

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

©Translation by Tony Devaney Morinelli

The story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (Orthodox feast days Oct 22/23, Aug 2; Roman Catholic feast day July 27) was already current in the sixth century and remained popular in both East and West. Their story was included in the western Golden Legend, by far the most popular book of the later middle ages. This version by Chardri - La vie des set dormanz - is translated from the Anglo-Norman. The transcription is published by Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1977. Brian S. Merilees, Editor. Dr. Morinelli's translation, which he has made available in this electronic form was accompanied by a study entitled Stasis and Dynamism in Old French Hagiography. - 2 volumes.

[The attraction of the legend of a centuries long sleep is preserved in American literature by Washington Irving's story of Rip Van Winkle.]

The goodness of God which lasts forever is always certain and pure. Nor is His goodness difficult for us to find - for when it is hot or freezing or clouds go flying by or winds blow or lightening strikes, do not all of us marvel at these things, whether they are on land or on the sea, when we take the time to see the transformations that God accomplishes by His power. How astonished would we be if we could but comprehend it all through God's willingness to assist us, for alone we surely could not begin to fathom it all. For who, without being overwhelmed, can count the stars of heaven or measure the height of the clear and brilliant firmament and the breadth of the whole world, or then to sound the depth of the sea. Truly great would be the wonder of anyone who would venture to speak of these things. But we give little thought to such things for our interest lies elsewhere rooted in great folly, wickedness and deceit. We have little care to think about anything except going astray amidst the worldly things we see. We delight too much in them good sirs and in the end we have only shame and sorrow. He who wishes to love God with his heart and wishes to retreat from the world which causes so much suffering will greatly delight without fail in the works of Christ Jesus which he has done and continues to do. Loyal will be he who in all his thoughts will set aside the great folly of the world.

Now to keep you in good spirit and for the good that may come of it I will tell you a tale in which there is no falsehood, a tale of a miracle which Jesus worked whose goodness is and always was. Those whom God loves with all His good heart, now give ear, both faithful and wise.

Now it is not into the fables of Ovid, good sirs, that I put my efforts, nor, know you well, that we will speak neither of Tristan or Galerun; nor in Renard or Hersent does my interest lie, but rather in God and His goodness who is mighty and always was, and in His saints, The Seven Sleepers who were so resplendent before the face of Jesus Christ. Now as it is written I will tell you their tale in truth from the beginning to the very end.

There was once a might emperor in Constantinople the Great, Decius he was called, proud and surely powerful. But as to his faith he was an infidel for he put all his trust in Apollo and Tervagant. Thus, he undertook the foolish notion that with all his power he would destroy all Christianity. And to vent his great rage he determined to travel through every land so that no foreign people would dare in anyway to contradict his commandment lest he would have them immediately killed and delivered up to wicked tortures. Thus did he instill fear in the people. The persecution began in Constantinople and spread as far as Carthage and so it came to Ephesus the city where Saint Paul spoke and preached the holy teachings which lifted the people from their pride and wicked ways. But because of the arrival of the emperor the cowardly people, the miscreants, quickly put aside those teachings.

The children of God, though few they were, fled into hiding as much out of fear of the evil savagery of the people as for the wickedness of the pagans in the city. As soon as the emperor arrive there (100) he commanded without any delay that a costly temple should be built of gray marble and hard stone, there in the middle of the city where he wished to carry out his foul plan, to sacrifice to the devil in hell. Images he has them make, some of iron some of wood and others of stone. And he made them in many ways, each had its own shape and form according to the craft and cunning of the workers who labored on them. They all bore the head of a monkey or that of a cat, tails of dogs or those of rats, here were owls and the graven images of the months of the year, some bulls others sheep and even those which resembled bats. Each oe carved out the image that he bore in his mind. [[1]] They made carvings of all the gods and worshiped them all adorning them with silver and pearls and beaten gold. Never before was such a treasure seen. To these gods they made their sacrifices and they called to judgement all those who refused to adore or honor their false gods. From the towns of the surrounding area they gathered each day, both rich and poor great and small of the miscreant pagan people. And so Ephesus was filled every day of the week with blood and smoldering smoke and with the stench of entrails which came from their butchery. Great was their corruption. The Christians were greatly distressed when they saw this madness and each made ready to flee as you can imagine. But the emperor when he realized this in his pride and haughty daring commanded his people to seek out the Christians wherever they may be in the land. He decided that he would deliver them over to torture if they did not heed his command. Now see all the pagans take to arms and set out here and there, far and wide. (150) They were joyful at the thought of bringing harm to the Christians (Need I make a long tale of this?) [[2]] Those who were weak of heart fled into hiding but the loyal folk, God's beloved, continued to hold firm to the law of God their creator, for they feared nothing. [[3]]

Well did they knew that this life was naught but dream and folly. They desired a life filled with unending joy. These Christians were seized and for God's sake who gives them strength they were delivered to martyrdom in ways which I which I truly tell you: some hung, some torn apart, others skinned alive and then killed, some were drowned and some burned, still others every limb subjected to torture, through hunger and heat they met their deaths; devoured by beasts, boiled, burned alive, killed through grief, or as most were, hacked to pieces. There were those whose severed heads, fixed upon pikes

were carried through the city gates and battlements. To frighten the Christians the pagans glory in the variety of many cruelties they can devise. How horrid and wicked! Yet in destroying the Christians they deliver them as saints in martyrdom to God. My Lords, in this way son rejects father, brother his sister or parent and out of fear of the threatened torments neighbor accuses a friend to acquit himself. [[4]] Never was there seen such destruction or sorrow. No man who lives today, however much his learning or knowledge can now attest to the suffering and distress that the saints suffered for God in both body and heart. (200)

