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VOLUMEN II







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## VOLUMEN II





# EUSEBIUS AND ALCUIN ON CONSTANTINE AND CHARLEMAGNE AS WISE RULERS: SAPIENTIAL RULERSHIP IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

## CONSTANTINO Y CARLOMAGNO COMO GOBERNANTES SABIOS EN LA OBRA DE EUSEBIO DE CESAREA Y ALCUINO DE YORK: LA REALEZA SAPIENCIAL EN LA ANTIGÜEDAD TARDÍA Y LA ALTA EDAD MEDIA

Manuel Alejandro Rodríguez de la Peña<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Time and again Eusebius of Caesarea and Alcuin of York chose to present in their writings their imperial masters, Constantine the Great and Charlemagne, as wise rulers, dressing them with Platonic and Solomonic robes. It is our assumption that to understand this sapiential discourse on kingship we should trace its roots to the Christian reception of the Greco-Roman and Biblical Wisdom tradition. Both the first Christian Emperor and the first ever Theologian-Prince, Constantine the Great had been vilified as a ruthless tyrant and an ill-educated ruler by authors ancient and modern. However, there is every indication that he was the prince with the highest cultural training since the Second century AD and a devoted patron of the arts. He was able not only to actively participate in fluent Greek in the heated debates at the Council of Nicaea but also to write theological tracts espousing a profound political theology which incorporated ideas and expressions from a great array of sources, both Christian and Pagan. In this regard, Eusebius presents us with a portrait of the first Christian Emperor that is appropriately Solomonic. In Eusebius' Constantinian

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narrative, the Emperor plays a sapiential role as a charismatic ‘Preacher-Emperor’ and a crowned theologian. In this regard, it seems that Christian theology was so important for Constantine only because religious wisdom had a clear political dimension, being as such a princely prerogative, and therefore integral part of the *arcana Imperii*. Five centuries later Alcuin of York presented Charlemagne as a Preacher-king (*Rex praedicator*) in Constantinian robes. If we compare the sapiential theme of rulership in the Constantinian and Carolingian texts, there is remarkable resemblance that points to a basic ideological continuity.

### Keywords

Sapiential rulership; Wisdom Theology; Christian Roman Empire; Constantine the Great; Carolingian Empire; Charlemagne; Eusebius of Caesarea; Alcuin of York.

### Resumen

Una y otra vez Eusebio de Cesarea y Alcuino de York eligieron presentar en sus escritos a sus soberanos, los emperadores Constantino el Grande y Carlomagno, como gobernantes sabios, vistiéndoles con ropajes platónicos y salomónicos. Entendemos que para entender este discurso sapiencial sobre la realeza debemos rastrear sus raíces hasta la recepción cristiana de la tradición sapiencial grecorromana y bíblica. A un tiempo el primer Emperador cristiano y el primer ‘Príncipe Teólogo’, Constantino el Grande ha sido vilipendiado como un tirano despiadado y un gobernante iletrado por autores antiguos y modernos. Sin embargo, todos los indicios apuntan a que fue el príncipe con la más alta formación cultural desde el siglo II d.C. y un devoto mecenas de las artes. Fue capaz no sólo de participar activamente en un griego fluido en los acalorados debates del Concilio de Nicea, sino también de escribir complejos tratados teológicos que defendieron una profunda teología política que incorporó ideas y expresiones de una gran variedad de fuentes, tanto cristianas como paganas. En este sentido, Eusebio nos presenta un retrato del primer emperador cristiano que es apropiadamente salomónico. En la narrativa constantiniana de Eusebio, el Emperador desempeña un papel sapiencial como carismático ‘Emperador-Predicador’, además de teólogo coronado. En este sentido, parece que la teología cristiana era importante para Constantino en la medida en que la sabiduría religiosa tenía una clara dimensión política, siendo así una prerrogativa principesca, y por lo tanto parte integral de los *arcana Imperii*. Cinco siglos más tarde, Alcuino de York representó en un estilo constantiniano a Carlomagno como un Rey-Predicador (*Rex praedicator*). Si comparamos la imagen sapiencial de la realeza en los textos constantinianos y carolingios, salta a la vista un notable parecido que apunta a una continuidad ideológica básica.

### Palabras clave

Realeza sapiencial; Teología de la Sabiduría; Imperio Romano Cristiano; Constantino el Grande; Imperio Carolingio; Carlomagno; Eusebio de Cesarea; Alcuino de York.

## INTRODUCTION: RELIGION AND GREEK WISDOM IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS

Time and again Eusebius of Caesarea and Alcuin of York chose to present in their writings their imperial masters, Constantine the Great and Charlemagne, as wise rulers, dressing them with Platonic and Solomonic robes. It is our assumption that to understand this sapiential discourse on kingship we should trace its roots to the Christian reception of the Greco-Roman and Biblical Wisdom tradition.

There is a growing tendency in recent decades to situate earliest Christianity in the Greco-Roman cultural and spiritual context. This scholarly tendency has challenged previous assumptions related to a certain mythic model of the formation of Christianity that posits «pure» Hebraic origins. Sensitivity to the rhetorical strategies of both the epistolary corpus and the Gospels suggests a «higher» literary and philosophical style than previously admitted and, therefore, invites us to a deeper reflection on the true sapiential dimension of early Christianity<sup>2</sup>.

Early Christian portraits of Jesus, the apostles, and other biblical figures often depict these subjects wearing the garment customarily worn by Greek philosophers. From sarcophagi and *arcosolia* to apses and icons, the garment, known as the *tribon* in Greek and the *pallium* in Latin, dresses Christian sages and saints. This Greek robe had been characteristic of the portraiture of philosophers, poets, and orators since the Hellenistic Age<sup>3</sup>.

In this regard, Arthur Urbano has argued that «the mantle became a locus of competition within the philosophical contexts of late antiquity. It served as a public, visual communication of intellectual expertise and moral authority. By maintaining or assuming a style of dress associated with philosophers, some Christian teachers enacted a visual engagement and challenge to contemporary philosophical culture»<sup>4</sup>.

Celsus's notorious intellectual effort to demolish Christianity in his *On the True Doctrine* (c. 170) shows how threatening it had become in the eyes of the pagan cultural elite. Probably, the astonishing proportions of second century Christian apologetic literary activity had much to do with it<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the Christianity of the late second century «was characterized by increasing intellectual sophistication, self-conscious separation from its Jewish parent, and a growing sense of mission. Perhaps most threatening of all to their pagan respondents, Christian thinkers

2. MEEKS Wayne A., *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983, p. 5; AITKEN Ellen B., «An Early Christian Homerizon? Decoy, Direction, and Doxology», *The Homerizon. Conceptual Interrogations in Homeric Studies*, Armstrong, R. and Dué, C., eds., *Classics@*, 3 (2006), p. 3.

3. URBANO Arthur P., «Dressing a Christian: The Philosopher's Mantle as Signifier of Pedagogical and Moral Authority», *Studia Patristica*, 62/10 (2013), pp. 213-214. On this, see also MARROU Henri Irenée, *Mousikos Aner. Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains*, Grenoble, Didier & Richard, 1938.

4. URBANO, A. P., *art. cit.*, p. 2.

5. BARNARD, Leslie W., *Athenagoras: A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1972, pp. 11-12.

were beginning to assert ownership of the cultural and intellectual property of their pagan opponents»<sup>6</sup>.

As is well known, there were two different sets of early Christian attitudes towards Greek *paideia*. The first one was marked by hostility and distrust and was best embodied by Tertullian (c. 160-220). The African rhetorician defined in his *De praescriptione haereticorum* the relationship between Greek learning and Christian revelation as being essentially one of radical conflict. For Tertullian, Paul had learned in Athens to recognize in Greek philosophy, «this poor human knowledge which pretends to search for truth», and which is basically responsible for the existence of heresies: *Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?* – «For what do Athens and Jerusalem have in common? Or the Academy and the Church? Or heretics and Christians? Our doctrine comes from the portico of Solomon, who himself had taught that it is in the simplicity of the heart that one must search for God. Too bad for those who have promoted a Stoic, a Platonic, or a dialectical Christianity! We do not need curiosity after Jesus Christ, or research after the Gospel»<sup>7</sup>.

In the East we find another Christian advocate of hostility to Hellenic *paideia*. Justin's Syriac pupil Tatian (c. 120-180), who composed in Greek a vitriolic refutation of 'the Greeks', that is, of Hellenic philosophy and religion in which he ridicules Greek philosophy and pagan deities<sup>8</sup>.

Tatian's *Against the Greeks* also demonstrates the hostility with which Greek culture was viewed by some early Christians<sup>9</sup>. In this work he displays a full repertoire of philosophical and cultural references on hand – at the same time as he subverts the contemporary cultural valuation of Greekness and praises 'barbarian' identity. In fact, he calls himself «a philosopher among the barbarians» (*Oratio ad Graecos*, 42.1)<sup>10</sup>.

The second view, which we may label 'sapiential', was presented by early Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The most learned of the early Fathers, Clement was certainly not a Gnostic. For him knowledge was not above faith or charity. For instance, in his *Stromateis*, Clement contrasted the Christian sage's true knowledge of God with the erroneous views of the Hellenistic pagans: «the Christian sage (*Gnostic*) alone is holy and pious, and worships the true God in a manner worthy of Him» (7.1.2). Therefore, the first step of faith (*pistis*), according to Clement, is knowledge (*gnosis*), that is, knowledge of God<sup>11</sup>.

6. HARGIS, Jeffrey W., *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999, p. 15.

7. TERTULLIAN, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7; STROUMSA Guy G., «Athens or Jerusalem? From Eschatological Hopes to Cultural Memory», *Myths, Martyrs and Modernity. Studies in the history of religions in honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, Dijkstra J. H. F. et alii (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 502-03.

8. NASRALLAH Laura, «Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic», *Harvard Theological Review*, 98/3 (2005), p. 297.

9. CAMERON Averil, «Introduction», *Doctrine and Debate in the East Christian World, 300-1500*, A. Cameron and R. Hoyland (eds.), Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, p. XIII.

10. NASRALLAH L., *art. cit.*, p. 299.

11. THOMPSON James W., «The Appropriate, the Necessary, and the Impossible: Faith and Reason in Hebrews», *The Early Church in Its Context. Essays in Honour of Everett Ferguson*, A. J. Malherbe et alii (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 1998, p. 315.

