

IVAN BODROŽIĆ
MAJA RONČEVIĆ

True Faith and Philosophy as a Way to Overcome Religious Prejudices according to 1st and 2nd Century Christian Sources

IVAN BODROŽIĆ

UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT, CATHOLIC FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

IVAN.BODROZIC@GMAIL.COM

MAJA RONČEVIĆ

UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT, CATHOLIC FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

MAJARONCEVIC@ICLOUD.COM

UDC <27-67:316.647.8>:27-28]“00/1“

<https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2023.5.1>

Review article

True Faith and Philosophy as a Way to Overcome Religious Prejudices according to 1st and 2nd Century Christian Sources

The authors explore religious prejudices in early Christianity, Judaism, and paganism using 1st and 2nd-century sources. During that era, ethnic and religious biases affected various societal levels. The first section examines biases among Gentiles and Christians toward Jews, followed by biases between Gentiles and Jews toward Christians, and the prejudices of Christians and Jews toward Gentiles. The second section delves into prejudices between Christians and Jews, focusing on how society reacted to Christians' distinctiveness from Jews, hindering their integration due to pagan religiosity. In response, Christians presented their faith as a bridge, emphasizing its universality for all people, not solely for the Jewish community. They offered a pathway for communion and reconciliation, asserting the superiority and broader interpretative nature of Christian faith over Judaism. Jesus Christ's life, St. Paul's teachings, and events from the Acts of the Apostles affirmed the faith's universal significance. The third section centers on 'barbarian philosophy' as an attempt to unify Christians and pagans amid growing societal tensions in the 2nd century. Christian apologists, once pagan philosophers, aimed to alleviate prejudices by aligning their received faith with their society, employing 'barbarian philosophy.' This approach viewed Christianity through rationality, rooted in the universal divine Logos, appealing to all people as the creator and advocate.

KEYWORDS:

early Christianity, barbaric philosophy, apologists, prejudices, Judaism, paganism

Social, ethnic, class and religious divisions have always existed across societies and historical periods. Late antiquity was no different, as divisions and prejudices persisted, as evidenced by various philosophers and historians throughout that era. Drawing upon 1st and 2nd-century Christian sources and other available works, this article explores religious prejudices and divisions within this context.

The epistles of St. Paul, originating from the 1st century, give us valuable insights into the societal divisions of that era. As a Jew, Paul was well-acquainted with the attitudes of his Jewish community toward others. Additionally, as a Roman citizen, he understood the Roman perspective on those lacking privileges provided by Roman civil law. Paul's conversion to Christianity exposed him to the concept of radical equality among all individuals, challenging the ingrained inequalities he observed within his people's religion and culture from an early age. This transformative experience prompted him, in his later years as a Christian convert, to seek compelling arguments advocating for the coexistence of all people in a framework of equality and mutual respect.

The issue of inequality and strained relations persisted in the 2nd century, notably affecting figures like St. Paul and Christian Apologists.¹ As converts from paganism to Christianity, they dedicated significant efforts to mitigate mutual prejudices. Their newfound faith spurred them to seek unity among people, leveraging their background as philosophers to envision unity through the understanding of God and humanity. They believed in attaining absolute truth through rational contemplation, maintaining their identity as philosophers. Despite society's perception of them as antiquated, they embraced a philosophy often considered unconventional or "barbaric" (i.e. Jewish). Instead of rejecting this philosophy, they viewed it as a potential avenue to guide people toward communal truth—incorporating their Christian conversion insights. Within the Christian community, they envisioned a space where Jews and diverse groups could coexist by embracing a shared philosophy. This endeavor aimed to reconcile Greek and "barbarian" philosophies, previously considered incompatible civilizations.

However, not all Christians viewed this endeavor favorably, seeing the reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable differences—be they religious or cultural—as a challenging project. Hence, the apologists encountered internal challenges within the community due to the complexity of this matter. This research encompasses three parts: the first delves into the existing prejudices among three distinct social and religious groups, while the subsequent sections explore potential methods for eradicating or

¹ Apologists witnessed the defensive and promotional activity of Christianity in the 2nd century. Their works, called Apologies (addressed to emperors or individuals), had promotional or theological purposes. Apologists believed that they possessed the truth by virtue of the gift of the Christian faith, and as they were philosophers, they addressed their compatriots in a way they could understand. See more in Luigi Padovese, "Apologists," in *Encyclopedic Theological Dictionary*, ed. Aldo Starić (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2009), 56–58; Tomislav J. Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske literature*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1976), 237–42; Michele Pellegrino and Stefan Heid, "Apologisti–Apologetica," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2006), 426–29.

surmounting these prejudices, as advocated and promoted by Christianity within that society. The second part delves into faith as a means to transcend misunderstandings and biases, whereas the third emphasizes the role of a shared philosophy in ameliorating strained relationships between diverse societal groups.

1. Prejudices in Roman society in the 1st and 2nd century

The relevance of this topic requires the very definition of prejudice. Prejudice refers to preconceived judgments, whether positive or negative, held about someone or something. These judgments typically oversimplify and diminish the characteristics and traits of individuals within a particular social group. Prejudices tend to lean more toward negativity than positivity and are commonly directed at individuals from diverse religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, or minority groups such as individuals with disabilities or those struggling with addiction. Since prejudices are usually not based on reliable data or personal experience, they are often difficult to change and eliminate. People often use them to determine how to behave towards someone or something.² Concerning the definition of prejudice,³ we investigate the mutual prejudices among Judaism, paganism, and Christianity in antiquity in the Roman Empire. We cannot provide a comprehensive overview of all prejudices but highlight the most significant ones that were the subject of open discussions in antique society.

1.1. Prejudice against Jews

This research delves into prejudices influenced by social or religious positions during the 1st and 2nd centuries. We primarily draw from Christian sources like the New Testament, notably St. Paul, who provides extensive insight into this matter in the 1st century. Moving into the 2nd century, figures like St. Justin and other Christian apologists similarly explored and discussed prejudices, as detailed in the third part of this research. When discussing prejudices against Judaism, it's vital to acknowledge that the Jewish people grappled with the loss of their independence, particularly as they came under Roman rule in the 1st century BCE.⁴

² Prejudice, "Predrasuda," Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2021, accessed March 16, 2023, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=5007>.

³ "Prejudice-adverse or hostile attitude toward a group or individual members, generally without just grounds or before sufficient evidence. It is characterized by irrational, stereotyped beliefs. In the social sciences, the term is often used with reference to ethnic groups (see also racism), but prejudice can exist toward any manner of person or group based on factors that have nothing at all to do with ethnicity, such as weight, disability, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation." Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Prejudice," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 12, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prejudice>.

⁴ More on this: Nadav Sharon, "Roman Conquest and Loss of Sovereignty," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, ed. Daniel R. Schwartz, Zeev Weiss, and Ruth A. Clements (Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012), 415-45; Lynn H. Wood, "Razdoblje između Staroga i Novoga zavjeta," *Biblijski pogledi* 6, no. 1-2 (1998): 115-38.

Due to the complexity of the topic, we did not investigate all the causes and the details of the position of the Jewish people within the Roman Empire. We referred to the Christian texts from the 1st and 2nd centuries that testify to the tensions since the Jewish people could not accept their position and coexist in the atmosphere that reigned in society at that time, even when they had no other political choice. Jewish people were considered barbarians⁵ within the borders of the Empire due to the difficulty of accepting Roman rule and the Hellenistic culture dominant in the Empire. Still, often prejudices against Jews were motivated by economic reasons.⁶

In Paul's writings, there are several passages addressing the strained relationships marked by mutual prejudices prevalent during his time. The Epistle to the Galatians, for instance, highlights not just the tensions between Greeks and Jews but also among various other societal groups and classes. His text is almost a proclamation advocating for the equality and unity of all people: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!" (Gal 3:28). Here, Paul expresses his disagreement with certain ethnic or class groups that consider themselves superior to others.

