Some writings, self-styled or called letters, are homilies, circulars, some anonymous (Hebrews, 2 and 3 John) composed (2 Peter) and several attributed to Paul, are pseudoepigraphic. "There are also glosses that the scribes introduced into the texts to better respond to the situation of the churches that read them and, on the other hand, the late texts, whose pseudoepigraphy jumps out at the eye; the latter, not preserved in the Christian canon, are part of the apocrypha" (QUESNEL, 2004, p.125, own translation). The famous text by Paul in which he would have said "Let the women keep silent in the assemblies, for they are not allowed to speak, they must be submissive" (1 Cor. 14:33-35, own translation) is a gloss by a scribe of the patristic era. The sources, as sacred as they are, have to be read with criterion.

3. How to read the Christian sources

John Dominic Crossan - an Irish researcher living in the United States, known for his technical and scientific rigor - tells us that during a lecture in New York, in 1995, he stated: "the story of Barabbas was created by the evangelist Mark". In the debate, a listener asked him about this statement: "Why don't you call it out for what it is: a lie?"

At the time Crossan would have given a defensive answer, but the question stayed in his head until he found the key to understanding:

"[...]Jesus' friends and enemies, as well as his words and deeds, were updated by the evangelists to speak to new situations and problems, new communities and crises. They were adopted, they were adapted, they were invented, they were created. In the 40s, for the Gospel of the Cross - the narrative of the passion and resurrection preserved in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter - the Romans were completely innocent. So, because they appeared that way on that occasion. " (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 558, own translation)

No gospel written after the war of A.D. 66-73/74 is willing to leave the Romans totally blameless, as the Gospel of the Cross did in the early 40s. No matter what Pilate thinks, he provides the soldiers for the crucifixion⁸. Mark blames the entire Jerusalem "crowd." Matthew blames all the people and John blames "the Jews." In John's time, in the 90s, these enemies are the Jews, except for "we, the righteous few." Crossan concludes, *"[...]the Gospels are not exact history, exact biography, exact journalism. If we understood the Gospels, we would understand and expect that."* (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 559, own translation)

⁸ "The historical conditions upon which the Christian communities lived between the first and fourth centuries formed the backdrop for the development of the portrait of Pilate [...] the more the Roman state persecuted Christians, the more generous becomes the depiction of Pontius Pilate as a witness to Jesus' innocence [...] the more distant he becomes from history, the more sympathetic he becomes [...]. Nastiness, avarice, cruelty, haughtiness, and disdain for the feelings of others are the charges leveled against Pilate by secular authors." (WINTER, 1998, p. 122; 133; 137;138, own translation).

For Crossan, the text has to be understood in its context and this *"is constructed from cross-cultural anthropology, through Jewish-Roman history to early Roman archaeology in the Jewish land."* (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 572. 26 Mk. 6, 35-44, *own translation*)

Is this how we read the Gospels?

Two readings of the same narrative from Mark's Gospel:

"When it was getting late, the disciples came near Jesus and said, 'This place is deserted and it is late. Send the people away, so that they can go to the surrounding fields and towns to buy something to eat. But Jesus answered, 'You have to give them something to eat. The disciples asked, 'Should we spend half a year's salary and buy bread to feed them? Jesus said, 'How many loaves of bread do you have? Go and see. They went and answered, 'Five loaves and two fish. Then Jesus told them to sit down on the green grass in groups. And they all sat down in groups of one hundred and fifty people. Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to distribute. He also divided the two fish among them. They all ate and were satisfied, and gathered twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and of fish. The number of those who ate the loaves was five thousand men. '"(Mk. 6, 35-44, own translation)

In a literal, textual reading, what does the text say? Exactly what is written: five thousand men (there were women and children?) were fed by five loaves and two fish: one of Jesus' miracles; extraordinary, irrefutable.

Another possible reading, made by theologians and exegetes, respected in the Academy: Jesus made them share what each one brought, he made the disciples set an example. By sharing what each one had brought, they all ate and had leftovers. It was a lot of people. The text may contain some exaggerations: five thousand men, plus the women and children, how many would that be? There were twelve baskets of pieces of bread and fish left over?

For the second reading, the numbers say little or nothing; the twelve is clearly symbolic, remembering the twelve tribes of Israel. The message is different; it is the one that the first communities practiced periodically: collective, fraternal meals, shared by all, remembering what Jesus of Nazareth had done. Everything is simple, subtle and not spectacular. The real miracle worked by Jesus is that he made everyone share what each one had, so that no one would go hungry. A very current message.

For a long time a reading prevailed that presumed that the facts described in the New Testament were narrated as they actually happened. What is written is real, is true, is unquestionable. Such a reading, literally, textually, is unacceptable, indefensible, and reinforces a mythological, pre-scientific vision.

"The reader is always advised to ask: what did the evangelist intend with his story quite likely, the authors of the Gospels personally believed in the historical realism of the events they decided to narrate.

They were children of a time when people thought in mythological terms, who believed in a God-in-the-world who freely intervened in the course of the world, for whom nothing was impossible... This applies particularly to miracles over the elements of nature.

Moreover, the evangelists were not eyewitnesses to the events they narrated. They put into writing what had been told about Jesus within the circle of his followers, from the tradition inaugurated after his death.

What actually counted for them, was not the narration itself, but the saving significance that the Jesus presented in the story holds for us.... An evangelist is a propagator of the Good News, not a historian or journalist. (Nrp) (LENAERS, 2017, p. 62, 63, 77, 87)

What matters, yesterday and today, is what the words mean to the reader or the community, always remembering that the texts from the Christian sources - the New Testament - are religious, theological, catechetical, and sometimes apologetic texts.

"This attitude of seeing what the text means for the present day has become distorted and has led to a dogmatization of the reading. Theologians began to look to the words, taken out of context, for arguments to condemn their opponents. At the same time, the growing juridical bent of Christian thought caused biblical ethics to be interpreted in the framework of a legalism similar to the one Jesus of Nazareth had fought at the price of his life. " (KONINGS, 2011, p. 210, own translation)

The reaction to this fundamentalist reading was the adoption and refinement of critical, textual or documentary, historical and literary research.

Textual criticism seeks to reconstitute the text or document in its original state at the time of publication. Historical criticism seeks to reconstitute, as far as possible, the facts, the reported sayings according to their historical objectivity. It seeks to find out what really happened in relation to what the texts tell. Literary criticism aims to find out what the text meant to its first addressees, taking into account the circumstances and modalities of the text's production, the style, etc. More recently, research has sought to follow the process of rereading and reinterpretation that took place from the very emergence of the biblical texts to their final redaction. One can thus follow the gestation and birth of the text (the previous tradition, literary form and redaction) and better understand the meaning assumed by the author. "When it comes to oral culture - characteristic of the era - one cannot speak of an original version of a story, but only of the multiform versions, and yet, typically, the substance of the story remains the same." (DUNN, 2009, p. 33, own translation)

This kind of research allowed us to discover that, in the Bible, many texts are "composite" (work of several authors), produced in several phases, even with entirely opposite thoughts, etc. (KONINGS, 2011, p. 221). It is known today that some texts are not by the supposed authors - like several of Paul's

letters - that pious or apologetic additions were inserted later, that there are mistranslations of the original texts, etc.

"New Testament texts were exposed to manipulation for centuries before the control of the printed text (seventeenth century) and especially in the hundred-year period separating apostolic times from the first concerns with a "canon" of New Testament books at the end of the second century." (HOORNAERT, 1997, p. 29, own translation)

"A just understanding of the Gospel texts requires the use of the historical-critical method, without ascribing exclusivity to it." (PAGOLA, 2011, 584, own translation). Often the biblical texts are read in a sense that the author was not aware of, but which is still legitimate, because it is based on the same understanding of life that the text, in its depth, carries with it. For to **read is to understand oneself with the text about life**. Let's apply this to the political reading of certain texts: Jesus was not a political activist, but his religious struggle to free mankind for justice and brotherly love can be read by us today as a political agenda, because today we cannot incarnate love for the oppressed and excluded without political articulation.

Hermeneutics expands, so to speak, the original sense of the text, referring to its meaning today, taking care to remain in the same logic, in the trail that the text opened. And taking care of this is the task of exegesis, which seeks to identify the meaning of the text, in its historical context. *"First of all, the Bible is a text. And if it is difficult to read, it is because it is a text. One must create a reading competence - for the Bible, for a novel, or a book of poems."* (MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 303, own translation);

When one speaks of a popular reading of the Bible, one thinks rather in the hermeneutical sense, more accessible from the life of the people, than in the exegetical sense, which requires a certain erudition.

"The mutual illumination of life in the light of the Bible and the Bible in the light of life is what inspires the ancient tradition of meditative Bible reading, done individually, in community, or in the liturgy. This practice has its roots in the early Christian communities, and its precedents in the Jewish synagogue. The first followers of Jesus saw in listening to the apostles and receiving their writings the genuine means of encountering Jesus Christ. " (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 210, own translation)

Origen (185-253 A.D.) wrote to one of his disciples: "that the act of reading be done with accurate application and special attention (reading): that the intention of reading be faith in God and the discernment of his will (meditation); that in order to read and to receive, it is absolutely necessary to pray (prayer) and that this whole journey be done in full trust in God (contemplation).

This tradition is being reinvigorated in Latin America under the name of prayerful reading in community, which, from the awareness of the current reality, seeks to establish analogies with the first Christian communities and with the biblical texts. Seeing in these realities the face of God that reveals

Himself and calls today for solidarity and justice, one prays and commits oneself to the construction of the kingdom of God.

This chapter, which is basically based on Konings' work, concludes with his felicitous commentary:

"In the utilitarian sense of the term, the Bible is useless. It is like a friend: instrumentalized, it loses its appeal. Usefulness is no criterion. In the case of the Bible, exactly as in the case of a friend, the grace consists in discovering the richness of its personality, with its contradictions, with the marks of its history, its aspirations and utopias - which reflect God in the face of not just one, but of countless people, during the two thousand years of tradition that the Bible represents. Those who have experience of true friendship or love know how long it takes to penetrate the spirit of a friend, and even longer to live in his spirit. So too does the Bible. A popular term expresses very well the right way to approach the Bible: you have to enjoy it! Or, better perhaps, let yourself enjoy it. Let your life soak in the Bible, so that it penetrates, to the core, our way of being and acting, as individuals and as a community." (KONINGS, 2011, p. 220-221, own translation)

4. The Gospel before the Gospels

The Gospel, as the proclamation of the Good News, the kingdom of God, was for Jesus of Nazareth his mission, the reason for his existence and the motive for his death. Not a few accompanied Jesus on his journey through the villages, mainly in Galilee. Of those who accompanied him, some, marginalized by society, no longer had roots, others were uprooted. Most of those who adhered to what they heard and saw remained where they were: in their simple way of life as poor, hardworking, pious villagers.

As quickly as the news of Jesus' ignominious death, the news must have spread that he was alive, that God had raised him from the dead. With the news that Jesus was not among the dead, the feeling, the conviction, and the faith of his imminent return spread.

The first Christian generation lived for several years, perhaps even two or three decades, in expectation of Christ's imminent return. St. Paul, still believing in this immediate coming, writes to the Thessalonians around A.D. 48, therefore less than 20 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth: "Behold, we declare to you, based on the word of the Lord: we who shall still be alive at the coming of the Lord..." (Thess. 4:15-18. GIBERT, 1999, p.128, own translation)

For Crossan, there was a dialectic of itinerants and heads of households that goes back to the time of the historical Jesus. The kingdom of God was present not only in the itinerants, but in the interaction of itinerants and heads of households, in a new community of healing and meals, of shared material and spiritual resources.

"Wandering charismatics were a common phenomenon in early Christianity. As for numbers, the local communities were certainly much larger. " (THEISSEN, quoted by CROSSAN, 2004, p. 393, own translation)

"[...]we can distinguish at least three types of mission: the first and most ancient is that of itinerant preachers...the recipients of the announcement were , in the first place the Jews ; the second type takes shape in Antioch of Syria and consists in the announcement of the Gospel to the Gentiles ; the third type , although a little less configurable, is provided by the Judeo-Christian missionaries who introduced themselves into the ecclesial communities - churches of Corinth, of Philippi and , perhaps , of Rome - to 'correct' what they considered to be a false interpretation of the Gospel." (PENNA, 2020, p. 56-57, own translation)

The first Christian communities, since Jesus left nothing in writing - because possibly, according to Crossan, he could not write - had to resort to individual and collective memory, which is as much or more creative reconstruction than recollection, of Jesus' words and way of life.

"Remembering his sayings and imitating his life is the main mode of continuity of the historical Jesus for those who walked with him and continued the path after him" (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 441, own translation). The tradition of life, the tradition of how Jesus lived, predominated among the villages and little towns of Galilee and Syria. The death tradition is primarily associated with Jerusalem, a city linked early on, even before Paul, to other cities like Damascus and Antioch.

"Christian preaching was not limited to the kerygma, that is, the first announcement of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Other literary forms emerged, generally oral, as a function of other needs of the preachers and their communities. In the various writings of the New Testament, we find traces of these early literary forms of Christian preaching (...). The discovery of these early forms of preaching underlying the present writings shows us the life and creativity of the first Christian communities, which were engaged in "crystallizing" the memory about Jesus of Nazareth, what people needed to know in order to convert to Jesus and to live in his community [...]. In Paul's letters we find that in addition to a narrative tradition of Jesus' life, there was also a tradition of the sentences he delivered (1 Cor.7; 10 etc.) in the manner of other Jewish teachers. " (KONINGS, 2011, p. 126-128, own translation)

The sentences consist of aphorisms, parables, and succinct dialogues. We also find in the letters evidence of creedal formulas, associated with catechesis, and hymns⁹ present at shared meals, an expression and source of fraternal coexistence in the primitive communities. One of these hymns is found in the Letter to the Philippians, written around 55 AD: "This is why God exalted him and gave

⁹ "Some hymns, or hymnic forms, were more or less obvious from the beginning; others were recognized only in the 20th century - hymns in praise of Christ, particularly in Pauline literature." (DUNN, 2009, p. 229, own translation)

him the Name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of as many as are in heaven and on earth and in the depths, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father, that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:9-11, own translation).

From what we know to date, the first Christian writings appear 15 to 20 years after Jesus' death. Almost simultaneously appear Paul's letters - the letter to the Thessalonians is the first preserved Christian document (50/51) - and an elaborate and ordered written collection of Jesus' words: Document Q, or **Quelle**, a German word meaning "source".

Document Q contains one of the oldest testimonies about Jesus; it is a veritable arsenal of teachings of Jesus. It is very likely that the composers and recipients of the Q Document lived in a situation very close to Jesus, both from the temporal and cultural point of view. (OPORTO, 2006, p. 73)

In the course of time, these primitive and scattered forms of preaching were no longer sufficient. A more complete way of formulating the proclamation emerged: the written Gospels. "They are in origin neither doctrine, nor philosophy, nor historiography; they are **kerygma** - proclamation of the trajectory of Jesus, crucified and risen prophet, source of salvation." (KONINGS, 2011, p.126, own translation)

The Gospels, like the various **kerygms** before them, make up-to-date re-readings of past events, illuminated by the light of the resurrection and adapted to the present needs of each time, which, of course, makes it difficult to reconstruct the historical facts as we conceive them today.

The Gospels began to appear 40 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, although the oral tradition began to be written down during the first generation of his disciples. If Theissen is right, **Document Q** would have been ordered and compiled sayings of Jesus 10/15 years after his death¹⁰. The relatively late date of the writing of the Gospels, for Pierre Gibert, is explained by the *"state of mind of the entire first generation of the Christian community: a community whose future was not on earth and which would therefore have no history to write down precisely because of the imminent coming of the Lord."* (GIBERT, 1999, p. 129, own translation)

Other reasons would explain this late appearance of the Gospels. Writings are demands of literates and it certainly took some expansion of Christian communities to create a significant mass of literates¹¹.

We must consider that the literacy rate in the Roman Empire did not reach 10%. Possibly even much less, since literacy in Palestine at the time of Jesus, according to Jewish sources, did not exceed 3%.

Nothing to be surprised about if one considers the illiteracy data gathered by Men Bar-Ilan from various societies in the first half of the 20th century. Turkey in 1927: 91.8%; Egypt in 1927: 85.7%;

¹⁰ "The image of the Pharisees in Q fits better with the Jewish Christianity of Palestine prior to 58/62, rather than the later period." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 122, own translation).

¹¹ The initial successes of Christianity were mainly among the poor and outcast, and, to many, it seemed to be essentially a working-class revolutionary movement (DAVIES, 1967, p. 57).

South Africa in 1921: 90.3%; India in 1921: 90.5%; Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia before 1950: over 90%. (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 274)

The writings of the 35/40s - creedal formulas, liturgical hymns, the sentences, the letters from 49 to 54, and the Gospels from 65/70 onward - *"were not to constitute in the eyes of the first Christian generations new Scriptures, nor even complements to Scripture. Until the beginning of the second century A.D. the Scriptures continued for Christians what they had been for Jesus of Nazareth and the first disciples and would later be called the Old Testament."* (GIBERT, 1999, p.134)

5. The New Testament - from its origin to our days¹²

There are 27 early Christian writings that have not been lost and were officially accepted as legitimate (canonical) at the African Synod of 399. These make up the New Testament, so called in contrast to the Old Testament and designating the Covenant with God, renewed in the person of Jesus. They are: four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse, and 21 letters, 14 of which are attributed to Paul and seven to other apostles: John (2), Peter (2), James (1) and Jude (1)¹³.

"The letters - much longer than similar letters of the time - are not pure letters, but in fact speeches, homilies, and rhetorical documents of various kinds, whose authors could not convey them personally to the target audience, sending a representative to proclaim them instead." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 20, own translation)

All written from the year 50 to the beginning of the second century, that is, 20 to 70 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout the second century, the four Gospels - or the "quadriform Gospel" as Irenaeus (130-200) called them - were the only ones recognized by the Church among the not a few in circulation.

According to Bessiere, *"the Gospels, like the rest of the New Testament writings, are absolute best-sellers. They were written in Greek and are now translated into more than 1,800 languages. The vast majority of people can read them in their mother tongue."* (BESSIERE, 1993, p. 130, own translation)

But how did these writings from the first century of our era come down to us?

The originals, written by the respective authors, are lost forever, like all the books of antiquity. The oldest witnesses are the copies. The interval between these copies and the time of the originals is small compared to the time between the time when the great Greek and Latin authors wrote their works and the date of their oldest copies that we possess. For Virgil, the distance is four centuries; for Caesar,

¹² Information taken from the books by Gérard Bessiere: *Jesus, the Amazing God*; and by Johan Konings: *The Bible, Its Origin and Reading*.

¹³ "Letters were usually dictated to an amanuensis, who drafted with a buril, on wax tablets, possibly using a system of abbreviations, and then transcribed the text in full onto a papyrus sheet or roll." (BRUCE, 2013, p. 12, own translation)

nine; for Plato, 13; and for Euripides, 16; while for the Gospels, we have complete texts from the fourth century and many earlier fragments.

According to Bessiere, among these older manuscript fragments, one can cite the Bodmer II papyrus, preserved in Geneva and dated approximately the year 200, containing two-thirds of the Gospel of John. Even older, the Rylands papyrus number 457, in fragments 3.5 in high and 2,3 in wide, is kept in Manchester, with a few lines of Passion narrative in the Gospel of John, dated 130, approximately 50 years from the original¹⁴.

According to Konings, "of the New Testament more than 5,000 ancient manuscripts have been preserved. Until 1935 only copies in parchment codex form, from the fourth century on, were known. In 1935, however, a small piece of papyrus was discovered containing a few verses from Jn, 18. Later more papyri were discovered." (KONINGS, 2011, p. 170, own translation) The oldest are one from the early 2nd century and several from the 3rd century. (WILSON, 2006, p. 97)

Among the several hundred manuscripts dating from before the year 1000, two are the most highly regarded, dating from the fourth century, presenting the New Testament in its entirety: the Vaticanus, kept in the Vatican Library, and the Sinaiticus, kept in the British Museum in London, which came from St. Petersburg and was bought from the Soviet government in 1933 for 200,000 pounds.

American researcher Bart D. Ehrman notes that "throughout the 20th century, archaeologists have unearthed numerous manuscript papyri more than 150 years prior to the Sinaitic Codex. Many of them are fragmentary, but some are extensive. So far, about 116 papyri have become known and have been catalogued; they contain parts of most of the books of the New Testament." (WILSON, 2006, p. 97, own translation)

"The quotations found in works by early Christian authors allow us to observe the Gospel text as it was read in the second and third centuries. The ancient translations of the Gospels, in Latin, Syriac or Coptic, some from the second century, allow us to read the texts as they were read in different places and situations. Between the 1st and 8th centuries, there are close to 300,000 quotations from the New Testament." (BESSIERE, 1993, p. 130-132, own translation)

Versions are called "the different forms that the **Bible** has taken over the centuries, both in the original language and in translations. The first are the Septuagint - the compilation and translation into Greek attributed to 70 Jewish sages of Alexandria, begun in the 3rd century BC. - and the Vulgate, the

¹⁴ The Magdalen papyri - three seal-sized fragments of papyrus belonging to Magdalen College, Oxford, dating from the mid-first century - is the earliest material codex evidence of the New Testament. There are about a thousand New Testament papyri in museums and libraries around the world today... many are still waiting for the day when some scholar finds the time to publish them. Many would say that it is the most valuable literary treasure of Christendom and, as such, a priceless part of the heritage of humanity. (D'ANCONA, 1996, p. 144; 191; 207)

translation into Latin, then the language of the people, coordinated by St. Jerome in the 4th century A.D. and other ancient versions of restricted importance - Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, etc.

The division of the biblical books into chapters was introduced by Stephan Langton (1150-1228) and into verses by Robert Estienne (1503-1559). These divisions do not always correspond to the structure and meaning of the text. In addition, they have been changed over time, so that the various editions of the Bible exhibit differences in numbering.

When the Protestant Reformation movement arose at the end of the Middle Ages, the reformers - Luther, Calvin, Tyndale - took up again what had been the proposal of the Vulgate: to offer the Bible in the language of the people. Only then the language of the people was no longer Latin, but German, French, English... The greatest impact came from Martin Luther, who translated the Bible into German with great literary art, favoring clarity and expressiveness over literalness.

After Vatican Council II (1962-1965), the Catholic Church published and made official the New Vulgate, which often corrects Jerome's text, seeking, based on recent research, a closer approximation to the Hebrew and Greek originals.

There is a growing diversification of translations in the same language. The phenomenon is not new: already in antiquity there were at least four translations into Greek, which Origen (185-250) published in parallel columns.

With the emergence of different evangelical denominations, each community has adopted its own translation of the Bible: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, without realizing that these are necessarily interpreted translations, which excludes the claim of being the only Christian.

Among the recent ecumenical translations, the Ecumenical Translation Bible (TOB), São Paulo, Loyola, a Brazilian version of the canonical one translated from the originals by an interconfessional group, stands out. An excellent study Bible.

On 11/21/2018, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) released a new official translation of the Bible into Portuguese. The translation is based on the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. A team effort that took 11 years to complete.

III - THE COMMUNITIES EARLY CHRISTIANS¹⁵

6 - Apostolic Period (30-49)

6.1 - The beginnings: Nazarites or followers of the path

"We designate as the Jesus movement the beginnings of early Christianity; an intra-Jewish renewal movement sparked by Jesus - a charismatic - in the Syro-Palestinian sphere, which flourished between 30 and 70 A.D. " (THEISSEN, 2008, p.14, own translation)

Early Christian communities are considered to be those existing in the period extending from the death and resurrection of Jesus until the last writing of the New Testament (Second Letter of Peter), around the year 130. This period is divided into three stages:

- a. Apostolic Period - the period from the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the year 30, to the year 67. It corresponds to the period of life of those who knew Jesus or joined him at the very beginning of the Way - way of life - of his followers; it corresponds to the first generation. The Assembly or Council of Jerusalem, in the year 49, constitutes a landmark in the subdivision of the period. Of the first twenty years (30 to 49) there is no biblical writing left; the little information is found in the Acts of the Apostles or "found" in other texts of the New Testament. From 49 to 67 is the golden time of the mission of Paul and his pastoral team from Antioch of Syria, which is well documented in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's seven authentic letters.¹⁶
- b. Subapostolic period - from 67, when the Jewish war against the Roman occupation broke out, until about 97. It is the time of the second generation of Christians.
- c. Post-apostolic period - from 97 to 130, the time of the third generation of Christians.

The first cycle of the spreading of the Good News in the first decades is that of Palestine, covering the communities of Galilee, Samaria, and especially Jerusalem in Judea. These first communities, less documented - except the Jerusalem community - are at the origin of the Gospel of John and behind the Gospel of Mark. The second cycle (from 49 - 67) is the time of the opening of Jesus' Good News to the Gentiles, that is, to those who did not belong to the Jewish religion.

¹⁵ This text is mainly based on the book by biblical scholar Ildo Bohn Gass: *An Introduction to the Bible - The Christian Communities of the First Generation*, from 2005.

¹⁶ "Paul's most important letters (especially the "capital epistles" - Galatians (48-?), Corinthians (55-56) and Romans (57) - were written between eighteen and thirty years after the death of Jesus. The knowledge of Greek literature and thought that his letters evidence, make Paul "one of the great figures of Greek literature" (Gilbert Murray), "a classic of Hellenism" (Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moelendorf): "he not only writes, but thinks in Greek." (BRUCE, 2013, p. 11, own translation)

Today it is common ground that each of the Gospels, although they bear the name of an individual - Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John - is a collective product that has as its origin and end a set of communities that follow Jesus and carry the oral traditions reflected in their respective Gospels.

"The Gospels would have passed through four stages: the initial impact of Jesus on the disciples; the informal, controlled living tradition; the written traditions; the gospel redaction. This journey makes the gospels reliable sources. " (SEGALLA, 2013, p. 141, own translation)

From this premise, it is necessary to understand that the Acts of the Apostles is not the only source of information about the first communities of Jesus' followers. For some scholars, the Gospels of Mark (year 70) and John, as well as his three letters (year 95), provide us with a lot of information about other early Christian communities not linked to Jerusalem.

A literal reading of the Acts of the Apostles, as if they were modern historiography¹⁷, leads us to think that the first Christian community was born in Jerusalem around the apostles, some women, including Mary, and the brothers of Jesus, and all the others would have originated from there.

As Gass said:

"The authors of Acts had strong reasons to 'forget' the Johannine communities. Luke's work is already a mirror of the process of patriarchalization and hierarchization of the communities at the time of the second Christian generation in the 80s. Therefore, it is of no interest to the authors of the Acts of the Apostles to discuss the communities that were organized outside Jerusalem, in an egalitarian way, largely around the disciples of Jesus [...]. It is no exaggeration to conclude that it is they, and especially Mary Magdalene, who organized the oldest communities of disciples of Jesus, in Galilee, Samaria, and Southern Syria." (GASS, 2012, p. 42-43, own translation)

The first generation of followers of Jesus of Nazareth are those who met him or joined him in the first years of the Way, whose followers would be called Christians - a pejorative expression, meaning "messianists", "subversives" - for the first time in Antioch, around 39-40.

Although a unitary and universal vision of the early churches has become widespread, more recent studies have shown the rich diversity of the first groups that tried to put into practice the mission that Jesus had entrusted to them.

It is more likely that the rearticulation of the Jesus movement took place in Galilee, as the authors of the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew, as well as John in his addition, testify. After a period of crisis and disarticulation of Jesus' movement because of his violent death, they gradually reorganized themselves again, under the leadership of women, from Galilee, their land of origin, since the book of Acts testifies that the first disciples of Jesus were all Galileans (Acts 2:7) They began to

¹⁷ "Acts is a work of ancient historiography...Mark writes according to the more technical (and therefore more accurate) mode of historiography, and not according to the more rhetorical mode.... We should therefore treat Luke's historical work with great confidence." Graig S Keener in BOCK, 2020, p. 372,373,390)

gather in their homes, starting from the memory of what Jesus had accomplished, to continue living new relationships of sharing and solidarity. Their eyes began to open. And the feeling grew that Jesus was still alive there where groups gathered in his name to live out his project (Mt. 18:20). And, as they shared the bread, the certainty of his presence came (Lk. 24:28-32). Thus, it was no longer possible to speak of death for him. His surrender on the cross was interpreted as the supreme revelation of what life is.

The great emphasis is on the table of bread shared in the homes (Acts 42:46), the meal of solidarity called agape, which preceded or was surrounded by the ritual of bread and wine. A memory of this has remained in the words of the eucharist to this day (Mk. 14:22-25). Central to nascent Christianity was the practice of the table of sharing, open to people who were poor, sick, unclean, and foreign, and to those who were in solidarity and shared with these people.

Faithful to the practice of Jesus, the first communities, besides attending synagogues in the villages, where they existed, gathered in the houses, making the everyday life the space of the sacred and where the role of women gained relevance.

"The communities met in the homes of the people, in the homes of Priscilla and Aquila, both in Rome (Rom16:50) and in Ephesus (1Cor16:19), in the home of Philemon and Apphia in Colosse (Fm2); in the home of Lydia in Philippi (Acts16:15); in the home of Nympha in Laodicea (Col4:15), in the homes of Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and of Olympas (Rom16:15). The creation of "house churches" made possible a greater influence and participation of women. (CRB, 1996, p. 23, own translation)

Each community could express its faith according to its way of life. Especially the churches outside of Judea were not afraid of what was different. At the same time, they knew how to embody the good news of Jesus in the diverse cultures of that time. There was much diversity. Variety was understood as an expression of the gift of the Spirit through baptism. In these first twenty years of the young churches, there was still no imposition of a single model of thought, of doctrine. There were also different visions about Jesus. The richness and the tensions of plurality were experienced. (Pt. 3, 1-10)

The first communities of Jesus' disciples were strongly influenced by the expectation of his glorious return. Even Paul, for a time, thought that he would witness Jesus' return, preceded by very recognizable signs. Each of the communities had its time to rework its understanding of Jesus' return. Some took more than two generations to understand that Jesus' continuing presence was the same way they had experienced it with the stranger they welcomed into their home, in the bread they shared, in the sharing of the Lord's Supper, in the community that met, in the sick and prisoners they visited, in the power of the Spirit. Thus they understood that Jesus was in their midst." (GASS, 2011, p. 25-26, own translation)

Of the numerous and varied early Christian experiences, the following stand out: the communities of the Beloved Disciple (John), those of Mark, of Jerusalem, and of the Hellenists. There are at least four groups that participated in the formation of the Johannine churches: Galileans, Baptists, Samaritans, and Greeks.

- The Galileans: were marginalized by the Jews of the capital, who considered themselves pure. From the experience of the resurrection, the Galileans saw their Messianic expectations fulfilled in Jesus as the Teacher, the Messiah, the Son of God and the King of Israel. This is why many Galileans would have joined the communities led by Martha and Mary Magdalene.¹⁸
- The Baptists: After the death of John the Baptist, many of his disciples followed Jesus. Like the Galileans, they were very critical of the sanctuary and all that it represented. They also could not afford to regularly observe the acts of worship and purification required by the Temple in Jerusalem.
- The Samaritans: they were also strongly excluded by the official Judaism of the temple. But the Johannine churches welcomed them; especially the women of Samaria. According to the book of Acts, the evangelization of the villages of Samaria was done by Philip, one of the seven Hellenists chosen in Jerusalem for the shared meal service (Acts 6:5; 8:4-25). He relied, in that work, on the collaboration of his four daughters who were prophetesses. The Samaritans' adherence to the Gospel, with their own messianic hope, and especially with the leadership of the women, was responsible for the understanding of Jesus that was so different from the other early churches. It was the Samaritans who gave the fourth Gospel such a special coloring.
- The Greeks: non-Jews who probably already sympathized with Jewish monotheism, but who did not accept it through the fulfillment of the Law. They were welcomed into the Johannine communities, without going through circumcision and cultural prescriptions about food and other things.

The Marcionite communities also organized their mission along the lines of Jesus' movement. In missionary teams, they went out into the villages healing the sick and casting out demons, that is, seeking to free people from the forces that were against the kingdom of God (Mk. 6:7; 13). They preached to all who would be converted and believe in the Gospel. Like Jesus, they were itinerant missionaries who lived with simplicity and detachment. "The Path, rather than an urban movement, remained a mostly rural experience." (GASS, 2011, P. 516, own translation)

"The bearers of what later became autonomous as Christianity were charismatic men and women, itinerant without a homeland.

There are, among these, at least two groupings: a Jewish-Christian grouping stemming from the mission to Israel and another type of itinerant charismatics linked to the mission

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene was of extraordinary importance in early Christianity, even more important than the apostles, for she was the exception witness to the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. (GNILKA, 1999, p. 296)

among the Gentiles. In the Syrian-Palestinian territory we can verify the existence of itinerant charismatics for several generations. "(THEISSEN, 2008, p. 76; 89-90, own translation)

6.2 - Jerusalem and Antioch of Syria

One of the 27 books of the New Testament (NT) is the Acts of the Apostles. Originally it was part of the same work as the third Gospel. Since the second century, tradition identifies its author as the physician Luke, who accompanied Paul on some journeys to spread the Good News. The author writes "to the Most Excellent Theophilus", an addressee who could be a patron or an anonymous "friend of God". Luke's claim to produce a "well-ordered narration, the fruit of a careful study of everything that happened from the beginning," so that Theophilus could verify "the solidity of the teachings he received," gives the work a theological and catechetical character.

"A fifty or so gospels were written over the centuries that were later considered apocryphal. The multiplicity of narratives and writings about Jesus is noted very early on. Already in the last decades of the first century, when Luke began to write his gospel, he came across many texts, certainly confusing some, naive others, so that he had to undertake a careful investigation to get away from these naive narratives. " (FRANGIOTTI, 2017, p. 62; 63, own translation)

The Gospel of Luke presents the Path of Jesus, which begins and ends in Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles presents the Path of the brothers - "the apostles, some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus" - from Jerusalem to Rome, the center of the world at that time. The second part of the work, when separated from the first, was renamed the Acts of the Apostles. The name is not appropriate in the sense that the book mentions the twelve; it gives some prominence to James, Peter, John¹⁹ and actually speaks of Peter and Paul. Roughly speaking, one can say that the first part of Acts is dedicated to the Jerusalem community, the second to the group of Hellenists, and the third to Paul. The Hellenists link the communities of Jerusalem and Antioch.

It should be kept in mind that Luke's work was written in Greek, probably between the 80's and 90's, and is intended primarily for Hellenists, that is, Greek-speaking and Greek-cultured Judeo-Christians. By this time, most Christians were Greek-speaking and Greek-cultured, diaspora Jews, inhabitants of cities in the Roman Empire. The temple and the city of Jerusalem had been razed to the ground. Both the Gospel and Acts reflect a Jewish-Hellenistic theology of the Church, elaborated

¹⁹ "The best indication in favor of a participation of James in Jesus' mission is his major role in the early Church.... Most researchers, convinced of James' unbelief while Jesus was alive, think that his conversion would have followed an appearance of the Lord mentioned by Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians" (1 Chron. 15:3-8). (BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 109, own translation)

according to the criteria of the author's communities. His theological perspective is to show how Jerusalem is the starting point of the gospel that is carried by Paul "to the ends of the earth, with the power of the Spirit." (Acts 1.8)

The community of the first disciples in the holy city of Jerusalem, around the Twelve Apostles, represents the new Israel, with the Twelve Tribes; a scene with strong symbolic content (THISSEN, 2008, p.97). Luke wants to show that Christianity has a common origin: the experience of the Spirit from Jerusalem, the center city of the people of God, where the life and witness of Jesus culminated and where the witness of his disciples begins. This original community is presented as an example of radical fraternity, communion of hearts, and sharing of material and spiritual goods:

"They were persevering in listening to the teaching of the apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread and in prayers [...]. All those who embraced the faith were united and put all things in common; they sold their possessions and goods and shared the money among all, according to each one's needs. Every day, all together attended the temple and in their homes they broke bread, taking food with joy and simplicity of heart. They praised God and were esteemed by all the people. And each day the Lord added to the community other people who were accepting salvation." (Acts 2:42-47, own translation)

The teaching ("**didache**" in Greek) was twofold: the remembrance of Jesus' deeds and words, and the re-reading of the whole Bible from Jesus' perspective.

In the Jerusalem community, two groups lived together: the Hebrew Jews, with an Aramaic language and a traditional Hebrew culture, and the Hellenistic Jews, with a Greek language and culture, from the diaspora. Although "the multitude of the faithful were of one heart and soul," problems arose between the two groups precisely because of an unacceptable behavior: the discrimination of Hellenistic widows in the breaking of bread. So the Twelve called a general assembly of the disciples (Acts 6:2) and chose Stephen and six other Hellenists to handle the matter. It wasn't long before they took on other duties: healing, proclaiming the Word, and baptism. Stephen, in proclaiming the Good News, became involved in an argument with some members of the synagogue of the Freedmen (Greek-speaking Jews). Accused of heresy, Stephen was arrested by the doctors of the Law and taken to the Sanhedrin, where he courageously expressed his faith and justified it with passages from the Scriptures. Accused of heresy, like Jesus, Stephen, "full of grace and power among the people," was taken out of the city and stoned.²⁰ According to Luke, Saul (Paul's Jewish name) was one of those who witnessed and approved of Stephen's death.²¹

²⁰ "When the sanctity of the temple was profaned, by word or deed, the Jewish authorities had power to enforce their own law. The penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning, and that penalty was applied to Stephen." BRUCE. (2013, p. 62, own translation)

²¹ "Paul appears to have acquired both Pharisaic and scribal education, including study in rhetoric, while living and growing up in Jerusalem." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 75, own translation)

At that time, around the year 35, a great persecution broke out against Jesus' disciples, causing many to leave the city and go to live in the villages of Judea and Samaria. And "those who were scattered went from place to place preaching the Word. Philip, one of the seven Hellenists, went to Samaria, where many were baptized. Other Hellenists went to Phoenicia, Cyprus, Damascus, and Antioch in Syria, where they preached the Word only to Jews. The community of Antioch is said to have been founded in the year 38. Converts from Cyprus and the city of Cyrene went to Antioch and began preaching to the Gentiles. "A great number believed and were converted to the Lord. The news reached the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch" (Acts 11:19-25, own translation).

Since "no one considered the things he owned as private property, but everything was put in common, Barnabas, a Levite, born in Cyprus, sold his field and laid the money at the feet of the Apostles" (Acts 4:36, own translation). Then, at the request of his community, he left Jerusalem and went to Antioch, where he stood out as a prophet and teacher. In 39 or 40, according to Justin Taylor, Barnabas' disciples got involved in a disturbance that the Romans characterized as subversive activities and attributed them to the Messianists, in Latin "**christiani**" from where the name Christians would have come from, recorded in Acts of the Apostles (TAYLOR, 2010, p. 109). For Stambaugh "the disciples were called 'Christ's people' by the pagans because it was in Antioch that they first broke away from Judaism as a distinct sect" (STAMBAUCH; BALCH, 1996, own translation). While on his way to Damascus to persecute the members of the local Church, between 36 and 37, shortly after the death of Stephen (the first martyr among the Followers of the Path), Saul undergoes an ecstatic, impactful experience that makes him aware that Jesus is present, alive, in those he was persecuting. Some exegetes understand that Saul "fell off the horse," as we would say today, in a figurative sense. Saul was 28 years old.

"It could not be more significant that the most effective creator of the Christian universe, Paul, began as an active instrument of the state - trusted government man, tax exactor, bureaucrat - and then disengaging from the state as he fell from the heights of his authority in a flash of enlightenment, blinded by the cross, brought down by gospel truth." (SHAMA, 2015, p. 156, own translation)

For Joseph Bortolini, even if there was some impacting "conversion" event on Paul's way to Damascus, where there were already followers of the Path, he was baptized, that is, initiated, not into a new religion, but into the true way of following his Jewish religion.

"Paul's conversion has the flavor of a slow process, of constant maturation. It would have been a metanoia, that is, a change of mentality: breaking the backbone of his rigid Pharisaic training - scrupulous attachment to the written and also oral Law; the exclusivity of race; discrimination of people and things, considering them pure and impure; the arrogance of feeling separate, pure - seems to be Paul's great conversion.

Paul's contact with other races and cultures defeated his arrogant ego as a blameless, self-sufficient Pharisee, and opened him to the realization that in Christ social differences have been abolished. "There is no longer any difference between Jews and Greeks, between slave and free man, between male and female, for you are all as one in Christ" (Gal, 3:28, own translation). The affection with which the Galatians, pagans, took care of him who was sick, showed him the universal brotherhood of the love of God that is free and precedes any human virtue. (BORTOLINI, 2003, p. 29-40)

Converted, Saul is catechized and baptized by Ananias in Damascus, where he remains for a short time. For him, "baptism not only assures the believer new life, but makes him a member of the mystical body of Christ. Such a conception was inconceivable for traditional Judaism." (ELIADE, 2011, p. 303, own translation)

Next, Saul retreats to the "Arabian desert"²² - we don't know where - certainly to think and rework his religious/spiritual convictions. Three years later, 38 A.D., he returns to Damascus, from where he was forced to flee by persecution from the Hebrews. He then went to Jerusalem (125 mi away), where he was introduced by Barnabas to the Apostles Peter and James, the only two who were there.²³ Again, threatened with death by the Hebrews, his "brothers" took him to the city of Caesarea and from there they shipped him to Tarsus, his home town²⁴. Until then, the converts called themselves: brothers, saints, believers, followers of the Path, or disciples of the Lord. For others, they were called Galileans, or Nazarites; considered to be a Jewish sect.

"Around 42-43, Paul had a strange experience, which left its mark on him until the end of his life. He tells something of it in 2 Corinthians 12:2-10. The experience belongs to the category that is usually called ecstasy [...] in this case "a form of direct union with Christ." [...] "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" - he writes to the churches of Galatia (Gal.2:20). The sequel to Paul's mystical experience was a nagging and humiliating physical ailment, perhaps epilepsy, that would put him in the company of men of action like Julius Caesar and Napoleon. " (BRUCE, 2013, p. 129-130, own translation)

In the middle of the year 45 Barnabas went to Tarsus²⁵ to fetch Saul to work together in Antioch (today Antakia, in Turkey), 285 mi from Jerusalem, with 500,000 inhabitants, then the third city of the

²² "Arabia meant the eastern part of the present-day kingdom of Jordan. It was populated by the Nabateans, whose capital was Petra. Paul's choice of this area will result from the assurance that no Jews were to be found there." (MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2004, p. 104, own translation)

²³ "We will probably never know the real nature of the relationship between James and his brother Jesus. But we do know for certain that James became, shortly after Jesus' death, one of the most important characters in the young Christian movement." (BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 113, own translation)

²⁴ "Tarsus had been around for over 6,000 years, making it one of the oldest in the world next to Jericho" (FERNANDES, 2008, p. 38, own translation)

²⁵ Tarsus - city located 10 miles above the Cidnos River, capital of the Province of Cilicia, where "in the autumn of the year 4 B.C. Cleopatra and Mark Antony met for the first time. Shakespeare offers a much more poetic view

Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. It controlled the roads connecting Asia Minor, the Euphrates, and Egypt, enjoyed an enviable water supply, fertile plain for agriculture, and offered the security of some distance from the sea (14 miles), being only a day's journey from one of the best ports on the Mediterranean.

The Jewish community in Antioch was as old as the city itself. According to Flavius Josephus, "considerable numbers of 'Greeks' were attracted to the synagogue, the Torah discussion, and the Jewish way of life. For a long time it had been prosperous, peaceful and open.