The emperor in his palace receives the good among the wicked and so appear seven young man of high birth but who are more noble still in their hearts for they love God above all things. Their names I know well to tell you now: the first had the name Maximian, then there was Malcus and Martinian, Dionysius and then Seraphim, there was also John and Constantine. These men had set their minds, their loyal hearts and their youth to serving God their creator and they were filled with great pity for the beloved of God whom the devil had led into such evil. Yet it troubled them greatly that they did not give the impression that they loved Christianity for they were of such noble families and so well loved in the king's court that if they held to the pagan's wicked law there would be no one in the king's empire who would dare contradict them. [[5]] but they prayed both night and day for the emperor for since they were of his house they loved him as they should. But now they undertook a plan of great daring for when the emperor went to offer sacrifice the seven went off on their own like brothers in good faith to a private place to adore God, to cherish and honor Him to pray for their families and for the emperor who was so faithless. But the jealousy of wicked people does not die for they wish to expose them in deed in word and insolence. And so the courtiers of the palace who wished to put an end to their cousins accused them before the king saying that the seven wanted to reject his law and so they argued as you shall now hear:

"Sire and emperor, who governs all the world around, the land and its beasts, flying birds and swimming fish of the sea, you are king, lord and sire and ever judge of your empire. We are your loyal friends and so we owe you all our love. Thus we do not wish to lessen your honor in any way. You have had people come from diverse lands to celebrate your all powerful gods who reign over all things. And indeed, to carry out your wishes, they come at once from their own lands. Yet, what is the point when those who come from far away obey you while those under your own charge consider your wishes worthless and despise both you and your position. And what good are all your riches when in your own court those you have raised, loved and cared for most are your very enemies who despise you and shame you on this earth. Indeed, it is Maximian, the palace mayor's son, who thinks he can outwit you by keeping the secret of his six companions. But we surely know their names: there is Malcus and Martinian, Seraphim and then John, Dionysius and Constantine. Yes, these seven young men are of great ancestry, the highest among your nobility but they are Christians all, without exception and have the least regard for you, your gods or your sacrificial rites. They worship and omnipotent god and scorn your commandments."

Now when the emperor had heard this know you well that he was not pleased. Without delay he summons the young men to appear immediately and he addresses them

thus: "Young lords," says he, "your folly and lack of loyalty disgrace both your house and your noble character. You come before me as though you were born and raised upon a peasant's lap. (300) Now let this be the lesson that your folly teaches you since by your own deeds you show contempt for my station and my law, I who am your liege lord, king and emperor. And you commit another folly for by your apostasy you lose this world. You reject our gods who are so powerful and you are taken by some strange one, by one who was hung,[[6]] that the Christians call Jesus a fool who had himself called God and yet whom God himself could not help. And you who ought to be wiser have corrupted your minds as those led by folly. By Apollo who is without equal, if you do not willingly adore him, I will tell you another tale: and you will live shamefully in grief and in truly great sorrow as long as I shall be emperor, and then shall you die a wicked death and never shall you have the least comfort. I do not wish to deceive you; go then to sacrifice, that worse," said he, "does not come upon you and it behooves me to do more."

Maximian then answers him: "Lord emperor, in truth I speak to you: I and all my companions despise even more than the lowest cur your idols which mean nothing and can do no good to those who do them honor. For these idols care little or not as to whether they lie in a great sewer or in the most beautiful temple of Spain clad in silver and gold, for they are deaf and dumb and cannot exist on their own. Of oak or pearwood are they made or of some other wood whatever it may be and they neither hear nor see. They are suited but for one thing only, to be the fuel in the furnace. By them all are you betrayed, for in the fires of hell you shall be boiled. Fiery flames await you there where you will be for time without end. But our god who formed all sky and sea and whatever exists who dwells in sacred Trinity and his holy goodness carries from death to life. And those who bend their knee toward him, he will place in joy unending, and God grant that I may be among them.

The king of heaven who created us for Adam's sin sent his son upon the Earth to save and care for his people. He was born of the sweet virgin who was and will be wholly pure. And so he put himself here for our ransom and suffered pain and passion to deliver his creation from the fires of hell that last forever. He will return as great and strong to the joy and delight of a heaven that will never end and where joy among his own shall endure. For that joy and for that life we have abandoned the great folly of this world. In Him do we believe, Him do we honor and for Him we will give both body and soul. He is God and He is king. It is He who founded our faith; He who made the seas and He the wind; He made all the firmament; He made the sun, He made the moon, and of the stars there is not a one that He did not make. And how did He do those things? He made all by His commanding word and so He directs all that is for He is Lord and Master of all. So wondrous His peerless beauty that it makes all earth and heaven tremble. In the heavens there is no bird that flies and in the sea no fish nor beast that does not live and die by Him for He created all this world. (400) He is our Lord Jesus Christ who made and governs all things. But the gods which you have made, you must understand, that we care nothing for them. These gods will rot and you shall die, no matter how much you may try to save them. The gold that is now fixed upon them with hooks will then be ripped away; with hammers will they smash the brows of your gods whose gold they will take, and there will remain only shame. For with this god of yours they will have no more dealings. Our

treasure cannot steal away anyone with such trickery for it is a treasure that leaves no one to go begging." Thus he is silent and says no more.

The king now raised his face up which he has lowered as the young man went on speaking. "Young valet", said he, "you have displeased me greatly in both word and deed, for you are born of a noble line. For this reason it seems to me a great wrong that I must even think about what shame must befall such a fine youth. Greatly would the beauty of my court be diminished should you all lose your lives. Go back now as wise gentlemen and think carefully at length and with dignity and leave behind this foolishness, for I know it is simply by some whim that you have rushed into it with such passion. But now I grant you some time to go off and think about it a bit and consider these things for yourselves such that you keep yourselves safe and sound."

With these words he grants them leave and does not allow himself to consider their desire that they might not give up their faith. Then the emperor went off outside the city with more than five thousand pagans enlisted in his company. With that foul lot of hateful people he went off throughout the land to finish off what he had started, to deliver the land of Christians and all their doings. And great was the destruction in every country there around. (450)

Now the young men whom I have told you about when they were given this time of respite went off in great fear but continued to work as goodly people. They put in order the affairs of friends and family then they went off on their own to a mendicant life. Clothing and food, gold and silver and whatever they could secure they had gathered together and give to the poor for they wished to live communally. And alone amongst themselves they realized that to wait for the emperor would only increase their sorrow. They had to leave the city out of sheer necessity. "My fellows," says one, "let us leave this country together. If the emperor can take all of us he will have all seven of us hung or be sacrificed without fail, for he has warned us so. The time is short and brief and to await him will cause us trouble. And there is a mountain nearby, far from people and without pasture called Celius. There in the rock is a hidden spot, a deep and wide cave where we can live for a long time without anyone's knowledge." "This is a good idea", say the others, "let us follow it for there is not much else that we can do".

