

The End of What?

Proposition I. It is not denied that the early Christians thought of themselves as living in an “end-time,” and they expected the end of something or other to come to an end very soon. The end of what? The common answer to this question is, the end of everything! But such a solution can only rest on an uncritical lumping together without question and without examination of dozens of vague and contradictory concepts. It can be shown easily enough that the apostles expected an end in the near future, but is that end identical with the second coming, the millennium, the day, the resurrection, the creation, the judgment, the return of the ten tribes, New Jerusalem, the cleansing of the earth by fire, the ceasing of time, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the establishment of the heavenly kingdom upon earth, destruction of Babylon, etc.? Apparently we are to assume in a vague and sweeping sort of way that it is. But that is not all, by “the end” we are also to understand the coming of the antichrist, the invasion of the wolves, the descent of the night when no man can work, the beginning of sorrows, the wintertime of the just, the time of unrule, and whatnot, for these events are just as clearly and explicitly said to be sure signs of the end. What nonsense this leads to! Nothing is plainer than that the eschatology of the early church was as complicated and precise as that of modern scholars is simple and vague. It shall not be our attempt to add to the confusion by presenting one more interpretation of early Christian eschatology; as Steubing notes, “Everyone who has tried to get a uniform picture of the Christian hope from the Bible soon finds that the thing is impossible, because the separate passages of the scriptures differ from one another to an extraordinary degree.”¹ But there are a few propositions regarding the expectations of the early church which stand out clearly, and to these we shall address ourselves after a brief glance at the leading teaching of our time: that the early Christians expected the end of the world and the second coming in their generation.

¹ Hans Steubing, “Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie,” *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 7 (1930): 462.

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“The belief in the literal and immediate Coming of Christ is the key to the Church of the First Age,” wrote Fawkes in 1917, that church taught, he says, “a charismatic religion, for which...the end of all things [is] imminent.”² “Though the coming of the Messiah was future, it was imminent, and hourly expected, and this expectation was the background of all the thought of the early Christians,” according to Kirsopp Lake, whose opinion bore great authority.³ What was expected, says Achelis, was nothing less than “the end of all times,” making all interest in this world completely void.⁴ It was, following Goguel, the immediate and “radical transformation of the world,” with the glorious return of Jesus to establish the eternal reign of God on earth.⁵ It is no mere fall of Jerusalem that is described in Mark 13, Eduard Meyer assures us, it is nothing less than the end of the world as depicted in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah.⁶ The essence of all apocalyptic promises, writes Paul Althaus, is their firm foundation in the expectation of an early end.⁷ According to Guillaume Baldensperger, the evolution of Christian doctrine is utterly incomprehensible without the premise of a belief in the immediate *parousia* [second coming] of the Lord, though this is not fully reflected in the New Testament—as it should be.⁸ According to Nestle, the earliest Christians expected the return of Christ in the immediate future, “*i.e.*, in the lifetime of the first generation, and with this they thought of the resurrection of the dead, the universal judgment, and the end of the world as connected.”⁹ For Frick, the apostolic fathers thought of the end of the world, the resurrection, and the judgment as a single and imminent

² Alfred Fawkes, “The Development of Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” *Harvard Theological Review* 10 (1917): 114–15.

³ Kirsopp Lake, “The Shepherd of Hermas and Christian Life in Rome in the Second Century,” *Harvard Theological Review* 4 (1911): 25.

⁴ Hans Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1912), 1:19.

⁵ Maurice Goguel, *Les premiers temps de l'église* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1949), 144.

⁶ Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 3 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 1:127.

§ ⁷ **Paul? Althaus

⁸ See Guillaume Baldensperger, “Jesu Aussagen über seine Parusie,” in *Das Selbstbewusstsein Jesu im Lichte der messianischen Hoffnungen seiner Zeit* (Strassburg: Heitz, 1888), 140–43.

⁹ *Zum Glauben des Urchristentums gehörte die Erwartung der Wiederkunft Christi, der Parusie, in nächster Zukunft, d. h. noch zu Lebzeiten der ersten Generation, womit man sich die Auferstehung der Toten, das Weltgericht und den Weltuntergang verbunden dachte.* Wilhelm Nestle, “Zur Altchristlichen Apologetik Im Neuen Testament,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1952): 118.

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event.¹⁰ What Jesus expected was the sudden and abrupt coming of the reign of God to replace all earthly governments, according to Loisy, an idea which the Lord accepted with all the childish simplicity of the Zealots themselves.¹¹

Proposition II. Yet what looks like an open and shut case is not so simple after all. Loisy for example, is not at all sure that Christ preached the end of the world as imminent or that he even had any idea or opinion about how the world would end.¹² Baldensperger must admit that the concept of the end which is so crystal clear to him and his colleagues is actually not as fully borne out in the New Testament as he would like.¹³ The New Testament story is not at all simple. Years ago Sharman devoted a dissertation to showing that Jesus when he spoke of the future “made statements about the time of three different events, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, the day of the Son of man, and the kingdom of God,” each to take place at a different time, but unfortunately confused by his disciples, who expected the day of the Son of Man within their own generation.¹⁴ Fascher points out that Christ made at least two appearances after the resurrection, and asks whether some sort of a second coming was not thereby realized,¹⁵ for, he notes, in the experience of Easter, Christ actually appeared as the triumphant Messiah who had conquered death.¹⁶ But things are even more complicated by the disconcerting fact that even after they had experienced these comings of the Lord, his disciples insisted on looking forward to the kingdom and waited with patience and hope for yet another coming of the Lord. Some, like Kessler, attempt to remove the complexity of the picture by a theory of contemporaneity: “the creation, the resurrection of Christ, and the end of all things are [in Cor. **1 Corinthians?* 15:45]

§ ¹⁰ Frick

¹¹ Alfred Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1933), 92.

¹² Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 92.

¹³ See Baldensperger, “Jesu Aussagen über seine Parusie,” 140–43.

¹⁴ Henry B. Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus about the Future According to the Synoptic Gospels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), 354–355. (see fn 62)

§ ¹⁵ Erich Fascher, “Dynamis Theou. Eine Studie zur urchristlichen Frömmigkeit,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1938): 90. [Check German pages 90–93 for this, fn 16 and pg 6 fn21]

§ ¹⁶ Fascher, “Dynamis Theou,” 91. [Note Above]

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conceived as a single occurrence,”¹⁷ they tell us, the “mystery” of verse 51 being the secret knowledge that the living and dead are contemporaries, i.e., timeless, in the resurrection. But this ingenious theory certainly escaped the ancient saints whose preoccupation with times and seasons, with preordained periods, with signs of things to come and things to come after them shows them to have been extremely time-conscious. The history-mindedness of the early Christians deserves a moment’s attention here, for it strongly argues against the once popular theory that they felt the end of all things was tomorrow and took no thought at all. Moreover, it becomes at once apparent that the early Christians had a very definite concept of their role and their place in history, and this of course is all-important in considering just what it was that they believed was going to end soon. There is another mystic school which maintains that Christ appears in glory every time he receives formal acclamation in the church—a shallow and sentimental interpretation that is poles removed from the notorious literalism of the early eschatologies, but none the less grants the possibility of multiple appearances of the Lord.

Oversimplifying the End

The main point of disagreement between the early Christians and the Jews, according to Justin Martyr, was that the Jews insisted on oversimplifying the *parousia*, claiming that the Messiah would only come once. “The prophets announced two *parousias*,” says Justin. “Much that foolish people refer to the first coming really belongs to the second, and many silly people do not know that he was to come twice.”¹⁸ Just as there are two *parousias*, Hippolytus informs us, so there must be not one but two comings of the abomination of desolations.¹⁹ Herbert Braun, trying to

§ 17 Kessler, p. 582

¹⁸ Καὶ ὅτι οἱ διδάσκαλοι ὑμῶν, ὧ ἄνδρες, τοὺς πάντας λόγους τῆς περικοπῆς ταύτης εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν ὁμολογοῦσιν εἰρησθαι, ἐπίσταμαι· καὶ αὐτὸν ὅτι οὐδέπω φασὶν ἐληλυθέναι, καὶ τοῦτο γινώσκω· εἰ δὲ καὶ ἐληλυθέναι λέγουσιν, οὐ γινώσκειται ὅς ἐστιν, ἀλλ ὅταν ἐμφανῆς καὶ ἔνδοξος γένηται, τότε γνωσθήσεται ὅς ἐστι, φασί. Καὶ τότε τὰ εἰρημένα ἐν τῇ περικοπῇ ταύτῃ φασὶν ἀποβήσεσθαι, ὡς μηδενὸς μηδέπω καρποῦ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τῆς προφητείας γενομένου· ἀλόγιστοι, μὴ συνιέντες ὅπερ διὰ πάντων τῶν λόγων ἀποδέδεικται, ὅτι δύο παρουσίαι αὐτοῦ κατηγγελέμεναι εἰσι· ... Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 110, in *PG* 6:729-730.

¹⁹ Hippolytus, *Fragmenta in Daniele* 40, in *PG* 10:665–666; *Scholia in Daniele* 12.11, in *PG* 687–688.

unravel the various comings and ends, gets involved in kingdoms that are already here and others yet to come; some, he explains, belong to Pauline eschatology, others do not. “Perhaps,” he suggests, “the κλήσις **see Braun, 152, for Greek* is also something future,” though on the other hand “the miracle of Christ’s existence is present—already accomplished.”²⁰ Fascher points out that there were at least two coming of Christ after the resurrection, and the saints went on looking for more.²¹ It is all very confusing. Eduard Meyer sagely observed that the *eschata* are a mixture of things to come, not just one thing, some of them are to come sooner, others later.²²

Proposition III. There is no proof that the early church expected the end of the world or the second coming of Christ to be soon. In view of such obvious complexity, it is strange that such a clear oversimplification of things can have ruled the schools for so long. But in our own day the impossibility of the conventional, oversimplified position is becoming clear. Very recently the Reverend Glasson has suggested that the universally accepted concept of the *kerygma* (the gospel as first preached) “ought not to be taken as final.”²³ That concept is, as he describes it: “The time of fulfillment has come, the new age has been inaugurated by the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus...soon He will return to glory to judge the world.”²⁴ This is the prevailing “one-package” theory of the end. It is defective, according to Glasson 1) in that it does not satisfy all conditions, and 2) in that it includes “the imminent return of Christ in glory to judge the world,” this latter “a doubtful factor” in Glasson’s opinion, for “the advent does not regularly appear as an essential part of the Kerygma.”²⁵ “It is to be observed,” writes C. H. Dodd, “that the apostolic Preaching as recorded in Acts does not (contrary to a commonly held opinion) lay the greatest stress upon the

²⁰ Herbert Braun, “Zur nachpaulinischen Herkunft des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 44 (1952–53): 152.

§ ²¹ Fascher, “Dynamis Theou,” [see note above pg 4 fn 15].

§ ²² Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 126.

²³ T. Francis Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” *The Hibbert Journal* 51 (1952–1953), 129.

²⁴ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 129.

²⁵ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 129–131.

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expectation of a second advent of the Lord.”²⁶ After citing the evidence he concludes “The evidence of these apostolic speeches is in striking contrast to the popular view that the early Church from the day of Pentecost onwards was possessed by an overpowering conviction that the return of Christ to judge the world was imminent.”²⁷ There is in fact in the scriptures only “one reference between them to Christ as Judge, one further reference to his return, and it is impossible to maintain that the note of imminence is at all prominent, if indeed it is present anywhere.”²⁸

Oscar Cullmann in Germany has joined the chorus of this new song: “the expectation of an early end is not the central theme of the New Testament expectations, let alone the whole obsession of the church.”²⁹ For, he explains, the New Testament insists on a period of waiting and delay. This recognition of the complexity of the thing is underscored by F. A. M. Spencer: “To do and be all that belonged to Messiahship could not from its intrinsic nature be achieved in one appearance, but required two.”³⁰ The problem of what would happen in the interval he finds to be a knotty one, though “Most of the writers in the New Testament betray an expectation that he would come in the course of a few years. And there are one or two sayings in the Gospels that may be interpreted as signifying that...he would return in the lifetime of some of his contemporaries.”³¹ The confusion increases when one considers what was to be the expected time of various events. A study of early Christian asceticism furnished proof to Erik Peterson that the kingdom of heaven, expected by the Christians in the immediate future, was not only a future consummation but a present realization as well—like the resurrection.³² The attempt to solve the time problem

²⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) 33, quoted in Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131.

²⁷ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131–132.

²⁸ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 132.

²⁹ *Zunächst einmal beweist der erwähnte Tatbestand, daß die zwar gewiß für das Neue Teatament charakteristische Naherwartung nicht das Zentrale an der neutestamentlichen Hoffnung ist.* Oscar Cullmann, “Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 3 (1947), 178.

³⁰ Frederick A. M. Spencer, “The Second Advent According to the Gospels,” *Church Quarterly Review* 126 (1938): 5.

³¹ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 5–6.

³² Erik Peterson, “Der Ursprung der christlichen Askese,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 2/3 (1949–50): 204, 206.

by insisting that spiritual things are timeless is becoming more conspicuous though, as we have noted, it is totally against the constant preoccupation of the Christians themselves with times and seasons. Thus when Hippolytus foresees two abominations of desolation to match the two comings of the Lord he is quite specific in dating the first in the time of Antiochus while relegating the second to the future as Antichrist. The fulfillment of times, the “today” of God, is a controlling factor in the thought of Jesus, according to Diétrich, it is that “today” that gives Christ his authority.³³ With the Sermon on the Mount, Diétrich believes, the promised kingdom received its formal charter, the hour of judgment had come and put an end to the power of Satan: the prophets and miracles prove it!³⁴ For Diétrich Luke 10:18 “I beheld Satan fall as a star from heaven...” proves that Satan is finished!³⁵ It is already the end! Just as Christ “awaited impatiently his messianic investiture,” according to Coulange, so his followers “examined the sky every day with feverish anticipation for the signs of his return.”³⁶ Such is the freedom of interpretation allowed by the scarcity of sources.

Others believe that the New Testament depicts the time of the end as conditioned: The kingdom of God will not come until a certain number of elect has been reached—such is the interpretation Cullmann puts on Revelation.³⁷ Steubing has argued that since after death everything is spaceless and timeless, one should not expect the second coming in time at all—since time is measured differently in God’s perspective, the time of the end is no time (what is *endgeschichtlich* is *aussengeschichtlich*): the *parousia* has no relationship to any calendar—a doctrine that would have surprised the Christians to no end.³⁸ And what is more logical than Althaus’s reflection, that since all evil culminated in the crucifixion, there should be nothing from that time on but the

³³ Suzanne de Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1948), 142.

³⁴ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 143–149.

³⁵ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 148–149.

³⁶ *Jésus, quand il était sur la terre, attendait impatientement l’investiture messianique et l’inauguration du royaume . . . Chaque jour on interroge le ciel pour voir s’il va s’ouvrir. On attend le retour du Christ, on l’attend fiévreusement.* Louis Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” *Revue d’histoire et de littérature religieuses* 2 (nouvelle série) (1911), 544.

§ ³⁷ Cullmann (see fn 29)

³⁸ Steubing, “Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie,” 463.

judgment—with the crucifixion the world was perfectly ripe for judgment—that should have been the great culminating moment of everything.³⁹ Only it wasn't. “Luke,” says K. Lake, “thought of Jesus as the founder of a society which would exist until a (possibly distant) Parousia, rather than as the herald of an immediate coming of the eschatological Kingdom of God.”⁴⁰ Sjoberg thinks the early Christians thought of the Messiah as already appearing in their midst: that, he says, was their heavenly secret that made them glad, this society of the just appearing at the end of time.⁴¹ Since the time was absolutely uncertain, according to Meyer, “people were all the more watchful for signs.”⁴² He interprets the admonition to “watch” as “to look for signs,”⁴³ though the whole idea in the scripture is that there will be no warning signs, that the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and that to “watch” meant to take heed of oneself lest one be caught napping at whatever unpredictable moment the Lord might choose to come: to watch not for signs in the heavens but for defects in oneself.

For Braun the expression ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς (Philippians 4:5) is the clearest proof that the time of the coming was thought to be near, yet ἐγγύς is often used in this sense to mean “nearby.”⁴⁴ Thus an agraphan: ὁ ἐγγύς μου, ἐγγύς τοῦ πυρός· ὁ δὲ μακρὰν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας, “who is near me is near the fire, but who is far from me is far from the Kingdom.”⁴⁵ And the scriptural, “they draw near me with their hearts.” To say “the Lord is nearby” certainly does not say “the time of the Lord’s second coming is soon.” All the fathers speculate on the time of the second coming. Irenaeus believed that the Antichrist had appeared in his generation,⁴⁶ and Tertullian points to world disaster as a sure sign of the imminent wrath of God.⁴⁷ For Origen the entirely

§ ³⁹ Althaus (see fn 7)

⁴⁰ Kirsopp Lake and Silva Lake, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 48.

§ ⁴¹ Sjoberg

§ ⁴² Meyer (see fn 6, 21)

§ ⁴³ Meyer

⁴⁴ Braun, “Zur nachpaulinischen Herkunft des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes,” 155.

⁴⁵ Didymus of Alexandria, *Expositio in Psalmos* 88.8, in *PG* 39:1488. See also Origen, *Homilies in Jeremiah* 20.3, in *PG* 13:532.

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.3, in *PG* 7 pt.2:1205–1207.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 3, in *PL* 1:780.

irrelevant II Thessalonians 3:2-3, proves that the end has not come yet.⁴⁸ While comparison with the days of Noah suggests to Origen that the consummation might be a gradual development; the case of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 21) leads him to conclude “that the future consummation will be sudden.”⁴⁹ Lactantius says the experts do not agree as to when the six thousand years will come to an end and bring the *consummatio temporum*, but he is sure that it cannot be more than 200 years away, and indeed “we should expect it daily.”⁵⁰ Hilarion says that 6000 years will be completed 101 years from the time of his writing and 470 years after Christ, but that the ten kings must come before the completion of that time.⁵¹

There is no need to add to these speculations though some modern ones are interesting. Thus Diétrich says the last times are the time of the church and had their formal beginning with the ascension of Christ.⁵² Why worry about time? According to Lietzmann, “all historical events take place in a world of appearances, stimulated by a long tradition of heavenly *phantasie*.”⁵³ Dodd interpreted Mark 9:1 as meaning that some will “recognize” before their death what has been true all along, namely that the Kingdom has already been established.⁵⁴ To this Kümmel objects that *idosin* can have nothing to do with *innewerden* but can only refer to actual sight.⁵⁵ Barth sees four motifs in the great event that show it to be a deep and secret doctrine of the Christians; they believe namely, 1) that Christ would appear with the setting up of the kingdom, 2) that it would happen in their generation, 3) that he would be seen by some but not all, and 4) that chosen witnesses would not die, like the others, upon beholding its glory.⁵⁶ Bornkamm is more conservative: Mark 9:1, he insists, does not say that the *eschata* will overwhelm the present

§ 48 Origen,

§ 49 Origen

⁵⁰ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.25, in *PL* 6:812.

⁵¹ Hilarion, *De Mundi Duratione* 17, in *PL* 13:1105.

⁵² See Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 171–87.

§ 53 Hans Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church*, trans. Bertram L. Woolf (New York: Scribner's, 1937), 76.

⁵⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 53–54.

§ 55 Kümmel

§ 56 Barth

generation, but simply that some few will still be alive when it happens; the dead, however, will be resurrected to participate in the occasion.⁵⁷

The Christians expected “the speedy ‘coming again’ of their King, and of the establishment of His kingdom. However they might explain the nature of His kingdom, the mere talk of it was like a challenge,” says J. W. J., who assures us that all this is to be understood spiritually, but does not tell us how the Christians might explain the nature of a spiritual coming.⁵⁸ The one thing of which Loisy is most certain is the very thing the Professor Piper most strenuously denies: “It is not stated that Jesus came to ‘dissolve’ or to ‘destroy’ the works of the Devil...but rather to deprive Satan’s works of their supernatural power.”⁵⁹ To say that Jesus ever said he would restore the temple is to slander him, says Simon, “the temple that was to come was he, he does not destroy or rebuild it, it is the temple!”⁶⁰ There is no end to the possibilities of “spiritual” interpretation. It reaches its fullest flower in Bultmann’s “demythologizing” process: “The Lord’s return is no longer taken literally by John,” he announces, making John a freak among all early Christians, “as though he were expected to redescend from heaven at some future date. The Lord’s return is accomplished by the Spirit’s presence within the church to guide and protect. Within the New Testament, therefore, the process of demythologizing goes on apace....The resurrection of Christ is not a miracle in the past...it is the transformation of the self here and now.”⁶¹ The apostolic fathers and the apostles themselves took members of the church to task for the popular intellectual game of denying the literal resurrection—but what did they know about it? “It is only too clear,” says the Reverend Manson, “that neither the Incarnation nor the Second Coming is

§ ⁵⁷ Günther Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” in *In Memoriam Ernst Lohmeyer*, ed. W. Schmauch (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagwerk, 1951), 118.

§ ⁵⁸ J.W.J.

⁵⁹ Otto A. Piper, “1 John and the Didache of the Primitive Church,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947), 444.

§ ⁶⁰ Simon

§ ⁶¹ Bultmann

rightly understood” by the disciples.⁶² When the beliefs of early Christians conflict with those of modern church historians there is only one possible explanation for the discrepancy: the ancient disciples just did not understand the Master with whom they lived with the deep spiritual grasp that is to be acquired only in the modern seminary (applications for registration must be made two months in advance.) The disciples utterly misunderstood or ignored Christ’s teachings about the future, according to Mr. Sharman’s Ph.D. thesis—and who could question such a source? Jesus, he tells us, “opposed clearly and strongly the eschatological and catastrophic conceptions of the kingdom,” while his disciples mistakenly identified “the day of the Son of man” with “the kingdom of God,” a misconception resulting in the hybrid idea of “the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”⁶³ This “double confusion by the early disciples” necessitated “the modifications in, and additions to, and shifting of documentary location for, the original sayings of Jesus.”⁶⁴ What this prepositional riot means is that Christ’s own disciples distorted his teachings in order to make them fit into their own scheme of things. Mr. Sharman must attribute to the apostles this shocking combination of trickery and stupidity by way of explaining why their ideas about the future of the church are so different from his. Christ’s teachings also disagree with Sharman’s, but that is, he can readily explain, because the apostles distorted and changed them. This is an excellent and a typical example of how the clerical mind works.

The faith of the early Christians, says Morris, was “the imminent restoration of a temporal independent Jewish state under Christian leadership.”⁶⁵ Since “Suffering humanity longed for a different world on earth,” Barnabas follows revelations in accepting a crassly literal “material Christian rule upon the earth.”⁶⁶ “Jesus, who saw ‘Satan fall like lightning’ was plainly convinced that he had ruined the devil’s empire completely,” according to the astute Coulange, but the

⁶² T. W. Manson, “The New Testament Basis of the Doctrine of the Church,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 1 (1950), 7.

⁶³ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 327.

⁶⁴ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 327.

⁶⁵ John Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” *Past & Present: A Journal of Scientific History* 3 (1953), 3.

⁶⁶ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 14 and 10.

Christians waited for the second coming of Nero, as Antichrist, to announce the end.⁶⁷ And of course there is the liberal social-gospel theory that Jesus intended that all should “continue to live as he lived and work as he worked, so that the kingdom of God might come” through social betterment⁶⁸—a doctrine that speaks very small today.

The present Catholic view is that Christ already reigns in his kingdom through the church: “The church exists in the world that...by its means he may reign. It is not that his kingdom is an ideal...but rather that in fact and reality it exists.”⁶⁹ No room for any “second coming” nonsense there. And how patronizing of that perplexed society to enable God to reign on earth through its agency. “The whole tenor of the gospel narrative,” says Lebreton, “shows him [Christ] deliberately rejecting the messianic programme set out in the *Psalms of Solomon*.”⁷⁰ When they cannot find a single passage clearly in their favor, priests love to fall back on the “whole tenor” of a text for proof, where “whole tenor” is read as one’s personal, general reaction as prompted by one’s training and conditioning. And who said anything about holding the messianic program to a single text? Did the literal expectation of the second coming which is expressed by every father of the church come from a reading of the *Psalms of Solomon*? In the last resort the clergy always can fall back on its old habit of resting its case on large, soft words: What Jesus brought, we are told, was a “deepening, spiritualizing, expanding” of the idea of the kingdom and the messianic hope;⁷¹ but we are not told what those soft, vague and satisfying words mean.

Proposition IV. The early Christians were keenly interested in their place in world history, which they believed was providentially assigned them according to a definite plan.

Olof Linton says that the early Christians in calling themselves true Israel did not think of themselves as entering into a new religion but into a new age of the world, a new phase of

⁶⁷ *Jésus, qui voyait « Satan tomber comme un éclair », estimait avoir ruiné totalement son empire . . .* Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 555.

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§ ⁷⁰ Lebreton

§ ⁷¹

continuing history, which they divided into sharply marked *aeons*.⁷² Christ was to them “the second Adam,” representing as did the first Adam a ministration of the gospel to the human race in a particular set and appointed period. The idea of a world-week in which the last day would be a golden Sabbath of a thousand years was a very ancient one and one which the early Christians accepted with enthusiasm. It is true, says Lietzmann, that the Christians regarded themselves as a new race, a *drittes geschlecht*, being obsessed by “the clear consciousness that with them a wholly new element had been introduced into history.”⁷³ Yet this was but a new act in an old play: The church, says Lietzmann, was older than the sun or moon, created before the world, the source and goal of all world history.⁷⁴ This idea is fully developed by Eusebius in the beginning of his *Church History*—the church is not a new thing, what is new is its restoration to the earth in the time of Christ.⁷⁵ All the civilization, all the softening of manners and integrity of morals that is to be found among the heathen are, he says, lingering remnants of the influence of the gospel surviving in attenuated form from other ages of the gospel.⁷⁶ “The deepest instinct of the early Church, as of our Lord himself,” writes Manson, “was to insist on the continuity of the Christian movement with the previous history of Israel.”⁷⁷ In Galatians 3 and 4, “The coming of Christ is seen as part and parcel of a continuous process,” beginning with Abraham.⁷⁸ One of the commonest questions put to the early Christians by their enemies was, Why did Christ come so late? Since it was ordained that he should come anyway, and since the nature of man does not change through the ages, why did he have to come at the end of time when his coming could assure salvation for but a single generation of men? To this the Christians had a ready answer: the time must be ‘fulfilled,’ the world must be ripe for a particular moment (*kairos*), all things were

§ ⁷² Olof Linton (See possibly: *Das Problem der Urkirche in der neueren Forschung: Eine kritische Darstellung* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1932)).

§ ⁷³ Lietzmann

§ ⁷⁴ Lietzmann

⁷⁵ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 1.4, in *PG* 20:76–80.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 1.2, in *PG* 20:64–65.

⁷⁷ Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 1.

⁷⁸ Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 2.

happening according to a definite plan. This is clearly stated in the *Clementine Recognitions* and in Justin, Irenaeus, and Origen.

Simon sees “a striking parallelism” between the Jewish hopes for Jerusalem and the temple and Christian conception of the *parousia*: both were originally part of a single doctrine, he explains.⁷⁹ If the Jews lacked an original sense for history they certainly acquired it in Hellenistic times, as Meyer showed,⁸⁰ and it was from the Jews that the Christians appropriated the *Sibylline Oracles*, as the Jews themselves had collected them from pagan sources. They conceived of their history in terms of what Flusser calls “prefiguration,” illustrated by the Midrashic rule: “The deeds of the fathers are a sign to the sons.”⁸¹ “This approach, which sees world history as an organic whole, is typical of the workings of the apocalyptic mind.”⁸² The apocalyptic mind was no Christian creation. The Dead Sea Scrolls show it at work, identifying the history of a local sect with the experiences of ancient Israel and Israel to come.

In the Christian concept of the pre-existent Messiah who appeared to Abraham, Moses, and Solomon, as the archetype of high-priest and king whose personal coming is foreshadowed by other high-priests and kings we have a familiar Jewish concept—not of learned official Jewry, but of the literal-minded Messianic Jewry that has left us the apocrypha and the scrolls. According to the *Slavonic Josephus*, the Great High-Priest of Eternity**none of these words found online* is to appear at the end; he is a type and a pattern, holding an office that many have held but which is fully realized only in his person and only at the end of times.⁸³ According to the book of *Jubilees*, Abraham made the same covenant as Noah, and all who do not come under that covenant are children of destruction.⁸⁴ It tells of the tables of the divination of the year that shall be taken up

§ 79 Simon

§ 80 Eduard Meyer

§ 81 Flusser

§ 82 Flusser?

§ 83 *Slavonic Josephus* **I don't think this reference works; see material after n. 167—part before note number worked but not material following; <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/gno/gjb/gjb-3.htm>

⁸⁴ *Jubilees* 14:18–15:26.

when at a new creation the heaven and earth shall be renewed.⁸⁵ What is holy here is not only descended from the beginnings of the race, it is heavenly and preexistent by nature: “This whole festival,” we are told of the Feast of the Booth, “was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah,” and must be celebrated till the end.⁸⁶ The question of *4 Ezra* is: “what shall be the separation of the times,” with special reference to the time of the end.⁸⁷ Moses, we are told elsewhere, was appointed “from the beginning of the world to write the law,” which writing he seals up in specially prepared vases and conceals in a place which “the Lord appointed from the beginning of the world,” to come forth in a later age.⁸⁸

In the same spirit, Justin announces that the Christians are rightly called Jacob, Israel, Judah, Joseph, and David and children of God; Rachael is the church and Noah rescuing the human race is the type of Christ.⁸⁹ The ancients who lived according to the law of reason were Christians, and while the demons anticipated the religion of Christ, Moses anticipated them. Answering those who ask why Christ came so late in history, Origen said, “In every generation the *sophia* of God has come to the souls of those whom it has found to be holy and descending has made prophets and friends of God.”⁹⁰ Why did Christ take three apostles with him on the Mount of Transfiguration, Hilary asks, and explains: “Because 6000 years having passed, the honor of the kingdom of heaven was prefigured; Shem, Ham and Japheth were three in whom the future election of the chosen people was prefigured,” yet it was till not time to build a temple, “for it was not yet time that he should appear in glory.”⁹¹ Such speculations are common in the early

⁸⁵ *Jubilees* 1:29.

⁸⁶ *Jubilees* 6:18.

⁸⁷ *4 Ezra* 6:7.

§ ⁸⁸ elsewhere?

⁸⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 123, 134, and 138, in *PG* 6:763–764, 787–789, and 793–794.

⁹⁰ κατὰ γὰρ ἐκάστην γενεάν ἡ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς ψυχὰς, ὡς εὕρισκει ὁσίας, μεταβαίνουσα, φίλους Θεοῦ καὶ προφήτας κατασκευάζει. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.7, in *PG* 11:1037–1038.

⁹¹ *Sex millium scilicet annorum temporibus evolutis, regni coelestis honor praefiguratur. Tribusque assumptis, de trium origine, Sem, Cham et Japhet, futura electio populi ostenditur. . . . Petro autem, ut tria illic tabernacula fierent offerenti, nihil respondetur: nondum enim ut in hac gloria consisteretur erat tempus.* Hilary, *Commentarius in Matthaeum, Cap. XVII*, in *PL* 9:1013–1014.

fathers (in diametrical opposition to modern Catholic teaching) and show how the early Christians always thought in terms of set times and definite periods.

According to the apocalyptic view of history shared by the early Christians we have to deal with repetitions of types in regular cycles. This view of the world Lord Raglan maintains is characteristic of all religion as expressed in ritual, where the creation of the world is rehearsed in a rite which is a periodic renewal of all things.⁹² Certainly the apocalyptic expectations speak constantly of the great renewal, “the new creation when the heavens and earth shall be renewed.”⁹³ But how is renewal necessary or possible unless the preceding foundation has lapsed? That aspect of the apocalyptic schemes is as conspicuous as any—there is renewal because there has been falling away. The world-rule of peace is to put an end to a period of darkness and desolation, according to the *Sibylline Oracles*, culminating in the divine wrath that shall bring invaders from Asia to overthrow the kingdoms of the world with a mighty hand.⁹⁴ The final end comes as a glorious deliverance from terrible times ahead. The affliction is as organic a part of the picture as anything. According to the *Midrash*, God requires four oaths of Israel and the world by which they are to live together throughout the course of world history: 1) Israel must agree not to revolt against the world empires under whose successive sway she must live from age to age, 2) these in turn must not make Israel’s load too hard to bear or they will be through, 3) Israel must agree not to hasten the coming of the last event, the messianic age, by violent means, and 4) she must not reveal her secrets to the people of the world.⁹⁵ This is the *modus vivendi* of the apocalyptic pattern. Divine institutions cannot be destroyed, but they can be removed from the earth when men defile them. At the new creation when the heavens and the earth shall be renewed, according to the book of *Jubilees*, Israel will return from her fallen state and be gathered together again. Why return? Why be gathered again? Because there has been a fall and a

§ ⁹² Lord Raglan

⁹³ *Jubilees* 1:29.

⁹⁴ *Sibylline Oracles* 3:601–14.

§ ⁹⁵ *Midrash*

scattering (such a calamity is a regular part of the picture): at the end of a set period God “sent His sword into their midst that each should slay his neighbour, and they began to slay each other till they all fell by the sword and were destroyed from the earth,” this extermination being immediately followed by the flood.⁹⁶ The pattern is well illustrated in the account of the Feast of the Booths cited above: “This whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah...and from the day of Noah’s death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they eat blood. But Abraham observed it” until in Moses’s day “the children of Israel forgot it.”⁹⁷ This is a dark and dreary world, says the Lord in *4 Ezra*, “because men do not keep the commandments I gave Adam.”⁹⁸ “The days are coming,” says a typical passage, “when the Most High shall begin to liberate those who are on earth...and then my Son will appear again...and a vast assembly will gather to fight him as he stands on Mt. Sion, for Zion will then appear...and the Lord will gather about him a peaceable assembly, namely the Ten Tribes who were once taken away by the Assyrians.”⁹⁹ Meantime, however, “no one who dwells on the earth will be able to see my Son or those with him except in the time of God...for the present age [*saeculum*] is in darkness and those who inhabit it are without light.”¹⁰⁰ The word used here for world, *saeculum*, means properly a “generation of men,”—its temporal sense appears in the same writing: “the present *saeculum* is not the end,” showing that *saeculum* is time, age, generation, and “this world.”¹⁰¹ This is the same as the Greek *aeon*, sometimes translated “world” where it properly refers to a particular age of the world. The thing that is commonly described in early Christian writings as the end is *kairos*, which means a particular, set period of time, a time set aside for a particular purpose. What Lake translates as “the last days of the end,” in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, he explains as really meaning “the consummation, the time when this age or world-

⁹⁶ *Jubilees* 5:9.

⁹⁷ *Jubilees* 6:18–19.

⁹⁸ *4 Ezra* 2:1.

⁹⁹ *4 Ezra* 13:29, 32, 34–36, 39–40.

¹⁰⁰ *4 Ezra* 13:52 and 14:20.

¹⁰¹ *4 Ezra* 7:112.

period is finished, and a new age will begin.”¹⁰² Even this emphatic designation of the end does not refer to the end of everything, but specifically of a period of time appointed for a particular purpose. In the newly found *Habakkuk Commentary* we read: “For there is yet a vision for the fixed time; it speaks of the end and it does not deceive.”¹⁰³ “The explanation of this,” says the ancient author of the commentary, “is that the final time will be of long duration.”¹⁰⁴ “The ‘final time’” in this writer according to Dupont-Sommer, “is the ultimate period of history, that which will follow the great Judgment, the definitive and eternal period which will see the absolute reign of God. God alone knows this crowning event but it will arrive at the exact moment fixed by Him, even if this moment sometimes seems to be excessively slow in coming...”¹⁰⁵ “The earth has endured,” says Dionysius of Alexandria “to the end of the *aeon*, but not to the end of the *aeons*.”¹⁰⁶ Loisy suggests that what Jesus taught was not the end of the world at all, but only the end of an age, the end of the reign of Satan.¹⁰⁷

Proposition V. The early Christians expected the immediate end of their dispensation of the gospel.

We have seen that the ancient Christians thought of themselves as introducing a new dispensation of the gospel into the earth. It was not the first establishment of the truth on earth—it had been brought in other ages, by Christ himself, and in those ages had enjoyed only a brief career and then passed away. As it was in the days of Noah, so was it also to be in the days of the Son of Man. The church, older than the sun and moon, has been throughout all ages the great maker of history, “but for that very reason,” says Lietzmann, “she does not stand in this world.”¹⁰⁸ Here we have no abiding kingdom, says the apostle. We have seen that the Jews regarded their holy rites

¹⁰² Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) 249.

¹⁰³ *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:3, quoted in A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Preliminary Study*, trans. E. Margaret Rowley (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 42.

¹⁰⁴ *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:3, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

¹⁰⁶ ἡ δὲ γῆ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἔστηκε. ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Dionysius of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Principium Ecclesiastae* 1.4, in *PG* 10:1577.

¹⁰⁷ Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 92.

§ ¹⁰⁸ Lietzmann

and teachings as *supermundane* and unassailable—they were not destroyed by the defilements of men, they were simply removed. So, said St. Jerome in a lucid moment when violent catastrophe had overthrown his fondest illusions and forced him to look at truth, so it was with the church: the church cannot be destroyed, since it is God’s, but it can be removed from this earth.¹⁰⁹ It had certainly been removed before, as the apostolic fathers repeatedly remind the people, and when the Christians were accused of innovation they maintained that it was simply being preached again to all nations as it had in the past—in every age of the world. The formula “then shall my Son appear again,” is accompanied by the explanation that such an appearance is necessary since the world subsided into darkness after previous appearances. After his previous visitations came corruption, the loss of the truth and finally dire destruction—the end of the world, or to use the much commoner expression, the end of an age (*aeon, saeculum*) of the world. There is not just one advent of the Lord in history—people are silly and narrow for insisting on that says Justin—but many, and to match each one of them there has been a destruction and an end. This is the lesson the earliest fathers repeat over and over again. Moses received instructions from the Lord: they were rejected by his people, and so he is depicted as hiding them up in the earth to come forth in a later dispensation. One thinks immediately of the Dead Sea Scrolls, for we must recognize the probability that those who laid them away believed they were transmitting them from one age of the world to another. In these Dead Sea Scrolls we are told the evil spirits are placed on the earth “for all the periods of the ages. For God has set them in equal parts until the last period;...God through the mysteries of His understanding and through His glorious wisdom has appointed a period for the existence of wrong-doing; but at the season of visitation, He will destroy it forever.”¹¹⁰ Note the emphasis on set periods, ages, and seasons and the concept of the coming of the Lord to earth as a “visitation.” Habakkuk in the scrolls is explained as writing “the

§ 109 St. Jerome

¹¹⁰ *The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline* 4:16–19, trans. William H. Brownlee, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Supplementary Studies Nos. 10–12* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1951), 16.

things which are to happen to the last generation; but the consummation of time He has not made known to him.”¹¹¹ The “last generation” is thus not the end of everything; Dupont-Sommer explains the expression: “The ‘last generation’ is the present [latest] generation; though this is not to pass away before the Day of Judgement arrives.”¹¹² It should be noted that the commonest expression for “last days” in the earliest Christian translators is *novissimi dies, novissimum tempus*—meaning “the latest times to date,” and not the end of all time.

