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Attempts at restoring pagan Hellenism during the Reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate. Figures of Christian Martyrs

Abstract

In the Orthodox Church, martyrdom has always been regarded and understood as being the supreme trial of faith, through which Christians confess their faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour, even at the expense of their life. The violent and atrocious persecutions against Christians lasted almost three centuries, more precisely until 313, when Emperor Constantine the Great granted freedom to the Christian religion through the so-called Edict of Milan. Later, after persecutions ceased, the relics of the holy martyrs were taken out of their tombs and place with devoutness in open vaults or reliquaries, and on the tombs of saints and martyrs were built the first churches called martyria. Here,



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Christians began to assemble so as to glorify God and to pray the saint martyrs for intercession before the throne of the Holy Trinity for the salvation of people.

Keywords

Paganism, Julian the Apostate, Hellenism, Martyrs

1 Introduction

The fourth century AD meant the final victory of Christianity over paganism. The Greek-Roman paganism with its gods and culture was drawing to an end. The Christian religion and culture sprang bright and powerful on the ruins of the pagan religion and culture. The temples of Greek and Roman gods were destroyed by Christian missionaries, and Christianity became a state religion.

In the first three centuries, pagans and Christians were in a terrible fight. The first fought in order to preserve an ancient and glorious patrimony, represented by the traditions of their ancestors, whereas the others in order to establish a new ideal and a new life. The pagan religion appeared in the Greek-Roman world firstly in people's homes and then outside, on the ancestors' tombs. Later they settled on the citadel's altar, where sacrifices were brought to the patron gods of the city or of the country¹.

Starting with the time of Emperor Octavian Augustus (31 BC - 14 AD) and even before him, a great religious crisis occurred in

¹ Fustel de Coulanges, *Cetatea antică. Studii asupra cultului, dreptului și instituțiilor Greciei și Romei*, vol. I, translated from French by Mioara and Pan Izverna, translation of the footnotes by Elena Lazăr, preface by Radu Florescu, (Bucarest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1984), pp. 223-226.

the Roman Empire as a result of the penetration of the Oriental cults, which had a doctrine independent of the state reason. It is known that for the Romans the celebration of the acts of cult of the official religion were a patriotic, civic, public duty, whereas practicing oriental cults was an individual religious duty with a much more powerful appealingness. Beyond the state reason they aimed primarily to offer suffering souls that could no longer find peace and comfort in the state's official religion the idea of individual atonement, of moral purity "κάθαρσις", of salvation "σωτηρία", introducing all kinds of mysteries with initiations for the physical and moral revival of the believers. They no longer subordinated the individual to the citadel, but first of all claimed to ensure personal salvation in this world and especially in the after-world. In the fourth century, the most important oriental religion was the religion of Sol invictus "Undefeated sun", with its terrestrial representative, the Persian god Mithras. Julian was attracted to this cult and he confided his soul to its god to such an extent that, when he was twenty, he replaced Christ with the Persian god, and the Holy Mysteries of the Christian Church with Mithraic initiation ceremonies and other mysteries². Moreover, he supported, as a real Roman, the national and conservative idea that the glory of the Roman Empire increased with the gods, and under their benevolent protection the benefactions of civilisation and culture were spread in the world. Each citizen had to preserve the religion of his parents and each citadel had to honour its heroes and gods³.

The Christian religion, being a universal one, is connected neither to the altar of the family, nor with the ancestors'tombs, nor with the country's altar, for "God is a Spirit; and they that

² Ioan Rămureanu, *Religia solară a împăratului Iulian Apostatul*, *Studii Teologice*, 2-nd series, XXXIX, (1987), no. 6 (November-December), (39-40).

³ Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, PhD thesis, (Bucarest: Cărților Bisericești Printing House, 1942), pp. 11-12.

worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4. 24), Julian's attempt at preventing the spread of Christianity was very well illustrated in the historical moment in which he lived. In the fourth century there was a great fight between two religions and two cultures. The Greek-Roman pagan religion and culture, represented by its political and religious leader, the emperor, who also occupied the position of Pontifex Maximus, opposed strongly the Christian religion and culture which were in full growth and development. Thus, Julian's action had the spread of a grand and tragic war at the same time, which reveals us the supreme moment of the battle between two great spiritual powers of the ancient world. Emperor Julian first took measures to reform paganism, to rejuvenate it, and in his mind this was an indirect attack against the Church. This reformation of paganism, which he called Hellenism, was accomplished following the model of the Christian Church, borrowing everything that he thought good in its practices.

