

CHRIST AND MITHRAS, TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

By Flavio Barbiero

(Translated somewhat freely by Franz Berg)

Editor's Note: Some people may be shocked to learn that December 25th is also the birthdate of another famous individual named Mithras. It should not be surprising then when we learn that Mithras' birth was signalled by a shining star in the night sky and that he was born to a virgin in a cave. Before he died, Mithras had a "Last Supper" and later came back from the dead. But the historical "facts" that Christianity shared with Mithras go much deeper. In this article, author and historian Flavio Barbiero traces the cult of Mithras through history and shows how the power and influence of this mysterious and secret society endures even today.

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In 384 AD Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, the last “Papa” (acronym of the words Pater Patrum = Fathers’ Father) of the so called Cult of Mithras, died in Rome. His name, and his religious and political appointments, are written on the underground walls St Peters’ Basilica, together with the names of a long list of other Roman senators, spanning a period from 305 to 390. The one thing that they have in common is that they all are “Patres” of Mithras.

As many as nine amongst them have the supreme title of Pater Patrum, clear evidence that it was here, inside the Vatican, that the supreme leader of the Mithraic organization resided, side by side with the most sacred Basilica of Christianity, erected by Constantine the Great in 320 A.D.

For at least 70 years the supreme leaders of two “religions” that were always supposed to be competitors, if not sworn enemies, lived peacefully and in perfect harmony side by side. It was the same Praetextatus, as Prefect of the city, who defended Damasus against his opponents, in 367, and confirmed him as Bishop of Rome.

Praetextatus often declared that he would have willingly accepted to be baptized, if the See of St. Peter were offered to him. Following his death, however, the opposite happened. The title of Pater Patrum fell (today we

would say by default) upon Damasus' successor, Bishop Siricius, who was the first in the Church's history to assume the title of "Papa" (Pope). Together with the title he also took upon himself a long series of other prerogatives, titles, symbols, objects and possessions, that then passed en masse from Mithraism to Christianity.

It was a true handover from the Mithraic Pope to the Christian one, that we can understand only in the light of what had happened the year before, in 383.

In that year the Senate almost unanimously voted for the formal abolition of Paganism and all its symbols in Rome and throughout the Western Empire. A vote that has always puzzled the historians, because in their opinion the majority of the Senators were Pagans and represented the last stronghold of Paganism against the irresistible advance of Christianity. This opinion, however, is utterly in disagreement with what, during those same years, Ambrose the bishop of Milan, used to declare, namely that the Christians had the "majority" in the senate. Who is right, Ambrose or the modern historians?



The Bishop of Milan [above] was a member of a great senatorial family and he closely followed Roman events; so it is unlikely that he could be wrong on a matter of that kind. On the other hand we cannot give the lie to the historians, because written and archaeological evidence confirms that the majority of the Roman senators were at that time "Patres" of the Sol Invictus

Mithras (the Invincible Sun Mithras), and therefore, according to common opinion, definitely Pagans.

What nobody seems to have understood, however, is that the two conditions, affiliation with Mithras and with Christ, were all but compatible. There is no lack of historical evidence proving this.



The most significant of the many possible examples is Emperor Constantine the Great. He was an affiliate of Sol Invictus Mithras and never disowned it, not even when he openly embraced Christianity and declared himself to be “God’s Servant” and a sort of “Universal Bishop”. His biographer Eusebius hails him as the “New Moses”, but Constantine was baptized only on his death bed, and he never stopped minting coins with Mithraic symbols on one side and Christian on the opposite [above]; in Constantinople he even erected a colossal statue of himself wrapped in Mithraic symbols.

As for the Roman senators, several contemporary sources, starting with St. Jerome, affirm that most of their wives and daughters were Christian. An extant example is St. Ambrose, himself a Pagan and according to historians the son of a Mithraic Pagan (Ambrose the Prefect of Gaul), although there is no doubt that his family was Christian and lived in a profoundly Christian environment.

Indeed, from his childhood Ambrose loved to play the part of a bishop, and in the year 353, in St. Peter’s, his sister Marcellina, still a young girl, received the veil of the consecrated virgins from Pope Liberius in person. Formally, however, he remained a Pagan until he was designated Bishop of Milan. He was actually baptized only fifteen days before being consecrated bishop.

The fact is that in that period, Christians destined for a public career were baptized only on the point of death, or else when, for one reason or another, they decided to embrace the ecclesiastic career. This was normal practice.

The Senator Nectarius, who was designated Bishop of Antioch by the Council of Constantinople in 381, was forced to postpone the consecration ceremony because first he had to arrange for his own baptism. After the abolition of Paganism every Roman senator became Christian overnight, beginning with that Senator Symmachus who went down in History for his stern defence of “Pagan” traditions before Emperor Valentinian. In fact, a few years later, the Emperor Theodosius, allegedly the most determined persecutor of heretics and Pagans, appointed him as Consul, the highest position in the Roman bureaucracy. One might ask how was it possible that men could follow two different religions at the same time?

The Mithraic Cult



The Mithraic Mysteries or Mysteries of Mithras (also Mithraism) was a mystery cult centered on the god Mithras that became popular among the military in the Roman Empire from the 1st to 4th centuries A.D. Information on the cult is based mainly on interpretations of the many surviving monuments. The most characteristic of these are depictions of Mithras as being born from a rock, and as sacrificing a bull. His worshippers had a complex system of seven grades of initiation, with ritual meals. They met in

underground temples, which survive in large numbers. Little else is known for certain.

