

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

***The True Story of the Roman Catholic Church***

***Joseph McCabe***

**In Six Double Volumes**

**Volume 1**

**How the Roman Catholic  
Church Really Began**

**Volume 2**

**How the Roman Church  
Became Wealthy and Corrupt**

THE TRUE STORY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Edited by E. **Haldeman-Julius**

**Volume I**

# How the Roman Catholic Church Really Began

The Actual Facts About the Origin and  
Early Growth of Catholicism

**Joseph McCabe**

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# HOW THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH REALLY BEGAN

## INTRODUCTION

THE English political philosopher Hobbes had defined the Roman Church as "the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof," and more than a century ago it seemed to very many thoughtful observers that another fall of Rome was close at hand. Napoleon had ordered his soldiers to bring Pius VII to France, to hear in stronger terms the imperial commands which he had refused to obey; and so low had sunk the power of this successor of the medieval "princes of all the earth" that only the silent and sullen peasants shuddered when he was brought, in gilded cage, to the feet of the new monarch of the earth. Half of Europe had thrown off the Papal yoke two centuries earlier. Now France, the last great power to sustain it, was in rebellion; and from France the spirit of revolt spread rapidly over Italy, Spain and Portugal, and the audacious regiment that had so long held southern Europe for the Papacy, the Society of the Jesuits, was disgraced and disbanded. Men recalled the successive stages of the fall of the Roman Empire fourteen centuries earlier. Pius VII, Napoleon's generals said, would be the last of the long line of men who had claimed to be the spiritual sovereigns of the world.

Yet the Papacy so far recovered that forty years later a distinguished Protestant historian? Lord Macaulay, predicted that even in those remote days when travelers would come from new civilizations to gaze upon the ruins of the city of London, as we go to see the ruin; of Thebes and Babylon, the Popes would still rule their millions of prostrate subjects from the Vatican Palace. France was once more almost entirely Catholic: Spain, Italy and Portugal, red with the blood of their rebels, were despotically ruled in the interest of the Pope; and, strangest of all, ten million subjects of the Pope now promoted his cause by every artifice at their command in the leading Protestant lands—Germany, England and America. Gradually, however, the modern spirit rose from victory to victory, and at the close of the century the Papal statisticians would report, in privacy of the sacred palace, that the loss in the course of the century, in seceders and descendants of seceders, amounted to about one hundred millions. Surely now some enduring and invincible force was destroying the fabric of the medieval organization.

And the twentieth century opened with new predictions, in the literature of every land, of the permanence of the spiritual Roman

Empire. The English Protestant statesman, Gladstone! estimated that by the close of the century the most modern of civilizations, the United States, would have six hundred million Roman Catholic citizens. A more cautious Protestant writer, Mr. Bodley (in "The Catholic Democracy of America"), said that they would at \*least number four hundred millions. In Germany the Church had in its Center Party a force that could sway the balance of political power. In En&and so scientific a prophet as Mr. H. G. Wells was writing (in "Anticipations") that he foresaw the shaven monks of the Church begging their bread amidst the wonders of the coming civilization. Still, quarter of a century later, some predict that this most ancient and conservative of the churches will be the last to survive. Does not the Pope today rule a larger and immeasurably wealthier body than he ever ruled before? Are there not forty million of his most generous supporters in the three most progressive of modern civilizations? And does not the Pope exert a diplomatic and political power nearly all over the world that his predecessors have not enjoyed for four or five centuries?

There is probably no other religious organization in history that has survived and surmounted so many revolutions. It is nearly nineteen centuries since the first group of followers of Christ whom we may call the primitive Roman Church met in poverty and obscurity on the dark fringe of the great city. It had barely established itself when a fierce persecution scattered its members. Thirty years later it had recovered, and it boasted that at last it included the noble and the wealthy, when a second persecution ravaged it. Through two centuries of disdain it continued to grnw until at last the express order was given to exterminate it; and it came very near extermination. Within a few years, however, men were astonished to find it enjoying the sun of the imperial favor, raising its spacious temples beside those of the old gods, and at length directing the hands of emperors to close all other temples in Europe and pronounce it the sole religion of all known civilization. It had scarcely established itself in this unique position when there burst upon *it* one of the most destructive tornadoes recorded in history. It conquered the world's new conquerors, but it had sunk to their level of crude and violent superstition, and it met a new menace when the brilliant civilization of the Moors and Saracens awakened a sense of shame in Christendom. Out of this struggle emerged, blood-spattered, with a great new art and a new intellectual life, and by the year 1300 it had a power far more complete and more extensive than any religious or. even political organization in history had ever had. It survived the mighty convulsion which *its* own moral degradation, the Renaissance, and the protest of Christendotn brought upon it; *it* rose to a greater height of power after the revolution of the eighteenth century; and its present head looks out *upon* our scientific and, rebellious world probably with greater confidence than the leaders of any other religious organization.

These arc historical facts, and one can understand how easily

the Roman Catholic writer or preacher can convert them into a proof that the unique experience of his Church implies a unique or supernatural force. Did not Christ say to Peter nineteen hundred years ago, "Thou art the Rock and upon this Rock I will build my Church"? How many are likely to take up the study of the obscure literary history of that text? It is easier to see a divine power, the fulfillment of a divine promise, in that unique record of destructive storms and survivals. So, even when they win wealth and culture, the children of the Irish or Germans, Poles and Italians, who a generation or two ago brought into America the robust faith of peasants still profess it; and with the vast new wealth with which they endow it the Church creates a political organization that shall reward the loyal, intimidate the disloyal, and create a literary atmosphere of its own. And with this power and wealth it can dictate to non-Catholic writers of history.

Historians have always been the most dreaded **enemies** of the Catholic Church. Whatever period of the past fifteen centuries they examined yielded such facts of moral degradation or bloody coercion or fraud that, even if one honestly recorded also the service rendered at one phase or the high character inspired here and there, the predominant impression left on the mind of the reader was one of somber demoralization or dangerous priestcraft, of ghastly tyranny or repulsive mendacity. That is why no Catholic historian is ever accepted as an authority **outside** his own Church. Is there one Catholic amongst the crowd of distinguished historians of the last century and a half whom non-Catholics ever read? And could there be a greater reflection than this on the veracity, or the freedom to tell the truth, of the Catholic historian? The Church cannot permit any writer who is read by its own followers to give a wholly sincere account of any period of history between the year 350 and the year 1850 A. D. They are nurtured on historical fiction from their early years, and they are then assured that any literature which disturbs this fiction is "against the faith" and the reading of it is as sternly forbidden to them as that of the most obscene literature. But it is increasingly difficult to persuade the educated Catholics of our generation that all the great non-Catholic historians conspired to libel their Church, and the great wealth and persistent intrigue of the Church have enabled it to meet the difficulty in a different way.

The older manuals of history had quite naturally had some tincture of Protestantism at a time when America, England and Germany were almost entirely Protestant, and it was claimed that the conditions of our time required a change. Historians were disposed to admit the claim for two reasons. The older history, even when it was unsectarian, expressed open disdain of the Church, and it was said that the new scientific history must be written without sentiment. In the next place it was said that, owing to the very late development of the science of psychology, the older historians were necessarily superficial, or that they failed to appreciate the relation of the institutions of any particular period to the mind of

that period. No one pretends that we have made new discoveries in this field of history. All the facts which I shall incorporate in this work have long been known and are undisputed *in* serious history. But in recent historical works there has been a marked change in the selection and accentuation of facts: a change of such a nature that the superficial reader imagines, and Catholics encourage him to imagine, that a long period of Protestant libel is over, and the Church modestly emerges at last as a venerable institution vitally connected with the **progressive** civilization **of the world**.

Let me give a few important illustrations. The first three centuries of the life of the Roman Church are described in the melodramatic terms of **Catholic** Sunday-school literature, and it is not explained that even critical **Catholic** scholars acknowledge that the great majority of the Roman martyrs are fictitious characters and there was very little persecution at Rome. Not a word is said about the imperial decrees and troops by means of which the Roman Church displaced rival religions ; and, while the vices of the pagans are stressed, nothing or little is said about the six centuries of moral and intellectual barbarism which followed the triumphs of the bishops of Rome. There is almost always in recent manuals a chapter on the ideal of the monastic life, but there is **rarely** a word about the general hypocrisy and sensuality of the monks and nuns which 'foul the pages of history from the fourth century to the ~~sixteenth~~ **twelfth** century. The true causes of the reawakening of Europe in the **twelfth** and thirteenth centuries are never fully given, and it is falsely represented that, after this awakening, the institutions of the later Middle Ages were based upon the spirit and desires of the people, instead of upon three centuries of grim oppression and persecution of that spirit. The art of the later Middle Ages is very properly appreciated but the reader is given an entirely false idea of its inspiration, its relation to the Church and the monks, and the profoundly immoral and largely irreligious life of the time. Hardly a word is said about the utter degradation of the Papacy during two periods of more than a century each, apart from shorter periods, or about the unscrupulous and disastrous methods of some of the men who, like Gregory I, Gregory VII, and Innocent III, **are** presented as "great Popes." The Inquisition and the religious massacres (of Albigensians, Huguenots, Jews, etc.) are diluted into insignificance; and the political side of the Reformation is so exaggerated as to conceal or obscure the clerical infamy which provoked it. The true nature of the French Revolution and of the relation of the people to the Church is **very rarely** put before the reader, and I know no single work which tells how the refined bishops and monarchs of Europe after 1816 shed more blood, with less cause, and with greater injury to the race, than all the revolutionaries of France.

These changes in the writing of history, wherever it affects the Roman Church, are neither scientific nor honorable. The effect of them is to convey to children or to the general reading public an impression of **the history** of the last two thousand years that **is**



false from beginning to end. The motive is not a new and larger charity that rises serenely above the rivalry of sects, but dread of the power of the modern Catholic Church. In the very heart of what was once the most Protestant region on earth, in the city of Boston, Catholics now dictate what shall or shall not be taught to Protestant children; and this is by no means **the** only American city where the priest controls the teachers and the class-books. Publishers are reminded, if they fail to perceive the fact, that any book which tells the full historical truth will be offensive to ~~one-~~ fifth of the community and will be excluded from half the schools and colleges. "Just: the book **we** need in America," said a New York publisher to me, in declining the manuscript of my "**Popes and Their, Church,**" "but you will **not** find a publisher in New York, Boston or Chicago who dare handle it," I did not. Deputations of influential Catholics wait upon the editor of **your** daily paper when some historical truth has strayed into **his** columns, and Catholic fiction soon displaces the historical facts. Ours is the golden age of tolerance, except of historical truth.

In these circumstances I set out to tell the full story of the Roman Church. Whatever services it rendered, whatever great personalities its doctrine inspired, will be faithfully recorded; but these and the disservices and irregularities will be told with a strict regard for proportion. By this I do not mean without sentiment or **censure**. It is quite **ludicrous** to suppose that an historian in whom the facts inspire disdain or disgust cannot present those facts with a strict regard for truth. There is in the modern science of history, (which, ~~as~~ I explained! includes no Catholic writers), no dispute about the facts I am going to tell. The untruth of which I have complained consists in the exaggerated reference to facts favorable to the Church and the very meager reference to, or entire omission of, the very much larger number of unfavorable facts. I shall endeavor to **use** a scientific rule of proportion in dealing with both.

And it is **just** because I have all the facts, from the middle of the first century to our own time, before me in their just proportion that I shall make no attempt to conceal my disdain. This work which I here commence is the history of the most successful imposture of the whole period of civilization. It is the story of a Church which pretends to have enkindled in the hearts of the race new sentiments of tenderness, brotherly love, and humility, yet imposed itself upon a reluctant world by violence and has in the maintenance of its power slain more pillions of men and women than all the other religions of the civilized era put together. It is the story of a Church that still tells the world that it brought with it a revelation of purity and holiness, yet its authorities have supinely surveyed, and have shared during long periods, a sexual and sensual license in their holiest institutions to which you will find not even a remote parallel in the history of any other civilized religion. It is the story of a Church that professes to have been founded by the **Jesus** of the Gospels. who scorned ritual religion, yet it became **and**

remains the most weirdly ceremonious religion the world has ever seen. It is the story of a Church that claims to have been instructed; from the first to take the side of the poor and the weak, yet it has, until our democratic age allied itself unfailingly with those who despoiled the poor and laid their feudal tyranny upon the weak. It is the story of a Church that is supremely arrogant in its claim to have the exclusive possession of truth, yet it has attained power by an unparalleled series of forgeries, kept ninety percent of the people of the world illiterate for more than a thousand years that they might not discover its fraud, smote with its blood-stained croziers the mouths of millions who sought to utter the truth, impeded for ages the progress of science and culture, and is today of a cultural poverty out of all proportion to its mighty wealth and jealously confines its members to a literature which is saturated with untruth.

Every phrase of this indictment has been deeply and coldly considered and will be fully vindicated in the twelve parts of this work. For the men and women of the Catholic Church, who have from infancy been educated in its mendacious literature, I have entirely friendly and sympathetic feelings. It is one of the most welcome symptoms of our time that they at last perceive or suspect the real purpose of the priest-made law that they shall not read criticisms of their Church. But they must not expect me to write with courtesy of that system. It will be a sufficient justification of my irony and disdain if I prove to the letter the justice of this indictment of it; and at every critical or contested point I shall appeal to the original as well as the best modern authorities and give thousands of explicit references to these. The non-Catholic reader will find here the complete answer to every untruth and an exposure of every fallacy in the great controversy of our time. And I repeat, that this grave charge will be substantiated, not by a pretense of making discoveries or by strained personal interpretation of evidence, but by a properly balanced and complete presentation of historical facts which you can verify in the expert authorities on each of the periods I successively review.

## CHAPTER I

## THE GREEK CHRISTIAN MISSION AT ROME



**ABOUT** the middle of the first century of the Christian Era, when we learn from **Paul's** Epistle to the Romans that **there is a community at Rome, the world had just passed** through one of its most brilliant literary periods. The Greek language had become, through five or six centuries of intense literary activity, the most perfect of all languages for the purpose of the writer. The Romans also had just had their Golden Age of letters, but the small Roman Church or community that lived in the **most despised suburb of the imperial city about the middle of** the first century was a Greek colony, a fragment, of a race that spread all over the Mediterranean area and had an immense literature. The **library at Alexandria contained more than half a million hand-written** volumes. Even shorthand had been discovered and was in daily use. Not until modern times has there been any other period **of history, when men were so eager to write down their thoughts** and experiences.

Just at this time, the Catholic says, we must put the greatest event of European history: the foundation of the Roman Church **by** the Apostles Peter and Paul, the laying of the first stones of the most momentous and most inspired of human institutions. And it **must excite the curiosity or the suspicion of even the Catholic** when he learns that there is no other event of any importance in the whole of history about which we have so little 'information. **Paul himself plainly regards the little colony at Rome as just one** of a score scattered over the Empire, and he is entirely ignorant of any claim that it enjoys a monumental privilege. From Rome, a few years later, he writes two further letters which equally ignore the presence of Peter in, or any special relation of Peter to, the Roman Church. No Roman Christian seems to have been able to **wield the pen until, thirty years later, Bishop Clement sends a** message to a sister-church in Greece; and here again there is, as we shall see, no reference to any privileges of his own Church or any **particular relation of it to Peter. Not until the end of the second** century do we find a Roman writer even implying that his Church has a unique authority, and then, and for two further centuries, the **other Churches sharply reject the claim and** invite the Bishop of Rome to cultivate Christian humility.

We shall see that there is not a single Roman **Catholic** work in which this situation is candidly and truthfully described, but it **is** enough here to notice the singular obscurity, from the ordinary historian's point of view, that enwraps the whole early history of the **Roman Church. The books that have been written by theologians**

during the last one hundred years on this very scanty Roman literature of the first two centuries are counted by the thousand, yet there is no general agreement. But since it is a material part of my story that the Roman Church even in its earliest stages forged its credentials, has enlarged its power by forgeries ever since, and maintains it by the dishonest manipulation of documents even today, we must see what in point of fact the very meager literature does tell us about the beginnings of the Roman Church. We shall see **that the three documents to which I have referred**—the Epistles of Paul, the letter of Clement, and the letters of Pope Victor—the only Roman literature of the first two centuries, are very plainly **inconsistent with the Catholic claim**, that there was in the Roman Church from the start a tradition of supremacy. They are, on the other hand, in complete harmony with the view that the imperial splendor of the city inoculated the leaders of the Roman Church with a very secular ambition **and led to the interpolation of forged texts** in the gospels.

### §1. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ROME

About the middle of the first century, when the first Christians appeared **there**, Rome was a city of a million people, the mistress of the world and the clotted center of its wealth. The ancient market-place on the site of the primitive village, the Forum, was now a beautiful broad avenue lined with magnificent marble buildings. The golden-roofed temple of Jupiter, the religious center of Rome, looked down upon it from the Capitoline Hill. The palace of the Caesars, not yet converted into the Golden House of Nero, overshadowed it from the Palatine Hill. On other of the low surrounding hills were the large and beautiful mansions of the new nobility: the great land-owners and capitalists who had displaced the old Roman patricians, whose lives had been extinguished in centuries of warfare. Between these hills, from the Forum, were the densely populated quarters of the half-million free workers and their families: tenement-blocks six or seven stories high towering above narrow streets, six or seven feet wide, into which the fierce sun never penetrated. But the workers were gay and carefree. The hours of labor were not long; there were a hundred holidays, with princely free entertainments, every year; there was free corn for every worker; there were cool marble colonnades and magnificent cheap baths to lounge in by day, and there was at night a flare of light and life that lit the sky.

In the year 59 A. D., when Paul's letter first introduces us to the Roman Church, the city was sinking to the lowest depth of its occasional demoralization. Just in that year the Emperor Nero had murdered his mother. All Rome was still discussing how he had sent her to sea in a beautiful gilded galley with sails of silk; how the vile servants of the young Emperor had put in its hold machinery that would tear it asunder when it reached deep water; how the Empress had swum to the shore, and how, when her son had sent men to dispatch her, she had torn the robe from her womb and said,

"Strike here, where Nero was born." And Nero, whatever his mental state had hitherto been, had now become a deranged sensualist, a Sadist monstrosity, bent on exterminating virtue from Rome and gathering about him the loosest nobles and the vilest parasites. One could see him prowling nightly through the less frequented streets, with a group of companions, violating any young woman or boy he encountered. All Rome must imitate him. He withdrew the police guard from the dark district of the Milvian Bridge to encourage even the workers to indulge in nocturnal orgies. He made men and women of the highest rank play obscene parts on the stage, and he filled the Golden House, the great palace which he built after the fire to overshadow Rome, with every vice that was known to the ancient city. The Praetorian guard of twenty thousand of the finest soldiers watched any attempt to interfere with this deliberate policy to debauch the entire city. The city "teemed with funerals," Tacitus says; yet let me add that in less than ten years Rome rose against its insane ruler and returned to sobriety.

During all this time there were men and women who clung to the finer ideal of Roman character or even led lives of asceticism. Half a century earlier there had been, under the first emperor, Augustus, a religious revival. For two centuries a very stern code of morals and a religious sentiment which found expression in new sects had been spreading over the Greco-Roman world. The sober and religious poetry of Vergil, which was generally prized as the highest literature that Rome had produced, testifies, in its popularity, to the success which Augustus had in restoring character. The Stoic philosophy was imported from Greece, and the letters of Seneca! Nero's tutor, make it clear that large numbers of the wealthier Romans shared his very high moral code. For those who could not associate this with the old gods of Rome there were new sects from the east, especially from Egypt. Somehow the cults of Isis and of Serapis, which were very strict in Egypt, degenerated at Rome and were banished from the city, like the Greek worship of Bacchus and other cults which tended to immorality, but there were several ascetic centers.

One new sect, in particular, was never corrupted and never accused of using its private meetings for conspiracy. It was the worship of a Persian god, Mithra, which had long been established at Rome. The Jesuit Father Grisar, who is counted the most learned recent historian of the Roman Church, tells his readers that Mithraism was "in many ways a distorted version and an aping of Christianity." He has not the courage to tell people in the twentieth century, as some of the early Fathers did when they were troubled by this resemblance of Mithraism to Christianity, that the devil had invented it to forestall the appeal of the Christian religion, so he hints that the simple explanation is that it borrowed from the Roman Church. On the contrary, the Mithraic religion was founded in Persia centuries before the birth of Christ and it was established in Rome in the first century B. C. It said nothing against the gods of Rome. Its members might take any oath of allegiance or pay,

homage to the vague divinity of the Emperor. Indeed its shining young god Mithra 'was identified with the "Unconquered Sun" of the Roman calendar, 'and, at midnight of December 25th, when the Romans themselves were celebrating the birth of the sun, they also commemorated with great joy and blaze of candles the birthday of Mithra. But it was an austere religion. In underground candle-lit temples those who joined it were baptized in blood in the name of "the Ram of God (Mithra) who had taken away the sins of the world," and they must sin no more. So they kept themselves quietly apart from the hectic life of Rome and established their temple, where linen-robed priests offered sacred bread and water on carved altars, on the little-frequented slopes of the Vatican Hill.

## §2. THE PREACHING OF PAUL

Rome in those ancient days lay entirely on the east of the Tiber, clinging as closely as possible to the Forum. The long low slope of the Vatican Hill, and the Janiculus, west of the river, were then a dreary district, to be avoided as much as possible. There was an old cemetery there, and the Romans never regarded a cemetery, as the Greeks did, as merely the "sleeping place" of the dear dead. Further south along the river, still outside the walls, was a poor and densely crowded region of low esteem. There the Jews, who were far from popular, lived, with other poor foreign workers from the ships that came up the river, and here criminals found a refuge from the vigilance of the city guards. It was, naturally, in this dark suburban fringe of the city that the Roman Church was born, little dreaming that a day would come when millions of people the world over could name no other place in Rome except the Vatican.

When the first Greeks or Hellenized Jews came up the river with the news that the Messiah had actually lived and died in Judea, and had set afire the Jewish quarter beyond the river, we do not know. But it matters little. The Epistle to the Romans, the authenticity of which few have ever disputed, is believed to have been sent from Greece about the year 59 A. D. "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world," Paul says. He longs to visit them and will, before long, do so on his way to Spain. But the complimentary opening must not lead us to suppose that there was a large community. The letter ends with greetings to a score of families. They have no special titles and there is no trace of any organization. "Church" means merely any gathering, however small, of the believers. To turn his words (xvi, 3 and 5) into modern speech, he says: "Give my kind regards to Priscilla and Aquila . . . and to the church [little group] that is in their house." In the book of Acts (xviii, 1-3) we read that Aquila and Priscilla, man and wife, are Jews who had been expelled from Rome, with other Jews, by the Emperor Claudius, and had gone to Corinth; and Paul, being a weaver -of tent-cloth like them, had lived with them and converted them. The Roman writer, Suetonius, tells us in his life of Claudius (Ch. xxv) that the Emperor did in fact banish the Jews for turbulence under the lead of a certain Chrestos

{a fairly common Greek name). It all hangs together, and we need not split hairs about the texts. A number of families of Jews and Greeks-hardly any of the names are Roman-in the district across the Tiber had accepted Christ, and Paul wrote to confirm them in the faith. We have no reason to suppose that there were many more than those he names.

How Paul went to Jerusalem and had a fierce struggle with the Jews, how he appealed to Rome and made an adventurous voyage, does not belong to this story. I am supposing that he did reach Rome about the year 62 A. D. and taught his gospel there for a few years. The desperateness of the school which would dissolve all the personalities of the first century into myth is amusingly illustrated by two books, published in a recent year (1927) by the English Rationalist publisher. One, C. Clayton Dove's "Paul of Tarsus," takes him to be a very definite historical figure and says that the attempt to make the Epistles spurious is losing ground. The other book, L. G. Ryland's "Evolution of Christianity" (a hash of the various mythical theories) assures us arrogantly that "the best critics a good while ago came to the conclusion that only four of the Epistles **could** be considered genuine" and that now Van Manen (he died more than twenty years ago, by the way) has "proved that the first three are composite works" (p. 131). In the same year 1927, as I will tell in the next chapter, we find two distinguished German professors, a Protestant theologian and a Rationalist historian, and Professor Foakes-Jackson in England, publishing important books which claim that both Peter and Paul were executed at Rome ; and in 1928 Professor B. W. Robinson, of Chicago University, tells us in the latest edition of his "Life of Paul" that it is practically certain that he was executed **at** Rome under Nero. That is the almost universal opinion of experts today, and I will say only that it seems a reasonable historical estimate of the relevant part of Acts, and of the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle of Clement, that Paul reached Rome **and** was (as Clement says) executed there, probably under Nero,

But let us keep to a reasonable estimate of the evidence in every respect. Paul cannot have achieved much 'in Rome. He is said to have been allowed to choose his own lodging, though a soldier lived with him, and he merely disputed with those who visited the house. If we know Roman life we imagine a small room in a tenement, barely furnished, with small windows of oiled paper, in the Jewish colony on the west bank of the river; and dark-bearded little **men** come upstairs-perhaps it is **the** apartment of the **weavers** Priscilla and Aquila-when the day's work is over and dispute fierily, as you will see them do in New York today, about the **Messiah**. **Indeed the Epistle to the Galatians, which Paul is said to have sent from 'Rome, very strongly suggests that Paul had many opponents, if not that the majority were opposed to him, in the Christian community itself. They were clearly for the most part of the Jewish race, and it was not easy to persuade them that the reign of the Law was over.**

What Paul taught is quite clear in his Epistle to the Romans and all the other Epistles that are beyond dispute. The Incarnation, Atonement and Resurrection are his three dogmas, reiterated in every chapter. That he knew nothing of a human Jesus and preached some mystic deity other than the gospel figure, as some claim, is quite untrue. He is writing to the Romans "concerning his [God's] Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord, which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh." Throughout he lays equal stress on the divinity and the humanity of Christ; and the occasional reference to the seed of David (which it was indispensable to hold, as a fulfillment of prophecy in controversy with the Jews) suggests that he had some such genealogical tree of Mary as we find later. Nearly the whole of the fifth and sixth chapters are taken up with a long statement that Jesus was crucified and that he died to redeem men from the taint of the sin of Adam. "Blood" and "cross" and "redemption" occur on every page. It is an equally indispensable part of his teaching that Christ "rose from the dead," that one day-and before long—God will "judge all men by Jesus Christ," and that there is a heaven for the virtuous. The only suggestion of ritual is that all are "baptized into Jesus Christ." Of officials or meetings or church organization there is no trace. Of Peter there is no mention, either in this or in the letters written from Rome.

### S3. IN THE DAYS OF NERO

So for a couple of years, probably 62 to 64 A. D., Paul, far from the lurid atmosphere of the city under Nero, argued in his tenement with the Jews and Judaisers who came to see him. No man could more eloquently exhort his disciples to be meek and humble, but for controversial opponents he had all the epithets of an oriental: "Their throat is an open sepulchre, the poison of asps is under their lips." In one place he boasts that his message has reached the palace, probably meaning that some Greek or oriental slave comes over by night to the obscure quarter across the river; for Nero's palace was now so drenched with vice and brutality that he could not have suffered any free Christian to remain in it. We will trust, at least, that the rumor in the early Church, that the vicious and luxurious Poppaea, who got Nero to murder his wife and marry her, was a Christian is not true. She presided at his orgies and clung to him when he forced the noblest women to prostitute themselves to the public or to their own slaves.

The prodigal expenditure of the Emperor in entertaining Rome and the sight of his twenty thousand lavishly paid guards kept down the murmurs of the people, but when in the year 64 a terrible fire destroyed the homes of hundreds of thousands, and the rumor spread that men had been seen throwing torches into the houses, a dangerous anger against the Emperor spread. To divert the suspicion from himself, the old Roman writers say, he laid the blame on the foreign fanatics of the turbulent quarter across the river. So the first persecution fell upon the Roman Church. It was a fixed



principle of Roman law that even the gods must be worshipped communally : "Let no man have gods by himself that are not publicly recognized." Yet Rome never persecuted for religion. In the year 187 B. C. the Senate had suppressed the worship of Bacchus because it led to orgies. In 48 B. C. it had closed the temples of Isis, and Tiberius had later banished all Egyptian sects, 'on a suspicion of conspiracy and other irregularities. As the Jews largely came from Alexandria, and their compatriots in Palestine were not very docile, they shared the suspicion; and doubtless the Christians were officially regarded as a Jewish sect. The blame of the fire was laid on them, and, when this charge could not be proved, they were accused of "hatred of the human race," and, Tacitus says, "an immense number" were put to death after suffering such torments as the diseased brain of Sero could imagine. Some were crucified; some, sewn into the skins of beasts, were torn by dogs ; some were soaked in tar and oil, and, as living torches, they lit the palace gardens at night,

So says the historian Tacitus (*Annals* xv, 44), and there has been a good deal of controversy about the genuineness of the passage. Some of the amateur critics are not historically well equipped for the work. Mr. J. M. Robertson says in his "Short History of Christianity" that we must reject the whole long passage as a medieval forgery because Tacitus is not quoted by any Christian writer before the manuscript of his work was discovered in the Middle Ages, and because "no hint of such a catastrophe is given in the Acts of the Apostles." The second reason given does not commend criticism of this sort, for a glance at the closing words of Acts will tell any person that the narrative ends just before the date of the fire. As to the first reason, it is true that no early Christian writer mentions Tacitus by name—they rarely do quote pagan writers—but the description of this persecution in the *Chronicle of Sulpicius Severus*, a Christian historian of the fourth century, corresponds so closely with that of Tacitus that Professor Drews believes that the interpolator of Tacitus actually took it from Sulpicius. Further, even Clement of Rome, writing about the year 96 to the Corinthians, says (Ch. v), immediately after mentioning the martyrdom of Paul—"I will return to Peter presently—that "to these men must be added a great multitude of the elect," who suffered "terrible and unspeakable torments." This most plausibly refers to the Neronian persecution; and the Roman historian Suetonius, of the second century, says in his *Life of Nero* (Ch. xvi) that he punished the Christians for their "malevolent superstition." In the third century all Christian writers refer to the persecution under Nero, but the earlier evidence is enough.

Facts which we shall see later make us quite disposed to entertain the idea of forgery in the Roman Church, particularly the forgery of martyrs. In an ancient list of the Roman bishops only two of the first thirty are not described as saints and martyrs: which is a remarkably bold forgery, seeing that in Rome there had only been two very short periods of persecution at the most before the

year 250. Dean Milman claims in his "History of Latin Christianity," that it is only in that year that we find the first genuine martyr-Pope. We shall see all this later. It certainly warns us to be cautious, but we need not abandon all sense of historical proportion and reject as spurious every test that does not fit into a preconceived theory. I agree with the French-Jewish Rationalist Solomon Reinach, with Professor Meyer, Professor Lietzmann, Professor B. W. Robinson, Professor Foakes-Jackson, and every expert who has recently written on the subject, that Nero persecuted the Christians and that Paul was probably one of his victims.

But the "immense multitude" and the picturesque torments are details that we may justly question. Tacitus wrote more than half a century after the event, and modern historians say that instead of using exact records, as Wommsen said of him, his chief weakness is that he did this so rarely. Clement of Rome wrote thirty years after the event, and in that ancient world oral tradition had a marvelous way of growing. Let us grant the savage tortures, as that was Nero's method, but we find the most learned of early Christian writers, Origen, saying ("Against Celsus," iii, 8) that down to his time, the second half of the third century, there had been few martyrs: "Some, on special occasions, and these can easily be numbered, have endured death for the sake of Christianity." So, without straining evidence, we may conclude that the tense debates in the humble tenements by the Tiber ended in a blaze of Sadistic fury, and the Roman Church, proud to have been the first to suffer, glorified and magnified its martyrs. We shall see in a later chapter how very few martyrs it had, and how many hundreds it forged.

## CHAPTER II

## THE LEGEND OF PETER

**W**HETHER Paul was ever in Rome, and whether he there laid down his life for his faith, are matters of interest only to the ecclesiastical historians. On this point the Church of Rome shares its belief with every other Church, and expert secular historians have no theory in their minds when they conclude that the evidence is acceptable. But the question whether Peter also was in Rome and lost his life in the persecution is much more important from our present viewpoint. It is just as essential for the Catholic to believe that Peter founded the Roman Church as it is to believe that whatever Church Peter founded was to be supreme above all others. To many in modern times even these questions may not seem of great importance, but they certainly are important to any man who would study the real origin of the power, or the return to power, of the Roman Church. A short consideration of the two questions will provide the first justification of the unflattering terms in which I have described that Church. Its story is the record of the most wonderful of impostures. It was from the start based on a forgery, and it has thriven on forgery ever since.

## §1. THE FIRST GREAT FORGERY

Since this is a history of Romanism, not of Christianity, we need not consider what had actually happened in Judca in the days of Tiberius. We must, however, in this case, devote some attention to those words of the New Testament in which Christ is represented as **saying to Peter: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church"** (Matthew, xvi, 18). For the explanation of this the American Catholic turns to his pretentious "Catholic Encyclopaedia," which boasts of its modern and scientific scholarship, and he learns that the word for "church" in the Greek and Latin texts, is "the term by which New Testament writers denote the society founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ." Such statements are as dishonest as the original text. The writer is fully aware that Matthew is the only gospel-writer who uses the word, and that the second and only other time he uses it he does not mean an ecclesiastical organization or society (xviii, 17). The use of the word in the text I have quoted above is unique in the New Testament; which at once suggests that it is an interpolation of a very late date, since what would have to be regarded as one of the primary intentions of Christ could hardly be thus ignored by three evangelists and all the other books of the New Testament.

Protestant writers would do better, instead of (as some do) supposing that Christ was standing on a rock at the time and re-

ferred to that rock (on which nothing was built), to denounce the text as a pun that Christ could not possibly have perpetrated. The language spoken in Judea at that time was Aramaic, and in Aramaic rock is Kepha, of which Peter is a Greek and Latin translation, Peter's original name is given as Simon or Simeon, and for some reason this was changed to Kepha or Peter; possibly it had been his nickname in his native village. Hence the text really runs: "Thou art Rock and upon this Rock I will build my church." It reflects the clumsy playfulness of a tenth-rate Greek writer, not a most solemn announcement of a divine plan.

Not only, however, is the plan of founding a new organization entirely inconsistent with the whole teaching of Jesus in the gospels or in Paul's Epistles, for the end of the world is near and in any case the aim is to convert Judaism, but the insertion of the word Church at this stage is a foolish anachronism. The Greek word means literally "calling together" or assembly, and in Greece it referred to certain civic assemblies. The Greek translators of the Old Testament used it to express assemblies of the Jewish people; and it is by no means true that, some writers say, it always means a religious assembly. In Psalm 26, v. 5, "the congregation [or crowd] of evil-doers" is a translation of the same word. It would have been completely devoid of meaning to any Jew of the time when Christ is supposed to have used it. Then, in Acts and the Epistles, it is used to denote a local, even a domestic, group of believers, and only in one or two places does Paul use it of the whole body of Christians; in which case it is meaningless and may be regarded with suspicion.

