Between a House of Prayer and a Den of Robbers

Violence in Church Space and the Politics of Christian Victimhood in the Fourth Century CE

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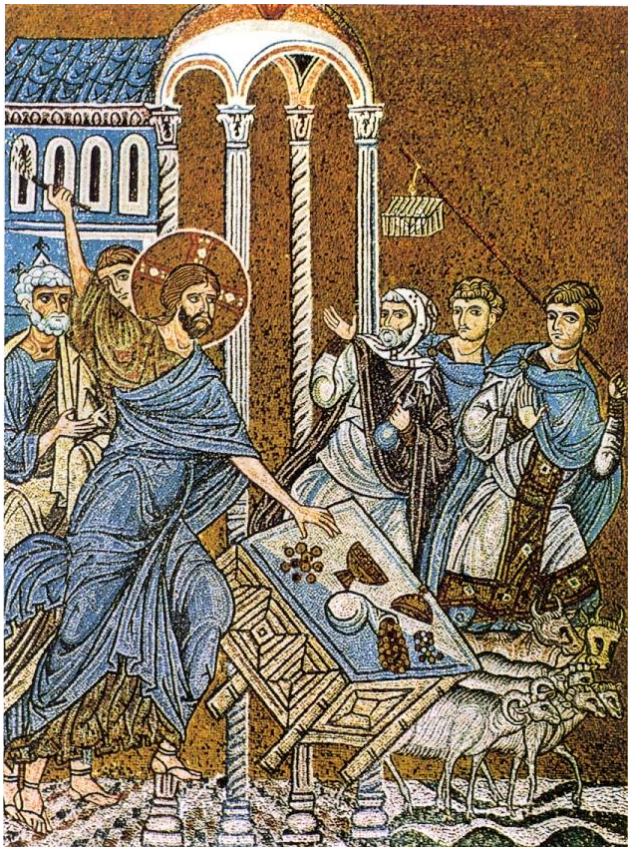

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Cover image: Twelfth century mosaic depicting Christ's expulsion of the money changers from the Temple, from Matt. 21:12-17, Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily, Italy.

Introduction

At Easter 386 C.E., Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and his congregation found themselves in church surrounded by barbarian soldiers who, if ordered, were ready to invade, arrest Ambrose and disperse his congregation.[1] Ambrose had fallen out with the Arian emperor Valentinian II about a recent law that allowed freedom of assembly to followers of what was in Ambrose's eyes the heretical Arian creed. Ambrose had kept resisting against the law, despite the emperor's summons to redress the issue. To make things worse, the emperor had requested two of Milan's most important basilicas under Ambrose's care for its own Easter celebrations. For Ambrose this was a request to which he could never comply. Allowing the Arian clergy and court to enter the basilicas would have meant a serious relaxation of faith. It would have allowed the heretics to mingle with the true faithful. Even worse, it would have relinquished any orthodox claim to those buildings as its exclusive worshipping space.

Ambrose knew all too well what fate awaited the church if he kept resisting. By organizing a defiant sit-in on what was the most important day on the Christian calendar, Ambrose had been consciously imitating the example of his eastern colleagues. The Arian-Nicene conflict had a long history and had been rife with similar situations in which heretical emperors and bishops had demanded Nicene church space for their own religious services. Celebrated figures, such as Athanasius and Peter of Alexandria, had organized similar sit-ins to seriously frustrate the entry of their opponents. But from their example Ambrose also knew that such defiant acts would often result in massacre. For instance, in 339 and 356 Athanasius had on both occasions been violently expelled from his churches.[2] If we take Athanasius' own representation of these events at face value, each of these intrusions had ended in bloody massacres. The behaviour of the intruding soldiers had transgressed all the boundaries of Christian morality. Their intrusion had interrupted the most sacred of Christian rituals, priests had been flogged, virgins molested and stripped of their clothes, altars defiled, the church stores plundered, and to add to the insult, inside the confines of the church the intruders had indulged in all kinds of pagan ritual as if the church were a temple.

But Ambrose also knew that despite the intrusion of the church and the violent expulsion of its bishop, exiled men like Peter and Athanasius had in end always emerged victorious. In the aftermath of the attacks on their churches, they had spread detailed accounts of the violence to all corners of the

[1] Ambrose of Milan, *Epistula* 75A: *Contra Auxentium*; *Epistula* 76, ed. & trans. by J. Liebenscheutz & C. Hill (Liverpool 2005); Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, trans. by H. Chadwick (Oxford 2008) 9.7-8; N. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (London 1994) 158-220; A. Lenox-Conyngham, 'Juristic and Religious Aspects in the Basilica Conflict of A.D. 386', *Studia Patristica* 18.1 (1985) 55-58.

[2] For 339, see: Athanasius, *Epistula Encyclica*, ed. & trans. by A. Martin (London 1985); for 356, see: "Second Petition or *Diamartyria*", quoted in: Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, trans. by A. Robertson (London 1891) 8.81.6; *Socrates Scholasticus*, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, trans. by P. Schaff, H. Wace & A. Zenos (Peabody 1900/1995) 2.11.

Christian world. In their writings they had lamented the offense, exposed the culprits as violent tools of the devil, and tried to mobilize support on the their own behalf. As a consequence, the accused perpetrators, whether an heretical emperor or bishop, had suddenly found themselves in what appears to have been an extremely vulnerable position. The victims, now considering themselves as successors to confessors and martyrs, had accused them of sacrilege, and had compared the intruders actions with those of the pagan persecutors of the past. No bishop or emperor could reasonably maintain his own position if the majority of his subjects considered him a tyrant. Indeed, by privileging religious space for the followers of their own doctrinal beliefs exclusive, they had not only put at risk their own image, so the writings of the victims claimed, but also the stability of the empire and salvation of all Christians in general.

From such examples, Ambrose knew exactly what he should hope for. No well-thinking emperor would seriously repeat the mistakes of his tyrannical pagan predecessors by invading the church and massacring its people. And no emperor in the present day would be so foolish as to remove a bishop from his proper place. The church, Ambrose argued, was God's temple, a divine inheritance given to the faithful to which to the faithful bishop was assigned as its rightful custodian.[3] However, if the emperor would still chose to storm the church building despite the risks to his own image, Ambrose claimed that he was ready to suffer and follow the example of his eastern colleagues. For him, the best defence against a domineering and violent tyrant was a passive defence. In defence of the church, he would under no circumstance take up the sword but use the only real means of available to a bishop in distress:

> I will never desert you willingly, though if force is used, resistance I know nothing about. I shall be able to lament, to weep, to groan: when I face arms, soldiers, Goths, even my tears are weapons: for such are the defences of a bishop. I neither ought, nor indeed can, resist in any other manner. But to flee and abandon the church is not my way.[4]

Such an emotional plea, anticipating or lamenting the violent disruption of religious space, was nothing out of the ordinary in Late Antiquity, nor is it today. In almost similar fashion, modern media bombard us on a near daily basis with stories and images of sacred and highly symbolical spaces that have been violently desecrated. These are usually accompanied by pleas for help directed at fellow believers around the world or at policy makers at home and abroad. Recent examples include the ardent pleas by archaeologists, historians and religious leaders to preserve and protect cultural and religious heritage in Syria from Isis's iconoclastic purge, as well as the generally shared affront of ISIS' killing of the 85 year old priest Jacques Hamel inside the church of the small Norman town of Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray. The Syrian conflict is only the recent example of such violence and the pleas for aid and support it can produce. From Kristallnacht to 9-11, symbolical and religious spaces have been violently targeted throughout recent history and have led to pleas for support with varied consequences. Inevitably, modern

[3] Ambrose, *Ep*. 75a, 35; *Ep*. 76, 19.
[4] Ambrose, *Ep*. 75A, 2

audiences have become all too familiar with these stories and the standard repertoire of prejudice, inter-communal strife, and physical horrors they contain. Closer scrutiny of such narratives and images in Late Antiquity like those of Athanasius, Peter and Ambrose, however, reveals that, regardless of whether these were fashioned by orthodox or heterodox Christian communities, such stories tend to exhibit very similar characteristics and employ some of the very same rhetorical strategies to frame the ways in which they convey their sense of victimhood to the outside world. There are nuances and differences, of course, but what emerges overall is a common idiom that readily cuts across Christianity's religious boundaries, and similar ways in which victimhood and outrage at the violent desecration of symbolic space and imagery is expressed, or, in fact, produced. In this thesis I want to uncover and explain the nature and dynamics of this remarkable phenomenon.

i. Hypothesis

As such, my thesis is centred on the hypothesis that this common desecration idiom has its roots in the first half of the fourth century C.E., that it specifically arose out of the new religious constellation characteristic for this period, and that the parameters that were set then and there help explain why the typical reporting on the desecration of Christian religious space assumes the standardized format it does throughout Late Antiquity. In practical terms, my thesis seeks to unravel these developments by studying and comparing the narratology and symbolism of a carefully selected set of late antique stories that describe the violent desecration and destruction of religious space.

Instead of reading such stories as *truthful* representations of actual violent encounters, my thesis focuses on an analysis of the literary mechanisms and rhetorical strategies employed in the rendering of such events, with special emphasis on the medium that was used most widely and effectively to communicate these stories to a wider audience: the letter. A substantial number of letters detailing such attacks survives. A great many of these letters where produced by some of late antique Christianity's most famous figures. The Alexandrian bishops Athanasius and Peter, the domineering Ambrose, the poetic Gregory of Nazianzus as well as the ever thoughtful John Chrysostom, all partook in the construction of such stories and each in one way or another pleading for the protection of their religious spaces or those of others in front of emperors who could be tyrannical as well as benign. Moreover these men themselves had often been victims of such violent acts, whereas on other occasions they had been actively involved as their perpetrators. The letters they wrote narrate the stories of some of the most violent episodes in late antique religious life. Some of these posit their authors as being the victims of on the receiving end of such apparently relentless attacks. For many in the present however, these stories have become emblematic of the intolerance of late antique religious life and the violent religious conflict accompanying

it.[5] Allowing us to delve deeply into the politics of victimhood, which is the central concept around which my thesis revolves, these letters provide an excellent material base to study which rhetorical mechanisms where developed, how these were employed vis-à-vis others in general and third-party observers in particular, and how all of this, in turn, impinged crucially on changing perceptions of religious space and on the development of late Roman law, in theory as well as in practice.

The goal of this thesis is neither dedicated to determining whether such reports are true or not, nor in cataloguing and enumerating all of the attacks on Christian religious spaces which occurred in roughly the century covered by my thesis. Rather, the fundamental question addressed in my thesis is to explore what Christian stories of violent desecration of religious space meant for those involved, both perpetrators and victims; how they were experienced, represented, justified and contested; how their representations were received and understood within the mental, moral and legal frameworks of late antique third-party observers; and more crucially, how and to what extent such stories contributed to the *mapping*, distribution and codification of religious spaces, places, groups and individuals in the Later Roman world. Moreover, my thesis starts out from the idea that the interpretation of any act of desecration was itself an object of struggle, and as such, a contested field upon which conflicting ideas about religious space, legitimacy, authority and identity could be articulated. By studying the desecration stories as traces of communication and persuasion in reference to Roman legal thought, it should furthermore become possible to investigate the way in which stories of desecration carried over directly into the legal mentalities of the age and were in turn translated into actual policies. Such an approach should allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the semiotic relation between the social configuration of religious space, and the articulation of self and other. My thesis operates on the notion that, indeed, it is this particular relation that plays a fundamental role in the rhetorical expression of late antique Christian victimhood.

ii. The Politics of Religious Victimhood and Epistolary Strategies of Persuasion

For the most part, scholars have forced themselves to understand such stories either as completely factual or fictive representations of intercommunal violence. Consequently, little attention has been paid to the specific congruence between the stories' content and form, and more specifically, to the medium used to communicate such stories to a wider audience: the letter. As stated above, there survive a substantial

[5] Good examples of the application of the 'intolerance argument' include: A. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity. A Social History* (Oxford 2007) 176-211; G. Fowden, 'Bishops and temples in the Eastern Roman Empire', *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978); and more importantly: R. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford 1987); G. Stroumsa, 'Le radicalisme religieux du premier christianisme: contexte et implications', in: E. Patlagean & A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Les retour aux Écritures: fondamentalismes présents et passeés* (Louvain 1993) 357-382; for a contestation of the 'intolerance argument', see: D. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1996); and for a short discussion on the history of the debate, see: H. Drake, 'Lambs and Lions. Explaining Early Christian Intolerance', *Past and Present* 153 (1995) 3-36.

number of late antique letters detailing such attacks. These have survived either in separate collections or are 'emplotted' in complete or abbreviated form in a number of late antique historical works, orations and sermons. Luckily, the majority of these letters are available in reliable, modern scholarly editions. Surprisingly however, scholars have found it natural to think of these letters, if they are indeed identified as such, solely as *carriers* of information.[6]

Over and against this traditional interpretive mould I believe that it is more useful to think of letters in terms of the *actions* and *politics* that people pursued by means of them.[7] By means of a systematic and thorough analysis I will seek to prove that the direct function of these letters was to spread the story of the desecration of religious space as far and wide as possible, and that this happened in an effort to spread the affected community's sense of victimization across the Roman world, possibly for the purposes of curtailing the behaviour of those responsible for such deeds in an attempt to negotiate legal protection with the imperial authorities. It was by means by these letters that both 'perpetrators' and 'victims' sought consensus through dialogue and conflict and it was by means of these letters that local desecration events could spill over into empire-wide controversies.

This explains why I wish to study these letters not just as carriers of information, but as a separate genre of sources which require quite a different approach: they need to be studied as *letters* and thus as traces of ancient communication. It is by analysing the dynamics of these communicative practices that we can begin to trace the origins and development of the common idiom identified earlier, namely the mechanism by which stories about desecration of Christian religious spaces almost always take on such a similar shape.

As a further step, it will also be necessary to study these desecration stories as traces of communication in reference to pertinent Roman legal thought. The reason why it is imperative to include this legal dimension is to socially contextualize the evidence provided by the letters and to show how stories of desecration carried over directly into the legal literature of the age. Further, by studying the interrelationship between the letters and late Roman law, one can finally begin to appreciate fully the multiple ways in which the authors of the desecration letters effectively tried to achieve legal protection as they sought to negotiate the acknowledgment of their own sense of victimhood, as this, obviously, was dependent on the *pathos* and support of third party observers. As a consequence these letters were construed in a highly formulaic and rhetorical manner: they needed to convince and spread the sense of victimhood to other communities. In order to convince, these letters contain images which show the

[6] Discussion on the interpretation and methodology used for studying late antique letter writing, see: R. Gibson & A. Morrison, 'Introduction: What is a Letter?', in: R. Morello & A. Morrison (eds.), *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford 2007) 1-16; S. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1989) 15-48.

[7] Studying the actions and politics letters were meant to perform instead of merely studying its contents, as suggested by Stanley Stowers (including a list of the various actions which might be performed by means of them), see: Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 15-16.

degrading, or proper treatment of spaces and everything and everyone the affected community held dear. These images were construed by making both implicit and explicit reference to concepts and ideas taken directly from the pages of Roman (*and* canonical) law which were framed by making use of the judicial and deliberative rhetoric of the age. But of course, perceived perpetrators could not sit still and were forced to contest the affected community's sense of victimhood. They too had to present their version of the event and needed to frame their actions as legal as well. But the ultimate question of who had been right or wrong was something only the imperial authorities could decide. A decision that was made no less difficult by the fact that in some attacks the perpetrators had colluded with those very same authorities.

In terms of being able to reconstruct this process of contestation and its accompanying intrusion narratives, it is particularly illuminating when we encounter a situation wherein a single act of intrusion is depicted from multiple angles, and is subjected to multiple voices that argue over its meaning, justifying or challenging the legitimacy of the deed and the ideological message it seeks to express. Even better, in some cases, the letters of *all* the participants, meaning perpetrators, victims, imperial authorities and third party observers have survived. Comparing why the remnant of these surviving letters were so successful and how and to what purposes their contents were used will help us determine which particular idiom for narrating desecration stories was most successful in negotiating an individual or community's legal protection. Subsequently, this comparison will help reconstruct how and why, in Late Antiquity, the use and contestation of a number of desecration idioms by a variety of religious groups resulted in the adoption of a single, more uniform, idiom across the Christian religious spectrum.

iii. Interpreting Violence

The concept of 'violence', as understood in Late Antiquity, defies easy definition. In our times, violence is most commonly understood as the "exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property".[8] But what is 'physical force'? Our modern word 'violence' derives from the Latin *violentia*, a word which was understood in Late Antiquity not necessarily as a mode of action but most and foremost as a quality of behaviour.[9] *Violentia* meant that a person was *being* impetuous, ferocious or vehement. Remarkably, in the later Roman empire *violentia* as such was hardly used as a legal concept at all precisely *because* it was difficult to define.[10] Instead, the legal vocabulary Roman legislators employed was meant to be precise in its definition and denote *actions* that could be policed. It envisioned people

[8] For the modern definition of violence and modern parlance, see: A. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English: Compact Edition* (Oxford 1974) 2635-3636; for a discussion of the various definitions of 'violence', see; G. Newman, *Understanding Violence* (New York 1979) 1-32.
[9] For the use of the Latin 'violentia' and associated 'vis' , see: 'Violentia', in: C. Lewis & C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1879/2011); M. Zimmermann, 'Violence in Late Antiquity Reconsidered', in: H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Burlington 2006) 356-357; J. Harries, 'Violence, Victims and the Legal Tradition in Late Antiquity', in: Drake, *Violence in Late Antiquity*, 88-99.
[10] Harries, 'Violence, Victims and Legal Tradition in Late Antiquity', 90-91.

using force (*vis*) to kill, wound, fight, strike, destroy, seize, plunder, rape or burn. But whether these actions were 'right' or 'wrong' in the eyes of the legislator was ultimately dependent on the status of the person who had perpetrated them, his or her mental mind-set, intentions and even the spaces in-or-against which those actions had been perpetrated.[11]

Furthermore, some violence was only deemed reprehensible when it affected certain classes of people.[12] For instance, violence perpetrated against the empire's *honestiores* was considered an outrage. But hurting or killing *humiliores* was deemed to be quite a different case. Violence against the latter was considered to be entirely legitimate, as least under the condition that it had been committed by the former and the right to do so had been granted by his imperial majesty. The Roman legal system maintained a similar distinction in its choice for punishment. Here again the late-Roman penal system distinguished between specific punishments best-suited for *honestiores* and *humiliores*. The crimes of the former were usually punishable by means of fines, confiscation, or exile. The crimes of the latter would often result in flogging, branding, mutilation or other forms of gruesome and exemplary forms of punishment. A similar ambiguous type of violence, as defined by Roman law, was the riot.[13] A crowd of rioters could tear and burn down religious buildings and violently molest the individuals hiding inside them. But these crowds themselves could not be punished for such actions, even if they had clearly perpetrated them in open contravention with the law. In theory at least, only the individuals, if identified, who were suspected of *orchestrating* the violent crowds, could be legally prosecuted.

So in a sense, the interpretation of what was 'violent' and what was not in Late Antiquity was, as much as it is now, polyvalent at best. Different people could observe, experience and participate in the same act of violence at the same time but understand it in completely different ways depending on their circumstances, perspectives and purposes. Indeed 'violence', according to the Roman legal and moral understanding, was not a straightforward phenomenon. 'Victim' and 'perpetrator' were not fixed categories.[14] These needed to be articulated and negotiated in different legal, social and cultural contexts, each in accordance to its own demands. Furthermore, these categories could be contested, twisted and turned by each of the involved parties in order to frame their actions as legal and just. As a consequence, the choice for either of these terms and their success in the contestation of violent episodes was in the end always dependent on the sympathy and support of groups and individuals who were only indirectly involved, interested or disinterested, powerless or powerful.

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[11] On conditions, see: Harries, 'Violence, Victims and Legal Tradition in Late Antiquity', 89-91.
[12] M. Gaddis, *There is no Crime for those who have Christ. Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley 2005) 19, 84, 141.
[13] Harries, 'Violence, Victims and Legal Tradition in Late Antiquity', 85-90.
[14] On the ambivalent nature of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' in representations of acts of violence, see: W. Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', in: W. Miller (ed.), *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honour, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca 1993) 53-92.

But if Late Antique 'violence' is indeed a category of thought which defies clear definition then what can we say about the category of 'religious violence'; the heuristic container according to which our desecration stories are most often understood by scholars today. Can we identify a distinctively 'religious' aspect of such violence? For most the twentieth century, scholars refused to concede that violence, like for instance the destruction of a temple or church, had anything to do with religion. In fact, the majority of scholars were convinced that conflict and violence in religious contexts disguised expressions of class struggle, secular politics or ethnic nationalism. Their paradigm derived from the conviction that religion was by nature peaceful and that any form of violence used in its name represented a 'worldly' deviation of the norm. Such scholars maintained that the religious groups and individuals who resorted to violence in our late classical texts do not represent authentic religion at all and that their actions masked more cynical, political and personal agendas. Indeed, according to this paradigm, violence for the purpose of religion quite naturally equals profanation.

But cannot in some cases profanation itself be religiously motivated? Is not religious violence itself often contested within such a dualistic frame? Take for instance a Christian bishop like Athanasius or Ambrose: they could interpret violence for the faith as divinely ordained, but on other occasions, especially when it was directed against their own person, could equally choose to see it as an aggressive intrusion of worldly force. Here a dynamic of contestation is visible which is quite similar to that of articulating violence in a legal context. Indeed, most of the victims of religiously motivated violence in Late Antiquity were keen to point out that the actions of the perpetrators were anything but religiously motivated. So how can anything be said about the religious nature of violent events when that religious quality or the absence thereof itself is part of the rhetorical framing of the violence itself?

Over the past two decades, and under the influence of successive social, cultural and linguistic turns, scholars studying religious violence, like for example, our violent desecrations, have become increasingly conscious of the construed and rhetorical nature of violence. Today's scholars are much more inclined to argue that whether the motives behind a violent act are inherently religious or worldly in nature is ultimately dependent on how and to what purpose it is represented.[15] There is, for instance, increasing emphasis on the manner in which different social groups might use, experience, interpret and depict violence, each in a different way and each according to a different set of cultural parameters. Instead of the question 'is violence religiously motivated or not?', the emphasis now rests ever increasingly on questions such as 'how and why do people chose to interpret violence as religiously motivated or not?', 'why are stories of violence so important for a given group or individual subject?' and 'why are acts of violence themselves important for the formulation and maintenance of different social and religious identities?'.

[15] Good examples of collaborative efforts pertaining the new paradigm with a special emphasis on violence in-and-against religious space (albeit almost exclusively violence against pagan religious space), include: H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Burlington 2006); J. Hahn (ed.), *Spätantiker Staat und Reliöser Konflikt. Imperiale und Lokale Verwaltung und die Gewalt gegen Heiligtümer* (Berlin 2011); J. Hahn, S. Emmel & U. Gotter (eds.), *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topgraphy in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2008).

However, such questions have also given rise to a new dilemma. For if all violence can be considered rhetorically construed, then what can we say about the actual purposes for which violence was used? Can the social dynamics and purpose of religious violence really be understood when only its representations survive? As a consequence of this dilemma, scholars interested in religious violence are nowadays confronted with a profound epistemological choice. One should either study only the reality of violence and ignore questions pertaining its representation, or that one should only study its representation and ignore its application in reality completely. If one choses to study the representation of violence alone, any statement about its reality immediately becomes suspect and that same suspicion arises when the question is pursued vice versa. Seeing the contents of our texts as both representation *and* as reality does not seem to make a good mix.

Two scholars in particular, both working in the field of late antique religious violence, have tried to bridge this epistemological chasm. The first, Thomas Gaddis', has mainly focused on the attitudes and mind-sets that drove late antique violence.[16] In one of his recent studies, aptly titled *There is no crime for those who have Christ,* Gaddis has shown how various Christian groups in Late Antiquity employed the language of religious violence to advance themselves in the competitive high-stakes process of Christianization. In order to make sense of this dynamic, Gaddis chooses to understand late antique violence most and foremost as a competition between discourses attempting to define it which he argues are part of a much broader debate about the legitimate uses of power. He argues that these discourses can be said to be roughly oriented in two directions. The first set of discourses is centrists by orientation and is used by institutional powers to legitimize violence in the interest of imperial or ecclesiastical institutional authorities. Christian emperors inherited these discourses directly from their pagan predecessors. These discourses stressed that violence could be legitimately used in order to enforce cohesion and unity across the religious spectrum. The opposing set of discourses however saw that unity as a threat and was used by religious militants as a response to the violence of the authorities. According to this set of discourses, violence perpetrated by the authorities against religious militants equals persecution and should therefore be considered as a worldly profanation of true religion. Violence perpetrated by the groups using this set of discourses was meant to divide religious communities and/or expose the hypocrisy of the authorities confronting them. Moreover these type of discourses tapped directly into the cherished memory of Christian martyrdom and the heroic resistance against pagan persecutors . And as far as the dichotomy between real and imagined violence is concerned, for Gaddis the two competing sets of discourses, not only show the variety of ways in which violence was interpreted and represented, but also provide the main reasons why religious militants and the imperial or ecclesiastical authorities used violence in the first place. In other words, not only are these discourses used to represent violence, they are subsequently also used to legitimize and activate violent action for a variety of purposes ranging from the maintenance of law and order, to the articulation of religious identities and enforcement of communal boundaries.

[16] M. Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ. Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley 2005).

A second option for bridging the divide between real and imagined violence has been proposed by Thomas Sizgorich.[17] His attention is directed on the role of militant devotion in the formation of late antique Christianity and early Islam and, more specifically, on the manner in which violent expressions of religious devotion became central to the understanding of Christian and Muslim communities between the fourth and the ninth centuries AD. Sizgorich captures, perhaps even more than Gaddis, the current social-scientific paradigm for understanding religious violence. This paradigm posits that inter-communal violence takes place as part of religious groups' efforts to construct and police their communities' social and symbolic boundaries. These symbolic and social boundaries, no matter how porous these might be in reality, mobilize individual- and group identity in conflict, and sometimes violence within and between groups. As such, violent action is used in order to strengthen group identities and activate group action. Conflict with the perceived other is needed by such religious groups in order to articulate and police their boundaries and sustain their group's cohesiveness.[18] Sizgorich however has taken this paradigm a step further by also focusing on the role that *memory of violence* plays in such processes, and more specifically on the ways in which different religious groups in late antiquity experience and interpret their own violent actions and those of others and use such violence to articulate communal identities. *Ontological Narrative* plays a crucial role in this process. Following in the footsteps of sociologists such as Paul Ricoeur and Margaret Somers, Sizgorich proposes that narratives play a determinative role in the interpretation of events, personalities, institutions and cultural forms encountered from moment-to-moment by human subjects.[19] He argues that Late Antique religious groups construed their identities by locating, or *emplotting*, their own experiences and actions and those of others within a repertoire of guiding ontological narratives. These experiences were subsequently interpreted as *episodes* of a larger story in which each and everyone involved took on a familiar role which dictated how their actions were understood and what form they should take. The result of interpreting day-to-day experiences as part of a fixed story was that its themes, plots and *dramatis personae* could in the first place become constituent for how individuals experienced reality in general, and secondly dictated what action individuals should take in order to make the narrative conform to reality. This means that the memory of violence cannot only be constituent for a group's identity, but can also provide the resource to represent, legitimize and activate new violence.

It is these two attempts in particular on which my thesis will partly build and expand. I subscribe fully to the new paradigm which stresses that violence and its representation can serve to articulate identities and enforce social and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, my own understanding of violence subscribes fully to the definition formulated by Michael Gaddis, namely that violence should be

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[17] T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Medieval Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia 2009).
[18] Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 8-12; here also drawing heavily on Daniel Boyarin: D. *Boyarin, Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford 1999).
[19] M. Somers, 'Narritive Constitution of Identity: a Relationship and Network Approach', *Theory and Society* 5 (1994) 1-45; P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. 3 vols. (Chicago 1984). Not mentioned but also of considerable importance for Sizgorich's work on ethnic boundaries and primordialist definition is Grigor Suny's investigation of Caucasian nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union: G. Suny, 'Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations', *The Journal of Modern History* 71 (2001) 862-896 & 'Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Eurasia', *International Security* 24.3 (2000) 139-178.

understood as a competition between discourses arguing over its meaning. Furthermore, I find Sizgorich's use of Ricoeur and Somer's concept of 'emplotment' especially fruitful for understanding the way in which late antique religious communities use the resources and memory of the past in order to interpret and represent real violent experiences in the present. Indeed, in reference to the methodological frameworks presented by Gaddis and Sizgorich, I would argue that each social and religious group represented episodes of violence according to its own cultural *register*, consisting of both material and textual resources, which provided a vocabulary and repository of norms, signs, symbols and narrative forms which helped interpret, represent, legitimize and delegitimize acts of violence and subsequent articulations of temporary victimhood.

iv. Mapping Violence and Victimhood

I do, however, believe that there is one key element missing from Gaddis and Sizgorich's analyses that is of crucial importance if we wish to understand both the representation of violence and victimhood in space *and* its role in activating violent action against space. I would say that any investigation of the violent action, and specifically the violent despoliation of religious and symbolical spaces, should not only involve critical use of the category 'violence', but should equally, and perhaps more importantly include the category of 'space'. Note that Sizgorich and Gaddis have chosen to focus mainly on the temporal resources (i.e. narrative, memory) which late antique communities used to interpret, represent and activate violent action. As they put it, these resources are mostly concerned with construing and representing the identity and behaviour of people. As such, they hardly pay any attention to the actual spatial dimension of violence nor its relation to the identities proposed, even though the analytical vocabulary they use, most importantly social-anthropologist Frederick Barth's 'boundary maintenance', is overtly spatial by definition.[20] Barth had argued that is not the imagined attributes that define an identity but the articulation and maintenance of its imagined boundaries. He had stressed that is the maintenance of a sense of 'boundedness' which makes a discrete group and not the imagined attributes of those who make up this group. This sense of 'boundedness' requires the implementation of imagined structures with which a given group may be enclosed. The maintenance of these boundaries represented for Barth an enduring and renewable discursive system of demarcation on the basis of ascribed qualities that is carried out at the imagined boundaries of the group by its own members and by members of other groups. It is striking however that even though this paradigm of 'boundary maintenance' is overtly spatial in its vocabulary, hardly any attention is paid to the role of the actual category of 'space' within the representation of violence or its role in construing identities. Consequently, both Gaddis and Sizgorich view space, even when it concerns violence in and against 'sacred space', merely as a sort of container in which people's

[20] F. Barth, 'introduction', in: F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (London 1970) 15-38.

actions are situated. As such 'space' hardly seems to play a role in contemporaries' interpretation of such events. Of course, such an attitude is easy to understand for does not everything happen in space? But is not where things happen critical to how and why they happen? Has not the spatial turn taught us that space is not given but produced and it has not emphasized the contingency and plasticity of space?

Indeed, I would argue that space is not merely a backdrop or setting for events, nor is it a sort of empty container ready to be filled with actions or movements. To the contrary, the recent spatial turn has taught us to understand space as both a product and productive, as scholars like Soja, Lefebvre and Foucault have suggested.[21] Furthermore, the spatial turn has taught us that a certain space, for instance a late antique church, synagogue or temple, is never constituted as a singularity, but always as a social construction which is highly relevant to the understanding of the histories of different groups and individuals. As such, the spatial turn has provided a completely different meaning to such innocent sounding words like 'boundaries', 'space' and 'place'. Moreover it has emphasized that there are no exact mimetic depictions or maps of any given space, only subjective projections relevant for the individual or group which produces a map of that space. Indeed as Lefebvre proposed, space should not be understood simply as a concrete material object, but also as an ideological, lived and subjective one.[22] Besides, a space never stands in isolation, but as Foucault suggested takes the form of relations among sites and codifies and distributes groups and individuals accordingly.[23]

So I would suggest that when we encounter in our letters a representation of a violent intrusion or desecration of religious space, that representation will ultimately present an imagination of the proper 'places', 'spaces' and associated spatial behaviours and identities of the 'victims', 'perpetrators', and 'observers'. Clearly the 'boundedness' of such identities *was* imagined in such representations as inherently spatial. As such, the representation of violence in-and-against space and the victimhood it articulates also requires an articulation of that space and the topographical place of each and every one in it. Thus what I would like to suggest is that representations of violence and contestations of victimhood allow us track changes in the perception of space, that sense of spatial 'boundedness', among different religious groups. This means that violence can be used both as a heuristic tool for understanding space and vice versa as a heuristic tool for understanding violence. Indeed as I understand it, violence has the power to produce imaginary topographies, or 'maps', which are used not only to represent violence but also to imagine and

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[21] B. Warf & S. Arias, 'Introduction: the reinsertion of space into the social sciences and humanities', in: B. Warf & S. Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (Abingdon 2009) 1-10; H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris 1991); E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London 1989), and more importantly *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford 1996); M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics 16* (1986) 22-27, & 'Space, Knowledge and Power', in: P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York 1982) 239-256; For an interesting application to literary products, see: R. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (Abingdon 2013); for 'space' in the Roman world, see: R. Talbert & K. Brodersen (eds.), *Space in the Roman World* (Münster 2004).

[22] Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 2-18.

[23] M. Foucault, 'Questions on Geography', in: C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (London 1980).

subsequently actively creative new topographical arrangements conforming to those topographies. Furthermore, I understand the construction of these *topographies of violence and victimhood* to be the process by which a religious group through stories of violence in-and-against its religious and symbolical spaces, maps its terrain, organizes space and places, and articulates hierarchies in value between people, places and objects. Such a topography is of course a product of the imagination, yet gains real-world relevance when a religious group attempts to make reality conform to that imagination. Moreover such a topography is usually not monolithic, but a site of overlap or contestation among different viewpoints, quite similar to the contestation of an act of violence. A single social group, either consisting of 'perpetrators' or 'victims', 'Christians', 'pagans' or 'Jews', can attribute different topographical meanings to the same site, and all of these groups can come into conflict over how to define and organize it. Furthermore, such a topography assigns each and every one a certain place. As scholars like Edward Said have argued, such imaginative topographies represents different types of spaces according to the rather arbitrary distinctions made by individuals or groups, or as Said puts it "the practice of designating in one's mind a familiar place which is "ours" and familiar space which is "theirs" is a ways of making geographical distinctions that are quite arbitrary […] It is enough for us to set up these boundaries in our own mind; "they become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and mentality are designated as different from "ours"'.[24] Of course, such a dynamic is not only present in the representations of violent episodes but also actively produces them. So not only do representations of violence actively map and give meaning to the spatial landscape encountered by a religious group, violence itself can be used to actively map an environment and orient its people.