"The ethnic diversity, culture, power, commerce, and religion of this city enabled the Christians who lived there to make a unique contribution to the evolution of Christianity." (STAMBAUGH; BALCH, 1996, p. 134;137, own translation)

"Saul stays a year with Barnabas in Antioch, where they organize the first important community of pagan origin and it becomes the point from where the Christian mission radiates to the Hellenistic world. " (ELIADE, 2011, p. 302, own translation)

The Christian movement, which until then was seen by the pagans as a mere variation of Judaism, a sect, becomes its own autonomous Path. Paul, a cultured and polyglot intellectual, translates the Good News, announced by Jesus, for the marginalized of the rural areas, for the Greek, urban world, of the big cities.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians - the first preserved Christian document, written during his second journey (50/51) - he recommends what he has been practicing for ages in each city he arrives:

"Let it be a matter of honor for you to live in peace, minding your own business and working with your own hands as we recommend. In this way you will lead an honorable life in the eyes of strangers and will no longer be in need of anything. " (1 Thess. 4:11-12, own translation)

Paul was born in Gishala, Galilee, according to Jerome (347-420), of parents who had been enslaved by the Romans, who had won their freedom and Roman citizenship in Tarsus.²⁶ This origin would explain how Paul cherished "the freedom of the children of God," whose fullness he came to find in overcoming the Law and conforming himself to Christ: "I live, but it is not I, it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20); "All things are permitted me, but not all things are fitting for me" (1 Cor 6:12).²⁷

Alain Badiou (*1937), philosopher, playwright and novelist, known for his communist militancy, in his book "Paul: the foundation of universalism", comments:

in Antony and Cleopatra (act 2, scene 2) of the facts recorded by Plutarch." (MURPHY-O'CONNOR. 2008, p. 47, own translation)

²⁶ "Paul had been born in Tarsus, a city whose inhabitants had received Roman citizenship from Mark Antony a century earlier." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 21, own translation)

²⁷ "Paul, a Jew, was sent or brought to Jerusalem in his youth by his parents for the purpose of being immunized against infection in the Hellenistic world, the 'place of bad waters,' which brought death to those who drank from them and caused God's name to be profaned." (Pirquê Abôt 1.11 in BRUCE, 2013, p. 121, own translation)

"Paul is a great writer, concise, formulaic, who knows how to leave rare and powerful images for the opportune moment. As the poet Henry Bauchau pointed out to us, some passages, which combine a kind of violent abstraction and ruptures of tone in an attempt to convince the reader, so that no rest is possible, are similar to Shakespeare's monologues. But what matters in this prose is definitely the argumentation and delimitation, the strong manifestation of an essential core of thought. There are, then, no parables, no complicated obscurities, no subjective indecision, or deformation of the truth. The paradox of faith must be produced as it is carried by prose in the light of its radical newness. Without Paul's texts, the Christian message would remain ambiguous and barely untangled from the overabundant prophetic and apocalyptic literature of the time. This is an important reason for their presence in the canonical corpus." (BADIOU, 2009, p. 44, own translation)

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor proposes the following chronology of Paul's life/activity:

"Birth (6 BC.); Paul's vocation (32/34); journey to Arabia and Damascus (35-37); first visit to Jerusalem (37); Antioch (45-46); ministry in Galatia (September 46 to May 48); ministry in Macedonia (September 48 to April 50); assembly in Jerusalem (October 51); journey to Ephesus (April to July 52); ministry in Ephesus (August 52 to October 54); Macedonia (winter 54-55); Illyria (summer 55); Corinth (winter 55-56); journey to Jerusalem (summer 56)." (MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2004, p. 43,46, own translation)

Isidore Mazzarolo adds other dates: Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (58); captivity in Caesarea (59-60); departure for Rome (60); release from captivity in Rome (62); visit to Spain (62); fourth journey (63-65).

"More recent studies believe that Paul, after his release in Rome, would have stayed in Spain for about three months, returning again to Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Finally, learning of the sufferings imposed by Nero on Christians, in solidarity and support, he returns to Rome, where he suffers martyrdom (in 67)." (MAZZAROLO, 2005, p. 157, own translation)

Eusebius of Caesarea (260-339 AD), whose culture impressed the Emperor Constantine and led him to play a leading role in the Council of Nicaea, recounts in his Ecclesiastical History:

"It is therefore (written) tradition that the Apostle, after having pronounced his defense, left again to exercise the ministry of preaching and that, having returned a second time to the same city (Rome), he ended his life with martyrdom, in the times of the same emperor (Nero)". (DE CESAREIA, 1999, Book II, XXII, 2. p. 68, own translation)

"Paul's death seems to have been motivated by accusations made against him by ultraconservative Judeo-Christians belonging to the same Roman community." (PENNA, 2020, p. 261, own translation).

7. APOSTOLIC PERIOD (49-67)

The Acts of the Apostles recorded a meeting held in Jerusalem around A.D. 48-50 that became known as the Jerusalem Council.²⁸ The meeting was attended by the apostles and elders, including Peter, John and James, Paul and Barnabas, representing the community of Antioch of Syria. The entire Jerusalem community must have attended as well, since two representatives were chosen there to bring a letter to the Antioch community. The meeting was set to answer the question, "is it necessary to circumcise the pagans (converts) and command them to observe the Law of Moses?" One group (those who had belonged to the party of the Pharisees and had embraced the faith) advocated YES; another group (the communities represented by Barnabas and Paul) advocated NO.

From the Letter to the Galatians, we know that Paul prudently did not enter the meeting to lose. Rather, he took some precautions: he brought a fellow Greek, Titus, a convert, uncircumcised, he "expounded his positions reservedly to the most notable people" and he tried to armor his communities from "false brethren and intruders who have infiltrated to spy on the freedom we have in Jesus Christ, in order to make us slaves.

"Paul, in Cecil Roth's words, gradually became convinced that it was impossible for Christianity²⁹ to make its way while bound by the yoke of Jewish law, with adherents of the new ideas continuing to abide by the custom of circumcision and the varied restrictions of diet. He 'made the capital decision to exempt Christian proselytes from the commandments of the Law and circumcision - and in one stroke changed the course of world history.'" (NASCIMENTO; JEHA, 2017, p. 142, own translation)

After a long discussion, Peter spoke about his work with the pagans and stood for NO.

Barnabas and Paul, defending the NO, told "all the wonders that God had performed through them among the pagans".

The proponents of one position or the other do not appear to have exposed the consequences of the YES and NO. They sought to be true to the Good News, behavioral consistency, and to facilitate living together.

The faithful of the Jerusalem community, as the Acts narrates, "daily and with one accord attended the temple and were faithful to the Jewish dietary rules. They were seen as a group or party

²⁸ "The Council probably looked more like the private gathering described by Paul than the solemn and protocol assembly imagined by Luke." (BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 199, own translation)

²⁹ It is improper to speak of Christianity before the middle of the second century. If Paul knew the expression Christian, he did not use it; he considered himself a "follower of the Path," which his contemporaries considered a "Jewish sect." (Acts 24, 14)

within Judaism along the lines of the Pharisees and Sadducees and thus enjoyed "**licita religio**," the religion allowed by the empire.

The final decision was NO, and the assembly followed the opinion of James, the leader of the Jerusalem community.³⁰ It was also decided to send a letter "to the brothers who come from paganism and are in Antioch and in the regions of Syria and Cilicia": "For we have decided - the Holy Spirit and we - not to impose on you any burden, apart from these indispensable things: to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from strangled meats, and from illicit unions. You will do well if you avoid these things. Greetings." (Acts.15, 28-29, own translation)

"This is a compromise solution, for each party gave in on some point: Peter agreed to the four laws of legal purity to allow Jews and Gentile converts to live together; James agreed not to impose circumcision on Gentile converts. " (RICHARD, 1999, p. 122, own translation)

For Crossan, at the Council of Jerusalem, [...] *the immediate issue of circumcision of male Gentiles was resolved. But a much bigger problem was created, because now there were two missions, one for the Jews, led by Peter; and one for the pagans, led by Barnabas and Paul. This would have worked well if Jews and pagans lived in completely isolated enclaves. And if only Christian-Jews preached to the Jews; and Christian-pagans to the pagans. It was excellent as idealism [...]. But would it work as a practical program? In a large metropolis like Antioch, for example, would there be two independent communities, one of Christian-pagans and one of Christian-Jews?* (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 502)

These unresolved issues soon exploded in Antioch, where, in a close-knit community, Christian-Jews and Christian-pagans ate together without observing the dietary commandments of God's Law. Paul writes in the Letter to the Galatians:

"But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I confronted him openly, because he had become worthy of reproach. Indeed, before some came from James' side, he used to eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and withdrew himself for fear of the circumcised. The other Jews also began to pretend along with him, to such an extent that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live the way of the Gentiles and not of the Jews, why do you force the Gentiles to live as Jews?'" (Gal. 2:11-14, own translation)

³⁰ It is the almost unanimous consensus of contemporary scholars that "James, the brother of Jesus, was 'head of the early Christian community, above Peter and the rest of the Twelve [...]' Clement of Rome (A.D. 30-97), who was to succeed Peter in the imperial city, addresses a letter to James as the Bishop of Bishops, who rules Jerusalem, the Holy Assembly of the Hebrews, and all the assemblies, everywhere." (ASLAN, 2003, p. 218-219, own translation)

James, the official leader of the mother church in Jerusalem, the Church of the circumcision,³¹ was a *"Judeo-Christian who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but also followed the full Jewish Law. This negatively explains why, unlike Stephen in the early 30s, or James son of Zebedee in the early 40s, James, Jesus' brother, the official leader, was not attacked, persecuted and executed until 62, as Negesippus and perhaps Flavius Josephus testify."* (HOORNAERT, 1997, p. 106, own translation)

After his execution he was vehemently defended, not only by Jewish Christians, but also by non-Christian Jews.

After the Council, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch "and together with many others taught and preached the Good News of the Word of the Lord" (Acts 15:35, own translation). According to Acts (13:1, own translation), "there were prophets and teachers in the Church of Antioch." It does not mention the existence of presbyters, as in the case of the Jerusalem Church (15:2).

"The five mentioned configure a rather plural ecclesial direction: Barnabas is a Levite originally from Cyprus; Simon has an Aramaic name, with a Latin surname from Niger, which identifies him as black; Lucius with a Latin name comes from North Africa (Cyrenaica); Manaen is a brother by breeding to Herod; Saul, a converted Pharisee from Tarsus. This is a multicultural and diverse team." (RICHARD, 1999, p. 108, own translation)

On the historical importance of the Jerusalem Assembly, philosopher Alain Badiou (*1937) comments:

"By letting Paul's action develop at the same time as that of the strictly observant Judeo-Christians, the Jerusalem Assembly prevented Christianity from definitely being just a sect like many others. But by containing the zeal of the pagan-Christians hostile to Judaism it was only a new enlightenment, also very precarious, since it had no roots whatsoever in historical Judaism. The Jerusalem Assembly is really founding because it endows Christianity with a double principle of openness and historicity." (BADIOU, 2009, p. 43)

³¹ "James was the most imminent representative of an early church - he would certainly be surprised if he were told that he adhered to a new religion - deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. He awaited the return of his brother Jesus, exalted to the right hand of God after his resurrection. He was opposed to Paul and his message, which aimed at a unified community of Jews and Gentiles that would transcend the traditional boundaries and specificity of Judaism. James did not accept that conception." BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 273, own translation.

7.1 - Paul's Apostolic Journeys ³²

For twelve years (from A.D. 46 to A.D. 58), from age 41 to 53, Paul undertakes the mission assigned to him by the Antioch community:³³ to take the Gospel to both the Jews of the Diaspora and the Gentiles "to the ends of the earth."³⁴ Paul makes three major journeys from Antioch. "In the three journeys as described in the Acts, Paul and his companions traveled some 10,000 miles." (CRB, 1996, p. 20, own translation)

Paul's three missionary journeys have as their starting point Antioch on the Orontes River in Syria, the most Romanized city in the East, with at least 100,000 inhabitants.

In 1945, Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, missionary in Antioch, went to find Paul in Tarsus to help him evangelize the local community of the followers of the Path, which already numbered about 50 members. They are the ones who accredit, sponsor, and send out on mission.

The *first journey* (46-47), although considered Paul's, was probably coordinated by Barnabas, who also took John Mark with him. Passing through Cyprus, they evangelize in the cities of Salamina and Dafos, where the proconsul Sergius Paul is converted. In Pamphylia, in the city of Perga, John Mark separates himself from Barnabas and Paul. In Antioch of Pisidia, Barnabas and Paul preach until they are expelled from the city. From there they go on to Lycaonia, preaching in the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In Iconium, Jews and Gentiles try to stone the two apostles (2 Cor. 11:25), who flee to Lystra and Derbe. On their return, they pass through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Perga, and Attalia in Pamphylia, from where they embark for Antioch.

In Antioch, Paul separates from Barnabas, who embarks with John Mark for Cyprus.

In the *second*, much longer *journey* (48-51), Paul and Silas, as part of a caravan to Corinth, pass through Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, where they had founded churches. "Only a well-organized, fairly strong caravan could travel safely in a territory of bandits, or wild animals, although on the pacified Roman roads of the region, there were inns every 20 miles, a distance covered more or less in a day." (The use of caravans to travel long distances may have been another of Paul's strategies for spreading the Good News). To cover the 512 miles that separated the two Antiochs, the caravan would take about 26 days. In Lystra, the young Timothy, converted by Paul, becomes Paul's traveling companion, who assumes him as a son, transforms him into a missionary and co-author of six letters.

³² The description of Paul's missionary journeys was gathered from the books cited by MURPHY-O'CONNOR, MAZZAROLO and MARGUERAT, with some quotes *ipsis litteris* and from the precious "illustrated map *Trajectory of the Apostle Paul*", published by Paulinas.

³³ "In just over ten years, Paul planted the church in four provinces of the Empire: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia." (ROLAND ALLEN in BRUCE. 2013, p. 43, own translation)

³⁴ "Thanks to her work during all these years, the church of Antioch of Syria was now a mother church with several flourishing daughter churches, mostly Gentiles like herself." (BRUCE, 2013, p. 165, own translation)

They continue to Troas (25 miles southwest of ancient Troy), from there they sail to Samothrace and Neapolis. On foot, along the Via Egnatia, they travel the 10 miles that separate Neapolis from Philippi, the capital of Macedonia. In Philippi, Paul stays in the house of Lydia, a merchant of purple, a pagan and a Judaic sympathizer (Acts 16:14). In the home of one of the women of the community, the first house church in Europe is born. The move from the synagogue to the home is decisive for the role of the woman. In the house, she is the owner, the hostess, the one who coordinates. Paul and Silas are put in prison, perhaps for the first time. In the house of the jailer - pagan like Ligia (a businesswoman in Philippi)³⁵ - the second European house church arises. Philippi was one of three cities where Paul was "beaten with rods" (2 Cor. 11:25) and where he was "shamefully treated" (1 Thess. 2:2). Invited by the magistrates to leave the city, Paul and his companions, passing through Antipolis and Apollonia, reached Thessalonica, capital of the Province of Macedonia. There, the setting for Paul's ministry was a workshop, where he worked as a tentmaker. The time of ministry in Philippi and Thessalonica was from the summer of 49 to the early spring of 50. Persecuted there also, Paul and Silas set out for Berea and from there to Athens, where Paul preached in the synagogue and the Agora, to the apathy and rejection of the hearers. Walking 50 miles, Paul, Timothy and Silas arrive in **Corinth** where they stay in the house/workshop of Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul sought a base for his missionary work that met two conditions: relative ease in planting and maintaining a church, and having excellent communications with the surrounding region. In the middle of the first century, Corinth fulfilled these conditions much more satisfactorily than Athens, already a ruined old city with a past much more glorious than the present. As a center of culture it had been surpassed even by Tarsus, Paul's hometown.

Corinth, by contrast, was a liberal city in great progress: the most important commercial center on the eastern Mediterranean coast. Paul had the possibility of influencing people from a wide variety of regions and converts to take the Gospel to their people. The travelers going in all directions offered some security for Paul's messengers.

They dedicate a year and a half (50-51) to the community, creating a community of 40 to 50 people. On their way back, they pass through Ephesus, where their companions, including the couple Priscilla and Aquila, stay. They sail to Caesarea (about 600 miles) and from there they continue on foot to Antioch of Syria (370 miles). Paul and Barnabas arrive as experienced travelers, having covered about 2000 kilometers.

³⁵ "Philippi, with a population of 5,000 to 10,000, where veterans of the Legions had been settled and were the ruling class, had Latin as its official language. There Paul planted the first church in Europe, where he remained for more than a year, from the late summer of A.D. 48 until about the end of the following summer." MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2007, p. 86, own translation.

In 51, with Barnabas and Titus, Paul is sent by the Antioch community to Jerusalem - 14 years after his meeting with Cephas - where the Council of the Apostles takes place (Gal. 2:11-21), recounted, for its importance, in the preceding pages.

Third journey: in the spring of '52, Paul and Timothy, disgusted with the situation in Antioch, set out for Ephesus, where they intend to establish a new base for their missionary activities. They follow part of the route of their previous trip, passing through Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. After traveling 507 miles, they reach Pessinunte in Galatia, where they are welcomed with open arms and spend most of the summer. After traveling another 335 miles, they pass through Hierapolis (now Pamukkale) and arrive in Ephesus, where they meet again, after a year, with Priscilla and Aquila, then leaders of the community.

Paul's choice of **Ephesus** (population about 200,000) for his second long-term headquarters was as well planned as the first, Corinth. The centrality of this city on the west coast of Asia Minor to the Churches he had previously founded is well illustrated by some simple statistics. As the crow flies, Ephesus is equidistant from Galatia, Thessalonica (298 miles), Corinth (248 miles), Philippi (276 miles), and Antioch of Pisidia (205 miles). Added to this is the missionary work that had been carried out by Priscilla and Aquila, who were colleagues in their profession as tent makers.

In July '53, as a result of his success, Paul was arrested. "He may have been handcuffed or bound in shackles, but he was not prevented from receiving visitors and writing letters. He was able to rely on professional secretaries to write to the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon." In prison, watching death up close, Paul reflects on the horrible death of Jesus, whose crucified death "was scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23, own translation). By thinking about the conditions of Jesus' life, ministry, and death - his historicity - Paul better understands the significance of the conditions in which he himself exercised his ministry³⁶. Released from prison, probably in the late summer of 53, Paul continued to live in Ephesus for another year or so.

It seems logical to attribute to the missionary initiative of Ephesus the creation of communities in Hierapolis, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Magnesia and Trales, in the Meander Valley, all within a radius of 119 miles from Ephesus, and also Colossae, linked together by excellent roads. In Ephesus, Paul's missionary strategy for evangelizing the rest of the Roman province of Asia was to motivate the strangers converted there to take the Gospel to their cities and villages of origin.

After three years, Paul resumed his contacts with Corinth at the end of the summer of '53 or very early in the spring of '54, when Apollos returned from there to Ephesus. In the 27 months (Acts 19:8-10) that they remain in Corinth, Paul and his companions certainly attend to the communities they had founded in the vicinity. Aware of the serious problems the Corinthian community was experiencing, their first step was to send Timothy there from Ephesus, which would take, between going and returning, about six weeks,

³⁶ "This is the only place where Paul actually mentions the historical Jesus." (WILSON,1992, p.42, own translation)

probably from early May to mid-June. During this period, a delegation from Corinth brought Paul news of deeper divisions in the community in Ephesus, which caused him to write the letter we know as the first to the Corinthians. Timothy was still in Corinth and could see the disaster that Paul's letter caused when read in public. Aware of what had happened, Paul, deeply depressed, embarked to Corinth, without solving at all the problems of the community, promising to return, decided to go to Thessalonica, covering the distance of 223 miles. Exhausted by the journey under the scorching sun, Paul arrived in Thessalonica in mid-July 54. Timothy had preceded Paul on this journey and revived the local community. "The contrast between the faithfulness of the Thessalonians and Philippians and the ridiculous neutrality of the Corinthians increased Paul's bitterness against the Corinthians." Leaving Timothy in Macedonia, Paul wrote another letter to the Corinthians (which was lost and is referred to in 2 Cor. 2:4) and, without passing through Corinth, returned to Ephesus, arriving there in the middle of August 54.

On the way he met Titus, who brought him news from the communities of Macedonia and especially from Corinth. In Troasde, a city he had visited twice before and which Paul wanted as an evangelizing center for the region of Asia and Europe, he stayed for seven days, perhaps in the house of Carpus (2 Tim. 4:13) and obtained good results. From Troas,³⁷ Paul embarked bound for Jerusalem, passing through the ports of Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, and Miletus. There he met with presbyters from Ephesus and, to protect Timothy from the Jews in Jerusalem, sent him to Ephesus. They then went on to Cos, Myrrh, Sidon and Tyre - where they spent a week's rest - Ptolemais and Caesarea Maritima.

Having left Antioch in the winter of 51-52, traveled from April to July to Ephesus and stayed there from August 52 to October 54, he embarked for Macedonia, where he spent the winter of 54-55 and the summer of the same year in Illyria. He then went on to Corinth, where he spent the winter of 55-56, arriving in Jerusalem before Pentecost (Acts 20:16), which in 56 fell on June 11th. He felt tired from the long trip (51-56) and the weight of his age - about 60 years old - which, given the life expectancy of his contemporaries, made him think that he had little time left. (MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2004)

After being imprisoned for two years in Caesarea, Paul, on being tried, appealed, as a Roman citizen, to Caesar. The adventures of the imprudent voyage to Rome are vividly described by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Upon arrival in Rome, Paul was allowed to stay in rented lodging where he continued to exercise his ministry for two years. Of the following years, we know little with certainty.

Carlos Mesters summarizes Paul's missionary strategy:

"In the first trip they don't stay in the same place for long, but they go from town to town. In the beginning, the method is this: arrive somewhere, announce the Gospel, create community,

³⁷ "In Paul's time, Troas was 'one of the most remarkable cities in the world,' a Roman colony founded by Augustus and surrounded by a massive wall five miles long. It resembled Corinth in strategic location and as a trade route between Asia and Europe, and was very prosperous. Its population was estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 people." (MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2004, p. 305, own translation)

and move on. In the second trip, he does the same, but stays longer in one place: one year and six months in Corinth. On the third trip he goes straight to Ephesus and stays there for three years. Then he stays another three months in Corinth. So, in the end, the method is different: to irradiate the Gospel from a central place (Acts 19, 10, 26), while the trips serve to visit and confirm the already existing communities. "(MESTERS, 2008, p. 49, own translation)

And in Hoornaert's words, *"Paul succeeded by following the paths opened in the large and small cities by the network of synagogues, which extended throughout the Mediterranean world, penetrated into Syria and Mesopotamia, reached Cappadocia and Pontus. Taking advantage of the five hundred years' experience of the Jewish Diaspora, the movement spread even beyond the borders of the Roman Empire [...], it reached regions where Roman soldiers had never set foot. In environments of hostility or at least marginalization, the principle of diaspora and the spread of unbureaucratized nuclei proved effective."* (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 60, own translation)

According to Milani, besides Hellenizing Christianity, centered in Antioch, *"another branch of Christianity expansion in Syria is Aramaic/Syriac or Oriental. The figure of the apostle Thomas is to this Eastern-Semitic Christianity what Paul is to the Western-Hellenized one. An important group of Christians was formed around Thomas, just as in Asia Minor around John, in Palestine around James, and in the Western world, around Paul.* (MILANI, 2007, p. 43)

Hoornaert adds: *"According to oral tradition, Thomas penetrated deep into the eastern regions of Syria, crossed Mesopotamia and reached the limits of the Indus River".* (HOORNAERT, 1997, p. 123, own translation)

Jesus of Nazareth was probably crucified on April 7 in the year 30. Thirty years after his death we find absolutely unexpected facts:

- The existence of small communities of followers of Jesus in 14 regions: Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, Mysia, Macedonia, Greece, Achaia and Asia; and in more than 30 cities outside Palestine: Caesarea, Pella, Tolemaida, Tyre, Damascus, Seleucia, Antioch of Syria, Salamin, Paphos, Tarsus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Perga, Miletus, Ephesus, Laodicea, Philadelphia, Smyrna, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum, Philippi, Thessalonica, Bereia, Corinth, Athens, Malta, Illyria, Pozzuoli, Ostia, and Rome;
- "Jesus draws to himself all the titles of human and divine honor and glory that existed and could be imagined within the Roman empire. Each cultural group - Palestinian, Judeo-Christian diaspora, Christian-Hellenist - used the noblest titles and the best they possessed in their cultures to express the depth that lay hidden in Jesus' authority, common sense, and creative fantasy." (BOFF, 2012, 117, own translation)

The opening paragraph of Paul's epistle to the Romans marks the moment in the history of Christian literature when Jesus was formally proclaimed "Son of God with power [...] according to the Spirit of holiness because of his resurrection from the dead." (VERMES, 2013, p.50, own translation)

- The center of irradiation of the Good News - already with features of a new religion - begins to move from Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria, regional capital of the empire and from there to Rome, capital of the Roman empire.³⁸

8. SUBAPOSTOLIC PERIOD (67-97)

8.1 - The Second Generation of "Christians"

Some important facts influenced the early Christian communities in the period of the second generation of Christians:

- no longer being able to count on "those who had been with Jesus of Nazareth."
- the need to redo one's understanding and feelings regarding "the nearness of the end of the world" and "the coming of the kingdom of God";
- the adaptation of the Good News announced to a homogeneous group of poor peasants to heterogeneous groups in the cities;
- patriarchalization and hierarchization;
- persecutions and massacres;
- Jewish-Roman war;
- break with Judaism;
- publication of the Synoptic Gospels and several "apostolic" letters.

No longer being able to count on "those who had been with Jesus of Nazareth":

The Christians of this generation are children of families that were converted or neo-converts, fruit of the proclamation and catechesis (**kerygma**) made by people who did not know Jesus of Nazareth personally. In order to find their way, they had to rely on the letters left by Paul - who began to play an apostolic role - and on the missionary work of his collaborators, among whom there were 52 women.³⁹ Certainly many of Paul's and other apostles' collaborators were younger than them and still alive at that time. We know that Paul's letters, while alive, served as exhortation to churches other than those to

³⁸ "Augustus states that when he became consul for the twelfth time, in the year 5 B.C., he gave sixty denarii to each of Rome's 320,000 citizens. Counting the women, children, and the large number of slaves, this leads us to conclude that Rome had more than a million inhabitants, this being exactly the same number accepted for Alexandria." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 104, own translation)

³⁹ Let's note that the canonical Pauline writings already presented 52 names of women among the 160 collaborators of the Apostle (CARREZ, 1987, p. 12)

which they were originally addressed. They were even compiled and reproduced by the Ephesian community. After Paul's death, the diffusion must have been much greater. More and more the spreading of the Good News depended on the example, the way of life of Christians and the transmission from person to person.⁴⁰

The need to redo the understanding and feelings regarding "proximity of the end of the world" and "the coming of the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 7:26-33; Rom. 13:11-12):

"The concept of the establishment of the kingdom of God can be clearly divided into three phases. The first, the Kingdom is expected to take place during Jesus' Palestinian ministry. In the second phase, the arrival of the Kingdom was to follow the "Parousia," expected soon after the cross. The third, the feverish waiting progressively slows down and the date of the Second Coming being postponed sine die and the notion of Kingdom metamorphosed into that of Church." (VERMES, 2006, p. 434)

From early on, the followers of the Way gathered in small communities, having meals shared by all, as brothers. In fraternal coexistence, in prayer, in celebration - in domestic spaces, until the end of the second century - and in assistance to the needy, they experienced the presence of Jesus Christ. The **parousia** (the second coming of Jesus Christ, the end of this world and the establishment of the kingdom of God) was expected by them soon. They had long affirmed with conviction: The Lord is coming! In Aramaic: **Maranatha**.⁴¹ The willingness of the faithful of the Jerusalem community to sell their property and put the proceeds at the service of all, as Luke narrates in the Acts of the Apostles, according to some exegetes, reflects the expectation of the immediate arrival of Christ and the end of the world.

"Undoubtedly, the members of Qumran and the early Christians shared a similar eschatological viewpoint. Both must be considered eschatological communities, in the sense that they had an intense expectation that the end times would soon come...." (SHANKS, 1992, p. 205, own translation)

Since He had not come while "those who knew Him" were alive, the brothers of the second generation, confused and perhaps even frustrated and disappointed, sought to better understand the meaning of "I will be with you," "I will return," "I will send the Spirit. Was time running "without a sign of the times", or were the massacre of the Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the persecution of

⁴⁰ "Acts ends its narrative around A.D. 60-62 (Paul being in Rome), and is the only historical monograph we possess about the first-century Church [...] The letters and sermons offer insight into this important period in which the apostles were dying and, the torch of the Christian faith, being passed to a new generation." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 85, own translation)

⁴¹ "The conservation of an Aramaic formula - *maraná tá* - in Greek texts indicates the long age of this cry. It goes back to the beginnings of early Palestinian Christianity and expresses its expectation of an imminent end: it longs for and calls for the Lord's takeover of sovereignty." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2005, p. 585, own translation)

Christians in Rome signs of the end of the world? The news of Peter and Paul's death in Rome must have spread among the Christians as an apocalyptic sign.

"Apocalypse could also be translated revolution. By apocalypse the Jews understood the end of the world, of an epoch, of a cycle, and at the same time the painful advent of an entirely new order, of a new world, of an epoch, of a cycle. It was the violent and warlike destruction of the devil's kingdom and the installation of God's kingdom. " (BRUCKBERGER, 1969, p. 143, own translation)

Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians show how vividly the community awaited the Lord's **parousia**.

"The First Letter to the Thessalonians is characterized by the imminent expectation of the coming of Christ; the Second Letter to the Thessalonians - deuteropauline - reflects the problem of the delay of the parousia. The eschatological effervescence of the delay of the parousia in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians leads one to place the date of redaction around the end of the 1st century, between 80 and 90, without excluding an earlier dating - between 70 and 80." (MARGHERAT, 2015, p. 383; 386, own translation)

Paul himself, the first and greatest theologian, had to rework his understanding of the Lord's second coming. He had written of the "present troubles", recognizing that "the time is short" and "that the figure of this world is passing away". He also wrote to the Romans: "our salvation is nearer now than when we first embraced the faith. The night has advanced and the day is drawing near.

"The mistaken expectation of an imminent end by Jesus and the early Christians did not trigger a major crisis in early Christianity. " (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2005, p. 301, **OWN TRANSLATION**)

According to sociologist Rodney Stark, "it was the martyrs of the 60s - James in Jerusalem and Peter and Paul in Rome - who mitigated the crisis triggered by the non-fulfillment of the prophecy - the **parousia**, or second coming - and the small number of adherents (about three thousand) by joining their suffering to that of Jesus as proof of atonement." (STARK, 2006, p. 208, own translation)

For the early Christians, the kingdom was a gift from God, and not the work of history. History then effectively came to an end, and the Lord's devotees should simply surrender to faith in the **Christos**, whose appearance was imminent...

"There was no place in this first-century view for the idea of men and women as historical agents capable of forging their own destiny, or at least contributing to it." (EAGLETON, 2009, p. 25, own translation)

Paul was wrong, and Jesus before him, just as everyone else who has announced and heralded hopes, expectations, proclamations, or prophecies of impending apocalyptic consummation throughout human history - at least so far. (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 165)

"[Nevertheless], the reign, or the community (God's "basileia") appealed to the imagination of opposition of the people victimized by the Roman imperial system [...] and to an alternative world free from hunger, poverty and domination. This "conceived" world is already anticipated in the inclusive bread-sharing, healing and liberation practices, and the community of brothers and sisters, freed from domination, of Jesus' movement, which found many followers among the poor, the despised, the sick and possessed, the marginalized, prostitutes, and sinners." (FIORENZA, 2005, 159-160, own translation)

The adaptation of the Good News announced to a homogeneous group of poor peasants to heterogeneous groups in the cities:

It was not very easy to understand how to live as brothers, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, in a Hellenistic world - elitist, slave-owning and patriarchal - with different values, sometimes contrary to their belief. In the large cities, such as Antioch of Syria, Ephesus and Corinth, most of the population were slaves and manual laborers. The Christian communities probably reflected this social stratification, in which the poor were the majority.⁴² For the communities to meet, larger houses were needed. Some of these houses were houses/workshops, as was probably the case of the property (owned or rented) of Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome, or the houses of Philologus, of Junia, of Nereus and his sister, of Philemon and Apia, of Nympha, of Lydia, etc.

In Philippi there was a community of women only with whom Paul meets, contrary to their culture. It was in these houses, domestic churches, that faith, hope and charity were experienced and celebrated, and reconciliation took place.⁴³ All sharing, in a meal, what each one had brought from home, celebrating with joy as Jesus of Nazareth had done with his disciples.

None of this was natural, socially backed, since the morality of the Roman world was based on patronage relations, which were absolutely normal. "Our hypothesis is that especially in Corinth, and perhaps only there, radical horizontal Christian equality conflicted with the vertical hierarchy of Roman society, which was considered normal, just as we accept today democratic processes and commercial advertising." (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 271, own translation)

"The church in Corinth - with 40 to 50 people, of whom we know, by name, sixteen - clearly defined itself as a heterogeneous group. Many had in common only Christianity. They

⁴² "Paul's Letters address a theme not found in any writing of ancient literature: work and the lives of workers." (HOORNAERT, 2006, p. 36, own translation)

⁴³ "The beginnings and inspiration of the Christian movement, the outpouring of the Spirit, took place not in the temple according to Acts (2:1-42), but in an *oikos* (Acts. 2:2). The *oikos* (home), and not the *naos* (temple), is henceforth the place of God's presence and blessing." (ELLIOTT, 1995, p. 183, own translation)

differed greatly in education, financial resources, religious training, political skills, and, above all, in their expectations. Some were attracted to the church because it seemed to offer them a new field of opportunity, where it was possible to fully utilize talents frustrated by society. They were active and ambitious people, and there was no agreement between their unacknowledged motives. From the beginning, a certain competitive spirit was part of the characteristics of that Church. "(MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2008, p. 279, own translation)

Despite the scandal of some, the Christians' way of life attracted others, many others. The great adhesion of the poor, the landless, the homeless, and those without citizenship happened precisely because there was a new practice in the communities that contested the social structure. Faith and fraternal love, concrete, palpable, broke cultural, class, and gender barriers.

"The extraordinary levels of urban disorder and cultural chaos, squalor, disease, misery, fear and social chaos, [...] gave Christianity the opportunity to exploit all its immense competitive advantages over paganism and other religious movements of the time as a solution to these problems." (STARK, 2006, p. 167, own translation)

Patriarchalization and hierarchization:

According to Carrez, by 67 A.D. the number of Jews and proselytes in the New Testament countries was about two million and of Christians, one fiftieth of Judaism, or forty thousand. (CARREZ, 1987, p. 326). Peter Oakes, estimating the proportion of Romans and Greeks in Philippi, calculated that in the composition of the local church there were 36% Romans and 64% Greeks. According to Crossan, in no other city where Paul founded churches were there such large numbers of Romans (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 217).

Paul and his collaborators were largely responsible for the rapid territorial expansion of the Gospel. The strategy of announcing the Good News and founding small Christian communities was designed by Paul and Barnabas with the approval and support of the community of Antioch of Syria. The title of Roman citizen gave Paul the right to move freely and with greater security throughout the territory under the dominion of Rome.

Coordinating a team of collaborators - itinerant and local, men and women, exercising functions of episcopate, apostolate and diaconate -, (Phil. 1:1; Rom. 16:1-7) Paul engaged in this mission for 12 years, from 46 to 58 AD. They gave priority to creating small communities in large port cities, where there were colonies of Diaspora Jews. "**Pairokia**" was the condition of most Diaspora Jews.⁴⁴ The **paroikoi** were socially and legally below those who were full citizens, but generally better regarded

⁴⁴ "The **paroikoi** are foreigners, strangers, people who are not in their own home, or who have no national roots...socially, they rank below full citizens (the **politai**) and above foreigners in transit, whether free or slaves (the **xenoi**)." (ELLIOTT, 1985, p. 28-29, own translation)

than slaves and freedmen, because of the importance accorded to their free-born status.(ARENS, 2008, p. 88)

Around the synagogues of the Jews gravitated Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism (God-fearing, worshippers and proselytes)⁴⁵ naturally more predisposed to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. In these cities there were, especially among the poorest - slaves, freedmen and other manual workers - people from all the provinces of the Roman Empire⁴⁶. Many Christian communities were created precisely in this social segment. In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul writes "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, own translation) and in the Letter to the Corinthians: "the common people and the despicable are the chosen of God" (1 Cor. 1:27-28, own translation).⁴⁷

The multiplicity, plurality and diversity of communities, with little theoretical formation and no unified structure, brought to the new religion the richness of diversity and the threat of the loss of unity.⁴⁸ In Paul's time, according to Richard, the communities did not have a broader structure, and there was no difference between clergy and laity, but an organic variety of charisms such as apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, prophetesses, etc. Presbyters or episcopalians were simply community animators; throughout the New Testament they are never called "priests". (RICHARD, 1999, p. 184)

"Paul's successors in the leadership of the assemblies, those who wrote the 'deutero-Pauline' letters such as Colossians and Ephesians and the later 'Pastoral Epistles' (1-2 Timothy and Titus), then shaped what became orthodox Christianity. They adapted to the basic institution and structure of imperial society, the patriarchal slave family ('slaves, obey your masters,' 'wives obey your husbands') and assigned hierarchical authority to monarchical bishops. " (Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in HORSLEY, 2004, p. 138, own translation)

Probably the Christian movement in its origins was as plural and diverse as Christianity today in the large urban centers of Brazil. Something to think about and value more!

In the subapostolic period, there is a movement of patriarchalization and hierarchization that manifests itself in the gospels and in the letters written in this period - some pseudo-Pauline - and in the

⁴⁵ "[...] the rabbis distinguish outsiders, religiously and socially related to Israel, into three classes: the full proselyte, the half-proselyte, or God-fearing, and the resident alien, who has settled in Israel but remains a non-Jew." (ELLIOTT, 1985, p. 36, own translation)

⁴⁶ "It was possible to become a slave in various ways: after child exposure, by a war prison, by a court judgment, by selling oneself for debt, and, above all, by being born to other slaves. The cities of Tyre, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome and the Aegean islands such as Chios and Delos were famous places where a thriving slave market took place. As Aristotle said in the fourth century B.C.: "Some are free by nature and others slaves...The slave is so by nature". (PENNA, 2020, p. 159, own translation)

⁴⁷ "A conviction of this kind subverts all, but really all institutions, including the Church. All must evaluate themselves by means of this criterion." (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 227, own translation)

⁴⁸ "By the 60s, thirty years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the total number of Christians was probably no more than 3,000, scattered within a radius of about 1,500 miles from Jerusalem." (STARK, 2006, p. 154, own translation)

Acts of the Apostles. In these writings, as we will see in other chapters, one can see the reduction of the role of women in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and in the early history of the disciples. The organization of the communities also begins, defining and hierarchizing the functions and charisms.

8.2 - Persecutions, massacres, Jewish-Roman war

The Jewish community in Rome was numerous and powerful.⁴⁹ According to Philo, "the great section of Rome on the other side of the Tiber is occupied and inhabited by Jews, most of whom are emancipated Roman citizens," that is, former slaves who had been brought to Rome. Julius Caesar (49 to 44 B.C.) and Augustus (63 B.C. to 14 A.D.) were particularly benevolent to the Jewish community, granting them very significant privileges (ARENS, 2008, p. 165;179). In 49 A.D., Emperor Claudius (41 to 54) expelled the Jews, there included the Christians, not yet differentiated by the Romans. Among the Christians of Jewish origin who had to leave the capital of the empire were Priscilla and Aquila. They went to evangelize in Corinth, where Paul later met them. Years later, Nero (54 to 68) revoked Claudius' decree, making it possible for the Jews to return. Thus, we can find Priscilla and Aquila again in Rome when Paul writes the Letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:3).

In 58-59 Paul is held prisoner in Jerusalem and Caesarea. In 60, he is taken to Rome and remains under house arrest for two years. In 62, James, the Lord's brother and head of the Jerusalem Church, is stoned at the behest of the high priest Anan, of Annas' family.

On July 19, 64, Nero burns down a section of Rome to build a sumptuous palace and blames the Christians. The Christians are persecuted and Peter and Paul are killed.⁵⁰ In his **Annales**, the historian Tacitus (56 to 117 A.D.) states:

"To get rid of the rumor (of having set fire), Nero arrested the culprits and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace [...]. A great multitude were condemned, not only for the crime of arson, but for hatred against the human race. And in their deaths they were torn to pieces by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set on fire, and at the end of the day were burned to serve as a night light. "

Domitian, son of Vespasian and brother of Titus, reigned from 81 to 96. He was one of the cruellest emperors of Rome. He attributed divine titles to himself, demanding worship of his person. His official documents began with the words, "Our Lord and God commands that the following be done [...]."

⁴⁹ "It is estimated that in the early first century A.D., there were between 40,000 and 60,000 Jews in Rome - probably as many as in Jerusalem itself [...] and eleven synagogues." (BRUCE, 2013, p. 25, own translation)

⁵⁰ "There are two traditions about Paul's death: in the first, Paul died alone in 64, executed by the sword, by sentence of the court; in the other, Paul and Peter died on the same occasion, victims of the persecution unleashed by Nero in 67." (CARREZ, 1987, p. 30, own translation)

The persecutions of Christians were unleashed especially because they refused to worship the emperor. Everything got worse when Domitian issued a decree against the Christian communities, considering their religion illicit. This happened at the time when the Judeo-Christians were expelled from Judaism (Council of Jamnia) in the second half of the 80s (GASS, 2012, p. 25). Persecutions became more intense on the periphery of the empire, where regional administrators wanted to flaunt their zeal for the emperor as deity. "The end of the first century thus placed Christian communities in political and social isolation." (KONINGS, 2011, p. 137-138, own translation)

According to Blanchetiere, a seventh part of the approximately seven million Jews registered in the time of Emperor Claudius resided in Asia Minor. At least two-thirds lived in the Diaspora, a percentage that grew considerably from the 70s A.D. (ARENS, 2008, p.159). These data are important to understand the impact of the Jewish War, not only on the Jews of Palestine, but also on those of the Diaspora and on the Christian communities, many of which were implanted next to them.

Jewish-Roman War:

"Resistance against the Romans had been growing in Palestine and elsewhere in the empire, such as in Alexandria, Egypt, where it was violently suppressed.⁵¹ Taxes, tributes and duties continued to take almost half of the farmers' production. The inability of the Roman Procurators to understand the culture and religion of the people of Palestine, coupled with the violence of repression for any disturbance of the order, buffeted the brios and patience of the people. "

The year 66 inaugurates seven years of "apocalyptic" events for the Jews of Palestine. War broke out in Jerusalem when the Roman procurator Geshios Floro (64-66) made a plunder of 17 talents from the temple treasury.⁵² In the face of protests, he had some rebels, including upper-class ones, crucified in Jerusalem.

The Zealots began a nationalistic revolutionary movement against Roman oppression and the local Jewish elites. In the same year, 66, revolts broke out in various parts of Palestine, extending to Galilee.⁵³

Riots and anti-Jewish actions also occurred in Ephesus, Cyrene, and Caesarea. As Flavius Josephus relates, they were instigated by Greek and not Roman citizens.

"In Caesarea (Judea) there was a massacre of Jews that provoked bloody reprisals in several northern cities (Tyre, Philadelphi, Gerasa, Pella, etc.). The following year, an anti-Jewish uprising, which spread to numerous cities in Syria and caused numerous deaths,

⁵¹ "Alexandria, the second most important city, granary of the wheat that fed the Empire, where 40% of the population were Jews at the time [...]" (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 19, own translation)

⁵² More than half a ton of gold/silver, equivalent to the wages of 100,000 day-laborers. The people reacted by collecting for the "poor guy".

⁵³ "Under Tiberius Alexander - an Alexandrian Jew who became second in command of Tyre in the siege of Jerusalem - twenty thousand zealots were crucified in Judea." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 93, own translation)

triggered a massacre of major proportions in Antioch. " (ARENS, 2008, p. 179, own translation)

In '68, one of the rebellious factions of Galilee, with a peasant social base, conquered from the opposing faction the dominion of Jerusalem and burned the building of the public archives, where the controls of the peasants' debts were filed.⁵⁴ Many nobles were killed, including the high priest. The priestly caste was killed either by the zealots or by the Romans.

Many Jews were killed. Others, fleeing the horrors of war, left Jerusalem.⁵⁵ The Judeo-Christians who were not killed abandoned the capital and took refuge in the city of Pella (Transjordan), in Northern Galilee and in Southern Syria. Thus, the Jerusalem Church in less than 40 years fell apart and Christianity, so soon, lost an important reference point. "It is possible that after the war some communities were reorganized, but the Jerusalem Church had totally lost its importance in the context of the other communities. Other cities of the empire began to acquire greater relevance, as was the case of Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome." (GASS, 2011, p. 12-13, own translation)

In 69, the generals Vespasian and his son Tito were responsible for repressing the resistance. With an army of 60 thousand men, they managed to retake almost all of Galilee, forcing the Jewish partisans to take refuge in fortresses. Nero committed suicide in 68 and several generals disputed power: Galba (68), Otonius (69), Vitellius (69), with Vespasian taking power in 69.