On the other hand there is not in the whole New Testament (apart from this one sentence) or anywhere in Christian literature before the third century any statement about a peculiar relation of the entire Christian body to Peter; and it is in the Roman Church that the claim first appears and all the other Churches reject it. All admitted that Peter had in the gospel narrative a leading position amongst the apostles, but they, as we shall see, unanimously rejected for centuries the idea that this gave the Roman Church any authority over any other Church. All the Christian writers of the second century attribute importance to the Roman Church because it was founded by Peter and Paul, but they never mention Peter alone and they quite obviously know nothing of the tremendous powers which the Catholic supposes to have been bestowed upon him. Clement of Rome, the only Pope to write anything until the last decade of the second century, refers jointly to Peter and Paul, as all other Christian writers do, and does not even faintly suggest that his Church has any authority to interfere in the affairs of other Churches. The authenticity of this Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians has been questioned, but I have already explained why these rejections of every fragment of Christian literature in the first century seems to me an abuse of historical methods in favor of theories. From a quite neutral historical viewpoint what is called the "we" narrative in Acts (purporting to have been written by a companion of Paul), the chief Epistles of Paul, and the Epistle of Clement present no serious difficulties.

And if we examine these documents and the authentic Christian writings of the second century in their order we see quite clearly the evolution of the Roman claim. In Acts Paul flatly opposes the opinion of Peter on the chief points under discussion, and no one present suggests any reason why Peter's decisions should prevail. In his Epistles Paul shows that he has clearly never heard, even from Peter, of any, special authority of that apostle. In Clement, head of the now slightly organized Roman community, we have a clear enough statement that Paul was executed at Rome (he came "to the extreme limit of the west and suffered martyrdom under the Prefects">, but not a clear statement that Peter was ever at Rome, and certainly not the least claim of authority or special relation to Peter. The Catholic writer usually represents this Epistle as the first assertion of Papal authority, or as an official interference of Bishop Clement in the feuds of the Corinthian Christians. Any person can read the translation of it (and all the other early Christian documents I quote) in the English collection of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, and he will at once see how dishonest such a representation is. It is not a letter of Clement, whose name does not occur in it, though no doubt he wrote it, but a brotherly address from "the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth." It is quite fatal to the Roman Catholic theory.

The next document is a letter of Bishop Ignatius to the Romans about the year 120. In it occur the ambiguous words: "I do not, like Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you." There is no need to attempt to fix the precise meaning of this because it plainly puts Peter and Paul on the same level of authority. Even thirty years after this, when Bishop Irenaeus gives us our next document, a reference to the Roman Church in his book "Against Heresies" (iii, 32), we still find only that Peter 'and Paul, in equal conjunction, founded the Roman Church and thus gave it special prestige. As even the western Church now seethed with doctrinal discussion Irenaeus (who had for a time taught in Rome) would have been pleased if he could appeal to its bishop's teachings as a standard of doctrine. He does not. Then at last (omitting writers who merely say that Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome) we get, about the year 190, the first genuine assertion of authority over other Churches by a bishop of Rome, Pope Victor. We shall return to this later, but we may here note that even Victor knows nothing of the founding of the entire Church upon Peter, and his claim, and all similar claims for the next three centuries, were rejected by the other Churches.

These documents make it quite certain that the text which we now find in Matthew was quite unknown in the Church until the end of the second century. We have no early manuscripts of the Gospels the only way in which we can judge the age of a particular text is to see at what date it is first quoted, if there is grave reason why it should be quoted. There certainly is grave reason. The Christian world was rent by controversy from one end to the other throughout the second century, as we shall see in the fourth chapter, yet no bishop has the least suspicion that

the bishop of Rome was divinely appointed to settle such controversies. But the prestige of Rome grew. Constantinople did not yet exist, remember, and Rome was the metropolis of civilization. Further, when the Roman community was restored after the death of Nero, it attracted a few wealthy converts, and was able to send contributions to the poorer Churches of the east. During this period also the belief spread that the two leading apostles, Peter and Paul, had taught at Rome and suffered martyrdom there. The bishops of Rome thus, in the second half of the second century, found themselves enjoying a particular esteem, and a long period of peace and (as we shall see) the favor of a concubine of the Emperor enabled them to build up a large community. In those circumstances the Petrine text was forged. Paul could not be chosen, as he does not enter the life of Christ, and Peter was the most prominent of the Apostles. So some Roman punster perpetrates his joke about Kepha; and the history of civilization far more than a thousand years was dominated by that momentous forgery.

## §2. WAS PETER EVER AT ROME?

It has seemed advisable at this point, if only for the purpose of exposing the dishonesty of modern Catholic writers in defending the authority of their Church, to examine the early Christian literature at some length: and, since all these works have been published in English, any man who has a special interest in the controversy will find the references of value. We need not linger so long over the second question: whether Peter was ever in Rome, but it is essential to the Catholic theory to prove that Peter was the founder and first bishop of the Roman Church, and it will be useful again to see how its apologists manipulate the evidence.

I have already said that the activity of Peter in Rome is admitted by several recent non-Catholic writers of distinction, and we are therefore not prepared to thrust the whole subject disdainfully aside with the assurance that Peter is a mere myth converted by a superstitious age into a personality. Professor Foakes-Jackson, a very liberal Protestant theologian, concludes in his "Peter: Prince of the Apostles" (1927) that we ought to accept the tradition. Professor Hans Lietzmann, a high Protestant authority on ecclesiastical history at Berlin University, strongly maintains in his "Petrus und Paulus in Rom" (1927) that there is plain evidence that Peter as well as Paul was martyred at Rome. Professor Eduard Meyer, a lay historian (and, I believe, a Rationalist) of world-distinction at Berlin University, entirely agrees with his colleague, in his important work, "Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums" (3 vols., 1921-3),

It may seem that in agreeing with these authorities about Paul and rejecting their conclusion about Peter I am admitting that prejudiced and arbitrary spirit which I have hitherto repudiated. But if my reader cares to glance at Foakes-Jackson's work he will at once acquit me. The author admits that both the historical and the archeological evidence in the case of Peter is "unsatisfactory";

that there is "no strictly historical proof of his ever having visited Rome." I have already shown that there is such proof, giving us at least a high degree of probability, in the case of Paul. Of the archeological evidence (the 'appeal to the supposed ancient tombs of Peter and Paul at Rome) I have said nothing. You will find it most minutely examined in Lietzmann and will agree with Foakes-Jackson that it is "unsatisfactory." And when we are asked to respect the "tradition" of the Church, we turn to the early evidences of that tradition and we find that it is entirely favorable to the preaching of Paul in Rome and just as unfavorable to the belief that Peter also was there.

**In the first place the complete silence of Acts and of Paul in his Epistles about the presence of Peter as a co-worker in Rome is very significant.** We know that there was a quarrel between the two but even a Catholic will hardly suggest that Paul and Luke were so bitter that they would not recognize the presence in the same city of Peter. The next piece of evidence is, as we saw, the **letter of Clement (or of the Roman Church) to the Corinthians.** The Catholic writer usually says that it testifies to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome. It certainly does not. "Martyr" means "witness," and in early Christian documents it is not clear sometime whether a man was a-witness to Christ by his life or by his death. The Greek word used in Clement of Peter is just as properly translated "bore witness" as "was martyred" : in fact, the first is the literal meaning. And Clement does not say that in the case of Peter this occurred at Rome, while, as we saw, he expressly states that Paul not only "bore witness" but "came to the extreme limit of the west and bore witness under the Prefects" (the name given to the chief civic authority of Rome) and "was thus removed from the world." The distinction is quite marked.

There are in the New Testament two "Epistles of Peter," and in the first of these the writer says (v, 13) : "The church that is at **Babylon saluteth you.**" **Babylon, of course, is Rome, says the Catholic writer, so the case is proved.** But ancient Babylon was still a great and flourishing city in the first century, and there is not a single reason in the letter why we should not suppose that it was written in that city. There was a large colony of Jews there - the Babylonian Talmud became as famous as the Jerusalem Talmud and some apostle was sure to go there. **So I need not discuss the genuineness of the Epistle, which is seriously disputed.** We can visualize Paul, the educated Pharisee, very plainly in his chief epistles, but read this I Peter and see if you can persuade yourself that it was dictated by a Galilean fisherman, who could most probably (in the fashion of the time) neither read nor write!

It is really not necessary to go further. Bishop Ignatius (about 120) does not clearly say that either Peter or Paul was ever at Rome. Justin (about 150), the Apologist, does not mention either apostle in either of his apologies. Irenaeus [after 180, and after visiting Rome) is the first to say that Peter and Paul founded the Roman Church, but he does not make Peter the bishop of it. Two

other references to the preaching of Peter in Rome by writers of the **second** half of the second century are in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius, but we need not discuss the merits of that unreliable book. It is enough that, whereas Acts and Paul's Epistles and Clement give satisfactory evidence of the presence of Paul in Rome, and by their silence discredit the legend of Peter's activity, it *is* a hundred years after the supposed death of Peter at Rome before any Christian writer mentions it; and we have not the works of the first two writers who are supposed to refer to it. By that time, as we have seen, Rome was busy fabricating its story of the choice of Peter and his successors to rule the universal Church, so the statements in Eusebius are not evidence.

From this point **onward** I shall, in examining the Catholic version of history, be able to use evidence that is not disputed by any non-Catholic historian. In this obscure early period it is not possible to do so, as regards Peter, and I have therefore examined the evidence with care. We not only have the right, but we are compelled, to discriminate between Peter and Paul. There is a most material difference between the evidence for the activity of each in Rome. But even if we allowed, with the German professors, that the early Roman graves purporting to be those of Peter and Paul, and the **references** to them in Eusebius, made it probable (against all the earlier evidence) that Peter was at Rome, it would not acquit the Roman Church of dishonesty. The Roman claim to authority is based upon the text in Matthew alone,

The theologians and historians I have quoted shrink from calling this a forgery. They ask us in one breath to have some respect for the oral tradition in the churches and in the next breath they **ask** us to see only an excessive zeal or a playful piety in members of these churches who invent new martyrs, new sayings of Christ, or new gospels (of which dozens began to circulate in the second century). I see no reason why the writing of an untruth in the Roman Church of the second century should be called an act of piety. We shall, in fact, find presently that it was deeply tainted with ambition and corruption before the end of the second century. Its natural prestige did not suffice for it, so it fabricated the story of Christ's promise to Peter. The first foundation stone of its **ecclesiastical** structure was a lie, and a lie told for its own profit.



## CHAPTER III

## THE LIFE OF THE EARLY COMMUNITY

**I**T has been necessary in the course of the preceding chapter to run forward to the end of the second century, when the Roman Church had fallen far below its primitive standard of virtue. Its life is, in fact, so uneventful, so domestic, so obscure until a work by a Roman Christian scholar of the early part of the third century, which was recovered in the last century, throws a remarkable 'light on it that there is little reason for us to linger over it. For a hundred years it was like the life of every other Christian Church: agitated by controversy, zealous to cultivate virtue, very slowly finding the need of organization, and enlarging its members at the cost of its purity. No material change can be detected in its dimly apprehended life until the latter part of the second century. Yet during that period the first dogmas were formulated, the first lines of the ecclesiastical structure were traced, the first concessions were made to the spirit of the environing pagan world. It is interesting and important to trace these first steps of the evolution of primitive into ecclesiastical Christianity.

## §1. THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL LIFE

The life of the primitive community is so easily gathered from the Epistles of Paul and has so often been described that a short summary will suffice here. Until late in the first century a "church" was a small group of men and women meeting 'at times in the house of some member of the group for mutual support and encouragement in virtue. The word church is probably a corruption of the Greek word "Lord's," meaning "the Lord's house," and it would have been better if the English translators of the New Testament had used the word "assembly." Private meetings of at least in part a religious character were common in the Greco-Roman world. The workers had organizations corresponding to the modern unions, as far as the local groups were concerned, and they held monthly or other periodical meetings. The chief aim of the guild—the medieval guilds are derived from these ancient unions—was mutual aid. They met over a friendly supper at which all the members, often including women and slaves, were on a footing of equality. It is far from true that, as is sometimes said, the Christian meeting offered the first example of brotherhood in the Greek and Roman worlds. At the meetings contributions were made to a general sick and burial fund. Each local center of weavers, carpenters, seamen, etc., chose some deity as its special patron, just as the medieval guilds chose patron saints, and a statue of the deity was set up in the meeting room, and no doubt some homage was paid to it.

It is only in modern times that we have realized the extent of this trade-unionism of the ancient world, and some historians **have suggested that the first Christian churches were small centers** of this kind in which the members were persuaded to believe in Jesus. Paul, and such converts as Priscilla and Aquila at Rome, would doubtless be members of the union of their trade. The fact that Paul learned the trade of weaving tent-cloth does not necessarily mean that he was a working man in the modern sense of the word, as it was then common for a Jewish father, even if he were in easy circumstances, to put his son to learn a craft. However, Paul came to earn his living at his trade, and he may have belonged to the weavers' *eranos*, as the Greeks called it, and thus have found a group of brother workers ready to receive him at every city he visited. But there is only a slight analogy between the convivial meeting of the pagan workers **and the** intense religious fervor of a group of primitive Christians meeting to prepare themselves for the second coming of the Lord. Professor Foakes-Jackson points out in his "Studies in the Life of the **Early Church**" (1924: a useful manual, by a liberal theologian, for those who want further information) that the synagogue is more justly regarded as the model of the early church. "The first Christian Churches," he says, "were no doubt synagogues, and the worship was entirely Jewish." There was at least one important feature in common. The "elders" presided over the group. Even in Acts we find Paul sending elders to administer a church. As "elder" is in Greek **presbyteros, which is in English corrupted into "priest," we see at once the origin** of the priestly order ; but we will consider that in a later chapter.

The custom of the synagogue was to meet on the Sabbath to hear the Law and Prophets read and listen to endless discussion of the meaning. The earliest Christians were just such groups of Jews who held that the prophecies were now fulfilled: that the Messiah had come. They had no writings of their own until, late in the first century, Paul's Epistles and perhaps some early lives or collections of sayings of Jesus began to be read. From Justin's Apology for the Christians we learn that **about the middle of the second century they met on the Sun's Day, the first day of the Roman week**, to mark their distinction from the Jews, listened, to the reading of certain "memoirs of the apostles," and received bread and wine **which had, after some elementary ritual, become "the body and blood of Christ."** Even long after this Irenaeus tells us that his Christians in Gaul still worship Christ "without pen and ink"—without **gospels or ritual books—and we find a great deal of difference** in the advance of the churches **in** different regions. All that we clearly see is that the early communities met to pray, to discuss, **and to partake of bread and wine which were in some vague sense the body and blood of Christ.** The origin of this is obscure, but the idea was familiar in some of the Greek religions and in Mithraism. We will try later to trace the development.

The community in Rome was almost entirely drawn from the Hellenized Jews and the Greeks who lived in the poor suburb beyond

the 'walls of the city. It continued for a century or two to use the Greek language in its meetings, and **few** Romans can have belonged to the group. All the writings of Roman Christians to the beginning of the third century, including **Clement's** Epistle to the Corinthians, were written in Greek. The "Kyrie Eleison," which is retained even today in the Roman Catholic ritual, is a relic of the first Roman liturgy, which was entirely Greek. There were no sermons, and the Old Testament was read in Greek. It was in Roman Africa that Latin began to be used, and probably the first translations of the Scriptures were made there. This might help to preserve the little groups, which in fear and trembling awaited the end of the world, from the taint of the terrible life across the river, and we shall see later what happened when the doors were, late **in** the second **century**, thrown open **to** the Romans. At this early stage we have merely a group of enthusiasts **anti** strict puritans with no distinction of clergy and laity. The spiritual gifts, Paul says, were equally distributed. One brother or sister has the gift of healing, another of prophecy, and so on. One of the most esteemed gifts is that of "tongues"—pouring out a nervous flood of speech that no one can understand—since it is a sure sign that the Spirit has descended on the speaker, and it becomes gradually necessary to regulate the meetings and the life of the group. We return to that in the fifth chapter.

## §2. THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE

Paul's Epistles show that there was by no means a uniform level of virtue even in the earliest communities. We shall quite expect that, since all of them believed that the end of the world was near, as Paul repeatedly reminds them and we find the Latin Fathers (Cyprian, Augustine, Gregory, etc.) insisting for centuries afterwards, and since at this early stage it was believed that there was no forgiveness for sins of the **flesh** committed **after** baptism, there were rarely scandals. But there was constant quarreling and bitterness. Paul complains on every page of all his Epistles of strife, envy and ambition; and we smile when we find him interrupting his  **fervent** exhortations to charity to tell them to "beware of dogs" or let them know how, he talked, to Peter. This, too, is quite natural and human. In the new brotherhood-movement of our time, the advanced social and humanitarian groups, we have just the same strife, envy and ambition, the same representation of opponents as frightfully wicked and malevolent.

On the other hand, the popular idea that the early Christian communities also were Socialistic or Communist has little or no foundation. For a moment, immediately after the death of Christ, we get—if we trust the document—a glance of a group holding all things in common, but the groups to which Paul addresses his Epistles are clearly not equal socially or economically. Some members have slaves, while many are workingmen. Some have more wealth than others and are exhorted to help the poorer. In one epistle "the chamberlain of the city" sends his greetings to a **dis-**

tant community, and in all of them Paul enjoins the greatest respect for the civic authorities. Even in Rome under Nero these are described as "God's ministers" (xiii, 6). Later, in Philippians, Paul rather boasts that he has converts "in Caesar's household," and before the end of the first century the Roman community seems to have included relatives of the Emperor, who must have had palaces on the hill with regiments of slaves. Paul is referring only to the future life and its chances when he says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." He, a conservative Pharisee, was not at all the man to encourage social rebellion. Submission to the political authority, and the strict obedience of the wife to her husband, and of the slave to his owner, were sacred duties. It did not matter much anyway, as the whole social structure would soon dissolve in the fiery close of the terrestrial drama.

It will be better to study in separate chapters the development of this small group of unorganized worshippers into the organized **Church which was ready to rule the world** when it secured imperial favor. Its story in the first century is too obscure for us to follow. It is impossible to believe that an "itnense multitude" of Christians already existed in Rome in the year 64, for they had not even the humblest place of worship, the semi-official Papal Calendar says, until about 220 A. D. In fact, as we shall see later, almost all the supposed victims of the Neroninn persecution who are honored in the Roman liturgy are fictions. Some unknown number of these early Christians-possibly Jews and Christians were lumped together-apparently including Paul himself, were put to death, and for the remainder of the reign of Nero there would be only a faint flicker of Christian life in the ghetto on the banks of the Tiber. Possibly it was then, or soon afterwards, that they began to dig subterranean corridors and chambers, the Catacombs, such as the Jews, already had for burials. But there are no martyrs of the time of Nero in these, and we will consider them later.

Nero was hounded to death by the Romans and his great golden house torn down four years after the fire, and the Christian group began again to meet in private houses. The very common idea, that they were in constant danger of their lives and gathered underground, by the light of lanterns, to hold their services, while scouts at the entrance of the Catacombs watched for the appearance of soldiers or civic guards, has no historical foundation. It is based on stories in the forged lives of the martyrs which would presently he turned out of the Roman clerical workshop in thousands. "It is not easy," says Professor Foaltes-Jackson, "to recall an instance of the police dispersing congregations or hunting clown persons suspected of being Christians, or of their breaking into the vast Catacombs around the city of Rome." The Roman official list of its early Popes winning the martyr's crown one after the other is a grotesque fiction. Probably no Pope was martyred until the third century, as we shall see.

From the death of Nero in 68 the Roman Christians were not molested by the authorities for nearly thirty years, and it seems

that they made considerable progress. We have not a single document about their life during this time. The first is the letter of the Roman Church (commonly, though misleadingly, called Clement's Epistle, though no doubt he wrote it) to the Corinthian Church, a fraternal admonition to avoid quarreling, which unfortunately throws no light on the Roman Church itself: except that it shows that, since the bishop has to write in the name of the Church, he was not yet a ruler even in his own community and claimed no right to interfere elsewhere. But it hints at some impending calamity, and in the same or the following year (96) there was what is called the persecution under the Emperor Domitian.

The motive and extent of it we will consider later, but the references, to it in the Roman History of Dion Cassius, a Greek of the second century who held high office under the Emperors, seem to show that the Roman Church had prospered. Domitian, he says (Hooks 72 and 73), put to death a number of men and women for atheism and Jewish practices, and amongst these were his own consin Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla. The other Roman historian of the second century, Suetonius, tells us that Domitian had imposed a special tax on the Jews (in which he would include Christians), and no doubt this led to disturbances. Domitian was, in any case, a gloomy misanthrope, near the end of his reign, and watching every hour for conspiracies against his life. He executed large numbers of suspects, and no doubt a few Christians were included, but it is scarcely correct to say that there was a general persecution of the Christians of Rome. The nobles and the people alike hated him, as we shall see, but he was concerned only about the nobles, of whom he executed a very large number. Flavius Clemens was put to death and his wife banished.

The incident throws some light on the prestige of the Roman Church in foreign lands and its generosity in sending alms. Being a first cousin of the Emperor, Flavius Clemens must have been rich, and we can hardly suppose that he was the only man of the wealthy order to have to some extent the language of Dion is ambiguous—embraced the new religion. That he suffered death for it is no evidence of his belief, for Domitian's victims had no alternative. They were conspirators, however the charge was formulated. Clemens seems to have been one of the new patricians who appeared in Rome after the death of Nero: sober, virtuous provincials who detested the dissolute and luxurious life of their predecessors. There was a considerable reform of morals which would last at least a century. Domitian himself, though a sensualist, reformed other people's morals very zealously. Since he was closely related to Vespasian, Clemens may have served in the war in Palestine, and become interested in the Jews and then the Christians. But writers who are deeply impressed by the fact that members of the imperial house were Christians before the end of the first century do not seem to realize that the family of Vespasian and Domitian (his son) was of very lowly origin and no culture. They came of small provincial farmers and would be of little account amongst the older

Roman families, though their wealth would be very helpful to the Church.

There is, as I said, no reason to speak of a general persecution of the Roman Christians as such, and the martyrs and persecution stories of a later date are fictional. Certainly' the Church suffered a calamity, as Clement says, in the loss of such important members and their wealth, but Domitian only aimed at influential people. Rome rid itself of him the next year, and Trajan opened the long and prosperous- and honorable period which is known as that of the Stoic Emperors. There was some persecution of Christians occasionally in the provinces, but the stories of Roman martyrs during the next hundred and twenty years are crude forgeries, full of the most absurd errors. We know very little about the progress of the Roman Church during this time. From the letters of other bishops we gather that it came to have a high repute for numbers and wealth, but throughout the second century it continued to have no meeting place. In an ancient fragment which purports to give the dialogue at a trial of Justin the Martyr about the middle of the century he is made to say to the official that he lives "above one Martinus, at the Timotimian Baths," and that he has not, in several years residence at Rome, heard of any other meeting place. What the Church had become by the third century we shall see presently, but there were during these obscure days certain important developments which we must try to trace,

## CHAPTER IV

## THE FIRST STRUGGLE WITH HERETICS

**S**CORES of times in the course of the last sixteen hundred years religious reformers have arisen who were shocked at the contrast between ecclesiastical Christianity and the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. The Church of Rome was scarcely established in the fourth century when "Protestants" arose to rebuke it, and it replied, as it has done ever since, with libel in the name of truth and violence in the name of Jesus. Yet the contrast is certainly one of the most piquant in the whole history of religion. Not even the shaven monks of Tibet and China, who perform their mechanical rites before the statues of the Buddha who disdained all religious speculation or ritual, seem quite so incongruous as the priests of the Roman Church. Over the grave of one who died in his effort to induce men to worship, not in temples, but in spirit and in silence, they have constructed the most elaborately ritual religion the world has ever known. On the teaching of one who urged men to reject all dogmas but the simple belief in God, all desires but that of poverty and humility, they have grafted the most intricate system of dogmas and the most autocratic and wealthy Church that have ever existed. Contemporary religious life affords no spectacle quite so naive as that of the High Mass in a Roman Catholic cathedral, when the florid music and the operatic movements of richly-clad priests are suspended for a few minutes while one reads to the people from the pulpit the ancient exhortation to avoid all temples and priests, all pomp and power and wealth.

The ease with which the American Catholic is reconciled to this glaring discrepancy must seem remarkable to any person who is not well acquainted with Catholic literature. The negative side of Christ's teaching, he is told, refers only to the Jewish religion; and for the positive elements of it, the plans of the new church that was to displace the Jewish religion, he must trust an oral tradition, passed on by the apostles to their successors, of which the Church has always been the devoted and conscientious guardian. The theory is so puerile, so entirely inconsistent with both the teaching of the New Testament and the historical record of the action of the Roman Church, that you wonder how any man of awakened intellect can assent to it. It is one of the most transparent stratagems of priestcraft. But if you read a little of the Catholic literature in which the tradition of the early Church is examined and see how untruthful it is, and if you know that the Catholic is forbidden to read any literature that disputes it, you begin to understand.

This entire work will be an exposure of the untruth of Catholic literature. We have seen how the Roman Church falsifies the story

of its origin in the first century, and we shall now see how false **it** is when it represents that the gradual construction of its creed, its liturgy, and its hierarchy was the realization, as circumstances permitted, of a plan communicated to it by the apostles. The idea is really so grotesque from the normal historical viewpoint that I do not intend to linger long over it, but, naturally, we must have some idea how the simple **creed of** the first century becomes the elaborate mythology of the fourth, how the brotherly group of the early Church becomes an organization in which a handful of clergy despotically rule and exploit the general **body of believers**.

### §1. THE CLASH OF JEW AND GENTILE

Even had the gospels existed in the days of Paul they would have left a very broad margin for fierce controversy about the relation of the new faith to the practical laws of Judaism, 'Were **men** still to have their children circumcised? Were certain meats still unclean? Were the stern fasts of the Jewish religion and the Sabbath now abolished? If so, what farce was left in any part of the Law? A score of questions arose, and there was no authoritative standard by which they could be answered. In the eastern churches one apostle succeeds another and wholly, often angrily, repudiates the teaching of his predecessor. Are they to listen to Paul, who claims a personal revelation, or to Peter and others who talked with the Lord? The Epistles very faithfully reflect the strain and confusion, and all through **the** first and **well** into the second century, when Jew and Gentile are definitely sundered and even the Sabbath begins to be abandoned, the churches are **rent** by the quarrel.

The Roman Church was as much disturbed as **any** other by this controversy. For centuries the Jews had had a passion for religious debates, as fierce as those in which the Mohammedans of the east discuss their rival interpretations **of** the Koran today. But the speculations about the meaning of particular phrases of the law were frivolous in comparison with the solemn **issues** which **the** Christians brought into the arena. Wherever a hundred Jews lived, and **they** had already spread through the whole civilized world, they conducted their quarrels about truth and virtue with a venom which astonished or amused their pagan neighbors. Even in Rome, though they lived in the quarter across the river to which **few** Roman citizens normally repaired, the Emperor had at one time ordered the whole turbulent crowd to **move** away from the city. But we need not enter into the details of this controversy. Taking a middle course between the extreme pro-Jewish school and certain new sects which held that Jehovah **was** not the God of Christ, and that the Old Testament must be entirely discarded, the churches formulated their position as we know it, and the Christian sect **became** a purely Gentile body bitterly opposed everywhere to the Jews. The first set of dogmas was fixed by the agreement of the Churches.



## §2. THE GNOSTICS INVADE ROME

This controversy had not even **approached** its end when a more formidable and scarcely less bitter, struggle invaded the churches. This was the quarrel with the Gnostic sects which appear before the end of the first century and for a hundred years or more make the Greco-Roman world ring with disputation. One usually reads a few lines about the teaching of one or other Gnostic sect and one then impatiently turns away with the reflection that it is as uninteresting as the study of theosophy. It is, and I am not going to enter into details, But a general idea of the situation is necessary if one would understand the doctrinal development of the early Church.

For several centuries before the destruction of the temple and the final dispersal of the Jews there had been successive waves of emigration over the Greek world. Palestine, a land of poor resources, had sent out its children age after age, as the Jewish regions of Poland or Galicia do today, to seek prosperity in lands of greater freedom and a more advanced economy. And, contrary to a very common estimate of the Jewish mind, those members of the race who reached Egypt, Greece and Italy, were to a very great extent fascinated by the philosophy of the Greeks. The later books of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.) exhibit the more practical side of this wisdom, but, as we see in the works of Philo of Alexandria, the most mystic elements of Greek philosophy were **zealously cultivated**. **It is, in fact, strange**, in view of the general estimate of the Jewish intelligence today, that the Jews of Alexandria ignored its science and devoted themselves to its mystic theories. **No one can understand the period who does not realize** that the people of the first century of the present era had inherited the results of five hundred years of the most intense intellectual **life**. **Alexandria, now the cultural metropolis** of the world, showed the outcome in three principal developments: an ascetic school (which led on to the monks of the desert), a very dreamy and mystic school known as the Neoplatonists, and the ablest and most promising scientific school that the world had yet known.

The dispersed or Hellenized Jews might have rendered great service to the world if they had taken up the mathematical and physical sciences of the Alexandrian Greeks, but, materialistic as they are apt to call them, they turned rather to the mystic philosophy and endeavored to apply it to the Jewish religion. Then came the Christian religion, and the attempt of Jews and Greeks to apply this mystic philosophy to the new religion led to one of the most **extraordinary intellectual** movements that the world has ever known. The different philosophies or sects were innumerable; and the leaders were often men of great ability. They agreed only in having a special knowledge (gnosis) derived from the light of reason, and so they are all embraced under the general title of Gnostic sects. Mainly, they endeavored to throw light on the nature of God and the Incarnation of Jesus; though the general contempt of material things led many to deny that a son or emanation of God could possibly have taken flesh, while others, in reaction against this **con-**

tempt of matter, held that Satan, the creator of matter, was the real friend of man and that the sensual life was the wisest.

The Roman is usually said to be, like the Hebrew, a man of purely practical mind, and the Gnostic ferment is described as a characteristic outcome of the subtle or restless Greek intellect when it was confronted with the gospel. It *is* quite true that the Latin Church produced very few original thinkers. Of the four who are selected as the original thinkers of the Christian world before the Middle Ages—Marcion, Origen, Tertullian and Augustine—not one was a Roman, and three were regarded as heretics. We may remember, however, that the Roman Empire produced very few original thinkers of any school. But the belief that the Roman Church went on its way placidly while the Greeks lost themselves in Gnostic controversy is quite wrong. Dean Milman exaggerates perhaps when he says that Rome was the most intense center of the Gnostic controversy, but if we remember the prestige of the city and the fact that the language of the Christian community was still Greek, we shall quite expect that Rome had its share in the struggle.

From the start echoes of the controversy would reach Rome, but about the year 140 one of the chief Gnostic Christians came to spread his gospel there. He was the son of a shipowner in the east, and, though very strict and ascetic in his life, he probably had wealth. When his heresy was fully understood, of course, his character was libelled in the characteristic Roman way. He was said to be the son of a bishop and to have been excommunicated by his father for seducing a nun. Even Justin the Apologist, when he defends his fellow Christians against the charge of holding orgies by night, says that possibly it is true of the followers of Marcion. All the Fathers accuse heretics in every century of gross orgies of vice, atheism, magic, and so on.

We know quite well that this Marcion was a man of the strictest life, and at first he was regarded as a most welcome accession to the community. The bishop of the time was probably too simple to understand the learned speculations of Marcion—apart from Clement, who was no genius, there is only one Pope in the first three centuries who rises out of mediocre obscurity—but a gift of 200,000 sesterces to the Church was a very plain proof of virtue. So Marcion was one of the most esteemed members of the Church, and he and a Syrian named Cerdo freely taught that Jehovah and the Old Testament had nothing to do with the Christian God, and that even the Jewish gospels of Matthew and Mark were tainted and must be abandoned. We are told that the eastern bishops sent a messenger to open the eyes of the bishop of Rome—a point not stressed in Catholic literature, of course—and the heretics were excommunicated. They set up a rival Church which spread over Italy and the east and flourished until the fourth century.

During the same period another of the ablest of the Gnostic leaders, an Egyptian named Valentinus, came to Rome and by his learning and eloquence seduced a further section of the community. This large sect also lasted until the fourth century. But from the

middle of the second century to the middle of the third the "peace" which Rome gave to its Christians was one prolonged and furious struggle with heretics and schismatics. The only scholar which the Roman Church produced in these three centuries, himself a schismatic and anti-Pope, Hippolytus, has left us a remarkable book, "A Refutation of All Heresies," in which he describes the extraordinary agitation of the time. More than once the Bishop of Rome was, to the horror of other bishops, seduced by the learning or the verbiage of the heretics, and orthodox messengers came on their heels from all parts to denounce them. At the beginning of the third century, as we shall see, the controversy culminated in a schism, Pope and Anti-Pope for the first time flinging anathemas at each other, and rending the community into halves, while half a dozen sects had their little groups on the fringes of the orthodox world.

### §3. THE PURITAN AND THE LIBERALS

With the details of these doctrinal controversies we need not concern ourselves. They are interesting only as showing how the teaching of the Church in regard to the nature of Christ and the Trinity was gradually forged in the stress of a terrible conflict, not authoritatively imposed on the faithful by some grave officials who had an oral tradition from the time of the apostles. Least authoritative of all during this seething age were the Bishops of Rome. They tossed as helplessly as corks on the swirling waters of discussion and, when they came to a decision, we generally find envoys of the eastern or African Churches telling them what to think. But a further illustration may be taken from the side of morals and discipline, though it will be necessary to devote a special chapter later to the gradual lowering of the moral standards of the Church.

Amongst the rebels who arose in the east in the second part of the second century was a certain Montanus, a pagan priest who was converted to Christianity. Brooding over the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit and conscious, as he thought, of great revelations in his own mind, he set up as an irdependent prophet and teacher. He was presently joined by two women, Maximilla and Priscilla, who deserted their husbands, and the three traveled together, pouring out the communications of the Spirit, or, as the bishops indignantly said, indulging in "corybantic excesses." They were orthodox in doctrine at all points except this claim of personal inspiration, which the clergy could not tolerate, and they seem to have been sincere fanatics of strict life. They had an immense success and produced quite a large literature, and about the year 180 some prophets of the sect came to add one more element to the Roman confusion.