In every Mithraeum the centrepiece was a representation of Mithras killing a sacred bull: the so-called tauroctony.

The image may be a relief, or free-standing, and side details may be present or omitted. The centrepiece is Mithras clothed in Anatolian costume and wearing a Phrygian cap; he kneels on the exhausted bull, holding it by the nostrils with his left hand and stabbing it with his right. As he does so, he looks over his shoulder towards the figure of Sol. A dog and a snake reach up towards the blood. A scorpion seizes the bull's genitals. Two torch-bearers dressed like Mithras are on either side, Cautes with his torch pointing up and Cautopates with his torch pointing down.

The event takes place in a cavern, into which Mithras has carried the bull after having hunted it, ridden it and overwhelmed its strength. Sometimes the cavern is surrounded by a circle on which the twelve signs of the zodiac appear. Outside the cavern, top left, is Sol the sun with his flaming crown, often driving a chariot. A ray of light often reaches down to touch Mithras. (Thanks to Wikipedia)

Cult or Religion?

This is the essential point. There is an enormous and incredible misunderstanding (which might be deliberate in some way) about the so called "cult" of the Sol Invictus Mithras, which is always presented as a "religion" arisen in parallel with Christianity and in competition with it. Some historians go so far as to maintain that this religion was so popular and deeply rooted in Roman society that it very nearly won the race with Christianity.

Yet there is absolute evidence that the so called "cult" of Mithras, in Rome, was not a religion, but an esoteric organization, with several levels of initiation, which had only borrowed the name and a few exterior symbols from the Oriental religion.

In so far as the contents, scope and operative procedures are concerned, however, the Roman Mithras had nothing in common with the Persian god. The Roman Mithraic institution can in no way be defined as a religion devoted to the worship of the Sun. The comparison has been made only with the purpose of stressing the point that Mithraism was not a religion dedicated to the worship of a specific divinity, but a secret association of mutual

assistance whose members were free in their public life to worship whatever god they liked.

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And yet every adept of Mithras apparently shared a common attitude towards religion. This is a well known fact. It is the same Praetextatus who reveals in an exhaustive way the philosophy of his organisation in the book “Saturnalia”, written by Macrobius around 430 A.D. (well after the formal abolition of Paganism). In a long conversation with other great Mithraic Senators, such as Symmachus and Flavianus, Praetextatus affirms that all the different gods of the pagan religion are only different manifestations (or even different names) of a unique Supreme Being, represented by the Sun, the Great Architect of the Universe. This syncretistic vision has been defined, for completely justified reasons, as “monotheistic Paganism”.

Most historians agree that the followers of Mithras were monotheists; what they fail to underline is the fact that their particular syncretistic vision allowed them to “infiltrate” and get hold of the cult (and revenues) of all the Pagan divinities. In fact every Mithraic grotto harboured a host of Pagan gods such as Saturn, Athena, Venus, Hercules and so on, and the adepts of Mithras in their public life were priests in the service not only of the Sun (who was worshipped in public temples that had nothing to do with the Mithraic grottos), but also of every other Roman God.



In fact, all the senators who figure in the inscriptions beneath St Peters' Basilica, alongside the titles of vir clarissimus (Senator), Pater, or Pater patrum in the cult of Sol Invictus Mithras, also held a long series of other

religious positions: sacerdos, hierophanta, archibucolus of Brontes or of Hecate, Isis, and Liberius; maior augur, quindecimvir sacris faciundis and even Pontifex of various Pagan cults.

They were also in charge of the College of the Vestal Virgins and of the sacred fire of Vesta. In the Senate there was no manifestation of cult connected to the Pagan tradition that was not celebrated by a senator adhering to the Sol Invictus Mithras. Most of the time that same senator was backed by a Christian family.

Pagan or Christian?

So, what were they, Pagan or Christian? The available evidence on this point is ambiguous. Also the character of Mithras himself, as he is depicted by Christian writers, is absolutely ambiguous.

A long series of analogies exist between Mithras and Jesus. Mithras was born on December 25 in a stable to a virgin, surrounded by shepherds who brought gifts. He was venerated on the Day of the Sun (Sunday). He bore a halo around his head. He celebrated a last supper with his faithful followers before returning to his father. He was said not to have died, but to have ascended to Heaven from where he would return in the Last Days to raise the dead and judge them, sending the good to Paradise and the evil to Hell. He guaranteed his followers immortality after baptism.

Furthermore, the followers of Mithras believed in the immortality of the soul, the Last Judgment, and the resurrection of the dead at the end of the world. They celebrated the atoning death of a saviour who had risen on a Sunday. They celebrated a ceremony corresponding to the Catholic Mass during which they consumed consecrated bread and wine in memory of the Last Supper of Mithras –and during the ceremony they used hymns, bells, candles, and holy water. Indeed, they shared with Christians a long series of other beliefs and ritual practices, to the point that the Mithraists and Christians were practically indistinguishable from each other in the eyes of the Pagans and also of many Christians.

