



Julian the Apostle: The Emperor who “Brought Piety as it Were Back from Exile”

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Abstract

Julian the Apostate stands as the only pagan emperor to rule after Constantine the Great instituted Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. During his reign he attempted to reestablish classical religion to its former preeminence, though he also recognized the need to adapt these practices to the context of the post-Diocletian, post-Constantinian empire. This paper will explore his paradoxical forward-looking conservatism through an analysis of the ways in which Julian’s paganism came to resemble the Christian faith he hoped to replace, namely the role of the priesthood, the emerging “pagan orthodoxy,” and the reorganization of the religious power structure into a strict hierarchy. Julian was a prolific writer, and his extant literature provides rare insight into the intentions and beliefs of this notable iconoclast. His polarizing attitudes garnered both enthusiastic praise and ardent condemnation from contemporary historians and theologians, all of which combine to produce an outsized historical record for an emperor whose reign lasted less than two years. Ultimately, the formidable intellectual and political challenge Julian posed to the Christian community required a proportional response, and the extent to which he affected the development of Christianity arguably makes Julian a “father of the Church.”

From the end of the third century and into the fourth century CE, the vast Roman Empire underwent arguably the most significant shift in Western history. The military ballooned in size and social and political importance, necessitating a sprawling bureaucracy to support its needs. Soon a talented new political elite sprang up almost exclusively from the military ranks and rose through the recently centralized government. From this new class of warrior-statesmen came Constantine, who, in an appeal for imperial unity, converted to Christianity. By the end of the century Christianity had become the dominant religion, and in a twist of fate it was the worshippers of the traditional Hellenic pantheon of gods who found themselves persecuted. In the grand arc of history the rise of Christianity, once set in motion, may seem inevitable. But in the midst of that

rise one figure stood athwart history, looking to curb the seismic shift going on around him by clinging to the models of the past. Flavius Claudius Iulianus, more commonly known as Julian the Apostate, defines the complicated influences at play during his revolutionary era more acutely than any contemporary, as his life reflects the tension between the appeal of the past and the obstacles of the present. On the one hand, Julian was determined to check the growth of an expensive, tax-funded professional bureaucracy as well as the rise and institutionalization of Christianity. In their wake he saw the collapse of a classical legacy that had developed seemingly unchecked under the conservative leadership of iconic emperors like Augustus and Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius. On the other hand, he understood that conventions of the past were no longer suitable to deal with the impediments of the present. The institutions that had defined Rome for centuries had proven insufficient in managing an empire that had, at its peak, stretched from the British Isles to the deserts of Arabia. In response to the challenge before him, Julian implemented sweeping reforms to reassert a fundamental way of life informed by the classical *paideia* of Rome's Hellenic heritage but evolved enough to cope with new obstacles that necessitated change.

This paper will focus on one specific and particularly notable point of intersection between tradition and innovation during Julian's reign. Despite being the nephew of Christianity's great patron, Constantine the Great, Julian came to be a staunch disciple of the traditional Hellenic pantheon of gods. He was the only non-Christian Caesar to obtain power after Constantine I. But though a "pagan"¹ had temporarily returned to the imperial throne, the organized and increasingly powerful Christian clergy continued to exert its influence over the minds and souls of many Romans. Julian was familiar with the tenets of Christianity, having studied under prominent religious leaders throughout his youth (and having been, at least in name if not always at heart, a Christian for much of his life), and so it is not surprising that his efforts to reestablish the hegemony of paganism involved adopting some of the most compelling and structurally effective characteristics of its rival religion. Julian's evolved paganism was one that strove to put forward a more unified religious face than had ever emerged from the disparate local, mystic, and hero cults of paganism-past. In so doing Julian and his advisors implemented—oftentimes quite vehemently—something akin to a pagan orthodoxy, which, though it still accounted for the wide range of polytheistic influences, brought the many gods into the fold of a single prevailing deity, Helios. At no point, however, were any characteristics of Christianity adopted solely for their utilitarian value without their first being justified within Julian's Neoplatonic and Hellenic worldview. Accordingly, Julian reinterpreted many of the canonical Hellenic myths by Neoplatonic standards, instilling them with allegorical importance—much as Biblical texts were received—thereby introducing a theurgical element to the religion. Organizational changes were

1. "Pagan" is not, of course, the term by which Julian and those of his creed would have called themselves, but rather a Christian designation. But for the sake of simplicity, except for when more specificity is required, I will refer to them as "pagans," and the religion as "paganism."

likewise justified for their adherence to Hellenic values, and in so doing Julian's priests achieve a close resemblance with Christian bishops.

To understand the historical significance of Julian's reign, one must understand who he was and how he came to hold power in an era that abandoned many past traditions. Julian came to preside over a world in transition, and he represented an ideological holdout—not a relic—of the past fighting for its place in the new Rome. Though history ultimately sided against Julian and his appeal to tradition, defeat was never the inevitable outcome. As chance would have it, his most radical ambitions for Rome shattered upon the impact of a Persian arrow, which left the emperor mortally wounded only a year and a half into his administration. His legacy, however, is far more than a mere historical *what-if*: Julian revealed the tenuousness of Christian dominion, and the existential shock his ascendancy gave the theological establishment provoked reactions and shaped doctrine in ways that are still relevant to the modern world.

Julian, true to his ideals, reckoned himself as much a philosopher as a politician or general, and accordingly he wrote more treatises, panegyrics, and orations than any other emperor in history, as well as a considerable archive of letters—his “immortal children,” according to Julian's friend and fellow pagan philosopher Libanius.² Fortunately for the modern scholar, many of those texts have been preserved either in full or as excerpts transmitted via the works of his contemporaries.³ They provide a rare glimpse into Julian's life, and an analysis of their contents provides explanations for many of Julian's actions and beliefs, revealing how they evolved over the course of his life. Divisive as he was, the historical record is further bolstered by those who found much to admire in his example and by those who found much to curse. Three accounts are of particular note: first, the contributions of Libanius, who, in addition to their correspondence, wrote many orations in defense of Julian; second, the historical work *Res Gestae* written by Ammianus Marcellinus, an eye-witness and enthusiastic pagan admirer of Julian's who fought in the emperor's army; and third, the immense collection of works by the influential Christian theologian Gregory of Nazianzus, safely written after Julian's death.

Becoming Julian

For many years, scholarship branded the Late Antique period as little more than the end of the classical world, emphasizing the traditional institutions that fell out of use. The Crisis of the Third Century nearly destroyed the administration of the Roman Empire, as invasion, civil war, and rampant inflation

2. In 1913 Julian's collected works were translated into English by Wilmer Cave Wright and published alongside the original Greek in three volumes by the Loeb Classical Library, the source from which my quotes and summaries of Julian's work are derived. The Libanius quote was found in the introduction to volume three, xvii.

3. It can be assumed some letters that did not survive were destroyed because they were too personally dangerous to their recipients or too blasphemous by the Christian powers-that-were. Others survived precisely because they documented Julian's persecution of Christians, or, more pertinent to my research still, because they record Julian mimicking certain Christian practices.

exposed traditional institutions as unfit to handle problems posed by such an expansive empire. But more recent scholarship by Peter Brown (1971) and others has renewed interest in the many beginnings that marked the period and the way the emergence of new institutions foreshadowed much in the modern world (7-9). Emperor Diocletian, an accomplished general, came to the rescue of the empire and lifted it from the crisis that nearly brought about its fragmentation and collapse. To do so he relied on the institution most familiar: the army. In response to external threats of invasion from the Persians, Goths, and war-bands along the Rhine, Diocletian nearly doubled Rome's fighting force. Such a dramatic expansion of manpower created an even more dramatic rise in administrative expenses, necessitating more taxes and, therefore, a more efficient bureaucratic structure to collect those taxes. Unsurprisingly the reorganization was unpopular with the traditional aristocracy as their positions of power were increasingly usurped by fast-rising military professionals; by the end of the third century even the imperial throne came to be the sole dominion of the military elite (Brown 1971, 22-33).

