



HERESIES OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE, OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF FAITH UNITY. SIMON MAGUS (THE MAGICIAN)

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ABSTRACT

Simon Magus was a historical figure from the first century who was an influential magician and the founder of Simonianism, an early Gnostic sect. He is known for his purported magical abilities, his attempt to buy spiritual power from the apostles, and his theological teachings, which sought to blend Greek philosophy with Christianity. The term simony, in the Christian church, refers to the buying or selling of spiritual offices, named after his attempted purchase of spiritual power. His doctrine included the concept of the Standing One (the ultimate deity), his own manifestation as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in different times and places, and Helena (or Wisdom) as the mother of creation. His unique synthesis of magic, philosophy, and religion led him to be considered the founder of Christianity's first heresy.

Keywords: *heresy; Simon Magus; Samaritan; wisdom, gnostic;*

INTRODUCTION

The word *heresy* is derived from the Greek noun *αἵρεσις*, which in turn originates from the verb *αἰρέω* = to select, to opt, or to choose. In a Christian context, the term *heresy* is used in the book of the *Acts of the Apostles* 5:17. Initially, the term *heretic* was used to designate someone who had a choice, who had several options available (cf. *Acts* 24:5; 24:14; 26:5 and 28:22), but also to indicate various schools, currents of thought, or sects, such as those of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were the best-known religious parties of Judaism. The former denied the existence of angels, life beyond the grave, and the resurrection of the dead, while the Pharisees exaggerated the precepts of secular Jewish tradition. Christians, too, were not spared from the unjust evaluation coming from the Jews, the Christian teaching being considered an especially dangerous and harmful heresy for those times. In the Hebrew context, an analogous process is highlighted: from the 1st century AD (corresponding with the emergence of orthodox rabbinic Judaism), the Hebrew term *min* מין (plural מינים, *minim*, the equivalent of the Greek word *αἵρεσις*) assumes derogatory connotations and is used to indicate deviations both from within Christianity and from the Gnostic camp.

1. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERM HERESY

The New Testament epistolary genre offers us a new approach to the term *heresy*. Consequently, it begins to acquire derogatory connotations and to indicate a separation or division.¹ The negative nuance of the term appeared alongside the development of the word *ἐκκλησία*

¹ *1 Cor* 11:19, *Gal* 5:20 and *2 Pet* 2:1.



(*ekklesia*). Therefore, αἵρεσις and ἐκκλησία become diametrically opposed notions. As previously mentioned, from an initially neutral meaning, the word ἐκκλησία acquires a negative counterpart, indicating a doctrine contrary to the dogmas and principles of a certain religion, which is often the subject of combat or even exclusion from the ranks of believers by its representatives. Outside the religious sphere, the term is used figuratively to indicate an opinion or even an entire philosophical, political, scientific, or even artistic system that disagrees with those generally accepted as authoritative. Therefore, a heretic is one who constructs their own definitive choice: heresy can, thus, be equivalent to a choice of both faith and belonging between opposing religious factions. Practically, the heretic is the one who chooses, meaning they accept only a part of the orthodox teaching, remaining in disagreement regarding other points of faith from the dogmatic treasury of the Church. However, in an informal register, the term is used to indicate an erroneous opinion or, in any case, a discordant one regarding certain themes of faith.

Initially, the term, as used by Greek writers, indicated a religious formation or grouping, without negative implications. Already in the New Testament, the term assumes a negative meaning, and with this meaning, it was utilized by the Holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers. Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher (100-162) was the first apologist to systematically use the term heresy to combat anti-Christian currents considered deviant and dangerous.

Furthermore, the term was widely employed by Saint Irenaeus of Lugdunum in his treatise *Contra haereses* (Against Heresies), to oppose his adversaries within the Church. He described his own positions as orthodox, in contrast to those of his adversaries, which were considered heretical. Evidently, still bearing a negative meaning, the term heresy can be seen as reciprocal: few would be willing to define their own beliefs as heretical, but would rather present them as the correct interpretation of a certain doctrine and, consequently, as the orthodox vision—which is considered heretical by others. What constitutes heresy is a judgment made based on one's own values; it is the expression of a point of view regarding a consolidated structure of beliefs. For example, Catholics viewed Protestantism as a heresy, while Protestants and Neo-Protestants or, in general, non-Catholics considered and still consider Catholicism as the great apostasy of all times.