The existence of a connection between Christianity and the sun cult from the earliest times is recognized by the Church Fathers, too. Tertullian writes that the Pagans “...believe that the Christian God is the Sun, because it is a well-known fact that we pray turning towards the rising Sun, and that on the Sun’s day we give ourselves to jubilation.” (Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1, 13). He attempts to justify this substantial commonality to the eyes of the Christian

faithful, attributing it to Satan's plagiarism of the most sacred rites and beliefs of the Christian religion.

Constantine believed that Jesus Christ and Sol Invictus Mithras were both aspects of the same Supreme Divinity. He was certainly not the only one to have had this conviction.

Neo-platonism contended that the religion of the sun represented a "bridge" between Paganism and Christianity. Jesus was often called by the name Sol Justitiae (Sun of Justice) and was represented by statues that were similar to the young Apollo.



Clement of Alexandria describes Jesus driving the chariot of the sun across the sky, and a mosaic of the Fourth century shows him on the chariot [above] where he ascends to heaven, represented by the sun. On some coins of the Fourth century, the Christian banner at the top reads "Sol Invictus." A large part of the Roman population believed that Christianity and the worship of the sun were closely connected, if not the same.

For a very long time the Romans continued to worship both the Sun and Christ. In 410, Pope Innocentius authorized the resumption of ceremonies in honour of the Sun, hoping with that to save Rome from the Visigoths. And in

460 Pope Leo the Great wrote: “Most Christians, before entering the Basilica of St Peter, turn towards the sun and bow in its honour.”

The Bishop of Troy openly continued to profess his worship of the sun even during his episcopate.

Another important example in this regard is that of Synesius of Cyrene, a disciple of the famous Neo-platonic philosopher Apathias, who was killed by the mob in Alexandria in 415. Synesius, not yet baptized, was elected Bishop of Ptolemais and Metropolitan Bishop of Cyrenaica, but he accepted the position only on condition that he did not have to retract his Neo-platonic ideas or renounce his worship of the Sun.

Friends or Enemies?

In the light of all of this, how should we consider the position of Mithraists in relation to Christianity? Competitors or cooperators? Friends or enemies? Perhaps the best indication is given by the coins minted by Emperor Constantine until 320 A.D., with Christian symbols on one side, Mithraic symbols on the other. Were Jesus and Mithras two faces of the same coin?

The Origins of Mithraism and Christianity

In order to explain the strict relation between Christianity and Mithraism we have to go back to their origins.



Christianity, as we know it, is by universal recognition the creation of St Paul, the former Pharisee who was sent to Rome around 61 AD, where he founded the first recorded Christian community in the capital.

Jesus' preaching was in line with the way of living and thinking of the sect known as the Essenes. He was a Roman citizen of essentially Germanic warrior descent who also inherited the legitimate kingship of the Aryan Royal House of David through his royal White Hebrew mother and enjoyed the personal favour of Augustus Caesar and the Imperial Court in Rome. He spent his youth mostly in kingly solitude on the Essene retreat of Mount Carmel that overlooks both the Mediterranean and the Galilee, the latter meaning the Land of the Gauls, or of the Celt and Germanic Warriors.

Paul was executed probably in 67 by the pro-Jew Emperor Nero, together with most of his followers. The Roman Christian community was virtually wiped out by Nero's persecution. We do not have the slightest information about what happened to this community during the following 30 years; a very disturbing blackout of news, because something very important happened in Rome in that period. In fact, some of the most eminent citizens of the capital were converted, like the Consul Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian; besides this, the Roman Church assumed a monarchic structure and imposed its leadership on every Christian community in the empire,

which had to adjust their structure and their doctrine accordingly. This is proved by a long letter of Pope Clemens to the Corinthians, written towards the end of the reign of Domitian, where his leadership is clearly stated.



This means that, during the years of the blackout, somebody who had access to the Imperial house had revived the Roman Christian community to such a extent that it could impose its authority over every other Christian community. And this “somebody” was none other than Vespasian, the “monotheist Pagan” Emperor of Rome. The Mithraic organization also was born during that same period and within that same environment.

Given the scarcity of written documents on the subject, the origin and the spread of the cult of Mithras are known to us almost exclusively from archaeological evidence (remains of Mithraea, dedicatory inscriptions, iconography and statues of the God, reliefs, paintings, and mosaics) that survived in large quantities throughout the Roman empire. These archaeological testimonies prove conclusively that, apart from their common name, there was no relationship at all between the Roman cult of Mithras and the Oriental religion from which it is supposed to derive.

In the whole of the Persian world, in fact, there is nothing that can be compared with a Roman Mithraeum. Almost every Mithraic monument can

be dated with relative precision and bears dedicatory inscriptions. As a result, the times and circumstances of the spread of the Sol Invictus Mithras (these three names are indissolubly linked in every inscription, so there is no doubt that they refer to the same single institution) are known to us with reasonable certainty. Also known are the names, professions, and responsibilities of a large number of the people connected to them.



The first Mithraeum [above: an example] discovered was established in Rome in the time of Domitian, and there are precise indications that it was attended by people close to the Imperial family, in particular by White Hebrew freedmen. The Mithraeum, in fact, was dedicated by a certain Titus Flavius Iginus Ephebianus, a freedman of Emperor Titus Flavius, and therefore almost certainly a Romanised Hebrew. From Rome the Mithraic organization spread during the following century throughout the Western Empire.

