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Christilism

Is St. Augustine responsible for all our sexual miseries?

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What do ultraliberal Catholic and Lutheran theologians have in common with ultraconservative Orthodox - preeminently Greek - theologians? If anything, then an ostensibly negative attitude, verging sometimes on overt despol, toward the theology of St Augustine. This ideological convergence is so odd that it deserves a short reflection. My personal hypothesis is that it is related to the philosophical shift that occurred at the turn of the XIXth c., mainly under the influence of Freud and Nietzsche. Let me put it in the following manner. One morning, the European mind woke up to discover that it was sick in some kind of deeply psycho-cultural sense. Feelings of guilt and shame haunted collective and individual memories, preventing people and societies from enjoying a healthy, natural freedom, especially in their use of sexuality. These feelings, so the European mind was told, derived from its Judeo-Christian historical upbringing. It is probably not wrong to assert that XXth c. philosophical thought has devoted most of its energies to comment on - as well as to wrestle with - the insights of Freud and Nietzsche. Under these conditions, it seems natural that open-minded theologians would strive to spare the tradition they represent from the accusation of secretly poisoning the core of Western civilization. They would argue that these morbid cultural side-effects do not pertain to the true nature of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but to some later and regrettable distortion of its original content. Among the alleged suspects of having caused this pernicious transformation, the figure of St. Augustine stands out as a most propitious victim for this great cultural sacrifice. "The man who fused Christianity together with hatred of sex and pleasure into a systematic unity

was the greatest of the Church Fathers, St. Augustine", writes Ute Ranke-Heinemann¹.

It is at this very point that the views of ultra-conservative Orthodox theologians gladly rally those of the Western tenants of liberal theology. St. Augustine is presented as the quintessence of the Western spirit, as distinguished from the spirit of the Greek Fathers. This is at least partly due to Augustine's views on the *Filioque* issue. No doubt it is an effect of God's grace if the Byzantine Tradition, what we call today Orthodoxy, has remained quasi ignorant of the theological significance of S. Augustine until the 13th century (Maximos Planudes). From this perspective, focussing on the theology of Augustine as the origin of these unhealthy and alienating guilt feelings circumscribes the disease affecting Christianity to the Western sphere of civilization. The Byzantine Church tradition comes out uncontaminated, as having preserved the initial message free from the corruption of foreign influences. *Quod demonstrandum erat*.

However, this serendipitous convergence between liberal lambs and conservative lions remains conditional. One still has to administer the proof that the theology of Augustine did effectively distort the ethical message of the genuine Judeo-Christian tradition. Why and how did something of the sort happen? Blaming later Christian thinkers for having unconsciously drawn on the conceptual resources of the Greco-Roman Pagan sphere of civilization, thus perverting the initial message of the Gospel, goes back to Harnack's *Origins of Christianity*. What Harnack had mainly in view was the influence of Plato and Neoplatonism. As for the theology of Augustine, no one will dispute that it is heavily indebted to this current of thought. But is it not less true of the Cappadocian Fathers and Maximus the Confessor? For sure, according to Harnack at least. Be that as it may, a more recent convergence of philosophers - Michel Foucault in the first row- and historians- Paul Veyne in particular - brought forward a new element. They emphasized the similarities between the doctrine of Roman Stoicism on marriage and its 4th century

¹ Eunuchs, p.75.

Christian equivalent, especially in the West. After Harnack, it has become common rule to appeal to Platonism when accounting for the rise of the asexual, monastic ideal within Christianity. In turn, the influence of Stoicism upon Christianity would pertain to *the legitimate use of sexuality*, to the development of a rigid set of rules between the allowed and the forbidden in the framework of heterosexual marriage. This would account for the rise, in the thought of Augustine, of a tightly patriarchal model of relationship between men and women. Feminism-orientated biblical scholars such as Elaine Pagels (*Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, 1988) and theologians such as Uta Ranke-Heineman (*Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, 1991) have argued that there can hardly be a more urgent task today than to free the message of the Gospel of this shell of foreign and alienating moral ideas forged during the Hellenistic period. Thus will the Church cease to be perceived as an obstacle to the legitimate pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment among men and women that are equally loved by God, and therefore equally deserving respect.

Interestingly enough, the general perspective that we just sketched out appears to be a total reversal of the original insights of Nietzsche and Freud. It is no longer the Jewish-Christian tradition, but the Greek civilization that is said to convey the values of an ascetical, all-joys-and-pleasures-killing ideal. However, the reader of Nietzsche and disciple of his Zarathustra will immediately recognize in this anti-Greek perspective a well-known configuration. To summarize Nietzsche's views, the good news of God's death will reach the whole inhabited world when, as a consequence of a long decaying process, nothing will be left of the Judeo-Christian tradition, of what constituted once its ascetical ideals, except its vague and all-embracing language of pity and compassion. Let me quote the *Genealogy of Morals*, ch.5:

“I understood the ever spreading morality of pity that had seized even on philosophers and made them ill, as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that had itself become sinister, perhaps as its by-pass to a new Buddhism? to a Buddhism for Europeans? to—*nihilism?*”

I would like to formulate the issue raised in reference to Nietzsche's philosophy in the following way. When Christian theologians come to perceive the ascetical values of the Church as a foreign burden inherited from the Greco-Roman world, is it an indication that Christianity is on the brink of rediscovering its genuine message - or does it not rather point in direction of the opposite process? Could it show that Christianity has deserted its most fundamental message, tacitly changing the latter, as Nietzsche writes, "into a kind of Buddhism for Europeans, into a nihilism"? In other terms, is sacrificing the thought of St. Augustine on the altar of modern concerns about sexual liberation and equal rights a necessary step towards the renewal of Christian faith? Or is it, on the contrary, a sign that we are no longer dealing with Christianity but rather with what I would call, paraphrasing Nietzsche's terminology- some kind of "Christilism"?

I am afraid one has to come to this saddening conclusion when one proceeds to a critical examination of the tenets from which the anti-Augustinian thesis derives. Let us then take a closer look at the latter. The first of these tenets has to do with the alleged moral asceticism of the Greek world of thought. The second with the general influence of this world of thought on the Judeo-Christian tradition. The third with the theology of Augustine, as the agent of a unique transformation of Christian thinking in the sense of a dramatic increase of rigorism and patriarchalism.

