



Revista Moldovenească de Drept Internațional și Relații Internaționale /
Moldavian Journal of International Law and International Relations /
Молдавский журнал международного права и международных отношений

2023, Issue 2, Volume 18, Pages 25-30.

ISSN 1857-1999 EISSN 2345-1963

Submitted: 25.09.2023 | Reviewed: 22.10.2023 | Accepted: 20.11.2023 | Published: 25.11.2023

<https://doi.org/10.61753/1857-1999/2345-1963/2023.18-2.03>

**TRIBUNA DISCUȚIONALĂ
THE TRIBUNE OF DISCUSSION
ДИСКУССИОННАЯ ТРИБУНА**

INFLUENCE OF ROMAN RELIGION ON CHRISTIANITY

INFLUENȚA RELIGIEI ROMANE ASUPRA CREȘTINISMULUI

ВЛИЯНИЕ РИМСКОЙ РЕЛИГИИ НА ХРИСТИАНСТВО

BYELOV Dmytro* / BYELOV Dmytro / БЕЛОВ Дмитрий

ABSTRACT:

INFLUENCE OF ROMAN RELIGION ON CHRISTIANITY

This article traces the influence of traditional Roman religion on Christianity. The establishment of the most important dogmas and the formation of the church hierarchy are analyzed.

The classical era is the Christian period of history that initiated the most important dogmas and formed the church hierarchy. The practice of Ecumenical Councils, which became the main governing bodies of the church, was introduced. The first Ecumenical Council was held in Nicaea. It approved the Creed, which was an exposition of the main dogmas that were obligatory for Christians. The Council of Nicaea was held for two months from June 19, 325. Taking into account historical sources, about three hundred and fifty bishops participated in it. It featured a speech by Emperor Constantine, in which he emphasized the importance of unity and harmony. The emperor needed a single and strong religion that would strengthen his rule.

Keywords: Christianity, Roman religion, Ecumenical councils.

JEL Classification: Z12, B19

Universal Decimal Classification: 123.1; 2-9

REZUMAT:

INFLUENȚA RELIGIEI ROMANE ASUPRA CREȘTINISMULUI

Acest articol urmărește influența religiei tradiționale romane asupra creștinismului. Se analizează stabilirea celor mai importante dogme și formarea ierarhiei bisericești.

Epoca clasică este perioada creștină a istoriei care a inițiat cele mai importante dogme și a format ierarhia bisericească. A fost introdusă practica Sinodelor Ecumenice, care au devenit principalele organe de conducere ale bisericii. Primul Sinod Ecumenic a avut loc la Niceea. A aprobat Crezul, care era o expunere a principalelor dogme care erau obligatorii pentru creștini. Sinodul de la Niceea s-a ținut timp de două luni de la 19 iunie 325. Ținând cont de izvoarele istorice, la el au participat aproximativ trei sute cincizeci de episcopi. Acesta a prezentat un discurs al împăratului Constantin, în

* **BYELOV Dmytro** – doctor of Law, Professor, Professor of the Department of Constitutional Law and Comparative Jurisprudence Faculty of Law „Uzhgorod National University” (Uzhgorod, Ukraine). / **BYELOV Dmytro** – doctor în drept, profesor, profesor la Departamentul de drept constituțional și jurisprudență comparată Facultatea de drept, „Universitatea Națională Ujgorod” (Ujgorod, Ucraina). / **БЕЛОВ Дмитрий** – доктор юридических наук, профессор, профессор кафедры конституционного права и сравнительного правоведения юридического факультета, «Ужгородский национальный университет» (Ужгород, Украина). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7168-9488> E-mail: dmitriy.belov@uzhnu.edu.ua belov_dimon@yahoo.com

care acesta a subliniat importanța unității și armoniei. Împăratul avea nevoie de o religie unică și puternică care să-i întărească domnia.

Cuvinte cheie: creștinism, religie romană, sinoade ecumenice.

JEL Classification: Z12, B19

CZU: 123.1; 2-9

РЕЗЮМЕ:

ВЛИЯНИЕ РИМСКОЙ РЕЛИГИИ НА ХРИСТИАНСТВО

В данной статье прослеживается влияние традиционной римской религии на христианство. Анализируется установление важнейших догматов и формирование церковной иерархии.