Within Christianity, there is a tendency to distinguish between heresy and schism. The latter implies a detachment from the Church without necessarily perverting the doctrine, even though, according to some prominent theologians, schism ultimately involves dogmatic influences as well.

The Holy Apostle Paul uses the expression *anathema* in many places within his epistles. Thus, he tells the believers in Rome the following: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed [anathema] from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh"², and to the Corinthians he addresses this message: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed [anathema]. O Lord, come! [Maranatha]"³. Those who do not live according to the teaching and apostolic tradition of the divine Apostle Paul, which is, of course, the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Himself, do not truly love the Lord. And those who do not truly love the Lord, they are anathema, meaning they are separated from the Lord.⁴ Also to the Corinthians, elsewhere, he says: "no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed [anathema]"⁵. The term *anathema* is also used by the Apostle to the Gentiles in the Epistle to the Galatians, against those who proclaim differently from what was truly preached: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any

² Rom 9:3.

³ 1 Cor 16:22.

⁴ Saint NICODEMUS the HAGIORITE, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς 14' ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου* (Interpretation of the 14 Epistles of the Apostle Paul), vol. I, Orthodoxos Kipseli Publishing, Thessaloniki, 1989, p. 697.

⁵ 1 Cor 12:3.



other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed [anathema]. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed [anathema]".⁶ We find, therefore, that in the Holy Scripture the words *anathema* (ἀναθεματίζω) and *anathema* (ἀνάθεμα) are frequently encountered.

2. SIMON MAGUS – THE ORIGINATOR OF HERESY IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

In the pages of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we encounter a certain Simon⁷, in the city of Samaria⁸, who greatly amazed the inhabitants of this city with his magic tricks. Saint Luke the Evangelist does not mention the origin of this interesting character. In essence, we are talking about an absolute charlatan who spread the false idea that he is a divine emanation, styling himself *the great power of God*.⁹ The onomatological packaging, sufficiently attractive to those weak in faith, was an eminently pagan one.¹⁰ The Samaritans, however, would have understood by God the Yahweh of the Old Testament, and the magician had to, in this situation, convince them of the veracity of his claims. His teaching consisted of an amalgam of ideas and magical practices based on various Judaic and Hellenistic conceptions, which is why the sorcerer Simon is considered the first heretic of the Church.¹¹

There are veiled references to the false doctrine propagated by Simon and to some of the heretical sects mentioned in the New Testament. In the Epistle of Saint Jude, verse 4 is directed against Simon's main doctrine, the heresy according to which one does not need to observe God's laws after conversion. The holy apostle John, for instance, placed great value on the observance of God's commandments by Christians.¹² Later, the expression of the same apostle: "who say they are Jews and are not, but lie"¹³ may have its starting point in the Samaritan falsification of true Christianity, carried out by Simon. The Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus, who lived in the 1st century AD, mentions that the Samaritans falsely claimed to be Jews when they believed it was to their advantage to do so.¹⁴

Due to the effervescence of the preaching of Philip the Deacon, Simon Magus declared his desire to become a Christian and was baptized. The author of the Acts of the Apostles employs the expression, frequently encountered throughout the Lucan writings, *he believed*, a phrase that highlights Simon's sincere desire to become a follower of the saving teaching. What follows shows, however, that deep within his heart the roots of evil had not been entirely eradicated. Therefore, so impressed was Simon by the visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit, which were poured out through the laying on of the apostles' hands, that he appealed to them, as experts in the sharing of grace, to obtain the formula at an appropriate price. Saint Peter's crushing rebuke evidently terrified him, because he begged the apostles' intercession to forestall the danger with which he was

⁶ Gal 1:8-9.

⁷ Σίμων ὁ μάγος or Simon of Gitta.

⁸ Acts 8:9-24.

⁹ Ibid., verse 10.

¹⁰ William Mitchell RAMSEY, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2019, p. 117. See also Adolf DEISSMANN, *Bible Studies*, T.&T. Clark, Second Edition, Edinburgh, 1909, p. 336.