In 70, after Passover, Tito surrounded Jerusalem with 20,000 soldiers. Several captured Jewish partisans were crucified. During the siege of Jerusalem, at least five hundred captured Jews were crucified **every day** by the Romans. (VERMES, 2007, p. 30)

In September of that year the Romans conquered the upper city and set fire to the temple, turning it into ashes and ruins (in 64 the work of enlarging the luxurious temple, pride of the Jews, begun at the time of Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.) had been completed). "The seven-armed candlestick, as well as the table of oblation loaves that were in the Holy of the Temple, were taken to Rome and displayed as trophies of victory the following year. Those who were not killed in the war were taken to the circus games, or were condemned to work on public works of interest to the empire, many taken as slaves" (GALLAZZI, 2012, p. 251, own translation). According to Arens, "about 100,000 Jews were deported and sold as slaves" (ARENS, 2008, p. 179, own translation). At the entrance of the Roman forum there is still today the Arch of Titus, which recalls the victory over Jewish resistance and the destruction of Jerusalem. "Rome's victory represented the end for several groups, such as the zealots, the Sadducees,

⁵⁴ "The power and authority of the temple leadership was also manifested in its control of the people's resources. Through a system of fees, tithes, and sacrifices, it exercised control over the Jewish nation. Another aspect of this control, incidentally not mentioned by Luke, is the role of the temple as a major landowner." (MOXNES, 1995, p. 74, own translation)

⁵⁵ "There is no evidence, to suggest that the core of the mother assembly abandoned Jerusalem. They maintained their presence in the city of Jesus' death and resurrection, eagerly awaiting his return, until the moment that Titus' army arrived and swept the Holy City and its inhabitants, Christian and Jewish, off the face of the earth." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 229, own translation)

the priests, the Essenes, and many Samaritans.⁵⁶ With the disappearance of the priestly elite, the Pharisees came out of the catastrophe strengthened." (GASS, 2011, p. 22, own translation)

Break with Judaism:

At the beginning of the Jewish War, the Pharisaic rabbis, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai and with the permission of the Romans, leave Jerusalem, taking the scrolls of Scripture with them. They take refuge in the region of Jâmnia (**Yavné**), west of Jerusalem, where the scribes set up a center for Biblical studies.

"There Judaism is reborn in the form that will traverse the Middle Ages and Modernity: Judaism without a temple, with the Bible as its reference point and the rabbinic oral tradition that will give rise to the Talmud. Its beginning is called "formative Judaism". If before '66 the Jewish-Christian community lived on good neighborly terms with the Jewish communities, after '73 Jewish nationalism and Pharisaic observance became the watershed between Jews and Christians. In the eyes of the rabbis, committed to restoring Judaism, Christians were no longer true Jews. The break between the Synagogue and the Church was a fait accompli. It is usually attributed to the Jewish Synod of Jamnia, around 80-90 A.D., the excommunication of Christian "heretics" assumed in the "eighteen prayers" of the daily Jewish prayer. " (KONINGS, 2011, p. 151, own translation)

In the synagogue prayer, they also introduced a prayer asking God to curse the Judeo-Christians. (GASS, 2011, p. 24)

The School of Jamnia became the successor of the Sanhedrin and the reference, as a moral and religious authority, for all Jews, including those in the Diaspora. Matthew's Gospel reflects the climate of animosity between the Christian communities and the Jews at that time, as can be seen in the expressions "hypocritical Pharisees" and "whitewashed sepulchers" put into Jesus' mouth.

"In Antioch of Syria, the Mattian community of Jesus' followers-Jews and Gentiles-wrangles and polemics "intramurally "with post-70s Judaism and is the victim of hostility from another Jewish community present there. The evangelist gathers traditions concerning the quarrel between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes and uses this material in the conflict with the Pharisaic Judaism of the time of his community. "(GOMES, 2009, p. 78, own translation)

⁵⁶ Of all the parties and sects that existed before the destruction (and according to ancient sources there were twenty-four), the only one that survived the national cataclysm was the Pharisees. Isidore Epstein in (BRUCKBERGER, 1969, p. 205)

God's judgment on Israel, mentioned in seventy passages, is also a warning to the community. Matthew shows how Israel had lost its status as "God's people" because it had rejected the prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself. (ESTRADA, 2005, p. 95; 97)

The leaders of the community had to be concerned about the weakest. Probably this concern was provoked by the expulsions of Judeo-Christians from Jewish synagogues, a fact that especially affected Matthew's community.⁵⁷ Hence the importance acquired by Jesus' words about the persecutions and hostilities against his disciples. Matthew always tries to illuminate the situation of his Church with words and sayings of Jesus, which he applies to the situation in which he lives.⁵⁸

The problem of the relations between Israel and Christianity, which is central to Matthew's Gospel, moves into the background in Luke, being replaced by the question of the mission and expansion of Christianity among the Gentiles in the Roman Empire.

"After the fall of Jerusalem, the strongest mark of the subapostolic phase is the tragic separation between Christians and Jews." (GASS, 2011, p. 13, own translation)

"In addition to Diaspora Jews providing the initial foundation for the growth of the Church during the first and early second centuries, Jews continued to represent a significant source of Christian converts until at least the fourth century." (STARK, 2006, 63, own translation)

From 70 on, the doctrine of the Jewish faith, previously still pluralistic, evolved into a uniform orthodoxy, guarded by Pharisees and Rabbis (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2008, p. 307). The orthodoxies, from side to side, were consolidating and, thus, the divergences and conflicts between Christians and Jews became more pronounced.⁵⁹

Also tragic (for its consequences throughout the history of Christianity) was the kerygmatic and apologetic way in which the evangelists transposed into the life of Jesus, and especially into the description of his arrest, trial, condemnation, and execution, the conflicts experienced by their communities with regard to the Jews.

"Their circumcision is the mark of infamy with which omniscient providence marked them in advance as the murderers of Jesus and the prophets." St. Justin -sec II

⁵⁷ "Many of the social developments in Matthew's community can best be understood as responses to the more immediate threat facing the community, namely, formative Judaism, which was developing and gaining influence in Matthew's environment." (OVERMAN, 1997, p. 80, own translation)

⁵⁸ "The animosity with which Matthew's community views the Jewish leadership confirms the effective competition and conflict, which existed between the two groups [...] [which] unintentionally helped define one and the other. These two movements are fraternal twins." (OVERMAN, 1997, p. 146; 151, own translation)

⁵⁹ "Christian interpretations of Matthew 27:25 have propagated a virulent anti-Judaism, claiming that the statement contained in this verse attests to Israel's rejection of God's 'anointed one' and, by consequence, God's permanent rejection of Israel." (GOMES, 2009, p. 182, own translation)

"It was the Jews who nailed Jesus to the cross." Origen - Theologian - 3rd century;

"Thus the Jews were punished as a punishment for their crime and their impiety." Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea- historian- 4th century;

"...circumcised dogs. " - St. Ephrem - 4th century;

"...snakes at the image of Judas" and solemnly promises them the hatred of Christians." - St. Jerome - 4th century;

"As Christians of faith are you not ashamed to keep in touch with those who shed the blood of Jesus?" - St. John Chrysostom- 4th century;

"The hour has already come for our Lord Jesus! They arrested Him - the Jews. They insulted Him-the Jews. They bound Him - the Jews. They crowned him with thorns, they defiled him with their spit, they flogged him, they covered him with contempt, they nailed him to the cross, they drove their spears into his flesh." St. Augustine -fifth century (Jules ISAAC in DREYER, 2012, p. 37-38, own translation)

Regrettably, one cannot but give reason to the comments of Haim Cohn (1911-2002), former Chief Justice of Israel, and the brilliant writer Amos Oz (1939-2018), quoted below:

"Why then be surprised that the Jews have gone down in "history," clearly, explicitly, and demonstrably without the slightest doubt, as a people of murderers who bear the "guilt" of Jesus' death? And this was caused neither by the trial, nor by the crucifixion, nor by what the Jews actually did or failed to do, but by the intentional description of the legal procedure and the religious stamp that was attached to that description." (COHN, 1990, p. 267, own translation)

"In fifty, or a hundred, or two hundred years there will be no memory of the conflict between Jews and Arab Muslims, while that between us (Jews) and Christians is a deep and dark affair and may yet last a hundred generations. As long as they teach every child, along with their mother's milk, that still roaming the world are God-killing creatures, or the descendants of God-killers, we will have no rest. " (OZ, 2014, p. 290, own translation)

8.3 - The synoptic gospels and their communities of origin⁶⁰

Publication of the Synoptic Gospels and several "Apostolic" Letters:

⁶⁰ This text is based primarily on Ildo Bon Gass's 2011 book *An Introduction to the Bible - Christian Communities from the Second Generation onward*.

If any Christian community in the early subapostolic era had, thanks to a patron, all the Christian writings, it would have:

- the collection of Jesus' sayings and miracles, known as the Source of Sayings, or Q, from the German *Quelle* (source), from about the year 39;
- Paul's 10 authentic letters (from the 50s to the 60s); 3 that have been lost and 7 that have come down to us; (QUESNEL, 2004, p. 40; HEYER, 2008, p. 8);
- perhaps short texts on the kerygma (first announcement), celebrations, hymns, "the story of Jesus", sentences and parables, anecdotal, personal recollections, "novellas" (more elaborate narrations). These primitive forms of preaching underlie the present writings and have not been preserved.

At that time it was written on parchment (thin sheep or donkey leather), originating from Pergamos, kept on a scroll. The text was presented in the form of parallel columns, which became readable as the book was unrolled (KONINGS, 2011, p. 168). What was written was easily worn away. Both the raw material and the production of book or letter were expensive.⁶¹ Christian writings were supplementary documents that presupposed oral preaching.

Some of Paul's letters were occasional writings on controversial points and concrete exhortations for Christian living. Hardly a Christian community would have been able to possess all these texts, which perhaps formed a bible (books) of less than 80 pages of a current book. Probably few communities possessed any documents or even needed them in apostolic times. They fed their faith basically by example, by way of life, by the narratives of those who knew Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, and by the Jewish Scriptures.

The subapostolic epoch begins for Christians - many of whom were Judeo-Christians - under the impact of the Judeo-Roman war. Seeing Palestine being destroyed - the land given by God to his chosen people - they wonder, "is it the sign of the times? The end of the world? The **parousia** expected by Christians? The destruction that would precede the glorious second coming of Jesus, so long awaited by the first generation? Is it God's answer to the traditional prayer of Christians 'Come, Lord!' (**Maranatha**)?" How did the Gentile - Greek and Roman - converts view and live with the ideological conflict generated by the Jewish-Roman war?

If M. Carrez's estimate is correct (CARREZ, 1987, p. 326), the number of Christians at the beginning of the subapostolic epoch was about 40 thousand. Considering the literacy rate of the time, there would be about 2 to 4 thousand literate Christians, which created a demand for reading about Jesus of Nazareth, the origin of this Jewish branch, Christianity, which was gaining its full autonomy. The oral Gospel was no longer enough. It was necessary to compile the oral narratives, organize them, write them up, and publish them.

⁶¹ "The price of a standard roll of papyrus was estimated to be the equivalent of two weeks' wages of an ordinary laborer." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 62, own translation).

8.3.1 Inheritance of Peter's communities

The communities around Peter were the first to articulate themselves to carry out the collective, anonymous work that generated a "new literary genre in the Bible: the Gospel, that is, a narrative of the practice and message of Jesus, including his passion, death and resurrection, organized as a biography. The final redaction of the first Gospel has, since the second century, been attributed to Mark, or John Mark, son of Mary, in whose home a house church met in Jerusalem, which welcomed Peter when he escaped from prison.⁶² A cousin of Barnabas, who accompanied him to Antioch of Syria and participated with Paul in the first missionary journey, John, called Mark, would have been the reason for the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, when each one organized his own missionary team.

Certainly, this Gospel was written in the late 60s. According to Konings, "around 60-65, and attempts to date Mark earlier are not convincing." For Gass, "the final redaction must have been done immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70" (GASS, 2012, p. 14, own translation). Chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel is as if Jesus is describing what was happening to the Christian communities of Palestinian origin to whom the Gospel was intended: the Jewish-Roman war, the destruction of the temple, and the persecution of Christians by the synagogues. He intends to show:

- who Jesus of Nazareth is for the communities;
- what it is to be a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth at the time the Gospel was being written and published.

As the disagreements and conflicts between Christians and Jews increased (80s and 90s), access to the synagogues, and consequently to the Jewish Scriptures, became difficult, if not impossible. It is in this period, the end of the subapostolic era, that most of the Christian writings appear. There are two sets of writings that are part of the heritage of the founded churches:

- by Paul and his team. They are: the Second Letter to the Thessalonians; the Gospel of St. Luke; the book of Acts of the Apostles; the Letter to the Colossians; the Letter to the Ephesians; the First Letter of Peter;
- by the Apostles, in and around Jerusalem, presided over by James, until his death in 62, and then by his brother Jude. The writings of this community are: the Gospel of Matthew; the Letter of James; the Letter of Jude.

8.3.2 Inheritance of the churches founded by Paul and his team

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians, considered by many exegetes to be pseudo-epigraphic, that is, written in Paul's name by someone, anonymous, from the community to which it is addressed,

⁶² The Gospel of Mark, until 1850, had been wrongly considered an abridged version of the Gospel of Matthew. (VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 29).

takes up the theme of the **parousia**, praises "the steadfastness and faith that you show in the midst of all the persecutions and tribulations you endure", exhorts, "do not let yourselves be disturbed so easily, nor be frightened as if the Day of the Lord is coming soon," and commands, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, stay away from any brother who lives idly and does not follow the tradition he has received from us." (own translation)

The Letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians are not really epistles, but theological-pastoral treatises; in the first case, Christological, and in the second, ecclesiological. They are circulars addressed to the Churches of Asia Minor: Pontus-Bithynia, Cappadocia and Galatia-Asia, whose capital was Ephesus. They reveal a high degree of enculturation in the Greek mentality, treating Christ as a mystery of reconciliation of all peoples with God and with each other, through the cross and resurrection.

The Letter to the Ephesians is a re-reading of the Letter to the Colossians and must have been written soon after this one, by another of Paul's disciples. They are very different in style. "The Letter to the Ephesians deepens Colossians and expands it, making a theological reflection on the mystery that is the Church, seeing the communities as a body, whose head is Christ. Another point in common in both letters is the list of obligations of family members: parents, wives, children, and of slaves and their masters. One notices how the churches, in a hostile environment, are gradually taking back the way of life of the patriarchal families, both from the culture of the Greeks and Romans and of the Jews. The same happens with the way of exercising leadership in the churches, which go through a process of hierarchization and control. The founder of the Colossian community (of non-Jewish majority), which Paul never visited, was his disciple Epaphras. The author of the circular letter was another disciple of Paul, perhaps Timothy. It was probably written in Ephesus, around the year 95, before the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The First Letter of Peter is named after Peter, but it was written in 95-96, in the last years of Domitian's rule, more than 30 years after the apostle's death. The letter is written in cult Greek and is addressed to converts of various non-Jewish religions.⁶³ It is intended to encourage the recipients, persecuted by the Romans, to endure suffering and unjust persecutions. They were unemployed and homeless, emigrants from northern and western Asia Minor (now Turkey) who, as outsiders, had no citizenship rights: they could not vote, perform marriages, own property, or receive inheritances. The authors of the Letter, from the Petrine circle in Rome, write from "Babylon," a pejorative used by Christians to designate the cruel and debauched capital of the empire.

"Christianism as a sect was not only a religious phenomenon, but also a social one. For its members, it represented a place where the many displaced, homeless, and stateless people felt at home. It was an alternative, self-sufficient society where people could cultivate in

⁶³ "Written no earlier than two or three decades after Pauline activity in the area, the letter - a circular - was intended for the whole of the predominantly rural Jewish and mainly non-Jewish Christian communities that were found throughout Roman Asia Minor north and west of the Tauro." (ELLIOTT, 198 p. 59-65, own translation).

common values and ideals divergent from those of the larger society. As a sect, Christianity appealed to people who were already in tension with the world. From the point of view of the general population, in fact, it was the Christians who were outside, they were the ones who put themselves in the condition of social and religious outsiders. And from this point of view, they were a potential danger to public order and social welfare. Christianity, according to the epistle, was offering its converts a singular and unique kind of honor and status in the midst of a society obsessed with philothymia, the love of prestige. Deprived of the three or four decisive standards of prestige (nobility of origin, wealth, proximity to Rome and Roman power, culture) the Christian sect promised elevation and equal standing with all members of the community. For converts from Judaism, there was the full experience of the fulfillment of the Messianic hope, and for pagans, the elite position in the eyes of God, to which they could not absolutely ascend before. " (ELLIOT, 1985, p. 78-79;112, own translation)

8.3.3 Inheritance of the communities of James/Jerusalem

The Letter of James, - written in very correct, even elegant Greek - by an anonymous Judeo-Christian, around the year 95, somewhere in Palestine, or more probably in Syria, wants to pay homage to James, the Lord's designated brother, head of the Jerusalem Church, who was killed by the high priest Anan in 62.

"Eighty Pharisees protested the condemnation of James the Tzaddik (the righteous) "for breaking the law" and eventually died with him. The direction of the Ierosolimite Church now fell to Simeon, Jesus' cousin who led the community to Pella in Transjordan." (ARMSTRONG, 2000, p. 183, own translation)

"During the three or four decades following Christ's death, the vast majority of Christians were in fact Judeo-Christians." (BERHEIM, 2003, p. 16, own translation)

It is not exactly a letter, but a collection of wisdom sentences, similar to the wisdom books, the "Q" Source, and the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. For Konings, "it is perhaps the most important document to show us how Judeo-Christians interpreted the Jesus event" (KONINGS, 2011, p. 148, own translation). The recipients are already scattered throughout Palestine and Syria in communities with great social inequalities, in which rich merchants and landowners participate. "Its demands are the practice of the word, the overcoming of an individualistic spirituality, equality, respect for the poor, solidarity, active faith and the exclusion of exploitation, in a strong admonition to the rich" (GASS, 2011, p. 76, own translation). The most famous phrase in the Letter of James is, "Faith without works is dead."

"The Epistle of James is probably the New Testament writing in which the poor are most exalted and the rich most severely condemned. " (BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 242, own translation)

"One of the most impactful texts of the New Testament for its insistence on the social dimension of Jesus' message." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 41, own translation)

"The existential and real choice of poverty is, for James, an existential attitude that has the value of a confession of faith and is expressed in daily practice. James combines, in his own way, three ideas of poverty. The first is from the Old Testament and Jewish spiritual tradition of the "poor of God" who live from the hand of the Creator. The second is from the doctrine of the Cynic and Stoic philosophers, according to which he who has abandoned everything and has nothing left to lose is free of everything. The third is from the tradition of Jesus' teaching that invites the crowds and the disciples to follow him, abandoning their possessions to enter into the convivial freedom of the Kingdom. Economic injustice is, in fact, for James, a consequence of the existential misfortune to which wealth condemns (James 5:1-6)...while it gives them the illusion of security and comfort, it consumes and dulls them from within. " (MARGHERAT, 2015, p. 529, own translation)

The followers of James in the radical communion of goods were called "Ebionites" by Irenaeus. The meaning of the term is not clear, it probably refers to the radicality of the option for the poor. (HOORNAERT 1997 (100-130, p. 108)

The Letter of Jude, like the previous one, was written by a Judeo-Christian at the same time, somewhere in Syria, or Asia Minor. It is attributed to Jude, successor of James. Both appear in the list of relatives of Jesus, whose clan ran the Jerusalem communities until the year 135, when the Romans just razed the city and broke the resistance of the Jews. This is not exactly a letter, but a note of 25 verses meant to warn the communities against the false teachers who are appearing. "We are unable to imagine their doctrines; the letter instead of clearly expounding and arguing them, assumes known ones, limiting itself to violently cursing the false teachers and exhorting the faithful." (KONINGS; KRULL, 1995, p. 87, own translation)

8.4 - To understand the gospels

Publication of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles

This is the eighth and last of the facts listed in the previous chapter as important for their influence on the second generation of Christians. Perhaps it was the most important for all the generations of Christians that followed: the publication of the three books about the "Good News of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God" - as the first of them, the Gospel of Mark, begins - as well as the Acts of the Apostles.

"The gospels tell us how each evangelist conceived of Jesus and presented him to a Christian community in the last quarter of the first century, a presentation that indirectly gives us a) a glimpse into the life of that community at the time the gospel was written; b) something about the pre-evangelical history of the evangelist's Christological views; c) something about the history of the community before, at the beginning of the century; d) limited means for reconstructing the ministry and message of the historical Jesus." (BROWN, 1983, p. 15, own translation).

The three Gospels - Mark, Matthew and Luke - published during the period of the second generation of Christians are very similar to each other, which is why they are called Synoptics. Some similarities and discrepancies will be pointed out, by way of introduction to the reading of these Gospels, which is recommended in this chronological order and not as it is presented in the Bible. The intention is to highlight four aspects about this very special literary genre that are the four Gospels:

- All are focused on one and the same character: Jesus. Which Jesus?
- Each Gospel is the product of a specific collective: a set of communities and oral traditions - which ones? With what characteristics?
- Each Gospel has a "**feedback**" function: it speaks to the communities that generated it and portrays them by clarifying, teaching, comforting, and encouraging.
- the first three Gospels are very similar - why? How similar are they?

8.4.1 - One and the same character

The first part of the project and the book **The Best Among Us (NUNES, 2016, p. 21-23)** had as its character exclusively Jesus of Nazareth, the object of scientific study. The character of the Gospel narratives is not only, nor is it primarily Jesus of Nazareth. The person is the same: the man Jesus; however, the focus, the look, and the understanding give him a new meaning. This gaze plays the role and effect of the "theoretical framework" that allows one to see and understand the facts in a certain way.

Both the evangelists, as the final editors of the Gospels, and the communities that brought them the facts, the values, the attitudes, through oral transmissions over 40 years for the first Gospel, started from the certainty, conviction, and faith that Jesus is risen. He is alive among us. He is the Messiah! He is the Lord! He is the Son of God! He who called himself the "son of man," who lived among our fathers and was witnessed by them - He is the Son of God.

The resurrection of Jesus made all those who "saw", "felt" and "witnessed" the resurrection re-read, reinterpret and re-signify everything they had seen and heard about Jesus of Nazareth. Hence the character of the Gospels is "Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God and his Good News". For a better understanding of the character Jesus, we understand that, methodologically, it is important to separate Jesus of Nazareth - a historical character constructed through hard intellectual work - and Jesus Christ, or Jesus of faith, the object of all the Gospels. The prologue of John's Gospel makes the distinction clear: Jesus, the man from Nazareth, and the mystery of this "Word become flesh" Jesus.

From this distinction, knowing that the Gospels are not biographies, nor history books in the sense that the expression is used today, one can read each of them with more objectivity and profit.

The arrangement of episodes, dramatic effects, development of a plot characterize the work of the evangelists, whose writing constitutes a Christology in the form of narration. Like the "Lives of the Philosophers," the gospel links the transmission of a message to a historically situated life plot. Depending on their upbringing, first century listeners/readers alternatively approached it from this or that type of writing: ideal biography of God's envoy, writing of aretological intention, romance, Greco-Roman biography. The Gospel of Mark can be qualified as a subgenre of Greco-Roman biography (David E. Aune), but taking into account the fact that it constitutes a popular literature that contrasts with the cultural elevation of the biography standard. (MARGHERAT, 2015, p. 39; 40; 41)

8.4.2 - Each Gospel reflects a set of communities and their oral traditions

The historical situation of each community intensely influenced the form and content of each Gospel.

"Each of the evangelists lived in a different context, and historical circumstances exert an influence on their depictions of Jesus' life and death. To these same circumstances belonged the hostility of the main Jewish circles toward the 'Apostolic Church,' as well as the Roman suspicion that Christianity was a subversive Jewish movement of apocalyptic tendencies." (WINTER, 1998, p. 228, own translation)

"From the remotest beginning, the Jesus movement was marked by differences, divisions, and conflicts, as indicated by the variegated if not contradictory articulations of the extant Gospels. " (FIORENZA, 2015, p. 160, own translation)

The **Gospel according to Mark**: as seen in the previous chapters, it belongs to the heritage of the Apostle Peter, to the communities that gave rise to the Gospel of Mark. The first Gospel was probably written in the context of the war in Palestine, the persecution by Nero and the death of Peter, between 65 and 70. It was published, according to some exegetes, just after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70.

"The communities organized their mission along the lines of Jesus' movement. In missionary teams, they went out into the villages healing the sick and casting out demons, that is, seeking to liberate from all the forces that were against the kingdom of God. Like Jesus, they were itinerant missionaries who lived with simplicity and detachment. It remained a mostly rural experience, where itinerant missionaries and communities lived together in village homes. " (GASS, 2012, p. 51, own translation)

Faithful to the practice of Jesus, the communities of Galilee gathered in homes, making everyday life the space of the sacred. (From the beginning of the fourth century, when the Roman emperors made the Christian religion official, the sacred space was increasingly transferred to temples). Mark highlights Jesus' ministry in Galilee, to which he devotes half of his Gospel. It organically presents the previous traditions and has as its center the mystery of Jesus' "way" and the cross revealing the "messianic secret."

As Marconcini says, *"the material is composed of approximately 95 narratives, 11,240 words and 1,345 vocabularies. Written in popular Greek, with semitisms, some Latinisms, with a lively style, proper of the spoken language. As if speaking to you, in a simple and spontaneous way, without major grammatical or syntactical care"*. (MARCONCINI, 2012, p. 90, own translation)

To Hoonert,

"In several respects, Mark is the first that provides us with information about 1) the language spoken by Jesus, 2) his relatives and neighbors in his native village, 3) the village where he spent his childhood, 4) the culture of the Galilean people, 5) Jesus' temperament, and 6) his manner of dealing with the village people of Galilee. We are never closer to the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth than when we read the Gospel of Mark." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 61, own translation)

For Comblin:

"Mark wrote his Gospel to protest against tendencies of dehumanization, that is, of making Jesus an object of worship, to the detriment of following Jesus." (BARROS, 2014, p. 181, own translation)

The **Gospel according to Matthew**: was probably written by Jewish-Christian scribes in the late 80s in Antioch, Syria. The communities that gave rise to it lived previously in Palestine, perhaps in Galilee, in a region where churches formed by people of Jewish origin who lived initially in Judea predominated. They see themselves as heirs of the apostles, especially Peter and the relatives of Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel, as Konings portrays, is situated in the vicinity of the new Judaism (the Pharisaic-inspired "formative Judaism") that emerged after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Matthew uses the term "Pharisee" the most in the Bible; in comparing it with Mark, we see that Matthew systematically specifies Jesus' opponents as being "the Pharisees," even where Mark writes "the scribes." This indicates that Matthew is addressing a community that takes distance from the new formative Judaism, dominated by the Pharisaic rabbis.⁶⁴ But this does not mean that he despises Israel's heritage! On the contrary, he seems to teach his Jewish-Christian community that it - and not the new synagogue - is "the true Israel." Matthew's Jesus is like a new Moses, coming from Egypt, who delivers five

⁶⁴ The feuds and disagreements, which the second evangelist (Matthew) learned about in his own environment, were described as if they had happened in Jesus' time (WINTER, 1998, p. 229).

speeches in assembly, like the five books of Moses. The first speech is solemnly set on the mountain, recalling the proclamation of the Law on Mount Sinai. As the new Moses, Jesus "perfects" the Law, in express opposition to what the Pharisees and scribes do, Jesus is "the only Teacher." The emphasis of Matthew's Gospel is on the proper formation of the disciples. It is the Gospel of the "Christian synagogue", an expression used for the gathering of Christians in the Letter of James.

"The Gospel of Matthew constitutes "a literature of community formation" (a "fellowship"), most evident in chaps. 5 - 7. Disciple is the designation for a Christian in his community, a model for all. The form of the Our Father (Mt.6:5-15) in Matthew is liturgical and probably used in the community in their services and meetings. " (OVERMAN, 1997, p. 99; 109; 186, own translation)

The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles: they form one work, written by Paul's disciples in the late 80s in Antioch, Ephesus or Greece. According to Konings, "Luke writes for the Churches of the Greek world which he himself, alongside his master Paul, helped evangelize. He resorts to indications of world chronology, dialogues, symposium scenes, travel scenes, etc., as is also done in Hellenistic literary works." ⁶⁵

In the preface to his Gospel, Luke says he aims to ascertain the faith in which his reader, Theophilus, was instructed. This goal corresponds to the Hellenistic culture that Luke has assimilated and the methodical investigation (in terms of that time) that he says he has carried out. He does not limit himself to evoking the activity of Jesus alone. The Word which generated Theophilus' faith also passed through the Church. Therefore, the history of Jesus (the Gospel) and the history of the community (the Acts of the Apostles) are two parts of the same great history of the Word.

Luke is concerned to teach "long-term" living. If Mark had shown that the **parousia** was not for now, Luke accentuates this even more. Instead of the bipolar opposition between "this world" and the kingdom announced by Christ (as "the world to come," time of the End), he periodizes time differently, as a "salvation history" (KONINGS, 2005, p. XII-XIII):

- the time of promise (the Old Testament);
- the time of the fulfillment of the promise (Jesus' performance);
- the time of the life of Christians in the world, gathered in the Church and animated by the Holy Spirit. "Now, living in the world means, concretely, living in the Roman Empire (which Luke treats with diplomatic respect), but also living in the community of brothers, described in its ideal project and in its real difficulties." (KONINGS, 2005, p. XIII-XIV, own translation)

⁶⁵ The Lucan work shows well how much Luke is immersed in the literary culture of his time; he is a great writer and monetizes the means at his disposal (MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 186).

For Romano Penna *"the Lucan community is characterized by a particular sensitivity to the dignity and ministry of women in the Church.* (PENNA, 2020, p. 201)

8.4.3 - Each Gospel has a feedback function

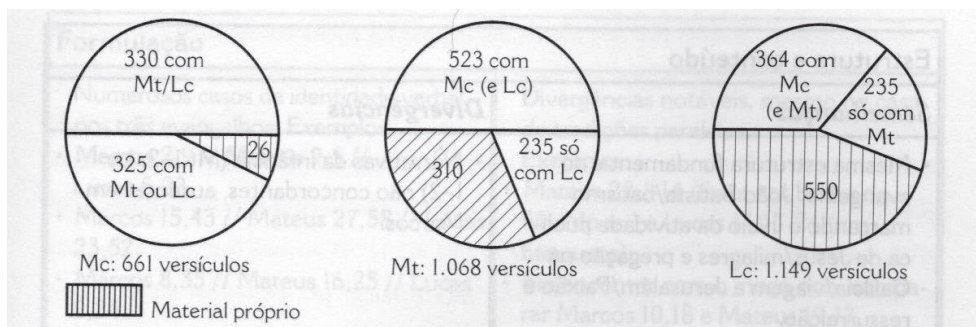
For Crossan, each Gospel updates for his community the words, attitudes and teachings of Jesus. What matters for them is to know what Jesus has to say to them at that moment, in those circumstances. It is also to see themselves in the life of Jesus. Hence the importance of understanding the origin and the problems of the communities to which the Gospels are addressed, bringing Jesus' words up to date. He probably never said "woe to you, Pharisees, hypocrites", "whitewashed sepulchers", but it is what the communities of Matthew would like to hear from Jesus at that moment when the disputes with the Pharisees were heated.

8.4.4 - The first three Gospels are very similar

When the authors wrote the Gospel, according to Mark between 65 and 70, they had in their hands collections of parables, healings, and accounts of the passion, death, and resurrection, as well as the oral tradition of the communities to which they belonged. Fifteen years later, when the Gospels honoring Matthew and Luke were written, the communities and their authors had in their hands not only Mark's Gospel, but also a second text, from which they copied a lot.⁶⁶ This text is called in German **Quelle** (source), or "Q". A text that would have existed and has not reached us. It helps to understand the similarities between the first three gospels. "Besides copying much of Mark and the source 'Q', the Gospels of Luke and Matthew still contain material that is unique to them, that is, narratives that are only found in Matthew or Luke, such as Jesus' childhood." In the exclusive material (EM) of each gospel, besides the modifications introduced in what they copied from Mark and the "Q" source, we can perceive the characteristics proper to the communities behind the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Daniel Marguerat illustrates, with the following graph, the qualified distribution, by source, of verses in the composition of each of the apocryphal gospels:

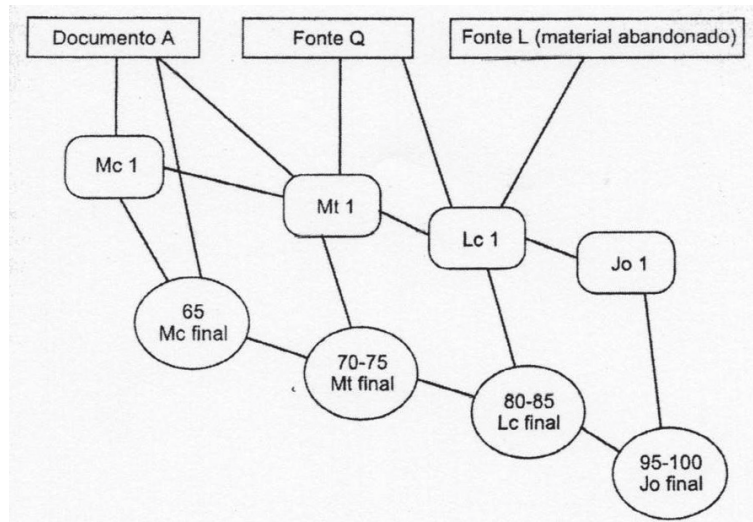
⁶⁶ "We can find 95% Mark material in Matthew, 52% being verbatim." (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 189, own translation)



"We notice that Mark and Luke present inverse features: Mark contains only a small amount of his own material (26 verses out of a total of 661), while Luke's specific part reaches almost half of the text (550 verses out of 1,149); the proportional distribution of Matthew places him between these two gospels. On the other hand, we identify 80% of Mark's material in Matthew and 55% in Luke. The text common to Matthew, Mark and Luke (triple tradition) over 330 verses, while the double tradition text (Matthew and Luke) comprises about 235. The narrative coincidences between the synoptics are therefore both large and multiple." (MARGHERAT, 2015, p. 17, own translation)

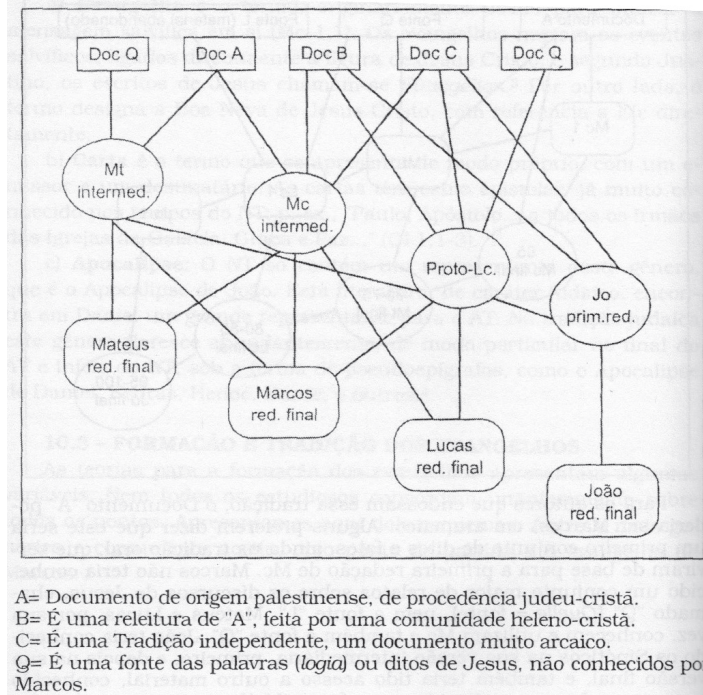
*"P. Boismard presents the redaction of the Gospels from earlier documents. The intermediate redaction of **Mark** is from 60-65 - it is intended for Christians coming from paganism - the final redaction between 70 and 71. The intermediate redaction of **Matthew** is from before 70 - it emanates from Judeo-Christian environments - and the final redaction is from about the year 85. **Protolucas** knows and uses, directly or indirectly, all the early documents. His final redaction is from about the year 85. The redaction of the Gospel of John, according to Boismard and Lamouille, went through at least four stages. The first, probably in Aramaic, was written around the year 50 and came out of Samaritan environments converted to Christianity. The second, around 60 to 65, has another redactor. Around the year 95, the same author, probably established in Ephesus and confronted with the hostility of the Judeo-Christians, thoroughly reworked his first work. In the early years of the second century, a last redactor merged the three earlier redactions known to him and is responsible for the present order of the fourth Gospel." (MORIN, 1988, p. 41-44, own translation)*

Warning that "not all scholars agree unanimously on the process of formation and tradition of the gospels," Izidoro Mazarolo presents the following representative schemes of sources, interconnections, and dates of the four gospels:



For the authors who endorse this tradition, Document "A" could be Mark, in Aramaic. Some prefer to say that this would be a first set of sayings and facts, still in the oral tradition, which were the basis for the first writing of Mark. Mark would not have known a larger set of accounts of Jesus' speeches, called "Q" (Quelle = source), nor the source "L". Matthew and Luke, on the other hand, know and use Mk and also the "Q" source. John would have known the Synoptics in its intermediate version, first, and then in its final version, and would also have had access to other material, known only to Luke, known as source "L" (**Lagen** = abandoned things; or by another name, **Leien** = legal source). A certain set of Words and Signs left aside by the Synoptic communities are contemplated by John's community. This utilization by John, which others have not done, calls this material "things left behind."

The following chart is more recent and more complex, but of great importance, as it contemplates the latest research, especially the studies of the Qumran discoveries. The starting point of this scheme is that the "A" document is the basis for Matthew and Mark (MAZZAROLLO, 2005, p. 105; 106):



"Two of the most obvious discrepancies between the Synoptic Gospels and John's are the length of Jesus' ministry - one year in the Synoptics with a single Passover and two or three years in the Fourth Gospel - and the date of the crucifixion, which, according to the Synoptics, followed the night of the Passover supper, but, according to John, preceded it. " (VERMES, 1996, p. 26, own translation)

8.4.5 - The survival of eyewitnesses until the Gospels were written.⁶⁷

"The New Testament emphasizes in several places the importance of eyewitnesses as guarantors of Christian traditions (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10: 39); 1 Peter 5:1; 2 Peter 1:16).

The presence of eyewitnesses at the time the Gospels were written acted as a stabilizer of the traditions included in them.

There is very little concrete evidence that allows a precise dating of the writing of any of the Gospels. The evidence that does exist leads most scholars to postulate a range of between thirty and sixty years between the time of Jesus' death and that recorded by the evangelists.

As can be seen in Table 1, conservative estimates reveal that of the approximately 60,000 eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry, death, or resurrection who were 15 years of age or older, at least 20,000 were likely to have lived thirty years later, and more than a thousand even sixty years later. Thus, it may be reasonable to conclude that living eyewitnesses may have contributed to the traditions that formed the basis of the Gospels, and that their continued presence in the communities from which the

⁶⁷ Text taken from the chapter "Collective Memory and the Reliability of Evangelical Traditions" by Robert Mclewer in BOCK, 2020, p.155-158, own translation.

Gospels emerged would have served to ensure that what was said about Jesus corresponded to actual memories about him - memories that corresponded to what he had actually done and said."

TABELA 1: Testemunhas oculares de Jesus sobreviventes em períodos posteriores
De acordo com o Modelo ocidental Coale-Demeny, nível 3, para mulheres

| | Cafarnaum | grandes multidões | Jerusalém | subtotais |
|----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Ano 0 | 1.005 | 10.000 | 51.750 | 62.755 |
| Ano +5 | 847 | 8.636 | 44.692 | 54.175 |
| Ano +10 | 701 | 7.356 | 38.069 | 46.126 |
| Ano + 15 | 573 | 6.174 | 31.952 | 38.700 |
| Ano + 20 | 466 | 5.094 | 26.360 | 31.919 |
| Ano + 25 | 374 | 4.117 | 21.307 | 25.799 |
| Ano + 30 | 294 | 3.244 | 16.787 | 20.326 |
| Ano + 35 | 224 | 2.469 | 12.775 | 15.467 |
| Ano + 40 | 162 | 1.786 | 9.243 | 11.191 |
| Ano + 45 | 110 | 1.208 | 6.250 | 7.568 |
| Ano + 50 | 67 | 740 | 3.830 | 4.637 |
| Ano + 55 | 36 | 399 | 2.067 | 2.502 |
| Ano + 60 | 16 | 177 | 918 | 1.111 |

9. POST-APOSTOLIC PERIOD (98-130)

9.1 - Context and heritage of the Pauline communities ⁶⁸

The period from the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian, in 96, to the year 130, when the last book of the New Testament - the Second Letter of Peter - was written, is conventionally called the post-apostolic period. One caveat: some exegetes, more recently, believe that the Gospel of Luke could have been published by disciples of the third generation, around the years 115 to 120. The book of Acts would have been published about ten years later.

⁶⁸ This text is based primarily on the books by Ildo Bohn Gass, *"An Introduction to the Bible - Christian Communities from the Second Generation onward,"* 2011; by A. G. Hamman, *"The Everyday Life of the Early Christians" (95-197),* 1997, and by Rodney Stark, *"The Growth of Christianity: a Sociologist Reconsiders History,"* 2006.

9.1.2 - The political context and the Christian communities

The emperor Domitian (81-96), in order to keep the empire united, imposed the imperial religion, made official by Vespasian (69-79 AD), on all dominated peoples, even demanding the worship of the emperor. He violently persecuted Christians who refused to worship him. With his death, the Senate, relieved of the continuous threats, resumed its power and elected Nereus, aged 70, son of a senatorial family, to restore peace. Nereus ruled for only two years (96-98), but prepared to succeed Trajan, a respected military chieftain. Emperor Trajan ruled from 98 to 117, respected the Senate and assisted the poorest of Rome with a food program, had major public works built, increasing the supply of labor. He also renewed the outlawing of Christianity in 112, changing his tactics toward Christians: the legal statute did not persecute Christians, but the Roman authorities were obliged to accept the accusations against Christians and judge them. If they refused to worship the emperor and the deities of the empire, they were considered traitors and sentenced to exile, forced labor in mines, on boats as rowers, death by beheading, cremation, or fighting beasts in public spectacles. Trajan maintained the traditional **Roman pax** that guaranteed public order at the expense of exploitation of the colonies and consequent enrichment and luxury for the elites. He extended, in 114-116, the borders toward Mesopotamia (Iraq), giving the empire its maximum geographical extension.

"In the time of Trajan, the center of the spread of Christianity in Asia was not Jerusalem, but Antioch [...]. A bustling, lively city, day and night [...]. Magnificent, one of the most beautiful in the empire, with its paved streets, its temples, its porticos. The Christian community, increased with the fugitives from Jerusalem, was composed mainly of faithful of pagan origin, among whom was the bishop Ignatius (35-110), one of the noblest figures of his time. (HAMMAN, 1997, (97-197), p. 14, own translation)

During the period of Roman rule, Antioch attracted an influx of Gauls, Germans, and other "barbarians," some brought as slaves, others as legionaries. According to Smith's estimates, *"the citizens were divided into eighteen tribes, locally distributed, that is, eighteen identifiable ethnic neighborhoods within the city [...] fraught with evil, with danger, fear, despair, and hatred. A city where the average family led a miserable life in dirty and cramped rooms,⁶⁹ where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one of their parents before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred and fear, rooted in chronic ethnic antagonism and exacerbated by an uninterrupted flow of foreigners. A city so devoid of stable social networks that any minor incident could ignite the violence of the masses. A city where crime proliferated and whose streets were dangerous at night.⁷⁰ And, perhaps above all, a city constantly decimated by cataclysmic*

⁶⁹ With a population of 150,000 confined in an area about two miles long and one mile wide, Antioch's population density was 117 inhabitants per acre. To compare: Chicago's density is 21, San Francisco's 23, and Manhattan Island, with all its skyscrapers, is 100 inhabitants per acre. (STARK, 2006, p. 167)

⁷⁰ This description of living conditions in Antioch does not differ much from those in other major cities of the Roman empire.

catastrophes: where a resident could expect to literally become homeless from time to time, if he or she was among the survivors. People who lived in such circumstances often had to go into despair. Surely it would not be strange if they came to the conclusion that the end times were imminent, also very often they must have longed for deliverance, for hope, even for salvation. " (STARK, 2006, p. 176;179, own translation)

It was under Trajan that Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, was martyred (107). Also Ignatius, bishop of the churches of Antioch, was arrested by the year 110 for his Christian leadership. He was taken to Rome, where he was tried and martyred in the Coliseum (GASS, 2011, p. 89).