But Clement, familiar with Homer, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, and Musonius Rufus<sup>12</sup>, also claimed in the *Stromateis* (7.2) that philosophy was delivered to the Greeks through inferior angels (mentioned in the sixth chapter of the book of Genesis), echoing the claim in Heb. 2:1 that the *Torah* was delivered by angels to the Jews<sup>13</sup>. He also postulated that Greek philosophy had in fact plagiarized the Old Testament<sup>14</sup>. This almost certainly confirms the high status that the *Graeca veritas* was given by the Fathers, pairing it with the *Hebraica veritas*. Plato and Moses, Greek philosophy (although there was no such thing as *the* Greek philosophy) and the Septuagint Bible, were thus presented as the two sources of Christianity.

In this regard, «however critical writers such as Eusebius, Clement, or Origen were of Homer, they nonetheless employed him as part of their notion of *praeparatio evangelica* whereby Homer becomes a prophetic figure and the poems a set of prophetic texts»<sup>15</sup>.

Inquiry into the exegetical practices of Clement of Alexandria and Origen indicates the extent to which they share methods of reading with interpreters of Homer. In this regard, Robert Lamberton's work on the attitudes toward Homer on the part of the Alexandrian Fathers has demonstrated their affinity to Middle Platonic readers of Homer, both Jewish and Pagan, like Philo or Numenius<sup>16</sup>.

Certainly, this Christian sapiential path of cultural syncretism had been also followed by both the Pagan Greek philosopher Numenius (c. 100 AD) and by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Numenius had famously stated that «What else is Plato, than an Atticising Moses?»<sup>17</sup>.

This saying was going to be echoed by the Early Fathers, particularly by Justin of Neapolis. Justin, a philosopher converted to Christianity around 130, introduced in the Church the concept of «spermatic Word» (*spermatikos logos*), taking it from the Stoic and Platonic tradition. The «spermatic Word» particularly referred to «a seed of reason» operative before Christian revelation in the Greek poets and philosophers, but more generally to the presence of wisdom and justice in all human generations and civilizations<sup>18</sup>.

In fact, Christianity and Platonism found common ground in their insistence on the transcendence of God and the immortal soul<sup>19</sup>, even being mutually exclusive

12. CHADWICK, Henry, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 126.

13. THOMPSON, J. W., *art. cit.*, p. 316.

14. CHADWICK, H., *The Church in Ancient Society...*, p. 127.

15. AITKEN, E. B., *art. cit.*, p. 9; see DROGE Arthur J., *Homer or Moses: Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture*, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1989.

16. LAMBERTON Robert, *Homer the Theologian. Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 44-83; AITKEN, E. B., *art. cit.*, p. 9.

17. GERÉBY, Gyorgy, «Alien Wisdom? Arnaldo Momigliano on the Hellenistic Perception of Barbarian Culture», *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, 14, 2008, p. 178.

18. HURTADO, Larry W., *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003, p. 644.

19. DE VOGEL, C. J., «Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?», *Vigiliae Christianae*, 39 (1985), p. 19.

and rival confessions<sup>20</sup>. Yet not only Platonism influenced Early Christian authors, but also Aristotelian and Stoic philosophers. Significantly, Eusebius of Caesarea argued in his *Ecclesiastical History* (5, 28, 14) that some Christian Peripatetic sages who were active in Rome at the end of the second century admired both Aristotle and his successor in the Lyceum, Theophrastus, using their writings and also the Aristotelian logic for their own theological works on the Holy Scripture. They may have been influenced in this regard by the physician and philosopher Galen, for whom, according to Eusebius (5, 28, 14), these Christians had the utmost respect<sup>21</sup>.

All in all, therefore, enough has been said to prove that all these Christian sages, be they heretical or orthodox, did have something in common: the reception of Greek philosophy. These Christian philosophers taught their interpretation of Christian doctrine to their disciples, wrote polemical tracts attacking rival «schools», purified their sacred scriptures of interpolations (so establishing a *kanon*) and claimed that their Christian opponents relied on forged or doubtful writings (*pseudepigraphoi*). In fact, part of Greek philosophy's quest for accuracy in all things was the unprecedented idea that every writing should be identified not just by a title but also by a name of its actual author – not some imaginary author. As David Dungan has argued, «these activities were exactly what their fellow philosophers among the Greeks and Romans were doing at the same time»<sup>22</sup>.

## CULTURE, CHRISTIANITY AND EMPIRE C. 300 AD

In the Third Century AD the prince's wisdom, after the short-lived splendour of the century of the Antonines, would remain in a secondary position in the Roman official ideology. This was logical to a certain extent, since during the Military Anarchy (A.D. 235-284) the imperial throne was mostly occupied by virtually illiterate soldiers.

Accordingly, imperial ideology and rhetoric did not stress culture or wisdom in its narrative and princely images of power. Remarkable but isolated exceptions to this rule were emperors like Gallienus (*imp.* 253-268) or in later times Maximinus Daia (*imp.* 305-313). Gallienus is portrayed in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* as an enlightened prince who tried to incarnate the Philosopher-ruler archetype in the Platonic fashion. In this regard, he is said to have actively supported Plotinus' ambitious project to build in Campania a 'city of philosophers' called *Platonopolis*. This city was supposed to be 'a kind of Pagan monastic community' governed in accordance with Plato's *Republic* sapiential utopia, but opposition in the imperial court blocked the project<sup>23</sup>.

20. See MEIJERING, E. P., «Wie Platonisierten Christen», *Vigiliae Christianae*, 28 (1974), pp. 15-28.

21. FITZGERALD, John T., «Eusebius and the Little Labyrinth», *The Early Church in Its Context...*, p. 122; FREND, W. H. C., *The Rise of Christianity*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984, p. 340.

22. DUNGAN, David L., *Constantine's Bible. Politics and the Making of the New Testament*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007, p. 34.

23. O'MEARA, Dominic J., *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University

On the other hand, Maximinus Daia, of whose education very little is known, was characterized by the *Epitome Caesaribus* as a 'protector of the wise' as well as someone 'devoted to the study of humanities', however being 'in birth, indeed, and in station a shepherd': *ortu quidem atque instituto pastorali, verum sapientissimi cuiusque ac litteratorum cultor*<sup>24</sup>.

Be that as it may, these were just isolated examples<sup>25</sup>. In contrast to this, the few Roman generals of this turbulent period who cultivated themselves only sought to acquire some degree of *humanitas*, a culture without specific political connotations, whose function was to avoid being humiliated with the appellative *semiagregestes*<sup>26</sup>. After the imperial purple was accessed in 235 by the army of the semi-barbaric official Maximinus I (son of a Goth settled in Thrace), soldier-emperors with limited cultural education succeeded each other in the throne, such as Claudius II (*imp.* 268-270), Aurelian (*imp.* 270-275), Claudius Tacitus (*imp.* 275-276), Probus (*imp.* 276-282) and Carus (*imp.* 282-283).

These usurpers raised to the throne through murder or coups d'état wanted over all to legitimize their power and reinforce the imperial dignity. To that end the process by which the living emperor became deified started. Thus, the emperor was no longer merely divine (*divus*) and equal to the gods (*isotheos*), but instead became himself a god (*deus et dominus*), demanding *adoratio* (προσκύνησις) of his subjects after the custom of the oriental despots<sup>27</sup>.

This divine condition of the emperors must be linked to the palpable decadence of the political propaganda and to the genre of the mirrors of princes in late Third century Rome. All ended up being symbolic and iconographic propaganda, leaving no room to elaborate legitimizing discourses. After all, an emperor-god was not required to exercise princely virtues to legitimize his power, as he was beyond good and evil.

This political and ideological predominance of the military in the Lower Empire would also imply the access of illiterate Germans to the ruling strata of Rome, the *clarissimi*, which would bring along unexpected consequences. One may bring up here the interesting hypothesis put forward by Ramsay MacMullen, who added one more factor to those traditionally listed as causes for the fall of the Western Roman Empire: the serious decline in literary instruction and arithmetical formation among the members of the imperial administration in the one hundred

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Press, 2003, pp. 15-16; SABO, Theodore E., *Christians, Gnostics and Platonists: An overview of the ethos of Late Antiquity*, North-West University, Diss., 2010, p. 17; PORPHYRY OF TYRE, *Vita Plotini (Plotinus)*, ed. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 440, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, ch. 12.

24. AURELIUS VICTOR, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 41, 18; ed. Th. M. Banchich, Buffalo, NY., 2018, p. 165; BLECKMANN, Bruno, «Ein Kaiser als Prediger: Zur Datierung der konstantinischen *Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen*», *Hermes*, 125 (1997), p. 184, n. 9.

25. For a discussion of wisdom as a princely virtue in Latin Imperial panegyrics, see MAUSE, Michael, *Die Darstellung des Kaisers in der lateinischen Panegyrik*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994, pp. 85-99.

26. MARROU, Henri-Irénée, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? (III<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, Seuil, 1977, pp. 68-69.

27. TURCAN, Robert, «Culto imperial y sacralización del poder en el Imperio Romano», *Tratado de Antropología de lo Sagrado*, J. Ries (ed.), vol. 3, Madrid, Trotta, 1997, p. 327.



years spanning between the beginning of the catastrophic military anarchy in 235 (murdering of emperor Alexander Severus) and the death of Constantine the Great (year 337), causing a never-ending series of problems for the efficiency of the ever more gigantic later Roman state apparatus<sup>28</sup>.

This hypothesis may be perfectly combined with that of the Russian historian Rostovtzeff, who attributed the fall of the Roman Empire to the urban elites' decline in culture and the general failure of the Late Roman world to completely civilize the urban masses. These shortcomings combined with a significant increase in the number of barbarian peasant-soldiers and the political ascendancy of 'barrack emperors' since the times of the Military Anarchy<sup>29</sup>.

Further, Géza Alföldy has called attention to the social and political consequences derived from the gradual disappearance since the Third century of a cultivated ruling stratum like the senatorial and equestrian *ordines* were during the Principate. This stratum, the ultimate source for imperial civil servants, would hand over its political role to barbarian *magistri militum* in the fifth century<sup>30</sup>.

