defined, but I would imagine that an archangel and even an ordinary angel, in a heavenly *ordo salutationis*, would take precedence of any mere human, except of course for the Virgin, who occupied an anomalous position, unique among females, analogous to that of an Augusta in the Roman imperial hierarchy. It is perhaps less often realised that the diabolic sphere might equally be conceived as organised in an order of rank, reproducing that of the terrestrial and the heavenly regions. I need only quote one piece of evidence for this. Palladius, writing his *Historia Lausiaca* in 419-20, records some interesting information he had received from a number of leading Egyptian monks (Cronius, Hierax and others), intimates in their youth of the great Antony, the first (or one of the first) of the Christian hermits and a man of unrivalled prestige among the early monks, who had died in 356. According to Antony, a man possessed by an authoritative demon (an *archontikon pneuma*) was once brought to him to be cured; but the holy man refused to deal with him, on the ground that 'he himself had not yet been counted worthy of power over this commanding rank' (*tagma archontikon: Hist. Laus.* xxii, ed. C. Butler, p.73.10-14). He advised that the man be taken to Paul the Simple, who eventually drove out the demon: it became a dragon 70 cubits long, and disappeared into the Red Sea. (This was a dragon larger even, perhaps, than the one disposed of, with little difficulty, by Donatus, bishop of Euroea in Epirus, for the removal of the corpse of which eight yoke of oxen were required, according to Sozomen, *HE* VII.26.1-3.) I may add that Antony, the original source of the story in the *Historia Lausiaca*, was an Egyptian peasant, who, although his family had been quite well-to-do (see Athan., *Vita Ant.* 1, 2), was illiterate and unable to speak Greek (id. 1, 16, 72, 74, 77; Pallad., *Hist. Laus.* xxi, pp.68-9). When Paul the hermit died, it was to Antony that two lions came, to dig the hermit's grave (Jerome, *Vita Pauli* 16).

VII

The Class Struggle on the Ideological Plane

(i)
Terror, and propaganda

In this chapter I propose to illustrate the way in which the class struggle was conducted on the ideological plane. For any overt expression of the point of view of the oppressed classes there is unfortunately very little evidence indeed: we shall look at some of it in Section v below. The nature of the evidence is such that we must resign ourselves to spending nearly all our time on the ideological class warfare (if I may call it that) of the dominant classes.

I shall waste little time on the simplest form of psychological propaganda, which merely teaches the governed that they have no real option anyway but to submit; this tends to be intellectually uninteresting, however effective it may have been in practice, and consists merely of the threat of force. It was particularly common, of course, in its application to slaves. 'You will not restrain that scum except by terror,' said the Roman lawyer, Gaius Cassius, to the nervous senators during the debate on whether there should be the traditional mass execution of all the 400 urban slaves of Pedanius Secundus, the Praefectus Urbi, who had been murdered by one of his slaves in A.D. 61. The execution was duly carried out, in spite of a vigorous protest by the common people of Rome, who demonstrated violently for the relaxation of the savage ancient rule (Tac., *Ann.* XIV.42-5) – which, by the way, was still the law in the legislation of the Christian Emperor Justinian five centuries later.[1] In Pliny's letters we hear of the similar murder in the first years of the second century of the ex-praetor Larcius Macedo (*Ep.* III.xiv.1-5). The slaves were quickly executed. Pliny's comments are worth quoting, especially since he describes Macedo (himself the son of a freedman) as 'an overbearing and cruel master' (§ 1). 'You see,' he says nervously (§ 5), 'how many dangers, insults and mockeries we are liable to. No master can be safe because he is indulgent and kindly, for masters perish not by the exercise of their slaves' reasoning faculty but because of their wickedness' (*non iudicio . . . sed scelere*). There are other indications in the literature of the Principate that slaveowners lived in perpetual fear of their slaves (see e.g. Griffin, *Seneca* 267, citing Sen., *De clem.* I.xxiv.1 etc.). The latest literary reference I have come across to masters' fear of being murdered and robbed by their slaves is in one of St. Augustine's sermons, in the early fifth century (*Serm.* CXIII.4, in *MPL* XXXVIII.650). Slave revolts, of course, were mercilessly punished: we hear from Appian (*BC* I.120) of the crucifixion of the six thousand captured followers of Spartacus along the Via Appia from Rome to Capua, on the suppression of the great revolt of B.C. 73-71. To avoid such a fate, rebellious

slaves often either fought to the death or killed each other.[2] In case it is objected, quite rightly, that such cruelties were Roman rather than Greek, let me emphasise the way in which the Greek geographer Strabo deals with the Spanish Celtiberians, who, on being captured and crucified by the Romans, still *epaiōnizon*, went on shouting for victory from the cross: this, to Strabo, was merely another proof of their *aponoia* and *agriotēs*, their senselessness and savagery (III.iv.18, p.165). However, I must admit that Strabo's mind had been thoroughly infected with admiration of Roman imperialism (see e.g. VI.iv.2 *fin.*, p.288; XVII.iii.24 *init.*, p.839). The passage I have just quoted reminds one of another, in Sallust, where the admitted heroism and steadfastness of the revolutionaries who followed Catiline to their deaths in 63 B.C. is seen only as evidence of their pig-headedness and their urge to destroy both themselves and the state, amounting to 'a disease like a plague which had usurped the minds of most citizens' (*Cat.* 36.4-5).

The Greeks, among whom sheer cold-blooded cruelty towards the victims of their civilisation – slaves, criminals, and conquered peoples – was on the whole much less pronounced than among the Romans, naturally acquired many of the characteristics of their Roman masters, including even a taste for gladiatorial displays, which are known to have occurred in the Greek East from at least 70 B.C.,[2a] when the Roman general Lucullus provided such combats on a great scale; they were subsequently presented by Greek notables who could afford the expense, and they became very popular.[3] Even female gladiators appeared. Louis Robert's bitter comment is very apt: 'La société grecque a été gangrenée par cette maladie venue de Rome. C'est un des succès de la romanisation du monde grec.' Mommsen wrote with equal detestation of this 'abominable entertainment', describing it as a 'cancerous affliction'.[4]

In matters where evidence lasting over thousands of years is available from many different human societies, it is often very dangerous to generalise; but at least it seems to be true of many slave societies that ruthless treatment of the slave (if only as a last resort, and combined with rewards for the obedient and faithful slave) is most likely to maintain that institution in being and make it serve its purpose best. There is more than a little truth in the remark of the ex-slave Frederick Douglass, 'Beat and cuff your slave, keep him hungry and spiritless, and he will follow the chain of his master like a dog; but feed and clothe him well, – work him moderately – surround him with physical comfort, – and dreams of freedom intrude. Give him a *bad* master, and he aspires to a good master: give him a good master, and he wishes to become his *own* master' (see Stampp, *PI* 89). On the other hand, it has recently been claimed (if, as some have plausibly argued, with much exaggeration) that even in the American Old South the slaveowners relied very much upon incentives and rewards, as well as punishment (Fogel and Engerman, *TC* 41, 147-53, 239-42; cf. 228-32) – and yet they made far less use than the Greeks and Romans of what one might think to be the supreme incentive to the slave to obey his master's wishes: manumission (ibid. 150-1). Genovese's just appraisal of the evidence for American slave revolts – which is surprisingly scanty – and other forms of resistance has well shown how slaves may in certain circumstances be induced to accommodate themselves in some degree to the system that exploits them (*RJR* 587-660, esp. 587-98, 613-21, 648-57). And of course slaves who are allowed to rear families

thereby become subject to one of the most telling forms of control which a master can have over them: the threat of breaking up the family (see III.iv above, § II).

A more sophisticated form of ideological class struggle was the attempt of the dominant classes to persuade those they exploited to accept their oppressed condition without protest, if possible even to rejoice in it. According to Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a pupil of Aristotle, it was laid down by the Pythagorean school that just as rulers ought to be humane, *philanthrōpoi*, as well as versed in the science of ruling, so ideally their subjects ought not only to obey them but to like them – to be *philarchontes*.[5] Another interesting word which is by no means uncommon is *philodespotos*, 'master-loving'. In the Archaic age the aristocratic poet Theognis believed that if you kick the 'empty-headed *dēmos*' (the mass of the people) hard enough you can reduce it to that desirable condition (lines 847-50; cf. V.i above and its n.16). A Syrian public slave at Sparta in the Roman period could even be given the name Philodespotos.[6] 'An essential function of the ideology of a ruling class is to present to itself and to those it rules a coherent world view that is sufficiently flexible, comprehensive and mediatory to convince the subordinate classes of the justice of its hegemony.'[7] Governing classes have often been successful in achieving this aim. As Rodney Hilton has said, 'For the most part, in so far as one has evidence at all, the ruling ideas of medieval peasants seem to have been the ideas of the rulers of society as transmitted to them in innumerable sermons about the duties and the characteristic sins of the various orders of society' (*EPLMA* 16). Those who disapprove of the techniques I am referring to may call them 'brainwashing'; those who employ them will reject such terms with righteous indignation and may prefer to speak of a process of enlightenment by which those who serve the community in a humble capacity are enabled to achieve a more profound understanding of social reality. Those of us who teach in universities often think in such terms, for a university, in a class society like ours, is among other things a place where the governing class seeks to propagate and perpetuate its ideology.

The most common form of the type of propaganda we are considering is that which seeks to persuade the poor that they are not really fitted to rule and that this is much better left to their 'betters' ('the best people', *hoi beltistoi*, as Greek gentlemen liked to call themselves): those who have been *trained* for the job and have the *leisure* to devote themselves thoroughly to it. In the ancient Greek world this demand is sometimes made quite unashamedly on behalf of the propertied class as such.[8] Sometimes it is limited to an even smaller circle: of this tendency there are two outstanding examples. First, there is the claim made by aristocrats that the essential qualification for ruling is noble birth (of which property is of course an inevitable accompaniment: see II.iv and its n.5). Of this kind of mentality we have already noted some examples, from Theognis in particular (see V.i above). Secondly, when government by a *dynasteia* of one or more well-born families had become almost extinct over a large part of the Greek world, we begin to find the assertion, familiar to everyone from Plato above all, that ruling should be the prerogative of those who have the right kind of intellectual equipment and have received a proper philosophical education. In practice, needless to say, virtually all such men would be members of the propertied class. Plato would no doubt have denied, as many of his modern admirers have done, that he was advocating oligarchy according to the normal

meaning of that term (which he knew very well; cf. II.iv above); but this is true only in the sense that he did not wish access to political power to be given to the *whole* propertied class *as such*. (In *Laws* V.742e; 743a–c he first declares, in a rather qualified way, that a man cannot be both good and very rich, and then goes on to say explicitly that anyone who is outstandingly rich cannot be outstandingly good, and cannot be happy either! Plato himself, of course, was not one of the richest Athenians.) In fact Plato would have entrusted all political power to those men who were in his opinion intellectually qualified for ruling and had received a full philosophical education – and such men would necessarily have to belong to the propertied class. For Plato, any kind of work that interfered with the leisure necessary for the practice of the art of government was a disqualification for membership of his governing class: this is true both of the ideal state pictured in the *Republic* and of the 'second-best' state described in the *Laws*, and also of the more theoretical discussion of the art of ruling in the *Politicus* (or *Statesman*).[9] The notion that manual work, because it 'weakens the body' (as Greek gentlemen evidently supposed), therefore *weakens* the mind, may have been a commonplace of the Socratic circle: it is very clearly expressed in Xenophon, *Oecon.* IV.2, and there is no reason to think that it was invented by Plato. But Plato has this conception in an intensified form: for him, manual work can actively *degrade* the mind. This comes out very well in a fascinating passage in the *Republic* (VI.495c–6a), describing the fearful consequences which are likely to follow if 'unworthy interlopers' meddle with such high affairs as philosophy – and therefore government, reserved by Plato for gentlemen philosophers. Unpleasant as it is from beginning to end, this is a dazzling piece of invective. Plato thinks it deplorable

> when any poor creature who has proved his cleverness in some mechanical craft sees here an opening for a pretentious display of high-sounding words and is glad to break out of the prison of his paltry trade and take sanctuary in the shrine of philosophy. For as compared with other occupations, philosophy, even in its present case, still enjoys a higher prestige, enough to attract a multitude of stunted natures, whose souls a life of drudgery has warped and maimed no less surely than their sedentary crafts have disfigured their bodies. For all the world they are like some bald-headed little tinker (*chalkeus phalakros kai smikros*), who, having come into some money, has just got out of prison, had a good wash at the baths, and dressed himself up as a bridegroom, ready to marry his master's daughter, who has been left poor and friendless. Could the issue of such a match ever be anything but contemptible bastards? And, by the same token, what sort of ideas and opinions will be begotten of the misalliance of Philosophy with men incapable of culture? Not any true-born child of wisdom; the only right name for them will be sophistry. (I have made use of Cornford's translation.)

It was of course the development of Greek democracy, especially in its Athenian form, where it depended very much on 'bald-headed little tinkers' and their like, that impelled Plato, an arch-enemy of democracy, to launch this tirade against the sort of person on whom it was so dependent. But Plato was well aware of the realities of the political class struggle of his own day: he knew only too well that (as he says in the *Republic*, IV.422e–3a) there was in each Greek city a basic division into two groups, hostile (*polemia*) to each other: the one of the poor, the other of the rich (cf. II.iv above). The two states he depicts in the *Republic* and the *Laws* were both designed, among other ends, to overcome this fundamental disunity.

The physical defects Plato attributes to his tinker remind one irresistibly of the earliest portrait which we have in Greek, and perhaps in any language, of the popular 'agitator': that of Thersites, who dares to speak out against King Agamemnon in the assembly of the Greek army besieging Troy, in Book II of the *Iliad* (lines 211–78). Thersites is all for sailing home and leaving Agamemnon and his noble friends to find out for themselves how dependent they really are on the rank and file; and he makes great play with the large share of spoils, in gold and bronze and women, that the king receives from the host. But Homer is not at all on his side; he represents the bulk of the army (*hē plēthus*, line 278) as disapproving strongly of his seditious speech and as breaking into applause and laughter when the great Odysseus thumps him on the back and shoulders with his golden sceptre and makes him subside weeping into his seat (lines 265–78). And Homer has carefully caricatured this proto-demagogue: he describes Thersites not merely as 'an irrepressible man who, when he felt inclined to bait his royal masters, was never at a loss for some vulgar quip, empty and scurrilous indeed, but well calculated to amuse the troops', but also as 'the ugliest man that had come to Troy; he had a game foot and was bandy-legged; his rounded shoulders almost met across his chest, and above them rose an egg-shaped head, which sprouted a few short hairs'. (I have used Rieu's translation of lines 212–19.) I might add that the aristocratic society for which the Homeric poems were composed would have regarded Odysseus' brutal treatment of Thersites as perfectly right and proper, and characteristic of a great man. A little earlier in the same book of the *Iliad* (II.188–206) we find the same hero's courteous behaviour to chieftains and leading men contrasted with his violence and contumely towards commoners ('men of the *dēmos*') who ventured to take independent action: such men he bludgeoned and abused, admonishing them to shut up and defer to their betters. The speech Homer gives him ends with the famous words, 'A multitude of chieftains is no good thing; let there be one lord, one ruler' (lines 204–5).

There is much other material of this kind which I wish I had space to quote, notably from Aristophanes (cf. my *OPW* 355 ff.). There is even a passage in Jewish literature which, under the influence of Hellenistic thought, asserts – in terms which would have warmed the hearts of Plato and Aristotle – that only the man who has leisure can achieve wisdom; the agricultural worker, the carpenter, the seal-maker, the smith and the potter, whose pursuits are admittedly essential for civilised life, are unfit to participate in public deliberation or exercise judicial functions. The whole passage, Ecclus. XXXVIII.24–34, is well worth reading.

