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The New Gods

Whoever finds it interesting to consider the unfolding pageant of irreducible ideas and beliefs would do well to fix his attention on the first centuries of the Christian era. There he will find the very model of every kind of conflict encountered, on a reduced scale, at any given moment in history. There is good reason for this: never before or since have men hated more. All due credit goes to the Christian—feverish, uncompromising, expert from the outset in the art of detesting, whereas pagans were left with only one weapon they knew how to wield: scorn. Aggressiveness is a trait the new men and new gods have in common.

If a freakishly well-mannered person, never visited by fits of peevishness, wanted to learn how to be peevish, or at least find out what purpose it serves, the simplest thing for him to do would be to read several ecclesiastical writers, beginning with the most brilliant of the lot, Tertullian, and ending with, let’s say, the venomous but insipid Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, whose tirade against Julian the Apostate makes you want to convert to paganism on the spot. Not a single virtue is vouchsafed the Emperor: with undisguised satisfaction the author discounts his heroic death in the war against the Persians, claiming he was killed by “a barbarian, a jester by profession, who traipsed after the army to help soldiers forget the trials of war with his banter and sallies.” No elegance, no effort to appear worthy of such an adversary. What makes his attitude the more unpardonable is that he had known Julian in Athens when as young men they attended the philosophical schools.

There is nothing so loathsome as the tone assumed by defenders of a cause which, though seemingly foiled, has really gained the ascendancy; they gloat just thinking of their triumph, yet at the same time cannot help but turn their very fears into threats. When Tertullian, sardonic and quaking, describes the Last Judgment, which he calls “the grandest spectacle of all,” he imagines
the last laugh he will have contemplating a heap of monarchs and
gods "uttering horrible moans from the very bottom of the pit." This
compulsion to keep reminding pagans that they were
doomed, they together with their idols, was enough to exasperate
even the most equable minds. Christian apologetics, which is a
running libel camouflaged as treatises, represents the Summum
of bilious literature. It is only in the shade of worn-out divinities
that one can take a free breath.

The more persuaded of this one becomes, the more harping
and terrifying the suspicion that if one had lived during the up
and coming years of Christianity one might have fallen under its
spell. The beginnings of a religion (like the beginnings of any-	hing) are always suspect, yet only they possess some reality, they
alone are true, true and abominable. The investiture of a new
god, whatever its identity and birthplace, cannot be witnessed
with impunity. This is not a recent inconvenience. It prevailed as
early as Prometheus, victim of Zeus and the new power clique on
Olympus.

Far more than the prospect of salvation, wrath against the an-
cient world swept Christians into a common delirium of destruc-
tion. Since most of them came from foreign parts, it isn't surpris-
ing they should have vented themselves against Rome. But what
sort of frenzy could the native enroll in once he had converted?
Less well-equipped than the others, he had but one recourse: to
hate himself. If not for this deviation of hatred, a rare case at
first, but highly contagious, Christianity might have remained a
mere sect limited to foreigners, the only clientele capable in fact
of painlessly exchanging the ancient gods for a nailed cadaver.
Let anyone who wants to know how he would have taken Con-
stantine's about-face, put himself in the shoes of a citizen holding
to his heritage, of a pagan proud to be one: how could he give his
consent to the cross or bear to see the symbol of a dishonoring
death emblazoned on Roman standards? Yet people did resign
themselves to it, in droves, and the sum total of inner defeats un-
derlying this resignation staggers the imagination. If, as an ethi-
cal phenomenon, it may be understood as the crowning event of a
crisis and thus granted the status or the pretext of a conversion,
viewed from an exclusively political angle it resembles treason.
To abandon the gods who made Rome was to abandon Rome it-
self for an alliance with this “new race of men born yesterday, without fatherland or tradition, leagued against all civil and religious institutions, wanted by the law, universally notorious, but wearing the general execration like a badge of honor.” Celsus’ diatribe dates from 178. Nearly two centuries later, Julian in turn would write: “If, during the reign of Claudius and Tiberius, a single distinguished mind was converted to Christian ideas, consider me an unmitigated faker.”

