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The Bishop Who Obeyed Julian

HILARY ARMSTRONG

'To strengthen the effect of these decrees, when bishops of the Christians who disagreed, and divided laymen, had been sent for to the palace, he advised them politely that their disagreements should be allayed, and that each without fear and without any prohibition, should serve his own religion. This he insisted on that freedom of speech might increase their quarrels and that he might not afterwards have to fear an united laity: for he knew by experience that no wild beasts are such enemies of humanity as most Christians are deadly dangerous to each other.'

Ammianus Marcellinus XXII:5, 3 and 4: immediately after the account of the decrees ordering the restoration of the traditional worship.

Bishops! What does he want bishops for? And what does he want with a Christian audience, when he is going to go back to the old customs of the Empire and has just ordered any temples that may have been closed to be opened, and the old sacrifices to be offered?

'It isn't a good moment for bishop-hunting anyhow. When Constantius reigned and was organising all those synods, and the Public Transport was nearly bankrupt with getting bishops from one to another, all expenses paid, it was generally easy to pick up a good few around Constantinople. But now. . .!'

'Then there are all these Nicenes coming from exile, and the Arians in their bishoprics wondering whether it wouldn't be safer to be somewhere else when they arrive.'

'If I was George of Alexandria, and I heard that Athanasius was coming back, I think I'd find it convenient to be somewhere on the far side of Ethiopia when he arrives.'

'Oh, you needn't think of George, I've heard that an Alexandrian mob has dealt thoroughly with him and burnt the pieces.'

'We're skirmishing round the edges of the really important question without quite daring to ask it. I know it's dangerous, but someone must ask it, even if only in private. What is the new Emperor going to do? He's declared himself a worshipper of the old gods, has opened any temples the Christians managed to get closed, and is going back to the

old ways before Constantine, but what is he going to do about the Christians? He doesn't seem likely at present to punish the Christians for being Christians, or even close their churches: and he certainly won't be an Arian or a Nicene. But will he favour either side, or neither, or both?

'The most important part of Julian's future intentions, to us, is what concerns ourselves. The drastic slimming of the Palace staff seems to be one of his righteous activities with which he is particularly concerned at present. It has gone furthest so far in the hairdressing, wardrobe, and kitchen departments, but we secretaries and people who do the work of arranging meetings and audiences for him will have our turn: as we shall discover if we don't have all available bishops and a respectable Christian audience ready for him here on Tuesday week. Anyhow, I think the days of plenty of highly esteemed jobs, comfortable salaries and generous extras in the Palace are over.'

This is a fair sample of the sort of agitated conversations between the Palace functionaries which followed Julian's order for a Christian audience, including all available bishops of any sort, to be ready for him in the Palace at an appointed time. However, after what was for them a week of frenzied activity, they felt they had some reason to be satisfied. They had collected a reasonably mixed audience of outstanding Christians, with a really remarkable variety of assorted and incompatible bishops. These did not include Pegasius of Ilion, though someone had sent to fetch him, as Julian might like to see him again. But Pegasius was very busy in preparing a grand opening of the temple of Athena, and the hero-shrines of Hector and Achilles, and said that he did not wish to appear as a Christian bishop: he had other possibilities in mind. So the young man sent to summon him only came back with a quite insignificant bishop of a quite insignificant See, whom he had picked up somewhere on the way.

On the appointed day all was reasonably ready. A hall in the Palace was moderately full of a variegated Christian audience, including a fair number of bishops subscribing to various confessions of faith. They whiled away the time of waiting, which was a good deal shorter than it would have been in the reign of Constantius, by exchanging anxious speculations on their own still unknown situation or contemplating with intense hatred their theological opponents, who looked very much like themselves. Quite soon a small, plainly dressed group entered the hall, without formal announcement or any sort of pomp or parade. But

it was somehow quite clear that this was the Imperial party. The Emperor Julian was a young man strong-looking and quick-moving, as plainly dressed as the others, with a pointed beard and eyes that one did not easily forget if he looked at one with attention. The small group which surrounded him were not unlike himself, men of a military and intelligent appearance. He looked at this audience neither with friendliness nor enmity but with an impassive politeness. There was no need to call for silence. The hall had become still at this entrance. So he began to speak. 'Some of you Christians will be surprised that I wished to address you. I worship the ancient gods, and have begun to restore the ancient customs of the Empire before Constantine. I do not like this new Jewish religion of his, which the Jews detest and Constantine and his successors adopted. Especially I reject its barbarian and implausible exclusiveness, its insistence that there is only one true way to God and no others should be permitted, which I see as an all too human expression of self-importance. It can perhaps be permitted to one tribe or people who arrogantly but understandably confuse their local lord among the great company of gods, with the First, the One, the Good, who we all worship and from whom all gods and all else come. Provided that in all other ways they conform to the customs of the Empire and do not interfere with other people. This the Jews do not. But the Christians hate them because they reject the claims which they make for their founder, Christ, whom they say was alone the Son of God: a belief about the interpretation of which they quarrel endlessly.