It was within this new power structure that Constantine the Great (and, later, Julian) rose to power. Constantine ruled either part or all of the empire from 306 until his death in 337, and his reign oversaw the creation of an "aristocracy of service," a vast network of professional bureaucrats who gradually assumed the administrative responsibilities once fulfilled by civic councils, fundamentally shifting governmental allegiance from the municipal to the state. Notably, after Constantine's miraculous conversion before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, these bureaucrats were predominantly Christian. Peter Brown attributes the revolutionary conversion of the Roman elite to the unprecedented importance of the imperial court, where the prospect of political advancement made adopting the emperor's faith an enticing opportunity (Brown 1971, 22-33). Sincere or not, conversion of the courts reflected an ongoing trend towards Christianity and other faiths that yielded more divine guidance and personal salvation, and the degree to which the pre-Constantine establishment felt threatened by Christianity is evident in the severity with which it persecuted the Church in 257 and 303 (Brown 1971, 49-57, 65).

Despite the trend towards conversion, however, formal education continued to mean the study of classical Greek and Latin texts: Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, and Vergil, Ovid, and Cicero, etc. The new classes of men advancing within the bureaucracy tended to hail from rural, pedestrian backgrounds, but the social revolution did not equate to a cultural one; they were soon inculcated into the established world of classical *paideia*. Without exception the Church intelligentsia learned the formal practices of rhetoric and philosophy by the traditional means of instruction, disassociating the texts from their conventional implications (Athanasiasiadi 2015, 10; and Elm 2012, 2). To many of them, this was only natural.⁴ They saw themselves as successors to the Hellenic heritage, and

4. Of course there were others, the ascetics, who chose the desert over civilization and rejected society altogether.

theologians like Origen and Basil of Caesarea argued that Christianity was not a deviation, but a natural progression in that lineage (Athassiadi 2015, 1-12). Indeed, as more and more non-Romans “invaded” traditional society, Christianity emerged as a reliably Roman institution (Brown 1971, 126). Pagans, however, did not see their counterparts’ amalgamation as nearly so natural. Among the most outspoken voices was Porphyry, who characterized Christianity as “a band of outlaws” with no right to the cultural legacy of the empire (Athassiadi 2015, 6). Pagans felt as though they were becoming *personae non gratae* in their own empire, and the culprit was clear.

This was the world into which Julian was born in 331. His elite family ties made it more difficult to navigate the atmosphere of change and conflict. When Constantine died in 337, his son and heir, Constantius II, executed many of his male relatives, including Constantine’s brother Julius Constantius, Julian’s father. Julian and his half-brother Gallus, spared due to their young age, were still perceived as threats to Constantius II, and Julian’s adolescence was spent in house arrest under the watchful eye of his cousin’s advisors. Despite his confinement, Julian was still a member of the imperial family and therefore privy to the benefits of such status. He studied under a host of elite philosophers, sophists, and theologians who inspired in young Julian a life-defining appreciation for intellectual pursuit. And though his education was typical in nature (i.e., steeped in the classical Hellenic tradition), he was naturally expected to follow in the Christian footsteps of his famous uncle (Athassiadi 2015, 13). This would not be the case.

Much of the record of Julian’s formative years comes from his letters written later in life, and in them he emphasizes those most responsible for his ideological development, a process that began very seriously with his first instructor. After consolidating power, Constantius II sent Julian to live in the charge of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia (“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, viii). There he studied under the eunuch Mardonius, who instilled in young Julian the belief that, through the wisdom of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and Theophrastus, he should, as he later wrote in *Misopogon*, “become better, not perhaps than other men—for it was not with them that I had to compete—but certainly better than my former self”; indeed, Julian credited Mardonius as the man “most responsible for [his] way of life” (*Misopogon* 353B-C). It was through Mardonius that Julian was first exposed to the ideas of truth and beauty as expressed in the Homeric epics, and these were lessons he took to heart (Athassiadi 2015, 16-20). In 342 Julian was relocated again, this time to Constantinople, and the orphan’s “suffering” at being separated from his mentor and surrogate father was considerable (*To Sallust* 241C).⁵ His education continued under the esteemed Hecebolius, responsible for teaching Julian rhetoric. Like Mardonius, Hecebolius was a Christian, though his religious affiliation had a way of corresponding to the persuasion of the current imperial court, and during Julian’s brief reign he discovered his “inner pagan,” only to return to Christianity after Julian’s death: his reliability was remarkable

5. Per Libanius, Julian and Mardonius stayed close the rest of their lives (Athassiadi 2015, 40).

(“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, xlvii).⁶ Nevertheless, according to Libanius his expertise was well enough established, and he knew “the innermost secrets of Homer’s mind and of all the choir around Homer” (Libanius, XV.27, as quoted in Athanassiadi 2015, 27).

In 345, however, Constantius II’s paranoia manifested itself again, and he sent Julian and his brother Gallus to be sequestered in a castle in Macellum for six years. Naturally, it was an ordeal that stuck with Julian, and in his *Letter to the Athenians* (in which he set about defending his decision to go to war against his cousin) Julian gave the following account:

We lived as though on the estate of a stranger, and were watched as though we were in some Persian garrison, since no stranger came to see us and not one of our old friends was allowed to visit us; so that we lived shut off from every liberal study and from all free intercourse, in a glittering servitude, and sharing the exercises of our own slaves as though they were comrades. For no companion of our own age ever came near us or was allowed to do so. (*To the Athenians* 271C.)

About the only break from this solitude came in the form of his studies with George of Cappadocia, also a Christian, and by the time Julian reached age twenty and was freed from his captivity, he had mastered the detailed knowledge of Christianity that would later appear in his writings (Athanassiadi 2015, 23). Yet, he also found an avenue to pursue non-Christian curiosities by way of George’s bountiful library, and when George was later killed by pagans, Julian requested the entire set be turned over to his care, for though there were many books “on the teachings of the impious Galileans,” there were also “many on philosophy, and many on rhetoric” (*To Ecdicius, Prefect of Egypt* 378A).⁷ That the letter conveyed no expression of grief concerning George’s murder is probably indicative of how he regarded his former teacher.

When Constantius II called Gallus away from Macellum, Julian took the opportunity to leave as well, and for the first time he had some degree of control over how his education proceeded. On the one hand, Julian had studied under the influence of Christians his entire life. It was a classical education, yes, but one no different than that which would produce many devout Christians; Gallus, for example, emerged from exactly the same circumstances with his faith intact.⁸ On the other hand, the same curriculum produced many pagans, too, and while Julian was surrounded by Christian influences, they happened to be the same Christians responsible for imprisoning and orphaning him. A degree of disillusionment would only be natural. In the narrative arc of Julian’s life, the decision before him would define his legacy.

