

Józef Grzywaczewski

Christianity of Gaul According to Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430-486)

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Ks. JÓZEF GRZYWACZEWSKI
Séminaire Polonais de Paris

CHRISTIANITY OF GAUL
ACCORDING TO SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS (C. 430–486)

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Christianization is a very long process. It started in Israel and was continued especially in the Roman Empire. Gaul belonged to those parts of the Empire where the Christian faith was proclaimed and accepted quite early. During the first five centuries a great part of the Gallic population became Christian. The Vth century is considered as a special period in the history of the Empire. It was the time of barbarian invasions and of the fall of Rome (476). This event had a considerable influence on the Evangelization of many countries and of Gaul, among others. There are several authors who lived in this period and wrote about it. One of them is Sidonius Apollinaris.

He was born in Auvergne c. 430 in a senatorial family. His father was the prefect of Gaul. After some studies in Lyon and Arles, he married Papianilla, a daughter of Avitus, and began his career as a poet and senator in the Roman time and finished as Bishop of Clermont. He is considered as “one of the last representatives of classical culture”¹ who entered the new era. The scholars are not unanimous about his literary qualities. Some of them, like C.E. Stevens consider him “as a writer who pursuits the cult of antithesis and paranomasia farther than one would have believed it possible”². A. Loyen, the editor and

¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford 1997, p. 1498.

² J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and Fall of Rome AD 407–485*, Oxford 1994, p. 1.

translator of his works in French, does not share in this opinion. He finds his style heavy and sometimes ridiculous, because it is a combination of Asian and Alexandrian style³. Most of those who study his writings probably agree with the statement of Harries: “For the modern reader who approaches Sidonius unawares, he is a difficult author. A considerable work remains to be done on purely literary aspects of his works, but, for the historian, some analysis is required of what may be termed the political aspects of Sidonius’ literary technique [...]. In his existent work, Sidonius placed himself firmly in the classical tradition, a tradition which he valued as a continuing assertion of *Romanitas* but which was nevertheless compatible with his sincere Christianity”⁴.

In his writings, he presents the antic world in its splendour, the fall of Rome, the invasion of Gaul by the Goths and the beginning of the new era, the Christianization of the Roman population and of the Latin culture⁵. The transition from the old Roman tradition to the Church is symbolized by the life of Sidonius himself.

1. Sidonius’s transition from public functions to the service of the Church

Sidonius as most of the young men belonging to the aristocracy was attached to the public activity. He went from Gaul to Rome, entered the service of Avitus (456). After his dethronement he started to work for Maiorianus (458). Later, his successor Anthemius named him prefect of Rome (461). But this was a time of trouble, the Roman Empire was going to be ruined (476). Finally he gave up his secular responsibilities, came back to Gaul (469) and became a bishop (c. 471). In the historical sources there is no information about the circumstances of his bishop election. At that time there were many persons of high rank who moved from public functions to the service of the Church⁶. As we know from historical sources, “the episcopate was not an

³ Sidoine Apollinaire, *Correspondance*, t. 2, *Introd.*, transl. A. Loyen, Paris 2003, p. XLV: “Ce dernier genre de style, hybride dans son appellation même, unit dans une même phrase les recherches de deux écoles, opposées à l’origine, l’asianisme, ami de l’ampleur, et l’alexandrinisme, ami du détail piquant, de la recherche et de l’élégance. Ce mélange, qui est assurément un indice de décadence, aboutit chez Sidoine à un style qui a tous les caractères de la préciosité, souvent alerte et plaisant, mais parfois alourdi par le pédantisme d’école le plus détestable. Le lecteur trouvera donc ci-dessous des exemples nombreux de préciosité ridicule, d’un mauvais goût”.

⁴ J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 2.

⁵ Bibliography of Sidonius, see J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 252–277; Sydoniusz Apollinarius, *Listy i wiersze*, tłum. M. Brożek, Kraków 2004, s. XVII–XXX (by M. Starowiejski).

⁶ Sidoine Apollinaire, *Poèmes*, t. 1, *Introd.* A. Loyen, Paris 2003, p. XXIII: “Cette vocation nouvelle coïncide, pour la date avec le début de l’invasion d’Euric, qui enleva aux provinces gauloises du sud la liberté et la douceur de vivre. Cette coïncidence n’est pas fortuite. D’autres aristocrates, parents ou amis de Sidoine, Agricola, son beau-frère, Félix, préfet honoraire, patrice et fils de consul, Ferréolus,

obvious option for retired prefects. Bishops in Gaul in the fifth century and earlier were drawn from men who could be loosely described as *domini nobiles* and who, or whose families, were leaders in their local communities. The assumption that the presence in Gallic cities of bishops drawn from closely connected families establishes the presence of something that Sidonius, *vir illustris*, would have recognized as an *aristocratic episcopate* fails to take account of social distinctions which were central to his thinking⁷. Generally, “all people in the Roman Empire saw an individual’s position determined for life by membership in a kinship group”⁸.

The historians point out that the number of bishops from senatorial families was bigger in Gaul than in other countries⁹.

Sidonius was aware that the bishop ministry was a burden that he accepted without preparation. He wrote to his uncle Apollinaris: “My own mind has been depressed by the weight of a troubled conscience; a violent fever brought me almost to death’s door. As you know, the cares of an august profession have been imposed on me (*tantae professionis pondus*), unworthy (*miser*) though I am of such an honour. And it has been misery to me to have to teach what I have never myself learned, and to preach goodness before practising it; like a barren tree, I bear no fruit of good works, but scatter idle words like leaves”¹⁰. He asked Fauste of Riez, former monk who also became a bishop, to pray for him: “How much better it would be for you to give the benefit of your unremitting orisons to a soul conscious of its guilt and trembling as often as it recalls the debts of a sinful career! For you are versed in the prayers of the Island brotherhood, which you transferred from the wrestling-place of the hermit congregation, and from the assembly of the monks of Lerins, to the city over whose church you preside, for all your Episcopal rank, an abbot still in

petit-fils, par sa mère, du consul Afranius Syagrius et le plus en vue des sénateurs gallo-romains, entrent dans les ordres vers la même époque [...]. Devant la menace germanique, l’Eglise offrait en effet le seul refuge à qui ne voulait pas s’exiler et de ses dignités comme le seul moyen pratique de se dévouer encore au bien public. Sidoine est donc allé de l’état de laïc à celui de clerc, poussé par les événements et non pas, comme saint Augustin, à la suite d’une de ses soudaines révélations”.