This attempt had to lead to the elimination of Christianity, but the state of facts proved to be totally different: Hellenism had become obsolete and in spite of all the measures taken, it was incapable of reaching the high ideals to which Julian aspired, together with the elite of the pagan society in that century. Then, he started the direct fight against Christianity. As a neoplatonist philosopher, he directed a poignant anti-Christian polemic, and as an emperor, he took a series of measures which, went from tolerance and inoffensiveness at the beginning of his reign to harshness, in its last months. These measures made him record his name on the list of the persecutors of the Church. Despite all this, Julian proved to be an astute diplomat in the fight against Christianity. He knew that religious tolerance was a way of restraining his adversaries and of imposing his will.

If Julian enjoyed some appreciations, these are due to the distinct features of his personality and, last but not least, to the meaning of his work. During his short reign, which lasted less than two years, this emperor conceived so many plans and

projects, most of them rather unusual, that for some he seemed a genius, for others a visionary temper. He passed some laws and he started some works which seemed to reveal an exceptional man and an emperor Rome and Constantinople had not had before. But none of this emperor's attempts can be compared to that of suppressing Christianity, "the faith of the Galileans", as he called it with mockery. This project, unique in the annals of universal history, envisaged practically the elimination of half of the population of the Empire, which would have led to a real catastrophe⁴.

Without officially announcing the recommencement of persecutions, the emperor, through his silence and equivocal attitude, allowed all the abuses and violence against the Galileans. Exiles became more frequent, and the pagan population, kindled by old resentments gave itself to acts of terrifying cruelty, demolishing churches, desecrating the tombs of martyrs, setting fire to the houses of Christians, stealing, persecuting and killing Christians with a rare barbarity. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Socrates and Sozomen narrate the tragic pagan revolts in Alexandria, Heliopolis, Gaza și Arethusa⁵. Bishops such as George of Alexandria and Mark of Arethusa suffered martyrical death⁶. Other Christians suffered death in

⁴ S. Gregorius Nazianzenus, Oratio IV. 74, in: J.- P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), p. 600BC.

⁵ Idem, Oratio IV. 86, in: J.- P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), pp. 613C, 618CD. see: Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericească*, translated by Iosif Gheorghian, (Bucarest: Cărților Bisericești Printing House, 1899), Book III, chap. 13-16, pp. 179-185, and Sozomen, *Istoria bisericească*, translated in Romanian by Iosif Gheorghian, Metropolitan of Romania, (Bucarest: Cărților Bisericești Printing House, 1897), Book V, chap. 9-10, pp. 184-188.

⁶ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericească*, Book III, chap. 2, *Răscolă provocată în Alexandria*, Book III, chap. 2, *Impăratul muștră poporul din Alexandria pentru omorîrea lui George*, pp. 165-168; Sozomen, *Istoria bisericească*, Book V, chap. 7, *Mărtea lui Georgie*, in quoted

other ways. Libanius and Ammianus Marcellinus, who were pagan, confirmed the violence of the anti-Christian repression. Leaving for war against the Persians, Julian, who had written part of his work *Against Galileans*, promised that on his return he would suppress totally and definitively the Christian faith and its followers. Fate arranged things differently, as he was defeated by Jesus, by the Galilean, as he called Him.

Despite all the appreciation one might have for his culture and spirit, always wishing to serve humanity, Julian did not choose the right way. First of all, he did not understand the grandeur and divinity of the Saviour, just as he did not understand the spirit of the times which were to come. Along with his defeat waned the glory of gods and paganism. Thus, the words: "You have defeated me, Galilean!", attributed by Christian tradition to Julian on his deathbed, acquire a profound spiritual meaning. Jesus Christ did not defeat only an apostate Roman emperor, the servant of Mithras, but a whole world with its religion and ideals.

2 An apparent Tolerance and Neutrality

Even if after his ascension to the throne (December 11th, 361) Julian kept a benevolent attitude towards Christians, this changed, soon, into a reaction of adversity towards them. The reason was the inefficiency of the reforms to which Hellenism, already fallen into ruin, was subject to.

Actually, Emperor Julian was a supporter of Hellenism, but he managed to hide his feeling astutely. Thus, in January 361, he attended the feast of Theophany in a church in Vienna "in

volume, pp. 181-182; S. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratio IV*. 88-91, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), pp. 616CD-624A.

