

Chapter Seventeen

The Establishment of Christendom, 235 to 430

In 235 Christianity was still a minor subculture in the Roman empire, and also in the adjacent lands. More people worshiped in the Judaeen synagogues than in the Christian churches, and the great majority of the population belonged neither to a synagogue nor a church: in the early third-century empire perhaps only one person in ten worshiped God. By 430, when Augustine died soon after finishing his *City of God*, the Roman emperors had been Christian for more than a hundred years, and most people in the empire, in Armenia, and even in Ethiopia were Christians. The establishment of Christianity coincided with a series of Roman military and political disasters and ultimately with the empire's collapse in the Latin west.

The rise of the Sassanids, and the first crisis of the Roman empire (235-284)

In the third century, after more than four hundred years of security, the Roman empire came close to disintegration. Specifically, in the years between the death of Alexander Severus (235) and the accession of Diocletian (284) the empire was battered by external enemies and was drained internally by political chaos and by monetary collapse. The troubles of 235-284 were in many ways a harbinger of what was to come in the late fourth and fifth centuries, when the empire's western provinces were lost, a chain of events traditionally called "the fall of Rome."

The Romans' troubles began with an apparent success. Between 194 and 198 Septimius Severus led two victorious expeditions against the Parthian empire, and the second culminated in the burning of the Parthian capital, Ctesiphon, on the east bank of the Tigris river. In the Jezirah of what is today northern Iraq Septimius organized a Roman province which he called "Mesopotamia." The province was anchored on a strong military fortress at Nisibis, built in the highlands from which flow the tributaries to the Habur river. In 216-17 Caracalla, Septimius' son, led a third expedition against the Parthians. Encountering little opposition, Caracalla crossed the Tigris and entered Armenia, where he set up a short-lived Roman province. Caracalla's expedition ended with his assassination, but the Parthian empire had been mortally wounded by the Severan incursions. Ca. 224 the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia - which had ruled since the third century BC - was overthrown.

The victorious rebels were the Sassanid family of Persia, the land to the east of the Persian Gulf. The Sassanid dynasty proved to be a much more formidable enemy to the Romans than the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia had ever been, and the Sassanids ruled Iran and much else in the Near East until the 640s. The Sassanid who put an end to the Parthian kingdom was Ardashir (224-239). As natives of Persia, Ardashir and his family took great pride in what the Persians had accomplished in the days of Cyrus and Darius, in the sixth century BC. After consolidating his power in Iran Ardashir conceived the ambition of recreating the great empire that his ancient forebears had once ruled. As a part of this project he decided to recreate what he supposed was the religion of Cyrus and Darius: he promoted, that is, the worship of Ahura

Mazda, which the Parthians had so long neglected. To this end he ordered those priests who knew the Gathas of Zarathustra (along with many other prayers, hymns and liturgies in the Avestan language) to promulgate these ancient oral texts. Out of all this would soon coalesce the Mazdian (Zoroastrian) religion, and eventually the book that we call the Avesta.

When Ardashir made an attempt to take back the Romans' Mesopotamian province, Alexander Severus and his mother, Julia Mamaea (who was in effect the empress during her young son's reign), organized a great campaign to quash the new Iranian power. In 233, however, Alexander was checked by Ardashir and the Romans agreed to withdraw. Ardashir's son, Shapur I (239-271) not only completed the recovery of "Mesopotamia" for the Sassanids but invaded Syria. In 256 Shapur captured and destroyed the city of Dura-Europos, on the middle Euphrates, and went on to sack the cities of Syria, including Antioch. The Roman emperor Valerian marched against Shapur but in 260 was defeated near Edessa, in eastern Syria. Valerian himself was captured and lived out his remaining years in Persia, the first Roman emperor to be taken as a prisoner-of-war. A relief carved into the rock in the Sassanid homeland of Fars still survives, celebrating Shapur's triumph and Valerian's humiliation.

The "barracks emperors" and the erosion of discipline in the Roman army

One of the reasons that Alexander Severus and Julia Mamaea decided to withdraw from the Jezirah in 233 was that a Germanic war-band known as the Alamanni had begun making raids across the upper Rhine. The Alamanni were emboldened to do so because they knew that Rome's Rhine defenses had been depleted for the Mesopotamian campaign. When the Roman legionaries learned that back home their families were in danger from the Alamanni, they demanded that the emperor leave Mesopotamia to the Sassanids and attend to the Rhine frontier. By the 230s the Roman army was increasingly imposing its will on the emperor rather than the other way round. The pay increases granted by Commodus, Septimius Severus and Caracalla had persuaded the legions that by threatening to mutiny they could extract what they wished from their commander. When Alexander Severus and Julia Mamaea, on the upper Rhine river in 235, decided to negotiate with the Alamanni rather than cross the river and do battle with them, the Roman troops rose up against the imperial family and killed both Alexander and Julia. The troops acclaimed as emperor their own leader, Maximinus the Thracian.

The murder of the Severi and accession of Maximinus Thrax opened the door to fifty years of "barracks emperors," army generals who usurped the supreme power each for a short time before being defeated and killed by the next usurper. Between 235 and 284 a dozen emperors were ratified by the senate in Rome, and another twenty or thirty pretenders were recognized in one sector or another of the huge empire. The political chaos was paralleled by economic collapse, as the emperors and pretenders promised higher wages to the troops in order to secure at least their temporary allegiance. The silver denarius was progressively devalued until by the 280s it was essentially a bronze coin. Even so, the taxes that the military emperors collected in order to pay their troops crushed the landholders who had been the backbone of the empire's governing class.

The Germanic and Arabic raiders

The Sassanids in the east and the Germanic barbarians in the north capitalized on the empire's weaknesses. We have seen the success of the Sassanids in Syria, but the Sassanids were at least a civilized enemy, seeking to enlarge their own empire. In the north, the Germanic barbarians were not yet sophisticated enough to have formal states, but instead were organized in chiefdoms or led by warlords. When they invaded the empire these barbarians were simply intent on plunder, rape, and slaughter. The Alamanni crossed the upper Rhine to ravage southern Gaul and northern Italy. Two hundred miles downstream, another coalition of warriors known as "Franks" poured across the lower Rhine to strike the cities of northern Gaul and for a short time they even terrorized Spain. From the Low Countries, sea-going raiders known as Saxons began to prowl the seas and to raid the coasts of Roman Britain.

Even more terrible than the Germanic raiders who crossed the Rhine were those who crossed the Danube. These were the Goths, whose first objectives were the cities of the Balkan provinces. When the emperor Decius (249-251) attempted to stop them at Abrittus in the swamps of the Dobrudja, just south of the Danube's delta, his army was destroyed and he was killed, the first Roman emperor to die at the hands of foreign invaders. With the Romans' Danubian army reduced to a fraction of what it was, the Goths had no reason to limit their marauds to the Balkans. By the 260s their targets were the cities of Greece and western Anatolia. Most of the empire's cities had been safe for so many centuries that their inhabitants had assumed that they would never be threatened by an external force, and in many cities the fortifications were either dilapidated or non-existent. Athens, Corinth, Pergamum, Smyrna, Ephesus and many other and famous Greek cities fell victim to barbarian raids. At Ephesus the splendid temple of Artemis, which had been the city's pride since it was rebuilt in the 350s BC, was in 260 CE plundered and burned by the Gothic raiders. Although the raiders' main objective was plunder, where they found inhabitants they routinely raped and killed. When notified in time that raiders were on the way, the urban residents fled, taking with them what they could carry into the remote countryside. But in other cities the inhabitants were taken by surprise, and suffered the consequences.

For the cities of the Levant and the Jezirah the danger came from Arabic-speaking raiders, who on horseback swept out of the Arabian desert unannounced and unforeseen. Their goal too was plunder. What protection the northern Levant and the Jezirah had, either from the Arabic raiders or the Sassanid armies, was furnished by the monarchy at Palmyra. The Palmyrene king, Odenathus, assembled a formidable cavalry and with it was able to maintain a zone of stability in the Jezirah. Odenathus was succeeded by his widow, Zenobia, who continued to provide some degree of law and order on Rome's eastern frontier.

In addition to the internal anarchy and the invasions by Shapur's armies and the Germanic and Arabic raiders, the empire was wracked by a plague in the 250s and 260s. This plague seems to have been just as devastating as its predecessor during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. How many people in the empire died of the third-century plague is very uncertain, but all estimates are in the millions. Such was the agony of the Roman empire in the years from 235 to 284.

The shrinking of Hellenism

In the fifty years of incessant war, political turmoil, and disease the cities suffered severely, stripped of much of their wealth by enemy raiders and by the many Roman armies that competed against each other. The wealthy classes, who had prospered in the Pax Romana, saw their numbers and their influence plummet in the third century. The new emperors - with the exception of Valerian and his son Gallienus - had risen from the ranks of the army. Far from being men of Culture, most of them had difficulty reading and writing. They had been taught neither Ciceronian Latin nor Attic Greek and their sympathies were more with the frontier provinces than with the old centers of civilization. In municipal government, the role of the old gymnasial class was, like the class itself, sharply diminished, imperial agents now making all important decisions. The barracks emperors looked upon the cities primarily as sources of the revenue needed to pay the army.

In Old Greece much of the ancient civilization disappeared in the Roman empire's third-century crisis. It was a luxury that could no longer be afforded. The 260s were especially terrifying for Greece and western Anatolia, with Gothic and Herulian raiders sacking many of the old centers. At Athens the annual archonship, established in 683 BC, lapsed in 261 CE (it was revived sporadically thereafter, but the names of only three men who held the office after 261 are known). An inscription listing a catalogue of Athenian ephebes may date to 267/8, but after the Herulian raid of 268 there were too few wealthy Athenians to sustain the institution (the last known ephebic contest at Athens occurred in 323). At Olympia, the list of *theokoloi* for Zeus ends in 265. Throughout Old Greece there must have been dozens of cult sites at which rituals, already pro forma during the Pax Romana, were simply dropped in the third quarter of the third century.

The persecutions of the Christians under Decius and Valerius, 249-260

Buffeted by so many disasters, it is not surprising that two Roman emperors were finally persuaded that the root of their problems was Christianity. This analysis may have begun to seem compelling in 248, when Rome celebrated its 1000th birthday. As the Romans looked back on the long history of their city, their present woes were all the more galling, and one clear difference between the glorious triumphs of yesteryear and the present disasters was that in the old days all citizens worshiped the gods. In the middle of the third century, on the contrary, perhaps about five per cent of the empire's population were "atheist" Christians. The architect of the empire-wide persecutions of the Christians was Valerian. A member of an old and aristocratic Roman family, Valerian held a series of important imperial positions in the 240s and became convinced that the Christians were responsible for most of the empire's troubles. When Decius became emperor in 249, thanks to a coup d'état, he decided that while he attended to the Gothic menace in the Balkans he would make Valerian his chief administrator for Italy and the more peaceful provinces. In that capacity Valerian persuaded Decius to launch, in December of 249, an empire-wide persecution of the Christians, in an attempt to eradicate the "atheistic" religion altogether. The guilty would not be exhibited in amphitheaters, as had been the counter-productive practice in the local persecutions of the second and early third centuries, but would instead be either executed by the authorities away from the public eye or sent to work in mines and quarries.

Every provincial governor was accordingly instructed to send officials to all the cities under his control, and see to it that all citizens attended a sacrifice to the traditional gods, pour a libation, and taste of the sacrificial victims. After participation in a sacrifice, the citizen received a certificate (*libellus*) stating the place and date of the sacrifice, and the name of the presiding officer. Some of these *libelli* have turned up on papyrus in Egypt. Judaeans were exempt from the order. Who were formally Judaeans was quite clear, because they were registered on synagogue rolls and paid the “Judaean tax,” but the Gentiles who were “God-fearers” at the synagogues were more difficult to identify. Decius’ persecution did not work as cleanly as intended, in part because proxy sacrifices were sometimes permitted, and in some provinces bogus *libelli* were available from the black market. Although a Christian who made sacrifice committed a grievous sin, most priests and bishops did not forbid their parishioners to obtain spurious *libelli* if the opportunity arose. Nevertheless, the persecution of 249-51 seems to have claimed the lives of several thousand Christians. Bishop Fabian of Rome was dead by January 20 of 250, and the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem soon thereafter. A letter written to a colleague of Cyprian, who as bishop of Carthage had gone into hiding, stated that seventeen Carthaginian Christians had already died of hunger, thirst and heat in the prison in which the letter-writer was held.¹

Decius’ persecution came to a dramatic end when he was killed by the Goths in the Romanian Dobrudja. In June of 251 the new emperor, Gallus, ordered an end to his predecessor’s program, evidently concluding that the attempt to mollify the old gods had been foolish or impractical. With his patron’s death Valerian was temporarily out of power, but when Gallus died in 253 Valerian was himself declared emperor. He did not immediately re-start the empire-wide persecution, and for four years merely allowed local officials to conduct persecutions if they chose to do so. In the summer of 257, however, Valerian and his son and co-emperor Gallienus sent letters to officials throughout the empire, instructing them to proceed with a new kind of persecution. This one did not target the rank-and-file Christians but was instead restricted to the leaders of the church and to church property. All buildings belonging to Christians were confiscated by the state, and meetings of Christians or gatherings in their cemeteries were prohibited. All upper-class Christians, including the lone Christian senator, were to be demoted to the rank of *humiliores*. Bishops, priests and lectors were to be arrested and sent into exile. In summer of 258 Valerian raised the sentence on bishops and presbyters to execution. It was in this phase of the persecution that Cyprian was martyred. With a large crowd of Christians looking on and praying, he was beheaded at the governor’s estate at Carthage on September 14 of 258.

Like Decius, Valerian came to a bad end, captured by Shapur in the deserts of eastern Syria during the summer of 260. When word reached Gallienus that his father had been defeated and was a prisoner of the Sassanids, Gallienus and his advisors concluded that the persecution of Christians had accomplished nothing. Gallienus (260-68) sent letters to the churches of the major cities, announcing that in his accustomed generosity he was restoring to the Christians their places of worship and their cemeteries, and was permitting them to worship without interference.² Gallienus’ letter signaled a de facto (although not a de jure) end to the *institutum Neronianum*. Although the Christians had enjoyed long periods in which Nero’s

edict had not been enforced, in 260 for the first time an emperor formally declared that it was not to be enforced, either at the imperial or the local level. The empire-wide persecutions not only had been unsuccessful in rooting out Christianity, but came to an end with a marked improvement in the Christians' status. When the Roman empire's fifty years of disaster (235-284) ended, Hellenism was much weaker than it had been, and Christianity much stronger.

Coptic and Syriac Bibles

In the late third century, the Christianization of the Egyptian countryside began in earnest. Until then, Christianity in Egypt had been mostly confined to Alexandria and the other Greek-speaking cities. The conversion of rural Egyptians was quickened by the translation of the Christians' Bible into the several dialects of the Egyptian language. We are not dealing here with the Egyptian peasants' *reading* of the Bible, because in the ancient world only a very small percentage of the population, whether in Egypt or elsewhere, was sufficiently literate to read a book. What was at issue was the Egyptian peasants' ability to *understand* as they listened to a lector reading the Bible. Although in Egyptian cities the language heard on the streets tended to be Greek, in the countryside the villagers spoke Egyptian, or "Coptic" as the language was then called, and many of them knew little or no Greek. Various books of the Bible were translated both into Bohairic, which was the Egyptian (Coptic) dialect of Lower Egypt, and into Sahidic, the Coptic dialect spoken in the Nile valley south of the Delta.

In the time of the pharaohs the ancient Egyptian scripts - demotic, hieratic, and especially hieroglyphic - were all quite complicated, but under Roman rule some bilingual Egyptians experimented with writing the Egyptian language in the letters of the Greek alphabet (plus a few improvised letters for sounds that were essential in Egyptian but not used in Greek speech). Very few of these early "Coptic" texts survive on papyrus, and the serious use of the Coptic script began with the translation of the Bible into Coptic. Casual translations of some Biblical texts may have been made in the second century, but more comprehensive translations were probably not attempted until late in the third century. By late in the fourth century, as the Nag Hammadi "library" shows, many Gnostic texts had also been translated into Coptic. The mass conversion of Egyptian speakers to one or another branch of Christianity occurred in the fourth century.