⁷ J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 170.

⁸ B.J. Malina, *Social Levels and Daily Life*, in: P.F. Esler (ed.), *The Early Christian World*, London 2000, vol. 1, p. 378.

⁹ L. Pietri, *Le sort des Eglises de l’extrême Occident*, B. *La Gaule*, in: J.-M. Mayeur, Ch. et L. Pietri, A. Vauchez, M. Venard (ed.), *Histoire du christianisme*, vol. 3, Desclée, Paris 1998, p. 216: “La charge épiscopale se trouve donc la seule fonction susceptible de conférer, dans des circonscriptions ecclésiastiques calquées sur la géographie civile, une autorité à son titulaire, alors que les postes de l’administration impériale se réduisent en nombre, puis disparaissent totalement. Cette situation a pour résultat une politisation grandissante des élections ecclésiastiques et pour corollaire une entrée massive – sans commune mesure avec les autres provinces de l’Occident – des membres de familles sénatoriales ou curiales dans le collège épiscopal gaulois”.

¹⁰ *The Letters of Sidonius*, translated, with introduction and notes by Ormonde M. Dalton, vol. 2, Oxford, 1915, V, 3, 3.

spirit, and refusing to make your new dignity a pretext for any relaxation in the rigour of the ancient discipline. Obtain for me, then, by your most potent intercession that my portion may be in the Lord; that enrolled from henceforth among the companies of my tribesmen the Levites, I may cease to be of the earth earthly, I to whom not a yard of earth remains; and that I may begin to estrange myself from the guilt of this world, as I am already estranged from its riches”¹¹. In a similar way he asked bishop Fonteius to pray for him¹².

Such a humility was typical of antic writers, but Sidonius was aware indeed of his faults committed in the world and of his responsibility in the Church. As far as we know, he started to live and work according to his new vocation, but he has never studied theology. In his correspondence, he made just a few references to the Bible. For having spoken about his dignity without enthusiasm, some historians suppose that “Sidonius became a bishop under some duress”¹³. He would have probably never entered the service of the Church, if he could continue his political career as prefect or senator. After the collapsing of the Empire, he wanted to serve his country as well as it was possible in that situation: “His consecration as bishop was a continuation of the aristocratic obligation of public service, allowing him to assist a city he loved which was under growing threat from the Goths, and to express in a new way his long-standing piety as Christian”¹⁴.

In the Antiquity there were no seminaries, no other schools to prepare candidates for priesthood (or for episcopacy). It is known that “the sixth-century Gallic episcopacy contained within its ranks three distinct groups of men. The first group comprised those who had come to the episcopacy from a monastic background; the tradition of the monk-bishop, nurtured in the fifth century by the monastery of Lérins, was still strong, particularly in southern Gaul. The second group consisted of men who, although celibate, were not monks. The third group was composed of married clerics who at the time of ordination had taken a vow of sexual continence”¹⁵. Those three groups existed already in the Vth century.

Sidonius, as other bishops who were married before, had to resign to the marital life; he remained in touch with his family; he conserved in his collection some letters to his son Apollinaris¹⁶, and to his wife Papianilla. When her

¹¹ *The Letters*, IX, 3, 4

¹² *The Letters*, VI, 7, 1: “I will add that the title of bishop imposed on my extreme unworthiness compels me to seek the covert of your intercession, that the gaping wounds of a seared conscience may at least be closed by your healing prayers”.

¹³ J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 172.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

¹⁵ B. Brennan, “*Episcopae*”: *Bishops’ Wives Viewed in Sixth Century Gaul*, *Church History* 54 (1985), p. 311.

¹⁶ *The Letters*, IV, 6; IV, 12.

brother Ecdicius was named patrician (*honor patricius accedit*), he sent her a letter with congratulations: “Knowing your affectionate nature, I am convinced that even in the very midst of our adversities this news will bring great consolation, and that not even the imminent dread of siege will divert your mind from the path of a joy common to us all. For I am sure you were never quite so gratified by any of my own honours, in which you legally shared; good wife as you have always been, you are the best sister that man ever had”¹⁷.

This is a very interesting statement. At that time, the wife of a man who became a bishop shared *legally* in his honour, but not always with her heart. In fact, such a woman *lost* her husband and had to remain alone, perhaps with her children. According to the Church law, “the wife of a cleric was, after his husband’s ordination, to be treated by him like a sister, but there was never any suggestion that the marriage itself was dissolved”¹⁸.

The theologians of the early Church have always pointed out the importance of chastity. The synod of Elvira (c. 314) has imposed the celibacy as an obligation (can. 33) in the local Church of Spain. “In the West local councils of the fifth and sixth centuries continued to legislate on the subject of the marital status of the clergy. The usual canons for admittance to that state required married men to practice continence and unmarried candidates to pledge they would never contract matrimony. The number of married bishops continued to decline”¹⁹.

Pope Leo the Great (†461) gave regulations concerning the bishops and priests who were married before ordination: “In order that their wedlock may become spiritual instead of carnal, it behoves them not to put away their wives but to ‘have them as though they had them not’ (1 Cor 7,29), whereby both the affection of their wives may be retained and the marriage functions cease”²⁰. Sidonius, as we can notice in his letter, had affection for his family: wife and children. He was conscious that the marriage was still valid, he pointed out that Papianilla who was before a very good wife now became a very good sister. In the same letter he mentioned their children (*nostris liberis*) and especially their daughter Roscia whom he calls “our joint care” (*cura communis*).

As we can imagine, not everybody was satisfied with Sidonius as the bishop of Clermont. According to Gregory of Tours, there were two priests who decided to attack him in the night²¹.

¹⁷ Ibidem, V, 16, 3.

¹⁸ B. Brennan, “*Episcopae*”: *Bishops’ Wives*, p. 314.

¹⁹ Ch.A. Frazee, *The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church*, Church History 57 (1988), p. 117.

²⁰ Pope Leo the Great, *Letters*, CLXVII, reply 3, transl. Ch.L. Feltoe, in: Ph. Schaff & H. Wage (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 12, Peabody, Massachusetts 1999, p. 110.

²¹ Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, transl. R. Latouche, Paris 1999, II, 23.