So they gather up a bit a money as they are given, enough to let them live away from anyone for a long time. All seven went off from that place and hid themselves in the cave that together they had chosen. And so the seven made an oath there and prayed to God their creator with all their hearts both day and night. They lived in the cave for a long time without anyone's knowledge.

Now while they were there, (500) one of the seven was elected by common agreement to go into the great city to find out any news about the goings on. But he did all this very carefully because he was well known by everyone. He put on old and patched clothes to conceal himself better. And so he went on his way as would a poor peasant in the company of simple people. In an unsuspecting way he went about here and there to seek out the news and find out about the emperor's doings and he also heard

about the young men who had gone off. Then towards late evening, like one afraid, he stealthily bought food for his companions. And so he carefully slipped away, beyond the pressing crowds and off to the cave straight away. There he fed his companions and recounted to them all his adventures, the wickedness and the hardships that he observed in the city. From beginning to end he told them everything for he had seen more than enough. (It was, by the way, Malcus who had gone.) Now, he went back and forth to the city and when he did he gave a good deal of alms to the poor from the spending money that he had.

Now good sirs, between these affairs there was hardly any time before the emperor had finished his campaign about the surrounding countryside. To Ephesus the beautiful did he return in great pomp and in his fury he summoned all his barons and commanded that that they summon forth Maximian and his companions.

Now Malcus was in the city as usual to see what was going on and he saw that the Christians were fleeing for fear of death, for the emperor had sworn by his accursed god (550) that there would be no one no matter how high born, wealthy, or proud who if they did not wish to sacrifice to the gods that he would have them dealt with severely. Numerous sufferings, tortures and anguish awaited them and then at last they would die a wicked death be it just or not. When the Christians heard this they tarried no longer in the city but fled away wherever they could to save themselves by any means possible.

When Malcus heard all this about the emperor and all the troubles that he had created he was never so fearful in all his life. But he thought the best thing to do at the moment was to but their food even though his mind was beset by how best to escape before the pagans might catch him. Now with cunning he fled away and with him carried enough bread. He came straight away to his companions whom he found hungry and he told them with tears in his eyes all he had heard; how the emperor had his men seek them out in the city and in the surrounding area and about the emperor's decree, how he had sworn in faith that not even all the gold in the world could buy off a Christian from immediate death who would not sacrifice to the gods. And so because of this the Christians fled away as they had to. "And we," said he, "are sought out in the land more than all." Then they all wept together of grief and every limb trembles and sweated from great fear and anguish.

"My lords," said Malcus, "there is but one course of action: Since you are hungry I urge you to eat something and calm your sorrows. To raise our spirits let us fear less about falling into their hands. Should the emperor call us our words will be more sensible and we will be stronger both against his words and his deeds."

With this Malcus their provider silently stands and puts their bread before them. Such as there was he gave them to eat and they ate but spoke little. Stricken with grief they wonder amongst each other what they will do when they stand before the emperor.

They went on talking until day became evening and as much as by grief as by their thoughts the seven young men fell asleep. For it so happens, as well you know, that

when people are overcome by the sorrows of their thoughts that they desire only to dream. Thus the Lord God who loves them makes them fall to sleep for this is His pleasure. And their faces were like roses which open at dawn as the seven young men lay in a row on their sides. He gave them rest who made the sea and land and sky to show to all such marvels as they have never before heard.

Hear now what God did next by His grace. On the next day when it was light the emperor had them sought out. Throughout the countryside and everywhere he had his men look for them, in mountain and in valley by men on horse and men on foot but when no one could find them anywhere the emperor's heart was troubled for since they were high born they young men were sorely missed.

The king spoke to his nobles, "Lords," said he, "it is a great pity that by now our young men must have perished. Their handsome ways and nobility have we lost. (650) Their sorrow and their suffering have troubled my heart. They thought that I was angered and so they went off on their own. Know, however, that I was not angered but that I wanted to mend their ways with forceful words. Would, my lords, that I had not done so. Unfortunately now we will see their youth no more."

"Sire", say the barons to the king, "You should not be in such a troubled state for such foolish ones since that have from the start trespassed against your edict and they should not be permitted to bring shame to our gods. They told you bluntly that they were rooted in evil yet you gave them the advantage when you granted them a time to think and so from that moment you frightened them. And so who cares if they have fallen from the earth since they would not do your bidding. There is not one among us who knows if they are still within your kingdom or if they are dead or alive - the seven troublemakers are gone!. If you still wish to know where they are, they have family in large numbers. Have them come before you and reveal all they know about where their children have gone. And if they do not satisfy you then you will remain ignorant of their whereabouts and so not be appeased."

"You speak well,"Let us summon them all tomorrow at dawn that we may clarify all this without any delay. I wish to see this matter through.."

And so they did his will and summoned forth all the young men's relations. They were many who came before their lord, dukes and counts and other nobles.. The king speaks his mind to them and says, "Lords, it seems to me that you owe me your loyalty and that it is you who protect my honor. Yet, through what you have just said, have you not, as I believe, all of you been false to the faith that you promised me. (700) Your response has upheld my enemies? They take both comfort and advice from you as you refuse my highest demands. These are but young men who are whimsical and light hearted. They ran off on that day because they were greatly afraid of the threats I made against them about matters which they do not understand. Refusing to sacrifice to the gods who control all things they ran off in flight. By Muhammet and by Tervagant, if you do not bring them back to me you will all deserve to die. Do not spare any measure to bring them back, not even the entire treasury of Damascus."