Syriac-speaking Christians translated their scriptures into their native tongue, the Aramaic dialect of eastern Syria and Mesopotamia. Their translation of the Old Testament (including most of the apocryphal books) was made from the Hebrew, possibly already in the second century. For a Syriac New Testament they for a time depended upon Tatian's *Diatessaron*, his conflation of the four canonical Gospels into one. In the second half of the third century, however, "Old Syriac" versions of each of the four Gospels were produced. In Syriac churches the letters of Paul perhaps were read in Greek and were followed by Syriac translations or summaries. If that is so, until late in the third century the church throughout Syria would have been partially dependent upon the Greek language. In Mesopotamia, where few people could understand Greek, Christianity had made little headway. The Old Syriac translations of the entire Bible were therefore important for the spread of Christianity in eastern Syria and Mesopotamia. Syriac was also understandable to most villagers of western Syria and Palestine,

even though they spoke the western dialect of Aramaic.

Latin Christianity and the bishops of Rome

As was pointed out toward the end of Chapter 13, the Gnostic and Montanist movements in the second century tended to focus attention on the bishop of Rome. Opponents of these movements strengthened their case by pointing out that the bishop of Rome was also opposed to “the heretics,” the assumption being that the bishop of Rome faithfully preserved the gospel as preached by the two greatest apostles: Paul and Peter. This appeal to the doctrinal fidelity of the bishops of Rome did not immediately lead to any extraordinary power for those bishops, but it did show that the church at Rome was one of the acknowledged centers of the *ekklesia katholikē*. It also made it incumbent upon the bishops of Rome to adhere carefully to tradition and to the beliefs of their predecessors: in an out-of-the-way city a bishop might espouse a novel or eccentric doctrine, but such originality in the bishop of Rome would have caused a great upheaval.

The same was of course true for the bishops of Alexandria, Ephesos, Antioch and other cities where the local church was supposed to have been founded by one of the apostles or evangelists. But none of these cities enjoyed the prestige among Greek-speaking Christians that Rome had among Latin Christians. While many great cities stood in the Greek East, no city in the Latin West could compare with Rome. For a long time the Christians of Rome were Greek-speaking immigrants, and through most of the second century their bishops too had Greek names and spoke Greek as their native language. One of them - Telesphoros - may have been martyred ca. 138, but the bishops of Rome were generally undisturbed by the emperors and by the prefects of the city. After Telesphoros, the next bishop of Rome who was certainly martyred was Fabian, at the beginning of the Decian persecution.³

The translation of Christianity from Greek to Latin was an important factor in the elevation of the bishop of Rome throughout Italy and all of the western, Latin-speaking provinces. So long as the church at Rome and its bishop were Greek-speaking, they stood in the same company with the large churches in the eastern provinces: Smyrna, Ephesos, Antioch and especially Alexandria. Although the bishop of Rome was regarded by many as *primus inter pares*, he was certainly in no position to give orders to the bishops of the great Greek cities. Once the Roman church replaced Greek with Latin as its liturgical language, it stood alone at the top of Latin Christianity: Lugdunum and Carthage were major cities, but Rome was many times larger, and politically and socially was in a class by itself.

By the late second century, all of the New and much of the Old Testament had been translated into Latin many times and in many communities. A translation was a *versio*, and these Latin “versions” were often crude and incorrect. Often a single book of the New Testament, or even a single chapter of a book, would be translated from Greek to Latin for use in the local church. Dozens of Latin versions of the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament are collectively known as the *vetus Latina versio*. At least one of these “old Latin” translations gained some currency in North Africa and was used by Tertullian and Cyprian. Another much used translation into Latin, the *Itala*, was probably done in Rome. In the late

fourth and early fifth centuries Jerome completed his excellent translation of the entire Bible into Latin, and the popes saw to it that Jerome's translation was *published*. Thus Jerome's became the *versio vulgata*, and eventually this "Vulgate" replaced the various older and anonymous translations, although here and there some were still in use as late as the seventh century.

Victor I (189-99) was the first bishop of Rome whose native language was Latin. A native of North Africa, Victor was much less comfortable with Greek than with his native Latin, and he therefore celebrated the eucharist and conducted the Sunday morning liturgy in Latin. Bishop Victor may also have been the first to recognize the vast potential of his position. Certainly he was the first to try - unsuccessfully, as it turned out - to exercise authority throughout the *ekklesia katholicē*. This happened in the "Easter controversy," which had been running for a hundred years but which was brought to a head by Victor. From earliest times many New Covenant Christians, especially in Anatolia, had celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus on the day of the Jewish Passover, the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month Nisan.⁴ They may have done so in order to have a joyful Christian alternative to Passover, the greatest of the Jewish holy days. But their tradition meant, of course, that in most years the Anatolian Christians did not celebrate Easter on a Sunday. Outside of Anatolia, most Christians celebrated Easter on Sunday - the first Sunday after the fourteenth of Nisan - and this was the tradition followed by Latin Christians. From Rome Victor denounced the "Quartodecimans" (the "fourteeners") and pronounced them excommunicated from the *ekklesia katholicē*. His ban was criticized by Irenaeus and other bishops in the west and was generally ignored in the Greek-speaking world.

The Roman church's appropriation of Peter

In the third century the bishops and church in Rome deemphasized Paul as a founder of their church and claimed that the Apostle Peter had been the city's first bishop. This was not an antiquarian quibble but a claim to supremacy, for it was made in light of Jesus' appointment of Peter at Matthew 16:18: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my *ekklesia*, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."⁵ If, when giving "the keys of the kingdom" to Peter, Jesus was looking forward to Peter's becoming the bishop of Rome, then Peter's successors in that position might also claim to have supreme authority over the *ekklesia*.

The original story of the appointment had nothing to do with the *ekklesia* in Rome nor even with the *ekklesia katholicē*. Instead it pertained to the only *ekklesia* known to the author of the Gospel of Matthew, and to the brethren for whom he wrote. This was the *ekklesia* in Jerusalem, where Peter did in fact hold a position of leadership for several decades. The remarkable growth of the Jerusalem *ekklesia* in the 30s and 40s depended in large part on Peter's leadership and on his firm testimony that he had seen the Risen Christ (in some quarters Peter was regarded as the first person who saw Jesus after the Resurrection). The appointment story may have first appeared in a Gospel that circulated in Jerusalem during the middle decades of the first century, when Peter's stock was highest. In 66, however, the Jewish revolt began, in expectation that the Messiah was about to reappear, and during the revolt Peter was carried to Rome and crucified. The Jerusalem *ekklesia* came close to extinction in August of 70, as Titus' forces sacked and burned most of the city. When Mark wrote his Gospel, soon after that disaster, Peter's stock had fallen precipitously (Mark said nothing about Jesus' appointment of

Peter as head of the Jerusalem *ekklesia*, and Peter's last appearance in the Gospel is as the denier of the Christ). Writing in the 80s, the author of Matthew repeated the appointment story from the pre-revolt Gospel but immediately neutralized it by adding Jesus' castigation of Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt 16:23 AV). The Gospel's author seems to have regarded Peter as partially responsible for the perverse tendencies and the near-extinction of the Jerusalem *ekklesia*.⁶

In contrast to the disgraced Jerusalem *ekklesia*, at the end of the first century the mostly Gentile *ekklesia katholicē* was just beginning to prosper. As the latter grew, Peter came to be understood not as a flawed leader of the Jerusalem *ekklesia* but as the rock on which the *ekklesia katholicē* was built. By the middle of the second century Peter had been rehabilitated, and the appointment story in Matt 16:17-19 far overshadowed the castigation story that followed it. Stretching the words of Paul at Galatians 2:11, the Christians of Antioch claimed (and still do) that Peter had founded the church in their city and had served as its first bishop.

All through the second century the Christians of Rome had claimed a special connection to Peter, and with some justification, since he had been executed and buried there. To make Peter a resident of the city and its first monarchical bishop was therefore not especially difficult. The earliest evidence we have for the identification of Peter as Rome's first bishop comes from letters written in 252 by Cyprian.⁷ In the fully developed legend Peter, in order to found the *ekklesia katholicē*, comes to Rome not long after Jesus' ascension into Heaven and remains there as bishop for a full generation (later chronographers dated his Roman bishopric to the years 32-67). Thus did it appear to Latin-speaking Christians in Late Antiquity that in the appointment story Jesus is looking forward to an *ekklesia* built on a "rock" that would be located not in Jerusalem but in Rome.

Unity of the catholic church

The persecutions of Decius and Valerian encouraged, in a paradoxical way, the cohesion of the catholic church (that is, the "universal church," and not yet the church governed by the bishop of Rome). The process had begun already in the late second century, apparently as a reaction to the Montanist controversy. In the face of continuing "revelations" by prophets and prophetesses, at some time before 200 CE bishops had organized regional meetings or *synods* in order to separate what they regarded as sacred texts from what they regarded as spurious. The Biblical canon was a result of a majority vote at a meeting of bishops in Anatolia, and the Anatolian bishops took the additional step of excommunicating those "Montanists" who persisted in their claims that the Holy Spirit was still active.

Initially, the persecutions by Decius and Valerian split the church, because Christians could not agree among themselves what to do and how to act in the face of an empire-wide persecution. In the second century, when persecutions were rare, the main problem was the Christian who was eager for the martyr's crown, and in order to obtain it sought to be arrested, tried and martyred by the local authorities. After too many Christians had "volunteered" for martyrdom the bishops agreed that such zeal was contrary to God's will: only the Christian who

had *not* volunteered would receive the martyr's crown in Heaven. In the systematic persecution under Decius the problem was reversed. Very few Christians voluntarily turned themselves in. Many more lapsed and made the required sacrifice to the traditional gods. Most Christians, however, went to great lengths to avoid either sacrificing or execution. Purchasing a bogus *libellus* was one solution, being included as a false proxy on a non-Christian's *libellus* was another, and flight (or going underground) was a third. After Decius was defeated and killed by the Goths in 251, and after the persecution had been halted by Gallus, most Christians took a forgiving view of what their fellow-believers had done or had not done in the recent danger. A minority of "rigorists," however, insisted that only those Christians who had resolutely faced the danger and survived were entitled to judge their fellows.

The disagreement came to a head in Rome late in 251 (the bishopric there had been vacant since January of 250, but the death of Decius opened the way for a new election). When sixteen surviving bishops of central Italy met to consecrate a successor to Fabian, the martyred bishop of Rome, the man they consecrated was Cornelius, perhaps one of the many presbyters in Rome. Cornelius' conduct in the recent persecution, however, had been unheroic and his attitude to the lapsed was lenient. As a result, three rigorist bishops consecrated the presbyter Novatian as bishop of Rome. Although most bishops admired the fortitude of Novatian and his backers against the persecutors, they denounced their actions in 251 as "schismatic": the rigorists were splitting what was ideally a single, catholic (that is to say, ecumenical) church. The majority of bishops *was* the catholic church. The majority stigmatized the rigorists as "Novatianists" and excommunicated them from the catholic church. It was in this rancorous controversy that Cyprian of Carthage wrote *On the Unity of the Church*, a short treatise that was to become a classic in the Middle Ages. Bypassing the question of laxity or rigor in the face of persecution, Cyprian focuses here entirely on the catholic church.⁸ As characterized by Cyprian, the unity of that church is itself a sacrament, established by the Christ. Those who split the church are therefore doing the work of Satan. Cyprian elsewhere warned "the Novatianists" that there was no salvation outside the catholic church: although they considered themselves Christians and bound for Heaven, and despite their courage in the Decian persecution, because they were now outside the catholic church the "Novatianists" would join their persecutors in Hell. The "Novatianists" maintained their own communion as a Christian minority until the seventh century, but the slightly diminished catholic mainstream emerged from the Decian persecution with increased determination to maintain its unity.

The controversy left us with a valuable document, a letter sent by Cornelius to the bishop of Antioch, asking for his support. Eusebius quotes the letter, in which Cornelius claims that the Christians at Rome included forty-six presbyters, fifty-two exorcists, lecturers and doorkeepers, and "more than fifteen hundred widows and people who were destitute."⁹ Based on this information, estimates of the number of Christians in Rome in the middle of the third century have ranged as high as fifty thousand.

Zoroastrianism

Christianity was not the only religion that grew vigorously in the third century, as Hellenism declined. The Sassanid takeover of Iran was followed shortly by the coalescence of

what Westerners call Zoroastrianism, and by the rise of Manichaeism. Zoroastrianism, more accurately called “Mazdaism,” was for long tied closely to Iran, while Manichaeism spread widely, eventually finding adherents in almost all parts of civilized Eurasia and North Africa. Both religions were historically significant until the eighth century. Today, Manichaeism has disappeared and Zoroastrianism is the religion of only a few hundred thousand people, many of them living in western India.

“Zoroaster” is a Greek name, a deformation of the Iranian *Zarathustra*. As I have argued in Chapter Two, Zarathustra probably lived and composed his Gathas early in the first millennium BC. These seventeen poems, in the language that linguists call “Older Avestan,” proclaimed the sovereignty of the god Ahura Mazda, denounced animal sacrifices (and demoted to the rank of demons those deities that required sacrifice), and promised that followers of the Truth would enjoy Paradise in the Afterlife, while followers of the Lie would pay the penalty. Kings Darius and Xerxes were devout followers of Zarathustra’s message, but under the later Achaemenid kings of Persia and under the Arsacids of Parthia the cult of Ahura Mazda declined in importance. The god Mithra became almost as popular in Iran as Ahura Mazda. The goddess Anahita was worshiped in temples, in which cult statues of her were erected. In the family of Sassan certain priestly duties for Anahita’s cult were hereditary.

The myth of Zoroaster was elaborated in Greek-speaking lands. Beginning in the fourth century BC a few Greek writers began celebrating Zoroaster, and subsequent writers attributed to him all sorts of things, from magic and astrology to doctrines about the soul and the Afterlife. Zoroaster became, for many Hellenes, the eastern sage *par excellence*. Because they so distrusted their own religious tradition, the Hellenes tended to look for truth in alien wisdom that was mostly their own invention.¹⁰ Plutarch, writing in the early second century CE, noted the report that Zoroaster had established his dualistic religion, and solved the problem of the existence of evil, five thousand years before the Trojan War.¹¹

When Ardashir established his Sassanid regime in the 220s CE, he promoted the cult of Ahura Mazda, whom he believed to have helped Cyrus and Darius more than seven hundred years before. An important part of Ardashir’s “revival” was the promotion of Zarathustra’s Gathas and of the ancient chants and spells that the magi recited. The Gathas were sung by Mazdian priests in the Older Avestan and the chants and spells of the magi were sung in the Younger Avestan language. None of this had yet been written down, and neither of the Avestan languages could be understood by the average Iranian in the third century. But from one generation to the next the priests and magi had memorized and thus preserved the sacred texts, many of them for well over a millennium. The Avestan texts were not committed to writing until the fifth or sixth century, but long before that they had become widely enough known in Iran that commentaries were needed to explain their meaning. Compositions of commentaries in Pahlavi (“Middle Persian,” the language of Sassanid Persia) began in the fourth century, and culminated in the *Denkart* of the ninth century. Like the rabbis in the Tannaitic academies, or New Covenant Christian scholars poring over their Old Testament, Zoroastrian scholars were adept at allegorical interpretations of their sacred texts. They were thus successful in finding profound wisdom and theology in even the most primitive of the Avestan texts.

That either Ardashir or Shapur intended the revived cult of Ahura Mazda to be a “world religion” is doubtful. Like many other people in the third century, they were monotheists and probably thought of Ahura Mazda as a more accurate version of the God that Judaeans and Christians worshiped. Although they knew that these non-Iranians had strange ideas about God, they did not make it their business to correct the foreigners’ errors. The Sassanids’ more limited ambition was to instruct all Iranians to worship Ahura Mazda in the same way that Darius had worshiped him, and to abandon their idols. The project seemed important enough to Shapur I that he appointed a Persian named Kartir, or Kirdir, as a *mobadh*, or “chief of worship” for the realm. Kartir outlived Shapur and reached his pinnacle of authority in the reign of Vahram II (276-93). Kartir was largely responsible for shaping Iranian Zoroastrianism. In so doing he borrowed some of what the Hellenes had invented about “Zoroaster” but did not celebrate his person. For Kartir and the Sassanid kings the religion of their land was not “Zoroastrianism” but “Mazdaism.”¹²

Sassanid Mazdaism was essentially monotheistic, the One True God being Ahura Mazda (like Satan in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Ahriman in Zoroastrianism functioned primarily as an anti-God, who would be conveniently vanquished at the End of Time). In rooting out polytheism, Kartir got rid of whatever idols were still worshiped in Iran. In place of the idols and their sacrificial altars he constructed “fire temples” and “fire altars,” on which fires were kept perpetually burning. Fire itself (the god Agni in the Hindu religion) had always been deified in the Indo-Aryan tradition, and Iranians who approached a fire altar were therefore seeing as much of divinity as humans were allowed to see. During Shapur’s reign Kartir was necessarily somewhat tolerant on religious matters, focusing his wrath on idol-worshippers and leaving the scriptural religions alone. Under Vahram I and Vahram II, however, he persecuted whatever scripturalists were to be found in Iran: Judaeans, Christians, Manichaeans, Buddhists, Hindus, and Baptizers. In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, neither Judaeans nor Christians seem to have been much harassed in the Sassanid period. The only known persecutions of Judaeans in Sassanid Mesopotamia occurred in the fifth century, under Yazdagird II (439-57) and Firuz (459-84).