Классическая эпоха – христианский период истории, положивший начало важнейшим догматам и сформировавшим церковную иерархию. Была введена практика Вселенских Соборов, которые стали главными органами управления церковью. В Никее состоялся первый Вселенский Собор. Он утвердил Символ веры, представлявший собой изложение основных догматов, обязательных для христиан. Никейский собор проходил в течение двух месяцев, начиная с 19 июня 325 года. Если принять во внимание исторические источники, в нем участвовало около трехсот пятидесяти епископов. На нем прозвучала речь императора Константина, в которой он подчеркнул важность единства и согласия. Императору нужна была единая и сильная религия, которая укрепила бы его правление.

Ключевые слова: христианство, римская религия, Вселенские соборы.

JEL Classification: Z12, B19

УДК: 123.1; 2-9

Introduction

Christianity is one of the world religions. Its formation and development took place in ancient times, in particular during the Roman Empire. There were a number of reasons for this in political, social and cultural life. Supporters of Christianity were persecuted and tortured. Postulates of the Christian religion: love for neighbor, immortality of the human soul. The main commandments met the requirements of the time, so Christianity took a leading role in the Roman Empire¹.

Purpose: to trace the influence of traditional Roman religion on the formation of Christianity.

Presenting main material

Ancient culture, in particular Roman religion, had a significant impact on the development of modern civilization. The formation of Christianity and the Roman Empire, its culture and religion are connected. In Rome, a new system of government arose – the principate, which influenced the emergence of world religion.

According to G. Kanabe, during the time when the Christian canon was being formed, this was the period of establishment of the bureaucratic legal cosmopolitan state, in which the polis was disbanded.

Traditional Roman religion was connected with the state system and political life. Also expressed a person's personal feelings. Already August uses it: restores temples, revives religious ceremonies. The following emperors also supported such an internal policy: the support of the traditional Roman religion. Therefore, Christianity entered into conflict with the Roman state, which protected the official religion².

Roman religion was based on the fact that individual objects, people have internal powers. Genii (good spirits), penates (guardians and deputies of the household) belonged to them. They also believed in the deities of forests, springs, and mountains. Initially, these spirits had neither gender nor personality, sacrifices were made to them, religious ceremonies were dedicated to them. Under the influence of Greek

¹ Bielova M.V., Byelov D.M. The influence of Roman law on the modern change of the legal paradigm. In: Visegrad Journal on Human Rights. 2023, Issue 2, p. 13-17. [Online]: https://journal-vjhr.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Visegrad_02_2023_PRINT.pdf (Visited on: 22.09.2023).

² Кнабе Г.С. Быт и история в античности. Москва: Наука, 1988, с. 165. [Online]: http://www.sno.pro1.ru/lib/byt_i_istoriya_v_antichnosti/byt_i_istoriya.pdf (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

culture, gods and goddesses appeared who were the patrons of various phenomena, processes, etc. For the Romans, it is characteristic to mythologize their history: myths about the founding of Rome. The Roman people considered themselves the chosen ones, and their state as one of the highest values. At the stage of the empire, the cult of the emperor as a living god was formed.

In the II century B.C. most of the Roman elite were indifferent to religion. During the times of the Roman Republic, there was such a hierarchical system: the highest body was the College of Pontiffs, with the supreme priest, the Grand Pontiff, who was the head of the state religion. Flamin served the cults of the gods. Roman religion served Roman society well. Especially in terms of communication skills. The Romans, under the influence of democratic principles, respected collegiality in governing the state and in everyday life.

From time immemorial, sacrifices were made collectively. The relevant groups made decisions regarding all cases. Facilitation in communication took place through religious gatherings. That is why religion was an organic component of Roman life. The emperor managed religious affairs, which led to problems in the church management system. The crisis of traditional religious beliefs was caused by the development of the economy, the improvement of the economic situation, the development of cities, cultural development and other factors. Educated layers of society were formed not only from the upper layers. They also included municipal owners. A philosophical concept gained popularity that did not approve of traditional religious views until the very denial of deities. An example is the opinion of the followers of Lucretius and Epicurus, who determined the purely philosophical meaning of the gods and the divine, which contradicted previous religious canons.

In the first century, the philosophy of Roman Stoicism became widespread. Its bright representatives were Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. Their main view was the position that a single world mind should be formed, which would serve as a distributor of good and evil and would be the founder of an ordered cosmos.

Part of the overall design of the cosmos is evil. Man is a part of the cosmos in which the divine mind resides. Its duty, as a component of the divine mind, is to support the world order, voluntary performance of duties, overcoming difficulties and dangers. Only the chosen sages had the opportunity to voluntarily choose to follow the cosmic order, to merge into a single mind of man and the world. Sages formed a certain kind of community, they approached the gods, joined the divine essence. Stoic philosophy, like other philosophical schools, was a doctrine, not a religion. It was common only among the intelligentsia or aristocracy of Rome and was not widely popular among the common population.