'But, since long before the time of Constantine, there have been fairly many of you in the Empire. My predecessor Gallienus thought it best not to attempt to abolish or prohibit you, but to leave you to worship your Christ in your already very various ways in your own churches and to retain that property which you had acquired, so long as you did not interfere with each other or with others and the ancient customs of the Empire, above all its worship of the gods, were maintained. This is the policy which I propose to restore, and I would recommend you to cooperate with me. You will have no favour from me, but you will not have what you call 'persecution' either. I desire that each of you should follow his own way to the First, of which ways there are many, some better than others. But each should follow the way to which he feels he belongs: provided that he does not interfere in any way with the general customs of the Empire, which I as Emperor of Rome ought to maintain, or the ways of others. During the last reigns the Empire has incurred a

good deal of expense, in one way or another, through the favour of the emperors to various Christians. The quarrels among them have caused a great deal of trouble, and even sometimes public disorder. I shall not, as is my right, reclaim the gifts of my predecessors, by which some of your bishops have become rich: though I shall see that the endowments of the ancient temples are and remain unimpaired. But all gifts and Imperial favour and interference will cease forthwith. And, as touching quarrels, I would earnestly and politely recommend a little more attention to your own holy books, which I know quite well, and especially to those stories about the Founder himself and his first followers which you call the Gospels. Jesus himself seems to have thought that the essential sign of the Christian faith was brotherly love. As the Father loved the Son, so Christians were to love each other, and live in the brotherly harmony of a good family. He said nothing about theological disagreements about how the Son came from the Father. This is what I would recommend you to study and be guided by in your own holy books. It is the only way by which you Christians will be able to live peaceably and worship God as you will in the Empire which I now govern.'

When the Emperor had finished speaking, he left the hall with the same absence of ceremony with which he had entered it, accompanied by most of his companions. They went directly through a courtyard to inspect the Household Guards and their quarters, which were near by. They were watched in the courtyard by a small and deliberately inconspicuous group, mostly made up of recently dismissed members of the Palace staff. In the back row, and trying to look as unnoticeable as possible, was the former Court Barber, rather shabbily dressed. The fine clothes and ornaments in which he used to peacock about the Palace, and which he had worn for his only (and final) interview with Julian, had been sold (at a considerable loss) for him to live on. He comforted himself with the thought that the Emperor's hair and beard were at least tidy: and tried to keep out of his mind the thought that Julian had probably combed and trimmed himself, a thing unheard of in the days of Constantius.

In the hall of audience no refreshments were available, even for bishops. That had not been precisely a friendly meeting, though politeness had been observed, and there had been no open hostilities. But most of the audience lingered all the same. It was a rare opportunity to meet friends or potential allies and to confront enemies. So soon every

corner and recess had its conspiratorial group, and the hall resounded with the polemical rhetoric of the age of the Fathers. Plenty of threats of eternal damnation were exchanged. It would of course have been dangerous to say anything against the Emperor in the Palace. The quarters of the Household troops were not far off and they were said to be enthusiastic for Julian.

One of Julian's companions had stayed behind when the rest left, and seemed to be watching with grim amusement the Christian audience ignoring the Emperor's recommendation of brotherly love. After a time he noticed an alternative to the noise of polemic and the murmuring of conspiracies. A small man in a plain undyed cloak was standing by a wall, alone and in silence, looking rather miserable. Julian's companion strolled over to him. 'You don't seem to be amusing yourself like the others,' he said in a friendly way. 'I don't find all this amusing at all' answered the small man. 'I'm afraid the Emperor, though he worships the old gods, may have been right about the Gospels. I think we should go home and read the holy books and pray, and I think about how we ought to live as Christians under his government.' 'You certainly don't seem likely to please the Emperor if you do,' said the other, not at all in an unfriendly way. 'Ammian is my name, and I am something of a friend of Julian's. Perhaps I helped him a little with preparing his speech to you, though the main idea was entirely his own. Many of us, since Christians began to become rich and powerful, have been watching them, and have noticed something rather paradoxical about them. They have preached that God is the God of love, who really loves all his creatures: and that is not at all a bad, and may be a very good, way of talking about the unknowable Good whom we all worship, the First from whom all things come. But there is probably no kind of worship and no way of speaking about God which has brought more hatred into the world than Christians have. Julian thought, and I agree with him, that an Imperial exhortation to Christians to love their Christian brethren, even if they disagree with them theologically, would be the very thing to disunite Christians and weaken them by their mutual hatred at the time when he wished them to be weak and disunited in their opposition to his great purpose of restoring the old religious ways of the cities and the whole Empire. The present state of affairs in this hall seems to show that he was right. Christians are behaving just as he thought they would, except for you. He would be pleased to see them behaving like this, though not

pleased with *them*. He would be a little disconcerted that you had taken his words so seriously but perhaps be tempted to be a little pleased with you for the way in which you had taken them. Are you by any chance a bishop?