Always there is a sense of repetition and cycle. The universe was destroyed and renewed, according to the *Odes of Solomon*, being refounded upon the rock upon which the kingdom is erected as a dwelling for the saints.¹¹³ According to *I Enoch*, a fall and collapse mark “the first end.”¹¹⁴ Sirach, noting that “everything liveth and abideth forever,” lists the dispensations of the earth: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Aaron.¹¹⁵ The Gospels speak of twin advents of Christ, says the *Fragmentum Muratorianum*, conveying a strong sense of repetition.¹¹⁶ In the *Clementine Recognitions* world history is set forth in terms of visitations, each of which was followed by a falling away, a general destruction, and the triumph of fraudulent priesthood. Ten of these dispensations are listed: Cain vs. Abel, the Giants vs. Noah, Pharaoh vs. Abraham (*not* Moses!), Isaac vs. the Philistines, Jacob vs. Esau, the Tempter vs. Christ, Simon vs. Peter, all nations vs. the one who is sent to sow the word among them, and finally the Antichrist vs. Christ.¹¹⁷ Note here that the dispensation of Christ is not the culminating time at all; the word is again to be

¹¹¹ *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:2, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

¹¹² Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

¹¹³ *Odes of Solomon* 22:11. See *Pistis Sophia* 2.71.

¹¹⁴ *I Enoch* 93:4.

§ ¹¹⁵ Sirach

¹¹⁶ . . . *ac de gemino euis aduentu, primo in humilitate despectus, quod fuit, secundo in potestate regali praeclaro, quod futurum est.* *Fragmentum Muratorianum* 23–26. See *Das Muratorische Fragment*, ed. Hans Lietzmann (Bonn: Marcus und Weber’s Verlag, 1902) 4–5; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Roberts and Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981 reprint), 603.

¹¹⁷ *Decem ergo quae diximus paria, huic mundo destinata sunt ab initio saeculi. Cain et Abel unum fuit par; secundum vero gigantem et Noe; tertium Pharaonis et Abraham; quartum Philistinorum et Isaac; quintum Esau et Jacob; sextum magorum et legislatoris Moysi; septimum tentatoris et Filii hominis; octaum Simonis et meum, Petrii nonum omnium gentium, et illius qui mittetur seminare verbum intergentes; decimum Antichristi et Christi, de quibus paribus alias vobis per singula latius exponemus.* *Clementine Recognitions* 3:61, in *PG* 1:1308.

preached to the world before the final coming of Christ and conflict with the Antichrist. This is exactly the picture given by the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, as we shall see. Even the tremendous climax of the cross was not the culminating event, as Lietzmann thinks it should have been,¹¹⁸ for, says Peter in this text, after that terrible event the sun came out again, everything returned to normal, and people went on about their wicked business as before—this was not the millennium!¹¹⁹

“The church was created first of all things,” says the Pastor, “for this reason she is old, for her sake was the world established.”¹²⁰ So, appropriately, six angels, representing the six great eras of time, are represented as working on her constructions. The gate is new “because he was manifest in the last days of the end,”¹²¹ which Lake explains as meaning not the end of the world, but of that particular age of the church.¹²² The Pastor then announces that that particular age has come to a close: it is really the end—the tower is about to be completed, and then repentance will no longer be possible for members of the church, though repentance will still be possible for those of the world, i.e. the end is here not the end of the world at all, but of the church.¹²³ This is dramatized most movingly when the six young men come and carry the Old Lady away to heaven without looking back. This sad loss was followed by the long wintertime of the just. Explaining how such dire loss is possible, Origen notes that “In every generation the *sophia* of God has come to the souls of those whom it has found to be holy, and descending has made prophets and friends of God.”¹²⁴ But men refuse to heed, and so God must send plague, famine, and earthquake to check rising corruption, as in medicine the onset of a disease may be checked by strong measures. When this fails, the disasters become more and more severe culminating in the abomination of desolation—and it was to this very thing that the ancient fathers, including Origen, looked

§ ¹¹⁸ Lietzmann

¹¹⁹ Clementine Recognitions 1:42, in *PG* 1:1231.

¹²⁰ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 2.4.1

¹²¹ Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.12.3

¹²² Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* vol. 2, 249.

¹²³ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 2.2.5 and Similitude 9.12–9.33

¹²⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.7, in *PG* 11:1037–1038.

forward. For each coming of the Lord there must be such an abomination, says Hippolytus.¹²⁵ Throughout the history of the world, Cyprian observes, the just have been the ones to suffer, and that along a well-established pattern: beginning with Abel, then the prophets, then the apostles, following the example of the Lord himself, and that is the example that all must suffer by who follow him. What the church expected in the immediate future was “an enormous *Umschwung* of all things,” said Achelis.¹²⁶ What was that to be?

Recently scholars have called attention to a singular type of *parousia* that strongly supports the suspicion that the envisaged end was that of the church on earth. Dufourcq says that the same idea of the coming of Christ that “illumines and vivifies all the life of the first Christians...burst forth also with marvelous power when the hour of death came to them.”¹²⁷ And Knudsin**Kundsinsin? observes that the idea that Jesus comes literally to the martyr in his hour of death was a familiar one to the early Christians; this does not, he notes, conflict with that *parousia* of Christ when he would come personally “to take home” the apostles after they had finished their work.¹²⁸ This certainly is the most convincing interpretation of the comfort given to those in straits and persecution: “the Lord is near.” If the church was to be taken away, the Lord would be the one to do it, and the early martyrs certainly thought of themselves as going to him in a body to dwell together with him far from the earth.

Thus Sharman devoted a dissertation to showing that Jesus when he spoke of the future “made statements about the time of three different events: the destruction of Jerusalem, the day of the Son of Man, and the kingdom of God,” each to take place at a different time, but unfortunately confused by his disciples, who expected the day of the Son of Man within their own generation (pp.353-5). Fascher points out (p. 90) that Christ made at least two appearances after the resurrection and asks whether the second coming was not thus realized, for in the *Ostererfahrung*

¹²⁵ Hippolytus, *Fragmenta in Daniele* 40, in *PG* 10:665–666.

¹²⁶ Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 1:17.

§ ¹²⁷ Albert Dufourcq (See possibly: *Histoire de la Fondation de l’Eglise: La Revolution Religieuse*, 5th Edition, L’Avenir du Christianisme 1 (Paris: Bloud, 1909))

§ ¹²⁸ Knudsin

(p. 91) he already appeared to men as the triumphant Messiah who had conquered death. Yet, says Fascher (p. 93f) they still expected the kingdom and waited for it with patience and hope as another and separate revelation. For Kessler and others, “creation, resurrection of Christ and the End of all things are (in I Cor. 15:45) conceived as a single occurrence” (p.582), the “mystery of verse 51 being the “contemporaneity” of living and dead in the resurrection. The perplexity of the eschaologists has been described by Steubing, who notes (p.462) that “every one who has tried to get a uniform picture of the Christian hope from the Bible soon finds that the thing is impossible, because the separate passages of the Scripture differ from one another in an extraordinary degree.”

2 (1-30)

Wickenhauser notes that the millennium of John is an earthly messianic kingdom, and fits in with a scheme rarely mentioned in the Jewish but exceedingly common in the early Christian writings, of the *Weltenwoche* of 7 times 1000 years.¹²⁹ The identifying Christian eschatology with earlier apocalyptic patterns calls for a basic pattern of duplication and repetition: there is not just one great event in history but a long series of events, there is not just one coming of the Messiah nor one end of all things. The vague lumping together in a single moment of the second coming, the Antichrist, the day, the resurrection, the creation, the judgment, the New Jerusalem, the burning of the wicked, the destruction of Babylon, the opening of the books, the end of time, the end of all things, the wintertime of the just, the last days, the time of the end, the day of the prince of this world, etc., is convenient but absurd. Christian eschatology was always a complex thing. Olaf Linton says the early Christians in calling themselves true Israel did not think of themselves as entering into a new religion but into a new age of the world, a new phase of a continuing history which they divided up into sharply marked *aeons*.¹³⁰ The same writer reports a general tendency in contemporary Christian thought to regard Christ as “the second Adam,” representing as did the

§ 129 Wickenhauser

§ 130 Olaf Linton, pg. 147

first Adam *ein ganzes Geschlecht*, and in his coming repeating history as it were.¹³¹ The idea of a world-week in which the last day would be a golden Sabbath of 1000 years has been shown to have very ancient proponents among the magi and the Babylonians, and Christian scholars are not averse to seeing in these older eschatologies the closest resemblances to Christian concepts acquired through Jewish channels. Repetition is the essence of the thing. The Apocalypses were eagerly embraced by the Christians, says Achelis, for they lived all in the future and were ever experiencing renewed longings for a new order.¹³² On the other hand, Lietzmann insists that the Christians regarded themselves as a totally new race, a *drittes Geschlecht*, being obsessed by the *klare Bewusstsein* that with them a *voellig neues* element had been introduced into history.¹³³ It was a new time, a new act in an old play. Repetition is not the right word: the old eschatologies are full of new beginnings and endings. The church, says Lietzmann, was older than the sun or moon, created before the world, the source and goal of all world history, “but for that very reason she does not stand in this world,” for there are two diametrically opposed states.¹³⁴ Daniel, says Lietzmann, was a contemporary of Polybius, the first writer of real world history.¹³⁵ Eusebius doctrine, “conception of the preparation for the gospel is a living part of Christian thought,”¹³⁶ according to Frederick Powicke: the New Testament is full of a very different preparation for a very different thing, yet the idea of preparation is basic in both cases—the gospel was fit into a plan of world history.¹³⁷ Reitzenstein has shown that this plan has a messianic tradition of great antiquity;¹³⁸ Burkitt is right in noting that Messianism is not a conspicuous part of late Orthodox Judaism,¹³⁹ but the Dead Sea doctrine shows that it is very conspicuous in the non-conformist sectarian literature of the Jews. The apocalyptic souls were in every age a select few, but they

§ ¹³¹ Linton, pg. 148–150

¹³² Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 1:16–17.

§ ¹³³ Lietzmann, II:41

§ ¹³⁴ Lietzmann

§ ¹³⁵ Lietzmann

§ ¹³⁶ Eusebius

§ ¹³⁷ Powicke

§ ¹³⁸ Reitzenstein

§ ¹³⁹ **F. C./ Francis C. /F. Crawford* Burkitt

represented a very real and solid tradition, to which Christianity belongs. One of the commonest questions put to the early Christians by their enemies was, why did Christ come so late? Since it was ordained that he should come anyway, and since the nature of man does not change through the ages, why did he have to come at the end of time when his coming could assure salvation for but a single generation of men? To this the Christians had a ready answer: the time must be “fulfilled”: the world must be ripe for a particular moment (a *kairos*);¹⁴⁰ all things were happening according to a definite plan. “The deepest instinct of the early Church, as of our Lord himself, was to insist on the continuity of the Christian movement with the previous history of Israel.”¹⁴¹ In Galatians 3-4 “The coming of Christ is seen as part and parcel of a continuous process” beginning with Abraham.¹⁴² The early Christians looked for the signs of the end with “*Gruebelnde Sehnsucht* in the events of world history,” says Knopf.¹⁴³ He sees in *1* and *2 Thessalonians* the adoption of Jewish Apocalyptic, which captures Christianity in the purely Jewish Apocalypse of John, the most often cited book of the second century.¹⁴⁴ Simon sees a “striking parallelism between the Jewish hopes for Jerusalem and the temple and the Christian conception of the *parousia*”: both were originally part of a single doctrine, he explains, but while the Jews reacted to delay by dropping the Messiah and pinning their hopes on Zion, the Christians did the opposite by giving up the temple and hoping for the Messiah.¹⁴⁵ Lake says “it was not the custom of the first Christians to speak of the ‘second’ coming—that is a modern point of view—but of the ‘coming’ of the Messiah.”¹⁴⁶ He says the term “Son of Man” was used for the “pre-existent Messiah, before he actually came as Messiah in function.”¹⁴⁷ Johannes Weiss argued that the Christians, like the Jews, believed that there were two *aeons*: *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*, and that they

¹⁴⁰ Nestle, “Zur Altchristlichen Apologetik Im Neuen Testament,” 116.

¹⁴¹ Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 1.

¹⁴² Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 2.


§ ¹⁴³ **Rudolf* Knopf, 2 (pg 2?) try *Das Urchristentum* BS 2410 .W28; in English BS 2410 .M282

§ ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 14–16

§ ¹⁴⁵ Simon, 247f (See Nibley *Christian Envy of the Temple*)

¹⁴⁶ Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 25.

¹⁴⁷ Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 25.

were living in a period of history which had begun only a short time before and would soon come to an end.¹⁴⁸ But what was that end to be? More recently, Bauernfeind finds the earliest Christians completely involved in the *Metaphysik der Weltgeschichte*.¹⁴⁹ “Along beside the expectation of the second coming,” writes Fascher, “there enters a grandiose historical  image, leading from the preexistent, to the incarnated, to the resurrected, to the exalted, to the returning One.”¹⁵⁰ This sense for history is not Jewish, says Kamlah in a recent study; the whole idea of history is strange to the Jewish mind: “It was the Christian universality...that produced the historical consciousness of the Western world.”¹⁵¹ This argues for the oft-noted affinity of Christian apocalyptic ideas with Persian rather than Jewish concepts. There is a mystic school which even regards Christ as appearing in glory every time he receives formal acclamation in the church—a shallow and sentimental interpretation that is poles removed from the literalism of the early eschatologies but none the less grants the possibility of multiple appearances of the Lord. The Christians appropriated the *Sibylline Oracles* from the Jews, as the Jews had collected them from the pagan oracles. This is what Flusser explains as “prefiguration” illustrated by the Midrashic rule: “The deeds of the fathers are a sign to the sons,”¹⁵² “this approach, which sees world history as an organic whole, is typical of the workings of the apocalyptic mind.”¹⁵³ This he illustrates by the way in which the Dead Sea sect identified their own history with experiences of Israel in the remote past and future.¹⁵⁴ Dupont-Sommer has shown how close this sect is to Christianity and how closely associated were their concepts of history.¹⁵⁵

§ 148 Johannes Weiss (Possibly from *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, 2nd Ed. (Göttingen: Vandendoeck and Ruprecht, 1900), quoted in Linton, *Das Problem der Urkirche*, 120–121)

§ 149 **Otto?* Bauernfeind

¹⁵⁰ *Neben die Parusie-Erwartung tritt ein großartiges Geschichtsbild, welches vom Präeristenten zum Fleisch Gewordenen, zum Auferstandenen, zum Erhöhten, zum Wiederkommenden führt.* Fascher, “Dynamis Theou,” 97.

¹⁵¹ Kamlah

§ 152 Midrash (quoted in Flusser?)

§ 153 Flusser

§ 154 Flusser

¹⁵⁵ See Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 98–100.

“End” not a single, simple event

Illustrations are extremely numerous in early Christian and related writings to show that the sects who looked to the future thought even in terms of repeated patterns of history.

The *Sibylline Oracles* begins by prophesying the wrath to come; it traces world history from the Tower of Babel, through the empires of the Egyptians, Medes, Persians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Macedonians and Romans, predicting that the rule of the last shall come to an end when invaders from Asia shall come “with a mighty hand” to overthrow the kingdoms of the world, which desolation shall be followed by a world-rule of peace.¹⁵⁶ Here we have the essential elements of apocalyptic: (1) There are terrible times ahead, 2) but also a glorious deliverance, 3) following a cycle that has occurred before—the only new thing is the ultimate and distant culmination.

According to the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, not one but two messiahs are predicted¹⁵⁷—and there is nothing preposterous about that. Eusebius dwells at great length on the importance of types and patterns in the messianic scheme: Christ is the archetype of high priest and king, hence all high priests and kings are Christs in the sense of being “types” (εἰκόνας), though the only real Christ is the one archetype.¹⁵⁸ The priesthood is spiritual and eternal. Christ always was, says Eusebius. He appeared to Abraham, Moses, and (as Wisdom) to Solomon—here Eusebius is following very early Christian doctrine of the *Clementine Recognition*: “Why should not the gospel have been preached even as now to all men who lived anciently and to all nations?”¹⁵⁹ Ours is but the old eternal gospel brought again. All the light, knowledge, civilization and refinement in the world is simply the lingering influence of the gospel brought to the world in former dispensations and then lost. There have been ancient visitations on the world, followed by corruption, the loss of the truth and finally physical destruction—the end of the world for that

¹⁵⁶ *Sibylline Oracles* 3:97–109, 156–61, 601–14, 619–23, 702–4.

§ ¹⁵⁷ *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* **no “messiah,” checked “two” “another” “second”;
“Saviour four times in brackets”

¹⁵⁸ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 1.3, in *PG* 20:68–76.

¹⁵⁹ τί δὴ οὐκ οὐκὶ καθάπερ τανῶν, καὶ πάλαι πρότερον εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους καὶ πᾶσιν ἔθνεσιν ἐκηρύττετο, ὧδε ἂν γένοιτο πρόδηλον. Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 1.2, in *PG* 20:61.

dispensation. There is not one advent in history but several, and to match each one of them there has been a destruction and an end.

According to the *Midrash*, God requires four oaths of Israel and the world by which they are to live together:¹⁶⁰ 1) Israel must agree not to revolt against the empires of the world under whose *aegis* she comes from time to time; 2) these in turn must not make Israel's load too hard to bear; 3) Israel must agree not to hasten the coming of the last event, the messianic age, by violent means, and 4) must not reveal her secrets to the people of the world. Here repetition is the theme. The hastening of the end by violent means is a characteristic part of the picture. The man who would lead the Jews to liberation always promises not only that he will free them from the mighty, but that “no mortal shall reign over you, but the All-Highest alone, who has sent me.”¹⁶¹ Such was the message of John, who promised that all rebellious people should be subject to Israel while Israel would be subject to none.

According to the *Slavonic Josephus*, some believed Herod was the promised one, others Jesus, and others Vespasian:¹⁶² such confusion makes it clear that we are dealing with a type and a pattern. The Great High Priest of Eternity is to appear at the end; he is a type, one holding an office that many have held, but in the end that office, typified throughout history by others, shall come to its full realization and be seen in its true nature—meantime it is constantly foreshadowed. According to the book of *Jubilees*, Abram made the same covenant as Noah, and all who do not come under the covenant are “children of destruction.”¹⁶³ It tells of tables of the divination of the years that shall be taken up when at a new creation the heavens and earth shall be renewed.¹⁶⁴ This will be when Israel returns from her fallen state and is gathered together again. For a fall is an unfailing part of the pattern. *Jubilees* tells how at the end of a set period God “sent His sword into their midst that each should slay his neighbour, and they began to slay

§ ¹⁶⁰ *Midrash*
§ ¹⁶¹ *Midrash?*

¹⁶² *Slavonic Josephus* 8.

¹⁶³ *Jubilees* 14:18–15:26.

¹⁶⁴ *Jubilees* 1:29.

each other till they all fell by the sword and were destroyed from the earth,” this extermination being immediately followed by the flood.¹⁶⁵ The pattern of times and dispensations is well illustrated in the account of the Feast of the Booths. “This whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah...and from the day of Noah’s death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they eat blood. But Abraham observed it” until in Moses’ days “the children of Israel forgot it....And all the days of the commandment will be two and fifty weeks of days, and these will make the entire year complete....Three hundred and sixty-four days...these will constitute a complete year.”¹⁶⁶ The *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which has recently come to its own as a document of prime importance for the study of early Christianity, is a fulsome discourse on times and seasons, with clear anticipation of two messiahs. The question of *4 Ezra* is: *quae erit separatio temporum*, with special interest in the *finem signorum tuorum*.¹⁶⁷ Then the great time is predicted when the Lord will visit the earth and all flesh shall see him together. *Praesens saeculum non est finis*¹⁶⁸—in which it is plain that *aeon* and *saeculum* refer to the state of the world in periods of time but after the day of judgment there will be no more future. A weeping woman who was barren 30 years and then lost her only son at his wedding feast suddenly disappeared and in her place is a city.¹⁶⁹ Next a very elaborate numbering of feathers on an eagle that rises out of the sea.¹⁷⁰ “The days are coming when the Most High shall begin to liberate those who are on earth...and then my Son will appear again...and a vast assembly will gather to fight him as he stands on Mt. Sion, for Zion will then appear...and the Lord will gather about him a peaceable assembly, namely the Ten Tribes who were once taken away by the Assyrians.”¹⁷¹ Meantime “no one who dwells on the earth will be

¹⁶⁵ *Jubilees* 5:9.

¹⁶⁶ *Jubilees* 6:18–19, 30, 32.

¹⁶⁷ *4 Ezra* 6:7, 12.

¹⁶⁸ *4 Ezra* 7:112.

¹⁶⁹ *4 Ezra* 9:43–10:59.

¹⁷⁰ *4 Ezra* 11:1–12:35.

¹⁷¹ *4 Ezra* 13:29, 32, 34–36, 39–40.

able to see my Son or those with him except in the time of God...for the *saeculum* is in darkness and those who inhabit it are without light.”¹⁷²

Moses was appointed from the *initio orbis terrarium* to write the law, which he places in specially prepared vases in a place which the “Lord appointed from the beginning of the world.”¹⁷³ One thinks immediately of the Dead Sea Scrolls and must recognize the probability that those who laid them away believed they were following a pattern in which written knowledge was to be transmitted from one age of the world to another. In the Dead Sea documents the good and evil spirits are placed on earth for all the periods of the ages. “For God has set them in equal parts until the last period;... God through the mysteries of His understanding and through His glorious wisdom has appointed a period for the existence of wrong-doing; but at the season of visitation, He will destroy it forever.”¹⁷⁴ The manner and style of the *Habakkuk Commentary*, as of *Daniel*, *Enoch*, the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and *Sibylline Oracles* “are essentially ‘Sibylline.’”¹⁷⁵ Habakkuk is explained as writing “the things which are to happen to the last generation; but the consummation of time He has not made known to him.”¹⁷⁶ This is the pattern usually attributed to the disappointed Christians. Dupont-Sommer explains: “The ‘last generation’ is the present generation; though this is not to pass away before the Day of Judgement arrives,... Therefore, it is necessary to persevere, to retain an absolute confidence.”¹⁷⁷ The author “lived in the thought that ‘the end of days’ had come.”¹⁷⁸ The usual fall: “Since the day when the Unique Founder was taken away until the disappearance of all the militant who walked with the Man of Untruth (there will be) about 40 years.”¹⁷⁹ A total disappearance of the wicked being probable at a later date: thus we have steps and degrees by which all things are consummated.

¹⁷² 4 *Ezra* 13:52 and 14:20.

¹⁷³ *Assumption of Moses* 1:14–18.

¹⁷⁴ *The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline* 4:16–19, trans. Brownlee, 16.

¹⁷⁵ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:2, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

¹⁷⁷ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

¹⁷⁸ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

¹⁷⁹ *Damascus Document B* 20:13–15, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 65.

The universe was destroyed and renewed according to the *Odes of Solomon* 22:11, being refounded upon the rock upon which the kingdom is erected as an dwelling for the saints.¹⁸⁰ *First Enoch* 52:6 speaks of the metal ages in the manner of Hesiod. A fall and collapse makes “the first end”¹⁸¹ Sirach, noting that “everything liveth and abideth forever,” lists the dispensations of the earth: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Aaron. The Gospels tell us, says the *Fragementum Muratorianum*, *de gemino eius aduentu*, the term conveying a strong sense of repetition or duplication.¹⁸² “After the Titans were extinguished,” says the Sibylline “then in the circling course of time, the Egyptian empire arose, then that of the Persians, of the Medes and Ethiopians and of Assyrian Babylon” down to the Romans. First there shall be the Great Deceiver doing great signs and wonders for men. *I Clement* actually appeals to the classic natural cycle of *koros*, *olbos*, *hybris*, and *ate* and lists the fates of past nations to show that what has happened before is happening again. This is his message and warning: if this were the last time, the exceptional time, when the story would not repeat, his position and that of the other apostolic fathers would be totally different. In the *Clementine Recognitions* world history is outlined and shown to fall into a number of visitations, each of which was followed by a falling away, a general destruction, and the triumph of a fraudulent priesthood. Ten dispensations are listed, and each one is matched with its fraudulent counterpart: Cain vs. Able, the Giants vs. Noah, Pharaoh vs. Abraham (not Moses!), Isaac vs. the Philistines, Jacob vs. Esau, the Tempter vs. Christ, Simon vs. Peter, *omnium gentium* vs. the one who is sent to sow the word among them (this is future!), and finally the Antichrist vs. Christ.¹⁸³ It is notable that here, exactly as in the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* the word is again to be preached to the world before the final coming of Christ and conflict with the Antichrist.

¹⁸⁰ *Odes of Solomon* 22:11. See also *Pistis Sophia* 2.71.

¹⁸¹ *I Enoch* 93:4.

¹⁸² *Fragementum Muratorianum* 23, See *Das Muratorische Fragment*, ed. Lietzmann, 4–5.

¹⁸³ *Clementine Recognitions* 3:61, in *PG* 1:1308.

There are yet other times to come, for even the tremendous climax of the cross was not the consummating event, for even after that “things returned to their usual course and men went about their wicked business”—this was not the millennium.¹⁸⁴ Yet the *Apostolic Constitutions* VI:17 states that all things have become new with the church. The same source says that “God has at all times called all generations to repentance.”¹⁸⁵

“The church was created first of all things,” says the Pastor, “For this reason she is old; for her sake was the world established.”¹⁸⁶ So six angels, representing the six ages of world history all have worked on her.¹⁸⁷ The history of the church is marked by definite times; thus the time of this delivery is stated to be the last revelation which the church will receive before the completion of the tower, after which repentance will not be possible for certain people, though those outside the church may continue to repent.¹⁸⁸ The gate is new “because he was manifest in the last days of the end,” though nothing is plainer than that the Pastor is convinced that the world shall continue its course.¹⁸⁹ So Lake explains that it is the “consummation, the time when this age or world-period is finished, and a new age will begin.”¹⁹⁰ Justin announces that the Christians are rightly called Jacob, Israel, Judah, Joseph and David and children of God; Rachel is the church; Noah rescuing the race is the type of Christ.¹⁹¹ The ancients who lived according to the law of reason were Christians, and as such he lumps them together. While the devils anticipated the religion of Christ, Moses anticipated them, and so the rite and doctrines of the Lord are reduplicated anciently in a good and bad sense.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Clementine Recognitions 1:42, in *PG* 1:1231.

¹⁸⁵ ὁ γὰρ Θεὸς, Θεὸς ὢν ἐλέους, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἐκάστην γενεάν ἐπὶ μετάνοιαν καλεῖ διὰ τῶν δικαίων καὶ τῶν προφητῶν. *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.55, in *PG* 1:720.

¹⁸⁶ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4.1

¹⁸⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9.12

¹⁸⁸ See *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.2.5 and Similitude 9.12–9.33

¹⁸⁹ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9.12.3

¹⁹⁰ Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* vol. 2, 249.

¹⁹¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 123, 134, and 138, in *PG* 6:763–764, 787–789, and 793–794.

¹⁹² Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 54, in *PG* 6:408–412.

Plato borrows from the prophets and duplicates their teachings¹⁹³ (“The prophets announced two *parousias*; much that foolish people refer to the first coming really refers to the second, and many foolish people do not know that he was to come twice.)¹⁹⁴ Answering those who ask why Christ came so late in history, Origen says “In every generation the *sophia* of God has come to the souls of those whom it has found to be holy and descending has made prophets and friends of God.”¹⁹⁵ From time to time in history, God has sent plague, famine and earthquake to check rising corruption as in medicine the onset of a disease may be checked by strong measures; if this does not work, the disasters become more severe and so on, until the abomination of desolation, which still is but the beginning of sorrows. Just as there are two *parousias* so the abomination of desolations is not one but two according to Hippolytus.¹⁹⁶ The one invisible, taking place in the time of Antiochus, the other future—the Antichrist. Throughout the history of the world, according to Cyprian, the just have had to suffer along a well-established pattern: beginning with Abel, then the prophets, then the apostles, following the *exemplum* of the Lord himself, which all must follow who follow him.¹⁹⁷ Why did Christ take three apostles on the Mount of the Transfiguration? asks Hilary, and explains: “Because 6000 years having passed, the honor of the kingdom of heaven was prefigured; Shem, Ham and Japheth were three in whom the future election of the chosen people was prefigured;” yet it was still not time to build a temple, “for it was not yet time that he should appear in glory.”¹⁹⁸ The demons, says Lactantius taught the same eschatology as the poets, and it is the same as ours with one exception, that they put Jove in the place of God:¹⁹⁹ the destruction and purification of the world and final restoration are the essence of this teaching. Like Origen, Methodius provides a philosophical interpretation for the old

§ ¹⁹³ Plato, *Apology*, 59.

¹⁹⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 110, in *PG* 6:729–730.

¹⁹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.7, in *PG* 11:1037–1308.

¹⁹⁶ Hippolytus, *Fragmenta in Daniele* 40, in *PG* 10:665–666; *Scholia in Daniele* 12.11, in *PG* 10:687–688.

¹⁹⁷ Cyprian, *Epistola LXXXI*, in *PL* 4:439.

¹⁹⁸ Hilary, *Commentarius in Matthaem*, *Cap. XVII*, in *PL* 9:1013–1014.

§ ¹⁹⁹ Lactantius

eschatology: the church is the moon that labors and brings forth in rebirth those pneumatics who were once psychics; in every age those who flee to the *logos* are received by the church and formed into the image of Christ in her womb; in certain periods of time they emerge as *politai* of the blessed *aeons* and so have to be washed.²⁰⁰

“End” Expected Is Not the Second Coming

There is a great variety of opinion among ancients and moderns as to the exact time of the end. This perplexity is not due to the willful and opinionated conclusions of moderns alone—it has always characterized the picture apparently. But why should this be? Why should anything as fundamental and as diligently studied as the times and seasons be the subject of so much disagreement anciently? The answer should be obvious: the disagreement is among those treating the theme at second hand—the eschatology was a secret doctrine: everybody knew it existed, but no one could or would (missing)?

Very recently the Reverend Glasson has suggested that the universally accepted concept of the *kerygma* “ought not to be taken as final.”²⁰¹ That concept is: “The time of fulfillment has come, the new age has been inaugurated by the ministry, death, resurrection of Jesus . . . soon He will return to glory to judge the world.”²⁰² For this does not satisfy all conditions, and especially it includes “the imminent return of Christ in glory to judge the world,”—a “doubtful factor,” to say the least in Glasson’s opinion, for “the advent does not regularly appear as an essential part of the Kerygma.”²⁰³ “It is to be observed,” says C. H. Dodd, “that the apostolic Preaching as recorded in Acts does not (contrary to a commonly held opinion) lay the greatest stress upon the expectation of a second advent of the Lord.”²⁰⁴ Then, citing the evidence, Glasson concludes: “The evidence of these apostolic speeches is in striking contrast to the popular view that the early Church from

²⁰⁰ Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 8.6, in *PG* 18:148.

²⁰¹ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 129.

²⁰² Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 129.

²⁰³ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131.

²⁰⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*, 33, quoted in Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131.

the day of Pentecost onwards was possessed by an overpowering conviction that the return of Christ to judge the world was imminent.”²⁰⁵ There is in fact in the scriptures “one reference between them to Christ as Judge, one further reference to his return, and it is impossible to maintain that the note of imminence is at all prominent, if indeed it is present anywhere.”²⁰⁶ But if they did not expect the advent and the judgment immediately, what did they expect? There is no agreement among scholars ancient and modern on the time of the end, because there is no agreement as to the nature of the end. If there was only one single glorious event in prospect, then of course, that is the end, and if anything at all is expected in the immediate future, then, of course, everything is expected, but this, as we have seen, is hopeless over-simplification. Oscar Cullmann now declares that the “*Naherwartung ist nicht das Zentralsale* in the New Testament expectations, let alone the whole obsession of the church.”²⁰⁷ For the New Testament insists on a period of waiting and delay. (Disappt.) This illustrates the new tendency to recognize that the time of the end was a complicated thing in the eyes of the early Christians and that modern scholarship has greatly oversimplified the whole problem. “To do and be all that belonged to Messiahship,” says F. A. M. Spencer “could not from its intrinsic nature be achieved in one appearance, but required two,” (Retic.) and the same intrinsic nature required more than a single moment of time for the accomplishment of all things.²⁰⁸ Of the interval between the two appearances Spencer follows the old schools: “Most of the writers in the New Testament betray an expectation that he would come in the course of a few years. And there are one or two sayings in the Gospels that may be interpreted as signifying that...he would return in the lifetime of some of his contemporaries.”²⁰⁹ The fulfillment of times, the “today” of God, controls all of Jesus’

²⁰⁵ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131–132.

²⁰⁶ Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 132.

²⁰⁷ Cullmann, “Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem,” 178.

²⁰⁸ Frederick A. M. Spencer, “The Second Advent According to the Gospels,” *Church Review Quarterly* 126 (1938): 5.

²⁰⁹ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 5–6.

attitude, says Diétrich, and gives him his authority.²¹⁰ With the Sermon on the Mount, the promised kingdom receives its formal charter, the hour of judgment has come and put an end to the power of Satan: the prophets and miracles prove it!²¹¹ Luke 10:18 proves for this authority that Satan is finished.²¹² It is already the end. Just as Christ “awaited impatiently his messianic investiture,” so his followers, according to Coulange, “examined the sky every day with feverish anticipation for the signs of his return.”²¹³ (Disap) Cullmann notes apocryphal evidence that makes the time of the second coming conditional: The kingdom of God will not come until a certain number of elect has been reached. But is “the kingdom” the same as the end? The spiritual interpretation of Apocalyptic promises does not alter the fact, says Althaus, that they must always by definition refer to the future, and have their *Wesen in der Naherwartung des Endes*.²¹⁴ The evolution of Christian doctrine is utterly incomprehensible for Baldensperger without a belief in the immediate *parousia* of Christ, though this is not fully reflected as it should be in the New Testament!²¹⁵ Steubing has argued that since after death everything is spaceless and timeless, one should not expect the second coming in time at all.²¹⁶ In *The Dead Sea Scrolls* Dupont-Sommer interprets the remnant of the people as “the very last people called upon to play a part on the stage of human history; for we are ‘at the end of the days.’”²¹⁷ The author lived, he says, “in the thought that ‘the end of the days’ had come, that the supreme Visitation of God, the last Judgement, was at hand.” Though the author does not say all this, it is assumed in the great tradition. The “soon” in the story must be *umgedeutet*, according to Steubing; since the God’s perspective time is measured differently, and what is *endgeschichtlich* is *aussengeschichtlich*; the *parousia* has no relationship to any calendar—a doctrine that would have surprised the Christians

²¹⁰ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 142.

²¹¹ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 143–149.

²¹² Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 148–149.

²¹³ Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 544.

§ ²¹⁴ Althaus

²¹⁵ See Baldensperger, “Jesu Aussagen über seine Parusie,” 140–43. **repeats n. 8

²¹⁶ Steubing, “Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie,” 463. **compare with n. 38*

²¹⁷ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 41.

no end.²¹⁸ According to Althaus all evil being fulfilled in the crucifixion, there was nothing for it but the judgment, for when the world was completely ripe: that should have been the great moment of everything.²¹⁹

All that the early Christians taught was the second coming, says Loisy: (Disap.) the negative significance of this—no evidence of establishing anything.²²⁰ “The belief in the literal and immediate Coming of Christ is the key to the Church of the First Age...a charismatic religion, for which...the end of all things [is] imminent.”²²¹ Lake: “Though the coming of the Messiah was future, it was imminent, and hourly expected, and this expectation was the background of all the thought of the early Christians.”²²² Here the phenomenon has been correctly observed, but the explanation is incorrect: the strongly negative and temporary orientation is there, but not because of an immediate *parousia*. How can we reconcile the two facts 1) that the early Christians saw themselves as living their present lives for but a limited time, and yet 2) did not expect the *parousia* to put an end to it? The only answer is that they expected something else to put an end to it, and as to what that was, they leave us in no doubt at all. “Luke,” says Lake, “thought of Jesus as the founder of a society, which would exist until a [possibly distant] *parousia*, rather than the herald of an immediate coming of the eschatological kingdom of God.”²²³ But to say that the church will be in existence at that future date is not to say that it will exist until then. It is Luke himself who speaks of the restitution of all things at that time of the *parousia*. Sjoberg thinks the early Christians thought of the Messiah as already appearing in their midst: that was their heavenly secret that made them glad, this society of the just appearing at the end of time. Paul and Mark 13 have exactly the same idea of the time, according to Meyer: since it is absolutely

²¹⁸ Steubing, “Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie,” 463. **similar to above*

§ ²¹⁹ Althaus

²²⁰ Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 72–73.

²²¹ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 114–115.

²²² Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 25.

²²³ Kirsopp Lake and Silva Lake, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 48.

uncertain, “*Um so mehr späht man nach den Zeichen aus.*”²²⁴ That is the way he interprets the admonition to “watch”—look for signs—though the whole idea in the scriptures is that there will be no warning signs, to “watch” being not to look for signs but to take heed of oneself. The whole church, unable to resist the *Zukunftsmusik*, expected “*in der nächsten Zukunft*” an “*enormen Umschwung aller Dinge.*”²²⁵ None of the passages cited by Coulange to prove the expectation of the immediate coming of Christ proves anything of the sort.²²⁶ “The earliest Christians expected the return of Christ in the immediate future,” says Nestle, “*d. h. noch zu Lebzeiten der ersten Generation*, and with this they thought of the resurrection of the dead, the universal judgment and the *Weltuntergang* as connected”—certainly Nestle connects them, but how did the Christians do it?²²⁷ For Braun ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς (Philippians 4:5) means that the time of the coming is near, in fact, that is the clearest proof of it, yet this does not mean that the time of his approach is near, but that he is already nearby.²²⁸ Thus the *Agrapha*; ὁ ἐγγύς μου, ἐγγύς τοῦ πυρός· ὁ δὲ μακρὰν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας.²²⁹ This concept is common to the saints about to pass on. Braun gets involved in kingdoms that are already present and others yet to come, some belong to Pauline eschatology, others do not; “perhaps the κλήσις is also something future,” though on the other hand the “*Wunder des Christseins*” is “*gegenwärtige, bereits erfolgte.*”²³⁰ Thus Dufourcq says the same idea of the *parousia* that “*illumine et vivifie toute la vie des premiers chretien... eclate aussi avec une merveilleuse puissance larsque vient pour eux l’heure de la mort.*”²³¹ Each martyr in the moment of death thus enjoys a personal *parousia*: the Lord is near and takes him up to him on high.

²²⁴ Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 126.

²²⁵ Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 1:16–17.

²²⁶ See Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 544. Coulange cites the following passages: 1 Cor. 7:29, 31; James 5:8; Hebr. 10:25, 37; 1 Peter 1:5; 4:7; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 1:3; and 22:20.

²²⁷ Nestle, “Zur Altchristlichen Apologetik Im Neuen Testament,” 118.

²²⁸ Braun, “Zur nachpaulinischen herkunft des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes,” 155. **compare with n. 44*

²²⁹ Didymus of Alexandria, *Expositio in Psalmos* 88.8, in *PG* 39:1488. See also Origen, *Homilias in Jeremiam* 20.3, in *PG* 13:532.

²³⁰ Braun, “Zur nachpaulinischen Herkunft des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes,” 152. **similar to n. 20*

§ ²³¹ Dufourcq

It will be seen that the problem of the time of the end is greatly complicated by the vagueness of the nature of the end. Scholars in the past have spoken with great certitude on this one point: they had no doubt what it was—they have been so sure in fact that they have never bothered to specify but assumed that any and all their readers would know, by some inner instinct or learned conspiracy, just what it was that was to happen.