6. His superficial “conversions” were quite typical of the age; see Athanassiadi 2015, 28-29.

7. Julian referred to all Christians as “Galileans.”

8. Though to say Gallus emerged unscathed would not do his deep-lying cynicism justice, and his brief reign as Caesar revealed him to be, according to one scholar, “a sort of Christian Caligula” (“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, viii).

Whatever the precise factors were that prevented Julian from embracing Christianity at this moment, it can at least be assumed, asserts Polymnia Athanassiadi (2015), that he was “neither a fervent convert nor consciously anti-Christian”: “He had only some indications, based on some obscure intuition, which pointed out the way that he was to follow; they were enough to prevent him from committing himself to Christianity, but not clear enough to engender any conflict in his soul” (24-25). If indeed an “obscure intuition” did guide Julian, it must have intimated a great sense of urgency, for in the subsequent year he lived nigh-nomadically, studying in Constantinople, Nicomedia, Pergamon, and Ephesus (Athanassiadi 2015, 30-33). His sojourns brought him into contact with a wider world of philosophy, and his elite status guaranteed an audience with the most prominent philosophers of the day. From Libanius he first discovered his saving grace, Hellenism, and from there he was quickly exposed to the emerging mysticism and divinity of Iamblichus’ particular style of Neoplatonic philosophy (Athanassiadi 2015, 30-31). Just as Christianity’s rise can in part be attributed to a popular desire for the promise of personal salvation, the reassuring strain of divinity in Iamblichan Neoplatonism surely attracted Julian, who had thus far endured a life in subordination to the paranoid Constantius. Julian pursued his new obsession vigorously, turning initially to Iamblichus’ Neoplatonic successor Aedesius, then to several of Aedesius’ disciples, and finally to Maximus, “the most outstanding man [Julian] ever met” (Athanassiadi 2015, 33, 35).

If Julian’s fate did indeed hinge on his path after departing Macellum, then by this point he had surely passed the point of no return. What began as an insatiable appetite for intellectual stimulation gained momentum until it culminated in the initiation of Julian by Maximus into the Neoplatonic Mysteries in 351. This ceremony represented Julian’s ascendance to a new theurgical threshold, as he now joined the privileged few that could perceive the metaphysical connection uniting all of life (Athanassiadi 2015, 37-38). From this stance it was no great leap to bridge his philosophy of unity with a true religion of unity, and given the historical interest of Platonists in the Cult of Mithras, it was logical that Julian found the all-encompassing theories of Mithraism so satisfying (Athanassiadi 2015, 38-41).

By this point Julian had unambiguously rejected Christianity, and his internal morality was set for the remainder of his life—with some minor adjustments to the application of his beliefs as he rose through the ranks of political power. Jan den Boeft (2008) argues that the attitudes on which Julian settled even set him outside the acceptable spectrum of pagan beliefs, and as he revealed his religious program through his actions, edicts, and publications, even those who admired Julian were given pause:

Ammianus Marcellinus, a pagan himself and an admirer of the neo-pagan emperor, looked at the evidence on what was characteristic of Julian’s religious conduct, and he concluded to a scathing judgment: *superstitiosus*. Julian was no better than his rival Constantius II. That

devout Christian had gone beyond the limits of correct religion by his irresponsible dabbling in dogmatic intricacies. For his part, the pious pagan had reveled in the cultic side of religion, but exactly like his cousin he had lost sight of the correct standards, and so his pagan practice was as aberrant as Constantius' love of dogmatic strife. Both of them were representatives of *superstitio*. (79.)

The combination of Julian's penchant for radicalism—either born out of his years of solitude, or a natural predilection, or just the persuasive influence of his teachers—with his stubborn idealism created a forceful personality in a man who would inherit the influence of his lineage. Unsurprisingly, many of those most formative in crafting Julian's beliefs would come to hold positions of prominence in his administration, and their influences were evident in his reforms.

But achieving the full potential of his influence would first require staying in the good graces of Constantius and the Christian establishment. As formative as his immersion into the fringes of Hellenism, Neoplatonism, and Mithraism was, Julian did not forget his precarious position. In fact, some habits he maintained into adulthood were genuine expressions of the Christian influence on his lifestyle. His austere attitudes towards sex, diet, and daily comforts were far more reminiscent of the ascetic monastic standard than of any classical model (Athassiadi 2015, 231). Similarly, his education produced a deep knowledge of scripture and inter-Christian conflict, knowledge to which he returned repeatedly not only when formulating attacks on his Christian opponents, but also in conforming to their social norms. His effectiveness in writing first in the style expected of Christian authors, and then later in the manner of a classical philosopher, reflected his thorough education, and he fluently manipulated the conventions of the various forms—panegyrics, treatises, hymns, laws, and letters (Long 2012, 336).

Still, much of his adult life was spent maintaining and—on the occasions where rumors of his strange voyages and associations piqued the interest of paranoid overseers—intensifying the Christian practices of his youth. Indeed, in 362 Julian composed a letter to the people of Alexandria in which he asserted that only “till his twentieth year [did he walk] in the road of [Christianity]” (*To the Alexandrians* 435A). In other words, he considered himself a Christian through his time at Macellum, but the Rumspringa that followed impelled a private renunciation of his faith. Only in 361 did he publicly reveal his pagan fidelity, meaning that for a dozen years he feigned the attitudes and behaviors of a Christian.

This was an act he was aptly prepared to perform thanks to influences of his youth, and when necessary he readily subverted his idealism for practicality. Among other examples, Julian regularly attended mass and made the formal church offerings and prayers; became a reader in the Church of Nicomedia; honored and constructed altars to the martyrs; and wrote a glowing panegyric to Constantius with all the proper pomp and circumstance expected of a Christian (Athassiadi 2015, 76, 44, 26; “Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, x). While Gallus

was serving as Caesar under Constantius, he sent an advisor to report on Julian's religious mindset, as he had heard reports that Julian had "abandoned [his] former mode of worship which was handed down by our ancestors" (*Gallus Caesar to his Brother Julian* 454C). Julian so convinced the informant of his faithfulness that Gallus then wrote to his brother, saying how comforted he was to hear of Julian's "zealous... attendance at the houses of prayer" and that he was "not being drawn away from the pious remembrance of the martyrs" (*Gallus Caesar to his Brother Julian* 454D). In the following years, Julian, appointed to lead an army in defense of Gaul, grew in power and influence. Now when he butted heads with Constantius he was in a position to stand his ground, though he showed the expected deference for his emperor more often than not. Eventually conflict with Constantius was practically unavoidable, as his troops⁹ bestowed upon Julian the title of Augustus, yet he continued to maintain his Christianity by celebrating the Feast of Epiphany ("Introduction" to Julian, Vol. III, xv). In all, his decade-long ruse was so effective that Christian intellectuals, including Gregory of Nazianzus, Socrates, and Sozomen, would later write of their confusion at his "sudden" change of allegiance; meanwhile, Libanius reveled in the deception, inverting one of Aesop's fables to describe the young Caesar as a "lion concealed under the hide of an ass" (Athanassiadi 2015, 26).