However, it is not less true that despite all its enduring structural weaknesses, in Christian Rome there was still a self-confident Imperial bureaucracy based on the common belief that education and excellence (*παιδεία* and *ἀριστεία*) went together. Indeed, John Matthews has argued that the Christian Empire of the Fourth century «was unmatched in Graeco-Roman history in its scale and complexity of organization»<sup>31</sup>, and Peter Brown has pointed out that «far from being a melancholic epilogue to the classical Roman Empire, a fleeting and crudely conceived attempt to shore up a doomed society, the first half of the Fourth century witnessed a long-prepared climax of the Roman State»<sup>32</sup>.

Regarding this, there has been also an historiographical controversy over the role played by the Church in this general context of barbarization and decay of civilization. First of all, it has to be said that after the Edict of Milan (313) what had been the persecuted Church of Martyrs underwent a period of even deeper Roman enculturation<sup>33</sup> during which it shed part of its original otherworldly values in favour of the social and political values of imperial Rome<sup>34</sup>.

28. MACMULLEN, Ramsay, *The Roman Government's Response to Crisis (A. D. 235-337)*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 48-70.

29. See ROSTOVITZEFF, Mikhail Ivanovich, «The Decay of the Ancient World and its Economic Explanations», *Economic History Review*, 2 (1930), pp. 197-214.

30. ALFÖLDY, Géza, *Römische Sozialgeschichte*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1975, pp. 264-265.

31. MATTHEWS, John, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London, Duckworth, 1989, p. 256. Although there is little evidence concerning the mode of operation of the three *scrinia* of the Imperial 'chancery' under the supervision of the *Quaestor Sacri Palatii*, the very existence of so many Imperial edicts or rescripts dated in the Fourth century is testimony to its productivity and importance (BARNWELL, P. S., *Emperors, Prefects and Kings. The Roman West, 395-565*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 25).

32. BROWN, Peter, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 17.

33. ALFÖLDI, Andreas, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1948, p. 26.

34. DUNGAN, D. L., *op. cit.*, p. 95.



This Roman enculturation of the Christian Church was many folded. Since Pagan elites of the fourth century still believed that *paideia* was «a gift of heaven to the fortunate few» who belonged to the social elites<sup>35</sup>, and therefore that the wise should rule the ignorant, the incorporation of the Episcopal hierarchy into the imperial establishment was also related to this Christian appropriation of Classical cultural tradition<sup>36</sup>.

As a matter of fact, along the Fourth century the Church would attract the most creative minds of the Roman world. Many Christian bishops were not only natural-born leaders, who «combined Christian theology with pagan philosophy, worldly political abilities with a secure faith in immortal values», in the words of Arnaldo Momigliano<sup>37</sup>.

The prevalence in the Church of the Fathers of sapiential ideals associated with classical *paideia* «explains a further feature of the political imagination of the age – the repeated references to a persuasive role exercised by the philosopher. In reality philosophers tended to be peripheral figures on the political scenes in Late Antiquity; some, indeed, were fierce recluses, proud of their ability to avoid all contact with public life. Yet the late antique philosopher had been empowered by long tradition to act as the disinterested adviser, even as the critic, of the powerful»<sup>38</sup>.

On the other hand, not a few Christian bishops and holy men chose to involve themselves actively in courtly politics as part of their moral duty to Church and Empire. In Lactantius († 326), Ausonius († 395), Eutropius († c. 378) and Aurelius Prudentius († 405) we surely find the best examples of Christian lay teachers and intellectuals playing a prominent role in the Imperial court in the fourth century. Their courtly role is also closely related to the first formulations of what we may call ‘Christian Political Theology’ as these men writings and speeches were the foundation stone of a new Imperial ideology based on both biblical themes and classical tradition<sup>39</sup>.

Indeed, the power of persuasion was a key element in the nascent Christian Roman Empire as Peter Brown has pointed out: «far from being rendered unnecessary by the autocratic structure of late Roman government, rhetoric positively thrived in its many interstices. For rhetoric (...) presented educated contemporaries with the potent image of a political world held together, not by force, collusion, and favouritism, but by *logoi*, by the sure-working, ancient magic of Greek words. Emperors and governors gave way, not because they were frequently unsure of

35. AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res Gestae*, XXIX, 2, 18, ed. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library, 331, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1939; P. BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

36. DUNGAN, D. L., *op. cit.*, p. 103.

37. MOMIGLIANO, Arnaldo, Preface to the *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 9.

38. BROWN, P., *art. cit.*, p. 4.

39. See DRAKE, Harold A., «Speaking of Power: Christian Redefinition of the Imperial Role in the Fourth Century», *Contested Monarchy. Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, J. Wieland (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 291-308.

themselves, ill-informed, or easily corrupted; rather, they had been moved by the sheer grace and wisdom of carefully composed speeches (...) They did so because their own high culture enabled them to see, in the local notables, men of *paideía*, their natural friends and soul mates»<sup>40</sup>.

## CONSTANTINE THE GREAT IN CONTEXT: CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

Lactantius (*Lucius Caecilius Firmianus*) was the first Christian apologete to be close to the imperial throne. Around 309, Constantine the Great, still a Pagan, would choose a Christian rhetor like Lactantius to make him his son Crispus' tutor<sup>41</sup>. Constantine himself had probably attended Lactantius' lectures in Nicomedia in his youth. More important, Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones* were also the original source from which Constantine absorbed his Christian Platonism, a key aspect of his later political theology<sup>42</sup>.

All in all, enough has been said to argue that Lactantius played a role which made him the first ideologue of Constantinian rulership. Here we find the first example of a historical trend which would become a trademark of sapiential kingship of Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Christian rulers associating themselves to the most prominent intellectuals of their time as their disciples and/or patrons. Constantine the Great and Lactantius, the first Christian emperor and one of the earliest sages of the Latin Church, open the long list of ruler-intellectual couples like those formed by Theodoric the Great and Boethius, Sisebutus and Isidore of Seville, Charlemagne and Alcuin of York, Charles the Bald and John Scotus Eriugena and Otto III and Gerbert of Aurillac (pope Silvester II).

Besides, Lactantius was to be the one to introduce in the Constantinian Latinity the intellectual forms that Christian Neoplatonism had in Alexandria by cloaking them in a Roman attire. Acknowledged by posterity as 'the Christian Cicero' (*Cicero christianus*), Lactantius devoted himself to the task of building a Christian philosophy in Latin rooted in Platonism<sup>43</sup>.

40. BROWN, P., *art. cit.*, p. 30.

41. Constantine may have attended in his youth the lectures of Lactantius while he was at the imperial court at Nicomedia. Lactantius, still a Pagan, was then under the patronage of Sossianus Hierocles, a member of Diocletian's circle (DEPALMA DIGESER, Elizabeth, «The Education of Constantine», *Costantino il Grande. Alle radici di Europe*, E. Dal Covolo and G. Sfameni (eds.), Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014, pp. 140-141; BARNES, Timothy D., *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 47, and 73-74; see also his article «Lactantius and Constantine», *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 63 (1973), pp. 29-46). Once made imperial tutor, Lactantius became a permanent figure in the court, since he followed Crispus to Trier in 317, when Crispus was made Caesar. It seems likely that he was in Constantine's circle of advisers until Crispus' execution in 326 (see STEPHENSON, James, «The Life and Literary Activity of Lactantius», *Studia Patristica*, 1 (1957), pp. 661-677).

42. DEPALMA DIGESER, E., *The Education of Constantine...*, p. 145.

43. DEPALMA DIGESER, Elizabeth, *Lactantius, Constantine and the Roman Res Publica*, University of California at Santa Barbara, Dissertation, 1996, pp. 3-19.

His thinking was reflected in the seven books of his *Divinae institutiones* (circa 304-314), which imitated Cicero's *De officiis* and pursued to establish the bases of a mystical sapientialism with a distinctly Roman touch<sup>44</sup>. Although he devotes the entire third book of his work to a passionate denunciation of the pagans' false wisdom (*falsa sapientia*), the last four books aim to establish the doctrinal foundations of the *christiana sapientia*, a wisdom supported by 'divine tradition' and not by 'human invention' like Pagan philosophy.

In Jacques Fontaine's words, «Lactantius presented a version of Christianity which is true wisdom, true justice and true worship (...) a propaedeutic of faith through the practice of the humanities that attempted to harmonize Christianity and ancient wisdom, in a period in which Constantine evolved from a solar monotheism towards a version of Christianity in which the only God seemed to count much more than Christ»<sup>45</sup>.

Furthermore, as stated before, it has been pointed out that several passages of a theological tract attributed by Eusebius to Constantine closely resemble Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones* in both thought and diction<sup>46</sup>. This fact undoubtedly betrays the Emperor's intellectual indebtedness and highlights the role of Lactantius as an ideologue of the Constantinian regime<sup>47</sup>.

Both the first Christian Emperor and the first ever Theologian-Prince, Constantine was to be proclaimed by the Greek Church 'the New Moses', the 'thirteenth apostle of Christ' (*triskaidékatos apóstolos*) and ubiquitously celebrated as the providential ruler that brought the Christians out of the catacombs. But he was also systematically vilified as a cruel tyrant by Pagan propaganda, particularly by the historian Zosimus in his biased *Historia Nova*<sup>48</sup>.

In the writings of the Pagan historians of Constantine we contemplate a military hero degenerating into a cruel and dissolute monarch in what amounts to an accomplished exercise in *damnatio memoriae* which later influenced historians like Edward Gibbon and Jakob Burckhardt.

Interestingly, within this denigratory line of the figure of Constantine the Great, Jakob Burckhardt quotes an anonymous pagan minor work which has not been edited, the *Anonymus Bandurii*. According to Burckhardt, in this anti-Constantinian pamphlet the emperor was attacked with a derogatory epithet,

44. FONTAINE, Jacques, *La littérature latine chrétienne*, Paris, PUF, 1970, pp. 44-45.

45. FONTAINE, J., *op. cit.*, p. 70.

46. KURFESS, Alfons, «Zu Kaiser Konstantins Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen», *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 130 (1950), p. 148; BOLHUIS, Andries, «Die Rede Konstantins des Grossen an die Versammlung der Heiligen und Lactantius *Divinae Institutiones*», *Vigiliae Christianae*, 10 (1956), pp. 25-32; BARNES, T. D. *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 74.