While the texts from Paul and others are illustrative for grasping the dynamics among Judaism, paganism, and Christianity in the first century, the Christian literature of the second century reveals an unchanged situation regarding social circumstances, which worsened for Christians. In his Apology, the Christian philosopher Justin,⁷ talks about the Jews in his Apology⁸ referring to them as 'barbarians,' affirming prevailing societal prejudices that labeled Jews as such, despite their existence under Roman rule for over two centuries. Moreover, prior to that, they had been influenced by Hellenistic culture. Mindful of the Christian doctrine advocating unity and equality among all, Justin endeavors to combat prejudices against Jews and steer people towards unity in truth.⁹

The increasingly intense dispute between Jews and Christians provoked a conflict and persecution at the end of the 1st century. Several

⁵ See in the following chapters the testimony of the apologists.

⁶ Cf. Luis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton - New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 107: "We may wonder that our sources do not indicate the economic causes for the hatred of Jews, especially in view of the prominence of the Jews, at least under the Egyptian Ptolemies, as in the Middle Ages under the Arabs, in the hated position of the tax collector or petty bureaucrat; but we may reply that ancient historians seldom stress or even indicate the economic causes of events: They underline the political and military factors and are strong adherents of the "great man" school of history. Moreover, we have no papyri from Alexandria, the site of the largest and by far the most important and, apparently, the wealthiest Jewish community."

⁷ Justin was born in Palestine to a pagan family. He was brought up in the culture of his time and went through several schools of philosophy before eventually converting to Christianity. He is one of the most significant Christian authors of the 2nd century, though there is not much information about his life. The official report on his martyrdom, testimony before the Roman prefect and information about his death are available. See more: Cf. Ivan Bodrožić, "Justin, filozof i mučenik," in Justin, *Razgovor s Trifunom* (Split: Verbum, 2011), 5-7; Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske literature*, vol. 1, 270-73.

⁸ This is the reference work for Justin's Apologies: Allan Menzies, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, translated by D.M. Kay (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896).

⁹ Cf. Justin, *The First Apology of Justin*, 5.

Christian authors from the 2nd century, like Marcion, openly opposed everything Jewish. Moreover, he contradicted the use of the Old Testament and even advocated the existence of a Jewish God who is different from the Christian God. As a radical opponent of Jewish religiosity and culture, he advocated for the exclusion of Old Testament content from the New Testament. He proceeded to violate the New Testament writings, retaining only some of Paul's epistles, Luke's Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁰ This reaction and intolerance of the Jews only further contributed to the worsening of the situation and rising tensions even within the Christian community because not everyone shared his attitude and the church authorities had to exclude Marcion from the Church. In the later period, there also other authors who testified to the tensions and prejudices against the Jews, such as Tertullian (*Adversus Iudaeos*) and Pseudo-Cyprian (*Adversus Iudaeos*)¹¹ with their respective works, but they chronologically fall outside the scope of our research.

1.2. Prejudices against Gentiles

Alongside the prejudices of Gentiles against Jews as uncivilized and barbaric, Jews also held biases against individuals from other nations who didn't share their religious values. Other surrounding peoples were viewed as pagans, embracing polytheistic beliefs, while the Jews adhered to a monotheistic faith. These polytheistic beliefs created barriers to social interaction and cohabitation with Jews, as they considered these beliefs unworthy of their God. Objective assessment of religious disparities hindered harmonious relations between these groups.¹² Jews held religious biases against pagans, leading to their exclusion as commanded by their Law. Some argue that Jews often avoided contact with Gentiles during this period. This tendency appeared more instinctual than theological or based on religious law. It's reflected in the symbolic extension of food taboos, gradually excluding non-Jewish food from the kosher diet. This avoidance was justified religiously due to the accurate perception that Gentiles were prone to idolatry, a practice strongly prohibited by Jewish law.¹³

A Jewish way of life essentially differed from the Greek lifestyle, which the Jewish people strongly resisted.¹⁴ Thus, differences in nationality,

¹⁰ Cf. Barbara Aland, "Marcione – Marcionismo," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, vol. 2, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2007), 3020-24; Bart D. Ehrman, *I cristianesimi perduti. Apocrifi, sette ed eretici nella battaglia per le Sacre Scritture* (Roma: Carocci, 2012), 121-43.

¹¹ Cf. Pseudo-Cyprian, *Adversus Iudaeos*, ed. Dirk Van Damme (Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1969). In the introductory study, the editor reports the opinion of scholars that this work probably dates back to the third century.

¹² Even the hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria points out clear boundaries between pagan myths and Scripture, i.e. paganism and Judaism: Maren R. Niehoff, "Philo's views on paganism," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 135-58.

¹³ Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World. Collected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 111-12.

¹⁴ Cf. Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*, 109. We have information about this in the Old Testament in the First Book of the Maccabees, which describes the struggle of Mattathias and his sons against the Hellenization of their people, performed since the time of Alexander the Great, who created a great Greek empire.

social standing, and culture often led to irreparable biases among diverse societies and religions. Driven by its monotheistic principles, Judaism looked down upon paganism, refusing to consider them as equals in humanity and disregarding their societal contributions. Consequently, they dismissed their societal organization, legal frameworks, and cultural advancements.

Besides the Jewish prejudices against Gentile society and institutions, certain Christian circles also harbored strong biases, even demonizing all aspects of paganism—be it poetry, literature, medicine, art, science, or philosophy. Among the early Christian authors, Tatian,¹⁵ a disciple of Justin in the mid-2nd century,¹⁶ was prominent in vehemently highlighting these prejudices. Later, at the century's end, Carthaginian jurist Tertullian¹⁷ followed suit. Both staunchly rejected any notion of engagement or association with contemporary society, believing that all its institutions and norms were either influenced by or at the will of demons.

1.3. Prejudices against Christians

Encountering diverse people and their religious beliefs, Christians initially sought reconciliation despite prevalent mutual prejudices and exclusivity. However, this endeavor was challenging, as some Christians themselves exhibited mistrust and intolerance towards others, as previously mentioned. Over time, these biases against Christians intensified, further complicating the situation. Initially, Christian activities were discreet and concealed due to the biases that led to their persecution. At the outset, pagans saw Christians as no different from Jews. Yet gradually, it became evident to all that Christians constituted a distinct group. This is evident from Christianity's early days when St. Paul was summoned to the emperor and brought to Rome to present his case before the imperial court.¹⁸

Since Nero and Domitian's time, many Christians were sentenced to death for professing their faith because there was a prejudice that they did not respect their society and care about its welfare.¹⁹ In addition, there

12

¹⁵ Cf. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, ed. Molly Whittaker (Oxford: Calendon Press, 1982). In his work he systematically refutes mythology and astrology (ch. 8-11), sorcery and medicine (ch. 16-18), philosophy, oracles and mythology (ch. 19-21), acting, dancing and mime (ch. 22), gladiatorial shows (ch. 23), drama and music (ch. 24), philosophy, mythology and pagan ignorance (25-26).

¹⁶ More about Tatian: René Falkenberg, "Tatian," in *In Defence of Christianity Early Christian Apologists*, eds. Jakob Engberg, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and Jörg Ulrich (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2014), 67-79; Franco Bolgiani, "Taziano", in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane vol. III*, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2008), 5205-09.