"Lord emperor," the families answer, "We have carried out your highest command this very day with loyalty to our liege lord. We are and will be obedient to you, sire, our entire lives. But why should we all die if it is these young men who have gone off in some madness? We will tell you what we know or what we have heard from others. The young men whom you ask about were not under our charge but have, according to some, hidden themselves quite cleverly in the great mountain beyond, in a cave which is there. There are they concealed they are they hidden. We do not know if they are alive or dead and more than that we do not know about these young men. Now it is up to you good sire", say they, "to carry out your will. There is nothing more we can do to help."

"Lord barons", says the emperor, "When you have told me the truth of how things have happened and where they are hiding go off in peace as good and noble men. Thereafter you will be held dearer to me when you will show me such loyalty."

(750) And so they go off but the emperor remains and to his advisors wonders how he may settle with them without endangering or hurting them for he did not wish to see the bodies of such fine men in torment. "There is one thing I want," says he, "to undo the scoundrels: I will have a wall built to block that hidden cave and they then be destroyed for they will be buried alive. They will die of hunger and distress to their pleasure or not."

The emperor did not wish to delay. He had them load carts and wagons with limestone and hard stone to block up the opening of the cave where they were hiding. The workers did the job in only a short time. But in the meantime there were among the emperor's household two who believed in God. These two withdrew quietly on their own for they wanted that in some way to prevent this holy martyrdom to be concealed from people and thought that the name of God should continued to be revealed to those who would come after them. For this reason they were intent upon putting their lives in writing. And so they did as they said they would. One was named Theodorus the other Ruffinus both loved by God. On a lead tablet they wrote the lives of the young men, the outrage and the evil that the emperor had done. Then without any noise or any emotion they concealed the lead tablet in the wall they were building in such a way as they were sure it would never rot as long as it was there. They did it so quietly that no one ever noticed. Now it was the costume in those ancient times to write in lead the story which you wanted always to be remembered, for lead will never rot as long as it lies in a dry place. (800) For this reason and with this in mind Theodorus and Ruffinus concealed the lead tablet until such time as God Omnipotent would work again by His power some sign.

Now when the cave was blocked up all the people were troubled for the young men who would die in such torment. But then they eventually leave and the emperor who never mended the error of his ways indeed only became worse than ever before.

Time passed and so it happened that the emperor died as did all those who lived through that time. Others came and others went, my lords, for it is the way of things that

as one dies another is born for such is the will of God. Thus it came to pass that all of that ancient world died away. And after one generation came another which too passed away. After Decius there were several emperors, powerful and rich. Of them there was a famous one by the name of Arcadius. This Arcadius had a most noble son who afterward became emperor and his name was Theodosius and through him Christianity was established in the land. Many were the Christian emperors before his time but none of them loved and honored God's faith as did he. He upheld righteousness and loved Christ Jesus above all else. Thus he exalted Christianity and was filled with goodness for he loved his creator and held Him in great honor. But God wished to put him to the test, to try his heart in such a way as you will now hear me tell. For God has his friends show their faith but trial and when in the end He finds them loyal in suffering and anguish he transforms their great sorrow into joy and abandons upon them his crown of glory. (850) Thus does God now wish to try Theodosius his dear friend.

In the thirty eighth year of the king's reign there arose a great and influential heresy spread about by a lying and miscreant people which said foolishly that no man born of a woman would ever be raised up from death to his final judgement. "It cannot be", they said, "that a dead man can rise again. There is no one, no matter how clever, who can live beyond his time. Not even from God can there be such grace. No one lives beyond one hundred years, no matter what the book [[7]] says. For after that time we die and never rise again in our bodies." All such perversities of the heretics was written down and published such that within a short time all of Christianity was all but destroyed.

They deceived the emperor so that he almost fell into error. For their tongues were so sharpened with their poisonous venom that these foolish and unruly people clung to their word and caused trouble throughout the holy church. The king himself said little for in his time there was belief in that error of faith. Yet such was his grief that he wept day and night in frustration and prayed God piously that He should in His time show the way to true belief. For the evil had now spread such that even the furthest lands of the kingdom were tainted with this evil to an equal degree. And so the king was in greater sorrow than he had ever been. But God, who grants all that is good, wishes that his good friend should suffer no more with tears and sleeplessness and so He restores his joy as now you shall hear.

While this madness went on, God touched the heart of a high born man by the name of Dalius who was the owner of the great mountain, Celius. Now this man had planned, through God's design, to build stables on the mountainside. Now the man's servants who were working there found a great supply of stone right at the blocked entrance of the secret cave where the seven saints reposed whom God so dearly loved. And so the men were overjoyed when they saw all the stone that was readily available to them. and they took great care to remove the ready cut stone. They worked on and cleared so much of the stone that it revealed the opening of the cave.

While this was all going on, God in his goodness awakened the seven youths who had been asleep. He raised them all up in amazement and wonder full of force and vigor as though it were the first day when they went to sleep. And even they thought that they

had merely slept from the evening before and had awakened that morning. Each thought he had slept but one night. Their color was clear and bright like a rose when it is new. "Lords", they say to each other, "it is now broad daylight! Now must we fear the emperor who angrily threatens us. (950) May God grant us His grace and hold us to His bidding so that the devil may not seize us in his power, and may God give us strength and courage to resist the tyrant emperor". Then Maximian says to them, "By the love of Jesus Christ, my good lords, do not fear the emperor nor his madness and great folly. Let all our trust be in God who will help us through His power. Watch that your heart may not fail you in this dire battle. God will surely reward us when we have suffered for Him. And you Malcus, my good brother, what did they say about the emperor yesterday evening when you were in the city. Tell us now what you learned."

Malcus answers, "I told you last evening all the new that I had heard, the emperor has men out looking for us throughout the country so that they can kill or hurt us."

"In faith," answers Maximian, "This is a difficult story. But now, Malcus, my good friend, it is time for you to go into the city to gather news as you did yesterday and to buy our bread without being noticed. Now the loaves you brought us yesterday were small ones. You did not bring large ones so that you could walk more easily. But now, my dear brother, I beg you, bring us some big beautiful loaves. You have enough silver denarii, so spend them generously. You will have plenty more silver and gold."