47. See DEDECKER, Daniel, «Le Discours à l'assemblée des saints attribué à Constantin et l'œuvre de Lactance», *Lactance et son temps: recherches actuelles*, J. Fontaine and M. Perrin (eds.), Paris, Beauchesne, 1978, pp. 75-90. It could also be the other way around, it may be that Lactantius was also influenced by Constantine; in this regard see HEIM, François, «L'influence exercée par Constantin sur Lactance: sa théologie de la victoire», *Lactance et son temps...*, pp. 55-70.

48. CAMERON, Averil, *The Later Roman Empire*, London, Fontana, 1993, p. 20.

*pupillus*, loaded with clear negative intellectual connotations<sup>49</sup>. By it, the pagan faction meant that Constantine, as a *pupil* of the Church, was ruled by others and required *tuitio* of a master.

Further, another contemporary source, the *Origo Constantini Imperatoris*, accuses him of lack of literary instruction (*litteris minus instructus*: 'slight training in letters'), but this allegation probably refers specifically to the poor education Constantine received before he went to the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia as a hostage *circa* 303<sup>50</sup>.

How far this image conformed to reality is another matter. In fact, the alleged illiteracy of Constantine was an unfounded and propagandistic accusation that, according to Timothy Barnes, is «disproved by abundant and variant evidence»<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, the first Christian Emperor not only «was an educated man by the standards of his time», but also «might have studied philosophy in his youth»<sup>52</sup>,

Constantine has been defined as «the prince with the highest cultural training since the Second century»<sup>53</sup>. He grew up in Diocletian's court at Nicomedia, a cultivated atmosphere of palatine senior officials, «where philosophers, poets and other literary men were welcome». There he learned to speak Greek and acquired some knowledge of Greek philosophy<sup>54</sup>, and may have also attended the lectures on Latin rhetoric of Lactantius<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, he would have received a careful literary and rhetorical education in both Latin and Greek, the first of the soldier-emperors of his age who was that lucky<sup>56</sup>.

It was certainly an education that the future Emperor did not waste, especially as the former soldier was able not only to actively participate in fluent Greek in the heated debates at the Council of Nicaea but also to write theological tracts on notions on the complexity of the substantial unity of the Father and the Son. Further, although some authors doubt that Constantine was capable of handling the ideas and literary sources of such a complex work as the brief theological treatise attributed to him, known as the *Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum*, everything points to actually being the Emperor's<sup>57</sup>.

49. *Anonymus Bandurii*, c. 61; BURCKHARDT, Jakob, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen*, Basel, 1853, reed. Munich, C. H. Beck, 2012, p. 385.

50. DEPALMA DIGESER, E., *The Education of Constantine...*, p. 139; BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, pp. 47 and 308, n. 31.

51. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 47; MILLAR, Fergus, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, London, Gerald Duckworth, 1977, p. 205.

52. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, pp. 73-74.

53. FONTÁN, Antonio, *Letras y poder en Roma*, Pamplona, EUNSA, 2001, p. 367.

54. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 47; ODAHL, Charles M., *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 72 and 301.

55. DEPALMA DIGESER, E., *The Education of Constantine...*, pp. 140-141.

56. Ramsay MACMULLEN has pointed out that «Constantine could express himself adequately if not elegantly in Greek (...) He had spent much of his early life in eastern courts, too, which were no doubt bilingual» (*Voting About God in Early Church Councils*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 28).

57. Harold DRAKE states that the *Oratio* was typically Constantinian in its rhetoric and style («Suggestions of Date in Constantine's Oration to the Saints», *American Journal of Philology*, 106 (1985), p. 349).

As Timothy Barnes has aptly pointed out, «such doubts arise from an assumption that Constantine was an ill-educated soldier, with little or no knowledge of literature or Greek philosophy. That assumption is vulnerable»<sup>58</sup>. This scholar has consistently refuted the arguments of Richard Hanson who believes it to be a post-Julian fabrication<sup>59</sup>. As a matter of fact, several lines of reasoning suggest that «there is nothing in the *Oratio* which Constantine cannot have written or dictated himself»<sup>60</sup>.

Certainly, the Emperor incorporated ideas and expressions from a great array of sources, both Christian and Pagan. For instance, several passages betray direct intellectual indebtedness to Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones*<sup>61</sup>, and the Platonic philosophical content of the *Oratio* exhibits a marked similarity to the contemporary Calcidius' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* and to Numenius of Apamea's treatise *On the Good*<sup>62</sup>. Finally, the grasp of Latin literature of the author of the *Oratio* is also showed in an awareness of the works of Virgil and Cicero<sup>63</sup>.

Constantine's cultural and artistic patronage should also be noticed. Like any other Emperor, he was not only head of the Roman State, he was also expected to be a devoted patron of the arts. As John Matthews has aptly put it, the generals who came to impinge upon the aristocratic society in Fourth Century Rome, «could do no better to prove themselves fit members of it than to patronize culture and its exponents»<sup>64</sup>.

As Peter Brown has pointed out, a late Roman ruler could still be praised for having been «a guardian of legal science and the laws, a fostering father of all humane studies, a friend alike of culture and justice»<sup>65</sup>. Indeed, it appears that it was not conventional sycophantic rhetoric. In Timothy Barnes appreciation, «Constantine took to the role with genuine interest»<sup>66</sup>.

When Athens came under his rule in 316 Constantine «added the patronage of Greek culture to his existing obligations»<sup>67</sup>. Praxagoras, a Pagan scholar, sought imperial favour with a history chronicling the rise to power of Constantine and

58. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 73.

59. BARNES, Timothy D., «The Emperor Constantine's Good Friday Sermon», *Journal of Theological Studies*, 27 (1976), pp. 416, and 421; see HANSON, Richard P. C., «The *Oratio ad Sanctos* attributed to the Emperor Constantine and the Oracle of Daphnae», *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1973), pp. 505-511. Other authors have doubted Constantine's authorship, arguing that the verbal echoes of Plato proved thorough rewriting by a Greek., thus disregarding the *Oratio* as a source for genuine Constantinian religious thought (BAYNES, Norman H., *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, London, British Academy, 1931, p. 56).

60. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 74.

61. KURFESS, A., *Zu Kaiser Konstantins Rede...*, p. 148; BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 74.

62. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 74; see KURFESS, Alfons, «Plato's *Timaeus* in Kaiser Konstantins Rede an die heilige Versammlung», *Jahresberichte des philologischen Vereins zu Berlin*, 64, (1920), pp. 90-96. Calcidius dedicated his work to an Ossius who may have been the Ossius, Bishop of Corduba, a trusted adviser of Constantine.

63. WATTS, Edward J., *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p. 6.

64. MATTHEWS, John, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court (AD 364-425)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 85.

65. BROWN, P., *Power and Persuasion...*, p. 36: quoting *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 6, 1722.

66. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 47.

67. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 72.

an unknown Greek author called Dionysius dedicated a work on music to the Emperor, saluting him as «a lover of the art, a finder and giver of all kinds of culture»<sup>68</sup>. Sopatros, a Neo-platonic philosopher from Syria who was a disciple of Iamblicus, established in Constantinople and came to belong to Constantine's inner circle, becoming his intimate adviser despite his Pagan beliefs<sup>69</sup>.

The Fourth century was a critical time for the legacy of classical literature. Written on papyrus, it was gradually crumbling away and threatened to sink into oblivion unless systematically transferred to parchment. Constantine had begun that process by having many books, not only Christian but also Pagan, copied, and his son and successor Constantius undertook to continue the effort. Constantine also founded an imperial library in Constantinople sometime after 330. His agents searched throughout the Empire for Christian books. At Constantine's death in 337 his library was reported to contain about 7.000 books<sup>70</sup>. Certainly, without the patronage of Constantine our knowledge of the classical literature would certainly have been even smaller.

## CONSTANTINIAN KINGSHIP AS SAPIENTIAL RULERSHIP

All in all, therefore, enough has been said to prove that Constantine the Great was not another one of the rude soldier-emperors so typical of Later Imperial Rome. Quite the opposite. To sum up, there is every reason to describe him as a bilingual bibliophile, intellectually curious, deeply interested in Platonic philosophy and Christian theology.

As Elizabeth DePalma remarks, «Constantine came to the throne espousing a political theology that was profoundly shaped by some of the most important trends of the late Third century: the wedding of solar theism to imperial rule, a willingness to live with religious diversity, and an engagement with Late Roman Platonism (...) Ironically, however, as these elements found expression in the policies of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine set the Roman Empire on a very new course»<sup>71</sup>.

At the very beginning of the new Constantinian regime, we find some interesting evidence of a sapiential discourse on kingship. Constantine took advantage of the Milan Agreement with Licinius of 313 as an occasion to build a narrative on his wisdom as *princeps providentissimus*. Thus, in this context of commemoration of the meeting of Licinius and Constantine a series of *Solidi*

68. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 72.

69. EUNAPIUS OF SARDIS, *Vitae Sophistarum*, VI, 2.1; ed. W. C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 134, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, p. 380; MATTHEWS, J., *Western Aristocracies...*, p. 104.

70. HARRIS, Michael H., *History of Libraries in the Western World*, Metuchen, NJ, The Scarecrow Press, 1976, p. 72.

71. DEPALMA DIGESER, E., *The Education of Constantine...*, p. 139.

and bronze micro medallions were coined in Rome, Arles and Trier in which the wisdom and providence of the two emperors were celebrated. In them the portraits of Constantine and Licinius with the legend *sapientia principis* and their images with spear, shield and helmet flanked an altar in which sits an owl in a clear reference to Minerva, the Roman Goddess of Wisdom<sup>72</sup>.

Still, it can be safely said that the narrative and circumstances of Constantine's conversion and accession to power, his Illyrian family origins, and his own personality as a soldier-emperor had much to do with the fact that the Roman-Christian Dominate of the Fourth Century fitted more in the moulds of what has been labelled as 'triumphal rulership' (*triumphaler Herrschaft*) rather than in those of sapiential kingship<sup>73</sup>.