His letter to Athens, an apologia of his decision to oppose Constantius, is the first obvious instance where he calls on the pagan gods (*To the Athenians* 275D). But even then his invocation asks them to bear witness to the justice of his cause, a relatively benign usage compared with what he might have done, namely, establish the basis for that justice in his ambitious religious intentions. Mark Humphries (2012) argues that these usages were within the bounds of what would be acceptable for "Christian and pagan alike," and the letter is not, in fact, "any first blush of a pagan revival" (76). This is not a wholly convincing argument, however, because although Julian never details his intentions for a Hellenic revolution (which he had already affirmed in the letter *To Maximus, the Philosopher* 415D), he is quite candid about his own faith and traditional allegiance. Julian, describing the time he spent in Milan under Constantius' orders, notes that he was able to bring with him four servants, one of whom "knew of my attitude to the gods, and, as far as he was able, secretly joined me in their worship" (*To the Athenians* 277B). Moreover, he extols the honorable virtues of Athens and its inhabitants, crafting a compelling tribute to the bedrock of Hellenism (*To the Athenians*, 269B). Those who looked to Julian to restore traditional values would not find anything discouraging in this letter.

The unavoidable conflict did ultimately prove avoidable, as the sitting emperor fell ill in November 361 and died before the two forces ever met in open conflict, though not before Constantius named Julian his successor (Athanassiadi 2015, 87). Immediately Julian set about constructing his court, and on his way to Constantinople he wrote letters to many of the men responsible for instilling his

9. The same troops with whom he openly sacrificed and "[worshipped] the gods" (*To Maximus, the Philosopher* 415C-D).

fervent pagan and Mithraic beliefs, expressing the joy and apprehension he felt at his seemingly miraculous ascendance (“Introduction” Julian, Vol. III, xvi).¹⁰ Unbeknownst to him, his life was fated to end only twenty months later on a battlefield in Persia in June 363. But the duration of his reign is not representative of the impact it would have on life in the Roman world. By the end of Constantine rule in 337 he had transformed Rome into a Christian empire run by a vast bureaucracy. Fewer than three decades later, improbably, his nephew had risen to the same imperial throne with every intention of reversing his uncle’s legacy and returning the Roman Empire once again to its Hellenic roots.

Julianus Augustus

Julian’s civic and religious reforms cannot be considered independently of one another. While Julian wanted to restore traditional paganism, he was not driven by some fundamental malevolence towards Christians. The greatest change the empire had undergone was not the shift from paganism towards Christianity, but rather the shift by which a web of roughly sovereign *poleis* became a single bureaucratically run state. As an Iamblichian Neoplatonist, his worldview was rooted in the philosophical heritage of Hellenism (Athassiadi 2015, 126). According to classical tradition justified and validated by the canonical Greco-Roman poets, philosophers, and politicians (whose works composed the traditional *paideia*), the *polis* was the soul of Hellenism. Thus, to save the empire Julian had to save the *polis*, and to save the *polis* he had bring about unity under Hellenism, and to instill Hellenism meant traditional *paideia*. Therefore, Julian held such a deep-seated antipathy towards Christianity because he viewed it as an ideology distinct from Hellenism, insofar as it gave its adherents a religious justification to dismiss the authority of the guiding lights of Hellenism as heathens enlightened not by God but by pagan idolatry. This ideological basis allowed Julian some flexibility: on the one hand, he commended Christians who proclaimed a theology suggestive of some overlap with tenets of Neoplatonism; on the other hand, he readily condemned the Cynics of his day, pagan philosophers who did not respect their Hellenic heritage and mocked the gods.¹¹

Julian was to restore the ancient practices that had propelled Rome to greatness, and his actions first as Caesar and later as Augustus thoroughly reflect those intentions. As has been outlined, and as is evident by the example of Julian’s education, classicism was far from dead in the mid-4th century. But to quote Peter Brown (1971), it was a “‘pasteurized’ success-culture” where men “read Greek literature to gain the skills of a gentleman, not to learn about the gods” (90). For Julian, the classical legacy held much greater significance, and the lessons imparted in its canonical texts were a referendum for appropriate

10. Several letters survive, including Letter 8 to Maximus, Letter 10 to Eutherius, Letter 43 to Eustathius, and Letter 26 to Basil of Caesarea, with whom Julian studied in Athens.

11. For his choice acceptance of Christians, see Long 2012, 336; and Liebeschuetz 2012, 218-9. For his rejection of contemporary Cynicism, see *Oration VI-To the Uneducated Cynics* and *Oration VII-To the Cynic Heracleius*.

administration; Constantine had rewritten those standards, and in so doing he had enabled decadence and general moral decay (Athanassiadi 2015, 65). But Julian was also an emperor shaped by the time in which he lived, and he was not oblivious to the reasons certain institutions had necessarily gone out of style and why others had taken their place. As a result, his reforms sought to update the institutions of the past to suit the needs of the present, and to this point he can be seen as a “recognizably Byzantine” emperor who, perhaps paradoxically, “dreamed of resurrecting the ancient religion and of returning to obsolete forms of government” by authorizing a “[break] with the religious and political patterns of the ancient world” (Athanassiadi 2015, 97, 1919; also, see Harries 2012, 128). Furthermore, because Julian’s reign marked a dramatic shift in policy, the reactions of his contemporaries naturally focused on those disparities. That bias in the historical record has a compounding effect on his legacy whereby memory and reality diverge to the point of inaccuracy. Recent scholarship has emphasized that a holistic analysis of sources confirms what should have been evident all along, namely that much of his daily administration is indiscernible from the behavior of other emperors from the same era (Harries 2012, 127; and Long 2012, 336).

With these caveats in mind, it is still worth looking at Julian’s political platform, as it is fundamentally intertwined with his program of religious reform. Susanna Elm (2012) summarizes his efforts into three primary categories: “*logoi*, *hiera*, and the *polis*—Greek language and culture, its gods and all things sacred, and the city as the physical locus of Greek culture, government and religion”—and each would be amended by refocusing Roman culture around classical *paideia* (5). On the one hand, this was nothing new for many Romans, and despite new anxieties life outside the court and army remained firmly in the grasp of Hellenic tradition and would continue to be in some eastern parts of the empire until the 10th century (Brown 1971, 29, 72). On the other hand, elsewhere, particularly in the urban hubs and the peripheries of the empire, traditional ideologies were clashing with foreign and homegrown challengers (Brown 1971, 9). These were the countrymen Julian resolved to represent, the “‘honest men’ who had watched with growing anger the blasphemies, the indecent affluence, the deep intellectual confusion of the court society of Constantine and Constantius II” (Brown 1971, 91). Right away he set about restoring the dignity and importance of cities by weeding out corrupt officials whose greed was depressing the fiscal system, redistributing land seized by the government, and emphasizing the fair distribution of tribute (Athanassiadi 2015, 59, 96-7, 103, 117). He restructured the army as well as the tax codes, and he drastically reduced what he saw as the abuse and overuse of the *cursus publicus*, or state post (Athanassiadi 2015, 96-7; “Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, xix). His actions garnered criticism from allies and opponents alike, but Julian’s determination in these matters was at least consistent with traits that guided much of his life: stubborn idealism and a resolve to see his objectives through to the end.

When his idealism clashed with disappointing realities the results were shattering, as was evident in his iconic *Misopogon*, written during a highly contentious stay in Antioch shortly before his death (Athanassiadi 2015, 203-16). In this text Julian concocted a satirical criticism of himself (and philosophers in general) for living a life so different than the people of Antioch, who bitterly disliked the emperor. The disdain was mutual, and their differences were encapsulated in the Antiochians' criticism of Julian's beard, a style that was symbolic of the philosopher but had fallen out of fashion in the age of Christianity. To Julian, this criticism was evidence enough of the degree to which Antioch had lost its way from classical *paideia*, which venerated the philosopher. Julian's stay in Antioch inspired another of his famous works, *Against the Galileans*, which dealt entirely with his criticisms of Christianity and began as follows:

It is, I think, expedient to set forth to all mankind the reasons by which I was convinced that the fabrication of the Galileans is a fiction of men composed by wickedness. Though it has in it nothing divine, by making full use of that part of the soul which loves fable and is childish and foolish, it has induced men to believe that the monstrous tale is truth. (*Against the Galileans* 39A-B.)