Gallia⁷ and then he brought sacrifices to goddess Bellona in Basel⁸. In Illyricum he again brought sacrifices to gods, before the army, after which he sent to the great cities and to the Roman Senate pagan manifestoes which contained no insulting expression referring to Christians⁹.

Shortly after the end of the funeral of emperor Constantius, Julian established a military court in Chalcedon, which, nevertheless, did not interfere in religious matters. The hagiographers did not identify any martyr among the convicted ones¹⁰. Then, after he took charge of the imperial palace in Constantinople, the first concern of the new emperor was to assemble a council to which he invited all the leaders of the Christian sects¹¹. Julian told all of them that "civil disputes are over; no one opposes any longer, now all of them can follow their religion in peace"¹².

Thus began the epoch of religious tolerance and neutrality, as a warrant of his good intentions. However, Julian's purpose was that of using the dissensions between the Christian groups -

⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Istorie romană*, introductory study, translation, footnotes and index by David Popescu, s. n., s. a, Book XXI, 2, 4-5, p. 259.

⁸ Joseph Bidez, *La Vie de l'Empereur Julien*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), pp. 120-386, apud Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, (Bucarest: Cărților Bisericești Printing House, 1942), p. 146.

⁹ L'Empereur Julien, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. I/1^{re}: *Discours de Julien César (Éloge de l'empereur Constance, Éloge de l'impératrice Eusébie, Les actions de l'empereur ou de la royauté, Sur le départ de Salluste, Au sénat et au peuple d'Athènes)*, texte établi et traduit par Joseph Bidez, (Collection des Universités de France), (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1932), pp. 213-235, apud *Ibidem*, p. 147.

¹⁰ Idem, L'Évolution de la politique de l'Empereur Julien en matière religieuse, in: *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, (Clasee des Lettres), Bruxelles, nr. 7, 1914, p. 410.

¹¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Istorie romană*, Book XXII, chap.5. 3, in quoted volume, p. 293.

¹² *Ibidem*.

odium theologicum – in order to destroy the force and unity of Christianity, so as to consolidate the restoration of paganism on the ruins of Christianity.

Another measure taken immediately after his investiture was the famous edict through which he ordered the re-opening of temples and the resumption of sacrifices. The pagans, especially the ones in the East, enjoyed this measure. According to Libanius, there were “altars everywhere, fire and blood, everywhere the smell and smoke of sacrifices; on the mountain tops there sounded the sacred trumpets; the bulls served to the cult of gods, as well as to the food of people”¹³. The Church historian Sozomen accounts that: “all the old rites were put in force and each city recommenced the local ceremonies”¹⁴.

When the temples were re-opened, the oracles were re-opened, too: the one in Daphne, near Antioch, and the oracle of Apollo, Didyma in Miletus. The diviners, the interpreters of the future rejoiced all the freedom they had not had until then.

Meanwhile, Julian appealed to different people, especially neoplatonist philosophers, in order to reorganise the empire. Among the people invited at the Imperial Court there were: Hermogenes, former prefect of Egypt, the theurgist Maximus of Ephesus, Priscus and the sophist Himerius. It is interesting that in this period, Julian also appealed to some Christian heretics: Aetius, to whom he offered a carriage in order to be able to come to Pamphilia, certain Basil, as well as the sophist Proheresius. Later, he sent a eulogistic letter to the heretic Photinus of Sirmium¹⁵. Despite the equidistance emperor Julian displayed, the pagans quickly understood that the emperor liked them.

¹³ Libanius, Oratio XVIII, 126, in: R. Foerster (ed.), *Libanii opera*, vol. 2: *Orationes 1-64*, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904), p. 290.

¹⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericăscă*, Book V, chap. 3: *Iulian împuținéză și slăbesce Religiunea Creștină și favoriséză Păgânismul*, in quoted volume, pp. 176-177.

¹⁵ Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 151.

On December 24th in 361 a revolt broke out in Alexandria, to which the philosopher Pythodor contributed significantly. It ended with the assassination of the bishop George of Cappadocia and two other Christians, Dracontius and Diodorus¹⁶. The leader of the army, count Julian, the uncle of the emperor, did not take any measure to appease the mutineers. The emperor found out about this event in January 362 and sent the authors of the murder a letter in which he asserted that their anger against bishop George, whom he called “the enemy of gods”, is understandable, but he has no word of rebuke for what led to this state of facts. He blamed it on the violence of this bishop and on the brutality of the prefect of Egypt, Artemius. However, in order to keep up appearances, he avoided the use of terms which might offend Christians. He does not even mention the term “Galileans” and he rebukes the people in Alexandria for having behaved like dogs, although if he had resorted to the existent laws, it would have been sufficient in order to punish the guilty ones. So that he should be as convincing as possible, he underlined that “A people dares, as dogs, to tear a man to pieces, then they have no shame and no scruple in presenting sacrifices to the gods, as if the hands dripping with blood were clean”¹⁷.