Manichaeism

The prophet called Mani lived from 216 to 277. Greek sources say that his name was Kurkibios, and that he took the name “Mani” because it meant “vessel” and he considered himself the “vessel” of God. He was born near Ctesiphon and perhaps grew up speaking both Syriac and Pahlavi. His father was a deeply religious man who had evidently been converted to the dualistic Mandaean sect of southern Mesopotamia, and we may assume that Mani himself was a Mandaean in his youth. By his own account, as a young man he was called in a dream, on April 19 of 240, to be the Apostle of Light in a world that needed illumination. We must consider him too a worshiper of God. His notion of God may have owed as much to the Iranians’ Ahura Mazda as to the Judaeans’ Adonai or the Christians’ God the Father, and Mani supposed that these were merely different names for the same deity. He regarded himself as “the seal of the prophets,” a title that would eventually be given to Muhammad, and saw himself as the last of a prophetic line that included not only Zarathustra but also Moses and Jesus (he described himself as an apostle of Jesus the Christ).

Unlike many other prophets, Mani wrote his own sacred texts. Very few of these survive, because the defenders of the established religions - especially Christianity, Islam and Mazdaism - were zealous in ferreting out the texts and destroying them. It is known that most of Mani's treatises were written in Syriac, and apparently only one in Pahlavi. His religion, which detractors called "Manichaeism," was thoroughly dualistic: light versus darkness, spirit versus matter, and good versus evil. Perhaps it could be included under the general rubric of Gnosticism, but Mani himself occupied so important a position in it that it is best regarded as a separate religion. As Mani's revelations taught, before the creation of the world God and Satan (or the Prince of Darkness) were already locked in combat, and the world and specifically humankind is where their war is fought out: our physical reality is Satan's realm, and our spiritual reality is God's. Mani's followers were assured that their spirits would spend the Afterlife in bliss. Although Manichaeism has parallels in Mazdaism, the two religions were quite different. Mani seems to have been largely indifferent to - and perhaps could not understand - the oral tradition that Iranian priests and magi kept alive in the Older Avestan and Younger Avestan languages, and that would eventually be written down and published as the Avesta. Zoroastrians reciprocated by condemning all of Mani's writings, which his followers venerated. Mani stressed asceticism, and Mazdaism did not. Devout Manichaeans were celibate and preferably virgins, owned no property, ate no meat and drank no wine. Eschewing all physical pleasures, they devoted their lives to prayer, to study of Mani's writings, and to meditation. This asceticism was based on Mani's dualist conviction that we are composites of the good (spiritual) and the bad (physical), and that it is our duty to minimize the physical and maximize the spiritual. Only a few followers were able to live so abstemiously, and Mani therefore differentiated "the elect" from "the hearers." The latter group was relatively large, and provided for the upkeep of the elect. The "hearers" were required only to abstain from meat, and to fast for short periods.

Because Mani's God was not explicitly Ahura Mazda, and because Mani had little use for the traditions of the Iranian magi, Kartir was the first persecutor of Manichaeism. While still a young man, Mani had an audience with Shapur I, and evidently made a sufficiently good impression on the king that throughout Shapur's reign Manichaeism was tolerated in the Sassanid empire. At Shapur's death this changed, and in 277 Kartir persuaded Vahram II to execute Mani. The prophet is said to have been crucified and then beheaded, as a precaution against his resurrection. Contrary to Kartir's expectations, however, Manichaeism became even more attractive after Mani's death than before. In 297 the Roman emperor Diocletian banned the new religion, but the ban was enforced no more regularly than had been Nero's edict against the Christians. For all of the fourth century Manichaeism remained a potent religion in the empire. Augustine was one of its adherents before he became a Christian. In the east, Manichaeism eventually reached China, where it was banned in 732. The most informative Manichaean materials thus far discovered are the Pahlavi texts found early in the twentieth century at the oasis city of Turfan, in the Xinjiang province of northwest China.

Hermes Trismegistos

As the Roman world teetered on the brink in the third century, its inhabitants were

increasingly attracted to what were regarded as revealed truths about a metaphysical world. Among educated Greek-speakers one of the most respected sources of revelation was the Egyptian god Thoth, or Tahuti. Since at least 3000 BC Thoth had been worshiped in Egypt as a god of wisdom and of writing. As Hellenes came to know him, they equated him with their god Hermes, and Thoth's city - on the left bank of the Nile some hundred miles upstream from Memphis - was in Ptolemaic times renamed Hermoupolis. The name Thoth was explained as meaning, in Egyptian, "thrice great," and for Hellenes the god thus became "Thrice-great Hermes" or *Hermes Trismegistos*.

By the end of the third century a number of texts were circulating that were written in Greek but that claimed to be translations of Egyptian texts that had been composed in deepest antiquity by Hermes Trismegistos himself. In these works Hermes is a conduit for Truth, the Truth having been revealed to him by "Poimandres, the mind (*nous*) of the ultimate (*authenticia*)."

The Truth that was revealed was of course dualist: The One God, or the Father, is Light, and *logos* is his son. Humankind is spirit wrapped in a physical shell, and the goal of the individual must be to regain complete spirituality. For the enlightened, this process is completed at death, when our spirits are progressively purified as they rise through the seven zones of Heaven. The doctrines bear some similarity to those of Gnostic Christians, and it is likely that these "pagan" texts were copied and preserved through the Middle Ages because they seemed to confirm - on the basis of the most ancient Egyptian sources - what was believed by Christian mystics in the Byzantine empire.

The various texts that purport to have been written by Thrice-great Hermes are conventionally called the Hermetica, or the Hermetic Corpus. The corpus that survives includes one text in Latin and eighteen in Greek. Most important of the Greek texts, and far the longest, is the *Poimandres*, sometimes Latinized as the *Pimander*. Not part of the Hermetic Corpus but related to it is *On the Mysteries of Egypt*, written by Iamblichos ca. 325. Some of the Hermetic treatises may have been composed as late as the fifth century. The Hermetica do not reflect a religion: people who took Hermes' revelation seriously were not organized in communities, had no tradition of worship, and perhaps did not even share a name. They were nevertheless believers, taking as truth the various texts that Thrice-great Hermes was supposed to have written.

All of the Hermetica were completely forgotten in the Latin West, but a few manuscripts remained available in the Byzantine empire. In the fifteenth century they were brought from Constantinople to Italy and created a sensation among Italian humanists, who supposed that both Christianity and Platonic philosophy were indebted to this "most ancient" Egyptian wisdom. In 1471, soon after the printing of the Gutenberg Bible and before the printing of Plato's works, Masilio Ficino's translation of the Hermetic corpus was printed and published. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600 for having espoused too openly what the humanists referred to as "the ancient theology," and which they found more believable than Christianity.

Like the humanists in Renaissance Europe, Christians in Late Antiquity believed that the Hermetic treatises were translations of Egyptian texts that had been composed long before Homer. Unlike the Renaissance scholars, however, the Late Antique Christians insisted that the

Hermetic texts did not pre-date Moses: it was from Moses that the Egyptians learned to know God and his son, the *logos*, Jesus the Christ. So Augustine declared that the Hermetic texts were written four generations after Moses wrote the Pentateuch. That the Hermetic texts were composed *in Greek* during the Roman imperial period, and were based in part on Christian doctrines, was demonstrated by Isaac Casaubon, a philologist, in 1614. In recent centuries the Hermetica have been generally ignored by humanists, Christians, classicists, historians, and Egyptologists.

Plotinus' Neoplatonism

While Hellenism declined and the search for divine truths intensified, Greek philosophy veered steadily toward theosophy. By the late third century the other schools - Epicurean, Stoic, Peripatetic, and Skeptic - attracted very little interest, and philosophy was almost synonymous with Neoplatonism. The leading Neoplatonist from the 240s until his death in 270 was Plotinus, who was perhaps a native of Egypt. As a young man Plotinus studied at Alexandria with Ammonius Saccas. Soon after Saccas' death Plotinus moved to Rome, where he stayed for the rest of his life. He was the leading philosopher of his time, and a friend of the emperor Gallienus. Although Plotinus published nothing in his lifetime, his lectures were posthumously published by Porphyry, his most distinguished student. These lectures Porphyry assembled in six *Enneads*, or groups of nine.

At the center of reality, as Plotinus saw it, was not a personal God but what Plato had called the Good and what Plotinus preferred to call an eternal and unmoving One. From The One (τὸ ἓν), reality emanated or proceeded through a series of what Plotinus called *hypostases*. The first hypostasis was that of intelligence, or *nous*. Next came "soul" or *psychē*, and finally came matter (*physis*). Unlike the dualist systems - Manichaeism and Christian Gnosticism especially - Neoplatonism did not condemn the physical world but linked it, however remotely, to the divine center of reality. As Plotinus understood it, the trouble with matter was not that it was evil, but that it contained so little of the divine One. Although we are situated very much in the hypostasis of matter, we also have within ourselves, so Plotinus taught, the higher hypostases, and through contemplation (*theoria*) we can on rare occasion achieve union with the One. As summarized by Francis Peters, "the thrust of the Plotinian spirituality is *inward* toward the progressively simpler and more authentic levels of being, back past action, sensation, discursive thought, and even intuition, to that point of unity that is the One."¹³

What was not taught by the Neoplatonists is as important as what was taught. Unlike the religions that flourished in Late Antiquity - especially the Judaeo-Christian, Gnostic, Manichaean, Mandaean and Mazdean religions - Neoplatonist philosophy had no place for Satan or a Prince of Darkness. Instead of reckoning with a principle of evil, Plotinus spoke only of separation from (or distance from) the principle of good. The further reality emanates from the One, the less it has in common with it. In the Neoplatonic system, therefore, the material world has almost no connection with the divine, but neither the world itself nor any aspect of it - property, wealth, sexuality - is inherently evil.

Neoplatonism became an important ingredient of Christianity, and also of Arabic and

Jewish philosophy. In the Renaissance it was a powerful influence in western Europe and in Britain, after humanists' rediscovery of Plotinus' *Enneads*. But a much earlier infusion of Neoplatonist thought affected Christian thinkers and writers in the third and fourth centuries. The elevation of the soul (as opposed to the resurrection of the body) in Christian belief is in large part a result of this early influence. It was also thanks to Neoplatonism that the dualistic tendency in Christianity was dampened: "the world, the flesh and the Devil" formed a familiar triad of evil for many Christians, but those Christians who were affected by Neoplatonism had less to say about the Devil and did not see the world and the flesh as necessarily evil. Also Neoplatonic is the idea - heretical, in the eyes of some Christians - that humankind is by nature drawn to divinity. In the ninth century al-Kindi and his circle, working at Baghdad, brought Neoplatonism into the Arabic language, and from Arabic it passed into the Jewish philosophical tradition.

Origen, born in Egypt, was the first and most important link between Neoplatonism and Christianity. An older contemporary of Plotinus and - like Plotinus - a student of Ammonius Saccas at Alexandria, Origen was in many respects the first Christian theologian. His formulations of Christian doctrine were highly respected for a century and a half. Because Origen was more a monotheist than a trinitarian, however, his writings came under attack in the Christological controversies of the fourth century and in 399 were condemned as heretical. But by that time many other Christian writers had drunk from the Neoplatonist well. Among them were Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea and his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, the so-called "Cappadocian Fathers" of the church. In the middle of the fourth century Marius Victorinus translated Neoplatonism into Latin, and then was converted to Christianity. His translations and conversion deeply affected Ambrose and Augustine. There is as much of Plotinus as of Paul in what is perhaps Augustine's most famous line, and the theme of his *Confessions*: "the heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."¹⁴

Plotinus' Neoplatonism obviously shared some emphases with Christianity and Judaism, and also with the Chaldaean Oracles, the Hermetica, and other "divine revelations." The crucial difference here was that the common ground that the latter asserted on the authority of revelation, Plotinus presented as a reasoned and reasonable theory of reality. But Neoplatonism also contrasted with the revealed religions in what it did and did not assert. With no divine revelations to inform him, Plotinus put no stock in eschatology: for him, predictions about the End of Time were baseless, as were descriptions of the Afterlife. The world he described, and the relationship of the *hypostases* to the One, were permanent. In this, Plotinus' system continued one of the main characteristics of Hellenism: the tendency to see the cosmos as eternal and divine.

Plotinus' relative sobriety contrasted with the credulous dogmatism of his successors in the Neoplatonic school. In the early fourth century Iamblichus brought both the Hermetica and the Chaldaean Oracles into Neoplatonism, fortifying the philosophy with divine revelation, and subsequent Neoplatonists paid more attention to this "alien wisdom" than to the *Enneads* of Plotinus. For years Iamblichus was much in demand as a speaker and traveled widely, but his base was at Apamea, whence the Chaldaean Oracles seem to have come. He described himself as "Exegete of the Beyond," *i.e.* as an expert on the metaphysical. Another Neoplatonist in Late

Antiquity who ventured far beyond Plotinus' speculation was Proclus, a prolific writer in the fifth century. Proclus claimed that he had been shown in a dream that he was a link in the "Hermetic chain," and that he had the same soul as the second-century philosopher, Nicomachus of Gerasa.¹⁵ According to his ancient biographer, Proclus "used to say that if it were in his power he would have preserved only the Chaldaean Oracles and the *Timaeus*, destroying all other books" because they were harmful.¹⁶

In contrast to Iamblichus, Proclus and even Julian the Apostate (who as a young man studied Neoplatonism at Ephesus), Plotinus remained in the Greek philosophic tradition. This has been well said by Peters:

Though he had no way of knowing it, Plotinus was himself the last major figure capable of assenting, without reservation or distinction, to the premise of Hellenic intellectualism that the good life for man can be adequately achieved by the unaided use of the human intelligence. From one side and the other the partisans of theurgy and revelation were narrowing in on what was once a powerful and attractive postulate.¹⁷

Diocletian's tetrarchy and the Roman recovery

The calamitous period from 235 to 284 was brought to an end by a series of able barracks-emperors from Pannonia (today mostly Serbia, Croatia and western Hungary). Pannonia had for long been the chief recruiting ground for Roman legionaries, and because emperors tended now to rise from the ranks it was predictable that the top of the Roman military establishment was crowded with Pannonians. It was the empire's good fortune that a group of these Pannonian generals trusted each other sufficiently to cooperate in restoring order in the provinces and on the frontiers. From 268 to 284 the emperors Claudius, Aurelian, Probus and Carus each contributed to the recovery.

Stability was finally achieved by Diocletian, favorite of the troops in 284. Soon after he was acclaimed emperor he appointed Maximian as his co-emperor, the agreement being that Diocletian would take charge of the empire's eastern provinces while Maximian governed the west. By the early 290s this division of authority was seen to have worked well enough that the two co-emperors or "Augusti" appointed as "Caesars" two more men as capable as themselves. These were Constantius Chlorus, to assist Maximian in the northwest, and Galerius to take over some of Diocletian's eastern provinces. The Roman empire was thus controlled by a tetrarchy, although Diocletian's own authority was great enough to identify him as the senior partner in the foursome.

In the chaotic years of 235-284 it had become the norm for the barracks emperors to live and die far from Rome. Emperors were necessarily with the armies that supported them, and these armies were either trying to defend the frontiers or battling against each other. The Roman senate duly conferred traditional powers on one emperor after another, but seldom dealt with the emperor in person. When Diocletian established his tetrarchy it was understood that the four rulers would stay where they were most needed, each surrounded by a mobile force of infantry and cavalry. The capitals for this tetrarchy were Milan in northern Italy, Augusta Treverorum

(Trier) to guard the lower Rhine, Sirmium on the lower Danube, and Nicomedia, just to the east of the Sea of Marmara. From time to time Antioch also served as an imperial residence.