The “new race of men” would frantically run around in circles before finally conquering the more fastidious element. How could these low-born strangers whose every gesture invited scorn be trusted? There was the rub, for by what manner of means could one accept the god of those one scorned, a god who was, to boot, of recent manufacture? Only the antiquity of gods guaranteed their legitimacy and any god was tolerated provided he had not been freshly minted. Under the circumstances people found the Son the more noisome on account of his absolute novelty: a mere contemporary, a parvenu. Repellent character that he was, unforeseen and un-presaged by any sage, he came as an appalling surprise. His advent created a scandal of such proportions it took four centuries to abate. The Father, on the other hand, being acknowledged as an old acquaintance, Christians fell back on him for tactical reasons, claiming him for their own: weren’t the books that celebrated him, books whose spirit the Gospels perpetuated, several centuries older than the temples, the oracles, the pagan gods? Or so Tertullian would have us believe. This apologist, once he really warms up, goes so far as to maintain that Moses predates by a few millennia the destruction of Troy. Ramblings such as this were calculated to offset remarks like the following: “After all,” wrote Celsus, “Jews have, over the course of long centuries, fashioned themselves into a national body, they have created laws conforming to their ways which they maintain even today. The religion they observe, whatever its worth and whatever one may think of it, is the religion of their ancestors. In abiding by it faithfully, they have acted no differently from other men who uphold the customs of their country.”

To yield to the prejudice of oldness was to recognize, implicitly, the exclusive legitimacy of the indigenous gods. Christians were, by design, quite willing to bow, nominally, before this prejudice,
yet they could not go all the way, for adopting it together with all its consequences would have been suicide. As Origen saw it, the ethnic gods were idols, remnants of polytheism; before him Saint Paul had demoted them to the rank of demons. Judaism considered the lot of them false, excepting one—its own. "Their only error," wrote Julian about the Jews, "is that while striving to gratify their own god, they do not at the same time serve the others." He does, however, praise them for abhorrning the fashion in matters of religion. "I flee innovation in every domain, and especially where the gods are concerned," is an avowal that discredited him, people availing themselves of it to censure him as a "reactionary." But what "progress," one may ask, does Christianity represent in relation to paganism? There is no "qualitative leap" from one god to another, or from one civilization to another, no more than from one language to another language. Who would dare proclaim Christian writers superior to pagan ones? A Saint Jerome confesses that, after re-immersing himself in Cicero or Plautus, he feels some aversion even for the Prophets, whose writing has more life and style than the Church Fathers'. "Progress" during that era was embodied by these unreadable Fathers: did turning away from them mean turning "reactionary"? Julian was perfectly right in preferring Homer, Thucydides or Plato. The decree by which he forbade Christian teachers from explicating the Greek authors opened him to lively criticism not only from his adversaries but even from his admirers throughout the ages, all of them. Without trying to justify him, one cannot help but understand him. He was contending with fanatics; to win their respect he was obliged, now and then, to be as exorbitant as they, to box their ears with some insane edict, otherwise they would have looked down on him as an amateur. Thus he asked these "tutors" to emulate the writers they were commenting and share their opinions on the gods: "If they believe that these authors were mistaken on the most important point, why don't they betake themselves to the churches of the Galileans and comment on Matthew and Luke!"

From the ancients' viewpoint, the more gods one recognized, the better one served the Divinity of which they were but aspects, faces. Limiting their number would have been an impiety, and suppressing them in favor of one a crime. This is the crime Chris-
tians were guilty of. No longer could they be turned aside with irony, already an obsolescent weapon as the evil they propagated had gained too much ground. All of Julian's bitterness sprang from the impossibility of treating them casually.

Polytheism corresponds more realistically to the diversity of our bents and impulses, allowing them room to flex, to demonstrate, so that each is free, following its nature, to stretch toward the god that best suits it for the moment. But what undertaking is possible with only one god? What can be made of him, how can he be used? With him around, one lives under constant pressure. Monotheism encapsulates our sensibility: it deepens us while cramping us. A system of constraints that confers upon us an inner dimension by stunting the outgrowth of our powers, it stands as a barrier, it hinders our expansion, it unhinges us. We were undoubtedly more normal having several gods than we are having only one. If health is a criterion, what a giant step backward we took with monotheism!

