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J.B. Bury

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER XI

## JUSTINIAN'S CAESAROPAPISM

THE absolutism of Justinian extended to the ecclesiastical world, and in church as well as in state history he occupies a position of ecumenical importance. He was a sort of imperial pontiff, and this Caesaropapism, as it has been called, represents the fulfilment of the policy which Constantius tried and failed to realise.

Justinian's ecclesiastical policy rested on his support of the council of Chalcedon, and thus accorded in principle with the policy by which his uncle Justin had restored unity to Christendom. But this unity was only a unity of the western Church with the chief Church in the East; whereas the East itself was divided. The monophysites were a large and important body, and the Emperor was not content not to make an effort to reconcile this difference, especially as the Empress Theodora was an adherent of the heretical creed. His object was to secure a unity in the Church, which should exclude all sectarianism, and embrace both East and West. Consequently he did not rest in the policy of his uncle Justin; he tried to accomplish what Zeno and Anastasius had failed to accomplish, a conciliation of the Chalcedonians and monophysites.

One of his first acts was to deal a final blow to paganism. He shut up the philosophical schools at Athens, with which Theodosius II had not interfered when he founded the university of Constantinople. The abolition of the Athenian university has two aspects. In the first place, it was the last blow dealt by Christianity to the ancient philosophers and their doctrines, and was one of the acts which mark the reign

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of Justinian as the terminus of the ancient world. In the second place, it was a measure in which Justinian's design of establishing a unity of belief and thought in the Empire was manifested; and it is to be taken closely with the law that pagans and heretical Christians were not to hold office in either the civil service or the army. His general principle is laid down clearly in a constitution (published shortly before his uncle's death)<sup>1</sup>: "All will be able to perceive that from those who do not worship God rightly, human goods also are withheld,"—a most concise expression of religious intolerance. It may be observed that in this constitution the Manichaeans are mentioned with special acrimony, and rendered liable to the extreme penalties of the law. It was the instinct of Christianity, which was essentially monistic, though not with Semitic monism, to fight against all forms of dualism as the most odious kind of heresy.

The monophysites held a peculiar position. They were very numerous, and they were supported by the sympathy of the Empress Theodora, who shared their creed. Justinian considered it an important political object to unite them with the orthodox Church, and it was a theological problem to accomplish this—to make concessions to the heretics without abandoning the basis of Chalcedon.

Justinian might have carried this out in the East without much difficulty, if he had been content to sacrifice union with the western Church. But that would have been to undo what Justin had done and he himself had confirmed; and the union of the eastern and western Churches was of primary importance for the restorer of Roman rule in Italy and Africa. His political designs exercised a perceptible control on his ecclesiastical measures.

This was the dilemma that beset every Roman Emperor—quite apart from his personal opinions—ever since the council of Chalcedon. If he chose to attempt to establish unity in the East, he must sacrifice unity with the West, as Zeno and Anastasius had done. If he chose to seek unity with the West, like Justin, he must be satisfied to see his dominions distracted by the bitter opposition of synodites and monophysites. The imperial throne shared by the orthodox Justinian and the

<sup>1</sup> *Cod. Just.* i. 5, 12. Compare the other laws under the same title.

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Eutychian Theodora was symbolic of the division of the Empire in the matter of theological beliefs.

Justinian's achievement was to overcome this dilemma.<sup>1</sup> He was powerful enough to carry a measure which tended to unity by modifying the synod of Chalcedon without breaking with the Church of Rome.

Apart from their personal opinions—which, while we admit that they co-operated, we must set aside in order to observe the influence of circumstances—the policies of Zeno, Anastasius, and Justin in regard to this problem were natural. To Zeno and Anastasius, who had no thought of recovering power in Italy, the opposition of the bishop of Rome was a matter of smaller importance than division in the Empire. Justin's policy was naturally anti-monophysitic, because it was a reaction against Anastasius; and such a policy implied a renewal of relations with Rome. Justinian's intervention in the political world of western Europe altered the position of the bishop of Rome, and in the fifth Council of Constantinople the Emperor exercised an unprecedented authority, which would have pleased Constantius II.