The prosperity of the Roman Church and the fame of the great city were, in fact, attracting adventurers and lecturers of every type, just as Chicago or Los Angeles does today, and the cultural level, in spite of the general elementary education which the Roman authorities gave, was low. Hippolytus tells us, after some priceless

chapters on ancient **conjuring**, ~~that~~ many of these charlatans copied ~~the~~ tricks by means of which Egyptian priests had duped the people. The heretic would slip some chemical furtively into a chalice, and the water which would be poured into it would be found to have the color of wine: or he would get a woman assistant to mutter a consecrating formula over a small chalice of wine, then pour it into a larger chalice (which he had secretly smeared with some effervescent chemical) and make it grow larger and larger before the eyes of the people. The weirdest claims of inspiration thus secured some attention. Toward the end of ~~the~~ century there came to Rome a Syrian Christian adventurer with a new revelation contained in a book that had been given to him by a pair of ~~angels~~, male and female, ninety-six miles high and with feet fourteen miles long; and, says the learned Hippolytus, many of the Roman Christians believed.

The chief interest for us is the apparent helplessness of the obscure bishops of Rome of the second century. The Montanists who came to Rome were favorably received, and it was once more envoys from the east who opened the ~~eyes~~ ~~of the Pope to their~~ heresy. They were expelled, but they returned at the end of the century, and again the Roman bishop was won by them and had to be warned from the east. The asceticism of the sect, which was based upon a vivid belief that the end of the world was near, made it appeal to the stricter Christians, who witnessed a growing deterioration in the Church at large. The only distinguished writer and scholar of the Latin Church until the time of Augustine, the African Tertullian, became a Montanist and spoke of Rome in accents of bitter scorn. The sect spread far and wide, and it is now claimed by some authorities that several of the relatively small number of genuine martyrs of the early Church were Montanists.

The work of Hippolytus to which I have referred is only one of a large number written by him, and even this was known in the Church only by a fragment until recent times. It had always seemed strange that the works of this one scholar of the Roman Church should not have been preserved. Since Augustine was not a Roman we may say that Hippolytus is the only scholar that the Roman Church produced until the later Middle Ages, if not the only scholar that ever bore the title of Pope or Anti-Pope. Yet he was honored in that Church as saint and martyr, and it created a sensation in the Christian world when, in 1842, the manuscript of the main body of his "Refutation of All Heresies" was discovered in the dust of an ancient Greek monastery. It is, in my opinion, the most learned book written by any Christian writer, apart from the school in cultured Alexandria, until the days of the Schoolmen. But its caustic picture of the life of the Roman Church at the beginning of the third century so pitifully exposes the conventional account of a harmonious and virtuous group, sending its heroic martyrs periodically to face the lions, that desperate attempts were made to prove it spurious. They have entirely failed. Hippolytus was a man of strict life, and, for the time, remarkable learning—he gives an account, not only of every Greek school of philosophy,

but even of the Brahmans of India and the Druids of the west-and the only consolation the Catholic can find is that, seeing the disorders of the Roman Church and the pitiful incompetence of its bishops to discriminate between sound and unsound doctrine, he set up a rival congregation and thus became the first Anti-Pope.

I will return to the book in the seventh chapter. A translation of it is included in the Library of the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol. vi), and ~~many~~ chapters of it will be found interesting. Here I need quote ~~only~~ a few particulars, which are supported by other historians, about the incompetence and complete lack of authority in face of heretics and schismatics of the Roman episcopacy.

About the year 190, when the Empire was ruled by Commodus, the remarkably dissipated son of the Stoic Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Church obtained its first measure of imperial favor. Since the death of Domitian, nearly a hundred years earlier, there had been no active persecution of Christians at Rome, and the Church had had all the advantages of that splendid age. "If," says Gibbon, "a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus." But under Commodus, a sensualist to the point of insanity like Nero, the reign **in blood** and license **was** renewed. The palace witnessed scenes such as those which Nero had provided, and we should not be surprised if some Christians were amongst those who were executed or sent to the deadly work of the mines in Sardinia, though there is no positive evidence of this.

The chief partner in the exotic vices of Commodus was a vulgar and **masculine**, though handsome, ~~ex-slave~~ named Marcia, who was the favorite in his splendid harem of three hundred concubines. It is not disputed that she was intimately associated with Commodus in the Sadistic outrages—he forced the priests of Cybele to castrate themselves and beat them with the phallic emblem he himself bore in procession amongst them—and the murders which he perpetrated. But it seems that she had a tenderness for the Christians, and in this Hippolytus is confirmed by the pagan historian Dion Cassius (Bk. lxxii, 4). Hippolytus quaintly says: "Marcia, a concubine of **Commodus**, who was a God-loving female and desirous of performing some good work, invited into her presence the blessed Victor," and she asked him if there were any Christians in the mines of Sardinia. There is not the slightest question about the utterly abandoned character of Marcia, and we shall see presently that this Pope Victor was the first to assert any claim to dictate to other **Churches: the first Pope in our modern sense of the word.** But we shall find every Pope who **is** regarded as conspicuously virtuous and "great" similarly cringing to sinful benefactors. Catholic historians are eager only to show that Marcia was not a Christian, and they profess to be bewildered at her action. The explanation is clearly enough given by Hippolytus, and it **is** interesting. She induced the Emperor to give orders for the release of the Christians

to "Hyacinthus, a certain eunuch, rather advanced in life," and we are later told that Marcia had been reared by this eunuch.

The translator of Hippolytus nervously observes in a footnote that the word which he translates "advanced in life" may just as well mean "presbyter" or priest of the Roman Church. We saw that "presbyter" simply means "elder." I find it difficult to believe that the Roman Church had sunk so low as to admit a eunuch and a collector of exposed female children (that is clearly his relation to Marcia) as a presbyter, though that would normally be taken as the meaning of the epithet "presbyteros" after his name. But there can be no reasonable doubt that he was a Christian and had induced Marcia to get for him this order of release which he took himself to Sardinia. It is a curious picture. The chief lady of a harem of three hundred mistresses in a palace which is described by the pagan historians as stained by deeper infamies than Nero or Caligula had ever perpetrated summons the Pope to her presence. I do not know whether she on that occasion wore the costume of an Amazon with which she was accustomed to show her disdain of all that was feminine and tender, but her life in the palace was notorious and is very fully recorded in history. And the Pope goes to the palace and gratefully gives her a list of Christians who are working in the mines; and the epithet "God-loving female" which Hippolytus applies to her without the least suspicion of irony apprises us how she was esteemed in the Church.

How the mine-workers were by no means all martyrs for their faith-if any of them were-and how an unscrupulous adventurer named Callistus fraudulently got his name included in the list and became presently Pope Callistus, "saint and martyr" and highly honored until this day in the Roman Church, we shall see in a later chapter. These facts will suffice to discredit the pretty story of "the early Church" which is told in Catholic literature. Long before the end of the second century the primitive innocence had departed, and during nearly a hundred and fifty years of freedom from persecution the Roman Church had grown in numbers and wealth and deteriorated in character. Its bishops were men of so little personality or culture that we know nothing whatever about the great majority of them until a letter from some other church lets us know how they have blundered in face of the seething controversies and how far they were from the Olympian tranquillity and firmness with which the Catholic imagines them governing the entire Christian Church in the first few centuries.

## CHAPTER V

## THE CREATION OF PRIESTS AND POPES

**F**ROM this historical account of the life of the Roman Church in the second half of the second century we are in danger of concluding too hastily that it now included large numbers of the Roman people and may have had some influence on the life of the city. The Catholic historian would like us to think this, but we are restrained by the fact that in the Pontifical Calendar, a semi-official 'chronicle of the Church in early ages, it is expressly stated that it was not until about the year 220 that the Christians had their first public meeting-place. The chronicle says that Pope Callistus then built a church in the poor district across the Tiber, but we gather from another source that he was merely permitted the use of a room above an old wineshop; and a wineshop in that quarter of Rome would be neither a large nor a reputable establishment.

There is an old History of the Emperors ("Historia Augusta") which we know to have many interpolations and inaccuracies, but on this point it is supported. The writer of the section of it which deals with the life of the Emperor Alexander Severus (Ch. xliii) says that the Emperor proposed to give the Christians the right to build churches but that his counselors dissuaded him on the ground that "the temples would be deserted and all Rome would become Christian." This is obviously an absurd gloss of a much later date. What seems to be historical is another passage which says that the Emperor (or some imperial official) was called upon to decide a quarrel. The Christians laid claim to a certain room and an inn-keeper disputed the claim. Alexander, who was so liberal in his religious views that he is said to have had some sort of bust of Christ in the imperial chapel—which does not prevent the same Roman writers who tell us this from creating the usual batch of martyrs during his generous reign—awarded the room to the Christians. Other references to the building indicate that it was more than two centuries old, and our admiration of the progress and influence of the Church is chastened when we thus picture it meeting in a dilapidated chamber over an ancient wineshop a hundred and fifty years after its foundation. A further passage in the Pontifical Calendar informs us that it still had no silver vessels for use at the altar. The consecrated bread was carried on small glass dishes or patens.

During most of this time there had been no acute need of public meeting places. A small group gathered in a private house could just as well listen to the readings of the prophets and partake of the mystic bread and wine. But with the development of the primitive supper into the Sacrifice of the Mass and the growth of some author-

ity to settle the disputes which rent the Church there was bound to be some organization. The modern historians who would reconcile us to the growth of the hierarchy point out that the pressure of controversy and the need to administer the affairs of a larger body would naturally lead to the creation of **offices** and authority. It is true within certain limits, but many Christian bodies of modern times include millions of people and hold property worth hundreds of millions of dollars without anything in the nature of a **consecrated priest or an autocratic bishop**. We are not here concerned with the creation of the priest and will not give much attention to it. Rome shared this development with all the other churches and **did not even lead in it**. The point of particular interest for us is the creation of the Papacy, but we may glance at the earlier stages of the evolution of the clergy and hierarchy,

### §1. THE SEPARATION OF CLERGY AND LAITY

The Jews, with whose ideas of religious organization the Christians had started, had almost lost the idea of a **sacrificing** priesthood. The majority of them even before the year 70 A. D., when the temple was destroyed, lived in foreign lands where they had only small synagogues or meeting rooms, and before the middle of the second century **Judea** was a wilderness and its children scattered over the world: But in losing contact with the temple and its priesthood the Jews had made the acquaintance of the equally privileged priests of a dozen other religions, and the model of the pagan organization must have been constantly in the mind of those who, selfishly or unselfishly, wanted to organize the ministerial functions of the Christian Church.

By what steps the rudimentary structure of the primitive Church, which I have described, was converted into the Church of the third century, with its sharp distinction of clergy and laity, the experts are unable to tell us, but if there is one point that is clear in that obscure development it is that the Catholic claim, that the Church slowly carried out a plan that had existed in apostolic days, is historically absurd. The first division of offices was natural and spontaneous. It was inevitable that the elders should form a special guiding council in any community, and, since differences of opinion are apt to paralyze the action of a group, it was natural that one man should be appointed to administer affairs with the aid of the elders. In other words, the rise of bishops in the primitive sense (literally "supervisors") and of presbyters ("elders") was quite natural. The **Epistle to the Philippians** opens with a reference to "bishops and deacons," but it would be bold to claim that this was actually written by Paul about the year 64. Before the end of that century, however, each Church had its bishop, presbyters and deacons (literally "servants" or assistants); and it is clear that the bishops and deacons were at this stage more prominent than the presbyters.

What it would be of real interest to discover is how the presbyter developed into a sacrificing priest, solemnly consecrated for



his function and thus separated from the main body of the believers. This plainly follows upon the development of the **primitive** supper in commemoration of Christ—we cannot even say when that **began**—into a mystic conversion of **the** bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This was at first, as Bishop Ignatius says about the **year** 120, the function of the bishop alone. In fact, each **im**portant function, such as baptism, had to be discharged by him, and as a consequence there was a bishop to every community; which is forgotten **sometimes by writers who try** to estimate the number of Christians in any region by **the** large number of bishops. About the middle of the second century, in Justin's Apology, we still find the bishop and deacons the chief officers. The bishop consecrates **the** bread and wine: the deacons take it to the people. But by the middle of the third century, as we shall see in a moment, we find the presbyters or priests of Rome and Carthage trying to raise the importance of their own **office at** the cost of that of the bishop. It was mainly Cyprian of Carthage who created the doctrine that priests and **bishops** were a holy caste with extraordinary powers, and it **was** very largely against this new doctrine that the **Montanists** protested.

The central point of the whole development is the evolution of the Mass, and the most learned ecclesiastical historians throw little light on it. We are not strictly concerned with this here, and I will only suggest that in the last part of the second century and first half of the third, when the old discipline was relaxed and large numbers of members were admitted to the Church on easy terms, 'the function of the Lord's Supper was gradually made more attractive to the new and more superficial Christians by borrowing one detail after another from the pagan **religions**, especially **Mithraism**. **From the time of Commodus onward, or from about 200 A. D.,** Mithraism was encouraged by the Emperors and spread particularly in the army. It far surpassed Christianity in its progress, and its **candles and incense and flowers, its vested priests and ornate ritual,** its birthday festival in mid-winter and resurrection-festival in spring, were borrowed to make the Christian service attractive. Each such addition widened the gulf between priests **and** laity, between church and sanctuary.

## §2. EARLY CLAIMS OF PAPAL SUPREMACY

With these features, which became **common** to all the churches of the fourth century, we are not **concerned**. It is the claim of Papal supremacy in the Roman Church that we have to consider, and the claim is so heavily discredited by the history of the first five centuries that here the Catholic writer is particularly reckless in falsifying the documentary evidence. I have already shown that the foundation which was created for it, an interpolation in the Gospel of Matthew, is a very obvious anachronism; and it must have been regarded as such by the churches generally, for they continued to rebut the claims of the Popes until the eastern churches in disgust severed their connection with Rome and the barbaric

invasion of the west laid in ruins every bishopric that had been strong enough to withstand the Popes. How, when strong bishops **arose once more in Europe**, the **Papacy** added to its **forged credentials** to ensure their submission we shall see in later volumes.

The word Pope or Papa was a common designation of bishops in the early Church, as it is in the east today. Every bishop was the "father" (Papa) of his little community. And the first such Papa of the Roman Church of whom we have any historical knowledge is the Clement who, about 96 A. D., wrote a letter to the Corinthians. The translation of the letter may be read by anybody, in the Ante-Nicene Library, and he will see how far it is from claiming any authority to intervene. The Christians of Rome courteously beg the Christians of Corinth to see that their strife is lamentably opposed to the teaching of Jesus. After Clement we **have, in the official list, a long line of Popes, all "saints" and nearly all "martyrs,"** but the list is late and unreliable, and we know nothing about most of them; except that the martyrdom is certainly ~~spurious~~, since there **was no persecution at Rome. It is not until** the year 189 that we reach a Pope who makes some **impression** in the Church; and it is an impression of great interest to us.

Catholic historians like the Jesuit Father Grisar find here their first evidence that the Papacy asserted its authority, and that other bishops agreed. There was as yet no fixed rule about the date of *Easter Sunday*, but most of the Churches agreed with Rome, and Pope Victor ordered the remaining Asiatic Churches to alter their **custom**. Here, sure enough, we have an assertion of international authority. You will remember that Victor is the Pope who enjoyed the favors of the imperial concubine and visited her at the palace so that imperial ideas may have come naturally to him. But the sequel, which the Catholic historian omits to tell, is fatal. Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus, to whom Victor sent his commands, told the Pope in very plain Greek to mind his own business. You can read his words in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius (Bk. v, ch. xxiv). "I am," he says, "not moved by your attempt to intimidate us. We must fear God, not men." He adds that all his bishops in Asia Minor are in agreement with him. Whereupon Victor, in true pontifical style, excommunicated all their Churches; and it not only had not the least effect on them but brought upon Victor the reproach of other bishops. They, Eusebius says, "bitterly attacked Victor" for his arrogant claim to dictate. Grisar and his colleagues say that at least the venerable Bishop Irenaeus "fully acknowledged the Pope's right to intervene" while regretting the harshness of his method. Not only is there no such admission in the letter of Irenaeus, but Eusebius expressly says that he "courteously admonished" the Pope and pointed out that Rome had no right to command any other Church.

Thus we have the chief bishops of east and west rejecting the Papal claim the moment it is first advanced, and we soon find an echo of the same sentiment in the other chief section of Christendom, the African Church. There is in the Ante-Nicene Library a little work entitled "**On Modesty**" by the ablest Christian writer who

had yet appeared in the west, Tertullian. In the first chapter he writes, with the somber irony that he **so** often uses: "I hear that there has even been an edict set forth, and a peremptory one, too. The Sovereign Pontiff-that is to say, the bishop of bishops-issues an edict: 'I remit, to such as have discharged the requirements of repentance, the sins both of adultery and fornication.'" We shall see in the **next** chapter what it was that angered Tertullian, but the scorn of **his** reference to the Sovereign Pontiff (a title borrowed from the pagans) **and head of all the bishops shows how novel** the claim was and how the Christians of Africa regarded it. No one questions that it is a **decree** of Pope Callistus that Tertullian has in mind. **About the year 220, therefore, the Papal ambition was fully mature,** and the forged text in Matthew was ready for use. But do not forget that, as I said, this would-be bishop of all the bishops presided over a small gathering in an inn-chamber in **one** of the slums of Rome.

### §3. THE SCORN OF THE CHURCHES

Tertullian, the 'Catholic may remind you, was a sort of heretic. He does not care to admit that the ablest man the Latin Church **had** yet produced, was a rebel, but Tertullian was all his life a **Mon-**tanist, a member of a condemned Church, and to persist in a schism bears the taint of heresy. So the Catholic writer asks you to consider rather the saintly Bishop Cyprian, the chief ornament of the African Church until Augustine and one of the greatest bishops of his time. A more learned and more liberal Catholic historian than the Jesuit Grisar was the French scholar Mgr. Duchesne, yet in his "Early History of the Christian Church" (i, 303) he claims **that Cyprian admitted** the Papal **claim** because he **speaks** of Rome as "the throne of Peter, the principal Church, the source of sacer-  
dotal unity," and two years later, in 254 A. D., he writes to the **Pope that it is his duty to intervene** in Gaul, where trouble has arisen. And, of course, the Catholic Encyclopaedia and all the other Catholic writers cheerfully follow the lead of this great scholar.

Some of my readers may have been a little shocked when, in the Introduction, I said that no Catholic historian is capable of telling the entire truth. Let me give them here a convincing **illustration**. **Duchesne** was a fine scholar **and** a more liberal Catholic than he cared to confess in his works. A friend of his told me of a conversation in which Duchesne compared the Church of today, **from the intellectual point of view, to an ivy-clad ruin**. "**Some,**" he said, "would tear it down, but some of us prefer to remove the ivy and restore the building." If this man cannot be quite **honest in his defense** of Rome no Catholic can. And he is not honest. You can read the letters of Cyprian to the Pope and the Pope's letters to him in English in the Ante-Nicene Library. Duchesne read them in Latin as easily as French. And you will see that beyond any question Cyprian and the whole of the African bishops in the sixth decade of the third century scornfully rejected the **claim** of the **Roman Pope** to rule the Church.

North Africa is today a fringe of desert and degenerate natives, and you may not realize its importance in the third century, **but the Romans had created there a populous and flourishing** civilization. Its Church produced two of the ablest leaders of Latin Christendom, Tertullian and Augustine. There were forty African bishops supporting Cyprian in his dealings with Rome. At that time the Roman fleet passed constantly between Carthage and Rome, and the two cities were the most important in the west. Cut by this time it was believed throughout the Church that Peter and Paul, the greatest of the apostles, **had** founded the Roman Church, and it was a distinction to any Church to have been founded by an apostle, however obscure. Such a foundation and the importance of the metropolis moved Cyprian to speak of the Roman Church as "the principal Church"; but what he meant by **"the source of sacerdotal unity"** must be understood from his repeated and emphatic assurances that the Pope has no right to dictate to any Church, if the words are not merely a semi-ironical **repetition** of the words of others.

The complimentary phrase which Duchesne quotes is **taken** from one of the longest of Cyprian's letters (No. liv), filling twenty pages of the printed edition, and from beginning to end it scolds the Pope for blundering and overestimating his powers; and it closes with a "warning" to the Pope that he is to read this letter to his clergy. The Decian Persecution had **just** occurred, as we shall see later, and there was very grave trouble in *every Church* about the treatment of "the lapsed": the weak members-the enormous majority-who had abjured Christianity to escape martyrdom. Cyprian, the zealot, was for imposing a stern penance, but others pleaded for "charity" (or filling up the churches once more as speedily as possible), and the Pope favored this policy. There had been the same trouble at Rome. Pope Fabian had been **executed**—at last Rome has (in the year 250) an undisputed martyr—and it was not possible during the persecution to elect a successor, Cyprian in Africa had thought it his duty to hide from the persecutors, so that in effect his chair also was vacant. It is at this stage that we find the priests of Rome and Carthage writing to each other and proposing to rule their churches without bishops. We shall see in the next chapter how Cyprian attributes these ambitions to the spread of grave corruption in the African Church,

In Rome, after a time, a certain Cornelius, who was disposed to be lenient with the apostates, was elected bishop. The rigorists were angry, and they elected, and induced the Italian bishops outside Rome to consecrate, a strict and learned priest of the Roman Church named Novatian. There was a new schism, and Pope and Anti-Pope appealed to and confused all the churches. Cyprian pretended that he was not properly informed at first **which** of the two was the **regularly** elected bishop of Rome—about which there was never the least doubt—and he supported Novatian, obviously because he was a rigorist; which, naturally, did not inspire fraternal sentiments in Pope Cornelius. It is a weird and wonderful story, and if you want to know what was the real spiritual condition of the Church

in the third century, read, not the pretty Catholic pictures of the glorious martyrs (generally fictitious) and the crowds of holy fugitives preserving their faith in the gloom of the Catacombs, but the fifty or sixty letters of Cyprian (and to Cyprian) which tell a sordid story both of Rome and Africa during the two years of persecution.

Cyprian could splutter anathemas like any other saint of the time, and in the long letter I have quoted (So. liv) he lets Cornelius know that the "band of desperadoes" who have just come to him from Africa, to get easy absolution in the Roman Church, are clerics excommunicated by himself. I leave the question of morals to the next chapter and need say here only that the single point of the lengthy letter is to tell the Pope that when an African bishop has excommunicated anybody Rome has no right whatever to interfere! The essence of his case is (Section 14): "For it has been decreed by all of us, and is equally fair and just, that the case of every one should be heard there where the crime has been committed?"

One has a strong suspicion, in fact, that the references to "the throne of Peter and the source of sacerdotal unity" are merely ironical repetitions of the flattery with which Cyprian's renegade clergy approached the Pope. In any case, to quote them without saying that they are found in a letter in which Cyprian argues at great length and with considerable scorn that the Pope has no right whatever to overrule any other bishop is dishonest.

As to the other case quoted by Ducheene and the other Catholic his torians, where Cyprian reminds Pope Stephen (Cornelius having been martyred) in the year 254 that it is his duty to interfere in Gaul, the attempt to represent this as a proof of Papal supremacy is equally dishonest. The letter of Cyprian to Stephen (Ixvii) is once more, on the contrary, a plain declaration that the bishop of Carthage is equal to the bishop of Rome. The bishop of Arles in Gaul had become a Novatian—the sect or schism persisted in Christendom until the sixth century—and the other bishops of Gaul had appealed to Cyprian and Stephen to help them. Cyprian wrote them at once, but for some reason Pope Stephen delayed. Possibly he wanted them to appeal to himself alone. So Cyprian writes another stinging letter. Referring to the trouble in Gaul, he says: "Which matter, dearest brother it is our business to advise for and aid in, since we who consider the divine clemency and hold the balance in governing the Church do thus exhibit the rebuke of vigor to sinners." The meaning of this is so plain that Roman copyists of a later date tried to suppress the passage, but it is in the oldest manuscripts and is said in other words throughout the whole letter.

A few years later Cyprian again let the Pope know what the important African Church thought of the new pretensions of Rome. To give his letter full weight he associated all the African bishops with himself in it, and it is enough to quote the disdainful and ironic words with which the letter (No. lxxii) closes: "We use no violence and make laws for none, because each prelate has the right to follow his own judgment in the administration of the Church and must render an account to the Lord."

Stephen, an arrogant man, insisted on his powers and threat-

ened to excommunicate the Africans. Whereupon the African bishops met in solemn council, and the letter they framed was a contemptuous defiance of the Pope. This is its note from the start : "We judge no man, and we cut off no man for tiffing from us. None of us regards himself as the bishop of bishops or seeks by tyrannical threats to compel his colleagues to obey him."

The Catholic Church does not provide translations of the works and letters of the early Fathers for its members. It is more politic to leave them in Latin and then assure the faithful that they all acknowledge the supremacy of Rome. But a **Catholic is not** forbidden to read them in English in such collections as the Ante-Nicene Library, and he will, if he does, have at once a very convincing illustration of the truth of my words. The power of Rome is based on forgery, and it is vindicated today by a use of documents which is equivalent to forgery. The early bishops often gracefully allowed the eminence of a Church founded by the two leading apostles and located in the metropolis of civilization, but on every single occasion when the Pope tried to use or claim power over other churches they opposed him. We shall see in a later volume that St. Augustine rejected the claim as sharply as St. Cyprian. It was, and is, an imposture. It was only when the other bishoprics of the west were ruined and Europe sank into gross ignorance that the forged text in Peter and later forgeries were accepted.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ADMISSION OF SINNERS

**U**P TO this point, nearly two hundred years after Paul had come to the west, we do not find the Roman Church exhibiting any distinction amongst the churches of the world. There had been, if we omit the disputable early names on the list, a score of bishops or Popes at Rome, and not one of them has any repute in Christian literature either for learning or person. Victor is the only man in the two centuries who makes any impression on the other churches, and it is a very bad impression; though we know nothing more than I have said about his arrogance, unless, with some scholars, we attribute to him a poor little-tract "Against Gambling," which was discovered some years ago. And I may say at once that this mediocrity of the Popes continues for another two centuries; or, at least, that only one man in the next two centuries, Damasus, stands out, and, in spite of his title of saint, we shall find him standing out in a very unpleasant light. If there is one other man in the first fifty Popes who attracts any attention at all it is Pope "St." Callistus, and we shall see in this chapter the peculiar nature of his title to fame. It is the most miserable record of all the early churches of Christendom.

There were, however, two ways in which the Roman Church took the lead, and we must glance at these before we pursue the chronicle to the conversion of Constantine and the dawn of a new

era. We shall hardly call them distinctions from the Christian or spiritual point of view, but they are two very important factors in the making of the Roman Church. Beyond any question it took the lead in relaxing the rigor of discipline and making the Church easier and more attractive to outsiders, and in forging lives of saints and martyrs to redeem the obscurity and insipidity of its early centuries. If any reader be inclined to suspect me of prejudice or harshness let him glance down the list or the first fifty Popes. Even the moderately informed Roman Catholic—the average Catholic will not know one name on the list except that of Peter, which has no right to be there—will not be able to tell you anything about forty-seven out of the fifty and will not know of anything that the Roman Church did for three hundred years except send alms to poorer Churches. But he will be quite sure that it was, during most of the time, fragrant with holiness and martyrdoms, and I will now show him, from Catholic sources, that that also is a fiction.

### §1. SOFTENING THE EARLY RIGOR

I have not the least disposition to detract from whatever holiness of life can be found in the early Church. Wherever you find a man of sternly religious life with a group of like-minded men and women you find also a vivid and literal belief that the time is close at hand when the final earthquake will destroy the world and the trumpets of the angels will summon all men for judgment before the throne of God. So literally believed Paul and Clement, Cyprian and Tertullian, Augustine and Gregory. Even in the comfortable clays of the early Christian Emperors Christian scholars were still calculating how long the world would last. The learned Hippolytus had said two hundred years. In the sunny days of Constantine and his successors it was clear that Antichrist had not yet come, yet Lactantius and other writers calculated that the scheme of things would last only for two hundred or two hundred and fifty years. In the earlier Church it had seemed that Antichrist had already prevailed and the end might come any day.

It is quite absurd for modern writers to speak of the early Roman Church contributing beautiful ideals to the life of the imperial city and to ignore that this was the ruling thought. Before the Christian code of life could affect any Roman he had to be persuaded of a creed that was very strange to him, for it insisted that the world was near its end, whereas he heard every day the cry "Eternal Rome." In point of fact, as we saw, the Roman Church was really, for a century or more, a colony of Greeks outside the city of Rome, speaking a tongue that was understood only by cultivated Romans and seafaring men, and having a peculiar and forbidding discipline. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians tells us that there were grave scandals even in the earliest churches, but we may surely assume that these were very exceptional. After Paul's time, at all events, the churches were very strict. Anathematizing each other seems to have been an act of piety and denouncing or libeling a heretic a necessity, but sins of the flesh were serious. The con-

viction was established that if a man committed such sins after he had been baptized God would not forgive him, so the Church must cast him forth. One would expect that as long as this terrible idea dominated it the Roman Church was very edifying.

But the idea was too terrible, too inhuman, to be sustained. Men began, especially in Rome, to inquire into the grounds of it and became skeptical. A belief circulated that there was some mysterious "sin against the Holy Ghost," for which there was, authoritatively, no forgiveness. But what the sin was no one knew. Some said adultery: some said apostasy. In the course of the second century the stern primitive idea was modified, and it came to be held that severe penance could atone even for serious sins committed after baptism, and the sinner could then return to the Church. It is all very obscure, like everything about the Church in the second century, but we must not easily accept pictures of the Roman Church with a crowd of penitents drooping in repentance and shame at the doors while the virtuous go inside. The Romans had, as I said, no meeting place until the time of Pope Callistus, and what happened then is one of the few things which we do clearly know about the Church of Rome in the first three centuries. Every canon of sound history is set aside when a writer describes that Church as living in holiness (about which we have only the vaguest assurances or assumptions) and having crowds of martyrs (which are mostly fictitious), and he then completely ignores a lengthy and undisputed document which does tell us a great deal about its life at the beginning of the third century.

## §2. THE BOLD MEASURES OF "SAINT" CALLISTUS

This document is, as I said, the "Refutation of All Heresies" of Bishop Hippolytus, the most learned work produced in the Roman Church for more than a thousand years. I have explained how and why it was kept from the knowledge of the Church until the last century, when it was found in a Greek monastery, and that the writer is a man whose integrity of life equalled his culture. He is a "saint" in the Roman Calendar, and, as he lived in Rome and was the most distinguished of its priests, the few attempts that were made in the last century to impugn his narrative had only one ground: he told the sober truth about the Roman Church.

Pope Victor, you will remember, was summoned to the imperial harem, and a Christian eunuch was sent to Sardinia with a list of the Christian prisoners. Amongst these was a young man named Callistus who was serving a sentence there for embezzlement: which makes one wonder whether these "martyrs" were really all victims of persecution. Callistus had been a slave of the Christian Carpophorus, and this man had set up his slave in a small banking or money-lending business. Callistus appropriated some of the money, fled from Rome, and was captured and put in the domestic treadmill. The Christian clients of the bank got his release, to give him a chance of restoring, but to recover his credit he made a disturbance at the Jewish synagogue and was scourged and sent to work in the Sardinian mines. His name was not on the list of those who



were to be released, but the resourceful youth got it inserted and **returned to Rome.**

This was about the year 198, when Pope Zephyrinus, one of the simple-minded nonentities who fill most of the list of Popes, was blown about by the conflicting winds of heresy. According to Hippolytus he was worse: he was "an uninformed and shamefully corrupt man," "accessible to bribes," and he was "bribed by Callistus." We may take this to mean that Callistus undertook to make money for the Church. He was appointed chief deacon and put in charge of the new cemetery (which still bears the name of St. Callistus) ; and he helped in the organization of the Church. It seems that the presbyters had begun to consecrate the bread and wine. Callistus inspired Zephyrinus to decree that the bishop alone should consecrate in future, and the deacons should take the consecrated bread to the people. How he also tried to steer the successor of Peter over the cross-currents of orthodoxy and heresy, and how many heresies they succeeded in endorsing, you may react, if you will, in Hippolytus. In 217 Zephyrinus died, and, of course, Callistus became Pope; and Hippolytus, in disgust, set up as Anti-Pope. and words of learned length and thundering sound rolled from one side to the other.

The first important step taken by the new Pope we have already seen truculently denounced by Tertullian. This new "bishop of all the bishops" published an edict that he would absolve, after suitable penance, even those who have been guilty of adultery and fornication. As Hippolytus puts it (Bk. ix, ch. vii) : "He invented the device of conniving with men in regard of their indulgence of pleasures, saying that all had their sins forgiven by himself." We may acquit the Pope of conniving at sexual indulgence, though a relaxation of discipline would scarcely improve morals, and we may even applaud the abandonment of the almost savage earlier theory that one lapse after baptism condemned a man or woman inexorably to eternal torment. All that concerns us here is that it was a very important new departure in policy. Evidently both in Italy and Africa until the year 200 sinners had been summarily expelled from the Church. Now the small flock of the elect filled up with more or less penitent sinners. Hippolytus says that men and women cast out of the other communities flocked to Callistus. The Church grew, and the Romans found it not quite so repulsive. It was also a new formulation of clerical power. A bishop could absolve from sin. Another forged text had been added to Matthew : "Whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven."

Another liberal decree of Callistus is mentioned by Hippolytus with great scorn. These men, he says, "lost to all shame, call themselves a Catholic Church, and some, under the supposition that they will attain prosperity, concur with them." The "Catholic" may not care to be reminded of this origin of his treasured name, but Callistus justified it. Did not Noah receive orders to take dogs and pigs and rats and all sorts of unclean things into the ark? Is there not a command in the gospels to "let the tares grow up along with the wheat"? The new relief of sinners sounds very drastic in the

words of Hippolytus : "For even also he permitted females, if they were unwedded and burned with passion at an age at all events unbecoming [or., more probably, at a seasonable age], or if they were not disposed to overturn their dignity through a legal marriage, that they might have whomsoever they would choose as a bedfellow, whether a slave or free [freedman], and that they, though not legally married, might consider such an one as a husband."

Then we get a lurid picture of noble Christian dames having -secret partners of low condition and resorting to thugs, cords tied round the abdomen, etc., to remove from the sight of their friends the result of the intimacy.

It was not quite as bad as it sounds. In Roman law the widow or daughter of a Senator could not validly marry a slave or a freedman, and she lost her rank if she married a free man of lower condition. It seems that there must have been a few ladies of senatorial rank now ready to enter the Church, but no men, and the ladies had to lose their dignity or remain unmarried. Callistus did not want them to marry pagan Senators and be led away, and he eased their consciences by permitting them to go through a religious form of marriage in secret with Christians of a lower rank. Hippolytus suggests that the common practice was to "marry" slaves of their own establishments, and, as the marriage must be kept strictly secret, abortion was much practiced. Later in the third century its practice seems to have grown, and it had not a little to do with the severe general persecutions.