Diocletian almost doubled the size of the army, adding both infantry and cavalry units. The latter - over a hundred *vexillationes* of cavalry, each consisting of five hundred men - were an innovation and reflected the need for a much more mobile frontier force than the Romans had traditionally deployed. In order to recruit so large an army Diocletian and the other tetrarchs supplemented their citizen troops by hiring tens of thousands of barbarians, most of them from the Germanic-speaking tribes north of the Danube and east of the Rhine. These were hardy and effective warriors, but were in effect mercenary troops. Although under the tetrarchy the foreign troops were still a relatively small minority in the Roman army, by the end of the fourth century the emperors were largely dependent upon Germanic troops and Germanic commanders.

Thanks to their formidable armies, the tetrarchs were remarkably successful in protecting the empire and in putting down pretenders to power. Maximian and Constantius defeated the Alamanni and Franks and pushed them east of the Rhine while Galerius and Diocletian kept the Goths north of the Danube. In 298 Galerius won a great night-victory over Narses, the Sassanid king, and commemorated it with a triumphal arch that still stands in Thessalonike. Galerius' army was in large part made up of Germanic barbarians.

In order to pay for the increased security Diocletian introduced a rigorous system of taxation, and an entirely new organization of provinces and dioceses (each diocese included several provinces) to administer the new tax. Diocletian also stabilized the empire's economy, introducing a new gold coin, the *solidus*, and publishing a list of maximum wages and prices. Although the monetary controls were ultimately ineffective, they did bring to a halt the runaway inflation that had ruined creditors in the preceding fifty years.

The “Great Persecution” of 303-311

Alongside Diocletian's achievements was one large mistake. For reasons that are not clear he decided to renew the empire-wide persecution of Christians that Decius and Valerian had conducted in the 250s. By the end of the third century perhaps ten per cent of the Roman empire's inhabitants were Christians. As many people belonged to the churches as belonged to the synagogues, and in their faith in God the Christians were at least as fervent as the Judaeans. The project of ridding the empire of Christianity was therefore very ambitious and, in retrospect, unrealistic. Diocletian's junior partner Galerius is usually credited with having persuaded his senior colleague that the Christians were a great danger, and it is beyond doubt that Galerius had an intense dislike for the Christians. This may have been accentuated when the king of Armenia, Trdat the Great, was in 301 converted to Christianity and ordered all of his subjects to be baptized. Another factor may have been Neoplatonist hostility to Christianity.¹⁸

Still another factor may have been Diocletian's own religious beliefs or policy. Polytheism was clearly giving way to monotheism, and for a while at least Diocletian backed away from “the gods.” During the tetrarchy the imperial cult was downgraded: Diocletian and Maximian were given the epithet “Jovian” and Constantius and Galerius the epithet “Herculean,” but none of the four called himself a god. The Olympians and their Roman counterparts

continued to be respected, but their cults were given no material support. Instead, Diocletian promoted a single god who might be acceptable to everyone and who might therefore help to unify a religiously divided population. The god of the Christians, Judaeans and Manichaeans was far too divisive and controversial for the role (Manichaeism was banned in the empire in 297), and Diocletian selected the sun, *Sol*, as a god that everyone could and should respect. To *Sol* Diocletian assigned the epithet *invictus*, “unconquered,” a favorite word in Roman tradition. *Sol Invictus* was much advertised on Diocletian’s coinage and inscriptions. It may be that Diocletian was offended by the Christians’ outspoken refusal to join the rest of the population in acknowledging *Sol Invictus* (the Judaeans would have been excused because of their long tradition and because they were not such aggressive proselytizers as were the Christians).

Whatever the causes, the “Great Persecution” of the Christians in the Roman empire commenced at Nikomedia in February of 303, with Diocletian and Galerius ordering the destruction of all churches, the banning of Christian assemblies, and the collection and burning of the Christians’ sacred books. A second edict, issued in summer of 303, ordered the imprisonment (although not yet the execution) of the Christian clergy. Finally, in 304 Galerius and Diocletian, the latter in failing health, ordered that all citizens - with the exception of Judaeans - sacrifice to the traditional gods or face the death penalty. None of the three edicts was rigorously enforced in the western provinces: Maximian and Constantius were in charge of the west, and neither had strong feelings against the Christians (Constantius had during his youth been married to a Christian - Helena - and had a Christian daughter). But in the east the edicts represented the empire’s most sustained effort to eradicate Christianity.

In 305 Diocletian, now in poor health, retired and prevailed upon Maximian to do the same. Galerius and Constantius were promoted to the rank of *Augustus*, and two new *Caesares* were appointed: Severus in the west, and in the east Galerius’ nephew, Maximinus Daia. For Christians in the east the tetrarchy’s new configuration was even worse than the one it replaced. Galerius was now officially at the top, and Maximinus Daia - in charge of Syria, Palestine and Egypt - outdid his uncle in his zeal to put an end to Christianity. So it happened that for eight years the Great Persecution raged on throughout the eastern half of the empire. Although the number of Christians killed is unknown, what little evidence there is suggests that it may have been several thousand.

The Christian martyrs died for a faith that was essentially monotheistic. “God against the gods” is an appropriate description of the Christians’ long struggle with Hellenism and the Roman empire, and the martyrs’ God had not yet been complicated by the trinitarian doctrines that were soon to take shape. It was to these early Christians’ belief in One God that Tertullian referred when he argued that the Christians - unlike the polytheistic Hellenes and Romans - agreed with the monotheism of the philosophers: “What a testimony the soul gives that it is by nature Christian!”¹⁹ In 258 Bishop Cyprian of Carthage was asked by Paternus, the proconsular governor, whether he worshiped the gods of Rome. Cyprian’s succinct answer was the ground on which Paternus sentenced him to be beheaded:

I am a Christian and a bishop. I recognize no other gods beside that one and true God, who made heaven and earth, the seas and everything that is in them. This God we

Christians worship.²⁰

In the Great Persecution of 303-311 the lines were still clearly drawn, and in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge the losers were - so far as the Christians of Rome were concerned - not only Maxentius' troops but also the old gods. This has been well said by Peter Brown: "As seen by the average bishop of the age of Constantine, the victory of Christianity had been a victory of strict monotheism over polytheism. The martyrs had died for a single, high God."²¹ The steady spread of belief in God, although due much more to efforts by Christians than by Judaeans, had evidently redounded to the growth (or at least the continued vitality) of Judaism in the Diaspora.

In early 311 the Great Persecution came officially (although not de facto) to an end, when Galerius - near death from a ravaging disease - issued his Edict of Toleration. In the edict Galerius regretted the obstinacy of the Christians, praised his own forbearance and clemency, and informed the Christians that they would no longer be punished for practicing their religion. Despite his uncle's edict, Maximinus Daia encouraged sporadic persecution of Christians in the provinces under his control.

The end of the tetrarchy and the rise of Constantine

When Diocletian and Maximian retired in 305, the revamped tetrarchy held together for only one year. It began to collapse in 306, when Constantius, the new *Augustus* in the west, suddenly died. His troops, concerned lest they be commanded by someone whom they did not know or like, proclaimed Constantius' son, Constantine, as the next *Augustus* in the west. Although angered by the coup, Galerius and the other tetrarchs accepted it, not wishing to be embroiled in a civil war. But Constantine's elevation almost immediately inspired another. Maxentius, the son of Maximian (Diocletian's original colleague) had long supposed that he would one day inherit his father's position, but when Maximian was forced into retirement in 305 Maxentius was given no place in the new tetrarchy. Maxentius did nothing at the time, but in 306, when he received news of Constantine's elevation on the Rhine, he set about obtaining what he thought was properly his. Maxentius was in Rome, and knew that many residents of Rome resented the fact that the city was no longer a capital - much less *the* capital - of what was supposedly the "Roman" empire. Worse yet for Romans and Italians was the recent requirement that they pay the same tax that people throughout the empire were paying. Making much of the storied history of the city of Rome, and of the special status that Italy had always enjoyed, Maxentius appealed to "the real Romans" to make him their emperor. He was acclaimed as a *Caesar*, and as ruler of Italy, by the populace of Rome and by the few Praetorian Guards stationed in the city.

The tetrarchy first assigned to one of its junior members, Severus, the task of dislodging the usurper Maxentius. But Maxentius was popular enough that the Romans stuck by him under siege. When Severus' troops began running short of supplies, Severus was forced to retreat (and to resign from the tetrarchy). In 307 it was Galerius' turn, but he too was soon bogged down in a siege outside the walls that Aurelian had built for Rome in the early 270s. When his food supplies began to fail, Galerius too was forced to return to the east. So it happened that the project of toppling Maxentius eventually fell to Constantine. This was somewhat awkward for

Constantine, because Maxentius was his brother-in-law (ca. 307 Constantine had divorced his first wife in order to marry Fausta, the daughter of Maximian), but the stakes were high enough that Constantine seized the opportunity.

In late spring of 312 Constantine crossed from Gaul into Italy with 40,000 troops. He won two minor engagements near Turin and Verona, and most of northern and central Italy threw its support to him. Maxentius' strategy was once again to remain behind the walls of Rome, but as the city entered upon its third siege in seven years, Maxentius was no longer so popular with the city's inhabitants, despite having built splendidly for them, including a new *circus* on the Appian Way. Aware of Maxentius' declining popularity, Constantine upon reaching Rome set up his camp just beyond the Tiber's right bank, in plain sight of anyone standing atop the city's western wall. In late October Constantine ordered his men to replace their traditional standards with Christian emblems called *labara*.²² At that, the Christians inside the city - numbering at least 50,000 - added their voices to those demanding that Maxentius give battle rather than drag the city through another siege. On October 28 of 312 Maxentius' forces sallied out from the gates, crossed the Tiber on the Milvian bridge and on makeshift pontoon bridges, and initiated the decisive battle. By the day's end Maxentius was defeated and dead, and Italy was under Constantine's control. The next day Constantine made his triumphal entry into Rome, the military parade including Maxentius' head, borne aloft on a pike.

The Christian emperor

When Dionysios Exiguus composed his chronicle, he pegged the beginning of the Christian Era to what he thought was the year in which Jesus the Christ was born. The *anno domini* dating inaugurated by Dionysios was gradually accepted, and by the time of Charlemagne was widely used both in the Byzantine empire and in western Europe. Toward the end of the Renaissance historians in Europe began dating events that had happened before the birth of Jesus the Christ according to a "before Christ" chronology. Thus Julius Caesar's assassination was said to have occurred "in 44 BC."

Although the birth of Jesus the Christ was a meaningful era-date for Dionysios and his fellow-Christians, a very good case could have been made for dating the beginning of the Christian Era to Constantine's conversion and his victory over Maxentius. With these events history turned on its hinge, and what followed was profoundly different from what had preceded. The change was felt immediately at Rome and throughout Italy, and when Constantine extended his realm to the Greek East he was hailed by Eusebius of Caesarea as an almost messianic deliverer. In 438, when Theodosius II ordered his jurists to compile what we know as the Theodosian Code (*Codex Theodosianus*), he stipulated that this grand compendium of imperial law should start with Constantine: those edicts and *constitutiones* issued before Constantine's accession were of only marginal interest. Our very word "ancient" (in Latin, *anteanus*) came into usage as an adjective to designate "the former" days, or the period "before" the empire became Christian.

In the immediate aftermath of his victory at the Milvian bridge, Constantine's religious policies were still somewhat fluid. On the triumphal arch that he built to commemorate his

victory over Maxentius, and that still stands near the Coliseum, the patron deity is Sol Invictus: the Unconquered Sun. And although he undoubtedly proclaimed Sunday a day for prayer because it was the day of Christian worship, he publicly proclaimed the innovation as a special honor for Sol Invictus. Among the offices that the senate conferred upon Constantine after his victory was that of *Pontifex Maximus*, the chief priest of the Romans' most ancient priestly college. Yet his subjects knew that Constantine's mother, Helena, was a Christian, and that he had not enforced the Great Persecution in his provinces. Most importantly and dramatically, his display of the *labarum* before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge publicly declared him a champion of Christianity.

Early in 313, and so just a few months after his victory at Rome, Constantine met at Milan, his capital, with his *Caesar* and brother-in-law, Licinius. Licinius had in 307 been appointed *Caesar* by Galerius and Diocletian (who briefly came out of retirement in order to reconstruct the tetrarchy) to fill the post vacated by Severus. Soon after that appointment Constantine gave his half-sister, Constantia, in marriage to Licinius (she was at least forty years younger than Licinius) in order to have a personal bond with his elderly *Caesar*. As 313 began Licinius was in charge of the Danubian provinces. Together, he and Constantine issued what has become known as the Edict of Milan, which gave to all citizens the right to worship as they chose. For Christians, the Edict of Milan was a formal repeal of the *institutum Neronianum*: henceforth, in the provinces that Constantine and Licinius controlled Christianity was not merely tolerated, as Galerius' edict in 311 had declared, but was a legitimate religion. Licinius was not himself a Christian, and seems to have had no special interest in Christianity, but he was courting Christian support for his showdown with Maximinus Daia, who continued to persecute Christians in Asia and Egypt. With the Edict of Milan Licinius assured himself that virtually all the Christians in the Greek-speaking east would favor him over Maximinus. On April 30 of 313, a few months after the Edict of Milan was announced, Licinius defeated Maximinus Daia in battle near Adrianople. Licinius then proclaimed the Edict of Milan valid throughout the Greek East.

Almost immediately the accord between Constantine and Licinius began to unravel, mostly because of Constantine's ever growing ambitions. In 314 Constantine invaded the Balkans, on the pretext that Licinius had plotted to assassinate him. Three years later, and after two defeats, Licinius purchased peace only by ceding to Constantine the Balkan provinces. Constantine then appointed his adult son Crispus and his toddler Constantine (II) *Caesares*, making abundantly clear his intention to establish an imperial dynasty. His second war with Licinius (323-24) ended with Licinius' surrender of all his powers in exchange for a promise that he would not be executed (he was executed in 325). Constantine was now sole ruler of the empire, the first to hold that position in forty years. From 324 until his death in 337 he was fortunate in having few worries about foreign enemies. The army, increasingly recruited from the tribes beyond the frontiers, was strong and dutiful, and because of his own proven abilities as a commander Constantine seems to have enjoyed the respect and loyalty of his generals.

Constantine's elevation of Christianity

When Constantine had gone on the offensive against Licinius in the years 314-324,

Licinius found that his Christian subjects preferred Constantine to him. Not surprisingly, then, Licinius' policies toward the Christians had become less friendly than they had been in 313. Those Christians whom he had appointed to high positions he removed, and he forbade bishops to hold regional councils (evidently fearing the church as an organized force). Bishops and presbyters, who initially were given an exemption from paying taxes, were added to the tax rolls. By 324 most of Licinius' Christian subjects hoped that he would be defeated by Constantine, whom they knew to be a Christian at heart, even though for reasons of state he had not yet been baptized into the church and so remained a catechumen. When Constantine was victorious, Greek-speaking Christians celebrated, and Constantine did not disappoint their expectations.

Very soon after his victory over Licinius, Constantine decided to build at Byzantium a new capital for the entire empire, a successor to the city of Rome. The ancient Greek city of Byzantium on the Bosphorus was strategically located, as the recent war with Licinius had shown (Constantine's land victory over Licinius was won near Adrianople, and Crispus won a naval victory off Chalcedon, directly across the Bosphorus from Byzantium). Byzantium was relatively small, and Constantine's intention was to give it something of a Christian character while significantly enlarging it. The new city was to be encircled with stout walls, and was to be called "New Rome." Construction went on for years, and on May 11 of 330 the city was formally re-founded as "New Rome." The citizens, however, called it "Constantine's *polis*," whence the anglicized name "Constantinople." Although Constantinople was graced by statues of Sol Invictus and of Cybele, it also boasted two fine Christian churches.²³ These churches were large and sumptuous, and were meant to demonstrate that Christianity was now a part of the imperial establishment.

Throughout the east the Christians' earlier churches had been confiscated, damaged or destroyed in the Great Persecution, but Christians now had Constantine's assurance that they could build with confidence. With his imperial resources Constantine was able to erect churches that went far beyond anything that bishops had hitherto imagined. He provided for building at Jerusalem the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and at Bethlehem the Church of the Holy Nativity. His most spectacular projects were those at Rome. Already in 314 the Christians of Rome, with Constantine's industrious support, began constructing the church of St. John Lateran (San Giovanni in Laterano). The original St. John Lateran was in design a basilica, perhaps the first of the Christian basilicas. Approximately 130 m long, with two aisles on each side of the nave, it could accommodate four thousand worshippers. With its beautiful mosaics, and with its columns made of several varieties of marble, the Lateran was meant to be the cathedral church of Rome, the seat of the bishop of Rome, and it continues to be that even though the Renaissance popes transferred their residence to the Vatican. The Vatican church of St. Peter's (San Pietro in Vaticano) was begun ca. 319 and completed in 326. It too was a magnificent structure, a basilica 120 m long and 65 m wide, with 86 marble columns (many of these were scavenged from temples and from secular buildings in Rome, some of them dating from the Republican period). The scale of the two Roman basilicas made a visual statement to all Romans that Christianity was now, far from being illegal, well-connected and rich beyond the wildest dreams of Christians during the recent persecution.