I would argue that both the authors and readers of our letters, each on its own, played an active role in producing and mapping these topographical projections. First of all, the authors of our desecration letters engaged in an activity which is quite similar to map-making, even though they themselves might not have been completely conscious of it. A text representing violence in-and-against religious space allows its readers to create mental images of the places it describes. Moreover, it is itself a mental image of how the author sees and experiences that spatial environment. Not only do such texts allow us to picture places and spaces, but by telling stories that take place in them, or by sculpting the characters associated with them, they give those places life and meaning. But in order to animate those places and spaces for the reader, the author must first survey the territory he wants to describe. He must determine what elements to include. He must determine its intended function and meaning. He must characterize its people and their relation to the places it contains. He must digress on questions such as: 'how do people behave in those places and how and why do they use them?'. He must codify and distribute people across those places. Some of those spaces can be used to characterize the dramatis personae or stand in a semantic and symbolical relation with those personae. Others may serve the composition of the story and its themes, plots, tropes and motifs. Such spaces may be presented as homogenous, but can equally be presented as

[24] E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York 1978) 54; in his observation, Said drew heavily upon Gaston Bachelard's so-called 'poetics of space', in: G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston 1969).

segmented containing for instance a variety of dichotomies such as between city and countryside, male and female. Such a *survey* might be based on images the author derives from first-hand experience as well as those derived from secondary reports, other textual traditions, myths, legends, or inventions of the imagination. Moreover, they can differ depending on the genre the author is operating in. But in any case, each of the places and spaces must be given meaning through the narrative he fashions. In doing so the author projects a map on the chaotic world that the narrative will attempt to represent, offering a figural and allegorical representation that can be used to guide the reader in various ways. As a result the author's mapping of violence in-and-against religious space functions as a tool for understanding the world and people's place in it. And perhaps more importantly, his 'mental map' also provides a tool by which the world might be changed and other worlds imagined.

The reader of our desecration narratives, or more often, the 'listener', actively participates in producing such worlds. Like the author, the reader must similarly envision a space and his or her place in it. He or she must plot a trajectory in that space and become orientated to the world depicted by the author. Some of the places and spaces presented might be familiar to the reader, he or she has heard about them before or use and traverse those spaces each day, while others might be unfamiliar and strange demanding or defined by behavioural norms which are antithetical to one's own. Those *real* environments the reader traverses each day might seem chaotic and contain spaces and places where one might easily get lost. Can a Christian enter a synagogue and can Jews enter a church? Can a city really be Christian when it contains temples built for pagan gods? Does a real Christian live in the city, or should he or she take one's abode outside of it, in the countryside or perhaps a deserted wilderness? Who may enter a church and how should he or she behave? How should a Christian organize the space around him- or herself in order to be able to live a virtuous Christian life? And how would those same questions be answered in a pagan or Jewish context? Can different religious groups use the same space for different purposes? In what sort of spaces do stories of violence take place? In such stories, what is the space of the victim? Where can one find the perpetrator? A religious building, its environment, one's familiar spaces, places and environment, city and countryside, Rome or Alexandria, are all real spaces but they are also spaces which need to be interpreted.

The imaginative map in stories of violence produced by our authors is above all meant to overcome such a condition of disorientation, that sense of 'placelessness' or 'bewilderment'.[25] Indeed, what readers do is use these maps as a sort of guidebook which helps them associate and interpret the real places they encounter in real life with those they encounter in the semi-fictitious environment of the text.[26] In other words, the reader uses the map to give imaginative form to the real world. Such a map can be

[25] On 'bewilderment' and the urge to orientate oneself to one's surroundings, see: Tally, *Spatiality*, 64-67; the corresponding need for 'cognitive mapping': 82.
[26] F. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in: C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London 1990) 347-360.

meant to undermine the taken-for-grantedness of the existing spatial projections[27]. Indeed, when that projection is internalized it is only a small step further to actively try or force reality to conform to that projection. And of course there might not be a place for everyone or anything in such projection. Such a process is the product of stories of violence but can of course also create violence. Late Roman lawmakers had a special role in this process. They contributed to this process of 'map-making' by attempting to fix its contours and by judging which spaces and places should be allowed on that map. What our desecration letters do is propose such a map, but the emperor, as chief law-maker, has the final word about whether or not it should be made to conform to reality. And of course, within such a process, *innocent* 'victims' may have much more persuasive power than *guilty* 'perpetrators'.

Correspondingly, viewing space as both product and productive has an important consequence for our use of the category 'sacred space'. Most scholars have been habituated to understand 'sacred space' according to Eliade's famous 'sacred-and- profane' dichotomy which stresses that worldly landscapes are ruptured by divine *hierophanies*.[28] In recent years however scholars have been increasingly inclined to judge this model as highly inflexible. Scholars are now more inclined to define space as the product of action. For example, Jonathan Z. Smith has proposed that spaces used for religious purposes are in fact as segregated and hierarchized as the communities that use them. Such spaces are constructed through ritual and punctuated by boundaries which separate zones into areas of greater or lesser sacredness to which access is prohibited for some and allowed for others.[29] Similarly Roy Rappaport has argued that these spaces are most and foremost construed by means of performances, or in other words, by people doing *things* in that space.[30] I believe that such *things* could indeed be rituals but they could also be violent actions, or more technically-speaking the representation thereof, which could help distinguish the character of a space. Moreover, in late antique thought, categories such as sacred or profane could be highly contested. A variety of social or religious groups could experience, categorize, describe any given space quite differently, and not by vision or imagination alone but also by senses or actions. Furthermore, these spaces, either categorized as sacred or profane, could have multiple layers of meaning which could be digressed upon by a variety of textual resources who could develop these digressions in complete isolation or as a process of intertextual interaction. Thus as a consequence, I will use 'sacred' or 'profane' throughout this thesis only when it is described as such by our sources. Instead I will use 'religious space' or 'church space' as more neutral terms either for spaces that are used for religious action or that are described and interpreted by our sources as such.

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[27] 'subversive cartographies', in: S. Cobarubbias & J. Pickles, 'Spacing movements: the turn to cartographies and mapping practices in contemporary social movements', in: Warf & Arias, *The Spatial Turn*, 36-58.
[28] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The nature of religion* (San Diego 1959); for Eliade's theory on the 'hierophantic centre', see M. Eliade, 'Le symbolisme du centre', *Revue de culture européenne* 2 (1952) 227-239; discussing the relevance of Eliade's views for the study of church space, see: A. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean. Architecture, Cult and Community* (Cambridge 2009) 26-29.
[29] J. Smith, *Map is not Territory: studies in the history of religion* (Chicago 1987); J. Smith, *To Take Place: towards Theory in Ritual* (Chicago 1987).
[30] R. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge 1999).

All in all, I believe that a combination of the theoretical perspectives provided by Gaddis and Sizgorich, alongside my own theory on *topographies of violence and victimhood*, as well as a sensibility for the specific type of medium through which these topographies were negotiated, should allow me to show the various ways in which the authors of our texts could play with both the form and content of the desecration idiom to communicate different messages to their audience in an effort to manipulate and control their audience's reaction. Moreover, by means of this methodological framework it will be possible to formulate four guiding principles around which the investigation of the desecration letters' rhetorical articulation and negotiation of victimhood, and legal materials will revolve: first, the notion that temporary and instrumental identities of victimhood were constructed and negotiated through a variety of authoritative re-iterations of the past, interpretations of the present and projections about the future. Second, that these identities were fashioned by means of a symbolical and metaphorical congruence between the boundaries of the imagined community and of its ideal sacred space. Third, that the negotiation of victimhood coincided with social, cultural and spatial realities of individuals and communities. And last, that the purpose of the desecration stories, with their instrumental temporary use of victimhood and creative topographical projections, was to favourably alter and shift those existing realities to one's advantage.

These guiding principles will be applied meticulously to a number case of studies. In the first chapter I will, by means of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, try to ascertain which forms early Christian narratives about the victimhood generally took, what the meaning would have been of their constituent elements and what messages and topographical register they were meant to convey to their audience. In the second chapter, I will attempt to ascertain how this early Christian register influenced fourth century politics of religious victimhood. In this chapter, I will also look at the various ways in which fourth century churchmen communicated their victimhood to the outside world track the role of church space and displacement in their efforts. In the third chapter, an analysis will be made of the politics of victimhood engaged in by the Arian and Nicene factions in the aftermath of Athanasius' second exile and the council of Sardica in 343 CE. In this chapter, special attention will be paid to the role that the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius played in the development of a new and unique model of religious victimhood in which the image of violence in church space played a fundamental role. Subsequently, in the fourth chapter, I will present an analysis of the subsequent use of Athanasius' unique representation of episcopal victimhood; first of all by his congregation in the aftermath of Athanasius' expulsion in 356 CE; then by his immediate successor Peter of Alexandria in the aftermath of his expulsion in 373 CE; and last its manipulation by John Chrysostom in the effort to displace his Alexandrian opponent Theophilos in 409 CE. In the fifth and final chapter, I will look into more general consequences of the Athanasius' particular model of Christian victimhood, and question the extent to which the application of the model and its adjacent mentalities, helped alter Christians' understanding of their own cultic topography as well as legally restrict the use of violence in-and-against Nicene church space.

As for a result, it is my hope that this thesis will provide new tools for understanding the referential framework and functions of similar desecration stories today and in other historical periods and may provide scholars with a better understanding of the enduring impact of these late antique narratives on later and present day articulations of religious otherness and processes of marginalisation: first of all, in that it will shed light on how media, past and present have generated patters of identification, inclusion and exclusion; second, in that it will provide information on how in Late Antiquity the boundaries between the rights of individuals and groups were drawn and under what circumstances, and cultural and legal practices, these boundaries could shift; third, in that it will shed light on the cultural habits that have informed the discourse of vulnerable people in Late Antiquity; and last, in that it will help to determine through what cultural and legal practices in late antiquity dissent and claim-making were performed and ascertain what cultural factors were involved when legal contestation turned into violent conflict.

1. Eusebius and the World of Early Christian Victimhood

By the time Eusebius completed his *Ecclesiastical History* in 325 CE, many Christians would have believed that the edict of Milan and peace of Constantine heralded the end of more than three centuries of persecution. And for good reason. Christians had been sporadically persecuted by the imperial authorities since the death of Christ. He himself had been tortured, judged and executed by imperial agents. As Christianity's quintessential 'victim', Jesus had been sacrificed for the salvation of humanity. Subsequently, Christian victory had always seemed close at hand, as if it were only a matter of time. Now with Constantine, Christianity seemed fully in control. The former persecutors had found gruesome deaths as divine retribution for their heinous crimes against the followers of Christ.[31] The present emperor knew better of course. Before the decisive battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, Constantine had aligned himself with the 'one true God' and had subsequently destroyed his pagan enemies in a series of lightning campaigns. "In this sign you will conquer", a dream had foretold him, and Constantine duly did.[32]

Now in full control, the emperor restored Christian possessions, built new churches, and returned bishops from exile.[33] He further ensured that really for the first time in its history Christianity would be a tolerated religion protected by the full might of Roman law.[34] This allowed Christians like Eusebius to operate for first time on very much the same, and even above the level of their former persecutors. How could it be different? Had not the victories of the emperor shown that Christianity was the one true religion? Was it not self-evident that Constantine would favour his own? Indeed, if we are to believe Eusebius, emperor and church now stood in a firm alliance. The emperor generously lavished gifts, money and privileges to his bishops. Following the example of the apostles, together they discerned and fixed Christian doctrine in a sequence of councils and synods which were believed to have ushered in an age of 'Christian piety'.[35] It now appeared as if the traditional Christian distrust of the imperial power, nurtured by three centuries of persecution, seemed to have been consigned fully to the past. Indeed Eusebius' history would easily make one believe that the revolution of Constantine had turned this distrust into unquestioned allegiance. There was every reason to of course. Bishops now enjoyed imperial protection and support, and everywhere it seemed as if the church would grow infinitely now that all its obstacles had been removed: a development increasingly visible in the early fourth century urban landscape with

[31] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, ed. & trans. by J. Creed (Oxford 1984); Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, trans. by C. Cruse (Peabody 1998) 9.9-11.
[32] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, trans. & com. by A. Cameron & S. Hall (Oxford 2002) 1.28-31.
[33] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica (HE)*, 10.1-9; *Vita Constantini (VC)*, 2.28-32. On new churches and restorations and repairs to religious architecture: *HE*, 10.2-4; *VC* 2. 39, 2.45-56
[34] Eusebius, *HE*, 10.5-7; *VC*, 2.42-45
[35] Eusebius, *HE*, 10.9; *VC*, 4.74-75; H. Drake, 'The Impact of Constantine on Christianity', in: N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge 2006) *111*-136; D. Potter, *Constantine. The Emperor* (Oxford 2013) *269*-274; T. Barnes, 'Constantine Athanasius and the Christian Church', in: S. Lieu & D. Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine: History, Historiography and Legend* (Abingdon 2011) 7-20; R. van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge 2007) 163-183.

Christian basilicas and worshipping spaces becoming ever more monumental. The church flourished both politically, financially and spatially through the granting of imperial privilege and prestige.

Furthermore, even though interaction between the imperial authorities and the Christians had largely been one of confrontation in the past, the Roman Empire had always figured large in the imagination of early Christian intellectuals, and its general image had not always been entirely negative.[36] Christian intellectuals like Eusebius had believed that it had been no coincidence that the birth of Christ had occurred at the time of Augustus.[37] The might of the empire was part of God's plan to spread the faith far and wide. Others like Lactantius were convinced that with the conversion of the empire, history was approaching completion.[38] They believed that the Second Coming was to occur at any moment now that Christians were poised to rule the earth. The empire would force its subjects to accept God's message and the true community of God would praise the Lord in unisonous worship. The actions of the Christian emperor, as God's replacement on earth, would be instrumental. He would guide the Christians through the final act of temporal history. In order to do so Constantine could make use of the persecuting apparatus of his pagan predecessors.[39] Recalcitrant Christians, pagans or Jews opposing the new found unity could count on the full and violent might of imperial office if they only but threatened to disturb it. But what would happen if not only the emperor but also his newfound Christian allies were allowed to use that apparatus to discern and enforce those religious truths? And how would Constantine's inheritance of an imperial coercive apparatus mix with the Christian memory of that apparatus? For indeed, alongside the coercive instruments of pagan imperial power, Constantine the convert had also inherited the tradition of Christian confessors and martyrs.

In more than one way, Eusebius' history shows how the experience of persecution and martyrdom had left a lasting mark on Christianity's culture, identity, and understanding of the past.[40] As historical anthropologist A. Assmann has shown, every cultural memory has its core in the remembrance of the dead and is often linked to foundational scenes of violence.[41] Similarly, Christians in the time of Eusebius saw themselves as the direct successors to the famous martyrs, virgins and bishops who had heroically suffered and died at the hands of pagan and Jewish persecutors. Local Christian communities nurtured the accounts of their martyrs heroic resistance against the judicial violence of pagan emperors. These martyrs and confessors were upheld as examples for the community to follow. They embodied flawless behaviour in that they had remained faithful to their beliefs even until the very end. They had remained obedient to their Christian faith and identity and had refused to make concessions to the Roman

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[36] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 87.
[37] Eusebius, *HE*, 1.4-7
[38] Lactantius, *Epitome divinarum institutionum*, ed. & trans. by J. Creed (Oxford 1984) 43.
[39] M. Walraff, 'Die antipaganen Massnahmen Konstantins in der Darstellung des Euseb von Kaisareia', in: Hahn, *Spätantike Staat und Religiöser Konflikt*, 7-18; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 45-67.
[40] See: Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 68-75; especially: E. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory. Early Christian Culture Making* (New York 2004) 10-32; for general application, see *passim*: L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London 2004).
[41] A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich 1999) 222, 251, 336.

authorities. These martyrs were Christianity's quintessential 'victims' in that they were subjected to the same lethal tortures as Christ. Their 'innocent' death, as sacrifice and 'baptism in blood' meant redemption and foreboded final victory for all the faithful.[42] As such, the remembrance of the martyrs' suffering represented the metaphorical scars that were fundamental for a Christian group's self-definition as the once persecuted, yet triumphal true community of God.[43] This could also include survivors. Some had given themselves up for martyrdom yet had miraculously survived. As confessors, they could proudly display the physical scars of persecution and were revered by their communities with a devotion almost equal to that of real martyrs.[44] Their persons radiated authority and sanctity. Like the martyrs, they had turned the other cheek, confessed their beliefs in the one true God, refused to sacrifice and piously frustrated the attempts of the pagan Roman authorities when they had tried to coerce them into obedience and conformity to pagan religious practice.

But what would martyrs be without persecutors? The many stories on which Eusebius had moulded his history positioned the persecutors as nothing but the martyrs' 'significant other'. During the times of persecution, imperial agents, soldiers, judges, prefects, proconsuls, pagans, Jews and even lapsed Christians had been thought of as the tools of the devil and the emperors as 'tyrants' lacking knowledge of the true faith. Christians like Eusebius believed that the religious and political purposes behind the persecution, for example the sustenance of the *pax deorum*, always veiled more psychological motives. The powerful pagans and Jews who had persecuted Christians were believed to have done so out of sheer anger, envy and jealousy. As such, with their "gnashing teeth" and "innate hatred", the persecutors of Eusebius' history embodied everything the martyrs were not.[45] Whereas the latter embodied selfless action and sacrifice for the benefit of the group, the former where believed to have acted mostly out of self-interest and irrational twists of mind. In their effort to pursue Christians, these persecuting 'tyrants' had colluded with violent pagan mobs to hunt down Christians wherever they lived. Even worse for Christians of Eusebius's frame of mind, they had colluded with Christianity's quintessential but also largely hermeneutical other, the Jews, believed by many late antique Christians to have been pivotal in the arrest and execution of Jesus Christ and therefore the eternal enemies of Christianity.[46]

The persecuting tyrants and their agents were defined by their violence. Their methods of torture and execution where believed to be as nasty as their perceived personalities. In the theatres and arenas of the empire, some Christians had been thrown to the lions for sport. Others had been covered in chains or tortured on racks. There where Christians who had died as a consequence of cheer exhaustion working in the mines or from hunger on some remote island. Bishops, virgins and other Christians had been

[42] Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, trans. by M. Dominique, M. Bernard & M. Groves (Leominster 1998) 16; Origen, *On Martyrdom*, trans. by E. Greer (New York 1979) 30.
[43] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 33-68.
[44] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 38-44, 84.
[45] Typical example of "gnashed teeth", in: Eusebius, *HE*, 5.1.15; example of "hatred", see: *HE*, 5.1.58.
[46] Example: Eusebius, *HE*, 2.1.8; also, see: D. Buell, *Why this New Race. Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York 2005) 35-62.

whipped, flogged and subjected to all sorts of degrading instruments only suited for the lowest dregs of society. Only a few martyrs had been as 'fortunate' enough to have been killed by the honourable sword; in theory, a 'privilege' only available to Roman citizens.[47] Of course, pagan sources judged the actions of those persecutors much more positively and had as such legitimized those actions completely different. They considered Christians to be a superstitious and contumacious lot whose outlandish rituals and worship of *only* one true god threatened to destroy ordered society as a whole and invoke the ire of the other divinities. Indeed, the anger of the gods and their retaliatory powers were always real and palpable for ancient people, ready to occur at any moment without warning.[48] Such a threat needed to be eliminated with urgency and violence was but one of many means to do so.

In stories of martyrdom, the interaction between martyrs, as victims , and persecutors, as perpetrators, would often have a distinct legal dimension.[49] In representing this dimension, authors of Christian martyrdom followed the examples set by Old Testament heroes such as those presented in the books of Daniel and Maccabees.[50] The narrators of such stories took care to frame their martyrs' challenges according to the actual legal mentalities and procedures of the persecuting authorities. But by the same token, these narrators also manipulated the meaning of such procedures by indicating that the persecutors 'hypocritically' had to twist and turn the law in order to convict pious and law-abiding Christians. Such stories usually begin with a legal enactment issued by the pagan authorities which serves as a point of departure for the narrative, such as a demand to sacrifice, or a show of loyalty to the imperial office, whose transgression would ultimately result in exile or death. Of course, enforcement of the law brings Christians into a conflict of loyalty. Compliance does not allow them to stay faithful to God. They consequently have to decide to remain faithful to their beliefs rather than to obey the authorities. That decision comes to the fore prominently when the Christian is examined by his or her persecutors, sometimes accompanied by tortures. The answers of the Christian would show that he or she not only choose to abide by God's law, but also exposed that the procedures used to convict the martyr were anything but normal and thus anything but legal. Similarly, the martyr's execution was then shown to be anything but ordinary and depicted as bloody and often also as pornographically as possible. This legal dimension, functioning alongside the fixed characteristics of martyrs and persecutors, also had a different purpose in that it actively tried to negotiate the Christian protagonists, as victims and thus true martyrs; for how would fellow believers accept a new martyr when the story of his or her death did not conform to the traditional parameters such stories would usually take? And how could an audience identify the true perpetrators when the martyrs' execution was portrayed as completely legitimate according to Roman law

[47] Sizgorich, *Violence and belief in Late Antiquity*, 82; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 127.
[48] R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven 2003) J. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden 2007) 48-67; 89-104, 182-201.
[49] J. van Henten & F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected Texts from Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London 2002) 2-4.
[50] E. Gruen, 'Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews', in: P. Green (ed.), *Hellenistic History and Greek Culture* (London 1993) 238-264; R. Albertz, 'The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel', in J. Collins & P. Flint (eds.), *The Book of Daniel. Composition and Reception, Volume I* (Leiden 2001) 171-204; Henten & Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death*, 10-23.

and morality? Over and over again, Christian authors' strategy to prove their martyr's veracity had been *redundancy*, continuously reiterating "the horror that was known".[51]

The fact that other believers across the empire, like Eusebius, would learn of such stories and consider these as part of their own history, indicates yet another persuasive strategy which local communities used to prove the veracity of the martyrdoms presented. For a large extent, Eusebius' history was a collage of local stories and histories, moulded together to create the image of a unified Christian world confronted with the same challenges and problems, and having the same heroes whose behaviour was supposed to be emblematic for all. These stories stressed that local persecution affected all Christians and that true martyrs embodied the beliefs and moral qualities of the entire Christian community. They showed violence directed against symbols, signs and people who were held dear by all Christian communities, and expressed values which were deemed to be quintessentially universal for all Christians across the empire. Such stories often took similar form and followed similar narrative models simply because that form was dictated by the shared demands of an *emotional community* of Christians.[52] As such, these stories of violence elicited capabilities for social bonding, made Christians emotionally experience the same offense and share a common hope for salvation. Unsurprisingly, these stories contain only minor reference to theological doctrine because such information ultimately would ultimately have the power to erect new boundaries. Martyrs who were also deemed heretics were difficult to accept. Victimhood is always dependent on the support of those directly, and more importantly, indirectly involved with the violence committed. That feeling of being a victim needed to be spread to as many people as possible. Those not directly involved needed to consider themselves as victims as well. Indeed, the intention of these stories was to allow for no impartial observers, and as such necessarily included an effort to both involve and polarise.

The medium early Christian communities used to communicate that feeling of collective suffering was the letter.[53] Its main use lay of course in the fact that letters could be copied rapidly and with reasonably little effort.[54] Because of its relatively small size, the letter could spread the outrage and narrative of persecution far and wide as it was copied successively down the line and distributed by its various recipients. Famous examples include the martyrdom of Polycarp and the many letters written by

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[51] Valentin Groebner has shown that the impact of representations of violence and cruelty will ultimately and most crucially depend on the audience's familiarity with the report: "the horror that is known". According to Groebner, this dynamic can be used to explain why why similar patterns, topoi and motifs continue to exist over long periods of time, see: V. Groebner, *Ungestalten. Die visuelle Kultur der Gewalt in Mittelalter* (Vienna 2003) 164.

[52] "People lived – and live – in what I propose to call *emotional communities.* These are precisely the same as social communities – families, neighbourhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships – but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they made about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore.", in: B. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review* 107.3 (2002) 846.

[53] For a typical example of Eusebius' use of letters, see: Eusebius, *HE*, 2.36.15.

[54] Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 41-57.

African bishop Cyprian.[55] Letters like these tapped into a tradition going back to the epistles of Paul and the New Testament. In fact, one should remember that twenty one of the twenty seven writings in the new testament take the form of letters, many containing all sorts of violence and martyrdom. Furthermore, for many years the exchange of letters between the scattered churches lacking an overall administration had performed the essential function of keeping the churches in touch with each other and as far as possibly united in ritual and belief. As such, these letters were not simply carriers of information, as for example accounts of martyrdom, but also part of a number of social actions. For instance, Christian letters containing acts of martyrdom could elicit a virtue or promote a habit of behaviour.[56] They could initiate, maintain, end or restore relationships with any given person or group. They could praise or cause that someone to feel sorry. They could threaten, console, mediate and give or request advice. Or could express thanks and give honour. Even the very delivery of the letter could mean the performance of distinct social action. Indeed, the fundamental difference between the ancient and the modern letter was that the former was that the former was as a rule not carried by an impersonal agency like a digital server or the post office, but by someone closely associated with the writer of the letter, someone in a position to tell the addressee a lot about the health, thought and intentions of the writer, and who could digress further on the contents of the letter. Moreover these letters were meant to be read aloud, sometimes even performed in front of relatively large (and possibly critical) audiences, thereby requiring from the carrier all sorts of rhetorical skills. The receivers could perform similar actions in turn by copying and distributing the letters themselves, and repeating the same process again and again. Furthermore, by reworking these letters into a coherent narrative, or by quoting them verbatim as ancillary proof, men like Eusebius were closely following the examples set by the Old and New Testament in which actual letters, either authentic or fictive, had long since been used to enhance the veracity of the biblical histories.

That shared world of Christian suffering communicated so persuasively in such letters, and reworked so eloquently in Eusebius' history, correspondingly negotiated a distinct map of that world. Stories of martyrdom had left the geography of the empire dotted with sites and places bearing witness to both the heroic resistance of martyrs and the heinous violence of persecutors. As such, the acts of martyrs communicated a distinct, yet familiar, topographical register to their audience. Such a register included locations far removed from the comforts of the cities in which many Christians organized their day to day existence. Such places of persecution could for instance include the dreadful mines, harsh mountains, and lonely islands to which many Christians would have find themselves exiled during times of persecution.[57] Even the sight of the mere sea could be associated with exile and thus presented as threatening.[58] Urban space was even more problematic, especially in that it was quintessentially a shared space. Eusebius'

[55] *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* ed. & trans. by M. Staniforth (London 1987): Cyprian, *Letters*, ed. & trans. by A. Brent (New York 2007).
[56] Ibidem, 15-16.
[57] For example, islands: Eusebius, *HE*, 3.18.1; mines: *HE,* 8.12.10; mountains: *HE*, 6.42.2.
[58] For an example of the dreaded 'sea', in Eusebius, see: *HE*, 8.6.6.

history tells us how Christians had been forced to sacrifice at pagan altars, images and temples.[59] Martyrs like Perpetua had been theatrically exposed and executed in the arena.[60] The marketplace, forum, agora, theatre and baths had often been primary sites for the humiliation of Christians or sites of formal and informal accusations.[61] Palaces and courtrooms had been the sites where Christians were tested to remain firm in the faith and where the verdict for their execution was given. Prisons were the places where they awaited those verdicts or spent their final moments before execution.[62] Even the places associated with the army, the main instrument of persecution, could be interpreted as sites of martyrdom. Indeed the last persecution which confronted Christianity had started out in the camps where Christian officers had refused to perform their sacrificial duties, and paid for it with their very lives.[63]

Also, the sites where martyrs were buried had, during the course of the third century, become increasingly important foci for Christian worship. Pagan authorities had tried to prevent such worship, for instance, by burning the martyrs' bodies and scattering their ashes across the sea, thereby denying the martyr quite literally a place.[64] Some Christians had fled into the wilderness or desert to live a life outside the law bereft of have and good. Consequently the desert, a place usually associated with convicts and criminals, came to embody new meaning, next to that provided by Christ's thirty days of wandering, namely as the place where *real* Christians could truly follow Christ as *anchorites*, and quite literally as *displaced ones*.[65] However, some Christians recognized that such voluntary flight and displacement when faced with persecution was in a sense contrary to the voluntary choice of martyrs and confessors to stay put and resist. Even more so, Christians like Tertullian had gone as far as to argue that such self-imposed exile constituted a denial of Christ.[66] But note that voluntary flight was not always presented by Christians in a completely negative light.[67] Had not Jesus himself advised that when persecuted his disciples should "flee to the next city"[Matt. 10:23] ? It is indeed likely enough that many Christians would have preferred the latter option.

Correspondingly, there were also places of violence which Christians interpreted though the signs and symbols of positive and divine violence. One such place was the Second Temple. In an effort to remove any perceived profanation from the Temple, Christ had forcibly overturned the tables and expelled the money changers from its precinct, exclaiming "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a robbers' den" [Matt.21:13]. More importantly, Christians believed that Christ had predicted the very destruction of that Temple [Matt. 24:2]. When it finally occurred many Christians were

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[59] As for example in the *Epistle of Dionysius to Germanus* quoted by Eusebius in *HE*, 41.12.
[60] *The Passion of Perpetua, Felicitas and their Companions*, trans. by J. van Henten & F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London 2002) 10.
[61] Examples, theatre: *HE,* 3.6.3; marketplace: *HE*, 9.5.2; baths and persecution: *HE*, 5.1.5 & Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Martyrs of Palestine*, trans. by C. Cruse (Peabody 1998) 9.2.
[62] On imprisonment Polycarp 4.15.47, on imprisonment, also see *passim*: Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine*
[63] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 10; Eusebius, *HE*, 8.1.4.
[64] Eusebius, *HE*, 8.7.6; Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 15, 21,51.
[65] P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750* (London 1971) 96-98; also, see: Eusebius, *HE*, 6.42.2.
[66] Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione*, trans. By S. Thelwall (New York 1895/2009) 12.
[67] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 36-38.

naturally inclined to believe that it had vindicated Christ's prediction and that it had proven the veracity of His words. Even more so, some Christians in the late third century had taken Jesus' actions in the Temple as an example and had violently attacked temples and idols in an effort to gain martyrdom. Not all Christians agreed of such actions of course. For example, the council of Elivira had strongly condemned such "rash" attacks and declared that Christians killed in such actions would not under any circumstance be honoured as martyrs.[68] Only those who would 'turn the other cheek' [Matt. 5:38–42] and had died in consequence could legitimately count on such honours.

As for positive and legitimate violence, Eusebius' history also seems to suggest that Christians had little quarrels with calling in imperial violence against fellow worshippers and their respective spaces when they felt they had a legitimate reason to do so. One such example, narrated by Eusebius, was the controversy surrounding Paul of Samosata in the late 260s and early 270s.[69] Eusebius tells us that Paul had been the bishop of Antioch for quite some time, but there had been a growing concern about his doctrinal views and general behaviour. As far as his theological views are concerned, Paul appears to have refused to recognize Jesus as the direct son of God. Perhaps even worse, Paul had not shown the proper humility expected of a bishop and had surrounded himself with an armed posse acting as if he were an imperial official. In response, his colleagues wrote encyclical letters detailing his crimes, organized a general council to condemn his views and subsequently excommunicated him, ordering Paul to leave his church immediately.[70] Paul refused to budge however, and continued to occupy the Antioch church building. Consequentially, the bishops felt they had but one option left. They pleaded their case in front of the emperor, who gave judgement against Paul. Now backed up by imperial fiat, Paul lost his 'place' and was driven out of the church. But how exactly, and what sort of violence was involved, is never told.

For Eusebius, such quarrelling between Christian and Christian was bound to have serious consequences. Perhaps, in direct reference to the expulsion of Paul of Samosata, Eusebius's narrative of the last *Great Persecution* introduces its readers to a completely novel addition to that familiar topographical register of Christian martyrdom. His history recalls that the last persecutors had not only directed their violence against the Christian people, but also against the objects and spaces Christians used for the act of worshipping God. Eusebius presents such actions as follows: he starts by recounting how Christianity had come to flourish under the privilege of Roman emperors and the number of Christians and churches had greatly increased. This flourishing was not to last however: "by the reason of excessive liberty we [Christians] sank into neglect and sloth, one envying and rivalling one another in different ways; we were almost at the point of taking up arms against each other, assailing each other with words as with darts and

[68] Clement, *Stromateis* 4.10, trans. by W. Wilson, from ANF, vol. 2 (New York 1885/2009); Council of Elvira, *Canon* 60.
[69] Eusebius, *HE*, 7.28, 30; for discussion, see: F. Miller, 'Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 1-17; J. Burke, 'Eusebius on Paul of Samosata: A New Image', *Kleronomia* 7 (1975) 8-21; F. Norris, 'Paul of Samosata. *Procurator Ducenarius*', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (1984) 50-70; V. Burrus, 'Rhetorical Stereotypes in the Portrait of Paul of Samosata', *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989) 215-225.
[70] One of these encyclical letters is quoted verbatim, in: Eusebius, *HE*, 7.30.

spears".[71] As a consequence, the Christians invoked God's anger, who in His ire, allowed Christian churches to be overturned and Christians to be chastised by pagan persecutors:

> It was in the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian. Imperial edicts were published to tear down the churches to their foundations, and to destroy their scriptures by fire. They also commanded that those who were in honourable positions should be degraded and that those who were freedmen should be deprived of their liberty if they persevered in their adherence to Christianity.[72]

This fragment is followed by a detailed account of the martyrdom and suffering of the various Christian communities across the empire. Eusebius tells how women of piety were tortured and defiled, how bishops were beaten and exposed and how adherents of the Christian faith were killed across the empire.

Eusebius contemporary, Lactantius, describes the scenes of the Great Persecution in similar fashion. His scene of the attack on the church of Nicomedia can be considered typical. Lactantius narrates that suddenly "while it was still twilight", the prefect's party came to the church of Nicomedia:

> (…) they forced open the doors and searched for the image of God; they found the scriptures and burnt them; all were granted booty; the scene was one of plunder, panic and confusion(…) Then the praetorians came in formation, bringing axes and iron tools, and after being ordered in from every direction they levelled the lofty edifice to the ground within a few hours.[73]

As in Eusebius, such violent imagery is followed by the burning of scripture and scenes of torture, occurring across the empire, but in any case not specifically occurring in the churches themselves. The latter can only be inferred. Indeed one can note that within these narratives the church building itself hardly plays a role at all. It is the community itself and its cherished scriptures that are shown desecrated, not the actual building. This is quite understandable, most and foremost, because those who created the original stories still firmly believed that churches were not temples for the divinity at all, but at best gathering places for the worshippers. In the latter third century, churches were not yet believed to be places in which the divine resided or that that these had a sacred character. The church building, if one can even call it as such, only united under its the Christian worshipping community.[74] These were believed to be holy, not the actual building which housed them. Had not St. Paul said that the worshippers themselves were the temples of the living God [2 Corinthians 6:16]?