Sidonius, after his entering into the service of the Church, renounced to the classic poetry. In one of his letters, he said with nostalgia: “At the very outset of my religious career (*religiosa professio*), the art of versifying was the first thing that I renounced; gravity of deed was now my business, and if I occupied myself with such frivolous things as verses, I might well be accused of levity”²². He was convinced that such a poetry was not suitable for him because of his ecclesiastical function. He found himself obliged to deal with Christian matters:

“My earlier life might not improperly find time for such pursuits, and in fact it did so. But now I only read and write of serious things (*tempus est seria legi et seria scribi*), for now it is high time to think rather of eternal life than of posthumous renown, and to remember that after death our good works, and not our literary work, will be weighed in the balance”²³.

As we know, he worked for the Church as a pastor, visited parishes of his diocese²⁴, confronted the Arian heresy²⁵, even if it was difficult, because the Arians were supported by the Goths²⁶. He did not become a Christian writer, he was not able to explain theological questions, he did not publish any collection of homilies or Biblical commentaries²⁷. His pastoral duty was to preach. In the letter to bishop Perpetuus, he gave the text of one of his sermons²⁸. As a former rethor, he was properly prepared to pronounce speeches. As a Christian, he had a general knowledge of the Christian faith. So, he was able to proclaim the Christian message to the people. As a new bishop, he introduced in his diocese a kind of prayer called *Rogationes* which were progressively accepted in other parts of Gaul²⁹. Some friends asked him to write the history of that time. He started to write a book about the wars of Attila, but finally he renounced to such a work³⁰. The subject was painful and dangerous. In one of his letters he confessed: “History is the last field in which I should now pursue fame [...] we write what is untrue to our disgrace, and what is true at our peril (*turpiter falsa, vera peruculose dicuntur*)”³¹. Indeed, the publications might

²² *The Letters*, IX, 12, 1.

²³ *Ibidem*, VIII, 4, 3.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, IX, 16, 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, VII, 6, 2.

²⁶ M. Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries*, Oxford 1996, p. 40–51.

²⁷ *The Letters*, IX, 2, 1–3.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, VII, 9, 5–7.

²⁹ E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine, part II: L'Eglise des Gaules au Vème siècle*, Paris 1966, p. 87: “Les Rogations, récemment établies dans la région, étaient de solennelles supplications où l'on demandait à Dieu d'écarter la maladie, la guerre et les intempéries qui, comme la sécheresse et la grêle, causaient les plus grands dommages aux récoltes”. See J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 191.

³⁰ *The Letters*, VIII, 15, 1.

³¹ *Ibidem*, IV, 22, 5.

have been controlled by the barbarian authorities, especially if the subject concerned politics.

2. Attitude of the civil authorities towards the Christian religion

Since the time of emperor Constantine, the relations between the Church and the Roman State were generally positive. The society was gradually Christianized: the civil authorities promoted the construction of churches, in 321 the observance of Sunday as a day of rest was introduced³². The influence of the Christian doctrine on the system of law was evident, as we can see it in the Theodosian Code, especially in the Book VI³³. There were some tensions and conflicts between bishops and emperors (bishop Ambrose and Theodosius)³⁴. The Arian controversies disturbed a lot the relations between the Church and the State³⁵.

The situation was not the same in the East and the West : “The Byzantine attitude (known as Caesaro-Papism) allowed the emperor to arrogate to himself ecclesiastical authority. It is best summed up in an extract from the Code of Justinian I, *Corpus iuris civilis*, vol. III, novella 6, 17 April 535). In the West matters took a different course. The Roman See had always enjoined much more independence *vis-à-vis* the imperial authority, while the conquest of Western Europe by the Germanic barbarian invaders wiped out the conception of a centralised State as Rome had known it”³⁶.

The conception of a *Christian State* was destroyed during the Germanic invasions: “Provinces relapsed into endemic disorder and confusion, their traditional administration submerged or adrift; social rebellion and banditry were rife over large areas; archaic and buried cultures surfaced, as the Roman patina cracked in remoter regions. In the first half of the Vth century, the imperial order was laid waste by the inrush of barbarians throughout the West”³⁷.

³² N. Davies, *Europe*, London 1997, p. 209. There is also a Polish edition of this work: N. Davies, *Rozprawy historyka z historią*, transl. E. Tabakowska, Kraków 1998.

³³ M. Vidal, *Réflexions ecclésiologiques*, in: E. Magnou-Nortier (ed.), *Le Code Théodosien*, Paris 2002, p. 68: “L’Empire romain vient de changer pour la religion chrétienne la religion de l’Empire”.

³⁴ I. Davidson, *Ambrose*, in: Ph.F. Esler (ed.), *The Early Christian Church*, London 2000, vol. 2, p. 1190–1196; J. Grzywaczewski, *Recepcja św. Ambrożego w Kościele wschodnim*, *Vox Patrum* 34–35 (1998), s. 227–256.

³⁵ Ch. Pietri, *De la partitio de l’Empire chrétien à l’unité sous Constance: la querelle arienne et le premier césaropapisme*, in: J.-M. Mayeur, Ch. et L. Pietri, A. Vauchez, M. Venard (ed.), *Histoire du christianisme*, vol. 2, p. 289–335.

³⁶ S.Z. Ehler, J.B. Morral (ed.), *Church and State through the Centuries. A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries*, New York 1969, p. 2.

³⁷ P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, London 1974, p. 112.

The south of Gaul was destroyed in 472 by Euric the king of the Visigoths. After the invasion, Sidonius wrote to bishop Basil:

“The Gothic king in breaking and bearing down an ancient treaty to defend, or rather extend by armed force the frontiers of his kingdom [...]. They say that the mere mention of the name of Catholic so embitters his countenance and heart that one might take him for the chief priest of his Arian sect rather than for the monarch of his nation [...]. For these reasons I would have you consider the secret malady of the Catholic Church that you may hasten to apply an open remedy. Bordeaux, Périgueux, Rodez, Limoges, Javols, Eauze, Bazas, Comminges, Auch, and many another cities are all like bodies which have lost their heads through the death of their respective bishops. No successors have been appointed to fill their places, and maintain the ministry in the lower orders of the Church; the boundaries of spiritual desolation are extended far and wide. Every day the ruin spreads by the death of more fathers in God; so pitiful is her state, that the very heresiarchs of former times, to say nothing of contemporary heretics, might well have looked with pity on people orphaned of their pontiffs and oppressed by desperation at this catastrophe of their faith. Diocese and parish lie waste without ministers. You may see the rotten roofs of churches fallen in, the doors unhinged and blocked by growing brambles. More grievous still, you may see the cattle not only lying in the half-ruined porticoes, but grazing beside altars green with weeds. And this desolation is not found in country parishes alone; even the congregations of urban churches begin to fall away”³⁸.