In further decrees Callistus laid it down that a bishop was not necessarily to be deposed for a grave sin, that clerics might remain in office although they were married, and that men who had been twice or even three times married could take orders. It was a general policy of liberality and departure from the stern asceticism of the early Church, and we are not surprised that Callistus thrived and reduced the followers of the learned Hippolytus to a little group of puritans. The Roman Church gratefully turned him into a saint and martyr when he died in the year 222, and Hippolytus, who wrote after that date, assures us that the only martyrdom he suffered was the experience of his early years that I have described.

### 93. THE NEW CHURCH

There is not a serious historian anywhere who doubts this, yet the pretentious Jesuit historian of the Roman Church, Father Grisar, repeats that Callistus was a martyr. There were, as the more learned Duchesne admits in his "History of the Christian Church," no martyrs under the gentle Alexander **Severus**, who favored all religions, or under the extraordinary Syrian degenerate, Elagabalus, who had preceded him. Duchesne **suggests** that Callistus was killed in some quarrel of the pagans and Christians. We have no serious reason to suppose that he did not die peacefully in his bed, as Hippolytus suggests. Possibly after his death the Church counted him a martyr on account of his years in the mines, but it was not until the seventh century that the record of his martyrdom, which is now treasured in the Catholic Church, was forged.

What is even more amusing is that Hippolytus was converted into a saint and martyr by this later age, when ignorance was so profound, even in the ecclesiastical offices at Rome, that the most grotesque and fantastic errors were packed into these martyr-legends. Hippolytus survived the favorable reign of Alexander Severus, and, if it is true that the young Emperor had a bust of Christ in his pious collection, the Church must have prospered. At his death, however, he was succeeded by a barbaric commander of the troops, a Gothic giant, eight feet high, who could eat forty pounds of meat, and wash it down with a proportionate quantity of wine, in a day. This boorish and ferocious Emperor seems to have been angered by Christian supporters of Alexander, and he issued an edict of persecution, but we have no idea how much or little it was carried out. Even the Catholic Professor Benigni (of the Papal College at Rome) admits that the tranquil life of the Church was "hardly interrupted by Maximin" (to whom, nevertheless, countless martyrs are credited in the legends), and it was not until 250 that serious trouble arose. This is the persecution in which legend tells of St. Lawrence, a deacon of the Roman Church, being fried on a large gridiron; and it says much for the stupefying atmosphere of the Church that until recent times even scholarly Catholics **believed** in a punishment which was utterly alien from Roman law and life. No educated person-see the article on St. Lawrence in the Catholic Encyclopaedia-believes these stories today, though ignorant Catholics are still **encouraged** to believe them. The legend of "St." Hippolytus is that he was one of the civic officials who assisted at the burning of St. Lawrence and was so impressed by his bravery-no doubt when he said, according to the legend, "Turn me over: that side's done"-that he and sixteen companions at once offered themselves for martyrdom! To such a pitch of intellectual degradation had the Roman Church sunk by the seventh and eighth centuries.

What really happened in this Decian Persecution we will consider later. Callistus had entirely changed the character of the Roman Church and had at least opened the door to corruption. His own early experiences warn us that the Church had already, before 200 A. D., fallen far below the level of early days, but the measures he adopted were bound to reduce the general character still further. Misrepresentation is so inveterate in Catholic circles that the writer on "Rome" in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the clerical Professor Benigni, who was brought from Rome to enlighten modern America, tells his readers that Hippolytus was angry because "the Pope thought proper to introduce certain restrictions"! That is Catholic Truth up to date in the most authoritative publications. The same high Roman authority, by the way, speaks of the dissolute Marcia, who had favored the Christians under Pope Victor, as "the morganatic wife of Commodus," and he is careful not to say a word about the character of either.

We have no further historical light on the character of the Roman community until, just after the Decian Persecution in 253,

there occurred the quarrel with Africa which I have described, Professor Eienigni would have us believe that there were then 50,000 Christians in Rome. In a letter preserved in Eusebius's History (vi, 43) Cornelius boasts that the Roman Church has forty-four priests, fourteen deacons and subdeacons, and ninety-four clerics in minor orders; and it supported fifteen hundred poor, sick and widows. The latter figure is n&leading. We have to remember that in Rome the workers received free bread and free medical service, and that from the early part of the fourth century there was ample provision for orphans and widows. If the Church wanted to keep its poor members away from **these pagan** services, it was bound to support an inordinate number of them. But the chief error is to suppose that each of the forty-four priests had, in modern style, a church and a congregation of more than a thousand people. We will **returnp** to the point later.

Of the general character we have no direct knowledge, beyond the ease with which African adventurers were received. This "pseudo-Bishop" Felicissimus whom you have welcomed, says Cyprian to the Pope, is "a fraudulent user of money entrusted to him, the violator of virgins, the destroyer and corrupter of many marriages" (Letter 54). Cyprian gives an appalling account of the condition of the African clergy. "I pass over the conspiracies, adulteries and various kinds of crimes" in the ranks of the clergy, he says in the same letter. If this was the condition of the African Church under a profoundly religious man who firmly believed that the end of the world was at hand, we know what to expect in the more liberal Church on the fringe of the great city of Rome. Bnt instead of picking up scandals here and there let us take the general judgment on the Churches of the third century of so polite and diplomatic an historian as Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History, viii., 1). He has to explain why God permitted the Decian Persecution to fall on the Church in 251, and this is the explanation:

But since from our great freedom we had fallen into negligence and sloth, when each had begun to envy and slander the other, when we waged intestine wars against each other, wounding each other with words as with swords and spears, when leaders assailed leaders and people **assailed** people, hurling epithets at each other, when fraud and hypocrisy had reached the highest height of malice, . . . when, devoid of all sense, we gave no thought to the worship of God, but, believing, like certain impious men, that **human affairs** are controlled by **no** providence, we heaped crime upon crime, when our pastors, despising the rule of religion, fought with each other, intent on nothing but abuse, threats, jealousy, **hated**, and mutual enmity, each claiming for himself a principality as a sort of tyranny. . . .

It certainly looks, as if the policy of Callistus had succeeded. **The** ark of Noah, to which the Church was often compared, now sheltered the unclean beasts as well **as** the doves and gazelles,

## CHAPTER VII

## THE MANUFACTURE OF SAINTS



SE OF the most difficult tasks of any historian is to assign a moral character to a city, a race, or an age. Nothing less than a statistical account of the distribution of virtue and vice in such an age or region would justify us in applying any general qualification to it. The good and evil have been mixed in every period of civilization, for the older nations had substantially the same moral code as we, and no man can now determine their relative proportions. Hence I do not say that the Roman Church of the third century was corrupt but simply that corruption had invaded it, and that the predominantly virtuous aspect of the earlier Church had been lost. Indeed we have this further difficulty, when we try to be entirely just to the Church and describe its virtues as well as its vices that the description of its better qualities rests very largely upon a literature which even Catholic authorities now regard as untruthful to an appalling extent. Even the writer on early ecclesiastical history who knows better than to tell how Lawrence smiled on a gridiron or Catherine was broken on the wheel is found repeatedly to give pictures of virtue and heroism which are taken from documents that are not now admitted by scholars.

All that I can do in these circumstances is to show the falseness of the accounts of life in the early Church of Rome which represent the primitive austerity as maintained throughout the second and third centuries, just as they represent the early fervor of the monks as generally sustained throughout the Middle Ages. But my protest will not be entirely understood unless we glance at the department of modern ecclesiastical history which examines the lives of the saints and martyrs of the early Church. Here the pressure of modern research has been such, the exposure of falsehoods has been so pitiless, the legends of the martyrs are so appallingly crude and blundering, that the Catholic clergy have had to yield to it. Several Catholic historians are authorities on the subject and although they are generally men who are under suspicion of modernism or, as it is quaintly called at Rome, Americanism—I say quaintly, because American Catholic literature is more untruthful than, let us say, German—the results of their work are irresistible. I have just mentioned a Roman martyr, St. Lawrence, whose picturesque death has been one of the most popular pages of martyr-literature for fourteen centuries, yet the Catholic Encyclopaedia now admits that the details are “not credible” and we know no more than that he was put to death. Hundreds of saints who have been the most popular of all precisely because their ordeal was so dramatic and so savage are now resolved into myths or dismissed with the cold

assurance that there is some evidence that they died for the faith in the second or third century. I have written a Little Blue Book (No. 1107, "Legends of Saints and Martyrs") on the subject and must confine myself here to a consideration of the matter as it affects the Roman Church.

### §1. THE GENTLE ART OF FORGERY

The discovery of this mass of untruth in the martyr-literature of the Church affects it chiefly in two ways: it deprives the Church of one of its most treasured proofs of supernatural guidance—the immense number of the men and women who died for it—and it apprises us that one of the important means by which it has really secured and maintained its position was forgery on a very large scale. I am not going to linger to prove that it is just and proper to use the word forgery. Every Roman writer who invented a story to fit certain unknown bones, and every writer who added to that story a detail which he consciously derived from his own imagination was a forger. It is not claimed by anybody that these things were done by saints *in* the semi-consciousness of a religious trance. The Jesuit priest H. Delehaye is one of the chief authorities in this field, and he will not admit the name "forgers." He means, he says, that the writers are not more guilty than any others who "naively believed themselves entitled to supplement the silence of tradition by narratives mainly [almost always, as he shows] supplied by their own imaginations." Since this applies to the great mass of the accepted legends of the most popular saints of every country we understand why he dislikes the word forgery. But how is it "naive" instead of dishonest for a man to think himself entitled to do this? At the best it shows a low moral standard; and Father Delehaye's own numerous works show that it was not pietists in a state of ecstasy, but priests and monks coldly calculating the effect of what they did, who perpetrated most of these things.

Twenty years ago the Catholics of England included in their list of publications a translation of Delehaye's "Legends of the Saints" (1907). They seem to have repented, and have not published a translation of any of the more important books the French Jesuit has since written, and I do not know if this book is available in America. Let me quote a passage in which he summarizes a good deal of the work, especially where more martyrs are fabricated on a given model:

The process [of composing these legends] appears so puerile and summary that one is tempted to assume that it can only have been carried out in the darkest epochs of the Middle Ages, and one can scarcely resist the temptation to locate this wretched plagiarism among barbaric surroundings in which literary culture was practically unknown. Unfortunately we must remember that as early as the fourth century in Italy, and indeed in Rome [almost entirely in Rome], we come across deliberate adaptations of

foreign legends to fit national saints. The passion of St. Lawrence even in its minor details is borrowed from that of the martyrs of Phrygia as related by Socrates and Sozomen. . . . The martyrdom of St. Eutychius as related by Pope Damasus [fourth century] is simply a reproduction of that of St. Lucian, and the Damasian version of the death of St. Agnes possesses undeniable resemblances to that of St. Eulalia (p. 104).

Apart from these "naive" compositions Delehaye admits that some of the martyr-legends are "audacious fabrications, the product of falsehood and ambition," from which "one turns contemptuously away" with a sentiment of pity for "the simplicity of their dupes." This class includes some of the most popular stories of martyrs, which were included in the literature deliberately supplied to uneducated Catholics when I was a Catholic pupil fifty years ago, and the class is very large. But the still larger class, which includes nine-tenths of the martyr-stories that are the most popular and most treasured in every country, is only relieved of the stigma of forgery by a little dexterous verbiage. You have an example in the above passage. Pope Damasus—a "saint," of course—was the most important Roman bishop of the fourth century: a very able and, as we shall see in the next volume, not very scrupulous man. Delehaye plainly hints that in his songs or hymns in honor of the Saints Damasus borrowed things that were said about other personalities and applied them to Eutychius and Agnes (and other martyrs). Most of us will conclude that the account he thus gave of Agnes or some other martyr was a piece of lying and forgery. There was no pious guilelessness about Damasus. He was a calculating adventurer who won the chair of Peter by bloodshed and was freely accused by some of his priests of worldliness and immorality.

The 'general procedure, according to these experts, was that the Church of the fourth and later centuries found itself in possession of genuine "acta" of the martyrs, or reports of their trials with, perhaps, a contemporary short account of the execution. Shorthand, we must remember, was then used in the Roman courts, and, when the Emperors became Christian, we may assume that large numbers of such acta or records were available to the Christian authorities. Very few genuine records of this sort have been preserved, though thousands have been forged, and with such crudeness that a college student of Roman history would smile at them. These records are too tame, and the next step was for the preachers of the fourth century to deliver panegyrics of the martyrs in which, Delehaye confesses, they added imaginary details to make the story more picturesque and impressive. Whatever name you may be disposed to give to that procedure, remember that it was a deliberate policy adopted by educated priests or bishops for the glorification of the Church. Writers of poems or hymns on the martyrs, like Pope Damasus, did the same thing. The third stage, which has given the Catholic Church its actual collection of lives of martyrs, was

that from the fifth century onward **these short accounts** were expanded into long fictitious narratives, the barbarous punishments of the early Middle Ages were attributed to the Roman authorities, ten or a dozen new saints were invented on the model of some particularly striking story, martyrs were created to go with unknown bones or relics or meet the increasing demand generally, groups of martyrs were recklessly enlarged until they became thousands, and so on. **Most** of this was done in Rome and Constantinople.

## §2. THE FEWNESS OF ROMAN MARTYRS

When, therefore, the Protestant is told by a Catholic friend that his Church is accredited by the tens of thousands of martyrs who in the second and third centuries faced the most horrible torments in their allegiance to it, the Protestant may justly retort these martyrs are, on the contrary, a specific evidence of the un-holiness of his Church, for they are mainly sheer products of calculated forgery. And if the Catholic takes refuge, as he is taught to do, in the plea that his Church has been libelled in Protestant lands for several centuries, and the new history is at length vindicating its innocence, the Protestant may reply that on this point it is precisely the new history that has exposed the appalling mass of forgeries, and that Roman Catholic scholars are compelled to endorse the exposure when they seriously devote themselves to this field of research.

In this chapter, at all events, I entirely ignore the work of Protestant or Rationalist scholars and rely simply on Catholic authorities. The martyrology, or collection of the lives of martyrs, is so gross that when, as early as 1600, Cardinal Baronius, the Papal Librarian at Rome, published what was at that time the most learned **history of the Roman Church** ("*Annales Ecclesiastici*"), he openly expressed his disdain and suspicion of many of these stories. A hundred years later an even more learned work in ecclesiastical history was written by a very able and very liberal French priest, Le Nain de Tillemont, and, as the priest had retired from clerical work, and the volumes on the martyrs were not in any case to appear until after his death, he contemptuously discredited most of the martyr-legends he touched. English Protestants gladly translated this work ("*Memoirs to Assist the Ecclesiastical History of the Six First Centuries*"), and, if one of these eighteenth-century translations is available to the reader, he will enjoy the dry humor of the critical notes. Every Catholic historian has known since that time that the martyrology is based upon a mass of forgeries, but it was not until Protestant and Rationalist scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century began 'to expose the legends by the hundreds that a few Catholics joined in their work. They are not popular in their own Church, and possibly the two whom I quote here, the Jesuit Delehaye and the Austrian Catholic historian Dr. Albert Ehrhard, Professor at Vienna University, are not available in America. The American Catholic authorities neither understand nor approve of such work.



But it is now so firmly established and known to historians that even the Catholic Encyclopaedia, which can be consulted in most public libraries, has to make startling concessions. That costly and pretentious work is by no means liberal. I should say, coldly, that it contains a thousand times more errors or misstatements (mainly historical) than any other Encyclopaedia published in the last thirty years. Yet one has only to read the accounts in it of the more popular martyrs to see how the stories that are still given to the young are completely discredited and a nervous inconsistency is found in the whole series of volumes. The article on "Rome," by a very Jesuitical Roman professor, will be found to reduce the martyrs of the Roman Church in particular to very few, yet if you turn to the special articles on these few you will find them at times obscured in controversy or largely fictional. Under the heading "St. George" you will read of "the unscrupulous freedom with which any wild story, even when pagan in origin, was appropriated by the early hagiographers to the honor of a popular saint." And so on. Probably the best counsel you can give to a Catholic friend who is horrified to hear of this modern exposure is to read the account of the more popular saints (Lawrence, Sebastian, George, Agnes, Catherine, Cecilia, etc.) in what he regards as his own standard authority, the Catholic Encyclopaedia; and warn him that "the residuum of truth" which the writer generally finds in the legend he demolishes is in many cases itself fictitious or seriously disputed.

Since the forgers were largely Roman clerics, the Roman martyrs have particularly been reduced by the recent exposure of their work. Professor Ehrhard's work ("Die Altchristliche Literatur," 1900), contains a valuable summary of all critical books and memoirs on the martyrs to that date. If the Catholic works to which I refer seem of remote date, you will understand the reason. When the Vatican saw the magnitude of the exposure which the new science was effecting it used its customary powers of persuasion to keep Catholic writers out of it: and, of course, the Catholic must not read other writers of the critical school. However, quite enough work had been done twenty years ago, and Dr. Ehrhard sums up the work of his Catholic colleague Delehaye, in examining the legends of Roman martyrs in particular, in these words (p. 556) :

He puts all accounts of Roman martyrs in the third class of Acts of Martyrs, which one may describe as religious romances : not only the Acts of St. Cecilia, which Erbes has decisively proved to have appeared only at the end of the fifth century, but also those of St. Felicitas, Sts. Nereus and Achilles, and all the others.

As the general plea of the Catholic Encyclopaedia is that the legend it politely sets aside is only an amplification of some earlier genuine document, so the martyr remains, let me say that Professor Ehrhard adds that "there is no evidence whatever that the Acts are based on earlier sources." They are what most of us call forgeries.

Father Delehaye has made a special study of references to the Coliseum in the stories of the Roman martyrs. Nothing about the

martyrs seems to be so deeply rooted in literary tradition as the belief that time after time the Christians of Rome were thrown to the lions in the arena at: the Coliseum. Perhaps some sharp-sighted reader will remind me that I have myself, in my "Crises in the History of the Papacy," told how the Christians across the Tiber would hear "the roar of the lions which might at any time taste Christian flesh," but note carefully, that I merely say "might." It seems to me inconsistent with general Roman character to imagine the people deriving any pleasure from such a spectacle. It was the light, not the bloodshed, which they loved. Yet I gather from a passage in one of Cyprian's letters to the Pope ("you are so often asked for in the Circus for the lions") that, hearing of such things in the provinces, there were degenerate Romans who may have raised the cry. The passage may **be** an interpolation, *as even Cyprian would know* that it was in the Amphitheater, not the Circus, that the gladiators and lions fought. There may, however, have been a few morbid cries of "Throw them to the lions at Rome," and the whole world is so sure that the Coliseum was stained with such spectacles that not a critic raised *an* objection when Mr. G. B. Shaw founded a play ("Androcles and the Lion") on the theme and other artists, dramatists, and novelists used it.

Father Delehaye has, it *seems*, shown by a critical study of the legends that all the stories of martyrdom in the Coliseum are to be rejected. I have not been able to *get* the French work, "*L'amphithéâtre Flavien et ses environs dans les textes hagiographiques*" (1897), in which he does this, but I am willing to accept the assurance of his colleague, Professor Ehrhard, that it is decisive. Androcles and the lion, like Cecilia and her organ, Lawrence and his gridiron, Catherine and her learning, Agnes and her wonderful hair, and all the other familiar stories of one's childhood, pass into the realm of myth. Wherever we put a critical finger on the Roman legends they collapse. The historical seminary of my old university, Louvain, which is intensely Catholic, investigated about thirty years ago the stories of nine saints who were said to have come from Rome to evangelize Belgium and have been martyred. They found, and stated in the *Annual of the University* (1899), that eight were purely fictitious. One martyr-story had coolly been multiplied by nine.

We must not, as I have already said, imagine that all this forgery belongs to the Middle Ages, when piety and ignorance were so blended that we might be asked to be lenient. A very great deal of it was done as soon as, in the fourth century, the persecutions were over and the Church appealed to the pagans. There is a decree of some early Pope ("About the books to be received") which some authorities ascribe to Pope Gelasius of the fifth century and others to Pope Damasus of the fourth. Father Grisar refuses to ascribe it to Gelasius, and the first part of it seems to be due to Damasus. It boasts that "by a singular prudence?" the martyrologies are *not* read in the churches of Rome because the authors are not known. But the Catholic writer who quotes this "singular" and edifying prudence does not tell you that the Pope goes on to say that unbelievers scoff at the absurdities and errors of the stories. Rome, in other words,

already in the fourth century had a mass of forged martyr-stories which were so crude that it feared the ridicule of the pagans. A long list of such works is added to the decree, but this may belong to a later age.

### §3. THE CATACOMBS

How many martyrs there really were at Rome or in the Church generally no man can say. Gibbon, by an ingenious and learned calculation, estimated that not more than two thousand Christians (out of several millions) were executed in the last, and most general persecution. He found that in Palestine, where the zeal was greatest, only nine bishops and ninety-two other Christians, according to the historians of the fourth century, were martyred; and he rather riskily extends this proportion to the whole Church. His critics scoffed, but before the end of the nineteenth century competent writers were estimating that there were probably less than two thousand martyrs in the whole of the persecutions. When one reads how many of these have dissolved into myth during the last few decades one wonders how many will be left in the end. It is enough for us that the genuine martyrs whom the new science has vindicated are almost all unknown to the general Christian public: that the well-known and popular martyrs have *had* every single *picturesque detail* stripped from them and are reduced to mere names, if not myths; and that the relics which have strewn Europe for more than a thousand years are overwhelmingly fictitious.

In conclusion the reader may expect a word about the Catacombs of Rome. Your Catholic friend who has been to Rome and *visited* these curious underground cemeteries will tell you indignantlly that they alone contain the bodies of tens of thousands of Roman martyrs. Indeed there is some vague number of millions of graves in the Catacombs, and the ordinary Catholic imagines that they are to a very great extent martyrs, yet any expert in the branch of history and archeology that deals with this subject will tell you that the martyrs were not nutnerous at Rome,

There are subterranean passages in many places (Alexandria, Paris, Crete, Naples, etc.) where the strata beneath a city are soft, and they have generally served as burial grounds. Underneath Rome the total extent of these narrow passages, often in tiers, is believed to be nearly six hundred miles, and some estimates of the number of corpses in them rise to six millions. There was a special reason for such underground cemeteries at Rome. It became the custom of the Romans to cremate the dead, and Jews and others who would not adopt the custom began to excavate, before Christianity arose, these passages in the soft rock lined with niches to receive the bodies. The Christians naturally followed the lead of the Jews, since each body was one day to rise again. From the first century, therefore, until the *year 303 every Christian who* died *in* Rome was buried in the Catacombs; and after the peace, when it became an act of piety to visit the underground "tombs of the martyrs," it was also felt to be a special act of piety to be buried underground with them.

The Catacombs are, in a word, the cemeteries of the Roman community until the year 410, and in the fourth century the number **buried in them would be enormous.** **Alter** the fall of Rome they were neglected, but the demand for "relics" all over Europe converted them for a time into quarries of a particularly valuable character to the Roman Church. The bones of ordinary Christians were brought out and sold all over Europe as the remains of martyrs. No one can say how many of the graves really belong to martyrs. Damasus spent large sums on the "re-decoration" of the Catacombs **in** the fourth century, and, since he was quite capable of 'redecorating' their lives in his poetry, one may suspect that he added a palm of martyrdom here and there underground. They do not help us to estimate the number of Roman martyrs. We can say only that the immense majority of the Roman stories of martyrs which we actually **have are fictitious, or that in the last analysis we find only a very** brief ancient tradition in some cases that they were put to death, in some unknown way, for the faith. Rome dreads history as much **as fundamentalism dreads science.**

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE APPARENT TRIUMPH OF ANTICHRIST

**T**HROUGHOUT the two centuries we have now reviewed we find the Roman community constantly varying between smallness with virtue and largeness with liberality. The pressure of Roman authority has very little to do with this. Certainly the fiction which one meets so often in Catholic literature of a body of believers scattering to the Catacombs every few years with the soldiers at their heels is a travesty of the facts. The harshness of Nero had fallen upon the little community in its earliest stage, and after that time there seems to have been very little persecution at Rome until the middle of the third century. All **that we** positively know about the so-called persecution under Domitian is consistent with my suggestion that he selected a few aristocratic Christians who might join the conspiracy against him; and I quoted in the last chapter a very conservative Roman prelate saying that the persecution under Septimius Severus "does not appear to have been very acute at Rome" and that that under Maximinus "hardly interrupted the tranquillity" of the Roman community. From about 65 to 250, in other words, was a period of generally unfettered activity, broken at very rare intervals by a short spell of harshness or an intrigue that forced the religious test on some prominent apologist for Christianity.

But when a genuine persecution for religion began in the year 250 the Roman community was no longer a group of zealots who felt that the end of the world was near and that at any moment they might have **to** answer for their sins. Callistus and his contempo-

aries, as they appear in the work from which I quoted, can hardly be supposed to have had a vivid faith in the speedy coming of Christ; nor can the aristocratic dames whom Callistus permitted to sleep with their Christian slaves or the married members of his clergy. From this new generation not much heroism was to be expected and very little was forthcoming. The Church prospered. Two basilicas were erected, and silver vessels were at last used in the service of the altar. By the middle of the century the Roman Church had, as I said, more than forty priests, and, though it is incongruous to give these **the charge of a thousand souls each as in a modern city**, especially as there were only two small chapels, I should estimate that there were between ten and twenty thousand Christians in **Rome**. **This is not**, perhaps, a quite miraculous issue of nearly two centuries of propaganda in a city of a million people, and it entirely discredits the rhetorical statement that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of Christians. A hundred and fifty years of almost continuous toleration and the relaxation of the old discipline by the Popes amply explain it. But the next fifty years, which witnessed two drastic general persecutions of the Church, are even more instructive.

### §1. THE DECIAN PERSECUTION

I have in the previous chapter surveyed the whole period of persecution—it would be better to say, the whole period of two and a half centuries during which there were a few very short periods of persecution—in order to show two things: 1, that the Roman claim of having borne witness to the truth of the lives of hundreds of thousands of its members is a monstrous exaggeration, and 2, that on the contrary, these martyr-stories actually prove how very far from holiness the Church was, since they are for the far greater part forged. The third point, which I shall now establish, is that the few who died for their faith are not nearly so significant as the tens of thousands, who under threat of torture or death abjured their faith. If there were forty-four priests and fourteen deacons of the Church after the Decian persecution, we may well assume that there were seventy or eighty of these clerics when it broke out; and the only martyrs amongst them of whom we have positive knowledge (in a letter of Cyprian) are Pope Fabian and four deacons. If, as Mgr. Benigni and most Catholic writers hold, there were then fifty thousand Christians in Rome, it is singular how very few of them earned the martyr's crown. And the situation is far worse when, in 303, the Emperor Diocletian opened the last persecution, for now every Christian was summoned to sacrifice to the gods. If in the intervening fifty years of peace the Roman community had again attained the proportions of a body of fifty thousand, then something more than forty-nine thousand nine hundred of them abjured their faith. Historians who say smooth things about "the early Church," as it is vaguely called, and entirely ignore that monumental apostasy mislead their readers.

The Roman Empire had decayed since the great days of the Stoic Emperors, and when Decius, a genuine **Roman** of the patriotic type, came to the throne in 249, he determined to restore it. Decius

had been set on the throne by a revolt of the soldiers. During more than a century of decay Syrians, Spaniards, and Africans had succeeded each other in the purple, and at last a Roman of the old type seized it. Most ecclesiastical writers lose sight of one interesting fact when they inquire into his reasons for persecuting the Christians. His predecessor Philip, an Arab sheik, had obtained power by procuring the murder of the Emperor, and there is an ancient tradition that he and his wife Otacilia were Christians. If it were not for their criminal enterprise Rome would, of course, welcome the tradition. In point of fact, St. Chrysostom himself says that they went to service in the Christian church at Antioch after the murder and were ordered to do penance. The Empress at least, whose nationality is unknown, though she was almost certainly an oriental, seems to have been a Christian. This may have counted in the mind of Decius when he decided that a restoration of the Empire demanded a restoration of the old religion and an eradication of all new sects. Cyprian speaks only of a decree issued by him that the clergy and nobles shall abandon Christianity or be punished, but the Sequel shows that he attempted entirely to destroy the Church. The persecution in Rome left behind it, when Decius died in 251, a fearful quarrel in the Church about lapsed members, as we saw. The whole of the members of the community seem to have been divided into three classes : those who sacrificed, those who offered incense on the altars, and those who bribed the officials to give them a certificate to the effect that they had sacrificed.

## §2. THE LAST GREAT CALAMITY

Aspart from the Pope and a few deacons we do not know how many or how few of the Roman Christians died; and this applies also to a short persecution under Valerian a few years later. Pope Xystus and five deacons are said to have been victims of this persecution. But Valerian died in the next year, and his son and successor Gallienus (260-268) not only suspended the persecution, but restored the churches and catacombs to the Christians of Rome. This was in effect a recognition, for the first time since Alexander Severus, of the Christian religion, and it is clear that during the next forty years the Roman Church made considerable progress. In the East even more progress was made. In Asia Minor it was claimed that the majority of the inhabitants were Christians. The Church, in fact, made such progress everywhere that when the Emperor Diocletian came to the throne he found it, in spite of his plan to restore the Empire and the gods of Rome, impolitic to interfere. For nineteen years he watched and tolerated the growth of the new religion from his palace in Nicomedia.

This is hardly the place to consider the policy of Diocletian. For years he saw a large Christian church publicly holding its services near his palace, and there is good reason to believe that his wife (more probably his concubine, as I have shown in my "Empresses of Rome") and daughter attended. His wife was, in fact, later included in the Roman martyrology as a saint under three different names, so reckless was the myth-making. So one of the three names

is correct, and she was so far from being a saint and martyr' that **at** the first pressure she and her daughter abjured Christianity. Diocletian was, in any case, too strong a man to be moved by such a wife, but he feared to weaken the Empire by religious strife. He, however, appointed an assistant, the Caesar Galerius, and this man, though an able general, remained all his life a boorish and superstitious peasant. He spent the winter of 302-303 in the superb palace of Diocletian with his even more superstitious peasant mother. Whether it was the anger of these two at the open disdain of Christian officers in the palace or the serious conviction of Galerius that the refusal of Christians generally to take the military oath was weakening the Empire we do not know, but in February 303 soldiers were sent to destroy the Christian church at Nicomedia, and an edict forbidding the cult was posted up. The edict was torn down by a Christian officer, to the applause of his comrades, and twice during the next fortnight there was a fire at the palace.

Diocletian now decided to extinguish Christianity, if possible without bloodshed. His first decree ordered that churches should be destroyed and their property confiscated, the sacred books should be given up and burned, and Christians of a high rank should abjure or be degraded. The disorder that followed brought a new decree: there were to be no public meetings, and the clergy were to be arrested. A third decree ordered all citizens to sacrifice to the gods under penalty of torture ; and at last a final decree imposed sentences of death for professing Christianity.

Sober historians estimate the number of Christians in the Empire at. from two to ten millions, yet even admitting some of the martyr-stories which are now discredited it was estimated that only two thousand were executed, though **in** the East the persecution lasted ten years. At Rome, once more, we have reliable knowledge of very few martyrs. It is significant that though this persecution was a systematic attempt to extirpate Christianity, though the Roman community was now more numerous than ever and must have had something over twenty thousand members, and though within ten years Christianity became a licit religion and was free to count its **glorious dead, we hear of no such crowds of martyrs as were** ascribed, to the older persecutions. Of the tens of thousands of Roman Christians all but a mere handful forswore their religion and either sacrificed or bribed the officials. Let us not flatter ourselves what we would have done in the circumstances. But at least let historians cease to incorporate in their text-books the entirely false representations of the facts by Catholic writers. "Many were false to **their** faith," you usually read. It is **a** quite certain historical fact that not one in several hundred of them was loyal to his belief.

### §3. A CHRISTIAN CAESAR AND A NEW HOPE

Diocletian had, in his attempt to restore the mighty Empire, appointed a second Emperor, Constantius Chlorus, in the West, and two rulers of lower rank **who were** known as Caesars. The trouble he caused seems to have deeply moved him, and he resigned in 305 and induced his co-Emperor to do the same. Constantius now ruled

the western Empire, including Rome, and the persecution ended. Even during the three years of persecution Constantius had refused to apply the decrees as far as his effective influence went. He had, Catholic historians tell you, a Christian wife, the lady who later becomes the glorious St. Helena of the Roman calendar; and, although he was compelled to divorce her when he was clothed with the purple, he retained a tenderness for her and her religion.

I have shown in my "Empresses of Rome" that Helena was never the wife of Constantius. She was a tavern-girl who caught his fancy, and a Roman officer could not validly marry such a woman. They had, however, a son, the famous Constantine, and the Christians of Rome must have been greatly interested when they heard in 306 that this youth had escaped from the palace at Nicomedia and joined his father in Britain. This, of course, was quite enough for the later myth-makers to raise his mother to the rank of a British princess. One legend makes her the daughter of "Old King Cole," or the ancient British prince Coel of Colchester. Her royalty is as fictitious as her virtue, but she had at least transmitted her robust peasant strength to her son, and, apparently, some interest in Christianity: When his father died just after his arrival at York, when the news came that the troops had declared him Emperor, a new and interesting prospect was opened. We need not go into the details of the blood clash of ambitions of the next few years. In 312 the young Emperor arrived with his armies outside Rome and raised a Christian standard. "In this sign [the cross] thou shalt conquer," was written on it; and he conquered and entered Rome with the Christian emblem flying proudly above his troops.

In the next volume we shall see a little about the character of Constantine and the new era which he opened. In 313 he and his colleague Licinius solemnly promulgated the Edict of Milan, permitting every man to worship according to his belief "whatever divinity there is on the throne of heaven." Two years earlier the Emperor Galerius had ceased to persecute in the East and had granted complete religious liberty. The reign of Antichrist had, after all, not begun. Two centuries and a half of unlawful existence, interrupted at times by active persecution, had ended in an astonishing and unexpected triumph. What success the Roman Church had in its new conditions, what sort of character it sustained, and how after another century of struggle it found itself the spiritual ruler of all Europe, we shall see in the next volume.