Under the regime of plural gods, zeal parcels itself up; when it addresses itself to only one god it becomes dense and exasperated, ultimately turning into aggressiveness, into faith. Energy, instead of being scattered, flows in a single direction. The remarkable thing about paganism is that it did not make a radical distinction between believing and not believing, between having faith and not. Besides, faith is a Christian invention; it presupposes the same unbalance in man and in God alike, the two carried away by a dialogue as dramatic as it is delirious—whence the frantic character of the new religion. The old, far more human, allowed you the option of choosing whatever god you wanted; since it didn't impose any one, it was for you to show your partiality. The flightier one was, the more often one felt the need to change, to forsake one for another, being pretty certain to find a way of loving them all in the course of one's lifetime. Moreover, they were modest, requiring nothing more than respect; one greeted them without having to genuflect. They were perfectly suited to the person whose contradictions had not been resolved, nor ever could be, to the mind divided and unappeased: what luck he had, being able
in the midst of his wandering turmoil to try them all out, with the likelihood of falling on the very one he needed most at any given moment! Once Christianity triumphed, the freedom to browse among them and to choose according to one's fancy became inconceivable. Their cohabitation, their admirable promiscuity was done for. Would an esthete, weary of paganism but not yet sick to death of it, have adhered to the new religion had he had some inkling that it was going to spread over so many centuries? Would he have swapped the whimsy inherent in a regime of interchangeable idols for a cult whose god was to enjoy such terrifying longevity?

Man gave himself gods supposedly because of a need to feel protected, guaranteed, but in reality out of craving to suffer. So long as he believed that there was a multitude of them, he could play his game boldly, having allowed himself loopholes; but when subsequently he limited himself to only one, he merely added to his shackles and pangs. One would be hard pressed to find another animal carrying self-love and self-hatred to the point of vice, needlessly shouldering such a heavy yoke. How cruel we are harnessing ourselves to the Great Spectre, riveting our fate to his! The one and only god makes life unbreathable.

Christianity used the legal rigor of the Romans and the philosophical acrobatics of the Greeks, not to free the mind but to hobble it. In so doing, it forced it to grow deeper, to descend inside itself. Dogmas imprison it, set outward limits it must not under any circumstances trespass; at the same time, they leave it free to roam through its own universe, to explore its own abysses and, so as to escape the tyranny of doctrinal certitudes, to seek being—or its negative equivalent—at the far reaches of every sensation. Ecstasy—the adventure of the bound-up mind—necessarily occurs more frequently in an authoritarian religion than in a liberal one; it represents a leap toward intimacy, a taking asylum in the depths, the flight towards self.

Having had, for such a long time, no other refuge than God, we have plunged as far into him as into ourselves (this plunge being our only real exploit in two thousand years); we have sounded his depths and our own, ruined his secrets one by one, worn out and compromised his substance by the two-fold aggression of knowledge and of prayer. The ancients didn't overwork their
gods: they were too elegant to harass them or to make them an object of study. Living before the transition from mythology to theology, they were oblivious of this unrelenting strain which affects the language of the great mystics no less than the blurbs of the catechism. When the here-below becomes synonymous with the unlivable, when we feel that the bond tying us to it has been severed, a remedy may be found not in faith, nor in the negation of faith (the two being expressions of the same infirmity) but in pagan dilettantism or, more precisely, in our notion of it.

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The most serious inconvenience the Christian suffers is not being able to serve, consciously, more than one god though in practice he has the leeway to enfeoff himself to several (the veneration of saints!)—a healthy enfeoffment which gave polytheism, against all odds, an indirect lease on life; if not for that, Christianity, in an excessively pure state, would have given rise to universal schizophrenia. With all due respect to Tertullian, the soul is naturally pagan. Any god who answers our immediate, our urgent demands represents for us an overflowing of vitality, a "whiplash"; this doesn't hold if he is foisted upon us or if he corresponds to no particular necessity. Paganism made the mistake of accepting, of accumulating too many gods: it died of generosity and too much understanding, it died for lack of instinct.

If, to overcome the self, that leper, one stakes everything on appearances, it is impossible not to deplore the passing of a religion devoid of drama, of attacks of conscience, of incentives to feel remorse, superficial in its principles and practices alike. In antiquity, philosophy and not religion was deep; in the modern age, "depth" and all the various excruciations that go along with it have their one source in Christianity.

