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## A MYSTIC'S UTOPIAN DREAM OF CHRISTIAN ROME The Political Theology of Origen

Until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AC, the Christian view on the Roman Empire oscillated between two extreme stances. On the one hand there was extreme scepticism in which the Church rejects the hostile state with its policy in broad sense, whereas, on the other hand, silent but decisive, there was the voice of mutual dependence, affirmation and co-operation. The former stance was slightly prevalent over the latter. Despite the apologists' reassurances about loyalty, calling for respect and praying for the people in power and their actions, the Empire of late Antiquity, pervaded with hegemonic hellenism, with its religious plurality and totalitarian administrative machine, was perceived as utterly hostile towards Christianity<sup>1</sup>. The Roman Empire was infrequently identified with the apocalyptic Beast or with the image of Babylon, with the world of fall and sin, sentenced to eschatological agony<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the shadow of doubt, persecutions suffered by Christians one time after another had considerable impact on their views. Additionally, the real convictions in Christian communes about the imminent coming of the parousia only strengthened such opinions<sup>3</sup>.

The respond of the authorities, imposing its vision of state religiousness upon its citizens, violating their rights to conscience and denomination. Arrests, tortures, forfeiture, bans and capital sentences triggered protests from Christians. Such a model of Empire could not be accepted, and its actions – aimed at the Church – were decidedly condemned<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Daniélou – H.I. Marrou, *Historia Kościoła. Od początku do roku 600*, transl. by M. Tarnowska, Warszawa 1986, 182.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E.R. Dodds, *Pogaństwo i chrześcijaństwo w epoce niepokoju*, transl. by J. Partyka, Kraków 2004, 101-128; M. Żywczyński, *Kościół i społeczeństwo pierwszych wieków*, Warszawa 1985, 84-87.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Didache* 10, 6, ed. W. Rordorf – A. Tuilier, SCh 248, Paris 1978, 180. See M. Żywczyński, *Szkice z dziejów radykalizmu chrześcijańskiego*, Warszawa 1976, 47-51.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. Chadwick, *Kościół w epoce wczesnego chrześcijaństwa*, transl. by A. Wypustek, Warszawa 2004, 19-28.

## I. THE THEOLOGICAL VISION OF THE STATE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

First Christians perceived their contemporary world (the Roman Empire as well) in religious categories. In the teachings of the antique Church, the conviction (in the sense of the New Testament) that the world hates everything good is that people are under the control of the devil and its demons. The institution of the state is not as bad as is a lost man stricken by the consequences of his sin, especially when considering his fall in heaven. "The master of this world" manipulates people who serve him to strengthen his kingdom, which is totally different than the one revealed by Christ as gospel. In regard to this, Evil begins fighting the "children of light" (Eph 5, 8). The life of Jesus Himself, persecuted by Herod, and His death sentence passed on by Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judaea, is the reflection of this truth.

Christians initially coming from Judaic communities shared their mentality and prejudice with Jews towards the Empire and its representatives. Romans occupied Palestine, destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem to build a pagan city; they also committed crimes and persecuted. Emperor Trajan, after repressions and merciless suppression of Jewish national uprisings in Libya and Egypt in the years 115-117, is considered as the personification of Evil according to rabbinic teachings. Hadrian, who put down the uprising of Simon bar Kokhba bloodily in the years 132-135, issued a ruling against Christians<sup>5</sup>. The same respond against intolerance and repressions was made by Jewish and Christian communities alike. In the eyes of Hippolytus of Rome, one of the first exegetes of the Great Church, the Beast of the Apocalypse (Ap 13, 11-18) personifies the Evil of the Empire:

"[...] after the manner of the law of Augustus, by whom the empire of Rome was established, he [Antichrist] too will rule and govern, sanctioning everything by it, and taking greater glory to himself"<sup>6</sup>.

However, Tertullian, in one of his apologies, wrote the following:

"That powerful state which presides over the seven mountains and very many waters, has merited from the Lord the appellation of a prostitute. But what kind of garb is the instrumental mean of her comparison with that appellation? She sits, to be sure, «in purple, and scarlet, and gold, and precious stone» (Rev 17, 4)"<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Baslez, *Prześladowania w starożytności. Ofiary, bohaterowie, męczennicy*, transl. by E. Łukaszyk, Kraków 2009, 280-281.

<sup>6</sup> Hippolytus Romanus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 49, 1-2, ed. H. Achelis, GCS 1, Leipzig 1897, 32, transl. by P. Schaff: [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iv.ii.i.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iv.ii.i.html) [dostęp: 10.04.2014].

<sup>7</sup> Tertullianus, *De cultu feminarum* II 12, 2, ed. M. Turcan, SCh 173, Paris 1971, 158-160, transl. by S. Thelwall: [www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-07.htm#P351\\_73144](http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-07.htm#P351_73144) [dostęp: 10.04.2014].