Despite all this, Julian realised that his measures in favour of Hellenism would cause a reaction of Christians. Therefore, at the end of 361, he granted amnesty to all the bishops exiled on the grounds of faith by his predecessor, emperor Constantius and restored all the confiscated goods¹⁸. Thus, among the ones

¹⁶ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericăscă*, Book III, chap. 2: *Răscălă provocată în Alexandria*, in quoted volume, pp. 165-166.

¹⁷ Emperor Julian, *Epistola 60, 380 a*, apud Filip Horovitz, *Împăratul Iulian Apostatul (Figuri antice)*, (Bucarest: Cartea Românească Printing House, 1923), p. 23.

¹⁸ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericăscă*, Book III, chap. 1: *Nascerea lui Iulian. Educația sa. Ajungerea sa în fruntea Imperiului. Apostasia sa*, in quoted volume, pp. 160-165; see: Theodoret, Bishop of Cyr, *Istoria*

who returned there were Saint Athanasius the Great, Meletius of Antioch, Eusebius of Vercelli and Lucifer of Cagliari, exiled in the Upper Thebaid, and Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. By granting this amnesty, Julian wished to become popular and to establish the peace which was so much troubled in the religious fights in the Empire. He thought tolerance the best politics towards Christians, considered sick spirits, which he rather had to cure, not punish. In this sense, he said:

“Not through fire and sword can one oblige people to give up their false beliefs of gods, and in vain does the hand sacrifice, if the conscience protests (...). I have decided to use kindness and humaneness towards all Galileans. I forbid any violence or for someone to be dragged in a temple or forced to do any action against his will”¹⁹.

Nevertheless, later, the laws given by Julian aggravated the situation of Christians. On February 22nd, 362, he gave the law about the organisation of the public post of the Empire, the so-called “Cursus publicus”. Through this, he refused to grant the bishops of the Christian Church the right to receive public carriages in order to go to synods, a right which they had had since 314, since the synod in Arelate, assembled to solve the problem of donatism. Henceforth, only the heretics and pagan philosophers summoned at the court enjoyed this right.

On March 13th in 362 was published a law, which required all the inhabitants of the Empire, especially Christians, to restore

bisericească, Book, 4, 1, in *Scrieri*, translation by Vasile Sibiescu, collection *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 44, (Bucarest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 1995), p. 134; N. Chiriac-Dimancea, *Biserica în timpul domniei împăratului roman Iulian Apostatul (361-363 d. Chr.)*, (Pitești: Institutul de Arte Grafice “Artistica” P. Mitu, 1927), p. 25.

¹⁹ Emperor Julian, *Epistola 114, 438 b*, apud Filip Horovitz, *Împăratul Iulian Apostatul-Figuri antice*, (Bucarest: Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1923), p. 50.

the goods of the temples and the communal incomes acquired illegally²⁰.

Emperor Julian imposed Christians to pay taxes in order to rebuilt temples. This law for the restoration of goods caused a vehement reaction of Christians, and the conflicts between pagans and Christians multiplied.

Many Christians resisted the restoration of polytheism and did not pay any tax required by the emperor for the reconstruction of pagan temples. Some province governors even preferred to ignore applying this measure. The case of Chrysanthus is known – he acted in such a way that no change in the religious architecture should be noticed in his province. Yet, in certain cases, Julian had to intervene personally. Thus, when he passed through Tarsus, in Cilicia, on his way to Antioch, the priest of the temple of Esculap in Aegea “Cilicia” appealed to the emperor so as to obtain the restoration of a column from the bishop of that place²¹.

Another law, given in March 13th, 362, called the “curial law” aggravated even more the situation of Christians. It obliged the clergy and the rich Christians to enter the curia of the city, in order to pay with their own money, if it was needed, the debts of the respective provinces to the state. The law also established the annulment of the right of the Church to possess patrimony in a corporate way, and also it renounced the indemnities of the Christian clergy, so generously granted by Christian emperors²².