The speculations of modern scholars on the time of the end only reflect the perplexities of the ancients. In the *Habakkuk Commentary* we read: “For there is yet a vision for the fixed time; it speaks of the end and it does not deceive.”²³² “The explanation of this” says the author of the scroll, “is that the final time will be of long duration.”²³³ “The ‘final time’” in this writer according to Dupont-Sommer, “is the ultimate period of history, that which will follow the great Judgement, the definitive and eternal period which will see the absolute reign of God. God alone knows this crowning event but it will arrive at the exact moment fixed by Him, even if this moment sometimes seems to be excessively slow in coming...”²³⁴ Irenaeus believed the Antichrist had appeared in his generation,²³⁵ and Tertullian points to disasters as the sure “*signa...imminentis irae Dei*.”²³⁶ The essential difference in point of view is illustrated by Dionysius of Alexandria: the earth has endured—will endure *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, but *not εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας*.²³⁷ For Origen the entirely irrelevant 2 Thessalonians 3:2-3, proves that the end has not come yet.²³⁸ Surely he did not share the orthodox modern concept of how that end was imagined, or it would not take a passage of scripture to prove that all things had been done away! While comparison with the days of Noah suggests to Origen that the consummation might be a gradual development, the case of Sodom and Gomorah, and Luke 21, gives him to understand “that the

²³² *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:3, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

²³³ *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:3, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

²³⁴ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

²³⁵ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.3, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1205–1207.

²³⁶ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 3, in *PL* 1:780.

²³⁷ Dionysius of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Principium Ecclesiastae* 1.4, in *PG* 10:1577.

§ ²³⁸ Origen

future consummation will be sudden.”²³⁹ Lactantius says the experts do not exactly agree when the 6000 years will come to an end and bring the *consummatio temporum*, though it cannot be more than 200 years distant by all calculations and indeed “we should be expecting it daily.”²⁴⁰ Yet as long as Rome stands it cannot happen. Hilarion says the 6000 years will be completed 101 years from the time of his writing and 470 years after Christ, but that the ten kings must come before the completion of that time.²⁴¹ Paul’s prophecy of perilous times to come refers says Chrysostom, not only to the future but also to the past—it is a three-dimensional sort of thing.²⁴² But what is the event referred to now under one designation and now under another and yet somehow vaguely a single thing? If actually more than one occurrence is expected, one may have not one but a number of times to consider. For example, Fascher points out that there were at least two appearances of the Savior after the resurrection, and asks, cannot such a return of the Lord be regarded as the second coming?²⁴³ On Easter Jesus had already shown himself to the world as the triumphant Messiah having conquered death itself. What more could one ask? Yet still, Fascher notes, the saints persisted in looking forward to a future kingdom and waited in hope and patience for something that could not take place until all the world had heard the gospel—and so, engrossed in missionary work, they forgot all about their program for the *parousia* (Witness).²⁴⁴ The last times are, says Diétrich, the times of the church, thus producing a little scripture of her own, and begin with the ascension of Christ.²⁴⁵ There is no point to arguing about the resurrection, says Lietzmann, “*sein Alle Ereignisse der Gesch. Vollziehn sich in der Erscheinungswelt,*” stimulated by a long tradition of heavenly *Phantasie*.²⁴⁶ For Frick, the

§ ²³⁹ *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.25, in *PL* 6:812.

²⁴¹ Hilarion, *De Mundi Duratione* 17, in *PL* 13:1105.

²⁴² καὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑστέρων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν φθασάντων τοῦτο δείκνυσιν· John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam Secundam ad Tiotheum Commentarius* 3.7.1, in *PG* 62:637.

§ ²⁴³ Fascher

§ ²⁴⁴ Fascher

²⁴⁵ See Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 171–187

§ ²⁴⁶ Lietzmann

apostolic fathers “*Weltende, Auferstehung, u. Gerichtsteht nahe*” as a single event (Winter).²⁴⁷ Bo Markus Barth would have “*das Dass, nicht das Wie*” the decisive point for Paul.²⁴⁸ The essence of early Christian thought was that everything was directed “*auf eine neue Welt,*” says Brandt,²⁴⁹ but where? Some have suggested that the original message of Jesus was simply that *die Krisis steht vor der Tür*,²⁵⁰ which later evangelists softened into “the Bridegroom”, thus turning a warning of destruction into a *parousia*. Dodd interpreted Mark 9:1 as meaning that some will “recognize” before their death what has been true all along, namely that the kingdom has already been established.²⁵¹ Barth sees four motifs in the great event: 1) Christ will appear with the *Anbruch des Reichs*, 2) it will happen in this generation, 3) he will be seen by some but not by all, 4) the chosen witnesses will not die like others upon beholding his glory.²⁵² Such subjective manipulation of the limited sources is a popular game with the learned clergy: it is only too easy to play, since one makes up one’s own rules in going along. Thus Bornkamm notes that Mark 9:1 does not say that the *eschata* will overwhelm the generation but simply that some few will still be alive when it happens; the dead however will be resurrected to participate in the occasion.²⁵³ What Jesus expected was the sudden and abrupt coming of the reign of God, replacing all the governments of the earth, says Loisy, an idea conceived with all the childish simplicity of the Zealots.²⁵⁴ Perhaps he did not preach the end of the world at all, says this authority, or even have any idea about the world or how it could end, but certainly he taught the end of the present age, the end of the reign of Satan, the judgment that would exterminate all the wicked from the earth.²⁵⁵ What the first Christian generation expected, says Goguel was the immediate “*transformation radicale du monde*” with the coming of the reign of God and the glorious return

§ 247 Frick

§ 248 Bo Markus Barth

§ 249 Brandt

§ 250

²⁵¹ Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 53–54.

§ 252 Barth

²⁵³ Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 118.

²⁵⁴ Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 92.

²⁵⁵ Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 92.

of Jesus.²⁵⁶ The Christians expected “the speedy ‘coming again’ of their king, and of the establishment of His kingdom. However, they might explain the nature of His kingdom the mere talk of it was like a challenge...” says JWJ, who says it was all spiritual, but does not presume to explain how they might explain the nature of a spiritual coming.²⁵⁷ There are various and easy ways of “spiritualizing” the concepts. F. C. Baur says spirituality alone set off Christianity from the pagan religions²⁵⁸—apparently he had never read Justin’s *Trypho*, where the spirituality of the philosophers is compared with the solid literalism of the prophets, to the latter’s immense advantage. St. Augustine could have all the spiritual burning bushes he wanted, but that is the sort of pale abstraction for which he could not settle—real angels and real prophets were what gave Christianity its advantage over the easy spirituality of the schools. To say that Jesus ever said he would restore the temple is to slander him, says Simon (efforts), the temple that was to come was he, he does not destroy or rebuild it, **it est le temple!**²⁵⁹ On the other hand, the one thing of which M. Loisy is most certain is the very thing Mr. Piper is most certain in denying: “It is not stated that Jesus came to ‘dissolve’ or to ‘destroy’ the works of the Devil...but rather to deprive Satan’s works of their supernatural power.”²⁶⁰ Meyer notes that the *eschata* are a mixture of things some of which are to be expected soon and some late.²⁶¹ The end of the world is expected late; the end of the period, the time, the period of the church is expected soon. All the mystical concepts that had been accumulating in Jewry since the time of Daniel were *auf ihn uebertragen*: when the Judge appeared all living things would be gathered together, the dead would rise, and all would be judged. This, he says, was the obsession of the early Christians. What John foresees, says Goguel, is specifically the triumph of the church over the empire.²⁶² Spiritualizing reaches its extreme in Bultmann’s “demythologizing” process: “The Lord’s return is no longer taken literally

²⁵⁶ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Église*, 144.

§ ²⁵⁷ JWJ **John Westbury-Jones?*

§ ²⁵⁸ F.C. Baur

§ ²⁵⁹ Simon

²⁶⁰ Piper, “1 John and the Primitive Church,” 444.

§ ²⁶¹ Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 126.

²⁶² Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Église*, 206.

by John, as though he were expected to redescend from heaven at some future date. The Lord's return is accomplished by the Spirit's presence within the church to guide and protect. Within the New Testament, therefore, the process of demythologizing goes on apace....The resurrection of Christ is not a miracle in the past...it is the transformation of the self here and now (Disapp.).²⁶³ This is the gospel according to Edna St. Vincent Millay. To Manson "It is only too clear that neither the Incarnation nor the Second Coming is rightly understood" by the disciples.²⁶⁴ The faith of the early Christians was, says Morris, "the imminent restoration of a temporal independent Jewish state under Christian leadership."²⁶⁵ Since "Suffering humanity longed for a different world on earth," Barnabas followed Revelation in accepting "a material Christian rule upon earth."²⁶⁶ The idea that Jesus comes literally in the hour of death to the martyr is familiar to the earliest Christians, Kundsins observes: this does not conflict with the *parousia* when Christ would come personally "to take home" the apostles after they had finished their work.²⁶⁷ "Jesus, 'who saw Satan fall like lightning' was plainly convinced that he had ruined his empire entirely," according to the astute Coulange, but the Christians waited for the second coming of Nero as Antichrist, to announce the end.²⁶⁸ For Steubing it is only a *naive Biblizismus* that sees the coming of the kingdom to this earth or within the limits of historic time no matter how remote.²⁶⁹ (Retic.) Mouson: Jesus intended that all should "continue to live as he lived and work as he worked, so that the kingdom of God might come," through social betterment.²⁷⁰ (Effort) Of the same school and perspective is Sharman, who insists that Jesus "opposed clearly and strongly the eschatological and catastrophical conceptions of the kingdom" and preached a doctrine of the future which his disciples utterly ignored identifying "the day of the Son of man" with "the

§ 263 Bultmann

²⁶⁴ Manson, "The New Testament Basis," 7.

²⁶⁵ Morris, "Early Christian Orthodoxy," 3.

²⁶⁶ Morris, "Early Christian Orthodoxy," 14 and 10.

²⁶⁷ Kundsins

²⁶⁸ Coulange, "Le Retour du Christ," 555.

²⁶⁹ Steubing, "Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie," 462.

§ 270 Mouson

kingdom of God” with the consequent hybrid idea of “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” The result of this “double confusion by the early disciples” was “the modifications in, and additions to, and shifting of documentary location for, the original sayings of Jesus.”²⁷¹ The present Catholic view is that Christ already reigns in his kingdom through the church: “The church exists in the world that...by its means [how patronizing of that perplexed body!] he may reign. It is not that his kingdom is an ideal...but rather that in fact and reality it exists.”²⁷² “The whole tenor of the gospel narrative [“tenor” being one’s own personal, general, reaction as prompted by one’s own training and conditioning]...show him [Christ] deliberately rejecting the messianic programme set out in the *Psalm of Solomon*”²⁷³ (Must we hold the messianic programme to a single text?) F. A. M. Spencer makes the surprising remark that “‘come with power’ does not necessarily imply Parousia” and that the eschatological chapters Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21 “evidently represent a conflation of predictions of the nearer conquest of Judea by the Romans and the remoter coming of the Son of Man.”²⁷⁴ Knopf, in the liberal tradition of his day, insists that Jesus brought a *Vertiefung, Vergeistigung, Entschränkung* to the idea of the kingdom and the messianic hope, without saying what those soft, vague and satisfying words mean.²⁷⁵ It was the literalness of the earliest Christian eschatology that gave it its matchless power, but it mixed joy with terror: all the “grim passages have been inserted, though the New Testament is full of them and Knopf must admit that the whole negative business seems to have been part of the eschatological picture which it corrupted at a very early date indeed.”²⁷⁶ (Winter) As Lietzmann saw it, the absolute certainty of Christian eschatology was the belief that the last and highest expression of the kingdoms of this world was the *Imperium Romanum*; this being

²⁷¹ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 327. (Same as sect. 1 fn. 63, 64)

§ ²⁷²

§ ²⁷³ Source? See the first section on the “whole tenor argument”

²⁷⁴ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 6.

§ ²⁷⁵ Knopf

§ ²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

threatened with catastrophe, the coming of the kingdom of God with the *parousia* of the Lord must be at the gates.²⁷⁷ The King of Kings would release the Roman dynasty and rule in its place. Scholars have never agreed on just what the kingdom of God is, and since its establishment has top priority among the *eschata*, on that score alone our ideas of the end must remain vague. Christ shunned popularity, says Diétrich, because he wanted “the mystery of the kingdom...to be received *dans le foi et non par la vue*.”²⁷⁸ A proposition to which the second coming delivers a whopping refutation. The home of the Christian is the heavenly Jerusalem, says Lietzmann, where God sits enthroned with his angels: *Dort is die Stadt der Zukunft...das ‘Reich Gottes,’ welches die auf Erden zerstreute Kirchen vereinigt wird.*²⁷⁹ (Retic.) For some the kingdom has already come as a spiritual experience. According to Frick (not to us) for Ignatius the kingdom is the society of sinless saints;²⁸⁰ the *Didache* insists on a clear distinction between the church and the kingdom, 2 *Clement* hopes for the realization of the church on this earth, and in the *Pastor* the church and kingdom of God are almost the same.²⁸¹ (Winter) With Augustine the identification of the church with the kingdom of God is complete.

A much-treated theme of recent years has been the disappointment of the early church in its fond expectations of the *eschata*. Thus Knopf: “*Die realistischen Zukunftshoffnungen Konnten sich in urchristlichen Gemeinden auf die Dauer nicht ungebrochen halten*” and so were exchanged for a more spiritual Greek eschatology.²⁸² Men of spiritual inclinations assume this to be the case, and then go to work on it. The “awakening” of the disciples at the crucifixion “must have been horrible,” according to de Faye “...*un ecroulement sans nom*” for the apostles, who strangely and immediately recovered.²⁸³ (Retic.) The difference between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, says Bultmann, was that the latter took a skeptical view of the last things, and finally completely

§ 277 Lietzmann

²⁷⁸ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 152.

§ 279 Lietzmann

§ 280 Frick

²⁸¹ See *Didache* 9.4, 2 *Clement* 12–14, and *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4.1 and Similitude 9.13.1.

§ 282 Knopf

§ 283 de Faye

overcame the old Jewish-Christian ideas.²⁸⁴ People soon forgot that “Christ” meant the same as “Messiah” and turned the title into a man’s name. The evidence for this is locked in Bultmann’s bosom. “Paul, once so sure of greeting the returning Savior in the flesh, began with the passing of time to lose his imperturbable assurance” according to the imperturbable assurance of Coulange who admits that Paul continued to await the day “*d’un moment a l’autre*.”²⁸⁵ But when the Lord still delayed Paul decided that he was waiting first for the gospel to be preached to all the world: this, Paul believes, has now almost been accomplished, and the Lord should come any minute. (Winter) We cannot conceive, Baldensperger assures us—who apparently can conceive—how absolutely engrossed the Christians were in the return of Christ, which completely *accapara leur etre tout entiere* (consumed their entire being).²⁸⁶ We cannot conceive it, because it is not properly reflected in the Gospels: that is “because they are already in retreat”—on the way to giving up the idea.²⁸⁷ Since it was this idea that gave the church all its *Grund* and *Schwung*, it was necessary to preserve it indefinitely, and so when Christ failed to appear the Christians preserved the millennial hope by transferring the Antichrist to the end of time.²⁸⁸ Thus, Steubing. It is true, says Althaus, with the failure of the end to put in an immediate appearance the whole Christian hope as depicted in the New Testament lost its meaning: but what right have we, he asks, to treat this *Naherwartung* as *zeitgeschl. Schranke* and use such ideas *als Bausteine unserer Dogmatik*?²⁸⁹ This he follows up with a long socio-philosophical discussion which can have had no meaning to an early Christian; he credits the early Christians with no integrity at all—they jump about like flees, revamping their doctrine with as little resistance to change and as little scandal at voltes-faces as Althaus himself. Peter explains the delay as proof of God’s patience, a doctrine which for

§ 284 Bultmann

²⁸⁵ *Paul qui, à l’origine, était si sûr d’assister vivant au retour du Seigneur, a donc perdu avec le temps son imperturbable assurance.* Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 547.

²⁸⁶ See Baldensperger, “Jesu Aussagen über seine Parusie,” 140–43.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

§ 288 Steubing, “Das Grundproblem der Eschatologie,” 463.

§ 289 Althaus

Althaus cannot be *Urchristlich* since it leaves no room for the Antichrist.²⁹⁰ When the judgment was delayed after the crucifixion—the moment at which the world became peculiarly ripe for judgment—one could only conclude that yet worse evils were on the way, an argument supported by Jewish Apocalyptic, but devoid, according to Althaus, of theological foundation. Nothing happened as expected, to follow Fascher: Christ probably expected to be stoned instead of crucified, and believed that his generation would see him return in glory.²⁹¹ Instead “he ‘appeared’ for a time to his people after the resurrection and was then taken away forever.”²⁹² Loisy says the first propagators of the Christian faith did not teach the theology of Christ or the history of Jesus but one thing only: the immediate return of Jesus as Christ in the kingdom of God to fulfill all the prophecies of the scriptures and the hopes of faithful Israel: it was only when the *parousia* failed to materialize that men had the leisure to work out the Christian religion in their various organized communities.²⁹³ *Apocalyptique* came before *evangelique* which was something quite different. “The Messianic kingdom, its laws and its teachings, ceased to be an expectation, but survived as an ideal. Gradually, in practice if not in theory, men gave up looking for the coming of the kingdom...”²⁹⁴ This according to Lake, who cites the *Pastor* as marking a step in this gradual evolution—it would be hard to imagine anything more definite and less gradual than the processes of the time of the end as described by the *Pastor*, but more of that anon. The transition is detected by Bornkamm in Matthew 25:1-13 which must be that of the later church since it fits in with Bornkamm’s scheme: the saints still expect the *parousia*, “but have now learned to count on a delay,” it has now become *Klugheit* to prepare oneself for a *lange*

§ 290 Althaus

§ 291 Fascher

§ 292 Fascher

²⁹³ *Ni le prédicateur ni ses auditeurs les plus fidèles ne songeaient à en fixer la teneur pour le transmettre à la postérité; la perspective imminente du règne de Dieu écartait toute préoccupation de ce genre. Après la mort de Jésus, les premiers apôtres continuèrent d’annoncer le prochain avènement, qui devait être celui du Christ en sa gloire. C’est seulement au bout d’un certain temps, lorsque les groupes de croyants se furent organisés en confréries permanentes, que le besoin se fit sentir d’une instruction plus complète, où l’enseignement sur Jésus et l’enseignement de Jésus, déjà singulièrement modifié et augmenté, se trouvèrent de plus en plus amalgamés pour former les livres de catéchèse liturgique auxquels on garda le nom d’Evangile.* Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 88.

²⁹⁴ Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 26.

*Ausbleiben des kommenden Herrn.*²⁹⁵ Coulange goes even further: since Christ is the Messiah he must return; and his life must be consistent with that character of Messiah: so in retrospect the life was reconstructed “*d’apres ce principe.*”²⁹⁶ To the Gentile Christians, says Coulange, the old Apocalypses one after another became enigmatic (one would expect the opposite process—they were certainly strange to the Gentiles before they joined the church: they could only become enigmatic to those who once understood them) nevertheless these converts began to expect the end and so produced 2 Thessalonians.²⁹⁷ As for Jesus he thought he had thoroughly beaten the devil and “never suspected that another combat would be necessary...”²⁹⁸ While Jesus “forecast the destruction of Jerusalem and the widespread growth of the kingdom, his disciples, failing to follow his advice, believed that the day of the Son of Man, following immediately upon the destruction of Jerusalem, was that which he promised within the generation.”²⁹⁹ Here the disciples do not merely change their concepts under the pressure of disappointment, but get everything wrong from the first. What Jesus himself taught as the future was, says Meyer “*von der Entwicklung der christlichen Anschauungen vollständig überwuchert*” so that e.g., Mark 13, does not have anything to do with Jesus, but is “*ein Erzeugnis der ersten Generation der Christengemeinde.*”³⁰⁰ The statement “my words will not pass away,” betrays for Meyer “*ein unsicheres Gefühl,*” the “first generation already beginning to die off and the catastrophe still failing to appear, people had to content themselves with the assurance that no definite date could be given.”³⁰¹ Yet this assurance is found in all the eschatologies, pre-Christian as well.

Nestle on 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17, says that after the death of Peter and Paul people waited in vain for everything to happen, and then began to doubt that anything would

²⁹⁵ Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 124.

§ ²⁹⁶ Coulange

²⁹⁷ Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 553.

²⁹⁸ Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 555.

§ ²⁹⁹ Coulange

³⁰⁰ Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 129.

³⁰¹ *Indessen ein unsicheres Gefühl hat sich doch schon eingeschlichen, man erkennt, daß die ursprüngliche Erwartung eines sofortigen Eintritts der Katastrophe sich nicht erfüllt, die erste Generation beginnt schon wegzusterben, und man muß sich zufrieden geben, daß ein bestimmtes Datum nicht genannt werden kann.* Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 126.

happen at all—these verses, he says, reflect that doubt.³⁰² It is a *Zustand der Unsicherheit* which is reflected perhaps in many a word put in the mouth of Jesus himself by the evangelists; 2nd Peter is to combat the doubter, he says, yet Peter does not argue the immediate coming of Christ, which is Nestle’s whole point. The New Testament is full of statements that the end of the world is not certainly near at hand; scholars insist that the ancients believed, on the contrary, that it was, and these are interpolations: the result is that the scripture becomes a mad mess of interpolation. This has gone so far and is so easy that at present a reaction has set in against it. Second Thessalonians emphasizes the distance of the second coming (but not of the end!) and so Braun promptly assigns it a second generation, post-Pauline date; because Paul did believe in the immediacy of some occurrences, the mention of any event as not immediate cannot come from Paul.³⁰³ “*Peu à peu*,” says Goguel, the original expectation in the immediate *parousia* and the radical transformation of the world *s’est atténuée*.³⁰⁴ Matthew 25:5 “betrays uncertain sentiment and deception,” and 2 Peter 3:4, proves that they had “abandoned the idea of an immediate return of the Lord,” that they had abandoned it, or that they had never had it?³⁰⁵ The odd thing is that they abandon the idea though it should come late, is very early attested in the writings. They did not give up the idea, but postponed it to “*un avenir lointain et totalement indéterminé*,”³⁰⁶ so that the idea ceased to be an effective force or exercise any direct influence “*sur les âmes*.”³⁰⁶ Which is to say, they gave it up—but they did not. The realistic eschatology of a Papias collapsed, says Brandt, and in its place *sucht man das Heil* in wholly new orientation: just the way Brandt himself would seek it, in a mystic and secret process of “realization” that makes the *parousia* etc. a present possession.³⁰⁷ Only there was no new orientation—that is all that is wrong with Brant’s**Brandt?* eloquent reconciliation. The disciples of the first generation, who certainly

³⁰² Nestle, “Zur Altchristlichen Apologetik Im Neuen Testament,” 118–19.

³⁰³ Braun, “Zur nachpaulinischen Herkunft des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes,” 155.

³⁰⁴ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Eglise*, 144.

³⁰⁵ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Eglise*, 144–145.

³⁰⁶ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Eglise*, 145.

§ ³⁰⁷ Brandt

should have known better, are responsible, according to Hopwood for what he calls “The Great Misunderstanding,” namely the folly of fastening literal eschatological expectations on the primitive church. “They could act in no other way than they did in their misunderstanding of Jesus, until the spiritual release of subsequent events and discoveries centering around the resurrection and exalted Jesus began to liberate them from their limitations” in the best manner of the **Chi.** Divinity School. “The apocalyptic hope failed in the non-fulfillment of the desired consummation; inasmuch as the failure became apparent, so the experience of the kingdom as a present possession came to the fore...”³⁰⁸ (Winter)

In the same way the Jews had been forced by realities “to throw their faith into the future,” since “tremendous assertions about the present” failed: “thus,” says Frost, “myth is divorced from its original purpose and is eschatologised.”³⁰⁹ Which of the two constituents, myth or eschatology, “is the dominant partner...is perhaps the most urgent problem confronting the Christian church today.” Tested by the messianic standard of the *Psalm of Solomon*:

The public career of Jesus was a shocking failure....and we can see to what desperate straits the early Apologists were reduced in their efforts to meet Jewish objections. Very soon the Church tends to slip back into the sub-Christian notion that the Ministry is only a preliminary to something other and bigger and better. We are presented with the idea of two Parousias...and it is only too clear that neither the Incarnation nor the Second Coming is rightly understood.³¹⁰

A pity that “the early Apologists” lacked the true insight and instruction enjoyed by Mr. Manson! The “double-minded” according to J. Morris were those “who doubted the reality of the long delayed second coming,” and certainly the term appears very early.³¹¹ Manson could only admit that these are men of his own conviction, not fooled by any “sub-Christian” literalism.

§ ³⁰⁸ Brandt.

³⁰⁹ S. B. Frost, “Eschatology and Myth,” *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952): 80.

³¹⁰ Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 7.

³¹¹ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 8.

The license and liberty of such interpretations as the above have recently been called into question. The “Disappointment” or Wrong-Track school must lose out on a number of points. First the gradualness which is so essential to their evolutionary developmental theories cannot be substantiated. The negative and long-term passages do not first appear in the second generation and increase in force and volume with the passing of time: they are met with full-blown at the very earliest time: indeed Bultmann argues that the whole matter of doubt and hesitation is completely settled “within the New Testament itself,” where the realization of all millennial hopes is for the earliest Christians already “present, is existential, as we say nowadays.”³¹² “All that Bultmann urges,” cries his disciple, “is that we should continue what Paul and John began,” for them “the Lord’s return is no longer taken literally.”³¹³ Yet the church beginning with these men and continuing for centuries did take it literally. The “tendency to literalize both Messiah and kingdom,” which had been responsible for the “Great Misunderstanding” far from fading out, “was carried forward into the new community by the eye-witnesses” themselves, who of all people should have known better.³¹⁴ The very men who insist that the literal expectations must necessarily have melted away must all observe that they did nothing of the sort. As late as the fourth century it flourished “against the determined opposition of the fourth century Bishops.”³¹⁵ Lake rationalizes by saying that the *eschata* were dropped “in practice if not in theory”³¹⁶ but whatever was the millennial hope but a theory? For the theory to survive is for the doctrine to survive, and to say they preserved the theory while dropping the practice is, where no practice is involved, mere feinting with words.

This is the second objection: the disappointment must have been terrible, we are told, yet all evidence is that the saints felt no disappointment at all. Just as the Jews never lost hope after A.D. 70, the death of Jesus never discouraged the faithful; Jews and Christians prayed daily the same

§ ³¹² Bultmann
 § ³¹³ (Bultmann’s disciple?)
 § ³¹⁴ Hopwood

³¹⁵ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 7.

³¹⁶ Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 26.

prayer: *Maranatha*, as if long and indefinite expectation were the program of both from the beginning.³¹⁷ The contradiction is ridiculous: “Every day,” says Coulange, “the saints eagerly studied the sky in feverish expectation of the return of the Lord. *L’attente, toujours déçue, n’est jamais découragée*”—the proof?³¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 7: 29, 31! The hope for the immediate coming was as lively in the second century as in the first, says Frick, but soon it was personalized, individualized and spiritualized.³¹⁹ Paul is typical: he was always being disappointed, but stubbornly refused to change his views. What he did, our moderns have discovered, was to invent one rationalized explanation after another to keep up his confidence; the harder the battle, says Diétrich, the greater not the doubts but the confidence of the church in the coming glory.³²⁰ To the bitter end Paul goes on “hoping ardently to be among the living when Christ returns”—poor man!³²¹ According to Sharman, the apostles simply refused to accept the Lord’s own concept of what was to come. Along with the influence of Greek thought worked the fact that the tense expectation in the immediate end would be bound to relax more and more the longer the end was delayed: a neat and logical principle, but one that does not work, for men who were just as eagerly and literally expecting the immediate end in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries as in the beginning. And why should there be any disappointment at all? Cullmann asks, had not enough already happened in the church to satisfy anyone’s cravings for wonders? Hence, he concludes the passages that seem to express doubt cannot have been afterthoughts to console delay but were part of the original tradition.³²² Bornkam explains the remarkable lack of any open expressions of disappointment by the comforting margin provided in the proposition that some few would still be alive at the time of the *parousia*—they did not complain because this left room for hope and so

§ 317 (Simon)

³¹⁸ Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 544.

§ 319 Frick, 152

³²⁰ *Plus la lutte s’intensifie, plus les forces de l’Antéchrist se manifestent, plus aussi l’Eglise ancre sa foi et son espérance dans la victoire de son Seigneur, cette victoire qu’elle sait déjà remportée sur la croix et qui bientôt sera manifestée à tous les yeux.* Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 224.

³²¹ . . . *l’attente du règne du Christ reste la grande espérance de sa vie . . .* Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 224.

§ 322 Cullman

the Christians were able to survive the failure of the *parousia* without bitter disappointment.³²³ Matthew 25:1-13 can only have been meant for a society *die sein Ausbleiben bereits erfahren hat*.³²⁴ Arguing that way, any indication that the end has not actually occurred must come from someone who had experienced its non-occurrence. But the report that a thing has not yet happened does not necessarily imply that the reporter thinks it should have happened. Cullmann, while insisting that there has been an *Enteschatosierung* of the Christian church since the second century, insists also that that has not been due to any delay in the *parousia* but to the influence of Hellenism, which also brought *Entpneumatisierung*.³²⁵ He denies Buri's claim that the immediate *parousia* was the *Zentralglabe* of the church—and it failed.³²⁶ It was not a central Christian article of faith at all, he says,³²⁷ (Charisma) and recently Glasson has pointed out that indeed there is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that it was.³²⁸ The scholars have been too free in their unbridled speculations, a reaction has set in: after all this fuss, Phythian-Adams observes, “St. John's Christology is in all essentials that of St. Paul and the Synoptic Gospels after all,” noting that the one word *logos* has been the cause for all the erring of the scholars.³²⁹ Their erring has been learned and determined; having chosen each his own value for “X” they have without difficulty adjusted all the other values in the equation to conform—and then triumphantly pointed to their work as a proof of their original contention. F. A. M. Spencer would call a halt to all this sort of thing. By accepting the literal return of Christ, he argues (New Tend.) we remove the strain “of having to contort his message, ignoring a considerable portion of it and making unwarranted deductions from other parts, to suit our preconceptions. We begin to see now. The world has not reformed itself or allowed itself to be reformed by God in love. But then

§ ³²³ Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 118.

³²⁴ Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 121.

³²⁵ Cullmann, “Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem,” 187.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

§ ³²⁷ ?

³²⁸ See Glasson, “The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?” 131–132; Glasson, *The Second Advent: The Origin of the New Testament Doctrine* (London: Epworth Press, 1963) 154–160.

§ ³²⁹ Phythian-Adams

Christ did not say that it would.”³³⁰ The theologians have said so for him (Return). All these theories are attempts to explain the complexity of the ancient eschatology as derived from an originally simple one through a series of disappointments. Briefly listed, they break down on the following points:

- 1) The new scrolls show that the element of delay and danger was not a Christian afterthought but was highly characteristic of the old eschatological traditions.
- 2) The negative aspect of the future with its terror and gloom does not represent a second-generation reconciliation to hard fact, but again is included in all the apocalyptic promises from the beginning as an organic part of the picture.
- 3) The Christians refused to betray that disappointment which modern scholars have so confidently predicted for them in retrospect; not only did they go right on hoping for the best, but when the worst occurred expressed neither surprise nor disappointment, apparently they had been taught to expect that too.
- 4) There is no evidence of a gradual evolution in their point of view: at every period we find the same literal hopes and the same spiritual interpreters. We find a double *parousia* at the beginning and the most literal concept of the *parousia* in every succeeding century. If they made allowances for possible delay in the second generation, the same allowances are made in the first generation and in the pre-Christian scrolls.

A quick view of the ancient sources will confirm this. The *Habakkuk Commentary* speaks of “the final time”: “God alone knows this crowning event but it will arrive at the exact moment fixed by Him, even if this moment sometimes seems to be excessively slow in coming for those who await it with so much eagerness.”³³¹ Now this last reads exactly like the commentaries on certain New Testament passages which, because they express impatience, have been taken by modern scholars as being beyond any shadow of doubt late interpretations in the New Testament, interpretations

³³⁰ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 18.

³³¹ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

impossible of production save in the second generation of Christians. Now we have the explanation for the extremely early appearance of “doubts and misgivings” in Christian literature—they are not doubts and misgivings at all, but part of the original picture of things to come. “If it delays, wait for it;” says the text, “for it will surely come and it will not be late,” which the ancient commentator explains: “refers to the men of truth...when the final time is delayed for them; for all the times of God arrive in their due season in accordance with what He has decreed about them in the Mysteries of His Prudence.”³³² The return of the Master to overthrow the sons of Seth must happen in the present generation.³³³ Prior to the first visitation there must be a divine chastening of Jerusalem and “there are two successive acts on the Day of Judgement: the one to condemn the nations, the other to condemn Israel...”³³⁴ The Habakkuk Scroll presents “the same idea that the Apostle Paul expressed later: ‘That which the eye has not seen, that which the ear has not heard, that which has not occurred to the heart of man, God has prepared for those who love him...’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). In this ‘final time’ the just will be as if overwhelmed with Knowledge,”³³⁵ and the scroll continues to talk of “all the things which will happen in the last generation.”³³⁶ Plainly there is complexity in times and events, and plainly the Christian eschatology is close to this. The association is even so close that we read that “It is necessary to ‘remain at one’s post’...Yes, it is necessary to keep watch, for the Master must return ‘at the end of the days’...The day of the last Judgement is at hand; life is lived in this expectation which is at once terrible and consoling.”³³⁷ The whole of Habakkuk is regarded by the commentator as an allegorical disguise of contemporary events, which he interprets accordingly, it is all a pattern and a type.³³⁸ The resurrection was an essential part of the picture from the first, to follow Josephus *Antiquities* 18:14. “*Expectate pastorem vestrum,*” cries 4 Ezra,

³³² *Habakkuk Commentary* 2:3, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

³³³ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 64–65.

³³⁴ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 43.

³³⁵ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

³³⁶ *Habakkuk Commentary* 1:5, quoted in Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

³³⁷ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 64.

³³⁸ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 26.

“he will give eternal rest for *in proximo est ille, qui in finem saeculi adveniet*; be ready for the rewards of his kingdom....He will give you robes of glory;” the Son of God appears in vision, surrounded by those crowned ones who confessed him in the world.³³⁹ There shall be a good time when men shall not taste death, and faith shall blossom and “truth shall be revealed which was for so long a time without fruit.”³⁴⁰ This is exactly the image in the Christian *Hermas*. There will be signs and then the city will appear (cf. *Didache*), then will come Jesus and those who are with him, and the remaining ones shall rejoice 400 years, after which “my Son Christ shall die and all who have human breath, and the earth shall revert to its primordial silence for seven days...”³⁴¹ “I saw,” says Enoch, “till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first,” using the language of the *Pastor*.³⁴² He predicts violence and a fall and “a great chastenment...executed on the earth, and all unrighteousness come to an end;” then it shall all happen again, “unrighteousness shall again be consummated on the earth,” and another end shall follow, “and then the righteous shall arise from their sleep.”³⁴³ The author of the *Zadokite Fragment*, is living “in the end of the days,” and the advent of the Messiah “from Aaron and Israel” is momentarily looked for.³⁴⁴ The *Sibylline Oracle* speaks of world empire after world empire passing away, until at the end “Then the nation of the Mighty God shall be again powerful, that nation which shall be to all mortals the guide of life.”³⁴⁵ Note that the end arrives, yet more is to follow. The DSD is charged with the tension and expectancy of the approaching end...³⁴⁶ Two spirits are to hold equal dominion until “the season of his visitation”—all the world shall sin until his end time everything having been arranged in the preexistence.³⁴⁷ (Elect) In both the DSD and DCD “the word *qetz* signifies not ‘end’ as in the Old Testament, but

³³⁹ 4 *Ezra* 2:34–35, 39, 42–48.

³⁴⁰ 4 *Ezra* 6:26–28.

³⁴¹ 4 *Ezra* 7:28–30.

³⁴² 1 *Enoch* 90:29.

³⁴³ 1 *Enoch* 91:5–10.

³⁴⁴ *Zadokite Fragment* 8:10 and 9:10.

³⁴⁵ *Sibylline Oracles* 3:194–95.

§ ³⁴⁶ Enoch??

³⁴⁷ *The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline* 4:15–26, trans. Brownlee, 16–18.

‘moment’ or ‘time,’”³⁴⁸ the exact equivalent of the Christian *kairos*, showing the same concept not of a single end to all things, but of various critical terminals in history. In the *Assumption of Moses* after the rule of the wicked, when will arise a just Levite named Taxo, who will train his seven sons, “Then his kingdom will appear throughout all his creation and then Satan will be no more and sorrow will depart with him;” the hills will fall and Israel will be happy, “and thou wilt look from on high and will see thy enemies in Ge(henna), and thou wilt rejoice, and give thanks...”³⁴⁹ In the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* they ask to know “what is the end of the world...what is the manner of thy coming, and what is the end, and what offences exist in the world.”³⁵⁰ In a text from the first half of the second century, the second coming of Christ is described as “*l’avènement de mon Père*.”³⁵¹ The editor is completely baffled by the words that the just will be resurrected “and they will not have to wait long,” since they cannot refer to “*la parousie prochaine*.”³⁵² In the *Testament of the Twelve*, the doctrine of the second coming *est un peu hesitante. On ne sait guere si le Christ doit venir avant out apres la fin de ce monde*.³⁵³ It seems that he is to come in the first place only to the just, for only they shall recognize the signs that precede him. Then later he comes in clouds of glory to judgment. The mention of two future *parousias* is not out of the ordinary, and it only impresses a modern reader as a sign of hesitancy because he himself hesitates.³⁵⁴ While he insists that the times he lives in are the last times, Ignatius notes that with the coming of Christ “that which God planned from the beginning began to unfold,” the result being not heaven on earth but “all things being thrown into confusion.”³⁵⁵ The closing paragraph of the *Didache* presents a full and circumstantial account of the end, and it is by no means a single, instantaneous event but a process punctuated by inevitable revelations of

§ 348 ??

³⁴⁹ *Assumption of Moses* 7:3, 9:1, 10:1–10.

§ 350 *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*

³⁵¹ L. Guerrier, *Le Testament en Galilée de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ (Avant-Propos)*, in *PO* 9:152.

³⁵² Guerrier, *Le Testament en Galilée (Avant-Propos)*, in *PO* 9:152.

§ 353 *Testament of the Twelve : same as Gospel of Twelve or is this Test. of IX Patriarchs? Is this the same french text as above referring to the Testament of the Twelve?*

³⁵⁴ Guerrier, *Le Testament en Galilée (Avant-Propos)*, in *PO* 9:151.

³⁵⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 19, in *PG* 5:659–660.

evil from below and visitations from above. The clearest statement of disappointment in delay is in *2 Clement* 11:

But let us serve the Lord and not be like those who say: “All these things we have heard in the days of our fathers but nothing has come to pass though we have expected from day to day.”