¹⁷ More on Tertullian, and especially on the relationship to nobility and Judaism in Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London-New York: Routledge, 2004), 27-35; Paolo Siniscalco, "Tertulliano," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane vol. III*, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2008), 5303-18.

¹⁸ Karl Baus, "Od praopćine do ranokršćanske velecrkve," in *Velika povijest Crkve*, vol. 1, ed. Hubert Jedin (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2001), 149. You can see more about the position of Christians in Roman society, from the time of persecution until the turn of Constantine and the freedom of the Church in Marko Medved and Franjo Šiljeg, "O vjerskoj toleranciji u prvim stoljećima kršćanstva," *Riječki teološki časopis* 19, no.2 (2011): 403-36.

¹⁹ Cf. Karlo Suso Frank, *Manuale di Storia della Chiesa Antica* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 101-5.

were numerous other causes of persecution²⁰ based on prejudices, i.e. conclusion that the new religion threatened the existence of the Roman state order and should be suppressed.²¹ In his article, Grgo Grbešić provides some of the prejudices that influenced the persecution of Christians. One of the prejudices is the hatred of the Jews towards the Christians, then the Christian way of life that differed from the life of that time, especially the religious life of the Christians. Various missionary services put Christianity on a higher level than the pagan religion, and the pagan witch doctors had material losses due to the decline of the pagans. On the other hand, some philosophers envied Christians, their beliefs, and their success in society.²² All this influenced the creation of new prejudices against Christians²³ that were both social and religious.²⁴ It is important to note that by the 2nd century, Christianity had distanced itself from Judaism, but on the other hand "Christianity was perceived as something of a threat to the existing social and political order. On a religious level, Christians were considered disruptive because they rejected the polytheistic system by asserting the supremacy of their own God."²⁵

Therefore, in the second half of the 2nd century, in his apologia, *A Plea for Christians*,²⁶ Athenagoras²⁷ addresses Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus pointing out the great injustice based on inequality done to Christians. Namely, he refers to the fact that the Greeks and Egyptians worship different deities without obstacles and highlight their features and characteristics, but Christians are not allowed. Thus, the Greeks celebrate their gods in various forms, the Egyptians celebrate their gods in the form

²⁰ More in Grgo Grbešić, "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," *Diakovensia* 15, no. 1 (2007): 27-40; Baus, "Od praopćine do ranokršćanske velecркve," 396-54.

²¹ Cf. Alwyn Pettersen, *The Second-Century Apologists* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 78-117. They accused Christians of atheism and disrespect for the emperor because they refused to participate in the cults of the pagan religion and to pay homage to the emperor's statues. Christians rejected the accusations of atheism and disrespecting the emperor because they believed in one God, the Creator, and regularly praying for those in power but could not accept participation in cult practices considering them futile and superstitious.

²² In Rome, there were instances of persecution against early Christians by philosophers such as Crescens, who persecuted Justin and Tatian. Similarly, Athenagoras, a philosopher from Athens, initially set out to refute Christian Scriptures but eventually ended up converting to Christianity (cf. Filippo di Sida, *Hist. Eccl. VII*, 27). Additionally, there were orators like Celsus who wrote dissertations against Christians, which were later rebutted by Origen in his famous work *Contra Celsum* in the 3rd century.

²³ Cf. Grbešić, "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," 23-27.

²⁴ Cf. Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16-37.

²⁵ Emily J. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century. The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003), 9.

²⁶ For the works of the apologist we refer to: Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2., trans. B.P. Pratten (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

²⁷ Athenagoras was a pagan philosopher who wanted to write something against Christians, but after studying the Holy Scriptures, he converted to Christianity. He was born in Athens and was engaged in the second half of the 2nd century. See more in Ivan Bodrožić, "Uvod u Atenagorine spise i misao," in *Atenagora, Molba za kršćane. O uskrsnuću mrtvih* (Split: Verbum, 2013), 7-8; Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske literature*, vol. 1, 279-80; Paul Nautin and Emanuella Prinziavalli, "Atenagora," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2006), 640-41.

of different animals, and Christians are not allowed to worship God and the Creator of all. Moreover, pagan people and polytheistic believers offer sacrifice to their gods as they wish, but only Christians cannot profess their faith and they feel contempt from others.²⁸ Athenagoras' Apology suggests that the imperial authorities accepted and supported various unfounded and unreasonable cults that existed in Hellenistic society. However, the Christian faith is portrayed as godless only because it proclaims the belief in only one God. According to Athenagoras, it is an illogical attitude and prejudice of the imperial government that condemns Christianity, which has an internal logical consistency aligned with reason and testifies it with a moral life, while looking benevolently at religions and cults that cannot even cross the threshold of rational evaluation and very often spread immorality in society.

Athenagoras also tried to show that prejudices about Christians as godless are unfounded because Christians worship one God who created everything and sustains everything, which after all is, by reason and great philosophical traditions: "That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being – I have sufficiently demonstrated."²⁹ Due to all the facts and evidence that Athenagoras put before the emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, he calls on the emperors to be bold, fair, and prudent, but also rational about Christians and their philosophy. He emphasizes that it is necessary to judge Christians considering facts, not prejudice.

14

In his apologies, Justin talks about the prejudices that Jews have against Christians and testifies that "Jews bloodily persecuted Christians during the second Jewish war against the Romans (132-135 AD) because they considered them collaborators."³⁰ In the First Apology, he shows how society, due to prejudice condemns Christians just because they are Christians, because of the Christian name, which is not the case with other religions: "For we are accused of being Christians, and to hate what is excellent (Christian) is unjust. Again, if any of the accused denies the name, and says that he is not a Christian, you acquit him, as having no evidence against him as a wrongdoer; but if anyone acknowledges that he is a Christian, you punish him on account of this acknowledgment. Justice requires that you inquire into the life both of him who confesses and of him who denies, that by his deeds it may be apparent what kind of man each is."³¹

²⁸ Cf. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 1.

²⁹ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 10.

³⁰ Grbešić, "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," 24. Such an accusation does not stand, although, on the other hand, Christians have a different approach to the society in which they live because they respect the legitimate government and do not want to solve their problems or their civil rights through armed rebellions.

³¹ Justin, *The First Apology of Justin*, 4. To deepen this topic, see: Graham N. Stanton, "Accusations of Jewish persecution in early Christian sources, with particular references to Justin Martyr and the Martyrdom of Polycarp," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 279-95.

His student Tatian, at the beginning of his apologetic work, *Address to the Greeks*, bore witness to the prejudices³² addressing the Greek public who lives in line with the criteria of Hellenistic culture. He indicates prejudices towards 'barbarians' while thinking primarily of the Christian faith, which has its roots in Judaism: "Be not, O Greeks, so very hostilely disposed towards the Barbarians, nor look with ill will on their opinions. For which of your institutions has not been derived from the Barbarians?"³³ In addition to facing prejudices, Christians experienced disparagement and mockery in their society: "But to you Greeks what can I say, except to request you not to rail at those who are better than yourselves, nor if they are called Barbarians to make that an occasion of banter?"³⁴

Tatian, often using the name barbarian, shows the prejudices that the society of that time had towards Christians who considered themselves the heirs of the Old Testament revelation, i.e. barbarian wisdom as the pagans called it from their perspective. To prove that this barbaric philosophy or Christian wisdom, is older and more valuable than the Greek, he uses Greek sources and common sense arguments to lead the Greeks to the truth in a very critical tone: "But now it seems proper for me to demonstrate that our philosophy is older than the systems of the Greeks. Moses and Homer shall be our limits, each of them being of great antiquity; the one being the oldest of poets and historians, and the other the founder of all barbarian wisdom. Let us, then, institute a comparison between them; and we shall find that our doctrines are older, not only than those of the Greeks, but than the invention of letters."³⁵ Tatian then went to the other extreme, advocating the closure of Christianity within a biblical culture and a life distanced from communicating with the culture of his society.