On the eve of his execution, referring to the death that awaited him, he said in his Letter to the Romans: "Let me be food for the beasts, through which it will be possible for me to find God. I am God's wheat, and I am being ground up by the teeth of beasts to find myself the pure bread of Christ" (translation to portuguese by Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, own translation to english).

"It is in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch that the expression 'Catholic Church' appears for the first time to refer to the set of Christian communities scattered throughout the known world." Ignatius' emphasis on hierarchy in the Church is impressive: "Follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ the Father. Follow the priest as you did the Apostles. Respect the deacons as you respect the precept of God. Let no one dare to do anything concerning the Church without the bishop". The sentence, said less than 80 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, surprises and contrasts with the equality practiced by the communities of John.

"At the turn of the first century, the Church takes its second breath. It penetrates deep into the lands of Syria and Asia Minor. Pliny the Younger finds many Christians even on the shores of the Black Sea, 621 miles from Jerusalem and 1,500 miles from Rome." A letter by Pliny, of indisputable authenticity, describes the Christian progression, in 112: the Christians form "considerable multitude" [...], "villages and fields are overrun." Pliny - "legate to the Province of Pontus and Bithynia, with consular power" - concerned with style and legal rigor, uses no hyperbole when he compares to a "contagion" the new religion that has already infested the Province of Pontus." (HAMMAN, 1997, (97-197), p. 13, own translation)

In this period the last documents that will make up the New Testament appear. They are documents attributed to:

- Paul's communities: Letters to the Hebrews; Pastoral Letters (two to Timothy and one to Titus); and the Second Letter of Peter;
- communities of the Beloved Disciple: the three Letters attributed to John, the Gospel of John, and the Apocalypse.

9.1.3 - Inheritance of the Pauline communities

The so-called Letter of Paul to the Hebrews is curious: it is not by Paul, it is not a letter, and it was not addressed to the Hebrews. It was written around the year 100, probably in Rome or Ephesus,

by disciples or admirers of Paul who dominated Jewish and Greek culture. It is a theological-pastoral reflection aimed at encouraging, comforting and animating the communities that live in persecution and fear. It is intended to be a response to the temptation to return to the old religions, including Judaism, as a shelter from persecution.

As we can see, it is an updated re-reading of the Good News for a specific public, living a special situation. It shows, once again, that the Good News, in order to be good and new, has to be reread for each new social situation. The letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the only high priest, king of justice and peace, which is strange, because it is the only New Testament document that attributes to Jesus the title of high priest and because Jesus of Nazareth was a layman and not a priest or Levite.

Historian and biblical scholar Eduardo Hoornaert maintains that the Letter to the Hebrews "was written around the year 65 and is the only New Testament text written in 'high' Greek, the language used by priests and other Jewish elite groups" (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 19;44;79, own translation). Its author, along with Paul and Mark, is one of the first three writers who each sketch a complementary image of Jesus. For Paul, in the 50s, Jesus is the Anointed One of God. For the author of Hebrews - probably a presbyter from the ranks of the dissident synagogues - Jesus is Priest like Melchizedek (the translation "after the order of" would be incorrect).

Mark, writing probably in Rome, 40 years after Jesus' death, creates a new literary genre, the Gospel, "a theological treatise that takes the form of a historical biography" (Elaine Pagels in HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 126, own translation): In it, Jesus is presented as "a divine hero, a popular prophet, like Elijah".

The pastoral letters are two documents addressed to Timothy and Titus, who were representatives of the communities to which they were addressed. They were written around 115, by leaders of Paul's communities of the third generation, who, according to the custom of the time, attribute to Paul the authorship of the letters and pay homage to two of his closest collaborators. They are considered, today, pseudo-Pauline. Since the 18th century they have been called Pastoral Letters. They are not exactly letters, but circulars of exhortation to widows, slaves, deacons, episcopalians and presbyters of various churches. The exhortations to servants to be submissive to their masters and the invitation to women to be submissive to their husbands show the concern of the leadership for not confronting slavery and patriarchal customs. In a hostile environment, in which Christians could be accused, tried, condemned, and killed, the authors recommend caution so that they are not seen as subversives of the established order. What is at stake is the survival of the house churches.

Christianism always tried to demonstrate two things: that it did not conspire against imperial power and the legality of the institutions, and that it had noble and ancient origins. To do so, it had to prove that it replaced Judaism, inheriting its spiritual legacy and its legal status (of religio licita). (NASCIMENTO; JEHA, 2017, p. 146)

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Pastoral Letters is in their historical testimony about the organization of the Church at the beginning of the second century. The structure of administrative positions is already more defined, there are elders, episcopalians, and deacons. In many communities the administrative positions were elective and were paid salaries. Only from the fourth century they became sacralized hierarchy. (GASS, 2012, p. 148;153)

The Second Letter of Peter was written in cultic Greek around the year 130, probably in Ephesus, by members of the communities of Pauline heritage. The author introduces himself as the apostle Peter, when the latter had been dead for almost 70 years. The letter has the form of a testament of an old apostle, before his death - a literary genre in vogue at the time - giving instructions to his disciples. He exhorts his readers:

"Make an effort to put more virtue into faith, more knowledge into virtue, more self-control into knowledge, more perseverance into self-control, more piety into perseverance, more brotherhood into piety, and more love into brotherhood. " (2 Pet. 1, 5-7, own translation)



Asia Minor in Paul's time
Source: Tubinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, BV7, 1983.

9.2 - Context and heritage of the communities of the beloved disciple

At the end of the first century, or perhaps in the first years of the second century, the "community of the beloved disciple" gives the last redaction of its proclamation, the so-called Gospel of John. Its introduction is the fruit of the absorption of Jewish reflections on wisdom

and of elaborations of Greek philosophy on the Word. The prologue of the proclamation is masterly: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" [...] and further on: "and the Word became flesh and came to dwell among us". Seventy to eighty years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, his beloved disciples see him as the Word of God, incarnate, that enlightens all men, who, enlightened, become children of God.

"According to Chris de Wet, 'for the Greeks the logos (word) also functions as the rational principle by which the universe is governed.' John probably gives logos the meaning that the Greeks ascribed to it: the primitive force of creation through which all things came to be. '" (ASLAN, 2018, p. 204; 123, own translation)

The communities of the beloved disciple were born plural, composed of traditional Jews, rooted in Torah and synagogue teachings; marginal Jews - Galileans, Samaritans, Baptists, Essenes, and Hellenists; and evolved into an even more eclectic composition of Greek and Roman Gentiles. In the beginning, in Galilee, women played a prominent role, especially Mary Magdalene. Eventually, some members of high intellectual level are incorporated into the community. 'A text as speculative as the prologue of the Gospel attests to the proximity to intellectual circles such as those that flourished in Alexandrian Judaism' (BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 35, own translation). The community was forced by the Jewish War into geographical and cultural displacement. It moves first within Palestine and then from Palestine to Ephesus: from a Jewish, rural cultural world to a Hellenistic, urban world.

John's Gospel reflects the great effort of the communities of the beloved disciple to respond to the problems posed by different social situations and to remain faithful to their traditions of freedom and authenticity. "The communities have, as their center of living, the radical practice of love, hospitality, and solidarity" (GASS, 2011, p. 120, own translation). Amidst geographical and cultural displacement, communities experience very impactful conflicts:

- a. The relationship with Judaism, which passes through three stages: peaceful coexistence among brothers, with some disagreements; radical doctrinal conflicts with the Jews and the synagogue; and, finally, expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue and from the Jewish ethno-religious environment. The trauma was such that the word "Jew" took on a generally negative meaning. The Jews had conquered, with the Roman Empire, a status of very significant religious and cultural autonomy; by economic weight, demographic participation (about 8 to 10% of the population of the empire) and political skill. The first Christian communities surfed on this wave until the Jewish War, when the Jews lost the privilege of the "legitimate religion" and, as a consequence, the Christians became religionless, a "depraved, unruly and contagious" (Pliny: 23-79 AD), "pernicious" (Tacitus: 55-120 AD), "new and evil" (Suetonius: 70-130 AD) superstition;
- b. relationship with other Christian communities: "The communities of the apostolic churches were hierarchical, while that of the Beloved Disciple had as its only value the love that equals all people. For John's Gospel, the apostolic communities will meet Jesus and will be able to follow

him only when they give up privileges and social position to become a branch in the vine that is Jesus". (BORTOLINI, 2003, p. 11)

"...no "hierarchical" institutional structure emerges from the Johannine writings such as we find in the pastoral letters written under Paul's name, or in the letters of Ignatius." (PENNA, 2020, p. 209, own translation)

"'The Beloved Disciple', has no name because he is more than an individual person. He is the bearer of the faith that underpins the message that the text conveys to us." (KONINGS, 2016, p. 59, own translation)

- c. relationship with the pagan, urban, culturally very different and plural world, of more rigid social stratification, not very permeable to egalitarian and fraternal coexistence. A new and difficult challenge! ⁷¹

The process of redaction of the Gospel reflects the pluralism of the community's origin, its spatial and cultural shifts, as well as the eclectic composition of Greek influence. "Its redactional history is more complex than the naive representation of a continuous and homogeneous redaction" (BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 25, own translation). Its writing took about 60 years. "There is also a tendency in the Gospel to 'multiply' views concerning the same event, without worrying about making them compatible. These are undoubtedly readings prolonged in time, but gathered together on the surface of the book" (BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 31, own translation). This suggests the existence of several, successive redactors, as a true "Johannine school". The American exegete Raymond E. Brown suggests "two successive redactions working from a common ancient tradition and finally conjoined in the definitive redaction." ⁷²

By way of chronology, the Jewish War of 70 would constitute the articulation between the two redactions, while the definitive edition would not be earlier than the last years of the first century (95-100)" (BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 36). "In any case one must recognize the decisive importance of a theological and literary personality with a strong ascendancy over the Johannine community; in other words, the one whom the book calls 'the Disciple whom Jesus loved' and in whom it recognizes an indisputable authority" (BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 40, own translation)

⁷¹ "Although the new gods spread throughout the empire and gained adherents, it seems to me that by the first century the empire had developed excessive pluralism - the massive influx of various new gods from other regions of the empire had then created what E. R. Dodds calls a bewildering mass of alternatives. There were many cults, many mysteries, many philosophies of life to choose from (STARK, 2006, p. 219).

⁷² "Reconstructing the life of the Johannine community, I presuppose four phases: first phase, the pre-evangelical era (50s to 80s) including the origins of the community - in Palestine, with the presence of disciples of John the Baptist - from the middle of the first century. The second phase, in the period of the first and main writing of the gospel, approximately 90s AD. The expulsion from the synagogues has passed, but persecution continues. The third phase involved the living situation in the now divided Johannine communities at the time the epistles were written, around 100 AD. The fourth phase saw the dissolution of the two Johannine groups after the epistles were written. The separatists tended, in the second century, toward docetism, gnosticism, cerintianism, and Montanism (BROWN, 1983, p. 20-23).

"The identification of the Beloved Disciple with Lazarus not only clarifies a number of enigmas about this story (last supper in the home of the host Lazarus), but also other unknowns in the Johannine Passion narrative. Lazarus, Beloved Disciple, would have welcomed Jesus' mother in his own home and played an important role in the founding of churches in and around Ephesus. One of the attributions of John of Patmos would have been to edit and promulgate the fourth Gospel on behalf of the Beloved Disciple". (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 128, own translation)

The originality of the Fourth Gospel - its specifically Christian character, therefore - is due to the identification of the divine Word with the human being of Jesus of Nazareth: a being that depends on history, as both the word "flesh" and the reference to the human and dated witness of John the Baptist suggest. "(BLANCHARD, 2004, p. 94, own translation)

The word "cosmos", with the sense of humanity, appears more than 70 times in the fourth Gospel, whose probable insertion in the Greek world (in Ephesus) makes the Johannine community particularly sensitive to the universality of God's gift.

"The Johannine Jesus, instead of speaking of the kingdom of God - the term "kingdom of God" could only cause misunderstanding in the ears of Greco-Roman citizens -, speaks of eternal life, or rather the "life of the eternal age." With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the idea of a kingdom of God along Jewish lines had floundered, and by that same time, the reign of the Roman Empire was beginning to martyr Christians. " (KONINGS, 2016, p. 15, own translation)

Jesus is the Savior of the world! "John is clearly a more reflective gospel than the others. Without neglecting to record the particular facts, it points out better than the others the deep meaning of what Jesus' action revealed: the radical union between Jesus and God and love-charity as the criterion of our action." (KONINGS, 2016, p. 15, own translation)

"With Jesus the divine (Word) becomes human (flesh) and the distinction between sacred and profane, the space preserved to God and that separated from him, comes to an end: the fullness of God shines in Jesus, a mortal man. " (MAGGI, 2013, p. 18, own translation)

The Gospel of John is the only one that attributes to Jesus the term **God**: "My Lord and my God!" - Thomas' confession of faith, "the twin" (in Greek **didymo**) - defined in the apocryphal texts "twin brother of Christ" (Acts of Thomas). "For John, Jesus is not equal to God, but God is equal to Jesus" (MAGGI, 2013, p. 18, own translation). "If you knew me, you would know the Father also: from now on you know him and have seen him." (Jn. 20:28; Jn. 14:7, own translation)

Academic studies on the Gospels have reached a level of sophistication, depth and scientific rigor unimaginable to the layman on the subject. As in any scientific study, the analyses and conclusions

are always probable, plausible and provisional.⁷³ As an example, let us look at an updated reading of the structure of the Gospel of John.

"To this day one finds the most diverse theories about the structure of the Fourth Gospel. An annual cycle of Jewish pilgrimage feasts may have constituted the basic structure of the narrative part of the Gospel according to John between 2:13 and 11:55 [...]. Commentators rightly see in the beginning an "opening week" of Jesus' public life (1:11 to 2:12), with a seven-day scheme, while at the end we have a week for the return to the Father, beginning with the anointing in 12:1 ("six days before the Passover"). Next to that fit, in John 11, the six days of the Lazarus story. " (BEUTLER, 2015, p. 19; 20; 21, own translation)

The Johannine letters: at the time of the publication of the Gospel of John, the context is one of persecution by the Jews and Romans, and the risk consists in the institutionalization of their communities, threatened by the hierarchization of the churches of Petrine and Pauline heritage. At the time of the publication of the letters, around 110,⁷⁴ the context is different: the adversaries are within the communities themselves, threatened by divisions. The companions who lead their brothers astray are called antichrists, false prophets, liars, seducers, sons of the devil. Christians are exhorted to remain united in the love of Christ and in communion with their brothers.

The author of the three letters attributed to John, written around the year 110, in Ephesus, seems to be the one who introduces himself as "the Elder", "the Presbyter", in the second and third letters,⁷⁵ which are short notes. The first letter is a kind of Pastoral Letter addressed to several churches, in the form of an instruction, a homily. In the second, the author writes in the name of a community to a sister church. In the third, it is addressed "to the chosen Lady and her children", probably one of the churches over which the Presbyter is responsible.

The Apocalypse

"By attributing the book to the prophet John, it is likely that the writers of this work wanted to pay homage to the apostle John. There is an ancient tradition of the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who died in 339, that states that John the Presbyter and John the Evangelist were distinct persons. It is certain that the final editor of this work, written in

⁷³ "In contemporary exegesis, the central debate about the historical-religious rootedness of the fourth gospel focuses on John's relationship with *gnosis*. Both the dualism that pervades the Johannine narration and its Christological conception centered on the figure of the heavenly envoy have favored this hypothesis." (MARGUERAT, 2015, p. 455, own translation).

⁷⁴ "[...] it is reasonable to situate the wording of 1 John between 100 and 110." (MARGUERAT, 2015, p. 483, own translation).

⁷⁵ "The often-proposed identification of the Elder with the presbyter John remains pure conjecture." (MARGUERAT, 2015, p. 489, own translation).

different times and contexts, was among the exiles. He was a political prisoner for rebelling against Roman domination, for witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is why he was in Patmos, which was transformed by the Romans into a large prison for all the leaders who resisted the imperial cult and oppression. " (GASS, 2012, p. 102, own translation)

The text went through a long period of redaction; the first (1-2, 3) and the fourth part (22, 6-21) correspond to the final redaction, dating from the beginning of the second century. The second part is the oldest, corresponding to the persecution of Christians after the burning of Rome, on July 19, 64. The third part corresponds to the violent persecution imposed by Domitian (81-96).

As a literary genre, the book falls within the tradition of Old Testament apocalyptic writings, very common in Judaism since the Maccabees' resistance against the Greek empire around 200 BC and continuing until around 200 AD. Most of the symbols found in Revelation are taken from Daniel, Isaiah and Exodus. The word **apocalypse** means "to reveal", "to take away the veil" and was interpreted by many as predicting catastrophic events, linked to the end of the world. Today the Apocalypse is seen as "prophetic", not in the sense of predicting, but of denouncing, of "revealing", in an encrypted language, what cannot be shown in the open, in any environment of oppression and repression. It is a book intended not to frighten, but to stimulate resistance and perseverance in faith and hope: tomorrow will be!

Two chapters of Revelation are dedicated to seven churches located in Turkey today: Ephesus (an urban center dating back to 1,000 B.C., the fifth largest city in the Roman Empire, with 450,000 inhabitants, famous for the Temple of Artemis and a theater with capacity for 25,000 spectators); Smyrna (a city dating back to 3,000 B.C., where Homer and Irenaeus of Lyons, disciple of Polycarp, who said he knew the Apostle John, were born); Pergamos (birthplace of Attalus, martyred in Lyons, it was a kind of " Lourdes " of pagan antiquity); Thyatira (known for its wool dyeing, birthplace of Lydia, a purple merchant, who, baptized by Paul, hosted him in Philippi); Sardis (rich in flocks and cloth market); Philadelphia (industrial city and wool market); and Laodicea (known for its warm waters - today Pamukkale - for the production of black wool and a type of eye drops).

A curiosity about the symbolic meaning of the numbers often used in Revelation: 666 - the number of the beast.

"In Greek and Hebrew each letter had a numerical value. The number of a name was the total of the numerical value of its letters. The number 666 is from the name Nero-Neron, according to the value of the Hebrew letters, or Caesar-God, according to the value of the Greek letters. It is also the number of greatest imperfection: six does not reach seven, it is only half of twelve, and this three times! The number 666 is the height of imperfection. " (GASS, 2012, p. 102, own translation)

IV - THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE 2ND CENTURY⁷⁶

10. The second war Jewish-Roman and *pax romana*

The second century is a landmark in the history of the West. In this period, the Roman Empire, the largest, most solid and enduring in universal history, reaches its apogee in territorial extension and lives its golden period in material and cultural terms. In the year 135, with the end of the second Judeo-Roman war, Judea is wiped off the map. Jerusalem is once again razed to the ground and the Jews are forbidden to return to live there. In the year 180, with the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, an upright and cultured man, the *pax romana* period, begun by Augustus Caesar in 29 B.C., comes to an end. The Good News detaches itself from ethnic-religious Judaism and asserts itself as the new religion,⁷⁷ acculturating in the Greco-Roman world.

"The Scottish historian Frend identifies the Jesus movement between 70 and 135 as a "dissenting synagogue," which seems to me a suggestive expression. Better to talk about "Jesus tradition", or "Jesus movement", without using the term "Christianism", at least when talking about the first 150 years after his death. "(HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 22-23, own translation)

The new religion spreads throughout all the provinces of the empire; it suffers persecutions and martyrdoms; it consolidates its hierarchical structure and its central power; it confronts Gnosticism and other heresies; it begins to base its message in philosophical terms and to participate in intellectual debates with the thinking elite, on an equal footing. The first stage of the Patristics (of the Fathers, or Fathers of the Church) is lived, which intends to show the Gospel as "the finished expression of the truth that Greek philosophy had sought". The theoretical foundations of the Church Fathers progressively permeated, popularized, and even vulgarized, in the pejorative sense, Christian catechesis.

By the end of the second century, as the archaeologist and historian Paul Veyne said, the social profile of a Christian community was perfectly compatible with the profile of the society around it, and Christians still stood out.

⁷⁶ This text is based primarily on A. G. Hamman's excellent 1997 book, *The Everyday Life of the Early Christians (95-197)*, and Rodney Stark's 2006 *The Growth of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*.

⁷⁷ It seems to have been Tertullian, in 197, who was the first to name Christianity with the Latin term *religio*. Earlier, in the *Apologetic*, he speaks of Christianity as a sect, then retrieves the term *religio* to speak of Christian faith as the true religion (*vera religio*). (FRANGIOTTI, 2017, p. 58).

10.1 - The Second Jewish-Roman War

Hadrian, who succeeded his cousin Trajan, ruled the Roman Empire from 117 to 138. He sought to consolidate the territorial conquests of his predecessor, visiting all the provinces and maintaining contact with the local elites. He spent 12 years of his government outside of Rome. As a great admirer of Greek culture, he was one of those responsible for the propagation of Hellenism, and had the Temple of Zeus (**Olympeon**) built in Athens. He sought to consolidate the empire through investments in roads, urban improvements, and the spread of the Greek-Roman cultural symbiosis.

Hadrian had no sympathy for the Jewish culture, which lived as an enclave in many cities where the Greco-Roman culture predominated. By decree, he banned circumcision throughout the empire, on pain of death. In the year 130, he ordered a Roman city to be built on the ruins of Jerusalem, with a plan to build a temple to the God Jupiter in place of the Temple of Yahweh. Construction work on the new city began in 131. The following year, an insurrection led by Simeon explodes and spreads throughout the country, catching the Romans off guard. The colonizers were expelled and the country declared itself independent.

Simeon, who came to be called Bar Kochba (Son of the Star), re-established Jewish Law, the service of sacrificial worship in place of the old temple, had coinage minted, and initiated land reform, which garnered him more popular support. "The country's Christian communities did not accept Bar Kochba's messianic claim, believing Jesus to be the Messiah. Neither did they support the struggle against the empire, and for both reasons they were violently persecuted by the followers of the leader of the Jewish resistance" (GASS, 2012, p. 92-93, own translation). In mid-135, General Julius Severus, Governor of Brittany, appointed to quell the rebellion, imprisoned and killed its leader, Bar Kochba, near Jerusalem. This was the end of the rebellion, whose suppression devastated the country.

The fate of the vanquished was worse than in 70: thousands of Jews were killed in the battles; many died from hunger, thirst, and disease. It is estimated that in four years of the uprising of Simon Bar Kochba - the Son of the Star - about 600,000 Jews died. Countless people were sold into slavery. Judea, which had been called Palestine, was officially given this name, and the previous name was banished. The construction of a new city, **Aelia Capitolina**, in Hellenistic style, on the ruins of Jerusalem and its settlement with exclusively non-Jewish people, buried the hopes of the remaining Jews to rebuild the temple, the city and the nation. Or, at least, it postponed the dream of the Jews to an unpredictable horizon, just as the Christians do with regard to the **parousia**. Eliade, a Romanian historian, states: "The ruin of the holy city and the destruction of the temple brutally transformed the religious orientation of the Jews, and so did the Christians. Deprived of the sanctuary, the only holy space where worship could take place, the Jews found themselves reduced to prayers and religious instruction" (ELIADE, 2011, p. 312, own translation). "The Sanhedrin moved from Jamnia to Usha in Galilee, which took over the spiritual conduct of Judaism in place of Judea, now depopulated." (GALLAZZI, 2012, p. 172, own translation)

The impact of these events on Christians of Jewish origin was not greater because, by this time, it had been 40 years since they had been expelled from the synagogue and from living with their ethno-religious group.

10.2 - The *pax romana*

"Warren Carter suggests three theological ideas that expressed and legitimized the power of the Roman Empire: a) the gods chose Rome; b) Rome and its emperor are agents of God's rule, will, and presence among human beings; c) Rome manifests the blessings of the gods-security, peace, justice-fidelity, fertility-among those who submit to Rome's rule.

Military force and divine power were, therefore, presented as two sides of the same coin." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 101 ,103, own translation)

Security, order and progress! - this was the immediate meaning of the expression **pax romana**, at the time. Roman armies "pacified" opponents of the empire. War and victory were preconditions to **pax romana**, seen as a benefit by the elites in the colonies. The general and historian Pliny the Elder (23 to 76 AD) enthusiastically states, "the immense majesty of Roman peace, that gift of the gods which seems to have brought the Romans into the world to enlighten it." In Israel Serique's definition: "the **pax romana** was a period of time and an ideological concept, which the Roman empire massified in order to justify many of its violent, discriminatory and unjust practices in the establishment and strengthening of the imperial structure.

Romanization, according to Crossan, "followed three successive stages of construction: roads and ports, temples and statues, aqueducts and bathhouses. Cities were used as administrative centers to oversee the production and distribution of local and regional resources" (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 172, own translation). With this, they generated taxes paid to Rome.

In urban communities, common forms of civic life were established, with administrative buildings, and Roman culture was spread. These initiatives were intended to awaken the loyalty of the people to the central power. The local aristocrats assumed the main responsibilities for the structures of urban life. They fought with each other to sponsor civic projects, and some of the wealthier ones even spent their own resources on public works. On the other hand, of course, they ended up being the main beneficiaries of the blessings of Roman urbanization and received the first fruits of the **pax romana**. The most influential patrons were called to occupy important posts in legislative bodies, civic offices, or priestly offices; such positions generated new services of interest to the empire and, in return, their occupants obtained land, tax reductions, and commercial permits.

"Throughout the empire, for example, coins, with divine images of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, were minted and used to favor and guarantee trade, profit, and ample imperial administrative apparatus. On a coin discovered in the city of Thessaloniki (now Thessaloniki), Caligula appears, wearing a priest's veil, sacrificing a bull in the temple of the divine Augustus, considered the

deity of the dynasty of emperors. It is the sacralization of the image of the emperor Caesar for domination and creative purposes." (Shigeyuki Nakanose in SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 104, own translation)

Thus the empire made political, administrative, fiscal and judicial dominion effective. The lower urban classes received their share of the benefits of urbanization in the form of public amenities. "The aristocrats offered them entertainment such as games and shows in spaces they built for that purpose, distributed food, money or lotteries." Among the urban amenities were baths, which were inexpensive and served the hygiene of the people. With their hot, warm and cold pools, libraries, reading rooms, rooms for massage and exercise, barbers and waxers, they soon became attractive and well frequented spaces in urban areas. Men gathered daily in the afternoon and some stayed until early evening; women looked forward to their schedules, although in some places mixed baths were allowed. The imperial cult was more visible than the baths, but these made Romanization more seductive because of the cult of luxury.

Roman roads served trade and communication between the cities of the empire and the capital.⁷⁸

"Since Paul asked Timothy to pass through Troas and pick up his cloak, books and notes that he left there (2 Tim 4:13), he obviously expected him to travel to Rome by land. He was to cross Macedonia via the Via Egnatia and then follow the Via Appia to Rome. That was approximately 1,193 miles. Paul's letter carrier was supposed to make this trip in reverse. This means that it would take about two months for the letter to reach Timothy in Asia."(MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2007, p. 246, own translation)

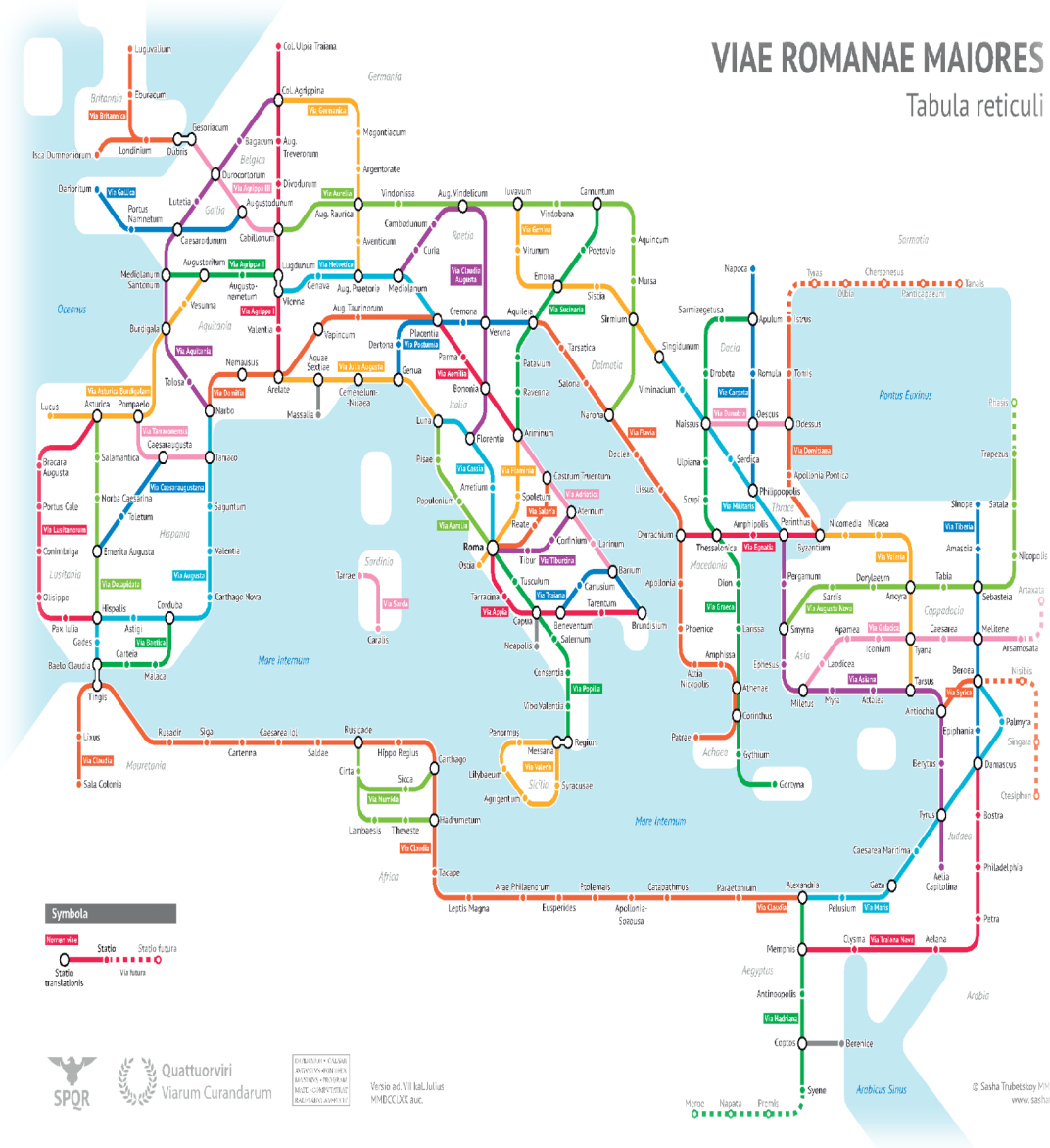
The road system connected to the ports, many of which were built or renovated using techniques that were beginning to use hydraulic concrete, invented at the time.

"The Roman road network still enjoys fame today; even in areas as remote as those that constitute Brittany, some 5,000 miles of roads were torn up, and across the entire empire a veritable network of roads allowed for an efficient system of communication. The virtual, though not total, suppression of robbers and pirates facilitated the movement of men and ideas."(DAVIES, 1967, p. 55, own translation)

The map of the layout of the Major Roman Routes (**Viae Romanae Maiores - Tabula reticuli**), created in June 2017 by student Sasha Trubetskoy in the form of subway lines, illustrates, in a simple way, the range of Roman routes.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ In 1995, fragments of engraved jugs were found in Massada, Herod's palace and fortress; they were wine pitchers. Herod the Great would have ordered his favorite wine from Italy, perhaps from the famous vineyards of Falerno in Campania. This kind of importation reflects the privilege of the upper classes, but it also provides data about the forms of communication used. Even there, on top of a fortress on a desert hill overlooking the barren Dead Sea, a buyer could receive a quality wine from his favorite Italian producer in a matter of weeks. (D'ANCONA, 1996, p. 155)

⁷⁹ For a more accurate reading of the map, which can be downloaded, check it out: <https://sashat.me/2017/06/03/roman-roads/>.



The wave of Roman urbanization, perhaps the most comprehensive so far discovered in the archaeological annals, physically and visibly expressed local gratitude for the blessings of the "**pax romana**" or, alternatively, the demand for allegiance to the emperor. It was repetitive and abundant, but ultimately accepted by all. (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 173; 174; 176)

This entire body of works represented Rome's worldview and had an enormous "ideological" impact. The proliferation of statues and temples was an integral part of the Roman imperial theology from which one has to understand the scope of the term "emperor worship". The person of the emperor and

religion, two compelling imperial symbols, reinforced stability as the highest good that could be aspired to.

"Christians and pagans of the time praised the era of peace which, from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius, favored the organization and cultivation of the conquered lands, the outbreak of industry and agriculture, business and wealth, but also the cultural and religious exchanges by which the East took its revenge on its victor, taking its language, its art and its religion to it." (HAMMAN, 1997(97-197), p. 26, own translation)

This was the perspective at least of those who benefited from the Roman peace, used as an ideological means also to justify the arbitrariness practiced. All actions became legitimate in the name of the good order and functionality of the empire.

Many sincere and upright Roman authorities could not understand why good Christian citizens refused to pay "emperor worship" and were willing to die for a faith that denied the emperor this right. For the authorities and for the people, emperor worship was an integral and essential part of the Roman system, in other words, of imperial theology.

11. The expansion of Christianity in the period

Paul, as Crossan says, "went to the synagogues in the Diaspora to convert not Jews but 'God-worshippers,' that is, non-Jews sympathetic to Jewish monotheistic spirituality. This strategy caused the number of adherents of the 'Path' to grow among the peoples where the Jews had colonies" (CROSSAN; REED, 2007, p. 155, own translation). Throughout most of the first century, the Jewish origin of the Good News - initially seen as a Jewish sect - and the welcoming and hosting of travelers in Jewish communities in the Diaspora favored its expansion. "Christianism emerged as a "dissident synagogue" within a very diverse Judaism that, in turn, is already dissident from traditional Judaism." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 137, own translation) In the second century, it is no longer the diaspora that is the facilitating element in the expansion of Christianity, but globalization and the "*pax romana*."

From Revelation we know some of the cities of Asia Minor where there were Christian communities established by Paul in the 50's and in the following decades by John and by the disciples of both. Paul had made Ephesus, the capital of the province, a center for spreading the Gospel.⁸⁰ Had Paul sought out the region because of his previous knowledge of suppliers of raw materials for his trade as a tentmaker, since there were sheep farmers, cloth and dye manufacturers there? Was it also out of intellectual affinity and adventurous spirit, since the local population was known for its exceptional

⁸⁰ "Paul traveled nearly 10,000 miles in his missionary journeys." (STARK, 2006, p. 152, own translation).

aptitude for commerce and the disciplines of the spirit? A happy choice! From there Christian missionaries would go out to various parts of the empire, including to Lyon in Gaul (now France), where Bishop Irenaeus (130-202) of Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey's third largest city) became one of the luminaries of second century Christianity. "With Irenaeus, around 170, the first signs of a specifically Christian consciousness are perceived." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 22, own translation)

During the reign of the philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the Church enters a new stage of surprising expansion. Regarding Marcus Aurelius, Peguy said: "he did not get the religion he deserved. It is a pity that he came close to it (Christian religion) without knowing it, and that he condemned it without understanding it." When smallpox spread, between 165 and 180,⁸¹ and low immunity to infection caused numerous deaths, Christians were valued for the help they provided. While pagan religions rarely offered any help when the faithful fell ill, many Christians - women in particular - were willing to care for the sick and feed them (STARK, 2006, p. 80; 90; 91).

In one generation, in the second century, Christianity was present in almost all the provinces of the empire. The Christian expansion took place mainly on the African coast of the Mediterranean, especially in Alexandria and Carthage. It is likely that Apollos, mentioned in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, converted to Christianity in Egypt. Alexandria was the second city of the empire with about 400,000 inhabitants. (BLAINEY, 2012, p. 63) Alexandria's population was as mixed, as colorful as today: Greeks, Syrians, and Arabs walked side by side with merchants, tourists, provincials, coming for business or to pursue courses in philosophy or medicine. "The foreigner who entered the city through the door of the Sun was dazzled by the splendor of the avenues, lined with columns up to the door of the Moon." (STARK, 2006, p. 80; 90; 91, own translation)

"In the city of Alexandria, where culture and philosophy flourished, Christianity quickly took on an intellectual aspect, becoming the pride of the city. Great names were revealed there: Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Athanasius, Arius, Cyril. Since the second century, one can speak of a 'school' of Alexandria. Around 180, Panthenus, coming from Sicily, settled in Alexandria, after a long journey which, according to Eusebius of Caesarea (265-339), took him as far as India. He united the fervor of the evangelist with the reflection of the doctor. He directed the school for catechumens, a kind of Christian university, where Clement (150-215) found the teacher and the light that led him to the faith. The Christian community, already organized, was governed by Demetrius, a bishop of great stature, who understood and favored the intellectual demands of

⁸¹ According to McNeill's estimates, between a third and a quarter of the empire's population reportedly perished during the epidemic, including Emperor Marcus Aurelius in Vienna in the year 180. Hans Zinsser notes that "so many people were dying that the cities and towns of Italy and the provinces were abandoned and turned into ruins." A new and equally devastating epidemic, probably of measles, in the year 251, spread throughout the empire, punishing the rural areas as severely as the cities. Calculations based on the account of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, suggest that two-thirds of Alexandria's population may have perished. (BLAINEY, 2012, p. 63)

evangelization. From then on, Alexandria was the beacon that radiated to the East and West, particularly to Rome." (HAMMAN, 1997(97-197), p. 23, own translation)

"When Christianity arrived in Carthage - facing the sea, a symbol of welcome - the city was the geographical, administrative, cultural, and commercial center of a transmarine Italy, a rival of Alexandria. Both were Rome's granary. "Everything in it breathes opulence," says the African Apuleius. It was a time of great economic prosperity, fueled by wheat and olive trees. Tertullian (160 to 220 AD), born in Carthage, jurist, noted apologist and polemicist against heresy, was the first Christian author to produce a literary work in Latin. Since the end of the second century, the churches of Carthage and Alexandria have produced their bishops and their geniuses. " (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), p. 20, own translation)

The Gospel spread rapidly, from place to place, from town to town, among Romanized populations in the countryside. The majority were poor and humble people of mixed blood. The spirit of tolerance, typical of Africa, explains, no doubt, this rapid progression that reached all layers of society. By the second century, Christianity had penetrated into the interior of the country two hundred and fifty miles down the Nile, which explains the legend that the Holy Family went there during Herod's persecution. In 180, a persecution tests the young Church. Twelve Christian villagers - five women and seven men from an insignificant village - are denounced, arrested, and then beheaded in Carthage. Tertullian speaks with some emphasis of the conversion of "thousands of people of both sexes, of all ages and all conditions." In every city, he says with a certain exaggeration, "more than half the inhabitants are Christians," and he adds with pride that if the Christians were to withdraw, "the cities would be empty." In 197, he writes: "We are from yesterday and we have already filled the earth and all that is yours: the cities, the commerce, the fortified places, the towns, the villages, the fields, the tribes, the armies, the palaces, the senate, the forum. We leave for you only the temples". (HAMMAN, 1997(97-197), p. 21, own translation)

In Marseilles there was the Northern road and the sea route by which goods arrived as well as missionaries from Italy and the Orient. From the coast, one could go to Lyon and Vienna by river or land. All the intellectual cream of Greece had emigrated to Marseilles. Romans attended its school of philosophy, its medical "faculty" was famous, and it maintained relations with Alexandria. Lyon's prosperity had attracted a large colony of Orientals and Phrygians. The first Christians came, like their compatriots, for professional reasons. By 150, there were enough communities to constitute a "church," and the mother communities sent to Lyon Bishop Potino. Irenaeus, his successor, governed the communities spread from the mouth of the Rhône to the banks of the Rhine. The Gospel had already reached Trier and Cologne. By 177, the Church of Lyon, associated with the community in Vienna, was important enough to attract attention and to motivate persecution.

On the eastern side, the Christian penetration in Asia reached as far as the country of the Euphrates and the Tigris (today Iraq). Two figures attest to the vitality of the new religion in

Mesopotamia: Tatian and Bardesanes. The literary importance of one and the other shows that the Gospel had already been preached effectively to the wise men and philosophers as far as the banks of the Tigris. Tatian, after going to Greece, went to Rome, where he was a disciple of the Christian philosopher Justin (100-65). After the death of his master, he returned to his homeland and there he wrote "Harmony of the four gospels," the "**Diatessaron**," which was long in vogue in the Syriac Church and of which a fragment was found in 1933 on the banks of the Euphrates. Bardesanes, born in 156 in Edessa, was one of the first poets to compose liturgical hymns in Syriac. Since the end of the second century, Edessa appears as a focus of intense literary and intellectual vitality, in which the Christian Syriac language was forged.

By the middle of the second century, the Church of Rome represented one of the most important communities, where some of the most intellectually significant Christians of the time converged. Despite all its diversity, it remained, until the middle of the second century A.D., a Hellenistic community, speaking Greek and maintaining close contact with the Christian churches of the East. "It was not until the middle of the second century that we can document some significant conversions among the lower-class Romans, who did not speak Greek and would need the translation of the New Testament into Latin" (STAMBAUGH; BALC, 1996, p. 150, own translation). The early Church of Rome was as non-Latin as possible. Christians spoke Greek. In it, Syrians, Asians, and stateless Greeks welcomed the Gospel with fervor. The first nucleus is formed by them. Native Americans and Africans followed.

"The world in which the church made triumphant, though sometimes painful, progress was eager for religion. Two phenomena call attention: the extraordinary popularity of the supposed mystery religions; and the attraction, increasing, that a monotheistic interpretation of conventional pantheism exerted on people, both cultured and uneducated. Despite periodic attempts (e.g. by Augustus) to revive ancient piety, the gods of Greece and Rome had lost any power to convey the inspiration of the past. The worship of the emperor or his genius, encouraged by Augustus and his successors, became increasingly prominent and enjoyed official support. At best, however, it provided a channel for the expression of corporate loyalty and the feeling that Providence watched over the empire. " (KELLY, 1994, p. 9-10, own translation)

Christianism functioned as a revitalizing movement that arose in response to the squalor, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the Greco-Roman urban world [...] by providing new norms and new modes of relationship that could address serious urban problems, to cities filled with the homeless and the poor, Christianism brought charity and hope. To cities populated by outsiders and foreigners, Christianism provided a basis for bonding. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianism offered a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by virulent ethnic antagonism, Christianism laid new foundations for social solidarity. Finally, to cities struggling with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianism provided effective social service. It is not surprising that the first missionaries were so

warmly received in Antioch: they were not the bearers of a simple urban movement, but of a new culture, capable of making life more bearable in the Greco-Roman cities. (STARK, 2006, p. 180)

Stark develops three theses on the consequences of the great epidemics of the 2nd (165-180) and 3rd (251) centuries on Christianity:

1. The epidemics wrecked paganism and Hellenistic philosophies' capacity for explanation and consolation;
2. Christian values of love and charity had been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity; "*when catastrophes struck, Christians were better able to cope with them, resulting in substantially higher survival rates. This means that in the wake of each epidemic, Christians comprised a higher percentage of the population, even without the addition of new adherents. Moreover, their remarkably better survival rate [immunization effect] would have been seen as a 'miracle' by Christians and pagans alike, a phenomenon that must have influenced conversion.*
3. *Large contingents of people, especially pagans, would have lost the bonds [social network effect] that had previously prevented them from becoming Christians.*" (STARK, 2006, p. 88-89, own translation)

12. The institutionalization process

Each of the Gospels is known to reflect the oral traditions of a community, as well as the problems it experienced during the period of the writing of the respective Gospel. They all faced, in their own way, the challenges common to the structuring of any social group: defining internal and external functions, drawing on the gifts and charisms of the community members, and fixing the role of each one.