Even though we find such direct statements in early-Christian literature, they are few, while the Church isolated itself from separatist and nationalist tendencies dominating in Judaism. From the very beginning, Christians subjected the institution of state to theological thought, creating a concept concerning mutual relations on the basis of the Church. It is dominated by the idea that the Church, despite being surrounded by evil, incomprehension from others and suffering persecutions even, is not entitled to fight the institution of corrupted state, but it is to change the inner nature of man who will be open for the Gospel about salvation and embark on conversion.

At the foundation of these teachings there was a rule based on biblical truth (cf. Wis 6, 3; Dan 2, 37) which says that all power, especially of a person in authority, comes directly from God, who is the Lord of history and human fates<sup>8</sup>. One can find such confirmation in the oldest relics of early-Christian literature, as in: *The Epistle to the Corinthians* of Saint Clement of Rome<sup>9</sup> or *Ad Autolyicum* of Theophilus of Antioch<sup>10</sup>. Evidence of martyrs kept in *acta martyrum* or in passions assume special meaning. Christians defending against the accusations of pagans clearly and decisively talked of their loyalty to the state and authorities, all according to the word of Christ: give the emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to Him. With dignity and contempt to injustice, which was done on Christians, they repeated they revere the emperor as the ruler and are loyal to him, but they cannot worship him, because god-like nature is not his<sup>11</sup>. The aforementioned Tertullian states this in the following way:

“A Christian is enemy to none, least of all to the Emperor of Rome, whom he knows to be appointed by his God, and so cannot but love and honour; and whose well-being moreover, he must needs desire, with that of the empire over which he reigns so long as the world shall stand – for so long as that shall Rome continue. To the emperor, therefore, we render such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone”<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, one can say that early-Christian political theology does not strike at the state itself, but defends the most fundamental rights of man, among them the freedom of conscience and religion. However, in conflict, when the state goes beyond its power and competence, forcing Christians not to act in

<sup>8</sup> Cf. W. Myszor, *Europa. Pierwotne chrześcijaństwo. Idee i życie społeczne chrześcijan II i III w.*, Warszawa 2000, 62-98.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Clemens Romanus, *Epistula ad Corinthios* 61, 1-3, ed. A. Jaubert, SCh 167, Paris 1971, 198-200.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Theophilus Antiochenus, *Ad Autolyicum* 11, 1-3, ed. G. Bardy, SCh 20, Paris 1948, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Acta Scillitanorum*; *Epistula Ecclesiae Smyrnenensis de martyrio s. Polycarpi*; Justinus Martyr, *Apologiae*, PG 6, 328-471.

<sup>12</sup> Tertullianus, *Ad Scapulam* 2, PL 1, 700A, transl. by S. Thelwall: [www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-12.htm#P11149\\_471144](http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-12.htm#P11149_471144) [dostęp: 10.04.2014].

conformity with their convictions and conscience, they should listen to God rather than unjust human rulings<sup>13</sup>.

## II. ORIGEN'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The teachings of one of the most eminent early-Christian writers deserves special attention in regard to political theology, an Alexandrian scholar, a fine biblist and exegete, Origen (about 185-253). It should seem that his attitude to the Empire is negative for many wellground reasons. Firstly, due to personal matters. In 202, the Emperor, Septimius Severus, the founder of the Syrian dynasty, issued an edict banning conversion to Christianity and Judaism. In practice, it should hamper the spreading of Christianity. The administration, subordinated to the authoritarian system, began persecutions of catechumens, neophytes and their teachers. News delivered by Eusebius of Caesarea states that, in Alexandria under Letus, Origen's father, Leonides, was arrested and sentenced to death along with many other Christians. The fact that he was beheaded signifies that he probably was a rich man and a citizen of Rome. As a teacher of grammar and intellectualist, he was involved in the preparation of catechumens and was persecuted for this reason by state authorities. It is worth to mention an anecdote told by Eusebius of Caesarea that Origen himself, as a young boy, wanted to attain the crown of martyrdom. Only his mother's pleas and his clothes hidden by her prevented another family tragedy<sup>14</sup>. The Roman Empire took away Adamantios'<sup>15</sup> father, ruined the family financially through forfeiture of wealth, and he was forced to find the means for himself and his widow-mother with six younger siblings<sup>16</sup>. These tragic events were not the only ones which could have translated into negative opinion on the Empire. The later-found school led by Origen did not only educate eminent theologians, bishops and teachers, but also martyrs and followers. Persecutions led by the state perpetuated for many years to come, especially under the prefect of Egypt, Serbatianus Aquila. Among Origen's students who died for faith, Eusebius of Caesarea mentions the following names: Plutarch, Heracleon's brother, the later bishop of Alexandria (the same who agreed upon Origen's exile), Serenus (who was burnt at the stake), Heraclides, a catechumen and Heron, a neophyte, who were beheaded for faith and many other. Eusebius also evoked the death of Adamantios' listener, Basilides the soldier<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hippolytus Romanus, *Commentarii in Daniele* III 31, ed. M. Lefèvre, Sch 14, Paris 1947, 258.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Eusebius Caesariensis, HE VI 2, 2-6, ed. G. Bardy, Sch 41, Paris 1955, 83-84.