1. A closer look at the cultural sources of the patriarchal complex.

One can easily criticize traditional Church views on the relationship between men and women as being inspired by a patriarchal social model. All types of sexual relationships are limited to the sphere of heterosexual marriage. In this framework, women are submitted to the authority of their husbands. Moreover, the authority in the Church is placed in the hands of men, who often happen to be, at least at the highest level of decision, non-married men. The theology of St. Augustine certainly provides some

justification for this male-dominated social and ecclesial order. The question is whether this justification derives from perspectives that are foreign to the Judeo-Christian revelation. Can it be ascribed to the Greco-Roman Pagan culture, a culture to which Augustine appears deeply indebted mainly through his complete training in the art of rhetoric? In other words, can we relate Augustine's patriarchal complex to insights that are at odds with a sound understanding of the Judeo-Christian civilization?

Such is certainly the hatred for matter and all that pertains to the bodily condition. It is foreign to the very principle of the Judeo-Christian revelation. This holds true in a literal sense: in the beginning or in the principle, God created the world and found that it was good. God created man and woman in his likeness and destined each one to the other. But what is exactly the connection between the patriarchal and this hatred of the physical condition? The suspicion towards sexuality has certainly a deep impact on the manner in which one views the respective positions of men and women. Once the naturalness of bodily pleasure is dismissed, the only purpose of a sexual relationship remains procreation: a heterosexual bond within marriage. Moreover, sexual asceticism added to the recognition of male authority leads to the establishment of a superior cast of non-married men within the Church. The question that remains is whether one can find in the Greco-Roman culture some trace of a sexual pessimism that would have something to do with a general disdain towards matter and bodily condition. Feminism-inspired theologians generally point out two currents of thought: Platonism and Stoicism. I would like to examine to what extent these two currents of thought are likely to have respectively inspired the views of Augustine on the relationship between men and women.

Within the Greco-Roman sphere of civilization, the philosophy of Plato and its prodigiously creative legacy stand probably closest to a dualism that tends to look upon down the body and material realities. Let me quote Plato's *Phaedo* for instance:

“ The soul, when it uses the body to look at something, by sight or hearing or some other sense . . . is dragged by the body among things which never stay the same, and it itself gets

lost and disturbed and tipsy, just like a drunk, from contact with such things . . . But when it looks by itself, on its own, it goes in the other direction, to the pure, the eternal, the immortal, the unchanging, and, because of its affinity with them, joins their company, whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases its wanderings and is with them and ever unchanging like them, from contact with such things. And this condition of the soul is called wisdom”²

Plato believed that material realities were of a different nature from spiritual ones, that the former were inferior to the latter, and that the soul of man was placed somewhere in between. It could either turn its inner eyes towards intelligible beauty, or seek its fulfillment among the realities of the inferior realm. But woe to the latter after what people call death, that is, separation from the body! We read in the same passage of the *Phaedo*:

“The soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of her departure, and is the companion and servant of the body always, and is in love with and fascinated by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body, until she is led to believe that the truth only exists in a bodily form, which a man may touch and see and taste and use for sexual pleasures, while she hates and fears and avoids that world, which to our eyes is dark and invisible, but which thought and philosophy can grasp—do you suppose that such a soul will depart pure and unalloyed ? She is penetrated by the corporeal, which the continual association and constant care of the body have wrought into her nature. And this corporeal element is heavy and weighty and earthy (...)”

For all that, one has still to ask whether Plato regards matter and physical realities as evil, as a principle which is opposed to the goodness of intelligible realities. What is inferior and heterogeneous is not necessary evil. In the *Symposium*, Plato describes how the soul can raise itself from the contemplation of beautiful bodies to the contemplation of bodiless beauty. Bodies, it is said in *Timaios*, are made in the likeness of ideal, bodiless and eternal paradigms. This is the reason why the “body” of the universe, this huge animal, is said here to be “unique, perfect, and unaffected by diseases and ageing” (34c). For sure, Platon claims that bodies are also made out of a matter, a principle which does not have the stability of these eternal paradigms. Matter or place, *khora*, is an ever-changing appearance, according to the same dialogue. It is in fact becoming itself. However, Plato never says that this primeval matter, our mother as he calls it, is evil. What Plato repeatedly calls evil is something else, namely: the *ametria*, the absence of measure of the soul, when it chooses to desert the contemplation

² 76c, d

of the Real in order to delve, through contact with matter, into an endless cycle of pleasures and pains. Evil is not matter, but the relationship of the soul to its body when the former has lost, through its own fault, its freedom and self-control. Besides, there is hardly any hint of patriarchy in Plato's dualistic philosophy. In this continuously above- (or beyond-)orientated universe, marriage is the least of human needs; homosexuality is repeatedly set above heterosexuality and nothing can prevent women, like Diotime in the *Symposium*, from philosophizing on an equal footing with men.

Should it then be argued that Augustine's Platonism, the one he came across through reading Plotinus and Porphyrius, was a far cry from the original one? For sure, one reads in Plotinus statements regarding the essence of matter that could never be ascribed to Plato. Let me quote a famous one:

“Matter is therefore both the cause of weakness in the soul and the cause of sin. It is therefore antecedently evil and primary evil
(πρότερον ἄρα κακὴ αὐτὴ καὶ πρῶτον κακόν·)”³

The need to comment these lines has given rise to a whole philosophical literature. I will not deal with it here, because what matters to us is not what Plotinus thought, but what Augustine thought that Plotinus thought, or the way Augustine has assimilated Neoplatonic teaching on the evilness of matter. Looking at things from this angle, one comes to striking results. At the turning point of his life, that is, during the process that led him to join the Christian Church, Augustine has very much relied on Plotinus' views on matter and evil. However, he has not used them to justify some rejection of matter and physical realities, including sexual relationships, but precisely the other way round: Augustine has drawn on Plotinus' theory to dismiss the identification between matter and evil, so as to develop a more positive view on human sexuality. The fact is that Augustine found in Plotinus' views a powerful instrument to turn down the religion that he had once adopted: Manicheism, a religion consistently based on the identification between matter, evil and sexual abstinence (supposed to be total for the elect among the Manichean faithful). After Gregorius of Nyssa, what Augustine discovers in

³ *Enneads*, I, 8, 14, 50-51

Plotinus is that Evil is nothing but privation, the absence of a positive something⁴. One can therefore not fill evil with the content of matter, as Mani's religion teaches. Accordingly, when Plotinus claims that matter is evil, he merely claims that matter is a nothing, a privation of the real Being which pertains to the realm of the spiritual. Having become Christian, Augustine will retain the Neoplatonic identification of the Real with the spiritual, bodiless Being of God. However, he will correct the Neoplatonic perspective on physical realities and matter: matter in itself is not nothing- Matter is good, since it is created by God. Matter can only be said to be nothing by comparison to the fullness of Being which is to be found in God alone.