Fools! Take the example of the vine: at any stage of its growth you have the assurance of the grapes no matter when the harvest is to be: in leaf, bud, blossom, and unripe fruit we have a perfect earnest of the consummation.³⁵⁶

Now Clement is stating the official doctrine by way of refuting those who have departed from it; but what the “disappointment school” insists on is that everybody doubted, and the official position of the church was shifting, temporizing and rationalizing. For this, as we have seen, there is no evidence, and the apparent exception in *2 Clement* proves the rule, for it is not Clement who doubts, and what is more important, his explanation, the parable of the vine, is a bona fide part of the old eschatological tradition. The *Apostolic Constitutions* says (Necess.) all things have already been made new,³⁵⁷ and Diognetus 9 that the *kairos* has already come in which the Lord’s power has been shown forth.³⁵⁸ But when *Hermas* tells us “The days of repentance have been fulfilled for all the saints, but for the heathen repentance is open until the last day,”³⁵⁹ we are introduced to a picture of real complexity: the end should already have come, we are told but there has been “a pause in the building of the tower.”³⁶⁰ “And I began to ask her about the times, if the consummation were yet.”³⁶¹ This is in fact the subject of the *Pastor*, a fact which few have

recognized. Lake insists that the *Hermas* is introducing a new order of things and giving the

³⁵⁶ ἡμεῖς οὖν ἐν καθαρᾷ καρδίᾳ δουλεύσωμεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐσόμεθα δίκαιοι· ἐὰν δὲ μὴ δουλεύσωμεν, διὰ τοῦ μὴ πιστεῦειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἐπαγγελίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ταλαίπωροι ἐσόμεθα. λέγει γὰρ καὶ ὁ προφητικὸς λόγος· Ταλαίπωροι εἰσιν οἱ δίψυχοι, οἱ διστάζοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ, οἱ λέγοντες· Ταῦτα πάντα ἠκούσαμεν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ἡμεῖς δὲ υἱοὶ ἡμέραν ἐξ ἡμέρας προσδεχόμενοι, οὐδὲν τούτων ἐωράκαμεν ἔτι. ἀνόητοι, συμβάλετε ἑαυτοὺς ξύλω· λάβετε ἄμπελον· πρῶτον μὲν φυλλοροεῖ, εἶτα βλαστὸς γίνεταί, μετὰ ταῦτα ὄμφαξ, εἶτα στραφυλὴ παρεστηκυῖα· οὕτως καὶ ὁ λαὸς μου ἀκαταστασίας καὶ θλίψεις ἔσχεν, ἔπειτα ἀπολήγεται τὰ ἀγαθὰ. *2 Clement* 11.1–4, in *PG* 1:343–346.

§ ³⁵⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions*

³⁵⁸ Epistle to Diognetus 9.2, in *PG* 2:1179–1180.

³⁵⁹ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 2.2.5

³⁶⁰ Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.5.1

³⁶¹ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.8.9

church a wholly new orientation regarding the time of the end, yet the *Pastor* itself protests strenuously against such an interpretation: it is concerned not with the future of the church, but wholly with the end. Christ came “in the last days of the end”³⁶² yet the end is not yet. Justin reminds us that Elijah must come and prepare the way for Christ at the end.³⁶³ He shows Trypho that according to Daniel the Lord must come twice and observes, “If Christ’s death has such *dynamis* in this age, how much greater will it be at his *parousia!*”³⁶⁴ Which plainly rules out any thought of a spiritual *parousia* already having taken place: what has taken place is as nothing compared to what will happen: an insult to the church, if we would follow the Roman interpretation. The trouble and misunderstanding about the hopes of the church arise from the fact, says Justin that many foolish people do not realize that these belong to the time of the second coming.³⁶⁵ All real Christians, he says believe on the resurrection of the flesh and the millennial Jerusalem when the work shall fill the earth, but there are many so-called Christians who will not accept this literal interpretation.³⁶⁶ Irenaeus quotes the “disciples of the apostles” as saying that salvation takes place by definite steps and degrees, and not in one blinding apocalyptic flash, they say “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,”—again, evil is not expunged in an instant, but by a series of conquests, “For in the times of the kingdom the just man who is on earth shall forget to die.”³⁶⁷ This shows what the ancients believed the kingdom to be: it was to be on this earth, a totally new order of things and by no means realized in their own time. “In the times of the kingdom, *revocata terra a Christo, et reaedificata Jerusalem, secundum characterem quae sursum est Jerusalem.*”³⁶⁸ Nothing more literal and less allegorical can be imagined. After the Antichrist has ruled all the earth for 3 ½ years from the temple at Jerusalem,

³⁶² Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.12.3

³⁶³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 49, in PG 6:581–584.

³⁶⁴ Εἰ δὲ τῆ τοῦ πάθους αὐτοῦ οἰκονομία τοσαύτη δύναμις δεικνύται παρακολουθήσασα καὶ παρακολουθοῦσα, πόση ἢ ἐν τῇ ἐνδόξῳ γινομένη αὐτοῦ παρουσία; Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 31, in PG 6:540–541.

³⁶⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 110, in PG 6:729–730.

³⁶⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 80, in PG 6:664–668.

³⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.36.2, in PG 7 pt. 2:1223–1224.

³⁶⁸ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.35.2, in PG 7 pt. 2:1219.

“then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds...restoring to Abraham his promised heritage.”³⁶⁹ The teaching of a literal millennium, rejected by many so-called Christians, was a favorite doctrine of “the elders.” The enlightened Christians who rejected the “naïve *Biblizismus*” of Justin represent the first wave of the spiritualizers who were presently to win a complete victory in the church, but as *Biblizismus* observes, this interpretation was not the product of a bitterly disappointed waiting for the *parousia*.³⁷⁰ The people who gave a spiritualized interpretation to this had been educated from childhood to give a spiritual interpretation to everything: they were the very ones who would never have expected a literal millennium anyway! There is a striking passage in the *Clementine Recognitions* on this subject: during a conference at Jerusalem at which the apostles spoke, the high priest put in an appearance in one of many gestures aimed at a compromise; from his words it appears that there was one great obstacle to such compromise and that was the insistence of the Christians on taking the millennium in a literal rather than a spiritual sense—for him the whole thing was obviously spiritual and only fools would think of it as otherwise.³⁷¹ This is consistent with the picture we get from the scrolls: official Judaism having entirely given up the literal interpretation of the scriptures, believing, as Charles notes, that anything like a future manifestation or revelation was absolutely out of the question.³⁷² Lactantius culminates an extremely elaborate last-day development with the *summus dies* of the *conclusionis extremae*,³⁷³ and describes the church of his day as still observing the stations and vigils in firm belief on a most literal *parousia*.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.4, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1207–1208.

§ ³⁷⁰

§ ³⁷¹ *Clem. Recog.*

§ ³⁷² Charles

³⁷³ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.24–25, in *PL* 6:809–812.

³⁷⁴ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.27, in *PL* 6:822.

What is the End? (31-49) (Section 2)

It cannot be an accident that the name most commonly—almost exclusively—associated with apostolic predictions of the end is that of Peter. As the Lord descended from the Mount of the Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, their talk is of “the restoration of all things.” That explains why Moses was there, for to him had been entrusted the covenant of the Old Testament, while the mission of Elias, (who had also appeared on that occasion), the Lord explains was “to restore all things.” As in their former conversation a week previous, Jesus warned the apostles to tell no man what they had seen and heard, and announced again with great emphasis that the work was to be completely rejected by the world, even as Elias had been rejected. It is hardly surprising, then, to find these same three apostles announcing a few years later that “the end of all things is at hand” (Peter 4:7), that “it is the last time” (John 2:18), and that the saints should be “an example of suffering affliction” with no hope of rescue save in the world to come (James 5:10). What was meant by “all things” coming to an end? The universe and heaven and hell were not coming to an end, and neither was the world itself, for John states that the Antichrist is just beginning to take over the church, “whereby we know that it is the last time.” (I John 2:18). For the apostles, the beginning of the Antichrist’s rule is the sign that something else has reached its end, and what can that be? “The restoration of all things” and “the end of all things” obviously refer to the same thing—the fullness of the gospel. What Elias restored, the Antichrist, as the Lord predicted, put an end to, “until the times of the restitution of all things” predicted by Peter (Acts 3:21) as a future event, when the fullness of the gospel would again be brought to the earth (Peter speaks of “restitution” and “refreshment”) as it had been in the days of the transfiguration. Moreover, everyone expected that Elias, the restorer of all things, would have to come again to earth before the Lord could appear in glory.

The problem of what the end actually meant has been solved in a number of ways:

1) By the simple and sweeping claim that only one future event was envisaged by the early Christians, and that this embraced every conceivable contingency foreseen in the apocalyptic writers and the scriptures. As we have seen, this is an untenable view.

2) By assuming that the end was not a sole and unique event: that an end could be followed by yet more history and yet other endings: by this reasoning the end could mark the conclusion of any of the great days of the world-week, of a time of visitation, a dispensation of the gospel, of an age of enlightenment and restoration, such as that of the apostles themselves, which certainly had an end.

3) The end may be thought to have been originally a single expected event, which with its indefinite postponement came to be reinterpreted by rationalization and duplication to mean a number of things; there was to be a real ending, but before it a long wintertime—a long meantime, which was inserted into apocryphal history as the end was delayed. But the study of the Jewish and other apocrypha shows beyond a doubt that the long night before the great day is part of the original concept, and not the late-born child of disappointment.

Is the belief in the end of times commensurate with an ambitious program of missionary work? The two are inseparable, for in every age the warning and the witness must precede the destruction: “as it was in the days of Noah.” But Lietzmann argued the opposite: “Paul,” he says, “gave the religion of Jesus the form, in which it was able to conquer the world.”³⁷⁵ As if Jesus and the apostles could not have made it a popular religion if they had wanted to—the very thing which they most scrupulously avoided! If Paul’s religion was a world-religion, that of the apostles certainly was not, and Lietzmann maintains that Paul was “the only one of the apostles who really understood Jesus.”³⁷⁶ Paul and Professor Lietzmann, that is, for the personal instruction of the Lord was lost on the apostles, who simply would not see the great plan for a

³⁷⁵ Lietzmann

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*

world-church. Christ instructed them to bear witness to the world and warn it, but Lietzmann will have none of that: their real mission, he says, “was to solicit citizens for the kingdom of God.”³⁷⁷ Only Paul got the point; but the whole system was only temporary, “until the new Jerusalem should come with the *parousia* of the Son of Man.”³⁷⁸ For after all “the home of the Christian is the heavenly Jerusalem where God sits enthroned with his angels. There is the city of the future, towards which we strive, the ‘kingdom of God,’ which will unite scattered churches on the earth.”³⁷⁹ **Mi.** 13 presents “exactly the same concept and mood that we find in Paul,” namely, that since the time is absolutely uncertain, “they looked all the more for signs. At any moment the time would be there...so it was important ‘to watch...’”³⁸⁰ But the watching was not for signs to determine the time, since the time was to have no signs: the second coming was to come suddenly, unexpectedly, without warning—but not soon; it was themselves that the saints were admonished to watch, lest they be caught napping. The sentry is not told to watch for signs of the approach of the sergeant of the guard, but to keep always alert so that no matter when the chief comes he will not be caught napping. Meyer states with the positive authority characteristic of his times, that the early Christians expected the immediate end of the world.³⁸¹ Then in the next sentence observes that such was not the case to judge by Mark 13, in which the time is uncertain. When Professor Meyer and the scriptures disagree, Professor Meyer has no difficulty settling the dispute in his favor: he simply declares the scripture out of order! Mark 13 is a late interpolation: it must be because it refutes his theory.

The early Christians, writes Harnack, “knew themselves as citizens of a world to come, upon which they were soon to enter. One who thus believes may easily make light of all that is around him, without falling into the attitude which is called pessimism...there is not room for

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*, I, 64

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*, I, 65

³⁷⁹ *ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*

³⁸¹ Eduard Meyer

abnegation or joy where there is a living belief that God made and rules the world, etc.”³⁸²

Sharman saw in *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, a number of expectations and possibilities: “*certain* disaster for his nation” in the near future—in that he was right; “*possible* disaster for his disciples,” a meaningless phrase, (is there anything vague about Christ’s predictions?);³⁸³ contradictory teachings e.g. Luke 21:29-31, where “the kingdom is promised within the generation,” versus Matthew 24:14, where “the end is deferred until the gospel has been preached ‘unto all the nations.’”³⁸⁴ But by what license does he make “the kingdom” and “the end” identical? In Luke “the coming of the kingdom will not be long deferred,” while in Matthew 16:19 “there is involved the establishment of institutions which imply a considerable period of future ecclesiastical activity.”³⁸⁵ But how long is “not long” when we speak of delay, and how long is “a considerable period” when we speak of future activity, and at what level is that activity to be carried on—can it not be in the kingdom?

How naively the experts can reach opposite conclusions from identical evidence is illustrated by the normal reaction of the ancient Christians to their expectation of the return of the Lord. According to Dufourcq, “the confident ardor with which they expected the Messiah furnished the occasion for the first development of the Christian hierarchy.”³⁸⁶ Spontaneously, freely, they got busy and organized the church with apostles, deacons, and presbyters. De Faye, however, says that while Christ himself organized the quorum of the twelve, “and wanted it to be durable, he never dreamed of forming a school of younger men who would receive his word and be the inheritors of his doctrine.”³⁸⁷ That was certainly the one thing to do if he wanted his word to be “durable.” At the same time that Dufourcq announced that it was the expectation of the *parousia* that produced the organization of the church, the German protestants announced that

³⁸² Harnack

³⁸³ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 126, emphasis original.

³⁸⁴ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 314.

³⁸⁵ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 315.

³⁸⁶ Dufourcq

³⁸⁷ De Faye

such an expectation must have had the very opposite effect. They said that since Jesus expected the immediate end of the world, “there was accordingly no room for a permanent institution.”³⁸⁸ Of course they assumed that the only conceivable type of institution was a permanent one, evolving its way through history. In this the Protestants and the Catholics saw eye to eye: either a permanent church or none. Both balked and absolutely refused to face the thought of “God giving over his sheep, and his sheepfold and his tower to destruction.”³⁸⁹ They were and are in the same case as those failing saints whom the apostolic fathers rebuke so roundly for insisting that God’s church must by its very nature be a permanent institution. “If the end was at hand and the Lord was approaching,” asks Schnitzer, “what need for a church, a papacy?”³⁹⁰ For a papacy, none, but the apostolic fathers themselves (Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp) urged the shortness of the times and the emergence of the final test as the strongest reason why the saints should band closely together, not live alone, come frequently together and give strength and encouragement to each other. That is the normal reaction of people in a last-ditch stand: it demonstrates clearly both the reality and the brevity of the early church organization. *Eschatologie und Kirche stehen in Widerspruch*, is the war cry of the early 1900’s, and “the eschatology of Jesus was the decisive argument against the founding of a church by him...”³⁹¹ Far from being opposites, they are corollaries of each other! Scheel later saw the point: “The church is, to be sure, placed in the world, but as the ark in the flood.”³⁹² It is a temporary place of refuge from the great storm; the church is necessary, he observed because the end is near, therefore Matthew 16:18 is eschatological, and the much-discussed rock is a rock of refuge. It is hard to reconcile his claim that “the church is necessary because the end is threatening,” with his assurance that “The church is to survive far longer than centuries, it belongs to the new world, and will be borne safely over

³⁸⁸ German Protestants?

³⁸⁹ ??

³⁹⁰ Schnitzer

³⁹¹ ??

³⁹² Scheel

into it.”³⁹³ This is the reassurance that the Christian churches need so badly, but in what scripture or what apostolic father is it to be found? It is simply Professor Scheel’s enthusiastic interpretation of the word rock. As the Lord delayed to come, according to Coulange, Paul continually revamped his ideas about the end; his final version saw the end postponed until the preaching of the gospel to all the world, a work which is almost completed: this conviction, says Coulange, Paul passed on to Mark, who passed it on to Matthew, “but it remained without influence.”³⁹⁴ What a feeble and wobbly doctrine this teaching of the end must have been—the “central doctrine” of the church! Coulange is trying to save the church by arguing that only one end was ever expected and that it did not take place: when Paul speaks of various ends and various events in the future, that is simply Paul’s own desperate and rattle-brained struggle to reconcile himself to the fact that the scheme of the future blocked out for him by the 19th century scholars fell flat: so he invented another scheme to explain what did happen. The change in the Roman Empire between Augustus and Constantine was not so great, says Schwartz, “as that of the little group who had looked at the resurrected Lord and waited for his return, and the catholic, that is, the universal church which filled the empire.”³⁹⁵ Others have asked, if they actually saw the resurrected Lord, why should they care whether he returned or not? They knew he was living in heaven, and they would go to him there. Why should they be all excited about a second coming? No wonder they were not surprised or dismayed when it failed to materialize!

Instead of giving the “Great Commission,” Sharman concluded, Jesus thought it “wiser simply to cast forth the seed thoughts in the parables of the kingdom, and leave it to the unfolding of history to reveal their intended message as to the limits of the kingdom.”³⁹⁶ If the apostles were really ordered by Jesus to preach the gospel in all the world, he says, “Their course of action seems inexplicable,” for it was only later when “the onward pressure of new experiences” had

³⁹³ Scheel

³⁹⁴ Coulange, “Le Retour du Christ,” 544-548.

³⁹⁵ Schwartz

³⁹⁶ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 351-352.

“widened their horizon so as to include ‘all the nations’” that they got to their task.³⁹⁷ Writing in 1917 Fawkes noted that the signs of the true primitive church have entirely disappeared from Christianity today: “Before the middle of the second century [primitive Christianity]...had disappeared so completely that we cannot now even imagine it.”³⁹⁸ So he proceeds to imagine it: “A charismatic religion, for which a tribal theology is an open question and the end of all things imminent.” Among the things “we cannot now even imagine” is what “the end of all things” was. “The belief in the literal and immediate Coming of Christ,” Mr. Fawkes identifies with “the shadow of the impending end.”³⁹⁹ A glorious event is expected to come upon them as a grim shadow. “The Christians of the first days lived for the moment.” That explains “The late organization of the Church, the fluidity of her standards, teaching, and observance for more than a century, the gap between the literature of the Apostolic and that of the post-Apostolic age—these things which are so unaccountable and so perplexing to us.”⁴⁰⁰ Unaccountable that the Christian church of the common tradition should not even remotely resemble the primitive church; perplexing that the early Christians should have given no thought at all to perpetuating their church, that in their expectation of an event that failed to happen they lost their grip on the church or at least made no provision at all for the perpetuation and increase of what they had, so that what meets us on this side of the gap is a new foundation, not even remotely resembling the old.

Lebreton, attempting to explain how Christ could possibly have been ignorant of the time of the day of judgment overlooks the fact that the scripture says nothing about his being ignorant of that day. But Lebreton commits the same error as the Protestants: judgment day, end of the world, second coming, etc. there is one event and one only to which the church looks forward. The feeble rationalizations of Lebreton, sentimental and rhetorical in the best manner of the 4th century, look with a clairvoyance that few prophets would claim, into the mind of the Master to

³⁹⁷ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 352.

³⁹⁸ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 115.

³⁹⁹ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 114.

⁴⁰⁰ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 114.

tell us that “here Jesus effaces himself to make the Father, his knowledge, his goodness and his sovran power apparent.”⁴⁰¹ A graceful and courteous gesture for a Caesar to an Augustus, but an unnecessary and confusing concession for the Son of God to make, especially since the purpose of his mission is to show forth the knowledge, goodness, and power of the Father in his person. The Son of God and the angels really do know the time and the hour, says Lebreton, “but it is not their mission to make it known, in this sense they do not know it.”⁴⁰² That such ambitious control of the scriptures is necessary in dealing with the expectations of the church only shows how determined men are to have their own way with God. “Since the end of all times was at hand,” says Achelis, “there was no point to working any more for everyday things. Once the bare necessities for subsistence were provided, one could leave the future to God. Earthly goods lost their value for the most part in the glow of the future.”⁴⁰³ Nice, but where does Achelis get, the end of all times? It is a good term to express a single culminating event, but apparently it is Achelis’ own, and on it he builds the attitude that the saints would logically have if that was their idea—but where do they talk of “The end of all times?” Harnack in 1923 noted that the early Christians never made any effort to set up schools for the education of their children, what teaching was done by Christians was of a strictly private, not an institutional, nature.⁴⁰⁴ This is a marked sign of indifference to the future.

The earliest Christians were vigorously preoccupied with the question of the time of the *parousia*, writes Eduard Meyer, in 1924.⁴⁰⁵ Apparently, they ignored completely the Lord’s own answer to the question: not even the angels know, so don’t ask! If that was the question, they willfully disregarded the official answer, but that is not the time they were asking about at all.

⁴⁰¹ Lebreton

⁴⁰² *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ *Wenn schon in kurzer Zeit das Ende aller Zeiten bevorstand, dann hatte es keinen Sinn mehr, zu arbeiten und sich zu mühen über den Bedarf des Tages hinaus. War nur für den notwendigen Unterhalt gesorgt, so konnte man die Zukunft Gott überlassen. Die irdischen Güter verloren ihren Wert zum guten Teil im Glanz der Zukunft.* Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, vol. 1, 19.

⁴⁰⁴ Harnack, 1923

⁴⁰⁵ Eduard Meyer, 1924

The apostles are represented as asking about the signs that shall precede the coming, but not to discover the exact time of the event; it was the other and more immediate event that concerned them, and that is what they ask and talk about: the end of all things, the rule of the Antichrist. Althaus at the same time offers a diametrically opposed interpretation: the earliest Christians did not concern themselves with the signs, it was only when the *parousia* failed that they got busy and worked out “*Stadien der Endgeschichte*.”⁴⁰⁶ The “not yet” which they experienced called for an explanation—and produced it.” It can be detected taking form already in the Synoptics, who corrected the immediate expectation of Jesus, fusing the Jewish catastrophe spectacle with the *parousia* in an elastic historical succession.”

When the early Christians talk about the firm and imperishable church, it is the heavenly church, “in Ignatius...is the model for the earthy church, a society of sinless saints. The *Didache*...speaks clearly on the *ekklesia* that Christ gathers into his kingdom...in the *Hermas*...the church is a heavenly institution which ‘on the end of the days’ returns to heaven where it will become the kingdom of God.”⁴⁰⁷ Thus R. Frick. The end of the days means thus not the time when Christ descends in glory at all. It is the end of the period, when the church is to be taken out of the world up into heaven and the false church is to be set up, in careful imitation of it, here below. And as far as the *Hermas* is concerned, that day has arrived.

“Why” asked Bardy in 1932, “was the early church absolutely indifferent to education?” “Why did Origen not even imagine that one might at least make an effort to for young Christians by study and reading of the Bible, in place of profane books?”⁴⁰⁸ In the fourth century, he assures us, it was a different story, but it was not till long after Origen that the problem of education was seriously dealt with. His explanation for the complete silence regarding education in the church

⁴⁰⁶ Althaus

⁴⁰⁷ R. Frick

⁴⁰⁸ Gustave Bardy, “L’Église et L’Enseignement Pendant les Trois Premiers Siècles,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 12 (1932), (SEE pg 28 for second half. where is first question?).

for the first three centuries is that for a long time the church got its members from adults: *fiunt non nascuntur christiani*.⁴⁰⁹ And for 300 years those members never had any children? Almost never, to follow Bardy: “Those born in a family of believers were rare.”⁴¹⁰ What kind of families were those? Can such a situation have gone on for centuries? M. Bardy is straining his argument to the point of the absurd, for he cannot otherwise explain this strange state of things in a church that he must suppose looked forward to a future of constant development. The question of education, he says, seems not even to have been brought up before the end of the second century and only in the third century did Christians begin to acknowledge the advantages of education.⁴¹¹ M. Bardy can think of no answer, but Paul has given us a very plain one. All such normal functions of life, he tells the Corinthians, are to be in abeyance—completely ignored—for the present emergency. The time left for the church is so short that nothing is to be expected for the normal activities of life.

Next Lake notes that Jesus does not explain the Christianity of the second century. Why not? Because, he explains, of the “rapidity of evolution.”⁴¹² But as we have said before, evolution is by definition not revolution; it is not rapid and abrupt like whatever happens between the time of the apostles and the second century—something radical and complete, that took place in only a very few years. The only alternative to a complete change in the Christian institution is the theory that Jesus was a myth. The New Testament does not show us the preaching of an ethical gospel, Lake observes, but something very real and eschatological.⁴¹³ And then suddenly it stops, and in its place one day we find another order of church and another order of preaching. What has happened? Is not the best explanation—the only one—that that happened which had been

⁴⁰⁹ Bardy, “L’Église et L’Enseignement,” 1, quoting Tertullian, *Apolog.*, XVIII, 4.

⁴¹⁰ Bardy, “L’Église et L’Enseignement,” 1.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

⁴¹² Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 22.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*

predicted: the end came, as predicted, the sheep were destroyed, and those came who preached another gospel, but used the names and made the same claims as the old?

In 1934 Buzy observed that there must be more than one Antichrist, if we follow the scripture.⁴¹⁴ The elementary simplicity of the popular eschatological picture was beginning to yield something to reality. We find in the New Testament, he says, a sharp distinction between the existing antichrists (“already appearing” in the apostles’ time) and the Antichrist of the end.⁴¹⁵ But the existing antichrists are described by John as a sure sign that the end has arrived. If yet another Antichrist is to follow, there must be yet another end—that is the end of the world. Buzy describes the New Testament doctrine that existing antichrists are being held under a certain restraint by a certain obstacle. That is reassuring, but then he must admit the clear announcement that this wholesome obstacle is going to be removed, and then will occur the *Parousie des Antechrists*. What is the obstacle? The preaching of the gospel, says Buzy, by the apostles, prophets, missionaries or witnesses, whose preaching must be accompanied by miracles,⁴¹⁶ i.e. the obstacle is the power of the priesthood. This is exactly the situation described in Hegesippus: When the last apostolic person passed away, the barrier was removed and the antichrists, who had been lurking in dark corners, boldly came out into the open.⁴¹⁷ How does Buzy explain this in view of the fact that his church claims to remain “firm and unshaken to the end of the world?” He cannot explain it, he sadly confesses.⁴¹⁸

The year 1938 saw some important inroads on the oversimplified doctrine of the single end. F. A. M. Spencer has serious doubts as to any thought of an immediate *parousia*; he speculated on “a danger of spiritual deterioration if the Parousia were unduly deferred,” and decided that the tares were not bad people but “evils,” for “bad people may become

⁴¹⁴ Denis Buzy, “L’Adversaire et l’Obstacle,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 24 (1934), 405-406.

⁴¹⁵ Buzy, “L’Adversaire et l’Obstacle,” 412-414.

⁴¹⁶ Buzy, “L’Adversaire et l’Obstacle,” 421-425.

⁴¹⁷ Hegesippus

⁴¹⁸ Buzy, “L’Adversaire et l’Obstacle,” 431.

good...whereas tares cannot possibly be transformed into wheat.”⁴¹⁹ Has he not read the triumphant declaration of fourth century fathers that the tares have become wheat, as they needs must if a world-church is to triumph? All this is necessary to save the church through the centuries. Spencer decided that “Jesus, with his limited human knowledge, was not prepared to give an estimate of the time it would take for the conditions for this [harvest] to become ripe.”⁴²⁰ He duly notes the strange fact that “we do not read that he told his disciples to realize his ideals, but we do read that he told them to be ready for him...”⁴²¹ It was not their project to work on building up the church, they were not to prepare the world for him, but to be ready for him. Mr. Spencer must observe with regret that the preparing process has not been a brilliant one; the preaching has not regenerated mankind. “There is a widespread yearning for the kingdom of God, but it is frustrated yearning. How can the frustration be removed...?” In only one way: “through the manifest presence” of Christ himself.⁴²² Mr. Spencer, after testing all the scriptures and seeking out the facts of history, has reverted to the crassest literalism. The apostles did not expect the immediate *parousia*; Christ himself did not preach it; he did not order the apostles to set up his church, and the apostolic teaching or what claims to be it has not by any means regenerated the human race. In the same year J. Kiss studied Paul’s views of the future.⁴²³ The words with which men have tried to solve the problem: ultimate *parousia*, delayed *parousia*; unfulfilled *parousia*, fullness of times, consummation of times, etc. show the complexity of the problem. But to all of them Paul gives the answer: “Let us do what we must do for the present and thereby we will best prepare ourselves for the future. ‘According to that which is above, not according to that which is on earth.’” This is not the program of a practical man building a world church, but one who hopes to guide his community, after a short period of suffering, into a better world. That is the only future Paul ever talks of.

⁴¹⁹ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 7.

⁴²⁰ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 7.

⁴²¹ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 17.

⁴²² Spencer, “Second Advent,” 18.

⁴²³ J. Kiss, 1938

Noting that Christ made at least two appearances after the crucifixion, Fascher in 1938 asked, “Was the appearance after the resurrection the same as the second coming? Did Christ not appear to the world in the Easter manifestation as the triumphant Messiah who had conquered death?”⁴²⁴ That is certainly the way the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church describe it. But why then, asks Fascher, did the disciples still look forward to the kingdom? Why were “Wait, patience, hope” their watch words? Why was this program later given up by the church? Fascher’s answer is that the *parousia* was completely overshadowed by the missionary program of the church, for the *parousia* must wait until all people have heard the gospel.⁴²⁵ Yet on no doctrine do the early fathers insist more emphatically than that the gospel was preached to the world and that, in miraculous fashion, by the apostles themselves; they finished the work in their own generation. Why then did the end not come? It did come, and to say that missionary work postponed it indefinitely is to overlook one of the basic teachings of the early church, that the prophecy of Joel was formally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

An Ingenious interpretation was put on early church history in 1939 by E. Kaesemann. From the Epistle to the Hebrews he sees the whole concept of the church to have been that of God’s people wandering in the wilderness, with Christ the High Priest as the central point of everything.⁴²⁶ God’s people are not only pilgrims and strangers in this world individually, as so many of the earliest writers insist, but they are collectively a migrating group. When the church “sojourning” in one city writes to the church “sojourning” in another, the concept was quite a literal one. And it is a concept that suits most ill with the idea of a world-dominating church. Reflecting on Luke 8:13 and Hebrews 3:12-14, G. Bardy concludes that “Nothing, in these formulas, indicates the end of the world,”⁴²⁷ though scholars have preferred to imagine that such dire disaffection in the church can only be that immediately preceding the second coming. It is nothing of the sort, says

⁴²⁴ Fascher, 1938

⁴²⁵ *ibid.*

⁴²⁶ E. Kaesemann, 1939

⁴²⁷ Gustave Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme Durant les Premiers Siècles*, (Paris: F. Aubier, 1949), 295-296.

Bardy, and must refer to an earlier period. “On the other hand, the general apostasy which will precede the coming of the Lord, seems clearly described in 1 Timothy.”⁴²⁸ On the contrary, this is yet another indication of a far earlier defection, for if every present condition were clearly set for it in this letter—this is a general apostasy, to be sure, but it is not a distant one—it is happening right in Timothy’s own time. As for 2 Thessalonians, Bardy in reading it cannot deny its implication, so he simply refuses, as many others have done, to recognize this alarming book as genuine. Still he must admit that it is in the best New Testament tradition: “The Lord himself had already announced this....The evangelists do not speak expressly of apostasy, but the idea which they express is certainly what we translate today by that word.”⁴²⁹ Peter, John, and Clement of Alexandria all describe a great and serious apostasy, Bardy notes, and then HE describes it, in the softest words he can find: “*Un peu partout l’hérésie fait des victimes et attire à elle...les disciples du Christ.*”⁴³⁰ A bit everywhere, indeed! “The second century,” he continues “is *par excellence* that of heresy. In the presence of an orthodox Christianity which had not yet consolidated its dogmas in definitive formulas...errors increased.”⁴³¹ The effective obstacle to the false ones was not the spirit of the Lord, as we have seen above, but “definitive formulations of dogma” by which courts and bishops, prefects and emperors could suppress irregularity. What better admission that the old order was wiped out?

In a work of free speculations, J. Westbury Jones marvels at “the aggressive energy of Christianity....Politics and social institutions it did not seek directly (sic) to touch....It had no more distinctive intention of changing human government and positive laws than had Marcus Aurelius of restricting liberty of thought and worship.”⁴³² A thoroughly dignified and conservative institution, designed to carry on in support of king and country was the primitive

⁴²⁸ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 296.


⁴²⁹ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 296-297.

⁴³⁰ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 302-304.

⁴³¹ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 306.

⁴³² J. Westbury Jones

church of Mr. Westbury-Jones. Recently Piper in studying the “last days” discovers that “It is not stated that Jesus came to ‘dissolve’ or to ‘destroy’ the works of the Devil, which during his earthly ministry and prior to the Parousia he never did.”⁴³³ But since he cannot have failed his purpose must have been “rather to deprive Satan’s works of their supernatural power.” Which is to say, that though Jesus failed to do what one would naturally expect him to have done, we cannot concede failure to him, and therefore his intention must have been some other one.

“The evolution of pneumatism and of eschatology,” Goguel wrote in 1949, “were  parallel...and could only work against the stabilizing tendency which characterized the second generation.”⁴³⁴ This interesting admission that the first and second generations represent not only divergent but actually opposite concepts of Christianity is the usual ground for rebuking the impractical, unworldly, and unenduring qualities of the earliest Christianity; but none recognized more clearly those qualities than the earliest Christians themselves—and they gloried in them. The sudden florition of evangelical literature in the second generation shows that it filled a vital need, Goguel observes, and the now generally admitted claim that the Gospels were not written as missionary tracts but addressed to the initiated shows that it was the church itself that yearned for contact with apostolic things.⁴³⁵ The new orientation of the second generation gave up the eschatology of Paul, who expected the end to come soon, and the church felt itself at last established on this earth, “*non pas sans doute comme s’il devait y vivre toufours*...but as if it were to remain for an indeterminate period, and practically as if its members would live out their whole lives here.”⁴³⁶ This is an interesting admission that the saints of the first generation had no such thoughts of permanence. How determined the earliest Christians were in their belief that the whole community of the righteous was to pass beyond is seen in Goguel’s notes that “None of the

⁴³³ Piper, “1 John and the Primitive Church,” 444.

⁴³⁴ Maurice Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 136 (1949), 39; See also *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 147-148.

⁴³⁵ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 149-150.

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

problems of the second generation was solved by an intellectual effort or by individual initiative...there was no preparation for them.”⁴³⁷ He cites the case of John, the one man, according to Goguel, who knew what was happening, yet even he “did not judge it possible to do anything but give his brethren this order of the day: Patience and fidelity in being witnesses.”⁴³⁸ If the apostles were deliberately reticent in doctrinal matters, they were even more reticent in church matters!

W. Eltester tells us that the genius of antique culture was a feeling for “this side,” as opposed to the “other side” feeling of Christianity.⁴³⁹ For the pagans, man stood on this earth as the measure of all things, and it was precisely because Christianity taught a diametrically opposed doctrine that it enjoyed its great success in the second half of the third century: but the *fugatio mundi* it taught then was of a harmless philosophical sort and worlds removed from that of the early church. Though the “eschatological fever” of the early Christians cooled off gradually, says Goguel, “In theory it was never denied; the idea of the end of the world and the *parousia* became a theoretical one and no longer exercised any real action on the souls of men.”⁴⁴⁰ Could any better description of Christianity itself be given? They kept the forms of godliness but denied the power. “They acquired the habit of thinking as if the present world would not come to an end, and that the only way one could cease to belong to it was by death.”⁴⁴¹ But had they not from the very first embraced death for that very reason? Though some might be caught up, all admitted that the one way to come out of the world was to die. “Why were the apostles so indifferent to the comforts and good things of this life?” asks E. Peterson, and answers: “Because these things were as good

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ Goguel

⁴³⁹ W. Eltester

⁴⁴⁰ Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 38.

⁴⁴¹ *On a pris l'habitude de penser et de vivre comme si le monde présent ne devait pas finir et comme si c'était seulement par la mort que l'on pouvait cesser de lui appartenir.* Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 38-39.

as done for.”⁴⁴² Then he theorizes: “As long as women have children, death will reign; the kingdom of God will come if the difference between the sexes vanishes.”⁴⁴³ This is far-fetched reasoning; the failure of the human race to reproduce will not bring the heavenly hosts down from above—it will, as Tertullian says, only succeed in depopulating the earth, not in filling it with saints.⁴⁴⁴

Recently Quispel’s emphasis on the early Christian concept of complete identification of the “new man” with the Lord himself, whose spirit fills him, casts a new light on the problem of the sufferings of the early saints. “The Lord suffers in Christ, so that Peter lives no more, but has become Christ.”⁴⁴⁵ Quispel says he hesitated many years before attributing such a doctrine to the early Christians, for it had been completely denatured by the “*geestoloze aesthetes*,” who avoid literalism at any price, and so “have no organ for the old Christian thought-world.”⁴⁴⁶ Peter rejoiced, says Quispel, because his crucifixion was not a personal sorrow but a part of the suffering of Christ. This makes him the prototype of the Christian martyrs. Peterson expressed the same idea at the same time: “The apostles prove, that in their death Christ himself dies in them. In very deed Peter died on the cross, like his master.”⁴⁴⁷ The same was true of Thomas and Andrew. And at the moment in which the apostle thus perishes, “the kingdom of God is at the point of coming.”⁴⁴⁸ Bornkamm reconciles the immediate end with the later one by assuming that they represent successive phases of adaptation in the church to an event that did not happen.⁴⁴⁹ But all this adjustment goes on within the New Testament itself. Diétrich explains the apparent contradiction another way: Peter says a thousand years is as one day, yet we are told that the testing time will be short. Her explanation: “*l’épreuve est courte* compared with the glory to

⁴⁴² Peterson, “Der Ursprung der Christlichen Askese,” [probably around 204].

⁴⁴³ Peterson, “Der Ursprung der Christlichen Askese,” 204-205.

⁴⁴⁴ Tertullian

⁴⁴⁵ Quispel

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ Peterson, [SEE “Der Ursprung der Christlichen Askese”]

⁴⁴⁸ Peterson, [SEE “Der Ursprung der Christlichen Askese”]

⁴⁴⁹ Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parousie,” [PG #?].

follow.”⁴⁵⁰ A neat rationalization, but futile, since the testing time is not short compared with a human lifetime. Still Diétrich must note that Christ’s predictions “have nothing in common with the *optimisme facile qui affirme le progrès nécessaire et croit à la transformation graduelle de ce monde*.”⁴⁵¹ It is even possible that the Lord conceived that only a remnant should be left, she says (Luke 18:8). But in thus knocking out the supports of a favorite Protestant concept, Diétrich does no service to her own faction: once it is admitted that Christ’s view of the future was not an optimistic one, are we not well on the way to conceding that it was a dark one? If there was to be no gradual reformation of the world, must we not give up the fond picture of the true church gradually conquering Babylon through the centuries? Once we admit that there is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the church had to progress and transform the world, is there any reason for insisting that it should stay around at all? To say that the continuance of the church was guaranteed while the success of its mission was not is to have it survive in vain. If it is possible that the Lord believed only a remnant would survive is it not possible that he believed none would survive? We often read of a remnant remaining righteous in the church, after all the others bear the name of Christ in vain, but instead of learning that this remnant survives in the world, we are always told that they are carefully put to death, leaving the field to imposters and false preachers. They survive the great apostasy for they and they alone do not fall away; they survive in the kingdom when they refuse like the others to yield to persecution, but by that very token they do not survive and escape on this earth—they buy their salvation at the price quoted, they lose their life to save it. There were very few who survived thus, and they are the few survivors who were predicted. “This conviction that sacrifices, hardships, sufferings, and even death are to be the lot of the fellowship as a whole,” writes Manson, noting that it is the church and not just select individuals who are marked by prophecy for extermination on this earth, “may help to explain a notorious difficulty.... Three times in Mark the rejection, execution, and resurrection of

⁴⁵⁰ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 225.