This is an horrible image. As far as we know, this report of Sidonius is not exaggerated. Gregory of Tours noted the atrocity of this invasion of Gaul in his book *Historia Francorum* and made references to the letters of Sidonius³⁹. The attack described by Sidonius was due to the general disorder of that time. Every barbarian tribe wanted to conquer a part of the Roman territory. From the point of view of Euric, there was no sense to keep the alliance (*foedus*) with Rome, invaded by the barbarians, destroyed by battles, emerged in political conflicts. The religion was not without importance; the population of Gaul was Catholic; the invaders were Arian.

Sidonius says that Euric was acting not as the monarch of his nation but rather as a chief priest of his Arian sect. During this invasion many churches were destroyed and many people were killed. The king was probably not

³⁸ *The Letters*, VII, 6, 4-8. Comp. *The Letters*, VI, 12, 5; VII, 10, 1.

³⁹ Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, transl. R. Latouche, Paris 1999, II, 25, s. 114: “En ce temps Euric, roi des Goths, franchissait la frontière hispanique, déchaîna dans les Gaules une grave persécution contre les Chrétiens. Il décapitait instinctivement ceux qui n’adhéraient pas à ses idées perverses; il conduisait en prison les clercs; quant aux évêques, il les exilait les uns et égorgeait les autres [...]. Il subsiste encore aujourd’hui sur ce sujet une lettre du susdit Sidoine à Basilius évêque”.

always able to keep his knights under discipline; we can suppose that during the war they could attack people spontaneously without a special order.

Sidonius as bishop of Clermont became the head of the resistance against the Euric's invasion in the district of Clermont. There were Roman citizens who passed to Euric with the conviction that there was no sense to fight for Rome. The efforts of the despaired patriots like Sidonius finished in 475 by capitulation⁴⁰.

Euric, after having taken the power over the south of Gaul, did not punish Clermont for the resistance; the city was not destroyed, its inhabitants were not exterminated. Sidonius was not killed, but only exiled in the castle of Livia in Carcassone. At the banishment place he did not suffer any bad treating; he could compose poems, he was allowed remain in touch with his friends, he had the possibility to work on the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*⁴¹. After receiving a letter from Lampridius, he wrote to him: "You must see whether the theme of my verses is such as to please you; but my cares forbid me to live in one mood and write in another. It would be unfair to me were you to institute a comparison between our two poems. I am harassed; you are happy. I am in exile; you enjoy your rights of citizenship. I cannot attain your level; I want of you verse like my own, but receive something infinitely better"⁴². He did not mention any study on theology.

After the war, as we know from historical sources, it was possible to restore the ecclesiastical buildings⁴³. Sidonius could leave the place of isolation in Bordeaux and Toulouse, and return to his diocese to continue his pastoral activity.

Later, after having established their administration in Gaul, the Visigoths did not manifest any hostility to the ordinary people with Roman origin or Celtic origin. Surely, there were some cases of aggression, but generally they tried to keep the old way of living: the Latin as an official language and the old Roman administration system.

The territory of the old Roman Empire was divided in several kingdoms (*regna*). About the year 480, the first system of barbarian states was established on the former Roman soil: the Burgundians in Savoy, the Visigoths in Aquitaine, the Vandals in North Africa and the Ostrogoths in the North of Italy.

⁴⁰ Sidoine Apollinaire, *Poèmes, Introd.* A. Loyen, p. XXV: "Nous voyons alors Sidoine remplir, avec honneur, un véritable rôle de gouverneur de province. Patriote déterminé, il semble avoir été l'âme de la résistance [...]. L'année suivante (475), il fallut céder [...]. L'Auvergne est livrée à Euric. La fiction du *foedus* est abandonnée, la souveraineté du Wisigoth reconnue. Sidoine, indigné et désespéré, n'est plus que le sujet d'un roi barbare".

⁴¹ *The Letters*, VIII, 3, 1. Scholars are not sure what kind of work it was: a translation from Greek or a preparation of a new version in Latin. See Sidoine Apollinaire, *Correspondence*, vol. 3 (Livres VI–IX), note 5, p. 196.

⁴² *The Letters*, VIII, 9, 3.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, IV, 15, 1–2.

The people were shocked. The intellectuals of that time were not able to explain such a disaster: “The decline of Rome, the collapse of structure, of law and order as well as the distrust of the immoral Eastern Empire left western Europe bereft of political cohesion. As the Vth century dawned, it seemed that God indeed had withdrawn his Grace as Europe was wracked by war, the status quo was shattered, and the civilization that had existed for a millennium was on the brink of extinction. It was only through strong, charismatic, and brilliant leadership and command that power structures managed to retain and build upon the fallen remnants of Roman rule”⁴⁴.

Some catholic scholars like Salvianus of Marseille tried to give a theological interpretation of this situation: the barbarian invasions should be understood as a punishment of God for the sins and weaknesses of the Christians⁴⁵. New people were coming to the Roman empire to be alighted by the Gospel; even if they came as invaders, they could be attracted to God for their salvation⁴⁶.

In the collection of Conferences (*Collationes*) by John Cassianus there is an anonymous letter, written after the fall of the Roman Empire, in which we find a positive presentation of the situation in Marseille ruled by the barbarians⁴⁷. The Catholics were not disturbed in confessing their religion⁴⁸. The

⁴⁴ T.L. Gore, *Neglected Heroes: Leadership and War in the Early Medieval Period*, Westport, CT, 1995, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Salvien de Marseille, *Ad Ecclesiam*, I, 1: “Aujourd’hui, c’est l’avarice, la cupidité, l’esprit de rapine, la haine, la cruauté, la luxure, la débauche, la trahison?” (quotation from E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l’époque romaine, part II: L’Eglise des Gaules...*, p. 43). The same author: “Quels sont les hommes puissants et riches qui ne traînent leur vie dans la fange du vice? Quel est celui qui ne s’est pas plongé dans le gouffre des immondices? Quel est celui qui a gardé la fidélité conjugale” (*De gubernatione Dei*, VII, 3; quoted from E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l’époque romaine, part II: L’Eglise des Gaules*, p. 47).