"My lords", answers Malcus, "I go willingly. Meanwhile, pray to God for me that he will be with me as I return to the city".

He takes the denarii and goes off, but he is fearful, silent and troubled. Now the coins were stamped in the time of Decius' fame and inscribed around the edge of the coin was the year in which Decius was crowned as emperor along with his name. (1000) Know now that there were three hundred years and seventy two [[8]] from the day that they entered the cave until the day that they awoke, but they knew not even the half of it thinking that they had slept since only the night before. So it was still morning when Malcus set off upon the road as careful as he was prudent to serve their common needs. But as he came to the entrance of the cave his heart shuddered for he saw all the stone like a ruin which he thought had fallen from the mountain in a great flood. But then since this could very well have happened he paid no further attention to it. Soon he was down the mountain and beyond the plain. He was very much afraid that those whom the emperor sent to threaten them might notice or recognize him. Little did he know that the emperor's body lie rotted in the grave. He continued on cautiously for he was afraid of everyone as he came into the city. It would have made you pity him if you could have seen the look on his face and his fear.

He came directly to the gates of the city and raising his eyes he sees above the gates a beautiful cross, marvellous and great. He stood motionless, in shock and almost falls over in fear. And then coming to he says to himself, "Is this the cross that I see? Yes, it is! No!, it isn't! It is but a dream, some trickery." At length he continues on and comes to another gate where he sees another cross above the door which is closed. (1050) "Now,

I know well," says he, "that this cannot be true. I am asleep and so I just think that they have place a cross here. For if it is the truth that this is the city where Decius would put up a cross then this is truly a joyous affair. I will go on a little farther and if this is a dream, tomorrow I will tell a lovely tale." To a third gate he goes and there again a cross he finds. At every gate he observes he finds a cross. "Oh God!" he says, "can this be? No matter where I look, left or right, I see the cross before my eyes. I am assaulted by visions for this cannot be dreams. I can feel and move by head and arms and legs and if I wanted to I could eat bread for I am even hungry. Then it must be a vision. I could say it is or it isn't.

By my Lord Jesus Christ who formed and made all the world, I must know for certain if I am deceiving myself or if this is true." And so went into the city. Everything was out of place and he recognized nothing that he saw. And then he considered further that he was in a dream for he heard people name Holy Mary and swear by the Holy Cross hardily in loud voices. "Oh, God!" cried he, "what can I do? Last evening there was no one so mighty on earth who dared say such words lest the emperor put them to death. Last evening the cross was everywhere hidden or it would have been burned or smashed. Now they swear by the Holy Cross and everywhere they adore Jesus and his sweat mother. What is the emperor doing now? I am overwhelmed, I realize that well. (1100)

But there is nothing else at all that I understand. May God save me", says he. Ephesus was never like this. It must be some other place. Can I not find out what country this is?"

And so he went along until he came upon a young man. "Young fellow," said Malcus, "stay for a minute for the love of God and tell me if you will without deceit, what is the name of this city?" "Good sir," said the young man, "Do you not know? By God the son of Mary, the city is called Ephesus the great, renowned in all the world." Now when Malcus heard this hardly did he rejoice for he thought that he had certainly lost all reason. In anguish he cries out, "Woe that I was ever born! It must be fairies who have found me and bewitched me. But if God wishes that I should lose all sense then I must take myself out of the city lest I become completely mad for I could wander about here without knowing where to go since I do not recognize the streets or any of the houses that are so lovely. I must try to see if I can come upon companions and when I find them tell them of this adventure which has troubled me so. But before I leave the city I must at least buy their provisions."

And so he goes off sad and troubled. He turns off into a bakery where bakers sell their bread. He has his money in his hand. The bread was ready to eat and he cast the money upon the table. The baker looked up and then stared down at the denarii. He picked one up and cried out, "Hey! by God!, what kind of money is this? The money that we use in this country isn't like this!"

The baker showed the money to his neighbor who was astonished for they had never seen the like in their country. Others came to marvel, both the wise and the foolish and they say, "In truth, this young man must have found a treasure." Malcus looked at the

coin and was astonished that everyone should be staring at him and says to himself, "Now, they have seen me, now they noticed me, soon both the baker and these other wretched rogues are sure to recognize me. Would that God would silence them both and that their eyes go blind, at least until I could get a league away either on a horse or on a mare. Never again for any reason will I come among these vile people. But now it shall be otherwise, for they will wish to bring me before the emperor who hates me so much and wishes to harm the seven of us. That's why these townsfolk are talking amongst each other in two's and three's. I can see by their faces that they care little for me. And I, now in my sorry and grief, what shall I do? I would rather lose my money than be caught by these people.

"My lords," says Malcus, "do not concern yourselves and, if you please, do not hold me to blame, for by God and his apostles this money is yours for the keeping as well as your bread. Have them both so may consider yourselves well paid for I am neither miserly nor greedy. Take whatever you will of mine so that you do not feel cheated. If you choose to refuse this offer you may do as you like and you can return my money to me without any cost to you and I will take my leave with your grace and thank you for your understanding." "Young man," they say, "By Saint Clement you should not have spoken so for you have found some treasure and we will prove you to be a thief unless you do exactly as we say. (2000) It's wealth we will share with you in secret if you tell us where you have found this treasure, for this is some kind of ancient coin that you have given us as money. You will show us this treasure," say they, "if you have your head on straight".

"My lords", says Malcus, "I have never found any treasure. I give you this money honestly; now take it in good faith and hold your peace. I would leave you now."

"In faith", says one of them, "what folly! By the Virgin Mary, this lad takes us all for foolish oafs!"

Now they all lay hands on him, tie him up, pull and kick at him trying to get the secret out of him. Now city folk are by nature as brutish as animals in the field. They know no self - control or kindness in situations where they are in control.

