

Religio and superstitio

J.A. North (UCL)

1. Religiosi dicuntur, qui faciendarum praetermittendarumque rerum divinarum secundum morem civitatis dilectum habent, nec se superstitionibus implicant.

Festus 366 Lindsay

Religiosi is the word for those people who, following the custom of the city, are very attentive to the rituals that should be performed and to those that should be omitted, but do not get involved in superstitions.

2. Audistis Theodorum et Numenium et Nicasionem, legatos Hennensis, publice dicere sese a suis civibus haec habere mandata, ut ad Verrem adirent et eum simulacrum Cereris et Victoriae reposerent; id si impetrassent, tum ut morem veterem Hennensium conservarent, publice in eum, tametsi vexasset Siciliam, tamen, quoniam haec a maioribus instituta accepissent, testimonium ne quod dicerent; sin autem ea non reddidisset, tum ut in iudicio adessent, tum ut de eius iniuriis iudices docerent, sed maxime de religione quererentur. Quas illorum querimonias nolite, per deos immortalis, aspernari, nolite contemnere ac negligere, iudices! Aguntur iniuriae sociorum, agitur vis legum, agitur existimatio veritasque iudiciorum. Quae sunt omnia permagna, verum illud maximum: tanta religione obstricta tota provincia est, tanta superstitio ex istius facto mentis omnium Siculorum occupavit ut quaecumque accidant publice privatimque incommoda propter eam causam sceleris istius evenire videantur.

Cicero 2 *Verrine* 4. 113.

You have heard Theodorus and Numenius and Nicasio, the ambassadors from Enna, declare publicly that they had this commission from their fellow-citizens, to go to Verres, and to ask him for the return of the statues of Ceres and of Victory. If they had obtained it, then they were to follow the ancient customs of Enna, not to give any public testimony against him, even though he had oppressed Sicily, since these were the practices that they had inherited from their ancestors. But if he did not return them, then they were to go before the tribunal, inform the judges of the injuries they had received, but, far above all things, to complain of the insults to their *religio*. I beg you, judges, in the name of the immortal gods, do not despise, do not scorn or neglect their complaints. The issues at stake are the injuries done to our allies, the authority of the laws and the reputation and integrity of our courts of justice. All these are weighty matters, but here is the weightiest of them all: the whole province is fettered by so great a *religio*, so great a *superstitio* has seized the minds of all the Sicilians, that whatever public or private disasters happen to them, they seem to be happening as a result of this fellow's criminality.

3. Ea tametsi multis istius et variis iniuriis acciderunt, tamen haec una causa in opinione Siculorum plurimum valet, quod Cerere violata omnis cultus fructusque Cereris in iis locis interisse arbitrantur. Medemini religioni sociorum, iudices, conservate vestram; neque enim haec externa vobis est

religio neque aliena; quodsi esset, si suscipere eam nolletis, tamen in eo qui violasset sancire vos velle oporteret. Nunc vero in communi omnium gentium religione, inque iis sacris quae maiores nostri ab exteris nationibus adscita atque arcessita coluerunt,—quae sacra, ut erant re vera, sic appellari Graeca voluerunt,—neglegentes ac dissoluti si cupiamus esse, qui possumus?

Cicero 2 *Verrine* 4. 113.

Although a great deal of various kinds of harm was done by that man, still this one cause, in the opinion of the Sicilians, is the weightiest of all; for, they believe that all the crops and gifts of Ceres have perished in these districts as a result of violation of Ceres. Heal, judges, the *religio* of the allies; save your own; for this is not a foreign *religio*, nor an alien one. But even if it were, if you had no wish to adopt it yourselves, still you ought to be willing to punish the violator. But now that the common *religio* of all nations is attacked in this way, now that these sacred observances are violated that our ancestors adopted and imported from foreign countries, and have honoured ever since (Greek *sacra* they wanted them called, as in fact they were), even if we wished to be negligent and remiss about these matters, how could we be so?