'A very small one of a very small bishopric' answered the other, 'I'm Philotheos of Hesychē. It's a little town on the coast, not far from Ilion, quite off the main routes to anywhere. But it has two large Christian churches, one close to the main town, and one near the harbour, which is a little way off, and a number of smaller ones in the country, and it has had a bishop for a century or two. The old bishop died well on in the reign of Constantius, and the people, looking for another one, thought it would be safest, in these troubled times, to elect a holy man. And as I lived quite simply, in a small house on some land which I have a good way from the town, and spent a good deal of my time in prayer and reading our holy books, and looked after and kept in repair one of our churches on my land, they thought that I would do. I do not quite know which side I should take in the great controversy. I think I hold the old beliefs of Christians, and I have a reverence for the great Origen. But I don't like Constantine's new synod of Nicaea, and the substance-language of its creed. And I've often spoken publicly in favour of the synod of Sirmium, because their condemnation of all substance-language was at least a movement away from that claim to know too much about God to which we Christians are rather liable. The Nicenes don't like Sirmium: one excitable bishop of theirs in the West, I think called Hilary, said it was a blasphemy. So people thought I should be Arian enough for Emperor Constantius, who was rather inclined that way and always interfering in church matters, which Julian, thank God, won't. The people in the diocese are divided; some are Nicenes, some are more or less Arians, and some are a bit vague, like me. The fiercest Arians are down by the harbour, where there are a good number of people from Alexandria who've been seamen. Their leader is the owner of a wine-shop near the end of the quay, whom the locals call 'Paul the Shipwreck'. He was washed ashore long ago, and somehow or other (perhaps by a lucky marriage) got hold of the wine-shop. Gossip goes that he was steering the ship he was in when it ran on the rocks. The extreme Arians like to gather there, and often sing that *Een-Potty-Otty-Ook-Een* song of theirs, to a tune they picked up from mime, on the quay and in the streets around. But there aren't too many of them, and they're not very popular even in their own part of the town, and I think

I can control them enough to stop any serious rioting that the Imperial authorities would notice. I won't let them sing their 'once upon a time He wasn't' in the churches I control, though they sing it in the streets. I sometimes, when they're blown in, ask extreme followers of Arius to preach in my churches – our harbour is not very good, nor is there much to come for, and any ships at Hesyche are generally taking refuge from adverse winds and bad weather. But this is only just, as there are about as many Nicenes as Arians among the Christians: and though I do not like their substance-language, I do not hinder priests of Nicene opinions from preaching and celebrating the Holy mysteries. You'll probably be pleased to hear that about half the people in my diocese follow the old ways, and are what we Christians call pagans. When I became bishop, I forbade Christians to spoil or destroy their fine old temples and images: and we have never been much inclined in Hesyche to interfere with each other's rites. There's an old temple on my land near the river, with images of the river-god and some nymphs. I sometimes go in, and look at the images without hissing or making the sign of the cross, and think about God: and I don't inspect the altar to see if there are warm ashes on it or go sniffing about for incense. But I don't go as far as Pegasius of Ilion is said to do. I never sacrifice myself, and forbid the Christians to. But I have kept you talking long enough. I hope I have persuaded you that I am the sort of Christian that Emperor Julian might tolerate as a peaceful and cooperative subject, even if not like. I have, I think, done a little to keep, and even to improve a little, the peace and quiet of my little town. But he has convinced me that I haven't done enough to promote brotherly love among Christians. I must go home and read and pray and think of something more. But perhaps you would kindly tell me this before we part. I know that few, if any, other bishops, especially if they have any pretensions to riches or influence, will follow my example. But, tell me, do you really think that the Empire would become more or less Christian if they did?

Ammian answered 'I knew already that many of the poorer Christians, even bishops, were good and useful subjects. If many of the richer and, now, more powerful ones followed your example, who knows? The Empire might at last become really Christian. Or perhaps not. Any large and complex human society needs a good deal of human wickedness among its rulers and those who serve them. Perhaps good Christians can never manage to be quite wicked enough. But my talk with you has certainly confirmed and strengthened the belief I had

before. Constantine did his best to doom Christianity by giving bishops riches and power, which followers of Christ shouldn't have. At least our talk has given me another example of a good bishop, I wish you good fortune.'