Only eras that have no precise faith (the hellenistic and our own) work at classifying the gods without sorting them into the true and the false. The notion that they could be of equivalent worth becomes unthinkable, however, the moment zeal gains the upper hand. Prayer cannot be addressed to a god who is probably true; it would hardly truckle to subtleties, or tolerate gradations within the supreme: even when it doubts, it does so in the name
of truth. One does not beseech a nuance. This has been the case only since the calamity of monotheism. Pagan piety worked differently. In Octavius, the author, Minucius Felix, before he gets around to defending the Christian position, has Cecilius, the representative of paganism, say: “We see national deities being worshipped: Ceres in Eleusis, Cybele in Phrygia, Esculapius in Epidaurus, Belus in Chaldea, Astarte in Syria, Diana in Tauris, Mercury among the Gauls and in Rome, all of them put together.” And he adds, speaking of the Christian god, the only unaccepted one: “Where does he come from, this god standing alone, lonely, forsaken, whom no free nation, no kingdom recognizes?”

According to an old Roman prescription, no one could worship in private new or foreign gods if they hadn’t first been admitted by the State, or, to be more precise, by the Senate, the only body entitled to decide which deserved adoption and which not. The Christian god, arising on the outskirts of the Empire, reaching Rome by underground channels, would later avenge himself handsomely for having had to be smuggled in.

A civilization is not destroyed till its gods have been destroyed. The Christians, not daring to make a frontal assault on the Empire, took it out on its religion. They allowed themselves to be persecuted the better to fulminate against it, to satisfy their irrepresible appetite to execrate. How miserable they would have been if Rome hadn’t deigned to promote them to the rank of victims! Everything about paganism, even its tolerance, exasperated them. Anchored in their certitudes, they couldn’t understand how anyone would resign himself, as the pagans did, to likelihoods or follow a cult whose priests, ordinary magistrates assigned to go through the motions of ritual, didn’t burden anybody with the crushing chore of sincerity.

When one repeats to oneself that life is endurable only if one can change gods, that monotheism contains the seeds of every form of tyranny, ancient slavery doesn’t seem in the least pitiful. Better to be a slave and have the right to worship the gods of one’s choice than to be “free” yet have no alternative to a single variety of the divine. Freedom is the right to difference; being plurality, it postulates a scattering of the absolute and the latter’s resolution in a dust-cloud of truths at once justified and provisional. In liberal democracy there is a subjacent (or, if you like, subconscious)
polytheism; conversely, every authoritarian regime has an element of disguised monotheism. How odd the workings of monotheistic logic: directly a pagan became Christian he fell prey to bigotry. It would be preferable to sink with a mass of lenient gods than to thrive in the shadow of a despot! Living in an era where, for lack of religious conflicts, we are witnessing ideological ones, we find ourselves faced with the same question that obsessed waning antiquity: “How can one give up so many gods for only one?”—except the sacrifice asked of us is inferior, on the level of opinions rather than gods. Directly a divinity or a doctrine makes claims to supremacy freedom is menaced. If one assigns supreme value to tolerance, any attack on it should be considered a crime, starting with those campaigns of conversion the Church is a past master at organizing. If, moreover, the latter presented a distortedly grave picture of the persecutions it suffered, and ludicrously padded the number of its martyrs, it was because, having been so long an instrument of oppression, it had to hide its heinous crimes beneath noble pretexts; by letting pernicious doctrines go unpunished, wouldn’t it have betrayed those who sacrificed themselves in its name? Thus, in a spirit of fidelity, it proceeded to liquidate those who “strayed” and, having been persecuted for four centuries, persecuted for fourteen. That is the secret, the miracle of its everlasting life. Never have martyrs been avenged more zealously and systematically.

The advent of Christianity having coincided with that of the Empire, certain Fathers (Eusebius among others) held that this coincidence had a deeper meaning: one God—one Emperor. In reality, the abolition of national barriers made it possible to move freely through a vast territory without frontiers, allowing Christianity to infiltrate the State and rage across it. Had it not been able to spread with such ease, it would have remained a mere dissident sect within the confines of Judaism instead of becoming an invading religion, and, what is still more onerous, a propagandistic one. It stopped at nothing to recruit, to assert itself, and to range abroad, even holding funerals in the daytime, a display offensive to pagans as well as to the Olympian gods. Julian observes that, according to the law-makers of old, “life and death differing in every respect, acts appropriate to one or the other should be segregated.” This segregation the Christians, given their
rabid proselytism, were not prepared to observe: they knew very
well how useful the cadaver was, what advantages could be drawn
from it. Not that paganism conjured death away, but it was care-
ful not to make a spectacle of it. It held, as a fundamental tenet,
that death is not consonant with broad daylight, that it is an in-
sult to light; it belonged to night and the nether gods. The
Galileans covered everything with sepulchres, said Julian, who
never refers to Jesus by any other name than “the dead one.” For
pagans worthy of the name, the new superstition could only seem
an exploitation, a capitalizing on the ghastly, so that they must
have found the inroads it was making on every level of society all
the more deplorable. What Celsus couldn’t have known, but what
Julian knew perfectly well, was that Christianity had camp fol-
lowers who, unable to subscribe to it wholeheartedly, tried none-
theless to follow along, afraid of being excluded from the “future”
if they stayed behind. Out of opportunism or out of fear of
loneliness, they wanted to walk alongside these men “born yes-
terday” but on the verge of being summoned to assume the role
of masters, of torturers.