15

2. Faith as a way to overcome prejudices

Bearing in mind the prejudices the people of antiquity experienced, Christians found themselves in the gap between paganism and Judaism, just as they had radical members in their ranks who were in favor of the same methods and ways of relating. The pagans initially treated Christians as a Jewish sect, and the Jews rejected them because their community had many pagan believers. Jews and Gentiles did not communicate with each other as we could see in the first section, and therefore there were conflicts and prejudices within the Christian community and also among these three groups. We present the Christian point of view that prevailed in the Christian community beyond all tensions. In the 1st century, it was the prevailing view, according to sources, that common faith was the means to overcome prejudices. While many Christians during this period were born and identified

³² Tatian is a philosopher born of a pagan family. Before converting to Christianity, he participated in the cults and mysteries of the pagan religion. See more in Ivan Bodrožić, "Tacijan: uvod u život i misao," in *Tacijan, Govor Grcima* (Split: Verbum, 2012), 5-6.; Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske literature*, vol. 1, 274-77.

³³ Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, 1.

³⁴ Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, 30.

³⁵ Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, 31. On the belief that Tatian considers Christianity an older religion than others see Falkenberg, "Tatian," 69-75.

as pagan peoples, they hinged on a shared revelation and faith (the faith of Abraham) which has its roots in the Old Testament.

Christians were individuals who sought to distance themselves from Judaism and society's institutions. However, they constituted a minority within the community, eventually becoming a heresy and sect excluded from its unity. We conducted our research based on the attitudes that developed and prevailed among most Christians, as represented by significant authors and Church fathers. They witnessed the bridges that the Christian community sought to build with the Jews and the society of the time offering the hand of reconciliation. This reconciliation mechanism was not entirely successful in addressing mutual biases and misunderstandings as positive communication requires willing partners. Where such partners existed among the Jews or in the society, cooperation was successful, and resolving misunderstandings was possible.

2.1. Jesus' teaching on the universality of faith

It is to point out that the turn towards mutual understanding and acceptance of all people in the Christian community came from Jesus Christ, as documented in the Gospels. His teaching was a radical innovation followed by his disciples, who did not distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. Christ encourages people of every nation to believe in God, whether a Jew³⁶ or a Syrophenician³⁷ or a Roman,³⁸ without making a difference between

³⁶ Mk 10,46-52: And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.

³⁷ Mt 15,21-28: Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

³⁸ Mt 8, 5-13: And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast

them. According to the teachings of Jesus, there are no barriers for individuals to believe in God, and all people have the opportunity to do so. Faith is not enclosed or exclusively given to a limited group of people, nor is it tied to national affiliation as in the case of Judaism, but rather a call to faith addressed to all people.

Regarding this, Saint Paul would say two or three decades later in the Epistle to the Romans: "There is no difference between Jew and Greek because they all have the same Lord, who gives richly to all who call on him" (Romans 10:12), thereby testifying that Christianity was guided by Jesus' attitudes. The novelty of Christianity is that there should not be any difference between people before God in the Roman society of that period. Christianity relies on the teaching of Jesus that Christians offered to the Jews as an authentic religion, which they could later easily present to the pagans as a kind of philosophy. Jesus taught his disciples and followers not to shy away from anyone and not to have prejudice towards others since all people have equal dignity and are all worthy of respect; every person, no matter what time he lives in and what nation he belongs to, has inalienable value and unquestionable dignity, including slaves and vulnerable categories of society. This way of thinking, which was not universally present in antiquity, clearly indicates the radical novelty brought about by the religious/philosophical thought of Christianity, all to overcome misunderstandings between people and social groups.

The opinions of scholars like Martin Goodman coincide with the fact that Christians are open to all who want to believe, which explains the great success in the spread of Christianity: "Christianity spread primarily because many Christians believed that non-Christians should have joined their faith and accrete to their congregations. I believe that no parallel to the early Christian mission was to be found in the ancient world in the first century."³⁹

17

2.2. Paul of Tarsus as a promoter of equality

In the middle of the first century, the apostle Paul from Tarsus⁴⁰ speaks in his epistles about the divisions and antagonisms that reigned in

out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

³⁹ Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*, 91.

⁴⁰ St. Paul (grč. Παῦλος, Paŭlos, lat. Paulus) was born in Tarsus in Cilicia between the years 5 and 10 and died in Rome in the year 67. Although he was born into a Jewish family, his parents had all the rights of Roman citizenship. His Jewish name was Saul. In addition to Hebrew and Aramaic, he also knew Greek, and got Hellenistic education. He learned the tentmaking craft. He was a member of the Pharisees, a firm adherer to the letter of the Law and persecutor of the first Christians. On the way to Damascus (34 or 36 AD), during one of the persecutions of Christians, he was converted and joined the Christians whom he persecuted from that moment on. After his conversion, he zealously followed Christ and often organized different Christian communities in the Hellenistic world during his missionary journeys. He cared of those communities, and his letters (epistles) encouraged and warned them about a life faithful to Christ, though adapted to the Hellenistic culture. Precisely because of his openness to the culture in which he preached, he was called the Apostle of the Nations. When he was arrested in Caesarea and imprisoned, he used his status as a Roman citizen to appeal to the emperor, so he went to Rome. He operated from Roman custody from 61 to 63. He was arrested again during the persecution of Emperor

Roman society. There were many prejudices in the relations between people, among different social classes and members of the two sexes. From Paul's Epistle to the Galatians,⁴¹ we can conclude what the situation was in Paul's time, but we also see that Paul teaches that all the baptized are children of God, regardless of their national origin: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3,26-29).

As a collaborator in the mission of the twelve apostles who were with Jesus, Paul preached the faith of Jesus Christ personally, but also by sending letters to the communities where he preached. He testified to the novelty offered by Christianity at the level of social life. But Paul knew well, even if he had Roman civil rights, the mutual non-acceptance and distrust between peoples, which caused unnecessary prejudice and hostility. He was aware of the social circumstances, divisions, and prejudices. By converting to Christianity he felt a shift, which allowed him to bridge chasms. Therefore, his texts bear witness to the belief that Christianity took positions that fought against prejudices, such as the prejudice the Jews had against the Gentiles (goyim), but also the one that the Gentiles had against the Jews.⁴²

Paul's text, addressed to believers in Galatia, testifies to multiple divisions and prejudices in society before the arrival and spread of Christianity. During the 1st and 2nd centuries, there were tensions towards Judaism in the Roman Empire, due to the prevailing logic of division in society mentioned in Paul's letters.⁴³ Despite being under Roman rule, since the time of Roman influence and successive dominion from the 2nd century BC,⁴⁴ the Jewish people always remained outside the influence of Roman culture and religion, which is why they were considered barbarians. The epithet 'barbarian people' testifies to the prejudices against Jews that prevailed in the society and were based on the degree of economic power, social influence, or technological

18

Nero in 67 AD and executed as a Roman citizen. See more in Celestin Tomić, *Počeci Crkve, Pavao-apostol naroda* (Zagreb: Provincijalat hrvatskih franjevac konventualaca, 1995), 7-41; Frederick F. Bruce, "Paolo negli Atti e nelle lettere," in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried (Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999), 1130-52; Celestin Tomić, *Savao Pavao-vrijeme, život i djelo Apostola Pavla* (Zagreb: Provincijalat franjevac konventualaca, 1982).