⁴⁵¹ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 226.

the Son of Man are...predicted by Jesus; and yet his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, to say nothing of the resurrection, found the disciples totally unprepared...It is possible that the disciples took ‘Son of Man’ to mean ‘the people of the saints of the Most High.’”⁴⁵² Though we cannot agree with this interpretation for a number of reasons, it is interesting as a further recognition of the idea (which it attempts to explain) that the slaying of the disciples was an essential part of the Christian story, and regarded as having a direct bearing upon the time of the end. R. Knopf has not had an easy time reconciling the good end and the bad end. The early Christian eschatological theme was, according to him: “Soon the Lord is coming for the judgment, to lead his own into the kingdom of God.”⁴⁵³ Here is the good and bad together, and this it was that “filled the early church with joy, yearning and also dreadful fear.”⁴⁵⁴ Yet as we have seen, the object of dread to the early Christians was not Christ but the Antichrist, whose coming was to be first. Whereas James, *Didache*, Justin, and Ireneaus all express a yearning for the end, for the Synoptics the end is a grim and dreadful thing; these passages don’t belong, however, Knopf decides, they have all been inserted into the text!⁴⁵⁵ Yet he must admit that Mark 13 and its parallels are very early indeed. To such ends men must go to avoid an obvious if unpleasant conclusion, fathering the Christians with being vague, shifting, contradictory, opportunist, and calculating because they will not conform to the prejudices of the later church. T. Brandt marvels that “the same men who carried in them a world revolution, God’s dynamite, make no protest against slavery and other social abuses,” instead having by association with Christ had a “new creation,” they were able to accomplish a much greater revolution.⁴⁵⁶ Spencer, however, sadly observes that the signs of world regeneration throughout the Christian centuries are not conspicuous if they are visible at all. Brandt overlooks how much the earliest Christians denounced all the social abuses and inequalities in their own society—they were quite aware of them; if they did not make any effort

⁴⁵² Manson, “The New Testament Basis,” 5.

⁴⁵³ R. Knopf

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ R. Knopf

⁴⁵⁶ T. Brandt

to attack them in the larger world it can only mean that that program which vitally concerned them within the church was not going forth into the world. Teicher finds that “there is in the scrolls no trace of preoccupation with political or social events or movements....The scrolls display no interest whatever in politics or history....The sphere of the scrolls is purely that of religion; their exclusive concern is with the moral and spiritual life on the ‘historical level,’ and on the ‘eschatological level.’”⁴⁵⁷ Yet this does not mean that the authors of the scrolls lived free of all controls, for “the legal and homiletic components of the fragments presuppose the existence of a developed and well-organized Jewish Christian sect.”⁴⁵⁸ While Nock expresses the conventional belief that “with the waning of the idea that the Lord would very soon come again, the church became a continuing society in a continuing world.” Yet, he says, “it is surprising to see how slow and slight was the adaptation before the fourth century of anything like mystery terminology.”⁴⁵⁹ The absence of this shows how reluctant the church was to accept the role of a continuing society.

Recently, William Nestle dealt with one of the commonest taunts directed against the early Christians; Why did Christ come so late? If the salvation of the entire human race was his purpose, “What would become of the pre-Christian generations?”⁴⁶⁰ The Christians answered this, says Nestle with the teaching of the *kairos*. The *kairos* is a proper time, a fit time or opportunity for something, an appointed period or point of time, but always it expresses a limited part of world history. The time must be “fulfilled,” the world must be ripe for the right moment (*kairos*). This is important in view of the constant use of *kairos* in apostolic announcements of the end. Where modern scholars glibly identify the end of the world, the second coming, the judgment, the resurrection, etc. with these utterances, what the apostles themselves say is that it is the end of the *kairos* or of the *aeon*, but not of the world. The other common gibe at the

⁴⁵⁷ Teicher

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ Nock

⁴⁶⁰ William Nestle

Christians mentioned by Nestle, was that the expected coming did not take place. Where do we find their answers to this?

“It has long been customary,” wrote J. Morris in 1953, “to seek in the Pauline epistles an ethical and theological code designed for the conduct of Christians on earth, or alternatively to look for policy of social and political reform. It is doubtful if either search is legitimate. If he had been asked to outline either, Paul would have given the short answer that they were none of his business...Paul believed that at the coming of the Lord ‘we which are alive and remain shall be caught up.’”⁴⁶¹ But if the Lord were to establish himself here for a thousand years what was the “catching up” business? Merely to accompany him for the last few hundred yards? For Paul, says Morris,

The end of the known world was really imminent, and every other consideration was subordinate to the impermanence of tangible reality. When, later, he made more precise what he understood by the coming of the Lord, he envisaged a total transformation of the material substance of the earth....Nevertheless, in the twenty-five years of Paul’s activity, practical problems of what to do in the meantime occurred very frequently. His letters nowhere contain a pragmatic statement of principles, but they abound with ad hoc answers...⁴⁶²

“Paul had worked for his own day,” says Morris, “for a world which he believed would have no foreseeable future.”⁴⁶³ Confusion comes from the usual identification of separate events: “The time is short,” for example, refers to “the imminent advent of the Lord.” Yet the same chapter says the advent is not imminent.⁴⁶⁴ Again, “Pauline Christianity took its stand on a root and branch opposition to the established organisation of society; it looked to a cataclysmic revolution, one imminent and one based on the equality of all men.”⁴⁶⁵ But, as we have just seen, other scholars are struck by the absolute lack of interest in the New Testament in the organization of society or in social reform. If any one thing is clear from the predictions of the great things to

⁴⁶¹ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 5; See 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17.

⁴⁶² Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 5.

⁴⁶³ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 5; See 1 Corinthians 7.

⁴⁶⁵ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 6.

come in the New Testament, it is that those things would be God's doing and not men's. "The fashion of this world passeth away," (1 Cor. 7:31) does not, as Morris would have it, express "The thorough hostility of the Christians to the established order."⁴⁶⁶ It expresses indifference to the social order, or maybe even contempt but certainly anything but hatred or aggressive opposition. Other contemporaries are now struck by the thorough support and loyalty that the first Christians gave the political and social order. The non-importance of the things of this world is the stock argument urged upon those who are reluctant to leave it, not a rally to an assault against it. Whether you are married or not married, rich or poor, etc. makes no difference, Paul insists, and he obligingly tells us why. Not because those things are evil, but because the time is short.

Most recently Greeven has noted that Paul deliberately avoids mentioning "the elders." Why? Because "he did not and would not look to the past. The church does not cling to its heritage, but lets itself rather be prepared for what is to come."⁴⁶⁷ For the society of Christ "lives on the powers of the world to come, which will be given her as the firstling offerings of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶⁸ Lastly, T.F. Glasson has asked, "Is our version of the *kerygma* correct?" Did the apostles really preach that "the time of fulfillment has come, the new age has been inaugurated by the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus....Soon he will return to glory to judge the world; repent and believe in the good news and you will receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶⁹ This concept, says Glasson, "ought not to be taken as final." For one thing, he points out, it omits the apostolic "witnesses," and falsely includes a doubtful factor, "viz., the imminent return of Christ in glory to judge the world."⁴⁷⁰

The tendency of opinion in the past years has, then been away from the conventional ideas of a continued church. The different interpretations of Paul's preaching all have in common

⁴⁶⁶ Morris, "Early Christian Orthodoxy," 6.

⁴⁶⁷ Greeven

⁴⁶⁸ Same as 96?

⁴⁶⁹ T.F. Glasson

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*

a program that could not possibly be attributed to a man who felt that his mission was to establish a great and permanent institution in the world. And while fissures are being detected everywhere in the simple and comforting doctrine of the invulnerable church, it is being increasingly recognized that the immediate return of Christ was not identical with the end which the brethren confidently expected. The teaching that the predicted end really took place and brought a dispensation of the gospel to a close is of course a bitter pill for Christian churches to swallow. Rather than accept it they do not hesitate to charge the Lord with error and the apostles with fraud: they all said there would be an end but they were wrong. They expected it soon, but it did not come, and so they invented one pious fiction after another to explain its delay. But it never came.

WHAT WAS THE END? ANOTHER VERSION. (Section 3)

Commenting on the Egerton Fragment, Mayeda says, “Belief on the near end of the world, and that Christianity from its inception was far removed from the world of culture and education,” is basic in the study of early Christian records. “*Nicht nur die Kulture, sondern alles, was die Menschen für wertvoll halten, ist Jesus unwichtig.*”⁴⁷¹ The word is well chosen: to the early Christians the things of this world are as nothing. Experience shows that the world is liable to take such an attitude to it as dangerous hostility; like a woman, it will tolerate any type of opposition but neglect. But from the Christian point of view, the world simply didn’t count. The only interest the apostles had in it was to warn it. In an apocryphal sermon of Peter the apostles are instructed: “Go forth out into the world after twelve years have passed, that no man might say: ‘We never heard it.’”⁴⁷² “Though the righteous sleep a long sleep,” says the *Book of Enoch*, “they have nought to fear.”⁴⁷³ In the Coptic *Sayings of Jesus* we read: “They went forth by threes through the four regions of the heaven and preached the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world.”⁴⁷⁴ The belief that the apostles themselves actually accomplished their mission and that the whole world heard the gospel in their generation was stoutly maintained by the early fathers. The miraculous accomplishment is in fact John Chrysostom’s main argument for the divinity of the church.

Dupont-Sommer interprets the instruction of the *Habakkuk Commentary* that “It is necessary to ‘remain at one’s post,’” as expressing the belief that its author was living “‘at the end of the days’...this belief...is clearly and frequently stated in the *Damascus Document*. The day of the last Judgement is at hand; life is lived in this expectation which is at once terrible and

⁴⁷¹ Mayeda

⁴⁷² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 6.5, in PG 9:264.

⁴⁷³ *Book of Enoch* 100:5.

⁴⁷⁴ *Sayings of Jesus* (Coptic)

consoling.”⁴⁷⁵ This is another attempt to reconcile the two endings; there was to be but one ending and that was to be good and bad at once. But is not the advantage of the church that it gives one some assurance that one is with the blessed? Does the conviction that one is saved wait until the final judgment? If that were so the saints would have no assurance at all; yet they constantly talk of that assurance. The joy and calmness with which they faced all the crises of this world was born of a perfect assurance. Is there anywhere a single statement that would indicate that any early Christian ever looked forward to the coming of Christ with dread? That they dread the Antichrist they make perfectly clear, but the whole advantage to being a Christian was that the judgment lost its terror. The wicked were doomed, but not the righteous, and it was not considered vanity or deception for an early Christian to regard himself as a member of the righteous band.

According to Peter in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* the end shall be when “faith shall fail from the earth and orthodoxy shall come to an end.”⁴⁷⁶ The false teachers and “sons of destruction” must rule, says the *Apocalypse of Peter*, “Then the God shall come to my faithful,” here it is not Christ, but the Father who comes: the Comforter, “and I will judge the sons of lawlessness”—it is they who have to fear, not the saints.⁴⁷⁷ After the rule of the scornful and impious men, who say that they are just, whose hands and minds touch unclean things while their mouths speak great things, will arise the just Levite Taxo, according to the *Assumption of Moses*, “and then his kingdom will appear throughout all his creation and Satan will be no more and sorrow will depart with him” the hills will fall and Israel will be happy.⁴⁷⁸ There is no dread here

⁴⁷⁵ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 64.

⁴⁷⁶ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them*, trans. J. Rendel Harris, (1900; reprint, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 31-32.

⁴⁷⁷ ἐκεῖνοι δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς ἀπολείας γενήσονται καὶ τότε ἐλεύσεται ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τοῦ πιστοῦ μου τοὺς πινῶντας καὶ διψῶντας καὶ θλιβομένους καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ βίῳ τὰς ψυχὰς ἑαυτῶν δοκιμάζοντας καὶ κρινεῖ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀνομίας... *The Apocalypse of Peter* 3. For Greek see U. Bouriant, *Fragments du texte grec du livre d'Énoch et de quelques écrits attribués à Saint Pierre*, in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française au Caire, Tome Neuvième*, (Paris: Librairie de la Société asiatique, 1892), 142.

⁴⁷⁸ *Assumption of Moses* 7:3-10, 9:1, 10:1, 4, 8.

for the righteous. “The wolves are coming,” says an early hymn, stand fast together!⁴⁷⁹ There, plainly, is the element of dread. We should live in hope, the hymn continues, the Lord will come for those of pure souls “singing hymns with the saints”—do they dread the judgment? The *Apocalypse of Elias* begins with a warning: “‘*am Ende der Zeiten,*’ appears [not the Lord but] the false teachers who deny fasting.”⁴⁸⁰ The Assyrian King appears in the north, the King of Peace in the west to slay the Assyrian King and establish the holy places; then another ruler and more distress, then the Antichrist appears in the fourth year of the good king: he fights Tabitha, Elias, and Enoch, and he rules the earth; next the saints are snatched from the wrath of the Antichrist into the holy land, which must be off the earth, which he controls completely; then come evil times for sinners, the overthrow of the Antichrist, the last judgment, the appearance of the Messiah, and the end of the world followed by the establishment of the 1000 year kingdom. In the *Book of Enoch*, Enoch predicts:

And after me there shall arise in the second week great wickedness, and deceit shall have sprung up; and in it there shall be the first end....And after it is ended unrighteousness shall grow up, and a law shall be made for the sinners [the lesser tower]....And after that in the sixth week all who live in it shall be blinded, and the hearts of all of them shall godlessly forsake wisdom....And after that in the seventh week shall an apostate generation arise...and all its deeds shall be apostate. And at its close shall be elected the elect righteous of the eternal plant of righteousness.⁴⁸¹

“In the ultimate times,” says a logion, “there shall be wise [or learned] men, abstaining from the earth, but they shall favor the rich and despise the poor.”⁴⁸² *IV Ezra* has a complicated picture of the end: the time will come when the signs will appear and the city will follow. “For my son Jesus shall be revealed along with those who are with him, and the remaining ones shall rejoice four

⁴⁷⁹ Ἐρχονται τινες προβατινοὶς Ἐν σχήμασιν ἔσωθεν λύκοι...Ζήτει ζῆσαι μεθ’ ἁγίων, Ζήτει ζῶν ἵνα λάβῃς, Ζήτει τὸ πῦρ ἵνα φύγῃς. “Christian Hymn,” in *The Amherst Papyri: Being an Account of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of the Right Hon. Lord Amherst of Hackney, F.S.A. at Didlington Hall Norfolk*, eds. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1900), 25.

⁴⁸⁰ Georg Steindorff, *Die Apokalypse des Elias: Eine Unbekannte Apokalypse und Bruchstücke der Sophonias-Apokalypse*, Neue Folge. II. Band, Heft 3a of *Texte und Untersuchungen Zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinriches’sche Buchhandlung, 1899) 11, see also *Apokalypse des Elias* 21.13-24.13, 70-75.

⁴⁸¹ *Book of Enoch* 93:4, 8-10.

⁴⁸² “a logion”?

hundred years; and after those years my son Christ shall die and all who have human breath. *Et convertetur saeculum in antiquum silentium diebus septem* as it was in the beginning.”⁴⁸³ Then shall come a general resurrection. In the Sibylline prophecies “Beliar will come and burn up all proud men, and a woman will rule the world—a widow...and then the heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll;” an absolute reign of evil will follow the passing of the Roman Empire: Woe to you, people of Italy—barbarians! But the Hebrew people will have their revenge on Rome. Then all things will return to a shapeless mass.⁴⁸⁴ The sources of these jumbled ideas are apparent. In this series, all the worked-over prophecies are applied to Christ in the traditional manner. “That you might receive eternal life and escape the heavy *thesmon* of the lawless one,” says a third century hymn,

come to the marriage of the king...and speak no more in double terms...For those will come in sheep’s clothing who are inwardly wolves; recognize them from afar. Seek to live with the saints, ask to receive life and escape the fire; hold fast the hope you have learned, for no one knows the appointed day of the Lord...Now is the time to do the works by which you shall be judged. Now is your opportunity...⁴⁸⁵

For the apostolic fathers, says Frick, “the time of the appearance of the kingdom is not determined, but thought of as near at hand.”⁴⁸⁶ For Barnabas and *2 Clement*, he notes, the kingdom does not mean the church, and both foresee between the two a “*Zwischenstand*” in which there will be trouble but in which the saints cannot be harmed. Barnabas, he claims, does not distinguish sharply between the gloriously invulnerable state and that of the *Endreich*. How could it possibly be the time of danger, trial, and death that all the apostolic fathers say it is if the saints were to be invulnerable on this earth. Far from that being the case, they must endure to the end: Frick is playing the old game—the very one the apostolic fathers all denounce so strenuously—whatever happens, of course the church is safe. In the apostolic fathers, says Frick, the view of glory to come helps the saints through the pangs of this *aeon*, the winter of the

⁴⁸³ *IV Ezra* 7:28-30.

⁴⁸⁴ *Oracula Sibyllina* 3.46-92.

⁴⁸⁵ “Christian Hymn,” in *The Amherst Papyri*, 24-26.

⁴⁸⁶ Frick

righteous.⁴⁸⁷ Are the righteous cozy and safe? He sees in Barnabas and Papias the first mention of the millennium; all the others think of the end of the world, the resurrection and the judgment as at hand.

In the *Clementine Recognitions* we find Barnabas offering salvation to all who are willing to receive it; forcing it on no one: simply bearing his testimony as a witness and then, without further ado, going his way. “We are not sent to argue or protest,” he says, we are here only because “we cannot keep silence without being damned.”⁴⁸⁸ He made no attack on existing institutions but as might be expected, his mild speech is clear and specific with its declaration, “it is entirely in your power to accept or reject what we announce—that is up to you,” antagonized his hearers no end. He returned to Jerusalem *horrore perculsum* at the treatment he had received in Rome.⁴⁸⁹ “Let us await the kingdom of God hour by hour,” says *2 Clement* to the church, which is plainly not the kingdom of God, “in love and righteousness, since we do not know the day of the appearance of the Lord. When someone asked the Lord when he would come, he said: When two are one, and the outside and the inside [i.e. the body and the spirit], and the male with the female,” which of course is interpreted as meaning when there is neither male nor female, though it says the opposite.⁴⁹⁰ “Paul, having taught the whole world and come to the termination of the sunset, completed his work,” according to *1 Clement*.⁴⁹¹ In his letter to James, Peter speaking of the misinterpretation of the scriptures says: “But already I perceive the beginning of this evil.”⁴⁹² Implying much worse to come over a long time. Ignatius’ letter to Polycarp is strictly a last-stand exhortation: “Give thyself up to prayer without ceasing. Implore additional understanding...be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit. Speak to everyman separately....The

⁴⁸⁷ Frick

⁴⁸⁸ *Clementine Recognitions* 1.8, in *PG* 1:1211.

⁴⁸⁹ *Clementine Recognitions* 1.10, in *PG* 1: 1212.

⁴⁹⁰ *2 Clement* 12.1-2, in *PG* 1.345-46.

⁴⁹¹ δικαιοσύνην διδάξας ὅλον τὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ τέρμα τῆς δύσεως ἔλθὼν καὶ μαρτυρήσας ἐπὶ τῶν ἡγουμένων, οὕτως ἀπηλλάγη τοῦ κόσμου καὶ εἰς τὸν ἅγιον τόπον ἐπορεύθη. *1 Clement* 5.7, in *PG* 1.219-20.

⁴⁹² Clement, *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2, in *PG* 2:25-28.

time call upon thee to pray....Stand firm like an anvil that is beaten....**Whi**ilst thou are here be a conqueror...it is noble to die and so conquer....Let none of you be found a deserter.”⁴⁹³

He calls himself in the Epistle to the Ephesians “the last of the faithful.”⁴⁹⁴ What does he mean? “The last times are come upon us,” he tells them, and assures them that the kingdom of God is not simply an expression for the church but refers to real power.⁴⁹⁵ “He who was before the ages with the Father,” he tells the Magnesians, “has also appeared at the end,” the end having already come.⁴⁹⁶ He tells the church to “Be one with the bishop and those placed above you,” not for a firm and unshakeable survival, but “after the pattern and teaching of immortality.”⁴⁹⁷ “We wrestle against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places,” noting that the evil is all within the church.⁴⁹⁸ “These are the ἐσχατοὶ καιροί [last times]”⁴⁹⁹ for Ignatius: the last opportunity, the last chance for the people of the church to win their salvation by the long-suffering of the Lord. He calls the members of “stones of the temple of the Father,” using the same imagery as the Hermas.⁵⁰⁰ There may be significance in Ignatius’ avoidance of the definite article when he says not “these are the last times,” but “these are last times,” as if speaking of a typical and characteristic thing. He follows it immediately by, “for the time that remains...” The double motive is here apparent: “Let us either fear the wrath to come, or love the present grace, one or the other.”⁵⁰¹ But the contrast here is not between a fearful and a desirable future, but between the kindness God shows us here and the penalties of ignoring that kindness. “Do not confuse his life with the real life,” Ignatius

⁴⁹³ προσευχαῖς σχόλαζε ἀδιαλείπτως. αἰτοῦ σύνεσιν πλείονα...γρηγόρει, ἀκοίμητον πνεῦμα κεκτημένος. τοῖς κατ’ ἄνδρα κατὰ βοήθειαν Θεοῦ λάλει· πάντων τὰς νόσους βάσταζε, ὡς τέλειος ἀθλητής. ὅπου πλείων κόπος, πολὺ κέρδος...ὁ καιρὸς ἀπαιτεῖ σε...εἰς τὸ Θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν...στήθι ἐδραῖος ὡς ἄκμων τυπτόμενος. μεγάλου ἐστὶν ἀθλητοῦ τὸ δέρεσθαι καὶ νικᾶν. μάλιστα δὲ ἔνεκεν Θεοῦ πάντα ὑπομένειν ἡμᾶς δεῖ, ἵνα καὶ αὐτὸς ἡμᾶς ὑπομείνη...μητις ὑμῶν δεσέρτωρ εὐρεθῆ. Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 1-3 and 6, in *PG* 5:719-724.

⁴⁹⁴ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 21, in *PG* 5:661-662.

⁴⁹⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 11, in *PG* 5:653-654.

⁴⁹⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 6, in *PG* 5:667-668.

⁴⁹⁷ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 6, in *PG* 5:667-668.

⁴⁹⁸ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 13 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:747-748.

⁴⁹⁹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 11, in *PG* 5:653-654.

⁵⁰⁰ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 9, in *PG* 5:651-652.

⁵⁰¹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 11, in *PG* 5:653-654.

adds, “which is not found here.”⁵⁰² With the birth of Christ, he explains, “Every law of wickedness vanished away; the darkness of ignorance was dispersed, and tyrannical authority was destroyed; God being manifest as man.”⁵⁰³ A more optimistic announcement cannot be imagined—this is the language of the Catholic Church of the fourth century—if one reads no further. But Ignatius continues: the devil promptly counter-attacked: “Then began the unfolding of what God had planned. From that moment all things were thrown into commotion, because Satan knew that God’s plan for the abolition of death was now under way.”⁵⁰⁴ “Well, the whole business has now reached its conclusion,” he tells the Magnesians. All that remains is for the saints to make their final choice: “The two ways lie before: the way of life and the way of death; and every man must prepare to go to the place he wants to go to.”⁵⁰⁵ This refers to a particular event in the immediate future, the final choice—not the return of the Lord, but the closing of τὰ πράγματα. “If any one calls lawful wedlock and the procreation of children destruction and pollution...such an one has the apostate dragon dwelling within him...Flee therefore from the wicked devices and snares of the spirit which even now worketh in the children of this world.”⁵⁰⁶

“The final stumbling block lies ahead,” Barnabas warns

Let us take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole past time of our faith will profit us nothing, unless now, in this wicked time we also withstand the coming source of danger, as becometh sons of God...Let us hate the error of the present time, that we may set our love on the world to come...The final stumbling block approaches concerning which it is written: “for this end that Lord cut short the times and the days, that his *dilectus* may hasten to his inheritance.”⁵⁰⁷

This is not necessarily the coming of the Lord: the final stumbling block itself hastens the passing of the elect to his reward. Since the Jews lost their covenant, we had better pay all the more heed

⁵⁰² Ignatius

⁵⁰³ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 19 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:753-754.

⁵⁰⁴ ἀρχὴν δὲ ἐλάμβανεν τὸ παρὰ Θεοῦ ἀπηρτισμένον. ἔνθεν τὰ πάντα συνεκινεῖτο, διὰ τὸ μελετᾶσθαι θανάτου κατάλυσιν. Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 19, in *PG* 5:659-660.

⁵⁰⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 5, in *PG* 5:665-666.

⁵⁰⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadelphenses* 6 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:829-832.

⁵⁰⁷ Epistle of Barnabas 4.1, 3, 9, in *PG* 2:731-734.

in these *novissimis diebus*. “For the scripture says, in the last days the Lord shall give over the sheep of his pasture and his sheepfold and his tower to destruction. And now that has happened which the Lord foretold.”⁵⁰⁸ And he closes: “The day is near when all things shall be handed over to the evil one.”⁵⁰⁹

“The time has come which the Lord foretold,” says the Epistle To Diognetus, “for what remains it behooves us to show each his own grace and power,” in this we will “despise the seeming death that is here and fear the real death.”⁵¹⁰ The *Didache* describes the last days as those of the spoiling of the sheep and the souring of love, and then goes on to describe all the many things which shall follow the last days. This shows the limited interpretation put on the term. He describes the saints of his own time as living in “the last opportunity.” “The days of repentance have been fulfilled for all the saints,” says the Hermas, “but for the heathen repentance is open until the last day...The Lord has sworn...that those who shall deny Christ in the days ahead have been rejected from their life. But those who denied him formerly have obtained forgiveness through his great mercy.”⁵¹¹ “Why is the gate new, Sir?” answer: “Because he was manifested in the last days of the end.”⁵¹² But if Christ came at the end, how can anything have come after him? Lake explains the expression as here used: “The Greek means ‘the consummation,’ the time when this age or world-period is finished, and a new age will begin.”⁵¹³ When he is forced to recognize the nature of the end, the scholar finds no difficulty in doing so; but when he turns to other passages he promptly forgets all about it. Speaking of bishops who are perfect in their office; “Their place is already with the angels, if they continue serving the Lord unto the end.”⁵¹⁴ Here is

⁵⁰⁸ Epistle of Barnabas 16.5, in *PG* 2:773-774.

⁵⁰⁹ Epistle of Barnabas 21.3, in *PG* 2:781-782.

⁵¹⁰ Epistle to Diognetus 9.2 and 10.7, in *PG* 2: 1179-1180 and 1181-1184.

⁵¹¹ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 2.2.5, 8-9.

⁵¹² Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.12.2-3.

⁵¹³ Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* vol. 2, 249.

⁵¹⁴ Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.27.3

the nearest thing to the kingdom on earth, but it is nothing of the sort—their reward is now certain but they can only claim it after this life on the other side.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* says that “In the last days shall be a saturation of false prophets who corrupt the word, and the sheep shall be turned to wolves, etc.” following the same plan as the *Didache*.⁵¹⁵ The times are here described as *ta eschata*, a significant plural. “Do good while you still have time,” says the *127 Canons of the Apostles*, “for the day of the Lord is near....The Lord shall come with his retribution; meantime “be confident [or careful] some of you, and be knowing some of you, as God has taught you; you are now left on your own recourses; add nothing to what has been said! [quotes Deuteronomy 12:32].”⁵¹⁶

“If Christ’s death has such power in this age,” says Justin, “how much greater will it be when he is here in person!”⁵¹⁷ We try to convert you, he tells the philosophers, “because of fear, but not for love of money, glory, or pleasure.”⁵¹⁸ After the resurrection, he says, “the apostles received power from Christ and went to every race [tribe] of men and taught...and he will return in glory.”⁵¹⁹ Have we not seen those becoming Christians from every nation of the human race? The witness has been given, and Justin feels that the end is therefore near. But the Jews made the foolish mistake of thinking that the Messiah could come only once. There have been more abominations than one prophesied says Hippolytus, “And the Antichrist is here, and as on Pentecost, the saints are about to receive their rewards in the kingdom at the same time that Christ comes.”⁵²⁰ It is with the second coming that the saints come to their own. “At one time justice shall be taken away from the earth, and the whole world will rush to its consummation; so we do

⁵¹⁵ ἐν γὰρ ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις πληθυνθήσονται οἱ ψευδοπροφήται καὶ οἱ φθορεῖς τοῦ λόγου· καὶ στραφήσονται πρόβατα εἰς λύκους... *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.32, in *PG* 1:1021.

⁵¹⁶ Jean and Augustin Périer, *Les “127 Canons des Apotres”* 12, in *PO* 8:582-583.

⁵¹⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 31, in *PG* 6:539-540.

⁵¹⁸ Διὰ δέος οὖν καὶ ἡμεῖς σπουδάζομεν ὀμιλεῖν κατὰ τὰς Γραφὰς, ἀλλ’ οὐ διὰ φιλοχρηματίαν, ἢ φιλοδοξίαν, ἢ φιληδονίαν. Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 82, in *PG* 6:671-672.

⁵¹⁹ Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 50-51, in *PG* 6:404.

⁵²⁰ ἔρχεται μὲν ὁ Ἀντίχριστος, καὶ εἰς μέρος τῆς πεντηκοστῆς, τὴν δὲ βασιλείαν οἱ ἅγιοι ἅμα Χριστῷ κληρονομεῖν μέλλουσι. Hippolytus, *Fragmenta in Daniele* 40, in *PG* 10:665-666.

not hasten the decision of God, but suffer in patience and fear,” but not of the judgment, it is fear “lest we fall upon such times, or stop believing in them, as if they would not happen;” for we must expect it: there is nothing we can do to prevent it; at best we can only hope to postpone it.⁵²¹ Of course, all this does not refer to the second coming. Irenaeus thinks the Antichrist, not the Lord, is just about to appear. The number 666, he says, “*recapitulationes ostendit universae apostasiae ejus quae initio, et quae in mediis temporibus, et quae in fine erit.*”⁵²² When the great universal persecution comes, says Origen, looking to the future, almost everyone will desert the truth so that few shall remain fighting for the truth until the end, and they alone shall be saved.⁵²³ Note that nothing is said of a few surviving, but only of a few sticking by their guns until death—and these alone shall be saved. Unwilling to admit that any such thing can have already happened, Origen has the proof that it has not yet happened, for “There are many people, not only of the barbarians but of our own nations, who until now have not yet heard the word of Christianity,” therefore it is still future: “then will be preached to all people, and then shall the end come.”⁵²⁴ But he forgets that it was the apostles who were to preach to all the world and who tradition insisted had done just that: a literal fulfillment of the preaching to all creatures has never even been remotely approached and yet, as Augustine says, the Lord’s command cannot have been disobeyed. Origen has made some changes: accordingly he finds himself in considerable trouble. He is puzzled that there should be two ends: a definite end of the apostles after which would occur those calamities which spell doom to the wicked world. Which is the end? A time of drought and plague is predicted, Origen observes, yet formerly the prayers of the saints prevented such—where will the saints be? But even this is not the end of the world, which comes *paulatim*

⁵²¹ ...ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὁ Ἀντίχριστος, ἐν αὐτοῖς αἰφνίδιος ἀναφανῆ, καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἀρθῆ, καὶ ὁ πᾶς κόσμος εἰς συντέλειαν παρῆ· ὥστε οὐ προλαμβάνειν ἡμᾶς δεῖ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ βουλήν, ἀλλὰ μακροθυμεῖν καὶ δεῖσθαι, ἵνα μὴ εἰς τοιοῦτους χρόνους ἐμπέσωμεν· οὔτε μὴν ἀπιστεῖν ὡς μὴ μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι· Hippolytus, *Scholia in Daniele 7.7*, in *PG* 10:681-684.

⁵²² Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.1, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1203.

⁵²³ Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 39, in *PG* 13:1654.

⁵²⁴ *Et in hoc statu constitutis rebus, Evangelium quod prius non fuerat praedicatum in toto mundo (multi enim non solum barbararum, sed etiam nostrarum gentium, usque nunc non audierunt Christianitatis verbum), tunc autem praedicabitur, ut omnis gens evangelicam audiat praedicationem, et nemo derelinquatur qui non audivit, et tunc erit saeculi finis.* Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 39, in *PG* 13:1654.

[gradually], with famine, plague, earthquake etc., during which some will repent and be turned to God.⁵²⁵ “They shall hate one another,” does not refer to good Christians, of course, but only heretics. Origen refuses to see the point of the statement: of course the sheep will never be wolves, of course Christians never hate—yet that is exactly what is being predicted: it is the sheep indeed who turn to wolves, it is their love that turns to hate, it is they who hate one another. A true product of the University of Alexandria, Origen, while he cannot deny the literalness of what the early church expected thinks he can spiritualize it: “Whereas we must wait in patience of the reign of Christ [where is the dread?]. . . as the Jews did to enter the Promised Land. . . still every day we see the word come in ourselves whenever we search out the true meaning of a passage of scripture.”⁵²⁶ This might have satisfied an Origen, but the vulgar Christians whose faith he despised would have none of it.

“We pray,” says Tertullian, “for the emperors, their ministers and powers, for the secular state, for quiet society and for the delay of the end.”⁵²⁷ A strange *marantha!* Tertullian, says Bishop John “sometimes speaks as if Christians ought, at others as if they ought not, to pray for the speedy consummation of all things.”⁵²⁸ “He appears, however, to have felt the necessity of concealing them [his opinions regarding the end], and is betrayed by the struggle between his conviction and his prudence into occasional inconsistency of language.”⁵²⁹ The general belief, as stated by Tertullian, was that the end of the world would immediately follow the downfall of the Roman Empire. Yet “the fall of the empire will be followed by the rule of the Antichrist.”⁵³⁰ But if the end of the world has already come, when will the Antichrist find time to do the damage that Tertullian so much dreads? In *De Oratione* he says it is wrong to pray for the continuance of the

⁵²⁵ Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 37, in *PG* 13:1651.

⁵²⁶ Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 38, in *PG* 13:1652.

⁵²⁷ *Oramus etiam pro imperatoribus, pro ministeriis eorum ac potestatibus, pro statu saeculi, pro rerum quiete, pro mora finis.* Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 39, in *PL* 1:532.

⁵²⁸ John Kaye, Bishop of Bristol, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries: Illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian*, 2nd ed. (London: Griffith Farran Browne & Co.), 10.

⁵²⁹ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 10.

⁵³⁰ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 10. (FIX QUOTATION?)

present world, since one should pray: “Thy kingdom come,” yet he does pray for the continuance of the empire in the Apology and explains why.⁵³¹

He must mean by the end what the apostles plainly do: the coming of the Antichrist, the end of the preaching. Cyprian says the “*occasum saeculi atque Antichristi tempus appropinquasse*” in exactly the same sense.⁵³² Lactantius prays for the last judgment without any fear; it is to come on this earth, he says, immediately after the *saeculorum fine*.⁵³³ “When the periods have been fulfilled, which God has set for death, death itself shall be abolished...at the end of 6000 years all evil shall be abolished from the earth and justice shall reign for 1000 years.”⁵³⁴ He mentions no Antichrist, but tells how under the rule of the ten kings that follow Rome shall come “the detestable and abominable time in which no man shall be happy.”⁵³⁵ “Then they shall call upon God and he shall not hear them,...and of those who worship God two parts shall be slain, and the third which shall be proved, shall remain.”⁵³⁶ But it shall not go well with them: *terra universa vastabitur*; the followers of truth shall flee to the mountains.⁵³⁷ Then comes the siege of Zion: but God will hear the saints and send a great king from heaven, who shall snatch them up and rescue them, scattering the wicked with fire and steel. It is a gaudy picture, but the unending element of complete domination of the world by evil is not failing. Then the gathering of a world-host to fight against Zion, and then, and not until then, comes the *novissima ira dei super gentes*, while the people of God hide in caves for three days, until the wrath of God *adversus gentes* terminates the last judgment, of which the saints have nothing to fear, then the

⁵³¹ Tertullian, *De Oratione* 5, in *PL* 1:1261-1262.

⁵³² Cyprian, *Epistola ad Thibaritanos, de Exortatione Martyrii* 56.1, in *PL* 4:360.

⁵³³ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.9, in *PL* 6:764.

⁵³⁴ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.11 and 7.14, in *PL* 6:769 and 782-783.

⁵³⁵ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.16, in *PL* 6:790-791.

⁵³⁶ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.16, in *PL* 6:792-793.

⁵³⁷ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.17, in *PL* 6:794-795.

just shall come out of hiding to find the bones of all the wicked on the earth: eternal peace shall follow.⁵³⁸

Jesus sowed the word of the kingdom by the apostles, says Athanasius, throughout the entire *oikoumenes*.⁵³⁹ The result is that the church is full of tares. Eusebius says the same: the holy apostles and disciples went to every part of the inhabited world: he names the places, Parthia, Scythia, etc., showing that by *oikoumene* he does not simply mean the empire.⁵⁴⁰ “Thus within a short time the teaching about Christ was carried εις πάντα τὸν κόσμον [into all of the world].”⁵⁴¹ And again, “After the faith of Jesus Christ had been transmitted to the entire human race,” the devil brought Simon Magus on the scene.⁵⁴² When officers of Domitian questioned Jesus’ family on subversive activities and especially regarding his kingdom, they answered that it was not of this world nor on this earth, but was heavenly and angelic, to take place at the consummation of the *aeon* but not on this earth! That would be the end of the world. The gospel was quickly preached to all the world, writes Eusebius, as a witness, but there he abandons the scriptures for his own report—the thesis of his history: “and then the end did not come! But by its power the church was established out of all the nations, not yet visible at that time of its being established among men [another way of saying, the apostles did not leave a church established in God’s foresight to be invulnerable and irresistible], and no more to be conquered by death, to stand and remain unshakable as upon an unshakable rock, founded by his power.”⁵⁴³ The foretold apostasy was real, says Cyril and it is happening now: “The greatest part of those believing the true word have apostatized.... This, then, is the *apostasias*,” thus is the coming of the Antichrist announced, and Cyril looks forward to it.⁵⁴⁴ The surest sign of the second coming he says is

⁵³⁸ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.26, in *PL* 6:813-814.

⁵³⁹ Athanasius

⁵⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.1, in *PG* 20:213-216.

⁵⁴¹ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 2.3, in *PG* 20:141.

⁵⁴² Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 2.13, in *PG* 20:168.

⁵⁴³ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*. I:3

⁵⁴⁴ Cyril, *Catechesis 15: De Secundo Christi Adventu* 9, in *PG* 33:881.