I shall content myself with just two more pieces of anti-democratic propaganda. The first, a very abstruse and rarefied type of argument, was developed out of the mathematical and musical theories of Archytas of Tarentum, a Pythagorean of the first half of the fourth century B.C., who seems to have been the first to develop, in a work on music, the notion of three different kinds of proportion, two of which, the arithmetical and the geometric, are material for our purposes, arithmetical proportion being represented by the progression 2, 4, 6, 8, and geometric by 2, 4, 8, 16. It may well have been Archytas himself, rather than Plato, who first applied the notion of distinct arithmetical and geometric proportion to politics: it certainly appears with this application in Plato and Aristotle, and also (in a debased form, as we might expect) in Isocrates; and there are echoes of it in later times, down to at least the

twelfth century. The whole subject is a very difficult one, but it has been illuminated by a most penetrating recent article by David Harvey,[10] whose interpretation I fully accept. I cannot do better than summarise his account, which explains very well how arithmetical proportion was alleged by anti-democrats to be 'a paradigm of a democracy; the geometric, of a 'better' form of constitution'. The equality exalted by democracy was said to be a kind of arithmetical proportion in which each number (representing a man) stands at an equal distance from its neighbour (2, 4, 6, 8, etc.). But this, it was claimed, fails to take account of the real value of each number (each man) and therefore introduces flagrant inequality, for the higher up the scale, the smaller the ratio at each step; hence, in political terms, the better the man, the less his worth is rewarded. Geometric proportion, which is not employed by democracy, is much fairer, in that the ratio at each step up the scale (2, 4, 8, 16 etc.) always remains the same; hence, in political terms, what each man receives is always equal to his worth.

I am afraid that the theory stated thus baldly and without the complicated intellectual scaffolding which surrounds it in Plato and Aristotle looks even feebler than it really is; but Harvey is certainly right in his judgment that the whole construction is essentially a subtle attempt to avoid an honest statement of the real oligarchic belief that 'Inequality is a splendid thing', by substituting a statement of the form, 'Inequality is true equality'. So flawed is the very basis of the argument that I do not think it is unfair to quote an unintentionally comic version of it in Plutarch (*Mor.* 719bc = *Quaest. conviv.* VIII.ii.2):

> Lycurgus expelled from Sparta arithmetical proportion, as being democratic and favourable to the rabble (*ochlikos*), and introduced geometric proportion, which is suited to sober oligarchy and law-abiding kingship. For the former distributes equality in numbers, while the latter distributes what a man deserves, by proportion; it does not mix up everything together, but it makes a clear distinction between good men and bad; . . . they get what befits them in accordance with how much they differ in virtue and vice. God applies this proportion to things: it is called Justice and Nemesis . . . God nullifies as far as possible the equality which the majority pursue, which is the greatest of all injustice, but he preserves that which is in accordance with worth, defining it geometrically, according to law and reason.

No one acquainted with Cicero's writings on political theory, which owe much to Plato, will be surprised to find reflections of the theory which we have just been discussing in his *De republica* (I.43, 53; II.39-40), where, as Elaine Fantham has put it, the 'moralistic language only thinly veils the fact that Cicero is approving a constitutional device to give political power to the wealthy in proportion to their wealth – no surprise perhaps in view of his respect for property and those dignified by its ownership in actual political life'.[11]

My other specimen of anti-democratic propaganda, which must come from the very end of the fifth century or the beginning of the fourth, is a brilliant little piece of pamphleteering which came to the notice of Xenophon and was inserted by him in his *Memorabilia* (I.ii.40-6). I think this is one of the best anti-democratic arguments produced in antiquity – better, anyway, than anything in Plato. Its thesis is that when the mass of the common people (*to plēthos*) enacts decrees by majority decision, against the will of the propertied class (they are specifically *hoi ta chrēmata echontes*), it is simply acting like a tyrant,

and its decrees are not *nomos*, law, but *bia*: force, coercion, violence, often presented in Greek thought as the very opposite of law (see e.g. Xen., *Cyrop.* I.iii.17). Decision by majority vote, a method which in the eyes of Greek democrats (perhaps the first inventors of it: see my *OPW* 348-9) evidently had a peculiar sanctity, is treated as not different in kind, when it involves the coercion of a propertied minority, from the coercion of the majority by the Few or by a tyrant. In this little dialogue Pericles, the great democrat, is made to look a fool by the young freelance aristocrat, Alciabiades – who, in the speech Thucydides puts into his mouth at Sparta (VI.89.3-6), describes democracy as 'an acknowledged folly'. I have translated this passage as literally as possible.

> They say that Alcibiades, when he was less than twenty years old, had a conversation about laws with his guardian, Pericles, the leading man of the city.
> 'Tell me, Pericles,' he said: 'can you explain to me what a law is?'
> 'Certainly I can,' replied Pericles.
> 'Then explain to me, do. For whenever I hear people being praised for being law-abiding citizens, I think that no one can really earn that praise who doesn't know what a law is.'
> 'There's no particular difficulty about your wanting to know what a law is, Alcibiades. Laws are what the mass of the citizens decree, meeting together and taking counsel, and declaring what can be done and what can't.'
> 'Do they think one ought to do good or evil?'
> 'Good, of course, my boy, not evil.'
> 'But . . . if it's not the masses, but a few, as happens under an oligarchy, who come together and enact what is to be done – what do you call that?'
> 'Everything the sovereign power in the city decrees to be done, after taking counsel, is called a law.'
> 'Even if . . . a tyrant who rules the city makes decrees for the citizens – is that a law too?'
> 'Yes, whatever a tyrant as ruler enacts, even that is called a law.'
> 'But . . . coercion (*bia*) and the negation of law – what is that, Pericles? Isn't it when the stronger compels the weaker to do what he wants, not by persuasion, but by force?'
> 'Yes, I suppose so,' said Pericles.
> 'Then whatever a tyrant compels the citizens to do by decree, without persuading them, is the negation of law?'
> 'Yes, I agree,' said Pericles. 'I take back what I said, that everything a tyrant decrees without persuasion is a law.' (Of course he is done for now: having incautiously allowed himself to be led *up* the garden path he is going to be led *down* it again, to his own confusion.) Alcibiades goes on,
> 'But when the Few make decrees, using not persuasion but force – are we to call that coercion or not?'
> 'I should say,' replied Pericles (he has evidently not seen the red light even yet), 'that whatever anyone compels anyone else to do, whether by decree or otherwise, without persuasion, is coercion rather than law.'
> 'Then . . . everything the masses decree, not persuading the owners of property but compelling them,[12] would not be law, but coercion?'
> 'Let me tell you, Alcibiades,' said Pericles, 'when I was your age I too was very clever at this sort of thing; for I used to think and talk about the very things you now seem to be interested in.'
> 'Ah, Pericles,' said Alcibiades, 'if only I had known you when you were at your very cleverest in such matters!'

The techniques of psychological class warfare which I have been describing – far from crude as they are – become even more subtle and interesting when we find the governing and exploiting class seeking to persuade not merely the

exploited classes but also itself that its dominance is both justified in principle and benevolent in practice. Let us briefly consider, then, some of the ways in which the Greek (and Roman) magnates salved their consciences and avoided those feelings of guilt which can sometimes afflict even the most complacent Dives when he sees Lazarus hungrily eyeing the crumbs that have fallen from his sumptuous table. The theory of 'natural slavery' is the perfect example of this kind of thing.

(ii)
The theory of 'natural slavery'

I begin with two kindred themes: the distinction between Greek and 'barbarian', and the ideology of slavery. Early in Greek history we encounter the dichotomy of the human race into Hellenes and *barbaroi* -- strictly, Greeks and non-Greeks, but I shall sometimes use the term 'barbarian' as the translation of the corresponding Greek and Latin words, as it is so convenient in practice, if often technically incorrect.

Plato, like the vast majority of his contemporaries, took it for granted that it was right and proper for Greeks to enslave 'barbarians', whom he calls their 'natural enemies'.[1] In the funeral oration which he puts into the mouth of Aspasia (a parody of the standard Athenian speech delivered on such an occasion), he makes her say that war against fellow-Greeks should be pursued 'until victory', but against barbarians 'to the death' (*mechri nikēs, mechri diaphthoras, Menex.* 242d). He also believed that all those whom he describes as 'wallowing in great ignorance and baseness' *ought* to be reduced to a condition of *douleia*[2] -- the standard Greek word for 'slavery', which in this context may mean either that or merely 'complete political subjection'. Those who are not inhabited by divine wisdom, he thought, are actually better off when controlled by those who are (*Rep.* IX.590cd). As Vlastos demonstrated more than thirty years ago in a brilliant article,[3] slavery exercised a profound influence on some of Plato's basic philosophical concepts. Although Plato never explicitly formulated the doctrine of 'natural slavery', it is implicit in his thinking (as Vlastos again has shown);[4] but the earliest surviving writer to give a formal statement of it is Aristotle, whose discussion of the question is by no means as clear as could be desired.[5]

Aristotle, for whom the slave is essentially an 'animate tool' (*empsychon organon*: see II.iii above and its n.12), says most explicitly that some men are slaves by nature,[6] although he has to admit that not all those who are in practice slaves or free men are by nature slave or free respectively.[7] For the 'slave by nature' he thinks it is *better* that he be subjected to a master; for such a man slavery is both beneficial and just.[8] He does not actually say that all barbarians are slaves by nature, but he quotes current Greek opinions to that effect without expressing disapproval.[9] We can certainly say that in Aristotle's view 'barbarians are slaves by nature', provided we remember that for him what is according to nature is not necessarily what occurs in every case: 'it is what occurs *as a general rule* (*epi to poly*) that is most in accord with the course of nature', as he himself puts it in one of his great zoological works.[10] And in Book VII of the *Politics,* after prescribing for the lands of the Greek proprietors in his ideal state to be tilled by slaves (who are evidently conceived as barbarians), he goes on to

suggest as an inferior alternative the use of barbarian *perioikoi*[11] -- that is to say, men who would not be actual slaves (though they might be what I have called serfs), but who would certainly not enjoy any of the rights of citizenship in his *polis* (cf. III.iv above and its nn.49-52 below).

The essence of the views held by Plato and Aristotle on 'natural slavery' was nicely expressed, more vividly than by either of them, in a book by the Virginia slaveowner, George Fitzhugh, published in 1854: 'Some men are born with saddles on their backs, and others booted and spurred to ride them; *and the riding does them good*'![12] (Fitzhugh must have been quoting, and contradicting, some famous words spoken on the scaffold in 1685 by the English radical, Richard Rumbold.)[13] His book, bearing the title (remarkable at that date) of *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society,* is perhaps the best of the ripostes by the slaveowners of the Old South against what seemed to them the more impersonal and inhuman treatment by the Northern farm owners of their hired labourers. ('Slaves,' Fitzhugh maintained, 'never die of hunger; seldom suffer want.') In his Preface, after apologising for having employed in his title 'the newly-coined word Sociology', he continues, 'We could, however, find none other in the whole range of the English language, that would even faintly convey the idea which we wished to express.' Speaking for the Virginia slaveowners, he says he will show 'that we are indebted to domestic slavery for our happy exemption from the social afflictions that have originated this philosophy'.

One passage in the *Politics* that is particularly interesting is the one in which Aristotle gives the advice that all slaves should be offered the reward of ultimate emancipation: he promises to give his reasons later, but unfortunately never does so.[14] If we read this advice with earlier passages explaining how the slave can benefit from his association with his master,[15] we may see a fairly precise parallel, at the individual level, with the theory of the 'tutelage' of backward nations', one of the main planks in the ideology of modern Western imperialism. But the statement in the *Politics* which corresponds best with the outlook of later Greek (and Roman) intellectuals is that in which Aristotle denies the very name of slave to the man who does not deserve to be in a condition of slavery -- or, as we might say, denies that the man who does not deserve to be in slavery is 'really' a slave at all.[16] This, and not the theory of 'natural slavery', became the standard view of thinking slaveowners in Hellenistic and Roman times, as we shall see in Section iii of this chapter. Even before Aristotle wrote there had been protests against the hypothesis of 'natural slavery'[17] and even against the assumption that barbarians are naturally inferior to Greeks[18] -- although of course the great majority of Greeks and Romans always took it for granted that they were generally superior to 'barbarians', and this attitude hardly changed in Christian times. As late as the beginning of the fifth century of our era the devoutly Christian poet Prudentius could say that there is as great a distance between the world of Rome and that of the 'barbarians' (*tantum distant Romana et barbara*) as between bipeds and quadrupeds, humans and dumb brutes, Christians and pagans (*C. Symm.* II.816-19).[19]

The theory of 'natural slavery' indeed is not at all prominent in antiquity after Aristotle's time, and when it does reappear it is mainly applied to peoples rather than individuals. This may be in a merely rhetorical context, as when Cicero stigmatises Jews and Syrians as 'peoples born for slavery' (*De prov. cons.* 10), but

we also find it seriously stated by a speaker (Laelius) in Cicero's dialogue, *De republica* (III.24/36, cf. 25/37), that a nation can benefit from being in a state of complete political subjection – (*servitus*, literally 'slavery') – to another (see my ECAPS 18 and n.52). There were, however, some distant but powerful echoes of the 'natural slavery' theory in much later times, when it played a highly significant role in Christian Spain in the controversy concerning the rightfulness of enslaving negroes, and the Indians of the Caribbean and Central and Southern America, in the fifteenth century onwards. It was, I believe, a Scottish professor at Paris, John Major, who in 1510 first applied the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery to the American Indians.[20] And at the great debate ordered by Charles V at Valladolid in 1550, to decide whether Christian Spaniards might lawfully wage war upon Indians and enslave them, before even preaching the Faith to them, Aristotle's doctrine was accepted in principle by both the leading disputants: the great scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the Franciscan friar Bartolomé de las Casas. The principal point of disagreement, it seems, was simply the factual question whether or not the Indians were 'natural slaves'; it was hardly questioned that negroes were. (The main book in English on this topic, by Lewis Hanke, on which I am mainly relying here, bears the delightful title, *Aristotle and the American Indians*!) It is things like this which give point to the remark of Engels that ancient slavery, even after its disappearance, left behind its 'poisonous sting' (*OFPPS* ch.viii: see *MESW* 560).

Anyone who is astonished at the acceptance of a doctrine so intellectually disreputable as that of natural slavery should reflect not only upon modern racist parallels but also upon certain other conceptions which are equally disreputable from the intellectual point of view but are widely accepted today because they are so convenient from the point of view of a ruling class. I suggest as one parallel the extension of the expression 'the Free World' to include countries like South Africa and a number of South and Central American dictatorships, while excluding all the Communist countries.

I have said nothing here about the position most opposed to the theory of 'natural slavery': that slavery was not merely 'not according to Nature' (*ou kata physin*) but actually 'contrary to Nature' (*para physin*). For this position, for which we have evidence from the fourth century B.C., from Philo of Alexandria in the early part of the first century of the Christian era, and in the Roman lawyers of the second to the sixth century, see the next section of this chapter.

(iii)

The standard Hellenistic, Roman and Christian attitude to slavery

From the Hellenistic period onwards, Greek and Roman thought on the subject of slavery, with hardly an exception, provides a set of uninspired variations on a single theme: that the state of slavery – like poverty and war, or liberty, riches and peace – is the result of accident, of Fortune rather than of Nature,[1] and that it is a matter of indifference, affecting externals only (see e.g. Lucret. I.455-8); that the good and wise man is never 'really' a slave, even if that happens to be his actual condition, but is 'really' free; that it is the bad man who is 'really' a slave, because he is in bondage to his own lusts – a wonderfully comforting set of doctrines for slaveowners. (I fancy that such austere philosophical notions are of

greater assistance in the endurance of liberty, riches and peace, than of slavery, poverty and war.) An early example of the line of thought I have just described, from the first half of the fourth century B.C., is Xenophon's statement that some are slaves to gluttony, others to lechery or drink or to foolish and costly ambitions (*Oecon.* I.21-2); among many later formulations, see the brief one in Augustine, *De civ. Dei* IV.3. And of course it was easy for those who held this position to conclude that where the 'bad man' was a slave, his condition was, for him, a blessing in disguise. Ingenious developments can be found of this or that aspect of the general theory, and of course some authors emphasise one aspect of it, others another; but there is a dreary similarity of sentiment over all. I think the fourteenth Oration of Dio Chrysostom is probably the most entertaining example I know of this kind of perverse ingenuity. Interesting statements of principle regarding slavery are rare: I would single out that of Chrysippus (the leading Stoic of the second half of the third century B.C.), that the slave should be considered as a sort of permanent hired labourer, in Seneca's Latin a *perpetuus mercennarius* (see n.17 to Section ii of this chapter).