However legitimate Julian’s passion for the defunct gods, he
didn’t stand a chance of resuscitating them. Rather than bend
himself to such a futile task, he would have done better to join
forces, in rage, with the Manicheans and together with them un-
dermine the Church. Thus, sacrificing his ideal, he would at least
have satisfied his rancor. Vengeance was his only remaining
 trump card. A magnificent career as a spoiler lay before him, and
he might have realized it had his eyes not been veiled with nos-
talgia for Olympus. One doesn’t wage wars in the name of regret.
It’s true he died young, after a reign of barely two years; if only he
had had ten or twenty to avail himself of, what a service he could
have rendered us! He wouldn’t have suppressed Christianity, but
he would have forced it to behave more humbly. We would be less
vulnerable, not disporting ourselves as if we were the center of
the universe, as if everything, even God, revolved about us. We
have never been saddled with a more dangerous bit of flattery than
the Incarnation. It granted us exorbitant status out of all pro-
portion to what we are. By giving the human anecdote the dignity of a cosmic drama, it fooled us about our insignificance, it shoved us into illusion, into that morbid optimism which, flying in the face of evidence, pictures our trudging along as apotheosis. Antiquity, being more reflective, put man in his place. When Tacitus wonders whether events are governed by eternal laws or whether they unfold haphazardly, he doesn’t really supply an answer, he leaves the question hanging in mid-air, and this indecision nicely expresses a feeling prevalent among the ancients. More than anyone, the historian, faced with that mixture of constants and variables making up the historical process, is naturally compelled to sway between determinism and contingency, between laws and caprice, between Physics and Fortune. There is scarcely a misfortune we could not ascribe, as we choose, either to a lapse of providence, or to the indifference of chance, or else to the inflexibility of fate. This trinity, so convenient anybody can use it, especially the undeceived mind, is the most consoling thing pagan wisdom has to offer. Moderns loathe having recourse to it, just as they loathe the idea, specifically ancient, which holds that good things and evil amount to a fixed sum nothing can modify. Obsessed with progress and regression, we implicitly admit that evil changes, either diminishing or increasing. The idea of a world identical with itself, condemned to be what it is, its attributes fixed for all time, this lovely idea no longer has currency; that’s just it, the future, an object of hope or of loathing, is our true abode—we live in it, it is everything for us. The obsession with coming events, which is essentially Christian, by reducing time to the concept of the imminent and the possible, makes us unfit to conceive an immobile moment reposing within itself, spared from the scourge of succession. So unsuited are we to a static vision that waiting, even when devoid of all content, is a void that fulfills us, an anxiety that reassures us. “God has no need to correct his work”—this opinion of Celsus’, which is that of an entire civilization, runs against our grain, our instincts, our very being. We are able to ratify it only in a singular mood, during a fit of wisdom. It even runs counter to what the believer thinks, for the thing religious circles, more than others, reproach God for is his self-satisfaction, his indifference to the quality of his work and his refusal to smooth out its irregularities. We will pay any price
for a little *future*. Belief in the Last Judgment laid the ideological groundwork for belief in the *meaning* of history; more than that, the whole philosophy of history is just a by-product of the idea of a Last Judgment. It's useless for us to lean toward this cyclical theory or that, all we can manage is an abstract adherence; in fact we behave as if history unfolded along a straight line, as if the various civilizations that followed one another were part of a grand design whose name varies according to our beliefs and ideologies, steps it takes toward its assertion and fulfilment.