There is a third event that happened in that same period this is somehow

connected to the Flavian Imperial family and to the White Hebraic environment, to which no particular attention has ever been given by the historians: the arrival in Rome of an important group of persons, 15 high priests of Hebrew Old Israel, with their families and relatives. They belonged to a priestly class that had ruled Jerusalem for half a millennium, since the return from the Babylonian exile, when 24 priestly lines had stipulated a covenant amongst them and created a secret organisation for the purpose of securing the families' power and wealth, through the exclusive ownership of the Temple and the exclusive administration of the Hebraic priesthood. The Roman domination of Judea had been marked by passionate tensions on the religious level, which had provoked a series of revolts, the last of which, in AD 66, was fatal to the Jews and to the Jewish priestly families. With the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Flavius in AD 70, the Temple, then the instrument of the Herodian priestly power, was razed to the ground never to be rebuilt, and the pro-Herodian Jewish priests were killed by the thousands. There were survivors, of course, in particular a group of 15 high priests, who had sided with the Romans, surrendering to Titus the treasure of the Temple, and for that reason they had kept their properties and were given Roman citizenship. They then followed Titus to Rome, where they apparently disappeared from the stage of history, never again to play a visible role — apart from the one who undoubtedly was the leader of that group, Josephus Flavius.



Josephus [above] was a priest who belonged to the first of the 24 priestly family lines. At the time of the Hebrew revolt against Nero, he had played a leading role in the events that tormented Palestine.

Sent by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin to be governor of the Galilee, Josephus had been the first to fight against the legions of the Roman general Titus Flavius Vespasianus, who had been ordered by the pro-Herodian Nero to quell the anti-Herodian revolt. Barricaded inside the fortress of Jotapata, he bravely withstood the then pro-Herodian Roman troops of Nero and their siege. When the city finally capitulated he surrendered, asking to be granted a personal audience with Vespasian (The Jewish War, III, 8,9).

Their meeting led to an upturn in the fortunes of Vespasian, as well as in those of Josephus: the former was shortly to become emperor in Rome, while the latter not only had his life spared, but not long afterward he was “adopted” into the Emperor’s family and assumed the name Flavius. He then received Roman citizenship, a patrician villa in Rome, a life income and an enormous estate. This was the prize for his role in the destruction of the Jewish priesthood and aristocracy of Herodian Old Israel.

The priests of this group had one thing in common: they were all enemies of the Jews and therefore they were certainly banished from the Jewish community. But they all belonged to a millenarian family line, bound

together by the secret organization created by Ezra under the patronage of the Aryan Persian King Cyrus, and possessing a unique specialisation and experience in running a religion and a country through it. The scattered remnants of the Roman Christian community offered them a wonderful opportunity to apply their millennial experience.

We know nothing about their activity in Rome, but we have clear hints of it through the writings of Josephus Flavius.

After a few years Josephus started to write down the history of the events of which he had been a protagonist, apparently with the aim of justifying his enmity against the Jews. It was God's will, he claims, who called him to build a Spiritual Temple to replace the material one destroyed by Titus.

These words certainly were not addressed to Jewish ears, but to Roman Christian ones.

Most historians are sceptical about the fact that Josephus was a Christian, and yet the evidence in his writings is compelling. In a famous passage (the so called *Testimonium Flavianum*) in his book *Jewish Antiquities*, he reveals his acceptance of two fundamental points, the resurrection of Jesus, and his identification with the Messiah of prophecies, which are necessary and sufficient condition for a Hebrew of that time to be considered a Christian.

The Christian sympathies of Josephus also clearly emanate from other passages of the same work, where he speaks with great admiration of John the Baptist as well as of James, the brother of Jesus.

Josephus Flavius and St. Paul.

The arguments used by Josephus Flavius to justify his own betrayal of the Jews and Jewish high priests seem to echo the words of St. Paul. The two seem to be perfectly in agreement with regard to their attitude toward the Roman world. Paul, for example, considered it his task to free the Church of Jesus from the narrowness of Judaism and from the land of Judaea and to make the Church universal, linking it to Rome.