Indeed, as much as buildings are concerned in such violence, on closer inspection Eusebius and Lactantius' depictions of such attacks were remarkably 'sterile' in comparison to the representation of

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[71] Eusebius, HE, 8.1.
[72] Ibidem, 8.1.7.
[73] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 12.2.5.
[74] R. Marcus, *The end of ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990) 140; Tertullian, *De corona*, ed. & trans. by J. Fontaine (Paris 1966) 9.2.

similar acts violence in-and-against religious space in Jewish and pagan traditions, even though these might have functioned as models for their own descriptions. The main reason was of course that these traditions portrayed violence in-and-against actual *sacred* spaces: Christians had none. Indeed, both traditions betray a deep sense of anxiety about using violence in 'sacred' space. Pagan memory was filled with instances of unrighteous violence in sacred space such as Virgil's graphic depiction of the *sacrilegious* violence of the Cataline Conspirators.[75] Furthermore, the destruction of temples was often used as a distinct *casus bellum* and as such used to pour scorn on the actions of enemy as violators of things that belonged to the gods.[76] Likewise, there had been a long tradition in Roman and Hellenistic thought which stressed that temples could function as place of asylum in which the use of any violence was completely out of order.[77] Traditionally, spaces dedicated to the gods in the Hellenic world were recognized as inviolable by virtue of their sacred character. Particularly in the Greek east, every supplicant who ensured his salvation on a temple's deity by embracing the altar devoted to him or her became one with that god and as such beyond reach because everything found in the sanctuary was considered the god's property protected from theft and assault. Violent action in violation of the gods' protection was to have serious consequences: in Greek, as well as Roman thought, stealing things used for divine service from a temple was punishable by death, and prosecuted as *sacrilegium* or *assebeia.* For Christians, the Jewish tradition in the Old Testament offered even more fleshed-out examples of desecration of the Temple and its sancta [Lev. 21:12, 23; Ezek. 22:26, 23:39; 44:7], but also non Jewish religious spaces, which especially in the case of the former strongly dichotomized actions and persons which were deemed to be pure or impure. Indeed, Jewish tradition showed that there were many things, spaces, persons and objects which could be shown desecrated or profaned. These included altars [Amos 2:7–8], sacrifices [Lev. 22:32; Mal. 1:12], priests [Lev. 21:4, 9], priestly dues [Num. 18:22], rituals [Lev. 19:8; 22:3], sacred time (Sabbath) [Ex. 31:14] and most importantly God's name [Isa. 48:11]. In comparison, the New Testament did provide some examples, but as shown above these usually portrayed positive action and were therefore more suited for legitimizing Christian violence.

The 'map' produced in Eusebius' history showed through stories of violence and victimhood, spaces and places to which Christians had been exiled; where they had suffered and died; to which they had fled; and from where the persecuting 'other' had organized the violence against them. These were spaces and places which not only dictated what form the story of violence and martyrdom should take but also presented Christians in the fourth century with a rather ambiguous connotation, neither completely positive or negative, of the spaces and places we today associate as typical for Classical civilization. For sure, some of these had been sites of violence, lawlessness and immorality, and as such believed to be

[75] Virgil, *Aeneid*, ed. & trans. by D. West (London 1990) 2.761; Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline*, ed. & trans. by W. Badstone (Oxford 2010) 51.
[76] Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. by P. Walsh (Oxford 2001) 1.11.33–1.13.41; for causes of war and the violation of temples in the Hellenistic era, see A. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World* (Malden 2005) 155-157.
[77] On asylum in the Hellenistic and Roman world, see: K. Rigsby, *Asylia: Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley 1996).

anything but Christian. But at the same time these had also been places were Christians had heroically suffered and died, and in that sense, special. So even though Christians of the third century posited their religion as one of fundamental 'placelessness', the stories presented in Eusebius' history, especially those centred around persecution in the later third – and early fourth century, already show and capture a remarkable shift, namely that spaces associated with violence and Christian victimhood distinguished them as *special* from those where no such violence had taken place. Furthermore, Eusebius' map now also presented a new and rather unambiguously Christian space in which many of the victims would find themselves during the last phase of persecution: the church. As such, violence in-and-against a Christian house of worship presented a distinct spatial rupture on Eusebius map, as it was the only un-ambiguously Christian space *against* which violence could be perpetrated. But even though it was *more* special than those other spatial settings of persecution, it was still interpreted as anything but holy and sacred.

2. New World, New Victims, New Letters. Church and Violence in the Fourth Century CE

Of course, Eusebius's depiction of Constantine's new world was meant to stand in stark contrast to that dangerous yet heroic world of persecution. In reality however, Eusebius depiction of a Roman empire united under the leadership of Christian emperor in pious worship proved to be a far cry from the truth. By the time he completed his history in 325 CE that new found unity had already begun to show some serious ruptures. As soon as Christianity was officially legalized, bishops, now invested with judicial and political powers, had started to quarrel over a number of theological and judicial issues. Furthermore, Christian subjects, from a range of different local denominations, now actively and often violently sought to reassert their place *and* space in Roman society.

Many of these conflicts were a direct legacy of the experience of persecution. In dealing with that legacy, Constantine and his closest advisors had propagated a policy of forgive and forget, allowing exiled bishops, even those who had cooperated with the pagan authorities, to return in office.[78] The only provision was that these first repented their crimes and received the emperor's forgiveness. But there were many local Christian communities who thought differently. In the Constantinian empire, 'lapsed' and confessors tended to clash ever frequently. In North Africa and Egypt there had been a growing concern about the ease with which lapsed Christians could re-enter the church. For the north African followers of Donatus, for instance, the memory of persecution was all too vivid, and indeed cherished.[79] They refused to welcome back Christians who had in one way or another acceded to the wishes of the persecuting authorities by handing over scripture and pointing out fellow believers. They were convinced that the hands of these *traditores* ('traitors' or 'trespassers') had become fitly with sin and would thereby threaten to pollute the Christian community as a whole as they baptized new members to the faith. Similarly the Egyptian Melitians renounced everyone who had lapsed.[80] There was to be no forgiveness, no redemption and only the twenty-eight bishops Melitius had personally ordained could function as a true 'church of martyrs'.

Philosophical disagreement about Christology created its share of disputes. Constantine's conversion had suddenly catapulted Christian communities into a shared world, yet their doctrines and beliefs remained anything but. The emperor was presented a difficult choice. Which local Christian tradition should he use to shape his version of an imperially endorsed, uniform and universal Christianity?

[78] Potter, *Constantine The Emperor*, 193-203; for a general overview of the Donatism and its confrontation with the imperial authorities, see: W. Frend, *The Donatist Church: a movement of protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford 1952/2000) 141-168.
[79] M. Tilley (ed. & trans), *Donatist Martyr Stories. The Church in conflict in Donatist Africa* (Liverpool 1996) 11-27.
[80] C. Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power. Theological Controversy and Christian leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Berkeley 2013) 37, 64, 80, 106-108.

In what place did Christianity have the oldest tradition, and which local tradition could acquire empire-wide support? Indeed Constantine had much to choose from but as so often in the late classical world big cities have big voices: Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantine's *Nova Roma* would come to dominate the choices available in the coming decades. For instance, Nicene Christians, amongst them most prominently the imperially endorsed bishops of Rome and Alexandria, held on to the Trinitarian dispositions agreed to at the council of Nicaea in 325 CE. They held on to the conviction that God should be perceived as three divine persons, namely that of the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons were thought to be distinct, but also to coexist in unity, being co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial. This was the creed mostly, though definitely not always, favoured in places like Constantinople and Rome. The Alexandrian priest Arius and his followers disagreed. They held on to the conviction that Christ was subordinate to God and that the three 'persons' stood in a clear hierarchy. More importantly, they thought that Jesus Christ, like any good son, should be considered as subordinate to the father.[81] This was the creed that was mostly favoured in cities like Alexandria and Antioch, even though Nicene Christians also had a strong presence in both of these cities. Yet it is wrong to see these groups as coherent as the church intellectuals of the past wanted us to believe. Nicene Christianity, Arianism and Donatism knew almost just as many divisions internally as Christianity in general.

But even though local realities hardly conformed to the cherished wish of an empire united in doctrine and belief, there had traditionally been instruments in place to solve and overcome such problems. Since the time of the apostles, Christians had organized meetings, councils and synods in order to develop some sort of compromise. An assembly of bishops offered a weight of authority far outweighing that of any individual.[82] It was believed that such consensus was reachable when its members allowed themselves to be guided by divine inspiration and the helping hand of the holy spirit. But whereas those councils had previously prescribed only rough and non-enforceable guidelines for Christian belief and authority, in the time of Constantine such decisions would be given legal force. Indeed, it was now the emperor who officially summoned the council and ratified its consensus. As a consequence, those opposing collective decision could now count on the violent might of the emperor to sway their mind. Equally, those agreeing could now depend on the well-established persecuting apparatus to force those decisions on local communities. As such, those who managed to acquire imperial support, and the backing of the majority of bishops, clearly had an advantage. Consequently, bishops jostled for control and mobilized their networks of support, all in an effort to decide the agenda of these councils and sway that

[81] C. Galvao-Sobrinho, 'Embodied Theologies: Christian Identity and violence in Alexandria in the early Arian Controversy', in H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Burlington 2006) 321-322; for a more detailed discussion, see: R. Hanson, *In search for the Christian doctrine of God: the Arian controversy*, 318-381 (Edinburgh 1988).
[82] C. Kelly, 'Empire Building', in: G. Bowersock, P. Brown & O. Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity. Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge 2001) 181-183; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 317-353.

consensus, as well as the support of emperor, to their advantage.[83] Unsurprisingly, such struggles created all kinds of accusations, ranging from forgery of transcripts, to threats of exile, and more often, actual violence.[84] It also created a context in which violence had a use.

The world of persecution and martyrdom provided the fundamental register according to which bishops and their communities choose to interpret the threats and violence of their rivals. Persecution was a familiar horror for fourth century Christian audiences because it was part of every Christian community's foundational history. Its villains and heroes, places and spaces, and other themes, tropes and topoi were highly recognizable and provided easily applicable models with which new episodes of violence could be represented.[85] The power of such registers was that they allowed for a collapse of time and space. It helped create the illusion, albeit temporarily, that nothing had changed since the days of persecution. Christian emotional response to violence in the fourth century was indeed conditioned by that register. Use of the register helped clarify the challenges, but also dictated their solution. Again communities needed to negotiate and fix their martyrs as true victims and pre-empt the legitimizing actions of the perpetrators. Martyrs were only real martyrs when they were accepted and ratified as such by other Christian communities. Their virtuous actions needed to be communicated to- and internalized by other communities. The latter needed to consider itself as victims as well and condemn the actions of the 'persecutors' as heretical, tyrannical or as inspired by the devil himself. In such a conundrum, heterodoxy and the charge of persecution easily mixed, simply because true martyrs were believed to be orthodox by definition, and nonviolent in essence. As such, the register of martyrdom would find new and polemical use in the various religious conflicts of the fourth century.

In order to gain support in those violent doctrinal conflicts, bishops again resorted to the familiar tradition of letter-writing.[86] Indeed the letters of fourth century Christian victims functioned in very much the same way those that were written during the first three centuries of persecution. They spread the sense of victimhood, condemned the perpetrators, and negotiated the meaning of violent conflicts. Their contents, however, reveal a distinct difference with their predecessor in that the letters were now produced in a highly volatile political and judicial context. The new judicial settings, provided by the emperor's court and church councils, dictated that the interpretation of inter-Christian violence proposed in these letters had to be increasingly framed in judicial and deliberative rhetoric.[87] Christians had to take into account that violent action now had to be quite literally articulated as legal or illegal in order to frame the participants either as innocent victims or righteous perpetrator. Moreover, the representation of violence now offered the possibility for all sorts of judicial action, for instance the excommunication of

[83] Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 43-47; also see: A. Fear, J. Ubina & M. Marcos (eds.), *The Role of the Bishop in Late Antiquity*: *Conflict and Compromise* (London 2013) 1-12; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 73-75.
[84] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 74-75.
[85] Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late* Antiquity, 65-75.
[86] Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 41-47.
[87] Ibidem, 46, 51.

individuals and/or the removal thereof, the formulation of petitions or answers to petitions, and attempts to censure heretics and polemicize against their ideas. But representations of violence could now equally be used in letters to apologize the violent actions of the perpetrators themselves and defend the main tenets of their beliefs. And it was by no means by letters that local disputes could develop into empire – wide controversies.

Within this context, bishops and imperial authorities were, for the first time, part of what was very much the same political establishment wherein both had a vested interest in articulating and dispensing divine truth.[88] The top man within this establishment was of course the emperor. Synodical consensus and the mediation of violent conflict, as well the articulation of victims and perpetrators, were only as good as their approval by the reigning emperor. Yet emperors were always keen to follow the consensus of the multitude. As a consequence, bishops had to take maximum effort to mobilize support in an attempt to convince the emperor of the legality of their actions. This new dynamic ensured that many of the letters were now addressed to the emperor or other imperial power brokers specifically, sometimes even before these were sent to fellow bishops. Such a choice is quite understandable if we take into account the fact that the emperor had the power to legally fix those synodical decisions in support of either victim or perpetrator: he was after all the supreme lawgiver. Furthermore, such a new dynamic meant that the stakes became much higher. Success would mean one could bring down the emperor's ire in on one's opponents. Failing to negotiate one's sense of victimhood however could mean the opposite and risk the prohibition of one's fundamental values and beliefs, and complete expulsion from Roman society.

As such, articulations of Christian victimhood now attempted to negotiate the juridical position and status of each and every one in the Roman world as well. For late antique Christians, all creeds alike, victimhood equalled righteousness; there is a place for victims but none for unrepentant perpetrators. As a consequence, success or failure in the contestation of an act of violence could seriously jeopardize one's place in society as well as one's most cherished convictions and beliefs. Images of violence could be used as a polemical tool to propagate divine truth and religious or political legitimacy.[89] Indeed it was through the specific genre of encyclical letter-writing (encyclical meaning literally circular) that bishops sought consensus through dialogue and conflict; threw up boundaries of self-definition; lavished praise and scorned blame to each another; developed and articulated religious philosophy; advised and admonished; and defended their communities against outside attack, all in an effort to protect their own as well as their community's legitimate place in society.

[88] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 68-70.
[89] Galvao-Sobrinho, 'Embodied Theologies', 324-325.

2.1. Losing One's Place.

In any inter-Christian conflict, control of church space, as the bishop's quintessential place, was extremely important. A church was the primary site where the communication with the divine was mediated. It was the place from which nearly all worshipping actions of the clergy and congregation were organized and directed at. A church provided the spatial nexus upon which all local episcopal power relationships converged. Not only were churches the places where priests gathered the faithful, shaped their opinion and channelled their devotion, they also served as venues for many other community-building activities such as the distribution of alms and organization of banquets on festive days – events that a thoughtful bishop could exploit to gain affection and popularity.[90] Furthermore, from the reign of Constantine onwards, church buildings in their newly ascribed public nature came to embody the idea of an officially sanctioned church.[91] Their visible and often monumental presence in urban and rural landscapes emanated a stamp of imperial approval and legitimacy. As such, in the zero-sum game of fourth century inter-Christian conflict, evicting a bishop from his church would constitute a major blow to his community and seriously undermine its legitimacy. Similar to the eviction of Paul of Samosata in the third century CE, imperial and ecclesiastical authorities in the fourth century would often cooperate in order to remove an uncompromising bishop from his basilica. If a condemned 'heretical' bishop would not leave his church voluntarily, his opponents would call in the help of worldly authorities to throw him out. Unsurprisingly, such actions would produce strong emotions among the congregants who would more than often try to prevent such evictions from taking place. Such attempts would unavoidably test the patience of the authorities who at one moment would be left no further choice but to use violent force to sustain law and order.

Such an eviction would often be buttressed by the judicial sentence of exile as the ultimate means to ensure a convicted bishop would not be in the position to reoccupy his see.[92] The choice of exile as the ultimate punishment for bishops also had another important reason. Though he could threaten to do so, no emperor would dare risk removing a bishop by means of capital punishment. No emperor wanted to be associated with the crimes of his pagan predecessors. Indeed, exile was the most severe punishment to which a Christian emperor like Constantine could threaten or sentence a bishop, without having to show the excessive force typically associated with pagan persecution.[93]

Yet despite the fact that expulsion would hardly ever result in execution, for a bishop, losing his place, and more importantly his church, could be extremely violent. Michael Gaddis has shown how

[90] Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 109; R. MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta 2009) 22-29, 65-67, 104-108.
[91] Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 109.
[92] Little has been written about the topic of 'exile' in Late Antiquity but a good introduction to the topic can be found in: E. Fournier, 'Exiled Bishops in the Christian Empire: Victims of Imperial Violence', in: H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Farnham 2006) 157-166.
[93] Fournier, 'Exiled Bishops in the Christian Empire', 160.

fourth and fifth century sources portraying inter-Christian conflict indeed dwell upon this particularly violent image.[94] But much more importantly, he has shown how churchmen on the receiving end of such violence usually choose to present it in a fairly consistent manner. Gaddis has identified the use of a number of familiar and recurring tropes. Most often, the violent invasion of church space is portrayed as having been perpetrated by non-Christians.[95] Gaddis argues that at least one possible reason for the presence of non-Christians was that they might have felt less anxiety with invading a Christian space than Christians. The presence of non-Christians might also be explained by the fact that during the fourth century the majority of imperial soldiers and officials would still have been staunchly pagan. Furthermore, Gaddis indicates that representations of such invasions often portray the desecration of the holy mysteries, such as the profanation of the Eucharist or damaging of holy objects like altars and chalices.[96] Also, the representation of the violent entry of soldiers would often revolve around a number of other graphic images such as the spilling of blood and use of warlike weaponry within the confines of the church.[97] And last, representations of such violent action would often show it being inflicted upon specific categories of people who were morally and legally supposed to be immune from such violence.[98] In the depiction of such invasions, monks, clerics, and virgins especially are shown being subjected to all sorts of degrading treatments, ranging from flogging to stripping and violent rape.[99] Prominent examples discussed by Gaddis include two successive Arian attacks on Athanasius' churches and congregation in 339 and 356 CE; the expulsion of Athanasius' successor Peter of Alexandria in 373 CE, and last but not least, John Chrysostom's violent expulsion from Constantinople in 404 CE.[100]

Gaddis postulates that the depiction of these violent intrusions communicated a distinct symbolical meaning: he claims that, as part of so-called oppositionist discourse, the violent invasion of church space symbolized for a Christian audience the destructive consequences of state intrusion into religious affairs.[101] As such, these events highlighted for audiences that the use of such worldly force within the 'sacred' confines of the church and against persons and objects deemed 'holy' not only seriously 'polluted' the church as a 'holy space' but also the perceived sanctity and purity of the community that

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[94] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 75-88.
[95] Ibidem, 81.
[96] Ibidem, 82.
[97] Ibidem, 83.
[98] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 83-85; also, see: R. MacMullen, 'Judicial Savagery in the Roman Empire', in: R. MacMullen (ed.), *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton 1990) 204-217.
[99] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 84-88.
[100] Attack on Athanasius in 339, see: Athanasius*, Epistula Encyclica*, A. Martin ed. & trans (London 1985); Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, trans. by A. Robertson (London 1891) 10; Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastic*a, trans. by P. Schaff, H. Wace and A. Zenos (Peabody 1900/1995) 2.11; for the expulsion of Athanasius in 356, see: "Protest [*diamartyria*] of the Alexandrian church," quoted in Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, 81; Athanasius, *Apology for his Flight*, trans by A. Robertson (London 1980) 6, 24; Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, 55–56, 59, 72, 81; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiatica*, 2.11; Peter of Alexandria's expulsion, in: "Letter of Peter of Alexandria*",* quoted in: Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. & trans. by L. Parmentier (Berlin 1954) 4.19; for John Chrysostom's expulsion in 404, see: John Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent* 4 [*Epistola ad Innocentium*], ed. & trans. A. Malingrey (Paris 1964); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, trans. by P. Schaff, H. Wace and A. Zenos (Peabody 1900/1995) 8.21-23; Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, ed. & trans. by J. Gregory (Peabody 1988) 57-58.
[101] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 82-83, 88.

used it: the Church of Christ.[102] Gaddis postulates that authors visualized this sense of pollution most frequently by referring to the invaders' degrading treatment of virgins.[103] In trying to understand the exact role of these virgins, Gaddis has chosen to build heavily on Mary Douglas's work on the relationship between gender and pollution.[104] Douglas has shown how women bodies in particular, often become sites upon which a communities fears about sexual transgression are played out. As Gaddis highlights, early Christians similarly took the virgin's body to stand for the imagined community of Christ.[105] Because virgins were considered to be chaste and holy figures, free from worldly sin or sexual pollution, any form of bodily harm done to them was considered an insult and assault on the honour and purity of the entire Christian community. As such, the fate of these virgins not only highlighted for a Christian audience the violent consequences of worldly force, but also articulated by means of the female body a solid boundary between matters of church and state. It was the profanity of the state that penetrated and violated the purity of the body of the Christian church.

Gaddis is of course correct in highlighting that the image of violence in church space played an important role in the polemical discourse of fourth century church controversy. I am likewise convinced by his observation that stories representing such actions were often depicted according to a coherent narrative pattern, even though I do not necessarily agree completely with Gaddis's interpretation of the meaning and character of its constituting elements. And I am equally convinced that Christians could interpret violence in church space as part of a symbolical effort to distinguish the proper limits of worldly authority and force in church affairs. But even though there is a lot to value in Gaddis's analysis, I do believe that there are a number of problems.

First of all, I would argue that Gaddis's analysis pays too little attention to the specific congruence between the content and form of these stories, and more specifically, no attention at all to the medium that was used to communicate such stories to a wider audience: the letter. The very first witness to the Arian attack on the Alexandrian church in 339 is Athanasius' so-called *Epistula Encyclica* (339).[106] Similarly, the first witness to the attack in 357 is again a letter, the so-called *Second Petition of Protest*, or *Diamartyria*, produced by Athanasius' congregation during his exile, and appended to Athanasius's *Historia Arianum*.[107] Likewise, the expulsion of Peter was first described in a letter before it was quoted verbatim in Socrates

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[102] "(…)the picture of armed soldiers violently invading a church or disrupting religious services. This image is both literal—it describes a number of real incidents that happened on particular occasions, under fairly similar circumstances—and allegorical. It symbolizes for the Christian audience the destructive consequences of state intrusion into religious affairs, and the corrupting effect of worldly power and particularly of violent power upon the church.", in; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 79.
[103] Ibidem, 84-85.
[104] Ibidem, 85-87.
[105] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 85-86; M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London 1966); M. Douglas, 'Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology', in: M. Douglas & A. Wildavski (eds.), *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley 1996); for a similar application, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 150.
[106] Athanasius, *Epistula Encyclica*, A. Martin ed. & trans (London 1985).
[107] "Protest [diamartyria] of the Alexandrian church," quoted in Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, 81

Scholasticus's *Ecclesiastical History*.[108] And similarly, the story of the attack on John Chrysostom's church in 404 is first digressed upon in John's correspondence with Pope Innocent of Rome and not as is commonly thought in Palladius' biography of Chrysostom to which it is only appended.[109] As such, not only does Gaddis simply fail to identify the letter as the primary medium for the so-called 'soldiers-in-church' motif, but by focusing solely on the motif of the violent entry into the church in isolation of the letters in which it is emplotted, he is fundamentally ignoring the broader textual setting and specific set of social actions of which the motif was part. For Gaddis it is enough to analyse these letters, which he does not even identify as such, in the same manner and according to the same set of questions as he would study the histories and other types of texts in which they are encased, and thus separate from the actions they were meant to perform, and the various audiences they were meant to address. Indeed, the letters which contained such stories had much more to tell their audiences than just the story of the violent invasion of church space alone. The narration of the act of desecration does not stand in isolation, but is only a small part of a much larger text. Moreover, such letters and their contents where part of a number *actions* and *politics* that their authors attempted to pursue by means of them, and more specifically, they were part of what I referred to earlier as the 'politics of victimhood'. As such, we should not only ask 'what does the violent desecration of a church symbolize?', but also 'what is the author trying to achieve by referring to such an event in his letter?', 'what sort of action is the narration of desecrated church space part of and what result is the author trying to achieve with it?'.

As such, I believe that any statement about the signs and symbols that the motif in the letter is meant to convey should always take into account the direct purpose and action for which the medium carrying the story was written and for which the rhetorically construed victimhood was used. Contrary to what Gaddis argues, the letters conveying these desecration stories do not appear to be overtly interested at all in articulating a proper divide between church and state. In fact, in each of his examples, the specific action performed by means of the letter and the story of violent desecration it contains, is either to negotiate a bishop's return from exile or invoke the sentence of banishment on an opponent. Athanasius' *Epistula Encyclica* of 339 and his congregation's petition or *Diamartyria* of 357 were both written with the clear intention to renegotiate Athanasius' return from exile. John's correspondence served a similar purpose, namely to implore the bishop of Rome to organize a council which would revoke the sentence of exile and would allow Chrysostom to return in office. And likewise, Peter of Alexandria's letter was meant to implore the orthodox community to demand his return after his expulsion from Alexandria. It is thus important to keep in mind that each of these letters was written in a context of politics of exile and displacement. Therefore, is it not likely that this distinct effort of renegotiating the exile's place and context of displacement has important consequences for the manner in which we understand the letters' contents, signs and symbols? And should we hence study their textual motifs pertaining 'desecrated'

[108] "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", quoted in: Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.19.
[109] John Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent 4* [*Epistola ad Innocentium*]; Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 57-58.

church space, not so much in terms of a dichotomy between worldly and sacred spheres, but more importantly in terms of 'spatial' displacement and exile?

Correspondingly, it is also pivotal to stress that, because these important underlying themes of exile and displacement are missing from Gaddis's analysis, it is not entirely surprising that he understands the church spaces in which these stories take place as mere containers for sacrilegious action. The relation between the dramatis personae and the places and spaces they occupy hardly plays a role at all in his analysis. By ignoring the specific category of space, I believe Gaddis is overlooking a crucial dimension of these desecration stories, most and foremost the role they play in including and excluding groups and individuals. To negotiate a return from exile means one must ultimately take effort to renegotiate one's own place. Such an action always necessarily involves an effort to include and exclude simply because the new occupant of the see and church needs to be removed so that the exiled bishop might return. As we will see, such an action is not so much concerned with articulating a proper divide between church and state, but is part of a much broader effort to map space socially and assign each and everyone his or her proper or improper place in it. In order to reassert and re-articulate a bishop's place, his expulsion and exile needed to be depicted as unjust, illegitimate and the result of all sorts of extraneous forces. The exiled bishop had to convince the receivers of his letter that he had indeed been the victim of an illegitimate intrusion. He had to prove that the new occupants literally did not belong to the space they now occupied and acted in such a way that they deserved expulsion in turn. Such an effort needed to assign a distinct topographical place to each and every one involved in the disgraced bishop's exile. And of course, those with an interest in preventing his return from exile had to take similar measures.

3. "Not a Church": The Council of Sardica and Athanasius' Second Exile

A bishop who was perhaps more than others capable of comprehending the risks involved in this new dynamic of violence, exile and displacement, but who equally knew the many possibilities of how to present and control it, was Athanasius. The well-educated Athanasius had been a staunch supporter of the new Trinitarian disposition from the beginning and an ardent opponent of Arian Christianity since the time he had still been a deacon. His succession to Alexander in 328 had been a rather disputed election.[110] When the council of Alexandria, quite surprisingly, elected him bishop, Athanasius took up his seat in a city in which the religious doctrine we nowadays refer to as 'Arianism' had been long since entrenched and was very much in the majority.[111] Consequently, his ordination was controversial since it was accepted by less than half of Alexandria's Christian population, and also no less so because it was also accompanied with the council's firm denouncement of his Arian and Melitian opponents, the majority, as heretics.[112] Athanasius' ordination therefore immediately meant the formal exclusion of others. His opponents would not allow it. They would not give up their 'place' without a fight. Subsequently, with Egypt's heterodox communities arrayed and often united against him throughout his career, Athanasius literally had to fight for his place and plead for aid from a succession of 'orthodox' and 'heretical' emperors to maintain it. His efforts were not always successful. Athanasius would be deposed and driven from his see by councils of eastern bishops meeting outside Egypt on at least five different occasions and for a variety of crimes ranging from tyrannical intimidation to sacrilege, most notably the violent destruction of altars and churches.[113] Whether these charges were true or not did not really matter that much in the Constantian empire. What mattered was who supported those charges and the extent to which the accused and accusers managed to gather ecclesiastical and imperial support. In anticipation of those councils, letters usually travelled back and forth, containing all sorts of indictments and apologies, as all the involved factions sought to gain support and fought to control the volatile religious environment of fourth century Alexandria. On the negative side, and as result of these letter-writing campaigns, Athanasius would spent many years in exile in the west or in flight in rural Egypt. Yet despite those setbacks, Athanasius would in the end always succeed in acquiring enough support for church councils and emperors to demand his return, and managed on more than one occasion to turn that support against his opponents. And despite often facing the charge of being a merciless and tyrannical persecutor himself, in the end, Athanasius always managed to position himself for the imperial authorities as a victim and true 'confessor' indeed.

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110 On Athanasius' election, see: Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 109-113; T. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge 1993) 10-22; D. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic and Father* (Oxford 2012) 25-30; Sozomen, *HE*, 2.17, 4.25; Athanasius, *Apologia Contra Arianos*, ed. & trans. by P. Schaff & H. Wace (Edinburgh 1889/2005) 6.5-6.
111 Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 59-63, 75, 99, 116, 128, 171.
112 Ibidem, 109-113.
113 First, from 335; second, from 338/9; third, from 356; fourth, from 362; fifth, from 366.

Unfortunately, the details of Athanasius' stormy career can be reconstructed only with the greatest difficulty, most and foremost, because only the letters and works written in his own defence have survived.[114] These do contain indictments and texts written by his opponents however, but these are always presented in a highly redacted form, and always in such a way as to support Athanasius' own defence. Consequently, the contents of Athanasius' encyclicals, correspondence and other textual outpourings have been taken at face value by a succession of ecclesiastical historians, both ancient and modern, and as such have become authoritative for how the many conflicts and violence Athanasius was involved in are understood. This dominance of Athanasius's version of events is also no-less caused by the fact that from the reign of Theodosius onwards, imperial orthodoxy was defined by stringent observation to Nicene doctrine and it was thus only natural for church historians in the fifth century to portray Athanasius as the hero of their histories.[115] Indeed the many accusations raised by Athanasius' opponents are difficult to understand when only Athanasius's own representation of those indictments have survived.

3.1 The Sardican Synodicals

But fortunately for our purposes there survives one underacted Arian encyclical in particular which enables us to shed at least some light on how Athanasius actions and those of his supporters were perceived by opponents, as well as on the type of accusations that these opponents formulated against them. The letter in question, the so-called *Decree of the synod of eastern bishops on the Arian side at Sardica*, was produced by the nominally 'Arian' faction of Eusebius of Nicomedia in the aftermath of the council of Sardica in 343.[116] The letter takes the form of *synodical* addressed to 'friendly' bishops in the west, and most prominently those in Africa. The epistle provides its readers with a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding Athanasius' second exile and his efforts to gather support for his return. Typically for a *synodical*, the letter contains a defence for the actions taken by the Eusebian side during the council of Sardica, a formulation of Christological doctrine, as well as an ardent plea to excommunicate- and cease all communication with Athanasius' and his supporters. The letter is preserved for us as part of a collection of original documents produced during the Arian controversy assembled by Hilarius of Poitiers' for his diatribe against the Arian bishops Valens and Ursacius most and foremost to show that Arianism claim to theological truths was intimately linked with its proponents wilful application of violent force.[117]

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[114] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 1-9; on Athanasius' autobiographical content, see: L. Barnard, 'Two Notes on Athanasius', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica 41* (1975) 344-356; on writings, see: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 1-18.

[115] On these fifth century historians, most importantly Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret and their allegiance to Nicene orthodoxy and its heroes, see; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 225; D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (New York 2002) 108-134

[116] "Decree of the synod of eastern bishops on the Arian side at Serdica [*Arian Synodical*]", quoted in: Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, trans. by L. Wickham, in: *Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool 1997) 1.2; on the council of Sardica, see: Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 71-81; Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 141-143.

[117] L. Wickham, *Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool 1997) ix-xii.