Accordingly, the dualistic legacy of Plato is the philosophical instrument that Augustine has used in order to reject the overtly negative view of the Manicheans on matter, bodily condition and sex. As for the Manichean doctrine, it is anything but a fruit of the Greco-Roman world of thought. Born in the country that we now call Iraq in the third century after Christ, the doctrine of Mani mixes elements taken both from Christianity and Indian Buddhism. During the time of Augustine, Manicheism was merely the latest of the series of religious doctrines that came from the exotic East – exactly in the way Christian faith itself had been perceived slightly earlier.

⁴ See Plotinus, *Enneads* 1,8, 10: “(...) it is quite correct to say at once that Matter is without Quality and that it is evil: it is Evil not in the sense of having Quality but, precisely, in not having it; give it Quality and in its very Evil it would almost be a Form, whereas in Truth it is a Kind contrary to Form.(...) Perhaps Evil is merely an impediment to the Soul like something affecting the eye and so hindering sight” . Compare to the following passage from Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechism* (c.7) :“For the distinctive difference between virtue and vice is not to be contemplated as that between two actually subsisting phenomena; but as there is a logical opposition between that which is and that which is not, and it is not possible to say that, as regards subsistency, that which is not is distinguished from that which is, but we say that nonentity is only logically opposed to entity, in the same way also the word vice is opposed to the word virtue, not as being any existence in itself, but only as becoming thinkable by the absence of the better. As we say that blindness is logically opposed to sight, not that blindness has of itself a natural existence, being only a deprivation of a preceding faculty, so also we say that vice is to be regarded as the deprivation of goodness, just as a shadow which supervenes at the passage of the solar ray”. And finally, Augustine in *Enchyridion*, c.11: “For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present — namely, the diseases and wounds — go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance, — the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils — that is, privations of the good which we call health — are accidents. Just in the same way, what are called vices in the soul are nothing but privations of natural good. And when they are cured, they are not transferred elsewhere: when they cease to exist in the healthy soul, they cannot exist anywhere else”.

Let us now say a few words about the other current of thought which is supposed to have influenced Augustine's view on the man/woman relationship, namely, late Roman Stoicism. Whatever be the causes of the rising "conjugalisation" of the Roman society, this hardly disputable historical trend has little to do with the penetration of Christian faith, since it starts approximately at the very time of the birth of Christ. For sure, it has features similar to what will later become, for the better and the worst, the Christian model of marriage. The main similarities are the positive emphasis on procreation as the goal of marriage associated with a negative emphasis on the search of sexual fulfilment. The latter relates mainly to sexual relationships without the bonds of marriage, like adultery and homosexuality. Moreover, in some writings, like in those of the Stoic Musonius, this condemnation encompasses even sexual enjoyment within marriage.

Notwithstanding, when one takes a look at the theoretical principles that justify such a stance, they appear to be very different from this hatred of the bodily condition which is admittedly incompatible with the Judeo-Christian revelation. The fact is that Stoicism does not despise the material dimension of the universe for the good and simple reason that it denies the existence of anything else than matter. From this point of view, it is just the opposite of Platonism and especially Neoplatonism: the Real, the existent, is matter - spiritual entities are illusions. The macrocosmic *Pneuma* which organizes time and space is a material fire, and so is this microcosmic *pneuma* which human beings identify as their souls. For the Stoics, and Musonius is no exception to the rule, the supreme value is Nature, and Nature is everything that exists in a material sense. If so, wherefrom stems such a stern view on the use of sexuality? As Foucault has consistently shown in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*, "Le souci de soi", sexuality carries the danger of falling away from what adequacy to Nature requires. If this adequacy rests on a specific tension, *tonos*, which unites the microcosmic *pneuma* to the macroscopic one, sexuality can unduly release this ontological tension. Here lies, according to Musonius, the cause of these

weaknesses and degenerations associated with sexuality that are abundantly accounted for in the medical science of the time. For sure, sexuality enjoyment is natural, since procreation is the principle of marriage and bodily attraction the means to implement it. However, nurturing enjoyment for the sake of enjoyment is seen as unnatural, as when it is cut off from its inner finality: the perpetuation of the human race. Musonius advises to refrain as much as possible from passionate feelings in the accomplishment of one's marital duties. As Foucault shows, the sexual ethics of Musonius is entirely based on the duty of governing oneself, as the virtue through which the dignity of the individual is raised to the level of cosmic Order. But here also, it is difficult to find any trace of patriarchy in this apology of procreation within the bonds of marriage. According to Musonius as according to many Stoic and non Stoic thinkers, marriage is about much more than procreation. It gives the opportunity to two individuals to reach a higher state of unity with Nature through the attainment of *homonoia*, of a mutual concord of thought and feelings which does not rest on bodily conjunction. Musonius argues that it is love, and not the striving after bodily pleasures and material convenience, that grants marriage its genuine dignity. For him as for other thinkers, it is clear that there can be no true love where there is no mutual respect and recognition of each other's respective rights and duties.

Our short enquiry leads us to the following conclusions. The rejection of matter and the hatred of bodily condition correspond to a way of thinking which is widely foreign to Greco-Roman civilization. When authors such as Plato or Musonius happen to emphasize the negative aspects of sexual pleasure, their views owe nothing to the idea that bodily condition should be discarded as being intrinsically evil. These views express rather a crucial concern for the well-being of the body and its subject, since *ametria*, the absence of measure that defines vice, is perceived as the factor that threaten them both. It is true that one can speak of a point of convergence between the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and the exotic doctrine of the

Manicheans, since they both tend to identify matter and evil. It is moreover undisputable that Augustine has been strongly influenced by these two philosophico-religious currents. However, one has to take into account that the greatest Latin Father, far from emphasizing this convergence, used the former's doctrine against the latter. According to the *Confessions*, it is Plotinus and the Platonists which have helped Augustine to get rid of the Manichean pessimism on matter and bodily condition. If matter is to some extent connected with evil, it is not due to what matter is in itself, but to what it lacks. In actual fact, Augustine's conversion to Christ, facilitated by his Neoplatonic readings, is essentially a conversion to the goodness of the created universe in every respect.