Among the Eastern cults that began to spread in Ancient Rome, a new religion – Christianity – appeared. It begins in the first half of the 1st century AD. The first mentions of Christianity can be traced in Palestine - one of the cults of the Jewish religion. In Rome, in the center of the empire, Christianity quickly gained great importance due to certain qualities and specific historical conditions. Apostle Paul played a culminating role in the formation of Christianity. In Rome, Christianity acquired a rather difficult spread – it was either permitted or prohibited. The authorities brutally persecuted the followers of Christianity. It gained official equality with other religions in 313 thanks to the emperors Constantine and Licinius, and already in 324 Christianity had the status of the state religion. Roman religion began to crumble, acquired the status of paganism. Temples of Roman religion were destroyed, statues of gods were destroyed. Although, it should be noted that some Roman churches were repurposed as Christian ones.

The form of protest of the oppressed and conquered is the idea of the equality of the people before God of early Christianity. The newly created religion was severely persecuted, as its origins were from the lower strata of the population.

During the time of Emperor Nero, the first mentions of Christians who were accused of setting fire to Rome and sentenced to death appeared in Roman sources. Due to constant persecution, Christian rites were held in secret. In the first century AD, the first Christian catacombs appeared in Rome. According to O. Fedorov, the underground burials of Christians began in 71 AD. He came to this conclusion after analyzing one of the inscriptions in the catacombs¹.

¹ Федорова Е. Введение в латинскую эпиграфику. М.: Изд-во Моск. ун-та, 1982, с. 199. [Online]: <https://esxatos.com/fedorova-vvedenie-v-latinskuyu-epigrafiku> (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

Emperor Nero began a negative official policy towards Christianity. The reign of Emperor Diocletian was the highest point of persecution of Christians. Constantine the Great made Christianity the official and leading religion of the Roman state, and Emperor Theodosius made it the only official religion. Emperor Constantine's decisive actions regarding the establishment of Christianity as the state religion already in the Western historiography of the 20th century. called the „Constantine Revolution”. M. Kazakov notes that various aspects of Christianization and the models set by it can be traced through its influence. In his opinion, the completion of the processes aimed at the transformation of Christianity into the state religion was carried out under Theodosius. At the same time, the process of integration of the empire and religion had a bilateral nature, and the church acquired the character of not only an ideological, but also a political tool¹.

The Romans got to know the gods of the conquered peoples, as they constantly went on campaigns for the purpose of conquests. The list of traditional Roman gods was supplemented with new ones. While enslaved by the Romans, the slaves maintained faith and reverence for their gods. The undermining of the foundations of the traditional religion of the Romans was caused by the recognition of overseas gods. Traditional beliefs underwent changes due to civil wars and proscriptions. The imagination of the afterlife and the bliss of the afterlife became widespread. The fear of being unsettled, suffering, the constant expectation of death led to a loss of confidence in earthly life. People started looking for salvation.

The basis of the Christian faith is the Bible („Holy Scripture”), which consists of two parts: the Old and New Testaments (Testament), as well as the Holy Tradition and the Creed approved at the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Antioch (381). Simultaneously with the formation of the creed, the process of formation of the Christian cult (combination of holidays, rituals, customs, and rites) took place. The most important of the Christian rites are the seven sacraments: baptism, communion, priesthood, confession, anointing, marriage and holy consecration. Christianity, like every religion, on certain days of the calendar honors saints or marks certain events in the life of the church. The main holidays are: Nativity of Christ, Baptism of the Lord, Meeting of the Lord, Annunciation, Easter, Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Trinity, Ascension of the Lord, Savior, Assumption of the Theotokos, Moving of the Honorable and Life-giving Cross of the Lord, Introduction to the temple of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Characterizing the nature of the relationship between the state and religion in the Roman Empire, E. Steyerman emphasized the functionality of the religious sphere, the focus of the imperial cult on solving specific internal political tasks within the empire on the one hand, and on the other - that the imperial cult raised the significance of religion in general as an important humanitarian tool².

The spirit of equality and collectivism occupied a dominant position at the initial stage of the formation of Christian communities. Next came the task of organizing internal relationships between believers. At the end of the first century, the institution of episcopacy was introduced and the positions of deacons - ministers of a lower rank - were introduced. In this way, the church hierarchy was formed. Christian communities chose elders from among themselves to lead church affairs and worship services. Bishops, who were honored by the successors of the apostles, ordained elders. This is how the church hierarchy was created. The spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire was facilitated by the decline and collapse of Greco-Roman paganism. Christians differed from other inhabitants of the empire by their strict way of life, fraternal attitude towards each other and respect for the new religion. Not only ordinary people, but nobles and rich people also began to accept the new religion. A large number of Christians became hermits - renounced the world, moved to deserts and forests and prayed there. Sometimes other hermits joined them, then monastic communities were already formed³.