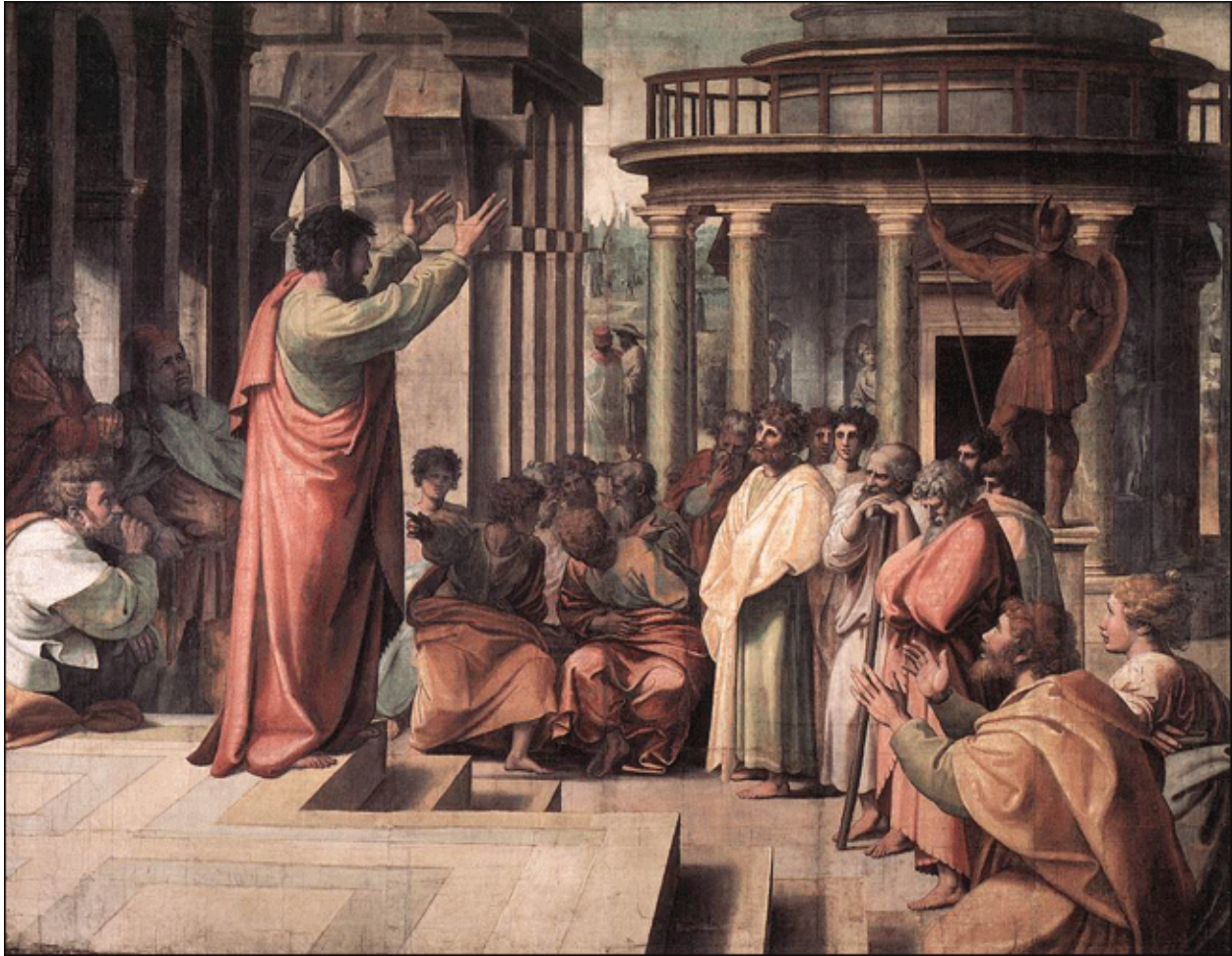
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There are sufficient historical indications to lead us to consider it certain that the two knew each other and were linked by a strong friendship. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, we read that after reaching Jerusalem, Paul was brought before the High Priests and the Sanhedrin to be judged (*Acts 22:30*). He defended himself:

” ‘Brethren, I was a Pharisee, because my parents were Pharisees: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.’ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, “We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them.”

Josephus was a high-ranking priest and he was in Jerusalem at that time; he certainly was present at that assembly. He had joined the sect of the Pharisees at the age of nineteen and so he must have been among those priests who stood up to defend Paul.



The Apostle was then handed over to the Roman governor, Felix, who kept him under arrest for some time until he was sent to Rome, together with some other prisoners (Acts 27:1), to be judged by the Emperor, to whom, as a Roman citizen, Paul had appealed. In Rome, he spent two years in prison (Acts 28:39) before being set free in AD 63 or 64.

In his autobiography (Life, 3.13), Josephus says: “Between the age of twenty-six and twenty-seven I embarked on a journey to Rome for the following reason. During the period when he was governor of Judaea, Felix had sent some priests to Rome to justify themselves before the Emperor; I knew them to be excellent people, who had been arrested on insignificant charges. As I desired to devise a plan to save them, . . . I journeyed to Rome.” Josephus somehow succeeded in reaching Rome, where he made friends with Aliturus, a Hebrew mime who was appreciated by Nero. Thanks to Aliturus he was introduced to Poppaea, the wife of the Emperor, and through her agency, he succeeded in freeing the priests (Life, 3.16).

The correspondence of dates, facts, and people involved is so perfect that it is

difficult to avoid the conclusion that Josephus went to Rome, at his own personal risk and expense, specifically to free Paul and his companions, and that it was due to his intervention that the Apostle was released.

This presupposes that the relationship between the two was much closer than that of a simple occasional acquaintance. Thus Josephus must have known much more about Christianity than is evident from his works, and his knowledge came directly from the teaching of Paul, of whom, in all likelihood, he was a disciple.

When Josephus returned to Rome in AD 70 his master had been executed, together with most of the Christians he had converted. His fatherland had been annihilated, the Temple destroyed, the Jewish priestly families exterminated and his reputation tarnished by the stain of treachery against the Jews. He must have been animated by very strong desires for redemption and revenge. Besides he probably felt responsible for the destinies of the humiliated remnants of one of the greatest families in the world, the 15 Hebrew high priests who shared his same condition.

There is information about a meeting presided over by Josephus Flavius, unquestionably the strongest and most important character in that group of people, during the course of which the priests examined the situation of the their family and decided on a strategy to improve its fortunes. Josephus lucidly conceived a plan that in those circumstances would have appeared to anybody else to be the utmost folly. This man, sitting amid the smoking ruins of what had been his fatherland, surrounded by a few humiliated and disconsolate survivors rejected by the Jews, aspired to no less than conquering that enormous powerful Empire that had defeated the Jews, and to establishing his descendants and those of the men around him among the ruling class of that Empire.