⁴¹ The Epistle to the Galatians belongs to one of Paul's great epistles. It is not large, but due to its great importance for the Church, it is considered among the great epistles. Paul wrote this Epistle probably after his second visit to Galatia around 54 AD. In it, he addresses the Galatians and answers their specific problem, primarily about justification by faith in Jesus Christ and the Law of Moses. See more in Tomić, *Počeci Crkve, Pavao-apostol naroda*, 137-143; G. Walter Hansen, "Galati, lettera ai," in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 657-76.

⁴² For example we can see: Gal 3,28: "No more Jew or Gentile, no more slave and freeman, no more male and female; you are all one person in Jesus Christ." Kol 3,11: "Here is no more Gentile and Jew, no more circumcised and uncircumcised; no one is barbarian, or Scythian, no one is slave or free man; there is nothing but Christ in any of us."

⁴³ On Jewish position in the Roman Empire, see more in Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*.

⁴⁴ Cf. Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2003), 40.

progress. Jews had a hard time accepting the values of the civilization, so they slowly adapted to the social criteria of Hellenistic culture because there was a fear that contact with Gentiles would pollute their faith. On the other hand, preserving their customs and hermetically making sure that they did not change anything, the Jews 'enjoyed' the epithet of barbarian people, and they integrated very slowly into society. In this sense, Paul mentions the national, class, and gender divisions and prejudices that were extremely present at that time and brings the novelty of Christianity that tried to bridge all these divisions by advocating essential equality among people. Another text of Saint Paul written in the Epistle to the Ephesians also testifies to it.⁴⁵ It first testifies to the Christian reflection of ancient times and the relations between peoples, among whom there was an almost bloc division (2:13-21): "But now, in Christ Jesus, you, who once were far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. Through him, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."

19

In this text, Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the bridge that unites and connects the Gentile people, who before him did not have access to God's revelation, and the Jewish people, represented as bearers of the covenant with God. Christ is the one who breaks the barrier between Hellenistic culture and barbarian (non)culture, between the Gentile people and the Jewish people. He combines two in himself, breaking the wall of prejudice and bringing peace.

The Epistle to the Colossians⁴⁶ (3,9-11) and the Epistle to the Galatians provides a similar speech about reducing the prejudice habit in ancient times: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed

⁴⁵ The Epistle to the Ephesians is one of the unique epistles attributed to Paul. It is the summary and climax of Paul's thoughts about Christ and the mystery of the Church. The exact date of the Epistle is unknown, and there are still disputes about the author of the Epistle. See more in Tomić, *Počeci Crkve, Pavao-apostol naroda*, 268-84; Clinton E. Arnold, "Efesini, lettera agli," in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 488-504; Karl Hermann Scheikle, *Paolo. Vita, lettere, teologia* (Brescia: Paideia, 1990), 155-61.

⁴⁶ The Epistle to the Colossians is valuable because of the discourse on Christology. It was addressed to the community of the Colossians, which was located in the city of Colossae and mainly consisted of Christians of pagan origin. Recently, there have been doubts about Paul's direct authorship of the epistle, and some authors have expressed their opinion about Paul's disciple as the author of the epistle. See more in Scheikle, *Paolo. Vita, lettere, teologia*, 149-55; Peter T. O' Brien, "Colossesi, lettera ai," in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 273-83.

in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here, there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." In this text, we also find evidence of the prejudices the Christian author writes about and warns believers that such prejudices, be they national, gender, social, ethnic, or any other, must not exist among them. Moreover, he emphasizes that Christ is the common bond that brings the unity of all humanity. The Christian faith is presented here as a healthy way of overcoming all prejudices and obstacles among nations and people of the time.

In the Epistle to Romans⁴⁷ (10, 11-12), the Christian writer emphasizes once again that national prejudices between Christian converts from Judaism and pagans should not exist because the Lord Jesus Christ is one for all and who calls on him and follow him will be saved: "As Scripture says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Paul testifies that the Christianity of the first century, immersed in the experience of the other world, tried to change the social paradigm and remove prejudices by sticking to the truth about one God, the creator, and father of all people. Christianity has been the bearer of the tolerance and prejudice-reduction process. But that process was neither simple nor easy. It continued even later in the second century, as evidenced by the already-mentioned apologists. While in the first century, St. Paul put much effort into convincing Jews that they should not shy away from Gentiles but rather accept them as brothers in faith and sharers of the same salvation goal, the situation changed over time.

20

2.3. The testimony in the Acts of the Apostles⁴⁸

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke also testifies about the persecutions and the Jewish prejudices against Christians. In the sixth and seventh chapters, he first gives an account of Stephen and the false accusation against him, his answer before the Great Council, and the stoning to which St. Paul attended and approved since he did not yet convert.⁴⁹ The condemnation and the act itself could not prove guilt but suggested the great degree of prejudice and intolerance that affected the attitude of Jews toward Christians. Furthermore, the eighth and ninth chapters (Acts 8-9) provide the

⁴⁷ The Epistle to the Romans is Paul's greatest epistle written to the community in Rome and his authorship is not questionable. Paul did not establish the community but provided the fundamental attitudes of his preaching. There is a large number of Jews who have converted to Christianity in the community. See more in James D. G. Dunn, "Romani, lettera ai," in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 1353-75; Schelkle, *Paolo. Vita, lettere, teologia*, 135-49.

⁴⁸ The Acts of the Apostles were compiled by St. Luke probably after the year 70 and are included in the biblical books of the New Testament. Acts describes the activities of the disciples and St. Paul after the Ascension, the origin and development of the Church, and the manner and organization of the first Church. More about the dating and other important circumstances of the creation of the Acts of the Apostles in Joseph J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 47-60.

⁴⁹ Cf. Acts 6-7.

viewpoint of the young rabbi Saul (later St. Paul), who intensely persecutes Christians, and then testifies to his conversion and preaching about Jesus the Son of God. According to the scholars who researched this problem, "Jews considered Christians of Jewish origin usurpers of their religious heritage. The Acts of the Apostles and Tertullian tell us about Jewish zeal in persecuting Christians. For Tertullian, they were slanderers."⁵⁰

Apart from the mentioned Saul's persecution against Christians, in which one of the victims was the deacon St. Stephen, Acts of the Apostles testifies to the death of James, the brother of John, and the imprisonment of Peter, without any real reason.⁵¹ As it was already said, some persecuted Christians because of economic reasons or interest, i.e. the reduced earnings they had by selling statuettes of various deities.⁵² Therefore, Christianity, which diverted people from such superstitions, wasn't welcomed by merchants due to their vested interests. The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19:23-25) document the incitement of a rebellion by a silversmith named Demetrius, from the temple of Artemis, against Paul's preaching.⁵³

3. 'Barbaric' philosophy as a way to overcome prejudices

The foremost concern in the 1st century was fostering unity and overcoming prejudices against Judaism, and the acceptance of the faith among the "people of the Gentiles" served as a significant step. However, by the 2nd century, the situation underwent a radical change, necessitating novel approaches to bridge divides and surmount the crisis. The rationale of faith, previously pivotal in the discourse between Christianity and Judaism, no longer sufficed as a solution. The altered circumstances called for new methods to transcend religious prejudices, misunderstandings, and intolerance that emerged during this period. This path revolved around philosophy, particularly what authors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries termed 'barbarian' philosophy. Scholars often refer to the philosophical content in sacred Jewish texts, resonating with Greek philosophy, especially Platonic thought, as barbaric philosophy. Interestingly, some individuals in antiquity believed that Plato derived inspiration for his philosophy from the texts of Moses. This belief gained prominence, notably after the translation of the Bible into Greek by the Jews.⁵⁴ We use the concept of 'barbarian

⁵⁰ Grbešić, "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," 24. The author also refers to a text from the Acts of the Apostles in which St. Luke represents the anger and persecutions that Saul instigated against the Christians: "Meanwhile Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorise him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he might find" (Acts 9,1-2.9. Cf. Acts 6,8-8,3).