In 536 A.D., by the influence of Theodora, Anthimus, a man of monophysitic opinions, was appointed Patriarch of Constantinople. In the following year Pope Agapetus visited that city on political business, to treat for peace on behalf of Theodahad; it was the second time that an Ostrogothic king had despatched a Pope on a message to an Emperor. Agapetus succeeded in obtaining the deposition of Anthimus, and the election of an orthodox successor, Mennas. That Justinian was not aware of the real opinions of Anthimus, before Agapetus unveiled his heterodoxy, is unlikely, but the supporter of orthodoxy could not refuse to oppose him, once it was made public, and that by the bishop of Rome. Dante represents Justinian as originally holding monophysitic opinions, and owing his conversion to Agapetus.<sup>2</sup>

E prima ch' io all' opra fossi attento,  
Una natura in Cristo esser, non piue  
Credeva, e di tal fede era contento.

<sup>1</sup> Procopius (*de Aed.* i. 1) says of the Emperor's ecclesiastical policy, *συντρίψας ἀπάσας τὰς ἐπὶ τὰς πλάνας φερούσας*

*ὁδοὺς διεπράξατο ἐν τῷ βεβαίῳ τῆς πίστεως ἐπὶ μιᾶς ἐστάναι κρηπίδος.*

<sup>2</sup> *Paradiso*, cant. vi. 13 sqq.

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Ma il benedetto Agapito, che fue  
Sommo pastore, alla fede sincera  
Mi dirizzò con le parole sue.

The controversy of the “three articles,” a long chapter in the ecclesiastical history of the sixth century, began in 544, and lasted for eight years. We need not follow its details, but the elements that were involved in it as well as its consequences must be briefly explained. Three points to be noticed are—(1) that it was externally connected with an Origenistic controversy which had disturbed Palestine for some years past; (2) that the difficulty of concluding the question depended on the wavering position of Pope Vigilius; (3) that Justinian’s desire to carry his point was at first quickened by the monophysitic leanings of his consort, who died before the dispute was decided.

At Justinian’s desire the Patriarch Mennas held a local synod, at which the writings of Origen were condemned. Theodore Ascidas, bishop of Caesarea, a monophysite who believed in the Origenistic theology, did not oppose this sentence, but made a fruitful suggestion to Justinian, of which the apparently exclusive aim was to reunite the monophysites, but which really contained a blow at a prominent opponent of Origen’s methods, Theodore of Mopsuestia. The import of this suggestion was that what really repelled the monophysites was not any point of doctrine, but the countenance given by the council of Chalcedon to certain Nestorians.

Accordingly in 544 Justinian promulgated an edict,<sup>1</sup> wherein the Three Articles (*κεφάλαια*), which gave the name to the controversy, were enunciated—(1) Theodore of Mopsuestia and his works were condemned; (2) certain writings of Theodoret against Cyril were condemned; and (3) a letter of Ibas, addressed to a Persian and censuring Cyril, was condemned. The council of Chalcedon had expressly acknowledged the orthodoxy of these writings and their authors, and thus the authority of that council seemed called in question, though the edict expressly professed to respect it.

The bishops of the East, including Mennas, signed the

<sup>1</sup> This determination of ecclesiastical matters by imperial edicts is the key-note of Caesaropapism. Basiliscus had attempted this policy in his brief reign.

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edict; but Mennas made his adhesion conditional on the approval of the bishop of Rome, and it is just the attitude of the bishop of Rome that lends an interest to the controversy.

Vigilius had been elevated to the papal see of Rome under circumstances which appear at least unusual. He was at Constantinople when Agapetus died in 537, and his election rested on the support of Theodora, with whom he is said to have made a sort of bargain not to act against the monophysite Anthimus, the deposed Patriarch. Before he arrived at Rome, Silverius had been elected Pope in Italy, and the deposition and banishment of the latter, on the charge of treason, by Belisarius,<sup>1</sup> give room for suspicion that corrupt dealings were practised for the benefit of Vigilius.