<sup>15</sup> Origen's nickname.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. Crouzel, *Orygenes*, transl. by J. Margański, Kraków 2004, 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> He was commanded to bring a young, beautiful Christian woman named Potamen and sentence her to death, who was burnt alive with her mother, Marcel, after tortures. After a few days, he himself, influenced by a prophetic dream and enhanced by the testimony of the virgin, stated that

Origen did not abandon the prisoners – he accompanied them in prison and in court, risking his own life. Approximately in 235, when his two friends, Ambrose and Proctod, were sent to jail, he wrote a treaty to them entitled *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, which is a synthesis of what we can call a life ideal<sup>18</sup>. In the end, Origen himself was arrested and tortured during Decius' persecutions in 250, as a result of which he died short time after having left the prison.

The biographical works cited state that the Scholarch of Alexandria did not have a reason to love the Empire. There were too many tragedies in his life to which the Empire contributed with its administration system and religious policy. It would seem that in Adamantios' writings there will be many words of criticism, reviling evil and injustice, which he experienced personally from the state. Origen himself, however, does not condemn the Empire in the writings which survived to this day. There are no verbal statements in which he would condemn the Roman Empire and its religious policy. As a matter of fact, he writes about the state very rarely and cautiously. Examining his writings, one can have the impression that this issue has been displaced from his field of interest. It would seem that such an attitude is not random, but has its ideological grounding. Similarly to Clement of Alexandria, Origen is bound with gnosis, but his perception of state, with all its social and political system, differs from the assumptions of gnosticism.

**1. Gnosticism and politics.** One of the basic assumptions of gnosticism is dualism in its extreme form. The gnostic vision of the world criticises the earthly order, which implicates negation and rejection of the material world, its Creator and all other earthly social and political structures. Kurt Rudolph, one of the most known researchers of gnostic philosophy, remarks that there is no rebellion against the world and no summons to change in a revolutionary way all that which is evil in gnostic writings<sup>19</sup>. The state and its politics are not a subject of interest for gnostics, because it is ultimately bound for annihilation. The world with all its structures tyrannises the "free spirit". Binding with worldly passions, the world may delay and disturb its liberation. Basically, the ideal reality of the world is pre-existential and assumes inclination towards the spiritual reality and, consequently, towards eschatology. Gnostics are also not interested in political systems or earthly relations, because they reject all earthly authority ideologically. Its manifestation is their great caution in interests in social life, culture, science and nearly absent reference to historical events in literature or even the criticism of Rome policy. In the gnostics' vision of the world, the earthly ruler, state with all its administration system, political and

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he is a Christian, he refused to take an oath of allegiance and, baptised by brothers in prison, was decapitated. Cf. Eusebius Caesariensis, HE VI 5, 1-6, SCh 41, 91-93.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. E. Stanula, *Wstęp*, in: Orygenes, *Zachęta do męczeństwa*, PSP 24, Warszawa 1980, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. K. Rudolph, *Gnoza*, transl. by G. Sowiński, Kraków 2003, 263.

social structures are evidence of enslavement by demiurge and his spiritual subjects of material reality entangled in matter. A gnostic is free of these binds and rebels against them. Gnostic systems reject any connection of earthly power with true God and desacralise his god-like legitimization. It is reflected in revolution on ethical grounds. A pneumatic opposes the earthly powers of this world, which guard the traditional ethical system. He also protests against earthly laws and commandments by his amoralism or libertarianism. He is aware that earthly laws and rulers guarding their order defend the reality which is untrue, irrational and hostile<sup>20</sup>.

Although many assumptions intertwine, Origen's teaching definitely diverges from gnostic views in this regard. In the writings which survived, Origen seems to confirm the argument in which he deeply affirms the state and the emperor. Origen is a citizen of Rome, aware of his rights and duties, who perceives the role of the state from the theological point of view, having on mind the global history of salvation. About 178, a pagan philosopher, Celsus, defending the Greek and Roman spiritual tradition as the only authentic and credible, in *True Word* he systematically attacks the theological and moral doctrine of the early Church and accused Christians of social uselessness, rebellion and separating from civil rights and duties<sup>21</sup>. Origen wrote an apology against him, where he explained that Christians are not the enemies of the Empire. In fact, the Empire needs them.

**2. Divine origins of power.** Most Origen's writings are exegetic and are directed at Christians, who in lesser or greater degree seek truth. Their subject refers little to the then social and political issues. However, *Contra Celsum* is of a different kind. The Alexandrian remarks that the writing is not intended for Christians, but it is a manifesto to pagans, people who do not know the teachings of the Church, or their faith has been diminished. As a consequence, Origen is forced to adapt the language, the way of reasoning towards people with such mentality, education or prejudices, but he also seeks to expose his own social and political views and see what role the Church performs in their context. Therefore, this piece of writing is a major source of analysis for us.