The religion of Christianity, in the face of confrontation with Judaism, survived through democracy and humanity. The development of Christianity took place by denying the ideas of Judaism and transforming traditional beliefs into new doctrines. Christianity contributed to the formation of a complex and comprehensive creed, which absorbed all previous elements of religion and philosophical systems.

¹ Казаков М. Христианизация Римской империи в IV в. Диссертация на соискание ученой степени доктора исторических наук. Специальность 07.00.03. Москва, 2003, с. 288. [Online]: <https://www.dissercat.com/content/khristianizatsiya-rimskoi-imperii-v-iv-v> (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

² Штаерман Е.М. Социальные основы религии Древнего Рима. М.: Наука, 1987, с. 306. [Online]: https://vk.com/doc35528094_473193249?hash=oL1IVzmiL40b91HvLwcKSyUifpL4B6fEbfz2qNqX (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

³ MacMullen R. Paganism in the Roman Empire. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1984.

The Christian creed was enriched by the ideas of Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Cynicism, Gnosticism, and Alexandrian philosophy. Thus, the philosophical idea of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria consisted in the Divine Logos, the Son of God, who formed a connection between God and people. Seneca's teachings developed similar to Christian ideas of the equality of all people. The Christian faith needed new spiritual guidelines, moral and ethical principles due to the changes that took place in the cultural, social and political life of the Roman Empire, which were covered by deep curvature, the existing religions of the time, not taking into account the persecutions and persecutions for 300 years.

In early Christianity, two sides were opposed: a positive attitude to the previous culture and its denial and rejection. In the end, the positive side won out. From the time of its birth to Constantine, the Christian church developed into a hierarchical government and adopted the modern order of things. There were significant changes in the economic, political and military spheres of the empire. The slave-owning system is undergoing a crisis, becoming ineffective both in the village and in the city. Land ownership is the main form of ownership in the economy. Latifundia become unprofitable due to the reduction of the workforce¹.

The work of slaves was replaced by the work of colonists and small tenants. Slaves were used to build houses, perform everyday work, build roads and deliver goods. The slaves were mainly not of Italian, but of provincial origin, namely: barbarians, Gauls, Moors, Syrians and Sarmatians. This contributed to the discord with the dominant cult and the acceptance of the Christian faith. A popular phenomenon was the gifting of documents certifying the freedom of slaves. Layers of privileged „free-lancers”, small and medium-sized enterprises became popular. The internal structure of the church was formed by the fourth century. Until that time, local councils of bishops were held. These councils examined organizational internal relations and resolved dogmatic problems. The decisions of the councils in Carthage, Alexandria and Antioch were significant for the church as a whole. After the beginning of the fourth century, the state of the Christian Church was changed by the Milan Edict of Emperor Constantine. He equalized Christianity in rights with all other religions of the Roman Empire. In this way, the status of Christianity was legalized and legitimized. The church reached its privileged status during the reign of Constantine the Great².

Conclusion

The classical era is the Christian period of history that initiated the most important dogmas and formed the church hierarchy. The practice of Ecumenical Councils, which became the main governing bodies of the church, was introduced. The first Ecumenical Council was held in Nicaea. It approved the Creed, which was an exposition of the main dogmas that were obligatory for Christians. The Council of Nicaea was held for two months from June 19, 325. Taking into account historical sources, about three hundred and fifty bishops participated in it. It featured a speech by Emperor Constantine, in which he emphasized the importance of unity and harmony. The emperor needed a single and strong religion that would strengthen his rule.

References:

1. Beard M., North J., Price S. Religions of Rome. Volume I, illustrated, reprint. Cambridge University Press. 1998. [Online]: http://khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/rel_rom1.pdf (Visited on: 15.09.2023).
2. Bielova M.V., Byelov D.M. The influence of Roman law on the modern change of the legal paradigm. Visegrad Journal on Human Rights. 2023, Issue 2, p. 13-17. [Online]: https://journal-vjhr.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Vishegrad_02_2023_PRINT.pdf (Visited on: 22.09.2023).
3. Elen Laport, Kolett Esten. Antychna Mifolohiia. OOO «Le livre da la mythologie grecque et romanie», 2000. [in Ukrainian]
4. Федорова Е. Введение в латинскую эпиграфику. М.: Изд-во Моск. ун-та. 1982, 256 с. [Online]: <https://esxatos.com/fedorova-vvedenie-v-latinskuyu-epigrafiku> (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

¹ Beard M., North J., Price, S. Religions of Rome. Volume I, illustrated, reprint. Cambridge University Press, 1998. [Online]: http://khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/rel_rom1.pdf (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

² Petrechko O.M. Rym ta khrystyanstvo u I - II st. n. e. Arkheol. doslidzh. Lviv. un-tu. 2007. Vyp. 10. S. 142-155. [in Ukrainian].