The first step in that strategy was taking the leadership of the newborn Christian religion and consolidating it into a solid basis of power for the priestly family and their Imperial Roman patrons.

Having come to Rome in the entourage of Titus, and thus strong in the emperor's protection and well supplied from an economic point of view, these priests could not have encountered great problems in taking over the leadership of the tiny and scattered group of White Hebrew Christians who had survived Nero's anti-Christian persecution, legitimated as they were by the relationship of Josephus Flavius with Paul.

Only six years had passed since he sought Paul's freedom from imprisonment by the Herodian puppet Nero. The Apostle of the Nations must have died at

least three years before. Josephus must have felt a moral obligation to continue the deeds of his ancient master whose doctrine he knew perfectly and, sensing its potential for propagation in the Roman world, he dedicated himself and his organisation of priests to its practical implementation. Once he had created a strong Christian community in the capital, it could not have been difficult for the priests also to impose their authority over the other Christian communities scattered around the Empire; first of all, on those that had been created or catechized by Paul himself.

Josephus Flavius and the Sol Invictus Mithras

Josephus Flavius knew all too well that no religion has a future unless it is an integral part of a system of military power. It was a concept innate in the DNA, so to speak, of the priests of Judah that religion and military power should live together in symbiosis, mutually sustaining each other. It is unimaginable that he could think that the new religion would spread throughout the Empire independently from, or even in contrast to, military power.

His first aim was therefore seizing power. Thanks not only to the millennial experience of his family, but also to his own experience of life, Josephus knew all too well that military power, especially in an elephantine organism such as the Roman Empire, was based on the Roman Army, and the Roman Army was based on economic power, and economic power on the ability to influence and control the financial leverage of the country. His plan must have envisaged that the priestly family and their Imperial patrons must take control of these levers. Then the Empire would be in their hands and the new religion would be the main instrument to maintain law and order within it. What was Josephus' plan to achieve this ambitious project? He didn't have to invent anything; the model was there: the secret organization created by Ezra and the Aryan King Cyrus a few centuries earlier, which had assured power and prosperity to the priestly families for half a millennium. He only had to make a few changes, in order to present this institution to the Pagan world as a mystery religion dedicated to the Greek god Helios, the Sun, for his undoubted assonance with the White Hebrew god El Elyon. He was represented as invincible, the Sol Invictus, to spur the morale of his adepts, and at his side was put, as an inseparable companion, a solar divinity of that same East from where the Hebrews had originated, Mithras, the Sun's envoy on Earth to redeem humanity; and all around them, in the Mithraea, the

statues of various divinities, such as Athena, Hercules, Venus and so on. A clear reference to God the Father, and his envoy on earth Jesus, surrounded by their attributes of wisdom, strength, beauty and so on, that was well understood by the Christians, and was perfectly Pagan to a Pagan's eye.



This organisation didn't have any political purpose: its scope was to preserve union between the priestly and imperial families and assure their security and wealth, through mutual support and a common strategy, aimed at infiltrating and controlling every position of power in Roman society.

It was secret. In spite of the fact that it lasted for three centuries and it had thousands of members, most of them very cultured men, there isn't a single word written by a member about what was going on during the meetings of

the Mithraic institution, what decisions were taken and so forth. This means that absolute secrecy was always maintained concerning the deeds that were undertaken in a Mithraeum.

Access was evidently reserved for the descendants of White Hebrew priestly and Nordic Roman imperial families, at least at the operative level; from the third grade up (occasionally people of different origin could be accepted in the first two grades, as in the case of the Emperor Commodus). This system of recruitment is perfectly in line with the historical and archaeological evidence.

Even at the peak of its power and diffusion, the Sol Invictus Mithras appears to have been an elitist institution, with a very limited number of members. Most Mithraea were very small in size and could not harbour more than 20 people. It was definitely not a mass religion, but an organisation to which only the top leaders of the Roman Army and the Imperial bureaucracy were admitted. Yet we don't know anything about the enlistment policy of the Sol Invictus Mithras.

Did it recruit its members amongst the high ranks of Roman society, or was the opposite true — that it was the members of this organisation who “infiltrated” every position of power of that society? Historical evidence favours the hypothesis that membership in the institution was reserved on a strict racial basis. Access to it, at least at the operative level, was most likely reserved for descendants of the group associated with the Hebrew priests who came to Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Sol Invictus Mithras Conquers the Roman Empire

Written sources and the archaeological testimonies give evidence that from Domitian on Rome always remained the most important centre of the Sol Invictus Mithras institution, which had become firmly entrenched at the very heart of the Imperial administration, both in the palace and among the Praetorian Guard.

From Rome the organisation very soon spread to nearby Ostia, the port then with the greatest volume of trade in the world, as goods and foodstuffs from every part of the Empire arrived to delight the insatiable appetite of the capital. In the course of the Second and Third centuries, almost forty Mithraea were built there, clear evidence that the members of the institution had taken control of trading activities, the source of incomparable incomes and economic power.

Subsequently, they spread to the rest of the Empire. The first Mithraea to arise outside the Roman circle were built shortly before AD 110 in Pannonia, at Poetovium, the main customs centre of the region, then in the military garrison of Carnuntum, and soon after in every Danubian province (Rhaetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Mesia, and Dacia).