According to Origen, the Roman world, especially its elites, have to be made aware that Christianity which is still in vast minority, is practically needed for the Empire, and the Empire – to Christianity. The model outlined by him is not an idealistic fantasy but viable to fulfil. Adamantios' thought reaches even further in its dreams in this treaty. Not only does the state serve its citizens and the Church, but Rome should become christian also, if it wants to survive and defeat its enemies. The inspiration for the subject of this work has been a sentence from *Contra Celsum*, which in the historical and political situation

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 263-269.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. F. Ruggiero, *Szaleństwo chrześcijan. Paganie wobec chrześcijaństwa w pierwszych pięciu wiekach*, transl. by E. Łukaszuk, Kraków 2007, 117-126.

from the first of the 3rd century sounds like a utopian dream of a mystic. Origen wrote the following at the of his apology, in conclusions as it were:

“«What would happen if the Romans were persuaded to adopt the principles of the Christians, to despise the duties paid to the recognised gods and to men, ad to worship the Most High?» this is my answer to the question: [...] Suppose [...] that all the Romans, according to the supposition of Celsus, embrace the Christian faith, they will, when they pray, overcome their enemies; or rather, they will not war at all, being guard by that divine power which promised to save five entire cities for the sake of fifty just persons. For men of God are assuredly the salt of the earth, they preserve the order of the world; and society is held together as long as the salt is uncorrupted”<sup>22</sup>.

According to the Scholarch of Alexandria, not only will the Church rescue and give Rome victory, but also it will lead to integration and unification of the society, which always is a basis for strength and stability of the state.

“We say that «if two» of us «shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of the Father» of the just, «which is in heaven»; for God rejoices in the agreement of rational beings and turns away from discord And what are to expect, if not only a very few agree, as at present, but the whole of the empire of Rome? For they will pray to the Word [...]. United in common prayer, they could defeat more persecutors than the prayer of Moses and his people”<sup>23</sup>.

During the time of persecution, these words sound like a utopian dream of a mystic. However, history will show that they are going to come true. Showed by Origen, his doctrine about the unifying teaching of Christ will become one of the main unification tendencies of Emperor Constantine's policy, who will treat the Catholic Church as a foundation and means to realize the attainment of peace, reconstruction and security of the unified Roman Empire. Unwittingly, the following question arises: “Wasn't Origen's idea an inspiration of a sort in this case?” Before Constantine betted on the *winning horse* (Christians) thanks to the surveillance apparatus and an effectively operating administration, he had to know the political and theological assumptions of “the new religion”. We also know that Eusebius of Caesarea, the late keeper of Adamantios' teaching legacy, belonged to the people bound with the court and person of the emperor, whereas the writings of the Scholarch himself, were commonly known and read not only by Christians. Imperial pragmatism, political instrumentalism, its promotion and care in treating the Church, sometimes touching upon despotism,

<sup>22</sup> Origenes, *Contra Celsum* VIII 69-70, ed. M. Borret, SCh 150, Paris 1969, 334-336, transl. by P. Schaff: [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxix.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxix.html) [dostep: 11.04.2014].

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem VIII 69, SCh 150, 334, transl. by Schaff: *ibidem* [dostep: 11.04.2014].

will eventually become dangerous, which in time will lead to the fight for “inner freedom”, which the Christians of the “martyr epoch” had<sup>24</sup>.

Origen's thought, however, is far from the later view of the Constantine state Church. Adamantios, according to St. Paul's teaching, thinks all authority comes from God. It is God who establishes and overthrows kingdoms. He in his Providence directs the worldly events and gives power to the kings or removes them from power<sup>25</sup>. As a consequence, all Christians adhering to God's commandment have to respect the ruler<sup>26</sup>. God administers only the good gifts, therefore power coming from God should be used for godly and honest deeds. One has to be obedient towards such power and has to be subject to it. Who opposes it, he or she opposes the order set by God and such conduct leads to damnation. An exception is a situation when the ruler persecutes the Church, forcing believers not to abide by the law of God. In this case one has to listen to God's commandment, since God's law is prime to the law established by an earthly ruler. The true law is the law of God and Christians have to abide by it. However, they condemn vile laws, which are not true laws<sup>27</sup>. In this regard, Origen refers to persecutions, the demand for obeisance and sacrifices to honour the ruler. It has to be underlined that there is no statement in the writing which would verbally and directly strike at any of the Roman emperors. Adamantios did not criticize the authority as the established unjust law which violated the freedom of conscience and religion. He did it tactfully – he did not reprimand or undermine the reliability of specific rulings of the authorities which have led to persecutions, but entered into an intellectual discussion on the legitimacy of Christians refusing the fulfilment of such duties. He refers to a classic example told by Herodotus when the Spartan messengers refused to bow in front of Xerxes, the Persian ruler, even though they could be sentenced to death by doing so. They justified this with the law of Lycurgus of Sparta, which tells that Lacedaemonians are not to bow before another human<sup>28</sup>. According to Adamantios, the situation is reminiscent of what Christians do. They do not call to rebellion and do nothing to undermine the position of the ruler or damage him in any way. However, Christians are the messengers of Christ and abide by the law of Ruler of all rulers, God Almighty. Therefore, spreading the word of Gospel and salvation, they cannot bow before Persian, Greek, Egyptian or any other ruler, even if they meet with the most severe of sentences. It can be noticed that Origen, when compiling a list of rulers before whom Christians cannot bow in a diplomatic way, did not put the emperor of Rome on that list.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. H. Rahner, *Kościół i państwo we wczesnym chrześcijaństwie*, transl. by M. Radożycka, Warszawa 1986, 53-62.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* VIII 68, SCh 150, 330-332.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 73, SCh 150, 344-348.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 37, SCh 147, Paris 1969, 110-112.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 6, SCh 150, 188-190.