All these measures show that Julian managed to place Hellenism in the foreground of the life in the Empire only “by

²⁰ Ioan G. Coman, *Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz despre împăratul Iulian. Încercare asupra discursurilor IV și V*, PhD thesis, vol. I, (Bucarest: Institutului Român de Bizantinologie Publishing House nr. 5, 1938), p. 104.

²¹ Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 155.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 156.

repressing mercilessly many innovations which surrounded Christianity as an apparatus necessary for its life”²³.

We have news on the existence of some martyrs in this period, but not because of a public persecution edict, as Julian did not want the Christians killed to be venerated as martyrs, but he wanted their death to be exclusively caused by the anger of pagans, encouraged by his measures. Thus, according to the testimony of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, there is the case of bishop Mark of Arethusa (Phoenicia), who saved the life of Julian during the massacre of his family in Constantinople. The bishop destroyed a pagan temple during the reign of Constantius, and many Christians who had become pagans returned to the true faith. When the situation changed, in the sense that Hellenism was favoured, bishop Mark did not hesitate to get involved. When the persecution broke out, first he wanted to escape, but when he found out that because of him the other Christians were threatened and persecuted, he returned from his refuge and offered himself to the angry mob to do with him what they pleased.

“He was led along by every age and condition, with no exception, alike by men and women, old and young, by all who held public offices, and by all people of rank. All had but one object of emulation, how to surpass each other in atrocity towards the aged man”²⁴.

Until the second half of the year 362, before the month of June, Julian and his magistrates did not resort to violent measures against Christians. The laws he gave show us that the neutrality which characterises the beginning of his reign, in his religious

²³ Joseph Bidez, *L'Empereur Julien, Oeuvres complètes*, t. I/Ire: *Discours de Julien César* (Éloge de l'empereur Constance, Éloge de l'impératrice Eusébie, Les actions de l'empereur ou de la royauté, Sur le départ de Salluste, Au sénat et au peuple d'Athènes), (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1932), p. 425.

²⁴ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discursul IV*, 88, 89, 90, apud Ioan G. Coman, *Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz despre împăratul Iulian. Încercare asupra discursurilor IV și V*, pp. 109-110.

politics, was artificial and precarious and he just waited for the proper occasion in order to change it²⁵.

3 From Tolerance to Persecutions

While he was crossing Asia Minor, in the middle of June 362, on his way to Antioch to prepare the war with the Persians, Julian had the occasion to notice, personally, that the restoration of Hellenism and the veneration of gods did not make the expected progress. This worry is clear in the emperor's letters. Thus, he wrote to the philosopher Aristoxenus: "Up to this place- Tyana - I see only people who refuse to offer sacrifices, or there are few, who, wishing to do it, do not know how"²⁶.

After he personally inquired about the progress of Hellenism, and saw that it was in a state of decay, starting with June 362, Julian took a series of measures against Christianity. The first attacks were against the symbols and images on the coins and war flags of Roman legions. Christ's cross and monogram were replaced by an altar and a bull, signs of sacrifices for gods. He wished to do this because as the leader of the army, it was the easiest thing to do²⁷.

As the name of Christian was derived from "χριστος", that means anointed, and he thought the members of the religion established by Jesus Christ might be somehow considered chosen, Julian gave an edict through which Christians could no longer have this name, replacing it to that of Galileans. Some

²⁵ Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 158.

²⁶ Emperor Julian, *Epistola 78, 375 c*, apud Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 158.

²⁷ S. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratio IV. 66*, in: J.- P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), p. 588CD, apud Ioan G. Coman, *Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz despre împăratul Iulian. Încercare asupra discursurilor IV și V*, p. 85.

teachings of the Saviour were mocked at, as he recommended Christians to endure persecutions with joy because this is what their faith requires²⁸.

On June 17th, 362, during his stay in Ancyra, Julian published the law against Christian teachers, considered the most baneful of his measures²⁹. It had the effect of a lightning strike on Christians, as in the Church, education was on the rise. As far back as the third century, many Christians were teachers in secondary and higher education. They protested vehemently against this law, which even pagans disliked. Ammianus Marcellinus called it "a tyrannical measure, which we should bury in a eternal silence"³⁰. The law included some dispositions referring to recruiting teachers. These had to stand out through behaviour and eloquence; they had to be appreciated by the order of the Curials, which gave a decree, subsequently subjected to the emperor for ratification. What Julian meant by the behaviour and morality of the candidate can be seen in a circular letter, that many researchers consider a letter addressed to Christian teachers in the East³¹. Using the attacks of Christian apologetes against pagan literature, Julian claimed that it was a duty to give up interpreting classical authors in their lessons³². This law concerning education represented a difficult dilemma for Christian teachers, who had to choose between apostasy – if they adopted the ideology of the Hellenistic writers which they commented - and interpreting

²⁸ Idem, Oratio IV. 97, in: J.- P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), col. 632A, apud *Ibidem*, p. 89.