⁵¹ Acts 12,1-5: "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

⁵² Cf. Acts 19,21-40.

⁵³ Cf. Grbešić, "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," 26.

⁵⁴ Cf. Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 41-51. From that

philosophy' here because it was used by Christian apologists in the 2nd century, obviously as a witness to the terminology used in their environment. However, the apologists themselves, coming from pagan society, were aware of the value of philosophy itself,⁵⁵ but also of the superiority of the revealed content, starting with the Old Testament, which belonged to the Jewish people, considered barbarian because they were not willing to accept all the parameters of Hellenistic culture. The apologists, however, have an ambiguous attitude: on the one hand, they criticize Hellenistic culture, and on the other hand, they are open to fruitful dialogue.⁵⁶ In conclusion, we can say that "second-century Christians had a twofold task; they had to defend Christianity against this onslaught from the Graeco-Roman world around them, but on a deeper level, they sought to reconcile their Christian faith with their Hellenistic roots. The result was a series of apologetic writers who attempted to defend and justify the Christian position, and yet also struggled to define themselves with relation to the Hellenistic world."⁵⁷

3.1. The confrontation between Moses and Hellenistic philosophy

Jews were outside the flow of Roman culture because their religion prevented them from mixing with other peoples and because they rejected Hellenistic culture, although they were part of the Roman Empire, by many people they were considered barbarian people who cultivated their own culture and religion. However, Christians have attempted to make an important breakthrough in combating such prejudices against the Jews, their philosophy, and their culture, claiming to be the rightful heirs of the promise of the Old Testament and the faith of Abraham, and thus of the writings that the Jewish people jealously guarded.⁵⁸ Christians affirmed the value and beauty of the 'philosophy' of the Old Testament, as witnessed by Aristides in the 2nd century⁵⁹ and other converts to Christianity. On the other hand, the apologists did not renounce the use of Hellenistic philosophy because for them it was part of their education and cultural identity.⁶⁰

In his apology Aristides writes about the Jews who approach the truth about God and their behavior surpassed the other peoples of that time: "The Jews then say that God is one, the Creator of all, and omnipotent; and

time there is a greater exchange between Greek philosophy and Jewish culture, witnessed by Philo of Alexandria who put his extensive Greek learning at the service of scriptural interpretation.

⁵⁵ Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 2-8.

⁵⁶ Cf. Claudio Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 13-25.

⁵⁷ Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century. The Case of Tatian*, 9-10.

⁵⁸ We know that this was not enough to prevent the Roman government's persecutions and lookouts against the Jews, who often rebelled and were severely punished.

⁵⁹ Aristides of Athens is a philosopher about whom we do not have much information. We know that he wrote an apology addressed to Emperor Hadrian. See more in Cf. Ivan Bodrožić, "Uvod u apologiju Aristida iz Atene," in Aristid, *Apologija* (Split: Verbum, 2013), 143-48; Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske literature*, vol. 1, 267-68.

⁶⁰ In that sense Hunt states: "In the second century, hellenistic philosophy was part of a common heritage bequeathed upon well-born sons by the Graeco-Roman education system, and philosophy permeated the intellectual atmosphere of the second century in an almost popularized form" (*Christianity in the Second Century. The Case of Tatian*, 74).

that it is not right that any other should be worshiped except this God alone. And herein they appear to approach the truth more than all the nations, especially in that they worship God and not His works. And they imitate God by the philanthropy which prevails among them; for they have compassion on the poor, and they release the captives, and bury the dead, and do such things as these, which are acceptable before God and well-pleasing also to men – which (customs) they have received from their forefathers.⁶¹ According to Aristides, the Jews came closer to the truth than all the peoples and philosophies with whom they shared the space and circumstances of the same society. This philosopher from Athens believes that they did not fully reach the truth because they did not accept Jesus as the Son of God, and they often betrayed God. Despite everything, Aristides shows how barbarian philosophy once surpasses other philosophies, especially Hellenistic philosophy, and thus paves the way for reducing prejudices against Jews and Christians, relying on common sense consistency with the truth.

Unlike other apologists, Clement of Alexandria⁶² somehow tries to reconcile Greek and barbarian philosophy by showing that there is a germ of truth in each of them: “Since, therefore, truth is one (for falsehood has ten thousand by-paths); just as the Bacchantes tore asunder the limbs of Pentheus, so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaunt as the whole truth the portion which has fallen to its lot. But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth – both those who possess not a little and those who have any portion – produce whatever they have of the word of truth.”⁶³

23

Furthermore, in chapter 15, Clement goes a step further and explains that Greek philosophy partly originates from the barbarians, trying to reduce both to a common denominator, i.e., the truth.⁶⁴ According to Clement, there can only be one truth, and those who possess it, possess it because they drink from a spring of water, which is divine. Philosopher Saint Justin would similarly contemplate the universal presence of the Logos within all individuals.⁶⁵

But behind such an idea is a belief that Plato read the books of Moses. This idea goes back to the philosopher Numenius, and Justin similarly traces Platonic philosophy back to an ancient source, namely the Mosaic and prophetic. A. J. Droge states: “It may be that Justin knew of Numenius’ claim

⁶¹ Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides*, 14.

⁶² Clement of Alexandria was born around the year 150, probably in a pagan family in Athens. However, he spent most of his life in Alexandria, thus called Clement of Alexandria. There is no exact information on when or why he converted to Christianity. He died shortly before 215. See more in Cf. Ivan Bodrožić, “Uvod u djelo Klementa Aleksandrijskoga Koji se bogataš spašava.” in Klement Aleksandrijski, *Koji se bogataš spašava* (Split: Verbum, 2014), 5-8; Henry Chadwick, “General Introduction,” in *Alexandrian Christianity. The Selected Translations of Clement and Origen*, eds. Henry Chadwick and J. E. L. Oulton (Louisville, KY: SCM Press, 1954), 15-33.

⁶³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 1,13. See more about the universal importance of philosophy for Clement in Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 197-212.

⁶⁴ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 15.

⁶⁵ Cf. Paolo Merlo, *Liberi di vivere secondo il Logos* (Roma: LAS, 1994), 211-45.

and that this provided the impetus for his assertion that Plato had actually 'read' Moses. Like Numenius, Justin traced Platonic philosophy back to an ancient barbarian source, but whereas Numenius allowed that this *Ur*-philosophy derived from a variety of ancient nations and theologians, Justin claimed that the writings of Moses and the prophets were the *exclusive* source. The 'Christian philosophy' therefore was not one, or even the best, among many philosophical schools; according to Justin, it was the *only* philosophy insofar as it was the reconstitution and restoration of the original, primordial truth."⁶⁶

3.2. Affirmation of 'barbarian' philosophy in antique Roman society

The 2nd century saw an interesting twist. Several philosophers converted from paganism to Christianity (Aristides, Justin, Athenagoras, etc.) discovered in the Jewish Old Testament tradition a strong intellectual message that they call "barbarian philosophy," following the name of the Jewish people as a barbarian people. They compare that "barbarian philosophy" even with the great philosophical traditions of Hellenistic culture such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism, considering it even older, more credible, and truthful.⁶⁷ Promoting the sublimity of "barbarian philosophy" in their society, they reduce prejudices against Judaism and its traditions, but at the same time against Christianity, which at that time was also undesirable, corresponding not to the canons of the pagan religion that was the official state religion in the Empire. Thus, their readiness for common-sense consistency with the truth became a way to overcome societal misunderstandings and prejudices. They called the pagan elite, emperors, administrators, intellectuals, and philosophers to a common-sense confrontation in the truth. They assumed that barbarian philosophy as sublime truth could be appealing to everyone. Moreover, they were convinced that that truth could become a common truth evident to every benevolent reason, seeking the truth about God and man, similarly to the Greek philosophy.⁶⁸

24

⁶⁶ A. J. Droge, "Self-definition vis-à-vis the Graeco-Roman world," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Origins to Constantine*, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 237.