Not very much was seen of Philotheos for a week or so after he had left the Palace, unnoticed and unaccompanied, and spent a day or two walking back to his little diocese, by ways which grew more and more unfrequented the nearer he came. He always said that he was and looked too poor for anyone to try to rob, and so far this had worked quite well. After he had celebrated the Holy Rites on Sunday in the great town church, he left the bishop's apartments by it as he sometimes did when he needed peace and quiet, for his own little house in the country, which he had kept. After some time he started out again, and went to visit a relation of his who lived at some little distance, half-Greek, half-Latin, who lived in a larger house on his very much larger estate, which had been his Greek mother's inheritance. Philotheos used to say that the people of Hesychia would undoubtedly have wanted him as their bishop, as he had much more land and much more influence on the neighbourhood, if it had not been for one awkward little fact, particularly awkward in the reign of Constantius, who liked interfering in church matters. He was a Hellene, who held to the old ways, and though not at all aggressive, was always very firm and definite about not being a Christian of any sort. He lived like Philotheos, quiet and withdrawn in his country house, and they had a liking for each other. Philotheos used to go every now and then and talk over his plans and difficulties with his cousin, and valued his advice in spite of their religious differences. He set out this time on mule-back, accompanied by a servant, as seemed suitable on a visit which might be of some importance for him. Alexandros was, as he expected, at home, listening to a reading of one of the philosophical manuscripts with which he spent much time. He was pleased to see Philotheos and gave him a hearty welcome.

'It is quite a time since I have seen you, Philotheos', he said. 'They tell me you've been to Court since then. That was most unlike you. Why did you do it?' 'Mainly by accident', said Philotheos. 'I was visiting a friend on one of the big roads to Ilion, and a worried young man from the Palace turned up. Our new Emperor, after proclaiming that the old Hellenic customs of the Empire were back again, had suddenly ordered that as many bishops as possible and other leading Christians should

be collected at the Palace, as he wished to speak to them. The very junior young man had been sent to collect Pegasus of Ilion, as someone remembered that he had once shown Julian round the Hellenic religious buildings of his diocese and Julian had been pleased to find them well looked after. But Pegasus was otherwise engaged, and didn't seem very anxious to appear any more in public as a Christian bishop. So when the young man heard I was a bishop nothing would satisfy him but to take me back with him for the Emperor's meeting: they were afraid that, things being as they are, they wouldn't be able to find enough bishops. So he took me along, and though I didn't at all enjoy the meeting, I was impressed by Julian and something he said, and that is what I've really come to talk to you about.'

Alexandros said 'I really think, Philotheos, that since you became a bishop, you have behaved more like one of our philosophers than I should expect a bishop to behave: You haven't, admittedly, given the little property you had already away, like our true philosophers when they decide to devote themselves to philosophy. But you've used the only large amount of wealth you have got control of by being a bishop for helping the sick and poor in various ways at your two great churches and elsewhere, and haven't started to live grandly yourself. And you have been kind and respectful to us old Hellenes and our gods and to the Christians who disagree with you. One might even think at times that you, a Christian bishop, really loved men, and that the coming of your God into the world was a coming of love, the best kind of all comings of expressed good to the world. But why are you now dissatisfied with what you are doing as a bishop, and what did Julian say?' 'He said a good deal, clearly inspired by strong dislike of Christians, as he had found them (and I don't wonder, in his family). But the one thing which he said which really impressed me deeply was that we should go and read our own holy books to find out how we ought to behave to other Christians who disagreed with us. So I went home and read the Gospels and the Acts. And I found in the Gospels that Jesus always insists that the mark of Christians, what makes them different from other men, is to be that they love each other like brothers, and more than most brothers, as the Father and the Son love each other, and with the same love, the love of God which is to be given to them. He didn't say anything about how, precisely, the Son came from the Father, and I don't know that I really want to. I don't think we know, anyhow. If there is a world made by God, there must be

a Son, in whom the many flowers upon the One, and we can catch a glimpse of the divine glory in a way which we're able, or almost able, to understand. You'll probably say that I've slipped in a bit of Greek philosophy here, but I suppose I've picked up a smattering by talking to you, and anyhow I don't much care and don't want to go further. When I'd thought a great deal about the Gospels, I looked at the beginning of the Acts, to see how the first Christian disciples coped with the teaching of Jesus about how they should live with each other. They shared everything freely, all that they had. Nothing was kept back. One could keep something for oneself if one liked, but if one lied about this, it was not forgiven. When I read this I thought 'Christians have not really any business to have property of their own anyhow, even less than your philosophers. But Emperor Constantine wanted bishops to be rich, so we bishops in his empire have control of a lot of property. I, since they made me a bishop, have a lot for this small place. And, when I'd read in the holy books what Jesus said about the love of Christians for each other and how the first disciples put it into practice, I thought that my Nicene fellow-Christians, of whose language about God I strongly disapprove, and say so, would only genuinely and surely believe that I, their bishop, really wanted to live as a Christian among them and act like a really Christian bishop in the present state of affairs, if I found someone of Nicene opinions to be a co-bishop with me, and to be responsible for one of the two large churches and its charities, and half the property of the diocese. I think I have enough influence in Hesychia to arrange this, though two bishops in a diocese are unusual. And I believe I once heard you say that you'd met a deposed Nicene bishop living quietly, rather like me, in a little house in the country not far from here. Could you give me an introduction to him? If he'll cooperate it will be much easier to arrange things here. If a priest has to be consecrated my co-bishop, there might be a good deal of fuss and noise in the neighbourhood about getting him consecrated. But to slip in another bishop, who is already a bishop, would be comparatively easy in this out of the way diocese: specially as the Emperor, thank God, will no longer want to interfere in internal Christian affairs. And I think, from Julian's manner, that it might be imprudent for Christians to draw any attention at all to themselves by rioting or the like for some time to come.'