As for its contents, the Arian *synodical* begins by recollecting for its audience the circumstances, arguments and procedures surrounding Athanasius first exile (July 335 – November 337 CE).[118] Its authors, most prominently Eusebius of Nicomedia, tell us how prior to his first exile Athanasius had been charged with sacrilege and the profanation of the sacraments. A grievous offense for any churchmen indeed. It tells us that reports had long since been circulating that claimed that during his tour of the Mareotis, Athanasius had, "with his own hands", split a chalice dedicated to God, broken down an altar, overturned a bishop's throne, and had "razed the basilica itself, God's House, Christ's Church to the ground".[119] It was said that after the intrusion Athanasius had personally handed over its Melitian presbyter Scyras to the worldly authorities.[120] Even worse, acting like a true tyrant, the quintessential embodiment of state-sponsored yet illegal pagan *vis*, Athanasius had been charged not only with the illegal expulsion of clerics, but also with murdering bishops and of forcing people into communion by threat of torture.[121] Acting on these allegations, which later became known as the 'chalice affair', the "bishops of Egypt" (read: the Arian bishops) decided to solicit the aid of the emperor to convene a council to investigate and pass judgement on Athanasius's crimes.[122] In anticipation, they dispatched a number of "well-renowned bishops" to investigate the places where Athanasius crimes had allegedly been committed.[123] The letter claims that the committee interrogated witnesses who provided substantial proof to vindicate the accusations against Athanasius.[124] The council was subsequently left with no other choice but to condemn and exile Athanasius on account of his crimes.[125] But even though Athanasius had been legitimately removed from office accordingly, the letter narrates how he nevertheless managed to procure himself a return from exile shortly after.[126] As soon as he arrived back in Alexandria, Athanasius decided to end up loose ties and organize another more thorough campaign to suppress the Arians.[127] This resulted in a number of new crimes apparently more heinous than before. For example, the authors claim that Athanasius had been so bold as to ordain pagans as bishops.[128] Even worse, they claim that Athanasius had *organized* pagan mobs to despoil the basilica of Alexandria as if it were a military campaign, an image which easily evoked the horrors of the tetrarchic persecution:

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118 On first exile and relation to his second exile, see especially: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 30-36.
119 *Arian Synodical*, 6.
120 Ibidem, 6.
121 Ibidem, 6.
122 Ibidem, 7.
123 "They took knowledge in their proceedings of Athanasius' immoral and criminal acts and did not give a general and hasty credence to the accusers: they chose distinguished and well-regarded bishops and despatched them to the actual place at which the things, complained of against Athanasius, had happened. The bishops viewed everything with their own eyes, took note of true facts and on returning to the council confirmed, with their own testimony, that the criminal offenses he was charged on by his accusers were true.", in: *Arian Synodical*, 7
124 Ibidem, 7.
125 "(…) Athanasius was duly condemned and deservedly exiled for his misdeeds as a sacrilegious person, a profaner of the holy sacraments, as guilty of violence in the destruction of the basilica, as a man to be abhorred for the death of bishops and the harassment of guiltless brethren.", in: *Arian Synodical*, 7.
126 Ibidem, 8.
127 "But seeing that Athanasius after his condemnation had procured himself a return from exile, he arrived back in Alexandria from Gaul after a fair length of time. Reckless of the past he became harsher in villainy (On November 23rd 337) (…) some pagans he ordained bishops (…) throughout the murderous attacks of the gentiles; heedless of the laws, he set all his store by foolhardiness. So it was that he despoiled the basilicas of Alexandria, by violence, by lethal attack, by a campaign.", in: *Arian Synodical*, 8
128 "(…) some pagans he ordained bishops (…)", in: *Arian Synodical*, 8

> Though a sound bishop Gregory had been appointed in his stead by decision of a council, he, like a barbarian enemy, like a sacrilegious plague, set fire to the *temple* with the people of the gentiles on hand, broke down an altar and secretly and clandestinely, made his escape in exile from the city.[129]

Furthermore, as the authors were keen to stress, Athanasius was definitely not the only episcopal tyrant operating in the East. The actions of his accomplices were shown to be equally gruesome. The letter emphasises that their return especially showed the dire consequences of entrusting "sheep(…) to such wolves".[130] Most prominently, Athanasius' main accomplice Marcellus of Ancyra had likewise managed to procure himself a return from exile.[131] The letter tells us that on his return he had indulged in all sorts of degrading forms of violence: for instance, he had dragged naked presbyters into the forum and had openly profaned the body of Christ by hanging it round the degraded priests' necks. He had also ordered consecrated virgins to be stripped and exposed naked in the forum in front of the gathered populace. Likewise, Lucius of Adrianopolis, another accomplice, had on his return been so bold as to throw the Eucharist to the dogs.[132] And Asclepas's return to Gaza had resulted in similar scenes. Like Athanasius, it is said that he had smashed an altar and incited many riots.[133]

But despite their many crimes, the authors lament, Athanasius and his accomplices had yet again managed to arrange a return from exile. The *synodical* tells us how at first Athanasius had "roamed the various parts of the world" and had tried to mislead and deceive bishops by means of his "trickery and flattery".[134] Some of these he managed to win over to his cause. Yet despite minor successes, Athanasius's actions in the East proved to be very much to no avail. The authors emphasise that, being close to the fire, the majority of Christians in the east kept acknowledging his crimes.[135] Subsequently, Athanasius decided to travel to Julius of Rome to instead plead his case before the bishops in the west: a novelty to say the least, so the authors claim, for never before had an eastern bishop been tried by his western colleagues alone.[136] They were after all not directly involved in the crimes Athanasius had committed. Unsurprising of course, the authors lament, the western bishops were easily swayed by "the falsehood" of Athanasius's letters and were happy to receive him back into the fold. Instead of condemning him for his crimes, they

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129 Ibidem, 8.
130 "Therefore, these things, being so, shall we go so far as to entrust Christ's sheep to such great wolves? Shall we make Christ's members, members of a harlot? [1 Cor. 6:15] God forbid!", in: *Arian Synodical*, 9.
131 Ibidem, 9.
132 Ibidem, 9.
133 Ibidem, 9.
134 Ibidem, 10.
135 "Subsequently, Athanasius roamed the various parts of the world, misleading some and deceiving guiltless bishops ignorant of his trickery and pestilential flattery, even some bishops unaware of his activities. He disturbed churches at peace or arbitrarily fabricated new churches for himself at will by soliciting subscriptions from individuals. (…) finally, when he recognized that these things were to no avail, he went off to Julius in Rome and to certain Italian bishops of his own party as well. He deceived them by the falsehood of his letters and they received him quite readily into his communion.(…) For if these letters from certain people, nevertheless they were not from those who had either been judges or had sat at a council. Indeed, even had they been certain people's letters, they ought never to have rashly trusted his spokesman in his own cause", in: *Arian Synodical*, 10.
136 "(…)they hoped to bring in a new law: that eastern bishops should be tried by western(…)", *Arian Synodical*, 12.

in turn wrote letters in support of him, even though they did not investigate the places where Athanasius crimes had been committed.[137] They even reached out to the emperor, who after seeing the scale of western support of Athanasius, gave his written approval for a new trial.[138] Now backed by an imperial letter, arranged by the ecclesiastical power-broker Hossius of Cordova, as well as the majority of western bishops, Athanasius successfully managed to gain himself a new trial at Sardica. The Arians agreed to participate, convinced as they were that justice was on their side.[139] After all, the previous council at Antioch had vindicated their decisions. There was nothing to worry about. But as soon as they arrived at Sardica 'after a long and arduous journey" and entered the church they found out to their great consternation that Athanasius, of all people, was celebrating mass together with the same people by whom he was meant to be judged(!).[140] How on earth could a breaker of altars and despoiler of churches be trusted with performing the Eucharist? Perhaps to no one's surprise, the Arian bishops refused to join Athanasius and promptly retreated. They now proposed Hossius's party to organize a new commission to investigate the places where the crimes had been committed as they had done previously in anticipation of Athanasius' first exile.[141] But it was to be to no avail, as the authors claim, the mind of the Nicene bishops was already made up: Athanasius exile was to be revoked whatever the arguments or evidence presented against it.[142] According to the authors, the situation in the following days became much worse. A large multitude of Athanasius's most violent supporters, and so it was claimed, the actual accomplices in his crimes, descended on Sardica.[143] Awed, the Arian bishops were subsequently warned by Hossius that if they did not commune with Athanasius, they themselves were to be held responsible for any damage caused upon the city by the angry mob. In response, the Eastern bishops left the council at Sardica and organized their own council a short distance away at Philippopolis, where they composed the aforesaid the synodical, formulated a new creed, and once again condemned and excommunicated Athanasius and his supporters.[144]

The version of events presented in the synodical written by Hossius's faction, which can also be found in Hilarius' collection, could not have been more different.[145] It starts by describing how the Arians

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[137] Ibidem, 10.
[138] Ibidem, 14.
[139] Ibidem, 14.
[140] Ibidem, 14.
[141] Ibidem, 18.
[142] Ibidem, 18.
[143] "A vast multitude, all of them vicious and abandoned souls, converged upon Sardica, arriving from Constantinople and Alexandria. Then people guilty of murder, guilty of manslaughter, guilty of violence, guilty of robbery, guilty of looting, guilty of despoliation, guilty of all unspeakable sacrileges and crimes; people who had broken down altars, set fire to churches and plundered the houses of private citizens, profanators of God's mysteries and betrayers of Christ's sacraments: who oppose the church's faith and make the impious and wicked doctrine of the heretics their own and have slaughtered God's wisest presbyters, deacons and bishops in hideous carnage. All these Ossius and Protogenes have gathered together in their little assembly. (….)They confused things human and divine, connected private matter with church matters and confounded harmony with us and disorder in the city, by saying we should bring heavy damage upon the city inless we communicated with them (which was unlawful). This was their repeated cry!", in: *Arian Synodical*, 19.
[144] Ibidem, 20-41.
[145] "Copy of the letter of the Synod of Serdica to all the churches [*Sardical Synodical*]", quoted in: Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, 1.3.

had tried to win support by spreading "slanders", how they had tried to contact pope Julius of Rome and how they had urged him to revoke his support of Athanasius.[146] But despite the accusations presented by some of the Arian bishops, the authors of the letter note that there was actually a greater number of bishops who wrote in support of Athanasius. And instead of condemning him in their letters, they testified to Athanasius' innocence and declared Eusebius's account to be nothing but a "pack of lies".[147] The letter narrates that in order to enquire into the veracity of Eusebius' accusations, Julius chose to summon the Arians to Rome. The Arians refused however whereby, according to the letter's authors, "they betrayed the lies in their letters": for why would the Arians, if they were so confident of their accusations, not dare present them in front of Julius?[148] For the Nicene authors, the actions of the Arians at Sardica implicated them even further: the flight of the Arians from the council proved their complicity. Besides, the evidence there presented against them was definitely not in their favour, as the victims of the Arian violence, warts and all, were paraded in front of the assembled bishops. Returned exiles showed their iron bands, others showed sword marks and scars, all testifying to:

> The use of armed soldiers, the crowds with cudgels, the judges menaces, the submission of false letters, stripping of virgins, burning of ministers, the imprisonment of God's ministers (…) All these things are due to the wicked and abominable heresy of the *Ario-Maniacs*.[149]

Further, a detailed investigation of Athanasius's previous crimes had proven the Arians completely wrong. Arsenius a man thought to be killed by Athanasius was shown to be alive and well.[150] Witnesses from the Mareotis, where Athanasius had allegedly broken a chalice, testified that no such thing had ever occurred there.[151] Even worse for the Arians, bishops from Egypt, of all places, had written that no such suspicions were entertained there.[152] Other witnesses, pagans and catechumens, present at the church where the crimes had allegedly been perpetrated, were interrogated, but none provided any evidence for the Arians' version of events.[153] They instead provided evidence that Scyras was not even in the church when Macharius, Athanasius' aid-de-camp, had made his 'violent' entry, but was lying sick in his cell instead.[154] Also, no evidence could be presented that there actually was a church in Mareotis or even a minister. For if there was no minister, how could there have been a church? And if there had not

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146 "We think indeed that the slanders against them have reached you too; and doubtless these people have tried to impress your ears to believe what they say against innocent men and to conceal suspicion of their own villainous heresy.", in: *Sardical Synodical*, 1.
147 "Eusebius, Maris, Theodore, Diognitus, Ursatius and Valans wrote to Julius our fellow priest and bishop of Rome some time ago, against the aforesaid fellow bishops Athanasius and Marcellus: bishops from other places also wrote, testifying to the innocence of Athanasius our fellow bishop and declaring Eusebius account to be nothing but a pack of lies.", in: *Sardican Synodical*, 2.
148 "As we said before, though invited they did not come and thereby they demonstrated their own falsehood and only betrayed the fabricated trickery or studied cunning which they practiced by their refusal.", in: *Sardican Synodical*, 2.
149 *Sardican Synodical*, 3.
150 *Sardican Synodical*, 5; further exaggerated by fifth century church historians: Socrates, *HE*, 1.27-29; Sozomen, *HE*, 2.23-25.
151 *Sardican Synodical*, 5
152 Ibidem, 5.
153 Ibidem, 5.
154 Ibidem, 5.

been a church, how could there have been a chalice? Not only was Scyras not present in the church at the time when the crimes had allegedly been committed, no proof could be found that he had been either a bishop or even a priest as the Arians had claimed. Indeed without a priest, they posited, how could there possibly have been a church?[155] But, as the authors stress, "instead of facing these charges, the Arians took flight, thereby proving their guilt".[156] In the end, the letter concludes in similar fashion to the Arian version: there was to be only one sentence suitable for the Arian "wolves", the letter urges its readers, no one was to share communion with Athanasius's false accusers, nor receive their letters or write to them.[157]

Now even though the 'Sardican synodicals' present us with two somewhat garbled and parochial accounts of the circumstances surrounding Athanasius second exile, they do contain a clear overview of the actions both parties took to communicate their sense of victimhood to the outside world as well as contest the appeal to victimhood of their opponents. Indeed, both letters reveal a number of shared strategies. Most importantly, both tap into the same rich register of persecution to represent the opponents' crimes and victims' suffering. The authors of both letters take much effort to reiterate precedent, not only by linking previous crimes to the more recent ones in question, especially those allegedly committed prior to Athanasius first exile, but also by articulating a relation between the motives and nature of pagan persecution in the past with that of their 'superficially' Christian opponents in the present. Related to this, in both letters the accused's association with pagans plays an important role. Not only does it help present the opponent as superficially Christian at best– he rules pagans not Christians – it also posits him as a veritable outsider to the community he intends to rule, a tyrant dependent on pagan support and not on the all-important consent of Christian majority. What this also communicated to Christian audiences was the idea that the traditional enemies of the church were still present, and that their victims where no less equal to the martyrs from Christianity's distant past. Correspondingly, those on the receiving end of such violence only saw their own prestige and authority increase by being associated with the martyrs and confessors of the past.

Violence against church space also plays a pivotal role in both letters and appears to be intimately entwined with the perceived legitimacy of the main protagonists. This mainly pertains the question of whether or not a bishop could perform the sacrament when he had also been charged with violence in-and-against a church or altar. Especially the violence against churches surrounding Athanasius' second exile plays a pivotal role with each side blaming the other for the violence and destruction perpetrated. This also counts for the multiple references to the degrading treatment of particular categories of people and objects, which very much follows the model deduced by Gaddis, and plays into the legal sentiments of the age, namely that virgins and priest, as honourable and sacred beings, ought to be exempt from violence, especially forms only suitable for criminals. But it also pertains the clerical duties of the accused

[155] *Sardican Synodical*, 5; the argument is repeated by Hilary of Poitiers to highlight the Arians' 'typical' distortion of truth and doctrine: Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius,* 5.1.
[156] *Sardican Synodical*, 7.
[157] Ibidem, 8.

bishop in question. For how can a bishop ensure the pious nature of these particular persons when he is also accused of their deprivation? However, it must be noted that in each of these two letters there always appears to be clear separation between violence committed in-and-against religious space which mainly pertains objects, and violence against certain classes of people, clergy and virgins: both never appear to actually take place in the same environment, at least in the way both narratives present it. Indeed the violence against these people never explicitly takes place inside church space, something which can only be inferred.

It is also interesting to note that in the contestation of their opponents' sense of victimhood, as well as in the articulation of their own, both the Nicene and Arian *synodicals* place nearly as much emphasis on undermining the veracity of their opponents' accounts as on their mischievous efforts at communicating these to a wider audience. Not only do they contest their opponents' arguments for victimhood, they also contest the manner in which that sense of victimhood is communicated to the outside world. As shown, the Arians accused Athanasius of spreading his victimhood in areas which had next to know knowledge of the crimes he had committed, his supporters' ignorance of local conditions and the judicial novelty of allowing an eastern bishop to be judged by western colleagues alone. They also accused Athanasius of spreading dishonest reports and of convincing his colleagues with flatteries and lies. Even though Athanasius managed to gather support, his opponents believed that particular support to be ultimately useless because it was in no position to either substantiate or disprove the crimes he had allegedly committed, simply because of sheer distance and the absence of direct involvement. In similar fashion, the authors of the Nicene synodical accused the Arians of fearing to appear in person before the bishop of Rome to verbally substantiate the contents of their written accusations. From their perspective, such a refusal not only seriously undermined the veracity of the contents of the Arians' reports, but also their legitimate claim to victimhood. In late antique Christian thought, the bold speak true, even when confronted by enemies, but the unrighteous quiver in fear, knowing that lies incite divine retribution. It should further be noticed that the idea of other bishops speaking on one's behalf is prominent in both letters. According to this idea, the veracity of the accusation itself is only as important as the scope and nature of the support one manages to contract on one's behalf. Both letters provide evidence that Athanasius especially was quite successful in this effort, managing to mobilize not only the support of the most prominent western churchmen on his behalf, but also that of a substantial number of Egyptian bishops, all writing letters on his behalf.

3.2. Epistola Enyclica

This turns us to the question of how Athanasius himself represented the circumstances surrounding his second exile?[158] As soon as Athanasius was expelled in 339, he took to writing down his version of events in his so-called *Epistola Encyclica* which he forwarded immediately before his departure to Rome.[159] The letter is addressed to "all the orthodox bishops in the known world", but we might infer that the letter is meant especially for those bishops with next to no knowledge of the calamities in Alexandria, especially those in the West.[160] It contains next to no information on the origins of the conflict between the Athanasian and Arian factions, nor does it contain much backgrounds on his opponents' motives for forcing his second exile and for introducing the allegedly Arian Gregory as his successor. Most and foremost, the main event around which the contents and arguments of the letter are centred is the violent entry of Gregory's accomplice the prefect Philagrius into the church of Theonis.

In the *Epistola Encyclica*, Athanasius makes use of a number of strategies to articulate his sense of victimhood, as well as his place as the one and only suitable bishop of Alexandria, to the outside world. He begins by construing a shared emotional bond between himself and his audience. He does so by comparing his own suffering with that of the outrage, a "pollution" (read: sexual offense), committed upon the Levite's concubine in Judges 19.[161] In response to the pollution committed, the Levite had divided up his concubine's body and sent a part of it to every tribe in Israel. By doing so he had hoped that each of the twelve tribes would feel equally affronted and invoke its zeal on the Levite's behalf. Likewise, Athanasius was now transmitting his suffering to the outside world by means of a letter whose contents should equally leave no room for impartial observers.[162] The violent expulsion of Athanasius from Alexandria as well as the violent breach of the church of Theonis constituted an insult to the entire Christian community. He stressed that if one member of his imagined emotional community suffers, all suffer, and like the tribes of biblical Israel those who considered themselves Christian should do well to invoke their zeal on Athanasius behalf.[163] According to Athanasius's frame of mind, ignorance is complicity. Important in this respect is that Athanasius is keen to stress these were no ordinary times. While resorting to the previously described register of persecution frequently throughout the letter, Athanasius nevertheless maintains a clear temporal distinction between past and present. He stresses the unprecedented and extraordinary nature of the events described in his letter, "never seen before in persecution or war" which surpassed even the "bitterness of persecution".[164] No ontological connection

[158] On Athanasius' second exile and problems of representation, see: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 30-36.
[159] C. Stephens, *Canon Law and Episcopal Authority. The Canons of Antioch and Serdica* (Oxford 2015) 46-47, 80.
[160] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 'salutatio'.
[161] Ibidem, 1.
[162] "On that occasion the tribes were astounded, each at the sight of part of the body of one woman; but now the members of the whole Church are seen divided from one another, and are sent abroad some to you, and some to others, bringing word of the insults and injustice which they have suffered. Be ye therefore also moved, I beseech you (…)", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 1.
[163] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 1.
[164] Ibidem, 1, 3.

between past and present as cohering to a single narrative here: Athanasius' suffering was claimed to be more grievous, and hence more special, than anything which had come before. Previous persecutions were bad, but Athanasius suffering was greater. Therefore the need to act was meant to be equally urgent.

Athanasius next step is to relate what happened in the church of Theonis. In contrast to the two *synodicals* where the violence against certain categories of people and religious objects is situated *outside* the confines of the church, in Athanasius's encyclical the violence is now explicitly situated *inside* space of the church. Athanasius tells us that while he and his *laos* were holding pious assemblies in peace, they was suddenly confronted by an edict, drawn up by the prefect Philagrius, which ordered Athanasius' immediate removal and announced the coming of his successor Gregory.[165] As Athanasius describes it, there was no immediate or pressing reason why he should be removed from office.[166] He underlines that no prefect had the authority to singlehandedly order a bishop's removal nor to appoint a new one in any case.[167] Athanasius stresses that whereas he had been chosen by the consent of the Alexandrian clergy and *laos*, Gregory was an uncanonical intruder whom no one had asked for.[168] Moreover, Athanasius believed that the introduction of Gregory had all the trappings of a foreign conspiracy. He reveals that Gregory and the prefect were both Cappadocians, a region long since associated with heresy.[169] Besides, he is keen to stress that this was not only a plot concocted by foreign outsiders alone, much worse, it was also an Arian plot. Athanasius reveals his audience that Gregory was in fact an Arian in disguise who stood under the direct orders of Eusebius of Nicomedia, indeed another outsider.[170] But Athanasius stresses that not only was Gregory's newly gained prominence as an outsider completely dependent on outside support, it was also, and much worse for a Christian audience, dependent on pagan support. He reminds his audience that Gregory's accomplice, the prefect Philagrius, had long been a persecutor of the church and its virgins and had recently turned to worship idols. Also, Athanasius firmly emplots Gregory and Philagrius as villains by comparing them to the most prominent persecuting architypes from biblical past.[171] Whereas Gregory exhibited the disposition of Caiaphas, an unbeliever, Philagrius exhibited that of Pilate, a Roman outsider. The comparison made by means of these biblical architypes implicitly indicated that that the suffering of Athanasius was reminiscent to that of Christ Himself.

Next, knowing all too well that the traditional legal discourse dictated that only the instigators of mob violence and not members of the mob itself could be persecuted, Athanasius describes for his audience the exact manner in which his opponents organized the violence against him.[172] The blame in his portrayal clearly rests on the organizers and not so much on the mob itself. First of all, he states that the

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[165] Ibidem, 2-3
[166] Ibidem, 2.
[167] Ibidem, 2.
[168] Ibidem, 2.
[169] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 2; On Gregory's intrusion, also see: Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 132-145.
[170] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 2-3, 5-7.
[171] "(…)while this notable Gregory exhibited the disposition of a Caiaphas, and, together with Pilate the Governor, furiously raged against the pious worshippers of Christ.", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 4.
[172] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 3.

mob that his opponents orchestrated was no ordinary mob but consisted mainly of societal 'outsiders' seeking enrichment, they were not motivated by any religious consideration. For Athanasius, it was impossible to fathom that the mob could have included any other Christians; they consisted only of categories of people who could only have been direct opposite to the pious and dutiful Christian *laos* that supported him :

> (…) this person [Philagrius], by means of promises which he afterwards fulfilled, succeeded in gaining over the heathen multitude, with the Jews and disorderly persons, and having excited their passions, sent them in a body with swords and clubs into the churches to attack the people.[173]

Now with all the 'outsiders' Athanasius could possibly conjure up in an Alexandrian context arrayed against him, the communal boundary which is normally imagined to exist between the Athanasian Christians and these groups hardens. The imagined boundary gains a real and palpable presence in the form of the church which segments the Athanasian Christians, as the true community of God, from the 'other', embodied by the violent mob. Athanasius describes how after Philagrius decree, the "faithful began to assemble ever more frequently in the churches (…) in order to prevent the impiety of the Arians from mingling itself with the faith of the church".[174] Subsequently, Philagrius forced entry into the church has all the trappings of a violent *adventus* and represents the forced dissolution of the material boundary which separates good Christians from bad ones as well as from other religious groups such as Jews and pagans. Athanasius narrates that by the time the attack occurred it was Lent- a holy season for fasting, purification and incessant vigils when Christians often spent nights in church, singing, hymning and praying: activities which Athanasius narrates his community was fervently engaged in.[175] Then suddenly the mob entered the church by force.[176] Virgins were stripped naked and trampled underfoot and monks were beaten and injured with all sorts of humiliating weapons.[177]

But interesting here is not so much Athanasius' description of what is inflicted on whom, but where things happen and how it transforms a space previously devoted to Christian worship. On closer inspection, the description of the violence in the church very much conforms to Rappaport's model of the relation between actions and various degrees of spatial sacredness.[178] Only here the sacredness, or special aspect, of the various spaces in the church of Theonis is not so much defined by actions of piety, but much more so by the complete opposite, by actions of impiety. Indeed**,** the church's holiest and most privileged sites, primarily preserved for actions associated with Christian membership, such as the altar, normally used for the performance of the Eucharistic sacrifice, as well as the baptisary, used for initiating

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[173] Ibidem, 3.
[174] Ibidem, 2, also, see: 3, 6.
[175] Ibidem, 4.
[176] Ibidem, 3.
[177] "(…)holy and undefiled virgins were being stripped naked, and suffering treatment which is not to be named and if they resisted, they were in danger of their lives.", Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 3, also see: 4-5.
[178] Swords, clubs and scourges, see: .", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 2, 4.

new members to the *laos*, become focal points for the invaders' performance of the most heinous forms of un-Christian worship and behaviour. For instance, Athanasius' narrates that "deeds of impiety and inequity" were committed on the "holy table".[179] Birds and pine cones were offered in sacrifice within the confines of the church. Inside the church, heathens sang in praise of idols, and dared to blaspheme "even in the churches of our Lord".[180] As referenced in Eusebius' depiction of the tetrarchic persecution, the invaders also consigned the books and holy scripture found in the church to the flames.[181] According to Athanasius, the heathens and Jews were not even 'ashamed' to enter the Church's most holiest of places, the "holy baptisary", where they stripped themselves naked and acted disgracefully.[182] Actions which would have immediately evoked the image of bathhouse, being in Christian eyes, the place of all sorts of pagan sin and sexuality.[183] But of course, the mob mobilized on Gregory's behalf still requires payment, and on Easter day Philagrius gives up the church to be plundered as a reward for services rendered.[184] In the action of plundering the church, Christ itself is shown degraded. The wine, blood of Christ was taken from its place and consumed irreverently.[185] The store of oil was plundered, the doors and chancel rails were broken off, and worse, the candles dedicated to divine service were lighted in front of pagan idols.[186] The degrading treatment of the church, its most holiest places and most precious objects, had transformed it into an imaginary microcosm pagan worship and behaviour.

The representation of the violent transformation of the church has of course the function to pour scorn on the perpetrators. But note that the transformation is also set up in such a way so that it offered Athanasius a suitable apology for his flight. As we have seen, there had been an age old, but also contested Christian taboo on voluntary flight when faced with persecution, especially when it concerned a community leader. Athanasius was very much aware of this taboo and as a consequence needed to thread carefully and leave as little room possible for others to also interpret his flight as being selfish as well as careless for his community's plight. Athanasius claims that after seeing the many outrages committed in the church of Theonis, he realized that he could under no circumstance allow for such violence to take place inside the church where he himself had taken up residence.[187] He argued that his voluntary flight would not only prevent the assembled Christians from additional "murders" and outrages being

[179] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 3.
[180] Ibidem, 3.
[181] "They were burning the books of Holy Scripture which they found in the church", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 3.
[182] Athanasius, *Epistula Encyclica*, 3.
[183] On Christian views of the bathhouse, see: E. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London 2013) 176-179; 'Bathing', in: G. Bowersock, P. Brown & O. Grabar, *Late Antiquity. A guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge 2000) 338; G. Schöllgen, 'Balnea Mixta: Entwickelung der spätantiken Bademoral', in G. Schöllgen *et a*l (eds.), *Festschrift K. Thraede* (Münster 1995) 182-194; F. Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1995).
[184] "In addition to all this, after such a notable and illustrious entry into the city, the Arian Gregory, taking pleasure in these calamities, and as if desirous to secure to the heathens and Jews, and those who had wrought these evils upon us, a prize and price of their iniquitous success, gave up the church to be plundered by them.", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 4.
[185] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 4.
[186] Ibidem, 4.
[187] Ibidem, 5.

committed, it would also spare his church, as a *space*, from further injury.[188] As shown, the way Athanasius portrays it, violence inside church space meant that ecclesiastical space could be transformed into a place for pagan worship and excess. Implicitly, his flight prevents such transformation from taking place. And subsequently, the 'careless' and 'selfish' flight becomes a final act of care for the community he is forced to leave behind. Besides, Athanasius was keen to remind his audience that his flight had divine approval: had Christ himself not advised his apostles that "if they persecute you in this city" to "flee to another" [Matthew 10:23].[189] Athanasius duly did. But his actions showed him as the righteous care-giving shepherd of his community.[190] Gregory's violence on the other hand showed him as intruder to be anything but.

But of course what Athanasius had to do next was to show that a city administered by a tyrant supported by 'pagan' and 'Jewish' mobs had grievous consequences for the community and city its leader had forcibly left behind. Athanasius describes that without its shepherd, the *laos* of Alexandria was subjected to a grievous "persecution".[191] As soon as he was in control, Gregory choose to impose new boundaries and threatened to make previous ones permeable. According to Athanasius, Gregory did so by attempting to force the people of Alexandria into communion with him by threat of violence.[192] If refused, recusants were debarred from entering their churches and risked death and torture if they remained obstinate.[193] As such, the Christians now faced a new boundary, materialized in their former places of worship. Crossing meant compliance and communion with a heretic, refusal meant exclusion from public worship and possibly death. Athanasius believed that the goal of this new compulsory act of boundary crossing was simple. In the letter he argues that all of it was done in an effort to promote the heretical theology of a Christ subordinate to the father: a doctrine, if we are to believe Athanasius, that the Alexandrian *laos* greatly abhorred.[194] Accordingly, the *laos* naturally refuses the temptation of mingling with heretics and stands ready to receive pious martyrdom.

As for a last strategy, after having sketched for his audience the frightful consequences of allowing Gregory's rule of the pious Alexandrian *laos*, Athanasius sets out to pre-emptively contest his opponents' letter-writing as well as their possible legitimization for Athanasius' removal. Again what matters here in the contestation is not so much the veracity of the contents of these reports, but most and foremost the manner and circumstances under which these are communicated to the outside world. Again violence plays an important role. As Athanasius' portrays it, even his opponent's letters are tainted by violence and

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[188] "For seeing that they were exceedingly mad against me, and being anxious that the church should not be injured, nor the virgins that were in it suffer, nor additional murders be committed, nor the people again outraged, I withdrew myself from among them, remembering the words of our Saviour, 'If they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another. [Matthew 10:23]' For I knew, from the evil they had done against the first-named church, that they would forbear no outrage against the other also.", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 5

[189] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 5

[190] For a similar construction, see the later version in: Athanasius, *Apology for his Flight*, trans by A. Robertson (London 1980).

[191] Ibidem, 5.

[192] Ibidem, 5-6.

[193] Ibidem, 5.

[194] Ibidem, 6.

offer direct proof of the violent desperation his community is daily subjected to. For example, ship captains are tortured if they refuse to take the persecutors' letters.[195] Consequently, those who deliver the letters do so only from fear of the governor violence.[196] The audience is also reminded that the secretary who writes Gregory's letter, Ammon (note the overtly pagan-sounding name), had long since been a heretic and had for this reason been cast out of the church by Athanasius's predecessor.[197] Furthermore, Athanasius points out that Ammon can testify to Gregory's allegiance to Arianism something which we are led to believe Gregory was anxious to hide from others.[198] The violent nature of his opponents' letters led Athanasius to conclude that there was to be only suitable reaction. Its deliverers should not be received, their letters should be torn apart and its bearers put to shame.[199]

Unsurpisingly, Athanasius's narrative of the events is the product of careful act of selection, omission and elaboration. One must keep in mind that on closer inspection his letter greatly condenses the circumstances surrounding his second exile. Indeed there is much that Athanasius did not tell his audience. For instance, all the described violence take place in what is very much the same space, most and foremost the church of Theonis, and in what is relatively a short time span, the night before-and-day of Easter. In reality however, the violence and political manoeuvring in Alexandria took place over a couple of months, and so did the various raids on the Alexandrian churches. The church of Theonis was definitely not the only setting of violence. The burning of the church from where Athanasius made his escape, as referred to in the Arian synodical, is also completely ignored. His encyclical is mostly silent on the various accusations directed against him, merely referring to his earlier exile as a failed 'plot' to overthrow him, knowledge of which, he claims, had already been widespread and therefore required no further digression. And writing the *epistula encyclica* was definitely not the only action Athanasius undertook to articulate his victimhood for the outside world. In fact it was just the first of many actions, which ranged from writing other letters to building new churches as well as travelling abroad and pleading his case before western bishops.[200]

As far as the spaces in the letter are concerned, there appears to be a peculiar relationship between the violent transformation of the church and the idea of physical displacement. The violence in the church of Theonis itself has a certain hermeneutical quality to it in that it is first and foremost set up for legitimizing Athanasius' voluntary flight, but also as an instrument for implicating Gregory as an improper shepherd whose removal which, Athanasius urges, should be effectuated as soon as possible. It also functions as a pivotal and divisive space on Athanasius' imaginary map. The space of the church functions

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[195] Ibidem, 5.
[196] Ibidem, 5, 7.
[197] Ibidem, 7.
[198] "The impious and mad Gregory cannot deny that he is an Arian, being proved to be so by the person who writes his letters. This is his secretary Ammon, who was cast out of the Church long ago by my predecessor the blessed Alexander for many misdeeds and for impiety.", in: Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 7
[199] Athanasius, *Epistola Encyclica*, 7
[200] For chronology and actions, see: Galvao-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 111-140; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 19-86; A. Martin. *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'Église d'Égypte au IVe siècle: 328-373* (Rome 1996) 303-350.

to segment Athanasius' community from the rest of Alexandria. It is a material manifestation of a communal boundary which is meant to enclose the community that Athanasius frames he and his audience are part of. Its breach by that community's significant other, Jews, pagans, heretics and disorderly persons, is meant to show the dire consequences of removing a canonical bishop from his see as well as postulate that such an action seriously threatened the survival of the community he and his audience are imagined to be part of. Interesting in this respect is Athanasius' understanding of 'community', and more particularly his use of the word *laos*. Athanasius use of *laos* is in fact a creative play. The dual meaning of *laos* – *congregation* in the particular sense, and *people* in the larger 'ethnical' sense – is coalesced by Athanasius into a single whole mainly as part of the effort to stress that Athanasius was supported by the entirety of the Alexandrian people, and was not like his opponents dependent on the aid of religious outsiders and disorderly persons.[201] More importantly, such a structure, informed by the imagined homogeneity of the Christian *laos* of Alexandria, firmly distributed those others as naturally belonging outside the city. Arians, Jews, Pagans and disorderly persons are outsiders, not native to Alexandria, not part of the *laos*, and should therefore be debarred entry, the letter seems to suggest. But correspondingly, this structure, visualized by the fate of the church, also ascribes privileged positions to certain people within the Athanasian community itself. Violence makes certain groups of people stand out within the privileged *laos*: the priests, deacons and virgins, but more prominently Athanasius himself. They are presented as the natural leaders of the Alexandrian city whose norms are presented as exemplary for the entire Alexandrian populace. And last, the letter presents a clear spatial division. Whereas the Athanasian churches are presented as only public places a true Christian could visit, true Christians are debarred entrance to other places, most notably churches in the possession of heretics, but also spaced deemed to be 'pagan', such as the bathhouse and temple.

In this respect we might ask whether the *Epistola Encyclica* successful in its effort at segmentation? Did it succeed in revoking Athanasius' exile? A direct relation is of course difficult to deduce. The letter was definitely not the only stratagem Athanasius had used to rearrange his place. Much happened in the time between his exile and return. Also, it would take another year for him to return to Alexandria.[202] Nevertheless the outcome at Sardica showed that Athanasius' efforts had definitely not been in vain. His version of events won out, and is referenced to in the Nicene synodical. The Sardican *synodical* very much takes Athanasius version of events for granted and even copies some of the more peculiar elements. Athanasius had also successfully renegotiated his place and those of his associates. His opponents now faced excommunication ratified by an imperially sanctioned council of the church. Furthermore, the canons of Sardica showed that the council had taken much effort to set straight the procedures regarding replacement, expulsion and renegotiation of exile. Effort was also taken at Sardica to create a canonical framework which attempted to ensure that each and every one in the Christian church retained its proper

[201] Athanasius, *Epistula Encyclica*, 1-7; On the dual meaning of *laos* in early Christian and late antique thought, see: Buell, *Why this New Race*, 2-3, 41-47, 69, 86-8792, 98-113, 139, 141, 155, 190, 221.
[202] Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 37-42.

place.[203] For instance, priests and bishops from minor sees could not be transplanted to bigger ones and vice versa.[204] Appealing to support outside the boundaries of the province was allowed for, and it was equally approved that the case of expulsion could be re-examined outside the province of the accused.[205] Indeed to a great existent, Sardica very much laid down the actions that Athanasius had previously undertaken to plead his victimhood as canonical and were as such standardized for generations to come. The segmentation of the Alexandrian population itself was less successful. The Arian conflict was to continue in Alexandria at least until the 370s, and Christians and other religious groups kept crossing spatial and behavioural boundaries haphazardly. The actual zealous enforcement of these boundaries in Alexandria took place much later under bishops Theophilus and Cyril. Men who both claimed to be acting in the interest of Athanasius legacy, and by their time had enough imperial support to reorder Alexandria's religious groups, individuals and space accordingly.

[203] For Council of Sardica, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 71-81; *The Canons of the Council of Sardica*, trans. by H. Percival (Buffalo 1900); Stephens, *Canon Law and Episcopal Authority*, 131-171
[204] Canon 1.
[205] Canon 4, 5, 9, 14, 15, 17.