When Malcus sees himself so badly treated by these people he fills up inside with frustration and tears, for his denials are worthless. And so they take him into the center of the city where more than ten thousand have gathered to hear what the bakers say about this young man whom they treat so badly. News spreads through the city that a young man has been taken who has found a great and marvellous treasure. People come from everywhere to see this young man who trembles with fear. Everyone looks at him, but no one recognizes him, nor where he comes from nor who he is.

Now Malcus too looks around to see if he can find brother or sister, father or mother, relative or friend who might rescue him.

But the more he looks and listens the stranger are the people he sees. There is no one that he recognizes and his heart is in a terrible quandary. Last evening he knew everyone but this morning he knows nothing. (1250) By what he has seen here it seems he has lost his mind. As though witless he stood astonished with the people all around him.

Now my good lords, in the mean time while the people were so enthralled the bishop Marinus, who led his people well, had assembled all the clergy to dispute the heretics on those points which I have already mentioned. As viceroy [[9]] was Antipater, who held great importance, for he governed wisely and well. he governed wisely and well. Now here they are in this great and noble assembly when someone came in with the news that a strange young man was being questioned about a treasure he had found.

"As things stand now no one can prove it. He denies it all but no one believes him, for the money was taken right from his hand. Thus, he awaits his justice."

Now when the bishop and the viceroy both hear this they command that the young man be immediately brought before them. And so some men go off and soon they bring him back. Being careful to guard him well until they come into the assembly before the bishop in the center of the town. Now Malcus thinks beyond a doubt that he will come before the emperor Decius who hated him so. Now is he completely dumb-struck. And now they leave the ignorant one in front of the great assembly where they had led him as though he had stolen some great thing. And all the ancient coins was brought along with him and turned over into the hands of the viceroy. Now Malcus was truly ashamed that he was being held as a thief and he didn't know what to say or to answer or how he should behave. And the viceroy was amazed when he saw the money that they handed him and likewise the bishop too was bedazzled. (1300) Know well in faith!

The viceroy thought on the matter and then said, "Young man, clearly is it proven that you have found a great treasure for the money was taken from your own hand. Now in this matter you have committed an error in not coming first to show me the king's treasure. By my lord saint Peter the apostle do you expect that the whole treasure should be yours? So that you may conceal it you tell of it to neither me nor anyone else. Know now that things will be otherwise. You will tell me, like it or not, how this money came to you. Now tell me, good friend, where this treasure is and you may go free."

Malcus then begins to tell him, "The truth as I tell you my good lord is that I have never in my life found any treasure neither silver nor any gold. And the coins that you have that you have seized from me, I have not stolen as a thief. They are from my father who lives in this city. Please God that I may never succumb to robbery or larceny as long as I live. So I do not understand any at all the difficulties that have happened to me.

The viceroy answers, "Now tell us young man, what town are you from?"

"Sire," said Malcus, "I have nothing to hide from you there, for what else could happen to me now? In this city was I indeed born if this is the city of Ephesus. But I am

somewhat confused that I see none of my friends here who might speak for me. Truly, I do not wish to deceive you."

"Now tell me," says the viceroy, "Do not be afraid or embarrassed. What then is the name of your family whom you claim to be from here?"

"Sire", said Malcus, "I will tell you the name of my mother and my father, of my brothers and my sisters, all their names my lords, of my uncles and my relatives for the name is well known in the city." (1350)

And when he told them all their names all the nobles in the assembly were amazed. The viceroy now answers, "It is great foolishness that prompts you to lie so openly here in front of all these wise people. You are lying; we see that clearly. Not a word of what you say is true. You think by such pretense that you can escape justice. But by almighty God you will speak another way! My wicked, foolish and nasty scoundrel, now you have played the sorry part when you think to trick so wise and noble a group as this. You think that you can make fools of us as you trumpet the devils words; that you would have us believe that this money was taken from your father's purse and that your father gave it to you. Yet we find that the very writing on the coin tells us that Decius had these denarii minted when he first ruled as emperor. Wicked and lawless rogue, at least three hundred years and seventy two have passed if not more since that time, as anyone who looks at one of the denarius can see. And it is three hundred or more years since the relatives you name have died. They were wealthy families of the nobility. And so young man you try to deceive us? This denarius and your own young years prove you false for there is no man born who can know of the things that went on when this coin was in use. You are surely a wicked rogue for thinking you can deceive us. Indeed are you worthless for your own trickery betrays you. And if you refuse to tell me where the treasure is then I will have you treated to no small discomfort: no more soft featherbed will you sleep upon but in a filthy jail will you lie until you acknowledge the truth about the emperor Decius' treasure. For surely have you found it! Now speak, as God is witness, and you will be forgiven and delivered from a sorry state."

Malcus raises his sad and thoughtful face to the emperor. (Do not be surprised if he was still sorrowful and weary.) When he hears what the emperor has said he throws himself upon the ground and says, "My lords, have mercy upon me here who am so bemused.

Assuage the confusion that is in my heart because of Decius the might emperor who held to such wrong doing. I ask to see that emperor Decius who the other day gave us leave to think over our answer after we were summoned to come before him in the city. Then I will acquit myself. Is he now within the city? Will he come to this council?

Then the bishop Marinus answers, "Young man, you seem something of a fool to me. There is now no one in this city by the name of Decius. But the Decius that you speak of lies rotted in the ground for over nearly hundred years. What can we say about your story?"

"Lord," says Malcus, "I beg mercy of you. I who am so bemused, weary and sorrowful of heart, for you my lords, do not believe me. For God and His name my lords, come and see my companions and you will believe right well that I am not lying in any way. I will lead you to them and you will see that they are hidden in a cave out of fear of the emperor Decius' cruelty. (1450) We fled from him and hid, I and six other young men. And I know that yesterday in the morning, the emperor Decius came into this city, if indeed this is Ephesus the great, for even this befuddles me for I see nothing that I know. Oh lords, have mercy upon me!"

The bishop was wise and understanding and had pity on the young man. He thought for certain that this might be some vision that the young man must have experienced. And he was truly moved for he realized that in some secret way God in His mercy was revealing some strange plan by using the young man as his pawn.

"My Lord," said the bishop to the viceroy, "This is truly a fabulous tale. Let us all go up and follow him and we will see if it is true or not."