'I'm really surprised at our new-devoutly Hellenic Emperor', Alexandros said, 'for giving such very Christian advice to the Christian

bishops – how he meant it is another thing – and the effect on you, you’ve even started to behave in your capacity as a bishop quite like a true philosopher. This mixture we live in, of property, Christianity and philosophy, is a curious thing. Most of us in the Empire don’t give away our property like the true philosophers. We hold on to what the chances of life have brought us. But we have a fairly general, at any rate theoretical, dislike of Pleonexy, of wanting to get more. We tend to despise and dislike people who want to get more than they have, and are not prepared, because they want more, to spend and give away generously what they control. There’s one exception to this, I must admit. Since the old fighting days, we admire bodily courage. And if someone gains great riches and power by fighting himself with his spear and sword in the front, as anyone who wants to lead others must, we shall admire and like him, and even worship him in the right place and time. The god after whom I am called, to whom I paid my respects on a visit to Alexandria some years ago, got immense power and riches by persuading his Macedonian fighting men to walk from Macedonia to India with him, most of the way through country absolutely unknown to him and them, conquering the Persian Empire and some other kingdoms on the way. And he did it because he was always himself in front. If they had a city to storm, he was up the ladder and on the wall fighting hard, sometimes well before any of the others had time to follow him. I’m glad Julian’s record in Gaul shows that he’s likely to take the sensible view that the most appropriate seat for a Roman Emperor is not on his throne in the Palace but on his horse in a battle. They say he admires Alexander greatly – I hope not too much: that could be a little dangerous for the commander of a Roman army on the Eastern frontier.

But perhaps we ordinary people should give up our admiration for the successful fighter in these days. We’ve learnt in the Roman peace, which Julian means firmly to maintain, that citizens can love their cities and their gods without fighting their neighbours, or someone, every summer. And I didn’t mean to wander off so much into ordinary peoples’ views on property; though I do think that our Greek dislike of Pleonexy is one of the best things about us. But we’re not all quite ordinary people. There are philosophers among us, and holy men among the Christians. There are very few. Porphyry perhaps draws the sharpest line between ordinary people and true philosophers. But, however you look at it, they are few. But the true philosophers and the

true Christians among them seem to have a very strong instinct that any kind of property gets in the way. Plotinus at Rome used to supervise the management of the property of the many children whose parents left them to his guardianship admirably and efficiently. But he said that, if they took to philosophy when they grew up they would of course give their property away. And he and his closest friends and associates in his circle ate little and generally took what little sleep they took in their friends' houses. And there are quite a few Christians too whom even we Hellenes, if they don't destroy our temples and holy images, can recognise as good men, like you. And some seem to be haunted by a sort of vision, of the naked man who wants nothing and enjoys the world because he is free from it. You Christians have your legends about your first man in paradise. And when I was in Alexandria, I had some talk with a Greek-speaking Indian I found there who knew some of his holy books fairly well. From what he told me, if you collected them all together and put them beside yours, they would look like the library of Alexandria beside my own little collection. He told me about the real naked sages of India, the Jinas, who have temples in which there are no images except naked statues of the perfect men of old times who had attained complete freedom. And some of the stricter ones walk from shrine to shrine 'clothed with the sky', as they say. They certainly wear nothing else. They eat a little if one gives them anything, as people will in India, where they reverence holy men. We reverence our good men who do not want anything, and are free for the goodness of God, though we don't generally imitate them. But, if the world becomes so stupid that the commander of fighting men does not have to fight himself at the head of them we shall still reverence the good wantless men, and let them help us to God. If we don't even do that, and don't even leave any room for them and God's other creatures, the darkness will have descended and there will be no real human beings any more. But I've rambled on like an old lonely man and forgotten to tell you what you came for. Yes, I do know a deposed Nicene bishop who lives quietly, like you, some way from here. You might have some trouble in persuading him to become an active bishop in the modern manner again, as he very much dislikes that sort of thing. But I'll certainly bring you together. You ought to meet. You're rather like each other, in spite of your theological differences.'