⁴⁶ O. Boulnois, *L’Empire ébranlé*, in: J. Duchesne (ed.), *Histoire chrétienne de la littérature*, Flammarion 1996, p. 195–196: “Salvien de Marseille, dans son traité *Sur le gouvernement divin*, répond aux doutes des chrétiens devant la déroute de l’Empire. Dieu n’abandonne pas l’Empire devenu chrétien. La ruine de l’Empire est le juste châtement de Dieu; les chrétiens ne sont vaincus que par leur vices (avarices, l’injustice sociale, les exactions fiscales). Dieu n’est pas contraint de donner à Rome la victoire. Au contraire, par cette crise, les Barbares eux-mêmes sont conduits au salut”.

⁴⁷ *Les Collations de Jean Cassien ou l’unité des sources*, textes choisis et présentés par J.-Y. Leloup, Paris 1992, Prologue, p. 8: “Quand j’établis un acte officiel je ne sais plus comment le dater: tiens! Cette lettre j’aurais envie de la dater de l’an 12 de l’empereur Romulus. Ce serait de la naïveté et peut-être de l’impudence car les Wisigoths qui nous dominent pourraient m’accuser de complot! Cependant à Massilia ne nous plaignons pas trop. Ils sont entrés en conquérants dans notre cité il y a neuf ans mais ils la respectent. Ils y ont trouvé un port précieux pour eux, le plus grand port de notre mer occidentale; quel avantage pour leurs relations et approvisionnement. La vie n’a pas beaucoup changé. Mais il semble se manifester un certain ralentissement. Quelle époque brillante nous avons vécue!”.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*: “Ceux qui passent aujourd’hui à Massilia voient avec admiration notre merveilleux baptistère, il est le plus grand des régions des Gaules. C’est qu’il y a eu affluence de candidats au baptême [...]. Ils viennent d’être baptisés par les prêtres avec l’aide des diacres et, revêtus de blanc, ils sont conduits devant l’évêque qui leur donne l’onction et les accueille avec tous au banquet pascal, l’Eucharistie [...]. Ces nouveaux chrétiens viennent de Massilia mais aussi de la région environnante. Ils

author rejoices with the great number of candidates for the baptism, he notices a lack of zeal in Christian life of many people, he does not complain about any pressure on the Christians. But as we know from other sources, there were some tensions and even some acts of hostility. Because the Visigoths were Arians, they took some actions against the Catholics and they persecuted especially priests and bishops, knowing that they lead thousands of faithful and keep them in unity and strength.

The Burgundians, who were invaders like the Visigoths, wanted also to be considered as *friendly* by the people of Gaul. According to the historians of this time, the Germanic people had no policy, neither to exterminate the Roman people nor to destroy the Roman heritage. On the contrary, they wanted to share in its benefits⁴⁹. Surely, the barbarians of that time were not as savage as the Germans and Russians in the XXth century.

The attitude of the Francs was more friendly towards the population of Gaul, especially after the conversion of their king Clovis. They learned the Latin language and wanted to continue the Roman traditions⁵⁰. In spite of it, in the territories occupied by them many people were killed and many of them lost their properties. It was due, as under the Visigoths, to the numerous wars and battles among barbarians leaders (*reges, principes*).

3. Christianization of people and of their culture

After the time of battles, the life in Gaul seemed to be stabilized. In the letters of Sidonius, written after his ordination, we find a lot of information about the Christian life at that time. So, we see the people keeping their property, the Christians starting to restore the churches damaged during the war⁵¹.

sont conviés à se réunir chaque dimanche à la célébration de l'Eucharistie et à y communier avec nous tous. Hélas, Il faut reconnaître que la ferveur des néophytes ne se retrouve guère à un haut degré dans l'ensemble de notre peuple chrétien”.

⁴⁹ V. Elisseff, J. Naudou, G. Wiet, Ph. Wolf, *Les grandes civilisations du Moyen Age*, in: R. Laffont (UNESCO) (éd.), *Histoire de l'humanité*, Paris 1969, vol. III, p. 81: “Les Barbares ne manifestaient aucune hostilité aux Romains, ni à leur système politique, ni à leur culture [...]. La coexistence dans la même famille de noms barbares et latins, souligne le rôle des unions mixtes?”.

⁵⁰ H.-I. Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? III^e–IV^e siècle*, Paris 1997, p. 159: “En pénétrant dans ces régions où le christianisme était ainsi inséparable de la latinité, les peuples germaniques déjà convertis – des Wisigoths aux Vandales – perdront la culture nationale qu'ils tenaient de Wulfila et adopteront rapidement une culture chrétienne d'expression latine. Quant aux Germains païens – Anglo-Saxons, Francs, Alamans, etc., leur conversion au christianisme, comme d'autre part, celle des Celtes d'Irlande ou de Grande Bretagne, impliquera tout naturellement une initiation aux lettres latines et, par elle, à une forme de culture savante, fécondée par l'héritage, si appauvri qu'il fût, de la tradition classique”.

⁵¹ *The Letters*, IV, 15, 1-2.

Many schools tried to return to their activities, for example in Tours, Lyon, Clermont, Orleans, Paris, Metz. He mentioned the monasteries in Lerins, in Grigny and in Jura which cultivated their spiritual work⁵². Their role was going to be considerable for the religion and the culture of Gaul⁵³.

In the Vth century Gaul was Christianized in great part. According to the register *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Galliae*, called sometimes *Notitia Galliarum*, there were 114 dioceses⁵⁴; each of them had a system of parishes⁵⁵. During the war several bishops were killed or died. King Euric, knowing the attitude of the Church towards him, did not want to give permission to ordain new bishops. After six years he changed his position⁵⁶. Sidonius was charged to choose a bishop for Burgus, Metropolitan of Aquitaine. There were many candidates properly prepared for the bishop ministry. Sidonius wrote to bishop Perpetuus: "So great was the company of the competitors, that two benches would not have held the candidates for the single vacant throne. And every one of these was as pleased with himself as he was critical of all his rivals [...]. I may freely admit that the multitude surrounding me today includes many of Episcopal ability. But then, all cannot be bishops"⁵⁷. The choice was difficult:

"If we choose one distinguished for humility, he will be called an abject; if, on the other hand, we propose a man with self-respect, he will be set down as arrogant; if our choice be one of small learning, his ignorance will make him fair game; if he be erudite, he will be declared conceited. If he is austere, all will shrink from an inhuman creature; if indulgent, they will blame his lenience. If he is simple, he will be an oaf; if clever, a sly fellow [...]. Does he love a quiet life? He is a coward. If our candidate is abstemious, he becomes a skinflint; if charitable with hospitality, a glutton; if with fasting, one vain of his austerities"⁵⁸.