⁶⁷ So, for example, Tatian holds that "the testimony of the Bible is therefore not only older and better than all Greek thought and literature, but also the original foundation for all Greek culture." Falkenberg, "Tatian," 78.

⁶⁸ Some authors such as Tatian seem to oppose philosophy, but basically present Christianity as a true philosophy. Tatian's hostility is only apparent, as Hunt states: "It is surprising in view of Tatian's apparent hostility towards all things Greek that he should present Christianity as a 'philosophy'. Yet in the *Oratio* Tatian clearly speaks of Christianity as 'our philosophy,' and refers to the activity of Christians 'philosophizing' (cf. *Oratio* 31-33). In the final chapter of the *Oratio*, he even calls himself a philosopher (*Oratio* 42,1). The problem that faces us is why Tatian should claim the term 'philosophy' for Christianity, and yet criticize hellenistic philosophy to the extent he does. The solution to this problem lies partly in the charge of plagiarism that he levels against the Greek philosophers and partly in the superior status that he demands for Christian philosophy, over and against that of the Greeks. Tatian's line of argument in asserting the superiority of Christian philosophy springs from his understanding of Judaism as the Christian heritage. During his conversion account, Tatian tells us that he was converted to Christianity through reading some 'barbarian writings.'" Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century. The Case of Tatian*, 103.

At the end of his commonsense approach to the question of God, Aristides emphasizes Christian philosophy above all philosophies in his *Apology*,⁶⁹ showing how it contributed to overcoming misunderstanding between peoples and religions in Roman society. About the Christians who alone found the genuine truth, Aristides says: "But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come."⁷⁰ All the knowledge of God that Christians have is due to the revelation of Jesus Christ and the acceptance of Jesus' salvific work.

By acknowledging the revealed truth and possessing the source of moral righteousness, Christians were persuaded of their superiority to all other nations. But on the other hand, they do not hold that the truth is exclusively theirs but universal because it springs from God. That is why they invite every reason to focus and be open to that truth. To show that Christianity brings the truth reason itself strives for, Athenagoras talks about Christian teaching (philosophy!), which is not human but divine: "If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrine, let it not surprise you. While you may not be carried away by the popular and irrational opinion but may have the truth clearly before you. For presenting the opinions themselves to which we adhere, as being not human but uttered and taught by God, we shall be able to persuade you not to think of us as atheists."⁷¹

In his works, Clement of Alexandria tries to direct Hellenistic and barbarian philosophy toward the culmination, which is Christian philosophy. Both philosophies have their fragments and find the fullness of the truth: "For instance, although the highest note is different from the lowest note, both compose one harmony. In numbers, an even number differs from an odd number, but both suit arithmetic; as also is the case with figures, the circle, the triangle, and the square, and whatever figures differ from one another. Also, in the whole universe, all the parts, though differing one from another, preserve their relation to the whole. So, then, the barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth not from the mythology of Dionysus, but from the theology of the ever-living Word. And He

⁶⁹ On the work of apologist Aristides see Allan Menzies, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, trans. D.M. Kay (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896). Justin also states it in a similar way, according to what Droge says ("Self-definition vis-a-vis the Graeco-Roman world," 234-35): "Justin contends, in other words, that Greek philosophy as it presently exists, divided up into different schools, each contradicting the other, cannot carry out its proper function of leading people to God. Only the philosophy contained in the books of Moses and the prophets is capable of this, as Justin makes clear through the persona of the 'old man' in the *Dialogue with Trypho* (7,1-2)."

⁷⁰ Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides*, 15.

⁷¹ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 11.

who brings again together the separate fragments, and makes them one, will without peril, be assured, contemplate the perfect Word, the truth."⁷²

3.3. The universality of the Logos

Referring to the notion of the Logos, we can conclude that Christians accepted philosophy as a rational activity because people could make bridges between them rationally. Clement wanted to direct the Greeks towards reason and spoke to them philosophically to lead them to faith. He had to approach them in a way known to them, and the Logos was the bond among all people. The Logos could be a bridge to the pagans because he is the author of all rationality, just as he is the one who became incarnate and manifested himself to Christians in fullness.⁷³ Thus, Christian philosophers offered a rational approach to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings, and at the same time, they invited their compatriots to reveal themselves to the power and beauty of the Logos. Christianity wanted to affirm itself as a rational religion, emphasizing the need for rationality to show that it did not oppose the welfare of the Empire or its institutions. On the contrary, everything that was valuable and that could be considered reasonable was also acceptable to Christianity, which also had to remove from its ranks some individuals who did not accept the possibility of communion with the components of the culture of that time.⁷⁴

Justin mentions how the same Logos exposed the demons who were not gods and caused misunderstandings among the barbarians. It is the Logos that took human form and became a man named Jesus Christ: "For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ; and in obedience to Him, we not only deny that they who did such things as these are gods, but assert that they are wicked and impious demons, whose actions will not bear comparison with those even of men desirous of virtue."⁷⁵ In this way, Justin confirms the existence of prejudices but believes that through reason and openness to the Logos, people can overcome them to the general satisfaction and for the benefit of the whole society.

26

⁷² Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 1,13. Clement is convinced that Plato is indebted to barbarian philosophy because Moses is older than Plato. Cf. Osborn, *Klement of Alexandria*, 33, 92.

⁷³ More on this in Ivan Bodrožić, "Odnos vjere i razuma u kasnoantičkom svijetu," in *Zapad, vjera i razum*, eds. Adolfo Polegubić and Vulić Boris (Frankfurt am Main: Hrvatski dušobrižnički ured-Kroatenseelsorge in Deutschland, 2015), 11-40.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ivan Bodrožić, "Klement Aleksandrijski i prihvaćanje grčke filozofije u Aleksandrijskoj Crkvi koncem 2. Stoljeća," *Vrhbosnensia* 16, no.2 (2012): 291-306.

⁷⁵ Justin, *The First Apology of Justin*, 5.

Conclusion

In the first two centuries of its existence, Christianity confronted numerous challenges stemming from religious and social biases, which significantly impacted intergroup relations. The prevalent injustices and disparities led to profound divisions within the society of that era. Anchored in the teachings of Jesus Christ, Christianity sought to address or eradicate prejudices and foster greater cohesion and equality among individuals, groups, and diverse populations of the time. In the first century, Paul of Tarsus played a significant role in advancing this objective, advocating for unity between Jews and individuals from other nations based on a shared foundation of faith. In the subsequent 2nd century, apologists continued this endeavor toward uniting all peoples and humanity, although their starting point exhibited some variation.