If false gods no longer exist for us, what better proof have we that our faith is anemic? It is difficult to see how, for a believer, the god to whom he prays and some totally different god could be equally legitimate. Faith is exclusion, a challenging. Because it can no longer detest the other religions, because it understands them, Christianity is through; it shows an increasing lack of that vitality which gave rise to intolerance. Yet intolerance was its very backbone. Much to its misfortune, it has ceased to be monstrous. Like declining polytheism, it is beset, paralyzed by an excessively open mind. Its god has no more prestige in our eyes than did Jupiter for the played-out pagans.

What does all this chatter about "the death of God" amount to if not proof of Christianity's demise? One dare not openly attack religion, so one takes it out on the foreman, whom one criticizes for being behind the times, timid, moderate. A god who has squandered his stock of cruelty is no longer feared or respected by anyone. We bear the stamp of all those centuries in which believing in him meant fearing him, in which our fright imagined him at once commiserating and unscrupulous. Whom would he intimidate now, with believers themselves feeling that he is outmoded, that he can no longer be reconciled with the present, let alone the future? And just as paganism had to make way for Christianity, so the latter will have to bow before some new belief; stripped of its aggressiveness, it no longer presents an obstacle to the uprising of new gods; all they have to do is rise up, and perhaps they will. It's unlikely they will have the face or even the mask of the old gods, but they will be formidable nonetheless.
For the person who finds freedom the equivalent of vertigo, a faith, whatever its origin, even if it were anti-religious, is a salutary fetter, a wished-for, dreamed-of chain whose purpose it would be to restrain curiosity and fever, to allay the anguish of the indefinite. When this faith wins out and ensconces itself, what results immediately is a reduction in the number of problems one must contend with, and along with this, an almost tragic diminution of alternatives. The burden of choice is lifted; your choices are made for you. This is precisely why refined pagans allowed themselves to be seduced by the new religion: they were counting on it to opt for them, to give them directions so they would no longer have to hesitate on the threshold of so many temples, nor fumble among so many gods. The religious effervescence without credo characterizing every alexandrian era ends with lassitude, with a repudiation of the mind’s wanderings. The co-existence of truths is denounced because, no longer satisfied with the little each offers, one aspires to the whole, but a limited, circumscribed, guaranteed whole, so great is man’s fear of falling from the universal into the uncertain, from the uncertain into the precarious and amorphous. The tumble paganism took in its time Christianity is now taking. It is collapsing, it is dying to collapse, which makes it tolerable to unbelievers, more and more disposed in its favor. Even after paganism had been conquered, the Christians continued to abominate it; they were maniacs incapable of forgetting, whereas today everyone has forgiven Christianity. Already in the eighteenth century, every argument against it had been exhausted. Like a poison that has lost its efficacy, it can no longer save or damn anybody. But it overturned too many gods not, in all fairness, to suffer the very fate it reserved for them. The hour of their revenge has tolled. They must be overjoyed to see their worst enemy brought as low as they, since it accepts them all without exception. In its heyday it razed temples and raped consciences wherever it cared to show up. A new god, though crucified a thousand times over, doesn’t know what pity is, smashes everything in his way, is dead set on occupying as much space as possible. Thus he makes us pay dearly for not having recognized him earlier. So long as he was obscure he might possess a certain charm: we hadn’t yet detected in him the stigmata of victory.

A religion is never more “noble” than when it gets to the stage
of seeing itself as a superstition and, standing beside itself, wit-
nesses its own undoing. Christianity took shape and flowered in
hatred of everything that was not itself; this hatred sustained it
throughout its career; now that the career is finished, so is the
hatred. Christ will not descend again into Hell: he has been put
back into his grave and this time he will stay there. It’s unlikely he
will ever rise from it again; he no longer has a soul to deliver,
either above ground or beneath. Just thinking of the excesses that
accompanied his advent, one can’t help but evoke Rutilius Nam-
atianus, the last pagan poet, exclaiming: “Would to heaven that
Judea had never been conquered!”

Since it has now been admitted that the gods are indiscrimi-
nately true, why stop mid-way, why not extol them all? That would
be the Church’s supreme accomplishment: it would perish while
bowing before its victims. . . . There are signs that it feels tempted
to do just that. Thus, following the example of the ancient tem-
ples, it would make it a point of honor to collect divinities,
wrecks from all over. But, once again, the true god must efface
himself before all the others can spring back to life.

[Translated by Frederick Brown]