4. Athanasian Victimhood and the Transformation of Church Space

The success of his encyclical and its peculiar model for articulating victimhood and renegotiating exile was definitely not lost on Athanasius himself. This is especially visible in some of his writings produced during his third exile. The situation was in any case quite similar. During the course of the 350s the tables had turned once more.[206] Now with a nominally 'Arian' emperor Constantius II much firmer at the helm, the Homoian faction at Constantinople and Alexandria received almost unlimited support and took great effort to reset the clock back to the pre-Sardican status quo. Subsequently, in 356 CE Athanasius was exiled for a third time, his place taken by the Homoian George, another Cappadocian.[207] This time however Athanasius decided to flee into the Egyptian desert where he had long since enamoured the support of the local monastic communities. On his own instigation, the Athanasian congregation now took to a familiar model to bring his case before the worldly authorities. The novelty here rests particularly on the fact that it was now the *laos* which presented itself as an active agent in articulating Athanasius' victimhood.

4.1. The Diamartyria

The letter his congregation wrote, the so-called *Diamartyria*, takes the form of a popular petition.[208] The audience addressed by the petition was quite different from that of the *Epistola Encyclica*. Whereas the latter was addressed most and foremost to a clerical audience of bishops and presbyters, the former addresses the local rulers of Egypt, most directly prefect and indirectly the emperor. What is similar is that like the *Epistola Encyclica* the petition urges the worldly authorities to take action and "to publish things everywhere", only this time not to bishops but to "prefect and magistrates in every place".[209] Addressing such a secular audience meant that the arguments and its accompanying signs and symbols had to be framed accordingly and thus quite differently from what we have seen before. Because the authors of the petition now addressed what was most and foremost a secular audience, the clerical and episcopal emotional register used in the *Epistola Encyclica*, with its dichotomy between 'Christian'- and 'unchristian' identity, behaviour and space, was likely to be of no use. Instead the petitioners had to try to play into a specifically secular emotional register which traditionally placed much more emphasis on worldly issues like loyalty, legitimacy and nature of imperial power.

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[206] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 79-83; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 111-211.
[207] Third exile, see: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 37-48.
[208] "Protest [*diamartyria*] of the Alexandrian church," quoted in Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum*, 81.
[209] *Diamartyria*, 81.3

Again, as in the *Epistula Encyclica*, the main event around which the arguments for Athanasius return are framed is the violent intrusion of church space. The event is described according to the familiar parameters, the only difference here is that the imagery associated with other religious groups is supressed and that the letter is instead more focused on images normally associated with illegal warfare and the abuse of secular power. It should also be noted that it was precisely this element which made the letter so attractive to Gaddis and explains why he choose to assign the *Diamartyria* as his primary model for understanding the general structure of the so-called 'soldiers-in-church motif'. It revels in the distinction between that which belongs to Caesar and that which belongs to God. Indeed the petition conforms neatly to his the idea of worldly intrusion and in this particular case of the *Diamartyria* his analysis appears to be spot on. I do however believe, as will be shown below when we discuss the other examples, that it is better to understand the petition as an exception rather than as rule, precisely because it addresses a secular audience.

Nevertheless, Gaddis is completely right to argue that this letter in particular mainly revolves around sketching the consequences of worldly intrusion.[210] The petition presents such intrusion as follows: at the time of the attack, the congregation is assembled for the purpose of pious worship, keeping nightly vigils and engaging in pious prayer.[211] Suddenly, out of nowhere and for no reason, a legion of soldiers, arms rattling, violently burst through the door.[212] Again virgins are stripped naked and slain, being more afraid of being touched than death.[213] Men are trampled underfoot and killed by "warlike instruments" and beaten with stripes "in the Lord's house".[214] The authors show that while the violence was going on, Athanasius kept sitting on his throne exhorting all to pray and shares the fate of his congregation.[215] The petitioners claim that he was pulled from his throne, manhandled, left for dead, and nowhere to be found after the attack had subsided.[216] Then follow scenes of plunder. The invaders break open every door, and search and plunder everything within.[217] The main culprit, *dux* Syrianus (i.e. the 'Syrian', again very much having the meaning 'outsider') is depicted as being actively in charge of the violence, handing out commands and so it appears, even personally participating in the attack.

Syrianus is also presented as acting against the explicit interests of the emperor.[218] The petitioners claim that if it had been the explicit wish of the emperor that they were to be persecuted, the Alexandrian

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[210] Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ*, 79-83.
[211] *Diamartyria*, 81.4
[212] "(…)while we were keeping vigil in the Lord's house, and engaged in our prayers (for there was to be a communion on the Preparation); suddenly about midnight, the most illustrious Duke Syrianus attacked us and the Church with many legions of soldiers armed with naked swords and javelins and other warlike instruments, and wearing helmets on their heads; and actually while we were praying, and while the lessons were being read, they broke down the doors.", in: *Diamartyria*, 81.4
[213] *Diamartyria*, 81.3-4.
[214] Ibidem, 81.4.
[215] Ibidem, 81.4.
[216] Ibidem, 81.4.
[217] Ibidem, 81.5.
[218] On Syrianus, see: Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 118-125.

Christians were happy to receive it.[219] They were after all anxious to abide by the emperor's command. But since this could hardly have been the case – the emperor claims to be pious after all – the emperor is urged to take action and punish Syrianus on their behalf.[220] For was Syrianus not abusing the trust and legitimacy invested in him by the emperor by persecuting law-abiding Christians? The main point here is that state-sponsored violence, without the explicit approval of the emperor, not only seriously undermined the emperor's power, it also dangerously associated him with the persecuting zeal of his pagan predecessors. Naturally, the petitioners are keen to warn their emperor of this association. At the end of the letter the exclaim "may it be known that a war has been waged against the church, and that, in times of Augustus Constantius, Syrianus had caused virgins and many others to become martyrs".[221] No Christian emperor wanted to have his name associated with a time of persecution. But it is definitely not the emperor alone who is targeted here. The illegality of the violence equally threatens the position of the prefect Maximus.[222] The use of illegal force in the basilica and the abuse of power against the express orders of the emperor threatens to depict the prefect especially as being seriously out of control in his own province. By presenting the attack in such a way, the letter implicitly urges him to reset the balance in order to avert the punishment of an angry and sidestepped emperor. A fickle emperor is a bad emperor, the letter seems to suggest, but it still leaves room for the emperor to show himself powerful by punishing the intruders.

When the attack has subsided, the church is represented not so much as having been transformed into a pagan space, but more specifically into a sort of a *lieu de memoire* for the victimized community whose primary function is to provide legal evidence for the attack on the church, as well as to bear testimony to the persecution to which its occupants claim to be daily subjected to as a consequence of Athanasius' removal.[223] Therefore, next to being a space of remembrance the church also becomes quite literally a legal space, whose contents could be used as proof in any court case. Analogous to similar actions undertaken during the tetrarchic persecution, the petitioners narrate that in the aftermath of the attack, Syrianus gave orders to remove the bodies of dead.[224] Yet despite his "criminal" attempt to hide the evidence, the survivors managed to retain the bodies of the most holiest of virgins and decided to bury them within the confines of the church.[225] They also decided to gather the weapons and equipment the attackers left behind and display them in the very church where the crimes had been committed "so that they might not be able to deny it".[226] Ashamed, the local authorities try to supress the evidence by sending

[219] "Now if an order has been given that we should be persecuted we are all ready to suffer martyrdom. But if it be not by order of Augustus, we desire Maximus the Prefect of Egypt and all the city magistrates to request of him that they may not again be suffered thus to assail us.", *Diamartyria*, 81.6.
[220] *Diamartyria*, 81.6.
[221] Ibidem, 81.3-61.
[222] On Maximus, the prefect of Egypt, see: Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 119.
[223] *Diamartyria*, 81.2, 4, 5-6
[224] Ibidem, 81.1-2, 5.
[225] "And when they saw that many had perished, they gave orders to the soldiers to remove out of sight the bodies of the dead. But the most holy virgins who were left behind were buried in the tombs, having attained the glory of martyrdom in the times of the most religious Constantius.", in: *Diamartyria*, 81.4.
[226] *Diamartyria*, 81.5.

Dynamius, the commander of the city watch, to take away the weapons, but with little success.[227] The weapons remain in the church for all to see, displaying the violence of the intruder and his accomplices. The letter tells us that when the members of the congregation confronted Syrianus and asked him to testify to his crimes he ordered the supplicants to be chased away and to be beaten with clubs.[228] Again the trope is present that those who act righteous have nothing to hide and nothing to fear when asked to justify their actions. In contrast the unrighteous try to hide the evidence in fear of judicial punishment. Also, the explicit display of the result of violence in church space, as embodied by the buried virgins and displayed weapons, makes the church stand out from the rest of space as being special, and perhaps, more sacred than any other church. Again violence had managed to make or at least affirm a space as special as a site bearing testimony to persecution, like any martyr's burial would.

As for its immediate purpose, the petition which took so much effort to play into the sentiments of a secular governing elite was hardly successful. Its secular themes were innovative in playing into the sentiments and concerns of a worldly ruling elite, yet its secular audience seems not to have been noticeably impressed and we might also wonder whether the petition was really spread to the many magistrates and prefects it had asked for. Furthermore, the local authorities and the emperor kept supporting the 'Arian' factions in the east, at least until 360. As a consequence, Athanasius was to remain in exile for many years and only managed to stage his return after both Constantius and George had died in 361 CE.[229]

Nevertheless despite having failed in its immediate purpose, the *diamartyria* alongside the *epistula encyclica* ensured that semiotic relation between violence in church and exile, in the manner Athanasius presented it, became in the decades that followed a standard part of the Nicene discourse on persecution. Athanasius himself was to use it in many of his works, most prominently as part of Anthony's vision of the 'future' persecution of the Athanasian community.[230] And during the course of the fourth century, exiled churchmen as well as historians would resort again and again to the familiar tropes and motifs which Athanasius had provided for. But despite the fact that the use of the motif in these later works often appeared rigorous and also surprisingly similar, we will see that on closer inspection the model left much room for literary play and innovative adaptation to the various circumstances and differing purposes for which it was used.

[227] Ibidem, 81.5.
[228] Ibidem, 81.2.
[229] Martin, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'Église*, 351-388.
[230] Athanasius, *Life of Anthony*, ed. & trans. by C. White (London 1998) 82-83

4.2. Peter of Alexandria

What that model exactly constituted for future generations can best be observed in the encyclical letter of Athanasius' immediate successor Peter of Alexandria.[231] Unfortunately however Peter's letter survives only in a fragmented form in Theodoret of Cyrrhus's (ca. 393-457) *Ecclesiastical History*.[232] Theodoret tells us how he had hesitated to insert it at full length and how he had decided only to "quote some extracts from it", mainly because he believed the its contents were too horrific for his intended audience.[233] But on closer inspection it does seem that Theodoret is somewhat putting us on the wrong foot. He did in fact include the horrors, and the only actual parts missing from the letter are its beginning and end. As a consequence, we know next to nothing about the letter's intended audience, nor do we know the specific identities of its subscribers, though we might infer, as we will see below, that the letter, like the *Epistula Encyclica*, was mainly intended for a clerical audience: most prominently the bishop of Rome, and likely also the monastic communities allied to Peter in Egypt. Fortunate for our purposes however is that the part that does survive and contains Peter's narrative of the attack on the church of Theonis in 373 CE. The letter presents a situation that is very much similar to that of Athanasius' second exile. The letter recounts how with imperial approval the *comes sacrum largitionem* Magnus had taken a military force from Syria to depose bishop Peter and replace him with an Arian candidate named Lucius. Allegedly Peter had fled before the attack began which despite his early departure ended in bloodshed. Like Athanasius, Peter decided to flee to Rome to plead his case before the bishops in the west.

Closely following the model of the *Epistola Encyclica*, Peter's narrative begins by describing how his congregation had suddenly been confronted with an edict drawn up the governor Palladius that demanded Peter to step down and to immediately facilitate entry to his replacement.[234] Like Athanasius, Peter states that the appointment of his replacement Lucius was hardly canonical.[235] Neither a synod had chosen him, nor the clergy or *laos*. Peter's description of the characters of Lucius and his accomplices equally conforms to the portrayal of Athanasius's enemies in the *Epistola Encyclica*. For instance, Peter claims that Lucius is only a superficial Christian who daily worships Serapis instead of God.[236] Also, he portrays Lucius's entry into Alexandria as anything but normal and very much inverted the normal procedure by which the *laos* and the clergy were usually meant to receive their bishop.[237] According to Peter, Lucius was neither

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231 On Peter's career and exile, see: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 53-54.
232 "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", quoted in Theodoret, *HE*, 4.19.
233 Theodoret, *HE*, 4.18.
234 Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.18; "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.1.
235" It was one named Lucius, who had bought the bishopric as he might some dignity of this world, eager to maintain the bad character and conduct of a wolf. No synod of orthodox bishops had chosen him; no vote of genuine clergy; no laity had demanded him; as the laws of the church enjoin.", in: "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.18.2.
236 "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.4.
237 "Lucius could not make his entrance into the city without parade, and so he was appropriately escorted not by bishops, not by presbyters, not by deacons, not by multitudes of the laity; no monks preceded him chanting psalms from the Scriptures (…)", in: "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.3; on the "pompa", see: P. Arena, 'the *pompa circensis* and the *domus Augusta* (1st-2sn c. A.D.)', in: O. Hekster, S. Schmidt-Hofner & C. Witschel (eds.), *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire* (Leiden 2009)77-94; F. Bernstein, 'Complex Rituals: Games and Processions in Republican Rome', in; J. Rüpke,

escorted by bishops, priests and deacons, nor acclaimed by the laity or chanting monks. Instead Lucius's entry had, like that of the ecclesiastical arch tyrant Paul of Samosata, all the trappings of a "parade", a *pompa*, being accompanied by a vast body of troops as well as his heretical accomplices: the Arian Euzoius, who would "ravage" Alexandria, and Magnus, and suspected by Peter of having been an ardent supporter of Julian and responsible for the burning of the church of Beirut.[238] Furthermore, Peter reveals that the governor who issued the edict, Palladius, is in fact a heathen who, Peter is keen to tell us, habitually prostrates himself before the image of the emperor.[239] Further, Palladius is being accused by Peter, as being the person who is mainly responsible for the subsequent violence. For Peter it had been most and foremost Palladius who had been responsible for bribing the mob to violence.[240] He is the one who enumerates the mob before setting out to attack the church "as if he were pressing forward to the subjugation of a foreign foe", and rewards them by plundering the church afterwards.[241]

The violent entry of Peter's enemies into the church results in a transformation quite similar to that presented in the *Epistola Encyclica*. Again the violence is explicitly presented as transforming the church of Theonis from a privileged place of piety into an imaginary place of pagan worship and behaviour. Peter shows how the invaders inverted all the rituals usually performed in the church: "instead of holy words, they uttered the praises of idols, there where the holy scripture had been read might be heard unseemly clapping of hands with unmanly and indecent utterances".[242] The virgins especially receive all sorts of degrading treatment. Foul language is used in front of them and they our pulled out of the church and dragged in triumph through the town.[243] But whereas in the *Epistola Encyclica* the violent entry of the intruders transformed the church primarily into an imaginary pagan temple, the church in Peter's letter takes on the trappings of what appears to be a theatre. For instance, Peter narrates how a transvestite, smeared with grime as if on stage, danced on the holy altar "where we call the calling of the Holy Ghost" with bystanders laughing out loud and raising shouts: indeed behaviour that has all the trappings of comedy and pantomime acting.[244] The stage act did not stop there. The intruders picked out a man from among their party who was said to be famous for his utter baseness. They stripped him of his clothes and placed him naked on the bishop's throne in order to perform the role of Christ's advocate. From his throne, the naked man mocked the assembled Christians by preaching the exact opposite of God's message: "for the for divine words he uttered shameless wickedness, lewdness, for piety impiety,

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A Companion to Roman Religion (Malden 2011) 222-234; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge 1986) 35-63, 299, 372; and most importantly: H. Jürgens, *Pompa Diaboli: Die lateinischen Kirchenväter und das antike Theater* (Stuttgart 1972).

238 "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.3.

239 Ibidem, 4.19.1.

240 Ibidem, 4.19.2.

241 Ibidem, 4.19.1-2.

242 Ibidem, 4.19.1.

243 Ibidem, 4.19.1.

244 "A boy who had forsworn his sex and would pass for a girl, with eyes, as it is written, smeared with antimony, and face reddened with rouge like their idols, in woman's dress, was set up to dance and wave his hands about and whirl round as though he had been at the front of some disreputable stage, on the holy altar itself where we call on the coming of the Holy Ghost, while the by-standers laughed aloud and rudely raised unseemly shouts.", in: "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.2.

for continence fornication, adultery, foul lust, theft, teachings of drunkenness and gluttony as well as all the rest were good for man's life".[245]

The idea of a church being transformed into place of theatrical performance, which mocked and inverted everything the Christian community held dear, would have greatly resonated among a Christian audience. In a sense, the theatre was one of the quintessential no-go areas in Christian thought.[246] Many Christens, and clergy especially, believed that the theatre was a space where no good Christian should be found. First and foremost, because it had been the place where in the past many Christian martyrs had been mocked, tortured and executed by pagan persecutors. But perhaps more specifically, the performances at the theatre were believed to be especially detrimental to the moral sensibilities of its spectators. For instance it was well-known that its actors would frequently prompt violent riots, often with the active involvement of claqueurs.[247] Also, the performers themselves were thought of as degraded persons who were to be refused baptism under any circumstance unless they abandoned their occupation. Moreover, many Christians objected to the theatre's alleged celebration of pagan idolatry because many of its play reiterated pagan mythology as well as occasionally mocking Christian rites and believes. And last, The theatre was problematic because it was a place where religious communities, and different sexes, freely mingled, and in whose stage plays gender roles were freely inverted. Indeed many Christians thought that the theatrical performers were able to excite lascivious passions in the spectators through their sinuous movements.

As in the *Epistola Encyclica*,, after the transformation of the church into a theatre, the city is transformed into place of persecution where, in Peter's words, a 'truceless war" is waged upon the faithful.[248] Indeed the actions of Peter's opponent Lucius appear to have all the trappings of that of foreign invader taking control of his conquered city. What is especially interesting in this part of the letter is that Peter here elaborates much more on the theme of exile than Athanasius initially did. Whereas Athanasius had been mainly concerned with framing the violence in Theonis as a prelude to his own voluntary exile, Peter is much more concerned with showing that his exile is a fate shared and lamented by the majority of the *laos*. Not only are many of his priests and colleagues exiled to un-Christian cities, the *laos* itself risks exile if it even dares to merely lament the fate of its leaders. As such, the attack on the church is here being presented as a preliminary to the displacement and deprivation of Peter's people and as such prefigures the fate of the entire city. As Peter tells us, Lucius, thinking that he was acting in the interest of the emperor Valens, instituted a public tribunal for which no less than nineteen priest and deacons were arrested and accused.[249] A grievous abuse of Roman law, according to Peter.[250] The unlawful

[245] "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.2.
[246] Jürgens, *Pompa Diaboli*, 1-34; R. Lim, 'Consensus and Dissensus in Public Spectacles in Early Byzantium', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 24 (1997) 159-179; W. Weismann, *Kirche und Schauspiele: Die Schauspiele im Urteil der lateinischen Kirchenväter unter besonderen Berücksichtigung von Augustin* (Würzburg 1972).
[247] "Theater", in: G. Bowersock et al, *Late Antiquity*, 719-720.
[248] "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.14.
[249] Ibidem, 4.19.4.

tribunal presents the captured clerics with a test which imposes new boundaries that the faithful are expected to cross if they want to maintain their place. Palladius tells them that if they subscribe to Arianism they will maintain their wealth and gain further honour from their emperor. But if they refuse they will instead risk punishment, chains, racks, scourging and imprisonment.[251] Furthermore they risk being deprived of property and to be driven in exile to "savage regions".[252] Such a test is of course a classic trope, visible in many martyrial *acta,* meant to show that for pious Christians the right belief in – and obedience to God – superseded any worldly concern whatever the costs. The trial is situated by Peter at what would have been a particularly recognizable place in the Alexandrian cityscape: the baths, a place which Christians were supposed to shun, again for its the association with some of the central imagined tenets of pagan morality: promiscuity and nudity.[253] Indeed for Christians hardly a place to conduct a secular trial, let alone a trial attempting to convict men dedicated to the service of God. Following the example of the martyrs closely, the accused of course refuse to comply. Lucius and his accomplices are forced to organize another trial. In the portrayal of the second trial the author again resorts to theatrical imagery: a show trial, with staged "cries" raised against the accused by "idolaters and Jews".[254] When the trial finds the accused guilty, Peter tells us that under threat of drawn swords, the convicted are forced to board a ship with no provisions. He claims however that the sea was hardly willing to receive such pious men on its surface, being all a foam, as if it wished to have no part in such an unrighteous exile. The city, here again represented as a collective unity, laments the exile of its holy men, but the persecutors forbid its citizens from displaying their emotions publically and privately. If found out, they risk tortures only "normally inflicted upon criminals", and exile to the mines of Phennesus and Prokonnesos.[255] Their possible fate is prefigured by that of their community leaders. After being transported across the sea, the exiled priests and deacons reach equally desperate places. After a framed enquiry by the persecutors, the eleven bishops of Egypt are exiled to Dio Caesaria, a Jewish city according to Peter: no place for pious Christians according to Peter's frame of mind.[256] Also a number of monks are deported to Heliopolis, being quintessentially pagan place according to Peter, and in its natural constitution unsuitable for men of such piety.[257] Indeed these places are presented by Peter in such a way as to stand in the starkest contrast to the Christian city of Alexandria that is left behind. Heliopolis especially is said by Peter to be:

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[250] Ibidem, 4.19.4.
[251] "Consider well these arguments; come willingly; away with all delay; subscribe the doctrine of Arius preached now by Lucius, (so he introduced him by name) being well assured that if you obey you will have wealth and honour from your prince, while if you refuse you will be punished by chains, rack, torture, scourge and cruel torments; you will be deprived of your property and possessions; you will be driven into exile and condemned to dwell in savage regions.", in: "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.4.
[252] "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.4.
[253] On Christian views of the bathhouse, see: Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 176-179; "Bathing", in: Bowersock et al, *Late Antiquity*, 338; Schöllgen, 'Balnea Mixta', 182-194; Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, 22-39, 199-206.
[254] "Letter of Peter of Alexandria", 4.19.7.
[255] Ibidem, 4.19.9-10
[256] Ibidem, 4.19.4.
[257] Ibidem, 4.19.7.

> (…) A place where none of the inhabitants , who are all given over to Idols, can endure so much as the name of Christ. Where each man is given over to superstition, where flourish the devils ways of pleasure, geographical location: surrounded by all sides by mountains, fitted with terrifying lairs of beasts.[258]

And last, Peter stresses that, like the Athanasian community, his *laos* was not alone in its suffering. It was shared by Christians in all corners of the empire. Indeed as Peter presents it, all those who acknowledge Peter's legitimacy run the risk of facing the violent zeal of his opponents.[259] Peter attempts to make this idea of shared communal suffering concrete by reiterating for his audience the fate of a certain Roman deacon. Damasus of Rome had sent a deacon bearing letters of consolation to the aggrieved Alexandrian Christians. The deacon however was intercepted by Palladius, and paraded through the city in chains as if he were a common criminal, before being dispatched to the copper mines of Phennesus.[260] Correspondingly, Peter postulates that the appeals and enquiries of the persecutors could hardly be trusted. The aforesaid bishops especially had been the victims of their opponents "evil" and "venomous" communication.[261] Now, we know that Peter eventually found refuge with Damasius in Rome.[262] If the letter should indeed be considered an effort at negotiating Roman support, the fate of a Roman deacon would have resonated greatly among its intended audience, and would have made the extension of victimhood particularly real and palpable for a Damasian audience. By framing inclusion in such a way, the letter would also have seriously precluded any attempt by Peter's opponents to contest his victimhood. After all, he was not the only victim, Damasus' community had itself been victimized as well.

The success of Peter's letter cannot be underrated, even though the precise circumstances surrounding his exile and return are murky to say the least. Though he had been expulsed by Palladius from Alexandria as soon as he had assumed his office, it was to take less than a year for him to return to Alexandria.[263] After producing the encyclical, Peter found refuge in Rome with his ally Damasius, who had long since faced a quite similar conflict with his opponent Ursicinus.[264] The reference to the fate of the letter-bearing Roman deacon is interesting in this respect, because it was likely meant to incite Damasius and his followers to support Peter, and evoke the memory of its own conflict with the followers of Ursicinus. Eventually Peter managed to travel back to Alexandria and his opponent was driven out by means of popular threats. Nevertheless the conflict was to continue at least until the year 380 CE, with two bishops jostling to improve their control of Alexandria.[265]

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[258] Ibidem, 4.19.9.
[259] Ibidem, 4.19.11-14.
[260] Ibidem, 4.19.10.
[261] Ibidem, 4.19.12-14
[262] T. Carter, *The Apollinarian Christologies: A Study in the Writings of Apollinarius of Laodicea* (London 2007) 412; Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 53-54
[263] 378 C.E., according to: Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 53-54
[264] For the conflict between Ursicinus and Damasus, see: N. McLynn, 'Christian Controversy and Violence in the Fourth Century", *Kodai* 3 (1992) 15-44; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 58-59, 72-75, 82, 85.
[265] Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 53-54.

4.3. The Athanasian Model of Religious Victimhood

By means of a comparison between the Athanasian letters and Peter's, it is now possible to extract what appears to have been a typically Athanasian model for articulating victimhood and negotiating exile in an ecclesiastical context. The model contains a number of elements. Most prominent in all the letters is the continuous use of the now well-established register of persecution. Its martyral language, signs and symbols dictate the forms of violence described in the letters, the character description of the protagonists and their enemies, and provided a range of familiar topographical settings for the martyral drama, most prominently the bathhouse, the temple, the theatre, and last but not least, the church. All would have resonated greatly with a Christian audience, and more specifically an episcopal audience, who would have been brought up with the stories of martyrs and whose personalities were believed to embody the quintessential moral qualities of Christian belief. Indeed, it was the familiarity, the "horror that was known" that gave it strength.[266] People were conditioned to know what to expect in such stories but also what to take out of it. Besides, the church was a bishop's quintessential place: what better way to unrighteous expulsion by referring to the grievous fate of the church in its aftermath?

The Alexandrian letters follow a very specific narrative structure. First of all, there is the sudden and reasonless introduction of uncanonically appointed outsiders, often either with the support of worldly authorities or despite the lack thereof. The outsider is dependent on 'foreign' and 'unchristian' support, as well as being portrayed as un-native to Alexandria. Not only is the intruder's own character un-Christian, those of his accomplices are described explicitly as being unchristian as well. Furthermore, the culprit and his associates are described as explicitly rallying and organizing a mob for violence: they bribe, they pay, they incite and give command. The mob similarly consists of societal outsiders, mainly Christianity's significant others, most prominently hermeneutically constituted Jews and pagans, whose fantastical behaviour is meant to represent the antithesis of behavioural norms and values of good Christians.

In response to this threat, the pious congregation, representing what is considered to be the only true and homogenous population of Alexandria, flocks into its basilicas and engages in pious and unisonous worship, as an exact opposite to the impious behaviour which is posed to breach the basilica. As such, the boundaries harden and take on a concretely material shape in the form of the church building. Prior to the violent entry, the building serves as a spatial microcosm for an imagined Christian community which helps segment them more clearly from the rest of Alexandria. There is no mention of Christians who do not flock to the basilica, or of the impartial behaviour of other religious communities. Each group inhabiting Alexandria is imagined to be directly involved in the violence that is about to occur.

[266] Groebner, *Ungestalte*n, 64.

More neutral categories are consciously left out of the map because they represent a sort of grey area of involvement and impartiality which threatened to seriously undermine for an audience the valance of the imagined boundaries. Indeed the boundaries between inside and outside are drawn up as sharply as possible.

The violent entry of the extraneous mob degrades everything and everyone the community holds dear. It dissolves that imagined boundary and sketches for the audience the dire consequences of a more permeable boundary. The described violence also specifically targets spaces and objects which are implicitly deemed to be more holy than others. These usually included spaces and objects which are either used by the priests to mediate with the divine, or which are used to initiate new members to the community. Also, these are usually objects and spaces which by means of violence are presented as clearly separate from the rest of the general space of the church: for example baptisaries, altars, storage spaces and points of entry (doors, chancel rails). The depicted violence also singles out people who are equally considered to be more holy then others, and who are meant to be representative for the entire Christian community: priests, deacons, monks, bishops and virgins. They inhabit the more sacred spaces in the topography of the church, and in the larger space of the city. People whose sanctity and moral quality is considered to be unblemished are nevertheless shown tarnished by external force.

The attack is further imagined as transforming church space from a privileged site of Christian piety and holiness into an imaginary pagan space which is given significance by imaginary forms of pagan behaviour. As we have seen, in the *Epistola Encyclica* the church is transformed into a pagan temple and in Peter's encyclical it is transformed into a theatre. These are significantly dichotomous spaces to the imagined Christian space. More specifically it was believed that these were spaces where no proper Christian should be found. However this transformation also has a distinctly different function in that it represents ultimate consequence of displacing a canonically chosen bishop from his proper place, and of replacing him by a heretical and uncanonical intruder. Furthermore, the transformation stands symbolical for the fate of the entire people of Alexandria and the city they inhabit. The spaces to which they are debarred are now remapped as being no longer Christian. Having gained control of the churches, the intruders test their original occupants' resolve either by inverting the meaning of the boundaries or by imposing new ones. Compliance to their doctrines, or sharing communion, means one is able to maintain one's place in Alexandrian society and have access to communal worship in the captured churches. Refusing the appeals of the persecutors means exclusion, from church, society and the city, torture and death, but also loyalty to the true orthodox, the deposed bishops and hence God himself.

The transformation of the church, and the displacement of its *laos* and presbyter, are presented to the audience as crimes which affect all and which leave no room for impartiality. As such, the audience is urged to feel itself included within the boundary the author has erected and whose breach is so visually described in the letter by means of the imaginary space of the church. Accordingly, in each of the letters,

the audience is urged to take action on what is now imagined to be its own community's behalf. Naturally, similar attempts by the opponents are pre-empted, not so much by contesting the veracity of their reports, but more specifically by contesting the manner and circumstances in which they are communicated. The explicit representation of their opponent's participation in the politics of victimhood is also meant to further underline and testify to the violence that the congregation is daily subjected to, and as such the opponent's letters become visible and tangible proof of persecution.

4.4. Transforming Constantinople: John Chrysostom's Expulsion

It would be a mistake to conclude that the model was exclusive to an Alexandrian setting alone. In the course of the 370s, and especially after the Nicene victory at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, the model was used increasingly by other church men in other parts of the empire as well. It's use usually conformed to its traditional epistolary form. John Chrysostom's letter to pope Innocent and the bishops Venerius of Milan and Chromatius of Aquila, written during his exile in 404, is one such example.[267] The letter can be found in two separate sources. One version survives in the church history of Sozomen of Bethlehem.[268] The other is appended to Palladius' *life of St. Chrysostom*.[269] The latter version is especially interesting because Palladius had been a member of the party which had delivered the letters to its various recipients in Italy and he may have also had a role in translating John's letter into Latin.

The addressees of the letter are equally interesting. The fact that the letter is addressed to the bishop of Rome is reflective of the fact that from Athanasius onwards appeals of protest and those concerning other disputes were more frequently addressed to the bishop of Rome. Not being directly involved, yet greatly influential, the pope of Rome was the opportune mediator, and had increasingly the authority to urge western bishops to action even though he still lacked the prestige and concrete authority of later ages.[270] The other recipients, Chromatius and Venerius, were equally important. They were in control of two of the other most prestigious sees in Italy. The latter especially, would often find himself close to the ear of the emperor Honorius, and controlled the prestigious see of the great Ambrose himself.[271] Ambrose's authority had partly been based on his heroic resistance against an nominally Arian court in Milan, a tradition which Venerius very much inherited and which he now used to solidify his leading position in the Italian church. However, , the context of John's letter is quite different in comparison to the peculiar circumstances in which the Alexandrian letters were written. Indeed, John's

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[267] John Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent* [*Epistola ad Innocentium*], ed. & trans. A. Malingrey (Paris 1964).
[268] Sozomen, *HE*, 8.21.23.
[269] Palladius, *Life of John Chrystostom*, 57-58 (2).
[270] G. Dunn (ed.), *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity* (New York 2005) 1-18, 96-98; G. Dunn, 'Roman Primacy in the Correspondence between Innocent I and John Chrysostom', in: *Giovanno Crisostomo. Oriente e Occidente tra IV e V secolo* (Rome 2005) 687-698.
[271] F. Montgomery-Hitchcock, 'Venerius, Bishop of Milan', *Hermathena* 71 (1948) 19-35; Dunn, *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, 95.

letter is itself not really as concerned with doctrinal matters as the previous letters were. The conflict narrated in John's letter was not about theology, but more about power and authority in the eastern church. His was a conflict of precedence, not orthodoxy.

John's main opponent in this struggle was the Alexandrian patriarch Theophilus.[272] The latter had used the prestige gained by his two predecessors to slowly build up his control over the eastern church. However, his rise to prominence had clashed with the interest of the now equally important John who controlled the important imperial see of Constantinople. The subsequent manoeuvring of the two can best be summarized as follows. First, Theophilus, had been summoned to Constantinople in order to be judged for his alleged mistreatment of some Christian monks. However, Theophilus managed to manoeuvre himself clear from the accusation and at the Synod of the Oak succeeded in invoking the sentence of exile on his opponent John by associating the latter with Origenism: a proof-less accusation, but effective nonetheless.[273] Fortunately for John, the emperor Arcadius quickly revoked the sentence and shortly after recalled him from exile. To straighten matters out, Arcadius ordered a new synod to be convened, again in an attempt to take away the tension between Theophilus and John, an action the former interpreted as John's latest manoeuvre to throw him out of office. Theophilus however could not stand idle now that his enemies under the leadership of his opponent John were attempting to judge him like a common criminal. He responded by gathering around him a large group of supporters, many of them shipped in from Alexandria, and in doing so managed to sway the consensus more firmly in his favour.

Once again, Chrysostom found himself accused. His defence was not helped by the fact that he had derided the emperor about the pagan rituals surrounding the instalment of a statue of the empress Eudoxia.[274] A reprimand the emperor did not quickly forget. Besides, John had further undermined his position with the imperial couple by clashing with their new personal favourite, the cathedral preacher Severianus, who had slowly gained increased influence at court after John's clash with the emperor.[275] Perhaps much more importantly, John had previously made a number of forays outside of his jurisdiction. Before his clash with Theophilus, John had toured the eastern dioceses and had managed to depose no-less than sixteen bishops and had replaced these with bishops more loyal to his cause.[276] Now with a considerate number of these alienated opponents arrayed against him, there was little room left for John to manoeuvre. After his opponents organized a trial which found him guilty, John was in turn violently

[272] On Theophilos, see: Socrates, *HE*, 16; J. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom. Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca 1995) 200-236; N. Russel, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (London 2007) 3-44; and violence: J. Hahn, 'The Conversion of the Cult Statues: the Destruction of the Serapeum 392 A.D. and the Transformation of the City of Alexandria into the "Christ-Loving" city', in: Hahn (ed), *From Temple to Church*, 335-366.
[273] Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 211-227.
[274] Ibidem, 238.
[275] Ibidem, 181-190.
[276] Ibidem, 163-180.

removed from his basilica in Constantinople and driven into exile. John was never to return.[277] He was exiled to a variety of places, each time because, even in exile, John still managed to exert his influence over eastern affairs. The Caucasus was eventually too much for John. He died there in the year 407.