**THE TRUE STORY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius**

**Volume II**

# **How the Roman Church Became Wealthy and Corrupt**

**The Shower of Imperial Gold and Its  
Demoralizing Consequences**

**Joseph McCabe**

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# HOW THE ROMAN CHURCH BECAME WEALTHY AND CORRUPT

## CHAPTER I

### FROM PERSECUTION TO PATRONAGE

**I**N THE first book we studied the life and fortunes of the Roman Church during the two and a half centuries after its foundation. All that is confidently known about it during that period could be told in a single short chapter, and it would be of little interest. A sudden blaze of insane fury throws a flickering and uncertain light, in the days of Nero, on a small Jewish-Creek group which awaits the second coming of the Messiah on the fringe of the city. Thirty years later this community has a bishop who can write in the name of his "Church" to brethren in Greece, and three lines in a pagan historian tell us that the Emperor Domitian has included some of its wealthier members in the long list of the victims of his suspicious melancholy. A century later it comes into the light once more for a few years. Its bishop visits the chief mistress of one of the vilest of the Emperors, and he attempts, for the first time, to dictate to other bishops: for which he is contemptuously told to mind his own business. In the next generation the Church stands out for a few years in the full light of an historical document, and we find it a body of possibly twenty thousand believers, rent by schism and heresy and ambition, too poor to have more than one small meeting-room in a wineshop, its early zeal and virtue now confined to a minority. In the middle of the third century we glimpse it again: a year of persecution sends a few of its clerics to death, and again it incurs the indignation of bishops overseas for its improper conduct. It remains obscure during the next half-century of peace, and, when the last and fiercest persecution opens, its members return almost entirely to the pagan temples.

This veracious and unimpressive history did not please the Roman Church in the days of its wealth and power, and it was hidden under an embroidery of miracles and martyrdoms which modern history has ruthlessly stripped from it. All but two of its early Popes were described as martyrs, since there seemed to be no other distinction that it was possible to give them, whereas we do not positively know that more than two of them were ever martyred. The Papal Chronicle admits that Pope Marcellinus himself saved his life, when the Diocletian persecution broke out, by offering incense to the gods, and it again falsifies the record, as Mgr. Duchesne admits, when it makes the Pope atone by a later, martyrdom. When the imperial summons was promulgated only one

priest and one minor cleric out of the whole of the Roman clergy offered themselves to the executioner; yet the Papal Chronicle has the effrontery to relate that there were seventeen thousand martyrs in a single month! To sustain the fiction that there was a peculiar supernatural force in the Church of Rome it was necessary to manufacture the additional fiction that ten times in two and a half centuries the red scythe of the persecutor had swept through its ranks, and tender and noble virgins and holy deacons and priests had perished in countless numbers with smiles on their lips. Let us grant that earlier Roman Church whatever virtue it possessed and whatever genuine martyrs it produced, but the version of its history which it still imposes on simple folk is a lie concocted to support a lie.

In the last book we left it at the close of the third century in a state of utter ruin. Its bishops and clergy had apostatized, and the best defense that most of them could make was that they had cheated the authorities by handing over other Greek books instead of copies of the Scriptures to be burned or had brought fraudulent certificates of having offered sacrifice. Their twenty or thirty thousand people were reabsorbed in paganism. Slowly and furtively, and with bitter reproaches, they began in 305 to return to the Church. Persecution still raged in the east, and the political situation was very uncertain. The new Emperor Constantius favored them, or at least disapproved of persecution, but he died in the year after his accession. Would his son Constantine sustain his policy? His movements, as he slowly came toward Rome and conquered his rivals, were feverishly discussed; and at length, in the fall of the year 312, he was nine miles from Rome and was said to have the name of Christ painted on the shields of his soldiers. A few days later he entered Rome, bringing the grisly head of their late Emperor, and the, second phase of the history of the Roman Church began.

In this book I am going to tell the remarkable story of the triumph of the Roman Church and the annihilation of its rivals, and again my main work will be to expose the untruth of the Catholic version of that triumph. It is false in almost every line. One would think that at least the manufacture of martyrs (except for the earlier persecutions) would now cease, but we shall still hear of martyred Popes and priests, who are supposed to have been slain by heretics; and so grossly has the forgery been done that they are in some cases actually heretics who were slain by the Catholics. We shall read how the imperial city, now that the red hand of the persecutor no longer keeps the Church underground, is captivated by its virtue; and we shall find that the truth is that, when bribery failed to convert the Romans, their temples were closed by force and the horrid policy of coercion, and martyrdom was cheerfully adopted by the Church itself. We shall read how the Roman people at last deserted their picturesque vices as well as their idols; and we shall find, not only that they took with them into the new Church their vices and their idols, but that fifty years of prosperity brought an extraordinary corruption upon the Roman clergy themselves.

We shall read of the great Popes who with wisdom and integrity guided the Church through this astounding revolutionary period; yet we shall find the same dreary succession of Popes without ability or personality, relieved only by one vigorous Pope, a "saint," who backs his way to power over the corpses of hundreds of Christian supporters of his rival. The enthusiastic French Catholic writer Ozanam says, "Not a single great man filled the See at Rome in the first four centuries ;" and we shall see later what was the character or culture of the only two Popes whom any man would call great in the next seven centuries.

The fourth century, when the Empire had been more or less restored by the vigorous efforts of Diocletian, was a literary century, though, not one of great writers. Even pagan writers begin to speak about the Roman Church, and the Christian literature of the fourth century is very large. Yet it is, once more, a sober historical fact that the Popes remain almost unknown, and the Roman Church makes no marked impression, except during a few years of a quite savage clash of ambitions. The oldest history of the Popes (the "Liber Pontificalis," which I will call, when I quote it, the Papal Chronicle) has, fortunately, been translated into English (1916) by Dr. Loomis, of Columbia University, with illustrative notes and an introduction. Dr. Loomis follows Mommsen, the great German historian, against Duchesne, the Catholic scholar, in placing the compilation of the book, from older records, in the seventh century. The historical school at Columbia is not one of those which I occasionally scold for compromise, and Dr. Loomis is frank. She finds in the book not only "pious stories", and "naive errors" but "manifest forgery," "invented details," "spurious decrees," "romantic fiction and deliberate fabrication." Yet even this dishonest attempt of Roman clerics to glorify their Church of the fourth century leaves it without distinction and—since the violent and vicious adventures are omitted—almost without interest. We shall have here the true story, from other Christian writers of the century, and it will certainly be found interesting. But we must begin with a few pages about the founders of the new epoch, Constantine the Great and his mother, St. Helena, for it is with these that the Catholic fiction of the fourth century begins.

#### 51. THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

In the Catholic Encyclopaedia, which we may take throughout as an authoritative account of Catholic history as it is now taught in educated Catholic circles, the writer on St. Helena tells us that she was in early years an "innkeeper" but that she "became the lawful wife of Constantius." Not a word is said about any controversy on the subject, yet it is the opinion of the majority of recent historians that Helena was just a tavern-girl in a rustic inn at which the legions called as they trod the roads of Asia Minor, and that she was taken from that malodorous environment—girls in such inns were in the Roman world generally of very free morals—by the Roman officer Constantius, remained his mistress for sev-

eral years, and was discarded by him when he became a Caesar. It is St. Ambrose who, in a panegyric of her, calls her "a tavern-woman"; and, although the word may mean either a female owner of the humbler type of inn or a girl serving in it, the age of Helena makes it certain that the word must here be taken in the second sense. Three Christian historians of the fourth century call her "the concubine" of Constantius. So she is described in the Chronicle of Bishop Eusebius, the court chaplain, or the continuation of it by St. Jerome. There is no question of a "lawful marriage," for Constantius, a Roman citizen, could not validly marry such a girl, nor can the concubinate be called an "informal marriage." The chief fact which Augustine laments in his "Confessions" is that for some years he had a concubine, which he deplores as a terrible sin in the teaching of the Church.

However, I have examined all the evidence in my "Empresses of Rome" and need not do so here. I merely resent the trickery of a writer who states positively, as if it were an undisputed fact, that she was a lawful wife, when the majority of recent historians regard her simply as a mistress. She was brought to court by Constantine when, probably after a prudent distribution of gold, the troops hailed him Emperor. He himself had a concubine and a son, as we shall see later. He was now thirty years old, a man of strong and ruthless personality. Why it was that so early in his campaigns he adopted the Greek monogram of Christ no one can tell, though hundreds have speculated on the subject. The story, which still circulates in pious circles, that it was revealed to him in a vision with the promise, "In this sign shalt thou conquer," is found only thirty years later in the Life of Constantine by Bishop Eusebius, and no serious historian looks at it. It is inconceivable that Constantine should keep to himself for more than twenty years (as Eusebius says), and refuse to be baptized, so remarkable a miracle. He was in his last illness when he accepted baptism. Throughout life he bore the title of Supreme Pontiff of the Roman religion and showed a special devotion to Apollo; and he built or restored a number of pagan temples. In the same year, 321, he ordered the general observance of Sunday as a day of rest and he directed that the auspices should still be taken in the temples. But we have not here to attempt to learn what was his real attitude toward religion.

His character was as ambiguous as his creed. It is enough to recall the events of the year 329, when he was in Rome. His eldest (and illegitimate) son Crispus and his twelve-year-old nephew were, in the words of St. Jerome, "most cruelly put to death," and shortly afterwards his wife Fausta was, in his own palace, suffocated in a vapor bath. Again I refer to my "Empresses of Rome" for an examination of the evidence, but even the Catholic Encyclopaedia admits the "executions" and Duchesne more candidly calls them "murders." They betray a streak of barbarism in Constantine and his mother, whom the Roman Church has decorated with the most fulsome panegyrics. The version of the tragedy generally accepted at Rome was that Fausta accused her stepson of making indecent proposals to her—we shall see later that nearly the whole

family was tainted with **violence** and vice—and that, when **Crispus** had been poisoned, Helena furiously demanded the death of **Fausta** on the ground that it was she who, like Potiphar's wife, had made **advances and been repulsed**. *There was no trial*, and therefore no "execution." It seems clear that Constantine had **Fausta** murdered to, appease Helena. But this does not explain the savage murder of the young nephew, and there is strong reason to suspect that the boy and **Crispus** were chiefly murdered to remove possible rivals to Constantine's legitimate children. Crispus was the son of a concubine and very popular in the army. I do not see much in the suggestion of some writers that **Crispus** and **Fausta** hated the new religion and were winning pagan support, for in the Papal Chronicle we read that in the year 313 the Pope and his clergy met for a council "in the house of **Fausta** on the Lateran," and I see no reason for fabricating such a detail. These facts must be recalled when we read about the new odor of piety and virtue in the imperial palace.

## §2. OUT OF THE GLOOM

These murders were committed in 329, seventeen years after the supposed conversion of Constantine and Helena, and they provoked in Rome a storm of anger and of contempt of Constantine's religion. Only a few years before this Constantine had kissed the wounds of the survivors of the last persecution at the Council of Nicaea; though he had then, with his usual baffling inconsistency, assured the prelates that the question which agitated the Church (the divinity of Christ) was "quite insignificant and entirely disproportionate to such a quarrel"! Now the Romans were so scornful that one—some say that it was the Emperor's chief counselor—composed, and nailed to the gate of the palace, a couplet which ran:

**Say ye the Golden Age of Saturn breaks again?  
Of Nero's bloody hue these jewels are.**

Constantine left Rome and began to build Constantinople. He had long before decided to do this, but Mr. H. G. Wells is not quite ingenuous in his "Outline of History" when he tells at length the wisdom of building a city in the east and says nothing about the murders which had driven him from Rome.

The Roman Church must have been depressed by these events, but it had already enjoyed so long a spell of imperial favor that its prosperity was not interrupted. It is difficult to give any confident account of its relations to the new court. Such myths grew up at once—ought we not to say candidly that such forgeries were perpetrated?—about the conversion of Constantine that it is impossible to say when he first embroidered the monogram of Christ on his standard and raised to a position of honor the cross which Romans had hitherto regarded as we regard the hangman's noose. Probably, especially if it is true that the Roman clergy met in his wife's house a few months after he had entered Rome, the Christians were at once informed of his intention to give them freedom. Within six months, at all events, the heralds announced to the whole world that



Constantine and his co-Emperor had changed the fundamental principle of Roman law. Henceforth every man was free to follow whatever religion he chose. And with this historic Edict of Milan an officer brought to Rome an order to the Prefect to restore the confiscated property of the Christians.

It is estimated by Catholic writers and a few others that by this time about one-fifth of the population of Rome (assuming that its population had now sunk to something like half a million) and Italy had become Christians. These estimates, however, are generally based upon the fallacious assumption that the number of believers in any province may be gathered from the number of bishops. If you notice that one bishop is said to have ruled a hundred thousand Christians at Rome before the conversion of Constantine, yet that St. Augustine, when he became Bishop of Hippo a hundred years later, twenty years after the establishment of Christianity as the state religion, had only a few hundred followers in a town of twenty or thirty thousand people, you realize how precarious is the basis of these estimates. We should, indeed, if we granted a hundred, or even fifty thousand believers to the Roman Church at the beginning of the fourth century, be appalled at the magnitude of their apostasy. If for the entire Empire we accept the figure of five million Christians which the more moderate writers on the subject offer us, and remember that modern scholars will not admit at least more than a thousand martyrs in the entire Empire, we have an even more terrible picture.

But we need not linger over these figures. From Rome and Milan the news rapidly circulated, by the swift couriers of the Roman post over the great roads of the Empire, that men were free to worship Christ. Even the eastern Emperors now found it politic, especially when they noted the robust ambition and great military skill of Constantine, to listen to the dictates of humanity. From the mountains of Persia to the north of Britain it was repeated that the sword would never again dictate a man's belief; **and in** the course of the next eighty years far more men and women would die for their religious beliefs than had died in three centuries of persecution, and during the next thirteen centuries many millions were to die. Within less than thirty years an edict would sanction the death sentence for religion.

### §3. THE GOLDEN SHOWER

The progress of Constantine is, as I said, so obscured by the legends and lies of the next fifty years that one cannot give a detailed account of it. How he exterminated his colleagues and rivals one after the other and became sole master of the vast Empire, how he strained its resources to create the superb rival to the city of Rome which he called Constantinople, does not concern us here. It is enough that in the course of the next twenty years he and his wife (until he murdered her) and mother gave incalculable wealth to the Churches and added such privileges to the profession of Chris-

tianity that toleration is much too feeble a name for the new policy. "To desert the altars is the latest form of ambition," complained a pagan orator. The new city on the Bosphorus was, of course, a Christian city, but even in the Empire generally the most effective title to promotion was to embrace Christianity. Villages which were willing to destroy, their temples and offer themselves for baptism were raised to a higher status and endowed with the privileges of a municipality. Towns were rebuilt on a more generous scale as a reward for conversion.

Constantine regained master of Rome, though he visited it only twice before his final abandonment of it, and the hostility of the pagans seems to have made him more generous to the Church. The Papal Chronicle fills as many pages with his gifts to the Roman Church as it had devoted to all the Popes of the preceding two hundred and fifty years. No longer do we read curt announcements, in vile Latin, that a Pope ordained so many clerics and then died a martyr. Under the heading of Pope Sylvester (314-335), who was fortunate enough to rule in this period, page after page is filled with a description of the wonderful gifts. He builds a new basilica (church), and the Emperor endows it with a mass of gold and silver and bronze vessels, each minutely described, that must have made it outshine the great temple of Jupiter. The list of donations to two new churches includes about four hundred massive silver objects and about seventy of gold, often encrusted with precious stones, besides valuable bronze chandeliers and other furniture. If we may believe the document, which at least describes objects in the possession of the Roman churches before the end of the century (and probably looted by the Goths), there was one silver ciborium (cup) five feet high, containing 120 lbs. of silver and adorned with jewels. We read of seven altars of solid silver, sometimes overlaid with gold, and of vaults of solid gold in some of the chapels. Ten or a dozen new churches are said to have been built, and in each case there is a long list of these imperial gifts. What is even more important, hundreds of lucrative estates were assigned to provide an endowment for the clergy and sustain the sumptuousness of the services. In a later age, the Papacy, as we shall see, dared, in one of the boldest forgeries of all history, to fabricate a document in which Constantine, when he leaves Rome to build Constantinople, assigns Italy to the Papacy. That forgery is the first base of the Pope's claim to temporal power, and, while it is disdained by every serious historian, even fairly recent Catholic historians like Cardinal I-Iergenroether-the clerical rank of these writers is generally proportioned to their audacity—very solemnly discuss it.

This celebrated "Donation of Constantine" could not, of course, be forged as long as any culture remained in the Roman Empire. It was probably fabricated in the Papal offices in the eighth century, as we shall see. Even these earlier gifts may not entirely come from the first Christian Emperor, though as his heretical successors would do nothing for the Roman Church for many years, we may assume that the list of property at least is justly referred to the

years of Constantine. Twenty years had wrought such an amazing change in the fortunes of the Church that one is almost surprised to see it still ruled for many years by men who are quite unknown to history. Great preachers rose in the eastern churches. St. Ambrose appeared in north Italy; St. Augustine in Africa. But the Roman Church remains without other distinction than its princely wealth, its bishops unnoticed until there arises in it a sordid scramble for its rule which will sufficiently enlighten us about the character it gradually assumed. But let us first complete this introductory part by a glance at the other religions with which the Roman Church entered into rivalry after the Edict of Milan.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RIVAL RELIGIONS OF ROME

**I**N THE year 274 a new and superb temple was opened on the slope of the Quirinal Hill at Rome. It was dedicated to the Sun, and the Emperor Aurelian had given fifteen thousand pounds of gold for its embellishment. His mother had been a priestess of some temple of the Sun, and throughout his short, but honorable and victorious reign, he had shown that he chiefly recommended that deity to the devotion of the Roman people. Aurelian, though at war almost all his life, had made a noble effort to restore, not merely the strength of the Empire, but the sobriety it had learned during the reigns of the Stoic Emperors or of Alexander Severus. People who do not realize that the history of Rome embraces nearly a millennium, in which periods of decay alternated with periods of vigor as in all other parts of the world, are astonished to read, as they rarely do, that, while the doors of the palace of the Emperor Alexander were open to all his subjects, a warning voice cried to them as they entered: "Let none enter these holy walls unless he is conscious of a pure and innocent mind." Aurelian attempted to enforce this sobriety and chastity even on his troops. It must be almost unique in military annals that when, on one of his campaigns, a common soldier had seduced the wife of his host, his body was torn in halves by tying it to two trees that were forced together and then released. For the guardianship of this virtue of his people Aurelian was anxious to see the Sun-god supreme in their minds.

The belief that one God was imperfectly reflected in the hundreds of deities of the Roman people had been quite generally entertained by thoughtful Romans ever since the first century before Christ. The greater divinities of the Romans corresponded entirely to the deities of the Greeks, their cousins, and Greek scholars had

long ago concluded **that** these were merely the attempts of their rude and ignorant ancestors to apprehend the one Eternal Deity. That phrase occurs in the joint Edict of Constantine and Licinius, and **it** is found throughout the fourth century in the writings of the pagans. When we have made every allowance for the different conditions of that time we must, seeing that every free Roman was educated, assume that the disbelief during several centuries of the better educated class in the old divinities must have had some effect amongst the general public. Moreover, a large part of the **Empire now consisted of the oriental regions which had borne a** number of great civilizations with distinctive sets of deities. Those provinces had seen the rise and fall of ten dynasties of gods far older **than those of Rome, and they were prepared at any time to** regard without astonishment an addition to the dozen religions which had their temples in every city round the Mediterranean Sea.

### §1. THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

**When, therefore,** the Emperor Constantine **summoned the Christians** of Rome from their humble meeting places, their Catacombs, and planted temples for them in the city, they had not to compete with **a religion that was unanimously cherished and profoundly believed by the Roman people.** There was only one deep root of the prevailing religion, the patriotic root. The favor of Jupiter was in some way necessary for the maintenance of the Empire, and so the sacrifices must continue. People did not in those days argue that nature bore on every hand the evidence of divine action, for it was only the philosophers and their few readers who believed in the planning of the universe, and none believed in its creation. **Not** was there any clear general belief in a future life in which the wicked would be punished and the virtuous rewarded, so that the ethical clement hardly existed in the Roman religion. The civil law took charge of justice and even of morals in the more important respects, for it imposed sentence of death for adultery. Religion was mainly a matter of tradition and practice; 'it was superficial.

Yet the old Roman religion, which we particularly mean when we speak of paganism, had become so interwoven in the life of the people that attempts to displace it were strongly resisted. Men did not ask, as they do today, whether it was true or not. The legends about the gods were not a creed, and the chief priestly functions were discharged by laymen appointed as civic officials are., It was not belief, but sacrifice, that mattered; and these sacrifices and sacred processions were intimately associated with the most joyous events of life. The days of public games were the red-letter days, and they opened always with a superb procession from the golden-roofed temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. The great Circus was almost religiously dedicated by its obelisk. The long mid-winter festival, the Sturnalia, seemed to be inseparable from the old religion. The June festival in honor of the goddess of flowers, when the most joyous of processions marched through the beautiful marble colonnades; the gay procession in

honor of the imported goddess Cybele; **the processions** of the priests of Pan and of Mars and other deities, kept the old religion vividly before their minds and linked it, not deeply but extensively, with their emotional life. The domestic hearth had its guardian spirits, and over every door was the image of a protecting deity; and the feeling of protection persisted so strongly that half a century after the conversion of Constantine the Christians of Rome still lit the lamps before the image, pretending that they were just lighting the entrance to the house. Every meeting-place of workers had its **patron deity**. **Sailors would be appalled at the idea of displacing** their familiar protectors, and farmers would despair of crops or cattle if the old religious practices were discontinued.

In short, Roman religion was not deep but was extraordinarily extensive. There were four hundred temples in Rome, and there **were** religious statues at every turn. The Forum, the great open space around or in which half the city spent its leisure, was a marble forest of religious monuments. Here were deities that rocked the cradle or eased the mother's delivery. There was a deity, Fortune, to which a man could appeal in every venture. Even the average religious person of our time thinks about religion only once a week, and sees a church only occasionally. A Roman's life was crowded with religious reminders and memorials every day; and the sentiments associated with these were generally joyous and often as gay as those of a secular festival. People who **came** from Asia or Greece and argued with a Roman that he ought to destroy all this elaborate and decorative religious paraphernalia and accept a story **about** a birth of a God in Judea (which had profited so little that the Romans had destroyed it half a century later), and the inheritance of a sin and sentence of hell by the whole human race, and so on, and the only evidence was that it was all written **in** certain anonymous books, had very **little** prospect of success **with** the mass of the Roman people. It is significant that there is no Epistle to the Athenians; and, as we saw, the Epistle to the Romans **is really** a letter to a **small group of Greeks and Jews** living **outside** Rome. There is not even an Epistle to the Alexandrians, the third great city of the old world.

## §2. THE VICTORY OF MITHRAISM

**When, therefore, we** say that the old gods of Rome were dying, as is so very commonly said, we should understand clearly what we mean. In the overwhelming majority of the Roman people **there was no change whatever of religious attitude. For five hundred years** new religions had been imported into Rome: first from Greece, then from Egypt, then from Asia Minor, and finally from **Persia and Syria. If these did not oppose the existing religious** life, but just added one more procession or festivity, they were generously welcomed. As late as the year 384, when the imperial adoption of Christianity was seventy years old, St. Augustine, who witnessed it, tells us that the procession of the priests and priestesses of Cybele through the streets was a general holiday. Tertullian

tells us that **except** during the **very** short periods of persecution at Rome-in all, about five years in two- centuries-the Christians moved freely about Rome, yet in the two hundred years they won **only twenty or thirty thousand out of the population of more than half a million**, and these were so superficially converted that they returned at once under pressure to paganism.

Yet there was bound to be a fairly broad fringe of skepticism in so cosmopolitan a city with so many religions and with so little to say about the truth of its own religion. It was amongst this minority that the new sects found their adherents. At the beginning of the fourth century the most successful of these new sects was Mithraism, a Persian cult to which I referred in the last book. It had sixty temples in Rome, and some of the Emperors had favored it. The soldiers on service in Asia Minor had come into contact with it there and had liked its martial spirit. Life was a **fight against legions of devils, according to the Persians. You met** in underground temples, lit by a blaze of candles, decorated with flowers and fragrant with incense. In the apse at the end was a **great carving of Mithra slaying a bull, and you were baptized in** his name in the blood of a sacrificed bull or ram. He was the god of light, the Sun-God, and therefore easily identified with the unconquered Sun of Roman religion. He **was the friend of men**, the "great captain" (as Wells speaks of his ideal), the leader in the fight against **evil**, and the reconciler of men with the Supreme God.

This religion, with its blood-baptism, was in many ways crude in comparison with the simple early Christian creed, but it had the peculiar advantage of blending some of the points of the Christian scheme with an attractive ritual and a central figure that was easily linked with the existing religion. The Fathers of the Church, as Duchesne says, found it the most serious of their rivals. "As mediator between the world and the Supreme Divinity," he says, "as creator and, in a sense, redeemer of mankind, the advocate of all moral good and the adversary of all the powers of evil, Mithra certainly does present some analogy with the Logos, the creator of men." The chief Mithraic temple at Rome was on the Vatican. When the first church of St. Peter was built, the two temples faced each other, and the services were **naturally** held on the same day, the Sun's Day ; and no one questions, that the date for celebrating the birth of Christ was borrowed *from* the Roman "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," which agreed with the birthday of Mithra (fixed, independently of Rome, by the winter solstice). The Mithraists had also an organization fairly analogous to that of the Christian Church of the fourth century. Their higher clergy *were* called Fathers, and the supreme head was the Father of Fathers. One of the greatest nobles of Rome in the second half of the fourth century, Praetextatus, was pressed by Pope Damasus to join the Church, and he **said**, with a laugh: "Make me Bishop of Rome and I will." In point of fact he was the Father of Fathers of the Mithraic religion. In spite of six decades of imperial pressure he and the other great nobles and officials remained outside the Church,

but many of them were Mithraists. Four Mithraic temples have been discovered in Britain, where at that time hardly any other temple existed.

### §3. THE NEO-PLATONISTS AND THE MANICHEANS

Duchesne gives the Neo-Platonists as the next most important rivals of the Christian religion, but that extremely mystic and elaborate philosophy had very few followers at Rome and was not properly a religion. We must not even imagine it making the progress at Rome that Theosophy makes in a modern city. It was almost confined to learned circles. It is important only because such success as it had helps us to understand what was really happening in the fourth century. Greek philosophy and Persian mythology had made thoughtful people all over the Greco-Roman world draw a sharper distinction than men had ever done before between matter and spirit, body and soul, purity and impurity. All these sects and philosophies were ultimately based on that distinction and appealed to it.

The real next rival, after Mithraism, was what is called Manicheism or Manicheanism. St. Augustine belonged to that sect for nine years, and his writings represent that it was a very serious rival to Christianity long after all other religions were supposed to have been suppressed by law. Mani was a Persian of royal blood who, about the middle of the third century, was converted to an ascetic life, as Buddha had been, and began to teach a new religion, based upon the old Persian belief in a supreme principle of darkness and evil as well as a supreme principle of light and virtue. He was crucified, about the year 276, and his followers were heavily persecuted. Diocletian was as severe against the Manicheans as against the Christians, and they had just as many martyrs: probably more in proportion to their numbers, since the members were still in the fervor of their first century. The sect reached Rome in the fourth century, and it obtained very numerous converts from that fringe of doubters and seekers and serious people upon which all these new religions drew.

In later years, when Manicheans were tortured by the Christian authorities to make them confess the "Secrets" of their meetings, some strange stories were extorted from the agonized witnesses. Even St. Augustine in his later years believed that they made the bread for their "sacrament" in a sexual orgy. No historian now pays any more attention to these stories, put into the mouths of tortured witnesses, than to the pagan stories about the Christians. The Manicheans were suspected and unpopular because they were very strict in their lives and cultivated virtue in severe isolation from the general community. In one of the extraordinary letters which St. Jerome wrote to Christian young ladies he tells one that "if you meet a pale and severe woman in the streets you call her unhappy or a nun or a Manichee." As far as we can see, the Manicheans were, as a body, the strictest of all the sects that appealed to Rome in the fourth century, and we are not surprised,

as they were still only two or three generations from the crucifixion of their founder.

There was also the Egyptian cult of the goddess Isis which at least in theory, and often in practice, had the same ascetic code of virtue. But it is enough to make it clear that there were two very serious rivals of Christianity in the fourth century, and both were ritual as well as ascetic religions. When, in his mature years, Augustine was challenged by a Manichean bishop to debate with him on "The Morals of the Manicheans," he shirked the challenge rather painfully and at length said that he had "never seen, anything wrong in the assemblies at which he was present and was not in a position to know what took place amongst the elect." About the same time we find him trying to convert a wealthy and cultivated friend, but we gather that the man remained a "pagan" with a general admiration of Christianity, Platonism and Manicheism. That was a very general attitude of thoughtful Romans. They smiled at Jupiter and Juno, though the old religion was so interwoven with the life of the state that they dreaded interference with it, and they appreciated any religion which provided the ethical element that the old religion could not provide. But the great mass of the people, though not so vicious as is often represented, wanted no change. The situation was totally different from the picture of it that is still given in Catholic literature.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEGENERATE POPES OF THE NEW ERA

**B**EFORE we attempt to trace how the rivalry of religions which I have just described ended in the complete victory of the Roman Church we must inquire whether there is any truth in the Catholic claim that it won Rome by its virtue and led to a moral uplift of the life of the great city. We have already set aside the theory that "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of Christians." The less any Catholic writer says about martyrs in our time the wiser he will be. The record of his Church in the Diocletian and Decian persecutions is really infamous. Already we find three levels of Catholic literature in regard to this subject. At the popular level, in the life of the great majority of the members of the Church, we find the old legends still imposed. People are kept in complete ignorance that all the moving stories of St. Agnes and St. Cecilia and St. Lawrence, etc., are now proved to be forgeries. At the middle level, that of the thoughtful and inquiring minority, who consult the Catholic Encyclopaedia, we get hundreds of these martyr-stories sacrificed but a general assurance that the Roman Church was, nevertheless, abundantly watered by the blood of martyrs. At the highest level, that of such scholars as the Catholic Church includes, we have the destructive works of



men like Father Delehay. The heads of the American Church do not encourage this type of literature.

If the martyr-argument thus proves to be fictitious and dishonest-remember that there is no impressiveness whatever in the fact that one man in a thousand refused to forswear his faith-we turn with an open mind to consider the next point in the Roman version of the triumph of the Church: the claim that its "holiness" captivated the Romans and was communicated to them. The supposed extreme wickedness of the Romans before their conversion is one important element of this story. I am going in a later series of volumes to give a careful account of Roman morals in each age and cannot say much on the subject here. But any reader who imagines that the dissipations of the days of Nero continued in the fourth century is very far from the truth. The morals of the mass of the people are obscure in any age. No one in those days set out to inquire what proportion of the people were vicious or virtuous. Of the character of the educated people, however, in the fourth century we have very good documentary evidence, and we find that it was generally high. The worst that is said of the Romans of the fourth century by a genuine student of recent times, Sir Samuel Dill (in his "Roman Society in the Last Centuries of the Western Empire"), is that they were no worse than English society was a hundred years ago; and I shall show that they were better. The other chief recent authority, the French Professor Gaston Boissier ("Roman Religion"), says that in the fourth century Rome recalled the age of the Stoic emperors; and Dill himself calls that age "a period of upright and benevolent administration and of high public virtue." Professor Foakes-Jackson and most of the more liberal ecclesiastical historians of our time agree that Roman vice has been greatly exaggerated.

We may see a little about that later, but here we will confine ourselves to the Catholic claim of superior virtue; and you will find it quite enough. I shall show in this chapter and the next that its new wealth corrupted the Roman Church to an extraordinary degree while the greater part of Rome was still pagan, and in the last chapter and the next book we shall see that there was no improvement of the morals of Rome after what the Catholic calls its conversion; and again I shall show this exclusively by the use of the Christian writers of the fourth century.

### \$1. THE EFFECT OF THE NEW WEALTH

Pope Marcellinus died "in his bed," Duchesne shows, in the year 304, or a year before he is supposed to have been "martyred," and the Roman See was vacant for the next year or two of, persecution. The whole Church was, in fact, dispersed. In May, 305, Diocletian resigned, the persecution ended in Italy, and the "faithful" began to sneak back to church. Pope Miltiades was elected, and he got from the imperial authorities at Milan an order upon the Roman officials to restore all Christian property. Some years were then occupied in bitter and painful disputes everywhere over

the treatment of the "traitors" : which is merely a corruption of the Latin word "traditores," or the men who had handed over the Scriptures to be burned, as Diocletian had demanded.

It was for this purpose that the Pope and a score of Italian and Gallic bishops met in 313 in "the house of Fausta," Constantine's wife. The trouble was especially grave in Africa, where the returned bishops were now accusing each other of murder, adultery and every conceivable crime. Some of the African bishops had appealed to Constantine, and Catholic writers carefully overlook the fact that they expressly invited Constantine to appoint, not the Pope, but some of the bishops of Gaul, to adjudicate on their quarrel. **Constantine ordered the contending parties to come to Rome, and the Italian bishops were associated with those of Gaul.** It is fairly clear that for the sake of peace they decided in favor of a bishop whose conduct was not above suspicion, and the rigorists seceded and set up the schismatical sect which was known as Donatism. This does not concern us until later, as its great spread was in Africa, but it was one more very serious split in the new organization.

It was only a few years after this that the famous controversy about the nature of Christ and his relation to God the Father broke out in the east. The struggle over this doctrinal issue alone led to far more deaths in the next fifty years than all the persecutions had caused in three centuries. The flame of passion was appalling: the bloodshed and brutality inconceivable to us today. Duchesne describes from the Christian historians of the time the scene in Alexandria in 355 when Athanasius was arrested. He was holding service at midnight in his church before a small congregation, largely consisting of consecrated virgins, when a troop of soldiers, and a crowd of the Arian Christians burst in the doors. They entered with drawn swords and trumpets blowing: "Their helmets gleamed in the light of the candles, their arrows flew through the church." The virgins, who rushed to protect their bishop, were "assailed with obscene cries, several were killed and others were outraged" (in the church). Athanasius was dragged out over the corpses and sent to the mines, but the reign of terror lasted eighteen months, the sacred virgins being beaten with thorn-bushes (apparently on the nude body) and half-roasted on furnaces.

It was this quarrel, which reddened the new Christian world with blood and fire for half a century, that led to the historical events which first disclose to us the corruption at Rome. I will tell later how Constantine summoned the great Council of Nicaea to settle the quarrel and how subordinate a part was given to the Pope and his representatives. Constantine died twelve years later, after showering prodigious wealth on the Roman Church, and it is not irrelevant to our subject to notice how silent that Church and all the other churches were about the appalling brutality that followed. The life of Constantine by Bishop Eusebius is pronounced by Mgr. Duchesne "a triumph of reticence and circumlocution"—which is a very polite description of it—and he maliciously

notes how it omits to mention "the murder of Crispus and Fausta." But Duchesne also, though the most liberal and learned of recent Catholic scholars, becomes reticent when he reaches the events of the year 337. He grudgingly admits that a score of princes and princesses were murdered, and he excuses his brevity by pleading that we are "badly informed."