It is often said that Christianity introduced an entirely new and better attitude towards slavery. Nothing could be more false. Jesus accepted slavery as a fact of his environment (see my ECAPS 19 n.54), just as it is accepted in the Old Testament; and his followers accepted and adapted the prevailing Graeco-Roman view which I have just described. (From now until the end of Section iv of this chapter I shall be very selective in giving references, especially to modern works: those not given here will be found in my ECAPS.) The significance of the much-quoted text in Colossians (III.11), 'There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free', is better understood in the light of the parallel text in Galatians (III.28): 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, *there is neither male nor female*; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' There is 'neither bond nor free' in exactly the same sense as there is 'neither male nor female': these statements are true *in a strictly spiritual sense*: the equality exists 'in the sight of God' and has no relation whatever to temporal affairs. The distinction between slave and master in this world is no more seen as needing to be *changed* than that between male and female. (As I have explained in II.vi above, the relation of a wife to her husband, in the Pauline view, bears a very strong resemblance to that of a slave to his master!) For St. Paul, Jesus had set all his followers free – from the flesh and all its works. The exhortation to the Christian slave to regard himself as 'Christ's freedman' in the same sense that the Christian who is a free man is 'Christ's slave' (I Cor. vii.22) may well have afforded him greater spiritual comfort than the pagan slave could obtain from the familiar philosophic view that if he was a good man he was 'really' free already; but it was basically the same view. Christian masters are briefly enjoined to treat their slaves fairly (see ECAPS 19 n.56), but there are many similar exhortations in pagan writers, e.g. Seneca (esp. *Epist.* XLVII: see the full treatment of Seneca's attitude to slavery in Griffin, *Seneca* 256-85, 458-61). And the yoke of slavery is fastened even more firmly upon Christian slaves as the emphasis on obedience to their masters becomes even more absolute. Certain phrases in the Pauline Epistles (see ECAPS 19 n.57), such as that in Ephesians (VI.5), exhorting slaves to obey their masters 'with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ', had

sinister implications which were fully brought out in two post-Apostolic works, the *Epistle of Barnabas* (XIX.7) and the *Didache* (IV.11): they explicitly tell the slave that he must serve his master 'as a counterpart of God' (*hōs typōi theou*), 'in reverence and fear'. I know of nothing that goes as far as that in pagan literature. St. Augustine even uses the *apostolica auctoritas* of St. Paul to rebuke the presumption of any Christian slave who might fondly imagine himself entitled to appeal to the provision in Exodus XXI.2 for the release of the Hebrew slave after six years' service. No, says Augustine (remembering Ephesians VI.5), the apostolic authority commands slaves to be subject to their masters, 'that there be no blasphemy of God's name and doctrine' – a remark (however faulty its logic) that is significant of Augustine's whole position on social matters (*Quaest. in Heptat.* II.77; and see further below on Augustine's attitude to slavery).

Whatever the theologian may think of Christianity's claim to set free the soul of the slave, therefore, the historian cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles rather more firmly on his feet. It performed the same social function as the fashionable philosophies of the Graeco-Roman world, and perhaps with deeper effect: it made the slave both more content to endure his earthly lot, and more tractable and obedient. St. Ignatius, in his *Epistle to Polycarp* (IV.3), is anxious that Christian slaves should be neither despised nor 'puffed up' (*mē physiousthōsan*); that they should 'serve the more, to the glory of God'; and that they should 'not wish to be set free at the public cost, lest they become slaves of lust'. (I confess that I find the last phrase somewhat inconsequential, nor can I see exactly how an even more intense degree of labour on the part of the slave can enhance the glory of God.) The Fifth Canon of the Council of Elvira (in the late third century or the early fourth) punished with no more than seven years' excommunication even the intentional flogging to death by a woman of her slave girl[2] – doubtless one who had accepted the sexual attentions of the woman's husband. Later episcopal decisions decree flogging as a penalty for ecclesiastical offences by a slave, female as well as male, when free men and women suffer some less degrading punishment: a fine or a period of excommunication.[3] And baptism seems to have been refused to a slave by at least some churches without the consent of his master, perhaps at first only if a Christian one, but later even if a pagan (see ECAPS 21 nn.59-60).

The situation changed not at all when Christianity succeeded to the seats of power in the fourth century, and the Christian Church – or rather, churches – assumed a position even in the public life of the Roman empire of the fourth and following centuries which I can only compare, functionally, with the role of what Eisenhower (in the final broadcast of his Presidency, on 17 January 1961) called 'the military-industrial complex' in the United States today. (One should normally speak of the Christian 'churches' in the plural, rather than 'the Church', because the latter expression is a strictly theological and not a historical concept: see Section v of this chapter. But perhaps the term 'the Church' is too convenient to be abandoned entirely by the historian.)

St. Augustine at least admitted that slavery was an evil in principle, but with that extraordinary perverse ingenuity which never ceases to astonish one, he saw it as God's punishment upon mankind for the sin of Adam (*De civ. Dei* XIX.15-16, cf. 21).[4] (These are among the many passages justifying the astringent

comment of Gibbon on the *City of God*, of which Colin Haycraft has reminded me, that Augustine's 'learning is too often borrowed, and his arguments are too often his own': *DFRE* III.211 n.86.) It evidently did not occur to Augustine that it might be thought blasphemous to attribute to an all-just Deity such a singularly indiscriminate method of collective punishment. In thus suggesting that 'justly was the burden of servitude laid upon the back of transgression', Augustine represented slavery as something divinely ordained, and gave the institution an even weightier justification than it had ever received from pre-Christian thinkers since the days when theories of 'natural slavery' were abroad. Indeed, Augustine and Ambrose went so far as to think that slavery could actually be good for the slave, an instructive form of correction and a blessing even – for, as Ambrose put it, 'the lower the station in life, the more exalted the virtue' (see ECAPS 21 nn.63-4). I have not been able to find in any early Christian writer anything like a demand for the abandonment of slavery or even for a general freeing of existing slaves. Passages in early Christian literature which are sometimes cited as containing attacks on the institution of slavery can be shown on inspection not to have any such implication (see ECAPS 21-2).

Although the Christians laid great emphasis on the importance of mono-gamous marriage and the sinfulness of sexual intercourse outside it (if with no great success, it must be said: see II.vi above, and Jones, *LRE* II.972-6), the Christian Empire did not provide for legal marriage between slaves, any more than the pagans had done. This need not surprise us. The antebellum South was deeply religious, but no single state legislature ever tried to legitimise slave unions and thus give them a greater chance of permanency, and they always remained subject in practice to the master's whim.[5]

Legislation giving a small measure of protection to slaves in certain respects was passed at various times by the Roman emperors, as when Claudius pro-vided that a sick slave exposed by a master should, if he recovered, become free and enjoy 'Latin rights'.[6] However, it is sometimes made explicit that enact-ments in favour of slaves have also in view the protection of the interests of masters in general, which might suffer if a few exceptionally cruel masters were allowed to behave with 'saevitia' and inflict intolerable indignities and injuries on their slaves.[7] (Probably it was reflections on these lines which made Augustus refuse – apparently – to allow the usual mass execution of the slaves of Hostius Quadra when they murdered him: the man is vividly described by Seneca as degraded, a *portentum*, a *monstrum*; *NQ* I.xvi.1,3,6.) Again, there are parallels from the Old South, as when the Supreme Court of South Carolina in 1849 upheld the conviction of a slaveowner for not giving his slaves enough to eat, on the ground that the law had to be enforced for the sake of 'public sentiment, . . . and to protect property from the depredation of famishing slaves' (Stampp, *PI* 217-18).

In the Christian Roman Empire, slaves were generally debarred from all grades of holy orders; serf *coloni* were similarly excluded, either entirely or unless their masters consented to their ordination. On this, Church and State were agreed, and there was legislation on the subject from 398 onwards.[8] It could of course be argued in defence of these disqualifications that a slave would be unable to consecrate his whole time to the service of God: this argument is found in a letter written in 443 by one of the greatest of the early popes, St. Leo I. More powerful, I suspect, was another argument advanced in the same letter:

Persons whom the merit neither of their birth nor of their character recommends are being freely admitted to holy orders, and those who have not been able to obtain their freedom from their owners are raised to the dignity of the priesthood, as if servile vileness could lawfully receive this honour . . . There is a double wrong in this matter, that the sacred ministry is polluted by such vile company, and the rights of owners are violated, in so far as an audacious and illicit usurpation is involved (*Ep.* IV.1, in *MPL* LIV.611).

As Gaudemet remarks, commenting on a letter of Pope Gelasius I (A.D. 492-6) in this connection, 'Le respect absolu du droit de propriété privé et de structures sociales cependant peu conformes à la doctrine évangelique, était ainsi nettement affirmé' (*EER* 139).

In the Roman lawyers (apparently pagan to a man), from the second or third century of the Christian era to the sixth, we sometimes find the admission that slavery was contrary to nature or to natural law – *contra naturam, iuri naturali contraria*: see *Inst.J.* I.ii.2; *Dig.* I.v.4.1 (Florentinus, third quarter of the second century); XII.vi.64 (Tryphoninus, *c.* 200); and I.i.4 (Ulpian, first quarter of the third century); and cf. L.xvii.32 (Ulpian).[9] Slavery indeed seems to have been regarded by at least some of the lawyers as the only feature of the *ius gentium* that did not also form part of *ius naturale* (see Jolowicz and Nicholas, *HISRL*[3] 106-7). This is a line of thought that can be traced right back to the unnamed thinkers of the fifth or fourth century B.C. who are said by Aristotle to have declared that slavery, because it was based on force, was contrary to nature and wrong (*Pol.* I.3, 1253^{b}20-3; 6, 1255^{a}5-12) – not merely 'not according to nature' (*ou kata physin*) but '*contrary* to nature' (*para physin*), a significant difference, not sufficiently brought out by modern writers (cf. my *OPW* 45). This line of thought may or may not have descended to the Roman lawyers through some of the Stoics. Certainly, apart from the Roman lawyers, the only identifiable Greek or Latin author I know in whom we find a reflection of the argument that slavery can be 'contrary to nature' is Philo, the Hellenised Jew who wrote at Alexandria during the first half-century of the Christian era. In one work he speaks with evident admiration of the Jewish sect of the Essenes, who (he says) do not have a single slave; they denounce slaveowners, he adds, for being unjust in destroying equality (*isotēs*) and impious in transgressing the precept of Nature, the *thesmos physeōs* (*Quod omn. prob. liber* 79; cf. *hoi tēs physeōs nomoi*, ibid. 37). In another work he similarly describes the 'Therapeutai' – who must surely have been either imaginary or a sect of the Essenes – as believing that the ownership of slaves was altogether contrary to nature, *para physin* (*De vita contempl.* 70); and again we have the interesting assumption that equality is the ideal: Philo speaks of the injustice and greed of 'those who introduce inequality, the origin of evil' (*tēn archekakon anisotēta*). It is perfectly clear, however, that Philo himself did not by any means reject slavery altogether. His own basic position was that which I have described as the standard one in Hellenistic and later thinkers: that the good man, even if he happens to be enslaved, is 'really' free, while the bad man, the man who is worthless or senseless – in Philo's Greek, the *phaulos* or *aphrōn* – is always 'really' a slave. Philo wrote two whole treatises on this theme, of which we possess only the second, usually referred to by its traditional Latin title, *Quod omnis probus liber sit*; the other, intended to prove 'that a *phaulos* is a slave' (see *Quod omn. prob. liber* 1), has fortunately not survived. The treatise we do possess is actually the earliest full-length statement of the theory to survive complete,

for the still earlier Stoic and other writings on the subject now exist, if at all, only in fragments. It is perfectly possible to demonstrate from Philo himself that what I have described as the standard view of slavery from Hellenistic times onwards can be assimilated to the old theory of 'natural slavery', provided slavery, for the worthless man, is treated as a benefit. In one of his fanciful attempts to establish borrowings by Greek authors – in this case, Zeno the founder of Stoicism – from the Jewish Scriptures, Philo recalls Genesis XXVII.40, where Isaac tells Esau that he is to 'serve' his brother Jacob. In the Septuagint, used by Philo, the verb in this passage is a form of *douleuein*, the commonest Greek term for serving as a slave. Isaac believed, Philo continues, that what seems to be the greatest of evils, namely slavery (*douleia*), is the highest possible good for a fool (an *aphrōn*), since his being deprived of liberty prevents him from doing wrong unscathed, and his character is improved by the control he experiences (*Quod omn. prob. liber* 57). Plato and Aristotle (see Section ii of this chapter) would have warmly approved: to them, such a man was a slave 'by nature'.

Some Stoics – the ex-slave Epictetus, for example – may occasionally have spoken as if they actually disapproved in principle of possessing slaves (see my ECAPS 22 n.72). But this is all ultimately unreal, part of the smokescreen of plausible ideas by which the more fastidious thinkers of antiquity concealed from themselves the unpalatable truth about a ruthless world of which they were trying to make the best they could, according to their lights. The unreality of all this talk emerges most clearly from Epictetus' description of the ex-slave who ends up by becoming a senator: he is then subject, says Epictetus, to 'the fairest and sleekest slavery of all'! (*Diss.* IV.i.40, p.360, ed. H. Schenkl, 1916). If being a senator was slavery, it was slavery in a Pickwickian sense, a kind of slavery which the vast majority of the population of the Graeco-Roman world would have embraced eagerly enough.

In early Christian thought I have been able to find nothing that goes even as far in rejecting slavery as the purely theoretical statements to the effect that it is 'contrary to nature', made by the early thinkers mentioned in Aristotle's *Politics*, by the Essenes as reported by Philo Judaeus and by some of the Roman lawyers. The farthest that I think any early Christian writer goes is to admit – as does Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), when freeing two of the many slaves of the Roman Church – that 'it is right that men whom nature from the beginning produced free and whom the *ius gentium* has subjected to the yoke of slavery should be reinstated by the benefit of manumission in the liberty to which they were born' (*Ep.* VI.12). Yet even Gregory ordered no large-scale manumissions, except of Christian slaves owned by Jews. I cannot speak from personal knowledge of Christian literature much after the sixth century, but I know of no fundamental change in the attitude of the Christian churches to slavery for well over a thousand years after the fall of the Roman empire in the West, and there was certainly no absolute condemnation of slavery as an institution by any Christian writer during the Middle Ages: statements I have seen quoted from Theodore the Studite, Smaragdus Abbas and others always have some particular limited application (see ECAPS 24 and n.76). I dare say it is only my own ignorance, but I know of no general, outright condemnation of slavery, inspired by a Christian outlook, before the petition of the Mennonites of Germantown in Pennsylvania in 1668[10] – a sect (not far removed from the

Quakers) whose sixteenth-century founder was an Anabaptist and who were outside the main stream of Christianity. Christian writers have often emphasised attempts by Christians to prevent or at least discourage enslavement; but these efforts were rarely if ever extended for the benefit of those outside the Christian fold, and writers who have drawn attention to them have often failed to mention that condemnation of the sin of enslaving Christians is commonly accompanied by the tacit admission that enslaving non-believers is permissible, and even praiseworthy if enslavement is followed by conversion to the Faith – a conversion which perhaps in some cases could hardly be attained by other means.[11] Christianity, therefore, actually came to play a very positive role in the slave trade of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Boxer has remarked upon 'the dichotomy which bedevilled the Portuguese approach to the black Africans for so long – the desire to save their immortal souls coupled with the urge to enslave their vile bodies', with the result that 'a close connection speedily grew up between the missionary and the slave-trader' (*PSE* 98, 101). Papal bulls of Nicholas V and Calixtus III in the 1450s record with approval the way in which captured negro slaves had been brought to receive baptism and embrace the Catholic faith; they gave the Portuguese, as a reward for their efforts in this field, a monopoly of navigation and trade over a large area between the Gold Coast and India; and they expressly authorised the king of Portugal to reduce to slavery all unbelievers inimical to Christ (see Boxer, *PSE* 20-3). In the American Old South Christianity was regarded by slaveowners as an invaluable method of social control. As Kenneth Stampp has said, not only did pious masters feel an obligation to care for the immortal souls of their slaves and to look after their spiritual life; 'many of them also considered Christian indoctrination an effective method of keeping slaves docile and contented' (*PI* 156-62, at 156). The Bible, needless to say, was pressed into service in favour of slavery, as it so often has been, notably in the great argument over Abolition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the U.S.A. The negro, it was widely believed, inherited Noah's curse upon Canaan, the son of Ham (Gen. IX.25-7), and some would even have made him the inheritor of God's curse on Cain (Gen. IV.10-15). Those who knew their Aristotle could easily buttress his theory of natural slavery with an argument supposedly founded on the Bible.[12] If I have ventured far beyond the ancient world in tracing the attitude of the Christian churches towards slavery, it is because I wish to emphasise that we need feel no surprise at all at what we find in the writers of the early Christian centuries.