Some elements of the formation of the different communities seem to have been common: the first Christians in a new locality were converted by their guests or by itinerant missionaries, individuals, couples, or pairs of men. These converts, when they came together, constituted an "**assembly**". The term (**ekklesia**) designated not only the eventual meeting, but the group itself. Although taken from the Greco-Roman cultural environment, it differed from it in that it did not exclude women and slaves. Men and women, masters and slaves, all converts, participated as brothers and sisters in the Christian Church on an equal footing. The gathering of members of various communities in the same city was the **ekklesia** of that place. Paul writes: "to the Church of God which is at Corinth" [...]; "to the churches of Galatia". To be a member of the Church meant to be received, as a brother or sister, into any other community. The roots of this usage, according to Meeks, are certainly in the biblical expression "assembly of the Lord." (MEEKS, 2011, p. 216, own translation)

At the turn of the first century, Christian communities begin to change: the term **church** begins to designate the "house," the domestic space where the community gathers. Apparently a subtle

difference in terminology or emphasis, but of enormous consequences. In the house, the role of each person corresponds strictly to the Roman customs of the time. "The Greco-Roman household was an economic unit, patriarchally run rigidly, with at the top the '**pater familias**', the oldest male member. To the woman he was the husband, to the children, father and master, to the slaves, master" (EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 33, own translation). The change of focus - "community" to "home" - meant, in practice, the assimilation of the Greco-Roman conception of home/family. The hierarchical model of the family was deeply ingrained in Law and custom. One can visualize the paths that were taken in the second and subsequent centuries:

1. assembly/community => house => *pater familias* => presbyter + council => monarchical bishop;
2. occasional house => permanent home/major room => temple.

By the year 115, the Pastoral Epistles, attributed to Paul, clearly show Christian communities that were well integrated into the structures of Roman society. Martin Ebner, professor at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Münster and co-author of the book **Ecumenical Church History**, highlights seven "paradigmatic trends in the evolution of ministries". They show how the process of institutionalization of the Christian church took place objectively in the second century.

12.1 Institutionalization

According to Bonneau, "the charismatic situation of nascent Christianity is not opposed to an embryonic form of institutionalization, that is, to a crystallization of often repeated activities" (BONNEAU, 2003, p. 79, own translation). But what happens in the second century is different: the functions that had been exercised become positions. Roles are assigned and institutional legitimization comes from above.

"The episkopos (inspector of various communities) is ordained for life through the laying on of hands by the presbyters (elders). By this act he is given the ministerial charism, as well as a certain immunity. He must publicly commit himself to a certain tradition, that is, to 'the right doctrine' and to the 'deposit entrusted to him'." (EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 37, own translation)

"The influential Church elder, Ignatius of Antioch (35-108 A.D.), framed this position-the divinization of earthly politics-in a succinct slogan: 'One God, one bishop.'" (ASLAN, 2018, p. 131-132, own translation)

12.2 Monopolization

The conflicts between itinerant preachers and local community leaders were evident from the time of Paul. There were disagreements about doctrine, style, priorities, and even power struggles, as

could not be otherwise. The conflicts get worse and the local leaders win.⁸² The itinerant preachers lost relevance throughout the second century.

The **Didache** - known as the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, is a kind of Catechism, elaborated with earlier documents, probably in Syria. Published at the turn of the first century, before some of the Johannine writings, it had much influence on catechesis. It had been lost and was found in 1873, in Constantinople. The **Didache**, with all its authority, limits the action of the itinerant preacher and establishes that the content of his doctrine is accepted if it conforms to the local authority.

12.3 Professionalization

Paul and several of his collaborators were self-employed workers who, carrying their work tools from town to town, lived from their manual labor. They did not reject the fact that other missionaries were supported by the communities. Manual labor, for Paul and Barnabas, was a means of support and of evangelization. Several apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and other itinerant preachers brought their wives and were supported by the host communities. The principle prevails: "let the man of the church live at the expense of the community" and some positions become remunerated.

12.4 Priesthood

When they were excluded from Judaism, Christian communities legally lost their status as a "legitimate religion". According to the mentality of the time, Christians had no religion because they lacked the constituent elements: temple, sacrifice, and priest. According to Meeks, "1st century Christians had no shrines, temples, statue worship, and sacrifices; they did not hold public festivals, dances, musical performances, pilgrimages, and, as far as we know, did not use inscriptions" (MEEKS, 2011, p. 293, own translation). The non-Christians could not understand that the great differential of Christians, inherited from the life and preaching of Jesus, was exactly this: understanding the community of brothers and sisters and the sharing of material and spiritual goods as sacred, without the need for temple, sacrifice and priest. Against the charge that Christians are not religious, according to Ebner, "*the theologian in the Epistle to the Hebrews was the first to take the offensive, while remaining faithful to the distancing from temple worship of any hue: he describes Jesus as high priest who acts in the heavenly Temple. He is both victim and sacrificer. Through his mediation, through hearing the Word alone, all Christians have immediate access to God - a clear overcoming of all attempts at earthly Temple worship in Jerusalem.*" (EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 39, own translation)

⁸² "Christianism began as an enthusiastic apocalyptic sect, and early Catholicism bears all the marks of a subsequent reaction in the face of the disappointments and excesses of such enthusiasm. Early Catholicism is the typical second-generation solidifying standardization of forms and schemes that were much more spontaneously diverse in the first generation." (DUNN, 2009, p. 522, own translation).

Ebner concludes: "A masterstroke, but one that was not maintained in the history of the theology of early Christianity. Here, too, the normal pattern was imposed" (EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 39, own translation). The first epistle of Clement (35-97), bishop of Rome, third successor of Peter (88-97), intending to resolve conflicts of authority in Corinth, lays the doctrinal foundations of a great turnaround in the process of formatting the Church: "Christ first instituted apostles, who in turn instituted episcopi and deacons with the task of, in turn, carrying on this line of succession.

Martin Ebner comments: "The tracks are thus laid for a change in the understanding of ministry: (1) the idea of succession becomes the decisive criterion for the legitimation of ministry holders; (2) servants of worship are terminologically contrasted with 'laymen' for the first time in 1 Clement 40, 5; (3) the function of episcopals in the celebration of the eucharist - in a manner analogous to the Veteran-Testamentary cult - is understood from the performance of a sacrifice, with the consequence that the very celebration of the eucharist can be understood as a sacrifice (see Justin, Apol. 1, 65). Which in turn becomes the basis on which, from the third century A.D. on, Christian ministers, too, are quietly called "priests." This historical-institutional line ends in the fact that, under Constantine, the Christian clergy are put on a par with the pagan priestly corporations, that is, partakers of the same privileges - for example, exemption from taxation." ((EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 40, own translation)

12.5 Defeminization

Something that draws attention in Paul's missionary work is the female presence: 62 women are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's authentic letters. Much more than the number of men. Women also played an active and directive role in the Johannine communities.⁸³ The Pastoral Epistles, attributed to Paul but written fifty years after his death, close the doors to women: they are forbidden to teach and deaconesses are forbidden to ascend to the already well propagated episcopate. "Scholars unanimously assert that Christianity in the period from 80 to 325 A.D. abandoned the feminism of Jesus and reaffirmed the patriarchalism of the Old Testament." (HINSON; SIEPIERSKI, 2010, p. 121, own translation)

God as father is a metaphor employed by Jesus, which appears 170 times in the New Testament. Commentary by Wanda Deifell, doctor in theology:

⁸³ "We are surprised to see to what extent in the Johannine community - portrayed in the Gospel and the Epistles, by the years 90 to 110 AD. - women and men were already on an equal footing in the flock of the Good Shepherd. It seems that this was a community in which, in the things that count in following Christ, there was no difference between men and women - a Pauline dream (Gal.3:28), which was not fully realized in the Pauline communities." (BROWN, 1983, p. 209, own translation)

"The number of times this metaphor appears in each gospel shows the influence of the social context and how this metaphor was becoming absolutized. God is called Father only 4 times in the oldest gospel, that of Mark. In Luke he appears 15 times. In Matthew, 42 times. In the most recent Gospel, that of John, he appears 109 times. What is at stake is not the legitimacy of this metaphor, as one of the multiple ways of talking about God. What is questionable is, in the first place, its absoluteness. Secondly, one suspects the use of the metaphor to perpetuate patriarchalism." (SUSIN, 2006, p. 266, own translation)

12.6 Hierarchization

Among the functions existing in the Pauline communities there is a certain hierarchy that characterizes functional, but not institutional, subordination. This is the case with the primacy of prophecy over glossolalia. There is no mention of formal positions in Acts and in the Pauline epistles.

"An office structure borrowed from the Gentile associations, consisting of episcopos and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1ff), was combined with the Jewish presbyteral constitution (1 Tim. 5:17ff). From this came the structure of three offices: bishop, presbyters and deacons." (THEISSEN, 2008, p.172, own translation)

In the **Didache** there appears a hierarchical structure of itinerants - apostles, prophets, and doctors (teachers) - alongside a sedentary hierarchy of bishops and deacons. These two structures merge in the second century, and the restless itinerant charismaticism of the early days passed into the background.

"The most elegant solution to move from collegial authority to the monarchical institution was to choose the bishop from the presbyteral body. The terms presbyter and bishop were synonyms for some time. Irenaeus seems to employ them interchangeably." (HAMMAN, 1997(97-197), p. 14, own translation)

"The fundamental step in the formation of the monarchical episcopate as such is presented by the threefold graduation (deacon, presbyter, with a bishop at the apex) which is still characterized by the fact that the bishop not only - according to his title - assumes the tasks of inspection, but also monopolizes in himself the other functions. This development probably provoked more controversies than can be recognized in our written testimonies." (KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 42, own translation)

"The letters of Ignatius of Antioch are the first testimony to the conjunction and consolidation of the triple hierarchy: monarchical episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate. Experts in patristics have generally considered that at the beginning of the second century the monarchical episcopate was already a consolidated fact admitted in Syria and Western Asia Minor." (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 142, own translation)

Other authors consider that the monarchical episcopate was, at the time (year 107), more a postulate of Ignatius than a general reality. Elsewhere, it seems that this change was somewhat slower and more painful. "In Clement's time, the Roman Church was still run by a presbyteral council, with a president at its head." (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), 115, own translation)

According to Hamann, *"the second century was the golden age of deacons, the young and enterprising ministers of the community and the most popular. Their youth was a counterbalance to the age of the bishop. They were the right arm of the bishop and the main agents of the Church. In constant relationship with the faithful, they knew them and their material and spiritual situation. They visited the poor and the sick in order to help them. They particularly watched over the widows, the old and the orphans. Suffered in the Great Church, the women recovered in the sects, in which they prophesied and baptized."* (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), 118-119, own translation)

12.7 Canonically endorsed resistance

The radical practice of love, solidarity, and equality in the Johannine communities, under the inspiration of the Spirit, certainly placed them in antagonism to the described tendencies of institutionalizing the Church. "You have received from Jesus the anointing that remains in you, and you no longer need anyone to teach you; on the contrary, since his anointing, which is true and not a lie, teaches you all that Jesus had taught you, remain with him" (1 Jn. 1:27) *Ebner draws attention to the paradox: the Johannine group managed to save its own conception unscathed within the canon, while at the same time placing it under the "protection" of the ministerial structure of the Universal Church.* (EBNER, in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 43, own translation)

The early Christian communities experienced a period of strong influence of the prophetism of the time, both Jewish and Hellenistic. "The Johannine community, like the whole of Christianity, knew charismatic beginnings, leaving a large space to the Spirit" (BONNEAU, 2003, p. 269, own translation). The informality and spontaneity, sometimes with pretensions of "new revelations", reinforced the eschatological tendencies and endangered discipline and doctrinal unity.

The itinerant, spontaneous, charismatic, prophetic, apocalyptic, and ethically radical Christianity was giving way to stability, doctrine, institutions, and hierarchy, without, however, denying the freedom so dear to the Johannine communities guided by the Spirit, "who blows where he wills."

13. The intellectual challenge and the main heresies

The external sources available on the early Christian communities are, of course, from the elites, whose opinions are not at all favorable. The first time the Roman authorities officially referred to the followers of Jesus was in Antioch of Syria. They called the participants in a riot

in the city "*christiani*," that is, "messianists," in the pejorative sense of troublemakers. In order to suppress the rumor that he had burned down a good part of Rome - a fire that lasted from July 19 to July 25, 64 - Nero blamed the Christians, certainly a human group that was not very sympathetic to the "opinion makers" of the time. The first generations of Christians did not have a good reputation among their literate countrymen.

"The awareness of being a minority, marginal, and clandestine group generated not only a salutary certainty of faithful remnant (consciousness of election), but also a sense of intellectual inferiority that, for quite some time, blocked the latent potential for new gentile conversions. " (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 119, own translation)

The expansion of Christian communities in large urban centers and in all social strata, including the middle and upper segments, brought into their ranks more intellectuals and more demands for study. With the intellectuals, living in a culture of great philosophical effervescence, also came doctrinal divergences.

In the second century, philosophers enjoyed great prestige in the cities and among the elite, including the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180), himself an intellectual.

"Philosophy was the deepest religion of most people of intelligence; most importantly, its concepts provided thinkers, both Christian and non-Christian, with an intellectual framework for expressing their ideas. The two most important types of thought in this period originated in Platonism and Stoicism." (KELLY, 1994, 11, own translation)

The philosopher Celsus, a disciple of Plato and Philo of Alexandria, with a good knowledge of Gnosticism, wrote a book, around 175 AD, against the beliefs of Christians. This book, called **True Discourse**, would have been sent to Origen, in the year 245, and earned from this brilliant Christian intellectual the refutation of every accusation. Through Origen's book - **Contra Celsum** - we know a little more about the external view of Christianity in the second century.⁸⁴

There is also a defense of Christianity that has come to be known as the **Letter to Diognetus** - a jewel of early Christian literature - a work that is said to have been forwarded by Quadrato to the emperor Hadrian (76-138).

"The effervescence of the Gnostics and the proliferation of sects taught the Church the difficult dialogue between faith and thought. The conversion of the philosophers and jurists posed to the Church the problem of culture and the study of faith and philosophy, of language and communication. Were not pagan letters as infiltrated with idolatry as the city? But how to

⁸⁴ Celsus was not only an anti-Christian, but also an anti-Semite [...]. Many objections against Christianity, Celsus takes from the Jewish polemic of his time, putting them in the mouth of a radically anti-Christian Jew. (FRANGIOTTI, 2017, p. 135).

despise the noblest of human heritages? How can one reject, says Tertullian (160-220) in his treatise On Idolatry, profane studies, since without them there are no religious studies? And how can one not be instructed in human science, how can one not learn to think and act, if education is the key to life. " (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), p. 52, own translation)

Men of letters who converted to Christianity became convinced that they had discovered true philosophy, accessed "ultimate wisdom". They tried to elucidate theological teachings with the help of the philosophical terminology of the time. What we find in them, therefore, is the first attempt to define, in a logical way, the content of the Christian faith, as well as the first connection between theology and science, between Christianity and Greek philosophy. Thus, the whole Christian apologetics of this first moment of intellectual confrontation with paganism sought at least three objectives:

- a. sought to answer the accusation that the Church was a danger to the State. It drew attention to the serious, austere, chaste, and honorable way of life of its adherents;
- b. exposed the absurdity and immorality of paganism and the myths of its deities. The apologetics also demonstrated that only the Christian has a correct idea of God and the universe. In this respect, the Letter to Diognetus is exemplary;
- c. presented Christianity as the true philosophy taught by the divine Logos itself. He said that Christianity possesses absolute truth because the Logos, which is divine reason itself, came into the world through Christ. From this one can conclude that Christianity is immeasurably superior to Greek philosophy; even more, that it is a divine philosophy. (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 119-122)

"The strong Gnostic insistence on grounding itself in the theology of revelation and the redemption of sin and guilt contributed to formulations in the theology of the majority church." (MARKSCHIES in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 90, own translation)

Two main heresies - Gnosticism and Montanism - born (or reborn) in the Christian milieu itself, required of the Church Fathers (Patristics) both combat and contestation (apologetics), and the theoretical formulation of right, orthodox doctrine (theology). Because they rejected the doctrines explicitly defined by the Church and deteriorated the specific content of the Christian faith, heresies were fought with ardor and brilliance by the Fathers of the Church.

13.1 Main Heresies

13.1.1 Gnosticism

There are no "Gnostic" texts prior to Christianity. The term **Gnostic** in classical Greek texts designates "intellectual":

" - one who has knowledge - as opposed to "practical". With a sense of heresy - teaching falsely called "knowledge" - it first appears in texts by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon. The term

gnosticism does not appear in ancient sources; it was coined by the English philosopher Henry More (1614-1687) to describe the heresy in the Church of Thyatira, mentioned in Revelation 2:18-29."

There has never been a Gnostic movement, for lack of organization, nor a Gnostic philosophy, for lack of systematization. There were many Gnostic masters, each one with his retinue of followers. From the characteristics that can be learned from the various Gnosés, they are ancient, prior to Christianity, and they are associated with occult and esoteric knowledge, reserved for a privileged elite. This special, spiritual, sublime knowledge would be acquired through intense personal effort or learned through initiation provided by masters, holders of such knowledge, be they pagan, Old Testament or Christian.

It didn't take long for pretentious carriers of esoteric, secret teachings to appear in the early church, received from Jesus Christ and ready to relay them to "beginners", "those who progress" and to those who will be "perfect". Something that could be expected, since it had occurred in all religions and beliefs.

The emergence of masters bearing secret knowledge, transmitted by Jesus Christ, or philosophical knowledge reserved for an intellectual elite, in the early church, in the passage from Hebraism to Hellenism, in an effervescent philosophical context, excited the brightest Christian minds, ready to defend, with all their might, the new religion and its apostolic tradition (orthodoxy) against heresy.

Unmasking "false prophets", bearers of special pseudo-knowledge, was easier to do, but refuting intellectual elaborations with philosophical pretensions was a greater challenge. These philosophical elaborations intended to explain, in another way, questions posed by nascent Christianity: the relationship between God, creation, the world, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

Contrary philosophical explanations, opposed to Christianity, which in its syncretism fed on Jewish, Christian and pagan sources, attacked the basic principles of the Christian faith: it was not God who created the world, but a "demiurge"; matter, the body, is despicable, what matters is the spirit, which through knowledge (**Gnosis**) has to rise to perfection, reserved to few. For the Gnostics *"there are three classes of men: the carnal, or material; the psychic; and the pneumatic. Those who are carnal can never be saved, while to achieve redemption, the pneumatic ones only need to learn the teaching of Jesus. The psychic class can be saved, albeit with difficulty, through the knowledge and imitation of Jesus."* (KELLY, 1994, p. 17, own translation)

The Judeo-Christian Gnosticism spread in Asia, Syria and Egypt. Some outstanding intellectuals were: Basilides of Antioch, between 120 and 145; Marcion, active in the Roman community between 139-144, until he was expelled. The most important of the Gnostics was Valentinus, one of the greatest theologians and mystics of his time. He taught in Alexandria and Rome between 135 and 160.

"Gnosis and esotericism became suspect in the eyes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Invoking the testimony of an oral and secret apostolic tradition, certain gnostics could introduce into Christianity doctrines and practices radically opposed to the ethos of the Gospel. It was not "esotericism" and "gnosis" as such that proved dangerous, but the "heresies" that infiltrated under the cloak of "initiatory secrecy". " (ELIADE, 2011, p. 322, own translation)

The reaction of the early Church, mainly through the Church Fathers, against heresies (apologetics) and the construction of theoretical explanations of its doctrine, in philosophical terms (systematic theology) matured the new religion for catechesis and intellectual confrontation.

13.1.2 Montanism

Montanism was a Christian movement founded by Montanus in the year 156 in Phrygia, Asia Minor, now Turkey. It was characterized as a return to prophetism and a strengthening of eschatological hope. Montanus claimed to possess the gift of prophecy and that he had been sent by Jesus Christ to usher in the age of the Paraclete. Two women who accompanied him - Priscilla and Maximilla - claimed that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. During their ecstasies they announced the imminent end of the world, calling Christians to gather in the city of Pepusa, where the heavenly Jerusalem would appear, since a new Christian era was beginning with this new divine revelation. They proposed a strict asceticism, in order to prepare for the final moment. They recommended chastity during marriage; forbade second marriages; instituted fasting two weeks a year; forbade the eating of meat; forced women to wear veils at sacred functions, and recommended that Christians should not flee persecution and give themselves up to be martyred.

In 172, in Phrygia, Montanus was seized by ecstatic fits. The whole region was shaken, and the bishops no longer knew what to do. The "saints of Phrygia" prayed with affectation and with the tip of their forefinger pressed against their nose, which earned them the nickname "pinched noses". The towns of Pepusa and Thimion, the cradles of the sect, were considered holy cities; people flocked there on pilgrimages and scanned the skies to see if the new Jerusalem was coming down from the clouds. The proselytes showered prophets and prophetesses with gold, silver and shining robes. On the shores of the Black Sea, a bishop had one vision, then two, then three, and began to make predictions as if he were a prophet, and went so far as to say: "Know, my brethren, that judgment will come within the year. The brothers were so terrified that they abandoned their city, their land, and most of them sold their possessions.

"Justin and Irenaeus, moderate spirits themselves, imagined a reign of Christ on earth, with the righteous, which would last a thousand years. This millenarianism would haunt the spirit of East and West in the next century" (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), p. 123, own translation). Montanus' doctrine spread from the East to Africa, from Lyon to the Danube, and even conquered, by its rigorism, people like the great Tertullian. Some cities were almost completely converted to Montanism.

One cannot help but see in Montanism a reaction against the structuring, hierarchization and reduction of prophetism and the role of women in the Church.

"In the oracles of their prophets, the Montanists saw a revelation of the Holy Spirit that could be considered a supplement to the 'ancient scriptures.' For this reason, from then on it became a matter of immense interest to the church that the New Testament, as it was beginning to be called, be assigned the right number of books and the right books." (KELLY, 1994, p. 43, own translation)

V - PATRISTICS – 2ND AND 3RD CENTURIES

14. Patristics

Although the apostles, from the beginning of the proclamation of the Good News, were concerned with catechesis, that is, with the proclamation and good understanding of the message, one can see in early Christianity a plurality of readings and re-readings of the "facts and sayings" of Jesus of Nazareth. In the process of writing the Gospels, as we have seen, the Christian communities behind them reread and reworked their oral traditions to adapt them to their times, in such a way that the texts, in the end, present different and even contradictory versions of the same facts and sayings of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. For each community, its experience of Christ, of the Messiah, of the Lord, prevails; each expression representing a facet of its community's experience of faith and religious life. Qualitative, meaningful, opportune time (*kairós*) takes precedence over quantitative time (*chronos*).

According to Walter Bauer, "the opposition orthodoxy-heresy takes shape very late, at the beginning of the second century". The first systematic theology, according to Eliade, "is a consequence of the crises, throughout the second century, that dangerously shook the Great Church". (ELIADE, 2011, P. 345, own translation)

There are three challenges facing the Christian intelligentsia at the time:

- a. defend against external charges against Christians - threat to the *pax romana*, atheism, "pernicious superstition" (Tacitus), etc;
- b. express his defense and his doctrine in philosophical language, acceptable to the Greco-Roman intelligentsia;
- c. correcting mistaken, or wrong, interpretations: combating heresies, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, especially Gnosticism and Montanism.

This effort to express Christianity in the face of paganism, Hebraism and heresy took the name of **Patristics**. It designates Christian thought in the period following the Neo-Testamental period (30-120) until the beginning of Scholasticism, that is, the 2nd to 8th centuries.

The early Church Fathers, who had contact with one of Jesus' apostles, are called Apostolic Fathers. They are: Clement, bishop of Rome, third successor of Peter; Ignatius, third bishop of Antioch (70-107), Polycarp of Smyrna (69-155), disciple of John, and Papias of Hierapolis. Also considered writings of the Apostolic Fathers are the **Didache** and Shepherd of Hermas.

"In the first 150 years of the history of Christianity, only two figures appear about whom we have enough information to be able to reconstruct a somewhat satisfactory biography: Paul and Pastor of Hermas, the latter a former slave whose work was read aloud for centuries in countless Christian communities. " (HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 56, own translation)

"There are two types of ecclesiastical writers of the first centuries: the Fathers, or Church Fathers, so officially designated for holiness of life, doctrinal excellence, and orthodoxy; benevolent and illustrious authors who were not officially recognized as Church Fathers: Origen, Tertullian, and Eusebius of Caesarea." (RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI, 2012, own translation)

The Catholic Church, giving Augustine special recognition, has divided Patristics into three periods: pre-Augustinian, Augustinian, and post-Augustinian.

14.1 Early Patristic/Pre-Augustinian Trends⁸⁵

The first Patristics covers Christian writings and writers of the 2nd and 3rd century at a historical moment when Christians live constantly under threat of violence and intermittent cruel persecution.

There are three trends observed in the Patristics:

14.2 Pastoral-catechetical and traditional-charismatic

It is a portrait of the Christian church at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century; a period that, although pioneering and pioneering, is traditional and charismatic. It attempts to record the essentials of apostolic times and to experience Christian brotherhood, in a prophetic and eschatological climate.

The main document of this period is the **Didache**, or Preaching of the Lord to the people through the Twelve Apostles⁸⁶ (discovered in 1873, in a monastery in Constantinople, today Istanbul), a kind of catechesis of the basic principles of Christian doctrine. This work represents the "transition" period between the apostolic environment of the New Testament, still linked to Judaism (despite the struggle for emancipation) and the pagan world into which the missionary church was launched, the world of culture, of philosophy, of empire, of Romanizing secularization. The first part of the **Didache** is called The Two Paths: the practices of virtues that configure the path of life and the vices that lead to the path of death. The second part deals with the Liturgical-Ecclesial Dispositions: baptism, fasting, prayer. The text makes it clear that the Eucharist was still celebrated within a common meal. The third part speaks of Disciplinary Prescriptions of the Community.

Other documents considered "apostolic": Epistle of Barnabas; The Shepherd of Hermas; the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Papias of Hierapolis.

⁸⁵ The following is a summary of chapter 3 from the book *Christian Spirituality in History - from the Origins to St. Augustine*, by professor/doctor Ronaldo Cavalcante, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.

⁸⁶ "The idea of twelve apostles was widespread in the last quarter of the first century" (BROWN, 1983, p. 85, own translation).

The Epistle of Barnabas dates back to the year 140 and attempts an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament precepts. The Shepherd of Hermas, a true apocryphal Apocalypse, is a complex work, but, as Pierini said, "in its own way, popularly suggestive, it outlines in perspective the drama of the second Christian generation in a Babylonian city like Rome. The theology of Hermas is the theology of mercy, "of the Good Shepherd, through the Church".

"The author of Shepherd of Hermas is a freed slave, slave-owner, smallholder, "charming and frank figure" (Brown), belongs to the third or fourth generation after Jesus. Although emancipation does not remove him socially from the slave caste, he belongs to the select group of independent freedmen who gave so much vitality to the economic life of the first and second centuries A.D." (HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 15-25, own translation)

It is observed that in Asia and Syria, a vision of Christianity as union with the Savior, through which immortality is attained, prevails; in Rome, there is an emphasis on the ethical question and, therefore, on Christian living. There we have a great influence of Stoic ethics in Alexandria and a strong presence of Neoplatonic philosophy in the allegorical reading of the Old Testament.

14.3 Apologetic-testimonial and theological-institutional

From the second century on, the Church becomes theologized and institutionalized. The apologetic writings are addressed to pagans, but are read mostly by Christians.

Authors of the time: the anonymous writer of the Letter to Diognetus; Tatian the Syrian; Athenagoras of Athens; Theophilus of Antioch; Hermias the philosopher; Milciades and Apollinarius of Hierapolis and, above all, Justin the Martyr. Converted in the year 132, probably in Ephesus, after undertaking several journeys preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and defending the Christian faith, Justin arrived in Rome in the year 150. There he taught brilliantly for fifteen years. His objective was to show that what was sought by all the philosophies of his time, the encounter of man with God, was fully realized in the Christian doctrine. He was beheaded in 165 and, with his death, Christianity acquired citizenship status.

Other notables of the period were Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon. Born in Smyrna, Asia Minor, he is considered by many to be the greatest theologian of the second century. It is difficult to find more precise information about the Gnostic systems than what he offers us.

14.4 Episcopal-ecclesiological and orthodox-exegetical

It is not known whether the churches of Africa were created from Rome. It is certain and curious that the African contribution to the Christian literature and theology of antiquity, in many aspects, is much more relevant than that of Rome. Starting in the third century, Africa is the center of the first Christian literature in the Latin language, producing a theology of first quality through various

personalities, besides forging a theological vocabulary that would serve the entire Eastern Church. Maintaining very close ties with the Roman See, the Church of Africa even helped in the dogmatic sedimentation of the primacy of Peter in Rome, reinforcing the role of the bishop in the process of institutionalization of the Church. Paradoxically, new possibilities for reading the Scriptures surfaced, inaugurating a new science within Christianity: the orthodox exegetical trend.

In these two centuries, II and III, there is a plurality of opinions among the writers regarding the pagan civilization, which converge when the confrontation occurs in the strictly religious field, where there is a struggle of religions. This confrontation is manifested in the persecutions, first of paganism against Christianity (1st to 3rd centuries), and then of triumphant Christianity, religion of the State, against residual paganism in the 4th century. From a symbiosis between Jewish, pagan and evangelical thought, the first Christian theology was born.

The division of Patristics into Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) - already begun in the 3rd century with the Alexandrians and other Africans - becomes definitive in the 4th century, favored and accentuated with the division of the empire into Eastern and Western.

The Roman, Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Anglican Churches believe that the Church Fathers provided the correct interpretation of Holy Scripture, recorded Sacred Tradition, and knew how to discern it from heretical doctrines.

15. Apostolic Fathers

Some authors and works, in chronological order:

Clement of Rome

Bishop of Rome from 88 to 97, he was the third successor of Peter, after Linus and Anaclet, about whom nothing historically reliable is known. Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians is the first Christian letter outside the New Testament. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, states that Clement "saw the apostles", "met with them". His Letter to the Corinthians was the first exercise of the Roman primacy after Peter's death. In this letter, written in 96, the Greek word **laikós** appears for the first time in Christian literature, meaning "of the people of God". The testimonies that Clement was martyred are late, from the fourth and sixth centuries.

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107)

A disciple of John, he knew the apostle Paul and was the third bishop of Antioch (70-107), after Peter and Evódio. He was the first Christian to give the Church the adjective "catholic". Concerned about the unity and ecclesiastical structure of the Church, he assumed and defended the figure of the monarchic bishop. He left us seven letters addressed to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralli, Rome,

Philadelphia, and Smyrna, and one to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. He was thrown to the wolves in the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome in 107.

Polycarp of Smyrna (69-155)

Polycarp claimed to be a disciple of the Apostle John. He traveled to Rome to try to convince Anicetus, the bishop of Rome, to celebrate the date of Passover on the 14th of Nissan, the Jewish **Pesach** day, and not on Sunday. They agreed on many issues, but not on this one, with East and West each keeping their own tradition. Bishop Polycarp, at the age of 86, was burned alive in Smyrna.

Papias of Hierapolis

He was born before the year 70 and died in Smyrna in 155. Only fragments of his works have survived, quoted by his fellow countryman Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, and by the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who calls him bishop of Hierapolis (today Pamukkale, Turkey). He would have been the first to investigate the origins of Christianity and to interpret - in a work of five volumes - the "sayings" (**logia**) of Jesus, some of which are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

*Shepherd of Hermas*⁸⁷

The Shepherd of Hermas is the first major Christian text that interprets the Christian message from the concrete situation of a married man, a father with several children. Jewish, born a slave, he is sold by his master to an aristocratic woman from Rome (Rose). He manages to emancipate himself from slavery, either through his own financial efforts or those of the community. He becomes a small businessman, starts a family, and writes a **best-seller that is** read - like chapters of a novel - for more than two centuries in the wide spaces where Christianity spreads, until it is qualified as apocryphal and falls into oblivion.

The Shepherd of Hermas is a collection of five Visions, twelve Commandments, and ten Comparisons, or Parables.

Hermas' universe is the world of workers, of Roman slavery, "inexorable and unchanging". His book is the only text that penetrates into the daily life of Christians and shows the poor of Rome discussing their problems, setting up strategies for dignification, in a society closed in castes, in the conquest of "a place in the sun". From it emerges a Christianity of the small virtues of the home, which teaches how to listen, to master the language, to struggle to earn one's daily bread, to prepare food, to

⁸⁷ This text is a compilation of the fascinating book by Eduardo Hoornaert: "*Hermas on top of the world: reading a Christian text from the second century*".

bear the inconvenience of married life, to respect the freedom of the other, to educate children, and to help a brother or sister in need.

Hermas understands that the process of conversion is slow, painful and global, because it implies the radical abandonment of the patronal logic that sustains Roman society and it is necessary to create a new environment for people to live together: the Church. Like Paul, Hermas rejects the benevolent patriarchalism of the surrounding society and combats the patronal ideology manifested by the presbyters.

Hermas bears witness to a Christianity that excels in terms of education. He is first of all a pluricultural educator, heir to the memorable educational capacity of Judaism, he transfers it to the Christian communities. He does not allow himself to be contaminated by the virulent anti-Judaism that is found in the writings of apologists such as Justin, or Melito.

15.1 Other Church Fathers

Justin, philosopher and martyr (100-165)

*He was born in ancient Shechem (Samaria) where, as a child, he studied rhetoric, poetry, and history. As a young adult he became interested in philosophy, devoting himself especially to Stoicism and Platonism. Justin continued to wear the cloak that identified him as a philosopher and taught students in Ephesus and later in Rome. At the end of a long road in search of truth, he found in the divine project of creation and salvation that is realized in Jesus Christ, the **Logos, that is, the eternal Word, the eternal Reason, the creative Reason.***

"We have learned that Christ is the firstborn of God and that he is the Logos, in whom the whole human race participates. Consequently, those who lived before Christ, but not according to the Logos, were evil, enemies of Christ? [...] on the contrary, those who lived and live according to the Logos are Christians, and are not subject to fears and disturbances."
(JUSTIN, "Apology")

Justin founded a school in Rome, where he taught freely the new religion, which he considered the true philosophy. His pupil Tatian, a Syrian, wrote his own Apology around 165, ten years after his master. Returning to Syria, based on a model of his master, he wrote, in the Syriac language, an evangelical harmony, the so-called **Diatessaron**, a work only surpassed in the fifth century by the "canon of the four Gospels". Justin was beheaded in 165 by order of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, to whom he had addressed his work "**Apology**" in 155. He is the most important of the apologetic Fathers of the second century and had much influence on the church's choice of philosophy as the field of religious dialogue.

Irenaeus of Lyon (135/140-203)

He was born in Smyrna (today Izmir/Turkey), where he attended the school of the bishop Polycarp, disciple of the apostle John. This itinerary of apostolic transmission of faith in Jesus Christ marked him deeply. In 171, Irenaeus was in Rome, as the bearer of a letter from Bishop Potino of Lyon to Pope Eleutherius. This saved him from being martyred like Potinus, who died in prison at the age of 90, victim of ill-treatment. In his work **Against Heretics**, he made it possible to unmask Gnosticism and its followers within the Church.

"Irenaeus is considered the first great theologian of the Church, creator of systematic theology; the greatest theologian of the second century. The first writer to speak unequivocally of a "New" Testament, in parallel with the Old. For Quasten, Daniélou and others, the marrow, the center of Irenaeus' theology is redemption. For a true redemption, a God-man is necessary. Christ became man to divinize humanity; this is the recapitulation, the restoration and consummation of humanity and the universe in Christ." (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 151, own translation)

Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

He was born in Athens, traveled through Italy, Syria and Palestine and settled in Alexandria, the "city symbolizing that fruitful crossbreeding of different cultures that characterized the Hellenistic era". Converted by his patrician Panthenus - a stoical philosopher, charismatic, cultured and virtuous - he succeeded him in directing the now famous catechetical school in Alexandria. He was Origen's teacher. During the persecution of 202-203, he had to go into exile in Cappadocia, where he died. For the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, Clement was an incomparable master of philosophy and, for St. Jerome, the most learned of the Church Fathers.

Clement draws the distinction between "simple Christians" and "Gnostic Christians," reserved for spirits who are dedicated to the intense search for truth, a dimension that is related to the incarnate Logos, that is, the earthly Jesus, author of concrete actions. Thus Clement encourages Christians not to asceticism and renunciation of the world, but to transform the spirit of the city by the example of a life guided by love of God and neighbor, and by the witness of a heart free from slavery to goods. Clement - like a beacon of Alexandria - poetically and enthusiastically presents the sublimity of the revelation of the Logos and the wonderful gift of divine grace, which fulfills all human desires.

Tertullian (155-220)

He was born in Carthage and converted to Catholicism in 193 in Rome, where he was a lawyer and had a solid intellectual and juridical formation. After his conversion, he returned to Carthage and there he inaugurated the autochthonous African Latinism, giving Africa a head start over Rome. He turned out to be a great polemicist, defending and affirming Christianity before the Roman intelligentsia.

Tertullian wrote the first known commentary on the "Our Father". He is considered a master of prose, in Latin and Greek, the prose of a rhetorician and a polemicist. He also wrote the famous expression "the human soul is naturally Christian"; he proposes non-violence as a rule of life. His ideal of a rigid and uninhibited life would have led Tertullian to join Montanism.

Hippolytus of Rome (170-236)

He was born around 170, probably in the East, where he would have been a disciple of Irenaeus of Smyrna, bishop of Lyon. He died a martyr's death in 236, in Sardinia. His literary production was enormous, including a chronicle of world history up to 234, of which, unfortunately, little has been preserved. One of his works, **Apostolic Tradition**, was only found in the 20th century. In it we find some very interesting information: "Let he who is blameless and has been elected by all the people be ordained bishop". About the catechumenate: "[...] they must hear the Word three years before they are presented for baptism; their life must be examined, whether they lived with dignity as catechumens, whether they honored widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they did only good works.

Origen of Alexandria (185-254)

He was born of Christian parents in 185 and died of cruel torture in the city of Tyre, probably in 254. When he was 17 years old, during the persecution of Christians by Septimius Severus, his father was arrested and his teacher Clement of Alexandria left the city. Origen wrote to his father encouraging him not to be discouraged from the supreme witness of the faith. Leonidas, his father, did not deny the faith and was beheaded. 40 years later, while preaching in Caesarea, Origen said, "It is not useful for me to have had a martyr father, if I do not behave well and do not honor the nobility of my lineage, that is, the martyrdom of my father and the testimony that made him illustrious in Christ.

Origen, in order to support himself, began to teach philosophy, grammar, and literature, and at the invitation of Bishop Demetrius, when he was only 18 years old, he took over the instruction of the catechumens. Origen's educational environment was the "Hellenistic environment of Antioch, where, for centuries, the philosophical research of the pagan doctors on literary texts and of the Hebrew doctors on Biblical texts was being perfected" (PIERINI, 1998, p. 11, own translation). Still as a layman, he accepted the invitation of several bishops of Palestine to preach in their churches. In 232, already as a presbyter, he founded a school in Caesarea and directed it for about 20 years.

Epiphanius points out that Origen wrote 6,000 works. Jerome, in a letter, gives us the titles of 800 of them. Out of a total of 600 homilies, we are left with 21 in Greek and a slightly larger number in Latin. They are works of textual criticism of the Bible; exegetical works (homilies, commentaries of a scientific nature, with philological, historical and etymological notes); apologetic writings, among which the work **Contra Celsum** stands out; dogmatic writings. The work **On Foundations, about God, the world,**

freedom, religion, and revelation, is considered the first system of Christian theology and the first manual of dogma.

Among the writings of a practical character, the oldest scientific study we possess about the Christian prayer, the **Our Father**, stands out. His is the phrase "since the soul of Jesus is preexistent, it can establish the union between the infinite Logos and the physical body of Christ". Origen, in the Christian field, rivals the philosopher Plotinus (204-270) in the pagan field, and both thinkers will mark the following centuries.

Cyprian of Carthage (200/210-258)

It is likely that he was born in Carthage to a family that was well off socially, economically, and intellectually. After a life of violence, corruption and passions, he converted in 246 and distributed all his wealth to the poor. In 249 he was elected bishop of Carthage by acclamation of the people. Cyprian wrote numerous works. "Besides standing out as a theologian, he shone as a pastor, a pragmatic man, faithful to ecclesiastical tradition, an uncontested fighter for the unity of the Church, and a tireless defender of a balanced Christianity, avoiding the excesses of laxity and rigorism. He was the first African bishop to suffer martyrdom, having been beheaded in 258. His theological emphases dominate the Christian West until the appearance of St. Augustine.

"In the history of ancient Christianity, the distinction between the first three centuries and those following the Council of Nicaea of 325, the first ecumenical one, is crucial. Almost as a "connecting point" between the two periods are the "Constantinian turn" and the peace of the Church, as well as the figure of Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. "
(RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI, 2012, own translation)

Eusebius of Caesarea (260-339)

It is more likely that he was born in Caesarea around the year 260 and that he was educated in the excellent local library formed by Origen. Around 313, he succeeded Agapius as bishop of Caesarea Maritima. Eusebius is important for his apologetic, exegetical and doctrinal works. More so for his Ecclesiastical History, in ten volumes, in which he sets out to reflect on and analyze three centuries of Christianity, up to 324, the year Constantine was acclaimed emperor of Rome.

In 325, he participated in the first Council of Nicaea, where he stood out among the more than 300 participants for his culture, fame as a writer, and for having fallen into the favor of the Emperor Constantine. He wrote "The Creed," a text that was approved and is practically the same that is recited today at all Masses. "He was the most qualified representative of the Christian culture of his time, in quite varied contexts, from theology to exegesis, from history to scholarship. Eusebius is known above all as the first historian of Christianity, but he was also the greatest philologist of the ancient Church."
(RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI, 2012, own translation)

"The impression one has when reading the works of the majority of the Fathers of the Church is that one does not see in them a discussion in favor of the human promotion of women and, even worse, they give no sign of reacting against the inexorable march toward the priestization of ecclesial structures and mentalities, in full swing at the time they write. It seems that they do not see the passage between the Master model and the Priest model from the communities' point of view. " (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 178, own translation)

VI - THE "PATH" IS MADE BY WALKING...

16 - The expansion : plural, united, universal

Scene One: Jerusalem, A.D. 30, Acts of the Apostles, text in Greek:

"They were persevering in listening to the teachings of the apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. All those who embraced the faith were united and put all things in common; they sold their possessions and goods and shared the money among all, according to each one's needs. Daily, all together attended the Temple and in their homes they broke bread, taking food with joy and simplicity of heart. They praised God and were esteemed by all the people." (Acts 2:43-46)

The multitude of the faithful were of one heart and soul. No one considered the things they owned as private property, but everything was put in common. And all enjoyed great acceptance. No one among them was in need. "A kind of ethical-religious communism, dictated by a spirit of sacrifice, alien to any constraint" - Bihlmeyer's comment, quoted by Benedict XVI.

Second scene: year 197 AD, Tertullian, from Carthage / Africa, Latin text:

"We are from yesterday and we have already filled the earth and all that is yours: the cities, the commerce, the fortified places, the towns, the villages, the fields, the tribes, the shields, the palaces, the senate, the forum. We leave only the temples for you.

Just over 150 years separate the two scenes. The first, in the year 30, concerns a small community of native Jews, who spoke Aramaic, or Diaspora Jews, who also spoke Greek. The majority, including the leadership, came from rural Galilee, where the Aramaic language was spoken. The second scene is found in **Apologeticum**, a work written by Tertullian, a learned lawyer, who wrote well and a lot, in Latin and Greek, born in Carthage, Africa, the son of a Roman Centurion.

The backdrop of the first scene is the majestic Jerusalem Temple; of the second, universal scene, "only the pagan temples" are left out.

The book Acts of the Apostles was composed by the end of the first century, or the beginning of the second century, so its author belonged to the third generation of Christianity. He was hardly a witness to the events he describes. More than the description of historical facts, the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles is an exhortation to an ideal and an apology of the Christian community persevering in teaching, in fraternal coexistence, in the communion of spiritual and material goods, in prayer and in missionary action.