This concerns us only in so far as it reveals the moral cowardice of the Pope, who, like every other prelate, truckles to the imperial murderers, so I will notice the events briefly. Constantine had, as we saw, murdered his illegitimate son and his nephew, in part at least to secure the succession of his three sons, but he had two half brothers and two married sisters, who, with their families, joined in the race to Constantinople for the division of the spoils. The eunuchs of the palace, with the connivance of Bishop Eusebius, forged a will leaving the Empire to the three sons, and their two uncles and seven cousins and other relatives and supporters were butchered in the superb palace. I may add that within three years the eldest son quarreled with the youngest and was slain, and that some years *later* the youngest, a youth whose court revived the worst vices of Commodus, was himself killed by his disaffected officers. A surviving cousin, Gallus, married to a daughter of Constantine, and both of an incredible viciousness of life, was raised to the purple and murdered. In a little over ten years twenty princes and princesses of the first Christian dynasty, half of them notorious for vice, were killed, and the survivor, Constantius, who ruled the whole Empire, was a heretic who made more martyrs than Diocletian had made. Julian the Apostate, the one member of the family who is so deeply reviled in Catholic literature, is the only one whom any modern historian treats with respect.

These things so closely touch my subject, since successive Popes breathed not a syllable of protest, that I have at least to glance at the horrors of the dynasty of Constantine, but it was some years before the history of the Roman Church was directly affected. This occurred in 353, when at last we have a broad light once more in the Roman See. The Emperor Constantius, now sole ruler and a friend of the Arians, had determined to "pacify" the Church by driving into exile every bishop who refused to communicate with the Arians. An envoy was sent to Rome and we may accept the story that Pope Liberius refused the bribe that was offered him to secure his consent. He was seized and taken to Milan, and a shorthand account has survived of the conversation in which the Emperor and his chief eunuch—these repulsive creatures ruled the court from the time of Constantine onward—tried to bully the Pope. "Of what consequence art thou?" the Emperor asked "the Bishop of Bishops." "Thou who dost thus disturb the peace of the whole world." There were, in fact, few bishops in the whole of Christendom who had not yielded to the imperial heretic. But Liberius stood firm and he was exiled to the wilderness of Thrace. It was then also that Athanasius was seized, as I described, and exiled. And the Roman clergy held an indigna-

tion meeting and swore that they would elect no other bishop; and most prominent amongst the heroes were Archdeacon Felix and Deacon Damasus.

It sounds as if wealth had not yet corrupted Rome, but listen to the sequel, which you may read in the notes to the Columbia University translation of the Papal Chronicle or in Duchesne. Within a very short time Archdeacon Felix received a flattering invitation to the court at Milan, expressed his willingness to sign any formula the imperial heretic wanted and, in the presence of three court eunuchs (representing the Roman people), was consecrated Bishop of Rome. And Deacon Damasus was one of the first to welcome the new Pope and almost all the higher clergy obsequiously accepted him.

## S2. BLOODY STRUGGLES FOR THE PAPACY

At least, you say, the Roman Church sustained its tradition of having one faithful man in a thousand, but unhappily we cannot even record this. Two or three years in Thrace (Bulgaria) cooled the blood of the martyr, and Liberius sent word to the imperial headquarters that he was prepared to submit. St. Jerome bluntly says that he "embraced the heretical perversity," but Catholic scholars are very eager to claim that the Pope never endorsed the Arian heresy. What we do know is that he signed a formula which was agreeable to the Arian Emperor and his bishops, and that he promised to remain in peaceful communion with bishops whom he regarded as heretics; and that beyond any question he did this that he might return to the comforts of the new papal palace at Rome. **In these circumstances we need not linger to inquire what** peculiarly subtle doctrinal expression he did endorse, but it was certainly not Trinitarian. St. Hilary, one of the few orthodox rebels, spoke **with scorn** of the Pope.

The Emperor was in Rome at this time, and to the clamors of the Roman Christians he blandly replied that they should very soon have their Pope back. But what about Felix? There were, the Emperor replied, to be two Popes as long as Felix lived. It seems that the priests of the Roman Church tamely submitted to this gross interference. The Emperor Julian afterwards wrote that it was "the eunuch, the chamberlain and the cook" of the palace who decided all these matters. It was left to the lay members of the Church to roar at the Emperor, as he surveyed the races in the Circus from the imperial box: "One God, one Christ, one Bishop." This implies that by 357 a very large part of the workers of Rome were Catholic; but do not form any hasty impression of their piety. They gave Liberius, who now returned, the reception due to a hero, and they drove Felix and his supporters out of the city. Here the sacred war began. Felix and his friends attempted to seize one church but were again driven out of Rome; and in 365 Felix died ingloriously in his bed, but to this day he is honored as

**Felix II**, Pope, saint and martyr, in this wonderful Papal Chronicle of the Roman Church!

Liberius died in the following year, and there began a series of events which put the character of the new Roman Church in the very plainest light. There was at the time in Rome a general of the army, a man of high character and of considerable literary ability, named Ammianus Marcellinus. You can read an English translation of his history of the time in the Bohn Classical Library. In this year, 366, he says (xxvii, 3) : "Damasus and Ursinus, inordinately ambitious to secure the episcopal See, fought most bitterly, to the pitch of blood and wounds." I will quote later what he says about the wealth and luxury of the Roman bishops of that time. Here he tells how the Christian rioters drove the Prefect (Mayor) out of the city when he tried to suppress the fight, and how, after one clash of arms between the rival Christian groups, a hundred and thirty-seven corpses were counted on the floor of the Church of St. Socininus. St. Jerome, who was probably in Rome at the time, says in his Chronicle that "people of both sexes were most cruelly done to death." Another Christian historian confirms it. But the whole story has come down to us in a Petition (*Libellus Precum*) which two Roman priests presented to the Emperor in later year. & Naturally you will find no English translation of this appalling document—the Latin original is included and endorsed in the Migne collection, Vol. xiii—but you can read the substance of it in Duchesne's "Early History of the Christian Church" (Vol. ii), or, more accurately, in my "Crises, in the History of the Papacy."

Damasus and the great majority of the clergy had continued to support Liberius, and on the Sunday after his death they met in one of the churches, and the supple Damasus was elected bishop. It had been a long sitting, and at the close the news was brought that seven priests and three deacons and a smaller body of the faithful, disgusted with Damasus, had met in another church and elected a rigorist named Ursinus or Ursicinus. In great rage they crossed the city to the rival church and the battle began. Gladiators, circus-performers, grave-diggers, and all kinds of rough folk were enlisted in the army of "St." Damasus, say, the petitioners. His friend St. Jerome admits, at all events, that it was his party that attacked. It is not even clear that Damasus was first elected. What we know is that the minority entrenched themselves in a church in the old quarter across the river, and there was a three days siege.

It was then that the Prefect himself was driven from Rome by the infuriated mob, but Damasus persuaded him to return and expel the seven rebellious priests from the city. Their followers rescued them from the guards and still held their church, and on October 26th, when the minority were holding service, the bloodiest fight took place. The Damasians attacked with swords and axes, set fire to the building, mounted the roof and flung heavy tiles on the besieged. The petitioners of the document I am quoting say that a hundred and sixty corpses were left in the church. The building

was small, and it must have been, with killed and wounded, a great pool of blood. Damasus had made more martyrs in Rome in a day than Diocletian in three years. All his clergy supported him, and it looks as if the greater part of the Church was involved. The Prefect of the city of Rome did not fly before a small crowd. However, a more vigorous Prefect—the Praetextatus whom I described in the last chapter as head of the Mithraists—was appointed and comparative order was restored, though violent conflicts continued to occur for another year.

We will consider the character of Damasus in the next chapter, though these events will sufficiently indicate it to any impartial reader. Fifty years later there would be further sanguinary fights for the Papacy, and what we shall see in the next chapter about the morals of the clergy will enable us to understand them. The Roman Church had, as we saw, very greatly degenerated by the year 200, and the general apostasy at the beginning of the fourth century tells us something about its character. These appalling and prolonged massacres in the churches themselves ought to restrain any man from imagining that the Church had a moral influence on the life of Rome, and the letters of St. Jerome which I shall presently quote are in entire agreement. Half a century of wealth had completed the demoralization of the Church and turned it into a mockery in the eyes of the pagans. Ammianus Marcellinus, one of the last of the pagan writers, speaks with some restraint, for at the time he wrote Christianity was the official religion of the state, but in every reference to the Christians one senses the disdain of his class. Not very many years later Augustine, still a pagan but very unsettled, would be in Rome, and we shall find him also declaring that the state of the Church in Rome checked him in his progress toward Christianity.

### §3. JULIAN THE APOSTATE

Meantime the Emperor Constantius, the patron of the Arians, had died, and the dynasty of Constantine came to a close in the singular figure of the Emperor Julian, reviled in all Catholic literature until our own day as "the Apostate." Writers like Duchesne, it is true, are now ashamed to reproduce the old invectives, for it is recognized that Julian was the only sound ruler of the Constantinian dynasty. His uncle Constantius had, we are assured, been chaste—one of the Christian chroniclers adds that his physical condition compelled him to practice this virtue—but in all other respects his conduct had been infamous, while to the Church he appeared in the character of Antichrist. Between bribery and cruelty he induced nearly the whole of Christendom to subscribe in some form to the heresy of Arius.

But there was no relief when Julian succeeded him, for, as is known, he attempted to restore paganism without, however, taking away the liberty of Christians. The name Antichrist was

transferred to him, and after his death his memory was buried under legend and libel. Catholic pupils are taught to this day that, when he was fatally wounded in battle after a reign of less than two years, he cried: "Thou hast won, Galilean." Cardinal Hergenroether, perhaps the most popular Catholic historian in the second half of the last century, gravely gives as historical all the calumnies against him. He is said to have corrupted his officers with drink and debauchery so as to prepare the way to the throne, and we are told, on the authority of St. John Chrysostom, that when he became emperor and came to Antioch, his personal conduct was openly licentious :

The Emperor, deserting his generals and magistrates and not deigning even to speak to them, conducted with him through the city **young** folk who were ruined by debauchery and courtesans who had **just** issued from the infamous places of their prostitutions. The Emperor's horse and guards followed far behind, while this infamous troop surrounded his person.

We are not in this work concerned with Julian, since he did not come into contact with or disturb the Roman Church, except in this regard: that the Catholic Church has until our own time bitterly maligned him. A recent historian may have gone a little beyond the **general** estimate in saying that Julian was "a great monarch and a great man," but all admit that he acted from the purest motives and showed the strictest integrity of character. The massacre which he had barely escaped when Constantine died was only the first of a series of experiences which had set his mind against the new religion. We are not here concerned with the **condition of the eastern world,** and to understand Julian's attitude one must know something about it. He found the court and rule of the Emperor Constantius sordid from beginning to end, the life of his cousin Callus and his Empress still more repulsive, and the acquiescence of all the bishops in what they had declared a deadly heresy a proof that Christianity did not bring the moral inspiration which it claimed. **Julian was a sincere student of philosophy,** trained by one of the last of the Greek thinkers, and it was his hope that an ethical and philosophical theism could infuse some new life into the old cult of Rome and the best of the cults introduced from Greece, Egypt and Asia. In pursuing this design he did not for a moment neglect the defense of the Empire, and it was in a distant frontier-war that **he soon perished.** **One may doubt whether,** even if he had lived long and had had pagan successors, the old religions could thus have been completely restored. By this time the gods were certainly dying. It would have been interesting only to have seen what would have been the fortune of each of the rival religions of the fourth century in an entirely free world. But the soldiers chose Christian commanders to succeed him, and within another twenty years religious freedom would be abolished by the Church which had demanded it for three centuries.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE CORRUPTION OF THE ROMAN CLERGY

**I**HAVE an amiable type of reader, if not admirer, who writes me from time to time a friendly protest that I am most industrious and conscientious in exposing the darker elements of the history of the Roman Church but that in omitting or abbreviating its \*contemporary virtues I present an unjust picture of it. Even if this were true my work would be legitimate and just. It is, above all things, an exposure of the comprehensive untruthfulness of Catholic history and a protest against much non-Catholic history that is today perverted by a desire to disarm Catholics. You may securely trust works of both kinds to give a very full account of every virtue or service that is discoverable, or imaginable, in the record of the Roman Church. A mere record of its vices and disservices is a useful, if not necessary, antidote to this literature. It is riot a false picture.

Yet it is not simply my aim to provide such a chronicle of scandal. This which I am writing is a genuine history, though it owes its inspiration mainly to the need to expose vices that are as a rule improperly suppressed. I have rendered whatever tribute a candid historian can to the early virtue and austerity of the Roman Church, but of genuine historical accounts of its life at that time we have so little that one has to be brief. For the hist of the early period, the behavior during the persecutions, even lay historians are far too apt to admit a picture which is based entirely upon acknowledged forgeries. The traditional picture of thousands of Roman Christians meeting in deep fervor in the lamp-lit Catacombs and stealing out at times to secure the bodies of their hundreds of martyrs is taken from early medieval fabrications. Except when a contemporary like St. Cyprian mentions in a letter that, for instance, a Pope and six of his deacons have been executed, we have no historical evidence to draw upon. There were martyrs in Rome. No one knows how many, but the overwhelming majority of the stories of Roman martyrs have been proved fraudulent. From the historical point of view we can find only that there were fire years of persecution at Rome in the whole of the second and third centuries, and that almost in their entirety the Roman Christians during those five years fled, not to the Catacombs, but to the pagan altars.

In the fourth century, with which I am now dealing, there is even less to be said for *the* virtue or distinction of the Roman Church. There may have been thousands of quite virtuous men and women in that Church 'in the first half of the fourth century but we have no historical testimony to that effect. Some of the Popes may have been "saints," but we have only the worthless assurance



of this of the Papal Chronicle. Until the days of Liberius, Felix and Damasus, the Roman Popes remain in almost complete obscurity. To the growing- Christian literature Rome contributes nothing of importance, for Tertullian, Lactantius and Augustine were Africans, and Jerome a Dalmatian. In the furious controversy of the time not a single contribution of **any** merit came from Rome. All that one can say, and I have said it, is that its new wealth enabled the Roman Church to build and decorate churches of great splendor. For the rest, if we confine ourselves to genuine historical evidence we have a record almost entirely of misbehavior. There is one exception. We have evidence of the presence in the Roman Church in the second half of the century of a group of very zealous and virtuous ladies. This will be noted in the present chapter. But what kind of "history" is it to present this tiny colony of virtue as a typical picture of Roman church-life in the fourth century when the writer who tells us **about it**, St. Jerome, expressly describes it as a small oasis of virtue in a vast desert of **vice**? And what kind of "history" is it to suppress the sordid murders and appalling vices of the princes and princesses of the imperial house, and the unparalleled brutality of **the** Papal elections, and then vaguely suggest to one's readers that the vice and violence of pagan Rome were exchanged in the fourth century for the purity and gentleness of the Christian gospel? I repeat that I am **giving** the historical facts-and all the facts-in the proportion in which we find them in works of the fourth century which are admitted to be authentic, and I will continue to do so.

### §1. THE SAINTLINESS OF "ST." DAMASUS

If we apply this sound historical method to the Popes themselves we find at once that we are debarred from paying any compliments to the Roman Church. Our period opens with "St. Sylvester," and the Papal Chronicle gives him twenty pages; yet even the Catholic Encyclopaedia admits that we have no **historical** information about him. Two quite obscure men follow, and then we have Liberius, whose spirit is broken by two years of exile, and, however ambiguous may have **been** the formula he signed, in abandoning Athanasius and resuming friendly relations with the Arian bishops he sinned deeply against the principles of his Church. So Duchesne admits, and his feeble defense of Liberius, or extenuation of his conduct, ends in the admission that it was "a downfall." We need surely not notice his rival, the courtly Felix; but remember that all but ten of the Roman clergy-and they must now have numbered many hundreds-bowed with him to the Emperor and his corrupt court.

Catholic writers make a more vigorous defense of Damasus, for he has to be retained as a saint in the calendar and he is the one Pope in four centuries who seems to rise above the level of mediocrity. What were his virtues? You will find only one that is genuinely attested. He had a great devotion to the martyrs; he restored and decorated the Catacombs and wrote a number of short

hymns or "Epigrams" on them. Now this is one of the most suspicious virtues of the fourth century, and I fancy it is this work of Damasus which St. Augustine has in mind when he says: "Let us not make a religion of the cult of dead men." The great age of forgery was just beginning, and Damasus gave it an impulse. His Catacombs now began to provide "relics" for the whole world, and, as we saw in the last book, he himself set an example of forgery in his poetical descriptions of the sufferings of the martyrs.

Instead, therefore, of correcting the general impression which we get from the events of his life, this zeal for martyrs confirms it. He was a sheer adventurer, a man of "inordinate ambition" for a wealthy and luxurious job. The Roman writer **Ammianus Marcellinus** from whom I quote these words tells us (xxvii, 3) what the life of the Bishop of Rome was in his day. Let me borrow the translation of the passage by the historian Gregorovius:

When I consider the splendor of civic life, I can understand these men [Damasus and Ursinus], in the desire to attain their object, striving with all the strength of their party; since, could they attain their end, they might be sure of becoming rich through the presents of matrons, of driving in lofty carriages, of dressing in splendid garments, of having such sumptuous meals that their tables surpass those of princes. And yet they might esteem themselves blessed, if, despising the splendors of the city under which they shelter their vices, they imitated the manner of life of some of the country bishops, since these, by their moderation in eating and drinking, by their simplicity in dress and by their humble bearing, commend themselves to the true believer in the Eternal God as men pure and of good repute.

Not only is this confirmed by the pictures of clerical life which I will presently quote from Jerome—they are, in fact, darker and more dishonoring—but we must remember that the pagan Marcellinus scourged his own people as much as the Popes. He was a general of the old type, looking round with censorious eyes on the luxury of Rome in its days of decay. Very graphically he describes for us the "thirty secretaries" who stand behind the host at a banquet in one of the marble palaces, the floor strewn with gold-dust so that the guests may not slip, and note down the weight of the marvelous peacocks or parrots or pheasants that are served up; the "lyres as large as chariots" and nude Syrian girls and wines cooled with snow; the dandies flying along the streets in gold-plated chariots, a dozen delicate silk tunics on their languid frames and on their mantles embroidered dragons that hiss in the wind; the women, thickly painted, in tunics of gold cloth, sitting in litters drawn by four white mules. This was "the fast set," and the clergy were on the fringe of it. But the historian who simply reproduces this as "Rome in the fourth century" misleads his readers. In the letters of Symmachus, the Prefect of Rome, or the "Saturnalia" of

**Macrobius** we get a totally different picture. But that is another story, which I will tell elsewhere;

Everything we know about **Damasus** confirms the impression that **Marcellinus** gives us. He leads the enthusiasm of the faithful when they swear they will elect no Pope in place of **Liberius**, and within a few months' he is supporting **Pope Felix**, the courtier. He deserts **Felix** for **Liberius** when the crowd makes its choice, and he hacks his way with the swords of gladiators to the Papacy. He is regarded with suspicion by the bishops of Italy and of the east, and in a few years some serious charge is lodged against him. In 374 he is denounced to the civil court for adultery by a converted Jew. The Catholic Encyclopaedia smiles and asks us how a man nearly eighty years old could be so suspected. The Papal Chronicle, which gives adultery as the charge, must be mistaken, the modern Catholic says. **But** it is quite possible that the charge refers to some earlier period, unfitting him to be Pope, and no one has ever suggested why the civil court of Rome should try the Pope unless it was a charge of adultery. The trial was, **Duchesne** admits, "threatening to end in a condemnation," when the Emperor, a boy, was induced to intervene and, after a mock inquiry, declare the Pope innocent. The Italian bishops still murmured, and **Damasus** got a synod of forty-four of them (a minority) to endorse his innocence; but the Catholic writer generally forgets to add that the **evidence was not examined by these bishops, since to examine it afresh would be a reflection on the Emperor's judgment.** The priests of Rome called **Damasus** "the tickler of matron's ears," and the charge against him was clearly hushed up, probably by the influence of **St. Ambrose** at the Milan court, to prevent scandal in the Church.

## §2. VIRTUE AND VICE IN THE LETTERS OF ST. JEROME

Such was the one "great" Pope in the first four hundred years of the Roman Church. His successors remained obscure and mediocre men until the accession of Pope **Leo** "the great" in 440, and we will study him in the next volume. For the moral condition of the Roman clergy generally, apart from their conduct in the support of **Felix** and **Damasus**, in the fourth century the chief document is the collection of letters of **St. Jerome**, who lived and worked under **Damasus** in Rome. He was, to be sure, a fiery monk of the Syrian desert, and such men are apt to exaggerate. We will bear that in mind, but no reasonable person can fail to recognize that he **insists** from beginning to end that the Roman clergy are corrupt as a body. He is not generalizing from a few bad types. But I will give lengthy quotations and you can judge. I translate them quite literally, since you will have to be a good Latin scholar to read them in the original, for **Jerome** was one of the purest Latin writers of the time. But can one not, you will ask, read these interesting letters in English? No, you cannot. All sorts of superfluous works of the Fathers are available in English, but neither in English nor in any other language will you get a complete translation of these

letters of the most saintly **saint of the fourth** century. Perhaps you will presently tunderstand why.

But first, let us glance at the more pleasant picture of Roman virtue. Jerome was a well-educated Dalmatian, who, in mature years, was attracted by the fame of the monks of Egypt and Syria and spent some years in the desert. As Duchesne remarks, this did not make for refinement of manners. Jerome tells himself how, **when** he was in some argument about his holy religion with another monk, they spat in each other's faces. "He made me . . .," says **the saint**; but you will have to guess the missing word. However, from 382 to 385 Jerome was secretary of the Pope at Rome, and he gathered about him in the practice of virtue a number of the **refined and aristocratic** young ladies from the few Christian palaces on the Aventine Hill. Every historian tells **you about that** fragrant "Aventine colony" of virtue. On the scale of this work all I have to say is that we gather from the titles of Jerome's letters that about a score of ladies (out of the hundred thousand Christians of Rome) practiced great austerities under his direction and **were** very chaste. **Some** of them went to become **nuns** in the east. One, Marcella, 'made a sort of nunnery of her palace, and here and at one other palace the virtuous young ladies foregathered. These groups had been formed before Jerome came, but he became the leader, and his long letters to some of them, when he returned to Syria, give us a unique picture.

**What** is historically significant about the letters is, not that they tell us that a score of ladies were virtuous, but that **they represent** all the other ladies and all the priests as corrupt. Let us begin **with** the long letter to the delicate maid Eustochium (No. 22) in praise of **virginity**. He reminds her how much more pleasant it is **even** from the rational **viewpoint: how she avoids** "the swelling of the belly," and so on. He makes rather free remarks on the difference between the male and female organs, and quotes Job: "His **virtue is in his thighs and his power in his navel.**" **She must think** of these things and not be like the other Christian women. He says :

It is painful to tell how many virgins fall every day, how many mother-church loses from her womb, upon how many stars the proud enemy builds his throne, how many **rocks the acrpent excavates to live in the hollows thereof.** You will see many widows before they marry [remarry?] cover their miserable consciences only with a garment of lies, and, if **the awollcn belly, the cry of a child, does not** betray them, they walk with heads erect and joyful steps. Others take drugs to cause sterility and **murder** the unborn. . . . These are **the folk who tell you, "Every-**thing is clean to the clean," "My conscience is enough for me," etc.

They are, it seems, addicted to drunkenness and are generally **so fleshy** that if you meet an ascetic-looking woman in the street

you say, "There **goes** a Manichee." Their **dress** is **outrageous**. Then there is "the pest of the Agapetae," the love-feasters. "Whence this name of wife without marriage? This new species of concubines? Kay, these harlots who keep to one man? They live **in** the same house, often in the same bed, and call us suspicious." He is referring here to the women who take private vows of chastity and then live "as sisters" with men or priests. The agapae or love-feasts were really banquets in the churches in honor of the martyrs, which often, as Ambrose and Augustine tell us, degenerated into drunken orgies, but the name "agapetae" seems to have been applied to any of these women who made a profession of living in spiritual affection with priests or monks.

There is not a class **in the** community **against** which he does not warn Eustochium. "I would have you avoid the society of matrons and not go to the houses of noble ladies." He describes their "crowds of eunuchs," their sumptuous dress and free ways. She is particularly to avoid widows. They are immoral, and they "dress with such pomp that you would think they are seeking, not mourning, husbands. **The clerics themselves, who ought to earn** respect as their teachers, kiss the heads of their lady patrons and hold out their hands to give a blessing, you would say, if you did not know to **receive the price** of their salutation." **These widows** "pass as chaste, as nuns, and then after a dubious supper they sleep **with the** apostles." Next come the monks and nuns:

Beware of nuns who go about in poor dress, with hair shorn, with long faces. . . . Beware of men who bear chains, who wear their hair long like women against the command of the apostle, who have beards like goats and go barefoot. These are all arguments of the devil.

**They,** it appears, fast during the day, when the eyes of their patrons are on them, and gorge in secret at night. Then **he turns** to the priests:

There are others--I speak of my own order--who seek the **priesthood** and deaconate. so that they may see women **more** freely. All they think 'about is their dress and their perfume. They must be neatly shod, their hair curled, their fingers sparkling with rings, their feet hardly touching **the ground lest the damp reach their soles**. When you see these people, regard them as husbands, not clerics. Some of them' do nothing else but learn the names, addresses **and ways of matrons**.

Jerome singles out for description **one** of them, an elderly priest, who is "the master of the art." He **is at the** houses of rich women in the morning before they are out of bed. He goes around the house begging articles by praising them. "Chastity and fasting are enemies of his." He is witty and not above the use of slang. Quite as bad as these, he goes on, are the widows and virgins of small means who hover about the houses of the rich. "They

think of **nothing** but the belly and what is near to the belly," Jerome tells the delicate maid. They are "drunken and lascivious," and they urge their rich friends to have a good time. "Use what you've got, my kitten, and live," they say. He even brings in the famous monks of Egypt and tells her that there are plenty of hypocrites even there. Some of them live in the towns in two and threes, have no rule or superior, and are commonly corrupt. They "visit virgins" and "on feast-days they gorge until they vomit."

We should be inclined to agree with Duchesne that when copies of this precious epistle **got about amongst the pagans there** was contemptuous amusement. Such letters probably help to explain why so few men of the patrician order joined the Church until, at **the close of the century, they were driven into it. In other letters** they would find Jerome praising a girl who sold her jewels without the consent of her parents (No. 24), or telling the widow Furia that if she **marries** again she "prostitutes **her** chastity like a harlot," or delicately telling a maid that, as it is unsafe to remain in the same room with any priest, she must invent "a necessity of the bladder or the bowels." In the priest Nepotian (Letter No. 52) he gives corresponding\* advice about women. "If in connection with your duties as priest a widow or a young woman comes to see you, never enter the house or be in their company alone." And "beware of the business-like priest," he says. The law (as I will tell presently) has deprived them of the right to receive legacies, but it is evaded every day, and children are defrauded by these priests securing the property of their mothers.

Then there is a letter (No. 125) to the monk Rusticus in which, while admitting that the Romans are angry over his censures, he repeats all the charges:

I know women of mature age who take pleasure in young men and seek them as spiritual sons, and they, gradually losing all sense of decency, pretend to be their mothers and enjoy the license of matrimony. Other men leave their virgin sisters and are linked with widows. . . . Others, girded with ropes, wearing sober tunics and long beards, are incapable of keeping away from women, remain under the same roof with them, dine with them, and have every advantage of matrimony without the name.

Rufinus must not even live with his own mother! All affection for father and mother must be sternly set aside by the man or woman who takes the vow of chastity. He must fly to solitude. We can guess what impression it made on Roman fathers to read :

Though thy little nephew **cling** to **thy** neck, though thy mother loose her hair and rend her garments and show thee the breasts thou hast **sucked**; though thy father cast himself down on the threshold ; tread over him and go forth with tearless eyes to the standard of the cross. In these things cruelty alone is true piety.

**93. THE MONKS REACH ROME AND DEGENERATE**

Amongst these many scornful references to monks and nuns we have noticed one in particular from which we learn that the Christian Emperors were compelled to declare legacies to them *invalid*. We still have, in point of fact, an imperial rescript of the year 370 which forbids priests and monks to visit widows and **orphans and deprives them of the right of inheritance**. This rescript had to be read in all the churches, and from what we have already seen we are not surprised to find the outspoken Jerome saying: **"I do not complain of the law but I am ashamed to admit that we have deserved it."** Bishops and nuns seem then to have taken over the work of relieving wealthy Roman widows of their possessions, and very promptly in 372, the law was extended to them. It was still shamelessly evaded, Jerome says, but it remained the law, a standing and fearful rebuke to the Church, for a hundred years. **It plainly means that within less than sixty years of the granting of toleration to the scattered and despised Christian community their clergy and other spiritual personages were, in spite of the prodigious generosity of the Emperors and the wealthier Christians, pursuing such worldly tactics that they had, as Jerome sadly expresses it, to be put in this respect on a lower level than the gladiators and the prostitutes.**

It does not enter into my plan to describe here how the persecution in the east had driven some of the more fervent Egyptian Christians to the desert and had thus opened the long and picturesque story of Catholic monachism; though there had, as Jerome describes in his letter to Eustochium, been celibate communities both of men and women in Egypt and other lands long before the beginning of the Christian Era. Indeed they had been 'common amongst the Buddhists and Jainists of India several centuries earlier and had spread over half of Asia by the first century. Jerome, who spent many years of austere life amongst the oriental monks, tells us very emphatically that large numbers even of the Egyptian monks led corrupt lives, and the filthiness of person which was generally cultivated and the savage violence of the troops of monks in the doctrinal quarrels were not to the taste of Roman Christians. The Romans were more addicted to the bath than any other people of antiquity, and they would be outraged when they found Jerome telling one of his aristocratic virgin pupils that she must avoid the bath so as never to see her own limbs. When, in 384, his disciple Paula (Rome wickedly, said his mistress, but, though Jerome admits to his virgin pupils, with his usual candor, that he is not a virgin himself, one may reject this rumor, if only on physical grounds) lost her daughter, and the, fasts which Jerome imposed were blamed for the death, there was a serious riot at the funeral of the young noble, the crowds demanding that these monks be stoned or thrown into the Tiber. Lactantius, the Christian orator,

when told of the weird practices of the Egyptian monks, said that it was "the life of beasts, not of men."

In the year 341 Athanasius had brought two of the Egyptian monks to Rome, and it was these who, going from one rich house to another and telling stories--properly disinfected, no doubt of the life in Egypt, inspired the little colonies of virtue in Rome which Jerome came later to direct. But only a very few of the ladies sold their possessions and retired to solitude. We hear of no monasteries in or near Rome in the sense of bodies of men living in common under a rule and a superior. St. Augustine, who is just as severe as Jerome--he wrote a little work called "Against the Monks"--on the vagabond monks, as St. Benedict in turn would be later, would presently try to confine them in monasteries and give them a rule of life. By monks and nuns in Rome Jerome clearly means men and women who make a vow of chastity and adopt a peculiar dress. The monks grow long hair, while the nuns bob their hair. "Tricks of the devil," says Jerome savagely. They live in couples as "spiritual" brothers and sisters. They fawn on the rich widows: the wealthy ladies of whom Marcellinus speaks, lost in paint and perfume while they have, as they travel slowly in their gold and ivory litters, embroidered sketches on their flowing silk mantles of the sufferings of Christ and the afflictions of Job. It is an appalling picture of degeneration and hypocrisy that Jerome paints for us. In a general way it is confirmed by the words of St. Ambrose about the Christians of Milan, or of St. Chrysostom when he doubts if a hundred people out of the half million of Antioch will be saved, or the sermons and letters of St. Augustine about the condition of the Church in Africa. But there is, as we should expect in so wealthy a city, a peculiarly wide corruption of the clergy and monks and nuns in the city of Rome. Once more let me say that the idea that this Church of Rome won the allegiance and affection of the pagans by its holiness is ludicrously unhistorical.

We cannot, on the contrary, resist the impression that every Christian practice that was imported into the Roman Church rapidly degenerated. With the example of Pope Damasus and the clergy generally before their eyes the bulk of the people would not be very spiritual. We have, at all events, unmistakable evidence in the letters of Jerome of a general viciousness in the community. The only instances of virtue that he gives are confined to a few families that you could almost count on your fingers, but when he speaks of vice and hypocrisy he speaks of whole classes, not of a few individuals. The men who would write history candidly and impartially must recognize the fact that the only three documents which do throw a broad light on the Roman Church in the first four centuries--the work of Hippolytus, the petition presented against Damasus and the letters of Jerome--place it on a low moral level. There is no serious evidence to induce us to alter the impression they give us.

We have, in fine, no historical reason to suppose that the remarkable moral laxity which Jerome describes was confined to the



pontificate of "St." Damasus. Any reader who may be disposed to wonder if I have given a correct or properly balanced record should note carefully these three facts: from 300 to 350 A. D. we have little or no direct evidence on the condition of the Roman Church, from 350 until the death of Damasus in 384, we have ample evidence and it is nearly all evidence of vice and violence, and from 384 until the end of the century we again have very little evidence. I have therefore described the Roman Church as we know it in the fourth century, and we have not the slightest historical evidence that it changed after the death of Damasus. I will return to the point in the last chapter, and we shall see that the facts suggest a continuous demoralization. Any historian who takes his account of the Roman Church in that critical fourth century from Catholic literature is putting an entirely untruthful picture before his readers.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE ROMAN CHURCH



THE candid student of Roman history must first, as we have now done, put aside those mythical explanations of the triumph of the Church which modern Catholicism is trying to enforce upon the world. He will then seek the genuine causes of the conversion of Rome and Italy, within a century, from an almost entirely pagan to an entirely Christian land. Modern history applied itself to this problem as soon as it won independence, and most of my readers will be familiar with the five reasons assigned by Gibbon in the fifteenth chapter of his famous history. Since three of these are the zeal, the claim of miracles and the austere morals of the Christians, we cannot, after what we have seen, regard them as factors in the conversion of Rome in the fourth century. But history was not yet scientific or completely independent in Gibbon's time, and his theory on this subject is not now considered satisfactory. At the most his five causes may explain whatever success the Church had had in its first hundred years of primitive fervor.