¹¹ Radu BOBICĂ, *Dicționar de termeni și concepte teologice* (Dictionary of Theological Terms and Concepts), Coresi Publishing, Bucharest, 2020, p. 894.

¹² See 1 John 2:3-6.

¹³ Rev 3:9.

¹⁴ *Antichități iudaice* (Jewish Antiquities), 9. 14. 3 and 9. 8. 6.



threatened. Simon was obsessed with the idea of power: he imagined it in all respects as belonging to the apostles in their capacity as super-magicians.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem observes how Simon desired power and not grace: "For what was Simon Magus condemned? Was it not because he approached the apostles and said: *Give me also this power, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit?* Simon Magus did not say: Give me also the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, but: *The power of the Holy Spirit.* He asked for this power, to sell to others what cannot be sold, which he himself had not acquired. Simon brought money to the apostles who were devoid of wealth; he did this because he saw that the price of the things sold was brought and laid at the apostles' feet. He did not consider that the apostles, who trampled upon the wealth brought to them for feeding the poor, would not have given, for payment, the power of the Holy Spirit... Therefore, if Simon Magus, who wanted to receive the power of the Holy Spirit in exchange for payment, went to perdition, how great is the wickedness of Manes, who said that he himself is the Holy Spirit? Let us hate those who are worthy of hatred! Let us turn away from those from whom God Himself turns away! Let us also say to God with all boldness, concerning all heretics: "Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?" Indeed, even enmity is good, as it is written: *And I will put enmity between you and her seed.* Friendship with the serpent gives birth to enmity with God and to death".¹⁵

Certainly, he did not see Saint Peter doing this for money. Nor did he act out of ignorance. He did it because he wanted to tempt them, because he wanted to have grounds for accusation against them. That is why Peter says: "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21). The Chief Apostle Peter brings to light what was in the man's thoughts, because Simon sought to hide his motivation. The apostle tells him to repent, to which Simon responds by asking him to pray for him. Even so, he did this superficially, merely in words, when he should have wept and repented like someone who truly repents. "And forsaking the straight paths is also a disease of the heart. The heart that does the will of the evil one is not a straight heart, since it cannot work righteousness except when it is in its natural state - that is, when it is the dwelling place of God. Simon Magus, who wished to buy with money the grace of God, was admonished by Saint Peter in the following manner: 'You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God'" (Acts 8:21)".¹⁶

Saint Ambrose of Milan concludes the following: "We see that Peter, by his apostolic authority, condemns this man who, through vain sorcery, not only blasphemes against the Holy Spirit but, also, does not possess a clear conscience of faith. However, Peter does not deprive Simon of the hope of forgiveness; for he calls him to repentance".¹⁷

From this moment, quite abruptly, Saint Luke abandons writing about the life and teaching of this toxic character. However, a mixture of traditions regarding his subsequent activity has been preserved in early Christian literature. Even if they contain a series of legends and inaccuracies, there is still no need to diminish the number and importance of patristic descriptions or to deny the connection between Simon Magus, summarized in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and the Simonian sect.

¹⁵ Saint CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Cateheze* (Catechetical Lectures), 16. 10, translation from Greek and notes by Dumitru Fecioru, IBMBOR Publishing, Bucharest, 2003, p. 177.

¹⁶ Hierotheos VLACHOS, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă: știința Sfinților Părinți* (Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Holy Fathers), translated by Irina Luminița Niculescu, Învierea Publishing of the Archdiocese of Timișoara, Timișoara, 1998, p. 200.

¹⁷ Saint AMBROSE, *Despre pocăință* (Concerning Repentance), 2. 4. 23, Nicene, vol. X, p. 348.