4. Nunc vero quid agat, quid molitur, quid denique cotidie cogitet quem ignorare nostrum putat? Quos appellarit, quibus pecuniam promiserit, quorum fidem pretio labefactere conata sit tenemus. Quin etiam nocturna sacrificia, quae putat occultiora esse, sceleratasque eius preces et nefaria vota cognovimus; quibus illa etiam deos immortales de suo scelere testatur neque intellegit pietate et religione et iustis precibus deorum mentes, non contaminata superstitione neque ad scelus perficiendum caesis hostiis posse placari. Cuius ego furorem atque crudelitatem deos immortales a suis aris atque templis aspernatos esse confido.

Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 194

But now, which of us does she think is ignorant of what she is doing, of what she is contriving, of what she is thinking? We know to whom she has appealed, to whom she has promised money, whose good faith she has sought to undermine by bribery. What is more, we know about her nocturnal sacrifices, which she thinks are secret, and her wicked prayers, and her abominable vows; in which she makes even the immortal gods to be witnesses of her wickedness, and does not realise that the minds of the gods are propitiated by piety, by *religio*, and holy prayers, not by a polluted *superstitio*, nor by victims sacrificed to obtain their sanction for acts of wickedness. This insanity and barbarity of hers I may well feel sure I feel no doubt that that the immortal gods have rejected from their altars and temples with revulsion her insanity and cruelty.

5. Nam, ut vere loquamur, superstitione fusa per gentis oppressit omnium fere animos atque hominum imbecillitatem occupavit. Quod et in iis libris dictum est, qui sunt de natura deorum, et hac disputatione id maxime egimus. Multum enim et nobismet ipsis et nostris profuturi videbamus si eam funditus sustulissemus. Nec vero (id enim

diligenter intellegi volo) superstitione tollenda religio tollitur. Nam et maiorum instituta tueri sacris caerimoniisque retinendis sapientis est, et esse praestantem aliquam aeternamque naturam, et eam suspiciendam admirandamque hominum generi pulchritudo mundi ordoque rerum caelestium cogit confiteri.

Cicero *On Divination*. 2.148

To speak the truth, *superstitio*, disseminated through the peoples, has oppressed the spirit of almost all men and women and has taken possession of their mental weakness. This has already been spelled out in my *Nature of the Gods* and it was my central objective in the present debate. If we were to abolish it root and branch, we would seem to confer a massive benefit both on ourselves and on our own people. It would not be true, however — I want this point carefully understood — that, by abolishing *superstitio*, *religio* would be abolished as well. For it is the duty of the wise to protect the institutions of our ancestors by maintaining the sacred rituals; and the beauty of the universe and the regularity of celestial events force us to recognize a nature that is predominant and eternal and such that it demands the and admiration of the human race.

6. Huic tamen, inquit, furori certum tempus est. Tolerabile est semel anno insanire. In Capitolium perueni, pudebit publicatae dementiae, quod sibi uanus furor adtribuit officii. Alius nomina deo subicit, alius horas Ioui nuntiat: alius lutor est, alius unctor, qui uano motu bracchiorum imitatur unguentem. Sunt quae Iunoni ac Mineruae capillos disponant (longe a templo, non tantum a simulacro stantes digitos mouent omantium modo), sunt quae speculum teneant.

Seneca *On superstition* fgt. 69 (Vottero) = Augustine, *City of God*
6.10. Trans in Beard, North & Price *Religions of Rome* vol. 2.9.5d

But for this lunacy there is a fixed time. It is bearable to go insane once a year. But just go up on to the Capitol: you will be ashamed of the crazy performances put on for the public, all presented as obligations by vacuous madness. One guy introduces the callers for Iuppiter's benefit, another tells him the time. One washes him, another oils him — he only mimes the action of oiling by moving his hands. There are women who dress their hair for Iuno and Minerva — they do it at a distance not just from the statues but from the temples — and move their fingers in the manner of coiffeuses, while others again hold up the mirrors.

7. Doctus archimimus, senex iam decrepitus, cotidie in Capitolio mimum agebat, quasi dii libenter spectarent, quem illi homines desierant. Omne illic artificum genus operatum diis immortalibus desidet.

There used to be a very polished pantomime artist, by that time a decrepit old man, who did his mime act every day on the Capitol, as though the gods would enjoy the show, when humans had stopped doing so. Craftsmen of every trade sit at that spot waiting for work on behalf of the immortal gods.

Reading

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