In Rome, as we saw, this success was by no means remarkable ; indeed, we should, up to the year 312, speak rather of the failure than the Success of the Church. The historians of the nineteenth century, therefore, approached the subject from a different angle. They studied what they called "the fall of Paganism," the collapse in the second part of the fourth century of all the rival religions; and this inquiry brought out the fact that in the Roman law-code of the fourth century we find a score of imperial decrees closing the temples and sternly forbidding the practice of any religion but the Christian. Gibbon notices these laws (Chapter xxviii), but he

does not at this point make the course of events very clear. The serious points, therefore, that a candid inquirer takes up are: what progress in the conversion of the city had the Roman Church made before it got the temples of its rivals closed by law, and what was the reaction of Rome when force began to be employed.

### §1. THE RELUCTANCE OF THE PAGANS

We are not here concerned with what happened in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. It is known that Christianity made more progress there than in Italy, and when Constantine founded a new imperial city, almost entirely Christian from the start, in the east, and his successors chiefly resided in the east and sought with all their wealth and influence to promote the new religion. it must have made even greater progress. But estimates of such progress are so difficult that of ten historians of modern times who have tried to calculate how many were Christians at the beginning of the fourth century, the figures vary between five and fifty millions! My own estimate is three millions in the whole Empire of one hundred million people. We must not too hastily accept optimistic accounts of progress even in the east after the building of Constantinople. One of the greatest cities of the east was Antioch, which had a population of half a million, yet its great preacher St. John Chrysostom vaguely estimated as late as the year 385 that only about one hundred thousand were Christians; and \*he added that "amongst so many thousand men there were not a hundred who would be saved, and he had a doubt about these." For one reason or other men just superficially passed from one religion to another.

Imperial pressure came later in the west; latest of all in Africa, where in 393 Augustine found, when he was made bishop of Hippo, a town of twenty or thirty thousand people, that he had a mere handful of Christians. All these things show how difficult it is to trace the actual change in the fourth century, and it is as difficult in Rome as elsewhere. In 313, the year in which the Edict of Milan gave complete toleration, the Christians of Rome are estimated by one historian to have numbered a hundred thousand, but this is clearly a great exaggeration. I should estimate about thirty thousand. Then the shower of gold began to fall, and the very handsome new churches and rich charities would undoubtedly win a large number of converts.

But it is extraordinarily difficult to trace the progress and to assign the causes. As early as 341 an edict was published (and is in the Theodosian Code) forbidding the practice of the pagan religion under pain of "condign punishment" (which, a writer of the time says, means death). As this was issued in the name of Constantine, who had died a few years before, it was intended for the whole Empire, but it was not enforced in Italy. A few years; later another law, still found in the same Code, orders the closing of the temples and expressly imposes sentence of death on any who

offer sacrifice. In 356 Constantius gave out an edict which says: "We command that sentence of death be passed on any who are convicted of offering sacrifice or worshipping idols." Yet the Senate at Rome was still overwhelmingly pagan, and it opened its proceedings always with the burning of incense on the altar of Victory which adorned *its chamber*. In fact, in 357 Constantius visited Rome, and he found it so solidly pagan that he acted himself as a pagan emperor. He did not interfere with the sacrifices and he visited the temples without a murmur. He even expressly confirmed the privileges of the priests and the Vestal Virgins. It is clear that the Roman Church had made far less progress than the eastern churches had made. There Constantine himself had closed or despoiled many temples, and Constantius had dealt a very heavy blow at the old religion. *In one place* he had assigned a beautiful temple to the prostitutes of the town. In most places he had confiscated the revenues and encouraged the local Christians to rise with axe and torch against the temples.

But while paganism was thus in a desolate condition in the east when the Emperor Julian made his unsuccessful attempt to restore it, we find it almost as powerful as ever in Rome. When Julian died, popular generals, Christians of humble *origin* and very rough ways, were raised to the purple. The first died in a few months and then Valentinian ruled the west for eleven years, leaving the east to his brother Valens, an Arian. Valentinian was brutal but not stupid. He refused to apply the decrees against paganism and merely sustained the policy of enriching the Roman Church and favoring converts to Christianity. The Church was pursuing the work in its own way, as the letters of Jerome sufficiently explain. The relations of Damasus with the Emperor were rather for the purpose of increasing the authority of the Papal Sec. The Pope got from Valentinian some vague decree-it has not been preserved-to the effect that a cleric must be judged by clerics only, and by clerics of equal rank. But who in Italy was equal in rank to the Pope? Damasus began to assert his authority over the hundred bishops of Italy, and they were for the most part heads of new and unimportant sees who *were* unable to resist.\* There was only one bishop in Italy who approached the bishop of Rome in rank. This was the bishop of Milan, where the imperial court now resided. Over the bishop of Milan the Pope had no authority *what-ever*. I may note, in passing, that neither prelate made the least protest against the brutality and immorality of Valentinian. He kept two monstrous bears in cages in his palace and fed them with human *victims*, and, *contrary to the strict law* of the Church, he divorced his virtuous wife in order to marry a beautiful widow who caught his eye.

Valentinian burst a blood-vessel in one of his appalling fits of temper, and his sons Gratian and Valentinian II succeeded. This was in 375, and you will understand what followed if you bear in mind two further facts. First, Gratian was only sixteen years and Valentinian only four years old. Secondly, St. Ambrose, the strong-

est and ablest bishop whom western Christianity produced, a statesman in **the** imperial service until he entered the ranks of the clergy, had become bishop of Milan, and the spiritual director of the imperial family in 374. But paganism was still so strong that it took Ambrose **seven** or eight years to induce the young Emperor to adopt the policy of coercion. Gratian permitted the priests of the old religion to declare, in the customary fashion, that his dead father had been raised to the rank of the gods, and in 378 he declared in an imperial rescript that all religions were free under the law.

## §2. THE CLOSING OF THE TEMPLES

St. Augustine, then a teacher of rhetoric in search of employment and a very thoughtful man who felt disposed to turn to skepticism in face of the rivalry of religions, came to Rome from Africa in 384. Roman Africa was still overwhelmingly pagan, and for the next **thirty** years we trace in Augustine's writings the strenuous efforts he had to make against pagans and Manicheans. **Rut** we are not concerned with Africa. Augustine surveyed the life of Rome at the time in a quite impartial mood. He expressly says ("Confessions," viii, 2) that "nearly the whole of the nobility" were still pagans, and the correspondence of the Prefect, Symmachus, and other literature **of** the time confirm this. What proportion of the people were Christians we cannot say, but Augustine's description of the religious processions, on the streets implies that the great majority were pagan; and we remember that only **a few** years earlier the Pope had been tried by the civil tribunal for adultery and was only saved from sentence by the Emperor. In seventy years, in other words, the Roman Church had done **no** more than its **wealth** and **privileges** and the peculiar methods described by Jerome would lead us to expect.

But the new policy had been inaugurated. In 382 the young Emperor Gratian rejected the title of Supreme Pontiff of the **old** Roman religion which each of his Christian predecessors had retained, **and** he confiscated the revenues of the temples. Pagan temples were, in a sense, civic institutions, not dependent on the contributions of worshippers and not, except in special cases, served **by** professional **castes** of priests. The loss of the revenue was therefore a deadly blow at the old religion. One is amused to read the indignation of Catholics today at the action of the Reformers of the sixteenth century in confiscating the property of **the monks** and the clergy. This was exactly the first blow which **their** own Church had aimed at the rival religions of the fourth century, and **it** has **their** **entire** approval. And this blow was followed by one that still more angered the pagans. Although the Roman Senate had little real power under the Emperors, it still met, in the Senate House in the Forum, and still, in 382, it opened its proceedings by **burning** incense before the marble statue of Victory. Gratian ordered the removal of the statue.

Next year Gratian was murdered in a military revolt and a still younger Emperor, Valentinian **II** (aged fourteen), was **amen-**

able to the counsels of St. Ambrose. The Roman nobles made a spirited effort to get back their statue, and the boy was advised by his counselors to yield; but we have a letter (So. xvii) in which Ambrose threatens the Emperor with excommunication if he yields, and from that time the group of important nobles at Rome who had so long defended the old religion began to break up. Gratian had, before he died, appointed a vigorous soldier, Theodosius, to rule the eastern Empire, and this man, though very sensual and violent in temper, was determined to make an end of all the non-Christian religions. On every side the bishops were now demanding that paganism should be forcibly suppressed, and Theodosius was not the man to shrink from violence. The people of Thessalonica, mostly Christians, but overburdened by taxes to sustain the Emperor's luxurious life, had rioted and killed some of the officials. Theodosius, in one of the most repulsive acts of treachery that disfigured that sordid age, invited the people to enjoy games at his expense in the Circus and flung an army of barbaric soldiers upon them. There was such carnage that estimates of the killed vary from 7,000 to 150,000: This man and the boy-emperors of the west opened the final stage of the campaign.

### §3. THE PERSECUTED BEGIN TO PERSECUTE

Once more I must refrain from following that campaign in the east, but a few words must be said to show how even there the task of uprooting the old religions was accomplished only with an incredible amount of violence. Catholic writers tell us that at the accession of Constantine one-half of the eastern Empire was already Christian, and we saw how he founded a Christian metropolis, from which gold streamed over nearer Asia and Egypt, and began to despoil and close temples. Constantinople, says St. Jerome, "was dedicated by the nudity of nearly all the other cities"; it was chiefly the rich old temples that Constantine had plundered. Then for fifty years his successors had fulminated against the old religions. Since the middle of the fourth century the law of the eastern Empire had imposed death for persistence in paganism, yet from 381 to 392 we find Theodosius issuing one fierce decree after another, and in those years occurred the most comprehensive destruction of the beautiful old temples and their works of art by mobs led by priests and monks. It was then that the great college and library at Alexandria, the last refuge of Greek culture, were burned. Yet in the last decade of the century we find the successor of Theodosius issuing half a dozen successive decrees against pagans; and as late as 415 we find the pagan school or university at Alexandria so flourishing and exerting so much influence on the life of the city that the angry monks tear the flesh from the bones of its venerable teacher, Hypatia.

If this was the difficulty in regions which seemed more prepared for the reception of Christianity, we must smile at the efforts of Catholic historians to tell us how easily and smoothly their Church won the allegiance of Rome. It had to use a violence quite

equal to that used in the sanguinary east, and the real course of events can be read in any large and authoritative history of the fall of paganism. The youthful Valentinian II accepted for the west the decrees which Theodosius issued from his voluptuous palace in the east. In 391 the death-sentence was confirmed for any who offered sacrifice, entered temples or defended statues. Cut in the following year Valentinian was murdered in a military revolt, and the troops offered the purple to a Roman,

The historians of the time tell us that there was a general return to the temples. The statue of Victory was restored in the Senate and the great majority of the Senators and nobles rallied to the pagan gods. Gibbon here makes one of his rare mistakes. "The inflexible courage of Ambrose alone," he says, "had resisted the claims of successful usurpation." But we have the panegyric of Ambrose on the assassinated Emperor, which very politely declines to reflect on "the celerity of his death," and we have a most courteous letter to the new Emperor Eugenius (No. 57, Pusey's Library of the Fathers) in which Ambrose still more politely speaks of the usurpation as the time "when Thy Clemency assumed the reins of government." The restoration of paganism was formidable and a flame of joy swept over Rome. Soon, however, the news arrived that Theodosius was summoned from his luxurious idleness, and with a last exertion of vigor he crushed the rebellion. He visited Rome, but he found the general sentiment in favor of paganism so strong that he even condescended to argue with the Senate and conferred honors on some of the leading pagans.

The city returned therefore to its earlier condition. The temples were closed and scaled, but there was no destruction and no active persecution. Then Theodosius died, and the bishops pressed the new youthful Emperor of the west, the weak and worthless Honorius, to apply the laws. To the end, as I will tell later, the chronicle of the imperial family in all its dynasties and branches is sordid, and the hereditary principle, which the bishops approved, now, in the hour of Rome's most terrible crisis, put the charge of the Empire in the hands of incompetent youths. But this entirely suited the religious policy of the bishops. Honorius, who idled in luxury while hundreds of thousands of barbarians were crossing the frontiers, was induced to decree once more that the last revenues of the temples must be confiscated, all statues and altars destroyed, and all temples converted to secular uses. To secure that these laws should now be enforced the bishops got themselves empowered to denounce to the imperial authorities any magistrate who failed to enforce the law and he was then punished by a fine, for each default, equivalent to five thousand dollars.

There was probably, in Rome and Italy, little need to inflict the capital sentence. The cause was hopeless, and educated men who had long regarded Jupiter and Minerva as mere symbols of an Eternal Deity were not likely to sacrifice their lives for the temples. For the mass of the Romans the change was made easy, as we shall

see in the next chapter, by dressing the Christian churches and ceremonies in the garments of dying paganism. And it is particularly important to remember that just at this juncture Rome perceived that it had to fight for its life. How strong the pagan sentiment still was after 410, the year of the fall of Rome, is easily measured by the fact that the greatest work of early Christian literature; Augustine's "City of God," is, as everyone knows, an attempt to vindicate the ways of God to pagans. Catholic writers seem never to reflect on the singular fact that Augustine felt it necessary to exert all his ability for ten years, (413 to 423) to reply to these pagans who are supposed to have disappeared. But they were silent and sullen. Only the villagers (*pagani*) here and there fought for their Jupiter, so the name "*pagans*" became popular. On June 1st of the year 408 the pagans of Calama, a small African town; celebrated the festival of Flora on the streets and led their wild procession before the very door of the Christian church. These things were gradually suppressed. Seventy years of persecution and the destruction of the Roman civilization made the Church of Rome at inst. supreme—in a world of ruins.

## CHAPTER VI

### PAGANISM IN THE NEW ROMAN CHURCH



NE would not count it a very high merit of the Church of Rome if it had taken a commanding part in this violent, and, as regards some of the rival sects and religions, sanguinary campaign. It did not, however. It was St. Ambrose in Milan, St. Augustine (who, in despair at the failure of his efforts, at last and reluctantly sanctioned persecution), and the bishops of the eastern churches who directed the fingers of the Emperors when they signed the twenty or thirty decrees which exterminated every other religion. Nor must we suppose that it was any delicacy of scruple that restrained the bishops of Rome. They were simply without distinction or influence. Damasus was the only Pope in the century who had ability, and no doubt he worked for the removal of the statue of Victory in the Senate. But he had to work through St. Ambrose. After the departure of Constantine the Emperors rarely visited Rome.

But it suited the spirit of the Roman Church to play an important part in the strategy that chiefly disarmed the hostility of the pagans and left the persecution of them in Italy generally bloodless. This was the adoption of as much color and artistic effect as possible from the religions to which the pagans had clung. Rome was, as we saw, always prepared to receive with liberality any new

religion that did not disdain its older gods and that had picturesque ceremonies and processions. If we may apply a very modern term to those ancient days, the Romans were Pragmatists in regard to religion. Cicero, a lawyer, is the only Roman writer who discusses God and immortality from the philosophical point of view. Most of them seem never to have considered the question of the truth of religion ; or, to express it differently, they already admitted so many gods that they were quite willing to admit that others existed. Educated Romans no doubt discussed religion as we do today, and they seem generally to have been either skeptical or, like Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, believers in one God. Of this class, which must have been large at Rome, the Church scarcely succeeded in getting a single member. I have already pointed out that of all the Latin Christian writers of the third and fourth centuries not one was a Roman. To add to my previous list let me say that Prudentius, the poet, was a Spaniard; and, if the slight poetry of Pope Damasus be quoted, he also was a Spaniard. Ambrose came from Roman Gaul. We very plainly see the cultivated men of Rome in the fourth century, the Senators and others who gathered round Symmachus, Praetextatus and Flavian, holding aloof in disdain from the Church of Damasus.

Apart from these few the Romans were not concerned about the truth of a religion, the question whether its gods really existed. The oldest apology for Christianity, addressed to the Emperor by Justin, took the line that there was nothing in the new religion that ought to be startlingly novel to a pagan. Greek and Roman mythology, Justin points out, was familiar with the idea of a son of God or a god taking human shape. The general attitude was simply molded by custom. Gods were as natural in the universe as men, and one was quite prepared to hear that there were gods in the east of whom one had not yet heard. It was the austerity and, the simplicity of the first Christian Church at Rome that had checked its progress. There was, as I said, a minority in every city of the Greco-Roman world who were disposed to welcome such a religion, but even these preferred the ascetic religions-the cults of Isis, Serapis, Mithra, etc.-which had ritual services.

Since the Christian Church had expressly been founded as a protest against sacrifices and rituals and temples, it regarded all these things as "pagan," as we now say, and shrank from them. But in the third century this attitude had been greatly modified. We saw this in the last book. In the fourth century the primitive objection to art and ritual was entirely abandoned, and services in the new Roman churches became much as they are today. "There is," says one of Augustine's pagan correspondents to him, "no difference between you and the pagans except that you hold separate meetings" ; and we saw how Father Grisar, after reading what we know about the Mithraists, perversely says that Mithraism, which is older than the Christian Era, was "an aping of Christianity." He does not want to admit that even the vestments and rites and furniture of his Church were borrowed. The absurd Catholic theory



that all the growth of doctrine and ritual and hierarchy was just the gradual realization of a scheme given to the apostles has to be sustained at any cost.

### §1. THE ZEAL FOR ART

A special branch of theology or of ecclesiastical history has in modern times attempted to trace, in a genuine historical spirit, this evolution of doctrine and ritual in the third and fourth centuries, but there is a great deal of obscurity. There was no unity, except on the fundamentals of Paul's Epistles, in the early Church. One local group celebrated Easter or the Nativity on a different date from other groups. One converted the primitive Lord's Supper into a "sacrifice of the Mass" before others. It was not until the fourth century that Sunday, instead of the Sabbath, was universally adopted as the day for service, and December 25th as the date of the Nativity. There is just the same obscurity about the adoption of other festivals, but they generally coincide with the dates of earlier pagan festivals. All that is quite clear is that the Church as a body passed through *three phases*. In the first century it had neither hierarchy nor ritual, neither calendar nor vestments. It had no altars, sacrifices, forms of worship, sacraments, statues, paintings, or any other paraphernalia. In the second and third centuries we find that the Lord's Supper becomes a sacrament and a sacrifice, and silver vessels and altars appear; and the officers who naturally developed—deacons, priests and bishops—became a special and sacred caste, clearly marked off from the rest of the community. Then, in the third stage, the fourth century, we find ritual, calendar and hierarchy fully developed.

The history of the time is mainly a record of councils that were held to settle doctrinal questions and quarrels, so that we cannot get a clear idea of the development. Moreover, the rival religions were so thoroughly destroyed that scholars find it difficult to give us a satisfactory account of them. Cumont has almost devoted a life-time to collecting all the scraps of knowledge about Mithraism which we derive from monuments and references in the works of the Fathers, yet we have a very imperfect acquaintance with it. Curiously enough, on the very morning on which I write this (May 10, 1929), the London press announces that the ruins of a Mithraic temple—the fourth to be found in England—have been discovered in the town of Colchester. Before the fourth century, and at a time when there was certainly no Christian chapel in England, this strange religion had spread triumphantly from Persia to the very imperfectly civilized provinces of Britain, yet one may safely assume that not one reader of the discovery out of a thousand will ever have heard of Mithraism. What the Roman Church borrowed from it we do not know but the "Mass" seems to have adopted much of the Mithraic ritual. The word Mass (in Latin *missa*) is taken from a form of dismissal which is spoken or chanted from the altar at the close, and we know that a very closely corresponding Greek

expression was used at the end of the Mithraic celebration, which included a sacred meal. It had priests and high priests (or Fathers), baptism; incense and candles, altars and flowers.

All the old religions contained the various elements which ultimately appear in the Roman Church. Holy (or lustral) water was very commonly sprinkled on the worshippers. It is related in the history of the fourth century that Valentinian, who later became Emperor, was at first an officer in Julian's guard, and that as such he had to be present at a **pagan service**. **He, we are told, used his fist on the priest for sprinkling him with some of his diabolical holy water.** The historian Sozomen in one passage speaks of 'the Emperor Julian being sprinkled in a temple in Gaul "after the Greek fashion,"' Some medieval copyist felt that this must be a mistake -so completely had the Roman Church concealed its borrowings -and he wrote "after the ecclesiastical fashion." It was familiar in both Greek and Roman, Egyptian, and Babylonian, temples; and it seems to be so natural in temple ritual that we find it also developed independently in Buddhism and in the Mexican religions. There is, in fact, a remarkable analogy to the Roman Catholic ritual both in Chinese Buddhism and in the old Aztec religion. Communion with the deity by partaking solemnly of bread and water, or bread and wine, was also a common practice, and confession of sins was known in the Greek mysteries, in ancient Babylon, and in several other religions. It was not until the twelfth century that any Catholic scholar spoke of "seven sacraments." In the twelfth century Hugo of St. Victor had counted thirty.

But it is enough that in the rival religions of the fourth century we find every element that gradually appears in the Roman Church. One serious rival was the cult of Isis-one of the most beautiful buildings in buried Pompeii is the temple of Isis-in which all the ritual of ancient Egypt was employed. Its priests were celibate and had their heads shaven. They marched in processions in long white linen garments and wore remarkable head-dresses. A great deal was borrowed from Egyptian religion. An early Christian work (the Paschal Chronicle) tells us that at the midwinter celebration of the birth of Horus a model of a stable was erected in the temple, with figures of the infant Horus and his virgin mother, as in Catholic churches today. Candlemas Day and other festivals of the Roman calendar are borrowed from Egypt. But gorgeous vestments, incense, lights and flowers, altars and statues, music, processions, frequent festivals, etc., were common features of the religions which were represented in every great city of the Roman world. Even the Jewish services in the temple could have afforded much ritual material. It does not much matter how or when each of these elements was borrowed, but no one who studies the simplicity of the Christian meetings in the time of Paul and knows that all these later accessories of worship existed in the pagan religions can doubt for a moment that they were borrowed. Many of the old temples were taken over, and even the altars and other contents were often used. The Roman archeologist Lanciani assures us

that there were old pagan altars in some of the churches of Rome as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century. In fact, I remember a friar conducting me over an old church at Rome thirty years ago and pointing out to me—not having the least suspicion of my identity—with some amusement, though with an air of secrecy, that one of the altars was at least in part pagan.

## §2. THE CULT OF THE VIRGIN

This transformation of the primitive Church was crowned by the elevation of Mary to the altar. There is a rather old but still popular work in circulation in the Catholic Church entitled "The Glories of Mary," and from it (or the later writers who borrow from it) the Catholic learns that St. Augustine had a great devotion to Mary. The quotations that Liguori gives to prove this are taken from works which are indisputably spurious. In fact, the Church officially dupes its members in the same way. There is a feast of "the Nativity of the Virgin" in the Catholic calendar, and on that day part of a "sermon of St. Augustine" on Mary is read. It is not merely spurious, but its language completely misrepresents Augustine's attitude. In his few references to Mary he naturally speaks with respect but he has not the least idea of prayer to her or veneration of her. Quite clearly in Roman Africa in the first quarter of the fifth century there was not a vestige of a cult of Mary, and this greatest theologian and leader of the Latin Church did not sanction such a cult. That is not a fact to be told to Catholics, and so the Church even today uses works which were ascribed to him by the monks of the Middle Ages and are now admitted by all experts to be spurious.

A thoughtful Catholic would notice a singular feature in a manual of theology of his Church. Such manuals are supposed to prove every point of doctrine by copious quotations from the Scriptures and the Fathers, but when you come to the section which deals with the cult of Mary there is a most remarkable poverty of **quotations, except from the Middle Ages.** For **three** hundred years the Church had no particular interest in Mary. The Fathers, when they did refer to her, which did not often happen, spoke with the **respect that one would expect in view of their belief that she** was the mother of Christ, but we can see quite plainly that they restrained themselves, and we understand the reason. The pagans all around them were worshipping divine virgins or even mothers of their gods. If the popular Catholic statue or painting of the Madonna and Child had been exhibited in those days, it would at once have been pronounced by Christians a representation of the Egyptian god Horus and his virgin mother Isis, or of the Greek Dionysos in the arms of his mother, Athene, Minerva, Diana, Cybele, Ishtar and other goddesses of that cosmopolitan world were the most popular of all deities. Just at that time the cult of "the Mother of the Gods" reached Rome from Asia and was familiar to everybody. It was in reaction against this almost universal cult of divine

or semi-divine women that the Christian Church restrained the feeling's one would expect it to have in regard to the mother of Christ. Yet it was very largely this universal worship of a divine mother or divine virgin that in the fifth century initiated the elevation of Mary.

It was the ignorant monks of Egypt who forced upon the Church, in a darkening age, the cult of which the learned Augustine had known nothing. The Arian controversy about the nature of Christ in the fourth century had ended in a decisive verdict that he was not merely divine, but God, and this had in turn prompted the idea that Mary was therefore the mother of God. We find St. Ambrose and St. Jérôme beginning in the second half of the century to prepare the way for such a cult; and we find not only the pagans laughing at "the new cult of Cybele," as they called it, but some of the Roman Christians heatedly protesting against the growing paganization of the Church. Their works have been destroyed, of course, but the replies to them of St. Jerome show that at least two able writers of the Roman Church, whom we may call the earliest Protestants, made a strong attack on the new developments. At last, in 429, the Archbishop of Constantinople himself, a learned and devout monk named Nestorius, began to attack the growing cult of Mary—it was obviously not yet established even in the east—as "the mother of God." He was, of course, pronounced a heretic, and the long and bitter struggle with his followers goes beyond the limits of this volume; but it was in that struggle that the armies of savage monks raised the war-cry "Theotokos" (meaning, "She is the Mother of God") and successfully established the new cult.

It is therefore one of the latest and most artificial additions to the Roman system, but it is nevertheless in the main a borrowing from paganism. Mary, in the Roman Church, is a compound of Isis and Cybele and Ishtar. All their attributes are appropriated to her, even the expressions ("Queen of Heaven," etc.) which had been used in Egypt and Babylonia during ages. Hymns, statues and altars were taken from the old mother-goddesses and adapted to Mary. Before the middle of the fifth century all the rival religions were extinct in the towns, and so gross and general an ignorance prevailed in Europe that the new generation which gathered around the altars of Mary had lost all recollection of her pagan predecessors.

### §3. THE DEGRADATION OF RELIGION

With the cult of Mary there spread also the cult of saints and martyrs and relics. This, in fact, began and developed earlier, since it was not borrowed from the pagans and did not correspond to any conspicuous element of pagan religion. It was quite natural that the Christians should, when the peace came, have a special veneration for the bones of the heroes and heroines of the days of persecution. It became the fashion to set aside certain evenings

for honoring the martyrs, and these celebrations degenerated into riotous festivals. St. Augustine tells us how, when he and his mother went to Milan, she took 'a basket of wine and cakes to church for the commemoration of the martyrs. The custom in Africa had been to place a cup of wine on each tomb and take a sip, and then the faithful munched their cakes and sang hymns. Monica was astonished at Milan to learn that, the bishop, St. Ambrose, had suppressed the entire custom, and she was not permitted to take cakes and wine into the church. He had suppressed the custom, he tells us, because it had led to drunkenness and license. A sort of fair had been held in the churches, wine being sold in booths, and late in the evening, when wine and dancing had enlivened the people, the scene was as pagan as anybody could imagine. It was one of the very worldly concessions that had been made to attract the pagans, as St. Augustine says, and the excesses continued long after the time of St. Ambrose. St. Jerome tells us of sacred banquets and other *lively scenes* in the churches of Rome. St. Augustine found the carousals common in Africa at the end of the century, and, though he checked them in his own diocese, he tells us that they continued elsewhere. He describes people dancing and singing all night in the important church of St. Cyprian at Carthage in the fifth century.

But while the love-feasts were gradually checked; the cult of the martyrs led to other lamentable developments. I have already quoted Augustine's strong objection to the cult ("Let us not make a religion of the cult of dead men") in his early Christian period. He said at that time, (389) that miracles no longer occurred. In later life, however, he not only admitted very disputable relics to his church but claimed that they worked scores of miracles. By this time the forgery of legends and relics of martyrs was extensively practiced, and Pope Damasus of Rome was in great measure responsible. The literature which already circulated in the Church was so gross that either Damasus or some later Pope was compelled by the jeers of the pagans to draw up a list of spurious lives of saints and martyrs. But the industry was too profitable to be abandoned, and Rome soon took the lead in supplying the world with relics and stories. This repulsive development belongs mainly to the early Middle Ages and will be considered in the next book, but the beginning of it falls in the fourth century and is part of the accommodation of the Church to the crowds of superficial folk who, shut out from the pagan temples, had no alternative but to attend the churches.

The new religion of Rome, in short, now became as ceremonious and mechanical as its predecessors and, as we shall see, had just as little moral influence. The last institutions of the pagan world to yield to coercion were the schools, in which, since all the standard Latin writers were pagans, the memories of the gods of the old religion still lingered. With the fall of Rome and rapid impoverishment of the Empire these schools were closed, and an entirely illiterate world succeeded that in which at least elementary education had

been given to every child. The full effect of this will be considered later. Here I am showing how before the Middle Ages began the Roman Church ceased to be, to use its own language, a moral and spiritual force. Attaining power in the way it did, by coercion and accommodation, it would naturally lose this force, and we shall see in the last chapter that this is what actually happened.

## CHAPTER VII

### PAPAL SUPREMACY STILL REJECTED

**I**F THERE is one doctrine which more than any other compels the Catholic Church and its writers to resort to dishonest maneuvers it is the doctrine that the Pope is, or ought to be, head of the entire Christian Church. The diplomatic historians who now make concessions to the Church on the plea that the growth of its power was natural, if not beneficial, in view of the age of lawlessness upon which Europe was entering, would have us not inquire too closely into the method by which Papal supremacy in the west was secured. But we need not linger to consider whether the usefulness of a usurper sanctifies the tricks by means of which he obtained power. We are going to see very definitely in later books that the sovereignty of the Popes over medieval Europe checked the development of its civilization. 'It was a power corruptly won and corruptly used, if we take into account all the facts of history and do not merely select the few which favor the Papal claim.

That claim is, historically, preposterous. We have already seen that the ultimate basis of it is a text in the gospel of Matthew of which we find no trace until near the end of the second century; which no Pope quotes until near the end of the third century; and which has all the marks of a late interpolation in the text. Even if we admitted this impossible text, there is no historical proof that Peter founded the Roman Church, and if, with several modern scholars, we accepted the tradition that he did, we should have to explain why all the other churches, 'which accepted the text and the tradition, flatly denied that the Pope had any authority over them. The latter is so formidable an objection that all Catholic writers, no matter what concessions they may make in regard to Roman martyrs and Papal morals, are here dishonest in the treatment of the historical evidence. I have shown that even the most learned of recent Catholic historians, such as Cardinal Hergenroether, Mgr. Duchesne, Bishop Hefele and Father Gisar, make a fraudulent use of the documents; and the various writers of the Catholic Encyclopaedia, especially the writer on the Popes, are quite unscrupulous in their attempts to show that the churches of the

first four centuries admitted the supremacy of Rome. This may seem a technical dispute between rival Christian bodies, but it is more. It **provides one of the most definite vindications** of my claim that the Roman Church built up its power by fraud and covers that fraud by dishonest tactics in our own time.

I am therefore in the early stages of *my* work, my first three volumes, paying particular attention to this point. In the third volume we shall find the supremacy of the Popes definitely established in the sense that the eastern churches have in disgust severed their connection with Rome, and the western churches are (as in Africa) either entirely destroyed or (in Spain and Gaul) transformed in character by the barbarians. After that, we shall see, it is a question of taking this power more comprehensive and detailed, and we shall find a fresh series of forgeries used for the purpose. But for a study of the controversial methods of Catholic writers even in our time it is particularly instructive to examine how they "prove" that the supremacy of Rome was admitted in the early Church.

We have seen the first part of this. Clement of Rome in the first century, the Catholic is told, interferes without rebuke in the affairs of the Corinthian Church; and the historical and easily ascertainable fact, since the letter has been translated into English, is that it **is** no Papal pronouncement but just 3 fraternal exhortation from the Christians of Rome to the Christians of Corinth and what the answer was, or if the Greeks deigned to give one, no man knows. There followed a hundred years of most stormy doctrinal controversy, with the Gnostics, and the bishops of Rome seem to have been the least interested in Christendom. When one of them, Pope Victor, does attempt a pontifical utterance on a different subject, about the year 190, his orders are scornfully repudiated by the eastern bishops and he is "bitterly attacked" by the bishops of Europe; yet his letter is quoted by Catholic writers as a proof of supremacy, and the sequel is omitted or misrepresented. When some years later, a Pope does venture to take sides in the doctrinal quarrel, he takes the heretical side and has to be corrected. And when he begins to call himself "the supreme pontiff" the only notice taken in the other churches is the mockery of Tertullian. Fifty years later again, the Catholic says, the African Church admits the Pope's supremacy; and we saw that this is a most shameless perversion of the facts. The African bishops repeatedly and contemptuously repudiated the claim as long as their Church survived.

#### §1. THE SCORN OF ST. BASIL AND THE EASTERN CHURCHES

In the last book I carefully **examined** each Papal claim as far as the fourth century. I mean each serious claim, for the arguments of some of the older writers are amusing. In such a collection of pontifical utterances as that of Jaffé, for instance, we read even of Pope Anacletus, of the early second century, and half his successors

asserting to the world at **large** the supremacy they have inherited from Peter; and when you turn to the Benedictine edition of the early Christian writings you find every one of these supposed letters of early Popes blandly described as "spurious." They are just relics of the mass of forgeries by means of which the Church established its power in the Middle Ages.

The more careful Catholic writers of modern times dare not appeal to these shameless fabrications of the Papal workshop, but they next **give us instances in which the Popes of the fourth century** exert an authority over the bishops of Italy. Only those who are entirely ignorant of church history can be impressed by such things. **The head of each metropolitan church in the early ages**, especially if that church had been founded by one of the apostles, exerted authority over all the bishops of his region. Eastern councils recognized this authority of Rome just as they recognized it in the bishops of Constantinople or Egypt. It has nothing whatever to do with universal supremacy. In fact, the Pope was not master of all Italy. When the Emperors fixed their court at Milan, the bishop of that See was put on a level with the bishops of Rome. About the middle of the fourth century the Spanish Christians needed help, and they appealed, not to the Pope alone, but, as the historian Sulpicius Severus says, "to the two bishops who had [in Italy] the highest authority at that time." When the Pope condemned the bishop of Milan for Arianism, he merely smiled at the innocuous thunder: and no Pope ever ventured to claim authority over his successor, St. Ambrose.

From other parts of the Church the Catholic historian can quote only those florid compliments which it was natural for other bishops to pay at times to so wealthy and important and apostolical a see. Catholic writers try to pervert these compliments into recognitions of Rome's supremacy, but we have seen, and shall further see, that **whenever the Pope** asserted such an authority outside Italy he was invariably resisted, generally with contempt. Yet it was an age when a supreme authority in the Church would have found occasion almost every year to assert itself and guide the distracted minds of millions. From Spain to Mesopotamia the Church flamed with the most passionate doctrinal controversy, during a period of about two centuries. What guidance did the Roman bishop offer to the world in the six or seven terrific conflicts that followed the Arian controversy? It was, in spite of its Peter and Paul, almost **the** least influential of all the greater churches in shaping the articles of the creed.