"Again, those from Simon's school, called Gnostics, Menander and Saturninus, Basilides, Marcus and Colorbasus and the others, invented newer ideas than others and transmitted them to those assimilated by them. That is why they call themselves Gnostics... Nicolaus or Marcion and Lucian from Cerdo. From these, the Manicheans took their starting points and transmitted new ideas. Now, all these have derived the starting points of their impiety from the philosophers Hermes, Plato, and Aristotle. Now, with the heresy of the Ariomaniacs, which corrupted the Church of God... These preach. Then. three hypostases, as the heresiarch Valentinus invented in the book he entitled *On the Three Natures*. For he was the first to invent three hypostases and three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and it is discovered that he stole these from Hermes and Plato".¹⁸

Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher, himself originally from Samaria, states that Simon Magus was born in the village of Gitta, to parents Antony and Rachel, and that his partner, Helena of Tyre, a former prostitute, was considered by everyone as his first divine idea, while he himself was acclaimed by the multitudes in Samaria and Rome as a divinity. In fact, out of adulation, the Romans erected a statue with the inscription *Simoni Deo Sancto*, "to Simon, the holy God".¹⁹ It is possible that this statue was, in fact, erected to the deity *Semo Sancus*, the god of trust, oaths, and honesty.

It is also very difficult to determine which city of Samaria is referred to. The city of Sebaste, to whose name Simon the sorcerer is linked, was built by King Herod the Great on the site of the ancient city of Samaria, in honor of Caesar Augustus, *Sebaste* being the Greek nominal form of the Latin *Augustus*. In the New Testament era, the city of Shechem was the most important city within the province of Samaria, being one of the candidates for the birthplace of the heretic Simon. According to some interpreters, the city of Sychar, attested in the Gospel text at John 4:5 and located near Shechem, would be the hometown of Simon Magus. Flavius Josephus mentions²⁰ a magician named Simon, a friend of Claudius Felix, procurator of Judea in the years 52-58 AD. The Simon in Josephus's history was born in Cyprus and claimed to be a magician. His power was so great that when Felix fell in love with the beautiful Drusilla, he hired Simon to persuade Drusilla to leave her husband and marry him. It is not mentioned whether Simon achieved this act through magical powers or not.

¹⁸ LOGAN A., *Marcellus din Ancyra, Despre Sfânta Biserică* (Marcellus of Ancyra, On the Holy Church), text, translation, and commentary, verses 8-9, in "Journal of Theological Studies", NS, vol. 51, part 1, April 2000, pp. 94-95.

¹⁹ Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher states that Simon Magus was a Samaritan from the village called Gitta. "The great church father maintains that the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul laid the foundations of the Christian community in Rome. He also relates that, during the time of the Roman Emperor Claudius, Simon was worshipped as a god in Rome due to his magical powers and that a statue was even erected to him on the island in the Tiber River, bearing the following inscription: "Quippe quum est sub Claudio Caesare a quo etiam statue honoratus esse dicitur propter magicam". The statue was dedicated to *Simoni Deo Sancto*, meaning "to Simon, the sacred god." Curiously, in the year 1574, a stone that seems to have served as the pedestal of a statue was unearthed from the Tiber, exactly on the spot described by Saint Justin; and on it were inscribed the words *Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio Sacrum*. The discovered stone was dedicated, however, to the god Semo Sancus, a sort of Roman Hercules. This discovery suggests that Saint Justin may have been mistaken regarding the statue in question, which purportedly was erected in honor of Simon Magus. "It is incredible that madness ever reached such an extent that a statue was erected and the senate issued a decree by which Simon Magus was enrolled among the Roman gods" (See Augustus NEANDER, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, vol. II, London, 1951, p. 123).

²⁰ *Jewish Antiquities*, 20. 7. 2.



Saint Irenaeus of Lugdunum²¹, Hippolytus of Rome²², and Saint Epiphanius of Salamis²³ broadly describe the Simonian doctrine, the latter two using information they claim originates from Simon's sect. From the very beginning, Simon Magus reportedly affirmed only that he was the true Messiah, although later he claimed to be God. It is also said that the heresiarch ordered a tomb to be dug for him, from which he was to rise in three days; but it is stated that he did not do so.²⁴ These features characterize him as the Christ of the Samaritans and, at the same time, present him as a striking antithesis to the true Jesus Christ. Besides declaring that God is unknowable, not being the creator of the world, but is inexpressible, ineffable, and self-created²⁵, he also mentioned that God is not the Father of the Lord Christ. His teaching deviates greatly from Christian doctrine, although it must be borne in mind that this assertion contradicts all other accounts.