At this point I must mention one thing that has long puzzled me. I realise that on Christian principles a good case can perhaps be made for accepting the condition of slavery *for the slave,* in the way that Stoics and Epicureans accepted it, as well as St. Paul and so many of the other early Christians, as something external and unimportant. This is so, even for those who might not go all the way with Cardinal Newman when he declared that according to the teaching of his church 'it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, though it harmed no one, or steal one poor farthing without excuse' (see ECAPS 23 n.74). But what of slavery as it affects the master? Surely

the Christian who prays not to be 'led into temptation' should proceed to renounce the total irresponsible domination over fellow human beings which belongs to the master of slaves and is only too likely to lead him (as we know it often did) into the gravest temptation, to commit acts of cruelty and lust? I do not know when this was first realised; but it was evident to the genius of Tolstoy, who in a remarkable passage in *War and Peace* makes Prince Andrey tell Pierre that what is most evil about serfdom is its effect upon those masters who have the power to punish their serfs as they please, and who, in doing so, 'stifle their remorse and become hardened'. (The conversation occurs in Book V, during Pierre's visit to Andrey at Bogucharovo.) I can only conclude that what prevented the Christian Church from admitting the dangerous, brutalising effect of slavery (and serfdom) upon masters was the irresistible force of the class struggle: the absolute necessity for the dominant classes of the Graeco-Roman world to maintain those social institutions upon which their whole privileged position depended, and which they were not willing, or even able, to forego.

(iv)

The attitudes to property of the Graeco-Roman world, of Jesus, and of the Christian churches

From ideas about slavery we pass to a closely related subject: attitudes to property. In V.i above I have briefly discussed the way in which property, from the seventh century B.C. onwards, largely replaced nobility of birth as the foundation of political power and of social respectability in the early Greek states, as in early Rome (for which see VI.ii above). Throughout most of Greek history, except perhaps in a few democratic states in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the bulk of the propertied classes would have agreed with Tennyson's *Northern Farmer. New Style* that 'the poor in a loomp is bad'. Origen says this most emphatically: the majority of the destitute (*hoi ptōchoi*) have most worthless characters (they are *phaulotatoi ta ēthē, C. Cels.* VI.16). The Graeco-Roman world was obsessively concerned with wealth and status; and wealth was by far the most important determinant of status. Ovid put it beautifully in three words: *dat census honores,* 'it is property that confers rank' (*Amores* III.viii.55). The Elder Seneca, writing in the late 30s B.C., could represent Porcius Latro, a famous orator, as exclaiming that nothing in human affairs shows up a man's virtues more clearly than wealth: 'It is property [*census* again] that raises to the rank of senator, property that differentiates the Roman *eques* from the plebs, property that brings promotion in the army, property that provides the qualification for the judges in the forum' (Seneca, *Controv.* II.i.17; and cf. Pliny, *NH* XIV.5). The Greeks, from archaic times through the Classical and Hellenistic periods and on into the Roman age, habitually expressed political complexion and social status in a fascinating vocabulary which is an inextricable mixture of socio-economic and moral terminology, with two sets of terms applied more or less indiscriminately to the propertied and the non-propertied classes respectively. (For what follows, see my ECAPS 10-11, and its nn.29-32.) On the one hand we have not only words which mean property-owning, rich, fortunate, distinguished, well-born, influential, but also, as alternatives for virtually the same set of people, words having a basically

moral connotation and meaning literally the good, the best, the upright, the fair-minded, and so forth. And on the other hand we find applied to the lower classes, the poor, who are also the Many, the mob, the populace, words with an inescapably moral quality, meaning essentially bad. Even Solon, often regarded as the founder of the Athenian democracy, could say in one of his poems that he had made laws equally for the *kakos* and the *agathos* – for the 'lower class' and the 'upper class', of course, rather than 'the bad' and 'the good'; but nothing could alter the social fact that the upper class *were* 'the good', the lower class 'the bad'. The Roman governing class was as thoroughly devoted to property as the most wealth-conscious of the Greeks. No surviving Greek writer is quite as explicit about the overriding importance of property rights as Cicero, the earliest known to me in a long line of thinkers, extending into modern times, who have seen the protection of private property rights as the prime function of the state. To mention only a few of the most interesting passages in Cicero – in the *De officiis*, after asking what greater mischief there could be than an equal distribution of property (*aequatio bonorum . . . , qua peste quae potest esse maior?*), he goes on to declare that States were established above all with the aim of preserving property rights (II.73, cf. 78, 83-5; I.21); and in the *De legibus*, after some very grandiose talk about the greatness of law (I.14) and how it is the highest Reason implanted in Nature (§§ 18,23), an eternal principle governing the entire universe,[1] indeed the very mind of God (II.8), he qualifies this by saying that of course he does not include under the name of law certain 'pernicious and unjust orders of the people, . . . many pernicious, many pestiferous enactments which no more deserve the name of law than the rules that brigands make for themselves' (§§ 11,13). And all three sets of laws he singles out as least deserving the name of law were – we might have guessed – primarily agrarian in character, and sought to effect those distributions of land which the Roman Optimates always regarded as a potential threat to the very basis of their power. In one of his speeches Cicero launches into a panegyric of the *ius civile*, the civil law – which I mentioned in VI.i above as one of the two greatest achievements of the Romans, their only outstanding one in the intellectual field. In the speech in question, *Pro Caecina* (67-75), Cicero emphasises that if the *ius civile* is subverted, no one can possibly feel certain of his own property (70); and that if it is neglected or treated carelessly, no one can be sure that he owns anything or will inherit from his father or leave anything to his children (73).

An interesting sidelight on the Greek and Roman respect for wealth and social position is the fact that 'charitable' foundations and bequests which provided for distributions in money or kind to a local population often divided the hand-outs into two or more categories, with the larger gifts going to those of higher social rank – councillors are the group in favour of whom discrimination is most often exercised (see III.vi above and its n.35).[1a]

In the rest of this section I shall concentrate on one particular aspect of ancient Greek ideas about property: namely, the way in which the ideas of the early Christians on this subject were moulded by social forces far beyond their control into something very different from those of the Founder of their religion. This again was a direct effect of the class situation in the Graeco-Roman world – of the class struggle. Unless Christianity was to become involved in a fatal conflict with the all-powerful propertied classes, it had to play down those ideas of Jesus

which were hostile to the ownership of any large quantity of property; or, better still, it could explain them away.

We must begin with the central fact about Christian origins, to which theologians and New Testament scholars have never (as far as I am aware) given anything like the emphasis it deserves: that although the earliest surviving Christian documents are in Greek and although Christianity spread from city to city in the Graeco-Roman world, its Founder lived and preached almost entirely outside the area of Graeco-Roman civilisation proper. Here we must go back to the fundamental distinction which I drew in I.iii above between the *polis* (the Greek city) and the *chōra* (the countryside) – because, if we can trust the only information about Jesus which we have, that of the Gospels (as I believe in this respect we can), the world in which Jesus was active was entirely that of the *chōra* and not at all that of the *polis*. Apart from Jerusalem (a special case, as I shall explain presently), his mission took place exclusively in the *chōra*, in its villages (*kōmai*), in the rural area (the *agroi*) of Palestine. Mainly it was conducted altogether apart from *polis* territory, in areas of Galilee and Judaea administered not by cities but directly by Herod Antipas the 'tetrarch' or by the Roman governor of Judaea; but it is highly significant that on the rather rare occasions when we do find Jesus active inside *polis* territory, it is never in the *polis* itself, in the sense of its urban area, but always in its country district. As we shall see, whenever we have any specific information (as distinct from vague general statements) the terms used are such as to point unmistakably to the countryside – the *kōmai, kōmopoleis, agroi, chōra*, also the *merē, horia, paralios, perichōros*. There is of course a great dispute about how much reliable historical information can legitimately be extracted from the narratives of the Gospels, even the Synoptics. But I would emphasise that in so far as we can trust the specific information given us by the Gospels there is no evidence that Jesus even entered the urban area of any Greek city. That should not surprise us: Jesus belonged wholly to the *chōra*, the Jewish countryside of Galilee and Judaea.

Palestine, which had been ruled from Egypt by the Ptolemies for over a hundred years after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., became around 200 part of the Seleucid kingdom. Just before the middle of the second century Judaea achieved a considerable degree of independence for nearly a century; but from 63 B.C. onwards the whole of Palestine and Syria was always effectively under Roman control, although Judaea (and Samaria) did not actually become a Roman province until A.D. 6 and Galilee and Peraea until 44.[2] In Palestine the native language at the beginning of the Christian era was Aramaic, which was spoken throughout the countryside and also by a good proportion of the inhabitants of many of the cities. (Some vernacular Hebrew was apparently spoken in Judaea, but very little in Galilee, in which most of the preaching of Jesus took place, and Jesus must have preached almost entirely in Aramaic.)[3] By the time of Jesus, Palestine contained a number of genuine *poleis*, some of which were much more Hellenic in character than others.[4] With the exception of Tyre and Sidon, which I shall mention presently, the cities on the coast (Caesarea, Ascalon, Gaza and others) were too far from the main scene of Jesus' activity to be mentioned in the Gospels, and we can ignore them here. The cities we need to notice are, first, Sepphoris and Tiberias, the only two in Galilee; next Samaria, between Galilee and Judaea, recently re-founded by Herod the Great as Sebaste

(but never mentioned under that name in the New Testament); thirdly the well-marked cluster of ten genuine cities administering a large area known as Decapolis, to the east and south-east of Galilee and the north-east of Judaea; and finally one or two cities at the periphery of the area within which Jesus moved: Caesarea Paneas, founded in 2 B.C. by Herod's son, Philip the tetrarch, some 25 miles to the north of the Lake of Galilee (and referred to in Mark and Matthew as Caesarea Philippi), and the ancient Phoenician towns of Tyre and Sidon, of which Tyre lay on the coast, due west of Caesarea Paneas, with Sidon to the north of it.

Now the word *polis* is often used by Greek authors (and in the Septuagint) in a loose sense, of places which were not true cities but simply large villages or market-towns which were described more correctly by other expressions such as *mētrokōmiai, kōmopoleis*. In the Gospels, Luke especially, the term *polis* is used on dozens of occasions for individual named places which were not technically cities at all: Nazareth, Capernaum, Nain, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Sychar of Samaria, Ephraim, Arimathea, Bethlehem – and Jerusalem. The last is a special case. From the early Hellenistic period onwards, Greek authors such as Hecataeus of Abdera and Agatharchides of Cnidus (*ap.* Jos., *C.Apion.* I. 197-8, 209) could call Jerusalem a *polis*; but that was never a correct description either in reality or in the strict technical sense, and it is best to regard Jerusalem as essentially the administrative capital of Judaea, of the *ethnos* (the 'nation') of the Jews.[5] Of the other places called 'poleis' in the Gospels we might wish to call Bethsaida a 'town'; none of the others was really more than a village. And although much of the activity of Jesus is said in the Gospels to have taken place in desert areas or by the shore of the Lake of Galilee or elsewhere in the country districts, we are sometimes told in very general terms that Jesus went through *poleis* (Mt. XI.11; cf. Lk. IV.43), or *poleis* and *kōmai* (Mt. IX.35; Lk.XIII.22), or *kōmai, poleis* and *agroi* (Mk VI.56). But in such contexts the word *poleis* must be understood in the very loose and untechnical sense in which the Evangelists (like some other Greek authors) habitually use it. As I said earlier, whenever we have a specific reference to a visit by Jesus to one of the genuine *poleis*, it is in every single case made clear that it was the country district of the *polis* concerned to which Jesus went. (Perhaps I should say again that I am omitting here many references which can be found in my ECAPS, esp. 5-8.)

Let us begin with Samaria. We can forget the bogus *polis* of Sychar (Jn IV.5), a mere village of course, and the passage in Matthew (X.5) in which Jesus tells his disciples *not* to go 'into a *polis* of the Samaritans'. That leaves us with only two passages in Luke: in XVII.11 Jesus merely goes 'through the midst of Samaria and Galilee', and in IX.52 he sends messengers 'to a *kōmē* of the Samaritans' to prepare for his coming, which in fact never took place – Jesus went to another *kōmē* (IX.55). There is never a mention of Sebaste, the city founded by Herod, which was a pagan town, with no large proportion of Jewish settlers, and the only genuine *polis* in the Samareitis.

The Decapolis (see above) crops up in two passages in Mark and one in Matthew, and the manner of its appearance is significant. In Mt. IV.25 crowds *from* Decapolis (which had a large *chōra*) and elsewhere follow Jesus. In Mk VII.31, Jesus comes from the borders of Tyre, through Sidon, to the Lake of Galilee, via (as the text has it) 'the midst of the boundaries (or 'territory') of

Decapolis'. But it is Mk V.20 which brings out most clearly what I am trying to emphasise: that in these cases Jesus is clearly in the country district attached to a *polis* and not in the actual *polis* itself. It needs to be taken with its whole context: the story of the demoniac out of whom was cast the legion of devils (Mk V. 1-20; Mt. VIII.28-34; Lk. VIII.26-39), whether this is to be located at Gadara or Gerasa, both of which were cities of the Decapolis. (For an alleged 'Gergesa', see ECAPS 6 n.15). In all three Synoptics Jesus is in the *chōra* of the city, and the incident is pictured as taking place beside the Lake of Galilee; the demoniac comes out of the city (Lk. VIII.27) and indeed was always 'in the tombs and in the mountains' (Mk V.2-5); afterwards the swineherds go into the city (Mt. VIII.33), and they tell the story in 'the *polis* and the *agroi*' (Mk V.14; Lk. VIII.34), whereupon people ('the whole *polis*': Mt. VIII.34) come out to Jesus (Lk. VIII.35) and beg him to go away – in Lk. VIII.37 it is 'the whole multitude of the *perichōros* of the Gerasenes' who do this. When Jesus tells the former demoniac to go home and publish the news of the divine work, he proclaims it, in Luke (VIII.39), 'throughout the whole *polis*', and in Mark (V.20) 'in the Decapolis'.

The situation is exactly the same on the two occasions on which Jesus is said to have visited the territory of cities outside his main area of action. It is not in Caesarea Philippi itself that he is found, but in its *kōmai* (Mk VIII.27) or *merē* (Mt. XVI. 13); and when he visits Phoenicia it is to the *merē* or *horia* of Tyre and Sidon that he goes (Mt. XV.21-2; Mk VII.24, 31), and he is there approached by a woman 'from those *horia*'. When multitudes come to him on another occasion from Tyre and Sidon, it is from their *paralios* (coastal district, Lk. VI.27). There is one reference in Matthew (XI.21) and Luke (X.13) to the doing of 'mighty works' in Tyre and Sidon; but (and this nicely confirms what I have been saying) this is simply part of the reproach to the 'cities' (in reality, *kōmai*) Chorazin and Bethsaida (and Capernaum) that *if* the mighty works which had actually been done in them had been performed instead in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented!