To what extent Constantine suppressed the old cults is uncertain. In his *Panegyric to*

Constantine Eusebius praised the emperor for melting down idols made of gold, silver and bronze, and for sending troops to Aphaca in Lebanon to close down the ritual prostitution in honor of Astarte (Aphrodite) and Adonis.²⁴ In his *Life of Constantine*, written soon after the emperor's death, Eusebius goes further and claims that Constantine forbade the setting up of cult statues, the practice of divination, and sacrifice.²⁵ If such laws were published they were hardly enforced. Perhaps the few traditional cults that still enjoyed some popularity were - with the exception of the Aphaca sanctuary - left alone by Constantine, and his appropriation of "idols" may have been limited to those cults that were obviously moribund.

The Arian controversy and the Council of Nicaea

As Hellenes became Christians, doctrine became more important and divisive. More specifically, attention was paid to a precise *articulation* of doctrines. Those Hellenes who had been schooled in Neoplatonic philosophy were thoroughgoing monotheists, and for them it was important to establish where Christianity stood on the question of monotheism and polytheism. Although in the early centuries Christianity had seemed to be a monotheist creed, urgent questions were arising about Jesus the Christ and about the Holy Spirit. Were these two also gods? Opinions about Jesus' relationship to God had been quite varied for a long time. The New Testament itself offered apparent contradictions. The Synoptic Gospels presented Jesus as the Son of God, and made a clear distinction between the two. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, identified Jesus the Christ as "the Word" (*logos*) that Judaeen philosophers and theologians in the Hellenistic period had begun positing as the eternal agent of God. The fourth Gospel stated that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God." The same Gospel asserted that Jesus the Christ had created the world. Although Paul had not used the term *logos*, his letters sometimes described Jesus as an incarnation of a pre-existent deity.

During the second and third centuries, as can be seen in the Apostles' Creed, the high Christology of the Gospel of John - and to a lesser extent of Paul - was not widely accepted. Most of these earlier Christians were monotheists, proclaiming their belief in the One True God. They described Jesus the Christ as the Lord and as the Son of God, but not as God or as an incarnation of God. Monotheism was the faith of the martyrs and also of the apologists, who used the arguments of natural theology against the Satanic polytheism of Greece and Rome. The bishops of the *ekklesia katholicē* were certain that God was the god of the Old Testament, and they were especially opposed to Marcionite and Gnostic attempts to discredit or supersede him. In that effort the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul were of little help, because those texts were prized by the Gnostics and Marcion.

With the legitimation of Christianity under Constantine, and with the battle against "the gods" all but over, Christian monotheism evolved into trinitarianism. Distinctions between God and Jesus the Christ could now begin to blur.²⁶ This was true especially in Egypt, where many worshippers regarded Jesus and God as synonymous. Another controversy centered on the Holy Spirit, or "the Comforter," who was in many places worshiped as still another god. It was to clarify this confusion, and to maintain a distinction between God, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, that an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius spelled out what he thought was the relationship of

these three: God is One, unbegotten and eternal. Jesus - although creator of the world - was begotten by God, and thus there was a time when Jesus *was not yet*. Logic demanded that the Son of God was not God. Arius and those who supported him made frequent reference to Paul's declaration at I Cor 8:6 (OSB): "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for him; there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through him." Another Pauline passage underlined by Arius was Galatians 4:4, where Paul writes that in the fulness of time "God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law" (AV).²⁷

As for the Holy Spirit, Arius taught that it was neither God nor Lord, but an "enlightening and sanctifying power" who was, as it were, a minister of the Christ. Just as the Christ was in all things obedient to God, so was the Holy Spirit obedient to the Christ. The central theme of Arius' theology was monotheism,²⁸ and the description of God as an invisible, incorporeal, and eternal One, a God whom even Neoplatonists could accept. Although Arius' Christology had ample precedents, and was similar to that of his Alexandrian predecessors Clement and Origen, it was no longer what most Christians in Alexandria believed. The majority view was now that although Jesus was the Son of God he was also - as God's *logos* - himself a god, as was also the Holy Spirit. Because he did not believe that either Jesus or the Holy Spirit were gods, Arius was denounced by many Alexandrian Christians. Led by Athanasius, a young and fiery deacon, they persuaded Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, to excommunicate Arius as a heretic.²⁹

This controversy had begun to rage in Alexandria during Licinius' last years, and was inherited by Constantine in 324. The matter seemed important enough that Constantine made its settlement a high priority. In 325 he called together bishops from all over the Roman empire to meet in council at Nicaea (Nikaia), forty miles south of the palace-city of Nicomedia. This was the first ecumenical council of Christian bishops, and was made possible only through the logistical support of the emperor, who transported the bishops - more than two hundred of them - to Nicaea at his own expense, and in person welcomed the bishops to their important task. He attended most of their sessions and made his own contributions to the arguments and deliberations, which went on for weeks. In the end, the majority of the bishops supported the position of Alexander and Athanasius, and formulated the doctrine of the trinity (*trinitas*) in the Nicene Creed,³⁰ which is still the principal confession of most Christian traditions.

Although the Nicene Creed articulated the trinitarian doctrine in an elementary way, it was spelled out in much greater detail in the Athanasian Creed, the *Quicumque vult* of the later fourth century.³¹ Here God is defined as a single deity with three *personae* or - in Greek - *prosopa*. These were words from the stage (as in the expression, *dramatis personae*), and can be translated as "masks" or "roles." As trinitarians saw it, God is One, but has three *personae*, or plays three roles: of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Because the purpose of the Council of Nicaea was to restore unity to an *ekklesia katholicē* in danger of fracture, it was important that - whatever the outcome of the vote - all the bishops accept the majority decision. For the most part that is what happened, the minority signing on to the creed that the majority had favored. A very few bishops did not. Arius himself refused to do so and was excommunicated, along with two die-hard supporters: Theognis, bishop of the

host-city Nicaea, and Eusebius, bishop of neighboring Nicomedia, where the emperor's palace stood until the construction of Constantinople was complete.³² The ecumenical council thus established the precedent that *confession* of the creed adopted by the majority was the essential point. Everyone knew that some of the bishops and some of the lay Christians who would thereafter confess the Nicene Creed were unhappy with parts of it. But whether they agreed with it or not, so long as Christians joined in confessing it they continued to be members of the catholic church.

The followers of Arius soon set up their own communion, a network of churches that professed the Apostle's Creed but not the Nicene Creed. The "Arians" (as their opponents called them) had their own bishops, and in many cities a Nicene and an Arian Christian church vied for members, each church anathematizing the other. From the beginning Christians had been a diverse lot. The Old Covenant Christians in Judaea, the Gnostic Christians, and the New Covenant Christians among the Gentiles had Jesus the Christ in common but their ideas about him and their expectations were very different. In the second century Marcionites, Ebionites, Montanists and other "heretical" groups each had their own communion, and in the third century Novatianists also established a separate organization. After Constantine's conversion diversity came at a higher cost. Now that the emperor was the champion of a unified church, the police power of the state was available to make things difficult for "heretical" communions. Public order was of paramount concern to the emperors, and they generally took a dim view of physical violence against "heretics." On the other hand, the emperors extended privileges and endowments to the catholic church but not to the "heretical" churches. The political power of exile was now exercised against bishops who were deemed heretical: from the reign of Constantine onward, a deposed bishop would be exiled by the emperor to a strange city, far enough from his former see that he was prevented from causing trouble to his successor. And in some circumstances the emperor and his subordinates chose to overlook violence done in the name of orthodoxy. To be excommunicated from the *ekklesia katholicē* had considerably more consequences after Constantine's conversion than before. Nevertheless, the "heretical" communions continued for a very long time. In the fifth century, as is shown by the church history written ca. 445 by Socrates Scholasticus, in many of the larger cities Arian and Novatianist minorities were still to be found.

The dynasty of Constantine (337-363)

In 326 Fausta, Constantine's second wife, charged that she had been raped by her stepson Crispus (Crispus was Constantine's son by his first wife, Minervina). Believing the charge, Constantine ordered Crispus' execution, but soon thereafter the emperor was informed that the charge was false and he then arranged for Fausta to be scalded to death in a hot bath. Before his own death Constantine formally entered the Church, baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia, one of the most vigorous critics of Nicene trinitarianism. Constantine had in the meantime made provisions that his three sons by Fausta - Constantine (II), Constantius, and Constans - should succeed him. Constantine may also have authorized the slaying of all the rest of his male relatives (half-brothers and their offspring) in order to prevent their interfering with the arrangements. In any event, they were slain immediately after the old emperor's death.

Constantius (337-361) was given the eastern, Greek-speaking provinces, while Constans received Italy, Africa and Pannonia, and Constantine II inherited the west. Constantine II was killed in 340, while fighting against his younger brother Constans, and in 350 Constans was killed by a usurper. Constantius soon dispatched the usurper and from 353 until his own death in 361 reigned over the entire empire. He is therefore an emperor of considerable historical importance. Constantius was able to maintain the empire's frontiers against assaults by the Sassanid Shapur II, and also by the northern barbarians. Managing so large an empire was of course a very difficult task for one man, and Constantius therefore appointed his sole surviving cousins - Gallus and Julian - as Caesars. Gallus (353-54) was soon executed on a charge of treason, but in the northwest Julian for long remained above suspicion while carrying out his assignments against the Alamanni on the upper Rhine and the Franks on the lower Rhine, and against the Picts and Saxons who were harassing Roman Britain.

Constantius' Christianity owed much to the instruction of Eusebius of Nicomedia and Constantinople, and so was much closer to the position of Arius than of Athanasius. As ruler of the east Constantius called together the eastern bishops (Council of Antioch, 341) to steer the catholic church toward monotheism. An outspoken opponent of the new orthodoxy was Athanasius, who in 346 had returned from his exile and recovered his bishopric in Alexandria. In 356 Constantius sent troops to remove Athanasius and install George, a radical monotheist, as bishop of Alexandria. Italy and the western provinces were until 350 ruled by Constans, whose trinitarian inclinations matched those of his subjects, and the Christological differences created an east-west (or Greek-Latin) rift in the Church. Julius, bishop of Rome from 337 to 352, was a staunch trinitarian and friend of Athanasius, and most bishops in the Latin west followed Julius. But once Constantius took control of the west he coerced the western bishops to accept the monotheist position, calling together councils at Arles in 353, at Milan in 355, and at Ariminum in 359. For a short time the lower Christology was therefore orthodox belief in the catholic church.

In his opposition to what we may now call "paganism" Constantius was apparently more vigorous than his father had been. The so-called "Arian" Christians, with their more clearly monotheist theology, were aggressive in combating polytheism and idolatry (in Alexandria, Bishop George not only encouraged the vandalizing of temples but even suggested that the city should disown its pagan founder, Alexander the Great). There is some evidence that in 346 Constantius issued a harsh edict to close the temples and ban sacrifices, under penalty of death.³³ To what extent this edict was carried out is unknown: sacrifices had been scarce for a long time, especially at urban temples, and those that were performed by the "pagans" (*pagani* were, literally, "people of the countryside") seem to have continued after 346 much as before.

The quickening pace of conversion to Christianity within the Roman empire

The Edict of Toleration in 311, followed by Licinius' promulgation of the Edict of Milan throughout the eastern provinces after his defeat of Maximinus Daia in 313, encouraged widespread conversion to Christianity. This Christianization of the east was accelerated when Constantine took control of the area in 324. In the entire empire perhaps no more than ten percent of the population was Christian at the beginning of the fourth century, but by the middle

of the century approximately a third of the empire's inhabitants were Christians, and by the end of the century Christians may have accounted for sixty or seventy per cent of the population.

The change occurred most rapidly in Egypt. Papyrus records indicate that the number of Christians tripled or possibly even quadrupled between 311 and 350. Through the third century Christianity in Egypt was for the most part found in Alexandria and other Greek-speaking cities, but the fourth century witnessed a wholesale conversion to Christianity of the Coptic-speaking peasants in the Nile valley. Many of these villagers became Christian overachievers, and it was in the Egyptian countryside that monasticism first appeared. Papyri show that monks (*monachoi*) were living in Egyptian villages by 324.

The fourth century also saw the beginnings of the widespread conversion to Christianity of Old Greece, both the Greek mainland and the Aegean islands. Except for such "un-Hellenic" cities as Corinth and Philippi, Christianity had been relatively inconspicuous in Greece during the second and third centuries. That began to change after 313, and changed more rapidly after Constantine's victory over Licinius in 324 and the transfer of his imperial residence to Nicomedia. Hellenism had been an essential part of the old Establishment, and Christianity had been a counter-culture. Now the old lines were erased, and Christian churches were soon established in most of the old Greek cities (in the countryside, the old gods continued to be worshiped until the end of the fourth century).

Christianity had come to Gaul, as we have seen, in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. For a century and a half, however, it was mostly confined to a few of the larger cities. The conversion of the Gallic countryside to Christianity began in the fourth century. Although the Christians did not translate their scriptures into Keltic, they were able to propagate their faith among the rural population because most of the villagers had a rudimentary understanding of Latin. Athanasius' exile at Trier, and his industry in promoting trinitarian Christianity, encouraged the growth of Christianity in northeastern Gaul. The preaching and writings of Hilary of Poitiers also played a part, but more important was Martin of Tours. Martin was a Pannonian soldier who during the reign of Constantius became a Christian missionary in Gaul, founded the first monastery north of the Alps, and from 371 until his death in 397 was bishop of Tours. The largely fictitious biography of Martin features his amazing miracles and the mass conversions that the miracles inspired.³⁴

The establishment of Christianity outside the Roman empire

Christianity beyond Roman borders was often "established" (that is, made a state or tribal institution) at the behest of a king or warlord. Fritigern, chief of the marauding Visigoths, became a convert to Christianity ca. 375, in part because of his desire for a compact with Valens, the Roman emperor in the Greek east. The kind of Christianity supported and protected by Valens was monotheist ("Arian") rather than trinitarian, and Fritigern and his men therefore learned something of the Arian version of the gospel and then underwent baptism. All of this was evidently overseen by Bishop Wulfila (or Ulfilas as he appears in Greek texts). Wulfila had grown up among the Goths but was bilingual, being a descendant of Greek-speakers who had been taken captive and enslaved by the Goths. An Arian Christian, Wulfila made it his life's work to translate the Bible into Gothic, using for that purpose a script that he perfected (he

omitted from his translation only I and II Kings, explaining that these books of the Old Testament were mostly war stories, and the Goths were already far too bellicose). Following Fritigern's example, other Germanic warlords and their troops adopted Christianity, usually of the Arian rather than the trinitarian brand.

As we have seen, the same kind of mass conversion accomplished among the Goths had happened in Armenia in 301, when King Trdat the Great made Christianity the religion of his Armenian kingdom. The Christian missionary credited with converting King Trdat, and then baptizing him and all of his subjects in the Aras river, was Gregory the Illuminator. Armenian traditions report that Gregory had miraculously survived multiple tortures and dangers inflicted upon him by the pagan king. But - so the story goes - when God punished the king by changing him into a boar and allowing him to be possessed by a devil, it was Gregory who exorcized the devil and restored Trdat to human form. Finally convinced, Trdat and all Armenia adopted the Christian faith.³⁵

Twenty years after the Christianizing of Armenia, its immediate neighbor to the north also became Christian. In this Kartvelian kingdom, along the southern slopes of the Caucasus mountains, the establishment of the new religion was decreed by King Mirian III and Queen Nana. According to legend, the royal couple's conversion was the work of Saint Nino, a woman who performed mighty miracles (curing King Mirian, for example, of blindness) and so persuaded them to adopt her faith. Although St. Nino has ever after been revered by Kartvelians, she was eventually overshadowed by St. George: in medieval times the kingdom came to be known to outsiders as "Georgia," perhaps because of the frequency with which St. George appeared in the mosaics of its churches.