5. Казаков М. Христианизация Римской империи в IV в. Диссертация на соискание ученой степени доктора исторических наук. Специальность 07.00.03. Москва, 2003, 534 с. [Online]: <https://www.disscat.com/content/khristianizatsiya-rimskoi-imperii-v-iv-v> (Visited on: 15.09.2023).
6. Кнабе Г.С. Быт и история в античности. М.: Наука, 1988. 272 с. [Online]: http://www.sno.pro1.ru/lib/byt_i_istoriya_v_antichnosti/byt_i_istoriya.pdf (Visited on: 15.09.2023).
7. MacMullen R. Paganism in the Roman Empire. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984. 246 p.
8. Petrechko O.M. Rym ta khrystyanstvo u I - II st. n. e. Arkheol. doslidzh. Lviv. un-tu, 2007. Vyp. 10, s. 142-155. [in Ukrainian]
9. Штаерман Е.М. Социальные основы религии Древнего Рима. М.: Наука, 1987. 320 с. [Online]: https://vk.com/doc35528094_473193249?hash=oL11VzmiL40b91HvLwcKSygUIfipLI4B6fEbzf2qNqX (Visited on: 15.09.2023).

References (Transliteration):

1. Beard, M., North, J., Price, S., Religions of Rome, Volume I, illustrated, reprint, Cambridge University Press, 1998. http://khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/rel_rom1.pdf (Visited 15.09.2023).
2. Bielova M.V., Byelov D.M. The influence of Roman law on the modern change of the legal paradigm. Visegrad Journal on Human Rights. Issue 2. 2023. p. 13-17. https://journal-vjhr.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Vishegrad_02_2023_PRINT.pdf (Visited 22.09.2023).
3. Elen Laport, Kolett Esten. Antychna Mifolohiia. OOO «Le livre da la mythologie grecque et romanie», 2000. [in Ukrainian]
4. Fedorova Elena. Vvedenie v latinskuyu epigrafiku. M., Izd-vo Mosk. un-ta 1982, 256 s. S. 199. <https://esxatos.com/fedorova-vvedenie-v-latinskuyu-epigrafiku> (Visited 15.09.2023).
5. Kazakov Mihail. Hristianizaciya Rimskoj imperii v IV v. Dissertaciya na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni doktora istoricheskikh nauk. Special'nost' 07.00.03. Moskva, 2003, 534 str. S. 288. <https://www.disscat.com/content/khristianizatsiya-rimskoi-imperii-v-iv-v> (Visited 15.09.2023).
6. Knabe G.S. Byt i istoriya v antichnosti. Moskva, Nauka, 1988. 272 s. S. 165. http://www.sno.pro1.ru/lib/byt_i_istoriya_v_antichnosti/byt_i_istoriya.pdf (Visited 15.09.2023).
7. MacMullen, R., Paganism in the Roman Empire, Yale University Press, 1984. 246 p.
8. Petrechko O.M. Rym ta khrystyanstvo u I - II st. n. e. Arkheol. doslidzh. Lviv. un-tu . 2007. Vyp. 10. S. 142-155. [in Ukrainian]
9. SHtaerman E.M. Social'nye osnovy religii Drevnego Rima. Moskva, Nauka, 1987. 320 str. S. 306. https://vk.com/doc35528094_473193249?hash=oL11VzmiL40b91HvLwcKSygUIfipLI4B6fEbzf2qNqX (Visited 15.09.2023).

Copyright©Dmytro BYELOV, 2023.

Contacts/Contacte/ Контакты:

BYELOV Dmytro,

Doctor of Law, Professor,
Professor of the Department of Constitutional Law
and Comparative Jurisprudence
Faculty of Law, „Uzhgorod National University”
(Uzhhorod, Ukraine).

E- mail: dmitriy.belov@uzhnu.edu.ua ; belov_dimon@yhoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7168-9488>

<https://doi.org/10.61753/1857-1999/2345-1963/2023.18-2.03>