When Vigilius was called upon to sign the edict of the "three articles" he felt himself in a dilemma. The western Church, especially the Church of Africa, cried out loudly against the document, while Vigilius felt himself under obligations to Theodora and the Emperor. A synod at Carthage went so far as to excommunicate the Pope (549).

At first he refused to sign. When he was at Rome, at a safe distance from the Caesar-Pope, resistance did not seem hard. But Justinian summoned him to Constantinople, where he remained until 554. During this time he wavered between the two forces in whose conflict he was involved—the ecclesiastical opinion of the West and the imperial authority. The latter finally conquered, but not until the Pope had been condemned in the fifth general Council, held at Constantinople in 553, after which he retracted his condemnation of the articles,<sup>2</sup> attributing it to the arts of the devil.

The fifth general Council, it should be observed, has an importance beyond the rather trivial subjects discussed. Its basis—its agenda—was an edict drawn up by the Emperor; it adopted theological tenets formulated by the Emperor. This is the most characteristic manifestation of Justinianean Caesaropapism.

<sup>1</sup> See Liberatus, *Brev.* 22; Anastasius, *Vita Silverii*. Liberatus wrote his *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum*, about 560, against Justinian's Articles.

<sup>2</sup> The "Condemnation of the Three Articles" is ambiguous. I use the ex-

pression in its proper sense, as the condemnation of the three proposals of Justinian's edict. But in popular usage the Three Articles meant the opinions which the edict condemned, and thus one who opposed the edict was said to defend the Articles.

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The election of Pelagius as the successor of Vigilius<sup>1</sup> to the see of Rome is noteworthy, because the Roman Emperor exercised the right of confirming the election, which had belonged to the Ostrogothic monarch. This right gave Justinian an ecclesiastical power of European extent, and introduced an important theory into Christendom. "According to the *Liber Diurnus* (a collection of forms which represents the state of things in those days or shortly after), the death of a Roman bishop was to be notified to the exarch of Ravenna; the successor was to be chosen by the clergy, the nobles of Rome, the soldiery, and the citizens; and the ratification of the election was to be requested in very submissive terms both of the Emperor and of his deputy the exarch."<sup>2</sup>

Pelagius upheld the three articles of the council, but the unity of the East and the consent of the Pope were purchased at the expense of the unity of the West. Milan and Aquileia would know nothing of the fifth Council, and although the invasion of the Lombards soon drove Milan into the arms of Rome, the see of Aquileia and the bishop of Istria seceded from the Roman Church for more than a hundred and forty years.

In Egypt monophysitism was ineradicable. Alexandria "the Great" was a scene of continual religious quarrels between the Eutychians and the Melchites, as they called the orthodox Catholics. In Syria monophysitism continued under the name of Jacobitism—a name derived from its propagator in the sixth century, Jacob al Baradai, a travelling monk.

The Armenian Church also adopted the Eutychian heresy, and in the ultra-Eutychian form of apthartodocetism, the doctrine that Christ's body was incorruptible. It is curious that the same cause favoured the survival of the two opposite doctrines, Eutychianism and Nestorianism, in Armenia and Persia respectively. The Persian government tolerated Nestorian Christianity in its dominions, and looked with favour on a monophysitic Armenian Church, because both creeds were opposed to the State religion of Byzantium.

<sup>1</sup> Vigilius died at Syracuse on his way back to Rome in June 555. Those who are curious about the details of these transactions may be referred to a chapter in Mr. Hodgkin's *Italy and her*

*Invaders*, vol. iv., entitled "The Sorrows of Vigilius," as well as to ecclesiastical histories.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. ii. p. 334.

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I have mentioned apthartodocetism. It obtained a certain notoriety in the last years of Justinian's reign, for the old Emperor adopted the doctrine himself, and enforced it on his subjects by an edict. His death cut short the full execution of his last and least Caesaropapistic undertaking.