⁵² Ibidem, IV, 25, 5; VII, 17, 3; VIII, 15, 2; IX, 4, 2.

⁵³ V. Desprez, *Le monachisme primitif. Des origines jusqu'au concile d'Ephèse*, Bellefontaine 1998, p. 504–518; 547–561; P. Riché, *Education et culture dans l'Occident barbare V^e–VIII^e siècle*, Paris 1995, p. 87–103; 239–241.

⁵⁴ E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, part II, p. 113–117; ibidem, p. 112: "La *Notitia Galliarum* correspond bien à l'état de la Gaule vers l'an 400".

⁵⁵ E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, part II, p. 125: "Du moment qu'un évêque se trouvait placé dans chaque cité, il allait de soi que son autorité s'exerçait sur tout le territoire qui dépendait de la ville dont il était le chef spirituel. Le district épiscopal fut donc, en principe, le même que celui de la *civitas*. Pour le désigner, on prit de bonne heure l'habitude de se servir du mot diocèse (*dioecesis*), mais on employa aussi le mot paroisse (*parochia*) qui appartenait depuis longtemps à la langue ecclésiastique".

⁵⁶ E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, part II, p. 84.

⁵⁷ *The Letters*, VII, 9, 1 and 13.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, VII, 9, 10.

Finally, Sidonius has chosen Simplicius, a man from senatorial family, having classical education and experience in diplomatic matters, whose faith had been improved by suffering in prison, married to a woman from high nobility which had intellectual traditions and merits for the Church (*litterarum aut altarium cathedras laude tenuerunt*). He was father of two sons, both very intelligent⁵⁹.

The choice was equally difficult for the election of a bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône (*Cabillonum*) because there were many candidates. After deliberations, a modest priest John (*sacerdos secundi ordinis*) was chosen because of his personal sanctity and his zeal in the pastoral service⁶⁰. The proceeding of bishop election was very complicated, the faithful had an influence on the election, but gradually their role was diminished and the role of the metropolitan and of the bishops of the province became decisive. According to the historians, in the Vth and the VIth centuries, Gaul had a lot of good pastors who were able to work efficiently for the Church and for the country as well⁶¹.

Sidonius, who estimated always people of high education, as a bishop admired persons who were able to combine their classical formation with the knowledge on theological matters. When one of his friends, Claudianus Mammertus, published the book “*De statu animae*”, he sent him a letter with compliments:

“In support of this opinion I have only to mention your new volume on the nature of the Soul, with all its wealth of evidence and mastery of diction [...]. Great God! What a wonderful book it is, and of what authority! Abstruse in subject, in exposition clear as day; in statement serried, expansive in discussion, and though barbed with many a point of syllogism, yet soft with vernal flowers of eloquence!”⁶².

After his death, Sidonius composed an epitaph on him:

“Beneath this sod lies Claudianus [...]. In three fields of learning he was a master and a shining light, the Roman, the Greek, and the Christian [...]. He was orator, logician, poet, commentator, geometer, musician; skilled also to loose the bonds of disputation, and with the sword of the word dissect the sects that harass the Catholic faith. Well was he skilled to chant psalms and lead a choir”⁶³.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, VII, 9, 16-25. See *The Letters*, VII, 5, 1–4.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, V, 25, 3-4.

⁶¹ E. Greffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, part II, p. 216 et 235: “Dès la fin du IV^e siècle, le rôle du métropolitain est devenu tout à fait prépondérant. C'est lui qui convoque les collègues (*comprovinciales*), c'est lui qui préside à l'élection, c'est lui qui consacre l'élu [...]. Dans son ensemble, l'Eglise de Gaules du V^e siècle semble avoir été gouvernée par des hommes de valeur qui ont rempli honorablement leur tâche. Il faut même dire que les évêques vraiment remarquables n'ont pas été rares. L'époque troublée des invasions nous offre une imposante galerie de saints évêques qu'on a vénérés de leur vivants et dont on a gardé pieusement la mémoire après leur mort”.

⁶² *The Letters*, IV, 3, 2.

⁶³ Ibidem, IV, 11, 6.

So, we see a man (a priest) with Roman or Gallic origin who knew how to make synthesis of Roman, Greek and Christian elements (*triplex bibliotheca, romana, attica, christiana*)⁶⁴. He was known for his skill in logic, geometry, and music; he became priest and orator and he devoted himself to the service of the Church and Christian faith. Such a connection of classical learning and Christianity was typical for that time, even if there was always a distance between the Roman and Greek culture⁶⁵. Such persons were appreciated, especially after the fall of the Roman Empire, because during the battles many educated people were killed and many schools were destroyed. At that time the language of communication was still the Latin, but there was a difference between the literary Latin used by the Church and by the aristocrats like Sidonius, and the every day Latin; the ordinary people were not able to speak correctly, they used some Celtic and Germanic words (barbarisms)⁶⁶. Rhetors and other teachers were considered by the old Roman population as defenders of the pure language and Roman culture⁶⁷.

Sidonius himself was not a philosopher, but he appreciated the role of philosophy in Christianity. He wrote to Faustus of Riez:

“The philosophy [...] in the Athenaeum she was with you and in the monastery; with you she abjured the wisdom of the world and proclaims that is from above. Whoever provokes you as her lawful spouse shall soon perceive the noble range of your philosophy, and find himself confronted by the Platonic Academy (fighting for) the Church of Christ. He shall hear you first declare the ineffable omniscience of God and the eternity of the Holy Spirit”⁶⁸.

This statement seems to be very important. It means that the Greek philosophy (perhaps not only Platonic) has been taken to the service of the Church,

⁶⁴ H.I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité*, Parution 1948, p. 132–133: “Déplorable ou providentiel, le fait est là: né dans la Palestine hellénistique, le christianisme s'est développé, a pris sa forme au sein de la civilisation gréco-romaine et en a reçu une empreinte ineffaçable [...]. Rien ne montre mieux la profondeur de la synthèse réalisée au bout de quatre siècles, entre christianisme et hellénisme que l'examen des cultures chrétiennes apparues dans les pays barbares”.