It must be noted in this regard that the *chrismon* that appeared in the heavens is described by Eusebius of Caesarea in the *Vita Constantini* as 'a trophy of victory over death' and a sign of victory over Maxentius (*in hoc signo vinces*)<sup>74</sup>, which was indeed a very meaningful choice of terms. As a matter of fact, all the ingredients for a Christianized survival of the Roman triumphal rulership rhetoric were to be found in the Eusebian text.

Yet besides all this bombastic, Pagan-flavoured triumphal rhetoric, it has to be noticed that Eusebius of Caesarea also presented Constantine as a Christian saint in his *Vita Constantini*. Moreover, in the speech he wrote for the Emperor's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the so-called *Tricennial Oration*, Eusebius set out a new caesaropapist theory of Christian Universal Monarchy with the Caesar as Christ's representative on earth and the Roman Empire mirroring the kingdom of heaven<sup>75</sup>.

Further on, in a daring analogy, Eusebius cast Constantine in both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Vita Constantini* in the role of a 'new Moses', raised up by God to bring the complete triumph of the Church, thus locating the Emperor within the context of Old Testament typology and imagery<sup>76</sup>.

This Eusebian choice of Moses as the archetypal figure of the Christian ruler rather than King David, who was later preferred in medieval Political Theology, is highly significant<sup>77</sup>. Not only because the later did not have the founding and

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72. WIENAND, Johannes, *Der Kaiser als Sieger. Metamorphosen triumphaler Herrschaft unter Constantin I*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2012, p. 403.

73. WIENAND, J., *op. cit.*, p. 13; on Christian triumphal rulership in Late Antiquity, see McCORMICK, Michael, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

74. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini*, I, 28-32, ed. A. Cameron and S. Hall, *Life of Constantine*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.

75. See DRAKE, Harold A., *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

76. CAMERON, Averil, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 54-55.

77. DUNGAN, D. L., *op. cit.*, p. 187, n. 40; CAMERON, Averil and HALL, Stuart, introduction to *Eusebius, Life of Constantine...*, pp. 35-39; CHESNUT, Glenn, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, Macon, Ga., Mercer University Press, 1986, p. 163.



prophetic role of the former, but also for its sapiential implications, given that Moses was the ideal prototype of the sage 'Prophet-ruler', the wise lawgiver par excellence.

As Brian Colless has argued, probably these biblical echoes of the Ancient Near East and Greek 'Deified Teacher' theme refer to one and the same Divine Wisdom cosmivision<sup>78</sup>. Further, it is worth noting that Hellenistic-Jewish historiographers and apologists like Eupolemus and Artapanus, in their efforts to show that the world was indebted to the Hebrews for all the components of civilization, made Moses the first philosopher and mediator of writing, a biblical Musaeus or Hermes<sup>79</sup>.

Eusebius reports that Constantine himself proclaimed in one of his speeches that «so far did Moses surpass in wisdom those who had lived before him, that even the wise men and philosophers who are extolled by heathen nations aspired to imitate his wisdom»<sup>80</sup>. And yet not only Moses was presented in this fashion. In fact, Philo of Alexandria pointed to the Hebrew Patriarchs as prototypical sages who did attain the archetypical wisdom (Χανων Σοφία) in a sort of philosophical way<sup>81</sup>. In another interesting passage, Philo also associated wisdom and holy rulership proclaiming that «the dogma for the students of philosophy» is that «the sage alone is ruler (ἄρχων) and king (Βασιλεύς)»<sup>82</sup>.

Before Philo there was already a sapiential interpretation of biblical tradition in which sages, prophets and rulers were one and the same thing. In fact, Philo may well have been echoing the Hellenistic tradition which made of Israel a people of «barbarian philosophers». For instance, in c. 300 BC Theophrastus already have described the Jews as being «philosophers by race»<sup>83</sup>.

In this regard, Martin Hengel has stressed the philosophical dimension of the image of the Jewish in some Greco-Roman authors, pointing out that «(their) non-sacrificial (at least apart from the Temple at Jerusalem), verbal form of worship with a strongly ethical stamp must have looked to the world of the time very like philosophy. It is no coincidence that the earliest Greek accounts, like those of Theophrastus, Hecataeus, Megasthenes, Clearchus of Soloi and even Strabo (or his informant, perhaps Posidonius), depict the Jews and their lawgiver Moses as barbarian philosophers»<sup>84</sup>.

78. COLLESS, Brian E., «Divine Education», *Numen*, 17/2 (1970), p. 120.

79. COLLESS, Brian E., «The Divine Teacher Figure in Biblical Theology», *Journal of Christian Education*, 10 (1967), p. 135, and *Divine Education...*, p. 155.

80. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini, Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum*, 17. For the Greek original text, see *Oratio ad sanctorum coetum - Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen*, ed. Kl. M. Girardet, Darmstadt, 2013.

81. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Vita Mosis*, I, 76; OPPEL, Herbert, *KANON: Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte des Wortes und seiner lateinischen Entsprechungen (regula-norma)*, Leipzig, 1933, p. 42.

82. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Somn.*, 2:2, 43-44; B. E. COLLESS, *Divine Education...*, pp. 135-136; SCHÜRER, Emil, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, vol. 3, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs, 1907, pp. 474-478.

83. THEOPHRASTUS, *De Pietate*, apud Porphyrius' *De Abstinencia*, 2.26, 6-11; LYONS, Evangeline Z., *Hellenic Philosophers as Ambassadors to the Roman Empire: performance, parrhesia, and power*, Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011, p. 61, n. 192.

84. HENGEL, Martin, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the pre-Christian period*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1980, p. 96; LYONS, E. Z., *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62, n. 192.



In fact, apart from Roman triumphal rulership, biblical sapiential kingship was the only imperial theme available for Christian eulogists and panegyrists since the Early Fathers have not produced any political thought at all. When early Christians materialized their political views only messianic eschatology with a strong anti-Roman bias came to their minds. Yet, the Christianization of Rome in the Fourth century also meant the neutralization, for all practical purposes, of these early Christian eschatological and political beliefs regarding imperial power: the converted Roman Empire could not anymore be perceived as the evil Fourth Kingdom to be radically swept away at the time of the Saviour's Second Coming<sup>85</sup>.

The question arises whether Constantine the Great did really fit in this Mosaic and Davidic mould. To begin with, Eusebius makes sure that his portrait of the first Christian Emperor is appropriately Solomonic in its overtures: «for no one was comparable to him for grace and beauty of person, or height of stature, and he so far surpassed his compeers in personal strength as to be a terror to them. He was, however, even more conspicuous for the excellence of his mental qualities than for his superior physical endowments; being gifted in the first place with a sound judgment and having also reaped the advantages of a liberal education. He was also distinguished in no ordinary degree both by natural intelligence and divinely imparted wisdom»<sup>86</sup>.

Constantine's *Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum* (Speech to the Assembly of the Saints), a sermon delivered by him at Nicomedia at Easter time, in the same year of the Council of Nicaea (325)<sup>87</sup>, proves not only the wide scope of his intellectual interests and the amplitude of his Greek *paideía*, but also his capacity as a Theologian-Emperor, an ἰσαπόστολος ('equal to the apostles') who could preach with *auctoritas* as an *orator*.

In this regard, it is quite relevant that another important feature of Constantinian rulership can be found in his title of *ekiskopos tôn ektós* ('exterior bishop')<sup>88</sup>. Obviously enough, in his role of 'New Moses' and 'overseer of bishops' he was inexorably bound to be an *Imperator praedicator*, a preacher-prince.

85. STROUMSA, G. G., *art. cit.*, p. 501.

86. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini*, I, 19.

87. The written version of this Constantinian speech is known to us because it was included by EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA in his *Vita Constantini* (IV, 32). On the relationship between the Eusebian *Vita* and the text of the *Oratio*, see PFÄTTISCH, Johannes Maria, *Des Eusebius vier Bücher über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin und des Kaisers Konstantin Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen*, Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, vol. 9, Kempten, 1913. For a discussion on the date and location of the *Oratio*, see BARNES, Timothy D., *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2011, pp. 113-117. In this work, Barnes corrects his previous theories on the dating. However, Bruno BLECKMANN suggests the Synod of Nicomedia of 328 as the most probable date and setting for the speech (*Ein Kaiser als Prediger...*, pp. 183-202). More recently Klaus Maria GIRARDET in his already mentioned German edition of the *Oratio* (*Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen*) has reintroduced the old chronology around 314; see also his «Konstantin und das Christentum: die Jahre der Entscheidung 310 bis 314», *Konstantin der Grosse. Geschichte – Archäologie, Rezeption*, A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds.), Schriftenreihe des Rheinischen Landes-museums Trier, vol. 32, Trier, 2006, pp. 69-82).

88. On this concept, see STRAUB, Johannes A., «Kaiser Konstantin als *episkopos tôn ektos*», *Studia patristica*, II, Berlin, 1957, pp. 678-695; and «Constantine as *Koinos Episkopos*; Tradition and Innovation in the Representation of the First Christian Emperor's Majesty», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 21 (1967), pp. 39-55.

Not incidentally, Eusebius presented Constantine as a crowned preacher in the *Tricennial Oration* (I.3; II.4; II.5), not only at the court but even in his speeches to his armed legions. In this regard, we find particularly interesting a passage of the *Vita Constantini* that reads as follows: «hence, the Emperor would sometimes himself evoke an assembly, on which occasions vast multitudes attended, in the hope of hearing an emperor sustain the part of a philosopher»<sup>89</sup>.

In this philosopher ruler's mood, Constantine's theological speeches were solemn *orationes* where the ethical goodness and virtue of the *orator* was clearly part of the message. This was a point that had already been made by the Fathers, who reinforced the moral connection between the speaker's eloquence and wisdom, *elocutio et sapientia*, already advocated by Classical tradition<sup>90</sup>.

This significant Constantinian role as a charismatic 'Preacher-Emperor' (*Prediger Kaiser*), has been duly remarked by Bruno Bleckmann, who has argued that «the mere possession of power was enough for only a few rulers. Most of them wanted to confirm to themselves and others that their possession of power was necessary in the sense of a higher objective. To a degree hitherto unknown, the emperors of Late Antiquity no longer left the justification for this claim only in the hands of their panegyrists, court philosophers, and poets, but emphasized this fact in their own pronouncements where they discussed ethical or philosophical and theological problems. It is well known that the most numerous 'self-testimonies' of this kind have been left by Constantine the Great. Not only in letters, but also in long speeches»<sup>91</sup>.