Notwithstanding, as we endeavour to assess the nature of the "transformation of the Christian message" allegedly brought about by Augustine, we cannot be merely satisfied by rambling about the possible influences of the Greco-Roman culture on the evolution of his thought. This amounts to one side of the coin only. Besides knowing better the *subject* of these hypothetical influences, we have to get a closer look at what is presented as their eventual *object*: the Christian understanding of bodily condition during late Antiquity

2. The shaping of the Judeo-Christian view on the man/woman relationship until the 4th century.

Take two kids, a gentle one and a bully. Leave them alone for a while. If the gentle kid becomes a bully, one can say that he has been influenced by his friend. But if both are bullies from the start, how can you tell that one has influenced the other? Well, the way one has to be a bully might have changed, and become more similar to the way the other one has to bully his or her comrades. Only in this case can one tell who has influenced whom.

If anything, the views on marriage and sexual relations that arose on the soil of the First Testament and the primeval teaching of Christ can hardly

be said to have been less stern and patriarchal than the customs of the late Roman Empire. As P. Brown points out at the beginning of his masterful book, *The Body and Society, Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, the Jews have developed a type of dualism which is not less radical, as to its concrete consequences, than the body/soul dualism of Greek Platonism, namely: the dualism between men's imperfection and God's perfection⁵. This attitude implied a dramatic and constant search for integrity of heart, something to which an improper use of sexuality had been from of old perceived as an obstacle. It is in the light of this search that Brown accounts for the birth of a drastic form of sexual asceticism on Jewish soil, just before the advent of Christianity. The way of life of Essenian communities, during the period of the second Temple, took the Roman intellectuals aback. Pliny the Elder is a good witness to this attitude:

"It is, writes Pliny, remarkable among all tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire...a race in which no one is born lives on forever"⁶.

St. Paul was not original in putting adultery, homosexuality, etc. on a same level with idolatry⁷. For all the rabbis of the time, these phenomena pertained to the very core of a world - the Greco-Roman world - which had remained foreign and even openly hostile to the Revelation of the One and true God. Having to introduce Christian faith to 2nd century Greco-Roman Pagans, Justin claims that the moral stringency of his religion's marital code as well as the quest for a complete sexual abstinence are its most evident self-defining properties⁸. Dramatic limitations of divorce cases, as an effort to implement the teaching of Christ reported in the Gospels, made the Christian marriage even more morally demanding than its pre-Christian Jewish equivalent. Moreover, the practice of sexual renunciation will soon appear to be an exotic privilege of the Christian faithful, since, as P. Brown shows, Judaism in its post- 2nd century renovated version would not approve of it⁹.

⁵ Columbia Univ. Press, 1985, cf.p.34 sq.

⁶ Quoted in *The Body*, p.38.

⁷ I Cor.6, 9-10.

⁸ *The Body*, p.34.

⁹ P.63.

In the early 4th century, such an ardently dualistic and morally austere Neoplatonic philosopher as Porphyry harshly blames Christians who thought to follow the precepts of their Master by making themselves “eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven”. How could the human race ever perpetuate itself if this were the true path?i10 It is a fact that Christian sexual practices exceeded everything Greco-Roman world had hitherto known in terms of austerity and praise of sexual abstinence.

Notwithstanding, P. Brown, evoking the irresistible rise of monastic life, emphasizes how little the movement launched by St Anthony the Great had to do - at least according to its original inspiration - with a rejection of the bodily condition:

“Far from being driven by a dualistic hatred of the body, the slow wisdom of the monks, between the fourth and the early seventh centuries, marked the end of dualism as conceptual tool with which to handle the complexities of human spiritual growth”¹¹.

What Brown means is that the search of spiritual life, as the desert Fathers understood it, started with the acceptance of the body as the battlefield designated by God. On the contrary, the rejection of the body rested on a vain and foolish hope to escape the good fight. The body had to be accepted, because virtue, as well as sin, had to do with the human condition in its wholeness. Dealing with the body in a certain way became an opportunity to defeat the real source of evil, that source from where all sins, bodily as well as spiritual, would stem. The monk’s enemy was not the body, but these tenebrous feelings which, according to Christ, dwelled in the depth of human heart -

“I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mat.5.28) ...For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder” (Mar. 7.21)”.

In this fight of the spirit with itself or within itself, the monks experienced and described how important was a prudent use of the body. What impure spirits could sometimes use to defeat strivings for holiness was to be reversed into an instrument of spiritual victory.

¹⁰ Body, p.181.

¹¹Intro.p.59

Christian literature has abundantly praised the greatness of this struggle. Among others, the treatise on virginity written by the once-married Gregory of Nyssa unceasingly builds on the ideals and experience of monastic life. At the same time, one should recognize that this powerful and enduring trend towards sexual renunciation did not merely produce healthy spiritual fruits. It has also given rise to a number of more or less dangerous misinterpretations within and beyond the limits of the Roman Empire. The religion founded by Mani that we have mentioned, features merely one case - albeit one of the most extremes - among a flurry of para-Christian movements that shared a negative attitude towards the bodily condition. Accordingly, one of the constant concerns of Christian writers, starting with Irenaeus of Lyon, was to dissociate what the latter called Gnosticism from genuine Christian doctrine. The necessity to prove that Christian continency and, later, monastic life did not witness some idiosyncratic rejection of the bodily condition led these writers to advocate the rights of marriage life and the whole "sexual economy" that went together with this state of existence¹². In other terms, Christian theology had to show that the practice of complete sexual renunciation, even if it were to be considered as a legitimate step to reach a higher level of perfection, did not take away the dignity of Christian marriage. Marriage was not a *pis-aller*, something that concerned only those who, for some reason or another, were no longer able to cut off their former ties and immerse themselves into the practice of angelic life. There were two integrally Christian vocations, the married and the non-married one, so that the whole Christian social order would rest on the harmonious interaction between these two states of existence endowed with their respective rights and duties. If one does not have this theological *status quaestionis* in mind, the whole attitude of Augustine towards human sexuality becomes incomprehensible. As the theologian writes in *De Bono conjugali*:

¹² Around 200 A.D., Clement of Alexandria writes his treatise on marriage in order to refute Gnostic asceticism. It is a false kind of asceticism, because it is inspired on the hatred of the created order (*Miscellanies*, III, 1,4;3,12). Same argumentation in J. Chrysostom's *On Virginity* (II,2;IV,2; V,1;VIII,3, etc.).