Far to the south of Armenia and Georgia, yet another establishment of Christianity took place in the fourth century. In the 340s King Ezana of Ethiopia was converted from paganism to Christianity.³⁶ This conversion is credited to a Syrian named Frumentius, who as an adolescent had served the royal Ethiopian family and who later in life returned to Aksum, preached the gospel, and was supposed to have performed miracles. A letter that Emperor Constantius sent to Ezana ca. 356 confirms that Frumentius was indeed the bishop of Aksum at that time. In his letter Constantius, an Arian, instructed Ezana to send Frumentius back to Alexandria in order to be re-consecrated as bishop (the original consecration, Constantius regretted, was invalid because it had been done by the "heretic" Athanasius). In several of Ezana's early inscriptions, in the Ge'ez language, he implores the help of four pagan deities, but in a later inscription, written in Greek, he testifies to his trinitarian Christianity:

In the faith of God and the Power of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost who have saved my kingdom, I believe in your son Jesus Christ who has saved me.³⁷

Despite the official support of Christianity in Ethiopia, other religions were evidently tolerated. Importantly, as we have seen, Judaism continued among the "Falashas." Early in the seventh century a group of Muhammad's early followers, fleeing from persecution by the polytheists at Mecca, were given protection by the Ethiopian king.

The conversion of Armenians, Georgians and Ethiopians was accelerated by the invention of scripts for the three languages. The Armenian and Georgian alphabets were devised about a century after the establishment of Christianity in those lands (initially the Greek and Syriac translations of the Bible sufficed). In Ethiopia an alphabet was produced for Ge'ez, and by the late fourth century at least parts of the Bible were available in Ge'ez. By the end of the fifth century Ethiopians could read in their own language all the books sacred to Christians, including the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. Several books that were subsequently lost in the Greek and Latin traditions (Jubilees, I Enoch) have been preserved in the Ethiopic tradition.

Julian the Apostate (361-363)

Early in 360 Constantius ordered Julian, his cousin and Caesar in the west, to send a substantial number of troops to the east, where they were needed for a campaign against Shapur II. When Julian informed his troops of the order they refused to go, and instead proclaimed Julian emperor. Deciding to ride the tiger, Julian accepted the acclamation, an act of insurrection that could only lead to a military showdown with Constantius. Somewhat reluctantly, Julian gathered all his troops and began marching - in summer of 361 - to confront Constantius. Fortunately, Constantius fell ill before Julian's army reached the east, and on his deathbed he designated Julian as his legitimate successor. Julian proceeded to Constantinople and commenced his reign, the last in the dynasty that Constantine had founded.

Although baptized and raised as a Christian, Julian had in his youth studied philosophy at Ephesus and was especially attracted to Neoplatonism. He remained a nominal Christian during Constantius' reign, but was angered by his cousin's suppression of the old cults. After Constantius' death Julian publicly renounced Christianity and embarked on a project to reform and revive the worship of the Olympians. The project was, in essence, to make a religion out of Hellenism. With Julian the name "Hellene" became virtually synonymous with "worshiper of the Olympian gods," and it was Julian's hope that wealthy and educated Hellenes would appreciate a reformed Hellenism and give their energies to it. Acknowledging the success of the Christians, Julian borrowed from Christianity those features that he supposed were crucial to its success. The new religion of the Olympian gods, accordingly, was to be complete with doctrines and creeds, with puritanical standards for the priests' personal behavior, with charitable institutions, and with a hierarchy much like that of the Christian Church. Julian assumed that most of the lower class would not be attracted to his brand of purified Hellenism, but he was confident - this can be seen from his writings - that among the privileged reading-class it would find many supporters, and in this assessment he was right. Until the sixth century "Hellenes" remained a distinguished minority in a mostly Christian world.

For his efforts Julian earned from Christians the designation "apostate." He did not persecute Christians - who by the early 360s may have accounted for almost half of the empire's population - but the favor that they had enjoyed from Constantine and Constantius came abruptly to an end. Instead of funneling support to Christian churches, Julian poured the imperial resources into refurbishing temples, most of which had fallen into neglect. He also provided generously for the purchase of sacrificial animals: although superficially a Neoplatonist, he was even more conspicuously a Hellene, and with such a designation he could not shirk the Hellenes'

traditional obligation of sacrificing to the traditional gods. To be a Hellene, Julian argued, was to love Homer and to worship the gods of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. During the two years of Julian's reign the altars at the old temples - at least in the Greek East - were once again red with the blood of sacrificial victims. Even Julian's supporters, hostile to the Christians, were disgusted with the sacrifices, but Julian was convinced that the old form of worship must be resuscitated. Julian abolished the laws with which his uncle and cousin had intended to suppress the old cults. At Rome he restored the Altar of Victory (which Constantius had removed from the senate-house in 357 on the grounds that Victoria was a pagan goddess). Julian also forbade Christians to teach Greek literature, explaining that only a man who respected the Olympian gods should have the privilege of teaching the books in which the Olympians were celebrated. Finally, Julian made overtures to the Judaeans, and raised the prospect that after almost three hundred years their temple at Jerusalem might be rebuilt. Because he ruled so short a time nothing came of the proposal.

Religious violence broke out in many cities during Julian's reign. For decades non-Christians had watched as the Christians with impunity plundered dilapidated temples and appropriated the materials to build fine new churches. When news of Constantius' death reached Alexandria in December of 361 a mob quickly gathered to wreak retribution on Bishop George, who had been one of Constantius' favorites. The mob - made up of pagans, Judaeans, and some trinitarian Christians, who considered George an "Arian heretic" - killed the bishop and dismembered his body. Judaeans in Palestine and Syria, taking advantage of Julian's hostility to Christianity, burned down churches while the imperial authorities looked the other way.

Instead of seriously impairing Christianity, Julian's program alarmed the Christians sufficiently that at his death they began a more strenuous effort to convert the world. Christian militancy increased significantly in the last forty years of the fourth century, and part of the blame rests on Julian's futile attempt to revive the old sacrificial cults. Sacrificial religion was by the fourth century utterly obsolete, and a wiser policy for Julian would have been to make the state neutral over against the several religions practiced by its inhabitants. Julian was not sufficiently detached to adopt such a policy. His dislike of Christianity was as strong as his love of Hellenism. His Neoplatonism was not the intellectual philosophy of Plotinus but the superstition of Maximus of Ephesos, a theurgist who relied on his own fantasies and on such "revealed" texts as the Hermetic corpus and the Chaldaean Oracles. Like his Christian opponents, Julian had no doubt that he knew what lay beyond the perceptible world.

Although devoted to the cause of restoring the Olympians and discouraging Christianity, Julian attended to the much more practical matter of dealing with Shapur II. The campaign that Constantius had envisaged Julian undertook. From the Roman citizenry and from barbarian tribes in the Germanic north Julian assembled an army of 65,000 men, perhaps the largest expeditionary army that the Romans had ever fielded, and in March of 363 led it into Mesopotamia. Proceeding south to Ctesiphon, he easily defeated the Sassanids in the field, but after the battle his huge army turned from an asset to a liability. Julian recognized that to besiege and take the city of Ctesiphon would require weeks and possibly months, and he did not have the provisions to feed 65,000 men for so long a time. He therefore withdrew toward the north, following the left bank of the Tigris, and was killed in one of the many cavalry skirmishes

that plagued the Romans' march. Whether the spear that killed him was thrown by a Sassanid horseman or by a Christian in his own army is unknown. His generals met and selected as his successor Jovian, who was a relatively young man, a professional soldier, and a Christian.

Jovian's challenge was to feed the army and to cross the Tigris. In order to extricate his troops from the threat of starvation he was forced to make a humiliating treaty with Shapur, ceding to the Sassanids everything east of the Tigris, including Christian Armenia (which had been independent of the Sassanids since Galerius' great victory in 298), along with Nisibis and several other fortified centers west of the Tigris. Jovian ruled only a year (363-64) before dying of fumes from a freshly plastered room in which he slept.

An interlude of tolerance

The generals' next choice was Valentinian (364-375), another military man, who promptly named his brother, Valens (364-378), as co-emperor. Valentinian assumed responsibility for the west while Valens governed the east. Because the settlement with Shapur had more or less pacified the Sassanids, Valens' principal concern was the Danube river and the Visigoths who lived across it. Valentinian himself guarded the Rhine from his headquarters at Milan and Trier, while his best general, Theodosius the Elder, maintained security in Spain and Britain.

Focused on the military dangers that the empire faced, Valentinian chose to avoid stirring up religious conflict among his subjects. Although he and Valens were both Christians, Valentinian of the trinitarian persuasion and Valens of the monotheist, neither attempted to suppress Hellenism, paganism, or "heretical" Christianities. In the mid 360s most men whose profession was either military or political were still pagan, and Valentinian and Valens had no desire to alienate them. The Panhellenic games - in honor of the Olympians - continued in Greece, and in Rome the Altar of Victory stayed in the senate-house (in the 360s and 370s only a small minority of the Roman senators were Christian). Christians in the Latin west were mostly trinitarian but Valentinian saw to it that monotheist bishops, such as Auxentius of Milan, were protected from violence. In the east, where many Christians were monotheist, Valens did not interfere with the trinitarian Cappadocians - Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus - as they worked to strengthen the trinitarian party in Anatolia. The worst religious violence in Valentinian's reign occurred in 366, when rival trinitarian Christian factions in Rome put forward rival bishops, Ursinus and Damasus. Damasus emerged victorious, but not without the deaths of 137 Christians, slain as his supporters massacred the followers of Ursinus within the walls of the Liberian basilica.

Parallel to the tolerant public policies of the Christian emperors Valentinian and Valens were the writings and speeches of pagans who urged that people should be free to worship whom and as they chose.³⁸ Themistius, the leading Greek orator of his day, urged Valens that "the differences of opinion between the Christians are unimportant compared with the three hundred different opinions among the pagans. God's glory is increased by the knowledge that religious differences are only a consequence of his unattainable majesty and of human limitations."³⁹ A few years later Symmachus pleaded that "there is no one single path by which to reach something

so great and so mysterious.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, by the late fourth century this pagan insight was too late. It had come after centuries of persecution of Christians, and immediately after Julian’s attempt to discourage Christianity and revive Hellenism. The political machinery of the empire had now become a prize for the dominant religious community.

The Visigoths and the Battle of Adrianople (378)

Valentinian died before the storms broke that put an end to the Roman empire in western Europe. They began with pressure along the lower Danube from the Visigoths, who under their chief Fritigern had nominally become “Arian” Christians. Despite their collective conversion, the Visigoths were still uncivilized and covetous of the good things to be found in the Roman empire. The Goths were themselves hard pressed by the Huns, mounted pastoralists who had abandoned their flocks for the much more exciting and lucrative career of raiding and slaughter. After devastating much of central and western Asia the Huns had encroached upon the lands north of the lower Danube, and in 376 sent the Visigoths streaming across the river. Once inside the Roman empire the Visigoths had a difficult time feeding themselves (Roman subsidies, arranged by Valens, were sold at extortionate prices) and so took to plundering villages and unwalled towns in the Balkan provinces.

Having decided in the spring of 378 to subdue the rampaging Visigoths, Valens assembled a large army and also asked for help from his young nephew, Gratian. Gratian (375-383) had upon Valentinian’s death inherited his father’s rule over the Latin west, which he magnanimously shared (when his troops demanded it) with his four-year old half-brother, Valentinian II. Although Gratian hurried from northern Italy to bring reinforcements for his uncle, Valens was urged by his advisors in Constantinople not to wait, but to march out and defeat Fritigern and the Visigoths on his own, lest Gratian receive most of the credit for the victory. In late July of 378 Valens and his army left Constantinople and proceeded to Adrianople, a hundred miles to the northwest, where the Visigoths were encamped. The decisive battle of Adrianople was fought on August 9 of 378, and it was an utter disaster for the Romans. Tens of thousands of Roman troops were killed, along with Valens himself. The southern Balkans and Greece were suddenly at the mercy of the Germanic barbarians, there being no Roman force available to prevent them. The Visigoths commenced an orgy of plunder and bloodshed, and for the next five years devastated the cities and countryside of Greece, Macedon and Thrace. Only Constantinople itself was impregnable, thanks to its massive fortifications and its location on the “Golden Horn” of the Bosphorus.

Theodosius I (“the Great”), 379-395, and Gratian

To fill the position of Valens, Gratian chose one of his young Christian generals in the west. This was Theodosius, son of the late general who had so ably served Valentinian. Arriving in Constantinople, Theodosius I assumed power over the east and ruled for sixteen years (379-395). By diplomacy rather than by military force he eventually persuaded the Visigoths to settle down in the Balkans, with the status of *foederati* (“allies”). They were to be ruled by their own warlords, and were to assist Theodosius against other barbarians who tried to enter the empire. Theodosius also negotiated his way to stability on the eastern frontier. He

strengthened the Roman accord with the Sassanids, agreeing to partition Armenia: the Romans received a third of Armenia as a client-kingdom, and the Sassanids received two thirds.

Theodosius earned his sobriquet “the Great” from Christian historians who appreciated his championing of trinitarian Christianity. Having grown up in the west, Theodosius was a fervent trinitarian. His antipathy against “Arianism” brought to a sudden end the brief period of tolerance that had characterized the reigns of Valentinian and Valens. In an edict issued in February of 380 Theodosius and Gratian admonished all of their subjects to accept the trinitarian faith:

It is our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans, as the religion which he introduced makes clear unto this day... That is, that we believe, according to the apostolic teaching and the evangelical doctrine, that there is one deity of father, son and holy spirit, with equal majesty and holy trinity.⁴¹

The edict makes clear the desire of Gratian and Theodosius that everyone in the empire - not only heretics but also pagans and Judaeans - should accept trinitarian Christianity. Nevertheless, the edict fell far short of coercing the population of the empire to become Nicene Christians. In the sixth century Justinian envisaged such extreme measures, but in the late fourth century Gratian and Theodosius clearly did not intend to outlaw other religions: Judaism remained a *religio licita*, and at least for the time being paganism continued to be practiced without official hindrance. The edict of Gratian and Theodosius in fact stipulated no punishment for those people - still numbered in the tens of millions - who remained outside the Catholic church. The much more limited purpose of the edict of 380 was to elevate trinitarian over monotheist Christianity. In the following year, 381, Theodosius convened an ecumenical council at Constantinople, in which trinitarianism once again officially replaced monotheism as catholic orthodoxy. Theodosius ordered that all “Arian” bishops should surrender their churches to Nicene bishops, and over the course of his reign he issued no less than eighteen constitutions against Christians who did not accept the Nicene creed.⁴²

In Milan, Gratian followed a similar policy of suppressing “Arianism,” a relatively easy matter there since most Christians in the Latin west had been trinitarian for sixty years. More difficult for Gratian was the battle against paganism. In 380, in order to strike a blow against the “demons” worshiped by the pagans, Gratian set aside the title of Pontifex Maximus, a title that all Roman emperors had held since Augustus had assumed the office in 12 BC. Still more controversial was Gratian’s removal, in 381, of the Altar of Victory from the senate-house in Rome. Most of the senators were still pagan and protested his action, their most eloquent spokesman being Symmachus. A pagan and the most respected man of letters in the Latin west, in 384 Symmachus held the office of Prefect of the City of Rome. In that capacity he delivered his nostalgic oration urging Valentinian II (Gratian was dead by 384) and Theodosius to permit the Altar’s restoration.

On the other side, the argument against restoring the Altar of Victor was made especially by Ambrose (Ambrosius), the bishop of Milan. Ambrose came from a wealthy and influential

family, and until 374 had been the consular governor of the province of Liguria and Aemilia, in which Milan lay. At the death of Bishop Auxentius, who had been unpopular because he was “Arian,” the Nicene Christians of Milan persuaded Ambrose to put aside his political office and serve as the city’s bishop. In his new position Ambrose exercised far more authority than he would ever have had in secular life: because Milan was the imperial capital for the western empire, Ambrose was the emperor’s spiritual advisor.

Gratian’s religious zeal did not endear him to his soldiers, many of whom were pagan and almost all of whom - because they had more immediate dangers to worry about - were leery of religious controversy. In 383 Gratian was killed by troops from Britain, who named their own commander, Magnus Maximus, emperor in the west. Theodosius was unable immediately to avenge his colleague, but in 388 he defeated Maximus. Proceeding to Milan, Theodosius confirmed as his nominal co-emperor Valentinian II, who was by this time an adolescent (Theodosius arranged that real power in the west would be exercised by Arbogast, a trustworthy general of Frankish descent).