The followers of the cult of Mithras included the customs officers, who collected a tax on every kind of transport dispatched from Italy towards Central Europe and vice versa; the Imperial functionaries who controlled transport, the post, the administration of finance and mines; and last, the military troops of the garrisons scattered along the border. During almost the same period as in the Danubian region, the cult of Mithras started to appear in the Rhine basin, at Bonn and Treves. This was followed by Britannia, Spain, and North Africa, where Mithraea appeared in the early decades of the Second century, always associated with administrative centres and military garrisons.

Therefore archaeological evidence conclusively demonstrates that throughout the Second century AD, the members of Sol Invictus Mithras occupied the main positions in the public administration, becoming the dominant class in the outlying provinces of the Empire — especially in Central and Northern or Nordic Europe. We have seen that the members of Sol Invictus Mithras had also assumed the leadership of Paganism, taking control of the cult of the main divinities, starting with the Sun.

The winning move, however, which made the success of the Mithraic institution irresistible, was that of seizing control of the Army. From direct experience Josephus Flavius knew that the Army would become the arbiter of the Imperial throne. Whoever controlled the Army controlled the Empire. Hence the main aim fixed by him for the Mithraic organization must have been assuming the leadership of the Army and taking control of it.

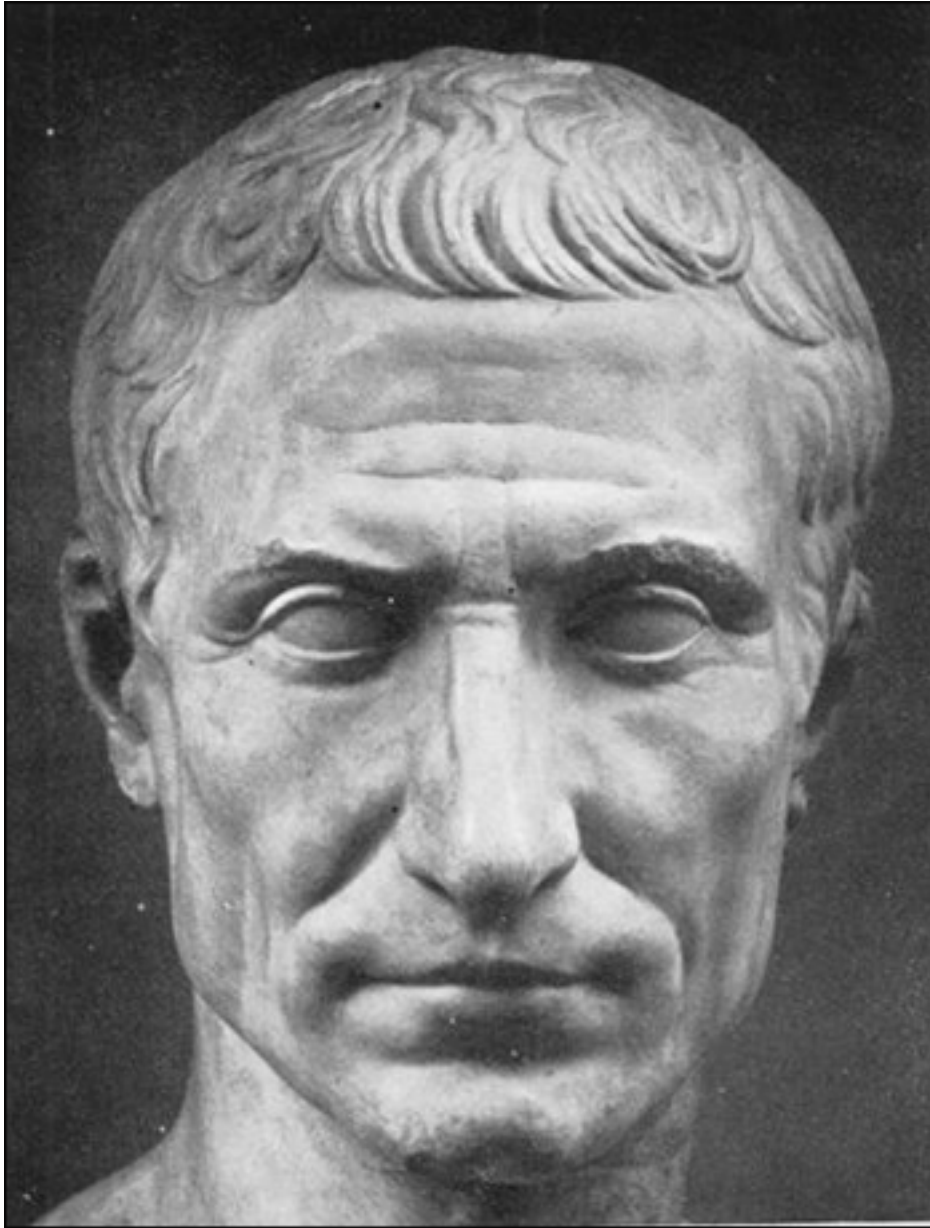
Soon, Mithraea sprang up in every place where Roman garrisons were stationed. Within a century the cult of Mithras had succeeded in controlling every Roman legion stationed in the provinces and along the borders, to the extent that the worship of Sol Invictus Mithras is often considered by historians to be the “religion” typical of Roman soldiers.