“When we say that marriage is good, we are not speaking about a relative good, in comparison to fornication (...) Marriage and fornication are not two evils, of which one is less so than the other. On the contrary, marriage and continency are two good things, of which one is superior to the other”¹³.

From this point of view, the example of Ecdicia, a Roman matron who wrote to Augustine seeking his advice, is compelling. Ecdicia had suddenly decided that she had become a “widow”- she would not hear of engaging any longer in any form of sexual relationship with her husband, since, as she argued, she wanted to live according to the evangelical counsels. The answer of Augustine is dismissive. According to the bishop of Hippone, it is more excellent to observe the duties of one condition than to adopt a superior mode of life. In other terms, breaking one’s natural duties in order to adopt a superior mode of life is a fault, if not a sin. Some feminist theologians have seen in this answer a proof of Augustine’s patriarchal attitude, as if he did not want a woman to emancipate by loosening the bonds of her conjugal servitude. From this perspective, the connection between patriarchalism and asceticism does not appear to be as cogent as it is currently argued by the same writers. Should we come to think of the defense of bodily condition, and more specifically of a legitimate use of sexuality as of an instrument of women’s oppression?¹⁴ Does conversely women’s path towards independence and “adulthood” imply a Gnostic rejection of the bodily condition? This provocative question left aside, it should be observed that the answer of Augustine bears no mention of sex – its logic would apply as well to Ecdicia’s husband if he had expressed the same desire as his wife.

Be that as it may, in a situation where the fundamental contrast between the sexual requirements of the new religion and the general immorality of Pagan society was constantly brought up by the most eminent

¹³ C. 52, 8

¹⁴ See Elizabeth A. Clark: “An irony of early Christian history is that the ascetic movement, which had so many features denigrating of women and marriage, became the movement that, more than any other, provided “liberation” of a sort for Christian Women. If they could surmount their identification with sexual and reproductive functioning, women were allowed freedoms and roles they otherwise would have been granted. I do not posit that most women consciously chose the ascetic life as an ‘escape’ from marriage. Nonetheless, their renunciations, motivated by religious concerns, served to liberate them from the traditional bonds of marriage. The advantages they received in adopting asceticism were practical as well as theoretical”, *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith, Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, Edwin Mellen Press, UK, 1986, p.42.

writers and witnesses among Christians, thinking of the influence of the latter on the former in terms of a strengthening of sexual asceticism can hardly be taken seriously. Any influence *in that direction* would and has effectively been perceived as an utterly dangerous slackening of the Gospel's teaching on moral and spiritual purity. Of course, Christianity has had to slip into Roman juridical patterns concerning marriage and divorce practices, especially after obtaining legal status during the era of Constantine. But if imperial legislation started to become increasingly restrictive on matters of sexuality, it is precisely due to the strengthening of the Church's position in the society. Speaking of influences in this field, there is little doubt that the stream flows from Christian faith in the direction of Greco-Roman behavioural codes and not vice-versa. Christian theologians found no difficulty in espousing the stern views of Musonius on the use of sexuality within marriage, since they practically coincided with their own code of behaviour. However, the anthropological and metaphysical tenets on which these views were based underwent a dramatic transformation under the influence of Christian faith. The problem with what was qualified as a "wrong use of sexuality" was no longer the fact that it harmed the delicate balance of nature, but that, being a sin, it hindered the access to Christ's salvation granted through baptism and the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. Natural damages were but contingent details in the supernatural struggle for holiness which was supposed to be the lot of Christians. Accordingly, the rigorism of such thinkers as Musonius, once endorsed by Christianity, acquired a width, a depth and a breadth that superceded anything these thinkers themselves could have imagined. From the perspective of Christ's Salvation, Christian theologians drew a continuous line between the chastity of marriage and the goal of the monastic complete renunciation to sexual enjoyment: union with God or divinisation. Meanwhile, they saw unchastity and "unnatural" sexual practices as a straightforward path to eternal damnation.

Therefore, we need to conclude that if Augustine's thought did bring about changes in the traditional Christian doctrine regarding sex and

marriage, these changes can hardly be ascribed to a rigorism bound with a cultural mentality foreign to the Christian cultural sphere. However, did Augustine's ideas *überhaupt* bring about significant changes in this traditional teaching? Should we think of them in terms of undue alteration or in terms of legitimate development? This is the issue we would like to address now.

3. Transformation...what kind of transformation?

3.1. St Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine on procreation and original sin

As we have said, according to a well-spread opinion, Augustine's theory on sex has decisively orientated Western Christianity on the path towards the general social neurosis of which the oppression of women is but a side-effect. It is however by no means easy to determine which aspect of Augustine's theory shows to be both so novel and so foreign to the previous Christian tradition.

Is it the condemnation of concupiscence as an immoderate search of sexual pleasure? We have quoted the Gospel. We could have quoted the First Testament, the epistles of Paul, or an indefinite number of writers from the earlier Christian tradition. There is hardly any need to emphasize such an overwhelming majority and unanimity. The issue bears rather on the association between concupiscence and the primeval sin. However, the idea that these immoderate desires of the flesh and the sexual behaviours that are associated with them - homosexuality for example - are a consequence of the sin of Adam is certainly not specific to Augustine. Man and women were not created with the passions that distort their likeness to God. This is an idea which can be found everywhere in early Christian literature, so that if it is a myth, one is entitled to claim that it belongs to the most fundamental principles of Christianity.

Admittedly, Augustine is said to have developed an idiosyncratic view on the manner in which the first sin propagates to the consequent generations, so that sexual pleasure will henceforth receive the stamp of guilt. It is true that, according to Augustine, the inclination of human heart towards evil passions that goes back to Adam propagates automatically as it were, through the biological process of human generation. Is this theory, however, an invention of Augustine? Actually, one finds exactly the same theory in *De opificio hominis*, the classical treatise of Gregory of Nyssa, written about 40 years (380) before Augustine took to the refutation of Pelagianism. According to Gregory, the consequence of the sin of Adam, that is, of Adam's dismissal of reason, *logos*, as the most excellent part of his nature, was that human beings started to produce their descendancy the way creatures without reason or animals, *aloga*, do. Precisely, this mode of generation, τὸ κατὰ τὴν γένεσιν, is such that what commands the operation of sexual organs are irrational feelings. The problem, explains Gregory, is that in human beings, irrational feelings tend to become sinful passions:

“The likeness of man to God is not found in anger, nor is pleasure a mark of the superior nature. All these and the like affections entered man's composition by reason of the animal mode of generation, διὰ τῆς κτηνώδους γενέσεως”¹⁵.