'Thank you', said Philotheos, 'I think I can show him some reasons for not being too worried about having a share in the episcopal estate

again, as long as he doesn't object to its being a half, not the whole. I think I know a little more about Julian's intentions in making that speech to the Christians. I had some talk with a friend of his, Ammian, after the meeting, which I found very enlightening. Julian is a very clever and subtle man. He's not going to be one of those lash-and-lash emperors who call on the torturers and the troops as soon as there looks like being any trouble. He thinks, perhaps rightly, that the best way to disunite Christians and make them quarrel with each other and so to stop them interfering with his plans is to give them the Gospel advice about brotherly love. It's a great disgrace to Christians that he thinks so. Ammian told me that he'd like me better as a man for it, but I was definitely trying to spoil his plan, so I'd better let you know. If mine works, we might even have a few more Christian converts in Hesyche.

'I was interested, too, in what you said about our mix-up about property and human goodness. Christians ought to dislike trying to get riches and property, if we read the Gospels, and some of us do. And we have a few, like your philosophers, who give up property altogether, we honour and reverence the real ones, and so we ought to, more than the philosophers, if they show us something of the goodness of Christ and his first disciples. But I'm not sure about all of them, even the real ones. There seem to be some rather curious things entangled with their love of wantlessness to make them freer to enjoy God and his world.'

'I'm always surprised at the fuss you Christians make about devils, and holy men fighting devils' said Alexandros. 'You seem to think of God's world as originally a perfectly good world, subject to continual attacks by powers of evil, who are responsible for all the evils in the world. But Plato didn't think of it like that at all. He thought that only the Good was perfectly good, and that if God wanted to make a world, he could only make the best possible world. And he recognised a dark, chaotic, not perfectly controlled element in the nature of things which one couldn't think properly about at all. He didn't explain where this came from, but some later philosophers who followed him thought it came directly from the One, from which all things come. But they still seem to disapprove of it, which is rather odd. But philosophers will go on discussing this, and perhaps someone will come up with a solution which will be more satisfying than this picture of the battle of good and evil powers which seems to have come over the Eastern frontier to Jews and Christians, and some Platonists. I've heard Christians who talk just like Mazdeans.'

'It wasn't Plato who said "Why callest thou me good? There is none other good but God alone." Perhaps we all ought to think about it' replied Philotheos. 'But there's also a certain element of local competition.' "*Our* holy man stands on a higher pillar or lives in a wilder cave, and fights more and more horrible devils, than *yours*." And, more seriously, there is very often in our holy men a real hatred of God's material world, not a longing to be free from it in order to enjoy it. Christians talk sometimes, not only like Mazdeans, but very like Manichees, for whom this world is not God's world at all, which is heresy for all Jews and Christians, whatever they may believe about Son and Father. But I would be most grateful if you would arrange for me a meeting with the Nicene bishop. I should like it to be here, as I should like you to be present at our discussion.'

'That I'll do gladly' said Alexandros. 'You'll have to give me a little time. I'd like to have one or two preliminary conversations with him before you two meet. And you must give me some days to get hold of him. But expect an invitation from me within the next week or two.'

Philotheos found he didn't have to spend too much time or trouble on the arrangements for the election of a Nicene co-bishop. He was, he discovered, rather more than usually popular in the diocese, both among most Nicenes and moderate Arians. A few strict Nicenes were likely to object to the sharing in theory but hardly likely to do so in practice. And there would be a good deal of noise around Paul the Shipwreck's tavern. But serious rioting, with any attempts at burning houses or killing, was wildly unlikely. And the election of a co-bishop was likely to be effective, though not quiet. So Philotheos spent a good deal of his time in the period of waiting walking about the Church estates, unaccompanied by his steward, Ptolemy, or any subordinate managers or rent-collectors, and talking to the farmers. He had been impressed by what Alexandros had said about the care which Plotinus took in looking after the estates of his wards. He thought that a Christian bishop, who probably had no business with property anyhow, should, if he happened to be responsible for a good deal, be at least as good as, if not better than, a pagan philosopher. As a result of his walks abroad, he became aware, since he was a person to whom the farmers talked freely, that a good many of the Church tenants were suffering from the most modern business methods from Alexandria. As a result, the important Ptolemy, much to his discontent, was required to dismiss several minor estate-managers and rent-collectors, members of

the extended and extensive Ptolemy family. And Ptolemy himself was made to understand that his appointment as episcopal steward was not necessarily for life.