Among his acts of ecclesiastical autocracy we must mention the edict which raised the see of Prima Justiniana, in his own native province of Dacia Mediterranea, to the rank of an archbishopric (535 A.D.) "Desiring," this document begins, "to increase in many and divers ways our native land, in which God first granted us to come into this world, which He himself founded, we wish to augment it and make it very great in ecclesiastical rank."<sup>1</sup> This decree was confirmed in another decree ten years later (545 A.D.) I do not consider it justifiable to say, as ecclesiastical historians sometimes do,<sup>2</sup> that Justinian desired to found a sixth patriarchate; on the contrary, the new archbishop, as I understand the second edict, was to depend on the Pope of Rome, and to hold the same position, for example, as the archbishop of Ravenna.

In regard to the missionary activity which Justinian encouraged for the conversion of heathen nations, I cannot do

<sup>1</sup> Novel xix. (ed. Zacharia von Lingenthal, 1881). Below, the imperial style speaks of Dacia Mediterranea as *nostra felicissima patria*. For the confirmation of the privilege, see Nov. cli. The old idea that Tauresium, which Justinian restored because it was his birthplace, and called by the name of Justiniana Prima, was identical with Achrida, arose from the circumstance that the title of the archbishop was "Archbishop of Justiniana and Achrida." See Appendix E in vol. ii. of Mr. Tozer's delightful book on the highlands of Turkey. "The explanation of the double title is, that while Justinian had established the metropolitan see at the place on which he bestowed his name, it was transferred to Ochrida when that place was made the capital of the Bulgarian kingdom." Mr. Tozer agrees with Mannert in identifying Uskiub with Justiniana. "It fell within the district of Dardania, and was situated at a moderate distance from Ochrida; it was also the most important position in that neighbour-

hood, and from having been the leading city, would be most naturally pointed out for restoration and decoration." "Von Hahn [the Austrian traveller], who passed by here in 1858, has shown that the names Tauresium and Bederiana may be traced in those of Taor and Bader," two villages hard by.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, ii. 333, "to erect a sixth patriarchate." The express words of Justinian are (Nov. cli. γ')—*καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς ταῖς ὑποκειμέναις αὐτῷ ἐπαρχίαις* [Dacia M., Dacia Ripensis, Prevalitana (Πρεβαλέα), Dardania, Upper Moesia, Pannonia] *τὸν τόπον ἐπέχεον αὐτὸν τοῦ ἀποστολικοῦ Ῥώμης θρόνου κατὰ τὰ ὁρισθέντα ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πάπα Βιγίλιου*. That is, the archbishop was to hold the place of, or be the representative of, the Pope in these provinces. The Patriarchs did not "hold the place" of the Pope. This disposes of Robertson's remark that Justinian's design "proved abortive." Robertson is also wrong in the date, which he gives as 541.

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better than quote the following little-known account of the conversion of the Nobadae<sup>1</sup> :—

“ Among the clergy in attendance on the Patriarch Theodosius was a proselyte named Julianus, an old man of great worth, who conceived an earnest spiritual desire to christianise the wandering people who dwell on the eastern borders of the Thebais beyond Egypt, and who are not only not subject to the authority of the Roman Empire, but even receive a subsidy on condition that they do not enter nor pillage Egypt. The blessed Julianus, therefore, being full of anxiety for this people, went and spoke about them to the late Queen Theodora, in the hope of awakening in her a similar desire for their conversion ; and as the queen was fervent in zeal for God, she received the proposal with joy, and promised to do everything in her power for the conversion of these tribes from the errors of idolatry. In her joy, therefore, she informed the victorious King Justinian of the purposed undertaking, and promised and anxiously desired to send the blessed Julian thither. But when the king [Emperor] heard that the person she intended to send was opposed to the council of Chalcedon, he was not pleased, and determined to write to the bishops of his own side in the Thebais, with orders for them to proceed thither and instruct the Nobadae, and plant among them the name of synod. And as he entered upon the matter with great zeal, he sent thither, without a moment’s delay, ambassadors with gold and baptismal robes, and gifts of honour for the king of that people, and letters for the duke of the Thebais, enjoining him to take every care of the embassy and escort them to the territories of the Nobadae. When, however, the queen learnt these things, she quickly, with much cunning, wrote letters to the duke of the Thebais, and sent a mandatory of her court to carry them to him ; and which were as follows : ‘ Inasmuch as both his majesty and myself have purposed to send an embassy to the people of the Nobadae, and I am now despatching a blessed man named Julian ; and further my will is that my ambassador should arrive at the aforesaid people before his majesty’s ; be warned, that if you permit his ambassador to arrive there before mine, and do not hinder him by various pretexts until mine shall have reached you and shall have passed through your province and arrived at his destination, your life shall answer for it ; for I shall immediately send and take off your head.’ Soon after the receipt of this letter the king’s ambassador also came, and the duke said to him, ‘ You must wait a little while we look out and procure beasts of burden and men who know the deserts, and then you will be able to proceed.’ And thus he delayed him until the arrival of the merciful queen’s embassy, who found horses and guides in waiting, and the same day, without loss of time, under a show of doing it by violence, they laid hands upon him, and were the first to proceed. As for the duke, he made his excuses to the king’s ambassador, saying, ‘ Lo ! when I had