Gregory does not claim that feelings of pleasure and anger are evil in animals. These feelings are even said to fill virtues with content in human beings when they are swayed by reason. However, since Adam's fall, the opposite case is the general one. In human beings, these feelings tend to sway reason:

“(…) for whenever a man drags down his mental energy to these affections, and forces his reason to become the servant of his passions, there takes place a sort of conversion of the good stamp in him into the irrational image”¹⁶.

¹⁵ C.18, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.3.

The attraction for pleasure that does not obey reason or rebel against the will – this is exactly the definition Augustine gives of concupiscence. What Augustine does is to provide a vivid description of the way in which every sexual act in the fallen man witnesses the presence of this element which is rebellious to reason - “the impulse of the brute”, as Gregory calls it, ἡ τῶν ἀλόγων ὀρμή. We read for instance in his treatise on *Marriage and Concupiscence*:

“When it must come to man’s great function of the procreation of children the members which were expressly created for this purpose will not obey the direction of the will, but lust has to be waited for to set these members in motion, as if it had legal right over them, and sometimes it refuses to act when the mind wills, while often it acts against its will! Must not this bring the blush of shame over the freedom of the human will, that by its contempt of God, its own Commander, it has lost all proper command for itself over its own members?”¹⁷

This rebellious element is the mark left on human sexuality by a primeval act of disobedience which had nothing to do with sexuality. Without this disobedience, our forefathers would have enjoyed the blessings of a sexual life devoid of lust¹⁸. In fact, contrary to what is often stated, Augustine does not condemn sexual pleasure as such. He even posits the possibility of a form of sexual enjoyment that would have been innocent, a form in which the limbs of the body would have been obedient to the intellectual part of human nature¹⁹. What Augustine refuses is to see in sexual enjoyment the highest joy attainable, since this material pleasure can hinder the blessedness that stems from spiritual union with God²⁰. Besides, Augustine does not,

¹⁷ Extract from Augustin’s retractations (b.2, c.53), c.7.

¹⁸ “And certainly, had not culpable disobedience been visited with penal disobedience, the marriage of Paradise should have been ignorant of this struggle and rebellion, this quarrel between will and lust, that the will may be satisfied and lust restrained, but those members, like all the rest, should have obeyed the will. The field of generation should have been sown by the organ created for this purpose, as the earth is sown by the hand”, *The City of God*, 14, c.23.

¹⁹ Thus the old Augustine writes in his first letter to the Pelagians: “But, while maintaining, ye Pelagians, the honorableness and fruitfulness of marriage, determine, if nobody had sinned, what you would wish to consider the life of those people in Paradise, and choose one of these four things. For beyond a doubt, either as often as ever they pleased they would have had intercourse; or they would bridle lust when intercourse was not necessary; or lust would arise at the summons of will, just at the time when chaste prudence would have perceived beforehand that intercourse was necessary; or, with no lust existing at all, as every other member served for its own work, so for its own work the organs of generation also would obey the commands of those that willed, without any difficulty” (1, c.34).

²⁰ This is why Augustine continues the same letter in the following manner: “Of these four suppositions, choose which you please; but I think you will reject the two former, in which lust is either obeyed or resisted. For the first one would not be in accordance with so great a virtue, and the second not in harmony with so great a happiness. For be the idea far from us, that the glory of so great a blessedness as that should either be most

strictly speaking, qualify *concupiscentia*, this tendency rebellious to reason, as a sin. It is the cause of sin, not sin in itself, otherwise the mere experience of lust would make a sinner of the regenerate who resists it²¹.

As we have said, it is difficult to see a serious difference between the ways Augustine and the Greek Fathers look upon the consequences of the original sin²². How was one to account for these pre-inclinations to evil that dwell in the human heart, willingly or not, if not by referring to the *Ur-trauma* of the Fall? As Gregory of Nyssa puts it, "the ruling element of our soul is more inclined to be dragged downwards by the weight of the irrational nature than is the heavy and earthy element to be exalted by the loftiness of the intellect"²³. There are however historical circumstances that explain why the notion of guilt has become so central in the theology of Augustine, whereas it is far less pregnant in the Eastern tradition. Augustine fought at length against a purely Western heresy. Pelagianism taught that human freedom of will had remained wholly unaffected by the sin of Adam. In the East meanwhile, the Fathers had to fight the exactly opposite doctrine. Messalians taught that Adam's sin had deprived all human beings of their freedom of will, so that, even after baptism, Christians could only count on the action of the Holy Spirit to oppose the influence of the Devil. Admittedly, the Greek Fathers, fighting the Messalians, had to emphasize the role of the individual will, freed by Christ, as what could cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the attainment of Salvation (*synergeia*). Meanwhile, in his fight against Pelagianism, Augustine

basely enslaved by always following a preceding lust, or, by resisting it, should not enjoy the most abounding peace. Away, I say, with the thought that that mind should either be gratified by consenting to satisfy the concupiscentia of the flesh, arising not opportunely for the sake of procreation, but with unregulated excitement, or that that quiet should find it necessary to restrain it by refusing".

²¹"Now this concupiscentia, this law of sin which dwells in our members (...) which is cleansed only by the sacrament of regeneration, does undoubtedly, by means of natural birth, pass on the bond of sin to a man's posterity, unless they are themselves loosed from it by regeneration. In the case, however, of the regenerate, concupiscentia is not itself sin any longer, whenever they do not consent to it for illicit works, and when the members are not applied by the presiding mind to perpetrate such deeds. (...) Inasmuch, however, as by a certain manner of speech it is called sin, since it arose from sin, and, when it has the upper hand, produces sin, the guilt of it prevails in the natural man; but this guilt, by Christ's grace through the remission of all sins, is not suffered to prevail in the regenerate man, if he does not yield obedience to it whenever it urges him to the commission of evil", *On Marriage and Concupiscentia*, c.25.

²² Cf. P. N. Trembelas on the Fathers' *homofonia* regarding the consequences of the Fall, *Dogmatikh*, Athenes, 1959, vol.1, p.529 sq.