"Luke's work is the first piece of Christian literature written from the apologetic perspective consciously addressed to the pagan reader. It marks the beginning of attempts to present the essence of the Christian faith to those outside the community of believers." (KOESTER, 2005, p. 52, own translation)

Written in Greek, with stylistic and dramatic resources characteristic of the Greco-Roman epic - emblematic in Virgil's **Aeneid** - the author of Acts describes the creation of the new Christian community. A story in which the hero, Jesus, is born in Bethlehem, the city of King David, and dies in Jerusalem; this is the first part, the Gospel. The second part presents the story of the Christian community - the term **Christian** appears here for the first time among all early Christian writings - which begins in Jerusalem and, moved by the Holy Spirit, takes, through Paul, the message of the kingdom of God to Rome, the capital of the empire. From there the kingdom of God extends "to the ends of the earth". The author's narrative scheme prevented him from discussing other early Christian communities.

It is hardly plausible that the first communities of Jesus' followers did not arise in Galilee, where his missionary activity was concentrated, and in Samaria, the latter mentioned in passing in Acts. They were certainly prior or concomitant to Jerusalem.

The main source of information about these communities would be in a document that has been lost. Part of this document, called "Gospel Q (**Quelle** = source), or "of the Sayings", or "tradition of words", has been preserved in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Sayings, sentences, miracles, stories, parables, would have been transmitted orally and, sometime between the 40s and the 70s, were collected, probably by "Hellenists", Judeo-Christians, whose first language was Greek. They would be "approximately 225 to 250 verses, or a Greek text of 3,519 words, with a total vocabulary of approximately 760 words, according to the International Q Project" (HURTADO, 2012, p. 293, own translation), which proves the interest and rigor with which the document has been studied.

Besides these sources on the primitive Christian communities, we would have John's Gospel as a source of information, since the community it represents would have originated in Galilee, with a strong protagonism of women and charismatics.

It is certain that Jesus lived an ethical radicalism, itinerant, in the sense that he renounced a home, family and possessions. His closest disciples did too. If Jesus' words had not been accepted and practiced in an uninterrupted way, and were notoriously ignored, they could hardly have been preserved beyond one or two generations. On the other hand, this itinerant, ethical radicalism cannot subsist for long: "It only stands a chance at the margins of society," as sociologist Gert Theissen observes.

"The behavior recommended in the word tradition (sayings) was practiced in at least one place in early Christianity: i.e., it was practiced by the itinerant charismatics, the apostles, prophets, and missionaries, who were, not exclusively, the bearers of the word tradition. " (HURTADO, 2012, p. 327, own translation)

"They must have found welcome, above all, among those people who were themselves situated on the margins of society: among the weary and burdened, among the poor and hungry, to whom they addressed the beatitude in their words. " (THEISSEN, 1987, p.49, own translation)

Certainly these itinerants appear first in Galilee and are of peasant background: small farmers, day laborers, tenants, shepherds, and owners of small vineyards. They go out to announce the Good News in villages and depend on the good will of others to subsist. Of course, they could not constitute the majority, made up of local sympathizers, or heads of families. This stateless existence of charismatic itinerants, a-family, lasts until at least the second century, as Papias and the **Didache** testify, which sees in them "the Lord's way of life".

The sources mentioned, plus Paul's seven authentic letters - all written in the 50s, that is, 20 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth - suggest that first-century Christianity was composed of several groups, with varying complexity of elements and emphases. Moreover, there was often (perhaps characteristically) within each group a variety or repertoire of beliefs, emphases, and modes of Christological expression. "There were differences that divided, but, perhaps even far more characteristically, there were several groups of various polychromatic characters interacting in a lively interchange."⁸⁸ Among the early communities of Jesus' followers, the leadership that stood out most was that of Judas the Just, Jesus' brother. According to the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, the Jerusalem authorities, "no longer able to bear the witness of him who, because of the high standard he had reached in virtue and piety, was considered the most just of men, put him to death, using the prevailing anarchy as an opportunity.

As a Jew, a faithful observer of the Law, Jude's major concern, as is apparent from the letter written on his behalf (Epistle of James) by some of his disciples around the 80s to 90s, "is how to maintain the proper balance between devotion to Torah and faith in Jesus as messiah." (ASLAN, 2013, p.223, own translation)

The communities under the leadership of James were quite different from the communities of John, and both different from the Pauline communities.

According to Justo Gonzalez, there is very little information about missionaries in the style of Paul and Barnabas. It seems that the enormous geographical spread of Christianity was not so much due to the work of missionaries or itinerant preachers, but rather to merchants, slaves, and other Christians who, for various reasons, were forced to travel and who took their faith from one place to another (EBNER in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 25). It is evident that this way of spreading the faith favored the unity of feelings, values, and to some extent behavior, but also great doctrinal diversity.

- Ten years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth - a "marginal", from a marginal town, crucified as a subversive, in a marginal province of the empire - his disciples were already making themselves known in the capital of the empire;

⁸⁸ "The inhabitants of the Roman Empire traveled more extensively and with greater ease than anyone before them did or would do again until the 19th century." MEEKS as quoted by STARK (2006, p. 152, own translation).

"25 years after the execution of Jesus in Palestine by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, the list of greetings in the epistle to the Romans (c 56 AD) attests to the existence of seven communities in the capital of the world empire. " (HURTADO, 2012, p. 327)

- By the end of the 1st century Christianity had spread to Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Greece, Rome, and possibly Egypt and Illyria, Dalmatia, Gaul, and Spain.

When the Acts of the Apostles was published at the end of the first or beginning of the second century, the authors record as being in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost representatives of those places where the presence of Christians was already then a reality: **"Among us are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the neighboring region of Cyrene; some of us have come from Rome, others are Jews or converted pagans; there are also Cretans and Arabs."** (Acts 2, 9-11)

- By the end of the 1st century the Jews were no longer a majority among the Christians.

"Only in the second half of the second century will the term "Christian" be applied exclusively to non-Jewish followers of Jesus [...] and Christianity began to form when non-Jewish followers of Jesus opposed Judaism on the one hand and Gnosticism on the other." (AUGIAS, 2011, 250, own translation)

- By the end of the 2nd century, Christianity had reached Mesopotamia, southern Italy, Gaul, Spain, Germania, and North Africa.

Among the 22 largest urban centers of the empire, 12 already had Christian communities in the year 100. The sociologist Stark lists the cities, with the estimated population at the time: Caesarea Maritima (45,000), Damascus (45,000), Antioch (150,000), Alexandria (400,000), Pergamos (120,000), Salamin (35,000), Sardis (100,000), Smyrna (75,000), Athens (30,000), Corinth (100,000), Ephesus (200,000) and Rome (650,000). Besides these, six others could be listed around the year 180: Apamea (125,000), Carthage (90,000), Cordoba (45,000), Edessa (80,000), Memphis (90,000), and Syracuse (80,000). The author sees "positive correlation of these estimates with the Fischerian thesis on urbanism, which predicts: "the larger the city, the more easily the Christians would have gathered the critical mass necessary to form a Church in a short time.

For the Marxist Kautsky, "by the year 98, there were Christian communities in about 48 localities; by 180, in about 74; and, by 325, in more than 550 localities. Until the middle of the third century, the new faith had very few adherents among the upper classes" (KAUTSKY, 2010, p. 365, own translation). "Bishop Dionysius of Corinth addressed, around 170, 'Catholic letters' (CESAREIA, 1999, p. 23.1) to numerous communities far beyond his own bishopric, thereby testifying to the universality of the unity of the ancient Church" (LENZENWEGGER, 2013, p. 17, own translation). In the course of the second century, the monarchical episcopate imposed itself everywhere, and in the conflicts that arose, it proved to be the axis of ecclesiastical self-assertion.

"In the third century, Christianity grew at an exorbitant rate [...]. It is quite consistent the thesis that by the end of the third century, Christianity had quantitatively become the largest closed religious community in the empire." (MARKSCHIES, quoted by KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 52, own translation)

The demographic and social composition of Christianity in the third century did not differ much from the rest of society. Very early on, it had already reached the higher strata of society as well.

"By the year 200, in the territories of the empire, there must have been about 200,000 Christians living, out of a total population of 60 million. A century later, Christians represent a number ranging from 5% to 10% of the empire's population." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 35, own translation)

"More surprising is how the absolute number (as much as the Christian percentage) quickly skyrockets between the 250s and 300s, as historians report and recent archaeological discoveries from Dura Europos support. "⁸⁹

Christianism could easily have reached half the population, roughly, of the Roman Empire by the middle of the 4th century, without miracles, or mass conversions. "It is likely," Stark notes, that "the growth rate of Christianity must have declined rapidly at some point throughout the fourth century." (STARK, 2006, p. 18, own translation)

- By the 4th century, Christianity reached Armenia - the first officially Christian state (MARTY, 2014, p. 53) - Persia, northern India, Ethiopia, lower Austria and northern Italy.

17 - The strategies

After its beginnings in Palestine - with itinerants and local communities, including among the marginalized, such as the blind, the lepers, the prostitutes (so present in the life of Jesus of Nazareth) - Christianity becomes a predominantly urban phenomenon.

According to Meeks:

"Within a decade of Jesus' crucifixion, the culture of the villages and hamlets of Palestine had been left behind and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement. It remained so from the dispersion of the "Hellenists" from Jerusalem

⁸⁹ The sociologist Rodney Stark, "exploring the arithmetic of the possible to grasp the magnitude of the phenomenon of Christianity's expansion", presents in the book cited above an interesting table showing the projected growth of Christianity at a rate of 40% per decade. According to this projection, the number of Christians per year would be (in rounded numbers): year 40 - 1,000; year 50 - 1,400; year 100 - 7,500; year 150 - 40,000; year 200 - 217,000; year 250 - 1 million; year 300 - 6 million, that is, 10% of the population of the Roman Empire. Stark notes that the growth rate used is consistent with the growth of Mormons during the 19th century (STARK, 2006, p. 18; 20).

until well after the time of Constantine. The movement had overcome the most fundamental division in the society of the Roman empire, the division between the rural people and the city dwellers, and the results would prove to be important. " (MEEKS, 2011, p. 35-36, own translation)

This process of "urbanization and Hellenization" of Christianity was literally enthusiastic - "moved by the Holy Spirit", as it is said in Acts - but not simply spontaneous.

The path taken - whose main protagonist was Paulo, for the success of the results, allows us to assume some strategic decisions, as follows:

- division of responsibilities and functions among the leaders mentioned in Acts (apostles, elders, some women, including Mary, Jesus' brothers, the group of Hellenists, Judas, Silas, Paul, Barnabas...), defining the area of work and the target audience of each one. The meeting held in the year 49, in Jerusalem, provoked by Barnabas and Paul (two Jews from the Diaspora), seems to have involved more decisions than those reported in Acts. The fact is that Jesus' brothers, from the family of David, stayed in Jerusalem: James the Just led the local community until his death in 62. Simeon, or Simon bar Klopas (62-107), a cousin of Jesus and James, succeeded him and led the transfer of most of the Christians from their community to the region east of the Jordan, the environment of the Hellenistic cities before the first Jewish-Roman war in 66, according to Hegesippus. (The emperor Domitian (81-96) imprisoned two of Jesus' great-nephews, grandsons of his brother Judas, because they were of the house of David, and later released them when it was found that, although Christians, they were nothing more than simple peasants.) (KOESTLER, 2005, p. 2018)
- Jude of Jerusalem, (-- -135), the fifteenth local bishop, who saw the city completely destroyed and renamed *Aelia Capitolina*, was the great-grandson of Jude "brother of Jesus" and was the last Bishop of Jerusalem of Jewish origin, according to Epiphanius of Salamina and Eusebius of Caesarea.

"The sources allowed us to distinguish three major groups of Judeo-Christian matrix: the Nazoreans (or Nazarenes) proper (in Judea and Palestine), Ebionites (= poor, in Palestine), and Elcasites (in Mesopotamia). Significantly, the 2nd century bishops of Adiabene (the region beyond the Tigris) all have Hebrew names. " (POTESTÁ, 2013, p. 25, own translation)

- The Hellenists, that is, the Judeo-Christians who had Greek as their common language, after Stephen's death in 42, therefore before the conciliar meeting in Jerusalem, had already gone to Damascus, Phoenicia, the island of Cyprus, Cyrene, and the city of Antioch. The circles of seven took on an urban mission (Samaria, Caesarea and Antioch), preaching in synagogues and in homes.
- Peter, John and Philip went to Samaria. Philip, assisted by his four prophetess daughters, worked in Samaria; he made Caesarea his missionary base and then would have gone to Hierapolis.

- Peter is said to have gone to Antioch, the capital of the Roman Province of Syria, where he became the first bishop. There are indications that Peter was around 52-54 in Babylon, where the Jewish community was, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, about 800,000.
- John - of whom we have little news - is likely to have gone to Galilee after leaving Samaria. Then, accompanying his community, which was fleeing from the horrors of war, he went to take refuge in cities of the Decapolis, and finally to Ephesus.
- Source Q missionaries, generally "couples working from house to house, constitute, in the territory between Galilee and Syria, a network of isolated and scattered houses of sympathizers within the smallest and largest communes." (EBNER in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 27, own translation)
- Thomas, according to the historian Eusebius, is said to have worked in Syria, Persia, and India.
- Bartholomew/Natanael is said to have brought the Good News to India (where the philosopher and theologian Panthenus, who directed the Alexandrian Catechetical School in the second century, travelling through the country, is said to have noted traces of Bartholomew's activity).
- Barnabas sought out Paul in Tarsus and together they set up the Antioch community, leaving a very eclectic team. Accompanied by Paul and John Mark, Barnabas focused on the regions of Cyprus, Syria and Cilicia.
- After three years in Arabia (35-38), where he probably concentrated his activity in flourishing Hellenistic cities such as Pella, Gerasa, Philadelphia and Borsa, Paul joins Barnabas. Later, disagreeing with him, he takes Silas/Silvano as his mission companion - who had already accomplished his mission with the brothers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia - and concentrates his work in Asia Minor (Pisidia, Lakonia and Galatia) and in Europe (Greece and Macedonia - in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea). He stays longer in Corinth and Ephesus.

Paulo strategically concentrated his "mission" on the capital cities of the empire's provinces, due to their importance as commercial, administrative and cultural junctions.

- a. seek out the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, especially those in which the percentage of Jews was higher. In the cities of the western provinces (places covered by the activity of Paul and his team) the percentage of Jews reached a quarter of the total population, against an average percentage of 10% in the empire. These communities had synagogues - where they could speak, since the *Way* was recognized until then as one of many Jewish sects - holy scriptures, in addition to the common language, group solidarity, mutual support and assistance in needs.

The continuous flow of money, goods, information, and official (Temple administration) and private correspondence between these communities and Jerusalem weighed on the decision. At first, the missionaries and converts were in their cultural environment, and could be Judeo-Christians, without confronting others in the community.

- b. make disciples mainly among the "God-fearing", Gentiles halfway to total adherence to Judaism, with resistance to the adoption of circumcision - considered by them, frequenters of public baths, obscene and anti-aesthetic - and of the food prohibitions of the Torah. These requirements were dispensed with by the new form of Jewish faith, the Path.

It is likely that most of the God-fearers had a higher level of prestige and wealth than the average of other Gentiles, which provided Jesus' followers with more credibility with Gentiles and Jews, as well as economic assistance and political protection.

Other strategic decisions may have been more specific to Paul

- c. recruit collaborators, men and women, among artisans able and willing to link mission trips and self-support.

Paul himself carried his work tools and was proud that he was not financially dependent on the communities. For Paul, his identity with the manual laborer had an evangelizing significance.

- d. recruit and train assistants to work as a team on mission trips and in the consolidation of churches in each city.

Priscilla and Aquila (her name, strangely enough, comes first in several quotations) become very present in Paul's life. The two, Jews, would have already been converted in Rome when Paul met them in the year 50.

Apollos (Apollonius), a fervent Jew from Alexandria, "an eloquent man and well versed in the Scriptures, was introduced to a fuller knowledge of God's Way by Priscilla and Aquila and became part of Paul's team.

Timothy, born in Lystra, 125 mi from Tarsus, the son of a Jewish mother and pagan father, whom Paul called "my true son in the common faith," continued Paul's work and would have been the first bishop of Ephesus, according to the testimony of the historian Eusebius of Caesarea.

Titus, of Latin name and pagan origin, became a great collaborator and would have become the first bishop of Crete.

Paul had dozens of collaborators; some risked their lives for him, others were companions on missionary journeys and in prison. In the letter to the Romans, Paul names, nominally and affectionately, 26 men and women.

- e. To delegate responsibilities and functions to male and female companions: through the creation of house churches, Paul opens space for women to exercise coordinating functions, expanding the role that Jewish and Greco-Roman society gave them. (It is true that there was a subsequent reaction on the part of the dominant culture, curtailing their power). He allowed the formation, in Philippi, of an all-female community (eklesia), which was absurd in Jewish culture; he gave Titus the pacification of the difficult Corinthian community and the mission of organizing a collection for the brothers in Jerusalem; He made Timothy co-author of the letters to Philemon and the Philippians; he gave Phoebe the function of deaconess of the community of Cenchrea and Junia the title of apostle ("Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and fellow prisoners, important apostles, who converted to Christ before me" - Rom. 16, 7). Some authors of older manuscripts, annoyed with the title apostle, tried to change it to Junius.
- f. Introduction of distance catechesis through the letters, where Paul answers questions, outlines practical guidelines, and elaborates a thematic theology according to the needs of each community. He thus reinforces unity in diversity.

- g. Installation of a catechetical school, in the house of Tiranos, in Ephesus, where he taught daily, and a center that reproduced and disseminated his letters, reinforcing the oral transmission, by word of mouth, of the Message and the exchange between communities (perhaps Paul died before seeing this project working).

However, this strategy of Paul's will not last for many years.

"In the second century, the Christian Masters appear in the documents under various names: "presbyters", "elders", "bishops", "prophets", "doctors". These are names coming from the traditional Jewish language. They indicate instructors, counselors, examples of Christian life. Christianity, then, is a school, a training, a catechesis; after some time of catechesis, the Christian returns to normal professional life and mixes with his colleagues from before. What is new is that he henceforth follows a new orientation." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 154, own translation)

- h. To lay the theoretical conceptual foundations for the Path to move from rural, Jewish culture/language to urban, Greco-Roman culture/language; from oral tradition to written tradition (the first preserved Christian text is by Paul, from the year 50); from tribal, Jewish messianism to a universal messianism.

Alain Badiou (*1937) sees in Paul - I think rightly so - the founder of universalism. It is Paul who gives this universalism its consciousness, although, of course, his theses have precursors. (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 8)

Paul elaborated a theoretical frame of reference for the Christian faith so proper and solid that many theologians consider him the greatest among them in the history of Christianity. For Paul, love of neighbor is not only a moral criterion; it is a criterion of rationality of human action, which is opposed to the irrationality of the law and the market. The rationality of these is "I am if I defeat you," the criterion presented by Paul is "I am if you are." ⁹⁰

Taking advantage of the "logistics" of the empire - paved roads and pacified sea routes, adequate ports and merchant fleet, administrative centers as cultural islands in the capital cities of the provinces, a language in common use (coiné Greek) Christianity expanded rapidly and remained diverse and united.

There is a high degree of cohesion and group identity, as well as interchange with other churches, where the "believer" is always received as a "brother". This unity in diversity authorized Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, around the year 110, to speak of the Catholic Church, that is, the Universal Church.

The primacy of a particular local church did not abolish the consciousness of universal communion in faith. The "new people" (1 Pet. 2:9) of Christians initially regarded themselves as the

⁹⁰ Pauline thought today may be the foreshadowing of critical thinking as it emerges from the 19th century onward, supported now on a much broader basis. (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 14, n. 17)

consummation of Israel, but consciously went beyond every limit of nationality. Also the discourse on Christians as the "third kind" (alongside the Greeks and the Jews), founded by the spiritual nature of their worship, expressed the claim to universality. (STOCKMEIER;BAUER, cited by LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 17)

Doctrinal and liturgical divergences, such as the date of Easter, forced the churches to seek new mechanisms of collegial understanding and decision: regional meetings arose. In the middle of the third century, synods were held in North Africa, with about 100 participants, including 70 bishops. These regional synods later generated the Ecumenical Councils to deal with universal unity.

18 - Way of life and daily life in early Christian communities

The first followers of Jesus were not Christians, but Jews. Not because the expression only appeared, from the outside in, 15 or 20 years after Jesus' death. Paul, who lived for some time in Antioch of Syria - where for the first time the name "Christian" appears - did not know the term or take it up. The point is that the first generation of followers of the Path, or disciples of Jesus, were entirely Jewish: they had the same way of life, the same social, civil and religious habits, the same Holy Scriptures, the same beliefs, with some differences, which were gradually affirmed.

The new faith, which has Jesus, his life and message at its center, emerges and is expressed in a matrix of a very deep-rooted social model: Judaism. This model, in terms of way of life, was very rigid; the Jews lived, in the Diaspora, in separate quarters, since they did not welcome foreigners into their homes and did not eat with them, due to their religious requirements regarding purity and food.

With regard to doctrinal interpretations - the main divergence from the "**Nazarites**" - the Jews were quite tolerant, given the long coexistence of the Pharisees and Sadducees, not to mention the Essenes.

Those who believed in the Messiahship and resurrection of Jesus were, for the rest of the Jews, the "Nazarites," one among many sects then existing. They themselves did not consider themselves members of a new religion.

The first conflict of the Jerusalem Christian community with the Jewish authorities, as recounted in Acts, has as its cause Stephen's grave accusation against the members of the Sanhedrin ("traitors and murderers") and, as a consequence, Stephen's death and the expulsion of the Hellenists exclusively. The followers of Jesus who followed the Law were not harmed.

The religious habits of the Jews, whether Christian or not, were, basically, the same: prayer three times a day, facing Jerusalem - even after its destruction - reading the Torah in the synagogues, observing the Sabbath and the other precepts laid down in the Law of Moses, and celebrating the feasts of God's chosen people.

The biggest divergences begin to appear when there are conversions of Gentiles; people from the most diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, within a Greco-Roman environment, and in some cases, quite homogenized, as was the case in the Mediterranean basin, where the Christian communities expanded rapidly.

Twenty years after Jesus' death, in the year 49, at the meeting in Jerusalem - which came to be characterized as the First Council of the new "sect" - non-Jewish converts were exempted from fundamental requirements of Judaism's Holy Scriptures. By culturally and religiously favoring the conversion of the "God-fearing" and other Gentiles, the Path became more acceptable to all citizens of the Roman Empire.

By progressively detaching themselves from the Jewish way of life, the followers of the Path increasingly integrated themselves into the Greco-Roman environment. It is true, as Potestá says, that "until the middle of the second century the Churches remain intimately imbued with Jewish doctrinal, literary, and moral traditions. At the same time they give evidence of divergent and conflicting beliefs and interpretations with respect to them and begin to delineate lifestyles and behaviors characteristic of Christians." Around the year 110, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, in a letter to the Christians of Magnesia, reminds the faithful that the praxis of Christianity was not the same as that of Judaism. From this we see the search for the affirmation of Christian customs and their Jewish origin.

The **Didache**, or Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles - "the oldest surviving compendium of Christian church directives, composed sometime during the second century, but including precious materials from the first century, most likely from the early Syrian churches" (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 108; KOESTLER, 2005, p. 174, own translation) - proposes for Christians a catechesis of basic principles of Christian doctrine. The "way of life" recommends: "Do not do to another anything that you do not want done to yourself [...]. Seek the evangelical perfection of love of God and neighbor: almsgiving, communion of goods, fraternity, absence of envy, respect for the teachers of the faith".

The "way of death" is a catalog of vices. "It is evil and full of curses: murders, adulteries, passions, fornications, thefts, idolatries, magical practices, rapine, false witness, hypocrisies, double-heartedness, fraud, pride, wickedness, arrogance, avarice, obscene talk, jealousy, insolence, haughtiness, ostentation, and absence of fear of God" (HINSON; SIEPIERSKI, 2010, p. 97, own translation) and "the lack of charity toward the poor" (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 27). Although the **Didache** is directed to the training of catechumens (beginners in the Christian faith),, own translation it is reminiscent of the kind of instruction that was passed on to proselytes in the synagogues.

"Christianism between 100 and 200 AD hinges around freely chosen Masters. The history of the best known Masters of the second century, such as Hermas (from Rome), Valentinus (from Egypt), Marcion (from northern Cappadocia), Tatian (from Mesopotamia), Justin (from Palestine) and Montanus (from Frigia in Asia Minor) reveal an interaction

between the colleges of Christian Masters and the universe of Eastern immigrants in the large cities of the Roman Empire. " (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 155, own translation)

In the middle of the chronological road from the emergence of the first communities of Jesus' followers to the rise of Christianity to the condition of official religion of the empire, facts appear that will mark, for a long time, the way of life of Christians in the Roman Empire. They represent the consolidation of previous trends that will direct and permeate the path of the Church for many centuries to come.

The following facts are observed in the middle of the second century:

- Gentile Christians become the majority. Justin (100-160), professor of philosophy in Ephesus and Rome, said: "There are already more converts from pagan cults than Jewish and Samaritan converts.

With Christianity's center of gravity shifted from the Jewish world to the Greco-Roman world, Christians find themselves immersed in an environment tolerant of religions, but laden with prejudice toward this strange group accused of atheism, irrational superstition, bad ethical behavior, and general opposition to the state and society.

In the course of the second century, the vulgar polemic against the Christians passed into the literary domain; pamphlets appeared in which pagan authors, from the height of their Hellenistic cultural consciousness, presented their criticism. Lucian of Samosata, in a satire, tries to ridicule Christians. The philosopher Celsus writes a book against Christians.

"Social, moral, and intellectual defamation characterizes the spectrum of pagan propaganda [...] and ends with the accusation of atheism and irreligiosity. For the Romans such accusation was very heavy, because in the mentality of ancient paganism the public good depended on the worship of the gods. In this hostile environment, Christians have to "compete" in virtues with non-Christians and refute, through their intellectuals, the vulgar and erudite accusations;

- the decline of the prophetic movements, which are treated with suspicion in both the *Didache* and the Shepherd of Hermas - two key documents of the time about desirable Christian behavior.

"In Rome, the Christians follow the way of life of the Jewish colonies, they maintain a great internal cohesion, they are based mainly on family frameworks, they practice almsgiving, fasting, prayer, suppers, feasts. They are easily identifiable by Oriental immigrants." (HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 39, own translation)

- eschatological expectations begin to differ, due to the delay of the expected parousia and the need for Christians to position themselves in history. Justinian expects Jesus to return one day to set up his kingdom in a rebuilt Jerusalem. Hippolytus "calculates" that the *parousia* will take about three hundred years. Irenaeus maintains the expectation of the earthly kingdom of God, after the coming of the Antichrist. (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 45)
- Irenaeus (130-202) said nothing about the imminent coming of Christ. Christians had begun to be convinced that the final consummation could be postponed indefinitely, and they systematized their

faith in terms of two advents of Christ, regarding the present as the interval between them. (DAVIES, 1967, p. 140)

Between the second and third centuries, Christianity was still widely entrenched with expectations of the end, sometimes spasmodic, whose characteristics are perceived by the criticisms of its opponents (THEISSEN, 1987, p. 64). Both within Christian households and in their relationship with bishops and presbyters, the Church experienced a period of "loving patriarchy,"⁹¹ softening the authoritarian social relationships dominant in the home and society. It also developed "even an ethos of a marked loyalty to the state." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 46, own translation)

- the consolidation of the monarchical episcopal structure, whose triad "bishop-presbyter-deacon" is defended by Ignatius of Antioch, since 108.

A verticalization of the communities took place in the last 30 years of the second century. The establishment of the monarchical government of the bishop cannot be considered the result of an almost natural process of overcoming the assembly regime. It is outlined as a choice lucidly made along the Asia Minor-Rome line, probably also to oppose the authority of prophets and theologians (Gnostics) who claimed that only their own charisms and their own visions would open paths of salvation to the disciples;

- the Church of Rome comes to represent one of the most important communities, where some of the most intellectually significant Christians of the time converge, such as Justin, Valentinus, and Marcion, son of a bishop of Pontus.

At the beginning of the third century the most important churches are: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage and Lyon. In 251, according to the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, "the Church of Rome supported, with the offerings of the faithful, 154 members of the clergy (bishops, presbyters, deacons) and 1,500 widows, orphans, and the poor. The number of the poor was greater than the members of any other city association". (BONNEAU, 2003, p.XX, own translation)

- the rise of Montanism as a charismatic reaction against the accommodation and loosening of customs, rigidity in the hierarchization of the Church, reduction of women's space. Montanism captivated people of the stature of Tertullian (166-220).

For G. Friedrich, "Montanism was the last great crystallization of prophecy in the Church. When it was confronted and defeated, the institutional function won a decisive victory over the charism." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 41, own translation)

- the beginning of the concern with the establishment of a Christian canon of the Scriptures, since by that time several gospels, now called apocrypha, were circulating which, under the apostles' name, propagated doubtful doctrines and fanciful accounts of the life of Jesus.

⁹¹ Hoornaert disagrees with this expression by Theissen and considers that both Paul and Hermas reject the "benevolent patriarchalism of the surrounding society." (HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 74, own translation).

By posing the question of a biblical canon proper to Christians, Marcion opens a new phase in the progressive acquisition by Christianity of an autonomous profile in relation to Judaism.⁹²

Once the split between the Jewish and Christian communities - henceforth two religions - was consummated, Christians quickly manifested their claim to purely and simply replace the Jews in the history of salvation.

Marcion, around 140, proposes to abandon the Hebrew Bible. Justin, around 150, writes: "The true, spiritual Israelite race, that of Judah, of Jacob, of Isaac and of Abraham [...] is us, we who this crucified Christ led to God [...]" (MEUNIER, 2005, p. 15, own translation).

- the overcoming on the doctrinal level of the Gnostic tendencies "thanks to the partial and effective recovery of them carried out by two Alexandrian masters between the end of the second century and the middle of the third century. Polemicizing with Gnostic authors, Clement and Origen reinterpreted a good part of that doctrinal horizon in which they themselves had been formed." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 46, own translation)

The Letter to Diognetus, by an unknown author, probably from Alexandria, describing the way of life of the Christians, is from this period:

"[...] they differ from other men neither by territory, nor by language, nor by dress [...]. Living in Greek and barbarian cities, as befits each one, and according to local custom as regards dress, food, and the rest of daily life, they show, in the opinion of all, the admirable and extraordinary character of their system of life [...]. They obey the established laws and with their life surpass the laws [...]. Christians, being in the world, are visible, but their worship of God remains invisible [...]. Christians marry like everyone else. They have children, but they do not abandon their newborns." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 32, own translation)

One of the novelties of the Gospel was that it taught the equality of man and woman, the greatness of virginity, and the dignity and indissolubility of marriage. Indissolubility and fidelity, reestablished, especially as regards the husband, seemed like unheard-of demands. (HAMMAN, 1997, p. 55)

Some consequences of Christian doctrine and practice were not long in coming: "almost half (48%) of Christian women did not marry before the age of eighteen, compared with a little over a third (37%) of pagan women"; with the postponement of marriage among Christians and the prohibition of

⁹² Marcion (85-160) was a wealthy shipowner from Sinope (Roman Province of Pontus, now in Turkey) and the son of the bishop of this city. Between 138 and 140 he was in Rome, contributing an important sum of money [200,000 sesterces, or 50,000 denarii, equivalent to the annual salary of about 150 workers] to the Church's funds. In 144 he broke with the church and founded a new sect which, after his death, spread very rapidly (DAVIES, 1967, p. 107).

abortion and infanticides, the death rate⁹³ was reduced and life expectancy⁹⁴ and fertility among Christian women increased, contributing to the absolute and relative growth of Christianity. "When she remarried, the pagan widow lost her entire inheritance, which became the property of her second husband. Among Christians not only were wealthy widows able to keep their husbands' property, but the Church was also ready to support poor widows." "Christian women enjoyed far greater security and marital equality than their pagan counterparts; consequently, considerably greater **status** and power." (STARK, 2006, p. 120; 122, own translation)

Abortion was frequent in all classes of society, in Egypt as in Rome. The exposure of children was no minor scourge. The abandonment of children was not only a common practice, but also legally justified and defended by philosophers. Both Plato and Aristotle recommended infanticide as a legitimate state policy (STARK, 2006, p. 134). In the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the patrician woman who married a commoner lost her title of *clarissima* ("most illustrious"). That is why one saw aristocratic girls living in concubinage with freedmen and even with slaves so as not to lose their title.

Tertullian strongly exhorted the young Christian woman to prefer the nobility of faith to the nobility of blood. Pope Callistus (217-222) was more sympathetic to these situations, recognizing as legitimate, in the internal forum, marriages contracted more or less clandestinely.

Hippolytus, the greatest theologian of the time, in Rome, scandalized, rebukes the pope, saying:

"To women without a husband and in the strength of age, burning with love for a man unworthy of their rank (that is, of a lower rank than their own) and unwilling to sacrifice their own, he (the pope) permitted as a lawful thing to unite with the man, slave or free, whom they chose as a bedfellow, and, without being married before the law, to regard him as their husband." (HAMMAN, 1997, (97-197, p. 57, own translation)

As can be seen, the situations Christianity had to face in a society without the regulatory framework of the Law of Moses were new and complex, as it had to apply the general principles of the Good News - such as equality between man and woman, between master and slave, detachment from money and power, love of God and neighbor above all things - to the concrete situations of a new society that also valued and cared for its good customs.

"Among the former slaves who became bishops of Rome we have Pius, the tenth bishop (139-154) and Calixtus (217-222)" (HINSON; SIEPIERSKI, 2010, p. 99, own translation)

Ponders sociologist and doctor of theology Gerd Theissen:

⁹³ "Recourse to abortion was frequent and led to the death of large numbers of women before they could make their contribution to fertility. The result of this practice was a significant incidence of infertility cases in the women who survived the abortions." (STARK, 2006, p. 135, own translation).

⁹⁴ "Only 4 percent of men reached the age of 50, and the percentage of women was even smaller, mainly because of the dangers of childbirth." (BROWN in HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 38, own translation).

"Although they originated from a dissident movement of animated charismatic wanderers, with a radical ethos, these groups (the Christians) had in a relatively short time become independent of their origins, developing into a much more moderate ethos. But also in this moderate ethos, the original radicality continued to produce its effects." (THEISSEN, 1987, p. 163, own translation)

19. Rituals in primitive communities

"A large and growing number of social scientists define ritual as a form of communication. It not only includes certain patterns of language; it is itself a kind of discourse, of speech [...] ritual is symbolic action, representing what society (or a social group) considers to be of primary importance, or even the structure of society (or the group)." (MEEKS, 2011, p. 295, own translation)

There is a consensus among scholars that the oldest rituals that were born and rooted in the primitive Christian communities, still in a Jewish environment, were the Eucharist and Baptism.⁹⁵ Other rituals tried to take hold but did not succeed. As Theissen points out, "in Corinth there were efforts to transform glossolalia (speaking in strange tongues) into a decisive initiation ritual. And in the Gospel of John, the tendency to deepen the Eucharist through the washing of feet is visible, if not to replace it". (THEISSEN, 2009, p. 173, own translation) They did not succeed because they did not have the deep roots that usually sustain the rites.

Baptism and Eucharist were linked together and both had strong connections to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Eucharist arose from Jesus' custom of eating with all who followed him. In their memory, the last collective meal is related to the death of Jesus, which on the other hand replaces the ancient sacrifices. Baptism, from its origin in John the Baptist, carries with it the sense of initiation, of access to the kingdom of God.

"None of these sacraments went back to an ancient prehistory (so common to religious rituals), but to a recent history: baptism referred to John the Baptist, the Eucharist to Jesus. Neither of them was legitimate as tradition, but as innovation. Both took on a new meaning because of their relation to the death of Jesus. " (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 431, own translation)

The men and women who accompanied Jesus of Nazareth in his pilgrim mission to announce and make the kingdom of God a reality, in embryonic form, certainly did not forget the meals shared in

⁹⁵ "Unlike Mt.28:19 and Lk. 22:19, John brings no word from Jesus' commanding or instituting baptism and the eucharist before he left the earth." (BROWN, 1983, p. 91, own translation).

joy and simplicity. At that moment, more than at any other, everyone felt like brothers. Each one put everything - sometimes so little - that he had brought or earned along the way to share with everyone. It was also a moment of joyful fraternization and of checking what each one needed. This commensality of Jesus of Nazareth became stronger with the memory of the last supper, relating it inevitably to the death of Jesus.

After the resurrection, convinced that he was alive among them, the disciples created communities in different places. Each one sharing their memories, experiencing new forms of relationships and, probably, reliving and repeating gestures of "breaking bread" in joyful fraternity.

"If, from the beginning, the Christian movement has something that distinguishes it from the synagogue, it is the centrality of the table. While the synagogue remains centered on reading, on the word, the center of Christianity is the table, that is, the agape, fraternal supper and feast of love preceded by the eucharist (thanksgiving), people give thanks for the gift of the new Christian brotherhood. But this kind of supper becomes impractical with the access of too many people." (HOORNAERT, 2002, p. 77, own translation)

"There are two moments that qualify the Christian meeting, in the early church: the meal and the word. Note their succession, since we must be careful not to interchange them "common meal" and then the drinking moment, consisting of drinking wine mixed with water, usually in a 1/3 ratio.

"The meal itself, probably opened by the consummation of the blessed/consecrated bread." (PENNA, 2020, p. 245, 247, own translation)

It is more likely that the custom of collective meals arose simultaneously and in various places, when the "breaking of bread" and the sharing of wine were accompanied by prayers, songs, remembrances, exhortations, and other spontaneous manifestations.

"The earliest tradition about this common meal is quoted in the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:23-26) - a tradition that explicitly relates this practice to the story of Jesus' suffering and death." (KOESTLER, 2005, p. 112, own translation)

Other groups of followers did not refer to the passion and death in the sharing of bread. This is the case with the communities of Galilee and the communities of the Gospel of Sayings, or Q Gospel.

A different tradition, Koester notes, though equally ancient and perhaps more directly reflecting the meal practice of Jesus and his followers, has survived in the Eucharistic prayers of the **Didache**.

The different traditions contain three common elements:

1. the chalice - symbol of the covenant;
2. the bread - symbol of the unity of the community, the church, the body of Christ;
3. the meal - anticipation of the banquet in the kingdom of God.

In the meal prayers in the **Didache** there are two striking acknowledgements: **We thank you, our Father**, for life [...] and for the immortality you **have revealed through Jesus, your servant**. They end with the exclamation: "Your grace come and pass from this world. **Maranatha!** Come, our Lord!"

The early Christian religion, observes the sociologist Gerd Theissen, "offers a unique opportunity to study [...] a vigorous transformation of the traditional ritual language: at that time, sacrifices were replaced by a new ritual language - in Judaism, in some philosophical currents, and in Christianity. For very different reasons, in these three camps, the sacrificial cult was eliminated." (THEISSEN, 2009, p.171, own translation)

As communities expand geographically and culturally, they incorporate brothers who have not lived the original experience of "sharing bread." Problems then begin to arise, as seen in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (years 54-55): "what you do is not eating the Lord's Supper, because each one hastens to eat his own supper. And while one is hungry, the other is drunk". (1 Cor. 11; 20-21)

"Very soon experiences of this kind led to the separation of the Lord's Supper from the normal banquet and, at the same time, accelerated the formation of a specific liturgical structure." (RATZINGER/Benedict XVI, 2012, p. 131, own translation)

The structuring of the day of worship gains its own strength and form as Christian communities move away from the synagogues, traditionally a place of worship, prayer and instruction. The Christian assembly and later churches/buildings replace the socio-religious role played by synagogues.

"In Revelation, the expression "Lord's Day" appears for the first time to designate Sunday. By the end of the first century, the tradition is already clearly fixed, when, for example, the Didache (around the year 100), as if it were a totally obvious thing to do, states: 'On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread and give thanks, after having confessed your sins.' Thus, at the beginning of the second century, the formation of Christian worship, in its essential components, was complete." (RATZINGER/Benedict XVI, 2012, p. 134, own translation)

The later evolution of the ritual concerning the Eucharist conforms to Burkhard Gladigow's general observation about rituals:

"[...] the increasing complexity of rites is closely linked to the professionalization of religion: they are performed by professionals of religion - and, in return, they legitimize such specialists because only they know how a rite is performed "conveniently". However, also connected to this as an autonomous motive for the perfecting of worship is an aesthetic joy." (GLADIGOW in THEISSEN, 2009, p.178, own translation)

This did not prevent - given the great prestige of certain communities founded by one of the apostles - different evolutions in the celebration of the Eucharist.

In 2nd century Rome, for the mobile and dispersed population, there were several places of worship presided over by priests.

- In the New Testament, the term "priest" (Heb. 5:6; 7:24) was reserved for Jesus Christ and the faithful in the sense of a collective priesthood. This position was abandoned and the title "priest" was applied not in a metaphorical but literal sense to the bishop or presbyter as the president of the Eucharistic celebration. Because of his function in worship, he attributed himself priestly quality, marking a distance between him and the people in the Church. (TERTULIANO as quoted by LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 21, own translation)
- With the concept of *koinomia-comunio* (communion), which originally expressed the union with Christ of those who believe in him, designated the union of the faithful, whose center was the Eucharist. In contrast, to exclude from the Eucharist, that is, excommunication, marked the break with a sinner or a heretic. (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 17)

John's baptism, recounted in the Gospels, was unusual among the Jews. It was a new gesture, a call to conversion and an eschatological announcement, of the time when God will send someone who will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mk. 1:8) Jesus had himself baptized by John, but did not take up the practice of baptism.

We do not know when the communities of Jesus' followers resumed baptism. It seems that the practice is taken up simultaneously among the disciples of John and Jesus. The first record of baptism is also found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, where the verb **baptize** and the noun **baptism** are used several times. Also in the Letter to the Romans, written in the year 56.

The meaning of baptism in Paul's words is almost a description of the rite: the baptized person in his or her relationship with Christ is plunged into death: "we are buried with him in death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we may live a new life. The Christian and the whole community, through baptism, are resurrected in Christ. This is the foundation of the Pauline ethic, to become what you already are: a new man.

Baptism for Paul "always corresponds to the death phase of the Christian journey, the resurrection of the believer, through faith, being (life) post-baptismal. Anointing, which would play an important role in later baptismal liturgies, is only mentioned once in the Pauline letters. The gift of the Holy Spirit mentioned in them does not indicate how this gift was symbolized.

"The center of the life of the communities was the worship meeting, in which each believer felt united with the others. One had access [...] by baptism (immersion) in running water, or if necessary by a triple sprinkling. With prayers and fasting, the community accompanied this initiation and the communion with the neophyte was sealed by the Eucharistic celebration." (QUESNEL, 2004, p. 106, own translation)

"The ethical level of the baptized person, as the Didache describes him/her according to the Jewish example, had to correspond to the claim of being "holy" because he/she had to "keep baptism pure and undefiled". The reinforced ethicization of the Christian message, also under the influence of Stoic criteria, thus appears as the sequel of the rebirth brought about by baptism." (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 16, own translation)

"In the second century, the catechumenate comprised three stages: that during which the hearers were instructed in the Christian life and exercised in practicing it. The immediate preparation of the elect; finally, baptism by triple immersion, preceded by exorcisms, by a long vigil and followed by the laying on of hands, a true sacrament (confirmation)." (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 30, own translation)

There are numerous indications to say that melody and singing were usually part of Christian meetings. The first complete description of the Christian rite of baptism is found in the work of Hippolytus, written around the year 220: the Apostolic Tradition. From this learned and eloquent Roman writer - the last to write in Greek in Rome - we have the oldest preserved ecclesiastical constitution, which reads:

"The catechumens must listen to the Word for three years. If any of them are dedicated and attentive, their time will not be considered; only their character, and nothing else will be judged.

The baptized: Once those who are to be baptized have been chosen, their lives will be examined: whether they have lived with dignity during the catechumenate, whether they have honored widows, whether they have visited the sick, whether they have done only good works.