²⁹ Emperor Julian, *De Professoribus*, 61, apud *Ibidem*, pp. 90-95.

³⁰ Book XXII, 10, 6, Book XXV, 4, 20, in quoted volume, pp. 308, 390.

³¹ L'Empereur Julien, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 1/2: *Lettres et fragments*, texte revu et traduit par Joseph Bidez, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1924), p. 46, apud Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 162.

³² Emperor Julian, *Epistola 42*, apud Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 164.

only the Gospel, in which case they were dismissed and punished by losing their salary. Famous teachers, such as Marius Victorinus in Rome and Proheresius in Athens, preferred to lose their position than abjure their faith³³. Others tried to replace pagan classics with Christian models, such as the case of the two Appolinarius³⁴.

Socrates, the Church historian, mentions about this law: "Through a law, (Julian) excluded Christians from the benefits of education, for fear – he said – they should sharpen their tongue in order to answer the dialectics of the Greek"³⁵.

Another Church historian, Theodoret of Cyrus, informs us that this interdiction was also valid in the case of children, who were forbidden to attend schools³⁶.

Through the law of education, the equilibrium between the two cults – the Christian one and the pagan one – was broken, and Julian gave all the measures favourable to Hellenism. Seeing the opposition of the Church, he put into practice not only enticing means, more and more numerous, but also means of oppression, in order to stop the progress of the adversaries, hesitating between legal and illegal. However, there were no martyrs. There were more severe measures, starting with 362. Henceforth, his aim was that of restoring Hellenism through any means.

Starting with this moment, in parallel with the restoration of Hellenism, without a general edict of persecution, Julian incited to violence. It is true that martyrs and confessors who had to

³³ Augustin Fliche, Victor Martin (eds.) *Histoire de l'Eglise depuis des origines jusqu'à nos jours*, t. III: J. -R. Palanque, G. Bardy, P. de Labriolle, *De la paix constantinienne à la mort de Théodose*, (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1936), p. 189.

³⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericescă*, Book III, chap. 16: *Apolinarii alcătuiesc cărți*, in quoted volume, pp. 182-185.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, Book III, chap. 12: *Julian opresce pe creștinii de a învăța științele profane*, in quoted volume, p. 179.

³⁶ Theodoret, bishop of Cyr, *Istoria bisericească*, Book III, chap. 13: *Unele legiuiri ale lui Iulian, date contra creștinilor*, in quoted volume, p. 138.

suffer in this period for their faith, were either victims of phrenetic and rebellious mobs or of the punishments dictated for delicts of common law. Julian never ordered, nor did he oblige Christians to bring sacrifices to gods. Indeed he did not punish these pagan excesses, but he disapproved of acts of violence: "By all gods! I do not want Galileans to be killed, beaten unjustly or abused in any way, but I say that reverers of gods must be preferred by all means. Because of the madness of Galileans, everything was on the point of collapsing, whereas, on the contrary we were saved through the benevolence of gods. Therefore, we must honour gods, their reverers and the cities that adore them"³⁷.

What was the most serious was this very duplicity between legality and perfidy. Julian proclaimed, officially, legality, but in practice, he patronised and encouraged illegality. According to this method of work, he took a series of measures against Christians, in which cynism was combined with irony.

4 Christian Martyrs fallen under Julian

Although Julian avoided as much as possible to make Christian martyrs, he did not succeed. In Alexandria, the pagan population martyred bishop George of Cappadocia, together with other two Christians, Dracontius and Diodorus, on December 24th, 361. Bishop Mark was martyred in Arethusa. In the city of Pessinus, two young Christians, who overthrew the altar of the Mother of Gods, were convicted – one to death, and the other was cruelly beaten with leather belts. In Caesarea, Cappadocia, the young men Euppsychius and Damas were convicted to death. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus left us a description of the savagery of Heliopolitans, who dishonoured the Christian maidens, and the historian Theodoret of Cyr

³⁷ L'Empereur Julien, *Epistola 83*, 376 c, apud Idem, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. I/2: *Lettres et fragments*, pp. 143-144.

mentions Deacon Cyril, whom pagans massacred, taking out his liver.