As we shall see in the next chapter, in connection with the Callinicum controversy, Theodosius’ policy toward the Judaeans was relatively benign. He regarded Judaism as a lawful religion and instructed his officials to punish Christians who attacked synagogues. On this matter, however, he was opposed by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan (the capital of the western empire). During his extended stay at Milan, Theodosius came directly under the influence of Ambrose. The most vivid illustration of the bishop’s spiritual authority over the emperor came in 390. In the large Greek city of Thessalonike a popular charioteer was arrested and executed for committing a crime. In their anger the charioteer’s fans lynched the city officials responsible for his execution. In retaliation against the fans, Theodosius ordered troops to find and kill the guilty. The troops far exceeded their orders and massacred many of the city’s inhabitants. The affair was the subject of much discussion in cities throughout the empire, and Ambrose assumed it as his responsibility to pass judgment on the emperor. Disapproving of Theodosius’ handling of the affair, Ambrose refused to administer the eucharist to him until he had done penance. With Heaven or Hell in the balance, Theodosius complied, making public penance in the Milan cathedral.

Monasticism and the suppression of public paganism

Already an indefatigable opponent of “heresies,” under Ambrose’s tutelage Theodosius became equally energetic in combating the “demons” of the Greco-Roman pantheon. From the outset he had presented himself as unsympathetic to paganism (on his accession, in 379, he was the first Roman emperor who did not accept the office of Pontifex Maximus), but more than a decade passed before he went on the offensive against the old gods. In his last years, however, Theodosius issued a series of edicts banning paganism. Although generations would pass before the eradication of paganism, Theodosius’ edicts were more effective than those of Constantius, in large part because by the 390s there was plenty of Christian muscle to carry them out. The muscle was supplied by the monks, men who had dedicated their lives to serving Jesus the Christ.

Monasticism emerged in the years after the Edict of Toleration (311), Constantine's conversion (312), and the Edict of Milan (313). With the "Great Persecution" now ended, Christians no longer faced death as the price of their religion and some of them regretted that they no longer had the opportunity to become martyrs. Because literacy and perhaps even some talents as a leader, liturgist, and preacher were required of priests and bishops, the average man had no way of showing his devotion to Jesus and the Church. Celibacy, however, had been highly prized in New Covenant Christianity since Paul's time: celibate men and women were "living like angels," a mortification of the flesh that clearly added to one's spirituality. All along, virgin women had a formal status, being supported by the local church to which they belonged, but until the fourth century celibate men did not: a celibate man was expected to make his living in some way or other, and not be a burden for the local church. It was in Egypt that celibacy became a full-time profession for male Christian overachievers: *monachoi* are first attested in Upper Egypt, in Constantine's reign. The first monks seem to have lived in villages, and - like their female counterparts - may have received some support from their fellow Christians.

Two variations of monasticism appeared by the middle of the fourth century. Anchorite (from the Greek verb *anachorein*, "to withdraw") monks moved away from towns and villages deep into the wilderness, where they lived a life of solitude, devoting themselves to prayer, meditation and celibacy. The anchorite monk depended for his food and drink on small gardens and a goat or two, and on whatever might be brought to his remote hideaway by ordinary Christians. Much more numerous than the anchorites were the cenobite (from the Greek words *koinos bios*, "shared life") monks, who lived in communities - monasteries - made up entirely of monks. The first cenobite community was established in the Nile valley by Pachomius, who began as an anchorite but was instructed in a dream to form a monastic commune. Although the cenobite monks' primary duty was again devotion to the Christ, they were self-supporting, and worked in the monastery or on its land as gardeners, herdsmen, weavers, carpenters, and cooks. By the time of his death in 346 Pachomius had helped to establish nine cenobite communities for men and two for women, and by the end of the fourth century the monks of Egypt numbered at least ten thousand. In the Nile valley of Upper Egypt several of the ancient Egyptian temples were taken over by celibate groups and were converted into Christian monasteries.⁴³ From Egypt monasticism spread quickly through the empire and into Sassanid Mesopotamia, as men chose "to leave the world" and to become professional Christians, an option that women had enjoyed since the first century.

The cenobite monks were, by the end of the fourth century, the "soldiers of the Church," available and in fact eager to serve their Lord in difficult or dangerous tasks. It was to the cenobite monks that a bishop looked when he needed a crowd of able-bodied men to intimidate potential opponents. In 391, the Christians of Alexandria, led by their bishop, Theophilus, clamored for the destruction of all the city's temples. Emperor Theodosius issued the desired edict, putting Theophilus in charge of the demolition. The bishop summoned monks from nearby monasteries to assist in the razing of the temples, and a bloodbath ensued. One of the last temples to fall (and one of the most stoutly defended) was the Serapeum, the most venerable temple of the cult of Sarapis and Isis and one of the architectural prizes of Alexandria. It is likely but not certain that the Alexandrian library, the largest in the ancient world, was burned at

the same time.⁴⁴

In the same year, 391, Theodosius issued an edict prohibiting sacrifices at the temples empire-wide. The following year a second edict - difficult to enforce - prohibited such private rites as the hanging of garlands, the worship of *lares*, and the burning of incense. More effective was the third edict, in 393, closing down all athletic games that had been established to honor the pagan gods. Thus ended the ancient Olympic Games, which in 776 BC the Hellenes had set up for Zeus and Hera. Theodosius' edicts, eagerly carried out by the monks and other zealous Christians, effectively ended the public worship of the old gods in the cities. The people of the countryside - the *pagani* - were less easily policed, and in many remote places they continued to practice their ancestral rites all through the fifth century. As a result, the word *pagani* began to take on a new meaning: now the word *paganus* might be applied either to a rustic or to a worshiper of the old gods.

In cities, on the other hand, the Christianizing of the empire went briskly forward. In the decades that followed Theodosius' edicts, grassroots bands of Christian vigilantes tore down what statues of "the demons" were still standing in the temples and other public spaces, and scavenged the temples themselves for cut blocks, column drums, and paving stones that could be used for Christian churches. Even in Athens, which still had a sizeable pagan population, the old temples were cannibalized. Eventually even the Parthenon was converted into a Christian church, appropriately dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Alexandria was shaken again by Christian mobs in the early years of Cyril's bishopric (Cyril, nephew of Theophilus and even more rabid, was installed as bishop - after some violence - in 412). The targets of the mobs were varied - "heretical" Christians such as the Novatianists, Judaeon synagogues, and what was left of paganism - but one of the most sensational was Hypatia, the female philosopher who headed the Neoplatonist school. The rioters pulled Hypatia from her carriage and carried her into a church where they stripped and killed her. After tearing her body limb from limb, they hauled her remains to a place called Cinaron and burned them.⁴⁵ Because many of the monks came from the lower, non-reading class, they had a special zeal in assaulting upper-class pagans. In the Nile valley Shenute (Schenudi), the abbot of a large monastery, led his monks against the estates of the wealthy non-Christians, and in North Africa roaming bands known as Circumcellions terrorized the governing class, whether pagans or "heretics," in the name of the Lord.

Amid such violence did public paganism and public Hellenism come to an end in most places. In private, millions of people in the empire were not yet Christian. Private celebrations of the ancient holidays could not be prevented: a small Hellenic elite continued to worship the Olympians until the sixth century, and in the remote countryside in both east and west *pagani* continued their age-old sacrifices and rituals. But that was largely hidden from the public eye, and from the 390s onward the Roman empire's external appearance was Christian. Even the senators in Rome began - at least outwardly - to convert to Christianity, and by the middle of the fifth century only a small minority still claimed to worship the old gods.

The breakup of the western Roman empire, to 430

In 392 Valentinian II, the youthful emperor of the west, had an open argument with

Arbogast, his chief general, and soon thereafter was found hanged (whether by his own hand or Arbogast's is not known). Arbogast then conferred the imperial power on a Roman aristocrat, Eugenius, who secured the Roman senate's goodwill by restoring most of the ancient Roman priesthods. These untoward events required Theodosius and his general Stilicho (of Vandal descent) once again to march to the west, to confront Arbogast and depose Eugenius. As the showdown neared, Eugenius appealed to the pagans of the west, and before the decisive battle in September of 394 there was a flurry of religious activity on both sides: Arbogast and Eugenius were heartened by favorable omens and by generous sacrifices to the old gods, while Theodosius and Stilicho banked on Christian prayers for victory. On the Frigidus river in the Julian Alps, near the present border of Italy and Slovenia, Theodosius won the battle, and for the last year of his life he ruled the entire empire.

For one man to rule so large an expanse, however, was difficult if not impossible, and in the event Theodosius the Great was the last to do so. On his death in 395, at not quite fifty years of age, he bequeathed the empire to his two sons: Arcadius, at seventeen, would rule the east, and ten-year old Honorius the west. Although the two minors were not themselves ready to rule, on his deathbed Theodosius received from Stilicho a promise to take care of the boys and of the empire.

Arcadius' reign in Constantinople (395-408) was happier, although briefer, than that of Honorius (395-423) in the west. The Visigoths had not settled down in the Balkans but continued to cause trouble, although this time their eyes were on Italy. Under their new warlord, Alaric, they invaded the Po valley in 402 but were stopped at Verona. The obvious weakness of the Roman frontier defenses tempted the barbarians to make a vast incursion across the upper Rhine. On December 31 of 406 raiders crossed the frozen Rhine not far from Mainz (Moguntiacum). Suebi, Alans and Vandals, followed soon by Burgundians, sacked Mainz and neighboring cities immediately. In the spring of 407 some of the raiders went north, joined there by the Franks,⁴⁶ to sack Trier and Reims, while others reached Aquitania in the west and the Po valley in the south. Honorius and his court had to flee Milan and set up their imperial palace at Ravenna, in the inaccessible marshes along the Adriatic coast.

Arcadius and his advisors in Constantinople turned the western empire's travail to their own advantage. Because Alaric and his Visigoths were nominally "Roman allies," Arcadius urged Alaric to lead his men to Italy and defend Roman interests there. The eastern empire thus rid itself of its unwanted guests. Alaric was happy to go to Italy, which was virtually defenseless, but instead of confronting the other barbarians he joined them in the looting of the empire's cities. After plundering several Italian cities along the way, the Visigoths on August 24 of 410 entered Rome itself. For the next three days they ransacked the Eternal City, pillaging houses, raping women, and slaying the few Romans who dared to oppose them. Many of the wealthier Romans had anticipated the Visigoths' arrival by sailing off to North Africa for refuge. Those who stayed - pagan, Christian, Judaeans - fled for refuge to the churches of Rome, which the Visigoths kindly spared. From Italy the Visigoths headed across southern Gaul to Spain, sacking cities as they went. In Spain they finally settled down, carving out for themselves a territory that for the next three hundred years would be "the Roman Kingdom of the Visigoths."

Gaul too was divided among the barbarians. Frankish war-bands took over much of northeastern Gaul, while the Burgundian invaders created their own kingdom in what is today central France. Britain was left mostly to its own devices, as Angles and Saxons - coming from what is today Denmark - first raided the coast and then penetrated into the southeastern interior of the island. North Africa was the last of the Latin west to fall to the Germanic warlords. In 429 Gaiseric (or Genseric) led 80,000 of his Vandal tribesmen across from Spain into Africa, where he took and sacked one city after another. When Augustine, bishop of Hippo, died in 430, his city was in the last stages of a Vandal siege. Carthage fell in 439, and the Vandals declared a Vandal kingdom in North Africa (it would last for more than a hundred years). By this time the dismemberment of the western empire was far advanced, and the Roman civilization that for centuries had characterized these lands was rapidly disappearing. Loss of life was less than it might have been in so great a disaster, because the barbarian conquerors were Christians (most of them⁴⁷ were "Arians," however, and the Roman west was trinitarian) and their intent was not to annihilate but first to plunder and then to subjugate the empire's inhabitants.

Augustine and the *City of God*

The sack of Rome was still vividly in people's minds in 413, when Augustine, bishop of the city of Hippo on the North African coast, began to write his *City of God* (the full title in the manuscripts is *De civitate dei contra paganos libri xxii*). A native of North Africa, Augustine had been a distinguished professor of Latin rhetoric at Milan until Easter of 387, when he was baptized in the cathedral by Ambrose. Returning to Africa, he was in 391 ordained as a Christian priest and appointed assistant to the elderly bishop of Hippo. When the latter died in 395, Augustine was chosen as his replacement.

Having been a Manichaean auditor for many years, Augustine was keenly interested in the problem of evil. With the Manichaeans, Augustine for a long time believed that Satan was supreme in the physical world and that evil was Satan's doing. But Augustine had also absorbed some of the teachings of the Neoplatonists, especially through the writings of Marius Victorinus and of Ambrose. In Neoplatonism there is no Satan, and "evil" is merely separation from "the One." Upon his conversion to Christianity Augustine accepted, as all Christians did, the existence of Satan, but he limited Satan's role to that of a Tempter: Satan constantly tries to entice men and women away from God, and when Satan succeeds, evil is the consequence.

One of Augustine's most important and most problematic contributions to Christian theology was his doctrine of Original Sin.⁴⁸ The doctrine was the chief topic of his *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, and it found frequent expression in his other later works. Since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, so Augustine concluded, humans have been irremediably "fallen" creatures. The Fall occurred when Satan lured Adam and Eve into sin, and ever since that time humankind has been burdened by Original Sin (*peccatum originale*).⁴⁹ Before eating the forbidden apple Adam and Eve lived like angels, free of sexual passion, but after sinning they descended to the level of the animals, constantly subject to lust (*concupiscentia*). Lust, or sexual desire, is a constant manifestation of humankind's Original Sin, and only by God's grace are some people saved. This doctrine may have taken root in

Augustine's mind as he turned away from Manichaeism, which he had embraced in his younger years, and it matured during his opposition to Pelagianism.

Augustine's *City of God* was meant to be a defense of Christianity against the many upper-class pagans who had fled to North Africa from Rome before or during the Visigothic sack, and who blamed the city's disaster upon the Christians. Some of these pagans had caught the ear of Volusianus, a pagan and the proconsular governor of the province of Africa. It was Augustine's initial project to persuade Volusianus and others that the accusations of the pagans were misplaced. The work grew in volume and scope, however, and more than ten years passed before Augustine finished the last (twenty-second) book.

By the fifth century critical thinking had long disappeared, and to analyze and understand why the Roman empire was being overrun by barbarians was within the power of neither Augustine nor any of his contemporaries, whether pagan, Christian or Judaeon. Augustine's goal, typical for his times, was to show that the sack of the city of Rome was not a punishment by the old gods, angry because their public worship had been abolished. Except for a discussion of the sack in Book One, Augustine rarely mentions what was happening in the world around him. The first five books castigate the ancient deities, rites, customs and history of the Romans, as Augustine makes the argument that the traditional gods of Rome - "demons," as he saw them - were not responsible for the city's success in ancient times, nor was the discontinuance of the demons' worship the reason why the Goths had recently sacked the city. That argument will be challenged by few modern readers, but in the early fifth century the matter was hotly debated. Judaeans and Christians of course, but even educated pagans assumed that what was happening to them was being done by supernatural agents, and the problem was to determine whether it was the gods, God, or a malign conjunction of the stars that sent the Goths to plunder the city.