⁶⁵ P. Veyne, *L'empire Graeco-Romain*, Paris 2005, p. 164: “En pleine IV^e et dernier siècle de l'Empire, les Hellènes continuaient à dire: ‘Vous, Romains; nous, Grecs’. Comme ils le faisaient un demi-millénaire. En 395, la séparation des deux moitiés de l'Empire sera un divorce entre un Occident latin et un Orient grec. La question est de distinguer plusieurs attitudes simultanées qui peuvent sembler contradictoires et qui sont restées inchangées pendant quatre siècles”.

⁶⁶ P.-G. Castex, P. Surer, G. Becker, *Histoire de la littérature française*, Evreux 1974 (city not indicated), p. 9: “A la fin du IV^e siècle, sur le territoire de l'Empire romain d'Occident, et en particulier sur le sol de la Gaule, la langue parlée est le latin vulgaire, bien différent de la langue écrite dont l'Eglise entretient la pratique. Mais d'une région à l'autre de l'Empire, les usages varient; de ces parleurs latins naîtront, après une genèse de plusieurs siècles, des diverses langues *romanes*: le roumain, l'italien, l'espagnol, le portugais, le provençal, le français”.

⁶⁷ J. Grzywaczewski, *La culture romaine en Gaule au V^e siècle d'après Sidoine Apollinaire*, *Annales* (Paris) 10 (2007), p. 127–135.

⁶⁸ *The Letters*, IX, 9, 13 (*huic sentiet Ecclesiae Christi Platonis Academiam militare*).

thanks to a person like Faustus who, using the philosophy, proclaimed the wisdom of God and explained some dogmatic definitions such as for example the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It may be an allusion to the book of Faustus *De Spiritu Sancto* in which there are some references to the philosophy and to the ancient (Greek and Latin) education system⁶⁹.

In the letters of Sidonius we see several priests and bishops, like Faustus, Lupus, Leontius, and many of the lay people as well. One of them was Paul, whom he met in Rome:

“I had already been made welcome to the home of the prefectorian Paul, and enjoyed the friendliest and most hospitable treatment in a house no less respectable for piety than for learning [...]. I am amazed when I think of the subtleties which he propounds, the figures of rhetoric adorning his judgements, the polish of his verses [...]. And over and above this encyclopaedic knowledge, he has a still better possession, a conscience superior even to all this science”⁷⁰.

Sidonius was impressed by Paul because of his knowledge of many things (*doctrina veneranda*), because of his way of speaking and treating of many subjects (*in omni atrium genere praestantior*) and especially because of his poetry. Paul was a Christian, so Sidonius found himself obliged by politeness to add a compliment on his piety (*pietas*). It is something typical for that time: the persons of high ranks were Christian and they wanted to manifest their attachment to their religion.

In spite of the intellectuals of high quality, Sidonius shows some persons who may be considered as a model of Christian lord and property owner:

“I recently visited the illustrious Vectius [...]. The majesty of his gait accords with his gravity of mind, and as the first secures him consideration abroad, so the last maintains his dignity at home [...]. With all this he is a regular reader of the Sacred Scriptures; even at meal times he enjoys this nutriment of the soul. He studies the Psalms, and yet more frequently chants them, setting a new precedent by living after this fashion in martial dress, the complete monk in all but the monastic habit”⁷¹.

We know that Vectius was widower, his wife left him a little daughter whom he was bringing up with tenderness, he administrated his property with

⁶⁹ F. de Riez, *De l'Esprit-Saint*, 5, transl. J. Berthon, Digne 1999, p. 14: “Il est clair que même la sagesse profane a compris que la multitude des siècles est contenue en ce monde de trois personnes. Lesquelles? Ce sont: *je, tu, il*. Ainsi, comme nous l'avons dit, même les arts libéraux, grâce aux leçons tirées des enseignement spirituels, ont compris que le réel se ramène seulement à trois personnes [...], car la plénitude qui tend vers le nombre *trois* dénonce l'incomplétude de la dualité, et que la perfection qui s'accomplit en trois rejette la quaternité”.

⁷⁰ *The Letters*, I, 9, 1; comp. the portrait of Phebus (*Carmen XXII*, 10–20).

⁷¹ *The Letters*, IV, 9, 2–4.

dignity and indulgence, he read the Holy Scripture and probably other Christian books (*sacrorum voluminorum lectio frequens*), he chanted psalms, he listened to a spiritual reading during the meal (*edendum sumit animae cibum*), as in the monastery⁷². It was something typical for that time that many lay persons, especially those of high rank, wanted to follow the example of the monks.

The image of Vectius is completed by the image of Philomatia who is presented as a model of Christian wife and mother, a person of faith and virtue. Surely, she was educated, because she was able to give advice even to men respected in the neighbourhood (*senioribus sequenda*). Probably there were other women in Gaul having such qualities⁷³. As far as we know, there were many people throughout Gaul making efforts to live according to the Christian teaching. So, the old Roman *virtutes* were gradually replaced by the Christian virtues⁷⁴.

Sidonius speaks especially about bishops, priests, rhetors, poets, senators, and about personalities belonging to the aristocracy. In his correspondence we find a few information about ordinary people. For this reason, the image of Gaul at the end of the Vth century which he paints with details, cannot be considered as complete⁷⁵. In spite of it, his picture of Gaul of that time is appreciated by contemporary scholars; through the writings of Sidonius we see the fall of the Empire and the beginning of the Germanic era, and we find a lot of information about the life in Gaul at that time⁷⁶.

Conclusion

Sidonius Apollinaris was a man of two epochs. In his young age, he was impressed by the political position of Rome; later he noticed the weakness of the Roman Empire and survived its fall. He moved from the public service to

⁷² About reading during the meal in families: *Life of Hilary of Arles*, 15 (author unknown); Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* VII, 1 and VIII, 2.

⁷³ *The Letters*, II, 8, 1–3. In the antiquity there were many educated women. St Gregory bishop of Nyssa discussed theological matters with his sister Macrina; he called her *teacher*; he asked questions and she answered them (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, transl. W. Moore, H.A. Wilson, in: Ph. Schaff, H. Wage (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Peabody, Massachusetts 1999, vol. 5, p. 430–468). St Jerome worked on the Holy Scripture with Marcella, Paula, Asela and with other women (*The Letters*, XLVI, 2); he notes that Eunomia “la fille du rhéteur Nazarius égale son père en éloquence” (Saint Jérôme, *Chronique*, 1^{an} 336, transl. B. Jeanjean, B. Lançon, Rennes 2004, p. 81). Sidonius noticed that in the private library of Ferreolus there were two sectors of books and of chairs, one for men and one for women (*The Letters*, II, 9, 4).