However, question arises at this moment: “Does authority which persecutes Christians, fights faith and destroys religion comes from God?” And another one connected with it: “Should Christians abide by it?” Origen replies positively to this question, explaining that it is dependent only on human whether he uses authority to do good or evil. All are servants of God and a time will come when one has to account for the gifts he has received from Him. Those who were immoral will be tried in front of God for their vile acts. Origen mentions the teaching of St Paul and says that both earthly judges and rulers are servants of God, regardless if they are aware of the fact or not. Consequently, Christians should not be only good and loyal citizens, but they should require more from themselves to serve as an example for others. Therefore, the duty of believers is to be obedient to authorities, pay taxes and customs and appropriate and unquestionable fear with faith, as well as respect for rulers and superiors. However, even if Christians behave in the aforementioned way and still they would be subject to persecutions, the state authorities will be held responsible for their moral guilt and suffer consequences in their own time; if not in this life, then in afterlife. Moreover, Origen subjects persecutions to theological interpretation. If persecutions perpetuate and Christians suffer unjustly, then there is a greater idea conceived by God and He allows it. Thanks to God’s will, earthly rulers govern the world, but only to the moment which God allowed them to. When God decides so, torture and sufferings of believers will come to an end. It is He who rules the earthly matters and human fates, according to His eternal conception<sup>29</sup>. People are sometimes blinded and do not see the truth. Demons, whose plots inspired these persecutions, are behind it. However, similarly to Socrates and Pythagoras, undeservedly pronounced guilty and persecuted, the same thing is with the Church. Sooner or later, truth will defend itself and hate-driven people will understand their mistake and guilt. God allows the suffering of the just, but He can also use the misdeeds of vile people for good and, thanks to the spreading of His word among all nations, order the world structure appropriately which has been violated by sin<sup>30</sup>. Thus, when Romans wanted to annihilate Christians with persecution, they could not do it, because God Himself fought on the side of the oppressed.

Similarly as Christians serve the state by fulfilling God’s will, honestly performing their duties on His account and praying for the country to God, so the Roman Empire, by the will of Divine Providence, serves the Church. According to the Alexandrian, the authorities have a duty not only to serve its citizens, but the state ruler should be a servant of the one who granted this power. Tertullian (who had lived a short time earlier) noticed that, while talking about Christian loyalty, the emperor is great, because he is lesser than heaven<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VI 79, SCh 147, 336-338.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 50, SCh 147, 142-144.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Tertullianus, *Apologeticum* 28, 3 - 33, 4, ed. H. Hoppe, CSEL 69, Vindobonae – Lipsiae 1939, 77-82.

Adamantios, who continues this idea, added that the Empire, its existence and history have been placed by Divine Providence into the history of salvation. The state, which serves God, has got duties towards the Church. God allowed Romans to create their Empire, unifying people of different countries and lands into one state and structure, so as to prepare the world and help the Church to spread gospel to all nations. The same correlation includes law. A ruler who is a servant of God has the duty to create a legal and political system which is going to agree with God's will. As a consequence, human laws defending true values and punishing evil and misdeeds are complementary to God's conception. Origen explains that a situation told in the Acts of the Apostles when the Apostles gathered in Jerusalem defined the regulations concerning the life of those who did not take the whole legislation into consideration when converting from paganism to Christianity. They defined only those matters which in civil law were not adequate to the rules of faith. Such criminal acts, like murder, adultery, theft, etc. are punished by state law. In this context, a human holding judicial power and giving just sentences becomes the servant of God and the avenger of those who were subject to misdeeds.

**3. The idea of Christian state.** Not only does the Scholarch of Alexandria subject the existing institutional structures to moral assessment, but also attempts to sketch a new state model, according to the Gospel ideal. He refers to the Old Testament description of Jewish country as an example of appropriately shaped legislation and state structures. According to him, such a state was a symbol of God's country. Its original system, the enacted laws, faith in one God and obedience to His will made the Israeli land a shadow and image of the true *civitas Dei* and the holy land in heaven<sup>32</sup>. If Jews had not sinned against God, forgetting His laws; if they had not allowed persecutions and martyrdom of prophets and, most importantly, if they had not murdered Jesus Christ, we would now have had a role model of ideal state which Plato dreamt about<sup>33</sup>. Origen attempted to analyze numerous state system and types of governments before he drew such conclusions and, according to him, Jews deserve true admiration<sup>34</sup>. Even though Israelites were an old and small nation, they were not annihilated, because God loved them more than other nations – He cared for, defended and blessed them<sup>35</sup>. Laws governing the earthly countries stem from human legislation and are therefore more or less just, depending on the law-giver. Jewish laws come from God and the Chosen People were given them through Moses and other prophets<sup>36</sup>. The law was to defend the society, so that it would not give in to degeneration and corruption. All belonging to this nation