It will have been noticed that I have said nothing so far about the first two Palestinian cities which I put at the head of my list above: Sepphoris and Tiberias, the only two real cities of Galilee, which had been founded by Herod Antipas (see ECAPS 7 n.17). There is the best of reasons for this: just as we hear nothing in the Gospels of Sebaste (the *polis* of the Samareitis), so we hear not a word of Sepphoris, and Tiberias is mentioned only in the Fourth Gospel (Jn VI.1,23; XXI.1), and then not in its own right but only in connection with the lake that bore its name, better known to us as the Lake of Galilee. Yet Sepphoris was only about four miles from Jesus' home village of Nazareth, and Tiberias is on the shore of the Lake of Galilee at almost the nearest point to Nazareth. One can understand that Jesus would not wish to enter Sebaste, a predominantly pagan city; but both Sepphoris and Tiberias were thoroughly Jewish in population and religion, even if their civic institutions (those of Tiberias at any rate) were of the standard Greek pattern, and even if Sepphoris was to be exceptionally pro-Roman during the great Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70 (see ECAPS 7 nn.18-19). Yet it need not surprise us to find no record of Jesus' presence in either of these cities: they were both regarded with hatred by the Galilaeans in Josephus' army in 66 (see ECAPS 8 n.20), and Jesus would no doubt have seen them as belonging to an alien world. In Mark I.38 it is the nearby *kōmopoleis* (the

substantial villages) of Galilee in which he contemplates preaching: that represents the reality.

I dare say that some New Testament scholars may object that I have made far too much of topographical evidence in the Gospels which they themselves are in general reluctant to press. To this I would reply that I am not using any of the Gospel narratives for any topographical purpose: it is a matter of indifference to me whether, for example, the pericope containing the 'confession of Peter' (Mk VIII.27ff.; Mt. XVI.13ff.) is rightly located near Caesarea Philippi rather than anywhere else. Nor have I drawn any conclusions from uses of the word *polis*. My one purpose has been to demonstrate that the Synoptic Gospels are unanimous and consistent in locating the mission of Jesus entirely in the countryside, not within the *poleis* proper, and therefore outside the real limits of Hellenistic civilisation. It seems to me inconceivable that this can be due to the Evangelists themselves, who (as we have seen) were very likely to dignify an obscure village like Nazareth or Capernaum (cf. ECAPS 8 n.22) with the title of *polis* but would certainly not 'down-grade' a locality by making it a country district if in their source it appeared as a *polis*. I conclude, therefore, that in this respect the Evangelists accurately reflect the situation they found in their sources; and it seems to me that these sources are very likely indeed to have presented a true picture of the general locus of the activity of Jesus. I may add that although I have not been able to find the point I have just been making emphasised by even a single modern New Testament specialist, it did not entirely escape the notice of the greatest scholar of the early Church, St. Jerome. As Henry Chadwick has now kindly pointed out to me, Jerome remarks in his *In Esaiam* xii, p.507 (the commentary on Isaiah XLII.1ff., in *MPL* XXIV.437), that 'if we read that Jesus was within the boundaries [*termini*] of Tyre and Sidon or the confines [*confinium*] of Caesarea Philippi, which is now called Paneas, nevertheless we must note that it is not written that he entered into the actual cities [*ipsas civitates*]'.

Jesus, then, lived and taught within an area which was neither Greek nor Roman, but wholly Jewish. This is best brought out, in my opinion, in the admirable recent book by Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew. A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London, 1973: see esp. its 48–9). As I mentioned earlier, Galilee, within which by far the greater part of the activity of Jesus apparently took place, was not even a Roman province during his lifetime: it was still a Roman 'client kingdom', until 39 part of the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Of course Jesus was well aware of the Roman imperial power that had already engulfed Judaea as a tributary province and could easily swallow up the remaining petty client kingdoms of Palestine whenever it wanted to. But he may well have had virtually no direct contact with the Roman imperial administration before his final arrest and trial, on the pretence that he was a political agitator, indeed a 'Resistance leader' – a charge which was certainly false, even if his followers may have included a few men with revolutionary associations.[6] Even the 'publicans' (*publicani* in Latin, *telōnai* in Greek) who crop up in the Gospels, such as Matthew (or Levi the son of Alphaeus), will have been employed by Herod Antipas, the tetrarch, and not by the Roman governor of Judaea – who by the way at this date, as we know from a recently discovered inscription, had the title not of Procurator but of Praefectus.[7] How much contact Jesus had with

Greek culture it is not possible to say, but it is likely to have been minimal.[7a]

The main element in the preaching of Jesus was the message, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. The meaning of this is that the end of the whole present dispensation is near: God will intervene and bring to a speedy end all the powers of this world. In preparation for these earth-shaking events men must repent of their sins and obey the law of God. In another sense of the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' (or 'Kingdom of God'), that Kingdom is within man's power to grasp *now*: if he repents and follows the right way of life, he can to that extent enter into the Kingdom even before the final cataclysm.[8] Various consequences follow from this. One of the most important is that the possession of wealth is a positive hindrance to entering into the Kingdom. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God,' said Jesus, after the man seeking eternal life who 'had great possessions' had gone away disconsolate on being told to sell all that he had and give it to the poor (Mk X.17-31; Mt. XIX.16-30; Lk. XVIII.18-30). This story, by the way, is commonly referred to nowadays as that of 'The Rich Young Man', and that is certainly what Matthew calls him; but Mark and Luke make it clear that in their minds young is what he is not, for they make him claim to have kept the commandments Jesus recommends 'from my youth up'! There is one respect in which Matthew's account differs radically from that in the other two Synoptics: Matthew (XIX.21) inserts into the command of Jesus the qualification, 'If you would be perfect' (*ei theleis teleios einai*) which is not in Mark (X.21) or Luke (XVIII.22): in them the command to sell all is unqualified. As we shall see presently, it is in Matthew's formulation that the passage is invariably quoted by the early Fathers.

Nothing better conveys the contrast between Jewish and Graeco-Roman attitudes to questions of wealth and poverty than the account given in chapter IV of Luke's Gospel of the public preaching of Jesus at Nazareth. (The point I am interested in does not occur in parallel accounts in the other Synoptics.) Jesus reads from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, opening with the words, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor' (Lk.IV.18). Now the word for 'poor' used here by Luke, as in the Septuagint version of Isaiah, is *ptōchoi*, a very strong word indeed, which very often in Greek means not just the poor but the down-and-out, the destitute, the beggar – Lazarus in the parable is a *ptōchos* (Lk. XVI.20, 22). Classical scholars will remember the appearance of Poverty (*Penia*) as a character in the *Plutus* of Aristophanes (lines 415-612), and how angry she becomes when Chremylus refers to Penia and Ptocheia as sisters: no, says Penia, the *ptōchos* has nothing, whereas her man, the *penēs*, may toil and scrape, but he has enough to live on (lines 548-54).

I must just mention here that although the word *ptōchoi* does also appear in the Septuagint version of Isaiah LXI.1, it there translates a Hebrew word which is sometimes better rendered – as indeed it is in the Authorised Version – by 'the meek'. But this takes us into irrelevant questions, which I am anyway not competent to deal with, of the various shades of meaning of the Hebrew words expressing poverty, lowliness and the like. Some of these are as ambiguous as the English word 'humble', which can be purely social or purely moral or a mixture of the two. The only point I need make here is that in the Hebrew ter-

minology, unlike the Greek, poverty and a lowly station in life are often associated with the moral virtues.

Luke is also the only Evangelist to give us the Parable of Lazarus (XVI.19-31) – who, as I have just said, is specifically a *ptōchos*, here quite rightly translated 'beggar'. Expositors seldom bring out the fact that the terrible fate of the rich man in the parable (Dives, as we usually call him) is clearly seen as a direct result of his great wealth, for he feels (verses 27-8) that Lazarus alone will be able to teach his five surviving brothers how to avoid a similar fate. In Luke's account of the Beatitudes, too, there is a very interesting divergence from Matthew's version. In Matthew (in the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount', chapters v-vii) Jesus is made to say, 'Blessed are the poor *in spirit* [*hoi ptōchoi tōi pneumati*: we might say, 'humble at heart'], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'; and 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst *after righteousness*, for they shall be filled' (V.3, 6); but Luke's corresponding version (in the 'Sermon on the Plain', VI.17-49) has simply 'Blessed are ye poor [*ptōchoi*, without qualification], for yours is the kingdom of God', and 'Blessed are ye that hunger now [not 'hunger *after righteousness*'], for ye shall be filled' (VI.20-1). In both cases, of course, the fulfilment of the blessings is intended eschatologically: they will be realised not in this world but only in the Age to come. And even the Lucan version is echoing the large number of passages in the Old Testament (especially in the Psalms, Isaiah, Proverbs and Job) in which the poor and lowly as such are treated with special reverence – several different Hebrew expressions are involved. In the thought-world of Palestinian Judaism, out of which Jesus came, it was not so much the rich and influential from whom the moral virtues were to be expected (as in the Graeco-Roman world), but the poor. An illuminating recent treatment of the Beatitudes by David Flusser (see ECAPS 12 n.33a) shows interesting connections with some of the literature of the Dead Sea Sect. Although Flusser is sure that it is Mt. V.3-5 which 'faithfully preserves the saying of Jesus and that Lk.VI.20 is an abbreviation of the original text', he nevertheless insists that 'Matthew's "poor in spirit" also has a social content'.

There is just one other New Testament passage, again in Luke alone, which I wish to mention: the Magnificat (Lk.I.46-55, esp. 52-3).[9] Here we find an interesting variant on the eschatological conception we have noticed already, according to which in the Age to Come the poor and hungry will be satisfied. We are still within the realm of eschatology, but the desired result is now conceived – in one form of the tradition of Jewish Apocalyptic – as having been in some mysterious way achieved already. 'He *hath* put down the mighty from their seats and *hath* exalted them of low degree. He *hath* filled the hungry with good things and the rich he *hath* sent empty away.' In the Greek the 'mighty' are the *dynastai*, and Thomas Hardy took his title, 'The Dynasts', explicitly from this passage (see ECAPS 14 n.40). In fact nothing of the sort had actually happened: the Dynasts were now more firmly in control than ever, as the Roman Principate began its long era of power. The picture in the Magnificat, in which the events are represented as having in a mystical sense occurred already, was a pleasantly harmless one from the point of view of the Dynasts, who certainly cashed the blank cheque St. Paul later wrote them when he said, 'The powers that be are ordained of God' and enjoined strict obedience to the civil authorities: Rom. XIII.1-7; Titus III.1; cf. I. Pet. ii.13-17; I Tim. ii.1-2. (On the

nature of the 'powers' to whom every soul is commanded to be subject, in Rom. XIII.1, see ECAPS 14 n.41.)

It is worth mentioning here that the Greek word *tapeinoi*, which is used in the Magnificat for 'them of low degree' (in opposition to 'the mighty', the *dynastai*) and has in Classical Greek literature, with very rare exceptions, a thoroughly pejorative sense (mean, lowly, poor, weak, base), appears as a personal name in a Greek papyrus emanating from a Jewish sectarian community at Nahal Seelim in Palestine about A.D. 130: one of the 'brethren' there is actually called Tapeinos,[10] a term which may have had much the same significance in the local community as it evidently did for the composer of the Magnificat.

I need not cite any of the other evidence from the Gospels showing that the possession of any substantial amount of property was regarded by Jesus as a positive evil, if only because it was all too likely to ensnare its possessor and divert him from the task of seeking the Kingdom of God. I am tempted to say that in this respect the opinions of Jesus were nearer to those of Bertolt Brecht than to those held by some of the Fathers of the Church and by some Christians today.

Within a generation the message of Jesus had been transformed into what is sometimes described (perhaps not unfairly) as Pauline Christianity. This process cannot be understood by the historian (as distinct from the theologian) unless it is seen as the transfer of a whole system of ideas from the world of the *chōra* to that of the *polis* – a process necessarily involving the most profound changes in that system of ideas. And in my opinion it is in this process of transformation that the most serious problems of 'Christian origins' arise.

I shall waste little time on the so-called 'communism' of the earliest Apostolic community, which appears only momentarily in the opening chapters of Acts (II.44-5; IV.32-7; V.1-11; cf. Jn XII.6; XIII.29), while the Christian Church was a single small body, and then ceases altogether, to reappear only within single monastic communities from the early fourth century onwards. This situation, which was already characteristic of certain Essene and other communities among the Jews, is entirely absent from the remainder of the New Testament; and even in the early chapters of Acts it is clear that communal ownership was not complete, and in any event had nothing to do with communal production. Later references which have sometimes been taken wrongly as evidence of a continuance of community of property are no more than idealisations of a situation in which charity is conceived as complete, as when Tertullian says, 'All things are in common among us, except our wives' (*Apol.* 39.11), or when Justin boasts that Christians share all their property with one another (*I Apol.* 14.2).

* * * * * *

I turn now to the attitude of the early Christian Fathers to the question of property ownership.[11] There are considerable differences of emphasis, but I think it would be true to say that with hardly an exception all the orthodox writers seem to have no serious qualms in accepting that a Christian may own property, under certain conditions, the most important of which are that he must neither seek it avidly nor acquire it unjustly; that he ought not to possess a superfluity but only a sufficiency; and that what he does have he may use but must not abuse; he must hold it as a kind of trustee (if I may be permitted to use that peculiar technical term of English law) for the poor, to whom he must give

charity. (Of many possible examples I will cite only Jerome, *Epist.* 130.14, to the very wealthy Demetrias.) It is upon the necessity of almsgiving that there is most insistence: the whole conception of course descended direct to Christianity from Judaism; and here the Christian churches do seem to have gone far beyond the ordinary pagan standard. (There are some interesting remarks about the absence of similar organised activities among the pagans, in the works of the Emperor Julian: see ECAPS 25 n.81.)

I shall return in a moment to the question of almsgiving, which is worth special attention, and I shall also have something to say on the question of sufficiency or superfluity of property. But I must first add a rider to what I have said about the general early Christian view of property ownership. The words of Jesus to the rich man seeking eternal life, which I discussed earlier, were not entirely disregarded; but it seems that the unqualified version of Mark and Luke was conveniently forgotten and the words of Jesus were always quoted in Matthew's formulation (XIX.21), in which the direction to sell all and give to the poor was prefaced by the qualification, 'If you would be perfect'. Out of scores of passages I have come across in the Fathers I have not found one that even notices the discrepancy between the Matthaean text and that of Mark and Luke.

So complete was the refusal to recognise the existence of any other version than that of Matthew that when Clement of Alexandria, in his *Quis dives salvetur?*, sets out Mark's narrative of the whole story *in extenso* in his own text, explicitly as his source, he inserts Matthew's 'if you would be perfect' at the point that corresponds to Mt. XIX.21, without any indication that these words are not in Mark! (See ECAPS 26 n.82 for references to the standard text of Clement and the good Loeb edition by G. W. Butterworth.) St. John Chrysostom is even at pains to put the conditional clause in the forefront and to make out that Jesus did *not* merely say to the rich man, 'Sell what you have': he actually rubs it in, expanding the words of Jesus into 'I lay it down for your determination. I give you full power to choose. I do not lay upon you any necessity' (*Hom. II de stat.* 5). Thus, by quoting the statement of Jesus in its qualified, Matthaean form, the Fathers were able to make use of the standard distinction between 'precept' and 'counsel': the command to sell all became literally 'a counsel of perfection'. (Among very many examples, I will cite only Aug., *Epist.* 157. 23-39.) And I think it would be true to say that after the rise of monasticism in the fourth century there was a tendency to take 'If you would be perfect' to refer essentially to the adoption of the monastic life: thus when Jerome presses on his rich friend Julian the desirability of ridding himself of all his possessions (again of course on the basis of the Matthaean text we have been considering) he is clearly advising him to become a monk (*Epist.* 118, esp. §§ 4, 5, 6, 7; cf. *Epist.* 60. 10).