John's letter, distributed from his first place of exile in Cappadocia, closely follows the Alexandrian model set out above. But as we shall see its contents nevertheless reveal a number of personal touches. The letter mostly ignores the other issues which contributed to John's exile and only focuses on the actions incited by Theophilus. Following the Alexandrian model closely, John begins by describing the unordinary procedures leading up to his first exile. He describes how Theophilus' entry into Constantinople was anything but normal. He does not follow the normal procedures for entering the church and the city. He does not announce himself, nor does he join mass in John's basilica, as any visiting colleague was supposed to do.[278] When he is asked to appear before trial, Theophilus presents the extraordinary claim that bishops should not be judged beyond the borders of their respective provinces.[279] Uncanonical of course, because Sardica had long since vindicated the legitimacy of such procedures.[280] Then, Theophilus and his followers retreat, and strike up camp outside the city as if they are a besieging army.[281] Feeling secure, Theophilus ignores the pleas of his opponents to be judged, and incites the clergy to hand in "dishonest petitions" against John.[282] Again, the contents of these petitions do not really matter for John, what matters is the mischievous circumstances and efforts by which the petition gathering takes place. Also, by attempting to organize John's removal, Theophilus now does the exact opposite of his earlier defence against being judged by John, by now hypocritically attempting to judge a bishop outside his own province. Unfortunate for John, Theophilus's ploy is successful: John and his supporters are forcefully driven from the church (at the *Synod of the Oak*).[283] When word of the uncanonical expulsion reaches the emperor, he orders John's immediate return.[284] Sensing the ground slipping away below his feet, Theophilus makes a pre-emptive night-time escape and flees the city in turn.[285] But after a while, the emperor also choses to recall Theophilus.[286] The game starts anew. Again, Theophilus manages to "chain up" a number of new accusations which he spreads among the assembled clergy and officials.[287] But contrary to normal procedures, Theophilus refuses to hand over the indictments to John's party who as

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277 Ibidem, 250-285.
278 "(…) moreover when he set foot in the great and divinely beloved Constantinople he did not enter the Church according to the custom and the law which has prevailed from ancient time, he held no intercourse with us, and admitted us to no share in his conversation, his prayers, or his society: but as soon as he disembarked, having hurried past the vestibule of the Church, he departed and lodged somewhere outside the city (…)", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 1.
279 Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 1.
280 See, ff201-203.
281 Chrysostom, Letter to Pope Innocent, 1.
282 Ibidem, 1.
283 Ibidem, 2.
284 Ibidem, 2.
285 "Theophilus secretly at midnight flung himself into a boat, and so made his escape, taking all his company with him.", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 2
286 Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
287 Ibidem, 3.

result have next to no knowledge of the charges laid out against them.[288] Hardly having a change to defend himself in such uncanonical procedure, the emperor, believing Theophilus's story – he did not have John's version of events after all –sentences John to be removed from his church. Of course, John couldn't flee in the dead of night like his opponent did and abandon his flock to the whims of a tyrant.[289] The righteous stay put and await the violence confronting them.

John depicts Theophilus as having all the familiar traits of an ecclesiastical tyrant who, for no apparent reason, uncanonically intrudes upon a pious city. He incites the clergy against John, and mobilizes violent force against him.[290] Like Peter's Lucius, Theophilus is not proceeded by clergymen, but by soldiers who march in front of him, just like they did in front of the arch heretic Paul of Samosata.[291] Furthermore, his actions are portrayed as being so immensely unlawful that they would not even have been condoned in a pagan court nor even by barbarian judges.[292] Besides, Theophilus' actions are described as even surpassing the villainy of pagans and barbarians.[293] And of course, according to John, his own unlawful expulsion could have only been perpetrated against the wishes of the emperor. John believed that had he been able to defend himself, the emperor would not have possibly made such a mistake.[294] Of course, such a suggestion is meant to put the emperor into a difficult position by implicitly introducing the question whether or not the emperor really wished to be responsible for the crimes perpetrated against the pious John and persecution of his followers. If not, he is urged to take action immediately, otherwise he risks being portrayed as a persecutor.

As in the Alexandrian letters, the violence in the church again manages to transforms it into a different space. John describes this transformation as follows. Suddenly, on the "great Sabbath", and under "cover of night", a dense troop of soldiers surrounding the sanctuary breaks into the church.[295] John compares the violent entry with the entry of a besieging army, with "every kind of outrage (…) committed as if it was a barbarian siege".[296] Exempt categories of people are singled out. The clergy are violently driven from the church.[297] Women from the oratories who have stripped themselves for baptism flee in terror not even being permitted to put on the "modest apparel which befits woman".[298] Much worse, many receive wounds, and the baptismal pools are filled with blood, "the sacred water reddened by it".[299] The intruders, some of them unbaptized, even dare enter the church's most holiest places.[300] Some

[288] Ibidem, 3.
[289] Ibidem, 3.
[290] Ibidem, 1, 2, 3.
[291] "(…) nor were they ashamed to have soldiers instead of deacons marching in front of them.", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
[292] Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 4.
[293] Ibidem, 1, 3, 4.
[294] "And these things were perpetrated contrary to the intention of our most pious Emperor (…)", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
[295] Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
[296] Ibidem, 3.
[297] Ibidem, 3.
[298] Ibidem, 3.
[299] Ibidem, 3.

even enter the place where the "sacred vessels" and "most holy blood" of Christ were stored.[301] In the confusion the soldiers even spilled the blood of Christ on their garments.[302] Such images easily evoked for a Christian audience the idea of blood sacrifice in a pagan temple. Not by the sacrifice of animals, but of people, whose bloodletting equals that of the sacrifice of Christ. Again this is an old and common trope in early Christian literature, only here translated to a very distinct environment. It recalled for his audience what in old martyr texts is often called a "baptism by blood" and stressed the sanctification of the martyr by his or her imitation of the suffering Christ.[303] It's use supported the argument that John's community was perpetuating the Christian narrative of martyrdom and resistance in which each of the key players had a particular role to play. The comparison between the invasion of the church and sack of a city by a barbarian army is equally interesting, especially for what is to follow. Sieges had always been portrayed as especially gruesome affairs accompanied by death, destruction, plunder and even cannibalism.[304] But for the audience this comparison might perhaps have had even more, and perhaps quite specific connotations. Likely, John's audience would have still remembered the violent invasions of the Goths in northern Italy at the start of the fifth century, and also the destruction wrought to many a Balkan city in the 370's.[305] Even Constantinople had been threatened. What these violent images framed around themes of invasion and siege warfare did was to further enhance for an audience the impression of Theophilus being an outside interloper who only manages to force his way into the city and church by means of violent barbarian force.

Subsequently, and following the Alexandrian model closely, John provides us with is an elaborate description of exile and displacement. What is being postulated in this description is a symbolic link between the 'siege' and 'sack' of the church, as if it is a besieged city, and the persecution and behaviour of the culprits in the actual space of the city space itself. The key word here is again 'displacement'. John writes that besides himself more than forty bishops are expelled from the city and the common people are "driven into the wilderness" and "emptying the churches".[306] The exiled bishops leave behind a city in sorrow and lamentation whose religious topography and infrastructure is thrown into confusion.[307] Indeed a veritable topography of tears. In this new topography, the *laos* cannot join the unrighteous Theophilus and his allies. Nor can they 'cross the boundary' by joining communion with the intruders. The churches remain empty and the Constantinople's Christian populace remain obstinate in supporting their true shepherd. John records how after his involuntary departure, instead of pious services, tears are shed

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300 Ibidem, 3.
301 Ibidem, 3.
302 "(…) and the most holy blood of Christ, as might happen in the midst of such confusion, was spilt upon the garments of the soldiers aforesaid (…)", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
303 Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 16; Origen, *On Martyrdom*, 30.
304 F. Urban, *Belagerungsschilderingen. Untersuchungen zu einem Topos der antiken Geschichtsschreibung* (Göttingen 1966); Lee, *War in late Antiquity*, 223-326, 133-138.
305 On Gothic campaign and atrocities in the Balkans, see: P. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford 1998) 130-138; Palladius, also speaks of Thracian *juvenes*: Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 192.
306 Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
307 Ibidem, 3-4.

everywhere, in houses, in market places, in the desert, as well as in every part of Constantinople.[308] Surprising however is that according to John, the Christians were not alone in lamenting his exile. He tells us that even the heretics, Jews, and pagans sympathized with John's fate and shared in the Christians' grief.[309] As such, John's exile had left no one unmoved, not even Christianity's other. Indeed, as John narrates it, everything was in a state of confusion and lamentation 'as if the city was captured by force'. Now with the city under foreign control, the Christian *laos* migrates "outside the walls, under the threes and groves, celebrating the festival [the Sabbath] like scattered sheep".[310] In the end, not only did John found himself displaced, but his *laos* was displaced as well. In a city controlled by heretics, there is naturally no place for 'proper' Christians.

John's reference to the lamentations of pagans, Jews and heretics is quite surprising, especially when we consider John's background and previous posting. We have seen how in the Alexandrian letters pagans, Jews and heretics were presented as the quintessential societal outsiders whose violence breached the integrity of the church. In these letters, these specific religious groups are imagined to belong firmly outside the space of the city which is meant to be inhabited by Christians alone. In John's letter however, these groups are not specifically presented as outsiders alone, but as legitimate inhabitants of the city on the hand, and as part of the same *emotional community* as Christians on the other. Furthermore, John's inclusion of these 'others' onto his imaginary map of Constantinople is particularly interesting when we take into account the manner in which John had mapped these groups previously. During his short time as presbyter in Antioch, John had showed himself to be a fervent opponent to any form of religious boundary crossing.[311] In his fervently anti-Jewish sermons he had admonished the Christians to strike their fellow believers on the cheek if they but dared to interact with Jews or dared enter their "robber's dens and dwellings of evil".[312] Similarly, in his other sermons, pagans and heretics could equally count on John's polemical attacks. He had urged his congregation that contact with these groups had to be avoided at all cost. For John, such contacts were a venomous distraction to the Christian mind proper. Indeed, in Antioch, John had been much concerned with firming up the boundaries which separated Christians from these communities. In Constantinople however, the lamentations of these others are presented as surpassing such solid religious boundaries. The 'other', is even said to not only lament his departure but also the fate of its Christian neighbours. As such, John's exile and violence against his person, as well as the fate of his community, are here portrayed as being so exceptional that is even lamented by Christianity's greatest opponents.

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[308] Ibidem, 3.
[309] "(…) for owing to the immoderate extent of the outrage not only the sufferers, but also they who did not undergo anything of the kind sympathized with us, not only those who held the same opinions as ours, but also heretics, and Jews, and Greeks, and all places were in a state of tumult and confusion, and lamentation, as if the city had been captured by force.", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
[310] Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 3.
[311] See: Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 21-45; in general, see: R. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Eugene 2004); on vocabulary and imagery used against Jewish places of worship, see: L. Rutgers, *Making Myths. Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven 2009) 79-115.
[312] John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos orationes*, ed. & trans. by P. Harkins (Washington, D.C. 1977) 5.12.12.

Consequently, if the fate of John and his *laos* should not even leave Christianity's other unmoved, it should equally leave no Christian untouched, as John asks his audience: "I beseech your Charity to rouse yourself and have compassion. (…) May you be induced to exert your zeal on our behalf".[313] Furthermore, he warns his audience that the manner of his exile could some have serious consequences and not only for the community of Constantinople but for the *oikoumene* in general. He stresses that the calamity might turn the right order of the church on its head and create an endless stream of violence which will leave no one unaffected.[314] Also the severity and uncanonical nature of Theophilus's actions have left no room for impartiality. Or as John describes it, when evil is discharged from the "head", all might suffer.[315] Bishop will rise against bishop and the order of the church will disintegrate.[316] John claims that if no action is taken, and if certain people are allowed to enter "strange" dioceses, "an implacable kind of war will overrun the whole world".[317] Such support does reap its rewards of course. John is keen to point out that if help is indeed provided, each could expect to be rewarded by God for his pious support.[318] Just as John and the Christian *laos* had been thrown out of the church and city of Constantinople, the tyrant Theophilus and his accomplices must now be thrown out of orthodox *oikoumene*.

How to explain John's use of this this particular epistolary model? It might first of all be explained by the simple fact that the model had been successful in the past, and of course by the fact that by John's time it had long since become the typical format by which episcopal victimhood was expressed, especially amongst Nicene churchmen in the Greek-speaking east. However, there might also be a different and more peculiar reason why John might have specifically picked this particularly Athanasian model. As mentioned above, Theophilus authority in the east had been built on the prestige gained by his two predecessors. These had long been represented as having heroically resisted the ire of emperors and the violence of their heretical opponents. As persecuted confessors, they had been exposed to violence on many occasions which when overcome saw their religious authority greatly increase. The predecessors of Theophilus had seen their churches invaded, and had responded to these acts by writing letters according to the typically Alexandrian model of victimhood to express their innocence to the outside world. Similarly, they had faced exile, but had each time managed to come out victorious and return to their see. Hence, what better way for John to undermine his opponents use of such a legacy than by making explicit use of the same model of victimhood on which that legacy had been build. According to the Athanasian model, the mere association with violence in church space seriously undermined Theophilus' position as Athanasius' successor.

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313 Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 2, 4.
314 Ibidem, 4.
315 Ibidem, 4.
316 Ibidem, 4.
317 Ibidem, 4.
318 "Having considered therefore all these things, and having been clearly informed of all particulars by my lords, our most devout brethren the bishops, may you be induced to exert your zeal on our behalf; for in so doing you will confer a favour not upon ourselves alone but also upon the Church at large, and you will receive your reward from God who does all things for the peace of the Churches.", in: Chrysostom, *Letter to Pope Innocent*, 4.

Moreover, such an association threatened to place him firmly in long genealogy of church tyrants which included Athanasius and Peter's famous Arian opponents Gregory, George and Lucius. Furthermore, if we choose to read John's use of the Alexandrian model as part of strategy to undermine Theophilus's authority, the reference to the lamentation of the heretics, Jews and pagans over John's departure becomes equally interesting. Theophilus had been one of the main instigators of the religious violence which had plagued Alexandria in the 380s and 390s.[319] He had been responsible for the destruction of the pagan Serapeum in 391. By referring to the lamentation of these categories of outsiders, John is implicitly positioning himself as a better and more prestigious leader than Theophilus. John's presents himself as being so pious and righteous in his actions that even the Jews, pagans and heretics of Constantinople were impressed by his piety. And between the lines, If such categories of 'outsiders' are impressed, they might also be converted. Theophilus could claim no such thing. He had after all been responsible for all sorts of sectarian violence in his home town and had been accused of misuse of imperial power previously. As such, John's narrative carried an implicit warning. The chaos and lawless violence Theophilus had incited in Alexandria was well known, and he was now exporting it abroad, to Constantinople. The consequences are made explicit by John. With John's exile, Theophilus plunged another city into turmoil. Only this time it was the emperor's city. How could an emperor control an empire when lawlessness wreaked havoc in his own city?

As for a result, John did manage to invoke the support of pope innocent. The emperor's however remained absent. In response, Innocent wrote numerous letters of consolation and even organized a commission to the eastern capital to renegotiate John's exile.[320] However, the commission never actually managed to reach Constantinople and by the 410s, the Italian bishops had other things on their mind. Furthermore, Innocent himself would be displaced, not so much by doctrinal or jurisdictional conflict, but by the Gothic invasion of Italy and sack of Rome in 410.[321] He hardly had the time, and increasingly, the interest to gather support for John's cause. And even though John did manage, partly through the aid of Innocent, to gather the support of what was in effect possibly a larger number of bishops than Theophilus, without actual palpable support from the imperial couple any attempt at facilitating his return would be futile.

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[319] Hahn, 'The Conversion of the Cult Statues', 335-366.
[320] Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 247, 273-275.
[321] Orosius states that when the sack occurred Innocent was resorting in Ravenna, because like Lot, he could not see the destruction of the sinful people [Genesis 19:16], in: Orosius, *Seven books of history against the Pagans*, trans. by A. Fear (Liverpool 2010) 7.39.2; According to the church historian Sozomon, pope Innocent had been sent as an envoy representing Honorius' court in order to broker a deal between Alaric and the emperor. Though it is not entirely clear where this episode fits in with the overall chronology, nor whether Innocent was sent from Rome or to Rome, see: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 9.7; Zosimus, *New History*, ed. & trans. by R. Ridley (Sydney 1982) 5.45.

5. After the Custom of the Eastern Churches: 'Sacralization' and the Exclusion of Violence from Church Space

As we have thus seen, the Athanasian model was fashioned specifically for negating episcopal exile, and also how its representation of spaces, groups and individuals was tailored accordingly. But what of the more general consequences of the Athanasian's register's idiosyncratic act of mapping its protagonists and antagonists across the imagined spaces of city and church? To what extent did the act of mapping people and spaces by means of stories on church violence influence Christians' understanding of their own cultic topography? And can it even be said that the application of the Athanasian register, this particular model of Christian victimhood, or knowledge thereof, managed to restrict the use of violence in Christian cultic topography as well as violence against Late Antique churchmen? Indeed, to what extent did the register help argue for the exclusion of Christian architecture from worldly and state sponsored vis, as well as prevent obstinate churchmen from being exiled? Or to put it differently: to what extent did these letters re-map Christians' perception of their own religious space?

5.1. Sacred Space?

In the first chapter we have already seen how early Christian theologians had formulated Christianity as a religion of fundamental placelessness. As opposed to paganism's well-defined distinction in religious topography, between non-sacred space on the one hand, *locus sacer* – a place which had been given official consecration – and *locus religiosus* – a place being the object of private dedication – on the other, Christians not only lacked any uniform legal or scriptural definition of their religious attachment to space, but also lacked any clearly circumscribed relationship between the space of religious action and the believers performing it.[322] The community of Christ, early Christians had argued, had no need for any specific place, nor was it believed that the sanctity of God physically dwelt in the sites were Christ was venerated.[323] Of course, apart from the Jerusalem Temple, God was not believed to dwell in any single place. Instead, early Christians understood God and Christian sacredness to reside in the community of believers not the actual building or spaces that housed them. The only space which could be ascribed by Christians, especially from the later third century, at least some form of meagrely defined sacredness, did so only derivatively: the catacombs and graves housed the martyrs and their resting places were privileged sites for

[322] Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*, 14-45; On sacralisation of Christian and pagan space, see: B. Caseau, 'Sacred Landscapes', in: G. Bowersock, P. Brown & O. Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (2001) 21-59; on pagan distinction between *locus sacer* and *locus religiosus*, see: Bowersock et al, *Late Antiquity*, 677-678.
[323] Marcus, *The end of ancient Christianity*, 140; Tertullian, *De corona*, 9.2; also see Paul's assertion that the believers in Christ were themselves the temples of the living God [2 Cor. 6:16].

religious ritual and commemoration – sacred endeavours – but the actual space that housed their remains lacked such sanctity specifically.[324]

Building on the scholarly contribution of Robert Marcus, scholars have generally argued that a radical change in Christian mentalities to religious space took place from the reign of Constantine onwards. Constantine had promoted and sponsored the building of monumental spaces dedicated to Christian religious service and it is argued that this building activity was partly responsible for engendering a distinct change of spatial mentality amongst the Christian faithful.[325] But this was certainly not the only influence on changing Christian mentalities. According to Marcus, these changes had everything to do with a transformation in the manner in which Christians had started to remember their history, and more specifically, the extent to which this new perception coincided with Christians' view of the particular spaces and places *where* that history was remembered.[326] In the second half of the third century C.E., Christians had increasingly started to distinguish the time of martyrs was special and separated from their own. This rupture was caused, most and foremost, by the ritual actions surrounding the cult of martyrs. For Christians, the bodies of deceased martyrs radiated not only sanctity, but also a temporal division: their day of death, the *dies natalis*, was commemorated as a rebirth at their burial sites. What Marcus argues is that by means of the performance of such celebrations, time itself was sanctified as it connected the Christians in present with those who had heroically suffered in the past. As a Christian participating in those ritual acts of remembrance, he or she remembered the time of the martyr's sacred actions in a space: in most cases his burial site, but increasingly also the church in which the martyrs acts were commemorated in sermons and ritual. Such veneration of the martyr and his role in the scheme of sacred time, caused what Marcus calls "the localization of the past in the present", a process in which the "sacredness of space was a reflex, a projection on the ground, of the sacredness of time".[327]

The new topography thus created, which, from the fourth century onwards, included tombs, monumental church buildings and later also the relics of Christian saints, infused by sacred time, was not only built on the veneration of martyrs, their bodily and material remains, and their place in the scheme of sacred time alone. The relation between sacred time, i.e. *memory*, and the sacralisation of space, was also visible in quite a number of other Christian practices. According to Marcus, one of the most influential of these practices was of pilgrimage.[328] Starting from the reign of Constantine onwards, and specifically after his mother's visit to Palestine, the topography associated with biblical narrative, what we now call the 'Holy Land', came to be regarded ever increasingly as a space more special, more sacred, than any other. Following the footsteps of Constantine's mother's famous visit, many Christians had increasingly felt the

[324] Marcus, *The end of ancient Christianity*, 140; for Marcus, also see: R. Marcus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.3. (1994) 257-271.
[325] Marcus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?', 261-262.
[326] Ibidem, 265-266.
[327] Ibidem, 271.
[328] Ibidem, 261-264, 270.

urge to visit the places where the biblical episodes of the temporal drama of salvation had played out. As they visited those places and commemorated the biblical history and its protagonists there, they also participated in specific kinds of Christian ritual peculiar to those places, which in turn, sanctified those places even further. Again what happened as a consequence, according to Marcus, was that these places of pilgrimage became to be progressively envisioned and experiences as sacred as the "past became localized in the present". It was the memory of past human action, according to Marcus, which gave such places their religious significance and sacredness, which in turn seems to altered Christians' attachment to space in general.

But did the sacralisation of time and the concurrent sacralisation of space also result in an explicit doctrinal and legal exclusion of religious space from violent and damaging action? To be *sacer* is to be not of this world and thus firmly outside the damaging, polluting and disrupting grasp of worldly force. Marcus' had posited that Christian ritual space became sacralised by means of Christian memory and sacralisation of time, but wouldn't that also mean that Christian religious space, once sacralised, also became disassociated from worldly violence and force?

The violence described in the letters above would lead one to argue that this would have hardly been the case. If we are to understand the motives which the authors ascribed to the perpetrators of violence in church space literately, many Christian bishops, and more specifically, Christians in general, were ready to use violent force in church space whenever it suited their best interests and without much qualms. But on the other hand, the intrusion of church space, when it is described by the victims, is always presented as both highly problematic and horrific. Those images and the violence they presented had been meant to raise the ire and affront of the readers, to force them into action on the victims behalf and invoke similar forms of punishment on the exile's opponent. The violent transformation of the space imagined in those epistolary narratives, from a site of Christian ritual and people into an imaginary space of pagan worship or conduct also indicates that church space was increasingly considered as significantly different and typically Christian as opposed to other spaces in the rural and urban environments. In the letters, the church is presented as the churchman's, and more specifically the bishop's, quintessential space. Often such an assertion was accompanied with vocabulary which described the church as "Christ's temple" or more simply "God's house", which to some extent already stressed that the bishops place was special and to some extent holy.[329] The bishop's residence in the church has an effect on the worldly protection and integrity of his congregation as well the general piety of the city. It is imagined that once the righteous occupant has been forced out of his place, that place, under new leadership, will correspondingly transform into something else, into a place which is by any means unsuited for Christian ritual conduct and morality, and in which no proper Christian should and could be found. We have seen

[329] The general verdict is that the language used in such 'locus sanctus narratives" did not literally mean that the building was actually considered to be holy and sacred like pagan religious space, see: Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy', 263-264, note 31; also see S. McCormack, 'Locus Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity', in: R, Ousterhout (ed.), *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (Chicago 1990) 15, notes 42-43

how it was also imagined that his departure would cause the city to transform correspondingly from a space of piety into a space of persecution hostile to Christians.

Thus, in the imagination of the authors and their letters, the expulsion of a righteous bishop from his place, the church, threatened not only the religious integrity of the building, but also that of its congregation and the city they inhabit. Even more so, it was an affront to God. Indeed the church was presented as a space from which all violence should be excluded, even though the letters themselves also implicitly presented the opposing norm of the perpetrators that violence under some circumstances was allowed. Such a norm, allegedly shared by all the imagined perpetrators, was of course a fable. Even though the alleged perpetrators are described as having little reservations for violently molesting church space, they did in fact actively try to legitimate their actions and downplay the violence of which they were accused. For them the accusation of committing violence in church was indeed different, problematic and potentially damaging.

Interestingly, the peculiar semiotic relationship presented in the letters between the priest and bishop on the one hand, and the perceived religious integrity of the church – its exclusion from acts of violence – on the other, has also been vaguely hinted at in a number of scholarly interpretations of a rather different phenomenon but which equally involved the problematic nature of violence in church space: church asylum. Church asylum is a concept that technically denotes not only that refugees are safe from legal persecution in the confines of the church, but also that the space itself should thereby be excluded from worldly authority and *vis*.[330] This concept of legally excluding religious space from violence was by itself hardly new in the fourth century Christian empire. It has already been alluded to how in Hellenistic and Roman imperial times, temples could function as places where accused criminals and trespassers could find refuge. Such privileges of asylum where often circumscribed in clear legal fashion in enactments, edicts and much more commonly in the Hellenistic context, in inter-state treaties. Ignoring such grants of asylum, for instance by violently destroying the temple or forcing its refugee out, was considered an act of *sacrilegium* (gr. *assebeia* or *ierosylia*), or sacrilege, and was punishable by means of legal force. Perhaps worse for the intruder, such action was believed to irrevocably incite divine retribution. Whereas by the advent of the reign of Constantine, pagan asylum had already seen a steep decline, where it did survive until the fourth century, it gradually disappeared in the first two decades of the fourth century as Roman emperors gradually lifted those privileges in favour of similar forms of legal immunity and patronage to the Christian church.[331]

Clearly formulated legislation on church asylum was however hardly instant when Christianity gained legal force and potency from Constantine onwards. It took at least a another century for a more

[330] B. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca 1999) 25-41; Rigsby, *Asylia*, 1-29; for a concise overview, see: 'Sanctuary', in: Bowersock et al, *Late Antiquity*, 680.
[331] Perrin, "Sanctuary", 680; Rigsby, *Asylia*, 25-30, 574-586.

narrow and precise legal definition to emerge. Fourth century definitions were definitely rather vague. For instance, the council of Sardica had already formulated the ecclesiastical privilege that those who flee to the mercy of the church, *ekklesia*, could count on the presbyter's protection.[332] However, it is most likely that the word 'church', *ekklesia*, was still meant to have the more general meaning and as such referred to the institution of the church and the community of Christians in general, and not specifically to any actual building that housed them. It was the imperial constitution of 392 CE which, for the first time, referred to the church building specifically, but nevertheless still imagined it as a place only partially outside the embrace of worldly authority and its violent *vis*. The constitution proscribed that: "if public debtors should suppose that they may take refuge in the churches, they shall either be dragged of their hiding places at one or payment of their debts shall be extended from the bishop who (…) harboured them".[333] What the constitution attempts to clarify is that the refugee, once he flees into the church, correspondingly becomes the bishop's responsibility. However, despite the bishop's protection, the culprit can still be dragged out of his hiding place by the worldly authorities, but if the bishop refuses, payment shall be exacted on the bishop. In a sense, the constitution reflects the same sort of ambiguity concerning the use of violence in church buildings that we had already encountered in the texts surrounding the violent expulsion of bishops from churches. On the one hand, it is still imagined that under specific circumstances violent force can be used to force the culprit out to face justice. But on the other hand, the use of violence is only condoned when it is permitted by the bishop who provided the refuge with asylum in the first place. Correspondingly, the refugee and the integrity of the church building are imagined to be the bishop's responsibility primarily and not that of the worldly authorities even though episcopal church space was technically considered to be public space and thus fall under the emperor's authority. The church is ultimately the bishop's place. Also, what should be considered is that church space specifically is hardly defined and that the constitution lacks a clear 'map' of what constitutes the topographical and physical space of the church or not.

For a more detailed 'map' of church space to appear in asylum legislation, one has to wait at least until the fifth century. What the fifth century legislation on asylum seeks to do, as opposed to similar fourth century legislation, is to define as narrowly as possible the actual space of the church in which the refugee could find safety from worldly force. For example, the constitution of 419 CE decreed that persons who flee for the sanctity of church shall be safe within fifty paces outside the church door.[334] Any violation of the church by anyone would constitute the albeit already familiar crime of *sacrilegium*. Here it is of course unclear whether the worldly authorities would face the same charge and for the refugee himself it was equally unsure whether the fifty paces would result in him or her being banned from the interior church space completely. In any case, it allowed churchmen to keep the refugee outside of the spaces reserved for religious ritual and away from the altar, which if we are to take fourth century narratives on

[332] Canons (Council of Sardica 343/4 C.E), 7.
[333] *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.45.1
[334] *Constitutiones Sirmondianae* 13

asylum, like the Chrysostom's sermon on the asylum of Eutropius literally, the refugee was meant to embrace to guarantee his own safety.[335] This is hardly surprising, for we have already seen in the letters how its authors imagined the intrusion of outsiders into spaces specifically assigned to Christian rituals to be highly problematic and damaging.

Perhaps partially in response to such legal vagaries, a general constitution of 431 attempted to define the space of refuge and the responsibilities of host and refugee even further. It now proscribed that people who were "afraid" were to find protection in church buildings, at the altars and oratories, but also in the walled-off sections that included the priests' cells, houses, gardens, baths and other spaces adjoining the church's precincts.[336] Within the boundary of this more closely defined and more narrowly mapped out church space, the refugee was to follow strict rules. First of all he had to respect the designated places to which he had been assigned. What this respect involved is not exactly clear, but we might imagine that what is meant are actions or modes of behaviour which interfere with the ritual actions performed in the designated places. The refugee had to oblige the clergy, and if armed, give up any weapons he carried. A church was a place of refuge and divine worship in which no violence should be committed, so no arms should be found within its confines. If the refugee refused however, the worldly and ecclesiastical authorities had the right to call in armed men to expel the refugee from the precincts of the church. But note that again a certain ambiguity is present. The refugee should relinquish his arms, and if not, armed men could be called upon by both bishop and worldly authorities to force the culprit out by any means available. However, this would hardly exclude the church itself from violent force.

Also note that the problematic category of armed refugees was but one of many categories of people who had already been denied access to church's protective embrace. The laws of 397 and 398 CE had already promulgated that granting asylum to Jews should be denied, and another law of those same years explicitly forbade clerics and monks to harbour "robbers" (*latrones*), though in late antique discourse that could almost mean anyone who defied vested authority one way or the other.[337] Furthermore, the church building itself had already been much more narrowly defined by Theodosian legislators as being a place reserved exclusively for the Nicene Orthodox. The Council of Constantinople had not only reaffirmed Nicene doctrine as both orthodox and the official state religion, its enactment was also buttressed by the an accompanying proscription that *all* church buildings were to be handed over to the orthodox.[338] A novelty to say the least, not even Constantine and the heretical Constantinius II had not gone as far as to map Christian religious space to belong exclusively to the followers of one religious denomination in particular. They had merely selected prominent church building within the cityscape to

335 "(…)Wherefore did he forsake the Church? Didst thou desire to save thyself? Thou shouldst have held fast to the altar. There were no walls here, but there was the guarding providence of God. ", in: John Chrysostom, *Homilia in Eutropium*, trans. by W. Stephens (Buffalo 1889/2009) 2.1.
336 *C.Th* 9.45.4.
337 Ibidem, 9.45.2-3, 9.40.16.
338 Ibidem, 16.1.2, 16.13.

serve as ritual centres for their own doctrinal supports. Such choices of course, as testified by the letters above, often resulted in violence. But never did Theodosius' predecessors reserve church space exclusively for the supporters of their own religious denomination. For instance, Constantine might have condoned worldly authorities to use violent force against Donatist congregations and religious space when they blocked the return of repentant exiled priests, but after being confronted with the consequences and threat to public order involved with such actions, Constantine had immediately rescinded and had even allowed the Donatists to re-occupy their churches.[339] In the conflicts above the emperors had merely been interested in assigning church space to what was considered to be their proper episcopal occupants. In no way, were they interested in assigning church space to members of their own favoured brand of Christianity exclusively. And even after the council of Constantinople, the Western emperor Valentinian II and his mother Justina, in the so-called Basilica conflict of 385/6 CE, had in the end only been interested in assigning one of the Milanese churches to Arian worship. [340]

Scholars have been at odds to explain the gradual extension of the right of asylum in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries. For the most part, the specific development of church asylum has been ascribed to Christian authorities merely duplicating existing pagan practices in a similar fashion to how saints took on the roles and imagery of pagan deities, and also similar to the way in which Christians copied the language of pagan spatiality in their act of describing the sanctity of church space.[341] Conquering space meant imitating legal enactments and mentalities which had previously similarly excluded pagan architecture from worldly interference and *vis*. In the late 1930s an important correction to this view had already been presented by the French legal historian Pierre Timbal Duclaux de Martin.[342] He had argued that the origin of church asylum should not be sought in similar practices associated with pagan temples and shrines, but more so in the demands of the church as opposed to the imperial government and more specifically in the episcopal duties of late antique bishops. He stressed that the practice of asylum, as it developed in the fourth century, was intimately connected to the bishop's prime duties of intercession and proscription of penance. If the accused criminal sought clemency from the imperial authorities, his most effective action would have been to appeal to the intercession of the bishop. Strengthened in his role as patron and intercessor by the Roman authorities, the bishop would first prescribe penance to the criminal harboured by the church. This short interlude of proscribed penance would then be used by the bishop to appeal to the imperial authorities and negotiate a grant of clemency. Hence, according to Duclaux de Martin, the space of the church, and the safe refuge ascribed to it, merely served as a practical means for the bishop to exercise his prime episcopal duties without pressing infringement from the worldly authorities: after all God's authority exceeded all worldly authority. Of course, such refuge would force imperial authorities into a dilemma. Dragging the criminal out by means

339 See: Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 202-203, footnote 29; "Letter of Constantine to the Numidian Bishops", in: Optatus, *On the Schism of the Donatists*, appendix 10, trans. by O. Vassall-Phillips (1917/2006 Oxford).
340 Ambrose, *Ep*. 76.3.
341 Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, 37.
342 P. Duclaux de Martin, *Le droit d'Asile* (Paris 1939).

of worldly force would go against the concordance between bishops and worldly authorities, against God even, but compliance to asylum would substantiate the idea that the church stood outside the sphere of worldly law and authority: a notion that would in itself promote a dangerous relaxation of punishment. Surely a church was not a place where earthly law was suspended! No wonder, Duclaux de Martin argued, that at the end of the fourth century worldly authorities actively sought to limit the practice of asylum and define its legal application as narrowly as possible. However, he had also noticed that despite the concerted effort by the imperial authorities to limit the practice, by the end of the 410s, as we have already seen, the imperial attitude suddenly relaxed and asylum was promptly legalized and defined much more in favour of the church.