Unsurprisingly, this work has not survived in its entirety. Excerpts do exist, however, as they were reproduced in various Christian repudiations of the treatise. These partial glimpses suggest that Julian's work, according to David Hunt (2012), was a polemic attacking "the very heart of recent credal controversy" over Jesus Christ's divinity, while simultaneously quoting verbatim scripture that highlighted "misapplications, inconsistencies, and contradictions" within the religion (258-9). Julian was making full use of his Christian upbringing. *Against the Galileans* and *Misopogon* are inherently linked, as Antioch was a thoroughly Christian city fundamentally incompatible with Julian's worldview. His disdain for the religion cannot be summed up in a single root cause, but it was in part due to the fact that a Christian's allegiance to the empire was, at best, second to their allegiance to God and the Church (Athanassiadi 2015, 167). The essential rationale for restoring traditional Hellenic values as the ideological basis for empire was to unite its people, but in Julian's mind Christianity was antithetical to those core values on the one hand, and antithetical even to the idea of unity, on the other.

The effort to reestablish traditional religion went hand-in-hand with the resurrection of classical *paideia*, but it also drove the reconstruction of temples and holy sites, part of a larger edict on religious freedom.¹² Conveniently, in playing the part of compassionate unifier, Julian also fomented differences within the Church. His edict of religious freedom pardoned exiled Christians who had fallen out of favor with the Arians, and he revoked discriminatory measures placed on

12. Julian proclaimed religious freedom and ordered the restoration of the temples in February 362, very shortly after ascending to the position of Augustus. This proved a controversial edict even amongst some pagans, as many temples needed restoring, because they had been harvested for stone. His edict requiring their reconstruction demanded from pagan and Christian alike the return or replacement of that stone ("Introduction" to Julian, Vol. III, xvi).

the Jews by Constantius and his brother Gallus while reasserting Jewish criticisms of Christianity (“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III, xxi; Athanassiadi 2015, 163-6). And though the principle of religious freedom applied to Christians as well, the egalitarianism only went so far. In a letter to one of his provincial administrators, Julian made this clear, writing that though “I do not wish the Galileans to be either put to death or unjustly beaten, or to suffer any other injury... I do assert absolutely that the god-fearing must be preferred” (*To Atarbuis* 376C-D).¹³ The dual objectives of incentivizing pagan practices while dividing Christians had tangible consequences, but over time Julian’s impatience grew with stubborn Christians who showed no signs of conceding; in June 362 he wrote as much to one highpriest, admitting that the “Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire” (*To Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia* 429C). In fact, while Gregory and other Christians rebuked Julian’s reign, later Christians could look back on his religious initiatives with indifference; in the seventh century John of Antioch said that Julian was the only emperor to rule Rome well (Athanassiadi 2015, 111-2)! Consequently, the ineffectiveness of his programs led Julian to take measures that approached persecution, though often under a more innocuous guise. The “Edict on Funerals,” for example, outlawed daytime funerals for the expressed purpose of preventing citizens from contracting disease by coming into contact with the dead; scholarship suggests this was far more likely a targeted ban on Christian celebrations of martyrs (*Edict on Funerals* Vol. III, 191; Harries 2012, 129). Similarly, Julian required soldiers to sacrifice to the traditional gods, which effectively excluded Christians from the army’s ranks unless they were willing to commit sacrilege (Athanassiadi 2015, 115). This was a major impediment: as previously noted, by Late Antiquity the Roman army was an “artesian well of talent” whose most elite members could find themselves fast-tracked to positions of aristocracy and influence, while even regular soldiers were paid with the stable gold *solidus*, ensuring some degree of steadiness in an economy still wracked by inflation (Brown 1971, 26-7).

Most seriously, Julian passed an edict that effectively forbade Christian instructors from teaching from Hellenic texts, for “when a man thinks one thing and teaches his pupils another, in my opinion he fails to educate in exact proportion as he fails to be an honest man” (*Rescript on Christian Teachers*, 422B).¹⁴ He went on to argue that it was “absurd that men who expound the works of these writers should dishonor the gods whom they used to honor,” and if the Christian instructors truly rejected the lessons conveyed in the classic texts, they ought to therefore “expound Matthew and Luke” (*Rescript on Christian Teachers*, 423A-D). Many pagans joined Christians in denouncing the decree as severe, and Ammianus declared the “harsh” measure as one that ought to be “buried in eternal silence” (“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III xx). Julian intended to force Christianity

13. Recall that Julian universally referred to Christians as Galileans. Naturally, “the god-fearing” refers to pagans; Julian frequently designated Christians “atheists.”

14. The original edict itself is lost, and the edited entry included in the *Theodosian Code* says only that city councils need examine the moral qualifications of instructors. Julian wrote a rescript (quoted here; also incomplete), which offers pointed invective against “hypocritical” Christians.

out of elite society, as the law would have deprived Christian children of training necessary to advance in educated circles (“Introduction” to Julian, Vol. III xix; Brown 1971, 93).¹⁵ It is unclear how effectively this law might have changed administration of education among Christian communities, as the edict only came into being a few months before Julian died (at which point it was no longer of any material consequence), but its mere existence came as a shock to Christians who had seen themselves as inheritors of the Hellenic legacy. Accordingly, the impact of the legislation far outlasted the law itself. Susanna Elm (2012) contends that “[b]ecause Julian sought to force Christians to do without ‘pagan’ learning, Gregory [of Nazianzus] and other Christians had to acknowledge and grapple with the ‘pagan’ elements in their ways of thinking as never before,” and, in some ways, the entirety of Gregory’s highly influential theology was crafted with this conflict in mind (7).

Pagan Reformation

Christianity began as a minority religion in a thoroughly pagan world. From that point of insignificance began a precipitous rise, and in relatively short order the ranks of the followers of Jesus Christ boasted emperors and administrators of the great Roman Empire. Insofar as Julian despised and discriminated against Christians, he was also willing to put aside his abhorrence for their ideology and way of life to recognize those Church intellectuals most responsible for the religion’s undeniable success. It was in this spirit of meritocracy that he addressed a letter to Basil the Great, with whom he had studied in Athens, asking him to join his court composed of “honest and reasonable men, intelligent and entirely capable,” and, more importantly, free of the hypocrisy so prevalent in imperial courts that “leads men to praise one another even while they hate with a hatred more deadly than they feel for their worst enemies in war” (*To Basil* 381B-C). Basil declined the offer, but the invitation is indicative of Julian’s willingness to learn from Christianity without rejecting the religion wholesale. In fact, Julian’s religious reforms owed a great deal to the Christian model. An analysis of the characteristics Julian chose to adopt reveals what he found most spiritually compelling or structurally advantageous in the Christian faith.¹⁶

Julian assigned great importance to empire-wide ideological unity on the basis of Hellenic *paideia*. In an abstract sense this was not novel, and in Julian’s paganism it is both the most fundamental similarity to the Church, and the greatest divergence with the paganism of old. When Diocletian lifted Rome from the Crisis of the Third Century, he converted the conglomeration of independent city-states into a web of administrative districts, divided and sub-divided by a hierarchical bureaucracy. The diversity inherent in the old city-states was no longer a positive

15. Importantly, the law did not outright prohibit Christian children from a formal education; it only restricted who could be appointed to official, state-funded teaching positions.