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* IV 31, SCh 136, Paris, 1968, 260-262; VII 30, SCh 150, 80-82.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 43, SCh 147, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 42, SCh 147, 124-126.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 50, SCh 147, 142-144.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 43, SCh 147, 126.

were obliged to abide by it, whereas the symbol of affiliation and covenant with God was circumcision. The established courts of law – led by the honest, just, those who enjoyed respect and a many-years testimony of impeccable life – were to take care of the public order<sup>37</sup>. Laws ordering the avoidance of contact with common folk and the morally-corrupted was introduced, so that demoralization would not spread. According to Origen, Jews retained good as something giving profit, but rejected all that which brings harm to the society. He refers to the ruling exiling harlots from the country, so as not to corrupt the youth. Eunuchs could not appear in public<sup>38</sup>. Fortune-telling and sorcery were abolished. Scenic or gym competitions and horse-racing were not practised. All painters and sculptors were exiled from the country, so that they could not be given the opportunity to create statues, because they convey a lie. And these, in turn, are used by demons. They mislead the simple-minded who, instead of directing their sight to the invisible and only God, start to worship the hand-made creations, calling them gods. Therefore, such artists could not be citizens<sup>39</sup>. Another feature which differentiated this nation from others was the appreciation and cherishing wisdom and knowledge. Compared to other nations, Israelites were superior in terms of education. They were a nation of philosophers. Days free from activities were established in their nation to search for knowledge and wisdom. The nation gathered for prayer and were studying God's laws during the Sabbath and other celebrations. From the earliest years, children were taught honesty and truth, respect for God and His commandments<sup>40</sup>. The situation changed when Jews abandoned God. Firstly in a slight fashion through minor sins, then they turned to greater transgressions and crimes. Consequently, God withdrew his attention from them and allowed calamities to happen to them. He did not want to annihilate them, but to make them come to their senses. He applied precautionary measures and punished lightly, just as a father rears his children. As a consequence, he allowed Assyrians or Babylonians to step into Jewish lands and conquer them, so that they would come back to Him, experiencing the severity of their reign<sup>41</sup>. Then He rescued them, defeated their enemies and blessed them further. However, when the society degenerated and corrupted, God abandoned them forever. It happened when they killed Jesus Christ under the reign of the Roman Empire<sup>42</sup>. God found them unworthy of living in the society. He allowed their independence to be lost, they were dragged into wars, Jerusalem destroyed and nation spread all over the world. However, it was not God's vengeance, but his sign of mercy, because they were incurably evil-sick. In that moment,

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 31, SCh 136, 260-262.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 31, SCh 136, 260.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 42, SCh 147, 124-126.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 31, SCh 147, 92-94.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 32, SCh 136, 262-266.

God transferred all his mercifulness on all earthly believers, who follow God's Word. He appointed a new society of Christians from among Jews who remained in good as well as among from pagans. Jesus Christ gave them laws which ensure happiness for those complying by them<sup>43</sup>. Hence, the Empire needs Christianity and it would be an ideal situation if Romans accepted God's teachings. Then, He would be on their side against all their enemies. Similarly as He watched over the Chosen People, defended and blessed them, He would give power to Romans to defeat the enemies of the Empire. He Himself would fight for them and achieve greater victories than in the times of the Exodus of the Chosen People<sup>44</sup>. Even a small number of the faithful to God would save others, same as the just were to save Sodomy (cf. Gen 18, 26). "For men of God are assuredly the salt of the earth: they preserve the order of the world; and society is held together as long as the salt is uncorrupted"<sup>45</sup>. Until the faithful deliver their prayers to God, the Lord refrains from His wrath and gives people time for repentance and change of life.

**4. The idea of co-operation between the Church and Empire.** In his theological vision of the Roman Empire, Origen goes even further. He states that Christianity will provide Romans with unification, whereas accepting the doctrines of the religion will transform the society<sup>46</sup>. The sketched vision of an ideal state based on biblical ideals could be accomplished in the structures of the Empire. In the time of the-then tragic crisis from Rome, it would be salutary and pragmatically desired.

Not only does such an idea shed light on Origen's positive attitude towards the state, but also on the idea, shaped in the early Church, of the closer collaboration and correlation between the two realms. In time, the tendency to treat the state (in Christian teachings) as an institutional "arm" serving the development of the Church with its power and possibilities will become apparent. According to early Christian writers, such a state, hailing from God's will, will be retained until the last moments of humanity<sup>47</sup>. Christians are not "suspended" over the earthly state. They are its citizens and have to be its best part<sup>48</sup>. They defend it against corruption, but, like the salt of the earth, they

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 69, SCh 150, 334-336.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem* VIII 70, SCh 150, 336, transl. by Schaff: [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxx.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxx.html) [dostep: 11.04.2014].