²³ *The Making of Man*, c.18, 6.

had to argue in the exactly opposite direction. Augustine unremittingly pointed out the flaws of human freedom considered independently from the grace of Christ. Of course, the fact that human freedom can achieve little without the grace of Christ does not exclude that it can achieve a lot through relying on the very same grace. However, from this time on, the West and the East started to reflect on matters of anthropology and sanctification from very different vantage points. Let us therefore examine the specific anthropological elements that emerged from the Pelagian controversy.

3.2 Sex and guilt in the Pelagian controversy

When evoking the Pelagian controversy, it should be mentioned, at least by way of passing, that it is Pelage, and not Augustine, who should be considered as a representative of Stoicism. The notion of *liberum arbitrium*, meaning the power to give or to refuse psychological assent to a mental representation, is a Stoic concept. Pelagius probably picked up the word, originally forged by Seneca on the basis of legal terminology, from Tertullian, whose acquaintance with Stoicism is well-known²⁴. In actual fact, the Stoic ideal of self-government stands in direct opposition to the Augustinian emphasis on the incapacity of the will to achieve its goal relying on its own power. From a general point of view, locating the source of human immorality in an in-born weakness of the will, as Augustine does, appears to be a totally new idea in the sphere of Greco-Roman philosophy.

Be that as it may, the debate over Pelagianism came to focus on the issue of sex and guilt as a consequence of the struggle of the young, energetic and well-educated bishop of Eclane, Julian, against an ageing Augustine. For the latter, things were quite simple: concupiscence being the reason that made sin unavoidable to human beings, its very existence witnessed that the curse of Adam extended its effects to all his descendents by way of generation. The main reference was Romans 5, 12:

²⁴ Cf. R. Sorabji, "Emotions and Peace of Mind", *Gifford Lecture Series*, III, n.21, www.giffordlectures.org. See also *Reading Seneca*, B. Inwood ed., Cambridge 2003, p.49-50.

^{NJB} **Romans 5:12** Well then; it was through one man that sin came into the world, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned.

However Julian found the idea of Adam's curse incompatible with God's fundamental justice and goodness. How could God ever consider all these human beings, including children not yet capable of a conscious moral behaviour, guilty of an action they had never committed? Julian calls Augustine "a persecutor of infants, who throws tiny babies into the eternal fire"²⁵. According to Julian, the story of Adam is merely a parable of our own existence: all sinners, though born with an uncontaminated free-will, can recognize themselves in the one who, at some point, deliberately set himself apart from the love of God. Very remarkably, the denial of the sinful character of concupiscence led Julian to proclaim the perfect naturalness of human sexuality. The views of Julian on sexual morals are certainly more rigid than what is currently suggested by modern liberal theologians, but the former and the latter share the same basic intuition²⁶. Nothing from what goes together with a "normal" or "natural" sexual activity should be considered foreign to the will of God:

"God made bodies, distinguished the sexes, made genitalia, bestowed affection through which bodies would be joined, gave power to the semen, and operates in the secret nature of the semen- and God made nothing evil"²⁷

Julian interprets Augustine's eagerness to associate any use of sexuality with guilt as witnessing the lasting influence of his previous Manicheist worldviews. According to E. Pagels, the only explanation to the official endorsement of Augustine's views by the Church is the will of the Roman State to propagate a pessimistic idea of human condition, so as to foster the

²⁵ *Against Julian*, 1, 48.

²⁶ M. Lamberigts summarizes Julian's position in the following manner: "In common with most of his contemporaries, Julian considered a life of sexual abstinence superior to married life and, in line with 1 Cor 7, viewed marriage as a remedy for those who were unable to manage without a partner *Ad Turbantium*, frg. 197; CCL 88.379; frg. 49; CCL 88.49; frg. 63; CCL 88.356; frg. 84; CCL 88.362). (...) In Julian's view, any understanding of *concupiscentia* as an uncontrollable force against which human persons were powerless might easily be used as an excuse to avoid personal responsibility. Julian, on the other hand, underlined the fact that one could only consider a person guilty if he or she had deliberately violated the prescribed frameworks (unnatural sex, adultery, fornication) (*Ad Turbantium*, frg. 45.48; CCL 88.351; frg. 62; CCL 88.356; frg. 135-6; CCL 88.368-9; frg. 194, 198; CCL 88.378-9)", "A critical evaluation of critiques of Augustine's views on sexuality" in *Augustine and his critics*, R. Dodaro and G. Lawless ed. Routledge, London, 2000, p.177.

²⁷ Augustine, *Opus Imperfectum*, 4, 40.

political virtue of obedience among its citizens. However, Augustine has always insisted that the reason why concupiscence witnessed the pregnancy of Adam's curse in his descendents was purely theological. It is on this basis that it became part of the official teaching of the Western Church. Indeed, what does it mean that Christ is the saviour of mankind if this salvation does not remove the guilt or the curse that affects all human beings? Hence Augustine's sharp reply to Julian:

“It is yourselves who invidiously deny this Liberator, since you ascribe a vain liberty to yourselves in your captivity”²⁸.

Exactly as the fall of Adam is not only an exact parable of our personal existence, the Incarnation of the Word of God does not merely aim at teaching us how to behave properly²⁹. God became flesh in order to destroy the root of evil existing in all human hearts through faith and the bestowal of His grace³⁰. It is true that the human race suffers unjustly from the sin of Adam. But is not the reestablishment of justice- justification precisely – the very purpose of Salvation, as the most glaring sign of God's goodness? It is also true that, according to Augustine, the bestowal of God's grace through baptism does not entirely destroy concupiscence, so that the seed sown by the first human being continues to bend the actions of his descendents, albeit regenerated in Christ, towards evil. Yet is it the sign that Augustine cannot conceive of sexual activity without guilt and sin? In actual fact, the effect of baptism, according to Augustine, is to remove that part of concupiscence which pertains to the guilt of Adam. The fact that concupiscence remains explains that those who are saved in Christ can sin – but if they do, it is no longer because they are prey to the guilt, *culpa*, of Adam, but because they suffer from its effects, as the punishment, *poena*,

²⁸ *Opus imperfectum*, c.8.

²⁹ “No doubt all human beings imitate Adam who by disobedience transgress the commandment of God; but he is one thing as an example to those who sin because they choose; and another thing as the progenitor of all who are born with sin. All His saints, also, imitate Christ in the pursuit of righteousness; whence the same apostle, whom we have already quoted, says: ‘Be ye imitators of me, as I am also of Christ.’ But besides this imitation, His grace works within us our illumination and justification”, *Opus imperfectum*, c.10.