But how to explain this sudden shifting imperial attitude? Building on Duclaux de Martin's work, Anne Ducloux has tried to provide somewhat of an answer.[343] First of all, in her effort to answer this question, Ducloux subscribes to Duclaux de Martin's observation that the development of the practice of asylum had little to do with for instance any perceived sacralisation and related inviolability of the church as was described by Robert Marcus. Martyrs were important in the development of church asylum, but this had mostly to do with the inviolability of the altar sanctified by the martyr's relics.[344] Most importantly, she stressed, it was the capacity of intercession attributed to bishops to which the refugees appealed when they sought safe refuge in church space. She stresses that when Arcadius and Honorius legislated on asylum, they were merely influenced by the idea bishops had a role as intercessors and not so much by the idea of the church as a sacred space which should consequently be excluded from violence. It was the bishop who tempered the violence, not the actual space itself. Whereas there were many specific circumstances surrounding the extension of the right of asylum in 419 and 432 CE in which domineering bishops like Augustine pleaded fervently against imperial intervention, what in the end really tipped the balance according to Ducloux was popular practice and the pressures exerted by it. The emperors recognized the legality of the practice of asylum because it had already and long since been accepted by the general popular majority, as narratives such as the life of Martin, or sermons like the ones delivered by John Chrysostom on the eunuch Eutropius, Duxloux argues, show.[345] As such, the application of the practice of the asylum in the fourth century, and its description in ecclesiastical sermons and narratives, had prepared the ground for emperors to legislate on – and legitimize the long since accepted practice of asylum in the fifth.

Yet, despite the assertion that bishops functioned as patrons and intercessors and that this was the main influence on the development of church asylum, Ducloux however does not provide an answer as to why specifically the practice of asylum, and in general, the exclusion of violence from church space, had become commonly accepted by the end of the fourth century. Nor does she provide an answer as to

[343] A. Ducloux, *Ad ecclesiam confugere. Naissance du droit d'asile dans les eglises: IVe-milieu du Ve s.* (Paris 1994).
[344] See also: Bowersock et al, 'Sanctuary', 37.
[345] Ducloux, *Ad ecclesiam confugere*, 59, 86-103.

why specifically there was a general anxiety about using force in church space. She provides a number of fourth century texts, though none of those discussed above, as evidence for the assertion that the practice of asylum long since predated actual legislation, but does not really care to explain the origins or reasons behind the rise of that anxiety specifically. But to be fair this any case cannot be said to have been her purpose anyway: she wanted to investigate the pressures exerted by the populace and the church in the specific context in which the laws were issued. Hence, the exact reasons why the practice of asylum recurs so often in fourth century texts, as well as the most likely causes for the general anxiety of using violence in church space, remain obscure.

What I would say however is that many the fourth century texts, which can be said to attest to this anxiety, but which cannot be said to belong specifically to the epistolary genre discussed above, actually reveal an interesting congruence between the discourse in our letters and the model of victimhood they presented on the one hand, and the principle of asylum – the church as a place excluded from worldly violence and imperial enforcement – on the other. Indeed, as we shall see below, I believe that it is in these texts that the echoes of the Athanasian negotiation of victimhood, and its idiosyncratic act of mapping of space and people, can be heard most clearly. Next to spreading a sense of mutually shared victimhood as well as aiding substantially in revocation of involuntary exile, the Athanasian register offered late antique audiences and churchmen, a tested means in doctrinal struggles to actually prevent the worldly authorities from expelling an obstinate bishop and congregation from their proper place. In my view, not only did the model offer a way to present an expulsion and negotiate the return of the expelled churchman, it equally offered a set of behaviours and actions to prevent such frequently violent actions from taking place. Examples of such preventive modes of behaviour and the accompanying language are manifold and each testifies concretely to the distinct influence the Athanasian register had on the developing practice of excluding church space from violent and correspondingly also on the development of church asylum.

5.2. Rallying the Faithfull: The Sermon on the Passion of Saint Donatus and Advocatus

One important source in this respect is the late fourth/early fifth century CE Donatist *Sermon on the Passion of Saint Donatus and Advocatus.*[346] The sermon presents a somewhat of a partial answer as to why specifically there existed a general anxiety about using force in church space, as well as its relation to the Athanasian model and letters of victimhood we have discussed above. It also shows how that anxiety was used by threatened bishops and presbyters to rouse the congregants in the church's defence and ultimately try and prevent the authorities from using force. The historical backgrounds to the expulsion described in the sermon are very similar to those prior to Athanasius first and second exile as well as to the use of the

[346] *Sermon on the Passion of Saint Donatus and Advocatus,* trans. by. M. Tilly (Liverpool 1996).

model in the letters of Peter and John discussed above. The sermon describes a situation in which again two different churchmen, each representing a different uncompromising religious faction, were claiming the same episcopacy and were both invoking worldly and ecclesiastical support to displace their opponents from what they considered to be *their* basilica.

In 311 CE, part of the African clergy had refused to accept the ordination of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. They claimed that the man who had ordained Caecilian, Felix of Abthungi, had been a *traditor* of the gravest sort.[347] In direct opposition to Caecilian, the Donatists ordained their own bishop Majorinus, and appealed to the emperor Constantine for recognition as the true Church in North Africa and demanded Ceacilian's immediate expulsion. In 312 CE Constantine instituted a commission of bishops at Rome to investigate both parties' claims.[348] But to the great consternation of the Donatists, the commission vindicated Caecilian's claim instead. Moreover, the commission decreed that sin could under no circumstance be passed on by ordination, nor would such ordination threaten to invalidate the sacrament. Furthermore, in 314 CE a commission of Gallic bishops again pronounced against the party of Majorinus.[349] However, Majorinus and his followers refused to accept and addressed another written complaint detailing the charges against Caecilian and Felix, to the governor of Africa.[350] The governor was not impressed, and claimed that the evidence presented against the two had been forged.[351] Business dragged on into the fall of 316 CE. Caecilian had been vindicated as the legitimate bishop of Carthage but the Donatists kept refusing to give up their churches: a deadlock ensued which continued to spark riots in Carthage throughout the year.[352] Constantine, diverted by the urgent matter of pursuing Licinius' army, and now seeing that public order was purposely disturbed in Africa by the obstinacy of the Donatists, decided to consign what was in essence a religious quarrel to the realm of worldly law. On November 10, Constantine wrote to the Vicarius of Africa and ordered the immediate confiscation of the churches and property of Majorinus's party.[353]

What happened next would remain a point of heated discussion between Catholic and Donatist churchmen in the century that followed. Allegedly, on March 12, 317 CE, imperial troops had burst into the Donatist church of Carthage and wreaked havoc on its resident congregation. Contemporary accounts are absent, but the attack of the church is remembered vividly in in the so-called *Sermon on the Passion of Saint Donatus and Advocatus*: our one and only source for the event. The sermon narrates the terrible outrages committed in the church, the heroic resistance of the martyrs and the treatment and burial of the

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347 On the early Donatist Conflict, Caecilian's return and Constantine, see: Potter, *Constantine The Emperor*, 193-203; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 141-168.
348 Potter, *Constantine The Emperor*, 198-199.
349 Ibidem, 200-201.
350 Ibidem, 201-202.
351 Ibidem, 201- 202.
352 Ibidem, 202.
353Potter, *Constantine The Emperor*, 202-203; C.Th. 9.34.1; for this particular law and Constantine, see: J. Harries, 'Constantine the Lawgiver', in: S. McGill, C. Sogno & E. Watts (eds.), *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture 284-450 CE* (Cambridge 2010) 72-92, specifically, 84.

casualties afterwards. Quite surprisingly, the sermon never refers to an actual martyrdom of St. Donatus, but only to that of an anonymous bishop of Avioccala.

The sermon survives in two different 'Donatist' and 'Catholic' versions.[354] Its editor Jean-Paul Brisson claims that the original Donatist verison must have been preached in March 318 or 319, as part of the yearly anniversary of the event.[355] This is unlikely however. It is much more likely the sermon originates from later periods of Donatist persecution. Possible candidates for the date of the sermon are the second Donatist persecution which started in 347 and ended in 348 CE, the third which started in 373 and lasted at least until the later 380s, and the last which started in 411 and lasted well into the later 410s.[356] Without picking a conclusive date, I nevertheless prefer the latter three options for a number of reasons. First of all, the sermon was meant to be performed in in the very same space in which the violence had previously been perpetrated which indicates a more likely *terminus post quem* of 321 CE, the year when Constantine had suddenly rescinded on the persecution of the Donatists and allowed them to reoccupy their churches.[357] The sermon could not have been delivered in 318 or 319 CE simply because the church would still have been under the control of Caecilian. Secondly, in a number of fragments, the sermonizer responds directly to a number of unique accusations made by Optatus of Milevis against the Donatists in the 370s, most importantly, the accusation that those not killed by the sword cannot be martyrs in the true sense, and that the Dontatists had been guilty of church thrashing themselves.[358] The sermonizer, explicitly claims that those not killed by the sword can indeed become martyrs, but of course only if they died in a righteous cause, like in the interest of maintaining the purity of Donatist faith.[359] Equally, the sermonizer attempts to show his congregation that visual proof exists, in the very church where the sermon is delivered, that the Catholics did indeed invade Donatist church space in the past.[360] And last, the sermon's image of Donatist resistance against "Catholics" recalls the language of another, much later persecution, namely that of 410s when the Donatists were once again ordered to hand over their churches to their Catholic opponents.[361] Hence, it is likely that the sermon presents the heroic resistance of the martyrs of 317 CE against Caecilian and his co-conspirator Marcellinus as an example for the congregation facing a new persecution organized by yet another Marcellinus in 411 CE.

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354 Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 51-52.
355 J.-P. Brisson, *Automatisme et Christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine de Septime Sévere a l'invasion vandal* (Paris 1985) 310; Frend ascribed the sermon to the year 320, in: Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 321.
356 For an overview of the arguments used for dating the text, see: K. Schäferdiek, 'Der *Sermo de passione sanctorum Donati et Advocati* als donatische Selbstzeugnis', in: D. Papandreou, W. Bienert & K. Schäferdiek (eds.), *Oecumenica et Patristica: Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag* (Cologne 1989) 175-198.
357 Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, 202-203, footnote 29; "Letter of Constantine to the Numidian Bishops".
358 Optatus, *On the Schism of the Donatists*, 2 *passim*, for cleansing rituals specifically, see 2.18, 2.19, 2.21, 2.22. 6.4; also see: Augustine, *Epistola* 108, ed. & trans. by B. Ramsey & R. Teske (New York 2004); Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have* Christ, 119-121; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 187-192.
359 Optatus, *On the Schism of the Donatists*, 3.8.
360 "Here in the inscriptions, memory preserves the name of the persecution as Caecilianist until the end of time, lest after his episcopate the parricide deceive others who were not privy to the things done in his name", in: *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus,* 8.
361 For the persecution of Donatism in the 410s and its language, see: Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 244-299; Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have* Christ, 112-130.

But in any case, despite the fact that the sermon should be dated much later than the events it records, it is likely enough that it contains some elements of the original reports circulated after the event and which must have influenced Constantine to some degree that a less violent approach to the Donatists was preferable. But even despite that residue, all the evidence concerning its possible date of composition, as well as the specifically Athanasian model deployed to describe the violence in the church, would lead one to argue that in any case the sermon postdates the specific context of Athanasius' second exile in which the register was first formulated and took on its current form. Indeed the sermon contains many of the familiar elements of the Athanasian model. The only element which appears to be clearly missing from the sermon is the appeal to a general ecumenical form emotional inclusion, so typical of the letters in the east. Instead, what we do find in the sermon in place of it is the articulation of an emotional bond between the martyrs in the past, the Donatist victims, and the congregation, the audience, in the present. Like their heroic predecessors, the listeners are admonished to feel one with the Donatist martyrs in the past, and to flock to their church and defend it against the intrusion of a heretical bishop and his worldly supporters like the ones presented in the story.

Following the Athanasian model of episcopal victimhood and displacement closely, the author of the sermon begins by offering the historical backgrounds to the general conflict between the Donatists and the catholic authorities. He explains how the devil, the main culprit behind the events which were about to unfold, had failed to destroy the Christians in the previous persecution and had been at odds as to what ploy he should use next. Now that general state persecution had ended, he had noticed that Christ was nevertheless willing to receive repentant *lapsi* back into his fold, but only in exchange of penance.[362] But the devil also knew that the minds of the lapsed were fickle by nature and that Christ's mercy could easily be subverted if proper incentive was offered.[363] The sincerity of their penance was only superficial after all: once a *lapsus* always a *lapsus*![364] Not even penance could force these men back into the fold, the sermonizer believed. So the devil devised a cunning plan. He introduced a novel idea – new ideas always being the main source of heresy – namely that lapsed Christian presbyters could illegally hold clerical office again.[365] He recognized that the best way to ensnare the lapsed presbyters to his cause was by "royal friendships and earthly gifts" (read: imperial support and patronage).[366] The devil also introduced a new vocabulary to support his evil stratagem. Christ, the devil had observed, is a lover of unity, so, the devil exclaimed "let there be unity!": of course a pun to the imperial authorities' discourse on religious unity, which the sermonizer now presented in as much of a negative light as possible.[367] The purpose of the devil's vocabulary was to enforce age the old boundaries between sinners and pious. The sermonizer notes that in the latest phase of this age old conflict, the people who were in support of the devil's unity were

[362] *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus,* 1-2.
[363] Ibidem, 2.
[364] Ibidem, 2.
[365] Ibidem, 2.
[366] *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus*, 2; for Constantine's letter to Caecilian on the restoration of confiscated church property, see: Eusebius, *HE,* 10.5.15-17.
[367] *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus*, 3.

called "Catholics" and those refusing it falsely called "heretics".[368] One of those demonic "Catholics", the sermonizer notes, was Caecilian whom he dubs "a latter day Pharisee" and "a robber (*latro*)" and whom he stressed is accompanied by his accomplices the tribune Marcellinus, the dux Ursatius and count Leontius. With the aid of these men of violence Caecilian had decided to impose his rule on the African church.[369]

Like the antagonists portrayed in the Athanasian model, Caecilian then issues a law which calls for the African bishops to step down and for all Christians to subscribe to his rule.[370] Of course, the true Christians, the Donatist congregation, refuse and flock into the basilica to resist. In full support of their legitimate leadership and faithful to Christ, the people anticipating the coming slaughter "did not flee from immanent death, but fled undaunted to the house of prayer with a desire to suffer".[371] The communities of pious and lapsed are now clearly segmented by the walls of the church. In the church the pious engage in pious activities, only to be performed between those walls. Outside, the soldiers await to commit sacrilege. Then, as the congregation was gazing over the "sacred readings" the cohorts of soldiers had suddenly burst into the church.[372] As in the Athanasian model, the culprits are then portrayed as explicitly organizing the violence and arranging the force which is tasked to commit it and promising rewards for its effort: "bands of soldiers brought together to perform a crime, but as true mercenaries, only thinking of pay (…) exaction of blood according to some contract".[373] The violent entry of the soldiers into the church again breaches the boundaries between insiders and outsiders and manages to transform the church into a space meant to be anything but Christian. Also again the violence accompanying the transformation is portrayed explicitly and with graphic imagery as possible. Virgins are defiled, priests are slaughtered, the church plundered. "Everyone kept their eyes shut as each and every age group in the basilica was killed."[374] Some of the soldiers were armed with cudgels, but this should not fool anyone, the sermonizer warns his audience, because some of the victims had clearly been killed by swords: it was the sword of the tribune Marcellinus himself that was said to have pierced the throat of the bishop of Sicibila.[375] A nod to Optatus who had accused the Donatist of setting up false martyrs because these hadn't been killed by the cold steel of a sword blade nor shed blood.[376]

Again following the Athanasian model of victimhood closely, the author also decides to present the violence as transforming the church into inherently un-Christian space and also, now with its bishop killed, chooses to link this transformation to the general transformation of the city and the adjoined fate

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[368] Ibidem, 3.
[369] Ibidem, 2, 6, 9.
[370] Ibidem, 2.
[371] "Although the people of God might have anticipated the coming slaughter and known about it from arrangements being made, they did not flee out of fear of immanent death. On the contrary, they flew undaunted to the house of prayer with a desire to suffer.", in: *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus*, 6.
[372] "There faith grazed on the sacred readings, and prescribed fasts fed them with continual prayers.", in: *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus*, 6.
[373] *Passion of St. Donatus and Advocatus*, 6.
[374] Ibidem, 8.
[375] Ibidem, 7.
[376] Optatus, *On the Schism of the Donatists*, 3.8.

of the congregation. The violence not only turned the church into a literal bloodbath were fellow brethren would later find:

> (…) massacred bodies littering the grounds, children on the bodies of their parents, and parent on the bodies of their children, some holding their dead in their arms. People of both sexes were touching each other, lying there in such a manner as would not otherwise have been fitting.[377]

The basilica itself had also been transformed into a "tavern" where instead of "pious prayers" the space was now profaned by "impure deeds and illegitimate incantations".[378]

The transformation of the basilica into a temple, and more importantly, a tavern is reflected by fate of the unnamed city in general. In the sermonizer's description traditional images of a city in the grips of persecution are mingled with images pulled from the world of the tavern and banquet, and like the mingling of sexes in improper positions by the dead bodies in the church, the proper boundaries which were supposed to exist between the sexes, appear as dissolved. The faithful themselves, like the congregations in the Eastern letters above, face a test to either subscribe to the persecutor and join communion or be blocked from sacrament and church space. Or as the sermonizer puts it:

> If people hold firm. Judges are ordered to intervene, secular powers are forced to use coercion. Homes are encircled by battle standards, threats of proscription are launched against the rich, sacraments are profaned, crowds are bedecked with idolatry, holy assemblies are transformed into splendid banquets. (…).It is a crime even to publish what was done among those banquets of lascivious youths were despicable women were present.[379]

Of course, the persecuted choose to avoid the contagion of communion with the *lapsi* and remain obstinate in their resistance. Now faced with the pressures of a similar persecution, the congregation should heed the words of the sermonizer well. Not only does he admonish that they should equally flock to the church when danger threatens, they should also be ready to "be slain in the battle line as an adversary of the gentiles, [it] is victory" because, as sermonizer asserts, "to be killed by the enemy in our combat is triumph (…) only you can derive your advantage from the wickedness of others".[380] The sermonizer also attempts to collapse time and space by means of the very space in which the audience and sermonizer find themselves. As told above, the sermon is delivered on the occasion of the yearly anniversary of the martyrdoms in the very church in which the calamities had occurred. Similar to the actions of the Athanasian congregation as alluded to in the *Diamartyria,* the Donatsists had chosen to set up a written memento with a very similar purpose:

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377 Ibidem, 13.
378 Ibidem, 3-4
379 Ibidem, 3-4.
380 Ibidem, 14.

> I say it is between these walls so many bodies were cut down and buried. Here in the inscriptions, memory preserves the name of the persecution as Caecilianist until the end of time, lest after his episcopate the parricide deceive others that none such things had been done here.[381]

Together with the story narrated in the sermon, the inscription not only reminded the congregation of the heroic example of its martyrs, it also reminded them of their quintessential enemies in the present, the perpetrators, who, as henchmen of the devil and therefore quintessentially outsiders, should under no circumstance ever be allowed back into the church. Furthermore these roles, of devilish lapsed and persecutors in opposition to heroic Donatist martyrs, are presented as timeless and part of an eternal cosmic struggle between Christ and the devil. Each and everyone has a role to play in that struggle in both present and future. As such, those who lapsed, past, present and to come, are strictly mapped as belonging outside the space of the church, whereas the heroic martyrs literally become part of that space. It is imagined that the only way in which the lapsed could force entry was through violence. The congregation knows its role and recognizes that of its opponents in the present. In many ways, a spot on example of Marcus observation that in the course of the fourth century, sanctified time became localized in space through the remembrance of martyrdom.

As noted, despite the similarities to the Athanasian register, explicit references to episcopal exile and displacement, so peculiar to the letters discussed above, are missing. But whereas explicit references to episcopal exile and displacement are missing from the sermon, implicit ruminations on the consequences of episcopal displacement for the church, city and congregation are nevertheless present. The sermon does also reflect on the displacement of the congregation as a consequence of Caecilian's take over. Like in the Athanasian model, after the attack the congregation against faces a test: on the one hand communion with the intruders means that one is able to retain access to the physical place of the church, obstinacy on the other hand means displacement but also faithfulness to God. Images revolving around the transformation of church space are equally present. The sermon vividly describes the violent transformation of church space from a place of piety and "sacred readings" into place of death and banqueting. The violence transforms the church into tavern, an image which for Christians in general, and Donastist in particular, had a very specific meaning. The tavern was imaged as a place of pleasure where the different sexes easily mingled and morals were equally low.[382] Furthermore, the tavern was a place of economic exchange – always frowned upon by Christians – and carnal consumption of food and plenty. Like a tavern, the church had been transformed into a place where metaphorically speaking, the divine nourishment of the Eucharist is sold for money. The metaphorical image of the tavern and the connected

[381] Ibidem, 8.

[382] On the image of the inn and tavern in Classical, Jewish and Christian literature, see: T. Grossmark, 'The Inn as a Place of Violence and Danger in Rabbinic Literature', in: H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Peceptions and Practices* (Farnham 2006) 57-68; R. Knapp, *Invisible Romans. Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women … The Romans that History forgot* (London 2011) 240-256; K. Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2013) 60, 230.

imagery of the Eucharist for sale, was of course an implicit reference to the *lapsi's* imperial support through "lavish gifts" and patronage. By involving themselves with the worldly authorities and their material and political support, not only did the polluted hands of the *lapsi* transform the Eucharist into mere food, the Eucharistic food itself had been the product of a vulgar sale of church office and economic transaction. Now that the church had been turned into a tavern the same thing of course happed to the city which becomes a space in which profanity, sexual intercourse and worldly gluttony are plentiful whereas previously in the hands of the Donatists it had been a place of piety. As such, the transformation of church and city, and the general moral decline of its people, are being presented by the sermonizer as the ultimate consequence of introducing churchmen against the wishes of the congregation.

Of course, the main reason why explicit ruminations on exile and displacement are missing from the sermon can be explained by the fact its purpose is so much different from that of the letters. Whereas the authors of the letters, by means of its graphic imagery and constructions of victimhood, had tried to invoke ecumenical support in an effort to revoke involuntary exile of its presbyter, the Donatsist sermon is much more concerned with actually preparing its audience for an intrusion and displacement that will be equally violent. As such, the sermon is much more concerned with proverbially 'rallying the troops' and with the polemical defence against certain claims and accusations made by the sermonizer's catholic opponents than it is with renegotiating a bishop's return. Indeed, what the sermon tries to evoke amongst its audience is a 'militant' mentality and atmosphere where by means of the memory of a similar intrusion in the past, the congregants are mobilized to imitate the behaviour of their predecessors and flock to the defence of its church and presbyter when danger threatens. As their predecessors, they are exhorted to likewise engage in pious readings and ritual, and once the moment arrives, passively resist catholic intrusion by any means possible. For not only was the integrity of the church at stake, but also that of the community and city in general.

5.3. The Displacement and Return of Gregory of Nazianzus

As we have seen, the Athanasian register of victimhood often presents the culprits as mindless and violent automatons who are insensible to the grievous violence they are about to commit as well as to the negative consequences it will have not only for their own image. Such an image of the mindless outsider intruding upon a community which had no voice in choosing the newcomer as its leader nor in the deposition of its own, is of course a highly polemical construct. As noted it was fashioned specifically to present the displaced as the proper leader and to correspondingly negotiate his return. What can be observed in some fourth century texts however is that the 'perpetrators' of these type of intrusions, were often keenly aware of the risks involved. In fact, some of these intruders knew all too well how the congregation would respond and how, if uncontrolled, forced entry could result in violence and bloodshed. Furthermore, it appears that some 'intruders' were well aware of the consequences and the negative repercussions to their

own image, as the 'victims' of such assaults would keenly present their opponents as tyrannical persecutors in its aftermath. For example, one such 'intruder', Gregory of Nazianzus, was acutely aware of the mode of the piously militant behaviour displayed in the Donatist sermon and the eastern letters, and did, at least according to his own representation, everything in his power, to restrain his soldiers and mob from excessive force when they facilitated his entry into the Arian occupied of Church of the Apostles in Constantinople in 380 CE. [383]

Gregory's situation prior to his forced entry is interesting in this respect.[384] He himself had been on the receiving end of a similar intrusion roughly a year earlier. In 379 CE Gregory had seen his church invaded by a violent Arian mob and had subsequently been forced out by his opponent Demophilus, the Arian bishop of Constantinople and a "wolf hiding amongst sheep", into what was anything but a voluntary exile.[385] The assault on Gregory's church had taken place at an Easter vigil and had left Gregory and a number of baptismal candidates wounded and even a colleague bishop dead. In exile, Gregory had appealed to the court of Theodosius and had then delivered an emotional yet forceful oration in which he had presented himself as a helpless victim of a vicious attack.[386]

Convinced by Gregory's ardent defence and accusation, Theodosius decided to back Gregory and facilitate his return to Constantinople. But Gregory hardly faced a warm welcome:

> For the city was rebelling with such violence - a strong and terrible outburst of passion it was - that people refused to yield even if something unpleasant was likely to occur, but held on tight to what they controlled: the Church of the Apostles, hitherto in the hands of the Arians. If they were forced out they would let their violent anger loose on me who could easily be made to submit. (…) A seething mob of townspeople confronted them [Gregory and his party], like the sand of the seas or a snowstorm or the waves' ebb and flow, torn between anger and entreaties, anger directed at me, entreaties to those in power. The market places were full, the colonnades, streets, every place, two and three storey houses were full of people leaning out, men, women, children, the very aged. There were scuffles, sobbing, tears and cries, all giving the impression of a town taken by force. I, the hero and the commander.[387]

The exact manner of Gregory's return and entry appears to have been left intentionally obscure. Indeed it seems that every effort is taken to disassociate it from any explicit reference to violence. Gregory is of course keenly aware of how such entries would normally be presented, even though his aim was most and foremost to write elegant poetry. Nevertheless, his description of his entry is accompanied with images of war and a city under siege: images which we have also encountered in the letters above. But what Gregory does is turn the original meaning of such imagery, namely as part of the effort to map the newcomer as

383 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poem* 2 (*On his own Life*), ed. & trans. by C. White (Cambridge 1996) 1325-1341.
384 B. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York 2006) 3-26, 50-59.
385 "wolf hiding among sheep", see: Gregory, *On his own life*, 33.15
386 Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 62-63, 162-163.
387 Gregory, *On his own life*, 1314-1336.

warlike intruders, around to present himself as the city's proper leader. What he wanted his audience to know was that despite the fact that his entry was facilitated by worldly force, he did take effort to restrain it. He tells his readers how the emperor's soldiers had surrounded the church at midnight. He also reports how his entry was meted with "a terrible outburst of passion" and that the "seething mob" refused to yield the church[388]. Indeed it seemed as if all the ingredients for a massacre were in place. Gregory writes that he did eventually manage to enter the church but he also concedes that he cannot recollect the exact circumstances and details regarding this entry. Whether force was used is never told explicitly and is only hinted at. Gregory even claims that he never even had the intention to take up his seat as bishop of Constantinople but that it was only after immense pressure from "men in high position" and his congregation that he accepted his new position.[389] The reason why he presents himself as a unwilling candidate again has to do with the effort of contrasting himself as the church's proper presbyter with the episcopacy of the heretical intruder Demophilus. It was the people who choose Gregory as its presbyter, not a pagan persecutor or a heretic.

The idea presented by Gregory, that his actions proved him to be the right caretaker of the Constantinoplitan church, is exemplified for his audience by the manner in which he presents his entry into the church and also the manner in which he allegedly managed to restrain the passions of his supporters. When Gregory took up his seat on the bishops throne, the crowd went wild, but none of this was his doing of course, he assures his audience. Women, part of his own party, were shouting from the upper gallery, "almost exceeding the bounds of decent behaviour for women" and their thundering noise was "echoing off the walls".[390] Of course, being a good shepherd, and also knowledgeable of the kind of behaviour that would be decent within the confines of the church, Gregory ordered a stop to it and was promptly applauded, "(…) everyone values moderation".[391] But it is of course also a veiled nod to the grievous fate of women, as well the loud and indecent voice of the invaders, so often depicted in the eastern letters. Gregory postulated that he had peacefully taken over the church and had managed to calm the tempers of all those involved: "the sword had been drawn and then fallen back inside its sheath" and the wild behaviour of the Arian occupants, as well as that of his own supporters, had been checked and explicit violence and bloodshed in the church had been prevented.[392] What Gregory seems to point at with the description of his entry is that a good shepherd settles for peace, not war, and is able to pacify the passions of all those involved. By his actions, the integrity of church, and thus that of the city and *laos* in general are preserved: being a bishop, these are his primary concerns after all. Indeed, what Gregory seems to stress is that his entry, as opposed to that of his predecessor Demophilus, had managed to transform his church back from a place of heresy, hatred and violence into a place of piety. He thereby re-asserts his

388 Ibidem, 1315-1320, 1327-1330.
389 "(…)until I entered the church, I don't know how.", in: Gregory, *On his own life*, 1341.
390 Gregory, *On his own life*, 1380-1391.
391 Ibidem, 1390.
392 Ibidem, 1390-1396.

place as Constantinople's proper and responsible bishop who not only has the ability to preserve peace, but also to turn congregation, city and church for the better.

5.4. Ambrose of Milan and the Basilica-Conflict of 386 CE

Besides this example of Gregory being keenly aware that his entry into the church could have seriously risked his own image, there also exists evidence that suggests that it could even have often been the worldly authorities themselves who decided to consciously back down from supporting such an intrusion, precisely because of its association with persecution and episcopal victimhood so vividly described in the Eastern letters. In the Donatist sermon we have already seen how the representations of intrusion, according to the tested Athanasian register, could be used to rouse a congregation in defence of its church. In Gregory's poetry we have seen how some intruders were aware of the effects of the register and the consequences it could have for their own image and position as rightful bishop. Ambrose of Milan, on the other hand, used such imagery in the infamous 'Basilica-conflict' to actually prevent his opponents from actually deposing him from office, from occupying his churches, as well as to shame the worldly authorities opposing his rule into complacency.

The Basilica-conflict, or Easter-Conflict, of 385/6 CE was part of a much longer struggle between Ambrose and the Arian court at Milan, chiefly between Ambrose and the emperor Valentinian II, his mother Justina and the Arian priest Auxentius.[393] The conflict had initially revolved around the delineation of the proper spheres of jurisdiction between emperor and church. However tensions had risen when the imperial consistory had issued a law which prescribed freedom of assembly for those who followed the 'light' version of Arianism laid down at the councils of Rimini and Constantinople.[394] Furthermore, the law proscribed that any opposition to the law would be treated as treason and punished as a capital offense. Repetitious appeals against the law would be punished in like manner. Of course, Ambrose found himself at a dilemma: as bishop of the imperial capital he felt himself responsible for the souls of its people and for the piety of the city in general. In order to maintain that piety, boundaries had to be enforced. The sinners had to be kept out of the church and had to be prohibited from mixing with the faithful. An idea firmly confirmed by Valentinian's colleague Theodosius who had excluded heretics from the legal possession of church space.[395] In this respect however, the law posed a serious problem in that it would nullify the possibility of implementing a similar law like that of Theodosius in the West. Valentinian's law provided for the complete opposite in that it now became completely legitimate for Arians to use Nicene worshipping space for their own services. The believers could now mix freely with the sinners and it was only a question of time before the general piety of the city would be affected. That

[393] See: McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 158-169; G. Liebenscheutz & C. Hill, 'Introduction', in: *Ambrose of Milan. Political Letters and Speeches* (Liverpool 2005) 14-17; Fournier, *Exiled Bishops*, 162-163;
[394] The law *C.Th.* 6.1.4. (23 January 386)
[395] *C.Th.* 16.1.2, 16.13.

probability seemed even likelier by the fact that emperor and his mother had been and still were highly supportive of the Rimini creed. The most prominent among those supporters of the Rimini creed and the new law was the Arian priest Auxentius.[396] With the support of the emperor's mother he had managed to gradually work his way up the palace hierarchy and now stood poised to take over Ambrose's role as bishop of the Milanese Church.

Ambrose would not allow it and kept up his resistance against Auxentius and the new law. The matter started to spiral out of control when the emperor had requested Ambrose to appear before the imperial consistory to discuss the matter in front of a court jury.[397] Ambrose refused to attend and kept refusing the emperor's summons. But at Easter, tensions exploded. Prior to the Easter celebration, the court of Valentinian II had requested from Ambrose two of the Milanese basilicas for its own Arian services: the new basilica (the Nova) and the basilica outside the walls (the Portiana).[398] Naturally, Ambrose had refused: handing over church space to heretics was an unacceptable request. In order to prevent the court's entry, Ambrose and his congregation had pre-emptively occupied the churches in question: a sit-in similar to those we have previously encountered in the East. Perhaps impressed by the risk that conflict was in the air, the prefect requested Ambrose to at least give up the Portiana. But again Ambrose refused to budge.

Frustrated, Valentinian and his mother decided to orchestrate a display of force.[399] Troops were dispatched to surround the basilicas. In the process, one detachment had surprisingly managed to gain possession of Portiana. Arian priests were sent who immediately started to prepare the church for the emperor's arrival by putting up imperial hangings.[400] Meanwhile, the Nova remained under siege. But despite the fact that the siege of the Nova seriously impeded Ambrose's movement and control, members of his congregation nevertheless managed to sneak past the guards and gain entry to the Portiana.[401] In the process, Ambrose's supporters managed to capture an Arian priest, later to be released after the intervention of Ambrose, and also tore down the imperial hangings.[402] This was a serious offense. The hanging represented the emperors authority and exclaimed his possession of the church as a public building under *his* authority.[403] Not responding in like manner would seriously undermine the emperor's credibility. Consequently, the emperor ordered new troops to be dispatched who again encircled the Portian church. In open defiance, Ambrose's supporters then put forth a dispatch which called for Ambrose to come to the Portiana. But with his own church surrounded by troops, Ambrose was of course unable to attend and send a number of priests instead. A stand-off ensued. Ambrose was accused

396 Ambrose, *Ep.* 75A.15.
397 Liebenscheutz & Hill, *Ambrose of Milan*, 142.
398 Ambrose, *Ep*. 75A & *Ep*. 76; The events are described by each of the main fifth century church historians: Socrates, HE, 6.6; Sozomen, HE, 8.4; Theodoret, *HE*, 5.23; for analysis, see: McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181-195.
399 McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181.
400 Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.4; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 188.
401 McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 188.
402 Ibidem, 188-189.
403 Ibidem, 190-191.

of being a tyrant and of orchestrating his mob's take-over of the Portion basilica.[404] Yet even though he still blatantly refused to hand over the churches in question, the imperial authorities now seemed to have been equally unwilling to take those churches from him by force. Forcing Ambrose out would have undoubtedly resulted in massacre. Awed by Ambrose forceful resistance, Valentinian ordered his troops to lift the siege and rescind on punitive measures against Ambrose and his supporters.[405] Ambrose had won.