Having shown the vices of the city of Rome, Augustine goes on in the second half of his work to show the sublimity of the city to which he belonged, the City of God. From the time of Abraham to the birth of Jesus the Christ, this divine city was Israel and Judaea. With the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ the divine city was opened to Gentiles, and became synonymous with the Church. To show that from very ancient times prophets had foretold that Jesus the Christ would save humankind from Hell, Augustine produced the many passages from the Old Testament prophets that earlier Christian exegesis had identified. He believed that Gentiles too had prophesied the Incarnation. Mercury (Hermes Trismegistos) spoke of it four generations after the time of Atlas and Moses, and the Sibyl of Erythrae - Augustine dated her poetry to the time of Homer or possibly as early as the Trojan War - uttered a Greek poem, in which the first letters of each line spelled out in an acrostic the title, *Iesous Christos theou huios soter* ("Jesus the Christ, Son of God, Savior").⁵⁰

Miracles, saints and relics

Living in an age of divine revelation, demons, and angels, Augustine was a firm believer in miracles. The Biblical miracles were the greatest, it need hardly be said, but "the demons of the Gentiles" also wrought miracles. Augustine recounted, for example, that among the demons who had journeyed to Rome on their own steam were the Penates who miraculously

accompanied Aeneas, the snake of Aesculapius that swam up the Tiber from Epidauros in Greece, and the stone of Cybele, that propelled the ship in which it was being carried from Anatolia. Real and remarkable as were these miracles, they “are in no way comparable in power and grandeur with those performed, as we read, among the people of God.”⁵¹

These had not ceased, as some Christians in Late Antiquity supposed, but were still to be seen. Many of them had occurred at Augustine’s own basilica at Hippo, where a shrine contained relics of St. Stephen the Martyr. Augustine kept a record of the miraculous healings that had taken place at the shrine, and in the final book of *City of God* he described them, reassuring his readers that in the City of God the power of God was frequently displayed.⁵² In retrospect, we can see that in Augustine’s time the age of miracles was just beginning. In Greco-Roman antiquity the educated class had been skeptical of miracles, but by the fifth century that class was disappearing. For the next thousand years the belief in miracles not only would be virtually universal among the illiterate or barely literate, but also would be fostered by the clergy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

As at Hippo, where a dead girl was - so Augustine asserted - brought back to life when one of her garments was carried to the shrine of St. Stephen, so miracles credited throughout the medieval period were normally accomplished either at the tomb of a saint or by a relic of a saint.⁵³ The tomb of a martyr or a confessor was his or her “place,” and was invariably supposed to radiate the saint’s power to assist a suppliant’s prayer. The inscription at the tomb of Bishop Martin of Tours announced, “Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul lies in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind.” Jerome described how the wealthy Paula, his benefactress, had come from Rome to visit the holy places of the east. In Samaria she saw tombs at which pilgrims with their voices and postures were beseeching the saints:

And here she was filled with terror by the marvels she beheld; for she saw demons screaming under different tortures before the tombs of the saints, and men howling like wolves, baying like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like serpents and bellowing like bulls. They twisted their heads and bent them backwards until they touched the ground; women too were suspended head downward and their clothes did not fall off.⁵⁴

Pilgrims visiting the tomb of a martyr, a bishop or some other saint often left gifts, in gratitude for miracles either experienced or expected. Some of the gifts were lavish: silver crosses and necklaces, silver altar tablets, linen and silk hangings.⁵⁵

While the tombs of recently deceased saints were known and accessible, the resting places of the most important saints - the apostles, or others mentioned in the New Testament - were often unknown, and in those cases the saint’s power was manifested not at his or her “place” but by a relic supposed to have come from the saint’s body. A relic might be the shin-bone of a martyr or the skull of a confessor, and so the Christians of Late Antiquity were notorious for their preservation and parading of holy bones. Every church did its best to acquire such a priceless relic, which would be kept in a bejeweled reliquary. As in Augustine’s own basilica, a record would be kept of the miracles wrought by the relic. Once a relic achieved

some reputation for its healing powers, pilgrims would travel hundreds of miles in order to pray before it, and perhaps to make a gift to the church in which it was housed. The miraculous powers of relics were not discredited in Christendom until the Protestant Reformation.

The waning of Greco-Roman civilization

Most people in the Roman empire had always believed in the supernatural, whether auguries and omens or marvels and magic. For a very long time, however, the educated had sneered at such credulity, and had prided itself on its “love of wisdom” (*philosophia*). By the beginning of the fifth century the educated class, whether in the Greek east or the Latin west, had itself become fascinated with the supernatural, and philosophy had become theosophy. God had routed the gods, and men and women of all classes now devoted themselves to finding the right relationship with God: for answers the few looked to Neoplatonism, while the many looked to Christianity, Judaism, Mazdaism, Manichaeism, or one of the other religions of Late Antiquity. The great majority had become Christians, and in their minds the Church was the only establishment that really mattered.

While defending the Christians from pagan accusations, the *City of God* makes very clear how alienated Augustine and his fellow Christians were from the Roman empire in which they lived. Despite the fact that the emperors had been Christian for a hundred years, Augustine and his readers did not regard themselves as “Romans” nor did they consider the Roman empire their own. Patriotic devotion is not to be expected in the provinces of an empire, and it is not surprising that in the Roman empire most of the provincials - whether Christian, Judaeian or pagan - had little affection for the state. Augustine and his fellow Christians, however, were not merely indifferent to the state but were passively hostile to it. As in the apologies of Tertullian and Minucius Felix two hundred years earlier, so in the *City of God* “we Christians” are still contrasted with “those Romans” (*illi Romani*), always to the disadvantage of the latter. The author details for the reader the obscenity and rapacity of Roman culture, while extolling the charity and chastity of the Christians. The title, *City of God*, is an apt statement of the work’s theme. The only community to which the author belonged and in which he felt at home was the Church. The days of classical Greece and Rome, when the individual’s highest loyalty was to the *polis* or *res publica*, were far in the past. Your identity now came from the religious tradition that you had chosen or inherited. Greco-Roman civilization had been replaced by Christendom.

1. Letter 22 in the Cyprian corpus, written to a lector named Celerinus by Lucianus, a Christian being held in prison.

2. Eusebius, *HE* 7.13.

3. Callistus (218-222), whose many enemies included Christians as well as non-Christians, was apparently killed by a mob and not by Roman authorities.

4. The synoptic Gospels place Jesus’ crucifixion on Passover, the 14th of Nisan (the Gospel of

John, contrarily, places it - see John 19:14 - on the day before Passover). The early Christians in Anatolia seem to have had one great holy day, on which they first mourned the death of Jesus and then celebrated his resurrection. This day always coincided with Passover.

5. Adapted from AV. This and Matt 18:17 are the only passages in the canonical Gospels in which Jesus speaks of his *ekklesia*. The three verses of Matt 16:17-19 have attracted a huge commentary, beginning with Luther and Zwingli. See Caragounis 1990.

6. In some quarters, however, Peter's stock remained very high all along. The Pseudo-Clementine literature, a romance perhaps dating from ca. 300 (it is mentioned disparagingly by Eusebius at *HE* 3.38) extolled Peter and made oblique attacks upon Paul's credentials as an apostle. Although most of the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* that have come down to us in mss. date from a later period, *Recognitions* 1.27-71 seems to date from the second century and to have circulated among Ebionites or Judaeans Christians. See Jones 1995.

7. *Epist.* 55.8 and 59.14.

8. Although Cyprian regarded the Roman church as unusually important within the catholic church, he did not yet suppose that the catholic church was centered in Rome. As bishop of the Christians at Carthage, Cyprian had more influence than Cornelius had.

9. Eusebius, *HE* 6.43.11.

10. Arnaldo Momigliano wrote some excellent pages (Momigliano 1975, pp. 147-50) on the Greek manufacture of Zoroastrianism: "I am not sure that one can calculate the consequences of being fed on forgeries. But I am sure that it makes a difference if a civilization, like the Hellenistic civilization, not only loses faith in its own principles, but admires its own forgeries as manifestations of a foreign civilization." Momigliano is here talking specifically about the "Zoroastrianism" elaborated by Greek writers in the Platonic tradition.

11. In discussing the problem of the existence of evil, Plutarch, *Concerning Isis and Osiris* 46-47, wrote as follows (Loeb translation): "The great majority and the wisest of men hold this opinion: they believe that there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the Artificer of good and the other of evil. There are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the sage (μάγος), who, they record, lived five thousand years before the time of the Trojan War. He called the one Oromazes and the other Areimanius; and he further declared that among all things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance, and midway between the two is Mithras; for this reason the Persians give to Mithras the name of 'Mediator.'" This Plutarch passage is a good example of the inability of the Hellenes to deal critically with the distant past, or with what they supposed were traditions of the Egyptians, Chaldaeans or "Magi."

12. Neither Kartir nor any of the Sassanid kings mentioned Zarathustra in the surviving inscriptions. They referred to the religion as "Mazdaism" (*mazdesn*). See Boyce 1979, p. 115.

Boyce observes that the Sassanids' silence about Zarathustra "is in marked contrast to the Pahlavi literature, which is full of the prophet's name."

13. Peters 1970, p. 590.

14. Cor inquietum est donec requiescat in te.

15. Marinus, *Vita Procli* 28. On this see Athanassiadi 1999, p. 151, n. 9. Proclus was born in Constantinople in 411, and died in 485. His *Chrestomathía*, something of a history of Greek literature, was lost late in the Byzantine period but was still available to Photius and to Michael Psellus. Proclus' extensive commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles is also preserved only in fragments, but much of his massive output survives. The six books of his *Theologia Platonica*, are now available in Greek text and French translation, edited and translated by H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, Paris, 1968-1997. Also extant are lengthy commentaries on the *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Timaeus* (five books), and other Platonic dialogues, as well as treatises on Providence, on the existence of evil, and other topics. Proclus also wrote *Eighteen Arguments against the Christians*, which survives only in an early 16th- century refutation.

16. Marinus, *Vita Procli* 38, as quoted by Athanassiadi 1999, p. 181.

17. Peters 1970, pp. 593-4.

18. Hierokles, governor of Bithynia (the province in which the persecution originated), was a Neoplatonist. And the most effective critic of Christianity ca. 300 was Porphyry, another Neoplatonist. Trdat the Great's conversion to Christianity and his establishment of Christianity as the religion of his kingdom, was perhaps related to his attempt to distance Armenia from the Sassanids (who by the early fourth century were rigorously Mazdian).

19. Tertullian *Apol.* 17: O testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae.

20. From the *Acta Proconsularia* on Cyprian's martyrdom: Christianus sum et episcopus. Nullos alios deos novi, nisi unum et verum Deum, qui fecit caelum et terram, mare et quae sunt in eis omnia. Huic Deo nos Christiani deservimus.

21. Brown 1971, p. 90.

22. The *lábarum* (perhaps a Keltic word) was a staff topped by the Greek letters XP (*chi* and *rho* being the first two letters of Χριστός).

23. On Constantinople's original religious structures and their subsequent history see Chadwick 1967, p. 127, n. 2. Constantine's own two churches were dedicated to the Twelve Apostles and to Peace. The original Church of Holy Wisdom (Haghia Sophia) was built by Constantine's son, Constantius. It was completely rebuilt (after its destruction by fire) by Justinian.

24. On Constantine's actions against paganism see Barnes 1981, pp. 254-55.

25. Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 2.45, says that soon after Constantine's victory over Licinius "two laws were promulgated, one of which was intended to restrain the idolatrous abominations which in time past had been practiced in every city and country; and it provided that no one should erect images, or practice divination and other false and foolish arts, or offer sacrifice in any way." At VC 2.44 Eusebius had written that immediately after defeating Licinius Constantine had forbade public officials of high rank (provincial governors and up) to offer sacrifices. It seems that the temples continued to function under Constantine, and so the VC statement has been interpreted to mean that Constantine forbade individuals to offer sacrifices on their own, but permitted the traditional sacrifices at temples to continue. Barnes 1981, p. 210, takes the VC statement at face value and dates the legislation to 324: "Constantine forbade the erection of cult statues, the consultation of pagan oracles, divination of any sort, and sacrifice to the gods under any circumstances." Libanius, writing in the third quarter of the fourth century, says that the traditional cults had not been disturbed by Constantine, but Libanius' statement may have been tendentious.

26. On the inconsistency between trinitarianism and monotheism in Christian discourse see the beginning of Marius Victorinus' treatise, *De homoousio recipiendo*.

27. The Greek phrase at Gal 4:4 is γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός. In the Vulgate, *factum ex muliere*.

28. This is clear in the Creed of Ulfilas. See <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/texts/auxentius.trans.html> for Jim Marchand's translation of the creed from the Latin, appended to Marchand's translation of the *Letter of Auxentius* (the *Letter of Auxentius* was preserved in the margin of a manuscript of Ambrose's *De fide*). Ulfilas' creed declares that the Holy Spirit is "neither God nor Lord, but the faithful minister of Christ; not equal, but subject and obedient in all things to the Son. And I believe the Son to be subject and obedient in all things to God the Father."

29. Arius seems to have been ordained as a priest some time before 300, and so was a generation older than Athanasius. Arius was prominent enough to have been a strong candidate for the bishopric when Bishop Achillas died ca. 315. The election went instead to Alexander, and Arius became more outspoken in his monotheism. When in turn Alexander died in 326 the city's Christians elected as his successor the young firebrand, Athanasius, who was a deacon, a writer, and Bishop Alexander's secretary. Because of his violence against the schismatic Melitians, Athanasius was exiled (by Constantine) to Trier in 335. He returned to the Alexandrian see in 346, having in the meantime brought most of the western bishops to his trinitarian position.

30. The pertinent section of the creed reads as follows: "I believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. By him were all things made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. And was made man."

31. Perhaps authored by Hilary of Poitiers, a much younger contemporary of Athanasius.

32. Eusebius of Nicomedia is not to be confused with Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who also supported Arius but - after being out-voted - subscribed to the new creed. Eusebius of Nicomedia was later readmitted to the Church, after agreeing to a vague paraphrase of the Nicene Creed. When Constantinople was dedicated Eusebius transferred his see from Nicomedia, the former capital, to the new capital. And it was Eusebius who baptized Constantine when the latter was on his deathbed in 337.

33. *Codex Theod.* 16.10.4 (from the year 346): “The same Augustuses [Constantius and Constans] to Taurus, Pretorian Prefect: It is our pleasure that the temples shall be immediately closed in all places and in all cities, and access to them forbidden, so as to deny to all abandoned men the opportunity to commit sin. It is also our will that all men shall abstain from sacrifices. But if perchance any man should perpetrate such criminality, he shall be struck down with the avenging sword. We also decree that the property of a man thus executed shall be vindicated to the fisc. The governors of the provinces shall be similarly punished if they should neglect to avenge such crimes.”

34. The *Vita* of St. Martin, written early in the fifth century by Sulpicius Severus, an Aquitanian presbyter, was meant to rival Athanasius’ life of St. Anthony, who established Egyptian monasticism.

35. *The Teaching of Saint Gregory* was written late in the fifth century, more than 150 years after Gregory’s death, the author taking the pseudonym Agathangelos (“Good Messenger”) and pretending to be a contemporary of the Illuminator. This *Teaching* was one of the first compositions in the Armenian language. Soon translated into both Greek and Latin, it circulated widely in medieval Christendom. For translation and commentary see Robert Thomson, *The Teaching of Saint Gregory: An Early Armenian Catechism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

36. On this see Steven Kaplan, “Ezana’s Conversion Reconsidered,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13 (1982), pp. 101-109.

37. Kaplan 1982, p. 103.

38. On these see A. H. Armstrong, “The Way and the Ways: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in the Fourth Century A.D.,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), pp. 1-17

39. Themistius’ speech as summarized by Socrates 4.32 and Sozomen 6.6-7 (translated by Armstrong, p. 9).

40. Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.10: Non uno itinere perveniri potest ad tam grande secretum.

41. Cod. Theod. 16.1.2: Imppp. gratianus, valentinianus et theodosius aaa. edictum ad populum urbis constantinopolitanae. cunctos populos, quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum, in tali volumus religione versari, quam divinum petrum apostolum tradidisse romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat quamque pontificem damasum sequi claret et petrum alexandriae episcopum virum apostolicae sanctitatis, hoc est, ut secundum apostolicam

disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub parili maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus.

42. For the edict of 380 see *Cod. Theod.* 16.1.2, and for that of 381 *Cod. Theod.* 5.6. On the religiosity of Theodosius see Jones 1964, vol. 1, pp. 165-66.

43. Deir el-Bahri and Medinet Habu, funerary temples of Hatshepsut and of Ramesses III respectively, are examples. Precisely because they were turned into Christian monasteries, these are two of the best preserved funerary temples from the second millennium BC.

44. So Peters 1970, p. 715. On the demolition of the temples see the church history of Socrates Scholasticus, 5.16. The temples, according to Socrates, were “razed to the ground, and the images of their gods were molten into pots and other convenient utensils for the use of the Alexandrian church” (from the anonymous translation, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates*, London: Bohn, 1853).

45. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.15.

46. Thousands of Franks had in the fourth century been permitted to settle west of the lower Rhine, on the assurance that when needed they would help to protect the empire from other would-be intruders.

47. The Franks remained pagans until 496. When the warlord Clovis married Chlotilde, a Burgundian princess who was a trinitarian Christian, Clovis and his followers accepted her religion. As a result, the Franks got on much better with their trinitarian subjects than did the “Arian” Visigoths and Vandals.

48. Although it was Augustine who elaborated the doctrine of Original Sin for western Christendom (in the Orthodox east it was less important), its roots went back to Philo, Paul, and the rabbinic academies. On these see Tennant 1968, a reprint of the incisive *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, which Frederick R. Tennant published in 1903.

49. On Augustine’s conception of evil and Original Sin see Mann 2001, pp. 40-48.

50. For the Sibyl’s acrostic, in great detail, see *Civ. Dei* 18.23. For Hermes Trismegistos see 8.23 and 18.39.

51. *Civ. Dei* 10.16 (Bettenson trans.).

52. *Civ. Dei* 22.8.

53. On the close association between relics and miracles see Brown 1981 and Snoek 1995.

54. Jerome, *Epist.* 108.13 (Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley trans.).

55. Brown 1981, pp. 11-12.