Baptism; at the cock crowing, one should first pray over the water. It should be running water, from the fountain or falling from above, except in case of necessity: if the difficulty persists, or if it is a case of urgency, one should use the water that one finds. The baptized will undress and be baptized, first the children, then the men, and lastly the women, who should have their hair loose and without their gold and silver ornaments (the deacon, placing his hands on the head of the baptized, dips them three times in the water). After rising from the water, (the baptized) will be anointed with the sanctifying oil by the presbyter, who will say: I anoint you with the holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ. After this, each one will dry himself and dress, and then enter the church. "

"The development of the practice of infant baptism, accelerated by parents eager to see their children become Christians, produced a marked change in Christian education." (HINSON; SIEPERSKI, 2010, p. 33, own translation)

"The role that circumcision represents in Judaism - a sign of identity and belonging - baptism henceforth represents it within this group that has assumed its autonomy from the Judaism that brought it into being, and which deserves the name Christianity." (QUESNEL, 2004, p.107, own translation)

"The oldest preserved church is that of Dura Europos, in present-day Syria. It functioned as a Christian house of prayer between the years 233 and 256. It is a house like the

others, situated on the corner. The church has a large meeting room, an agape room and a baptistry. It is noteworthy that the place of worship is facing the uprising (where Abraham had come out from). On one side there was a small platform and on it the bishop's chair, which corresponds to the guidelines of the Didascaly." (HAMANN, 1997 (97-197), p.180, own translation)

20. The third century in the history of Christianity

The third century proved to be a decisive moment in the history of the Church, because it consummated the separation, now definitive, between Christianity and Judaism. From now on she will be totally exposed to Hellenistic culture and to the Roman world; she will look for ways of acculturation, accommodating herself to the new *locus*. (CAVALCANTE, 2007, 174)

Eusebius of Caesarea (265 to 339), an erudite and rigorous researcher, bequeathed us in his Ecclesiastical History the most relevant information about "the history of the Church from the apostles" until Constantine in 324.

Five major events occur in this period:

- In the Greek world there is a philosophical renaissance that will be represented by Plotinus, among the pagans, and Origen, among the Christians; both thinkers will mark the following centuries;
- In the Latin world, Christianity underwent extraordinary territorial and cultural expansion and differentiated itself from Eastern Christianity;
- Among the cultural changes, the most noteworthy, because of the organizational, social and theological consequences, is the priestization of the function of the bishop and then that of the priest;
- emergence of ascetic movements: hermitism and monasticism;
- beginning of the empire's systematic persecutions of the Christian religion.

20.1 - Philosophical Renaissance

Origen was born in 185, in Alexandria, in an Egyptian Christian family. His teacher was Clement of Alexandria. He was a student of Ammonius Sacas, founder of Neoplatonism and master of Plotinus. He directed the catechetical school of Alexandria and founded and directed the school of Caesarea, whose library, enriched by Panfilo, had more than 30,000 manuscripts. His great treasure was Origen's monumental work, the **Hexapla**, a critical edition of the entire Old Testament in six columns (Hebrew text in Hebrew characters, Hebrew text in Greek characters, Greek translation of Aquila, Greek translation of Symmachus, Greek translation of the Seventy, Greek translation of Theodotion), written from 212 to 245. A work of 6,500 pages, whose only copy was lost in the year 638, at the time of the Arab conquest. According to Jerome (347-420 - translator of the Bible from ancient Greek and Hebrew into Latin, the **Vulgate**, published in 400), Origen wrote 2,000 works. He lists 800 and Epiphanius (310-403) speaks of 6,000. Of his homilies, hundreds have come down to us.

Origen distinguishes three levels of reading Scripture: 1) the literal; 2) the moral; 3) the spiritual, this being the most important and most difficult. Each of these levels indicates a state of consciousness and spiritual and psychological maturity.

"For Origen, the fundamental issue for man is to resemble God as closely as possible. And to achieve this goal, it is necessary that God's grace be added to human efforts on this upward path toward God. The ideal way to perfection is the imitation of Christ." (CAVALCANTE, 2007, 189, OWN TRANSLATION)

Besides his theological works, Origen devoted himself to the study and discussion of philosophy, especially Plato and the Stoic philosophers. He died in Tyre, Lebanon, in 254. Quasten considers him "the greatest scholar of the ancient Church".

Plotinus was born in Nicopolis, Upper Egypt, in 205. At the age of 22, in Alexandria, as a disciple of Ammonius Sacas, he converted to the Neoplatonic philosophy which, like the Stoics, was a school of spiritual life. "His work possesses a tone of mysticism, which is new; one feels there, as until then one had not yet felt, the desire and the effort of a soul that wants to find itself and at the same time lose itself in the universal and ineffable One."

Plotinus did not write as much as Origen, but his spirituality had a great influence on pagans and Christians.

20.2 - Expansion

Third century Christianity, according to Marksches, "grew at an exorbitant rate," which is incompatible with the popular imagery of a withdrawn Christianity hiding in catacombs, not least because systematic persecutions do not occur until the year 250.

"The Christian proportion of the population was substantially higher in cities than in rural areas at that time - which is why the term paganus, or peasant, came to refer to non-Christians (pagans)." (STARK, 2006, p. 20, own translation)

Both in the East and in the West, the Church expands noticeably in the last years of the 3rd century, on the basis of a well-developed hierarchical system, with great influence from the episcopates of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Carthage.

With the division, in the third century, of the Roman Empire into provinces, the bishop of the provincial capital was given a prominent role; the bishops of smaller communities were subordinate to him. The first synods (meetings) and regional councils are recorded in Carthage (218/222), Alexandria (232), Italy (250-251) and Antioch (268). "We even possess the minutes of a Synod of Carthage, held in the fall of 256 A.D., which go back to stenographic notes and show that at that meeting, as to the issues under discussion, the general patterns of meetings of the other organizations of the province and empire were followed." (STARK, 2006, p. 24, own translation)

The bishop of Alexandria ordained the bishops of Egypt and claimed for himself the right to dismiss them; he convened and presided over the synods of the region.

During the last years of the third century, the Episcopal see of Antioch - undoubtedly an apostolic foundation - reached its full recognition. As can be seen, the Church of the third century is structured and articulated, quite different from "early Christianity looking like a huge spread of local congregations, each with its own separate life, its own constitutional structure and its own officers, each receiving the designation 'church'" (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 69, own translation). This organization helps to understand the expansion of the Church.

"Pope Cornelius (251-153), in a letter to the bishop of Antioch, reports that the Roman Church comprised 46 presbyters, 7 deacons, 7 subdeacons, 42 acolytes, 52 exorcists (the number of exorcists, greater than that of presbyters, is striking), readers and hostiaries, more than 1,500 widows and indigents officially assisted" (KELLY, 1994, p. 142, own translation). Scholars estimate that Rome then had over 30,000 Christians, who supported its religious ministers.

"In 280, Tirídates III, king of Armenia, converted to Christianity, thus beginning the Christianization of a wide reign, already outside the scope of the Roman empire" (PIERINI, 1998, p. 99, own translation).

"In the third century a marked divergence between Eastern and Western thought on the question of man and revelation begins to manifest itself" (PIERINI, 1998, p. 99, own translation). Regarding the account of original sin, recorded in Genesis, Origen attributes to it a sense of cosmic myth, while the Western theologians, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement, consider it a historical account.

Thanks especially to the theologians Tertullian of Carthage (160-220) and Hippolytus of Rome (170-236) - the greatest theologian of the third century - the West was faster in developing a more mature Christology.

The central question in Christology was how to understand that Jesus is a person, at once God and man: "Side by side in this indivisible person, one can see divinity and humanity, divine spirit and human flesh, immortality and mortality, strength and weakness. Opposing the allegorical and speculative-philosophical tendencies of the Alexandrian school, the school of Antioch arose in the third century, intensely dedicated to Biblical exegesis.

20.3 - Priesthood of the function of bishop and priest

The ecclesiastical regiment of Hippolytus, around the year 215, entrusted to the bishop all decisive functions in the community. Liturgy and preaching, power over penitents and direction of the community, all depended on the bishop, whose function, from then on, will characterize the whole organization of the Church.

Cyprian of Chartreuse, around 250, convinced that the unity of the Church was guaranteed by the bishop, wrote: "The Church has its basis in the bishops, and every action of the Church is directed

by these its superiors" (KELLY, 1994, p. 142, own translation). In this period, the bishop was increasingly burdened with pastoral, administrative, economic, and magisterial functions, and had less and less time and energy for cultic functions. There was a shift from an ecclesiology of communion to one that emphasized the powers of the ministers, thus preparing the passage from communal worship to ministerial worship, with more passive attendance by the community.

Along with the development of the cultural function, there was also a priesthoodization of the minister and the cultural ministry, a result of the growing enculturation in the Roman Empire. The baptismal priesthood of Christians was losing strength in favor of the priestly tasks of the presbyters.

The theology of ordination, in its turn, was being constituted throughout the third century, until it crystallized in the fourth century with the Council of Nicaea (325), which established the criteria for the demarcation of the episcopal and presbyteral ministry.

"There is no doubt, that this theological evolution must be seen in the context of the implantation of Christianity in the empire, as a religion with specific rites, liturgy and ministers. The enculturation distorted the meaning of the Christian priesthood and dampened its break with the Jewish priesthood as a consecrated office set apart, with functions as a mediator.

It is evident that a rejudaization of the Christian conception of priesthood occurred, later reinforced in the Middle Ages by a sacrificial understanding of the life of Jesus, who had paid with his blood the ransom for human sins.

The close link between bishop, presbyter and community was maintained during the third and fourth centuries in the form of choice of the bishop by all, as well as in the increasing protagonism of the clergy, both in the choice and in the absence of the bishop." (ESTRADA, 2005, p. 375; 379; 383; 387. CAVALCANTI, 2007, p. 223, own translation)

In the early fourth century, "Pope Marcellus (308-309) organized the Church of Rome into 25 parishes, in which the presbyter presided because of the absence of the bishop." (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 20, own translation)

"The normative exercise of an episcopate with "Catholic" scope will only be exercised by the bishop of Rome Victor I" (189-197) . (PENNA, 2020, p. 255, own translation)

20.4 - Ascetic movements

"The phenomenon of monasticism emerges in the second half of the third century, with solitary individuals or anachronists as its first representatives. This is a troubled political moment, of religious syncretism encouraged by the empire, of discrimination and intermittent persecution of Jews and Christians, which generates uneasiness, insecurity, and fear for the future.

The systematic and cruel persecution by Emperor Decius (250) may have been the main reason for the emergence of the movement, to which is added the desire for a solitary, isolated life (anachoretism) and, a little later, eremitism as an option for a poor life, stripped of material goods.

Among the Anakoretas, Antony (251-356) and Macarius (300-391) were prominent. Antony was born in Tebaida, Upper Egypt, the son of wealthy parents. At the age of 20 (271), when his parents died, he distributed all the inherited goods and went to live in the desert. His fame as an excellent shepherd, a great connoisseur of the desert, an austere, kind and sensible man, attracted many people and colonies of ascetics were formed around him. When he was 65, he accepted that others would come to live near him, each one in his cave, meeting periodically as a community to pray together.

It is impressive to this day that Antony lived in an extremely hostile environment, living in caves (he spent 20 years without being seen by anyone), eating so little, in quantity and variety, making sacrifices and fasting, and living 105 years! This isolation did not prevent him from twice going to Alexandria to serve the interests of the local community.

20.5 - Systematic persecutions

The political instability that arises after the dynasty of the Severes (193-235 A.D.) leads the Roman constitutions to lose power and the Church, as the main spiritual institution of the empire, to gain relative power. As a result, the Church was seen as a threat to the unity of the empire. In this period, incriminations against Christians intensified in different places, and the Church was cruelly persecuted by the empire, as we will see in the next chapter.

VII - THE ROMAN EMPIRE, CHRISTIANS AND THE CHURCH

21- Non-systematic discrimination, incrimination and persecution

The first generation of the followers of Jesus, in the period called the apostolic period, from the 30s to the 60s, was composed exclusively of Jews from Palestine or the Diaspora. The deaths of Stephen, a Jew born in the Diaspora, in the year 36, of James, son of Zebedee, in 43/44, and of James, head of the Jerusalem Church, in 62, show the internal conflicts, between brothers, and the intolerance towards Jewish orthodoxy.

Jesus' followers were and considered themselves Jews - one of several groups existing at the time. It becomes a special group as it collectively incorporates new behaviors and discrepant interpretations of the Torah. And, progressively, it will distance itself from orthodox Judaism.

The empire's relations with the Hebrew religion, and consequently with the Jewish and Christian communities, were well defined by the recognition of "**religio licita**" (permissible religion), won by the Jews' support of Caesar in the historic campaign in Egypt (48-47 BC).

Trebilco lists five privileges for diaspora Jews in Asia Minor: 1) the right to meet in the synagogue; 2) the right to build synagogue buildings; 3) the right to collect the temple tax and state protection for its transportation; 4) exemption from military services for Roman citizens among the Jews; 5) the right to observe the Sabbaths, dietary prescriptions, and to live according to the laws of the ancestors.

These rights constituted an extraordinary fact because Jewish communities were exempt from the "communion of Roman worship" and remained Jews - recognized as loyal citizens. They were only questioned when there was conflict of the Jewish community with the local community.

From the point of view of the pagans, with whom they still had little contact, Christians were those strange Jews, "**peregrini**", "**paroquoi**" (foreigners), who lived apart. They could be discriminated against, sometimes prosecuted, for being different, but also admired for their unity, their mutual support, their lifestyle, and their monotheistic faith. Around the Diaspora Jewish communities, there were always non-Jews, proselytes, or "God-fearers". There is no record of popular hatred against Jews, except from the Jewish War.

Of the three decades (60 to 90) after the apostolic period, very little is known. Koester points out that we do not know even one name of a Christian from this time.

Between the 1st and 2nd centuries, the Roman Empire's attitude toward Christians was milder than the Neronian legend might make one think. "An immeasurable variety of cults was present in the

empire, allowed as long as they did not disturb the established order and imperial authority." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2012, p. 52, own translation)

We know from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians that he three times suffered the punishment of scourging, as well as "beatings" and imprisonments, consequences of public riots arising around him or linked to him. Other tribulations of Paul, such as imprisonment for a longer term in Ephesus, must have occurred under the pretext of disturbance of public order due to his propagandistic activity. Jews were forbidden by the empire to proselytize, which of course extended to Christians.

It is possible that the conflicts of the Pauline community with the Jews in Thessalonica were linked to the propagandistic activities of the Pauline community. The preaching of the Christians created uneasiness for both the Jews and the pagans by threatening the covenant of the Jews with the empire.

For Lenzenweger, the "Gospel in no way faced a religious vacuum, but rather entered into competition with a polytheistic system, whose acceptance through sacrifices guaranteed, according to the conviction of the Romans, the well-being of the empire (**salus publica**)." (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 12, own translation)

According to the historian Suetonius (69-141), Emperor Claudius, in 49, expelled the Jews from Rome, motivated by an unrest caused by Jewish believers in Christ. For Kaufmann, "the measures taken confused the fact that Christians venerated Jesus as the 'Christ' with the name of the slave Crestus, calling the group simply 'Crestians,' that is, a band of slaves." (KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 45, own translation)

In the year 64, the emperor Nero blamed the burning of the city of Rome on Christians "whom the people knew badly, regarding them as misanthropes, atheists, men given to orgiastic rites. And on the night of August 15, 64, Nero's circus, situated where St. Peter's Basilica now stands, witnessed one of the most atrocious scenes of a reign fertile in ignominies: Christians turned into living torches, lighting the games and orgies" (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 27, own translation). It is assumed that Peter was killed in this context of persecution of Christians.

Tertullian (160-220) states that Nero gave a legal instrument to his action against the Christians, the **Institutum Neronianum**, whose essential interdiction was: "**Non licet esse Christianos**" (It is not lawful to be a Christian). There is doubt about the historicity of this fact.

Koester states:

"We know of no official decisions of the Roman authorities of the first century regarding Christianity, and we cannot assume that during this period members of the churches or their leaders were always persecuted or punished only because of their Christian faith. It seems that arrests were made on charges such as disturbance of public order, formation of illegal and secret associations, and refusal to offer sacrifices to the emperor." (KOESTER, 2005, p. 356, own translation)

Around the year 90, the name of the "Nazarenes" was inserted in the formula for the curse of heretics in Jewish prayers, which sealed the total and definitive separation between the Hebrew religion

and Christianity, leaving the latter out of the privileges granted by the empire to the Hebrew religion. But in spite of this, Christians lived a period of about 30 years, from 65 to 94, without persecution.

Domitian, in the late 1st century, persecuted Jews and Christians, forcing them to forward to the imperial treasuries the annual offering that they had previously sent to the Temple in Jerusalem, since the latter no longer existed. He extended this obligation to all people who followed the Jewish way of life, regardless of age. The Jewish way of life is now called **asebeia** (ruthless) and is characterized as a capital crime (**crimem laesae maiestatis**).

Accused of atheism and adherence to the Jewish way of life, the emperor had his cousin Flavius Clement executed and his wife Flavia Domicilla banished; the only two Roman martyrs we know by name in this period. For the historian Eusebius of Caesarea (263-340), Domitian was the second emperor to persecute Christians. He "seems to have been the first emperor to realize that the new faith represented a threat to the old Roman traditions." (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 59, own translation)

The legal status of Christians within the empire remained undefined until the **Rescript of Trajan** (98-117). In answer to Pliny the Younger, Proconsul in Bithynia, who wanted to know how to proceed in view of the numerical and geographical expansion of the Christians, the Emperor Trajan, in the year 112, fixed the rules of conduct for the representatives of the empire: Christians are in fact atheists. If they are convinced, they must be punished, but they must not be sought out, and anonymous denunciations must be set aside. Everyone who repents should be set free. Tertullian (160-220) showed the iniquity of the Rescript: "The Christian is punishable not by being guilty, but by being found out" (HAMMAN, 1997 (97-197), p. 90, own translation). Honest officials, like Licinius Gratian, were perplexed to justify procedure that seemed iniquitous to them and authorized magistrates to send young Christian girls to the lupanar.

As can be seen, at the beginning of the second century the emphasis of accusations shifted in the sense that faith in Christ itself came to be understood as a foreign religion corrupting the mores. However, attempts were made to avoid mass persecutions.

"This Rescript of Trajan would make jurisprudence, even though the attitude of power toward Christians throughout the second and third centuries lacks clarity. The great Antonines, Hadrian (117- 138), Antoninus Pius (138-161) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180), would do nothing to aggravate anti-Christian legislation. But here and there flames of antagonism would erupt and martyrs would fall, due to the pressures of the people on the local power." (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 28, own translation)

This is what seems to have happened to the Christian community of Scili. Twelve Christians, five villagers and seven villagers, from an insignificant village in North Africa are denounced, arrested, and executed in Carthage in the year 180. The account of these events, written in Latin, is the first preserved document of the Church of Africa.

The book Acts of the Apostles often recounts the hostile behavior of the population against the Christians. In Acts 19:23 we find described: "a serious riot about the Path, involving goldsmiths, craftsmen and their profit, and faith in the great goddess Artemis.

"The political situation of the empire until the middle of the second century, both in its internal and external affairs, and also with unprecedented economic prosperity, did not justify persecution of a religious group that observed the norms of peace and public order and was eager to prove that it followed the moral precepts of the good citizen.

After the middle of the second century, when the period of peace and prosperity came to an end, the Roman authorities were progressively forced to take measures against the Christians, because public opinion accused them of various misfortunes and calamities. (KOESTER, 2005, p. 359, own translation)

The title "martyr" (= confessor) and the term martyrrium appear for the first time in the account of the martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, at the end of the second century. In this text also the custom of collecting the bones of the executed and burying them in a worthy place is attested for the first time." (MARKSCHIES quoted by KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 62, own translation)

At the beginning of the third century, the emperor Seventh Severus was able to consolidate his power by putting an end to a period of infighting that had weakened the empire. He imposed a series of political, economic, military, and social reforms. He proposed "to unite all subjects under the cult of the 'undefeated Sun,' in which all the religions of the time would be merged, as well as the teaching of various philosophers.

Two groups refused to bow to syncretism: the Jews and the Christians. To stop the advance of these two religions, the emperor, in the Edict of 202, prohibited, under penalty of death, any conversion to Judaism or Christianity. The persecution focused on the new converts and their teachers. It was in this year that Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, suffered martyrdom. Leonidas, father of Origen, was among the Alexandrian martyrs of the time. Clement, who had been teaching in Alexandria for 20 years, chose to take refuge in Cappadocia, where he was less known.

The most famous martyrdom of this period, around 203, is that of six Christians: two women (Perpetua and her slave Felicity) and four men, among them Perpetua's brother, a slave and two other free young men. This story is told in **The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity**, a work by several authors. The central part of the work is Perpetua's diary, written in prison until the eve of her martyrdom on March 7, 203, at the age of 22: the only one of a woman from antiquity that has come down to us. All six, beginning with the slaves, refused to abandon the Christian faith and were killed with the utmost cruelty. The courage of the young mother, Perpetua, her love for her newborn son, her consideration for her family, her good humor, and her Christian faith above all are impressive. On the eve of her

martyrdom, she wrote in her diary: "Now my sufferings are mine alone. But when I have to face the beasts, there will be another who will live in me, and will suffer for me, since I will be suffering for him.

The emperor Caracala, who succeeded Severus in 211, intended to make himself popular, extended Roman citizenship to all his free subjects, and revived the persecutions, which were interrupted in 203, especially in North Africa. His successors Eliogabalus (218-222) and Alexander Severus (222-235) - the latter considered a friend of the Christians - continued Severus' syncretistic policy, but did not force Christians and Jews to follow this syncretism.

Maximinus the Thracian (235-238) mainly persecuted the Church leaders in Rome, exiling the greatest theologian of the time, Hippolytus, and the bishop of Rome, Poncian, to the infamous mines of Sardinia. To allow a new pope to be elected, Poncian, for the first time, resigned his office on September 28, 235 (Hippolytus had opposed the pope on the grounds that he had relaxed the rules of penance to accommodate a large number of new converts from the pagan religion).

From 238 to 244, the empire had five emperors, and the Christians lived a time of some tranquility. Philip the Arab (244-249), from the province of Syria, would have been the first Christian emperor baptized by Pope Fabian - chosen by acclamation by the people of Rome in the year of celebration of the city's millennium (247). There is no confirmation of these facts by official pagan sources.

"Unlike popular images, the real problem for Christians in the second and third centuries was not the permanent persecutory pressure from the authorities, but the insecurity that possible persecution and execution might actually take place. Until the middle of the third century it depended on the decision of each governor whether or not to persecute Christians because of their profession of faith." (KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 57, own translation)

"Throughout the second century and much of the third, there was no systematic persecution against Christians" (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 79, own translation). In this period, persecutions were sporadic and limited to certain places, starting not infrequently under pressure from the pagan plebs.

"Although martyrdom was neither a constant nor a universal experience of Christians in the first two centuries, it was a possibility that everyone had to reckon with." (HURTADO, 2012, p. 791, own translation)

The situation changed radically - at least juridically - during the period of rule of the emperors Decius (249-251) and Valerian (253-260). Origen wrote at the time: "the persecutions are no longer isolated as hitherto, but have exploded everywhere.

22- Systematic persecutions: the background

"Since St. Jerome (347-420) there has been a scheme of ten great persecutions. This was supposed to be reminiscent of the ten plagues of Egypt. From then on the concept

"persecution" also entered historical research. But as popular as it is, it is imprecise, since it designates legally founded coercive measures based on the initiative of the Roman authorities against Christians, it is not appropriate for circumscribing the experiences of believers in Christ with pagan state bodies at the time." (STEGEMANN, 2004, p. 356, own translation)

Although it is difficult to define the number of persecutions of Christians, given their dispersion throughout the extensive territory of the empire, it is an indisputable fact that in the second half of the third century, Christians and the Church were systematically and universally persecuted by the authorities. Why? To approach the understanding of this phenomenon, whose cruelty astonishes us, it is convenient to keep in mind some facts:

22.1 - The role of religion: in the Greco-Roman world and especially in the Roman Empire, politics, economy, culture and religion were fully integrated. One of the fundamental virtues of the Roman citizen was **pietas**, "a mixture of love and fear which reigned as an ideal in the Roman family, with children showing **pietas** for their parents who, in turn, showed it for the State, while the latter showed it for the gods.

A virtue that linked the individual, the family, the empire and the gods in a reciprocal relationship: "**do ut des**" (I give so that you give). Relations with the gods were governed by rituals to be strictly observed, and it was up to the state to enforce them.

"The cult played an active role in empire building. It was an integral part of a network of power and created a space for the influence of local elites over population, of cities over other cities, and of Greeks over native cultures. In the words of Crossan and Reed, this cult was the 'glue' that held world civilization together; and even if it was not the only unifying element, it was the most crucial." (RIEGER, 2009, p. 6, own translation) The cities were graced with statues of the gods and goddesses, temples, processions and always civic-religious festivals, in which everyone naturally participated;

22.2 - The role of the emperor: for Roman citizens, the emperor was the personification of the empire, of society, and of the **pax romana** - prosperity and security - so hard won. Reverence, gratitude, admiration, love, adoration, were natural feelings toward emperors who evidently cultivated these feelings and related behaviors. The Roman Senate, after the death of a great emperor, declared him divine.⁹⁶ Other emperors, on their own initiative, declared themselves gods and demanded worship, but even these continued to believe and affirm the supremacy of the gods. It was the peace of the gods, the **pax deorum**, that guaranteed the stability and prosperity of the Roman state.

⁹⁶ "As far as we know, in the period from 14 AD to 337 AD, of the sixty emperors who ruled the Roman Empire, 36 were deified, along with 27 members of their families [...]. Constantine was one of those deified by the Senate after his death (337 AD)." (ASLAN, 2018, p. 204, 208, own translation).

Stone inscription made in Priene (Asia Minor) during the visit, in 9 B.C., of the emperor Octavian, appropriately named Augustus:

"The Divine Providence who ordered all things, taking an interest in our lives, arranged the most perfect order by bestowing upon us Augustus, whom He endowed with divine virtue to be a benefactor of mankind. And sent him as our savior and for our descendants, so that he would end war and put all things in order, surpassing in goodness all previous benefactors. Since the birth of the god Augustus was the beginning of a Good News (evangelio) for the world, happening because of him." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 104, own translation)

The modern concept of ideology helps to understand the function of religion and the emperor in maintaining the empire and conforming the spirit of paganism. Offering sacrifices to the gods for the welfare of the state personified in the emperor was for the Roman citizen a civic act, a natural exercise of **pietas**, learned from childhood. As one revered one's ancestors at the domestic altar, one revered the emperor. To refuse to revere the gods and the emperor was, in the eyes of the Romans, an act of impiety, a profession of atheism, an offense to the emperor and omission of the people's counterpart to the complacency of the gods (**do ut des**). The prosperity of the empire depended on the good will of the gods and this on the recognition and worship of the Roman citizens. The worship of the emperor was considered mutually beneficial to rulers and ruled. Festivals in honor of the emperor were high points in the life of the community and the people participated massively and joyfully;

22.3. Nature of the Christian faith: The center of the new faith, which emerged in the midst of many others existing and accepted in the Roman Empire, was a person, Jesus, whom believers called and considered above all and everyone the Lord (in Greek, **Christos**). Paganism knew no "act of faith". The Roman citizen was born into a family that believed in the gods as they believed in the emperor. Everything was perfectly natural, like speaking Greek, or Latin. Christianity began with the profession of faith: the recognition and acceptance of a person / God, Lord of everything and everyone.

There is no denying that the Christian religion, in the Roman Empire, was a counter-cultural force, at odds with the prevailing principles and sentiments.

"The very language that Christians used to talk about Jesus reflected the language that the Romans employed for the Emperor. The Emperor's arrival in the city was known as the "parousia," as Christians described the Second Coming of Christ." (ASLAN, 2018, p. 204, 208, own translation)

By nature, potentially, the Christian religion was subversive of the **pax romana**. On the other hand, Christian communities played a role of social support to the weakest in a society where "an economic crisis, or reversal of fortune, precipitated the middle classes to the level of the poor." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2012, p. 52, own translation) Group solidarity made up for the lack of social integration and comforted individuals when discriminated against, incriminated, or persecuted.

22.4 - The pagan way of life versus the Christian way of life: the Christian communities, spread throughout the vast and diverse territory of the empire, were naturally conformed or tried to inculcate themselves to the local way of life. However, Christians were withdrawn from the pagan way of life, frequenting public baths, theaters, civic-religious festivals, etc. The Romans appreciated public spaces. It must be remembered that the people spent most of their time outside their reduced domestic space. The Christians did not attend anything that was associated with the cult of the gods, and almost everything in the cities was associated with the gods. They tried not to marry pagans, so that they could more easily maintain their lifestyle.

In the school of the imperial pagans, one of the students, Alexamenos, is a Christian. His classmates mock him and draw on the walls a crucified ass, with the inscription: Alexâmenos worshipping his god! The young Christian, courageous, responds, writing, "Alexamenos faithful!" The graffito discovered on the Palatine has been preserved and can be seen in Rome in the Kirchner museum. (HAMMAN, 1997(97-197), p. 94)

There was a growing tension between the Christian **ethos** and the pagan **ethos**;

22.5 - Growth of Christianity and strengthening of the Church: "publicly", comment Stockmeier and Bauer, the impression was inevitable that the community of the faithful constituted a foreign body within society, even appearing as a counterfeit of the State. While it was seen only as a marginal group, it was given only local attention, but with the growth of the communities, opportunely exploited for propagandistic purposes, the nervousness of the Roman authorities increased. The all-embracing Church, with its organizational forms, inevitably provoked conflict with the state based on a religion. (STOCKMEIER; BAUER cited by KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 31)

The ethnic minority of Jews, although the largest non-pagan religious group in the empire, respected the prohibition of proselytism. "Christianism, on the other hand, did not allow itself to be bounded; its incessant growth threatened the Roman empire and necessitated, almost compulsorily, taking measures of containment.

After the violent persecutions at the beginning of the third century, there was a period of relative peace, during which the number of converts increased surprisingly. This fact seemed to give reason to Tertullian's interpretation of the bloody persecutions: "The blood of Christians is seed. The exemplary deaths of Christians moved those who witnessed them and favored the expansion of Christianity. Historian Peter Brown notes that already in the third and early fourth centuries "the Great Persecution showed that the Christian Church had changed as much as the empire. The Church had achieved power and unity." (RIEGER, 2009, p. 43, own translation)

22.6 - Decadence of the empire: the three fundamental elements of the Roman imperial institution - that is, the principality based on the army, the aristocracy based on land ownership (senators) or on commerce (knights), the people as a source of sovereignty and as a reservoir of soldiers and

workers - were gradually degenerating, forming social forces that became more and more rigid, more closed, more parasitic [...] Slavery, the root of ancient civilizations, had contributed to disqualifying manual labor, the handmade product, progressively impoverishing industry and commerce. It had, finally, disqualified and impoverished social stratification, contributing in a decisive way to gradually eliminate the small and middle bourgeoisie, both in the country and in the city, making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

"The progressive internal disintegration, beginning with the emperor Marcus Aurelius, was added to the external disintegration, by the pressure of the barbarians, by the need for great expenses to finance the armies, the fortifications, the continuous war campaigns: an evident sign of this other situation was the progressive accentuation of militarism in the life of the empire, with all the unproductive expenses linked to this phenomenon." (PIERINI, 1998, p. 125, own translation)

By the year 250, the barbarians beyond the borders are becoming increasingly bold in their incursions within the empire's domain, the economy is in crisis, and the old traditions are increasingly in disuse.

22.7 - Attempts to restore religious traditions: although Christian historians have characterized him as a cruel character, the emperor Decius was simply a Roman of ancient temperament and a man willing to restore the old glory of Rome. To do this, it was necessary to restore the old cults. If all the subjects of the empire returned to worshipping the gods, possibly the gods would again favor the empire. What was at stake was the survival of the old Rome of the Caesars. The emperor's purpose was not to create martyrs, but apostates. The persecution promoted by Decius lasted a little less than two years, but it was systematic, universal, inflexible, and cruel.

The later persecutions, as a goal, or as a consequence of attempts to restore the old religious traditions - under Valerian (253-260), Aurelian (270-275) and Dioclesian (284-305) - did not have the expected effect. The later systematic persecutions of the third and fourth centuries were as ineffective as the sporadic ones of the first and second centuries. The ethnic cleansing invoked and supported by Greco-Roman intellectuals had not been accomplished.

Neither the empire was rejuvenated, nor was the Church destroyed. The persecutions wore down the authorities before the people: many martyrs, much cruelty, many apostates, but the Church remained firm and the Christians more united, with new heroes, the martyrs, and with the **lapsi** (fallen, apostate), repentant and penitent, back in the Church.

"It is likely that the total number of those martyred by the Romans - as terrible as it was - did not reach a thousand. His steadfastness, however, greatly strengthened the faith of other Christians and impressed many pagans." (STARK, 2006, p. 182; 214, own translation)

Commenting on Galen's **Edict of Toleration**, F. Ruggiero writes:

"The Christians were an extremely anomalous enemy. For more than two centuries Rome had sought to assimilate them into the social fabric itself [...], they were physically inside the Roman civitas, but for various reasons they were alien to it; they had finally determined a radical transformation of the civitas itself in a Christian sense. "

23- Systematic persecutions: facts, reactions and consequences

The emperor Gaius Trajan Decius (249-251), a very traditional general, began his government with a certain religious mistrust of Christians and political concern over the growth of the Church. He decided to repress them, while building new pagan temples and strengthening their cults and sacrifices, convinced that the prosperity of the empire, with great internal difficulties and external threats, depended on the unity, even if coerced, of all Roman citizens around the gods of their ancestors.

At that time, the Christian Church of Rome had been led for thirteen years by Fabian, chosen pope by acclamation of the people and the clergy while he was still a common citizen, a layman. On the same day, January 10, 236, he had been ordained deacon, priest, and bishop. As pope, he exercised great influence, including his administrative acumen. He had taken a census of the Christians present in the city of Rome and divided the city into seven ecclesiastical districts; he delegated to each one its parishioners, its clergy, and its catacombs, as the cemeteries were called. He had sent seven deacons and seven subdeacons to collect the acts of martyrdom throughout the empire. According to Cyprian of Carthage, Emperor Decius had said that he preferred a rival in the empire to a bishop like Fabian in Rome.

Still in the first year of his rule, Decius determined by an Edict that all citizens of the empire (to which all inhabitants of the empire had been elevated in 212 AD) should offer a **supplicatio**, a sacrifice of supplication to the gods of the state. "The complacency of the gods was to be won and the old religion, renewed: thus the welfare of the state, personified in the emperor, would be guaranteed." (LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 33, own translation)

"On set days, Donini explains, the heads of households in the various urban and rural centers throughout the territory of the empire were to appear before special committees to obey the official cult, offering a sacrifice to the simulacra of the gods and the statue of the emperor. "

At the very least they had to burn incense in front of the emperor's statue (**turificati**). Why not accept this empty ritual? asked some more tolerant people.

"In case of refusal, arrest, torture and, ultimately, capital execution of the renitent was carried out; to the others a certificate (the libelus) was granted, which proved the act of worship and the loyalty of the subject." (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 207, own translation)

"Since Jews were excluded from the Edict, the legal consequences affected almost exclusively those Christians who did not make the sacrifice: if, after admonitions, they did not change their minds, they were either deported to the mines or executed." (KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 59, own translation)

During the rule of Emperor Valerian (253-260), Christianity lived a few years of peace. In the fourth year of his government (257), the emperor begins an improvised, harsh and cruel persecution of Christians. Faced with the precarious financial situation of the empire, the imperial advisor (later usurper), Macriano, induced Valeriano to try to plug the hole in the public finances by sequestering the goods of rich Christians. In August 257, a new persecutory Edict aimed at eliminating the Christian organization: exile for renitent Christian leaders, prohibition of meetings and of entering cemeteries, under penalty of death. A year later, the persecution became more cruel, putting the most prestigious clergy and laity to death. Upper-class Christians were threatened with the confiscation of their property.

Galien (260-268), Valerian's son and associated with him since 253, succeeded in restoring order in the empire, saving the borders threatened by the barbarians. In his first year in office, Galienus promulgated an Edict of Toleration, which would change the fate of Christians. He returned the confiscated cemeteries and other property to the churches.

From 260 to the beginning of 303, Christianity lived a new and long period of religious peace, interrupted, briefly, by a new persecutory attempt, by the emperor Aurelian, in early 275, to introduce a common cult in the empire: to the "**Sol invictus**". He gave himself the title of **Dominus et deus**, naturally rejected by the Christians. The 40 years of peace favored the internal and external development of the Church. Many Christians rose to high positions in the state and proved to be capable and honest men.

The impositions of the Edict of Decius (249) and of the later persecutions, by Trebonian Galus (253) and Valerian (257-258), *"provoked reactions and different behaviors, from extreme resistance to forms of compromise or concession. The dilemma was: resist or flee (a solution, at first sight less noble, but for which one could refer to the precise evangelical indications: 'those who are in Judea, flee to the mountains' Mt.24,16). For their part, the authorities aimed not to eliminate all Christians, but to weaken the churches by dividing them, by taking moral authority away from the leaders, or by hitting some of them exemplarily." (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 54, own translation)*

"Some rushed to obey the imperial edict as soon as they heard about it. Others remained steadfast for some time, but when they were brought before the courts, they offered sacrifices to the gods. Others, perhaps more cunning, used trickery and the power of gold to obtain false certificates without having sacrificed anything. Others, finally, stood firm and were willing to face the most cruel tortures that their executioners could impose." (GONZÁLES, 2009, p. 140, own translation)

The consequences of the persecutions in Rome were especially harsh. Many Christians took refuge in religious communities in the African desert, many were martyred, and many denied their faith. We do not know the number of any of them.

Popes Fabian and Sixtus were executed in 250 and 258 respectively. Because of Decius' prohibition, Rome was without a bishop for more than a year. The emperor being absent, fighting the Goths, sixteen bishops, the people and the clergy gathered together and elected the priest Cornelius Pope in March 251. Exiled by Decius, Pope Cornelius died in exile in 253 at the age of 53. The historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived in this period, bequeathed to us detailed descriptions of the tortures suffered by Christians by the thousands in many regions, in the imperial houses of Nicomedia, Phoenicia, Egypt, Thebaida and Phrygia.

The Christians, when not condemned to die by the sword, by the fire, or to bloody games in the amphitheaters, could, men and women, be sent to the mines. The duration of the forced labor was ten years. The condemned were branded with iron and hot coals on the arm or hand. "From the historical point of view," notes Cavalcante, "one can divide the many accounts of Christian martyrs into three basic groups: (a) official court cases, (b) eyewitness accounts, (c) legends composed long after the facts." (CESAREIA, 1999, p. 197, own translation)

The martyrs' gestalt is an epic of courage and delicacy, with the young and graceful Blandina sustaining the testimony of 15-year-old Pontic in Lyon in the year 197; of delicacy and modesty of the young mothers Felicity and Perpetua in Carthage, and of the brave Potamena who, as her countryman Eusebius of Caesarea wrote, "nobly endured the end, with different parts of her body being covered little by little with boiling pitch, from the feet to the crown of her head. This after the judge Aquila had ordered the severest of tortures to be applied to her in every part of her body." About Potamena, the stern historian wrote: "For besides the perfections of the mind, she also flourished in the maturity of personal attractions." (CESAREIA, 1999, p. 207, own translation)

"In early Christian culture, the figure of the martyrs took the place of the hero figure of pagan culture, and the lives and legends of the martyrs replaced the heroic myths and legends that were the most popular and persistent elements of the ancient culture." (DAWSON, 2014, p. 186, own translation)

Once the waves of persecutions were over, the Church had to face new problems with three new groups of Christians, victims of the persecutions:

- a. the numerous *lapsi* (fallen) or *sacrificati*, who had sacrificed and denied the faith, but wanted to return to live together in the Church. What to do? Never accept? Accept with conditions; which ones? Rebaptize? The controversies in this regard reached a conflict which led the rigorist Novatian of Rome to make himself antipope against the "laxity" of Pope Cornelius. Novatian, as antipope, was against the reconciliation of the fallen for the sake of the holiness of the Church. He gave birth to the *Church of the righteous*;
- b. the *libellatici*, that is, those who had arranged a false proof of having sacrificed;
- c. the *martyrs* or *confessors*: the prestige of the persevering ones, who, tortured, did not give in, came to be considered filled with the Holy Spirit and, therefore, with the right to reconcile the

weak. Their distribution of *letters of peace* to the *lapsi* and *libellatici* began to escape the Church's control.

The Synod of Carthage (of 251) confirmed: those who had sacrificed, the **sacrificati**, were to receive peace only on their deathbed; the **libellatici** were to receive more lenient treatment. Another council, in the following year, decided for the reconciliation of all with a suitable penance, since only in the strength of the Holy Spirit could one resist the danger that threatened all, as Cyprian then said. He himself had gone into hiding and later became the first African bishop to be martyred, in 258.

At the beginning of the fourth century, in the years 303 to 311, the emperor Aurelian Diocletian imposed the last great and systematic persecution of Christians, as part of great reforms of the empire: administrative, financial and social. With the social reform, he did not intend the integration of Christians, but the elimination of the Church institution. It was a focused and cruel persecution against the leaders, followed by destruction of the churches, burning of books, and confiscation of property. Christian commoners were turned into slaves. His own wife Prisca and his daughter Valeria, both Christians, obeyed the Law and offered sacrifices to the gods, but his butler Dorotheus and several others at court suffered martyrdom. Persecution reached its peak in the East, especially in Syria, Egypt and Asia Minor, with many Christians, both men and women, being sentenced to ten years' hard labor. Diocletian, who abdicated in 305, was succeeded as "Augustus" by Galerius and as "Caesar" by Maximinus Daia. The latter proved to be more fanatical than Diocletian.

On April 30, 311, on his deathbed, Emperor Galerius promulgated the **Edict of Toleration**: "moved by our mercy to be kind to all, we think it right to extend to them also our pardon, and to allow them to become Christians again, and to meet again in their assemblies, as long as they do not violate public order. In exchange for this tolerance from us, the Christians will have the obligation to pray to their god for our welfare, for the public good, and for themselves, so that the republic may enjoy prosperity and they may live in peace."

"Soon the prisons and the quarries were opened, and from them sprang a human torrent of crippled and ill-treated people, but in enjoyment of what for them was a direct intervention from above." (GONZÁLES, 2009, p. 140, own translation)

The emperor Constantine, with the **Edict of Milan of the year 313**, got the glory of the end of the persecutions. Becoming the sole emperor in 324, Constantine took over Diocletian's and Maximinus Daia's dream of an extensive restoration of the old empire. The main difference was that while these two had tried to restore the old empire by reaffirming the old pagan religion, Constantine believed it was possible to do this restoration not on the basis of pagan religion, but on the basis of Christianity (GONZÁLES, 2009, p. 25): "In 318 Constantine recognized the jurisdiction of the bishops, and in 333 the bishops were placed on an equal footing with the magistrates." (DAVIES, 1967, p. 256, own translation). On February 27, 380, Emperor Theodosius I promulgated in Thessalonica an Edict of Faith, by which Christianity was elevated to the rank of state religion and the Christian faith - expressed by

the creed approved at the Council of Nicaea (325) - was imposed as law, and every infraction against the creed was to be punished as sacrilege.

XVIII - CHRISTIANISM IN THE 4TH CENTURY

24 - The end of persecutions and state favoring of the Christian religion

For many historians, the fourth century was the most important for the history of Christianity and its doctrine. Cavalcante points to four sets of relevant events (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 253):

- the end of the Roman Empire's persecutions against Christianity;
- the state favoring of the Christian religion starting with Constantine and recognition of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire;
- the emergence and development of the phenomenon of monasticism;
- the emergence of the great theological minds in both the Christian East and West.

About the first two items, we complete here the facts summarized in the previous chapter.