This process began in earnest at the great Council of Nicaea in 325. The Emperor Constantine, entirely ignoring the Pope, had ordered the contending bishops to meet, under his own presidency, and settle their differences. The two priests who represented the bishop of Rome were lost in the crowd of three hundred members of the Council. And when in the end the bishops came to decide **the** question of jurisdiction, they ignored as **trivial** the Papal **claim**



to sovereignty. "Just as all in Italy is subject to the Bishop of Rome," they said, so all Egypt should be subject to the Bishop of Alexandria, and so on. 'But the controversy did not even moderate its fury, as we saw, and the Emperor Constantius in 342 ordered the bishops of east and west to meet once more, at Sardica ('Sofia), and come to terms. About eighty came from each side, but the easterners refused to meet the westerners. They excommunicated the Pope and other western bishops, who, naturally, returned the compliment. So when you find Catholic writers quoting the canon; of the Council of Sardica, remember that this was no general (or Ecumenical) Council. Even here, moreover, there is no acceptance of supremacy. All that it means in that fifty or sixty western bishops (out of several hundred) decided that in certain controversies the Pope should have the power, not to judge the dispute, but to appoint judges in the region in which it arose. But the Council was a total failure and its decisions were scornfully ignored in the greater part of the Church.

Pope Julius, who seems to have been a very pontifical type of person, then intervened. He rebuked a group of eastern bishops for holding councils without his permission! It is the Greek historian, Sozomen, who tells us this (in his Ecclesiastical History, iii, 8), and the Catholic writer carefully overlooks this fine assertion of authority. Because the eastern bishops, the historian says, replied in a letter which was "exquisite in the elegance of its language, composed in a vein of oratory, but full of irony and not devoid of serious threats." Sometimes, it is true, you will find a **Catholic** writer quoting from the letter a recognition that "the Roman Church is assuredly magnificent in the eyes of all, since it was from the first the home of the apostles, the fount and metropolis of piety." But he conceals from his readers that the letter **is one of** polished irony from beginning to end, and that it closes with the blunt declaration that the eastern bishops do not acknowledge that any church is "superior" to theirs because it is bigger or wealthier, and that they will break communion with the Pope if he does not mind his own business. Julius sent two legates to summon these wicked bishops to appear before him, but they insulted his legates and sent them back with another "exquisite" letter. The Catholic historian naively remarks that these two letters have "not been preserved" in the Papal archives: like similar letters and reports which I will quote later. No one questions the statements of Sozomen.

After Pope Julius came the unfortunate Liberius who added to the growing disdain of Rome by signing some sort of heretical formula and purchasing the comfort of his palace by yielding to an heretical Emperor. But the east was in so lamentable a condition that one of its most venerated prelates, St. Basil, looked once more to the west for aid. He wrote to all the western bishops to send delegates to the east, and this did not at all suit Pope Damasus, who wanted to be invited to make a personal pontifical declaration on the quarrel. When at length the Pope repented by sending to the east

a formula which all must sign without altering a syllable and summoned the eastern bishops to appear before his august throne, the saintly Basil lost his temper. In a series of disdainful letters (read Nos. 215, 239 and 266) he told Rome that it was useless to appeal to "a proud and haughty man who sits on a lofty throne and cannot hear those who tell him the truth on the ground below."

The bishops at last came together once more in the General Council of Constantinople (381). I am not here concerned with the doctrinal decisions, but in **view** of the rapidly developing pretensions of Rome it was deemed advisable to renew the canons passed at Nicaea in regard to jurisdiction. Prelates were forbidden to interfere in concerns outside their metropolitan region, and the See of Constantinople, a city which was now frequently described as "the new Rome," was declared to have the same authority in the east as the Roman See had in the west. Even the scholarly Duchesne, whom one so rarely finds shirking or misrepresenting the facts, says here, instead of giving the words: "By the third **canon** the Bishop of Constantinople finds himself attributed the pre-eminence of honor after the Bishop of Rome." It seems impossible for even the most liberal Catholic historian to tell the entire truth. As the phrases "new Rome" and "old Rome" will tell anybody, the two prelates are put on a footing of absolute equality.

We shall see in the next book how this fundamental principle of the eastern churches was vigorously reasserted in the fifth century, against the Papal pretensions, at the Council of Chalcedon. Never in the whole fiery history of the eastern churches, when rival bishops or rival groups so keenly sought the support of western churches, was there the least deviation from it. From the days of Pope Victor to the days of Leo the great every single attempt of the Popes to dictate to eastern churches was at once resented. At last, as we shall see, the easterners in disgust ceased to communicate with Rome, and a Chinese wall of mutual hostility was erected between the Greek and the Latin Churches.

## 32. THE SCORN, OF ST. AUGUSTINE AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH.

But the Popes had not even, until civilization was wrecked, that sovereignty in the west which the eastern bishops were disposed to grant them. Northern Italy was not subject to them until late in the fourth century, the Emperors deserted Milan, and the city and its See rapidly dwindled in importance. From Gaul, as late as the middle of the fifth century, we shall find a saintly archbishop writing from the ruins of the Gallic Church to defy and reject the Papal claim of supremacy. In Spain the Popes had no jurisdiction until there also the havoc wrought by the barbarians ruined the old Church. But the most important province in the west was Roman Africa, and the great St. Augustine was the leader of its Church. It is therefore essential for the Catholic historian to show that at least the African bishops acknowledged the Papal supremacy, and

to this day books and sermons repeat with pride the supposed words of St. Augustine: "Rome has spoken: the case is finished." This is a fraudulent misrepresentation of what Augustine said, and until it disappeared in the waves of Vandal invasion the great African Church repudiated the Roman claim almost more bitterly than did the oriental Churches.

I explained in the previous book how the Papacy had interfered in the internal affairs of the African Church in the days of St. Cyprian, and how Cyprian and his fellow-bishops had used language to the Pope for his interference that a Catholic writer would blush to reproduce. For more than a hundred and fifty years there was not the least further pretension of Roman authority in African affairs. During the whole of the fourth century and the first quarter of the fifth the African Church was rent by the Donatist schism, the beginning of which I explained in the last book, but, though the Emperor had in its early stages compelled the African bishops to seek the arbitration of the Italian bishops, with the Pope at their head—even here, in 313, there had been no African appeal to the Pope—there was no further reference to Rome. The Donatists were very democratic in their ideas. Amongst the less violent pleasantries of the war they used to take the wealthier Catholics and harness them to their own chariots or make them do the work of the miller's ass. It is probable enough, therefore, that they would have smiled at the thunder of Rome. But, as Duchesne points out, when St. Augustine became a bishop and assumed the leadership—the schism had now flourished for a hundred years—his favorite argument was that the Donatists were not recognized by the other Churches while he and his colleagues were part of the "Catholic" (which means universal) Church. It was at this time that the word Catholic came into general use against schismatics. And Duchesne frankly admits the significance of the fact that, while Augustine lays great stress on the support of the western Churches generally, he never mentions the support of the Bishop of Rome in particular. On one occasion, in 397, the African bishops had asked the opinion of the bishops of Rome and Milan together; and even this decision they ignored when they found it unsatisfactory.

The famous phrase which is fraudulently used by every Catholic as a saying of Augustine refers to a different quarrel. The west had at last produced a heretic, and, curiously enough, he was a British monk, Pelagius (or, probably, Morgan). He had traveled in the east and spoke Greek and Latin, and he had about the year 400 settled in Rome and won great repute amongst the educated Romans, none of whom seem to have scented heresy in his teachings. The fall of Rome sent him with other fugitives to Africa, which was not invaded until some years later, and there the more sensitive theological nerves of St. Augustine registered a formidable heresy. In a word, Pelagius, a robust man of large proportions and vigorous character, stressed the power of the human will to resist temptation, while Augustine maintained that the will was powerless without grace. Augustine, in the year 416, induced his fellow-

bishops to hold two synods and condemn the heresy. The decisions of the synods were sent to Pope Innocent, and in a very flattering letter he was invited to support them. The African bishops wanted "the authority of the Apostolic See added to our own modest decisions." This, of course, was no appeal to Rome to settle a controversy, but Innocent chose to interpret it as such and assure them how very proper it was for them to appeal to him. He condemned Pelagius, and Augustine, then preached the jubilant sermon from which the Catholic everywhere still quotes: "Rome has spoken: the case is finished."

But a scholar like Duchesne knows that he must not stoop to this level, and he gives **the actual words of Augustine** and moot of the relevant facts; as I did twenty-seven years ago in my "St. Augustine and His Age." To translate the words literally, he said: "The decisions of two councils have been sent to the Apostolic See, and a reply has been received. The case is finished." The perversion of these words into a statement that the case is over because **"Rome has spoken," is bad enough, but the historical circumstances** make it quite dishonest. One of the strongest arguments of the Pelagians in Africa was that Rome was on their side. Two of the **leading Roman priests, both future Popes**, supported the teaching of Pelagius, and it was not the authority of Rome but **the repudiation** of the favor it had shown to **heretics** that delighted Augustine. **For the Catholic popular writers not merely to change** Augustine's words but to conceal the historical circumstances and the sequel is trickery of the lower political type; for the case, instead of being settled, now entered upon a new and, for Rome, most unpleasant development.

Shortly after sending his letter Pope Innocent died, and one of the priests who favored the heresy, Zosimus, was elected to succeed him. The character of Zosimus, a Greek, is not very clear, but Duchesne shows that his conduct in his negotiations with the bishops of Gaul suggests that it was not of the most scrupulous type. However, a pupil and friend of Pelagius at once sped to Rome and had an audience with the Pope and his clergy, and Augustine was **presently outraged** to learn that a letter had been received from Zosimus to the effect that he revoked or suspended the condemnation of Pelagius by his predecessor, and the Africans might send representatives to Rome for a re-examination of the matter. And on the heels of this messenger came another with a letter—neither letter is in the least disputed—which declared that Pelagius was "a good Catholic," a man of "unquestionable faith." The African bishops held a new council, but their reply to the Pope has, says Duchesne, "been lost."

We have already seen several instances of this "loss" of documents at Rome which were unfavorable to its claims and we shall see more. But Duchesne must have known that a passage from the letter, which was warm, is given in a work of the contemporary writer Prosper ("Contra Collatorem," ch. v.), and it seems that

this full synod of more than two hundred African bishops replied to Rome : "We hereby ordain that the sentence which Innocent passed on Pelagius and Celestius remains in force." Bishop Hefele quotes this, but alters it in translation. However, Duchesne does relate an important fact that most Catholic writers generally omit. The Africans wrote indignantly to the Emperor, and the Prefect of Rome was officially warned that there seemed to be a prevalence of heresy in his city! This it is that explains why Zosimus hastily wrote to assure the Africans that they had misunderstood him, that he had merely suspended judgment, and in a second letter that he now found that Pelagius and Celestius were heretics. The Africans ignored his assurances. It is amusing to find Zosimus opening one of these retracting letters by a pompous reminder of the authority of his Apostolic See, "against whose judgment no one would dare to contend."

Let me complete the story. Zosimus died soon afterwards, and the funeral procession had only just returned from the cemetery when the clergy split into two bitterly hostile factions and elected two Popes. The deacons seized one church, the priests another, and Rome prepared for another sanguinary feud. The Prefect of Rome expelled Boniface, the candidate of the priests, from the city, but the man induced a princess of the court to use her influence, and the Prefect had to reinstate Boniface as Pope and declare his rival Anti-Pope. In short, there were, as the Pontifical Chronicle admits! seven months of quarreling and fighting, the city guards having to be called out even to protect the solemnity of the Easter celebration. The Emperor ordered a synod of Italian bishops to decide which was really Pope, and, when they failed, bishops of Africa (who must have smiled) and Gaul were associated with them. Unfortunately we have here no independent document to give us the details, but it is clear enough that the Roman Church was in much the same condition as we found it at the election of Pope Damasus.

Boniface was declared to be the true successor of Zosimus, and he soon found that he had inherited another very serious quarrel with the Africans. One would imagine, as Duchesne says, that after the Pelagian affair Rome would hesitate to interfere again in Africa, but Zosimus was either stupid or bitterly angry and affronted. Before he died he received an African priest who had been condemned by his bishop. He declared the priest innocent and sent orders to his bishop to take him back under pain of excommunication. It was not only a wanton assertion of authority, for the priest eventually confessed that he was a scoundrel and Zosimus had merely taken his word that he was innocent, but it was a defiance of the African bishops who had years before decreed that no cleric of Africa could appeal to any bishop overseas. The African bishops now renewed their decrees and ignored Zosimus, and the Pope sent a particularly pompous Italian Legate, one Faustinus, to settle the matter. Augustine and a number of other bishops met him at Carthage, and they asked him on what ground the Pope

based his right to interfere in African affairs. *In* virtue, he replied, of the canons passed at the great Council of Nicaea, which gave these powers to the Pope. He produced copies of the canons, and the African bishops were angry when they looked up their own copy and found no correspondence. Augustine, however, persuaded them to do nothing until they had communicated with the eastern Churches.

At this stage Zosimus died, and Pope Boniface confirmed the arrogant Faustinus, who had remained in Africa. The rest is soon told. From the eastern patriarchs the African bishops learned that the Pope had tried to pass off on them as canons of the Nicene Council, one of the greatest **Councils** of the universal Church, a couple of canons that had been composed at Sardica, as I have described, by a handful of western bishops; and there are scholars who do not admit even these as genuine decrees of that unauthoritative gathering. The trick tests all the ingenuity of the Catholic apologists. The Pope, says Cardinal Hergenroether ("History of the Church," ii, 370), "really had in mind the canons of Sardica which follow those of Nice in the collections." Even Duchesne repeats this excuse, as all do, that in the Roman collection the canons of Sardica followed those of Nice, but he cannot stoop to claim that there was an honest error at Rome. It would be childish to suggest-it is childish for Hergenroether and all other Catholic scholars to suggest- that any Pope of this period (which means the whole Papal chancellor) when the Papal claim to supremacy was the main concern of the Roman Church, did not know, as well as they knew the site of St. Peter's, what the Nicene Council had decreed.

In 419 the African bishops called a general synod to meet the Legate. We have complete shorthand reports of synods and councils of the time, for shorthand was perfectly developed, but the acta of this synod have "not been preserved." Fortunately, a copy of the letter which the synod sent to the Pope was preserved somewhere and can be read (in Latin). Bishop Hefele again pretends to translate parts of it and again falsifies the text. The bishops tell of three days of stormy discussion, of "intolerable things that they do not care to mention." I have read some of the shorthand reports of these African synods and can imagine it. The bishops are sending back his Legate to the Pope with a trust that "we shall not have to endure that pompousness any longer." Augustine and all the other bishops of the African Church consented to the policy: the Pope must mind his own business and not interfere outside Italy. And just three years later we find Pope Boniface writing to an eastern bishop:

No one ever resisted the dignity of the Apostolic See, for its judgment cannot be called into question: no one ever rebelled against it without being judged by his own deed.

And this fraudulent declaration is quoted by distinguished Catholic theologians of modern times—Hurter, for instance—as a proof of the supremacy of the Pope.<sup>1</sup> But Rome was so infatuated with its ambition that it tried to enforce it in Africa once more. The same worthless priest, Apiarius, was again deposed and fled to the new Pope at Rome, Celestine, and he was so arrogant as to send Faustinus back to Africa. He returned with a letter that made the Pope wince. It was so acrid that Augustine and a few others refused to sign it. Faustinus had, it says, “insulted the whole assembly by pretending to assert certain privileges of the Roman See.” The Pope is not to interfere again:

Do not, then, send clerics to execute thy will to those who are in authority, lest we seem to introduce the empty pride of the world into the Church of Christ.

### §3. THE PAPAL CLAIM EVERYWHERE REJECTED

I have at this stage discussed the historical events with more detail than usual, not merely because the abundant evidence once more throws a clear light on the character of the Roman Church, but most particularly because we have here the clearest possible proof of the dishonesty of Catholic writers in our own time. The events I have described will be found, almost exactly as I have given them, in Mgr. Duchesne’s “History of the Early Church” (3rd vol.), the most learned of recent Catholic works and exceptionally liberal. Only here and there, as I have pointed out, Duchesne fails in candor or softens harsh language in translation. But turn to almost any other Catholic writer and you find shocking perversions of history. Even the learned Bishop Heele (“History of Councils”) over and over again manipulates the evidence in the interest of the Church. Cardinal Hergenroether (“History of the Church”), who also is esteemed one of the “great” Catholic historians of modern times, has the effrontery to say, after describing these relations with the African Church, that there were “isolated cases of resistance” but that “there certainly were appeals from Africa to the Holy See,” and that Augustine found it right for Rome to intervene in episcopal quarrels.

But the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the pride of the American Catholic Church, is more dishonest on this point than any other serious recent work I know. This question of Papal supremacy is, naturally, one of the most important it has to treat, and under the heading “Pope” you will find it discussed by an English Jesuit, G. H. Joyce. He begins:

History bears complete testimony that from the very earliest times the Roman See has ever claimed the supreme headship, and that that leadership has been freely acknowledged by the universal Church.

This amazing statement is not Jesuitical: it is as brazen an untruth as any historical writer could perpetrate. To justify it the Jesuit

quotes the Epistle to the Corinthians {falsely representing that the Pope speaks personally in it with a note of authority), the very natural compliments to the Roman Church of Ignatius and Irenaeus (who expressly denied its authority in Asia), the adventure of Pope Victor (whose authority was not questioned, he does not blush to say), and the relations with St. Cyprian (who, he says, gave an "effective primacy" to the Pope) ; and after glancing at and totally misrepresenting these events before the year 300, when the **Papal claim** was barely formulated, he evades all the nasty difficulties **raised** by the undisputed events I have described in **this** chapter by pleading that the limits of his space--in the most important article of a twenty-volume Encyclopaedia--prevent him from covering the fourth and fifth centuries! And American Catholics think that their Church is so bold and liberal that its freedom alarms the Vatican !

I have examined other historical articles of the **Encyclopaedia** in my little book "The Popes and Their Church." Under "Apostolic See" a Dr. Wilhelm says: "As **early** as the fourth century the Roman See was already the Apostolic See par excellence, not only in the West, but also in the East." In the third century, the age of Cyprian, Dr. Wilhelm says, the **Pope** claims authority as the **successor** of Peter "and no one objects to this claim." Almost every historical article in the **Encyclopaedia** is at much the same level of "scholarship." In not **one** single case, outside Italy, was the Roman claim of authority admitted to the date I have reached, yet these writers uniformly say exactly the opposite—that it was universally admitted; and the facts I have used are undisputed, the documents admitted by all. And I would therefore ask my amiable friends who think my language about the Catholic clergy harsh what is today the meaning of the words fraud and untruth if they are not to be applied here?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MORAL IMPOTENCE OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

**W**E NOW, in conclusion, turn from the Roman Catholic historians and their lamentable falsification of the evidence to those non-Catholic historical writers who, to conciliate the Catholic authorities, repeat the familiar legend of a moral and spiritual reform of the imperial city by the Roman Church. It happens that, having at one time to write a book on "St. Augustine and His Age," which is based entirely upon the original documents, I know the literature of the fourth century, Christian and pagan, almost as well as the literature of the nineteenth century. The conventional idea of what happened in Rome, on the other hand, is not based upon contemporary evidence but upon three superficial



considerations. The first is the general assumption that ancient Rome was always very licentious. One is prepared to find a good deal of license in a city in which the religion of the great majority, the old Roman religion, is not of an ethical character, but this common opinion about Rome does not take into account the other religions and philosophies which came to have a moral influence on the leading Romans and the variations of the character of the city in different ages. The fourth century was, generally speaking, a sober age. We have very little information about the life of the mass of the people, but we have more light than at any other period on the character of the patrician class, and we find them an admirable group of men, taking pride in the fact that the vices of older Rome exist no longer.

The second point is that a reformation is assumed because it is loosely and superficially supposed that what Rome embraced in the fourth century was the severe moral code of the gospels and Epistles. This, we have seen, is quite false. The Roman Church had abandoned primitive Christianity long before a tenth of the Romans were incorporated in it. It had become a ritual religion with formal ceremonies and gaudily decorated churches. The belief that the end of the world was near had faded with the conversion of the Emperors and the liberation of the Church. The somber emphasis on sin was now found only in a rare type of preacher like St. Ambrose; and even in his Church the general character was so poor, the religious services so ceremonious, that he had to rebuke sordid scenes in the sacred buildings themselves.

And the third error is, as we saw, to select the few pictures of virtue from such record as we have of the life of the time and leave under the veil of a dead language the far more numerous pictures of vice. Almost the single historical evidence that is quoted in support of the claim that the Roman Church effected a moral and spiritual renovation in the fourth century is the account of Jerome's virtuous pupils. These, we saw, were a score of ladies—the group included hardly a single man—out of the quarter of a million Christians of Rome, and the same St. Jerome paints the rest of the community in the darkest colors. Duchesne, in the first chapter of his third volume, is fairly frank and admits that the world overcame the Church not the Church the world. He quotes only the names of about a dozen eminent laymen and says that they were too virtuous to join the clergy. Any historian who dilates on a score of virtuous ladies—and we have every reason to believe that the corresponding ladies of the pagan group which gathered round Symmachus were quite virtuous, though not ascetic—and a dozen good men in one hundred years, and refuses to notice two such terrible documents as the petition to the Emperors of two priests against Damasus and the letter of Jerome to Eustochium, neither of which has ever been translated, is falsifying the record. The candid historian will find it most probable that the strict Manichaean and Mithraic temples of Rome contained far more virtuous ladies than Jerome's letters introduce to us, yet they are never noticed. I sur-

**vey** the entire record of the Roman Church in the fourth century **and**, soberly speaking, it is a record predominantly of vice, violence, and clerical ambition: just such as we ought to expect when a religion is demoralized, enriched, and imposed by force upon a reluctant community. No one in our time will admire the suppressed religions, but it is historically false that the suppression led to any moral improvement.

## §1. THE NEW IMPERIAL FAMILIES

Since the historical records of any **age** are concerned above **all** with the acts and characters of its monarchs we will first consider these. Members of the imperial house rarely lived in Rome in the **fourth** century. Even when a **western** emperor was set up, the **court** was fixed at Milan because it was nearer to the frontiers. We are not therefore going to hold the Popes responsible for the characters **of** the Emperors, though we could justly ask the **Catholic** historian why, on his theory, his head of the universal Church was so persistently blind, throughout the century, to the misconduct of the **Emperors** and their corrupting **example**. The chief reason why I take up this point is, however, because here we have clear and indisputable evidence of character after "conversion," and it **must** help us to understand what happened in Rome.

Let me say first that none of the Emperors of the fourth century belonged to the Roman nobility. Emperor means Commander, and in its **beginning** the Empire simply meant that a temporary Commander (as Roman generals had always been) was awarded the **office** for life and thus acquired supreme power over the army and the Republic. There was no hereditary monarchy, and great confusion was caused by the intrigues of Emperors and Empresses to get their sons, whatever their merit, to **succeed** them, and the claims of the troops to elect the successor. Most of the Emperors of the fourth century were appointed by the troops or chosen by other Emperors; though it suited the Church in many cases that **boys** should succeed their fathers. Each line, however, began in a popular military commander, generally of humble origin, never of the Roman patrician class.

We saw the character of the Constantinian dynasty which covered the first half of the century. Constantine, son of a tavern girl by an irregular union, was a vigorous and capable ruler, but his **personal** character was very defective. The brutal murder of his wife, son, and child-nephew would be enough to condemn any man, but the later years of his life also were repellant. In his Christian-capital he was surrounded by priests, but he was very far from showing signs of repentance for his crime. He founded the oriental and voluptuous court of the eastern Emperors. In dress and the display of jewelry he was ridiculously effeminate, and he wasted the resources of the Empire with appalling prodigality at a time

when they ought to have been carefully nursed. He was a very doubtful sort of Christian, but he had his sons and daughters reared in the faith and they were worse than himself. The "succession" to the throne was settled by an orgy of murders in the palace. The youngest son soon attacked the eldest, who was slain, and proved to be a young man of the most corrupt ways. He made an open parade of unnatural vice at his court and was assassinated by his disgusted officers. The daughter Constantina married her cousin Gallus, and it would be difficult to say which was the more vicious, or which vice they did not cultivate. Ammianus Marcellinus opens his chronicle with a terrible account of this "mortal Megaera," this **woman-monster**, and her husband was an epitome of vice. The third son Constantius, who found himself supreme after twenty imperial relatives had been slain, was regular in morals, but it was he **who** had been chiefly involved in the murders of his uncles and cousins, and he brought terrible distress on the Empire by forcing the **Arian** creed on it.

Then, **as we saw, came Julian**, the **one entirely respectable** member of the dynasty, and with him it ended. Valentinian, who opened the new dynasty, was a man of brutal appetites and uncontrollable temper. **Much of his conduct was barbaric. His brother Valens**, emperor of the east, was of less offensive type, but an Arian and the sensual head of a eunuch-ruled court. Gratian died **before his character was formed, and his brother Valentinian II also** was slain in early manhood; while the Emperor they created in the east, Theodosius, was a man of singularly contradictory character. His record is stained, as I said, by one of the most brutal and treacherous massacres of a whole town that we find in that age of violence, and he ended, like Constantine, in a **voluptuous** idleness and indulgence. **The women of these various families were no** better than the men: selfish, unscrupulous, and often vicious. The courts were hives of intrigue under loathsome oriental eunuchs. The century **closed with two toy-emperors again on the throne in east and west**, and neither ever rose above the luxurious indolence in which the eunuchs reared them, while the Goths were now pouring over the frontiers of the Empire. And I may add, as we shall not return to these imperial matters, that until the end of the western Empire in 476 there was not the least improvement of character. Placidia, **sister of the Empress Honoria, attached herself to a Gothic general**: her daughter had a child by her own steward and later offered her heart to the king of the Huns: her son Valentinian III was slain for raping the wife of one **of his generals. At this time**, in the fifth century, the imperial court was back in Rome, under the eye of the Popes. Its record is more deeply than ever stained with **intrigue, bloodshed, and vice, while the Empire heavily sank into the tomb.**

## §2. THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

In the previous section I have summarized the lives of the emperors and empresses as I have described them in my "Empresses

of Rome," and it seems to me a just summary. Naturally each of the Emperors is praised in the monastic chronicles of a later date for his **august** piety, but this generally means generosity to the Church, and the facts I have given are beyond dispute. Both imperial courts were far inferior to what they had been during the greater part of the period of pagan emperors. Not a single emperor after the conversion of Constantine reached the moral stature of Augustus, Vespasian, Antoninus Pius, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Alexander Severus, Aurelian, or Diocletian. And since the upper class of Romans of the earlier age had generally followed the lead of the emperors, we may assume that they did also after 380. Almost the only prominent figures in the feeble struggle to save the Empire are barbarians. Rome itself still failed to produce men of any distinction: either commanders, who were so sorely needed, or literary men, or outstanding religious personalities. Of the four Popes who succeeded Damasus only one, Innocent I, was a man of strong and high character; he and Leo I, the only other strong Pope before the end of the Empire, were not strictly honorable in enforcing the Papal claim and completed the alienation of the east. We shall see this about Leo in the next book.

Of the life of the people we have no direct historical knowledge. The rhetorical looseness of the familiar statement that the people of Rome were in the fourth century converted to more sober or more virtuous ways ought to be perceived by any man, Catholic or non-Catholic, who will take the trouble to inquire what Roman writers tell us anything about the morals of the Roman people either before or after they became Christian. The answer is, for both periods, none. Even the letters and sermons of the bishops make no such claim, and no Christian historian describes any **change of** morals at Rome. In the next volume we shall see that the only Christian writer who does make any comparison of morals before and after the conversion emphatically says that the second stage was worse than the earlier. I should not ask anybody to believe this. The priest Salvianus who says that the morals of the pagans were superior to those of the Christians was not in a position to know what the morals of the Romans had been a century earlier. But it **is** a curious fact, a piquant commentary on the claim of a moral uplift, that the only priest of the time who makes a comparison says that there was a moral deterioration.

If we want to form an opinion, therefore, we have to estimate the probabilities from other evidence, not simply to say that, since the Roman bishops now controlled the whole population, it must have improved. One piece of evidence to which we cannot close our eyes is **the** prolonged and very savage rioting in the days of Damasus. A mob would not represent the entire Roman Church, but the fact that the rioting continued for months and had to be crushed by the civic authorities plainly shows that the fighters for Damasus were not simply a small body that he could have **checked**. After this date we have no positive information. Did the immoral houses of Rome shrink in number? No writer even suggests it. Was there a growth of any other kind of virtue?

Again no writer suggests it. The fact is that it is writers of a very much later age who first made the statement that the Popes reformed the morals of Rome when paganism was suppressed, and this entirely groundless claim has passed into general circulation without a challenge. It is part of the policy of distracting the attention of historians from the use of coercion and the fraudulent development of the Papal claim.

There are only two positive claims of evidence of change of heart that one finds seriously advanced. One is the suppression of slavery and the other the suppression of the gladiatorial games. The claim is not worth considering as regards slavery. No Pope ever condemned slavery, and we shall find the Papacy in the seventh century the largest slave-owner in Europe. Slavery began to shrink, naturally, when the great Roman capitalists were ruined with the destruction of the Empire, but it was not condemned in principle until centuries afterwards. As to the brutal games of the amphitheater, we must again note that no Bishop of Rome condemned them. The games had been condemned by Roman moralists, Cicero tells us, before the Christian Era began, and were repugnant to the Stoics. No Christian Emperor or Pope of the fourth century condemned them. The younger Emperors and Theodosius could be induced to sign all sorts of decrees against the pagan religions, to which the Romans were equally attached, but they were not asked to suppress the games.

In 404, when the monk Telemachus made his spirited protest against them—though some historians point out that the story is late and disputable—it was a Christian audience that enjoyed the games. The Roman Church had not forbidden its members to attend. Nor did the games cease at once, as is generally said. They were gradually suppressed at Rome; and, since the very heavy expense of them (often more than a quarter of a million dollars in a few days) had been borne by individuals—there was no charge for admission—the decay of wealth in Rome must be taken into consideration. The Callic priest Salvianus tells us that in Christian Marseilles the most brutal spectacles of the amphitheater and the most obscene spectacles of the theater were still witnessed about 450 A. D. There is an extraordinary lack of proportion in the minds of Catholic writers who now discuss these matters. They fancy that our modern sentiment must have been in the minds of these Roman Christians of the fourth century. Let me remind them of the appalling assassinations and religious massacres of that age, and let me recommend them to look up the attitude of the Papacy, fourteen centuries later, when at last a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded. Pius IX refused the invitation to become a patron of it on this ground: "Such an Association could not be sanctioned by the Holy See, being founded on a theological error namely, that Christians owed any duties to animals." The real error was the suggestion that our modern age could teach the Roman Church humane sentiments which it had lacked, as even Professor Lecky says, for seventeen centuries.

### §3. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

We may now surely conclude that the process of corruption which we found advancing in the Church of Rome in the third century had gone so far before the end of the fourth century that the Church had ceased to be a moral power. The only documents which throw a broad light on it, about the middle and the beginning of the last quarter of the century, give it a comprehensively bad character. We have seen how little moral influence it had in the imperial house, even when it came back to reside in Rome. We have seen that there must have been a conspicuous worldliness amongst its clergy, and we do not read of any reform of their ways. I look carefully over the best works of recent Catholic historians for something to offset these serious charges and redeem the general character of the Church and I find nothing of the same weight. Almost no "saints" now appear in the Roman calendar, for we must firmly decline to give that title to men like Damasus. The general repute of the bishops of Rome in the other Churches is that they are chiefly occupied with their new ambition to rule the universal Church, and the accounts of their synods and councils and their communications with the other Churches confirm this. No doubt most of the Popes of the time were religious men of strict moral life, but prosperity had ruined their Church. The attempt to accommodate all Rome in it had destroyed its really Christian character, and the claim to rule other Churches made it unscrupulous in its methods. It truckled to the most vicious princes and princesses and, beyond throwing out a censure occasionally at the looseness of its consecrated virgins, it bothered little about morals.

The only other light we could throw upon the Roman Church would be by analogy with the condition of the other Churches. St. Augustine furnishes this very abundantly for Africa, which was the most important section of western Christendom after Italy. His letters and sermons reflect a very low general condition of morals; and it is recorded that the king of the Vandals, when he conquered the province, expressed abhorrence at the prevalence of immorality and attempted to reform it. St. Ambrose does not give a much better account of the character of the majority of his people, and the great preachers of the east paint still darker pictures. Swarms of by no means ascetic monks wandered everywhere, selling spurious relics (Augustine says) and refusing to work. The doctrinal controversies were conducted with appalling violence, of which the murder of Hypatia by the monks is only one instance. Over and over again we read such passages as:

By the vigilance of Memnan the churches were shut against them [the rival bishops], and a strong garrison was thrown into the cathedral. The troops, under the command of Candidian, advanced to the assault; the outguards were routed and put to the sword, but the place was impregnable,

and the besiegers retired; their retreat was pursued by a vigorous sally; they lost their horses and many of the soldiers were dangerously wounded with clubs and stones. Ephesus, the city of the Virgin, was defiled with rage and clamor, with sedition and blood; the rival synods darted anathemas and excommunications from their spiritual engines.

This was a scene at the **holding** of the Council of Ephesus in the year 431. Archbishop "St." Cyril, who led the opposition to the troops, then **spent** \$300,000 in corrupting the courtiers to get the ear of the Emperor against his rival the Archbishop of Constantinople and to establish the cult of the gentle mother of Christ, and a second Council of Ephesus was **summoned**. When the bishops hesitated "a furious multitude of monks and soldiers, with staves and swords and chains, burst into the church; the trembling bishops hid themselves behind the altar or under the benches , , , it is said **that** the Patriarch of Alexandria reviled, buffeted, kicked, and trampled his brother of Constantinople." And so on. The Middle Ages had **begun** at once. Rome was spared the worst of these scenes, though several years after the fall of the city we again find its clergy electing rival Popes and the soldiers being called **upon** to eject the 'Anti-Pope' and his followers from one church and guard the Pope during his solemn celebration in another. The notion that the triumph of the Church of Rome brought light into a dark world, which some historians so **frivolously** embody in their writings, is as far removed as possible from the 'historical truth'. It confuses the primitive Church of Paul and Clement with the gaudy, ambitious, and very corrupt Roman Church of the fourth century.