Eventually a message came from Alexandros that the Nicene bishop Dositheos was staying with him for some days, and would be glad to meet Philotheos. The two liked the look of each other as soon as they met. They were both middle-sized men, plainly dressed, with nothing obviously bishop-like about them. After some general conversation Dositheos said 'I am attracted by your proposal that I should be co-bishop with you of your diocese of Hesychie. Some of the stricter Nicenes whom I know think that I should not be: that the creed of that great synod is the only one of all the synods to express the true Christian faith, and its strength lies in that word you, Philotheos, object to – *Homoousios*.' 'I'm surprised', interposed Alexandros, 'that you Christians should make such a fuss about a not too unusual and rather vague Greek philosophical term like that, which really doesn't mean much more than 'of the same natural kind'. Dositheos answered, 'Perhaps the word meant little more than that to many of those who accepted it at the Synod to please the Emperor. But to me, and many more Nicenes, its presence is at least an assurance that we Christians believe that Christ was really God as well as really man. There may at some future time be a theologian who will say that God is not substance but substance-maker, and so beyond substance, as he is beyond everything. But I shan't be surprised if he recites the Nicene Creed quite happily whenever he has a duty to do so, even if he is quite sure that he is right, and is right, in saying that God is beyond substance.' 'It all seems a little unnecessary' said Philotheos, 'when even extreme Arians have no hesitation in saying that Christ was God as well as human. And whether there are degrees and differences in God, or whether he is there complete as a whole wherever he is, which is everywhere, should be left to the philosophers to discuss freely.' 'That is, though perhaps in rather a different way, why I am willing to be co-bishop with you' said Dositheos. 'I know from my own experience that being made bishop of a Christian community gave no special line of information to God. I do not know, as bishop, what in precise detail makes Christ God as well as man. And I am not sure that a gathering of bishops will necessarily be told by God any more about God and how he chooses to show himself to his creatures than a single bishop, though it is well for bishops to meet and talk about these sort of things and compare the lights which

have been given them. And we know since Constantius came to the throne how many synods of bishops called or approved by the Emperor there can be and that none of them will dare to say without the Emperor's approval that the conclusions they have come to should be believed by all Christians. And the Emperor will only want this so that Christians in his empire shall all be at peace, and that God may not punish him for not caring for this. But I myself do not think all we Christians need to think or feel the same about these things, or that we ever shall, any more than the philosophers. But we have a duty of communion and brotherly love laid on us, and that seems to me more important than theology. So I will accept, as things are, your solution. It seems to me that we should all live in brotherly love, and share in the holy rites and try to do our duty as followers of Christ without chattering endlessly about our own opinions and trying to persuade, or, worse still, to force, others to agree with us.'

'I think we shall get on very well together in the diocese' said Philotheos. 'I have long thought that we claim to know much too much about God, though the three names in the Scriptures, of Father, Son and Spirit, should have some meaning for us. At least the theologies have not yet managed to insert their differences into the holy rites. We shall both commemorate the Last Supper and celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ in much the same way. But I think you also felt some reluctance to take on again these modern responsibilities of a bishop as a rich man, important in this world because he has resources and estates.' 'I certainly think that Christians, and especially their leaders, the bishops, should have as little to do with worldly importance and property as possible' answered Dositheos. 'And I found the estates of my former little diocese a great worry, I had an estate manager who cheated me a great deal, and eventually got the ear of someone near the Emperor and got his cousin appointed as the Arian bishop who replaced me. So he is still very comfortable. But I have heard that you have an estate manager who is fairly trustworthy.'

'Well, I'm perhaps not quite as satisfied with my manager, Ptolemy, as I was' said Philotheos. 'He'd probably have satisfied Plotinus. He and his numerous family, whom he has brought to assist him hand over what seems to me a fair return from the Church lands. But I tend to walk about them a good deal, alone, especially lately, and I find that the farmers, now they know me better, will talk to me. And I do not get the impression that the estate management is carried out with much

Philanthropia. We talk about it a great deal, but don't practice it very much, when it comes to seeing that the people who actually grow things have enough grain to live on till next harvest when all taxes and dues have been collected. Some of the lesser Ptolemies on the smaller estates have been a good deal too harsh in that way, and at my demand to Ptolemy the managers have taken themselves elsewhere. Plotinus was rather detached from non-philosophers, unless they actually came to him for help. But as Christian bishop of this diocese I feel a sort of responsibility that the farmers on Church lands, Christian, heretic, or pagan, should have enough to eat during the winter. So I should like to ask you, Alexandros, since you have good landholding connections, to look out for me for that rare specimen, an estate manager who has some *Philanthropia* for the farmers. Perhaps you will find one who has been recently dismissed for not getting enough out of the estate. That is, of course, if Dositheos agrees.' 'I'm entirely of one mind with you on this' said Dositheos. 'And I also like, and shall imitate, your habit of having as few clergy to live with you, even simply, at the Church's expense at the main diocesan church, as is needed to run it and its charities, on which most of our resources should go. It has occurred to me that we might both of us find it useful to have some of those newer sort of holy men and women who live in communities, to administer our charities. They are beginning to be very successful in some dioceses. There are a couple of small communities of men and women living near me, founded by someone with Egyptian experience, who are successful at living together, but do not seem to know quite what to do with themselves. If you like, I will invite them to my Church, and if the experiment is successful, you can follow my example later.' 'Most willingly,' said Philotheos. 'All seems to be happily settled, and when I return, I shall make immediate preparations for the election.'