Be that as it may, what is clear is that Constantine acted as a crowned theologian when he delivered his *Oratio* to a Christian audience, probably composed by some bishops and clergy. In this speech the Emperor, still a catechumen, salutes the bishops with a remarkable statement of diffidence: if he makes any doctrinal mistake, those who know God's mysteries must correct him<sup>92</sup>.

Though being primarily a religious sermon, however this *Oratio* fits into no recognizable literary category, for it combines homily, philosophy, apologetic, and literary exegesis into an expression of its author's personality. Yet the *Oratio* is also a political manifesto against persecutors of the Church and against his arch-rival, Emperor Licinius. As Timothy Barnes puts it, «as so often, Constantine's religious prejudices neatly coincided with his political interest»<sup>93</sup>.

The conclusions which Constantine derives from Neoplatonic philosophers are unsurprisingly Christian. Thus, the equivalence of Platonic (particularly the *Timaeus*)<sup>94</sup> and Christian theology is consistently asserted: God the Father is the

89. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini*, IV, 29.

90. KEMPSHALL, Matthew S., «The Virtues of Rhetoric: Alcuin's *Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus*», *Anglo-Saxon England*, 37 (2008), p. 19.

91. BLECKMANN, B., *art. cit.*, p. 183.

92. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 74.

93. BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 75.

94. BLECKMANN, B., *art. cit.*, p. 184; DEDECKER, D., *art. cit.*, p. 81.

First Good, and the Demiurge, while the Second God of the *Timaeus* (as traditionally interpreted) is God the Son, Christ, the *Logos*<sup>95</sup>. Furthermore, to justify this assertion, Constantine quotes thirty-four lines from the *Sibylline Oracles* (VIII, 217), whose initial letters forms an acrostic in Greek of the words *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour, Cross*. Constantine then produces an exegesis of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, claiming that the Eclogue foretold the birth of Christ<sup>96</sup>.

In this sense, there also is no doubt that Constantine's Platonist outlook was an important aspect of his political theology. In fact, it is probably the source for the term ὁμοούσιος included in the Nicene Creed<sup>97</sup>. According to a letter written to his diocese by Eusebius, Constantine himself suggested this word to be added to the Creed of Nicaea to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son<sup>98</sup>. Therefore, the Emperor's philosophical background and opinions were not irrelevant at all. As Lewis Ayres states, «whether or not one believes Eusebius' account of Constantine's interventions, his text does give us a very plausible account of how someone with his theological trajectory could have interpreted Nicaea's terms»<sup>99</sup>.

Though all this Constantinian involvement in ecclesiastical debates we should not be deceived about the implications at stake. François Heim has pointed out that «we must dismiss the myth of a Constantine obsessed by theology, finding his delight in the quarrels of specialists. He didn't even understand, for instance, how the Trinitarian problem could unleash such violent passion»<sup>100</sup>. Indeed, he dismissed the point raised by or against Arius as «extremely trivial and quite unworthy of so much controversy»<sup>101</sup>. For him, there were «tedious matters about which no one understood anything and which it could be better not to raise»<sup>102</sup>.

It seems very likely indeed that Constantine's personal theological involvement as reflected in the *Oratio* and the Council of Nicaea was considered by him an imperial prerogative, an integral part of his *sacra auctoritas*. In some of his publicized statements Constantine rebuked those Christians who ventured to talk about theology at all unless did they do so «in words divine that are kept hidden» as in

95. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini, Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum*, 3-10; BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 75.

96. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini, Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum*, 19-21; BARNES, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius...*, p. 75; on the use of the Fourth Eclogue, see GIRARDET, Klaus Maria, «Die Christianisierung der 4. Ekloge Vergils durch Kaiser Konstantin d. Gr.», *Gymnasium*, 120/6 (2013), pp. 549-584.

97. Mark EDWARDS (see «The Arian Heresy and the Oration to the Saints», *Vigiliae Christianae*, 49 (1995), pp. 379-387) and Lewis AYRES (*Nicaea and Its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 91, n. 17) have both pointed out that probably the *Oratio* was the first occasion in which Constantine endorsed the term *homoousios*. In one letter, EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA hints at this precedent: *Ep. Caes.* 16: «Already our Emperor, the most beloved of God, affirmed in a discourse that even according to his divine generation he was before all the ages, since even before he was begotten in actuality, he was in the Father».

98. AYRES, L., *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91; DEPALMA DIGESER, E., *The Education of Constantine...*, p. 141; see BEATRICE, Pier Franco, «The Word *Homoousios* from Hellenism to Christianity», *Church History*, 71, (2002), pp. 243-272.

99. AYRES, L., *op. cit.*, p. 91. On this, see GIRARDET, Klaus Maria, *Der Kaiser und sein Gott. Das Christentum im Denken und in der Religionspolitik Konstantins des Grossen*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010.

100. HEIM, F., *art. cit.*, p. 61.

101. MACMULLEN, R., *Voting About God...*, p. 28.

102. HEIM, F., *art. cit.*, p. 61.

cultic initiations. It seems that he viewed himself as playing the role of a sort of Christian μυσταγωγός (mystagogue).

Following St Paul's teaching (I Cor. 2:7: «we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory»), Constantine «could claim that true wisdom lay in the Christian message, even if it needed elucidation»<sup>103</sup>. Inevitably, the correct interpretation of this hidden wisdom, this *sapientia abscondita in mysterio*, «would become a matter of authority»<sup>104</sup>, of his own *auctoritas* as imperial mystagogue.

Though the evidence is not wholly conclusive, there is a strong probability that Christian theology was so important for Constantine only because religious wisdom had a clear political dimension, being as such a princely prerogative, and therefore integral part of the *arcana Imperii*. We cannot be certain, but it seems likely that this connection between *praedicatio*, *sapientia* and *imperium* was part of an ideology that we may safely call 'Christian sapiential rulership'.

In sum, we can safely conclude that from Constantine's reign onwards Christian sapiential kingship also had its place within the framework of the Later Roman Empire discourse. For instance, if we take a look at late Fourth-century Imperial panegyrists, one of the most important themes in their praise of emperors was that of the ruler-philosopher, proclaiming that the perfect prince had to be *philológos* (a man of letters) as much as *philopólemos* (battle-loving). As Ninoslava Radosevic has pointed out, this Platonic *topos* was indeed profusely used by authors such as Libanius and Themistius who, although pagan themselves, dressed the first monarchs of the new Christian Empire in sapiential robes<sup>105</sup>.

To be precise, this notion of the Christian philosopher-emperor had in the Fourth century different levels of meaning. In the first place, the Emperor must strive to make a *mímēsis* (imitation) of Christ, himself the incarnation of Holy Wisdom as ο λογος του θεου, in order to turn the Empire into an *eikōn* (image) of the Kingdom of God. This Christocentric and eschatological image made the emperor play a role in the history of Salvation<sup>106</sup>. Accordingly, he would be presented with sacral-sapiential features insofar as he was the 'New Moses', an *imperator praedicator* who will lead the Church and the Empire with his wisdom and his eloquence.

This Eusebian *imperator praedicator* theme was not going to fall into oblivion in the following centuries. Indeed, Gilbert Dagron and Michel Lauwers have both argued that the Constantinian preacher-prince model, so close to 'royal

103. CAMERON, A., *Christianity and the Rhetoric...*, pp. 57-58; CHADWICK, Henry, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 35.

104. CAMERON, A., *Christianity and the Rhetoric...*, p. 58.

105. RADOSEVIC, Ninoslava, «The Emperor as the Patron of Learning in Byzantine *Basilikoi Logoi*», *To Ellenikon: Studies in honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, J. S. Allen and J. Springer (eds.), New York, Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993, p. 268.

106. FARINA, Raffaele, *L'Impero e l'Imperatore cristiano in Eusebio di Cesarea. La prima teologia politica del Cristianesimo*, Zurich, Pas Verlag, 1966, pp. 27-31.

priesthood', was highly influential in 'diverse forms of sacrality' of Byzantine (βασιλεύς διδάσκαλος) and Carolingian kingship (*rex praedicator*)<sup>107</sup>.

In the second place, Fourth-century sapiential political theology also implied a discourse of an idealized wise emperor who made correct political decisions thanks to his education in the classical tradition, in particular in the *Homeriké paidéia*. In this regard, rhetoric (ῥητορική) and eloquence (δαινότης λόγου), together with a perfect knowledge of classical literature and some familiarity with the deeds of the heroes of Antiquity were necessary conditions for a good ruler<sup>108</sup>.

However, to make wise decisions did not depend only on the literary culture of the sovereign. In their works, Libanius and Themistius insisted on the importance of a specific political education of the future ruler, an education in the science of good government (βασιλείας διοίκησις). This science of government included patronage of learning and Themistius stated that good rulers should reward with honours talented men of letters in the same extent as heroic warriors<sup>109</sup>. To sum it up, according to this view, an uneducated emperor (*agroikóteros anaphaneís basileús*) would be a prince completely incapable of ruling well, reducing the imperial dignity to mere ostentatiousness<sup>110</sup>.

All in all, therefore, enough has been said to argue that Lactantius and Eusebius of Caesarea had succeeded in giving a new Christian meaning to the ancient *topos* of the sage ruler and thus provide Constantine and his successors with a new legitimacy added to military victory. As Eusebius states in the *Vita Constantini*, his possession of Divine knowledge was for Constantine a way to remind his subjects that «God himself had given him the empire of the world», for «he conceived it to be incumbent on him to govern his subjects by appealing to their reason, and to secure in all respects a rational obedience to his authority»<sup>111</sup>.

## CHARLEMAGNE: NEW SOLOMON, NEW CONSTANTINE

In her biography of Charlemagne, Rosamond McKitterick has observed that «the presentation of the Frankish rulers as emulators of Constantine» was «consonant with other tendencies on the part of the Franks to see themselves as heirs to a past that included Constantine, the Early Church and the popes»<sup>112</sup>. In this

107. DAGRON, Gilbert, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le 'césaropapisme' byzantin*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p. 307; LAUWERS, Michel, «La glaive et la parole. Charlemagne, Alcuin et le modèle du *rex praedicator*: notes d'écclésiologie carolingienne», *Alcuin, de York à Tours. Écriture, pouvoir et réseaux dans l'Europe du haut Moyen Âge*, Ph. Depreux and B. Judic (eds.), *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 111/3, Rennes, 2004, p. 221.