16. At the same time it is important to be wary of ascribing too much credit for parallels to Christianity, as there may be some cases where common features are not symptomatic of an adoptive relationship, e.g. the prevalence of fasting in each religion.

force for the empire, and Constantine endeavored to create a cultural basis for unity by converting to Christianity and holding the consensus-building Council of Nicaea (Athanassiadi 2015, 141). Julian rejected Christianity as the foundation for unity but grasped the importance of a shared Roman identity. Using Hellenism as the basis for a shared identity had the benefit of a familiar history, but it also posed new challenges due to how immense and varied that history was. At the same time, Julian considered the narrowness of a single divinity one of the weaknesses of Christianity, for in his mind it struggles to account for the great differences among people on earth (Hunt 2012, 252). And indeed, Constantine's call for unity under the name of Christianity worked in some respects but produced much inter-Christian strife. Julian played on those rifts in his polemical *Against the Galileans*, for as Ammianus Marcellinus wrote, "experience had taught him that no wild beasts are such dangerous enemies to man as Christians are to one another" (Hunt 2012, 255). Paradoxically, the diversity of a polytheistic creed enabled unity, as the range of interpretations made for a more inclusive mindset.

Julian's conception of the unity of Hellenic religion and *paideia* allowed for some variety and was consequently "more complete" than the Christian alternative, for it "embraced and sanctioned the whole historical achievement of the Greco-Roman world" (Athanassiadi 2015, 122-3). In 360 he authorized Sallust, a fellow Iamblichian Neoplatonist, to write what would come to be regarded as "the official catechism of the Pagan empire" titled *On the Gods and the World* ("Introduction to Oration IV," Vol. I, 351). The catechism produced in Sallust's text reflected a paganism different but not mutually exclusive to that which Julian expounded upon in the four works most informative of his religious beliefs: *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, *Hymn to King Helios*, *To the Cynic Heracleius*, and *To the Uneducated Cynics* (Athanassiadi 2015, 126-7). His running conflict with the Cynics is the most instructive of Julian's attempt to form a pagan orthodoxy. Julian wrote *To the Cynic Heracleius* after attending a lecture in which the traditional gods, along with his program of pagan reform, were ridiculed by the Cynic Heracleius; he wrote *To the Uneducated Cynics* attacking another Cynic's lecture that Julian felt misunderstood the philosophical principles of the school's most famous practitioner, Diogenes (hence why his victim is "uneducated") (Marcone 2012, 239-41). The Cynics of Julian's age resembled in some respects a pagan parallel to Christianity, insofar as they both rejected the authority of traditional religion, as well as the society from which that tradition found its cultural justification (Marcone 2012, 239). Julian's desire to create a united, popular front out of the myriad philosophies of Hellenism was naturally threatened by this rebuke as it made evident the natural divisions in the ideology. (In this way the Cynics were doing to Julian's orthodoxy what Julian tried to do to Christianity by pardoning the exiled non-Arians and elevating the Jews.) In turn he argued, especially in *To the Uneducated Cynics*, that true Cynicism as practiced by Diogenes had much in common with the principles imparted in Plato's teachings and that it was the fourth-century Cynics, not Julian, who

had lost their way (Marcone 2012, 241). If the Cynics would recognize their membership in the philosophical tradition of Hellenism, Julian would not hesitate to allow for the idiosyncrasies of their particular brand of paganism. But so long as they attempted to destroy the rationale for a pagan orthodoxy, Julian was forced to attack their ideology in the same manner he attacked Christianity, for he was extremely preoccupied with eliminating the antagonists and dissenters to his religious program.

Salutius' "pagan catechism" and Julian's impassioned attack on Cynicism constituted the foundation for Hellenic philosophical unity. The *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, written shortly after the attack on Heracleius, and the *Hymn to King Helios* addressed another argument against a unified paganism. While Julian criticized Christian monotheism for its narrowness, Christians made the counter-claim that polytheism was inevitably chaotic (Marcone 2012, 247). Julian acknowledged the powerful centripetal force that Christianity had on the empire, so in response he and his peers sought to take the best of both monotheism and polytheism: a supreme deity akin to the Christian God that served as the focal point of all worship, and an inclusive mythology that brought together all the minor deities and cult gods of the Hellenic world. In order that the two cross-purposes did not contradict one another, the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* relied on Neoplatonic interpretations to explain the diversity of mythical narratives in allegorical terms, thus providing for a means of maintaining the traditional foundational myths that were so important to tradition, while avoiding infringing on the omnipotence of King Helios (Marcone 2012, 247). The allegories also contributed to a growing theurgical framework in Julian's new paganism whereby the adherent could create a spiritual connection with the divine (a process that began in *To the Cynic Heracleius*), imitating the most humanistic aspect of the Christian faith (Athanassiadi 2015, 136). Once again the shadow of Christianity looms: Julian drew from the established practices of a Greek philosophical movement to produce a religious handbook of sorts that offered spiritual advice by way of allegories—a result openly reminiscent of Christian scripture/scriptural interpretation. Meanwhile, the *Hymn to King Helios* pulled explicitly from Mithraism in anointing the sun-god as the central divine force. But Julian managed to incorporate the traditional pantheon of gods, too, by assigning each of the Hellenic gods an aspect of the larger Mithraic figurehead. In one typical fusion, Julian writes, "Among the intellectual gods, Helios and Zeus have a joint or rather a single sovereignty" (*Hymn to King Helios*, 136A-B). He continues through the pantheon one-by-one, drawing from the inspiration of Plato, Homer, Hesiod, and others to assign the various parts of the whole that is Helios: Aphrodite accounts for Helios' creative function; Athena embodies pure intellect; and so on (*Hymn to King Helios*, 138A ff). The unity of the various traditional gods into the "One" can be seen as a reflection of the Christian model Julian's uncle first established, but it also embodies the central tenet of Neoplatonism (Athanassiadi 2015, 160). In that sense, Julian simultaneously achieved a complex synthesis of a theurgical

Mithraism, the Platonic form, and traditional Hellenic mythology. The emperor's religious program, responding to unique obstacles of Late Antiquity, accounted for the diverse local mythical legacies that were so important to civic identity *and* established a divinity embodying the shared *Romanitas* of a united Hellenic empire.

Once Julian's updated paganism had a solid backbone of orthodoxy, the primary unifying function of the official imperial religion was fundamentally met. The manner in which Julian united the Hellenic tradition of paganism relied on ideological justifications that already existed within the traditional legacy, but the final product bore a strong enough resemblance to Christian precedent to verify the heavy influence of the Christian model on Julian. Subsequent evolutions continued to look to the distant past of pagan tradition as imparted by classical *paideia*, as well as to the models of the recent Christian past, of which Julian was well informed. The pagan priesthood was one such institution steeped in tradition, and the changes he made to their role were almost certainly influenced by his upbringing and education under prominent Christian bishops. Julian believed himself responsible for the salvation of the empire, a feat that could only be accomplished through the rediscovery of Rome's classical legacy. Lately, priests from oriental cults had given the priesthood at large a bad name. Their untoward behavior combined poorly with the popular perception of their divine power, and they soon came to represent the hazards of demonic possession (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff). Paganism was spread thin between the local cults, and without some formal network to connect the diverse branches there could be no unifying standard (den Boeft 2008, 69-70). Julian recognized that the low status of priests corresponded with lowered admission standards, and rejuvenating the priesthood required redefining their role and what their power meant. It was only natural, Julian believed, that the men entrusted with conferring the *logoi* to the people should naturally be the most powerful and respected members of society (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff). In this Julian imitated Constantine, as the Christian clergy had become a strict means of social control whereby the most honorific members of society were those who had ascended the hierarchy of the Church (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff). Julian duplicated that strict inner organization within the ranks of his priesthood and even went so far as to assign appropriately fancy wardrobes to different rungs, a practice as Christian as any other (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff).