A month or so later the election took place. It had easily been agreed that the great Church by the town should be the Church of the Nicaenes, with Dositheos as their bishop, and that Philotheos should minister to those who rejected Nicaea in the great Church by the harbour. So Dositheos was elected by acclamation bishop in the town church, and Philotheos set him, with prayer and blessing, in his bishop's seat. The election, as Philotheos had foreseen, was a noisy affair, but there was nothing which could be called serious disorder, then or later. No one was killed, and no houses were destroyed.

After Philotheos had celebrated the Mysteries in the great town church, had given notice that they should proceed to the election of a co-bishop, and had presented Dositheos to this congregation – he had already celebrated several times for mainly Nicene congregations – there was a certain amount of noise in the church. A high shrill voice, echoed by some others, cried out ‘One Constantine. One Nicaea. One Substance.’ This came from an elderly and wealthy widow, who had been at the court of Constantine at the time of Nicaea, and had heard Athanasius preach. It was her often repeated demand that there should be only one bishop, a Nicene one, in Hesyche. But her Nicene friends, who were mostly supporters of Dositheos and the compromise, eventually persuaded her to keep quiet. There was a fair amount of shouting and singing of the Arians’ favourite ‘Once upon a time He wasn’t’ near the West door. But as most of the congregation, Nienes and moderate Arians alike, were supporters of Philotheos, and he had long prohibited the singing of the Alexandrian street song in church, it was a fairly simple matter to put the extreme Arians out. They retired to their tavern to prepare for some more disturbance in the evening. And, after a great and apparently unanimous shout of acclamation, Dositheos was duly installed as bishop.

Most Nienes, and a good many moderate Arians, strongly approved the installation of Dositheos as bishop. The largest Nicene landowner in the diocese, who had a fine house in town, arranged a celebration that evening for the installation. But the extreme Arians, after being turned out of the church, had retired to the South end of the quay to sing their song near Paul’s tavern, and were more than ready to go up town and cause trouble by the time of the celebration. Gregory the Nicene, however, had anticipated this, and had invited a good many of his peasant farmers, who were being liberally entertained in an outbuilding, and had brought their cudgels. As he was well known as a kindly and understanding landowner who took a great part in the management of his own estate, their attitude to the proceedings was enthusiastic. When the Arian mob came battering at Gregory’s gates, a well directed charge from an unexpected direction was enough to disrupt them thoroughly, and the country cudgels were most effective. A good many skulls were cracked on both sides, but there was no burning of buildings, or actual deaths, so no occasion for instantaneous canonizations, even if the available bishops would have thought of each a thing, and there was not really a Christian riot.

So the co-bishopric was quite happily and comparatively peaceably set up, and Hesyche remained quiet and peaceful, and perhaps rather more genuinely Christian than most places, not only during the short reign of Julian, but for rather more than the next two. The two bishops were well on in years by the time of the new arrangement, and had gone to their rewards (various, according to the theological opinions of the persons describing them) well before a single aggressively orthodox Theodosian bishop (a minor Court appointment), took charge and began to lead or drive the diocese along the triumphant path of Orthodoxy and Christendom, in its Byzantine form. It followed it, rather slowly and at first hesitatingly for some centuries, till those lands passed to the Seljuks and then to the Ottomans. Then, since the only effective orthodoxy for practical purposes in sight was that of Islam, those who wanted to get on and prosper in this world generally became Muslims. But a sizable Greek-Christian minority remained. And there also remained a widespread feeling, strongly discouraged if it became at all noticeable by the Orthodox bishops, that Hesyche had been happier and more peaceful, even perhaps more Christian, in the days when the diocese had two bishops, equally dividing the episcopal power. Little was recorded or known about the bishops, but looking back, in a dim and confused way, to their time as a good time was greatly strengthened by the appearance in a church of the place, some four hundred years later, of a rather unusual icon. No one knows who painted or installed it, but it showed two Hierarchs (unnamed) standing on each side of, and at a somewhat lower level than a figure of Christ in glory. The figure of Christ was not dissimilar to those in coronation icons. But He was not crowning anybody. His hands were outstretched, each grasping one hand of one of the Hierarchs. This icon became very popular and much venerated. Perhaps, in spite of the objections of Orthodox bishops and theologians, it continued to convey some idea that when the diocese was ruled by two bishops, deeply divided theologically, but living together in Christian love and sharing what property and power there was, there was always a Third with them.