It seems that the father of all heresies developed the old idea of "the great power of God"²⁶ into a trinitarian scheme: Simon appeared to the Samaritans as the Father, to the Jews as the Son (he only gave the impression of suffering), and to the world in general as the Holy Spirit: "I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter, I am the Almighty, I am all that belongs to God".²⁷ Thus, Simon was considered by many as a god and taught that he himself was the one who, among the Jews, appeared as the Son, descended in Samaria as the Father, and went to other nations as the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Regarding creation, the first thought (*Ennoia*) was produced from the Father's mind to create the angels, who in turn created the visible universe.²⁹ These angels, however, imprisoned the first thought out of jealousy, placing it in a human body so that it could not return to the Father. Thus, *Ennoia* was condemned to pass from one body to another, the most recent being that of Helena of Tyre. To redeem his first thought, the Father incarnated in human form, becoming Simon and offering salvation to human beings, if they would recognize him as the first God. The magician

²¹ Saint IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus haereses*, I, 23, 2: Contro le eresie, 100.

²² HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME, *Philosophumena* 6, 7, in "Translation of Christian Literature, Hippolytus Philosophumena", vol. II, Ed. W.J. Sparrow-Simpson and W.K. Lowther Clarke, London, 1921, p. 244.

²³ "The Great Power of God who descended from above. To the Samaritans he said he was the Father, and to the Jews that he was the Son who suffered, but in reality, he only appeared to suffer" (Saint EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS, *Panarion* 21.2 and following, in Henry L. Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, translated by Laurian Kertesz, Herald Publishing, Bucharest, 2008, pp. 91-92.

²⁴ HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME, *Philosophumena* 6, 20, in *Translation of Christian Literature, Hippolytus Philosophumena*, vol. II, Ed. W. J. Sparrow-Simpson and W. K. Lowther Clarke, London, 1921, p. 267.

²⁵ In Greek ἀπογένεθλον, see *Constitutiones Apostolicae*, VI, 10, in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 1, col. 933.

²⁶ William M. RAMSAY, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, London, New York, Toronto, p. 117 and Adolf DEISSMANN, *Bible Studies*, Edinburgh, 1909, p. 336. "Those Simonians not only do not confess Jesus as the Son of God at all, but say that Simon is the Power of God, about whom they tell many miraculous tales, saying that he was possessed by a Power similar to that with which Jesus was also thought to be endowed" (ORIGENE, *Contra Celsum*, V, 62, in *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 147, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1969, 169).

²⁷ Henry L. MANSEL, *Ereziile gnostice din primele două veacuri* (The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries), Herald Publishing, Bucharest, 2008, p. 82.

²⁸ Saint IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus haereses*, I, 23, 1: Contro le eresie, 99-100. We can also compare: Hippolytus of Rome, *Philosophumena*, VI, 19; TERTULLIAN, *De Anima*, XXXIV; Saint EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS, *Panarion*, XXI, 1; *Acta Petri et Pauli*, in Lipsius, *Apocryphische Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*, 2, part I, pp. 30 and 301.

²⁹ "At the beginning, Simon Magus said that he himself is the God who is above all things and that the world was created by his angels" (Saint IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus haereses*, II, 9, 2: Contro le eresie, 138).



promoted a redemption creed in which he saved Helena of Tyre from the bondage of successive transmigrations into various female bodies. Also, he preached salvation by obtaining grace.³⁰

The Simonian doctrine of salvation differed from that of the other Gnostic groups because it promised redemption within the temporal order, while other representatives of Gnostic currents³¹ could conceive salvation as achievable only by escaping their earthly prison. Demanding faith in Helena and in himself, Simon Magus later permitted excessive liberty concerning immorality. He borrowed many elements from the ideologies of Greek paganism, proposing some concepts that recur in later Christian Gnosticism. Saint Irenaeus and the other Christian authors mentioned above consider Simon Magus as the first major heretic in the entire Christian space and the promoter of a long line of interconnected errors. The modern association of Gnostic origins with heretical forms of Judaism might suggest that their instinct did not deceive them.