The story is not as clear cut as it seems however. The narrative sketched above is what Ambrose wanted his followers and posterity to believe. For the most part, next to everything we know about Easter-conflict comes almost exclusively from Ambrose's own writings, most prominently a sermon delivered to his congregation during the encirclement of the Nova, which was later handed over to the emperor as a memorandum (Letter 75A), and a letter to his sister detailing the efforts of the imperial authorities to remove Ambrose from his churches as well as the latter's heroic resistance (Letter 76). It has been noticed that one of the key features of these two texts is that they greatly manage to condense both time and space. Subsequently, scholars have gone to a considerable amount of effort in order to reconstruct the chronology and identify the various churches mentioned.[406] But it appears that for Ambrose such things mattered little. For Ambrose, condensing time and space appears to have been instrumental for two important reasons: first of all, the condensation of time and space seemed to strengthened Ambrose's pacifying role in the conflict. Ambrose is always at the centre of things and he makes it appears as if he is present in all the churches described in the conflict: but when violence is committed, only those churches where peace had been maintained. However, he is keen to stress that all violence happened outside his authority, mainly matters pertaining to mob violence, especially the breach of the Portiana and the tearing down of the hanging, and that only peaceful things happened at his instigation. Being vague about where each and every one was during the conflict was, could only be helpful in that it allowed Ambrose to distance himself from anything violent. Indeed, it had been during the conflict that Ambrose was accused of failing to retrain his people, an accusation which made Ambrose vulnerable to exile for breaking the law which condemned any turbulent opposition.[407] Instead, in the letters, and especially the memorandum, Ambrose wanted to show that, as the righteous and pious presbyter and bishop of Milan he had done everything in his power to prevent violence and that, as a result, he had managed to preserve the integrity of both city and church. But there were also another reason for condensing time and space. The fact that it is often difficult to establish in which or what church the events had taken place has to do with the fact the identity of specific church spaces described hardly matters for the particular purposes of the letters. Church space has a more allegorical function in Ambrose's letters and functions mainly to demarcate the proper divide between the metaphorical and

[404] Ibidem, 190-191.
[405] Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.26.
[406] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 229; Liebenscheutz & Hill, *Ambrose of Milan*, 160-161; R. Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals: Rome, Constantinople, Milan* (London 1993) 88-89; M Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed. Social Environment and Religious Change in Northern Italy AD 200-400* (Oxford 1999) 198 fig. 5.
[407] *C.Th*. 6.1.4; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181.

physical space of the emperor as opposed to the spaces reserved for God and the Church. They are not meant to represent an exact map of Milanese church space.

In describing and mapping those churches, Ambrose used various elements of the Athanasian register to articulate church space in a completely different manner from what we have previously encountered. As we have seen, in the eastern letters church space had been described as a space exclusively reserved for Christian ritual which stood under the guardianship of a canonically chosen presbyter. His residence in the church preserved the integrity of the ritual, of the congregation and of the entirety of the city. Both church and city remained spaces were the proper boundaries between Christian and not-Christian were maintained as long as the proper presbyter maintained his place. Violent intrusion, and the expulsion of the presbyter from his rightful place, transformed church space into a binary pagan space under the guardianship of an uncanonically chosen presbyter who by his intrusion not only seriously upset the religious integrity of the church, but also of the Christian population and city in general. The readers of the eastern letters were supposed to feel included in the affront, they were to raise their sorrow and ire on behalf of the victimized community and urge the authorities to act on the victims behalf and facilitate the exiled bishop's return. Subsequently, the church building had been articulated as the victimized bishop's quintessential place, as opposed to that of the intruder. However, the church building itself had never been articulated as a space belonging exclusive to Christians alone and thus *outside* the authority of the emperor. As public buildings, churches, and basilicas especially, technically fell under the emperor's jurisdiction. He was after all the person who had the power to decide which party had the legal right on the buildings they occupied and could legally deploy force to push any intruder out. Nevertheless, there still existed a grey area as to under whose authority the church building truly belonged. The eastern letters had propagated that is was the bishop's place, but the law and authority to which they appealed dictated that it stood under guardianship of the emperor. Moreover, a number of letters only spoke vaguely about the church as "Christ's temple" and "God's house", but this had been more a matter of style than a concrete definition of the church as the sacred and exclusive residence of God. Furthermore, as Neil McLynn has shown, distinctions blurred even further when churches were situated in imperial capitals.[408] For instance the distinction between private and centrally administered churches (i.e. public) was never clear cut, nor was it clear which of the churches belonged to the imperial palace and infrastructure and which religious buildings were supposed to be outside of it.

The Easter-conflict however gave Ambrose an opportunity to clarify those boundaries. In his attempt, Ambrose departed from the notion that churches, as episcopal spaces, were primarily public buildings and thus under the explicit authority of the emperor: a notion which the earlier Eastern letters still seem to have supported to some extent. What Ambrose did however was use the Athanasian model and its imagery, primarily as a means to turn the legal notion of the church as a public building on its head.

[408] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan,* 175-178.

Indeed what he argued throughout letters 75 and 76 was that the church was essentially not a public building at all: it was God's house and as such the house of what roughly constitutes a private individual.[409] Being trained as a legal scholar, Ambrose knew all too well that under Roman law it was impossible for an emperor to infringe on the home of a private individual. The church, as the individual's house, was supposed to stand firmly outside the legal jurisdiction of any law-abiding emperor. Presenting the church as God's place in this particular conflict is understandable in that it helped surpass the ambiguity of categorizing church space as either belonging to the bishop or as falling primarily under the jurisdiction of the emperor. Being now truly and unambiguously God's space, the church truly belonged to neither. But the bishop had still had an important role in that he was its caretaker.

A few examples of Ambrose's use of private –public metaphor will suffice. As noted, letter 75, was originally designed as a sermon.[410] Ambrose had produced and delivered the sermon during the most tense moments of the Basilica-conflict. When it was preached, soldiers were surrounding the basilicas and poised to invade at the emperor's command. For Ambrose, the purpose of the memorandum had been to clear himself from the accusation of being a firebrand, an *incentor*: someone who had orchestrated mobs to violence; and a tyrannus, a usurper of church and ecclesiastical office.[411] But apparently, the initial purpose of the sermon, before it was later turned into a memorandum addressed to the emperor was completely different. Ambrose's intent had been to reassure his congregation that when the moment of danger would arrive he would under no circumstance abandon the church and his flock to the whiles of the heretical oppressors. If the soldiers would enter, they would be able to drag away his body but not his soul, for a bishop, Ambrose claimed, should be ready to suffer:

> Have you in consequence become alarmed in case I deserted the Church, and that fearing for my own safety, I might abandon you? But you could have noticed the instructions that I sent back, to the effect that the desire to desert the church could only possibly occur to me, since I feared the lord of the universe more than the emperor of this world: that if force was used to drag me away from the church my body might be forcibly moved, but my mind could not be. So, if the emperor were to act as it is customary for holders of royal power to act, I was ready to suffer what it is the part of a bishop to suffer. (…)Why then are you worried? I will never desert you willingly, though if force is used, resistance I know nothing about. I shall be able to lament, to weep, to groan: when I face arms, soldiers, Goths, even my tears are weapons: for such are the defences of a bishop. I neither ought, nor indeed can, resist in any other manner. But to flee and abandon the church is not my way. (…)"If I were required to surrender anything that was my property, whether my estate or my house, or gold or silver, whatever was at my legal disposition, I would offer willingly; but I was unable to lay hands on and surrender anything from the temple of God, which I had

[409] Ambrose, *Ep.* 75A. 5, 17-18, 31, 33, 35; *Ep*. 76.2, 8, 19.
[410] Liebenscheutz & Hill, *Ambrose of Milan,* 142-143.
[411] Ambrose, *Ep.* 76. 22.

> received to keep safe, not to surrender" (…) [But] I wish that I was certain that the church would under no circumstances be handed over to heretics.[412]

Ambrose here presents himself as someone who would be willing to suffer but who would never actually be prepared to use violence himself. His weapons, the defences of a bishop, was to lament, weep, groan and shed tears. Passive resistance through emotional appeal, as we encountered in the eastern letters, not violence as displayed by the intruders. A good presbyter keeps his church free from violent force, a bad one brings it inside. And even though the soldiers surround the church, Ambrose would not comply. In the end, so Ambrose assured his supporters, their lamentations would convince the emperor to change his ways.

Moreover, Ambrose posited that the churches in question were not so much his place, but that they were only part of his inheritance. He argued that the churches under his guardianship were ultimately God's place, His Temple.[413] It was neither a place for heretics nor was it a place which stood under the explicit jurisdiction of the emperor.[414] Ambrose tells his congregation, and subsequently, the emperor that if the church would have been his personal possession, he would have happily handed it over. Ambrose was a law abiding subject after all. But instead, Ambrose presented himself as being merely a caretaker of God's inheritance, an inheritance which he believed to stand firmly outside the jurisdiction of earthly law and authority of the emperor. This divide, Ambrose argued, had been fixed by biblical truth. Jesus had excluded "the money changers and those selling seats and doves" from the Temple. How then could Ambrose, as keeper of God's inheritance, allow those kinds of people to re-enter the "Temple of God": an emperor who had forgotten the meaning of Jesus' phrase "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's", and a heretical priest, who surrounded himself with pagans.[415] Surely the church was not a denarius! In like manner, Naboth had defended his vineyard with his blood: should the congregation now passively hand over the church as the inheritance of Christ?[416]

But whereas the emperor had merely quite literally forgotten his place, his accomplice, the Arian Auxentius, Ambrose revealed to be even worse and the complete opposite of Christ. Auxentius is portrayed with imagery we have already encountered in the Athanasian register; only here that imagery is consciously contrasted with the biblical description of Christ's actions in the temple. Ambrose tells us that whereas Christ had merely excluded "the money changers and those selling seats and doves" from the Temple with a scourge.[417] Auxentius and his accomplice Mercurinus were less peaceful. In order to force their entry, the former was prepared to wield a sword and the latter an axe.[418] Furthermore, Ambrose was

[412] Ambrose, *Ep.* 75A.1-3.
[413] Ibidem, 5, 17-18, 31, 33, 35.
[414] Ibidem, 3.
[415]Ibidem, 21-23.
[416] Ibidem, 17-18.
[417] Ibidem, 19, 23.
[418] Ibidem, 23.

keen to highlight that Auxentius character was equal to that of a wolf, who like his heretical brethren freely surrounded himself with pagans.[419] If Auxentius would manage to take possession of the church it would have grievous consequences: "(…) in an instant Auxentius will destroy as many peoples as are within his power, some by the sword, others by sacrilege. From me he demands the basilica, with gory lips and bloodstained hands".[420] As in the Athanasian register, allowing the authorities to replace a proper presbyter with an intruder will have grievous consequences, not only for the integrity and piety of congregation, but also for that of the city and church as a whole.

However, Ambrose assures his congregation that victory was just around the corner. All the signs pointed to in the direction that he and his supporters are indeed in God's favour and indeed the church their rightful place. For even though the emperor's barbarian soldiers had surrounded the church and had tried to find an alternate entrance to bypass the blocked entrances on numerous occasions, still as if by divine providence, they had never actually managed to enter.[421] Ambrose's reminded his congregation that they knew all too well that one of the doors was in fact still open and that the true believers could slip in at will under the prying eyes of the besiegers. Surely this must have been a sign of God's support. In their unbelief, the Arian soldiers had been blinded and thus unable to see the hidden entry right in front of their eyes.[422] A metaphor of course which emphasized for Ambrose's audience that only the true believers could enter God's inheritance and that the unbelievers could not.

Letter 76 very much continues in the same vein. Again Ambrose claims that he had not been an active agent in inciting his congregation to violence. He again presents himself as being merely a passive observer, but who would nevertheless under no circumstance surrender his church. When the order had been presented to him to hand over the church, Ambrose again replied that "a temple belonging to God cannot be handed over by a bishop".[423] It was a private space, an inheritance from God, not a public space:

> I reply: "emperor it is not lawful for me to surrender the basilica, nor is it right for you to receive it. No law entitles you to violate the house of a private individual, do you think that you may seize the house of God? (…) It is written: What is God's to God, what is Caesar's to Caesar. Palaces belong to the emperor, churches to the bishop. The jurisdiction entrusted to you is over public buildings, not over sacred ones".[424]

The emperor cannot force entry because the church, as God's house, is the possession of a private individual. The emperor has his palace as his own quintessential place. The palace is the emperor's denarius, his place in the world, not the church. The church is the residence of God and therefore sacred.

[419] Ibidem, 21-23.
[420] Ibidem, 17.
[421] Ibidem, 9-10.
[422] Ibidem, 10.
[423] Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.2.
[424] Ibidem, 19.

Of course, the church is here set up metaphorically to emphasize the boundary between worldly and sacred authority. What Ambrose attempts to represent is that the emperor, even though he might have received his worldly authority from God, does not stand above the church but was merely a part of it. The church was the inheritance of God handed over to the righteous care of bishops: they represented the true leadership of earthly souls, not the emperor.

Now with the boundaries firmly in place, Ambrose sets out to prove why he should be considered the righteous caretaker of God's private space. In the letter Ambrose constantly refers to his efforts to preserve the church from violence. For instance, he narrates that the people who had forced entry into the Portian basilica against the wishes of the emperor were not incited by him but by God and that hence only God could pacify them.[425] Furthermore, inside the church, his followers had behaved only with the greatest decency.[426] No actions of theirs had transgressed the customary norms of Christian behaviour. The imperial hangings had been carefully folded away and were only torn apart by innocent children at play.[427] 'Surely one could not claim that there was any political intent in the innocent actions of a child?', Ambrose appears to suggest. He tells his sister that he feared that if the soldiers had entered the Nova it would have resulted in carnage and that such a violent intrusion would have ultimately resulted in the ruin of the city.[428] The semiotic link between the fate of the city and the church was one we have also seen in the Athanasian register. The fate of the church is here again set up as a reflection of the general fate of the city. If violence would have been committed and Ambrose forced into exile, the city would be given over the rampages of persecution. Ambrose claimed that he had done everything to prevent such calamity and seems to have clearly distanced himself from the example of his Greek colleagues in the eastern letters. He tells his sister that when martyrdom threatened, he had been ready not to "defend himself with a defensive wall of people nor (…) cling to the altar".[429] Instead he would offer his neck and gladly become a martyr so as to spare the church and altar from ruin.[430] Good presbyters preserve the integrity of the church, bad presbyters don't. Whereas Athanasius and Peter had surrounded themselves with a human shield in pious worship, Ambrose would preserve the physical integrity of his people and instead offer himself up as sacrifice.

In highlighting Ambrose's role as both a righteous caretaker and peacekeeper, the Gothic soldiers also have an important role to play. In the letters above, we have seen how the soldiers had commonly been presented as faceless agents of destruction. Furthermore barbarian soldiers, like the Goths, had usually been associated with violence and destruction in particular, and Arianism in general. Alongside the mob, they had been the ones who had committed the most gruesome violence, and participated in the

[425] Ibidem, 10.
[426] Ibidem, 22-23.
[427] Ibidem, 24.
[428] Ibidem, 9.
[429] Ibidem, 8.
[430] Ibidem, 8-9.

sacking and transformation of the church. It has already been noted how in letter 75, the sermon, Ambrose had preached that the besieging soldiers had been blinded by their own unbelief and had subsequently been unable to enter the church. In letter 76, Ambrose inverts the imagery of the soldiers even further. Whereas in letter 75 only the righteous believers had been able to enter the church because the soldiers had been blinded by their impiety, in letter 76 Ambrose's presence in the church and passive resistance even manages to transform the soldiers' unbelief into piety.

Ambrose writes that when he and his supporters were unable to enter the Nova because of yet another blockade of Gothic soldiers, he and his congregation retreated to the "smaller basilica".[431] There they started to recite psalms, reminiscent to the pious religious action usually performed before an attack as described in the Athanasian register, and an action alluded to by Augustine in his *Confessions* as an imitation of the "the custom of the Eastern churches".[432] The pious behaviour very much impressed the soldiers and instead of wanting to oppress the obstinate behaviour of the occupants they wanted to join Ambrose's religious services.[433] They first tried out the Nova, still filled with Ambrose's supporters, but Ambrose refused. In response the soldiers started to flock to the smaller basilica.[434] Of course, and very much according to the Athanasian register, the sudden arrival of the soldiers' entry into the smaller church caused panic among the woman, all too aware of what fate awaited them.[435] The soldiers however, declared that they had come for prayer and not for battle.[436] And when suddenly word went out that the emperor had rescinded on his order to occupy the churches and prosecute Ambrose, the Gothic soldiers, previously the epitome of heretical violence, rushed towards the altar and made the joyous news known with "kisses of peace".[437] The city was saved.[438]

So, instead of violently intruding the church, overthrowing the altar and violently molesting its occupants, in Ambrose's reworking of the register, the barbarian and Arian soldiers had rushed into the church to join Ambrose's religious service and bring a message of peace. God's space pacified all, Ambrose seems to suggest, and he was its caretaker. A total inversion of the image of soldiers in church space commonly presented in the Athanasian register of course. In the Athanasian register the intruding violence had managed to transform the church into a place of anything but Christian piety; in Ambrose's description of the Basilica conflict, the church was *defacto* a place of peace which transformed even the most violent intruders.

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[431] Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.24.
[432] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, 9.7-8
[433] Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.12-13, 25-26.
[434] Ibidem, 13.
[435] Ibidem, 13.
[436] Ibidem, 13.
[437] Ibidem, 26.
[438] "Thus the Lord our God said that it was for him the withering of a gourd was sufficient grounds for grief, how much more might he (God) to be concerned for the salvation of so large a people. And that is why he had cancelled the destruction he had prepared for all the city", in: Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.25; "Then I realized that God had indeed smitten 'the worm that came at dawn, so that the whole city might be saved' [Jon. 4.7.].", in: *Ep.* 76.26.

Unfortunately, there exist no direct evidence as to why the emperor had suddenly rescinded on the crackdown of Ambrose and his supporters. It has often been suggested that the authorities only backed down after Ambrose's discovery of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius in June 386.[439] But it should be noted that the order to rescind on the seizure of the Milanse churches and prosecution of Ambrose had already been given in early April.[440] It is therefore unlikely that the discovery of the martyrs led to an instant sanctification of the Ambrosian churches and that for this reason alone the imperial authorities had backed down from using force. It is more likely that the imperial authorities were highly aware of the usual consequences of violently occupying church space. Like Gregory of Nazianzus, they knew how such an event would be presented and how it would place them in an uncomfortable yet also artificial role of persecutor. It seems to have been for this anxiety precisely why Ambrose throughout his negotiations with the imperial court continuously brought up the familiar imagery of martyrdom and violence so typical of the Athanasian register. Whereas his opponents had weapons and soldiers at their disposal, a bishop like Ambrose had tears. If violence would be used and he expelled, Ambrose would sent his own presentation of that event to all corners of the empire and invoke his brethren's zeal on his behalf. Furthermore, Augustine's eyewitness account of the Basilica-conflict in his *Confessions*, and his observation that Ambrose sit-in and religious rituals in the Milanese church consciously mirrored "the custom of the eastern church", seems to suggest that Ambrose was indeed actively trying to imitate the actions of his colleagues presented in the Eastern letters.[441] Especially Ambrose's equation of the integrity of the church to the general fate of the city seems to suggest that this is indeed the case. If Ambrose would have been removed and his heretical opponents allowed to take over, ruin would befall the city. However, Ambrose's place had been preserved and in consequence even the heretical soldiers had been turned to piety.

Hence, what narratives, like the rousing sermon of the Donatists, the eloquent letters of Ambrose, or the apologetic poetry of Gregory show is that Athanasius' peculiar and epistolary way of articulating episcopal victimhood could just as easily be used for quite different purposes. The Donatist sermonizer had used it to rouse his congregation in defence of its church. Gregory had used it in his poetry to defend himself against allegations of tyrannical intrusion and sacrilege. And Ambrose had reworked the epistolary model for a variety of reasons: as part of a sermon to placate the fears of his congregation, as a memorandum to clear himself from charges of tyranny and intrusion, and most importantly as a way to demarcate the proper boundaries and spaces bishops and emperors were ought to respect. Nevertheless, the main congruence between its use in all of these sources is that again and again exile or the threat thereof plays an important role. Just like their eastern predecessors, all three were ultimately trying to articulate their own place as well as defend themselves against the ultimate sentence of exile. In doing so

[439] Ambrose of Milan, *Epistola* 77 (, trans. by W. Liebenscheutz & C. Hill (Liverpool 2005).
[440] For chronology, see: Liebenscheutz & Hill, *Ambrose of Milan*, 133-136; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 209-219.
[441] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, 9.7-8.

they used the theme of violence in church space, as well the general and increasing anxiety about its use, as a way to either defend their own place and keep their opponents out.

5.5. Violence in Church Space and the Law of 409

As such, the anxiety about using force in church space could be tapped into by eloquent churchmen and used to prevent such violent from taking place, but did the Athanasian model also make it into imperial law specifically? Can its typical and symbolical language and imagery be found in any of the Roman constitutions issued in later fourth or early fifth century? An imperial constitution issued in Milan in 409C E might provide an answer. This law, *Constitutiones Sirmondi* 14 (15 januari 409 CE at Ravenna), was issued in the wake of the infamous Calama incident of 408 CE.[442] The law captures the growing the anxiety created by the narratives as well as its consequences for Roman legal thought very well. However the circumstances in which the law was issued couldn't have been more different to that of the letters and sermons discussed above. The main event which led to the law was not inter-Christian violence or the threat of exile at all, but an extremely localized conflict between Christians and Romans in a backwater in Northern Africa.

In June 408 CE, the pagan residents of the Numidian town of Calama had organized a procession as part of the customary celebration of the Kalends.[443] When it wended its way through the streets and past the local Christian church, it had naturally caused a great uproar amongst the local Christian clergy. The clergy had tried to put a stop to the celebration of such pagan rites because they took the halting and dancing in front of the church as intentionally mocking the Christian place of worship. Also knowing that the emperor had recently placed a penalty on public pagan worship, the clergy decided to confront the pagans and order a stop to the procession. The pagans refused, but the Christian kept blocking their way. Infuriated, the pagan procession transformed into riot which resulted in the stoning of a local Christian church. However, his was just the first incident of many and gradually the situation spiralled out of control as the pagan and Christian communities descended into open conflict. In a second uproar, the church was stoned again and in a third one set on fire causing the clergy to flee in terror. The local bishop Possidius, with the help of Augustine, appealed by letter and embassy to the emperor Honorius for support. Augustine's letter gave a detailed description of what had previously occurred, but it also set out to warn the emperor that any form of relaxation to the pagan offenders would not only seriously undermine his authority but also lead Christians to question whether he really had the Church's best interest at heart.

[442] See: Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 1999) 88-91; on the Calama incident, see: Augustine, *Ep.* 90, 91, 97.
[443] Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, 88-91

Throughout the letters, the violence is never described in a particularly Athanasian way, nor do issues such as exile and displacement play an important role.[444]

Now with his credibility as a ruler and defender of the Christian community at stake, the emperor's response was to order the governor to unleash the full legal force on the Christian's behalf and punish the guilty pagan ringleaders with capital punishment. The order to crack down on the pagan culprits was accompanied with a law which pointedly reiterated the familiar language of the Athanasian register, even though the imagery of the language itself had never been specifically employed by Possidius and Augustine in their appeals to the emperor. Nevertheless, the law reiterated the familiar imagery of what was now considered to be a familiar offense. As we have seen in the law of church asylum of 392, the church had already been posited as a place which was ambiguously considered to be both firmly outside the grasp of worldly force on the one hand, but also as a space where the authorities could use force if allowed by the bishop on the other. However, the writers of the law of 409, perhaps also with the expulsions of Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom still in mind, now imagined that Catholic church space should be completely excluded from violent force. Furthermore, the law offers an intricate view of how violent invasion of church space was now commonly imagined:

> If any person should break into such sacrilege that he should invade Catholic churches and should inflict any outrage on the priests and ministers, or on the worship itself and on the place of worship, whatever occurs shall be brought to the notice of the authorities by letters of the municipal senates, magistrates, and curators, and by official reports of the appropriators, called stationarii [i.e. rural 'police'], so that the identity of those who could be recognized may be revealed. If however, the offense is said to have been perpetrated by a multitude (mob), some, if not, all can nevertheless be recognized, and by their confession the names of their accomplices may be disclosed. Thus the governor of the province shall know that the outrage to the priests and ministers of the catholic church; to the divine worship and to the place of worship itself must be punished with a capital sentence against the aforesaid convicted or confessed criminals etc.[445]

The law includes a number of familiar elements. Most importantly, the law categorizes the invasion of Catholic church space as a sacrilege, an offense we have previously encountered in the letters, but which had never been so explicitly mentioned in reference to violence in- and against church space. Also, the law leaves a crucial opening for the imperial authorities in its effort to police ecclesiastical space. Indeed what the law indirectly suggests is that whereas the intrusion of a catholic church is considered a sacrilege, invasion of church space in the hands of heretics clearly is not. A distinction which echoes canonical the canonical legislation of the age which decreed that the term *ecclesia* should never be used in reference to heretics. And it is also a distinction which mirrors Athanasius' earlier riposte against the allegation that he had sacrilegiously invaded church space in the Mareotis.[446] Not only had there been

[444] Ibidem, 89.
[445] *Constitutiones Sirmondi* 14.
[446] See above p. 44-45.

hardly a priest present in the Mareotis when the attack had allegedly taken place, Athanasius had claimed, it had also been a building in the hands of heretics and should therefore never have been called a church in the first place. As such what the law articulates is that only church space in the hands of a Catholic bishop or presbyter should be firmly excluded from violent force. If the space was occupied by a heretical priest, the authorities are free to any means necessary. Gregory and Ambrose had both organized intrusions of church space in heretic hands, but they had taken effort to present such actions as peaceful and respectful of the buildings they intruded. The law however clearly sees violent action in such efforts as less problematic.

Furthermore, the law formulates what sort of actions such an intrusion might include. Much of it sounds familiar and all of it is imagined to take place specifically within the confines of the church. The law speaks of outrages inflicted on the priests and ministers, on the act of worship and even on the place of worship itself. In doing so the law recalls the sort of violently degrading treatments and transformative practices we have previously encountered in the letters of Athanasius, Peter and John, and which have also been alluded to in the various sermons discussed above: the flogging, stripping and killing of priests and virgins, the interruption and conscious inversion of religious ritual, and the general damage done to the church building itself, for instance the destruction of doors and altars, and the intrusion into – and looting of ecclesiastical spaces normally excluded from worldly contamination.

The law imagines that this sort of violence is generally committed by a mob. The mob itself cannot be punished, but only the instigators. The problem of assigning blame for the offense either to the faceless mob or to its orchestrators is an issue which we have also encountered previously in the writings discussed above. The Eastern letters had organized the narrative of the assault in such a way as to cast the blame primarily on its organizers, most and foremost, the intruding bishop. As such, the fact that the law formulated that primarily the culprits, if identified, should be punished, is by itself not really that new or even interesting. But what is new and interesting however, it that the law for the first time connects this proscription specifically with a prohibition against violently intruding church space. It should be remembered that it had been this connection specifically which had been so important in Athanasius, Peter and John's efforts to revoke their exile and in turn invoke a similar sentence on their opponents. Now that connection had found its way onto the pages of an actual law.

And last but not least, the law formulates what the authorities consider to be the proper response to such an attack. It describes in detailed fashion which local organs should be notified and how these should then proceed to inform the imperial authorities of the offense committed. Punishing sacrilege ultimately rests with the authorities and no mention is made of penance or exile. Instead, the law proscribes capital punishment to anyone who breaches the sanctity of a Catholic church. In the eastern letters, we have seen how the victims had anxiously tried to solicit the support of their fellow believers through letter writing and embassy, and how appeals to the secular authorities had only come second

place, the only exemption being of course the Athanasian *Diamartyria*. It was the believers themselves, affronted by the calamities inflicted on their brethren, who had been expected to pressure the authorities to act on the victims and exile's behalf. The authorities themselves were usually imagined as colluding with the intruders and only the highest office of the emperor had been appealed to in more neutral fashion The law of 409 carefully lays down which steps the victims should take. The authorities now have an important role and are imagined to stand firmly on the side of the victims. They are the persons under whose jurisdiction the protection of the church seems to belong, even though the violent force which could be used to implement that jurisdiction only touches the physical boundaries of the church. Furthermore, the local authorities are not imagined to openly collude with the culprits. The empire now truly was in orthodox hands.

As such, what the law of 409 in conjunction with Eastern letters and narratives above shows, is that the process of gradually excluding violence from church space is intimately connected with imagery derived from the specifically Athanasian way of articulating episcopal victimhood. The violent imagery Athanasius, his opponents and his successors had created during the initial stages of the Arian conflict in the East, had found a use outside its original context, and indeed seems to have become emblematic for how religious persecution and clerical victimhood was generally imagined. In other words, what had originally been imagery used primarily to revoke the exile of a victimized presbyter now had as an added and perhaps unintended consequence that not only violence in church space became a quintessential feature of how persecution was commonly imagined, it also correspondingly created a mentality amongst churchmen and holders of secular authority that violence in church space should be excluded in its entirety and thus that the church building itself should be placed firmly outside the sphere of worldly law and *vis*.

The space of the Catholic church now truly represented a rupture with its surrounding environment. A rupture that was firmly embedded in Roman law. Whereas places like temples, theatres, inns and bath houses could easily be imagined as places of violence, churches were gradually thought to be anything but. Ambrose's formulation of the church as God's temple and private space, and the law of 409, in a sense solidified the new map which had previously been presented in the letters. Previously, before the violence of the fourth century, the church had been thought of by Christians as a building which merely housed the community of believers. Fourth century violence, however, helped Christians identify what that the church building really was and how different it was from its surroundings and non-Christian religious space especially. Whereas those other places were now imagined as places were violence could safely take place, the church was now imagined as space firmly excluded from worldly force. Correspondingly, violence helped delineate Christianity's metaphorical and physical boundaries of a compass in which, as if it were a needle, the imaginary presence of the church was firmly at the centre. In a world were in real life religious difference was often vague, the now familiar representation of church space and the violence affecting it helped Nicene Christians determine who they were and how they

should behave. It taught them which places to enter, and which to avoid. And it formulated for them with which persons they should associate and which they should shun. Most importantly, it had helped distinguish the proper hierarchy in the world and recognize the prime authority in the salvation of their souls: a hierarchy in which the bishop, the custodian of the church, stood firmly on top.

In the end, the perception of church space had changed markedly. The church had changed from a building which was thought to merely harbour the community of God, into a building that was formulated as the presbyter and bishop's quintessential place, and subsequently a space that was primarily Catholic and sacred. And even though it surely wasn't violence alone which gradually helped remap church space as Catholic and sacred: the sacralisation of time and space, martyrs, ritual, conscious imitation of pagan practices and competition with the spaces of other religions must have each played an important role. It can however also not be denied that images of violence and persecution must have played an equally fundamental role. Especially when those violent images and stories are understood as standing in tandem with all of these other explanations for the gradual sacralisation of church space. As the letters and subsequent manipulation of the Athanasian register show, the connection between the exclusion of violence from religious space and its sacralisation is a close one. At the end of the fourth century, violence in Christian religious space, had not only gradually remapped it as a space excluded from worldly *vis*, but also as a space more sacred than before. The fate of the spaces which were not considered Orthodox or Christian couldn't have been more different.

Conclusion

What we have thus seen is how the peculiar circumstances and discourse surrounding Athanasius' second exile gave birth to a typically Alexandrian, and more specifically Athanasian, way of articulating episcopal victimhood and displacement. We have seen how this model, or register, was built around a carefully formulated semiotic relationship between episcopal exile, the violent intrusion and transformation of city and church space, and the displacement of the congregation. It has been highlighted how for late antique audiences this peculiar register contrasted the effects of episcopal duties of the original occupant of the see to that of the newcomer, and that it had also systematically mapped for these audiences different groups and individuals, as well as actual places, as either naturally belonging inside or outside the imagined spaces of city and church.

Furthermore, it has been shown how this particular model was used by Athanasius' successor Peter of Alexandria, and how he, like his predecessor, had successfully managed to renegotiate his exile by means of it. As an example of the subsequent epistolary use of the register in the Greek-speaking East, and outside of the direct Alexandrian context, we have also seen how John Chrysostom used the specifically Athanasian register against his opponent Theophilus to renegotiate his literal and figural place at the centre of the Eastern church. Furthermore, it has been argued that the reasons John might have had for using the register were twofold: first of all, because Chrysostom's opponent claim to authority in the Eastern church and Alexandria was based on his appropriation of the Athanasian legacy. The register used by John subverted these claims, not only to Alexandrian leadership but also that of the Eastern Church in general. And secondly because by the start of the fifth century the register offered a tested and proven means of renegotiating exile and expressing episcopal victimhood in the Greek-speaking east: to speak about persecution and exile, was to speak about violence in churches.

Of course, John's use of the register proved in the end to be less successful than that of his predecessors. But what John's use of the model does aptly show is how at the start of the fifth century, speaking of involuntary episcopal exile, intrusion and persecution could not be entirely disconnected from speaking of violence in church space. Furthermore, use of model in the context of persecution helped nurture a general anxiety amongst churchmen and imperial authorities about using violence in church space which could now be deployed all the more effectively by churchmen to rouse the congregation on their behalf and protect their churches from violent invasion. But we have also seen how churchmen and worldly authorities on the opposing end were equally aware of this dynamic and the damage it could do to their own image. The example of Gregory has shown how perpetrators could subvert the models imagery in their own defence and plead themselves clear from accusations of sacrilege. In the case of Ambrose we have equally seen how deployment of such imagery could be used the manoeuvre the authorities in such a

position that violence was out of the question. And in the law of 409 CE we have seen how such general anxiety about using violence in church space, produced by the Athanasian model, had slowly worked its way into legal thought, and had as such, helped demarcate Nicene, or Catholic church space, as existing firmly outside the world of violence.

And last, what we have seen throughout the investigation, is that violence and church space, as a fundamental part of how persecution and episcopal displacement were imagined, had contributed to a gradual change in the general perception of church space. Whereas at the beginning of the fourth century, church space had still been imagined as a place which was merely used to shelter the community of believers and as such lacked a clear sense of sacredness, at the end of the fourth century and first decade of the fifth church space had, by means of the model, changed into a place that was imagined to both sacred and Catholic and as such outside the grasp of violent force. In effect, narratives on violence and victimhood had helped sacralise Catholic churches as spaces nominally outside the sphere of worldly authority and its violent force. As I argued in the introduction, I understand the construction of topographies of violence and victimhood to be the process by which a religious group by stories of violence in-and-against its religious and symbolical spaces, maps its terrain, organizes and spaces and places, and articulates hierarchies in value between people, places and objects. As I have argued, such a topography is of course a product of the imagination, yet gains real-world relevance when a religious group attempts to make reality conform to that imagination. In the Arian Conflict, Nicene churchmen had created mental maps which had primarily functioned to stress their own innocence, highlight their own - and communities' sense of victimization, and renegotiate their own rightful place in the cities which held their sees. By the beginning of the fifth century, the Nicene Orthodox, who had posited themselves as persecuted victims throughout the fourth, had now managed to make that imaginary map articulated by that ontological victimhood to conform through reality by means of worldly law. Indeed, the imaginary topography of victimhood, presented in the letters and sermons they created, had been made to conform to reality.

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