108. RADOSEVIC, N., *art. cit.*, p. 268.

109. THEMISTIUS, *Orationes*, 4, 54a; 5, 63c; 8, 105d; 9, 123b; RADOSEVIC, N., *art. cit.*, p. 274.

110. RADOSEVIC, N., *art. cit.*, p. 269.

111. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Vita Constantini*, IV, 29.

112. MCKITTERICK, Rosamond, *Charlemagne. The Formation of a European Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 147.

regard, it is worth recalling that Charlemagne's palace at Ingelheim was decorated with a remarkable series of ancient ruler portraits which included, in the apse of the *aula regia*, the Roman emperors Augustus, Constantine and Theodosius<sup>113</sup>.

Such references could be multiplied, but this one should suffice to show that the figure of Constantine was held in high esteem in the Carolingian court. Further, I would like to draw attention to the striking similarities between the Constantinian discourse on wise kingship and the Carolingian one.

Certainly, one cannot approach Carolingian royal ideology without dealing with Alcuin of York's works and letters. More concretely, his role in recovering the Eusebian *topos* of the wise Christian ruler was particularly decisive. To begin with, in several of his letters dated in the last years of the Eighth century, Alcuin repeatedly presented Charlemagne as a Preacher-king, a true *Rex praedicator* in Constantinian robes.

As Michel Lauwers has pointed out, Alcuin thus recognized «the sovereign's clerical, even priestly function, which seems to refer to the various forms of sanctity by which the Carolingians intended to distinguish Frankish royalty. This motive of royal preaching is reminiscent of a number of themes characteristic of the theology of the Christian Empire developed at the height of Constantine's reign (...) By making Charlemagne a *Rex praedicator*, in the very years when an Empire was reborn in the West, Alcuin seems to be recovering such conceptions of Christian power; in any case, his letters pose the problem of what is quite inappropriately called *Caesaropapism* in the medieval West»<sup>114</sup>.

Furthermore, the capitularies and conciliar decrees make it clear that Charlemagne himself, like Constantine before, played a part in theological discussion and in the reform of the clergy and the liturgy. Not only Charlemagne's court played a central role as a place where scholars could congregate and cooperate, the Frankish ruler himself, though not a theologian-ruler like Constantine the Great or Theodosius II, was an outstanding patron of learning who played a crucial role in the birth of the Carolingian Renaissance<sup>115</sup>.

In his seminal study on the topic of Carolingian Renaissance, Walter Ullmann pointed out that in Charlemagne's Age, «Frankish society and its government underwent what may in modern parlance be called a radical ideological transformation»<sup>116</sup>. This ideological transformation was related to the role of the Frankish ruler: «The renaissance of society substantially strengthened the monarchic role of the King, and none realized this better than Charlemagne himself. The

113. MCKITTERICK, R., *Charlemagne...*, p. 163.

114. LAUWERS, M., art. cit., p. 221.

115. MCKITTERICK, Rosamond, «The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning», *Charlemagne. Empire and Society*, J. Story (ed.), Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 164.

116. ULLMANN, Walter, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship*, London, Methuen, 1969, p. 1.

descending theme of government and law was the conceptual complement of the renaissance of Frankish society»<sup>117</sup>.

As a matter of fact, Carolingian rulership, according to Ullmann, «was firmly embedded in ecclesiology: this ecclesiological theme was perhaps the most original of all Carolingian themes applied in practice. Through its operation rulership became an ecclesiastical office and as such was subjected to ecclesiastical norms, laws, and criteria. The ruler *qua* ruler had become incorporated in the structure of the Church (...) This character of government science as a species of applied theology imprinted itself upon all the component parts of the science: each and every one of its particulars exhibited the incontrovertible traces of the paternal ancestry – theology (...) There is no item within this ecclesiastically conceived doctrine of government which in the final resort is not traceable to a theological premiss, itself so largely derived from an interpretation and application of the Bible»<sup>118</sup>.

Therefore, it is only when «due emphasis is given to the views which Charlemagne held in regard to the value of the Bible for purposes of government»<sup>119</sup> that one can understand the real dimension of Carolingian Sacral Kingship. Indeed, as Ullmann points out, the Bible was to Charlemagne «the instrument of celestial governance through which the pattern of the right kind of earthly government may be discerned; in brief, it was the beacon for mankind»<sup>120</sup>.

In Carolingian Europe, the Bible was the main source of religious knowledge, that is, wisdom. Indeed, at no other time in medieval history was the Bible so frequently copied within so short a time<sup>121</sup>. As Ullmann puts it, «no other single factor was more instrumental and crucial in the process of transforming Frankish society than the Bible. The Bible was credited with the status of a textbook containing all the relevant maxims, axioms and norms relative (to private) and public life. To Charlemagne and his advisers the Bible was not only a book of religious edification or instruction or divine revelation but also and above all a book which between two stiff covers, so to speak, embodied the sum-total of all knowledge necessary for the ideological renaissance of Frankish society»<sup>122</sup>.

Charlemagne expressed himself the value of the Bible in these words reproduced in the *Libri Carolini*: «For it is a treasure which lacks in nothing whatsoever, is abundantly provided with all that is good; whoever approaches this treasure with a devout mind and searches for anything in good faith, will profit from this knowledge and enrich himself (...) In the Scriptures there will be found the norm, on the basis of which authority is instituted, and according to which the superiors should act towards their subjects and the subjects towards their superiors, how

117. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

118. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 188.

119. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

120. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

121. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

122. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 18.



secular counsels are to be taken with prudent deliberation, how the fatherland is to be defended, how the enemy is to be repelled»<sup>123</sup>.

Alcuin of York's interest in the Bible's sapiential books and Hebrew Wisdom is readily apparent. Not incidentally, Alcuin joined Eanbald, the future archbishop of York, in supervising the construction between 767 and 780 of a basilica in York dedicated to Holy Wisdom called *Alma Sophia*<sup>124</sup>.

Furthermore, Alcuin was intent on building a Solomonic image for his royal pupil. In a letter of 798 on the spiritual meaning of the names of the Sundays before Easter, Alcuin quotes the Queen of Sheba in a description of the joy experienced by those who stand near the new Solomon, Charlemagne, and hear his wisdom<sup>125</sup>. Between 801 and 804 Alcuin quoted the Queen of Sheba again, in *De animae ratione*, a treatise written for Charlemagne's cousin Gundrada, on a subject Alcuin described as integral to spiritual progress in the *Disputatio de vera philosophia*. Alcuin urges Gundrada to pattern her conduct on the example of the Frankish ruler, «our Solomon» (*Salomonem nostrum*), who has mastered philosophy despite all the cares of royal government and who shines forth as a model of conduct»<sup>126</sup>.

It is against this background that Alcuin wrote commentaries on each of the three books attributed to King Solomon which were pointed out by Origen as the basis of Christian wisdom: *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *the Song of Songs*<sup>127</sup>. The Liberal Arts and their relation to the study of Scripture were also discussed by Alcuin in manuals on the Arts of the *Trivium*, which are prefaced by a little treatise in the form of a dialogue between a master and his pupils, *De vera philosophia*, which it is usually treated as the preface to Alcuin's *De grammatica*<sup>128</sup>.

Alcuin's most coherent description of the Christian sapiential ideal occurs in this short philosophical dialogue, which has been considered to be in itself an evidence for the Carolingian Christianization of the Liberal Arts and the development of a Christian culture uniting all orders of Carolingian society<sup>129</sup>.

123. *Libri Carolini*, II, 30, ed. F. Bastgen (suppl. vol. to MGH. Conc., 1924), p. 92, lines 12-18.; ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

124. ALBERI, Mary, «The Better Paths of Wisdom: Alcuin's Monastic True Philosophy and the Worldly Court», *Speculum*, 76/4 (2001), p. 903; see MORRIS, Richard, «Alcuin, York, and the Alma Sophia», *The Anglo-Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archeology in Honour of Dr. H. M. Taylor*, L. A. S. Butler and R. K. Morris (eds.), Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 60, London, 1986, pp. 80-89. This church has not been located so far, although it has been suggested that York Minster's current chapter house may reflect Alma Sophia's plan.

125. ALCUIN OF YORK, *Epistolae*, ep. 143, ed. E. Dümmler, M.G.H. *Epistolae*, IV, vol. 2. Berlin, Weidmann, 1895, p. 227, lines 31-35. See also ep. 144, p. 230, lines 27-30; for Charlemagne's mocking reply (ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 909).

126. ALCUIN OF YORK, *De ratione animae*, ed. J. J. M. Curry, *A Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus, and Translation*, Dissertation, Cornell University, 1961, p. 69.

127. ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 899.

128. BULLOUGH, Donald A., «Alcuin's Cultural Influence: The Evidence of the Manuscripts», *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (eds.), *Germania Latina*, vol. 3, Groningen, 1998, p. 15. Bullough suggests that Alcuin wrote the *Disputatio* and *Ars grammatica* before 796, while still at Charlemagne's Aachen court. The *Disputatio* prefates Alcuin's *Ars grammatica* in several Ninth-century manuscripts that preserved various late-antique and Carolingian grammatical texts used in ecclesiastical schools. The exact relationship of the *Disputatio* to the *Ars grammatica* has yet to be determined.

129. BULLOUGH, D. A., *art. cit.*, pp. 19-20.



In this philosophical dialogue, Alcuin revived the classical scheme of the seven Liberal Arts, borrowing from the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus the parallel between the Liberal Arts and King Solomon's seven-pillared Temple of Wisdom and enriching his discussion with reminiscences of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*<sup>130</sup>. Although the link with Solomon's Temple may have been suggested by Cassiodorus, it is Alcuin who expands the allusion and recalls the traditional exegesis of the biblical *House of Wisdom*<sup>131</sup>.