⁷⁴ M. Banniard, *Genèse culturelle de l’Europe V^e–VIII^e siècle*, du Seuil 1989, p. 94–100.

⁷⁵ L. Pietri, *Le sort des Eglises de l’extrême Occident*, B. La Gaule, p. 209–222.

⁷⁶ O. Boulnois, *L’Eglise, gardienne de la culture*, in: J. Duchesne (ed.), *Histoire chrétienne de la littérature*, p. 221: “Sidoine s’y révèle à la fois un esprit subtil, un aristocrate viscéralement romain, pour qui Rome et l’Eglise ne font qu’un, et passionné de littérature [...]. Ses lettres constituent un document précieux sur les rapports tourmentés entre les barbares et les Romains”.

the Church, like many persons at that time. In his poems and letters, he shows his attachment to the ancient world. The Greek and Latin cultures started to be Christianized during the period of the Roman Empire. The notion of *romanus* signified more and more *christianus* and the classical philosophy was used to explain theological questions. In Sidonius' writings we see also a new world which was going to be formed. The world was politically dominated by the Germanic people (Franks, Burgundians, Visigoths) and spiritually inspired by Christianity. Just after the fall of Rome it was too early to realize the danger for civilization. Sidonius, like many other Roman citizens, deeply believed in the universal value of the ancient culture. He hoped that the barbarians would progressively assimilate it. In fact they were not able to assimilate the totality of the Roman heritage, but they received the Catholic faith and with the religion they accepted many elements of the ancient culture and civilization.

CHRYSTIANIZACJA GALII WEDŁUG SYDONIUSZA APOLINAREGO (OK. 430–486) (STRESZCZENIE)

Artykuł przybliży postać Sydoniusza Apolinarego, który uchodzi za ostatniego Rzymianina w Galii opanowanej przez barbarzyńców. W jego pismach znajdujemy wiele informacji na temat chrześcijaństwa w Galii: ukazuje on sytuację Kościoła zwłaszcza po upadku cesarstwa. Wojny spowodowały wiele zniszczeń: zburzone kościoły, diecezje pozbawione biskupów, parafie bez kapłanów. Jednakże po ustaniu walk następuje odnowa: odbudowuje się świątynie, mianowani są nowi biskupi, zwiększa się liczba wiernych. Dzieła Sydoniusza zawierają cenne informacje na temat sytuacji w V w., lecz jest to obraz niepełny, bowiem Galia w jego ujęciu jawi się jako *panteon* wybitnych osób, nie widać natomiast ludzi przeciętnych; autor bowiem, nawet jako biskup, zdawał się ich nie dostrzegać. Wydaje się, że można by porównać Sydoniusza do Sienkiewicza. Polski pisarz ukazuje słynnych rycerzy, takich, jak Wołodyjowski, Kmicic, Skrzetuski, wyolbrzymiając ich bohaterstwo. Sydoniusz prezentuje ludzi jak Lampridius, Nicetius, Claudianus, Faustus de Riez, eksponując ich kulturę osobistą, wykształcenie, prawość moralną oraz troskę o edukację innych. Podczas lektury pism Sydoniusza obserwuje się przejście od wizji Rzymu jako potęgi militarnej do dynamizmu kulturowego. Rzym, w jego ujęciu, nawet po upadku cesarstwa, zachowuje swą pozycję już nie jako państwo, lecz jako naród o wysokiej kulturze. Jednakże i w zakresie kultury następuje ewolucja: dziedzictwo greckie oraz rzymskie podlega chrystianizacji, dawne rzymskie *virtutes* są zastąpione przez cnoty chrześcijańskie, a samo pojęcie *romanus* staje się synonimem *christianus*.

DIE CHRISTIANISIERUNG VON GALLIEN
NACH SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS (C. 430–486)
(ZUSAMMENFASSUNG)

Der Artikel bringt die Gestalt des Sidonius Apollinaris, der als *letzte Römer* in von Barbaren beherrschtem Gallien gilt. In seinen Schriften finden wir zahlreiche Informationen über das Christentum in Gallien. Es wird auch die Situation der Kirche, vor allem nach dem Fall des Römischen Reiches dargelegt. Kriege richteten viele Schäden ein: zerstörte Kirchen, Diözesen ohne Bischöfe, Pfarreien ohne Priester. Jedoch nach vielen Kämpfen stellt sich die Erneuerung ein: die Kirchen werden wiederaufgebaut, neue Bischöfe ernannt, wächst auch die Zahl der Gläubigen. Obwohl die Werke von Sidonius zahlreiche Informationen über die Situation im 5. Jh. bergen, liefern sie ein unvollständiges Bild, da Gallien nach seiner Darstellung als ein Pantheon der herausragenden Gestalten erscheint. Die gewöhnlichen Menschen geraten aber nicht in den Blick. Der Verfasser, selbst als er Bischof wurde, schenkte ihnen, wie es scheint, keine Aufmerksamkeit. Vielleicht könnte man Sidonius mit Sienkiewicz vergleichen. Der polnische Schriftsteller zeigt berühmte Ritter, wie Wołodyjowski, Kmicic oder Skrzetuski und glorifiziert ihre Heldentaten. Bei Sidonius erscheinen solche Menschen, wie Lampridius, Nicetius, Claudianus, Faustus de Riez, wobei der Bischof ihre persönliche Kultur, Bildung, moralisches Niveau sowie die Sorge um die Erziehung und Bildung der anderen hervorhebt. Bei der Lektüre von Sidoniuswerken kann man den Übergang von einer Vorstellung Roms als einer militärischen Macht zu einer von der kulturellen Dynamik geprägten Sicht feststellen. Nach seinem Verständnis behält Rom, selbst nach dem Zerfall des Kaiserreiches seine herausragende Position, nicht mehr als eine Staatsmacht, sondern als eine sich durch hohe Kultur auszeichnende Nation. Gerade aber im Bereich dieser Kultur ist eine Evolution zu verzeichnen: das griechische Erbe wird christianisiert, alte römische *virtutes* wurden durch christliche Tugenden ersetzt und selbst der Begriff *Romanus* wird zum Synonym von *Christianus*.