Matthew 24:14: “‘And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.’ And that is just about how it has been: the entire world has been filled with Christ’s teaching. And what comes next?... ‘the abomination of desolation’...Brotherly hatred is giving all that is left over to the Antichrist!”⁵⁴⁵ Epiphanius says the sect calling itself the Apostolic cannot be the true church, since the true gospel must have been preached in every part of the world for a witness.⁵⁴⁶ At the end of 6000 years, says Hilarion, calculating for his own century, according to the promises, “those who believe in the true faith are to be liberated from the world.”⁵⁴⁷ According to his figuring, the ten kings must appear 101 years after his time, or in 470 A.D., a rather good date for the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages, 476 being the conventional date assigned to that event. Why did not Christ tell the apostles when the end would come? Because, says Chrysostom, by not knowing the day they would be rendered the more zealous; he comes as a thief not to steal, but to make us the more watchful. “Why,” he asks, “do all the greatest and worst disasters come at the culmination? Some say the world will die of old age,” but it is not so, he assures us, the signs of the end: “plagues, wars, and earthquakes, are not those of old age...they are punishment and medicine for a sick and sinful society.”⁵⁴⁸ Note how everyone was rationalizing for postponement. John has his own arguments to still nervous misgivings: It is not enough for the apostles to preach the word just once: It is not enough for the field to be sown just once: it must be done again and again, for the birds eat up the seed and the devil steals it; ceaseless activity can

⁵⁴⁵ Cyril, *Catechesis 15: De Secundo Christi Adventu* 8-9, in *PG* 33:880.

⁵⁴⁶ Epiphanius

⁵⁴⁷ Hilarion, *De Mundi Duratione* 16, in *PL* 13:1104-1105.

⁵⁴⁸ τίνος οὖν ἕνεκεν ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ ἡ σύνοδος τῶν συμφορῶν; τινὲς μὲν φασιν, ὅτι κάμνουσα ἢ κτίσις καὶ ἀσθενοῦσα, καθάπερ σῶμα γεγηρακὸς πολλὰ ἐπισπᾶται τὰ νοσήματα, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὴ γηρῶσα πολλὰς ἐπισπᾶται τὰς συμφοράς. ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν σῶμα κατὰ φύσεως ἀσθένειαν καὶ νόμον ἐπὶ τὸ γῆρας ἔρχεται· οἱ δὲ λοιμοὶ καὶ οἱ πόλεμοι καὶ οἱ σεισμοὶ οὐ διὰ τὸ γῆρας τῆς κτίσεώς εἰσιν...ἀμαρτιῶν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἅπαντα ταῦτα κολαστήρια, καὶ νοσημάτων ἀνθρωπίνων φάρμακα. John Chrysostom, *Homilia: In Apostolicum Dictum: Hoc Autem Scitote, Quod in Novissimis Diebus Erunt Tempora Gravia* (2. Tim. 3.1) 6, in *PG* 56:278.

prevent this.⁵⁴⁹ But the apostles say nothing about any preventative, and just as the end cannot be avoided but only postponed, so this cure which Chrysostom suggests is the wishful thinking of the fourth century. Still Chrysostom sees that the Antichrist “will not only sit in the temple of Jerusalem, but throughout the churches everywhere”—his rule will be universal within the church, though John cannot tell us who he is.⁵⁵⁰

The expectations of the early church have both a positive and a negative aspect. Both are clearly and repeatedly set forth by the ancients and together they form a consistent and perfect whole. The claim that they are in hopeless conflict, representing totally different levels of Christian thought, or the recent statement by Father X. That there is an insoluble contradiction between the positive and negative views of the future of the church, can only rest on a willful misinterpretation of very clear evidence. But such an interpretation is unavoidable if one is to maintain the persistence and survival in the world of the apostolic church. Briefly stated, the “negative” doctrine of the future of the church is that the successors of the apostles are to be wolves, that the tares will overcome the wheat, the door will be shut, the tower completed, and the long night “in which no man can work,” “the wintertime of the just” will ensue. It is the teaching that after the witness of the apostles the end will come, and that end will be introduced by the rule of darkness, not the coming of the Lord. This is perfectly consistent with the normal apocryphal teaching: the truth has been sent down from heaven in dispensations: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ—each being characterized by a “visitation” and followed by a falling away and an age of darkness. But was Christ’s visitation the last, or was it also to be followed by an age of darkness? That is the crux of the whole matter. On this point the negative teaching of the New Testament, the Apocrypha, the apostolic fathers is very clear and explicit. But what is the positive teaching? It is certainly that Christ is coming again; that his visits to the world before

⁵⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam Secundam ad Thessalonicenses Commentarius, Homilia 3.3*, in PG 62:482-483.

⁵⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam Secundam ad Thessalonicenses Commentarius, Homilia 3.2*, in PG 62:482.

and after the resurrection are not the end of his dealings with men. The Christian world today attempts to make out that such was not the case, but none deny that the early Christians certainly believed it was. The issue is not to be settled by one verse of scripture supporting the one claim or the other. We must recognize 1) that there is a good deal of negative and positive prediction, and 2) that the two are not the productions of different periods or different groups in the history of the church but are found in close organic association at all times. How they can be reconciled will only appear if one first considers what the arguments are.

The Positive Expectation

The positive expectation of the church is the glad message of glory. But it is glory to come, not a glory in this world now. It is a message of hope and faith, not of fulfillment, as the theologians of the fourth century fondly believed. The Lord is coming again. The happy culmination lies in the future, things will be better some day, crowns await us beyond. This is in the apocryphal tradition; it demands an interval between the sorry present and the glories of the future, and the interval during which that glory is a hope not a reality is painful. The negative aspect of the promise is thus implicit in the positive. The mere fact that all is promised argues the defect of the present order of things which all the early saints proclaim in loudest unison. It is the negative aspect of the problem that illustrates the expectations of the church on earth.

It seems unnecessary to harp on such a well-known theme as the contempt of the early Christians for the things of this world, yet it is needful to set forth this doctrine with some fullness by way of illustrating its extreme literalness among the early Christians. Nothing is easier than to “spiritualize” any doctrine and to view the Christian contempt of the world, flight from the world, condemnation of the world, etc. as denial of the lusts of the flesh and things worldly. The tendency to take this easy way is so natural, not to say inevitable, that the early fathers must

continually warn against it. The primitive Christians were not concerned with any allegorical loss of this life, for them it was absolutely literal.

The negative aspect of Christ's teaching is exceedingly prominent. He compared himself to "a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" (Matthew 13:24-25). This is the only parable which is fully explained. The field we are told is the world, the wheat and tares grow together indistinguishably in the world, not "in the kingdom here below." The church is gathered out of the world and brought together—that is the very meaning of *ekklesia*—it is the wheat which is gathered "into my barn" (30). But such a gathering, we are explicitly told, does not take place till the harvest which is "the end of the world" (39). Meantime the wheat is disorganized, hopelessly mixed with tares throughout the field, which is the world. However one interprets it, the sowing of the Lord was to be immediately followed by a sowing of the adversary, which would render the wheat worthless until it was finally gathered into the barn at the end of the world. The Lord told the apostles that Elias had come to announce him and restore all things, "and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them" (17:12). His suffering and rejection is not unique and peculiar, it follows the old pattern: "But first he must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah so shall it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:25-26). It was not a new story. What would follow this rejection, ultimate victory? Far from it! Following that, he predicted, "The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it" (22). God sent many other prophets to work in his vineyard before: they had been rejected and cast out. Then came the beloved son of the Lord of the vineyard—was his fate a different one? It should be, since he was a person of a unique and exalted status. But though his authority was other and greater than that of his predecessors he was treated exactly like them—only worse (Luke 20:13-15). He did not conquer the world at his coming. "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness

comprehended it not” (John 1:5). “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (10). This rejection was by “the world” not a mere Jewish segment of it. “No man receiveth his testimony” (3:32). It was not that the world failed to comprehend his message beyond its intellectual grasp, but because men chose not to understand because “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (19). The gospel does not flourish in a world of sinners: “Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.” (7:7). What is to be done in that case? Nothing.

The Lord having been rejected, the world is abandoned to its own recourses: “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go....Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am ye cannot come” (33-34). “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins” (8:21). How can those who actually seek Christ possibly die in their sins? Because the possibility of salvation is not to remain long on earth. Not only is the Master to leave the earth, but he is to shut the door behind him. Then the people will “begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying Lord, Lord, open unto us,” but it will be too late (Luke 13:25). “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you...While ye have the light, believe in the light” (John 12:35-36). “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said to the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.” (13:33). What is the promise of a successor? “Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,” (14:30).

“I am the light of the world,” is a beautiful sentiment much loved by Christians who ignore the whole purpose of this speech, which is to make perfectly clear that the light is not going to remain: John 9:5: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” but the light is only here for a little while: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (4). Of what night is he speaking? Not death, which is a

passing to light. It is a night that hinders men from working. What works? God's works—"the works of him that sent me." What is here predicted for the world is a complete darkness following the mission of the Lord.

But for what purpose should the Lord come to the earth to work and suffer only to have a curtain of darkness descend after his departure? On this subject his words are clear and emphatic: he comes "for judgment," against a world that could see the light if it would, but is definitely not going to see it (9:39). He is a witness to the world for the Father, and the world gets its chance: "But now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father" (15:24); he testifies "of it, that its works are evil," and in response the world hates him (7:7). "As it was in the days of Noah": Was not such the mission of Noah, who was ordered to preach to a world that would not receive him. Why preach then? As a witness and a warning, having heard the warning the divine emissary is free to say: "Now I go my way...and ye shall die in your sins," (8:21). So we have Paul, strictly in the spirit of the Master, shaking his garments before the Jews as he takes his leave of them, telling them that he now departs having completed his mission: their blood is upon their own heads—he goes and they shall die in their sins (Acts 18:6).

The Son of God being unique in his nature and calling leaves behind him when he leaves the earth, a void which no man can fill, as the above remarks declare. Only the Holy Ghost can take the Lord's place; he is his sole successor. The disciples he describes as merely servants left behind to do special work (Mark 13:34); they are to receive their orders from the Paraclete exactly as if the Lord himself were giving them, but the *exousia* given to each was authority to function in his particular calling—there is no specific mention of apostles, but a variety of servants is indicated. No one has authority equal to the Lord's, but each has a limited authorization, "each one for his particular work." Here no fullness of authority is indicated, but strictly limited assignments.

Here the master of the house is “as a man taking a far journey,” literally going to live abroad. No one knows when he is coming back—though, as we read in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a long journey argues that he is going to be gone for a long time—yet, since his return is bound to be sudden whenever it happens (and sudden does not mean soon), there is only one proper course of behavior for everyone: all should act as if the Lord were to return within the hour. The servants must expect the Lord’s return, but they have no right to demand it or to request relief in the dangerous rear-guard position which they have been ordered to hold.

For the servants whom the Lord left behind were told explicitly and repeatedly that they were to occupy a rear-guard position in which they could expect no relief in this world. Their orders were to endure to the end—and the early Christians had absolutely no doubt about what that meant—and that if they did not hold on to the end they could not expect their reward, the crown that awaited on the other side. Never are they promised relief or victory on this side. The Master had been rejected and slain. Would the servants fare better? By no means: “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?” (Matthew 10:25). “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (22). Here we have the prediction—they must fare as the Lord had fared. But does not this frustrate their mission? They cannot redeem the world by dying, as the Lord did. What have they to gain by their rejected preaching? Everything, namely, their salvation. Having announced that “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected...and be slain,” the Lord immediately adds that the same fate must be suffered by any who would follow him: “If any will come after me, let him deny himself...For whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:22-24). This is no mere departing from a life of lust: it is death in the literal sense.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before you....Remember the word that I said to you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you....They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that

whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God a favor....These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. (John 15:18-20, 16:2-4).

Here the apostles are told that after they have preached for a while a time will come when the world will turn against them, exactly as it had against the Lord, and reject them utterly. They are told not to be surprised, and Peter reminds his followers of this warning when, being overcome by enemies after much success they were amazed and appalled.

But though the reward of the apostles in carrying out their missions is plain enough, what point was there in such activity if they knew they were to be rejected? Again the answer is clear: their message was a witness and a warning: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations [not just the Jews!] for my name’s sake” (Matthew 24:9). “But he that shall endure unto the end,” (how can one endure to the end if he is killed? That is only possible if enduring to the end and being killed are one and the same thing, as Tertullian observes) “the same shall be saved” (13) that is the motive and reward. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (14). They are to preach not to the ear of faith, but, like Noah, the ancient prophets and the Lord, as a witness against those who shall not believe, and that includes all nations, and not just the Jews. Paul tells us why he preached to the Jews who would not hear him, when “he shook his raiment, and said unto them: Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish,” is the cry of the apostles, “for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.” (13:41). “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just...and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (3:14-15). These men were not sent forth to convert but to condemn the world. “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). Could any stronger

language be imagined to express their true chances of success? They were told to baptize whoever believed, but they were not to baptize the world or convert Babylon at any price. The believers would be few: “one of a city and two of a tribe,” (Jeremiah 3:14). As for the world, it was reserved for the burning; Babylon is dedicated to one end alone: not conversion (as M. Duchesne ecstatically announces) but destruction. They were not to spend their time wearing down opposition and winning people by long-term programs; they were to bear their testimony and be on their way: “Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11). Those against whom such a testimony has been given are reserved for “the day of judgment” and classed with Sodom and Gomorrhah (Matthew 10:15). The program outlined in Matthew 10 and Luke 9 is not that of the founding of a church but of a rapid warning of the world delivered in a limited time: “I send you forth as lambs among wolves...salute no man by the way” (Luke 10:3-4). What is wrong with a little civil decency? Nothing, as Paul says, only the time is too short for any ordinary business: buying, selling, marrying or any pleasant social relationships, all must be forgotten “in the present emergency” for “the time is short”—even that short! (1 Corinthians 7:26-29). The apostles are only to go to individual houses for lodging and food otherwise, “Go not from house to house” (Luke 10:7), but “in the city that does not receive you, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say: ‘Even the very dust...we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you’” (10-11). People are told that they have had their chance. As for the apostles, their vindication will come on the day of judgment (14-16), and not on the day when a church emerges strong and permanent. Meantime “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things [speaking to the apostles]” (24:47-48). This was the specific preaching of the apostles, not the instruction of the churches in the mysteries, which is a very different thing.

If the apostles were to suffer the same rejection and death as the master, what of the “little children” whom they taught? They too were required to “endure to the end,” but it was predicted that many would not do so but would fall away, corrupt the truth, change the teachings and carry on as the Church of Christ under a false label. The Lord had said that after he had “risen up and had shut the door” he would become immensely popular, just as did the prophets once they were safely dead,—but then it would be too late (13:25). Nevertheless the world would swarm with those claiming to be his adherents. There would be a church, right enough, and it would bear his name, and worship him—but in vain! “In vain do they worship me” (Matthew 15:9). This is not worship of Apollo, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, or the devil, it is worship of God—but it is vain. The men who cast the son out of the vineyard say: “This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance” (21:38). They were not to destroy the inheritance, but claim it for their own. “Many shall come in my name...and shall deceive many” (Mark 13:6); these are not the idolater, pagans, or worshippers of false gods. Plainly the survival of the Christian name is no guarantee that the Lord’s church has survived.

The position of the church is clearly stated by Paul: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock...to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock....Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:28-31). Here the strongest possible guarantees of security are given: the flock is under apostolic guidance and has been purchased by God with his own blood—could one ask for more perfect assurance of permanence and invulnerability? The next verses administer a powerful rebuke to such comfortable and popular reasoning: apostolic guidance is to be withdrawn, and as a result the wolves will attack; that attack will be successful, for the flock enjoys no immunity, for all that it has been “purchased with his own blood;” so Paul has been warning the church, and in no spirit of mild fatherly

admonition—he is worried and alarmed, his warnings have gone on night and day—and with tears. Why the tears? If he foresaw victory for the church that later Christians described in retrospect as inevitable, he would have shared with them the calm assurance that all is well. But he has no such assurance; “But I fear, lest...your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For he that cometh preacheth another Jesus...transforming themselves into apostles of Christ,” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13). There is fear here, but not of pagans. “There are contentions among you...Is Christ divided?...I thank God that I baptized none of you” (1 Corinthians 1:11-14). These are not the words of a man anxious before all to convert and baptize people. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel...some would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6). This is no pagan threat: the gospel is retained—in a perverted form. “Who hath bewitched you?...Have ye suffered so many things in vain?...After ye have known God...how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?...It is good to be zealous always, and not only when I am present with you...I stand in doubt of you.” (3:1, 4; 4:9, 18-20). Here it is plain that there is a real danger, and also what that danger is. It is not the same danger that threatens the apostles: they are to lose their lives and win their glory; so are their faithful followers—but for the rest it is another fate: they will go on as followers of Jesus, but not real ones. This is not the end of everything, if it were “he would not afterward have spoken of another day,” it remains “for us to labor therefore...lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief,” (Hebrews 4:8-11). The testing time is not over; this is not the last dispensation, for there is another day to come—as every former visitation has been followed by darkness, so it can happen again “after the same example of unbelief.” There is no assurance of immunity for the church. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost...and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance” (6:4-6). Here again are all the thrilling guarantees of absolute security: enlightenment, the heavenly gift, the assurance of the Paraclete

and of supernatural powers—immediately followed by a stinging rebuke to any feeling of security, and a grim warning: even those who have received such a fullness can fall away, and if they do, reform is out of the question. The falling away is a one-way process; it cannot be reversed; those heavenly powers can only be had again by a fresh visitation from above. “Esau ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected...though he sought it carefully with tears” (11:17): there is such a thing as being too late, in spite of earnest seeking, repentance, and calling upon the Lord. Yet if the church were to remain this would not be so, for individuals can always work their way back in—this is a message for the church as a whole.

Reticence

Of a piece with the conversion of the whole church to the ways of the world was the loss of ancient doctrines, ordinances, and miraculous powers. From the first, the apostles refused, following the example and instruction of the Lord, to divulge the fullness of their teaching to the general public: “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given....Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not” (Matthew 13:11-13). Here Christ is speaking of the multitude that follows him to hear his words, yet he will never divulge to them the great things given to the apostles. These things are not to be found in the New Testament, where only the public preaching is reported. “I thank thee, O Father...because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent” (11:25). “He charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ” (16:20), and after the transfiguration he charged the only three who were allowed to see this, the greatest revelation of his true nature, “Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” (17:9). “All cannot receive this saying, save to whom it is given....He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” (19:11-12). Does this sound like the doctrine of a universal church? The disciples came unto him privately for special instruction, especially regarding the things to come (24:3).

Even at the ascension his glory was not revealed to all present: for “When they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.” (28:17). He called and ordained “whom he would,” and they were few—no general universal vocation (Mark 3:13), and told them “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without all things are done in parables.” (4:11). Those without were also his followers: all did not receive instruction on the same level. Why did Christ not give to those who were willing to listen to him either his whole teaching or none. The fact that the multitudes had the word preached to them by the Son of God in person does not mean that they comprised, or were intended to comprise, his church. Even when “he could not be hid,” he still “would have no man know it” (7:28), and “the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it” (36). Even his disciples when they did not understand some things “were afraid to ask him” (9:32) since those things were “hid from them” (Luke 9:45). When they discussed the future of the kingdom, the apostles “kept it close and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen” (36). “If I tell you, ye will not believe” (22:67); “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12). Such reticence is not cagey: the swine do not want the pearls, therefore they are deliberately held back, not out of contempt for the swine, but not to be wasted on them. After the resurrection he told everything to the apostles in a great discourse of which only the opening words have been handed down to us (Luke 24:27). Without this address the apostles themselves had not understood, yet they do not bother to hand that discourse down, though it would certainly have been the doctrinal foundation of the church if they had. He tells Peter: “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” (John 13:7). Later ages are not made privy to the explanation. Likewise, Luke’s “former treatise,” of the 40-day teaching of Jesus “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,” (Acts 1:1-3) was not handed on to the church. Christ himself, after rising from the dead, when one would suppose all former rules of reticence to be suspended, the time limit “until the Son of man be risen from the dead,” having been reached, was even more reticent than before, appearing “Not to all the people,

but unto witnesses chosen before God” (Acts 10:41). The apostles themselves thereafter receiving their instructions from the Holy Ghost were told to limit their teaching, and lay upon certain people “no greater burden than these necessary things” (15:28); and it forbade them “to preach the word in Asia,” and “suffered them not” to go into Bythinia (16:6-7). Plainly the command “go ye into all the world” was not without limitations: it was given to a limited number of persons (specifically “the eleven”), who were to give a limited teaching (“teach them to do those things I told you about,” not, “tell them everything I ever told you”), for a limited time: “until the end of the world.”

This we shall see, does not mean forever and ever, but refers to a specific event which was not far away. Nor was the word to be generally received: “Saying, Go unto this people, and say, ‘Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.’” (28:26). Does that sound like a popular program? Having established a church, Paul withholds his teaching: “I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat...neither are ye now able. For ye are yet carnal.” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Is it right to condemn people for a witness they cannot understand? Of course, “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” (2 Corinthians 4:3). The apostles may “have many things to say,” which are “hard to be uttered,” it is because “ye are dull of hearing,” (Hebrews 5:11).

Now this reticence of the apostles certainly fits in with no program for a popular and expanding church. Their doctrine was one which the world could not take. But they could not for that reason revamp it into something the world could take: that was the program of the next generation. And that program was the end of the apostolic teaching: like the Jews “When they knew God...they became fools....Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness...who changed the truth of God into a lie...and even as they did not like to retain God in knowledge,

God gave them over to a reprobate mind,” (Romans 1:21-28). This was given by way of warning to Christians.

For them, Paul can announce that “prophecies, such as they are, shall fail; whatever tongues we have shall cease; whatever gnosis we have shall disappear,” and in the place of these three, he says, shall be left “these three, faith, hope, and love,” (1 Corinthians 13:8, 13). These are the bare indispensables, necessary for life itself—they are not the great gifts, which are going to be lost. He accuses the Galatians of “perverting the gospel of Christ,” and marvels not that this is so, but that it has begun so soon (Galatians 1:6-7). First and Second Timothy describe the ruination of the doctrine as being in full course: some follow a false gnosis, some have had their faith overthrown by false ideas about the resurrection, some have been spoiled by love of money—only the Lord knows who are his; and things are going to be much worse—with great urgency Timothy is told to “be instant in season and out of season....For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:2). Who are they? Paul has just announced that many have already done that, that “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (1:15); and immediately after says that “No man stood with me, but all forsook me,” in a recent trial (4:16). “They” are not some of the members, they are not many, for many have already gone the wrong way, yet Paul describes a future so much grimmer than the grim present and past as to appear by comparison as a night in which no man can work. It is hard to conceive of “they” as being anything at all but the membership of the church in general: as long as anyone will “endure sound doctrine” one may “reprove, rebuke, exhort.” At a time in which it will be too late for that can only be a time of universal apostasy.

The arrival of just such a time is predicted by the apostolic fathers in no uncertain terms. *I Clement* is like a man calling from the shore to a swimmer who has almost reached a point of

no return; the tone is one of desperation bordering on hysteria. Though the writer gives no orders, but only extremely non-committal expressions of opinion, though he never mentions his name or rank (an all-important item were his business to give orders to Corinth), the language he uses in describing the situation in the church is the strongest possible, and it paints a dark picture. The “sudden and successive disasters and surprises that have overtaken the church”⁵⁵¹ from the direction of the pagans do not worry or concern him—he passes them by without comment, not a word of hope or sorrow, to deal at great length with the real danger, the thing that is actually destroying the church: strange outlandish, loathsome and unholy dissention; the condition is not new but chronic (*epimonos*); “My love ate and drank and grew full and waxed fat and kicked over the traces,” that is how the church has gone. “Every man turns away from fear of the Lord and gropes like a blind man in this faith...every man walketh according to the dictates of his own evil desires, resuming again unrighteousness and unholy ambition which brought death unto the world.”⁵⁵² This is no doing of the heathen, it is as the Lord and the apostles had foretold. Clement reviews the former dispensations and tells how in each one the man of God was opposed by another full of evil ambition, the very thing that is destroying the church and tells how “Ambition and rivalry have overthrown great cities and uprooted mighty nations.”⁵⁵³ Why does he bring this up? “Not only as a warning to you do we send forth these things, but also to put ourselves in mind of them, for we are all in the same trench and we all face the same fight.”⁵⁵⁴ This is no local squabble. Clement next compares the church members with the fallen ones of old, to whom the Lord yet extended his voice. The church is compared then with Israel—in her fallen state, and with this goes a promise and a threat: “If you want to hearken unto me, you shall eat the good of the earth; but if you will not so, neither hearken unto me, the sword shall consume you....Therefore let us...become suppliants for this mercy...turning our back upon our strife and

⁵⁵¹ *1 Clement* 1.1, in *PG* 1:205-206.

⁵⁵² *1 Clement* 3.1, 4, in *PG* 1:213-216.

⁵⁵³ *1 Clement* 6.4, in *PG* 1:221-222.

⁵⁵⁴ *1 Clement* 7.1, in *PG* 1:221-224.

vain works.”⁵⁵⁵ Lip service is not enough: “this people honoreth me with their lips,” he quotes, but the Lord is not satisfied.⁵⁵⁶ Next he interestingly describes Christ as being “like a root in the earth that had no water,” his mission anything but a brilliant success, himself beaten and put to death, in all humility.⁵⁵⁷ “And what of us?” Clement asks, “we have all gone astray like sheep...”⁵⁵⁸ He then pleads: “let us turn about in our rapid course to that goal of peace which was set before us in the beginning.”⁵⁵⁹—a plain declaration that the church is running full-speed in the wrong direction. Then he warns the people against thinking that as the church of God they cannot lose; the very acts of kindness in which the people were putting their trust, he tells them, are not a gage of security, but actually a source of danger to the church: “Beware brethren, lest his many acts of kindness turn out to be our condemnation.”⁵⁶⁰ The next section ends with a plea: “Therefore let the faith of us in the resurrection be rekindled again.... Let us fear him and turn away from the vicious works of wicked lust and desire.”⁵⁶¹ In Section 39 he returns to his main theme: we are not safe, there is no cause for congratulation, “for what can a mortal do, or what real strength do creatures of earth possess?... If the heavens are not pure in his sight, how much less so those who dwell in houses of clay!”⁵⁶² God is under no obligation to help his people if they are foolish: “Call and see if he will hear you, or whether any of his angels will heed you!”⁵⁶³ Already the time had come when they would call upon his name in vain! “For I have seen how the foolish have taken root: their resources are quickly used up. Their sons shall never know security. They shall beg their bread at the doors of lesser men, and no one shall come to their

⁵⁵⁵ *1 Clement* 8.4, 9.1, in *PG* 1:227-228.

⁵⁵⁶ See *1 Clement* 14, in *PG* 1:235-238.

⁵⁵⁷ *1 Clement* 16.3, in *PG* 1:239-240.

⁵⁵⁸ *1 Clement* 16.17, 6, in *PG* 1:241-242.

⁵⁵⁹ *1 Clement* 19.2, in *PG* 1:247-248.

⁵⁶⁰ *1 Clement* 21.1, in *PG* 1:255-256.

⁵⁶¹ ἀναζωπυρησάτω οὖν ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν... φοβηθῶμεν αὐτὸν, καὶ ἀπολίπωμεν φαύλων ἔργων μιαρὰς ἐπιθυμίας. *1 Clement* 27.3, 28.1, in *PG* 1:267-268.

⁵⁶² *1 Clement* 39.2, 5, in *PG* 1:285-286.

⁵⁶³ *1 Clement* 39.7, in *PG* 1:285-286.

assistance.”⁵⁶⁴ What stronger language could be used to depict the loss of blessings once received, or to warn against thinking that blessings cannot be lost because God has given them? He promises “If we keep the order which the Lord has given us we will not go astray,”⁵⁶⁵ but is there any guarantee that we will keep it? Far from it, “Consider brethren, that the greater the knowledge of the gospel that has been vouchsafed us, the greater rather is the danger in which we lie.”⁵⁶⁶ The people loved to think, as they do today, that God’s past blessings have the very opposite effect on the church, and are a proof that God will not let it fail. In such reasoning Clement sees a source of the gravest danger to the church. In Section 46 Clement expresses genuine concern for the way things are going:

Why do we rend and tear to shreds the members of Christ, and revolt against our own body, and have reached such a pitch of madness as to forget completely that we are members of one another?... Your schism has turned many aside, has cast many into a state of dejection and indifference, and many into doubt and uncertainty, and has been a source of pain to all of us. And your disorder is chronic.

Things were bad enough in the days of Paul, he reminds them, but now they are worse, for it is not apostolic men but ordinary ones who are now being followed. He shows us how after the passing of the apostle, things in the church at Corinth went exactly as Paul predicted they would. Clement spends two sections in desperate pleading for repentance, telling them that God will still hear them if they will repent; then comes the grim warning of what will happen if things continue the way they are:

Behold, I shall send out to you the utterance of my breath, and I shall teach you my word. Since I called and ye hearkened not, and I continued to stretch out my words but you paid no heed... therefore I in my turn will laugh at your destruction, and I shall rejoice when ruin comes upon you, and when sudden confusion, and catastrophe and tribulation are there, or when utter ruin and attack. For there will come a time when you will call upon

⁵⁶⁴ Ἐγὼ δὲ ἐώρακα ἄφρονας ρίζας βαλόντας, ἀλλ’ εὐθέως ἐβρώθη αὐτῶν ἡ διαίτα. πόρρω γένοιτο οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν ἀπὸ σωτηρίας· κολαβρισθείησαν ἐπὶ θύραις ἡσσόνων, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ὁ ἐξαιρούμενος· *I Clement* 39.8-9, in *PG* 1:287-288.

⁵⁶⁵ Οἱ οὖν τοῖς προστεταγμένοις καιροῖς ποιοῦντες τὰς προσφορὰς αὐτῶν εὐπρόσδεκτοὶ τε καὶ μακάροι· *I Clement* 40.4, in *PG* 1:289-290.

⁵⁶⁶ *I Clement* 41.4, in *PG* 1:291-292.

me and I shall not hear you. The evil ones shall seek me and not find me for they hated wisdom...wherefore they eat the fruits of their own way...⁵⁶⁷

On this negative note the epistle concludes. There is not a word about any specific action taken by the church to influence Corinth in any way: this is simply, in almost the very words, what the Lord had predicted would happen after he had risen up and shut the door—all would be calling upon him, but none in righteousness; the world would seek him and not find him. It is not a heartening picture: Clement says 1) this is what can happen if we take the wrong way, and 2) we are on the wrong way. To be saved it is not enough to ignore the wrong path—we are already on it, far along the way, and must make a great effort to turn back, reversing our course completely! There is no indication that the Church of Corinth, which failed to heed the words of Paul, ever heeded those of Clement.

The so-called *2 Clement*, written to the whole church, is just as negative. He begins by reminding the church that merely calling upon the name of the Lord will not save them,⁵⁶⁸ and quotes a lost scripture that should effectively silence any fond illusions that God's church cannot be lost; "Even though ye be gathered to me in my very bosom, if you do not keep my commandments I will throw you out and say to you: get away from me, I do not know you, whence ye come, ye evil-doers."⁵⁶⁹ The next section tells them to put no hope in this world and quotes a significant conversation between Peter and the Lord:

For the Lord said, "Ye shall be as lambs in the midst of wolves." Peter answered and said, "But what if the wolves tear the lambs to bits?" Jesus said to Peter, "The lambs don't need to fear the wolves after death, and you need not fear those who shall kill you, for they can't really harm you; but what you should fear is the one having power over you after death, to throw your body and spirit, into Gehenna's fire."⁵⁷⁰

Here it is no secret that the wolves will prevail in this world. The next section warns against the usual overconfidence, and even goes so far as to tell the members that even the promise of the

⁵⁶⁷ *1 Clement* 57.3-6, in *PG* 1:325-326.

⁵⁶⁸ *2 Clement* 4.1, in *PG* 1:333-334.

⁵⁶⁹ *2 Clement* 4.5, in *PG* 1:335-336.

⁵⁷⁰ *2 Clement* 5.2-5, in *PG* 1:335-336.

Paraclete is no guarantee that the church cannot be lost: “If Noah, Job and Daniel could not save their children by their own virtues, how shall we ever enter the kingdom of God if we don’t keep our baptism and our garment pure? Or who shall be our Paraclete if we are not found doing righteous and holy deeds?”⁵⁷¹

There is a significant episode in a Clementine homily that may cast a ray of light on a subject on which the apostles were always very reticent: the future of the church. When someone suggested, “Why should we not put a stop to Simon’s blasphemies?” which were causing the church so much trouble, the apostle replied: “Would Simon were the last one to persuade men away from God! But as the Lord said ‘There will be many false apostles, false prophets,’” etc. there is not much to be done about it. “Saying this, with tears, he signed to the multitude with his hand to come forward. Then he blessed them and sent them off telling them to assemble together in the morning, while he himself refused his dinner and groaning went straight to bed.”⁵⁷² When one considers that Christ wept as he looked down upon Jerusalem, and spoke of the future, and that Paul wept as he contemplated what was ahead for the church, these eloquent tears of Peter, and his loss of appetite when the subject turned to future impostors in the church, do not seem like an artist’s invention. Another Clementine writing reminds the saints that just as the Jews who believed Moses were not saved, failing to keep the commandments, so those who are not flocking to Christ “will gain no advantage by that if they do it simply because they find it expedient to do so; nor does salvation come from believing in the teachers and calling them ‘Lord.’”⁵⁷³ Such strong language as this, totally opposed to the tone and teaching of the later church can hardly be a forgery. Yet another Clementine homily reminds us that in every other period in which God has sent down the truth there have been false priests to discredit and out countenance the real ones,

⁵⁷¹ Εἰ δὲ καὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι δίκαιοι οὐ δύναται ταῖς αὐτῶν δικαιοσύναις ῥύσασθαι τὰ τέκνα αὐτῶν, ἡμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ τηρήσωμεν τὸ βάπτισμα ἄγνον καὶ ἀμίαντον, ποῖα πεποιθήσει εἰσελευσόμεθα εἰς τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ θεοῦ; 2 *Clement* 6.8, in *PG* 1:337-338.

⁵⁷² Clement, *Homilia* 16.21, in *PG* 2:381-384.

⁵⁷³ Clement, *Homilia* 8.5, in *PG* 2:228.

and that this development is not strange to the present dispensation: we are still in danger.⁵⁷⁴

Apparently there is a genuine and very old Christian tradition that ties this “negative” doctrine to Clement.

To show that Clement’s Corinth is not an isolated case, we have the letters of Ignatius to other cities. It is the same story. “Why do we not, as gifted with reason, act wisely?” he asks the Ephesians, “When we had received from Christ, and had grafted in us the faculty of judging concerning God, why do we fall headlong into ignorance? And why, through a careless neglect of the gifts we have received, do we foolishly perish?”⁵⁷⁵ Again there is no talk of threat from the pagans—that will never destroy the church: but this other thing will. Whoever calls marriage pollution “has the apostate dragon dwelling within him,” the apostate dragon, is what the ancients feared, not the imperial cult.⁵⁷⁶ “Flee therefore the wicked devices and snare of the spirit which even now worketh in the children of this world.” They “even now” look forward to worse things ahead. In dealing with those who are leading the church into darkness a policy of complete non-resistance is recommended: one cannot fight fire with fire. This is exactly the attitude of the Clementine writings. In Section 11 Ignatius makes the blunt statement: “These are last times; all that remains for us now is to be aware of our own inadequacies and count with fear and trembling on the long-suffering patience of God, lest our follies be charged against us. Let us either fear the wrath to come or enjoy the mercy shown us here.”⁵⁷⁷ When Christ brought the truth to earth that was not the end of troubles; Satan immediately counter-attacked and as a result, all things are now in confusion.⁵⁷⁸ Ignatius tells the Trallians that he knows about the mysteries and higher things, those supremely important things which belonged to the gnosis, but that he may not convey them to the church, which is not ready to receive them: the reticence of the apostles is still

⁵⁷⁴ A different Clementine homily

⁵⁷⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 17 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:751-752.

⁵⁷⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadelphenses* 6 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:831-832.

⁵⁷⁷ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 11, in *PG* 5:653-654.

⁵⁷⁸ See Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 19, in *PG* 5:659-660.

being observed, and it means that the doctrine must inevitably be lost, for when Ignatius dies his knowledge dies with him.⁵⁷⁹ It is the impostors who survive, and, says Ignatius, they put the name of Christ as a label on everything and the people, knowing no better, gladly accept this counterfeit, under the impression that it is the real thing.⁵⁸⁰ So he advises the Trallians to accept Christ again, and build themselves up again in the faith. The famous letter to the Romans is a doctrine that seems simply pathological if one believes that Ignatius foresaw for the church any future at all. He has described himself as its most valuable teacher, a last link with the high and holy knowledge of the apostles, he is the “third bishop after Peter” of the largest and, next to Jerusalem alone, the oldest church in Christendom; he writes to numerous churches because he feels, he says, that they need guidance and instruction so badly that he cannot keep silence. Yet he feels not the slightest obligation to remain on earth and help the church out. There is no thought of laying a great foundation, and anything but a belief that the foundation is already secure. Yet the saint has only one goal, one object, one interest in life—he wants to die, so he can get his reward on the other side. No man could have contributed more to securing the future of the church at this critical moment when all the churches were lost in uncertainty as to doctrine and authority and being simply overwhelmed by hordes of skillful and successful impostors, yet though he knows this, Ignatius displays a complete and absolute indifference to the future of the church. He warns the Philadelphians that there “are many convincing wolves who by their pleasing villainy capture those who were on the road to God,”⁵⁸¹ and makes it clear in Section 8 that they do not stop in the forgery of holy documents. The Smyrnaeans he warns “against the beasts in human form” who come to corrupt, and denounces again that ever-growing popular belief, already in the church in Paul’s day, that the resurrection and the crucifixion were not to be understood in any crass literal or physical sense.⁵⁸² Then he advises them as he did the

⁵⁷⁹ See Ignatius, *Epistola ad Trallianos* 5, in *PG* 5:679-680.

⁵⁸⁰ See Ignatius, *Epistola ad Trallianos* 6, in *PG* 5:679-680.

⁵⁸¹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadelphenses* 2, in *PG* 2:697-698.

⁵⁸² Ignatius, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos* 4, in *PG* 5:709-710.

Philadelphians: “The wise thing to do for the time that remains is to stay sober and, while there is still a chance, to repent and return again to God.”⁵⁸³ Addressed thus to a church, the expression “while there is still a chance,” (which becomes extremely common at this period of church history) can only indicate complete darkness ahead. Such times are the theme of the letter to Polycarp: “The times demand of you that you keep God in your calculations as pilots to the wind and as a storm-tossed sailor does the harbor.”⁵⁸⁴ The only harbor from this storm will be God, not the quiet waters of the world-church. “Don’t be thrown into a panic by those who teach false doctrine and make it so plausible,” he says, showing how great the danger really was, “but stand unshaken like a wave-beaten rock: it is a great thing for an athlete to be killed and yet to conquer. For God’s sake we must endure all things, as he has suffered us. Be more zealous than you are. Recognize the time we live in” yet think of the one who is timeless and beyond time.⁵⁸⁵ Here we have it: not to yield is to win—but to win out by being put to death. Not only is no future to be expected here, but he wants the bishop of Smyrna to think of the second coming as having no time at all—it was not at the gates, not to be foreseen at all. The letter to Mary Cassobolita, genuine or not, sums up well all of Ignatius’ main teachings: “The sufferings of the present stage are nothing at all compared with the glory to come;” present pain is little, the future reward is great.⁵⁸⁶ “Flee those who deny the literal death and resurrection of the Lord, there are a great many just now who are suffering from that disease.”⁵⁸⁷

The message of Barnabas is the same. He does not mince words or imitate the formal complimentary introductions of Ignatius but goes right to the point: “The days are evil and Satan possesses the power of this world.”⁵⁸⁸ This is not an optimistic view: “The final stumbling block

⁵⁸³ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos* 9, in *PG* 5:713-714.