Just as Julian's experiences within the church affected his amendments to pagan priesthood, so too did the life-changing influences of his early-twenties. Accordingly, the most prominent of those influences, Maximus, was positioned atop the hierarchy just below Julian, who occupied the traditional role of *pontifex maximus* ("Introduction to *Letter to a Priest*," Vol. II, 295). The ranks directly beneath him were likewise filled with Iamblichan Neoplatonists, the "shock troops of Julian's religious reform" (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff). Julian's class of religious officials would be held to the high standard implied by their new

description, philosopher-priests, for the emperor intended to create “a powerful and universal pagan Church” (Athanassiadi 2015, 181 ff). As the top religious official Julian took charge of equipping his ecclesiasts, and some of his strict prescripts survive in the form of a letter to one member of the new priesthood (*Letter to a Priest* 288B-305D; den Boeft 2008, 69-70). Julian required that “No priest must anywhere be present at the licentious theatrical shows of the present day” (if Julian believed it possible, he would have “[banished] such shows” and restored theaters to their former purity), nor should the priest “have an actor or a chariot-driver for his friend” or let a “dancer or mime even approach his door” (*Letter to a Priest*, 304B-D). Furthermore, priests are to “refrain from too costly dress and from outward show” and pray often, “if possible three times a day”; they should avoid the works of the philosophers Archilochus and Hipponax, as well as Epicurus and Pyrrho, and “much more must they avoid such thoughts,” for “philosophy alone will be appropriate for us priests” (*Letter to a Priest* 303C, 302A, 300C, 301D, 300D). The first thing the priests must teach is “reverence towards the gods” and the adoration of “not only the images of the gods, but also their temples and sacred precincts and altars” (*Letter to a Priest* 299B, 296B). In short, the (fragmentary) letter suggests a serious priesthood of devotion and austerity.

The first extant passage from the letter refers to another component of the priesthood, which, though justified according to Hellenic virtues, is quite explicitly an imitation of a Christian practice: “You must above all exercise philanthropy,” writes Julian, “for from it result many other blessings” (*Letter to a Priest* 289B). Julian urges the priests to follow his example, for he himself “[had] often given lavishly to those in need” and then recovered what he had given “at the hands of the gods” (*Letter to a Priest* 290C). Julian paints a wholesome picture, advocating for generous philanthropy to good men, helpless men, and the poor, but also to share with the wicked, “for it is to the humanity in the man that we give, and not to his moral character” (*Letter to a Priest* 290D). He attributes the motivation for such philanthropy first to the will of the gods—how can one who will not spare “even so much as a drachma . . . think that he is worshipping Zeus aright?”—and then to a congenial spirit of brotherhood—“every man, whether he wills or not, is akin to every other man,” a kinship born of divine creation (*Letter to a Priest* 291C-D). But the final extant passage represents a shift in mood and motivation, though still on the theme of philanthropy. Julian implores the priest to show “proof of his love for his fellows. . . [by] sharing cheerfully . . . with those in need . . . and trying to do good to as many men as he is able”; and then he turns his attention briefly to the religious opposition,

for when it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the priests, then I think the impious Galileans observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained ascendancy in the worst of their deeds through the credit they win for such practices. [. . .] And the result is that they have led very many into atheism. (*Letter to a Priest* 305B-D.)

Just as Julian observes the virtues of philanthropy, so too does he identify the utilitarian value achieved by creating a religion that strives to serve the people. Another letter, addressed to the High-Priest of Galatia, Arsacius, repeats Julian's functional interpretation of charity. He first chastises the priest for the failure of the Hellenic religion to take root as hoped, and then asks,

Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism? I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues. And it is not enough for you alone to practice them, but so must all the priests in Galatia, without exception. (*To Arsacius, High-Priest of Galatia* 429D-430A.)

Julian then requests the building of hostels, so that the poor may profit from pagan benevolence, and the distribution of corn to strangers and beggars, for "it is disgraceful" that "the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well" (*To Arsacius, High-Priest of Galatia*, 430B-D). Julian recognized that through philanthropy, as through *paideia*, there existed the opportunity to spread Hellenic religion. This dual responsibility was to be meted out by his new class of priests, dressed to awe and learned in the ways of philosophy on the one hand, refined and humane on the other, seeking an honest life of service to man and devotion to God.

With the new priesthood in mind, it was clear that the public perception of Julian's religious program mattered. Establishing the mores of his reforms was crucial, of course, but unless he could win the favor of the people, there was little hope of stymieing the rise of Christianity. Image mattered, and in this same line of thought there was one notable and original component of Christianity with no definite parallel in paganism: Jesus, the human link between the heavens and the earth, between mortality and divinity. A few pagan candidates emerge. Attis, the child of Cybele the Mother of the Gods (herself analogous to Virgin Mary), embodies certain Christ-like characteristics. He represents an "emanation" of Helios, sometimes referred to in the text by the same moniker as Jesus: *Logos*, "the Word." Moreover, according to Liebeschuetz (2012), he is "a savior figure who descends from heaven, mingles with lower matter, suffers, and rises again, setting an example of how man can rise too . . . [though] there is no suggestion that Attis atones for the sins of man" (223; and footnote 74, 227). More obliquely, Julian recast Heracles' crossing of the sea as the hero walking on water—an allusion to

Jesus' miraculous and iconic feat (Liebeschuetz 2012, 223; and footnote 74, 227). Asclepius, a mythological figure known to heal the body as well as the soul, is another alternative. Indeed, Christians already acknowledged him as a competitor to Jesus due to their similarities, and in *Against the Galileans* Julian felt it natural to extend the comparison (Athanassiadi 2015, 168).

For paganism to desire a figure as compelling and empathetic as Jesus is not all that surprising, and a parallel like this may have facilitated some conversion. But the most fascinating figure upon whom Julian infers Christ-like characteristics is telling: Julian himself! When Julian compared Asclepius to Jesus, others had already dubbed Julian the re-embodiment of Asclepius (Athanassiadi 2015, 168). In a related act of self-aggrandizement, Julian proclaimed himself the son of the supreme Helios, simultaneously emulating Alexander the Great's ancestral link to Ammon, while asserting his own divine lineage that would naturally imply comparisons with Jesus (Athanassiadi 2015, 192). Polymnia Athanassiadi describes Julian's hubris thusly:

Julian seems to have taken the daring step of coming to face his god not just as a commander and a protector but even as the model for his own career on earth; in the role of the restorer of order in the world and redeemer of the Roman empire Julian saw himself as a human replica of Mithra, one to whom 'a mortal frame was given that he might discharge these duties,' before achieving divine status. (Athanassiadi 2015, 41.)