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 69-70, SCh 150, 332-338.

<sup>47</sup> Tertullian thinks that the Roman Empire is going to last as long as the world, all thanks to Christians, who in their prayers to God ask for peace and delay the end *pro bono publico*. Cf. Tertullianus, *Ad Scapulam* 2, PL 1, 700A.

<sup>48</sup> In an anonymous text entitled *Epistula ad Diognetum*, a famous sentence was written: "what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world" (VI 1, ed. H.I. Marrou, SCh 33, Paris 1951, 64, transl. by J.B. Lightfoot: [www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-lightfoot.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-lightfoot.html) [dostep: 11.04.2014]).

change the idea of perceiving life, values and history. They are honest, able to sacrifice themselves for good, obedient to laws, retain the current customs and traditions, not falling back on injustice and crime. The loyalty of the Church, exemplarily performed civil duties and prayer for prosperity and blessing give profits for the Empire.

Origen, in his theological conception of an earthly state, compares it to the *civitas Dei*, the image of which is the Church. Christian structures, the way of governing communes, laws and governors, may act as a role model for Romans<sup>49</sup>. People appointed to govern the commune of believers have to be characterized by humility, in-born rhetorical skills and righteousness. One does not shoulder responsibility for the Church to people avid for power and looking for their own profit. The basis of their action should be God's commandments and duty towards all people: Christians, in order to strengthen their faith, and all other outside the Church, so that they can find the highest law and justice in Jesus Christ. Origen suggests that the idea of paragon governing the Church commune be transferred to the state, giving public posts to people of dignity, justice and law who shall exercise power as their duty by order of the great King, The Creator of the Universe<sup>50</sup>. It is not a phantasmagorical idea or demagogy. Adamantios, through concrete examples, showed how the Church communes function (and how they govern themselves according to their laws) as well as how pagan gatherings operate, which are full of unjust, immoral and superstitious people. According to Origen, we can even objectively compare the old and honoured Churches, like in Corinth, Athens and Alexandria, as well as the quarrelsome and immoral gatherings of people operating in those cities<sup>51</sup>. The same can be said about the elite enjoying power. Senators performing responsible civil duties lack any moral principles whatsoever, and the tasks they carry out are performed in honourably. Even the most calm members of the believers' Council have a greater morality not only than senators, but than governors as well. Looking at their predispositions and their moral life, many of them could govern the whole state with success in secular life<sup>52</sup>. Christians, however, reject to perform these honourable and important community posts. They do not fear responsibility and they do not want to isolate themselves from public life. Their mission and tasks are different, but from a theological standpoint they are even more important. Christians do not apply for public duties to dedicate their lives to the necessary task for the public good, which is service to God and the Church<sup>53</sup>. Adamantios states that in the following way:

“And this service is at once necessary and right. They take charge of all – of those that are within, that they may day by day lead better lives, and of those

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* III, 30, SCh 136, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 75, SCh 150, 350-352.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 29-30, SCh 136, 70-72.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 30, SCh 136, 72.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 75, SCh 150, 350-352.

that are without, that they may come to abound in holy words and in deeds of piety, and that, while thus worshipping God truly, and training up as they can in the same way, they may be filled with the word of God and the law of God, and thus be united with the Supreme God through His Son the Word”<sup>54</sup>.

Christians serve the whole society. Even though they reject public duties or join the Roman legions, “they support their country more than all other people, they raise citizens and teach how to worship God who takes care of the Empire”<sup>55</sup>. Even though they do not take weapons to their hands, similarly to pagan priests, they organize their own legion of piety, they fight using prayers delivered to God, so that soldiers fighting for the right cause could win, whereas the just ruler restored peace anew. Christians are the people of God, *the salt of the earth* and the salt of the Empire. Until they carry out their mission, the Empire will not die. They do not want to conquer others with the use of swords, or kill them, even though they act unjustly<sup>56</sup>, because they are the children of peace<sup>57</sup>. Yet, they fight the most fierce battle with who is the source of all conflicts, wars and evil: Satan and his demons. It is the devil who is the true enemy of the people and a usurper. Demons, fearing that they may lose their power which they forcefully imposed on nations, incited kings, senates, princes and all nations. Unaware and lied to, they persecuted Christians<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, *God’s people* have to unearth the deceitful actions of the devil, his intrigues and laws, which ultimately lead to doom. United and involved in the Church, Christians want to eliminate the tyrant who illegally and with violence took control on earth. Through their ascetic way of life and true piety, Christians do more good than soldiers who fight and kill their enemies. They defend the homeland and fight for the emperor, when their prayers are delivered to God<sup>59</sup>. Their lifestyle wins over not only the generosity of the true Lord and all kings, but also motivates all heavenly powers to war, like angels, souls and spirits. They show generosity to the worshippers of the true God and want to gain His favour<sup>60</sup>. When Satan is defeated, the source of wars and evil shall disappear, and all people shall unite in one faith. Through just life in the earthly state, they shall attain *civitas Dei* in heaven. Accepting the teachings and law given by Christ shall make civilized people out of barbarians – they will abandon their wild laws and beliefs and the desired peace shall set in<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem VIII 75, SCh 150, 352, transl. by Schaff: [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxxv.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxxv.html) [dostep: 11.04.2014].