⁵⁸⁴ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 2, in *PG* 5:721-722.

⁵⁸⁵ ...στηθι ἐδραῖος ὡς ἄκμων τυπτόμενος..., Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 3, in *PG* 5:721-722.

⁵⁸⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Mariam* 2, in *PG* 5:883-884.

⁵⁸⁷ φεύγετε τοὺς ἀρνούμενους τὸ πάθος Χριστοῦ, καὶ τὴν κατὰ σάρκα γέννησιν..., Ignatius, *Epistola ad Mariam* 5, in *PG* 5:885-886.

⁵⁸⁸ Epistle of Barnabas 2.1, in *PG* 2:719-720.

approaches,”⁵⁸⁹—there is soon to be a last great show-down. He reminds the church (for this is a general epistle) that the Jews had the covenant and lost it, “take heed lest the same thing happen to us.” Israel had the covenant and the promise, and after all the marvelous signs that were given “they finally were abandoned,” in view of which we have no more reason to feel secure than they, “lest resting at our ease we fall asleep in our sins.”

Don’t fool yourself by saying “the covenant is both ours and theirs.” They lost it just that way, remember, after Moses had already received it.... We had better take earnest heed in these last times: for the whole past time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now, in this wicked time we also withstand the coming sources of danger, as becometh sons of God.... Take heed, lest resting at our ease, secure in having been called of God, we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, getting power over us, should lead us away from the kingdom of the Lord. This is a real danger, brethren, for consider that after so great signs and wonders were wrought in Israel, they were actually abandoned. Let us beware lest we be... “called but not chosen.”⁵⁹⁰

The fact that one has been righteous, and much blessed and suffered for the cause does not mean a thing as far as future security is concerned: “If a man has a knowledge of the way of truth and then goes the way of darkness, he deserves to perish.”⁵⁹¹ For example, “God swore that he would give a covenant to the fathers to give to the people; and he did give it indeed, but they did not prove worthy to receive it because of their sins.”⁵⁹² How about us? “The Father, about to redeem us from darkness... declares, I the Lord thy God, have called thee in righteousness.”⁵⁹³ The church has nothing to walk off with, it is just as possible for it to go the wrong way as the right, and every indication is that at present it is going the wrong way. “There are two ways of doctrine and authority, the one of light, and the other of darkness.”⁵⁹⁴ We have our choice, the church is not forced to be saved: “Again, and yet again, I beseech you: be good lawgivers to one another... get

⁵⁸⁹ Epistle of Barnabas 4.3, in *PG* 2:731-732.

⁵⁹⁰ Epistle of Barnabas 4.6-7, 9, 13-14, in *PG* 2:731-734.

⁵⁹¹ Epistle of Barnabas 5.4, in *PG* 2:733-735.

⁵⁹² Epistle of Barnabas 14.1, in *PG* 2:767-768.

⁵⁹³ γέγραπται γὰρ, πῶς αὐτῷ ὁ Πατήρ ἐντέλλεται, λυτρωσάμενος ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ σκότους, ἐτοιμάσαι ἑαυτῷ λαὸν ἅγιον. λέγει οὖν ὁ προφήτης: Ἐγὼ Κύριος, ὁ Θεός σου, ἐκάλεσά σε ἐν δικαιοσύνη..., Epistle of Barnabas 14.6-7, in *PG* 2:767-770.

⁵⁹⁴ Epistle of Barnabas 18.1, in *PG* 2:775-776.

wisdom, intelligence, understanding, knowledge, patience.”⁵⁹⁵ The choice lies ahead, “for the day is near in which all things shall be handed over to the evil one.”⁵⁹⁶ In some texts this has been softened to read: “all things shall be destroyed with the evil one,” which is absurd.⁵⁹⁷ “Handed over” is how it appears in the *Didache* text, and this indeed is consistent with Section 16 of the Barnabas Epistle: “The scripture says, ‘In the last days the Lord will give over the sheep of his flock and their fold and their tower to destruction.’ And that has happened of which the Lord spoke.”⁵⁹⁸ What remains: hope in our hearts if we are pure—that is all.

The closing paragraph of the *Didache* sums up the message of all the apostolic fathers:

The whole time of your faith will profit you nothing if you are not perfect in the final test. For in the last days the false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall change to hate; for as lawlessness increases they shall hate one another and persecute and betray, and then shall appear one who leads the world astray as the Son of God, and he shall do signs and wonders and the earth shall be given over into his hands, and he shall commit iniquities which have never been since the world began. Then shall the creation of mankind come to the fiery trial...And next shall appear the signs of the truth. First the sign spread out in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly, the resurrection of the dead, but not of all the dead...Then shall the world see the Lord coming in the clouds of heaven.⁵⁹⁹

Again the message of warning: past trials and blessings to the church mean nothing as a security for the future; expect the worst on this earth, but do not join the forces of evil who triumph under the prince of this world.

Almost the identical passage is found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, with one interesting variant: “And then shall appear the deceiver of the world the enemy of truth, and many shall be

⁵⁹⁵ Epistle of Barnabas 21.4-5, in *PG* 2:781-782.

⁵⁹⁶ Epistle of Barnabas 21.3, in *PG* 2:781-782.

⁵⁹⁷ See Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers vol. 1*, 409; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1956) 155; Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950) 50; Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers vol. 2*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 83. The Greek reads: ἐγγὺς ἡ ἡμέρα ἐν ἣ συνάπολεῖται πάντα τῷ πονηρῷ; the Latin: *Prope enim est dies, in qua omnia cum malo peribunt*. See *PG* 2:781-782. The two other examples given, the one in Section 16 of the Epistle of Barnabas and the second in *Didache* 16.4, both use conjugations of the verb παραδίδομι: the former παραδώσει and the latter παραδοθήσεται.

⁵⁹⁸ Epistle of Barnabas 16.5, in *PG* 2:773-774. See also *Didache* 16.4.

⁵⁹⁹ *Didache* 16.2-8.

‘scandalized’ by him. But those who endure to the end, such shall be saved.”⁶⁰⁰ Long after that comes “the sign of the Son of Man in heaven,” preceding the coming of the Lord. This is the old familiar formula, oft repeated because of its great importance; for it answers the question foremost in everybody’s mind: “What will become of us?” The answer: endure to the end and you will have the greatest of rewards—eternal life. There is no agony or injustice in a message that predicts only death for the faithful, while the survivors are the myriad deceivers and scamps who shout the name of Christ from the housetops. The *Apostolic Constitutions* also repeats the old warning against overconfidence: “God has cast off the falsely-named Israel, because the Jews became full of heresies. That must be a lesson to the church in which even now just such heresies have arisen.” Therefore, “take care lest you fall into the sleep of death; for your whole former uprightness will not count for a thing if you, at the final reckoning depart from the true faith.”⁶⁰¹

For the famous *Shepherd of Hermas* the evil time of the promise has already begun: “In this present age, sinners are not to be distinguished from the righteous, for they are just alike. That is because this present age is the wintertime of the just, when the sins of the wicked generally do not stand out. Just as all trees are equally bare in winter...so now, there are neither righteous nor wicked, but all seem just alike.”⁶⁰² Is not this the field of the world in which the wheat may no longer be gathered without the tares? “There is indeed a time coming which will be the summertime of the just, and a wintertime of the unjust....Then the fruits of the just will be evident...and the barrenness of the unjust.”⁶⁰³ Then, but not until then: for the present there is only a uniform barrenness and desolation. The dark night has begun, but only begun: the “long journey” which the Master takes (Mark 13:34) “is the time,” says Hermas, “that must pass until the Lord’s return.”⁶⁰⁴ And it is a long one. Does he really think the blessed time is over? What of

⁶⁰⁰ *Apostolic Constitutions*

⁶⁰¹ *Apostolic Constitutions*

⁶⁰² *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 3.2-3.

⁶⁰³ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 4.2-4.

⁶⁰⁴ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 5.5.3.

the church? The church he sees in vision as an old lady: “Why,” he asks his mentor, “did she [the church] sit in a chair? Because every sick person sits in a chair, that the weakness of his body may find support.”⁶⁰⁵ Six young men appear; we are told that these are the angels or bringers of the six dispensations of the world; naturally when the woman comes down to earth again they bring her. But what do they do now? They come and take the woman away to a tower, described as the supernal world whither the patriarchs and prophets of old have repaired, i.e., heaven, “and four others took her chair and bore it away to the tower. I did not see their faces because they were turned away.”⁶⁰⁶ And the angels refused to speak to him. There is something sad and touching in the averted faces of the angels, the heavenly messengers who will have no more intercourse with men—it has about it the finality of the apostle’s tears.

By now it should be clear that the apostolic fathers a) foresaw the complete domination of a deceiver in and through the church, b) were greatly disturbed by the insistence of church members that since God had given them the covenant and bought them with his blood they could not possibly lose, and c) could promise for the faithful a reward on the other side, but not a word of help, relief, or final victory for the right on this earth.

This strongly negative note predominates right up until the establishment of the new imperial church in the fourth century. It is an organic part of the Christian tradition, carefully sidestepped and slurred over by historians and divines. The Lord will come at a time when false teachers will teach false doctrines and the saints become children of destruction. Constantly the doctrine of the two ways is brought forth: the church must make a decision—the decision was not made for it for all eternity on the cross, it is as likely to choose the wrong as the right way. The righteous receive one comfort in their steadfastness: “And though the righteous sleep a long

⁶⁰⁵ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.11.4.

⁶⁰⁶ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.10.1.

sleep, they have nought to fear.”⁶⁰⁷ As we have said, the night of darkness following a visitation of heavenly revelation is a standard part of the apocalyptic scheme:

And I saw the corrupter and the corruption, the seducer and the seduction who appeared as lover. They lead the world astray and corrupt it [the identical words in the *Didache*]; they invite many people to the banquet, and give them their intoxicating wine to drink [this figure is used by Ignatius] so that they vomit up their wisdom and their conscience and lose their reason. We are passing over a dangerous torrent indeed.⁶⁰⁸

These are the figures and the very words used by the apostolic fathers. Enoch speaks of the tower exactly as the *Pastor of Hermas* does in describing the church: “And after that I saw that when they forsook the house of the Lord and His tower they fell away entirely, and their eyes were blinded;...And I saw that He forsook that their house and their tower and gave them all into the hand of the lions, to tear and devour them, into the hands of all the wild beasts.”⁶⁰⁹ This is the language of Paul and Clement. Enoch tells how the sheep were destroyed by false shepherds, how they are eaten up by wild beasts, who also “burnt that tower and demolished that house. And I became exceedingly sorrowful over that tower because that house of the sheep was demolished...”⁶¹⁰ Then, when it was too late, the sheep came and tried to rebuild everything, “And they reared up that tower, and it was named the high tower; and they began again to place a table before the tower, but all the bread on it was polluted and not pure. And...the eyes of those sheep were blinded so that they saw not, and the eyes of their shepherds likewise.”⁶¹¹ Just so, in the *Pastor* after the real tower has been taken up to heaven with all the righteous and true stones that go to make it up, the ill-fitting and discolored stones that had been rejected and left behind on earth were built up into a lesser tower. For the church does not leave a complete vacuum when it goes, rather it is forced off the scene by a pushing, aggressive and ambitious church which takes its place and imitates its forms, but in things that are “polluted and not pure.” In the Christian

⁶⁰⁷ *Book of Enoch* 100:5.

⁶⁰⁸ *Enoch*

⁶⁰⁹ *Book of Enoch* 89:54-56.

⁶¹⁰ *Book of Enoch* 89:65-67.

⁶¹¹ *Book of Enoch* 89:73-74.

Sibylline poems an absolute reign of evil is foreseen in the future and then all things return again to a shapeless mass.

The commonest figure associated with visions of the end is Peter, to whom the Lord was believed to impart more knowledge on the subject than to any other. In the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* a vision of Peter is reported: “And after a time they will seek to perform miracles, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and they will not be able, because of their little faith; and they call and are not heard, because they do not call on him with all their hearts. But those who are separated from them, few in number, ask and are heard because their hearts speak the truth...”⁶¹² Here is a ray of comfort—a few will hang on, and so one might think the church would be saved; but such fond hopes are immediately dashed by the announcement that those who remain in the faith “are not suffered to live; for there will rise up against them bribed judges and also bribed deniers [of the faith]; and for the name of our Lord they shall be judged and beaten.”⁶¹³ Exactly as predicted in the New Testament. “After these things shall have happened, the faith shall fail from the earth and orthodoxy shall come to an end.”⁶¹⁴ This does not mean for a moment that churches professing the name of Christ shall not abound;

Those who are named as being baptised in our Lord and as confessing his name, shall be more miserable than all men; and they shall trample on the faith and talk perversely and they shall divide our Lord; and in that time there shall be reckoned many teachers, as the Spirit of the Father does not speak in them, and they shall divide our Lord; and the father of lies and the calumniator, that is, Satan, shall enter into them and disturb their minds; and their faith shall fail and...they shall seek our Lord and shall not find him, and they will call to him and he will not answer them.⁶¹⁵

Speaking of the officers of the church, he says, “In their days men will appear as sheep who are ravening wolves...they shall call upon the Lord, and there will be none to answer them, and there will be no Saviour for them; because evils are multiplied on the earth...and there will be none

⁶¹² *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 31.

⁶¹³ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 31.

⁶¹⁴ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 31-32.

⁶¹⁵ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 32.

that speaks and none that answers, because the Holy One wills it...”⁶¹⁶ James weeps in prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, and John cries: “Woe, woe to the sons of men who are left in the generations to the times that are to come.”⁶¹⁷

The apocryphal tradition of the day of darkness is set forth in *IV Ezra* 5:1-6. After the “three ways” the angel prophesies: “Behold the days shall come when the inhabitants of the earth shall be guilty of great excesses, and the way of truth shall be deserted and the land barren of faith; and injustice shall be multiplied....And one for whom the inhabitants of the earth hope not shall reign, and the birds shall migrate together to escape.” It shall be a time of chaos and wild beasts; sweet water shall turn salt, etc. In the newly found apocalyptic fragment from Akhmim “...many of them shall be false prophets and teach various doctrines and go the way of destruction.”⁶¹⁸ “Satan will speak and sing in the four corners of the world” in the days before the Lord returns; according to the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*.⁶¹⁹ And in the *Contendings of the Twelve Apostles* Satan says, “I will corrupt all those whom Peter and his companions, the Apostles, teach through love of gold and silver, and by reason of that desire they shall return unto me. And I will make the worship of idols to reign again...and they shall attribute to Christ various natures, which the hearts [of men] cannot understand...”⁶²⁰ As for their priests, “Their power [shall] spring from mine when they mingle tares with wheat, for my commandment is [to sow] tares, and they shall perform it. And I will make them to cry out against the believers, and to slay them.”⁶²¹ Again it is Peter who receives the information, this time from Satan: “For I will wipe out all those who follow after the Lord Christ, and I will destroy them on sea and on dry land. And know this, O Peter, and understand well, that he (i.e. Anti-Christ) shall come, and shall

⁶¹⁶ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 32-33.

⁶¹⁷ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 33-35.

⁶¹⁸ *The Apocalypse of Peter* 1.

⁶¹⁹ *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*

⁶²⁰ The Acts of Saint Peter, Chapter 6, in *The Contendings of the Apostles: Being the Histories of the Lives and Martyrdoms and Deaths of the Twelve Apostles and Evangelists*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 422.

⁶²¹ The Acts of Saint Peter, Chapter 6, 423.

mingle temptation with the kingdom of Christ, and he shall be at that time the means of ascent for the tares.”⁶²² After two and a half pages of such threats, couched in formal and familiar language, Peter’s answer is simply that Christ “shall blot thee out, O Satan, and He shall not give thee dominion over His servants.”⁶²³ Nothing is said as to when this shall happen, and Satan himself admits that the true servants will be slain by the false ones, and not come under his power. Here again the only comfort is the ultimate comfort.

Early Christian hymns proclaimed the same message: “There shall come wolves in sheep’s clothing; know ye them from afar; seek to live with the saints.... Hold to the hope thou has learned, to the time which the Lord hath set for you.”⁶²⁴

The importance and strength of this tradition of a night to come, and the literal sense in which it was understood by the early church, is clearly attested in the writings of the church fathers of the second century. Irenaeus is convinced that the Antichrist has appeared shortly before his own time “towards the end of the reign of Domitian.”⁶²⁵ He expects a “universal apostasy” to take place at the end of 6000 years. “Tribulation is necessary for those who are to be saved,” he explains, “that by being trodden under foot, reduced in numbers, dispersed through steadfastness in the word of God, degraded, they may be fitted for attending the banquet of the King.”⁶²⁶ The number 666 “Designates his universal apostasy, which will take place at the beginning, in the middle times, and at the end.”⁶²⁷ The fathers of the second century are less consistent, more speculative, more allegorical, but they cannot break away from the doctrine of a literal rule of darkness. While Irenaeus says that many in his day say the Antichrist was Titus (the

⁶²² The Acts of Saint Peter, Chapter 6, 423-424.

⁶²³ The Acts of Saint Peter, Chapter 6, 424.

⁶²⁴ “Christian Hymn,” in *The Amherst Papyri*, 25-26.

⁶²⁵ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.3, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1207. (SEE SIDE NOTE)

⁶²⁶ *Et propterea tribulatio necessaria est his qui salvantur, ut quodammodo contriti, et attenuati, et conspersi per patientiam Verbo Dei, et igniti, apti sint ad convivium regis.* Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.28.4, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1200.

⁶²⁷ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.1, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1203.

arch-enemy of the Jews)—indication of the strong Jewish orientation in the church, Hippolytus, more conservative, literal, and less philosophical than most, says that when the Antichrist comes suddenly, “Righteousness will be taken away from the earth and all the earth will enter partnership with him,” in view of which “we must not anticipate God’s will, but suffer in silence, practice long-suffering and beseech that we might not fall upon such times: yet we must beware of acting as if such times were not coming.”⁶²⁸ We must expect it, he says, since we cannot prevent it—it has been prophesied; all we can do is pray for its postponement. “And he shall put to death all who do not worship the image of the beast.”⁶²⁹ In this process “The faith and endurance of the saints will be revealed. For he says, ‘And he shall make all...to have a sign...on their foreheads.’” The faithful are not only sure of being put to death—there is no other way that they can prove that they are faithful to the end! The purpose of such activity is “the wiping out and driving out of the world of the servants of God...all of them everywhere.”⁶³⁰

There will be a time of wiping out [*thlipsis*] such as the world has never seen since its foundation, in every city and country to make the believers deny; and the saints will run from east to west and hide in the mountains and in caves. For everywhere the abomination will overtake them, destroying them on land and sea, expunging them utterly in every corner of the earth...they shall be dragged from their houses and hiding-places and completely wiped out throughout the whole world.⁶³¹

“Satan is allowed no power against the servants of God,” says Tertullian, “unless God himself permits it.”⁶³² The question is, will he permit it? He will indeed. “The devil attacks, but

⁶²⁸ Hippolytus, *Scholia in Danielelem* 7.7, in *PG* 10:681-682.

⁶²⁹ Hippolytus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 49, in *PG* 10:767-768.

⁶³⁰ Hippolytus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 49, in *PG* 10:769-770.

⁶³¹ Τότε γάρ ἔσται θλίψις μεγάλη, οἷα οὐ γέγονε τοιαύτη ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, ἄλλων ἀλλαγὴ κατὰ πᾶσαν πόλιν καὶ χώραν εἰς τὸ ἀναιρεῖσθαι τοὺς πιστοὺς πεμπομένων· καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἀπὸ δύσεως εἰς ἀνατολὴν πορευομένων, καὶ τῶν δὲ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν εἰς μεσημβρίαν διωκομένων, ἄλλων δὲ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσι δαί σπηλαίοις κρυπτομένων· πανταχοῦ δὲ αὐτοὺς τοῦ βδελύγματος πολεμοῦντος, καὶ διὰ θαλάσσης καὶ διὰ ξηρᾶς τούτους διὰ τοῦ προστάγματος ἀναιροῦντος, καὶ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐκθλιβόντος· ...πάντες γὰρ τότε ἐκ παντὸς τόπου ἐκδιωχθήσονται, καὶ ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων κατασπασθήσονται, καὶ ἐν τῷ δημοσίῳ συρθήσονται, καὶ πάση κολάσει κολασθήσονται, καὶ ἐκ παντὸς κόσμου ἐκβληθήσονται. Hippolytus, *Scholia in Danielelem* 12.1, in *PG* 10:688.

⁶³² Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 2, in *PL* 2:126.

the Son protects,” but let us not get the idea that this is unlimited protection.⁶³³ The devil cannot even enter into swine unless God allows it, “how much less likely that he could enter into his sheep without permission!” But the permission is given—there is the rub! We loosen the devil’s hands when we yield to temptation.⁶³⁴ It is all up to us. Tertullian argues that it is wrong to flee from persecution, since it would not happen at all if it were not God’s will, and if it is, it is impossible to flee anyway.⁶³⁵ “It is not enough for one or two to try to make a getaway,” he says contemptuously, “whole churches now go in a mass to pay their tribute. I do not know whether to weep or blush, seeing the whole church thus basely bargaining and going to perdition.”⁶³⁶ The whole earth swarms with scorpions, he says, whose bite makes everyone’s blood cold, their senses dull, drives spirit from their flesh and turns their stomach against the truth. The faithful are hunted down by traps and ruses in the church, while the heretics grow fat. Every soul is good and the church once flourished in righteousness,

But since the rule of the last times is that evil must conquer, good things can no longer even be born, so corrupt are the seeds; good cannot be had by instruction, so deserted are the seeds; good cannot even be thought of, so disarmed are all vows and oaths...so that today not the renunciation but the moderation of sexual license is considered chastity; and one is thought sufficiently chaste if he is more chaste than he used to be.⁶³⁷

“It is silly,” he says, “and thoughtless for everybody to be so scandalized and alarmed that the heresies prevail to such an extent: all this that is happening in the present time has been foretold

⁶³³ *Que ostenditur, utrumque apud Deum esse, et concussionem fidei, et protectionem, cum utrumque ab eo petitur, concussio a diabolo, protectio a Filio.* Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione 2*, in *PL 2:126*.

⁶³⁴ *Tunc enim eruimur diaboli manibus, cum illi non tradimur in tentationem.* Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione 2*, in *PL 2:126*.

⁶³⁵ Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione 4*, in *PL 2:128-129*.

⁶³⁶ *Parum denique est, si unus aut alius ita eruitur. Nescio dolendum an erubescendum sit, cum in matricibus beneficiariorum et curiosorum, inter tabernarios, et lanios, et fures balnearum, et aleones, et lenones, Christiani quoque vectigales continentur.* Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione 13*, in *PL 2:140-141*.

⁶³⁷ *Sed ut mala magis vincunt, quod ultimorum temporum ratio est; bona jam nec nasci licet, ita corrupta sunt semina; nec erudiri, ita deserta sunt studia; nec cogi, ita exarmata sunt jura...ut non ejuratio, sed moderatio libidinum pudicitia cedatur; isque satis castus habeatur, qui minus castus fuerit.* Tertullian, *Liber de Pudicitia 1*, in *PL 2:1032*.

and so must happen.”⁶³⁸ But the future is very grim, so grim, says Tertullian, that we actually pray for the continuation of the Roman Empire, knowing that after it the Antichrist must come. Though in so doing we are postponing the second coming of the Lord, the Christians are willing to make that sacrifice, to pay that supreme price simply for the delaying of what must come first! From this one can see what intense feelings of dread entered into the early Christian contemplation of the future of the church.

“The gospel brought peace to the earth”, says Origen, “until the abounding of iniquity causes the love of many to wax cold, and therefore God and his Christ will desert them, and so they will fall to making war again.”⁶³⁹ “If these are but the beginning of sorrows,” he ponders, “what will the increase of sorrows be like? And what will be the end of general sorrows in all the world, if they are to reach to the limits of the earth and not be confined to parts of it only?”⁶⁴⁰ Then always the rationalizing and speculating philosopher, he gives his own explanation: “I think, however, that it will be against the irreligious, **who** will no longer be able to reproduce themselves.”⁶⁴¹ As if under such circumstances there could be anyone on earth but the impious! The bitter pill is already becoming hard to swallow. When the Lord says, “and they shall hate one **another**,” that means of course, not the church but the heretics, “for Satan always is divided against himself.”⁶⁴² Thus the doctors of Alexandria can neatly extricate the church from any danger by the very sophistry against which the apostolic fathers exerted all their eloquence.

⁶³⁸ *Non oportere nos mirari super haereses istas, sive quia sunt, futurae enim praenuntiabantur; ... Vane ergo inconsiderate plerique hoc ipso scandalizantur, quod tantum haereses valeant.* Tertullian, *Liber de Praescriptionibus Adversus Haereticos* 1, in *PL* 2:14-15.

⁶³⁹ *...et sic pax multiplicata est mundi propter incrementa Ecclesiarum futura ut ea pax salutis multorum fiat occasio, dum non coguntur exire ad bella et pugnare pro patriis sicut pridem fiebat; sic consequens est, cum propter abundantiam iniquitatis refrigerit charitas multorum, et ideo dereliquerit eos Deus et Christus ejus, iterum fieri praelia...* Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 37, in *PG* 13:1650.

⁶⁴⁰ *Si ergo tales erunt primitiae dolorum, qualia putas erunt incrementa dolorum? Qualis autem et finis erit generalium dolorum in universo mundo, ut non jam per partes, sed universum exterminent mundum?* Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 37, in *PG* 13:1651.

⁶⁴¹ *Tamen arbitror quae sunt secutura, adversus impios fore tantummodo, ut in doloribus acutissimis et diutinis crucientur, donec deponant quae conceperunt et formaverunt semina peccatorum ab operationibus contrariis.* Origen, *Commerariorum Series* 37, in *PG* 13:1651.

⁶⁴² Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 38, in *PG* 13:1652.

Though the scripture does not say so, Origen argues that the great persecution must be because the pagans blame Christianity for the calamities that befall them as a result of the persecution! And of course, though the scripture does not say it, some righteous must escape on this earth—the proof of this is very cunning: since the Gentiles can never agree perfectly among themselves, being devilish, they will never make a solidly common front against the Christians, and so there will be loopholes. On the other hand “when the time comes when they shall...undertake a universal persecution everywhere against the people of God, then...there shall be a falling out among even those who appeared to be true believers. Then will come the false prophets, and love will become cold, not only among the faithless, but even among the faithful themselves.”⁶⁴³ Soften it as he will, the tradition was too emphatic and well established in the church to be so soon rooted out. It took the fourth century with its mass conversion of people unacquainted with the traditions, to do that.

At the end of the third century Cyprian describes his world as one of darkness. The pagan scene is one of bloodshed, immorality and complete insecurity: “Killing has become an art, a science, a habit.”⁶⁴⁴ But is the state of the church better? “The vigor of ecclesiastical discipline is so enervated, and becoming worse at such a staggering rate in the complete indifference to vice, that vice enjoys not only pardon but authorization.”⁶⁴⁵ Nothing is easier, he says, than for Christians to return to their old vices, which public opinion approves and custom tolerates. In

⁶⁴³ *...cum autem contigerint quae Christus praedixit, tunc quasi succendendi sunt omnes a quibusdam gentilibus incipientibus Christianos clupare, ut tunc fiant persecutions jam non ex parte sicut ante, sed generaliter ubique adversus populum Dei. Tunc continget illud ut multi scandalizentur qui videntur in fide consistere, et se alter alterum tradent, et erit odium inter ipsos etiam qui videntur fideles. Tunc pseudoprophetae multi insurgent multitudinem insensatorum fallentes; tunc et refrigescente charitate non solum apud infideles, sed etiam in ipsis fidelibus, et fervor charitatis ex multis iniquitatibus refrigescet...* Origen, *Commentariorum Series* 39, in *PG* 13:1654.

⁶⁴⁴ *Homo occiditur in hominis voluptatem; et ut quis possit occidere peritia est, usus est, ars est.* Cyprian, *Epistola ad Donatum* 1.7, in *PL* 4:209-210.

⁶⁴⁵ *...nam et eo usque enervatus est ecclesiasticae disciplinae vigor et ita omni languore vitiorum praecipitatur in pejus, ut jam non vitiis excusatio sed auctoritas detur.* Cyprian, *Liber de Spectaculis* 1, in *PL* 4:811.

doing so they piously ask: “What is there in the scripture against it?”⁶⁴⁶ In view of this, he says, “How can we deny that the collapse of the world and the time of the Antichrist are at hand?... Let us not think that what is ahead is anything like what has already happened: this is a harder and a fiercer fight before us;...for the time is coming, beloved brethren, which the Lord long ago foretold.”⁶⁴⁷ Then citing John 16:2-4, I Peter 4:12-14, etc. he announces these days are now at last about to come. He speaks with the words of the apostolic fathers of old when he says: “Let us be fearful and concerned, lest, finding ourselves secure in the church which has bestowed upon us the priestly dignity, we become neglectful and are found inactive. The scripture speaks of false pastors.”⁶⁴⁸ He describes the bishops rioting with prostitutes by night and insists that “one cannot be a good Christian and throw dice”—yet they all do it!⁶⁴⁹ If they stand fast and are put to death, they are good pastors. And if they do not and are not? “We run into no small danger that our society will be eradicated by a return to idolatry.”⁶⁵⁰

We will treat the doctrine of expectations in the fourth century in a separate study. But here we may briefly point out how the doctrine was all along kept alive by the later fathers, who whenever a real persecution seemed to face them, suddenly forgot their buoyant confidence born of worldly success, and remembered the old eschatology. “Now is the time of the apostasy,” cries Cyril of Jerusalem, “for the people of the true faith are falling away....While formerly one could distinguish heretics, today the church itself is full of crypto-heretics. The people have turned away from truth with itching ears....The greater part of them have departed from the true

⁶⁴⁶ Cyprian, *Liber de Spectaculis* 2, in *PL* 4:812.

⁶⁴⁷ *Scire enim debetis et pro certo credere ac tenere pressuram diem super caput esse coepisse et occasum saeculi atque Antichristi tempus appropinquasse....Nec putemus talia esse quae veniunt qualia fuerunt illa quae transierunt: gravior nunc et ferocior pugna imminet....Venit enim tempus, fratres dilectissimi, quod jam pridem Dominus noster praenuntiavit et docuit advenire...* Cyprian, *Epistola ad Thibaritanos, de Exhortatione Martyrii* 56.1-2, in *PL* 4:359-360.

⁶⁴⁸ Cyprian, *Liber de Aleatoribus* 2 (*Opuscula Supposita*), in *PL* 4:903-904.

⁶⁴⁹ Cyprian, *Liber de Aleatoribus* 8-11 (*Opuscula Supposita*), in *PL* 4:908-912.

⁶⁵⁰ *Nolumus ergo, fratres dilectissimi, vos mercenarios inveniri, sed bonos pastores, cum sciatis tum non minimum periculum incumbere si non hortati fueritis fratres nostros stare in fide immobiles, ne in praeceptis euntium ad idololatriam funditus eradicetur fraternitas.* Cyprian, *Epistola: Cleri Romani ad Clerum Carthaginensem, de Secessu Divi Cypriani* 2.2, in *PL* 4:231.

teachings....This, then, is the very apostasy [predicted by Paul] and the adversary is about to appear;” thus is the coming of the Antichrist announced.⁶⁵¹ Viewing his own times in the light of the scriptures Hilary concludes,

There is no other way about it, the Antichrist must come in this very time in which we are living, whose ministers (according to 2 Corinthians 11:14) shall transform themselves into angels of light, at which time Christ will be wiped out of the minds and consciousness of all men....Right now the heretics are introducing a new Christ, under whose guise the Antichrist will slip in.⁶⁵²

The rule of Rome, says Lactantius, shall be followed by the rule of the ten kings, who shall bring Asiatic ruin upon the world and usher in the detestable and abominable time in which no man shall live happily.⁶⁵³ As for the present state of the church, simulated virtue is the mode. Like the men of old he warns against overconfidence and saying what can and what cannot happen to the church: “It is to be determined by God, and not by you, what the victory will be. Since the bad often outnumber the good, luck is as necessary for victory as courage is. Who does not know how often the better and the juster cause is conquered? All history is full of examples.”⁶⁵⁴ This is simply the apostolic fathers with a new and academic slant. Under the evil rule that is to come “it shall be given to him [the king] to desolate the earth entirely...the whole earth will be laid waste as if by a universal bandit-raid. Then the followers of truth...shall flee to the solitary places.”⁶⁵⁵ Then comes the siege of Zion, relieved when God hears the saints “and sends down his great kingdom from heaven, to rescue and deliver the oppressed saints, scattering the wicked with fire and steel.”⁶⁵⁶ While the devil collects an innumerable host from all the nations of the world to say siege to Jerusalem, the people of God will be hidden in caves in the

⁶⁵¹ Cyril, *Catechesis 15: De Secundo Christi Adventu* 9, in PG 33: 881-884.

⁶⁵² ...ac necesse est in ipsam nos aetatem antichristi incidisse, cujus, secundum Apostolum (II Cor. XI, 14), ministris in lucis se angelum transformantibus, ab omnium fere sensu et conscientia is qui est Christus aboletur....Nam ipsi nunc Christum novum, per quem antichristus subreperet, intulerunt. Hilary, *Contra Arianos vel Auxentium Mediolanensem* 5, in PL 10:611-612.

⁶⁵³ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.15-16, in PL 6:788-791.

⁶⁵⁴ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 6.6, in PL 6:655.

⁶⁵⁵ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.17, in PL 6:794.

⁶⁵⁶ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.17, in PL 6:794-795.

earth until God has finished with the Gentiles, whereupon they shall emerge from their hiding places to find the earth littered with corpses and bones, with only the saints left alive.⁶⁵⁷

Jerome, who in the days of prosperity proclaimed that all things had been fulfilled and that there was accordingly nothing in the way of future developments to look forward to, saw another light in the days of tribulation. What happened to Israel can also happen to the church, he announces in the best Apostolic fashion.

The wrath of God can be seen in the way in which he devastated the church and the land of Judah, and destroyed Jerusalem itself....When the destroyer lays waste the church of God [since God's wrath against us remains unappeased] then all assistance will be useless....The priests themselves, as if carried away in the stupor of a helpless infatuation, will become idiotic.⁶⁵⁸

That is the future, he says, and his own age is well on the way to reaching it:

Imagine how error will flourish among the people when their teacher himself is gone astray! How can one remit sins, who himself is a sinner?...Alas! A disciple of the Antichrist governs the Church of Christ....From which it is plain that you by a little leaven have corrupted the whole mass of the church, receiving the Eucharist today from a hand which yesterday you spat on as you would an idol!⁶⁵⁹

“Often,” says Tichonius, “God brings strangers into the church, who are the cause of the fatal wounding of many.”⁶⁶⁰

“Why,” asks John Chrysostom, musing upon the scriptures, “do all the disasters and calamities of the church come all at once? Some say that the world will sicken and grow weak like an ageing body, yielding by stages to weakness and disease. But these symptoms—plagues, wars, and earthquakes—are not those of old age....These are quick punishments and powerful

⁶⁵⁷ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.26, in *PL* 6:813-814.

⁶⁵⁸ Jerome

⁶⁵⁹ *...quantus erit error in populo, cum errat ipse qui docet! Quomodo potest peccata dimittere, qui ipse peccator est?...Proh dolor! Antichristi discipulus Ecclesiam Christi gubernat....Ex quibus ostenditur, vos per modicum fermentum totam Ecclesiae massam corrupisse, et de ejus manu hodie Eucharistiam accipere, quem heri quasi idolum despuebatis.* Jerome, *Dialogus Contra Luciferianos* 5, in *PL* 23:168.

⁶⁶⁰ *Frequenter enim inducit Deus in Ecclesiam alienigenas, et multos in morte vulnerat.* Tichonius, *Liber de Septem Regulis* 7, in *PL* 18:61.

drugs administered to a sick and sinful society.”⁶⁶¹ Certainly no one could describe a corrupt society in more detailed and convincing terms than Chrysostom, who at this late date can still repeat the apostolic warning against overconfidence: “Do not abuse the security which the church gives us, nor fall back on the easy carelessness of the peace we enjoy.”

Augustine****

It is really Salvian who rings down the curtain on the ancient world. He has summarized the historical and scriptural aspects of the Christian expectation in words that echo all we have quoted before: “It is true that God has given man his law, taught his precepts, and given instructions for his development. And what has happened after that? Man has transgressed the precepts, incurred the penalty, lost paradise, and been duly punished and damned.”⁶⁶² Such has been the course of history and such it remains. Salvian duly reviews the cases of Adam, Cain, Noah, the cities of the plain, Moses, and finally the Jews themselves, who were not merely punished, but punished *sub testimonio*, a witness having been given them. And now it comes to you, he tells the Christians, “You, the people of the Lord, are being wiped out. Well, why not?...Since all the multitude of the people have sinned, why should not vengeance come upon all? We ourselves, by our own confession, now declare that God has deserted us.”⁶⁶³ They think themselves immune because they have the message of the Son, but is it any less a sin to reject the Master as we do today, than it was anciently to reject his servants? Conditions have not altered, the old rules still apply. “The people of Israel who were once God’s own children, are today nothing. In view of this, we are certainly deceiving ourselves if we think that because we are called Christians we cannot lose, and that a good name alone can guarantee our safety while we

⁶⁶¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilia: In Apostolicum Dictum: Hoc Autem Scitote, Quod in Novissimis Diebus Erunt Tempora Gravia* (2. Tim. 3.1) 6, in PG 56:278.

⁶⁶² *Dedit scilicet legem, praeceptis imbuat, institutione formavit. Quid autem post haec secutum est? Praeteriit homo mandatum sacrum, sententiam subiit, paradisum perdidit, poenam damnationis excepit.* Salvian, *De Gubernatione Dei* 1.6, in PL 53:37.

⁶⁶³ Salvian, *De Gubernatione Dei* 1.10, 12, in PL 53:44, 47. (SEE NOTE AT SIDE)

go about doing evil.”⁶⁶⁴ Salvian, like the apostolic fathers, sees the Christians making the same fatal mistake as the Jews, assuming that the possession of a name and a tradition will guarantee their claims forever.

Yet that vain assurance has been the refuge of the church all through the ages. “It is not enough to call upon his name,” says *2 Clement* to the overconfident saints;⁶⁶⁵ Ignatius denounces those “who make capitol of the name of Jesus Christ,”⁶⁶⁶ as Polycarp does those who “hypocritically bear the name of the Lord to lead empty-headed people astray.”⁶⁶⁷ “If you receive the name alone but do not receive the clothing from them, you will benefit nothing. . . . If you bear the name, but do not bear the power you will bear the name in vain,” says the Pastor.⁶⁶⁸ Justin insists that it is not right to punish people for bearing the name of Christians, since the name really means very little: “All are called Christians,” whether good or bad.⁶⁶⁹ The name in itself is meaningless, he assures the pagans, “If people are to be punished simply because of the Christian name, why should they not be saved purely by the name,” an absurd idea.⁶⁷⁰ The world looks no further than a label, but there is nothing either good or bad in a name. We are all called Christians, but among ourselves we judge if a man is a Christian by his works. All the heretical cults from Simon Magus on have gone under the name of Christian, but that does not mean that all are true followers of Christ. Tatian asks the same question: why persecute us for a name?⁶⁷¹ Yet Justin assures us that it is not sillier to think people should be punished for a name than it is to think they can be saved by a name. “They call themselves Christians,” says Cyprian, “who go

⁶⁶⁴ *Populus enim Dei et Israel appellatae sunt. . . . Ergo Judaei aliquando utrumque, nunc neutrum. . . . Quae cum ita sint, quae ratio est ut ipsi nos falsa opinione fallamus, existimantes scilicet quia Christiani esse dicamur, quod opitulari nobis inter mala quae agimus nomen bonum possit, cum Spiritus sanctus nec fidem quidem dicat hominibus Christianis sine operibus bonis posse prodesse?* Salvian, *De Gubernatione Dei* 4.1, in *PL* 53:71.