The pagan insistence on finding their own Jesus is an odd subplot given the hostility between the religions, but Julian's apparent fellowship with Jesus is mildly convincing: he imagined himself the savior of Rome, poised to reinvigorate the soul of the empire. But his idealism proved anachronistic in Late Antiquity, another example of Julian's paradoxical attempt to restore tradition by adopting aspects of contemporary Christian institutions. Whether the priesthood was mimicking the organization of the Church, or a pagan emperor was aligning himself with a first-century Jewish carpenter, Hellenism increasingly came to embody what it hoped to replace.

Christian Reformation

The precise events surrounding Julian's death remain uncertain.¹⁷ What is not uncertain, however, is that, ultimately, Julian's dream of a reformed pagan empire died with him. He had hoped to bring about a conservative reformation, reinstalling classical *paideia* as the philosophical basis for society while removing Christianity from the ranks of the aristocracy, at minimum, and perhaps from all of Roman life. Had his reign not ended so abruptly on that Persian battlefield,

17. A. Marcellinus, Libanius, and others offer varying accounts. Some say he died on June 26, 363, when he was injured by the Persians at Ctesiphon; others claim he died several days later. Likewise there are discrepancies as to who struck the fatal blow, "friend" or foe.

there is no way of knowing to what degree he would have succeeded. But Julian's significance to history is not rooted solely in what might have been. His attempt to push the western world forward by looking backwards rocked the Christian establishment, and while the sweeping reforms he enacted over his twenty months as Augustus may have had only a short term impact on the political and religious administration of Rome, their effects are still felt today in Christian theology. Conflict between the two competing ideologies existed well before Julian appeared on the scene and would have persisted all the same had he never risen to prominence. But he did rise to prominence, and although his imperium promised to unite the Greco-Roman world under the umbrella of its shared heritage, his immediate legacy was one of renewed friction between Christians and pagans. Furthermore, his long-term legacy is defined not by the pagans with whom Julian identified but by the Christians whose lives he shook to the core with twenty months of unapologetic, polytheistic, pagan rule. His brief sojourn to power caused Christians to assert the essentially Christian nature of the empire with less complacency in the future and to reconsider the intersection between Christian and Greco-Roman identity. Julian represents a unique historical figure, as he simultaneously stood counter to the forward march of progress and yet is singularly responsible for affecting much of what is most enduring about Late Antiquity. Indeed, Julian's complicated legacy is that of one of the great enemies of Christianity and one of its Church Fathers (Elm 2012, 15).

From the time Christianity emerged in the Roman world up until Constantine's conversion, educated Christians had to toe the line between classical tradition and their own religious piety. On the one hand, "disassociating" themselves from Hellenism in order to look at it afresh "from the Christian point of view" produced a canon of responses that advocated for "an attitude of reasoned acceptance of part of the Greek cultural heritage" (Athanassiadi 2015, 10). It was within the scope of this approach that Basil of Caesarea produced something of an authoritative list of classical texts that Christians should and should not read (Athanassiadi 2015, 10). The two ideologies could coexist in this environment, but once Constantine and Constantius II upset the equilibrium between the worldviews, that relationship grew more complicated as pagans, for the first time within the bounds of the Greco-Roman world, found themselves the targets of persecution. Christians like Eusebius, on the other hand, all of a sudden found themselves the heirs to the Greco-Roman legacy (Athanassiadi 2015, 122-3). Accordingly, Julian's sudden ascendancy must have seemed an act of divinity for many traditionalists, just as it must have been an eye-opening reversal of fate for Christians who expected the Christian rule that began under Constantine to continue indefinitely. It seemed their concerns were validated with the enactment of, for example, Julian's repressive *Edict on Education*, or with the publication of the three-volume *Against the Galileans* (Hunt 2012, 258-9).¹⁸

18. As noted earlier in the essay, the work only survives in fragments, and no portions of books II or III survive. David Hunt (2012) posits that had they survived, our understanding of the debt Christian creed-making owes to Julian "might have been even more apparent" (259).

The divergent relationship between Julian and Christianity can best be understood when considered in the context of another prominent figure of the age, the Christian intellectual Gregory of Nazianzus. Julian and Gregory had known each other while studying philosophy in Athens, and Gregory's brother even served as Julian's doctor for a short time (Elm 2012, 6). In the course of his life Gregory wrote 45 orations and over 19,000 verses in meter concerning Christianity, and his vast corpus would come to define him as one of the preeminent intellectuals of his era. Indeed, during Byzantium his works were circulated more widely than any other texts besides the Scriptures themselves, and today he is known to church history as Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the three Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church, indicating the importance and influence of Gregory's teachings (Elm 2012, 7). Elm has argued that Gregory's works were fundamentally oriented to respond to Julian's reign and philosophy, a conclusion that is perhaps not surprising given the nature of his subject and the era in which he worked. While it is generally accepted that Gregory "'rewrote' the key-concepts of the 'pagans'. . . [by] incorporating Christian elements into the classical matrix," Elm (2012) asserts an even closer association: Gregory's entire opus was a "point-by-point" refutation of Julian's writings, laws, and edicts (7-9). Just as Julian had during his reign, Gregory focused his writings on the triad of Greek *logoi*, *hiera*, and the *polis*, placing them each as "foundational for the well-being of... the *oikoumene* of the Romans" (5, 10). Gregory and Julian differed philosophically only "with regard to the divinity that had originated all three" (10).

In other words, the two rivals sought the same abstract goals for the empire, but how those ends materialized in concrete form required the complete subjugation of the other's ideology. Julian's edict prohibiting Christians from teaching and discussing the classic works of Hellenism was a defense of the *logoi* that made the empire what it was. The edict was also a direct affront to Gregory's conception of *logoi*, which was, inextricably, the Word of God (though the Word may be discussed using the language of the classical world). The two characterizations of *hiera* were also, obviously, incompatible, and this came to bear particularly in the administration of the *polis*, where both opponents sought the removal and destruction of temples/churches and idols that bore testament to the rival religion (Elm 2012, 13-14).

In Gregory's view, Rome was now a Christian empire. Julian and his Hellenic models had misled the Romans, resulting in fragmentation and war, and only by the image of Christ could the disparate parts be made whole. Just as Julian cast Constantius II's failure in Persia as evidence of the failure of Christianity, so too did Gregory characterize Julian's Far East defeat and death as a confirmation of Christianity. But though Rome became firmly a Christian empire, the principles upon which the empire rested were unchanged, and Christians did not soon forget how easily Julian rose to the level emperor; his memory persisted, then, in the word "Hellene," which would last through Byzantine times as a synonym of "pagan" and as an invective (Athassiadi 2015, 227, 11 footnote 36). The

empire's Hellenic roots were revised to reflect that the *logoi*, *hiera*, and *polis* were, in fact, Christian from the beginning. Disaffected pagans in the west, reacting nostalgically as the cultural carpet was pulled from under them, concocted the enduring and idealized image of *Roma aeterna*, a vision of a city that was no more (Brown 1971, 120). At one time Julian envisioned himself the savior of Rome and the last best hope for the Hellenism of old. But it is said that he died a defeated man, that in his final moments he took a handful of his own blood, tossed it in the air and said, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean" ("Introduction" to Julian, Vol. III xxvi). Little could he have known—nor would he have wanted to—that his legacy would live on in Christian theology, for to quote Susanna Elm (2012), "without paganism no Christianity, without Julian's writings no Gregory the Theologian" (15). And yet, despite the debt of gratitude owed him, it was Gregory who dubbed Julian a deserter—*apostate*, in Greek—thus branding forever a true Father of the Christian Church (13).

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