The end of persecutions: at the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity was a complex organism.⁹⁷ According to Paul Veyne, archaeologist and historian, an expert on ancient Rome: it was "a religion, with a belief, with a spirituality, a morality, a metaphysics, all under an ecclesial authority. A church, a machine of conquest and framing [...] that the world had known nothing like it." (VEYNE, 2011, P. 64, OWN TRANSLATION)

Christianism got that far thanks to a special, collective effort, which is described by Lerry Hurtado, a professor at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland:

"Christianism from the beginning thematized martyrdom strongly, presenting the brutal deaths of believers as inspiring acts of religious devotion. Christians played themselves out so that the coercive efforts of Roman magistrates would promote the very faith they sought to destroy! Christians wrote and vigorously disseminated accounts of their martyrs, which formed an important genre of ancient Christian literature that circulated to promote a courageous faith through the example of those who were treated as celebrated characters." (HURTADO, 2012, p. 791, own translation)

Emperor Galerius died five days after his **Edict of Toleration** (311), leaving the empire in the hands of four rulers: Constantine, Licinius, Majentius, and Maximinus Dazu. The following year, Constantine eliminates Majentius. In 313, Constantine allies with Licinius and the two tighten their alliance with the **Edict of Milan**. In the same year, Licinius eliminates Maximian Dazu, who continued

⁹⁷ "In the third and fourth centuries, Syriac was the international language of the church in the Roman diocese of the 'East,' which included Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia." (BAILEY, 2016, p. 13, own translation).

to persecute Christians. According to Shirley Case, "by the year 300 Christianity had become so widely accepted in Roman society that it made successful persecution by the government impossible [...]. Constantine's conversion might best be seen as a response to the massive exponential wave going forward, rather than as its cause." (CASE, as quoted by STARK, 2006, p. 20, own translation)

Since the **Edict of Milan** (313), freedom of worship has become the official norm in the Roman Empire: "It is in accordance with the state structure and the prevailing peace, that we will guarantee to every citizen freedom of worship according to his conscience and choice".

During the persecutions, the unity and solidarity among Christians and between the churches, which already drew attention for their courage and heroism, increased and aroused the admiration of non-Christians. With the end of the persecutions and Christianity having become a licit religion, it expanded, gaining adherents in all social classes, not excluding intellectuals, among whom paganism was in crisis.

"The times encourage one to be a Christian for opportunism: if one wants to make a career as a high official, for example, it is better to be one [...]. Because of this, the Church registers a great number of new suitors! Many are sincere, others are not. The catechetical institutions are completely full, the procedure less demanding [...]. We are really moving towards a mass religion, in a situation of Christendom." (MEUNIER, 2005, p. 29, own translation)

The Constantinian policy of favoring Christianity, comments Cavalcante, "will continue throughout the fourth century, notwithstanding the short-lived attempt by Julian the Apostate (361-363) to reintroduce paganism. All subsequent emperors adopted Christianity. The climax of this history is, without a doubt, the government of Theodosius (379-395), which really makes orthodox Christianity official as the state religion." (CAVALCANTE, 2007, 313, own translation)

The second ecumenical council, held in Constantinople in 381, convened and led by Theodosius, made the Nicene faith triumph.

"In 391 any pagan cult activity was disallowed, even in private homes. The destruction of pagan temples and shrines by the population, which had hitherto occurred with impunity, now received legal approval, which led to the destruction of the great Temple of Serapes in Alexandria." (KÖTING as quoted by KAUFMANN et al. 2012, p. 118, own translation)

In the following centuries, the 5th and 6th, there were many and harsh persecutions against the pagans. The prolonged and ruthless plundering of what had once been a glorious non-Christian **establishment** - with all the temple rights on local taxes, the temple property, the investments made by the devout and by proud donors to pay the priests and cover the costs of worship - all this accumulated fortune of centuries of piety was essentially wrested away by force. There must not have been much left by the year 400 A.D. (MACMULLEN, as quoted by STARK, 2006, p. 219, own translation)

"The Bishop of Alexandria, in 415, led his Christian community against the Jews of that metropolis. Synagogues were razed, leaving literally no stone unturned, and Jewish

homes were looted, leaving behind many dead, wounded, and a hundred thousand Alexandrian Jews expelled (FRANGIOTTI, 2017, p. 105). *Bands of itinerant monks attacked synagogues, pagan temples, meeting places of heretics and also homes of wealthy Gnostics in Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Palestine and North Africa.*"⁹⁸

The custom of making pilgrimages to the Holy Land in thanksgiving for the end of persecution and in supplication for peace extended throughout the year.

It is said that Egeria, or Etheria, a pilgrim, spent more than three years (381-384) traveling from France to Constantinople and from there to Jerusalem, Jericho, Nazareth, Capernaum, Alexandria, Thebes, the Red Sea, and Sinai. Next she traveled to Antioch, Edessa, Mesopotamia, to the Euphrates River, to Syria, returning to Constantinople. She wrote a book about the trip - which gives her the title of the first Hispanic writer in the Latin language - with very valuable information about the liturgy in the places she visited, with details about the ceremonies in the Church of Jerusalem, and about the societies she passed through.

24.1 - The state favoring of the Christian religion: during the period when Constantine divided the government of the empire with Licinius, he limited himself to guaranteeing the peace of the church and to returning to it the properties which had been confiscated during the persecutions. He tried to maintain good relations with the devotees of the ancient cults and particularly with the Senate, since the empire officially was pagan and, as head of the empire, he was the High Priest.

He maintained the Academy of Athens and the Museum of Alexandria, the two great centers of study of the time, dedicated to the teaching of the old pagan wisdom. Gradually, Constantine's support for the Church increased: he donated the Lateran palace, owned by his wife's family, and provided imperial means of transportation for the bishops to attend the Synod of Arles in 314, at no cost to the Church. From 313 to 322, the empire is divided between Constantine in the West and Licinius in the East. With the mysterious death of his brother-in-law Licinius in 322, Constantine - a skilled statesman and strategist - becomes sole ruler.

For geopolitical reasons (proximity to the enemy Persian Empire, connection between East and West, territory where the church was numerically stronger, and distance from the Roman Senate and the old pagan families of Rome's aristocracy, etc.), Constantine decided in 324 to make Byzantium the new capital of the Roman Empire.

In 325, Constantine convened and presided, as "bishop of bishops," or bishop to outsiders as he called himself, the Council of Nicaea (now Iznik, in the Marmara region of Turkey), at which the Church defined, in summary form, "the object of the faith of Christians." In his letter to the bishops who could not attend the Council of Nicaea in person, Constantine laid out his position with brutal clarity:

⁹⁸ Alexandria's Jewish community was large and traditional; historian Edward Gibbon cites 40,000. The looting and demolition of synagogues may have been a disproportionate reaction to the killing, perhaps accidental, of Christians by Jews.

"[...] let us refrain from having anything in common with the Jews, who are our enemies, let us attentively avoid all contact with their wicked customs [...] for how can they entertain correct ideas on any point after they have engineered the death of the Lord [...] do not allow your pure spirits to share the customs of a foolish and so depraved people." (SHAMA, 2015, p. 241-243, own translation)

About 300 bishops participated in this ecumenical (universal) Council. "Almost all were from the East, 3 were from the West (Italy, Spain and Gaul), 2 from Armenia and 1 from Persia." (MONDONI in LIMA, 2015, p. 175, own translation)

For historian and theologian Eduardo Hoornaert:

"It is apparently for theological and pastoral reasons that the bishops are summoned by the emperor Constantine to meet in Nicaea in the year 325. In reality, this meeting is part of a plan created by the Think Tanks of the empire and results in an important imperial political victory, concerned with unifying the living forces of society around a religion capable of redeeming the imperial project that suffers from divisions, disputes, corruption and especially lack of ethics. Now, think the emperor's advisors, this is where the Christian movement can make a good contribution. " (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 136, own translation)

However, "the Church's first dogmatic formulation, the Profession of Faith according to Nicaea, did not restore the unity of worship, desired by Emperor Constantine, nor did it put an end to the heated theological discussion." (LENSENWEGER, 2013, p. 64, own translation)

Dazzled by the favor that Constantine showed them, there was no lack of Christians who strove to prove that Constantine was God's chosen one and that his work was the consummation of the history of the Church. A typical case of this attitude, according to González, was Eusebius of Caesarea - the most learned Christian of the fourth century - who attended the Council and was highly regarded by the Emperor. (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 35)

In 330, the new capital of the empire, reformed and sumptuously decorated with monuments from pagan temples, was inaugurated under the name of Constantinople. On that occasion, Constantine appointed several Christians to the highest positions in the administrative machine, seemingly favoring Christians over pagans.

Constantine had the church of St. Irene built in Constantinople, in honor of peace. Helena, his mother, built in the Holy Land the churches of the Nativity and the Mount of Olives. By order of the emperor, or following his example, churches were built in the main cities of the empire (almost all of Constantine's successors built pompous churches to perpetuate his memory).

Constantine received baptism only in 336, on his deathbed, at the hands of his advisor, the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. He could have followed the example of many other Christians who postponed baptism as long as possible, waiting for the forgiveness of all sins. Certainly the reasons of state and his role as emperor weighed heavily on Constantine: 1) he was a Christian (since 312?), but

emperor of a pagan majority and a Christian minority, and of other faiths, including Judaism; 2) as the highest authority in the empire, he would not admit to being commanded by any religious authority.

It is also true that Constantine's government meant a political turn for the Church, the so-called "Constantinian turn", the results of which were: a) the building of numerous churches; b) the exemption of clerics from taxation and from providing public services; c) the equating of bishops with high state officials; d) the authorization of the Church to receive, by testament, donations of land and other property; e) the recognition by the state of the decisions of ecclesiastical courts; f) the institution, since 321, of the Christian Sunday as a day of rest.

"Already with Theodosius, in the years 389-390, Christianity becomes persecutor not only of the traditional religions, but also of Judaism. An intolerant aspect emerges that from then on will continue to manifest itself throughout the centuries." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 234-235, own translation)

"Judaism continued to be preserved as religio licita. Paganism was not. Its temples were destroyed, its services repressed, it became a crime to practice pagan services, even in the privacy of the home. Justinian's code of 529, for the first time, omits Judaism as religio licita. Three years later a new edict determined that all synagogues in the empire were to be turned into churches." (SHAMA, 2015, p. 248; 251, own translation)

The Spanish theologian José M. Castillo, in his precious book "Jesus: the humanization of God", analyzing the "strictly political theology underlying the definitions of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople", records:

"Theodosius the Great (379-395, Spanish, by means of the edict Cunctus populus , imposed "the general, irrevocable prohibition of all pagan cults and sacrificial rituals" and placed all who acted contrary under the threat of the punishment of laesae majestatis. By virtue of this imperial decree, Christianity ceased to be a Jesus movement (G. Theissen) and was constituted a state religion. And so the Catholic Church obtained the worldly position of state church and heresy was framed as a state crime. The theological stance of the Ancient Church was consummated. A theology that reached the Christological formulation at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451, and which to this day theologians continue to analyze." (CASTILLO, 2015, p. 249-250, own translation)

"As a result of the events of the fourth century, for the next thousand years and more, if one wanted to be a temporal king, it was necessary to accept Christ as eternal King. " BROWN, as quoted by RIEGER, 2009, p. 44, own translation)

"When, from the third and fourth centuries AD, orthoxia - the terminator of Christianity - is imposed, the Pauline interpretation of crucifixion and those responsible for it are marginalized; the leaders of this world, according to the wisdom of this world, in the name of the law. When Christianizing the empire, the empire imperializes Christianity (emphasis added). One had to look for other crucifiers...aggressive anti-Judaism arose out of Christian orthodoxy." (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 37; 38, own translation)

25 - Emergence and development of monasticism

In the fourth century, Christianity is essentially a religion of cities and villages (remember that the urban population was no more than 15% of the total population). Around the bishop, a large clergy moves, and around the priests and deacons, the minor clerics form, who channel the tides of the faithful to the basilicas. The small primitive communities had expanded in favor of the masses. This mass, writes Duchesne, "was Christian as a superficial and formal mass could be; the water of baptism had touched it, but the spirit of the Gospel had not penetrated it." (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 46, own translation) The three years of catechumenate was no longer required. Sunday homilies in the large, newly built basilicas would have to make up for the lack of knowledge of Scripture and doctrine.

The answer to these problems will come from great popular speakers, classically trained and with a strong theological foundation; the great minds of the East and the West.

The question of "Christian ethos," that is, exemplary behavior, was more complicated. From the example above, not much could be expected.

"Around the emperor - who was often a mediocre Christian - teemed a band of officials, courtiers and courtesans, whose religion accommodated decadent customs. Moreover, certain literate and aristocratic circles - notably the senatorial families - remained for a long time hostile to Christianity, which was considered a barbaric, egalitarian, poetry-less religion. Philosophers, rhetoricians, grammarians and sophists, would still for a long time make life hard for Christianity: the philosophical school of Athens - the thinking center of paganism - would only close its doors in 529." (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 46, own translation)

The response to the relaxed, unevangelical behavior came from the people, the laity, the anacoreta and monasticism.

Monasticism emerged in the middle of the 3rd century and developed further in the 4th century. The earliest known participant in monastic life is Hieracas of Leontopolis (+ 340) - the first Coptic exegete and translator into Greek - who started a monastic community in his own city. The Anakoretas, initially settled in the Lower Nile area, took the ascetic ideal into solitary life. The most famous hermit

was Anthony (251-356); the closest testimony to him is given by seven of his letters (335-345) whose authenticity is today almost unanimously accepted. His fame spread thanks to the biography **Life of Anthony** - known as Saint Anthony - written by Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria, in which he speaks, in 357, that "the desert became a city". By telling an edifying story, this and similar books were intended to propose figures to be imitated.

Just as Antony was beginning the solitary life, Paconius (242-348) was starting the first cenobitic (communal) establishments in the Upper Nile. He founded seven male monasteries, each with hundreds of monks, and two female monasteries. His sister Maria founded several others.

Monasticism developed further in the fourth century, after the period of persecutions, and is configured as "a voice of protest against the spread of worldliness, promoted by the State in union with the Church. Just remember the court bishops, so easily dazzled by the emperor's favor, and the waves of conversions, often superficial and self-interested, in both the masses and the elites.

The solitary Christian life in isolated communities also originated among Christians who were refugees in many places, fleeing from persecution. After the Constantinian era, the examples of the hermit Paul of Thebes (228-330) and the anachoret and monk St. Anthony the Abbot came to be followed by thousands as a form of protest against a hierarchical Church that was increasingly losing the simplicity of the Gospel. "Retreating into the desert is a radicalization of the ideal of rupture and detachment: all ties are cut to unify one's life. The word **monk** comes from the Greek monachos, derived from monos, alone." (MEUNIER, 2005, p. 31, own translation)

When Paconius died in 346, "there were already around 5,000 monks who, in various monasteries lived according to his rule." (SHINDLER, as quoted KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 170, own translation). Palladium (368-431), who, in the **Lausian History**, presents the first flowering of monastic life by telling wonderful stories about monks in the desert, states that around 430, "the female monastery established by Pacomius had four hundred members, many had histories of wealthy families. At least in the beginning, they had quite a bit of autonomy from the bishops." (MARTY, 2014, p. 87, own translation)

One of them, Athanasius, had already sought to limit the wandering of monks in an attempt to contain the proliferation of uncontrolled experiences. (POTESTÁ; VIAN, 2013, p. 65, own translation)

"The great model of a fighter for Orthodoxy is Metropolitan Athanasius of Alexandria who, in the decade between 346 and 356, succeeded in imposing the Orthodox model throughout the region he controlled, in the midst of persecutions, exiles, threats against his life, and difficulties of all kinds. He is the great champion of orthodoxy in the fourth century." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 137, own translation)

Basil the Great, a native of Caesareis in Cappadocia, got rid of his riches, giving them to the poor, and settled in an isolated and inhospitable place where, with his friend Gregory Nazianzen, he produced "the two monastic rules, which would have a decisive influence on the cenobitic life

throughout the East and would give him the title of legislator of Greek monasticism.” (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 247, own translation)

"Around the end of the fourth century, from Mesopotamia to North Africa, one witnesses a wave of violence perpetrated by the monks: in 388, they set fire to a synagogue in Kalinico, near the Euphrates, and terrorized the Syrian villages where there were pagan temples; in 391, the patriarchs of Alexandria, Theophilus, summons them to "purify" the city of Serapeum (Serapeu), the great temple of Serapis. Around the same time, they forcibly penetrate the homes of pagans to search them for idols. And in 415, a group of fanatical monks commit one of the most heinous crimes recorded in history: they lynch Hypatia, the noble philosopher of Alexandria, whom her disciple, Bishop Synesius, evokes as "mother, sister, teacher, and benefactor." (ELIADE, 2011, p. 357, own translation)

"Uninterrupted to our days, the monastic current - which the world ignores or pretends to ignore because it is silent - has not ceased to feed the secret fountain of a Church constantly threatened by drought, corruption, jurisdictionalism, Pharisaism." (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 50, own translation)

26 - The great theological minds: humanism

From the pagan and Christian intellectual elite emerged the Christian intellectuals who brilliantly sought to respond to the problems of the time. Regarding this Christian elite, writes Pierrard, "it is remarkable the similarity of their training and their trajectory within the Church: literary studies that make them writers of class, promising profane career interrupted by the 'conversion', period spent in fortifying solitude, intense personal activity accompanied by strong doctrinal influence" (PIERRARD, 2012, p. 50, own translation). Men with a great awareness of being living the end of one history and the beginning of another. Two groups among them stand out for their contribution to the:

The theological debate which divided the Church, and to some extent the empire, between Arians and Nicenes. The Council of Nicaea took the side of Alexander, patriarch of Alexandria, in the theological dispute with the priest of his diocese, Arius (256-336), without, however, appeasing the two opposing currents and another that defended an intermediate position. So much so that, in the fourth century, Christianity was divided, on a worldwide scale, into two parties (Nicenes vs. Arians), around a theological problem: Who is Jesus? What are the relationships between Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father?

Out of the discussion of these theological questions arose the Trinitarian doctrine of the three great Cappadocians - Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, his younger brother Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, and their friend Gregory, bishop of Nazianzen. Nyssa and Nazianzen were small towns

in Cappadocia (today an important region of Turkey). They explained more clearly the differentiation of the three divine persons and developed a different conceptual system to describe the mystery of the Trinity. They were thus able to make the **Nicene Creed**, which is repeated in all masses to this day, actually prevail.

Basil the Great (330-379) and Gregory and Macrina were from a deeply religious family whose roots extended back at least two generations. His maternal grandparents, Basil and Macrina, had spent seven years hiding in the woods during the persecution of the emperor Decius. Basil studied in Caesarea, Antioch, Constantinople and then in Athens. There he met Gregory Nazianzen.

At the age of 26, he became a professor of rhetoric. Converted under the influence of his sister Macrina, he embarked on a long journey to Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine to meet eminent hermits. Upon his return, at the age of 28, he donated his goods to the poor and settled in Iborra, where he and his friend Gregory of Nazianzen founded a community for men, similar to the one his sister, Macrina, had founded for women in Anessi. During their six years in Iborra Basilio and Gregory wrote an anthology of the works of Origen and the **Rule**, about conventual life. Along with manual work there is intellectual work and prayer, the monk's greatest duty. At the age of 32 or 34 he is ordained a priest and at 40 is chosen bishop.

Perhaps what is most striking about Basilio's spirituality is the socially committed character of his episcopal ministry. He dedicated himself to eradicating the misery of his city, building several works in the neediest sectors: institutions to help the marginalized and foreigners; a hostel and shelter for the elderly; a hospital, with a wing reserved for contagious diseases; a church; and, later, lodgings for employees and workers. The building turned into a real working-class city. (HAMANN, cited or CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 249)

This work will be renamed **Basiliade**.

The following text is from a homily by Basil:

"And you, who are hiding all your goods in the works of an insatiable avarice, do you think you are harming no one, leaving so many unfortunates in privation? Who is a miser? A person who is not content with what is necessary. Who is a thief? A person who takes from someone what belongs to him. And aren't you a miser? Are you not a thief? You have monopolized the goods whose management has been entrusted to you. He who strips a man of his garments will be called a plunderer. And does he who, being able to do so, does not clothe the beggar's nakedness deserve any other name? To the hungry belongs the bread you keep. To the naked man, the cloak which you keep even in his coffers. To the barefooted man, the shoes that rot in your house. To the miserable, the money you keep hidden. This is how you live oppressing so many people you could help [...]."

Basilio knew how to be haughty: a high official commissioned by the emperor to bend him with promises and threats, when he said to him, "No one has dared to speak to me in these terms," Basil replied, "Perhaps this is because you have never stumbled upon a real bishop." Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), younger brother of Basil and Macrina - (Saint Macrina the Younger, granddaughter of Saint Macrina the Greater and of Basil the Elder, a well-known lawyer of Caesarea of Cappadocia). He married Theosebea, "a very beautiful young woman, with whom he seems to have been very happy" [...]. When she died, he became a hermit and was ordained a priest.

Appointed by his brother, Basil, bishop of Caesarea, to be bishop of Nyssa, he showed no aptitude for administrative functions. He distinguished himself as a speculative theologian, for his mystical life, and for his mystical works, which to this day are among the classic works of contemplative literature.

At the Council of Constantinople in 381, he, along with Basil and Gregory, helped clarify the Nicene doctrine and make it actually prevail. After the Council, "Emperor Theodosius made him one of his chief advisors in theological matters and Gregory was forced to travel to various parts of the empire, even Arabia and Babylon." (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 135, own translation)

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390): was the son of the Bishop of Nazianzus, who was also named Gregory, and his wife Nona - for in those days it was not forbidden for bishops to be married. He studied rhetoric and philosophy in Caesarea, Alexandria and Athens, where he became friends with Basil. When he returned, at the age of 30, he went to live as a monk in Basil's community. Ordained a priest, he gave up his duties to return to the life of a monk. Basil made him bishop, unwillingly, of an unimportant village.

After Basil's death, he decided to enter the quarrel between Arians and Nicenes, to which his friend had devoted so much energy.

In the year 379 he established an orthodox community (of the Nicene faith) in Constantinople, a city where, in those days, there were only Arian churches. On this occasion he delivered his five theological discourses on the Trinity, which to this day are still regarded as one of the best expositions of the Trinitarian doctrine. When he was attending a celebration in the cathedral of Saint Sophia, in the company of the new emperor Theodosius, *"a ray of sunlight opened a path through the clouds and fell on Gregory. Immediately those present saw this as a sign from heaven and began to shout: Gregory bishop! Gregory bishop! And so the unknown monk of Nazianzo became Patriarch of Constantinople. In this capacity, he presided, in 381, over the first sessions of the Council of Constantinople, and soon afterwards resigned the office he had never desired. He returned to his homeland and devoted himself to pastoral tasks and to composing hymns.*

In these respects, the contribution of each of the four giants is extraordinary: Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine.

"The names of John Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine, even if there were no others, would have been enough to honor any age. But they were but four of the many exceptional scholars and men of original genius, who then devoted their sorrows to the Christian cause." (DAVIES, 1967, p. 295, own translation)

Besides these, in the fourth century, the following stand out: Arius and Athanasius of Alexandria, Cassian, Damasus of Rome, Hilary of Poitiers, and the great historian Eusebius of Caesarea, considered to be "the father of encyclopedias and dictionaries."

Ambrose (339-397): son of a high official of the empire, governor of the province of Emilia and Liguria, based in Milan, concerned about public order, went to a meeting in the church, during which the new bishop of the city was to be chosen. Two groups were fighting: Arians and Nicenes. Suddenly a boy shouts, "Ambrose bishop!" Unexpectedly the people (Nicenes and Arians) also started shouting, "Ambrose bishop! Ambrose!"

Yielding to the insistence of the people and the imperial order, Ambrose agreed to be bishop of Milan. He was then baptized, and within a week was made, successively, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, and priest. Eight days later, on December 1, 373, he was consecrated bishop. He distributed his great fortune to the poor and began to lead an ascetic, exemplary life. Being a learned man, in a short time he became one of the best theologians of the Western Church. Haughty and popular, Ambrose knew how to defend the causes that seemed just to him, including confronting the emperor. In his homilies and in his treatises on biblical and ecclesiastical themes, he sought arguments in both Philo and Origen. He himself prepared the catechumens for baptism. It was he who prepared and baptized Augustine, who wrote of Ambrose: "I began to esteem him at first, not as a teacher of truth [...], but as a man who was kind to me. I followed his conversations with the people assiduously, not with the intention that I should have, but to find out whether his eloquence was worthy of the fame he enjoyed".

Excerpt from one of Ambrose's sermons:

"God ordained that all things should be produced, so that there should be food in common for all, and that the earth should be the common inheritance of all. Therefore nature produced a right common to all; but avarice made it a right of a few [...]"

"On the other hand, it is also Ambrose's unfortunate onslaught against the Jews: 'do not pray for these people, nor show any mercy for them. '" (SCHAMA, 2015, p. 250, own translation)

John Chrysostom (347-407) was born in Antioch, Syria, where he studied with the famous pagan orator, Libanius. At the age of 20, already a lawyer, he began the catechumenate, which then lasted three years. He decided to become a monk, but to please his mother, he set up, with three friends, a small convent in his own city. When his mother died, he went to live among the monks in the mountains of Syria, where he remained for four years learning the monastic discipline and two more in complete solitude. Returning to Antioch, he was ordained a priest and began to preach. His fame spread throughout the Greek-speaking Church. In his preaching, he turned more and more to the problems of

the time, trying to illuminate them with the Word of God. However, the reading of this Word was not always able to clear up and undo the prejudices and religious feuds:

"Many, I know, respect the Jews and find their way of life venerable. This is why I hasten to eradicate and destroy this lamentable opinion [...] that no one should worship the synagogue because of the holy books, that everyone should hate and avoid it [...]. Do you have to greet them, exchange a single word with them? Must you not turn your backs on them entirely, for they are the common shame and infection of the whole world?" (CHRISOSTOM. *Adversus Iudeos*, IV, 1.6. vii, in SCHAMA, 2015, p. 244-245, own translation)

For Gilvan Ventura da Silva, *"the virulence of John Chrysostom's attacks against the Jews of his time seems to constitute practically irrefutable evidence that, from the point of view of syncretic interactions between social groups, the separation between Judaism and Christianity had not yet been consummated in the fourth century... despite the long-standing campaign of the episcopate against Jews and Judaizers"*.

Sérgio Alberto Feldman adds:

"Hatred and contempt for Jews are incited in order to separate the two communities and aim at a definition of Christian identity distinct from the synagogue. This cutting of the umbilical cord is done violently. Not even the common Jew escapes, being described as libidinous, a glutton and a drunkard. The hedonistic characteristics are accentuated: "libidinous, voracious, avaricious and perfidious bandits [...] the most despicable of human beings." (NASCIMENTO; JEHA, 2017, p. 154, own translation)

In 397, appointed bishop of Constantinople - or patriarch, since the bishop of this city bore this title - he began a profound and radical change, starting with the clergy. Some priests who claimed to be celibate had women in their house whom they called spiritual sisters. Other clerics had become wealthy and lived in as much luxury as the powerful civilians of the big city. The Church's finances were completely disorganized and the pastoral task neglected. John curbed all exaggerations and, setting his own example, sold the luxury items in the bishop's palace to feed the poor. By his firm and eloquent preaching, he garnered sympathy and also hatred. This orator, who earned the surname "Chrysostom" (mouth of gold), thundered from the pulpit of the Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople:

"That bridle in your horse's mouth, that gold hoop on your slave's arm, those golden ornaments on your shoes, are a sign that you are robbing the orphan and starving the widow. After you die, whoever passes by on the street will say, "With how many tears did he build this palace? How many orphans found themselves naked, how many widows reviled, how many laborers received unfair wages!" So not even death will rid you of your accusers."

Empress Elia Eudóxia made special donations to the church. The bishop thanked her. And he continued preaching as before.

In 404, John was banished to Armenia, dying in 407 on his way to a more distant exile (in 430 his remains were taken to Constantinople and Emperor Theodosius II, son of Aelia Eudoxia, publicly asked forgiveness on behalf of his parents).

Jerome (347-420): according to Gonzáles (2009, p. 155), of the giants of the fourth century none is as interesting as Jerome. For his gigantic and endless struggle with the world and with himself. He was proud, rude and bitter. Those who dared to criticize him were simply called "two-legged asses". He was the most erudite of the Latin Fathers. He was born to a well-to-do family in Dalmatia (Yugoslavia). He was educated in Rome, studying grammar, rhetoric and philosophy, devoting himself especially to the study of Cicero and Virgil. At the end of his studies he was baptized. In Antioch he studied Aristotle's logic and deepened his knowledge of Greek. He then lived for three years in the desert of Calcis (Palestine) as a hermit (375-378), learning Hebrew from a monk of Jewish origin. In 379, at the age of 32, he was ordained a priest in Antioch. Two years later, he participated in the Council of Constantinople, where he got to know the work that had been done by the two Gregory of Nyssa and Nazianzen. The following year, in Rome, he became Pope Damasus' advisor for his writing quality, his knowledge of Origen's works, and for his experience in monastic spirituality.

Two years later, when Damasus died, Jerome went to Bethlehem, where at the expense of Paola - a friend and fellow student in Rome - he built three monasteries for women and another for men.

From within his immense literary production, a peculiar style of spirituality emerges, always linked to the radical commitments of the Gospel. (CAVALCANTE, 2007, p. 272)

Taking as his source the **Septuagint** in the original Hebrew and Greek, as well as the classical Greek version of the Old Testament, which dates back to pre-Christian times, and the preceding Latin versions, Jerome, with the help of other collaborators, was able to offer a better translation: it constituted the so-called **Vulgate**, the official text of the Latin Church, which was recognized as such by the Council of Trent. After recent revision, it remains to this day the official text of the Latin-speaking Church.

Aurelius Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo: He was born in the city of Tagaste, today a region of Algeria, the son of a pagan Roman official of the lower ranks. His mother, Monica, was a fervent Christian. He studied in a nearby town, Madaura, and at the age of 17 moved to Carthage. There, he met a woman with whom he lived and by whom he had his only son, Adeodato. He studied rhetoric, a discipline that prepared lawyers and public servants. Not satisfied with just speaking well and convincingly, he turned to philosophy, adhering to Manichaeism, which had spread to the Mediterranean coast with the aura of an eminently rational doctrine. Augustine taught grammar in Tagaste (374), rhetoric in Carthage (375-383), Rome (384) and Milan (384-386) where he officially worked as a teacher. There, interested in rhetoric and by Bishop Ambrose's reputation as a good orator, he began to listen to his preaching. He resisted conversion, but prayed, as he later said, "Give me chastity and continence. But not soon."

At the age of 32, he converted to Christianity and together with his son Adeodatus and a friend, Alipius, were baptized by Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Augustine records: "We were baptized and all

concern about the past life disappeared". The three of them, together with Monica, decided to return to Africa and on the way, in Ostia, Augustine's mother died.

Arriving in Tagaste, he wrote his first Christian works, where one can see the Neoplatonic background. He became known as a dedicated Christian, a skilled teacher, and a spiritual leader of his companions.

When, in 391, he went to Hippo, the community that attended the Eucharistic celebration, responding to the appeal of bishop Valerius, nominated him to be a priest. He was ordained a priest and four years later, against his will, made bishop of Hippo, together with Valerius, who, being old, feared that the city would lose its episcopal see (in those days the bishop could not be transferred, nor have two bishops in the same see).

Since 396, Augustine shines in Hippo, whose thought and literary activity belong to the universal patrimony: together with Thomism, Augustinianism is one of the original forms of Christian philosophy. This man, converted from pleasure and Neoplatonism, during his 34 years as bishop, developed an activity that went far beyond the limits of his small diocese. His hundreds of sermons were intended to instruct the people, but his letters - 276 have been preserved - were addressed to all that the Roman world had in terms of thinking heads. Augustine's treatises revolved around what he considered to be the three scourges of the time: Manichaeism, whose spiritual universe seemed chaotic to him; Donatism, an African schism caused by Bishop Donatus, who intended to exclude sinners from the Church; and Pelagianism, the doctrine of a Breton monk, Pelagius, who proclaimed the power of man's will over grace. Two great works of Augustine deserve special attention: **Confessions** and **City of God**, in which he strives to show pagans that Christianity could vivify the new world.

"A fine writer to the point of reaching the highest poetry - his Confessions find comparison only in Pascal's Thoughts - Augustine stands, in an Africa overrun by Vandals and a world submerged in darkness, as the living conscience of the West." (PIERRARD, 212, p. 48, own translation)

When Augustine died (430) - the last survivor of the "age of the giants" - the Vandals were besieging Hippo. 20 years earlier (410) the capital of the empire, Rome, the eternal city, had been taken and sacked by Alaric and his Goth troops.

"The world is falling into ruin, yes! But despite this, and to our shame, our sins continue to exist and even prosper. The great city, the capital of the Roman Empire, has been consumed by a great fire, and all over the land the Romans are going into exile. The churches that were once venerated are now heaps of dust and ashes" (Jerome).

Humanism, before being theorized, was lived by Christian communities. As Romanian historian Eliade put it, "it is very likely that no other historical society has known - neither before nor after - the equivalent of the equality, charity, and brotherly love experienced in the Christian communities of the first four centuries." (ELIADE, 2011, p. 357, own translation)

For Eduardo Hoornaert, it is the social and political action - the fight for well-being, health, and dignity - that explains the victory of Christianity against the so-called paganism, and not the changes of symbols, that is, of images, gestures, or rites.

ADDENDUM:
Who founded Christianity?

The question

Justin Taylor in **The Origins of Christianity** poses the question, "As we begin the third Christian millennium, an obvious question to ask is: where did Christianity come from? The obvious answer to that question is, of course, that Christianity came from Jesus." Then the author adds, "This is true, but with some restrictions [...]." (TAYLOR, 2010, p. 17, own translation)

Martin Ebner, at the beginning of his book **Ecumenical Church History**, asks, "did Jesus found a Church?" Before substantially discoursing on the question posed, he answers, "Jesus did not perform an act of foundation (for the initiative goes back to God), nor did he approve a certain constitution."

Let's see the answer to this question in other authors, which served as a basis for the chapters published here:

- the founder of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth (PIERRARD, 2012, p.7, own translation);
- Jesus was not the founder of a religion, or a Church, but a passionate prophet for the kingdom of God, the ultimate cause that made him live and die (VIGIL, 2006, p. 153, own translation);
- the history of the Church goes back to Jesus of Nazareth [...] and all (the evangelists) assume Jesus as the basis of their faith and thus as the founder of the Church (STOCKMEIER; BAUER, cited by LENZENWEGER, 2013, p. 7, own translation);
- Jesus founded early Christian itinerant radicalism (THEISSEN, 1987, p 127);
- Jesus of the ministry does not seem to have organized more than a circle of disciples, and the apostles fled when he was arrested (TAYLOR, 2010, p. 17, own translation);
- While it is unlikely that Jesus saw himself as the organizer of a new community - and certainly not the founder of the Church - it is also unlikely that he had any interest in forming moral individuals (KOESTER, 2005, 2005, p. 94, own translation);
- Jesus' own is to prepare, announce, and actualize the kingdom of God. It cannot be said, from the data offered to us by the gospels, that Jesus' intention was to found a religious community detached from Judaism. There was no deliberate attempt to build an embryo of the future Church, with a structure of offices, institutions and orientations distinct from Judaism. In the gospels there is no foundational moment of the Church (ESTRADA, 2005, p. 116-117, own translation);
- the earliest non-biblical reference to Jesus in a work by Josephus proves that by the year 94 CE, when the work was written, Jesus of Nazareth was already known as the founder of an important and enduring movement (ASLAN, 2013, p. 217, own translation);
- Palestinian Judeo-Christianism was not a new religion;
- In the first communities there is no evidence that the apostles, following directives from Jesus before he died, were founding a new hierarchical church. There was not even a mechanism for the succession of the 12 apostles. The real hierarchy was that of the different gifts of prophecy (ARIAS, 2001, p. 127, own translation);
- the early Christians did not believe that they belonged to a new religion. They were Jews, and the main difference that separated them from the rest of Judaism was that they believed that the

Messiah had come, while the rest of the Jews were still awaiting his advent. From the point of view of the non-Christian Jews, the situation was the same. Christianity was not a new religion, but a heretical sect of Judaism (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 49-50, own translation);

- Christianity began its existence as one among several competing Jewish sects and movements. Judaism was not one, whether in Judea, Galilee or the Diaspora [...],⁹⁹
- the emerging movement of Jesus' followers, through a long and complex process, discover their identity, which transforms them into "Christians" (MEEKS, 2007, p. 49;63, own translation);
- the most important element of Christianity, which distinguishes it, and indeed separates it from Judaism, is the admission of the Gentiles, which is considered a fulfillment of Scripture [...], but this event was totally unexpected and unforeseen (TAYLOR, 2010, p. 15-16, own translation);
- Jesus was not a "Christian", but a Jew (although heterodox). Indirectly he laid the foundations of what would later become the Church, after the Passover experience [...]. His story, as told to us by his followers, became a source of inspiration and legitimation for many ecclesial decisions, but they cannot be attributed directly to Jesus (ESTRADA, 2005, p. 117, own translation);
- the conviction in the spiritual presence of the living Jesus explains the emergence of the Jesus movement after the crucifixion. However, it was St. Paul's supreme doctrinal and organizational ability that enabled nascent Christianity to unfold into a viable and powerful resurrection-centered world religion. (VERMES, 2013, p. 175, own translation);
- To speak of Jesus as the founder of Christianity, or of the Church, is completely improper...and there is no single founding act of the Church. (PENNA, 2020, p. 43, own translation)
- Jesus did not want to found a new religion: Paul, on the contrary, was conscious of intentionally founding the new *Ecclesia*. Without Jesus one does not understand Paul; the reciprocal is true, but, on the other hand, without Paul one does not understand the Christian world (SCHLESINGER/PORTO, 1979, p. 272, own translation);
- Jesus announced the kingdom, and it was the Church that came (LOSISY, in BATTEAU, p. 82, own translation);
- We call the beginnings of early Christianity the Jesus movement: an intra-Jewish renewal movement sparked by Jesus - a charismatic - in the Syro-Palestinian sphere (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 14, own translation).

Reassessing the issue

- No religion emerged from a single brain as the result of a purely logical process: every religion is the product of multiple social influences that often span centuries and reflect the most varied historical situations (KAUTSKY, 2010, p. 404, own translation).

⁹⁹ "At the beginning of everything there is diversity: not just one Christianity, but many Christianities." (Mauro Pesce in AUGIAS, 2001, p. 287, own translation).

- Religion is above all a social phenomenon [...] or, as an economist would say, a collectively produced *commodity* [...] and faith itself is a social product, collectively produced and sustained (STARK, 2006, p. 192, own translation);
- Why be surprised if religions are necessarily cultural constructions and, therefore, historical, relative and provisional? What often paralyzes us is that, with the intention of exalting the Gospel, we degrade it. It is quite common, in religious environments, to identify the Good News of Jesus with the cultural construction that is the Christian religion (HOORNAERT, 2012, p. 99, own translation) ;
- The history of the early Christian religion is the history of the origin of an autonomous religious symbolic system. It began with the separation of the ritual symbolic language from Judaism (through the abandonment of circumcision and dietary prescriptions). It was completed by the creation of a symbolic language of its own [...], new, international, exclusive [...] (THEISSEN, 2009, p. 283-284, own translation);
- The too close approach to the reality of the Church or even the identification with the kingdom gives rise to an abstract, idealistic, spiritualizing ecclesial image that is indifferent to the fabric of history. The concrete church is not only a gift from above, but also a historical construction of the people of faith, in dialogue with the surrounding world (BOFF, 2012, p. 16, own translation);
- Institutions are always a consequence of the human *conditio* and cannot be explained by a specific founding act, be it human or divine. The more we attribute a special dignity to institutions, the less we are able to take human dignity seriously. It is the human being who has an intrinsic dignity, not the institution (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 236-237, own translation);
- Distancing itself from Vatican I, Vatican II proposed the question of the origin of the Church in nuanced terms, more respectful of the biblical data and historical reality. The Lord Jesus began his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the advent of the kingdom of God promised centuries ago in Scripture (ALMEIDA, 2001, p. 69, own translation).

Summarizing the issue

In the current Catholic environment two fundamental currents are outlined: one affirms, in a more dogmatic view, the presence of the Church already in the proclamation of the Kingdom and in Jesus' actions; the other affirms that the Church as an institution was not in the thoughts of the historical Jesus, but emerged as a post-resurrection evolution, particularly with the progressive process of deschatologicalization. (BOFF, 1982, p. 123, own translation)

Boff lists several exegetes and theologians, such as Ratzinger and himself, who fall within this orientation. In this last perspective, it is clear that the Church, as a historical reality, is synonymous with Catholicism. (BOFF, 1982, p. 124, own translation)

What does it matter?

The decisive question is not whether Jesus wanted the Church, but to what extent ecclesial attempts at realization appear in line with Jesus' vision. (EBNER in KAUFMANN, 2012, p. 8)

When we remember how often our efforts to convert the world have been mixed up with various kinds of imperialism, can we be sure that God really wants the whole world to be Christian? (MEEKS, 2007, p. 25)

We can deduce from the sources mentioned here that Jesus of Nazareth did not ask the question of how to carry out the Kingdom of God, which he announced and made present, nor how to organize himself for it. Everything indicates that, for him, this was not his problem, but the problem of the Father, the Owner of the Kingdom. The Spirit would tell his followers what to do.

The "Best Among Us" project¹⁰⁰ started with a search: who was Jesus of Nazareth? And so:

- portrayed him as a human figure as faithfully as possible, according to the best that has been published;
- sought to present various and different interpretations of the fact - the resurrection - without which he would be an unknown today;
- followed in the footsteps of the early Christian community in its territorial and cultural expansion, in its doctrinal struggle against both external and internal disagreements, and with the persecutions of the empire;
- ended his quick journey seeing the Church, with solid intellectual cadres, organized, hierarchical, with regional and central centers of power, being taken to the condition of official religion of the empire.¹⁰¹

The sole merit of the project was the effort of compiling information and presenting a long, complex and admirable history in 70 short chapters. 18 on Jesus of Nazareth, 20 on The resurrection, and 32 on The early Christian community. (NUNES, 2016, p. 516)

Now what?

The project leaves here a challenge: since the best of us is alive, present in the story that is being written today, how can we speak of him and his message in language that is adequate to the modern world?

A great challenge for all religions, which, in the face of the problems that alienate modern man, intend to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

The Hellenization of Christianity, which allowed the early Church to leave the rather narrow context of a single nation and enter the much wider cultural context of the then world, led, paradoxically, to a further "Judaization" of Christianity and the fixation, again, on a "single language":

¹⁰⁰ <www.omelhordenos.com.br>, preceded by the project <www.tetrapharmakon.com>.

¹⁰¹ See the Introduction to this book.

"Our language is the most important and most intrinsic structure of the human world; it is a prism through which we see the world. The language of the past is mythical, mythological, while also being poetic. In recent centuries, our language has become predominantly scientific. Modern man, without losing the poetry, always wants more clear rational, empirically proven explanations." (HALÍK, 2013, p. 91, own translation)

"By virtue of the internal dynamics of an evolution that is also the creative work of God, the granite block of modernity has detached itself from the mountainous mass of human history, striking hard at the clay feet of the Church's medieval faith."

The Church needs a radical reform, affecting all its domains. Both in its message and in the way it presents itself, it must adapt to modern reality. " (LENARES, 2017, p. 13, own translation)

In his essay "Happiness and Salvation," the German theologian Gisbert Greshake formulated the alternative facing human beings as follows. "Either full happiness is pure illusion and the human being, striving to be fully happy, is something absurd and meaningless, or else happiness is gift, fullness of life which can only be reached with grace from the One who is the source of life."

Hope, inspired by The Best Among Us, consists precisely in seeking and hoping for the fullness of this earth. To believe in heaven is to seek to be faithful to this earth until the end, without defrauding or despairing of any truly human longing or aspiration. He who does nothing to change this world does not believe in a better one. He who does not work to banish violence does not believe in a fraternal society. He who does not fight against injustice does not believe in a more just world. He who does not work to free human beings from their slavery does not believe in a new and happier world. He who does not do anything to change the earth does not believe in heaven. Recalling Crossan: "The imitation of his life, more than remembering his sayings, is the main mode of continuity of the historical Jesus." (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 441, own translation)

"For the modern believer the real good news of Jesus of Nazareth is that from him, even after his death, flows a life force that surpasses the limits of time and space, just as it did before death. This force produces an improvement in the quality of life of all those who turn to him and follow him, and is therefore a source of salvation for them. " (Roger Lenaers in NUNES et al. The best among us: for a contemporary Christology, p. 176, own translation)

[...] the purpose of faith is to serve-it is never an end in itself. (KEERNER, 2017, p. 265)

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