More authentic facts about Simon Magus are contained in the work *Refutatio omnium haeresium* VI, 7-20 (Refutation of All Heresies) attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, where we are given some extracts from a work ascribed to Simon Magus, titled *The Great Revelation*. In this work, an elaborate Gnostic system of the Godhead's emanation is presented, describing the unfolding of the world in six pairs, male and female, in the upper and lower regions, among which the sun and moon play an important role. His stay in Rome, where he attracted attention through his miracles, and his disputes with the Apostle Peter are mentioned in this work and in all patristic writings from the first centuries. He is said to have been seen flying through the air in a chariot but being unable to withstand the spiritual powers of Saint Peter, he fell from the chariot, breaking his legs.³² He resurrected the souls of the prophets from Hades.³³ According to an ancient tradition, Simon is depicted deciding to offer the emperor the supreme proof of his magical powers by attempting to fly. It is said that he flew a certain distance above Rome, but, through the prayers of Saint Peter, he fell and broke his leg and was ultimately stoned to death by the people. Another source stated that the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul commanded the demons accompanying Simon in his flight, in the name of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to no longer support him. Then the magician fell to the ground and died.³⁴

³⁰ "Those who place their trust in him (Simon Magus) are no longer considered theirs (the creator angels) and, being free, live as they please, for man is saved by his grace, not by good works" (Saint IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus haereses*, I, 23, 3: Contro le eresie, 100).

³¹ The definition of the terms *γνωστικός* or *γνώσις* brings with it a continuous contraction among contemporary readers. Regarding ancient Gnosticism, it is perceived through the lens of the metaphysical dualism imposed by Platonism (427-348 BC). The history of Gnosticism is developed through the themes triggered by legendary stories that feature the following characters as protagonists: Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, the Nicolaitans and Cerinthus, Carpocratians, Justin the Gnostic, Ophites, Naassenes, and Cainites. Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Hippolytus of Rome considered Gnostic movements as Christian heresies.

³² ARNOBIUS, *Adversus Gentes*, II, 12, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Translation of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. XIX, Ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Edinburgh, 1871, p. 77.

³³ TERTULLIAN, *De Anima*, XXXIV.

³⁴ Then Simon [Magus] went up on the tower in front of everyone and crowned with laurels, stretched out his hands and began to fly. And when Nero saw him flying, he said to Peter: "This Simon is true; but you and Paul are deceivers." To which Peter said: "You shall immediately know that we are true disciples of Christ; but he is not Christ, but a sorcerer and an evildoer." Nero said: "Do you still persevere? Behold, you see him ascending into heaven." Then Peter, looking steadfastly upon Paul, said: "Paul, lift up your eyes and see!" And Paul, lifting up his eyes, full of tears, and seeing Simon flying, said: "Peter, why are you idle? Finish what you have begun, for our Lord Jesus Christ already calls us." And Nero, hearing them, smiled a little and said: "These men already see themselves defeated and have gone mad." Peter said: "Now you shall know that we are not mad." Paul said to Peter: "Do at once what you are doing." Peter,



In literary pieces such as the works of Saint Clement of Rome like *Acta Petri* (The Acts of Peter), an apocryphal writing dating between 150-200 AD, which recounts the activity of the Holy Apostle Peter beyond what the book of the Acts of the Apostles offers us, there are many imaginary stories about the encounters between Simon Magus and the Apostle Peter. The Roman historian Suetonius Caius Tranquillus specifies that during the festivities organized in Rome by the Emperor Nero, between the years 60-61, a magician, known as Simon Magus, attempted to fly with wings he had built. His fall was later depicted by the Italian painter Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (1708-1787) in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome. Here is how the episode in question is rendered: "Tomorrow I will leave you, for you are atheists and impious, and I will fly to God whose power I am, although now I am weakened. Then, after you have fallen, I am the standing one and I will ascend to my Father and say to Him: Me, the standing one himself, Your Son, they wished to keep down, but I myself did not will what they [willed] and I return".³⁵

According to Hippolytus, Simon's final performance failed. He was buried alive (or burned alive, text variations exist), promising to appear after three days, but he did not appear, because, according to Hippolytus' laconic expression, he was not the Christ.