³⁰ . “He that is begotten is no sinner as yet in act, and is still new from his birth; but in guilt he is old. Human from the Creator, he is a captive of the destroyer, and needs a redeemer”, *On marriage and Concupiscence*.

that the fault has deserved them³¹. It is true that, for the ones whose freedom has been regenerated in Christ, falling prey to the enduring effects of the first sin induces a new, individual guilt. However, they can appeal to Christ's grace to remove the weight of this guilt, so that they can rely on God's standing help to take up again the good fight. Here, marriage appears as a powerful instrument destined to foster human freedom and dignity. The fact that the reasonable intention of the will- that of generating a new life - joins together with a sexual desire freed from the guilt of Adam reverses the enslaving dynamics of sin. It prevents the will from being overwhelmed by the irrationality of animal desire:

“Conjugal intercourse is not in itself sin, when it is had with the intention of producing children; because the mind's goodwill leads the ensuing bodily pleasure, instead of following its lead”³²

In this manner, the Christian couple, notwithstanding the weight of what Paul's calls the “old man”, can experience something of the innocence of desire that was at the heart - or rather should have been - at the heart of the relationship between the first man and the first woman:

Genesis 2:22-25 Yahweh God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. ²³ And the man said: This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called Woman, because she was taken from Man. ²⁴ This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Now, both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but *they felt no shame* before each other.

For Augustine, the frail relationship between a man and a woman which is called love hides the mystery of love that unites Christ to the Church, along the lines of 1Cor 5. Sexual ethics is not indifferent when what is at stake is the growth of this frail relationship. The will and capacity to produce life is the criterion which discriminate between unions that find grace in the eyes of

³¹ “Carnal concupiscence is remitted, indeed, in baptism; not so that it is put out of existence, but so that it is not to be imputed for sin. Although its guilt is now taken away, it still remains until our entire infirmity be healed by the advancing renewal of our inner man, day by day, when at last our outward man shall be clothed with incorruption (...) Even *now*, says he, when the law in my members keeps up its warfare against the law of my mind, and retains in captivity somewhat in the body of this death, there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, c.21.

³² *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 1, c.13.

God and unions that do not. Is this laying the ground for the new form of patriarchalism which is said to have moulded a millennium and half years of European civilization? One would have to reflect whether this divine institution of marriage, as the mode of existence that befits genuine love between a man and a woman, can be something else than patriarchal, in the sense usually advocated in feminist theology. As we cannot, unfortunately enough, expand on this topic, we shall briefly conclude.

At the beginning of this presentation, we have defined a new concept, Christilism, as a reversal of the basic Freudo-Nietschean theme against itself. The fundamental problem of European Western civilization would not be due to the annexation of Greek, spontaneously Pagan modes of thinking by Judeo-Christian supernatural rigorism, but the exact opposite. The generosity of Judeo-Christian wisdom on matters of sexuality would have been obscured by Greco-Roman metaphysical dualism and social Puritanism, a turn of events in which the theology of Augustine would have shown instrumental. In our presentation, we have tried to point out the thoroughly artificial and unconvincing nature of this attempt to salvage Christian faith from the cultural suspicion which fell over it since the time of Nietzsche and Freud. The objective elements which serve to build this hypothetical construction are scarce or weak, to say the least. Pessimism regarding bodily condition is not a cultural feature which is more dominant in the traditional Greco-Roman world than in the Jewish sphere of civilization. The main element, however, is not that, on matters of sexual ethics, Jewish tradition shows far more restrictive than its Greco-Roman equivalent. One needs to take into account is the phenomenon which P. Brown describes at length: the outbreak of an unprecedented wave of asceticism during late Antiquity, something which is indubitably associated with the rapid penetration of Christianity into the inner layers of society. Indeed, the reasons of this outbreak are unlikely to be found elsewhere than in the theological and spiritual configuration of the new religion. It is Christianity which has gradually

influenced the moral and legal patterns of the late Roman Empire in the direction of an increased Puritanism, with all the typical features that are included in the modern notion of heterosexual Patriarchalism. From this perspective, the views of Augustine on human sexuality do not appear to differ essentially from those expressed by the other Fathers of the Church before him or during his time, including on the Greek-speaking side of the Empire. It is true that the struggle against Pelagianism led Augustine to forcefully deny the naturalness of what he called lust. However, this position had nothing irreconcilable with an optimistic, anti-Manichean, view on matter and bodily condition. If there is nothing wrong with the beautiful universe that came out from God's sovereign decision, and especially with the tenebrous feelings that dwell in the heart of human beings, what is the salvation of Christ exactly about?

We are finally brought to the following consideration. Provided the alleged transformation of Christian views on sexuality by Augustine is a gratuitous hypothesis, provided such pre-Augustinian, "innocent concept" of Christian sexuality is something of an idle fancy, then it is not Augustine, but the promoters of this hypothesis who are suggesting to transform Christianity. Indeed, they do so by adjusting the substance of the Christian tradition to their own representation of a legitimate use of sexuality, a representation that owes nothing to the original inspiration of the Christian tradition. In actual fact, these views are borrowed from the Nietzschean-Freudian philosophical legacy, that is, from the very movement which has radically questioned the *bien-fonde* of Christian moral teaching. It might be true, after all, that the Judeo-Christian tradition stands at the core of what these authors describe as the European cultural neurosis. Where faith is said not to make sense any longer, nothing is left from the supernatural dimension of the Judeo-Christian tradition except dictatorial, resolutely incomprehensible moral requirements. However, claiming that the "natural understanding" of sexuality which stems from this non-, if not anti-Christian, worldview is to be considered as the genuine content of Christian faith, is a position that has *ipso facto* renounced

to the logical consistency of its implicit source of inspiration. Who could take seriously a conceptual magic trick destined to accommodate the remnants of a prodigious tradition to the controversial taste of the day? Nietzsche, as we said, has himself prophesized what would become of his strong and fiercely atheistic doctrine regarding the *Übermensch*. The “spreading morality of pity” was to generate the “new Buddhism”, the “Buddhism for Europeans” that he called Nihilism. Its avatar that we have called Christilism tries to solve real theological issues by operating misleading cultural relativizations. Maybe it is high time we did theology again.