We can now return to almsgiving. There is an enormous amount of evidence of the high value attached to almsgiving by early Christian thinkers which it would be superfluous to quote, and I shall concentrate on two passages, one from a Latin and one from a Greek Father, both of which emphasise the expiatory character of almsgiving and thus demonstrate the Jewish roots of Christian thinking in this field. Optatus, in his polemical work against the Donatists (III.3), had occasion to allude to almsgiving when speaking of the visit of certain imperial emissaries (Macarius and others) to Africa in 347, in order to make charitable distributions provided by the Emperor Constans. He first

claimed, on the strength of Proverbs XXII.2, that it was God who had made both the poor and the rich (a significant and characteristic use of the Christian religion to justify an oppressive social order), and he then proceeded to explain that God had a very good reason for establishing this distinction: it would of course have been perfectly possible for him to give to both classes at once, but if he had done so, the sinner would have had no means of atoning for his faults (*si ambobus daret, peccator quae sibi succurreret invenire non posset*). To drive his point home, Optatus now quotes what was for him another inspired and canonical work, Ecclesiasticus (III.30): just as water quenches fire, so do alms atone for sin (*sic eleemosyna extinguit peccatum*; Optatus might also have quoted Tobit IV. 10; XII.9). Later, the theology of almsgiving – if I may call it that – may have become more subtle, but whenever almsgiving is being discussed, the notion that it can be an atonement for sin is seldom absent. This is conspicuously true of the second example I said I would give of the Christian concept of almsgiving, from a Greek Father. This comes from the work by Clement of Alexandria, usually referred to by its Latin title, *Quis dives salvetur?*, which is actually the earliest treatise to provide a detailed justification of property ownership by Christians, and is perhaps the most important work of its kind. Clement puts most eloquently the argument that almsgiving can actually purchase salvation, and he exclaims, 'What a splendid commerce! What a divine trading!' (32.1; cf. 19.4-6). Needless to say, almsgiving often played an important part in penance (see ECAPS 27 n.89). Too often, however, it seems to have been resorted to, contrary to the admirable prescription of Jesus in Matthew VI.1-4, as a means of self-advertisement: there is a good example in Paulinus of Nola, *Epist.* 34. 2, 7, 10.

The early Christian attitude to property ownership, then, developed into something very different from that of Jesus – as of course it was bound to do, not merely because, as time went on, the eschatological nature of the concepts of Jesus gradually lost its original force, but (and this is much more important) because such a development was imposed on the Church by irresistible social pressures. The orthodox Christian position that I have outlined was held with only minor variations by virtually all the great names among both the Greek and Latin Fathers (see ECAPS 28-31). So far I have found only three partial exceptions among the non-heretical writers: Origen, St. Basil and St. Ambrose. Of these, much the most interesting is Ambrose, certainly in the social sense one of the most exalted of the early Christian Fathers – he was a member of the senatorial aristocracy, the son of a Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls, and himself, at the time of his appointment to the bishopric of Milan in 374, the governor of the province of Aemilia and Liguria, of which Milan was the capital. (I know of scarcely any other early Father who could be considered his social equal, except Paulinus of Nola.) Now Ambrose is far from consistent in his attitude to property rights; and some recent Continental commentators, in their anxiety to rescue him from any such heinous offence as a belief in 'communism' (one monograph, published in 1946 by J. Squitieri, is entitled *Il preteso comunismo di San Ambrogio!*), have given rather perverse interpretations of some of his writings.[12] The fact is that in certain passages Ambrose shows great uneasiness on the whole question of property rights. Yet he can allegorise away the statement of Jesus contained in all three Synoptics (Mk X.25; Mt. XIX.24; Lk. XVIII.25) that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a

rich man to enter the kingdom of God; he can say that not all poverty is holy nor all riches necessarily a source of crime, and that in good men riches can be a prop of virtue; and of course he accepts almsgiving as the great panacea through which the taint of riches can be removed: thus alone can riches become 'the ransom of a man's life' and 'the redemption of the soul', for 'almsgiving purges from sin'. And so, when Ambrose says that God intended the whole earth and its produce to be the common possession of all men, and continues, 'sed avaritia possessionum iura distribuit', he nevertheless goes on to accept the existing situation, provided the property owner gives to the poor. His attitude is perhaps best brought out in a passage in the *De Helia et ieiunio* (76), where he tells the sinner to redeem himself from his sins with his own money, thus using one poison to subdue another – wealth itself is a poison, but almsgiving, which redeems from sin, turns wealth into sin's antidote!

St. Augustine seems not to have been troubled about property rights. With characteristic ingenuity he extracts an argument in his favour even from the Parable of Lazarus: Lazarus, we are told, went to Abraham's bosom; well, Abraham was rich! (*Epist*. 157.23–4; cf. *Serm*. XIV.4 etc.). As this and many other passages show, the level of argument in this field is not always high, and some may feel some sympathy for the Pelagian who turned one of Augustine's favourite weapons against him by advocating a figurative interpretation of Abraham in the Parable (see ECAPS 31 n.112). Sometimes in the fourth century the poor are warned that they must not think they can take the initiative and *demand* even the necessary minimum of subsistence from those Christians who had vast possessions. Two centuries earlier Irenaeus, citing the Scriptural parallel of the Israelites 'spoiling the Egyptians' at the time of the Exodus (Exod. III.21–2; XI.2; XII.35–6), had expressed some sympathy for the man who, after being compelled to give years of forced labour to another, makes off with some small portion of his property (*Elench*. IV.30.1–3). But now Gregory of Nyssa is careful to show that no such initiative can be justified by an appeal to the 'spoiling of the Egyptians' in Exodus as a precedent (*Vita Moys*. 2).

If we may ignore some passages in early Judaeo–Christian writings, it is only in the mouths of heretics that we find an unqualified denunciation of private property ownership. Usually, of course, we know nothing of their arguments, all our information being derived from orthodox condemnations of their views. In this category are four or five strains of heretical thought from the second, third and fourth centuries, which I have already sufficiently identified elsewhere (ECAPS 32–3). I have been able to discover only one single surviving work which argues at length that the mere possession of wealth creates a tendency to sin and that it really is best to divest oneself of all one's possessions: this is a work probably written in the first decade of the fifth century, the *De divitiis*, either by the heresiarch Pelagius himself or by one of his disciples. (It was first published in 1890 and has been much discussed in recent years: see ECAPS 33–4 and nn.124–5.) I will only say that although this remarkable treatise does recommend divesting oneself of all property (thus 'transferring it from earth to heaven'), it does not actually condemn 'sufficientia', and it regards even wealth not as an actual sin but as something that is very likely indeed to result in sin. The most radical passage goes so far as to treat the existence of the few rich as the reason why there are so many poor, and continues, 'Get rid of the rich and you

won't find any poor' (12.2)! There is, however, not a word to suggest that this desirable end can be achieved by anything but religious persuasion; and – rather strangely, perhaps – there is no appeal to the 'primitive communism' (if I may call it that) of the earliest Apostolic community at Jerusalem, and indeed no advocacy at all of community of property, even as a theoretical ideal. I know of no evidence that any Pelagian ever advocated the reform of secular institutions. I will only add that this work, the *De divitiis*, in spite of some over-ingenious arguments and the usual inflated rhetoric, seems to me a far better approximation to the thought of Jesus, as expressed in the Synoptic Gospels (Luke especially), than at any rate the principal work on the orthodox side, Clement's *Quis dives salvetur?*, from which I quoted earlier. Clement does not scruple to make use of the argument (ch.13) that only if a man possesses some property can he do the things the Lord requires: feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and entertain the homeless – as Zacchaeus and others entertained the Lord himself (Lk. XIX.1–10). 'What sharing (*koinōnia*) would be left among men,' he asks, 'if nobody had anything?' (This at least is not quite as feeble as the passage in which Aristotle, *Pol*.II.5. 1263ᵇ5–14, pretends that the very great delight of doing a kindness to friends or guests or comrades is possible only when there is private ownership of property – as if generosity or liberality could be expressed only in the form of material benefits.) But Clement's principal weapon in this controversy, as so often elsewhere, is a resort to the allegorical method of interpretation which had been invented by pagan Greek scholars in the Classical period and perfected by Hellenistic Judaism in regard to the Old Testament (Philo provides some extraordinary examples); this type of exegesis flourished extravagantly at Alexandria in particular (see ECAPS 35 n.128). The Fathers of the Church soon realised that any inconvenient statement in Holy Writ could easily be allegorised away; and they sometimes go to the most extreme lengths in their ingenious applications of this technique.[13] Anyone to whom exercises of this sort are not already too tiresomely familiar may derive some innocent amusement from the passage in which St. Augustine, in one of his anti-Manichaean works (*Contra Faust. Manich*. XXII.48–59), deals with the awkward problem of Rachel and the mandrakes, in Genesis XXX.14–18. (At the climax of this fascinating story, it will be remembered, the Patriarch Jacob, trudging in from the fields in the evening after a hard day's work, is greeted by the older and more ill-favoured of his two wives with a confident, '"Thou must come in unto me, for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes". And he lay with her that night,' the result being Issachar.) But it would be wrong to end this glance at allegorical interpretation of Scripture by the Christians on a note of levity. Such interpretation could also have dire consequences, as when St. Augustine, in yet another of his allegorical flights, dishonestly perverted the sense of the words 'compel them to come in' which occur in the Parable of the Great Supper in Luke's Gospel (XIV.16–24) to justify the persecution of religious dissent, interpreting the 'highways and hedges' (in the command to 'go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in') allegorically as 'heresies and schisms', thereby furnishing mediaeval persecutors with a bogus Scriptural foundation for their activities, of which they did not hesitate to make use.[14]

The early Christian attitude to property ownership, as I have described it, is open to criticism from more than one direction, quite apart from its departure

doctrine of the 'Just War', although incidentally even the early Roman Republic had had a doctrine of the 'bellum iustum', derived from the principle of fetial law: that no war was acceptable to the Roman gods unless it was a defensive war, waged to protect Rome or her allies – itself nicely criticised by Cicero as the means by which the Romans gave their aggression the appearance of legitimacy (see ECAPS 36-7 and nn.130-1). And the doctrine of the Just War has never come to very much, because any country that goes to war can always justify itself easily enough in its own eyes. As for the class struggle, I cannot see that the Christian churches have done much more than either deplore it in principle or ignore its very existence; and all too often they have explicitly underwritten the existing social and economic order in its crudest form. To quote a well-known Anglican hymn[16] –

> The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them, high or lowly,
> And order'd their estate.

Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*, of 1931, admits that the class struggle had been a serious danger forty years before, but then proceeds to speak of this danger as having been largely dispelled by Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* – an opinion which has hardly been confirmed by the events of the years since 1931: not even the growth of Fascism, while it lasted, could validate that claim. There have, needless to say, been a few striking individual exceptions within the churches who have broken right away from their official policy, from John Ball in 1381 to Camilo Torres in our own time.[17]

When the early Hebrew prophets, or Plato and Aristotle, tried to formulate a vision of the good society, they thought first in terms of the Israelite nation or of the Greek city: for Plato and Aristotle the society as such had first to be good, to have good institutions, before men could lead the good life within it. Their successors, in both cases, tended to despair of creating a good society: for them, either the individual man (the Stoic, in particular) had to discover how best to live his personal life in an indifferent if not hostile world, or else there was a Good Time Coming, but it would be achieved by some supernatural agency. In the latter case one could comfort oneself by imagining (as in Jewish Apocalyptic) that in some mysterious way the desired result had been achieved already: the passage in the Magnificat which I quoted earlier provides a good example. The use of the future tense – 'He *will* put down the Dynasts, exalt the humble, feed the hungry, and send the rich empty away' – might have created a very different atmosphere: it might have pointed to social change instead of acceptance of the existing order. But the institutions of society were (as I have put it) the relations of *men and men*; and the Christian as such was therefore not concerned with them, and there was nothing to prevent him from being a complete political conformist. I have already referred to St. Paul's order to Christians to obey the political authorities, as 'powers ordained of God': he equated resistance to them with resistance to the ordinance of God, necessarily involving condemnation.

At the present time there is a debate going on among Christians whether (to use the language I have employed) it may not be absolutely necessary to reform

the relations between men and men – in particular the relations between States and between classes within States – in order that the relations between man and man may not be for ever distorted and damaged. Among these relations between men and men, I would suggest that a central role is played by property-relations, including in particular ownership of property and the way in which production is organised. Those of us who watch the debate within the churches from the outside may feel that careful study of what actually happened in the early Christian centuries, both in the field of ideas and in actual social life, might well shed some light on current problems and controversies, and as a result might have a powerful influence upon the future of man.

(v)
The ideology of the victims of the class struggle

Let us turn now to something very different: the ideology and propaganda of the other side in the class struggle – of the exploited and the oppressed, of the slaves above all. The difficulty here is the scantiness of the evidence, even for the humbler *citizens*. For the great period of Greek history, the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., there is certainly some democratic propaganda, insisting on the fitness of the poor citizen, as well as the rich, to share in ruling the state: this might be compared with some of the arguments advanced in seventeenth-century England, notably the Leveller contributions to the Putney Debates in 1647. (These debates, preserved in the Clarke Papers, are most conveniently read in Woodhouse, *PL²*.)[1] To the Greek historian those debates should be exceptionally interesting, for the great question at issue was precisely that which divided Greek oligarchs and democrats: ought political rights to be strictly confined (as desired, for example, by Cromwell and Ireton) to men of substantial property? 'All the main thing that I speak for,' said Ireton, 'is because I would have an eye to property' (Woodhouse, *PL²* 57).[2] But even some of the Levellers (though probably not the great majority) took the line that hired labourers and servants, as being too dependent upon their masters, ought not to enjoy the franchise (see III.vi above, *ad fin.*). Most of the surviving Greek literature that I have in mind here either pleads the cause of democracy (among citizens alone, of course) or merely, with Solon, urges the powerful to abate their exclusive and arrogant claims and recognise, in Colonel Rainborough's famous words at Putney, that 'the poorest he hath a life to live, as the greatest he' (see Woodhouse, *PL²* 53). Virtually all this Greek material has what we might almost call a middle-class flavour, and indeed much of it comes from the *mesoi* (the men of moderate wealth) so beloved by Aristotle and others, of whom Solon is an outstanding example. Needless to say, hardly anyone ever thinks of the mass emancipation of slaves unless they have volunteered for military or naval service during a 'national emergency'.[3] Aristophanes in the *Frogs* (lines 190-1, cf. 33-4, 693-4) makes Charon refuse to ferry a slave over the Styx unless he was one of those who 'fought in the naval battle' – that of Arginusae, in 406, in which a number of Athenian slaves helped to row the ships of the Athenian fleet (as they never did at normal times) and were rewarded with their freedom.

Some of the literary material from the Greek world in which we can recognise the heartfelt cry of the oppressed may be thought not strictly germane to the

subject of this book, because it is only incidentally a product of class struggle: some of it is essentially a protest against *foreign imperialism*; some of it is primarily a *religious* protest; and some of it is both these things, like the Book of Revelation and some other Apocalyptic literature, Jewish as well as Christian, including the Book of Daniel, dating from 167-163 B.C. (probably 166-164) and the earliest surviving piece known to me in any language which can justifiably be described as 'resistance literature'.[4] But I myself would certainly not agree to exclude most of the literature I have just referred to. When imperialism leads directly to exploitation of a conquered people, or at any rate the primary producers among them, for the benefit of the foreign rulers, that is a situation closely resembling class struggle; and, as I have indicated in my definition of class and class struggle (II.ii above), effects are likely to be produced upon the class struggle within the oppressed community – as certainly happened, for example, in Seleucid Palestine and even more in Roman Palestine, where some members of the Jewish propertied class were hand-in-glove with their Roman masters, and the great Revolt of A.D. 66-70 was directed partly against the native Jewish oppressors.[5] Nor can protests which are primarily religious in form (like the Books of Daniel and Revelation) be excluded from a consideration of the outlook of an exploited class as such, at any rate if one of the reasons for their very existence is the oppressiveness of the imperial power, as in the two cases I have just mentioned. Rome, under the guise of 'Babylon', is ferociously attacked in Revelation (e.g. II.13; VI.9-10; XII-XVIII; XIX.2), and is said to be 'drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus' (XVII.6); and when she 'comes in remembrance before God', he 'gives unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath' (XVI.19) – splendid, blood-curdling stuff, in which the impotent fury of the oppressed, unable as they are to revenge themselves, finds satisfaction in the certainty of divine vengeance.