Even before taking control of the Army, however, the attention of Sol Invictus had been concentrated on the Praetorian Guard, the Emperor’s personal guard. It is not by chance that the second known dedicatory inscription of a Mithraic character concerns a Commander of the Praetorium, and that the concentration of Mithraea was particularly high in the area

surrounding the Praetorian barracks. The infiltration of this body must have started under the Flavian emperors. They could count on the unconditional loyalty of the many White Hebrew freedmen who owed them everything — their lives, their safety, and their well-being. The Roman Emperors were reluctant to entrust their personal safety to officers who came from the ranks of the Roman Senate, their main political adversary, and so the ranks of their personal guard were mainly filled with freedmen and members of the equestrian class. This must have favoured the Sol Invictus, which made the Praetorium its unchallenged fief from the beginning of the Second century onwards.

Once it achieved control of the Praetorium and the Army, the Sol Invictus Mithras was able to put its hands also on the Imperial Office. This actually happened on 193 A.D., when Septimius Severus was proclaimed Emperor by the Army. Born in Leptis Magna in North Africa to an equestrian family of high-ranking bureaucrats, he was certainly a member of the Mithraic organisation, having married Julia Domna, sister of Bassianus, a High Priest of Sol Invictus. From then on the Imperial Office was a prerogative of the Sol Invictus Mithras, as every Emperor was proclaimed and/or removed by the Army or by the Praetorian Guard.

As far as we can judge from hindsight, the final objective of the strategy devised by Josephus Flavius and the Flavian Emperors was the complete transfiguration of the ruling class of the Roman Republic through the membership of Sol Invictus Mithras. This result was achieved in less than two centuries thanks to the policy enforced by the Mithraic Emperors.



The backbone of the Roman Imperial administration was formed by new families of unknown origin that had emerged at the end of the First century and the beginning of the Second, in antagonism with the Senatorial aristocracy, traditionally opposed to the Imperial authority. They formed the so called “equestrian” order which soon became the undisputed fiefdom of the Sol Invictus Mithras. No doubt most of the families of the 15 White Hebrew priests of Josephus Flavius’ entourage, wealthy, well connected and enjoying the Imperial favour, became loyal members of this order. The Sol Invictus Emperors belonged to the equestrian order and governed in open opposition to the Republican Senate, humiliating it, depriving it of its

prerogatives and wealth, and striking it physically with the exile and execution of a great number of its high-profile members. At the same time they started introducing equestrian families into the Senate. This policy had been initiated by Septimius Severus and then developed by Gallienus (who, we must remember, was also the author of the first Edict of Tolerance towards Christianity) who established by decree that everyone who had held the position of provincial governors or Prefects of the Praetorian Guard, both appointments reserved for the equestrian order, would by right enter into the Senatorial ranks.

This right was later extended to other categories of functionaries, great bureaucrats and high-ranking Roman Army officers (all members of the Mithraic institution). As a result within a few decades virtually the entire equestrian class passed into the ranks of the Senate, outnumbering the decayed families of the old Italic and Roman Republican aristocracy.

In the meantime the spread of Christianity throughout the empire proceeded at a steady pace. Wherever the representatives of Mithras arrived, there a Christian community immediately sprang up. By the end of the Second century there were already at least four episcopal sees in Britannia, sixteen in Gaul, sixteen in Spain, and one in practically every large city in North Africa and the Middle East. In 261 Christianity was recognized as a lawful religion by the Mithraic Emperor Gallienus and was proclaimed the official religion of the Empire by the Mithraic Emperor Constantine the Great at the beginning of the fourth century, although it was still in a minority in Roman society. It was then gradually enforced on the population of the Empire, with a series of measures that culminated at the end of the Fourth century with the formal abolition of the Pagan religions and the mass “conversion” of the Roman Senate.

The final situation regarding the ruling class of the Western Empire was the following: the ancient nobility of Pagan origin had virtually disappeared and the new great nobility, that identified itself with the new Senatorial class of great landowners, was made up by former members of the Sol Invictus Mitras. On the religious level Pagan rites had been eliminated (in large measure due to their repeatedly demonstrated vulnerability to subversion and bribery from the rival Persian Empire) and Christianity had become the sole religion of the inhabitants of the Empire; it was controlled by ecclesiastical hierarchies of bishops coming entirely from the Senatorial class, who were endowed with immense landed properties and quasi-royal powers within their episcopal sees.

The priestly families had become the absolute masters of that same Empire that had destroyed Herodian Israel and the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem. All its high offices, both civil and religious, and all its wealth were in their hands, and supreme power had been entrusted in perpetuity, by divine right to the most illustrious of the priestly tribes, the “Gens Flavia” (beginning with Constantine every Roman emperor bore the name of Flavius) and were in all likelihood descendants of Josephus Flavius and the Imperial Flavians. Three centuries earlier Josephus had with pride written: “My family is not obscure. On the contrary, it is of priestly descent: as every people has a different foundation for its nobility, so with us the excellence of the line is confirmed by its belonging to the priestly order” (Life 1.1). By the end of the Fourth century his descendants had every right to apply those same words to the Roman Empire.

At that point the institution of the Sol Invictus Mithras was no longer necessary to boost the fortunes of the Mithraic priestly and imperial families and so it was disposed of. It had been the instrument of the most successful revolution in History.