Then they all went up together, the entire assembly people with Malcus leading them, right to the cave which he knew so well. They go up to the cave and the bishop follows for they are all curious to discover what adventure might come of this. Now the bishop, when he glances to the right notices on a stone the lead tablet that we told you about earlier. It was the tablet on which the workmen had written the lives of the young men: the whole story from start to finish just as the accounts tell us. For it was Theodorus and Ruffinus, the two Christians who set themselves to accomplish the task so that Jesus through His great power might uphold the faith of others yet to come.

The bishop picked up the lead tablet in his hand and so to be completely forthright he did not break the seal or open the tablet until everyone had gathered around. When all the people were anxiously around him the viceroy immediately commanded that they should all be silent so that they might hear what the bishop had to say when he read from the tablet. The bishop broke the seal and then stared a long time at what was written on the lead while no one made a sound. When the bishop had read through the tablet he was moved to pity and he he spoke out loud while the people listened.

"Hear you now all together, for I have found great sorrow and great joy in what is written here and which Holy God has lead us here to discover. Now hear the words of this writing, of this marvellous adventure: Thus says the writing that I see here that in the time of Decius the king, seven young men fled away out of fear and hid themselves. The first was Maximian, then Malcus and Martinian, Dionysius and Johannin, Seraphion and also Constantine.

Now the emperor inflicted a martyrdom upon these seven young nobles whereby he enclosed them with a wall of stone inside this deep quarry where they had hidden because they feared him. But then Ruffinus and Theodorus set the story down in writing which has lasted from that time until now for they wanted everyone to remember them as

the martyrs they were. Thus were these seven martyrs, the holy elect, buried alive here. Know you all well that these good men, Ruffinus and Theodorus, have written and committed to our remembrance what they saw and what is true. Now let us all honor these seven for they were glorious martyrs."

When the bishop had read all this and the people had heard it, they all began to weep out of great pity and they went into the cave where they found the seven martyrs where they were huddled together. Each of them trembled with fear and their color was so fine that they resembled a flower at dawn. (1550)

When the bishop beheld this sight he immediately threw himself upon the ground and reverently adored the six before him and so too the viceroy fell to the ground as did the people who entered in to adore the seven saints. And they praised God Almighty who allows such miracles to happen among men. Such was their joy that all the people cried out with praise. There was neither old nor young who did not say, "Blessed be you, oh Jesus! For you do not abandon us for our sins or for our prideful trespasses but grant us forgiveness through your great goodness. We all do evil and yet you love us all equally and wish that we should serve you as our lord, not for your benefit but rather for our own good, for you are not in need of anything that we might do. But then you, as our great Lord, show us great miracles and great love which bring us to You as now we see through Your goodness, Lord God Jesus. For now have you resurrected your most sweet saints through Your mercy to destroy the falsehood of those heretics who wish to lead our souls into the depths and so destroy all Christianity. Now is that wicked notion which was so vile, rebuked into nothingness for we see in truth that the dead are raised to life and that we know that in this form shall we all be raised at the last judgement. Woe to them who in their foolishness wish to lead us into any other belief."

The bishop heard their affirmation, and although he had heard many before, none in his life had touched his heart as did this one. But Malcus leads him on and the viceroy as well before his companions with the people following behind. The saints rise and fear that this may be some trouble. But the bishop tells them they have nothing to fear and so assures them. And so now that they are no longer frightened they tell of the madness of the time of the emperor Decius, how he had for no reason attacked all Christianity and of the pain and suffering he had inflicted on Christians. They told everything of the deeds of days of old and the people marveled at their strange tales. They all listened with great interest to the young men and held it to be truly marvellous to have lived in such a time.

The bishop had them take down the story in writing from beginning to end and he had it sent without delay to the goodly emperor Theodosius and they ask him both great and small that he might hasten to see the goodness which Jesus Christ had given us eyes to see. When the emperor had listened and heard he was overjoyed at their request. Without delay he sets out immediately and leaving Constantinople he heads for Ephesus so that he might arrive before it is too late. When the people hear that the emperor is coming they rejoice at his arrival. They go out to meet him with palm branches and candles, and not slowly like people in chains but they dance and carol. Music and singing accompanies their way with harp and viol and while some pipe others leap, one plays the fiddle another the hurdy-gurdy [[10]]. Never was there such great joy in Ephesus as there

was when they saw the emperor. And so take their emperor to that cave where the God's saints were for from that place they had not moved.

When the seven saw the emperor coming they came forth from the cave to meet him with joy and happiness. When the emperor saw the seven young men he cast himself straight upon the ground and worshipped them humbly for their faces glowed and shined as does the sun's heat at mid-day in the month of may. Yet he did not remain silent but sweetly did greet them and said with tears in his eyes, "My lords, good Jesus has saved you and kept you by His Holy Name. This we know He has surely done. My Lords, "he continued, "it is my belief that when I see you all alive it is as when Jesus in his goodness did raise up Lazarus and how by His Holy Name He preached the resurrection of the dead over all the earth and that all would stand for the last judgment. Dashed now is that belief that the heretics put forth with misdirection. Thank be to God for He has returned to us through your blessed appearance. Now we do not doubt in any way that we shall all stand for the last judgement. "

Maximian then speaks to the emperor. "Lord emperor, indeed you speak the truth, through us God has shown you His glorious power that you may be certain of your beliefs and uncover the heretics lies, for all will rise on that last day before God their creator and each one shall be judged according to his deeds for good or for evil as it may be and to affirm this truth God has now brought the seven of us back to life. Know then that even as the child in the womb of it mother, the child who does not worry or see or feel, does not work or hear what is good or evil, who has no troubles or fears, even as that child have we long been with neither troubles or weariness thinking only that we have been asleep.

But now, my lord right emperor, let us pray to Our Lord. As it is true that He was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered His pain and passion and rose again, may he grant you health and keep you in His peace through our prayers forever. And may He defend your empire through His goodness from all evil and adversity. May so trials or other heresy beset you in this life and may He be so loving to us all that He may grant us everlasting joy. Amen, Amen, let us all say!"