<sup>1</sup> I have extracted this curious narrative from R. Payne Smith’s translation of the ecclesiastical history, written in Syriac, of the monophysite John of Ephesus. On missions M. Gasquet

(*L’empire byzantin*, p. 75) remarks : “ Les missions voilà donc l’élément nouveau qui donne à la politique byzantine son caractère distinctif.”



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made my preparations and was desirous of sending you onward, ambassadors from the queen arrived and fell upon me with violence, and took away the beasts of burden I had got ready, and have passed onward ; and I am too well acquainted with the fear in which the queen is held to venture to oppose them. But abide still with me until I can make fresh preparations for you, and then you also shall go in peace.' And when he heard these things he rent his garments, and threatened him terribly and reviled him ; and after some time he also was able to proceed, and followed the other's track without being aware of the fraud which had been practised upon him.

"The blessed Julian meanwhile and the ambassadors who accompanied him had arrived at the confines of the Nobadae, whence they sent to the king and his princes informing him of their coming ; upon which an armed escort set out, who received them joyfully, and brought them into their land unto the king. And he too received them with pleasure, and her majesty's letter was presented and read to him, and the purport of it explained. They accepted also the magnificent honours sent them, and the numerous baptismal robes, and everything else richly provided for their use. And immediately with joy they yielded themselves up and utterly abjured the errors of their forefathers, and confessed the God of the Christians, saying, 'He is the one true God, and there is no other beside Him.' And after Julian had given them much instruction, and taught them, he further told them about the council of Chalcedon, saying that 'inasmuch as certain disputes had sprung up among Christians touching the faith, and the blessed Theodosius being required to receive the council and having refused was ejected by the king [Emperor] from his throne, whereas the queen received him and rejoiced in him because he stood firm in the right faith and left his throne for its sake, on this account her majesty has sent us to you, that ye also may walk in the ways of Pope Theodosius, and stand in his faith and imitate his constancy. And moreover the king has sent unto you ambassadors, who are already on their way, in our footsteps.'"

The Emperor's emissaries arrived soon afterwards, and were dismissed by the king of the Nobadae, who told them that if his people embraced Christianity at all it would be the doctrine of the holy Theodosius of Alexandria, and not the "wicked faith" of the Emperor.

In his own dominions too the activity of christian missionaries was necessary, for in the devious recesses of Asia Minor there were many spots, *pagi*, where heathenism survived. It is remarkable that for the conversion of his heathen subjects Justinian employed a monophysitic priest, John of Ephesus, who afterwards wrote an ecclesiastical history in Syriac from the monophysitic point of view. We shall see how the monophysites were persecuted by a zealous Patriarch and an unwise Emperor after Justinian's death. Towards the close of

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the century, when the heresy was almost exterminated from the Empire, it was revived, as has been already mentioned, by one Jacob al Baradai, who, dressed as a beggar—hence his name “the Ragged”—travelled about in the provinces of Syria and Mesopotamia and organised anew the monophysitic Church. To the nascent monophysites was attached the name of the second founder of the sect; they were called Jacobites.