For nearly a century scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the so-called 'Acts of the Pagan Martyrs of Alexandria', which survive only in Egyptian papyri of the period of the Roman Principate published in modern times.[6] The form of most of these papyri is a copy, or rather a pretended copy, of the official records of the trials of prominent Alexandrians, who are most sympathetically treated by the compilers, while the harshness of the Roman emperors towards the great metropolis of Egypt is implicitly rebuked. These documents emanated from the leading circles at Alexandria, who were them- selves, of course, members of an exploiting class, and I mention them here merely because they do constitute indignant propaganda against an imperial power and have aroused so much scholarly interest. Some of them – the *Acta* of Isidore and Lampon, and of Hermaiscus – are also bitterly anti-Jewish: they provide, I suppose, the earliest surviving examples of popular anti-Semitic propaganda. Anti-Semitism was endemic at Alexandria in the early Roman Principate, for the Jews there had received various privileges from Julius Caesar and Augustus, which aroused resentment and jealousy on the part of the Alexandrians. (There is an excellent account of the position of the Jews in Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman periods by V. Tcherikover, *C. P. Jud.* I.1-111.) Other anti-imperialist propaganda (anti-Greek or anti-Roman) has been assembled by recent writers: it includes some of the *Sibylline Oracles*, in Greek

hexameters, the so-called *Oracle of the Potter*, surviving in Greek papyri from Egypt, and the *Demotic Chronicle*, a text in Egyptian demotic; from farther East come the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, a Persian work surviving only in some paraphrases in Latin by the Christian writer Lactantius, and the *Bahman Yasht*, another Persian text, in a Pahlevi translation.[7] Most of this material seems very strange to us today. Anyone who wishes to read some specimens might begin with *Orac. Sibyll.* III.350-5, 356-80; and V.155-78, 386-433, prophesying the doom of Rome (cf. VIII.37-49, 81-106, 165), and four other passages from the *Sibyllines*, IV.115-39; and V.137-54, 214-27, 361-85, containing prophecies associated with the 'false Neros' who appeared in the twenty years after Nero's death in 68.[8]

I must not fail to mention three remarkable documents in Latin (one a literary letter, the other two literary speeches) which reveal some recognition by members of the Roman governing class of the mentality of Rome's victims – it would be going much too far to speak of genuine 'sympathy' (cf. IV.iv n.13). The only one which relates to the eastern part of the Roman empire is the 'letter of King Mithridates [VI Eupator of Pontus] to King Arsaces' [of Parthia], composed by Sallust and surviving as a fragment of his *Histories* (IV.69). Mithridates attributes to the Romans 'a deep-seated desire for domination and rule' as their 'one inveterate motive for making war on all nations, peoples and kings' (§ 5); the letter calls them 'the plague of the world' (*pestis orbis terrarum*, § 17), accuses them of having become great 'by daring deceit and adding war to war', and declares that they will destroy everything or perish in the attempt (§§ 20-1). In a phrase which no doubt reflects Sallust's own belief, the king is made to say, 'Few men desire liberty: a large proportion are content with just masters' (*pauci libertatem, pars magna iustos dominos volunt*, § 18). The other two documents are speeches in Tacitus, relating to the western part of the empire, which also show some recognition of the mentality of the oppressed. The first is that of the fiercely anti-Roman British chieftain Calgacus (*Agric.* 30-2), who is depicted addressing his men before the battle of the 'mons Graupius' (perhaps not far south of Inverness) in A.D. 83 or 84. It contains defiant statements about 'liberty' which, in Tacitus, are hardly more than Roman clichés, and must have been written with quiet derision on his part; but one remark has echoed down the ages: when the Romans, says Calgacus, 'create a desolation, they call it peace' (*ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*, 30.6). The other speech, in *Annals* I.17, is the one I have referred to near the end of IV.iv above, by a leader of the the mutiny of the Pannonian legions in A.D. 14, named Percennius, described by Tacitus as a former leader of one of the theatrical factions and represented by him as a noxious demagogue (see esp. IV.iv n.13). The real detestation felt by Tacitus for any 'agitator' who pleased the lower orders in the provinces by uttering sentiments hostile to Rome or its rulers emerges nicely from the brief but concentrated invective of *Hist.* IV.68 against Julius Valentinus, a leading man of the Treveri, who at an assembly during the Gallic revolt of A.D. 70 'heaped insults and odium upon the Roman people'. Tacitus scorns to itemise these, and contents himself with remarking that they included 'all the charges commonly levelled against great empires', which – if he is not merely dis- missing them with contempt – he presumably regarded as too familiar to need specification. I shall do no more than record in a note[9] a few examples of other

speeches, usually describing subjection to Rome as slavery, which are put by Tacitus or Dio Cassius into the mouths of leaders of rebellion against Rome.

There is one form of expression of protest, associated particularly (though not solely) with slaves, which deserves to be singled out: the fable. Phaedrus, a slave and freedman of the Emperor Augustus, who wrote in Latin in the first half of the first century of the Christian era,[10] made great use of collections of the fables of Aesop, another ex-slave, who probably lived in the early sixth century B.C.[11] Phaedrus has a fascinating passage in the Prologue to his Third Book, lines 33-40. He says he will explain why the fable was invented: it was to enable the slave to give expression in a disguised form to sentiments which he dared not speak out aloud for fear of punishment! And it was not only slaves whom Phaedrus had in mind as the disguised heroes of fables. One of his pieces, about a frog dreading a fight between two bulls, is introduced with the words, 'The lowly are in trouble when the powerful quarrel' (*humiles laborant ubi potentes dissident*, I.30.1). And at the end of the Epilogue to his Third Book he quotes Ennius: 'It is sacrilege for a common man [a *plebeius*] to mutter in public' (III. *Epil.* 34). Another fable, intended to demonstrate 'how sweet liberty is', speaks of the wolf who is on the point of being persuaded by the dog to serve his master when he notices that the dog's neck has been galled by a chain: realising what this means, he refuses to join the dog in servitude (III.7; cf. Babrius 100; *Fabulae Aviani* 37). The fable I like best of all is explicitly concerned not merely with slaves but with the poor in general (the *pauperes*): Phaedrus introduces it with the words, 'A change in the person who controls the State [if I may so translate *in principatu commutando*] brings to the poor no change in their situation but a change of master' (*nil praeter dominum* – if that is the correct reading). This fable (I.15) is about a timid old man, pasturing a donkey in a meadow, when suddenly a hostile army approaches. The old man begs the donkey to flee with him, to avoid capture. But the donkey merely enquires if the enemy will make him carry two packs at once; and when his owner says he does not suppose they will, refuses to move. 'What does it matter to me whose servant I am,' he asks, 'so long as I carry only one pack at a time?' Gerrard Winstanley expressed much the same point of view in 1650, in his *Appeal to All Englishmen*, when he said of the poor in England that if they should fight and conquer a foreign enemy, 'they are like to be slaves still, for the gentry will have all . . . For, say they, "We can as well live under a foreign enemy working for day wages as under our own brethren"': see the collection by Hill and Dell (cited in VII.ii n.13 below) 387.

'Aesopic' fables were a literary genre simple enough to appeal to those who lacked the elaborate literary education needed for a proper understanding of a large part of Greek and Latin literature; and even those with no education at all could grasp them immediately. Quintilian, writing in the nineties of the first century the standard Latin handbook on rhetoric (*Institutio Oratoria*), remarks that *fabellae* have a special appeal to country boors and the uneducated (*ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum*, V.xi.19). He would certainly have said the same about the Parables of Jesus. But the governing classes of antiquity were clever enough to take over this weapon of their subjects and turn it sometimes to their own advantage. We all know the fable of Menenius Agrippa, from the *Coriolanus* of Shakespeare (I.i.53-169), if not from Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* (6.3-5) or from Livy (II.xxxii.8-12). However fictitious its

attribution to the consular in question and the year 494 B.C., it is the most famous of all those fables that were appropriated by the ruling class. Among other fables intended to keep workers in their place is the amusing one in which the donkeys appeal to Zeus for relief from their labours: its moral is that what each individual must endure cannot be cured (it is *atherapeuton*).[12]

It was not a slave but a learned man, the Hellenistic scholar Daphitas (or Daphidas) of Telmessus, who not only reviled the Attalid kings as 'filings of the treasury of Lysimachus, who rule Lydia and Phrygia', but addressed them directly as 'purple weals' (*porphyroi mōlōpes*, Strabo XIV.i.39, p.647). He can only have been likening the kings to the marks of a whip on a man's back. This was well understood by Tarn, who shows exceptional awareness of social realities in the Greek East; but several other scholars have failed to grasp the fact that for Daphitas the kings, as oppressors, *are* 'purple weals' on men's backs, and they have supposed the verse to be pretending that the Attalids were once slaves themselves, 'purpled with bruises' or 'with stripes' (Hansen, and the Loeb translator, H. L. Jones); 'they had purple backs then too, or should have had' (Fontenrose).[13] Daphitas, by the way, is said to have paid for his *lèse-majesté* with his life: according to Strabo, he was crucified on Mt. Thorax, near Magnesia on the Maeander.

A few direct and open attacks on emperors, necessarily anonymous, are recorded here and there. In V.iii above I mentioned the bitter verses put up in the hippodrome at Constantinople in the early sixth century, addressing Anastasius as 'world-destroying emperor' and accusing him of 'money-grubbing' (John Lydus, *De magistrat*. III.46).

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I must conclude this section with a short discussion of the religious issues which bulked so large in men's minds in the Christian Roman empire of the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, in order to make it clear that in my view the religious questions were very largely unconnected with men's class positions, except in one or two special cases, of which Donatism in North Africa is the only conspicuous one. In this book I have been concentrating upon class, because I believe that in the long run it is the production of material necessities and the economic and social structures through which this is accomplished that have the most powerful effect upon men's behaviour and even thinking, rather than any incidental religious beliefs they may hold. But in the short run religion may play a decisive role in influencing men's actions and the nature of the groups into which they divide; and so it was in the Christian Roman empire, when political class struggle was a rare phenomenon (cf. Chapter VIII below) but religious strife was widespread and intense.

I agree with A. H. M. Jones that it is a serious mistake to see the doctrinal controversies which so agitated the early Christian churches as the expression either of 'nationalist feeling'[14] or of 'social protest'. His article, 'Were ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?', in *JTS* n.s.10 (1959) 280-98 (reprinted in his *RE*, ed. Brunt, 308-29), and his *LRE* II.964-70 (with III.326-7 nn.61-70), are absolutely decisive. I must, however, point out that Jones's attack is concentrated against the view that certain heresies were essentially 'national'; the word 'social' in the title of his article is relevant only to his discussion of the

social aspects of Donatism[15] – which of course was always rightly regarded as a schism rather than a heresy, until the Catholics had the ingenious idea that the Donatist belief in the necessity for re-baptising Catholics admitted to their fold could be regarded as a heretical belief, sufficient to bring the Donatists within the scope of the stringent laws passed against heresy in the late fourth century and the early fifth (see *CTh* XVI.vi.4.*pr.*). While admitting in his book that Donatism was 'associated with a social struggle' (possessing, indeed, 'some features of a class war'), Jones insists that its social aspects were far from being the essence of Donatism; and he is clearly right. (See, however, VIII.iii below, on the Circumcellions.)

Another area in which religious 'nationalism' has been seen by some historians is Egypt; but I know of no specifically religious material from that country, comparable with the anti-Roman propaganda of the 'Acts of the Pagan Martyrs' of Alexandria, referred to above, which, as we saw, were evidently produced by members of the Alexandrian upper classes. However, some of the literature emanating from Egyptian monastic circles is worth a mention here for its denunciation of the oppression of the peasantry. It was of course essentially religious, and its social character was purely secondary and due to the fact that during the Later Empire paganism – outside Alexandria, at any rate – became increasingly confined to the upper classes. The outstanding representative of this trend is the monk Shenute (whose name is also rendered Shenoute, Schenute, Shenudi, Schenoudi, Schnoudi, Chenoude, Chenoute; in Latin it is Sinuthius). His works, written in Coptic (Bohairic), but showing knowledge of Greek literature, seem not to be well known to ancient historians, although they have been edited in Coptic and translated into Latin and some modern languages. Shenute was abbot of the White Monastery at Atripe in the desert of the Thebaid (Upper Egypt), where he is said to have lived for more than eighty years from the 380s onwards and to have died at well over a hundred, perhaps as late as 466. For my purposes the most useful document, especially for English readers, is Shenute's open letter to a wealthy pagan landowner, Saturnus of Panopolis, edited in the original Coptic more than once and translated complete into English by John Barns, SHS (1964).[16] Shenute himself was of peasant origin and, as Barns says, 'his sympathy lay with a stratum of society normally too inarticulate to express itself in Greek', and a 'fanatical fearlessness made this formidable monk an outspoken champion of the oppressed Egyptian peasant before the highest authorities' (SHS 155, 152). He delighted in open attacks on 'the paganism lingering among the propertied class' (ibid. 155). We hear of the pillaging of more than one of the few pagan temples which had somehow managed to survive into the fifth century, and of raids on the house of the pagan landlord mentioned above, which Shenute regarded as defiled not only by the presence of pagan cult objects and of magical papers and potions, but also of baths, built by the *forced* labour of the peasants on the estate and maintained by contributions exacted from them (see Barns, SHS 154-5 and n.17, 158). Baths, as Shenute insisted, were something that peasants did not need. Later Roman peasants could indeed be greatly impressed by what has been cynically called 'the odour of sanctity' in its more extreme forms. The young St. Theodore of Sykeon (not far from the modern Ankara) made a very great impression when he came out of the cave in which he had been living in religious isolation for two

years: 'His head was covered with sores and pus, his hair was matted and an indescribable number of worms were lodged in it; his bones were all but through the flesh and the stench was such that no one could stand near him' (*Vita S. Theod. Syk.* 20, in the English translation by Elizabeth Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* 101).

Shenute's letter to Saturnus, vigorous and highly abusive, mentions a number of indignities and injustices allegedly inflicted by Saturnus on his dependent peasants: carrying off their property (including cattle and carts), the imposition of forced labour, and compelling the peasants to buy meat and wine from him at unreasonable prices. Here we do see a leading cleric acting as protector of the poor; but one is bound to wonder whether Shenute's attitude to a pious Christian landlord who was similarly oppressive might not perhaps have been very different. And as Barns says, 'If any hoped that the final triumph of Christianity would mean the rectification of social evils and a less bitter spirit in the population of Egypt, that hope was to be disappointed. With the passing of the pagan landlord the tyranny of the great estate only became more absolute; and once paganism was as good as dead the resentment of the governed – by now an inveterate habit of mind – made differences of Christian doctrine its excuse for disaffection from the governing power and schism from its established Church' (SHS 156); cf. VIII.iii below and its nn.32-8.

I wish I had been able to give a systematic account of a few other religious figures who are recorded as acting, or at least speaking, on the side of the humble against their oppressors. They fall into very different categories. Sometimes, as with Shenute in the incident just described, they are simply standing up for Christians against powerful pagans – or for members of their own sect against 'heretics' or 'schismatics'. Some of them are bishops exercising their ecclesiastical authority to prevent acts of obvious injustice (for example against the *coloni* on Church estates), like Pope Gregory the Great and St. Theodore of Sykeon, as described at the end of IV.ii above. (There are other examples of Gregory's concern for the peasants on Church lands.) A particularly interesting group are those 'holy men' whose authority – the Romans would have called it *auctoritas* as opposed to *potestas* (see VI.vi above and its n.8 below) – is not of a political or even ecclesiastical nature but is derived from the force of their own personality, often heightened by the respect engendered by the extreme rigour and asceticism of their lives. They have been studied in particular by Peter Brown, in an article in *JRS* 61 (1971) 80-101 (limited almost entirely to Syria and Asia Minor) which has some fascinating material but is marred by blindness to the realities of the class struggle in the Later Roman Empire (see e.g. IV.ii nn.24 and 42 below). Defiance of 'lawful' political authority is very rare, since the Christian Churches – mindful of the instruction of St. Paul – preached absolute obedience to the State and its organs except when it was believed to be offending against religion (see the latter part of VI.vi above and its nn.77-98 below, with my ECAPS 14 and n.41). But intercession with the powerful on behalf of the humble is recorded on several occasions, often as a simple plea for justice or for mercy and forgiveness.