However, they were much more numerous. Thus, we know the martyrs Saints John and Paul, priests John and Pigmentius, and an officer called Terentianus, with his son. All these formed a group which was martyred in Rome.

Saints John and Paul had offices at the imperial court, being part of the militia under Constantine, Constant and Constantius. During the reign of Julian they had retired to Rome. This appeared as a demonstration; therefore Julian invited the two brothers to resume their offices. They refused and, knowing what awaited them, they gave all their fortune to the poor and prepared for death. Julian sent officer Terentianus with the order to fulfil the emperor's wish in ten days. They persisted in their refusal. Then Terentianus killed them in the corridor of the house they lived in and buried them on the very spot where they had been executed. Afterwards, he spread the rumour that they had been exiled. Nevertheless, other Christians - priest Crispus, the cleric Crispinianus and Benedicta - discovered the place where they were buried. Being caught at the tombs, they were murdered, too. Their bodies were buried in secret with those of other martyrs, by priests John and Pigmentius and senator Flavianus. According to the martyrical acts, the son of officer Terentianus got sick and was miraculously healed at the tomb of these martyrs. Then the son and the father converted to Christianity and were both convicted to death at the same time. Priests John and Pigmentius, wanting to bury these two martyrs, were in turn killed and senator Flavianus was exiled. Called into question for a long time, the deeds narrated in the martyrical acts are now confirmed by the Christian archaeological discoveries in Rome³⁸.

³⁸ Joanne Carnandet (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur, vel a catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur*, (Tomus VII: *Martii tomus primus*, Parisiis et Romae: Editio novissima curante, 1865), pp. 141-142.

In Ancyra, pagans martyred priest Basil. He urged Christians, publicly and privately, to remain attached to their teachings and to avoid pagan sacrifices and libations. He exhorted them to refuse the honours the emperor offered them, and told them that these ephemeral favours will be punished with eternal death.

At Merum, in Phrygia, Amacius, the prefect of the province opened one of the temples of the city. Christians entered it at night and destroyed the statues of the gods. There were numerous arrests. Three Christians: Macedonius, Theodulus and Tatianus denounced themselves as authors of the deed. They were convicted to be burnt alive on red-hot gridirons after they refused to sacrifice to gods³⁹.

In the city of Durostorum, in Scythia Minor today "Silistra", a Christian soldier in the Roman garrison whose name was Emilianus, furtively overthrew the altars and statues of the gods in the temple of the city, the vicar of Thrace, Capitolinus, condemned him to be burnt at the stake because he insulted the gods. The execution took place on the bank of the Danube, in a place called Gedina, approximately three miles away from Durostorum⁴⁰.

In Alexandria, the pagans, encouraged by the fact that the death of bishop George of Cappadocia was not punished, wrote to the emperor and required the punishment of Artemius, an Arian, former military commander in Egypt, during Constantius. He was blamed, just like George, for having taken part in the destruction of the Serapeum temple. Julian confiscated his fortune and then ordered for him to be beheaded⁴¹.

Among the martyrs during Julian, one must also mention Publica the deaconess, who was the abbess of a convent of nuns. These

³⁹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Istoria bisericescă*, Book III, chap.15: *Martiri în Frigia*, in quoted volume, p. 182.

⁴⁰ Theodoret, bishop of Cyr, *Istoria bisericească*, Book III, 7, 5, in quoted volume, p. 137.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, Book III, 18, 1-2, in quoted volume, p. 146.

made, through their songs, a manifestation hostile to Julian during the transportation of the relics of Saint Babylas from Daphne to Antioch. Furious, the emperor, ordered deaconess Publia to be brought, and without any respect for her old age, ordered the soldiers in the escort to slap her, until her face was covered in blood⁴².

In Antioch, the priest Theodoret, being caught praying at the tomb of Saint Babylas, after the arson of the temple of Apollo in Daphne, was brought before count Julian, the uncle of the emperor with the same name, who recommended him to venerate gods. Upon refusing, he was beaten and eventually beheaded on October 23rd, 362⁴³.

The last jurisdiction act of count Julian seems to have been a capital sentence against two Christian soldiers, Bonosus and Maximilianus, the tribunes of Cornuti Seniore Ioviani and Cornuti Seniores Herculiani. They refused to obey the order given to the whole army to suppress the Christian monogram on flags. Consequently, they were beheaded. In their martyrical acts is narrated that the Christian population in Antioch, led by the Orthodox bishop Meletius, accompanied them to the place of the execution. They were martyred in January 363⁴⁴.