They present genuine philosophy to society as a pathway, believing that through its pursuit, intolerance can be transcended, and a shared understanding can be established. Genuine philosophy is a discipline that unifies people and enables them to shed biases against one another. By embracing what's termed as "barbarian philosophy" as the true essence of life's philosophy, they temper their sense of Greek/Hellenistic pride. However, the responsibility for reducing prejudices doesn't solely rest on apologists but also on Christianity itself. The advent of Jesus Christ is pivotal in dismantling biases. His teachings are then followed by the apostles, including Paul, who, like the apologists, highlights and endeavors to overcome religious biases through genuine faith and philosophy. Christianity, guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ, inherently stands against prejudice, a message advocated by Jesus' followers like the apologists. The foundation they reference is universal to all humanity—the Logos.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Aland, Barbara. "Marcione – Marcionismo." In *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, edited by Angelo di Berardino, 2:3020-24. Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2007.
2. Arnold, Clinton E. "Efesini, lettera agli." In *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried, 488-504. Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999.
3. Baus, Karl. *Velika povijest Crkve*. Vol. 1, *Od praopćine do ranokršćanske velecркve*. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2001.
4. Bolgiani, Franco. "Taziano." In *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, edited by Angelo di Berardino, 3:5205-5209. Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2008.
5. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Justin, filozof i mučenik." In *Justin, Razgovor s Trifunom*, edited by Ivan Bodrožić, 5-16. Split: Verbum, 2011.
6. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Klement Aleksandrijski i prihvaćanje grčke filozofije u Aleksandrijskoj Crkvi koncem 2. stoljeća." *Vrhbosnensia* 16, no.2 (2012): 291-306.
7. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Odnos vjere i razuma u kasnoantičkome svijetu." In *Zapad, vjera i razum*, edited by Adolof Polegubić and Boris Vulić, 11-40. Frankfurt am Main: Hrvatski dušobrižnički ured-Kroatenseelsorge in Deutschland, 2015.
8. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Tacijan: uvod u život i misao." In *Tacijan, Govor Grcima*, edited by Ivan Bodrožić, 5-14. Split: Verbum, 2012.
9. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Uvod u djelo Klementa Aleksandrijskoga Koji se bogataš spašava." In *Klement Aleksandrijski, Koji se bogataš spašava*, edited by Ivan Bodrožić, 5-12. Split: Verbum, 2014.
10. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Uvod u apologiju Aristida iz Atene." In *Aristid, Apologija*, edited by Ivan Bodrožić, 143-48. Split: Verbum, 2013.
11. Bodrožić, Ivan. "Uvod u Atenagorine spise i misao." In *Atenagora, Molba za kršćane. O uskrsnuću mrtvih*, edited by Ivan Bodrožić, 7-17. Split: Verbum, 2013.
12. "Prejudice." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Last modified April 12, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prejudice>.
13. Bruce, Frederick F. "Paolo negli Atti e nelle lettere." In *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried, 1130-52. Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999.
14. Chadwick, Henry. "General introduction." In *Alexandrian Christianity. The Selected Translations of Clement and Origen*, edited by Henry Chadwick and J. E. L. Oulton, 15-33. Louisville, KY: SCM Press, 1954.
15. Clark, Gillian. *Christianity and Roman Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
16. Droge, A. J. "Self-definition vis-a`-vis the Graeco-Roman world." In *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Origins to Constantine*, edited by Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, 230-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
17. Dunn, Geoffrey D. *Tertullian*. London-New York: Routledge, 2004.

18. Dunn, James D. G. "Romani, lettera ai." In *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried, 1353-75. Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999.
19. Ehrman, Bart D. *I cristianesimi perduti. Apocrifi, sette ed eretici nella battaglia per le Sacre Scritture*. Roma: Carocci, 2012.
20. Falkenberg, René. "Tatian," in *In Defence of Christianity Early Christian Apologists*, edited by Jakob Engberg, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and Jörg Ulrich, 67-79. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2014.
21. Feldman, Luis H. *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*. Princeton-New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.
22. Fitzmyer, Joseph J. *The Acts of the Apostles*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
23. Fredriksen, Paula. *Augustine and the Jews*. New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland: Doubleday, 2008.
24. Goodman, Martin. *Judaism in the Roman World. Collected Essays*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007.
25. Grbešić, Grgo. "Progoni kršćana, napose u Dioklecijanovo doba," *Diakovensia* 15, no.1(2007): 21-43
26. Hansen, G. Walter. "Galati, lettera ai." In *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried, 657-76. Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999.
27. "Predrasuda." In *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2021. Accessed March 16, 2023. <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=50076>.
28. Hunt, Emily J. *Christianity in the Second Century. The Case of Tatian*. London-New York: Routledge, 2003.
29. Justin Martyr. *Dialog with Trypho*. Translated by Thomas B. Falls. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
30. Moreschini, Claudio. *Storia della filosofia patristica*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005.
31. Medved, Marko, and Franjo Šiljeg. "O vjerskoj toleranciji u prvim stoljećima kršćanstva," *Riječki teološki časopis* 19, no.2 (2011): 403-36.
32. Merlo, Paolo. *Liberi di vivere secondo il Logos*. Roma: LAS, 1994.
33. Menzies, Allan, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 1: *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*. Translated by D.M. Kay. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896.
34. Menzies, Allan, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 9: *The Gospel of Peter, the Diatessaron of Tatian, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Vision of Paul, the Apocalypse of the Virgin and Sedrach, the Testament of Abraham, the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, tje Narrative of Zosimus, the Apology of Aristides, the Epistles of Clement (complete text), Origen's Commentary of John, Books 1-10, and Commentary on Matthew, Books 1, 2, and 10-14*. Translated by D.M. Kay. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896.
35. Nautin, Paul, and Emanuella Prinzivalli. "Atenagora." In *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, edited by Angelo di Berardino, 640-41. Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2006.
36. Niehoff, Maren R. "Philo's views on paganism." In *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Graham N.

Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa, 135-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

37. O' Brien, Peter T. "Colossesi, lettera ai." In *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Ried, 273-83. Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 1999.
38. Osborn, Eric. *Clement of Alexandria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
39. Padovese, Luigi. "Apologists." In *Encyclopedic Theological Dictionary*, edited by Aldo Starić, 56-58. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2009.
40. Pellegrino, Michele, and Stefan Heid. "Apologisti - Apologetica." In *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, edited by Angelo di Berardino, 426-29. Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2006.
41. Pettersen, Alvyn. *The Second-Century Apologists*. Eugene - Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020.
42. Pseudo-Cyprian. *Adversus Iudaeos*. Edited by Dirk Van Damme. Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1969.
43. Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 2: *Hermes, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*. Translated by B.P. Pratten. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.
44. Schäfer, Peter. *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World*. London-New York: Routledge, 2003.
45. Schelkle, Karl Hermann. *Paolo. Vita, lettere, teologia*. Brescia: Paideia, 1990.
46. Sharon, Nadav. "Roman Conquest and Loss of Sovereignty." In *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, edited by Daniel R. Schwartz, Zeev Weiss, and Ruth A. Clements, 415-45. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012.
47. Siniscalco, Paolo. "Tertulliano," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* Vol. 3, edited by Angelo di Berardino, 5303-18. Genova-Milano: Marietti, 1820, 2008.
48. Stanton, Graham N. "Accusations of Jewish persecution in early Christian sources, with particular references to Justin Martyr and the Martyrdom of Polycarp." In *Tolerance and intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa, 279-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
49. Suso Frank, Karlo. *Manuale di Storia della Chiesa Antica*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000.
50. Šagi-Bunić, Tomislav J. *Povijest kršćanske literature*. Vol. 1. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1976.
51. Tatian. *Oratio ad Graecos*. Edited by Molly Whittaker. Oxford: Calendon Press, 1982.
52. Tomić, Celestin. *Počeci Crkve, Pavao-apostol naroda*. Zagreb: Provincijalat hrvatskih franjevaca konventualaca, 1995.
53. Tomić, Celestin. *Savao Pavao-vrijeme, život i djelo Apostola Pavla*. Zagreb: Provincijalat franjevaca konventualaca, 1982.
54. Wood, Lynn H. "Razdoblje između Staroga i Novoga zavjeta." *Biblijski pogledi* 6, no. 1-2 (1998): 115-38.