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It is difficult for most people nowadays to understand the great importance

attached to religion in the ancient Greek world, above all in the Christian period, when dogma could assume a central role, even in the minds of those who very imperfectly understood the subtle theological issues involved. I have often been struck, when reading the Fathers and the ecclesiastical historians, by the way one another spiritual leaders of those times dominated their communities and received their unquestioning loyalty: the priest as well as the layman almost invariably believed what his particular bishop told him he ought to believe, except of course when that bishop was a man who did not hold the traditional beliefs of his community but had been foisted upon it against its will, by imperial decree for instance. (The institution of a Catholic patriarch in Monophysite Alexandria after the Council of Chalcedon – for which the use of troops was necessary – and his subsequent murder by a Monophysite mob provide only the most famous example of this kind of imperial interference and its unhappy results.)[17] Among many examples that could be given of the steadfast loyalty of congregations, whether 'catholic' or 'heretical', to their bishop, one of the best is that of Cyzicus (on the north coast of Asia Minor) in the second half of the fourth century. In 367 its bishop, Eleusius, who seems always to have been a member of the 'Semi-Arian' sect led by Macedonius, was induced by the threats of the Emperor Valens to abandon his particular doctrines and subscribe to the emperor's own brand of Arianism. Eleusius soon repented of his apostasy, and on his return to Cyzicus he announced to his flock that he no longer felt worthy to hold his bishopric. His congregation, however, refused to accept his resignation, and insisted on his remaining their bishop. When Eudoxius, the Arian patriarch of Constantinople, supported by the emperor, sent Eunomius to replace Eleusius, they built themselves a new church outside the city, where they could continue their form of worship under Eleusius; and they persisted until Eunomius withdrew.[18] Eleusius himself, it is worth remarking, was no mean persecutor: he had destroyed pagan temples in his city before the accession of Julian in 361 (Soz., *HE* V.15.4–5); he had also demolished a church in Cyzicus belonging to the Novatian sect, which Julian compelled him to rebuild (later exiling him);[19] and he did his best to harry and drive out those whom Socrates calls 'the Christians', meaning of course the Catholics.[20]

A set of beliefs, once acquired, was indeed not easily eradicated: what made most of the German peoples so stubbornly Arian for so long was simply the fact that Arianism was the form of Christianity they had originally adopted; to them it was the true Catholic faith, and Catholicism was heresy. The Armenians, who had to make valiant efforts to preserve a certain independence from both Rome and Persia, were untouched by the Christological controversies during the fifth century (they were not represented at the Councils of Ephesus or Chalcedon) and became acquainted with them only in the early sixth century, from Mesopotamian Monophysites fleeing from persecution by Persian authorities who supported Nestorianism in that area. The Armenians consequently condemned Nestorianism and adopted a Monophysite form of Christianity, which they retain to this day. The Egyptians, as Jones says, 'were in turn homoousians and monophysites partly because they had been taught no other doctrine, but mainly because these were the faiths of their great popes Alexander and Athanasius, Cyril and Dioscorus'; and the fact that the Council of Chalcedon not only condemned Dioscorus but also gave precedence in the East, above

Alexandria, to Constantinople, 'the upstart see whose pretensions the patriarchate of Alexandria had always resented and often successfully crushed', was an important factor in making Chalcedon detestable to the Egyptians (*LRE* II.966–7). Even quite small 'pockets' of eccentric belief of one kind or another might persist for a long time in particular areas, as in the village in Numidia, part of St. Augustine's diocese of Hippo, where all the inhabitants were Abelites/Abelonii, practising a strange variety of continence and perpetuating their community by adoption, until they were brought to see the error of their ways by St. Augustine (*De haeres.* 87, in *MPL* XLII.47). Such peculiar communities were far less likely to exist for long inside cities; but we hear, for example, of a congregation of 'Tertullianists' at Carthage who worshipped separately in churches of their own and only gave up the last one to the Catholic bishop of Carthage at the end of the fourth century or in the early fifth (Aug., *De haeres.* 86, in *MPL* XLII.46).

Religion in those days was universally regarded as a matter of enormous importance, and it was generally believed by Christians that holding the 'wrong' dogma, and sometimes even practising the 'wrong' ritual, might involve eternal damnation – a position which is far from extinct today, of course, although it is very much less widespread than in the Later Roman Empire. The niceties of doctrine could obsess very ordinary minds. Gregory of Nyssa has a delightful sketch of the passionately theological atmosphere of Constantinople in the late fourth century, which has often been cited but is still worth repeating. 'If you enquire about your change, you will get a piece of philosophising about the Begotten and the Unbegotten,' he warns. 'If you ask the price of a loaf of bread, the reply is "The Father is greater and the Son inferior". And if you say, "Is the bath ready?", the answer is that the Son is from nothing' (*Orat. de Deit. Fil.*, in *MPG* XLVI.557). This is part of a passionate denunciation of ignorant, insane, deranged, illogical and incomprehensible philosophising on the part of amateur dogmatic theologians who are all slaves, rogues, runaways from servile employments, tradesmen, money-changers or purveyors of clothing or food. (I have rearranged the elements of the invective slightly, but every expression I have used comes directly from the text.) These are pleasantries of a type to which many of the Fathers of the Church were addicted when denouncing other Christians belonging to a rival sect. Gregory is saying that Constantinopolitan theologising is what we might call a mere mouthing of slogans; and so indeed it is likely to have been on the part of most laymen and even many clerics and monks, who were simply persevering, faithfully but blindly, like human trams, in the truths – as they saw them – which they had received from their spiritual leaders. This passage is often cited by itself, out of context, and those who quote it usually fail to observe the essential fact that the formulae which Gregory so abhorred were detestable not because they were mindless slogans, but because they were Arian slogans. I have never come across in any of the Fathers any protest against a repetition of what the Father concerned regarded as Catholic slogans – those embodying the tenets of his own particular sect. I cannot refrain from mentioning here the famous theological poem called *Thalia* which Arius the heresiarch is said to have composed in a racy metre for the edification of his followers: St. Athanasius gives extracts which I shrink from reproducing, since they must seem little better than gibberish to

anyone not versed in the niceties of the Arian controversy.[21] The *Thalia* would have been rather strong meat for the uneducated. But the ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius, who was himself an Arian (and therefore survives only in fragments), mentions without disapproval that Arius also wrote, and set to catchy tunes, popular theological ballads in the form of work-songs for the mill and travel-songs for journeys by sea and land (*HE* II.2). Another theologian who is credited with the same kind of activity is Apollinaris of Laodicea (the father of the heresiarch of that name), who, in the second half of the fourth century, is said to have had his poems (which were all 'for the praise of God') sung by men not only on convivial occasions but also at their work, and by women at the loom (Soz., *HE* VI.25.5).

Many of us may find much unconscious humour, even absurdity, in the writings of some of the Fathers and in many of the supersubtle theological controversies in which they indulged. The devout Christian, however, may see such things in a very different light. To avoid giving unnecessary offence, therefore, I shall confine myself to a single example, coming from the Arians, whose heresy is surely now extinct. We hear from Socrates (V.23) of a dispute which agitated the Arians from about A.D. 385 onwards, for some thirty-five years in Constantinople and in other cities even longer. Believing as they did that the Son was 'created out of nothing', the Arians fell into controversy as to whether the Father was such, and ought to be called 'Father', before the Son existed. When the party of Dorotheus, which took the negative view, gained the upper hand, the followers of Marinus, who answered the question in the affirmative, insisting that the Father had always been the Father even when the Son did not exist, built separate churches for themselves and worshipped apart from the others. Socrates adds that the latter section of the Arians were nicknamed 'Psathyrians', after one of their number, Theoctistus, who was said to have been a cake-seller, *psathyropōlēs*. The nice theological issue between the two groups was never actually settled, and the division between the two parties in Constantinople was healed only when both sides entered into a self-denying ordinance never to allow the question to be raised again.[21a]

Apart from sarcastic jests at the expense of one's religious adversaries (such as the use of the term 'Psathyrians' in the way I have just described) deliberate humour is a commodity that is scarce enough – perhaps appropriately – in the ecclesiastical writers. Socrates does devote one whole chapter (*HE* VI.22) to the witty sayings of Sisinnius; and this is all the more remarkable in that Sisinnius presided over the schismatic Novation sect at Constantinople (395-407).[22] But pure theological humour is exceedingly rare. I have come across in the early Christian centuries only one example of a real joke which is both strictly theological and not made up for the purpose of ridiculing someone of a different dogmatic persuasion. (It is a strictly Greek joke, which cannot easily be reproduced in another language.) At the service of dedication of the first church of St. Sophia in Constantinople on 15 February 360, the Arian Eudoxius, who was patriarch of Constantinople from 360 to 370, startled the congregation by opening his dedicatory sermon with the words 'The Father is impious [*asebēs*], the Son pious [*eusebēs*]'. A great commotion immediately arose at this apparently blasphemous statement, but Eudoxius quelled it with the explanation, 'The Father is impious because he worships [*sebei*] no one; the Son is pious

because he worships the Father.' The joke went down well, and according to Socrates it was still remembered in his own day (the second quarter of the fifth century), although he himself remarks gravely that with such sophistries the heresiarchs rent the Church asunder (*HE* II.43.10-14, 15; cf. Soz., *HE* IV.26.1).[23]

In the West, theological controversy was couched in far less subtle terms than in the Greek East (its profundities could be debated more intricately in Greek, and some of them could scarcely be expressed in Latin), but it was equally vigorous in some places, especially Africa and Rome itself. When Constantius II in 358 issued an order that the Roman bishopric should be shared between the two rival popes, Liberius and Felix, the people assembled in the Circus are said to have responded with unanimous and indignant shouts of 'One God, one Christ, one bishop' (Theod., *HE* II.17.6). The fierce fighting between the supporters of the next pair of rival popes, Damascus and Ursinus, in 366, we are told by Ammianus, left 137 corpses in a single day on the floor of a Roman basilica (Amm. XXVII.iii.12-13); another contemporary source gives a figure of 160 victims.[24] One could cite many similar examples of violent strife and massacre on the part of enthusiastic Christians of the fourth and following centuries, in the East even more than the West. Those who enjoyed the support of the state (usually, but by no means always, the Catholics) were seldom reluctant to use force, even armed force, against their religious adversaries. According to Socrates and Sozomen, Macedonius, the Arian patriarch of Constantinople in the 350s, sent four units (*arithmoi, tagmata*) of troops of the regular army to ensure the conversion to Arianism of the exceptionally large congregation of the Novatian sect at the little town of Mantinium in Paphlagonia (in northern Asia Minor). Arming themselves with sickles and axes and whatever else came to hand, the peasants defeated the soldiers and killed nearly all of them in a bloody battle in which they themselves suffered heavy losses (Socr., *HE* II.38.27bis-29; Soz., *HE* IV.21.1-2).[25]

These and other such atrocities may make us sympathise with Ammianus when he endorses the opinion of the Emperor Julian that 'no wild beasts are such enemies to mankind as are most of the Christians [*plerique Christianorum*] in their deadly hatred of one another' (XXII.V.3-4). This statement should surprise only those who have not studied the original sources for the history of early Christianity in detail but have relied upon modern textbooks. It is essential to understand that the Christians, racked by heresy and schism – of which we can see the beginnings even in New Testament times[26] – were never anything like a single, united body, and that each sect (by no means only those who had the best right to call themselves 'Catholics') had an unpleasant habit of denying membership of 'the Church' and indeed the very name of Christian to all 'heretics' and 'schismatics' – that is to say, to all those who were not within its communion – and of persecuting them in one way or another whenever it could, as sinners outside 'the Church'. For the Christian 'ecclesiastical historians' by whom the history of early Christianity has mainly been written, 'persecution' is essentially what is done *to* 'the Church' (in the restricted sense I have just explained), either by pagans or by 'heretics' or 'schismatics'; they have usually forgotten the persecutions *by* 'the Church' (i.e. what they consider to be the orthodox or 'Catholic' church) of pagans, Jews, heretics or schismatics. Anyone who has not discovered this for himself may derive some amusement from a glance at the two entries under 'Persecution' in that often excellent and very scholarly work,

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church[2] (1974): one deals solely with the persecution *of* the early Christians and the other reads merely, 'Persecution: see Toleration' – and when we look under 'Toleration' we find only a very brief reference to the persecutions conducted *by* the early Christians (with hardly more than the remark, 'St. Augustine went so far as to demand corporal punishment for heretics and schismatics'), and we then jump straight to the Middle Ages! In an unpublished *rapport* delivered to the International Colloquium on Ecclesiastical History held at Oxford in September 1974 (a revised version of which I shall publish shortly), I tried to explain the earlier stages in the process of persecution by the Christian churches which 'made of organised Christianity, over more than a millennium and a half, a persecuting force without parallel in the world's history'.

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I doubt if a better means could have been devised of distracting the victims of the class struggle from thinking about their own grievances and possible ways of remedying them than representing to them, as their ecclesiastical leaders did, that religious issues were infinitely more important than social, economic or political ones, and that it was heretics and schismatics (not to mention pagans, Manichees, Jews and other 'lesser breeds without the Law') upon whom their resentment could most profitably be concentrated. Of course I am not saying that leading ecclesiastics magnified the importance of theological questions with the deliberate aim of distracting the common herd from their temporal grievances: they themselves quite sincerely held that only adherence to the 'right' dogma and the 'right' sect could ensure salvation and escape from the frightful prospect of eternal damnation. But there is no doubt that the effects of religious enthusiasm were as I have described them. Not many humble folk in the Christian Roman empire were likely to become obsessed with reforming the world of their day, or (for that matter) to achieve much unity among themselves, if they accepted what they were taught (as the vast majority did) and believed that life here and now is insignificant compared with the infinite stretches of eternity, and that their real enemies were those enemies of God and his Church who, if they were not suppressed, would endanger men's immortal souls and bring them to perdition. 'Heretics' and 'schismatics', as well as 'unbelievers', were an entirely new kind of internal enemy, invented by Christianity, upon whom the wrath of 'right-thinking people' could be concentrated, for in paganism the phenomena of 'heresy' and 'schism', as of 'unbelief', were inconceivable: there was no 'correct' dogma in which it was necesary to believe in order to avoid anathema in this world and damnation in the next, and to secure eternal life; and there was nothing remotely resembling a single, universal Church. We may reflect by contrast upon the good fortune of the mass of Greeks in the Classical period, who had no such beliefs instilled into them, to prevent them from recognising who their real internal enemies were, and to persuade them that democracy was a useless if not an impious aim, since 'the powers that be are ordained of God' (see the preceding section of this chapter).

VIII

The 'Decline and Fall' of the Roman Empire: an Explanation

(i)

Intensified subjection and exploitation of the lower classes during the first three centuries of the Christian era

In this last chapter I shall again show how a Marxist analysis on class lines can help to *explain*, and not merely to *describe*, a historical process: in this case the disintegration of large portions of the Roman empire, part of a process which seemed to Gibbon 'the greatest, perhaps, and most awful scene in the history of mankind' (*DFRE* VII.325).

I have demonstrated in V.iii above and Appendix IV below how Greek democracy, in the course of the class struggle on the political plane, was attacked with increasing success from the late fourth century B.C. onwards by the Greek propertied classes, their Macedonian overlords and eventually their Roman conquerors. As we have seen, democracy, when it worked, could play an important role by protecting the lower classes to some extent against exploitation and oppression by the powerful. Democracy still led a precarious existence in some places in the last century B.C., but during the first century of the Christian era it was gradually stifled and during the next century it virtually disappeared; certainly before the end of the third century it had, for all practical purposes, sunk without trace. (Democracy in the Latin West had never existed on anything like the same scale, and I know of no real sign of its existence after the first century.)

As we saw in IV.iii above, the great age of slavery in the Roman world, especially in Italy and Sicily, was the last two centuries B.C.: the advent of the Principate in the last generation B.C. and the marked decrease in the number of wars producing large slave-hauls gradually brought about a new economic situation: slaves now had to be bred far more extensively than before, if their number was not to decline drastically; and for the reasons given in IV.iii (§§ 6ff.) above this was bound to result in an attempt to increase the rate of exploitation of humble free men, in order to make up for a reduced return overall from slaves. An exploiting class, except in so far as it can be forced or persuaded (like some capitalist classes in the modern world) to abate its claims in order to facilitate its own survival (an eventuality which of course did not arise in the Graeco-Roman world), will use whatever means may lie to its hand.

In order to tighten the economic screw more effectively on the lower classes among the free population, it was obviously desirable to restrict to an absolute minimum not merely their political but also their legal and constitutional rights and privileges. Until the second and even (to some small extent) the early third