Simon Magus was succeeded by Menander³⁶, who was also from Samaria; he taught in Antioch in the first century. Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher reports about Menander in the same way when he mentions Simon Magus, "that a certain Menander, also a Samaritan, originally from the village of Capparataea, became a disciple of Simon and came under the influence of demons. Coming then to Antioch we know that he deceived many people with the arts of his magic".³⁷

Menander was called the "savior and provider of eternal life" through the rebirth obtained by baptism, a concept that slightly reflects the teachings of the Savior Jesus Christ. Saint Justin records that Menander's followers believed they were immortal as early as 154 AD.³⁸

Although he attained, no less than his master, the performance of sorcerous actions, he performed miracles far more impressive than Simon Magus. About himself, he declared that he was the redeemer himself, sent into the world for the salvation of mankind. He taught that only thus could one acquire power over the angels who assisted in creating the world, if they allowed themselves to be guided by the magical experience that only he knows, and if they received baptism from his hand. Those who would be deemed worthy of this baptism would enjoy eternal life even here on earth, because, thus, they would no longer die, but would remain on earth in an unaging youth and an endless life. This baptism as well as the promise of resurrection seem to have been Menander's original addition. The deliverance from death preached by Menander was understood

looking fixedly at Simon, said: "I adjure you, angels of Satan, who carry him in the air to deceive the hearts of the unbelievers, by God, who created all things, and by Jesus Christ, whom He raised from the dead on the third day, not to hold him any longer from this hour, but to let him go." And immediately, being let go, he fell into a place called *Sacra Via*, that is, the Holy Way, and was broken into four parts, perishing by an evil fate.

³⁵ Saint CLEMENT OF ROME, *Acta Petri*, XXXI, in Anton Daniel Toth, *Simon Magul în literatura creștină a primelor patru secole*, Paideea Publishing, Bucharest, 2006, p. 107.

³⁶ See EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3:26 and 4:22; IRENAEUS, *Adversus haereses* 1:21; Saint JUSTIN THE MARTYR, *Apologia* 1:26; Philipp SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:235; John GIESELER, *A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History* 1:56; Johann Lorenz VON MOSHEIM, *Ecclesiastical History*, Wetzlar und Welte, *Kirchen-Lexikon*, vol. VI, s.v., Christian Wilhelm Franz WALCH, *Historie der Ketzereien*, 1:185 sq., 276, 284; Johann Matthias SCHROCKH, *Kirchen Geschichte*, Leipzig, 1788, 2:244.

³⁷ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Istoria bisericească* (Ecclesiastical History), 3. 26. 3, in the collection *Church Fathers and Writers*, vol. 13, translated by Teodor Bodogae, IBMBOR Publishing, Bucharest, 1987, p. 119.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.



by Irenaeus, Tertullian³⁹, and Eusebius of Caesarea in its physical, literal sense, but Menander's followers must certainly have given it a spiritual meaning, otherwise the sect could not have continued to exist for a long period of time. Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher did not emphasize the physical element and undoubtedly understood that the promised immortality was simply of a spiritual nature.

CONCLUSION

Heresy in Orthodoxy is defined as an incorrect, deviant, and dangerous belief, opposed to the right faith. Orthodoxy, instead, is true faith, inspired and kept alive by the Holy Spirit. Heresiology is the rhetoric of religious deviance discursively constructed by polemicists, orators, and theologians of all confessions.

Before delving into the origins and history of heresy, it is important to consider the intimate yet contradictory relationship between orthodoxy and heresy and, consequently, between the heretic and the Orthodox Christian. “Christian” heretics, throughout all times and places, likewise profess faith; yet their faith differs from Orthodox dogma – the fundamental truths of the economy of salvation – and is therefore distorted and potentially dangerous. Traditional views concerning the origins of heresy within the Church can be traced back to Hegesippus, one of the earliest Church historians. As recorded in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Hegesippus described the Church of the apostles as a *virgin* (παρθένοϛ), “for she had not yet been defiled by any vain teaching.”⁴⁰ Thus, Hegesippus may be regarded as one of the earliest witnesses to the conviction that Orthodoxy preceded heresy – that truth existed before error entered and infiltrated the Church. The history of Christianity has often been recounted in these terms, with various moments identified as the beginnings of particular doctrinal errors.

³⁹ TERTULLIAN, *De Anima*, L.

⁴⁰ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 22, 4, in *Church Fathers and Writers*, vol. 13, trans. Teodor Bodogae (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing House, 1987), 171.



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