In Gaza, pagans obtained from the emperor the permission to destroy the convent built on the neighbouring mountain by hermit Hilarion, his condemnation to death, as well as that of his disciple, Hesychius. However, these sought refuge in Alexandria. The pagan population, deceived, tried a diversion. Three Christian brothers, Eusebius, Nestabius and Zenon, were very much loathed by pagans. After they were beaten, they were taken to prison. One day, at the theatre, the mob started to ask for the death of the three young men, accusing them of having profaned the temples and insulted the gods. Inciting one

⁴² *Ibid*, Book III, 19, in quoted volume, pp. 146-147.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 146-147.

⁴⁴ Paul Allard, *Julien l'Apostat*, 3-e Éd., (Tomus III, Paris, 1919), pp. 153-154.

another, they forced the gates of the prison and took out the Christians. Then, two more Christians were caught. One, called Zenon, managed to find refuge in Anthedon, a harbour situated at twenty stadia distant from Gaza. The other one was called Nestor. Melted by his beauty, the pagans did not kill him, but threw him outside the city, intending to let him die, but he was saved in time by Christians. The other two martyrs were killed by the blows of the mob. The remains full of blood were thrown in a place where the corpses of animals were thrown. After they burnt them, the pagans mixed the human bones with skeletons of donkeys and camels⁴⁵.

When Julian made preparations to go from Antioch to Persia, two soldiers, Juventinus and Maximianus, who belonged to the imperial guard, criticised Julian's religious politics. A soldier denounced them. Before they were judged, their fortunes were confiscated and they were sent to prison. The emperor sent secret agents to convert them, but it was in vain. They were condemned to death, on the grounds of having conspired against Julian, not because they were Christians. The sentence was put into practice at night, on January 25th, 363, in Antioch⁴⁶.

Upon leaving for Persia, Julian is said to have announced, according to several authors, that on his return, he would restart the war against Christianity, much more persistently than before, and that he would make even the name of this

⁴⁵ Sozomen, *Istoria bisericească*, Book V, chap. 9-10, in quoted volume, pp. 184-188.

⁴⁶ Henri Leclercq, *Les martyrs: recueil de pièces authentiques sur les martyrs depuis les origines du christianisme jusqu'au XX-ème siècle*, (Tome III: *Julien l'Apostat, Sapor, Genséric*, Tours : Mame, 1903), pp. 96-98, apud Ioan I. Pulpea, *Lupta împăratului Iulian împotriva creștinismului*, p. 196.

harmful sect disappear⁴⁷. Actually, this point was his governing programme.

5 Conclusions

Emperor Julian the Apostate remained in history as a great statesman and military, a thinker and a philosopher emperor, who reminds us of another Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, whom he always wished to be compared with.

Unlike any of the Roman emperors who were persecutors, he reunited in his person all the means of fighting against Christianity. As a philosopher, he persecuted Christianity through his writings, and as an emperor through his laws and measures.

The main directions of his plan were establishing and reforming Hellenism, anti-Christian polemics and persecuting Christians. In his view, Christianity was an obstacle to establishing Hellenism, therefore, he tried by all means to disunite Christians, granting religious freedom to all sects and then persecuting. He recommended tolerance, but when violent acts were committed, he did not punish the authors. He was afraid of killing someone for being a Christian, so as not to be venerated as a martyr.

Julian's reign disrupted the Church to a great extent, and, if he had not died so quickly, he would have caused even greater convulsion.

Despite all this, one must admit that the Church benefitted from this attitude. Persecution was a homage he brought, unwillingly, to the superiority of the Christian Religion. Mention must also be made of the fact that, indirectly, Julian contributed

⁴⁷ S. Gregorius Nazianzenus, Oratio 5. 26, in: J.- P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1886), p. 629A.

to the re-establishment of Christian unity, ruined by division and Arian disputes. Christians of all categories united in order to overtake the common enemy, as Julian did not persecute only Orthodox, but also the other Christian sects.

Julian's work was the last serious attempt to re-establish the cult of gods. This attempt was doomed to fail from the very beginning, because the course of history is not changed through laws and caprices, be they of a genius emperor. He constitutes a unique example of opposition to the natural evolution of history. After this last assault on Christianity, paganism entered the last phase of its history.

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