And when he had spoken they looked out upon the assembly and the goodly emperor. Then the seven laid themselves down without grief or pain and rendered their souls to the Lord God Almighty who brought them with majesty into His most holy Paradise where they are never without joy and pain and sorrow are unknown.

Who ever saw such a noble emperor who was so stricken by grief. He wept in grief and the tears he shed were many. Never was their an emperor of our faith who had so kind a heart as he. He kisses each in turn and bids them rest and peace. The silken cloak which he wore would have been as worthless as straw had he not used it to cover their holy bodies. And he commanded that his treasury be brought up so that they may make reliquaries for the seven for he did not wish to place them in the earth but rather in vessels of gold. So he gathered together all his gold, for his treasury was large and he pondered how best he could do them greater honor. But as he did wonder how best not to

forget these saints they appeared to him in a dream (know you well that this is no fable) and all seven spoke thus to the king: "Why" said they, "have you collected this treasure for the carrying off of our bodies as relics? [[11]] This seems to be a temptation [[12]]. We thank you with all our hearts that you we might not move us elsewhere but that we remain in the cave, long and wide, where our joy was found; where the seven of us did sleep three hundred years and seventy two, and from where Our Lord who closed us in did raise us up and from where we shall again rise with other men at the great judgement."

When the emperor awakened he was truly joyous and glad that the seven deigned by their goodness to reveal their will to him. Then immediately without delay he spent heavily from his great treasury to gather workmen who gathered before him eager to demonstrate their talent. They worked on until the entrance of the cave was completely gilded around. No timber or wooden nails did they use but marble and limestone to wall it about with great skill and labor. Then he had the saints bodies brought back to lie within the cave. The procession of the bodies [[13]] was held with great celebration. It is not a mere story that the most noble of the empire were present and bishops and clergy whom the emperor did lead in the procession. They established a great feast of the Seven Sleepers and of their deeds. They built around the cave a church, new and beautiful and also a hospice where all those afflicted by troubles were received and there God performed His kindness out of love for His glorious saints. And so departed in health and well being all those who came in sickness and disorder. But now the goodness that God does do is known by all the world and His grace is abundant. And the heretics of that time when they heard about these events left their folly and believed in God the Son of Mary. They preached everywhere about His Holy Resurrection and admitted that their former beliefs were false, hopeless, and filled with error. For this most holy event had proven the truth that the dead will be raised. So great was the repentance of the heretics that they followed the emperor to Constantinople where they proclaimed at every door the grace of Jesus Christ who had done this thing.

May He keep us all as one who dwells in Holy Trinity and may He grant us by these saints the joy to be with Him. And may He grant that through their prayers He will keep us in peace in every land; that neither misbelief nor heresy may set us awry in folly. May He grant in our time joy and sweetness and that He may deliver us from the moans and stench of hell, so filled with evil and venom. For the devil is ever at work to cast us from joy to suffering. He sets out each day without rest or delay to draw the highest nobles unto himself and so discredit our faith for if he can make the leader fall soon will the little people fall along with him. Where after all do we find the greatest folly, treason and wrong doing than among the prelates on this earth. Some are covetous, some do kill, some are liars others traitors while others malign and are usurers. And I would even dare swear that few are those in this life either among the laity or the clergy who is not given to simony [[14]] or deception, greed, usury or roguishness. It is the devil who entices them so as to catch them each in their own vice. And few are those within the church who have not caught their foot in his traps; as few as are those people who do not feel themselves besmirched. It is not so unusual when their prelates act foolishly as they

follow that one who must lead them this way. It is through the devil who deceives them that they become party to such evil through which he plots to entrap them.

May God grant them now His grace that they may leave behind these ways over which even devil would rejoice could he be tamed. And our leaders on earth may God then hold in loyalty and righteousness openly and without pretense. And may He keep us safe from folly and grant us eternal life where there is neither evil nor shame.

Here now does Chardri finish his story and so he says: May God give to deceit little honor and short life and to those who will love Him may they blame me for it. Amen, Amen say you all loudly and I will confirm it; may God save my soul.

Amen

EXPLICIT NOTES

[1] The narrator precisely describes not the temples of ancient Ephesus but rather the sumptuous stone work on the gothic cathedrals of his day. Reference to the images of the months of the year refers to the zodiac (see the portals of Saint Denis in Paris). Describing this art as the craft of pagans may very well set our narrator among the followers of the Cluniac reform which sought to cleanse the church of excessive and non-religious decor.(St. Bernard of Clarivaux)

[2] In other words: Aren't true Christians, even in our own times, eagerly persecuted by others - thus another veiled reference to Cluniac reform.

[3] see Irenaeus, Eusebius on early persecutions. Herder, History of the Church.

[4] History Herder p. 222 223 libellus of Decius

[5] Mut lur pesa e neporquant

Semblant n'en firent tant ne quant K'il amassent crestiente Car il furent enparante E tant amez en la curt le rei Ke s'il tenissent lur mal lei N'en aveit nul de sun empire Ke les osast encuntre dire.

[6] Note the notion common to Gnostics and to Muslims that for a god or a holy person to die on a cross is not only impossible but is unbecoming to a divinity.

[7] The Bible

[8] Our manuscript reads treis cens seissante deus, 362 but most traditions hold to 372. A misreading and confusion of douse or douz (12) and deus or dous (2) is very probable. The numerology of 372 years is of interest: 3+7+2=12, the full cycle; 2+1=3, the Trinity.

[9] viscount

[10] simphonie, for this history of this instrument in the Middle Ages Merriless refers us to The History of Musical Instruments, Curt Sachs (New York, 1940), pp. 271-3.

[11] the text reads "translatiun", i.e. the translation, the practice of removing a saint's body from an ordinary grave to one particularly worthy of enshrining the remains.

[12] In other words, the devil and not God inspired the emperor to have their bodies moved to a shrine other than the cave.

[13] translatiun, see above.

[14] the buying of religious title or office.

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Paul Halsall October 1997