As a result, John Marenbon remarks, Alcuin «was able both to insist on the radical need for knowledge of the Arts and yet also to place the secular wisdom they represent within a scheme of Christian wisdom deriving from Christ, who is himself Wisdom. Alcuin had not merely, as often noted, transformed the *Philosophia* of Boethius' *De consolatione* into the Christian figure of Wisdom (*Sapientia*). He has also Christianised Augustine's argument in *De Ordine*. As in Augustine, the Liberal Arts reflect the underlying structure of true knowledge. However, this is now seen to be grasped, not by the workings of reason itself, but through the interpretation of Scripture»<sup>132</sup>.

Indeed, secular wisdom *per se* not always found Alcuin's approval. For instance, in 792 Alcuin reproached Ricbod's misdirected *amor saeculi*, manifested in excessive fondness for Vergil and preoccupation with his high status as archbishop of Trier<sup>133</sup>. Classical literature and learning were, in Alcuin's view, tools to be used in order to achieve not human, but divine *sapientia*. Both were gifts of God, and neither could function properly without the other, but secular learning was to be subordinated to religious wisdom<sup>134</sup>.

Therefore, to provide the Christian ruler with this religious wisdom, the *vera sapientia*, was a crucial matter for Alcuin. In one of his letters, written in anger at the deviations of the *pueri palatini* in the royal entourage, Alcuin advised Charlemagne to build in Aachen a «new Athens», a model city in which the Liberal Arts support Christian learning according to the principles of the «true philosophy» already outlined in the *Disputatio de vera philosophia*<sup>135</sup>.

Alcuin's ambivalence appears not only in his comments on his own experience as abbot at Tours and palace schoolmaster at Aachen but also in his critics of Charlemagne's courtiers. Indeed, Alcuin would dare to criticize the worldliness

130. MARENBN, John, «Carolingian Thought», *Carolingian Culture: emulation and innovation*, R. McKitterick (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 172; and COURCELLE, Pierre, *La consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité de Boèce*, Paris, Etudes Augustiniennes, 1967, pp. 33-47. See BRUNHÖLZL, Franz, «Der Bildungsauftrag der Hofschule», *Karl der Grosse. Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. H. Beumann y W. Braunfels, vol. 2, Düsseldorf, Schwang Verlag, 1965-68, pp. 28-41.

131. MARENBN, J., *art. cit.*, p. 173. Similar images are to be found in GREGORY THE GREAT (*Moralia in Job*, XXXII, XXVI, 32) and BEDE THE VENERABLE (*In Proverbia Salomonis*, I, VIII, 34).

132. MARENBN, J., *art. cit.*, p. 173.

133. ALCUIN OF YORK, *Ep.* 13, p. 39, lines 7-9; ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 907.

134. CONTRENI, John J., «Inharmonious harmony: Education in the Carolingian world», *The Annals of Scholarship*, 1/2 (1980), p. 85.

135. ALCUIN OF YORK, *Ep.* 170, p. 279, lines 20-26; ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 907.

of Charlemagne's court in harsh terms, but, as Mary Alberi reckons, «at the same time, he made every effort to convert the court to *true philosophy*, so that the necessity of royal service would become less problematic to him and his students»<sup>136</sup>. In this regard, the results of Alberi's research strongly suggest that «Alcuin was not a mere compliant instrument of court policy, but an independent advocate of his own, monastically inspired religious and cultural program»<sup>137</sup>.

Alcuin's dissatisfaction with Charlemagne's worldly court inspired persistent efforts to instil his monastic *vera philosophia* in Charlemagne and his powerful courtiers. In the mid-790s Alcuin wrote another two textbooks, *De rhetorica* and *De dialectica*, as philosophical dialogues in which he and Charlemagne play the roles of *Magister* and *Discipulus*.

Both textbooks display a sapiential discourse on kingship. The first one, the *De rhetorica*, upholds «the ideal of a civil society whose philosopher-king orders his government according to moral philosophy's basic precept, *ne quid nimis*»<sup>138</sup>. In a similar mood, in his *De dialectica* Alcuin instructs the Frankish ruler in logic, a discipline he considered necessary for the rational investigation of the Christian faith and its defence against heretics. In this treatise, as Mary Alberi has aptly remarked, Alcuin also cast Charlemagne in the role of Solomon, the ideal philosopher-king and chief advocate of the «true philosophy»<sup>139</sup>.

Liutpold Wallach has pointed out that Alcuin's combination of 'political' subject-matter, prescription of the cardinal virtues and formal dialogue with Charlemagne made the *De rethorica* nothing less than the earliest Carolingian *speculum principis*, a treatise on kingship: «The *De Rhetorica* is made up of rhetorical doctrine, not because Alcuin wanted to write a rhetorical textbook, but because he wished to describe the *mores* of Charlemagne as those that ought to serve as examples to his subjects»<sup>140</sup>.

Wallach's interpretation has proved influential, even though a more systematic study of Carolingian *Fürstenspiegel* would suggest that Alcuin's treatise does not, in fact, fulfil the criteria necessary for it to be categorized in this genre<sup>141</sup>. But if this *littera exhortatoria* is not a *speculum principis*, what is it? Many historians have been prompted to confess bafflement at this question<sup>142</sup>. Why does Alcuin then define the entire scope of rhetoric as political (*civiles quaestiones*)? Why does he conclude his treatment with an analysis of the four cardinal virtues?<sup>143</sup>

136. ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 898.

137. ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 898.

138. ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, pp. 908-09.

139. ALBERI, M., *art. cit.*, p. 909.

140. WALLACH, Liutpold, *Alcuin and Charlemagne: Studies in Carolingian History and Literature*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1959, p. 71. For the equation of the personal virtue of a ruler with the prosperity of his kingdom, see ALCUIN OF YORK, *Ep.* 18, p. 51.

141. ANTON Hans Hubert, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit*, Bonn, Röhrscheid Verlag, 1968, pp. 87-88.

142. WALLACE-HADRILL, John Michael, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 101.

143. KEMPSHALL, M. S., *art. cit.*, p. 9.

Similarly, in one of his most memorable letters to Charlemagne, Alcuin quoted the Platonic *dictum* on philosopher-kings relying on Boethius<sup>144</sup>. As it is well known, the philosopher-king was by far the chief political institution of Plato's ideal city, where everything is left to the wisdom of the great lawgiver, a godlike sage. This figure is the solution that Socrates provides to his disciples to the questions asked in the dialogue reproduced in the *Republic*. This dialogue develops in response to the question first given voice by Thrasymachus and Glaucon: why justice is absent in the *polis*? The Platonic Socrates solves the question with the philosopher-king institution: «Unless communities have philosophers as kings, or the people who are currently called kings and rulers practise philosophy with enough integrity – in other words, unless political power and philosophy coincide (...), there can be no end to political troubles»<sup>145</sup>.

A recreation of the Platonic Republic of sages is to be sought in Charlemagne's immediate institutional surroundings, that is, in what has been called the *academia palatina* of Aachen, a kind of «ministry of public education and spiritual instruction situated in his own court»<sup>146</sup>.

In this 'court academy' its members, both scholars and courtiers, debated in the presence of Charlemagne complex theological and philosophical matters. «In one way or another – Ullmann remarks – this court academy constituted a reservoir of ecclesiastical personnel as well as a vehicle for the dissemination of ideas: in personal and impersonal respects it potently fertilized the ground upon which synodal decrees were eventually to fall (...) for it was to a very large extent the same personages who had frequented the academy, who became bishops and abbots and as such participated in the ecclesiastical councils of the time»<sup>147</sup>.

Rosamond McKitterick's examination of Charlemagne's personal intervention in the promotion of scholarship indicate that the patronage of learning was an integral part of righteous Christian rulership and thus considered to be an obligation for the king. As McKitterick points out, «royal patronage was not random aesthetic pleasure, but an organised and determined assembly and deployment of resources to carry out the specific aims articulated in the royal capitularies (...) Rather than acting as an occasional benefactor, the Carolingian ruler sustained groups of artists, scribes and craftsmen over a long period of time in order to create artefacts for his particular objectives. His patronage was designed to promote his royal power as a Christian king and to consolidate the Christian faith by disseminating the key texts on which that faith was based»<sup>148</sup>.

144. ALCUIN OF YORK, *Ep.* 299, p. 373, lines 7-8; COURCELLE, Pierre, «Les sources antiques du prologue d'Alcuin sur les disciplines», *Philologus*, 110 (1966), p. 303; and WALLACH L., *op. cit.*, pp. 60-72.

145. PLATO, *Republic*, 473d, ed. R. Waterfield, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 193.

146. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 24; BRUNHÖLZL, F., *art. cit.*, p. 28.

147. ULLMANN, W., *op. cit.*, p. 25.

148. MCKITTERICK, R., *The Carolingian Renaissance...*, p. 165.

In conclusion, with these various distinctions in mind, I shall argue that the sapiential theme of rulership profoundly pervaded both Constantinian and Carolingian political theologies, particularly the writings of their two most influential exponents: Eusebius and Alcuin. No consistent exposition of Constantinian and Carolingian Political Thought can omit the names of these two enthusiastic ‘propagandists’ of Holy Wisdom and Christian Empire.

However, this is a key topic somewhat neglected<sup>149</sup>. As Rosamond McKitterick has aptly put it, «a concentration on political ideology, related partly to possession of the title of emperor after 800 (...), has diverted attention away from the gradual build-up of momentum and definition in Charlemagne’s religious and cultural policies (...) Certainly, viewed as a whole, the half century of Charlemagne’s rule allows us to appreciate the extraordinary ways in which his promotion of correct thinking and correct language was an essential component of an overall strategy of control. In this, the concept of *correctio*, the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of power were yoked together»<sup>150</sup>.

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149. For a broad approach to the topic from a European wide perspective, see RODRÍGUEZ DE LA PEÑA, Manuel Alejandro, *Los reyes sabios. Cultura y poder en la Antigüedad Tardía y en la Alta Edad Media*, Madrid, Actas, 2008.

150. MCKITTERICK, R., *Charlemagne...*, p. 294. On the medieval posterity of this Political Theology of Wisdom, see RODRÍGUEZ DE LA PEÑA, Manuel Alejandro, «The ‘Wise King’ Topos in Context: Patronage of Learning, Royal Literacy and Political Theology in Medieval Western Europe (c. 1000-1200)», *The Routledge History of Monarchy*, E. Woodacre, L. H. Dean and Ch. Jones (eds.), London, Routledge, 2019, pp. 38-53.

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