<sup>55</sup> Cf. ibidem VIII 74, SCh 150, 348-350.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. ibidem VII 26, SCh 150, 72-74.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ibidem V 33, SCh 147, 96-100.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. ibidem IV 32, SCh 136, 262-266.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. ibidem VIII 73-74, SCh 150, 344-350.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. ibidem VIII 64, SCh 150, 318-322.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. ibidem VIII 68, SCh 150, 330-332.

Adamantios underlines another important role Christians perform in regard to the Empire. The Church has the duty to raise citizens to life in accordance with the just positive law as well as with God's commandments<sup>62</sup>. He believes that in the time of crisis, the reformation of the Empire has to begin from the inside, through the spiritual transformation of its citizens. Evil, crimes and all injustice are based on sin and result from the actions of malicious spirits. Christian teaching is like a cure. It forms philosophers and teachers, teaches the young to control their passions and citizens – to care for the common good. Christian doctrine condemns misdeeds and moral decay<sup>63</sup> and leads people towards true wisdom. When the society is finally granted the gift of conversion, united by Christ's law, peace and unity shall set in in the whole Roman Empire, and God's power will guard it against evil and disasters<sup>64</sup>.

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Summing up, we may say that the idea of affirmation and the wish to work for the common good dominate in the theological vision of the state sketched by Origen. The Scholarch of Alexandria does not reject the institution of the state. In biblical thought, he underscores the Divine origins of authority, which one should respect and be loyal to. However, when the state abuses its power as far as conscience and faith of citizens is concerned, a Christian should abide by God's law. Religion demands freedom and respect towards its principles. Not only does Christianity not oppose the assumption and aims of the state, but also has to raise good and honest citizens, forming the earthly society based on true values. The state, therefore, should not only be open for the Church, but also take care of it, respecting its inner life. It will gain God's blessing through that, pleaded by worshippers as well as the best and the most valued citizens. The role model sketched by Origen would be to establish a state based on Christ's values, with a Christian ruler as head. In that moment of history, such an idea was only a theoretical dream. However, in short time, the emperor Constantine, who went down in history with the appellation "the Great", shall attempt to fulfil this dream.

Translated by Paweł Tutka

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 75, SCh 150, 352.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 56-57, SCh 136, 130-132.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *ibidem* VIII 69-70, SCh 150, 334-338.

## UTOPIJNY SEN MISTYKA O CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIM RZYMIE TEOLOGIA POLITYCZNA ORYGENESA

(Streszczenie)

Orygenes z Aleksandrii († 253), jeden z najwybitniejszych pisarzy wczesnochrześcijańskich, w apologii *Contra Celsum* podjął rozważania nad teologiczną wizją państwa. Dominuje w niej idea afirmacji oraz wola współpracy dla wspólnego dobra. W myśl nauczania biblijnego Adamantios podkreśla Boskie pochodzenie władzy, której należy się szacunek i lojalność. W przypadku jednak nadużycia kompetencji państwa w kwestii sumienia i wyznania obywateli, chrześcijanin winien bardziej słuchać Boga. Religia domaga się wolności i uszanowania jej zasad. Chrześcijaństwo nie tylko nie przeciwstawia się w swojej doktrynie założeniom państwa i jego celom, lecz może mu służyć na wielu płaszczyznach. Państwo pełniąc rolę służebną względem obywateli, do których należą chrześcijanie, szanując ich zasady życia, zyska przez to Boże błogosławieństwo, jak również najlepszych i najwartościowszych obywateli. Ideałem, który kreśli Orygenes, byłoby zbudowanie instytucji państwa na wartościach Chrystusowych, z chrześcijańskim władcą na czele. Świat rzymski, a szczególnie jego elity, muszą zrozumieć, iż chrześcijaństwo, które ciągle jest jeszcze w ogromnej mniejszości, jest pragmatycznie potrzebne Imperium, a Imperium chrześcijaństwu. Rzym, jeśli chce ocalić i zwyciężyć swoich wrogów, winien stać się chrześcijański. Kościół, według Scholarchy z Aleksandrii, może być źródłem scalenia i unifikacji społeczeństwa, co zawsze stanowi podstawę siły i trwałości państwa. W tym miejscu historii myśl taka była jedynie teoretycznym marzeniem. Jednak w niedługim czasie cesarz Konstantyn, który przejdzie do historii z przydomkiem Wielki, podejmie próbę urzeczywistnienia tego ideału.

**Key words:** Origen, patristic theology, early Church, policy, Christian state.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Orygenes, teologia patrystyczna, Kościół starożytny, polityka, państwo chrześcijańskie.