⁶⁶⁵ *2 Clement* 4.1, in *PG* 1:333-334.

⁶⁶⁶ Ignatius

⁶⁶⁷ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 6, in *PG* 5:1011-1012.

⁶⁶⁸ Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitudo* 9:13.

⁶⁶⁹ Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 7, in *PG* 6:337.

⁶⁷⁰ Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 4 and 7? See side note.

⁶⁷¹ Tatian, *Oratio Adversus Graecos* 27, in *PG* 6:864.

about in darkness, thinking they have the light.”⁶⁷² The promised night, therefore, is not one in which the name of Christ is extinguished—far from it: in that darkness men make more than ever of their Christian profession, and are firmly convinced that they are the church. This is precisely what the Lord had predicted: after his rejection and departure he would become enormously popular in the world and all would call upon his name, seek after him, and worship him—but in vain, it would be too late, the door would be shut.

Contemporary scholars are taking increasing note of the negative side of the early Christian expectations. There is more than a jarring note to deal with. The negation is much too insistent, the passages much too full and numerous and the whole thing is much too tightly integrated into a single apocryphal scheme to be brushed aside as late and clumsy interpolation. Because it is not the sort of thing that Christian students since Eusebius have been taught to expect, they have hardly even noticed the grim clouds on the early Christian horizon, but by universal agreement all look the other way. “We should never have guessed for a moment,” writes Lake, “how stormy were the first five years of the Church in Corinth if we had not had the correspondence of St. Paul to guide us.”⁶⁷³ Ferocious feuding is certainly not the sort of thing anyone would expect “for a moment” in the closely knit little band of humble love-filled saints. Nor should we guess for a moment that peace-loving saints “would turn into dangerous and vicious characters.”⁶⁷⁴ Yet, Holtzmann observes, that is exactly what the *Didache* predicts. Frick, noting that the tone and viewpoint of the apostolic fathers is actually far more gloomy and negative than that of the apostles, concludes that that indicates a change of viewpoint in the church.⁶⁷⁵ Just the opposite: it proves that the expectations of the apostles of far worse things to come were actually being fulfilled in the days of the apostolic fathers. Frick detects in the

⁶⁷² ...*Christianos se vocent, et ambulantes in tenebris habere se lumen existiment...* Cyprian, *Liber de Unitate Ecclesiae* 3, in *PL* 4:512.

⁶⁷³ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 68.

⁶⁷⁴ Holtzmann?

⁶⁷⁵ Frick

apostolic fathers that there must be an interval between the church and the kingdom of heaven, a time of trouble: he glosses over the implication of this by the strange announcement that in that interval the saints are to be invulnerable to any harm!⁶⁷⁶ So determined are the experts in the face of all evidence to deny that the church could ever be lost. Tertullian's dread of what was to come Frick explains as fear of the day of judgment, yet Tertullian himself, who has a right to be heard, for all that he brings unwelcome news, says it is specifically the Antichrist, not the judgment, that he is afraid of. Frick attributes to Tertullian and the earlier fathers a confusion on the matter of the end which is matched only by his own, but one thing he must have—the church goes on in glory! F. A. M. Spencer studying the parables of the mustard seed and the wheat, says “as the husbandman would find nothing worth reaping for some while after sowing the seed, so would the Messiah meet with very inadequate response if he should return within a few years.”⁶⁷⁷ The amusing implications of this will be dealt with later, for the present it suffices to note that the man must admit, the prediction of a lengthy period of time during which the church would not present a satisfactory spectacle to men or to God; how he accounts for this is not our concern here, which is simply to point out that he admits the fact. As Spencer sees it, there is much evidence of frustration in the founding of the church: it was followed not by paradise but by “subsequent centuries of disorder and corruption and war;” the apostles make “wistful query” whether the kingdom cannot be restored in their time and receive no satisfactory answer.⁶⁷⁸ Sharman temporizes, speculating that Jesus saw the near future “as holding for his nation *certain* disaster...for his disciples *possible* disaster.”⁶⁷⁹ Buzy sees a predicted conflict between the adversary and the one who hinders him from showing himself: “It is not said that the combat will be a short one; it will continue as long as the obstacle is able to hold out against the thrust of the

⁶⁷⁶ Frick

⁶⁷⁷ F. A. M. Spencer

⁶⁷⁸ Frederick A. M. Spencer, “The Imminence of the Parousia,” *Church Quarterly Review* 148 (1949): 243.

⁶⁷⁹ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 126, emphasis original.

adversary.”⁶⁸⁰ Thereby Buzy allows the church a long span of life. The adversary will win and have his day, but not soon. But he is wrong—for the adversary was half-way through the obstacle in the time of the apostles, and in the passage Buzy citing the apostle says “the mystery of iniquity is already at work;” if he does not here say how long the opposition will hold out against him, there is, as we have seen, plenty of evidence elsewhere that it will not be for long.⁶⁸¹ We cannot avoid the impression, Buzy finds, that the Antichrist must already have been here for some 19 centuries! He does not know how truly he speaks. But in summarizing, this Catholic scholar makes a significant confession:

One point, however, remains obscure...:we are incapable of explaining how, once the entire world had been evangelized, those who preach the gospel seem to disappear and leave the field wide open to false messiahs and to false prophets; how the two witnesses, having given their testimony, were put to death, with the result that the beast of the sea does not meet with the least opposition.⁶⁸²

The admission of the fact is far more important than any of the cunning explanations that can always be worked out to remove the sting from painful reality, through here we may thank M. Buzy not only for his admission of the fact, but also for his frank confession that for the present he simply can't explain it. It does not fit into the accepted patterns of church history, but there it is. Bardy notes that the urgent plea of Hebrews 3:12-14, for the saints to “take heed” of themselves “while it is called today,” and “hold steadfast...unto the end,” does not refer to the end of the world at all but to “the general apostasy which shall precede the coming of the Messiah,” as indicated in 1 Timothy.⁶⁸³ He would soften the hard news: “We need not insist on the ideas expressed here,” and “The evangelists do not speak expressly of apostasy,” yet after all is said, “the idea which they express is certainly what we would translate today by the word”—

⁶⁸⁰ M. Buzy

⁶⁸¹ Buzy, “L’Adversaire et L’Obstacle,” 404.

⁶⁸² Denis Buzy, “L’Adversaire et L’Obstacle,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 24 (1934), 431. [N. cites (Eusebius III:24) in text, but is not present in article, see source]

⁶⁸³ Gustave Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme Durant les Premiers Siècles*, (Paris: F. Aubier, 1949), 295-296.

apostasy.⁶⁸⁴ A universal apostasy, no less. J. Morris describes how wherever Paul taught, “In each case he at first received the support of a section of the leading men and women of the city, and later found their support grow cold.”⁶⁸⁵ The Lord told the apostles they would have success for a time, but then all would go against them—and they should not be surprised but remember what he had predicted. A.G. Herbert, a Catholic writer, has decided to go all the way in accepting the negative aspect of church history and make the most of it. As

in the Old Testament the hope of the coming kingdom took shape through defeat, exile, and servitude; and so in the New Testament it was fulfilled through a death by crucifixion. The hallmark of authenticity is seen again in the fact that it makes the same demand on men today....He who accepts it as true is obliged...in the midst of a world that is still dark and cruel...to believe nevertheless that the divine kingdom exists and the King sits on his throne, and to be prepared to suffer, as did the saints of old...sustained by faith in things not seen.⁶⁸⁶

Again we must thank Mr. Herbert for his admission of facts that his church has to say the least been exceedingly reluctant to admit. “Defeat,” he tells us “...is the hallmark of authenticity.” How often have we been told by his co-religionists that God’s church cannot be defeated, that its forward march is irresistible, that it is to remain firm and steadfast until the end of the world. “Can God fail!” shouted a Roman Catholic priest at the author when he dared suggest the apostasy.⁶⁸⁷ Now Mr. Herbert tells us that the only real victory is spiritual and on this a earth a very limited one. Well, any church can claim that. When he speaks of “things not seen,” they are for all the things available on this earth; for the ancient saints those things were not seen because they were not here, and they would not be seen until after death. Mr. Herbert is not guilty of preaching early Christian doctrine. His “things not seen” are an intellectual, “spiritual” abstraction of a high rhetorical caste. His explanation raises questions that can only alarm his faction, but at least it admits that as far as this earth is concerned one must reckon with the possibility of complete failure. Walter Völker in his study of Clement of Alexandria notes that

⁶⁸⁴ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 296-297.

⁶⁸⁵ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 4.

⁶⁸⁶ A. G. Herbert

⁶⁸⁷ ?

that enthusiastic apologist and founder of Christian doctrine is singularly “far from any trace of optimism” in his teaching.⁶⁸⁸ If there is any optimism at all in the early Christian writings, it is with reference to things on the other side.

⁶⁸⁸ Walter Völker, study of Clement of Alexandria

99-105

THE NEGATIVE PROGRAM OF THE EARLY CHURCH (Section 4)

In *IV Ezra* 8:1-3 the principle is stated: “The Most High created this world *propter multos*, but the future world *propter paucos*....For many have been created, but of them but few shall be saved.” Then the normal question is asked: if all who are sown in the world are not to be saved how can God damn his own? *Misere haereditat tuae!* And the answer is significant: “Leave present things to the present and future things to the future! Do not concern thyself about the many who perish: they are none of your concern; they had their free agency”⁶⁸⁹: do not think God wants anyone to perish—they bring it on themselves. All that concerns you is that you will be saved—don’t worry about the others. *Pereat ergo multitudo quae sine causa nata est...*⁶⁹⁰ It is hard to believe that a merciful God should allow any to be lost, how then can we accept a doctrine of limited salvation? The answer: it is none of your business, but it is most certainly a basic teaching of the early church. The earthly failure of the Lord was proclaimed by the enemies of the church from the beginning and was denied by the “double-minded” Christians who were “ashamed of the crucifixion.” It was too much for them to admit, In the *Slavonic Josephus* “They hung a fourth tablet with the inscription...: Jesus never reigned as king, he was crucified by the Jews, because he proclaimed the destruction of the city and the desolation of the temple.”⁶⁹¹ He was *Jesuus Basileus ou basileusas*: the king who never ruled. When Celsus makes fun of Christ’s conspicuous failure to convert the world, Origen does not deny it. Of course a complete reversal of common values is behind this: “The Lord said in secret,” according to the *agrapha*, “if

⁶⁸⁹ *Vobis enim apertus est paradiscus, plantata est arbor vitae, praeparatum est futurum tempus praeparata est abundantia, aedificata est civitas, probata est requies, perfecta est bonitas ante perfecta sapientia. Radix signata est a vobis, infirmitas extincta est a vobis et mors absconsa est, infernum fugit et corruptio in oblivionem. Transierunt dolores et ostensus est in finem thesaurus immortalitatis. Noli ergo adicere inquirendo de multitudine eorum qui pereunt. Nam et ipsi accipientes libertatem spreverunt Altissimum et legem eius contempserunt et vias eius dereliquerunt. IV Ezra 8:52-56.*

⁶⁹⁰ *IV Ezra* 9:22.

⁶⁹¹ A. Berendts, *Die Zeugnisse vom Christentum im Slavischen “De Bello Judaico” des Josephus*, (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1906), 11.

ye do not make the right hand as the left, and the left hand as the right, and if you do not make what is uppermost nethermost and what is hindmost foremost, you will never know the kingdom of God."⁶⁹² In *VI Ezra* the Lord calls: "Hear O my people! Prepare for the combat and go about in suffering, as strangers on the earth; pay no attention to the things of this world—let the one who sells be as if he sold not."⁶⁹³ The workers work in vain, says this source, using the language of Paul; then why bother? Because the righteous will be saved. A common saying attributed to Jesus is that "This world is but a bridge: go over it, then, but do not build your house upon it."⁶⁹⁴ Everything is transition, everything is temporary—not, as modern scholars assume, because the end of the world is at hand, but simply because that is the nature of this world. Mayeda, discussing the Egerton Papyrus recently repeated the old error: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near," can only mean for him that the end of the world is near, and for that reason "Christianity from its beginning kept aloof from the culture and education of the world...and not only the culture, but everything that the world of that time esteemed as valuable was for Jesus of no importance."⁶⁹⁵ Is the end of the world the only possible explanation for any and every denunciation of the world: Is the only conceivable reason for shunning sin, that sin is about to be abolished? Rather the opposite is true: the denial of the world was an aggressive and active thing, the world was to be actively resisted because it was a real power—it was not to be the loser, but the winner here below. But what we note here, is only the fact that the early church did have a strong antipathy to the world, no matter what the reason. "If you do not fast from the world," says the logion, "you will not find the kingdom of God."⁶⁹⁶ And again, "I was in the midst of the world



⁶⁹² εἶπεν γάρ μοι ὁ κύριος ἔάν μὴ ποιήσητε ὑμῶν τὰ κάτω εἰς τὰ ἄνω, καὶ τὰ ἀριστερὰ εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ, οὐ μὴ εἰσελθῆτε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν μου'. (V) λέγω δὲ τὴν ἐντολὴν ταύτην ὑμῖν τοῦ σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, ὅτι ἔάν μὴ ποιήσητε τὰ ἀριστερὰ δεξιὰ καὶ τὰ ἄνω λογίσηθε ἔντιμα, οὐ δυνήσεσθε εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ'. (A) *Actes de Philippe, Martyre* 34. See *Acta Philippi: Textus*, in *Corpus Christianorum: Series Apocryphorum* 11, cura François Bovon, Bertrand Bouvier, Frédéric Amsler, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999), 404-405.

⁶⁹³ *IV Ezra* 16:40-41.

⁶⁹⁴ *Logia et Agrapha Domini Jesu apud Moslemicos Scriptores, Asceticos Praesertim, Usitata* 46, in *PO* 13:376-377. See also 75, in *PO* 13:404.

⁶⁹⁵ Mayeda

⁶⁹⁶ logion

and found everything drunk but no one thirsting among them, and my soul laboreth for the sons of men who are blind and do not heed the poor.”⁶⁹⁷

In the Coptic *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, the Lord says, “The time has come when they shall take me from you,” whereupon the apostles weep and say: “Have pity on us, O Son of God. Tell us also, what shall be our destiny?” “Do not fear dissolution,” is the answer, “but especially do not fear the power. Remember all that I told you, that even as they have persecuted me they will persecute you also; but rejoice for I have overcome the world.”⁶⁹⁸ Andrew then asks the Lord what advantage the devil gains from making men transgress, to which the answer: “Have I not come to take into my kingdom those who are my own? Why should not the devil try to do the same?”⁶⁹⁹ The apostles need not be nonplussed that the evil one is so successful—this is his kingdom. When in the legend of Andrew the people all beg Andrew to stay alive and help the church, he refuses to do so: “O Lord,” he prays, “do not allow thy servant to be kept from thee... Let not my body be taken from the cross before thou hast received me to thee, that through my departure a multitude of my relatives might be drawn towards thee who are now resting in thy rest.”⁷⁰⁰ He thinks of his dead relatives rather than any future glory of the church. This is precisely the attitude of Ignatius who feels 1) that though he is the ablest and most inspired man of the church in his day, there shall be no profit in his remaining here and laboring with the church, and 2) that he cannot enjoy the presence of the Lord in the church here below. This strongly negative attitude to the church on earth finds later expression in the sordid cult of tears, and the morbidly negative Diogenian traditions of the Christ, who preferred to be addressed as “O meskin!” For example, Jesus wakes a sleeping man and says to him, “Arise and remember God!” When the man replies: “Why dost thou ask that? I had resigned this world to those of this world,”

⁶⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁸ *Évangile des Douze Apotres* 7, in *PO* 2:160.

⁶⁹⁹ *Évangile des Douze Apotres* 4, in *PO* 2:154.

⁷⁰⁰ μὴ παραχωρήσης, Κύριε, τὸν σὸν θεράποντα ἐκ ταύτης τῆς ὥρας ἀπὸ σοῦ χωρισθῆναι... καὶ πρὶν ἢ τὸ σῶμά μου ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ καταβῆ, προσλαβοῦ με πρὸς σέ, ὅπως διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς ἐξόδου ἢ τῶν πολλῶν μου συγγενῶν σύνοδος πρὸς σέ γένηται, ἀναπαυομένων ἐν τῇ σῇ μεγαλειότητι. *Acta et Martyrium S. Andreae Apostoli*, in *PG* 2:1244-1245.

the Lord answers: “go back to sleep again, O friend!”⁷⁰¹ Or the logion: “My food is hunger, my hair is fear [of God]; my clothing is wool; my cloak in winter a spot of sunlight; my lamp is the moon; my transportation feet; my nourishment everything that the earth bears....So there is none richer than I upon the earth.”⁷⁰² This obviously philosophical adaptation none the less expresses the powerfully world-denying element in the Christian message. It is the *Leitmotiv* of the Logia: “A man who desires this world is like a man who drinks from the sea: the more he drinks the thirstier he gets, until it kills him.”⁷⁰³ When the disciples cry, “O Prophet of God, would that thou command us to build a house for the service of God,” his answer is, “Go to and build it upon the water....How can you serve God and love the world?”⁷⁰⁴ “The world is the devil’s field, and the people of the world are his plowmen.”⁷⁰⁵ *I Clement* describes the Lord’s mission as a conspicuous failure, and his attitude as one of complete submission and humility: he was “a worm and not a man,” he was a root that found no soil here in which to grow.⁷⁰⁶ There is no need to labor the point of constant conflict between the two worlds: God, as the king of the world to come, says a Clementine homily, “loves every human being who has no converse with the present world but tries always to escape it.”⁷⁰⁷ The set expression is not “the Church at Rome to the Church at Corinth,” but the “Church sojourning in Rome to the Church sojourning in Corinth, where “sojourn” is given by Polycarp as *paragrinari*—passing through.⁷⁰⁸

Barnabas opens his letter: “Since the times are the worst, and the adversary holds sway in this world, we must consider our course of action.”⁷⁰⁹ Is he plotting a program for converting the world and crushing the adversary? No—Barnabas has not read the fathers of the fourth century. The problem is not to tide a crisis over, but not to give in before the heavenly reward has been

⁷⁰¹ something from the Diogenian traditions of Christ

⁷⁰² *Logia et Agrapha* 44, in *PO* 13:374-375.

⁷⁰³ *Logia et Agrapha* 48, in *PO* 13:378.

⁷⁰⁴ *Logia et Agrapha* 75, in *PO* 13:404.

⁷⁰⁵ *Logia et Agrapha* 117, in *PO* 19:543.

⁷⁰⁶ *I Clement* 16.15, in *PG* 1:241-242.

⁷⁰⁷ Clementine Homily

⁷⁰⁸ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* Introduction, in *PG* 5:1005-1006.

⁷⁰⁹ Epistle of Barnabas 2.1, in *PG* 2: 729-730.

won—it is to “endure to the end.” How can we cure ourselves, he asks: “By fleeing from it all and holding the error of this time in abomination while concerning ourselves only with the age to come.”⁷¹⁰ This is no time to scatter, he tells the saints, get together and arrange things for the great trial ahead; purify yourselves; beware of those who think they are wise. “The Lord and his reward is near...therefore search out the will of God and do it, that ye may be saved in the day of judgment.”⁷¹¹ Don’t give up or give up any of the righteous practices while you are still in the fair vessel (the body), he tells them. If they can hold on until they are put to death all will be well. But any way one looks at it, there is no future.

In his letter to the Philadelphians, Ignatius leaves no doubt that he is a valuable worker in the church; in introductions to other letters he tells us that in view of the evil way things are going in the church, he cannot keep silent, love forces him to speak.⁷¹² Then why does not love force him to stay on earth and help the church? Because, as we learn from the letter to the Romans, he has no hope for the future of the cause here on earth. The letter of Polycarp proclaims a sharp division between the “firmly rooted faith handed down from ancient times and remaining until today”⁷¹³ and the “empty and vain teachings of the many,”⁷¹⁴ and says we must be prepared to take leave of the latter—the popular doctrine. It is this which will prevail, because the world remains the world. It has often been claimed by protestant students that the immediate expectation of the end would make the idea of a church or community unnecessary, and therefore, since the early Christians did expect an immediate end, there can have been no real interest in the church. On the other hand, Catholics argue that since there was a church they cannot have expected an immediate end. Both are agreed on the premise that expectation of the end would naturally banish all concern for a church on the earth. But is not the opposite the truth? The greater the threat, the greater the need to come together. In a last-ditch stand, soldiers have one comfort and one only—they are

⁷¹⁰ Epistle of Barnabas 4.1, in *PG 2*: 731-732.

⁷¹¹ Epistle of Barnabas 21.3, 6, in *PG 2*: 781-782.

⁷¹² See Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadelphenses* 7, in *PG 5*:701-704.

⁷¹³ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 1, in *PG 5*:1005-1006.

⁷¹⁴ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 2, in *PG 5*:1005-1006.

together, the individual is not alone—and as the danger and certainty of destruction become greater, the more determinedly do the fighters cling together. Many examples of this might be given, but they are not necessary, since the early fathers propound the principle with great clarity. Because the times are evil, says Barnabas, come together often and strengthen each other. “Take comfort in the society of the saints,” says the *Didache*.⁷¹⁵ “In these last times may the church be gathered in from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.”⁷¹⁶ This is not the process of scattering out to conquer the earth, but the opposite. “Watch over your life...be prepared, for you know not the hour in which our Lord comes. Come often together, seeking the things which are needful for our souls. For all the past time of your faith will profit you nothing unless in the last opportunity you are perfect.”⁷¹⁷ “We must endure all things,” says the *Apostolic Constitutions* and tells how: “Let us renounce everything in this world: parents, children, property”—everything, “so that if we are called to martyrdom we may confess the name without difficulty, and if for the name’s sake we be punished, we may rejoice as hastening to immortality.”⁷¹⁸ Here all ties with this world must be broken—even good ones. “Let us not be surprised if we are persecuted; let us not love this world at all,” or be “like those Jews who marvel at the deeds of Christ but will not believe in him for fear of the high priests.”⁷¹⁹ The *Shepherd of Hermas* opens with a declaration: “Your city is far from this city...why do you seek to own land and build buildings?...Be ready, that whenever the master of this city wishes to put you out for resisting his law, you may go out from his city....Do not touch that which is another’s, earthly wealth does not belong to you.”⁷²⁰ We are strangers wherever we live, says the Diognetus Epistle, “Christians live among perishable things,

⁷¹⁵ *Didache* 4.2.

⁷¹⁶ *Didache* 9.4.

⁷¹⁷ *Didache* 16.1-2.

⁷¹⁸ ἀποταξώμεθα οὖν καὶ γονεῦσι, καὶ συγγενέσι, καὶ φίλοις, καὶ γυναῖκι, [τέκνοις] καὶ κτήμασι, καὶ σύμπαντι τῷ βίῳ, ...ἐὰν δὲ κληθῶμεν εἰς μαρτύριον, μετὰ ἐνστάσεως ὁμολογεῖν τὸ τίμιον ὄνομα· καὶ ἐὰν τούτου χάριν κολασθῶμεν, χαίρωμεν ὡς ἐπὶ ἀθανασίαν σπεύδοντες. *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.6, in *PG* 1:836.

⁷¹⁹ *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.6, in *PG* 1:836.

⁷²⁰ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 1.1

holding fast the imperishable things which are in heaven.”⁷²¹ “When you hear that we look for a kingdom,” says Justin, “without making any inquiry, you suppose that we speak of a human kingdom; whereas we speak of that which is with God....Our thoughts are not fixed on the present,” we are not looking for a kingdom here.⁷²² The literalness of this concept is plain. It is no wonder that Justin’s Christians impressed outsiders as being difficult. “We happen to be in the flesh,” says the Epistle to Diognetus, “but we don’t live according to the flesh. We happen to be sojourning on the earth, but our program is in heaven [ἐν οὐρανῷ πολιτεύονται].”⁷²³ πολιτεύονται is a strong word: It refers to the actual action of the church, and for this earth it has no future. “If we expected a human kingdom,” says Justin, “we would do anything to escape getting killed so that we might live to enjoy our expectations. But as it is we have no hopes in the present at all, being killed doesn’t worry us, by being utterly put to death we actually profit.”⁷²⁴ Justin is in no doubt on the matter. The Christians expect to be put to death, yet feel that that will in no way jeopardize the setting up of the kingdom, because the kingdom is not to be in this world; it is not merely out of the world in a spiritual sense, but as Justin notes, in a physical sense as well. To be μετὰ Θεοῦ [with God] is not for Justin any more than for Ignatius, to be simply a member of the church; it is to be on the other side; it is not merely to be dead to the sins of the world, it is to be put to death physically. Thus the famous remark of Justin:

You ask, if God is on our side, how can we be overcome by evil men and condemned by them? This is my answer: **The** angels that were sent to watch over men in the beginning sinned with women, begot the demons, and enslaved the rest of the human race, making it the victim of many ills, which pagan poets and philosophers falsely attribute to God himself and his children.⁷²⁵

⁷²¹ Epistle to Diognetus 6.8, in *PG* 2:1175-1176.

⁷²² Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 11, in *PG* 6:341-342.

⁷²³ Epistle to Diognetus 5.8-9, in *PG* 2:1173-1174.

⁷²⁴ Εἰ γὰρ ἀνθρώπινον βασιλείαν προσδοκῶμεν, κὰν ἠρνούμεθα ὅπως μὴ ἀναιρώμεθα, καὶ λανθάνειν ἐπειρώμεθα, ὅπως τῶν προσδοκωμένων τύχωμεν. Ἄλλ’ ἐπεὶ οὐκ εἰς τὸ νῦν τὰς ἐλπίδας ἔχομεν, ἀναιρούντων οὐ πεφροντίκαμεν, τοῦ καὶ πάντως ἀποθανεῖν ὀφειλομένου. Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 11, in *PG* 6:341-342.

⁷²⁵ Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 5, in *PG* 6:451-454.

In a word, Satan is the prince of this world and we expect nothing good here. Here the church has no more chance than a snowball in hell. “Why does God delay the confounding and destruction of the whole earth, with the abolition of evil angels and demons and men?”⁷²⁶ To give all a chance to be tested: “As it is, every man does well not by force but by choice, so that by the operation of the demons righteous men like Socrates are persecuted and put in chains.”⁷²⁷ To carry out God’s plan, all must have perfect freedom to do right or wrong. This is the doctrine of the two ways. But is one free to do good if it costs him his life? Indeed he is: he can even expect to pay that price, no matter in what age of the world he lives. The early Christians often compared themselves with Socrates: death was not only their lot, but the normal lot of the righteous in this earth. “We will not teach you to be poets, philosophers, or orators,” says Justin, “but we will make mortals immortal, humans gods,” etc.⁷²⁸ Truly the entire program of the church—not only a part of it—is aimed at but one objective: for this world it has no objectives. “Christ is the stone,” says Irenaeus, “which shall destroy temporal kingdoms and bring in an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the dead,” not the church.⁷²⁹ Paul discouraged marriage, according to Tertullian, not because it has defects in itself, but because *in extemitatibus saeculi* it seemed redundant or because it was not being rightly performed.⁷³⁰ But if the church were to last at all, marriage would be an indispensable institution for a going concern, and anything but “redundant.” “Ours is another *genus, sedem, spem, gratiam, dignitatem in coelis...*”⁷³¹ “Should we not flee with all haste from a collapsing house?” asks Cyprian, “This world is tottering on the brink...and are you not thankful

⁷²⁶ ὅθεν καὶ ἐπιμένει ὁ Θεὸς τὴν σύγχυσιν καὶ κατάλυσιν τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου μὴ ποιῆσαι, ἵνα καὶ οἱ φαυλοὶ ἄγγελοι, καὶ δαίμονες, καὶ ἄνθρωποι μηκέτι ᾧσι... Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 7, in *PG* 6:456.

⁷²⁷ ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην πράττειν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἢ πάσχειν τὰ γινόμενα, ἀλλὰ κατὰ μὲν τὴν προαίρεσιν ἕκαστον κατορθοῦν ἢ ἀμαρτάνειν· καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν φαύλων δαιμόνων ἐνέργειαν τοὺς σπουδαίους, οἷον Σωκράτην καὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους, διώκεσθαι, καὶ ἐν δεσμοῖς εἶναι· Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 7, in *PG* 6:456.

⁷²⁸ ἦτις οὐ ποιητὰς ποιεῖ, οὐ φιλοσόφους κατασκευάζει, οὐδὲ ῥήτορας δεινούς· ἀλλὰ, παιδεύουσα, ποιεῖ τοὺς θνητοὺς ἀθανάτους, τοὺς βροτοὺς θεοὺς, ἐκ γῆς δὲ μετάγει εἰς τοὺς ὑπὲρ Ὀλυμπον ὄρους. Justin Martyr, *Oratio ad Graecos* 5, in *PG* 6:237.

⁷²⁹ ...et Christus est lapis, ...qui destruet temporalia regna, et aeternum inducet, quae est justorum resurrectio... Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.26.2, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1194.

⁷³⁰ Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem* 1.2, in *PL* 1:1389.

⁷³¹ Tertullian, *Apologeticus Adversus Gentes* 1, in *PL* 1:307-308.

to God to escape the imminent shipwreck and destruction?...Let us hail the day when we leave this earth....Paradise is our *patria* and the patriarchs are our parents: why should we not rush to meet them?" All our joy is now on the other side.⁷³² Cyprian is still enough in the early tradition to see that the dissolution of this world is only a secondary reason for wanting to leave it. "The crops fail, the grapes and olives fail, the grain dries out with drought: What is that to a Christian...whom Paradise invites, who expects the blessings and abundance of the heavenly kingdom?...*nec jam mundo sed Deo vivimus*...and since the end of the world is near convert your minds fearfully to God."⁷³³ This is an expression never found in the early writers. "Nothing at all is promised us for this life," says Arnobius to the pagans, "we suffer as well as you do, it is true, but we do not expect help here; we have been taught to hold all threats, whatsoever they may be, in contempt....Hence, what you call the severity of persecution we call liberation, not persecution."⁷³⁴ Rightly does Julian observe that the literal observation of Luke 22:42f and Luke 12:33 would mean the dissolution of any society—the Christians knew that. "In this the Christians differ from the unbelievers," says Chrysostom, "that they bear all things willingly and hold themselves superior to human assault in the hope of things to come."⁷³⁵

⁷³² *Si in habitaculo tuo parietes vetustate nutarent, tecta desuper tremarent, domus jam fatigata, jam lassa, aedificiis senectute labentibus, ruinam proximam minaretur, nonne omni celeritate migrares? ...Mundus ecce nutat et labitur...et tu non Deo gratias agis, non tibi gratularis quod, exitu maturiore subtractus, ruinis et naufragiis et plagis imminentibus exuaris? ...Amplectamur diem qui assignat singulos domicilio suo, qui nos istinc ereptos et laqueis saecularibus exsolutos paradiso restituit et regno....Patriam nostram paradisum computamus: parentes patriarchas habere jam coepimus. Quid non properamus et currimus ut patriam nostram videre, ut parentes salutare possimus? ...* Cyprian, *Liber de Mortalitate* 25-26, in *PL* 4:623-624.

⁷³³ *Vinea licet fallat et olea decipiat, et herbis siccitate morientibus aestuans campus arescat, quid hoc ad Christianos? ...quos paradisi invitavit, quos gratia omnis et copia regni coelestis exspectat? ...nec jam mundo sed Deo vivimus...et quia jam mundi finis in proximo est, ad Deum mentes vestras Dei timore convertite.* Cyprian, *Liber ad Demetrianum* 20-23, in *PL* 4:579-580.

⁷³⁴ *Nihil enim est nobis promissum ad hanc vitam, nec in carunculae hujus folliculo constitutes, opis aliquid sponsum est, auxillique decretum: quinimmo edocti sumus minas omnes, quaecumque sunt, parvi ducere, atque aestimare fortunae....Itaque ista, quam dicitis, persecutionis asperitas liberatio nostra est, non persecutio...* Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes* 2.76-77, in *PL* 5:934-935.

⁷³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Ad Populum Antiochenum, Homilia* 2.3, in *PG* 49:37.

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MARTYRDOM PRESCRIBED (Section 5)

It was an article of faith with the early Christians that in this world the righteous are not wanted. In their habit of comparing themselves with the righteous Socrates, a pagan, they proclaim this as a general principle. St. Apollonius, comparing Christ with the suffering Socrates, explains to the judge: “We Christians gladly die: to live or die in the Lord, it is all the same.”⁷³⁶ He speaks of no “death to sin,” of course, but of a most literal being put to death. An early fragment attributed to Barnabas quotes the Lord as saying: “Those who wish to see me and touch my kingdom must take me by agony and suffering.”⁷³⁷ There are evils to come, says an early Christian letter, but if the king commands it, it is all well, “and we gladly undergo the trial of such a death...”⁷³⁸ “Pronounce no man happy before his death,” says Sirach, “for by his latter end a man shall be known.”⁷³⁹ The same sentiment is expressed often with regard to martyrdom. “Let us, O brethren, give ourselves unto death and preserve our souls, which is the true faith.”⁷⁴⁰ “The friends of God are not afraid,” says a logion, “and do not sorrow since they have seen to the heart of things, while men look at the surface. The world will kill those who are afraid of being killed; but those who know the world have left it: they hate what the world loves and love what it hates.”⁷⁴¹ St. Andrew not only prayed on the cross that God would prevent all attempts to save him, and was miraculously saved from all rescue, but urged the 20,000 brethren present at his martyrdom to follow his example: “leave this life altogether,” he tells them, “despise all temporal things; to lose the pains of this life is more than a fair exchange for the promise of eternal life.”⁷⁴² “We cannot carry out our orders here,” says *2 Clement* “unless we leave our habitation in this world;” how literally he means this becomes apparent in his admonition: “let us not be frightened

⁷³⁶ See “The Martyrdom of the Holy Apollonius,” in F. C. Conybeare, *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and Other Monuments of Early Christianity*, (1896; reprint, Kessinger Publishing: 2006), 44-47.

⁷³⁷ Epistle of Barnabas 7, in *PG* 2:748.

⁷³⁸ An early Christian letter?

⁷³⁹ Sirach, 11:28

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⁷⁴¹ *Logia et Agrapha* 115, in *PO* 19:542.

⁷⁴² *Acta et Martyrium S. Andreae Apostoli*, in *PG* 2:1240.

at having to go out of this world”—which shows that he is referring to no mere change of daily habits, and he goes on to explain: “For the Lord said, ‘You will be as lambs among wolves.’ Peter said, ‘but what if the wolves tear the lambs to pieces?’ to which the Lord said: ‘The lambs need not fear the wolves after they are dead, so you do not fear those who kill you.’”⁷⁴³ Here there can be no doubt that the wolves will prevail, and what their victory will mean for the faithful. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, we learn that the athlete who dies in the combat is the one who finishes his course, and indeed Polycarp is described as are many other saints as one whose assignment in the battle was to incur death, and who could not carry out that assignment completely by anything short of martyrdom. “I beg of you,” writes Ignatius to the Romans, “not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to become the food of wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God....Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may...leave nothing of my body....Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴⁴ This shows how the early Christians interpreted most literally the Lord’s pronouncement: “Whoever will come after me must lose his life.” On no other condition could one become “a true follower of Christ.” We do not merely accept the death of Christ, according to Ignatius, we must willingly accept death ourselves. To accept death is one thing; to accept one’s own to prove it is another, but such is to be the test. There are false coins and there are true ones, and the true bear the stamp of God, “through which, if we do not of our own free choice accept death in the manner of his death, we shall never have in us the power of life.”⁷⁴⁵ Ignatius tells us what is meant by “enduring to the end”: “If the will of God is that I should be deemed worthy to go to the end, the beginning is well devised, if I receive the grace to accept my calling without a moment’s hesitation....It is fine to descend and leave this world to go to God so that in him we reach the end.”⁷⁴⁶ Here is no mention of Christ’s descending to earth: the saint is going to him, leaving the world to do it.

⁷⁴³ ὅθεν, ἀδελφοί, καταλείψαντες τὴν παροικίαν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ποιήσωμεν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ καλέσαντος ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ φοβηθῶμεν ἐξελεθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.... 2 *Clement* 5.1-4, in *PG* 1:335-336.

⁷⁴⁴ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Romanos* 4, in *PG* 5:689-690.

⁷⁴⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 5, in *PG* 5:665-668.

⁷⁴⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Romanos* 1-2, in *PG* 5:685-688.

Ignatius is very literal: He describes himself as bound, literally, in the hope of fighting beasts, hoping to become a disciple of the one who offered himself.⁷⁴⁷ For Ignatius salvation is not to be bought by a mere change of attitude or allegiance, but by enduring to the end against every test. Do not fight fire with fire, he tells the Ephesians, but with kindness; “thereby the devil’s plant will not grow in us.”⁷⁴⁸ But this is no program of conversion. “Let us study to be imitators of the Lord, even though this means that one will be disgraced, rejected and put to death.”⁷⁴⁹ “For the Lord’s sake we must certainly endure all things,” he tells his colleague Polycarp, “Become more zealous than you are. Learn to know the times. Look forward to the one who is overdue, the timeless, the invisible, but who is seen for our sake, the one not felt with hands, who suffereth not, yet who suffered for us, who in all ways endured for us.”⁷⁵⁰ “Since he suffered all things that we might live, it behooves us to imitate him in enduring what he did. And if we suffer because of his name, let us glorify his name.”⁷⁵¹ Could a clearer statement of the future program of the church be desired?

When the *Didache* describes the darkness that is to come, the deceiver of the world who is to have all power, the culmination is the time “when the human race will be put to the fiery trial, and be scandalized, and many shall be destroyed, but those who endure in their faith shall be saved even by the doom itself.”⁷⁵² Here we have the familiar promise that they who endure to the end shall be saved, but how by the doom (or curse) itself? “The meaning is obscure,” says Lake.⁷⁵³ Yet what could be more simple? We are told that many will be destroyed, but that those who remain in the faith (not in the flesh) will be saved by that very destruction decreed. The only difficulty with the passage is the familiar paradox that he who loses his life shall save it. It is

⁷⁴⁷ See Ignatius, *Epistola ad Romanos* 4-5, in *PG* 5:689-692.

⁷⁴⁸ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 10, in *PG* 5:653-654.

⁷⁴⁹ μιμηταὶ δὲ τοῦ Κυρίου σπουδάζωμεν εἶναι. (τίς πλέον ἀδικηθεῖς, τίς ἀποστερηθεῖς, τίς ἀθετηθεῖς;), Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 10, in *PG* 5:653-654.

⁷⁵⁰ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 3, in *PG* 5:721-722.

⁷⁵¹ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 8, in *PG* 5:1011-1012.

⁷⁵² *Didache* 16.5

⁷⁵³ Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers vol. 1*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 333.

foolish to deny the faith out of fear, says the *Apostolic Constitutions*, since we are all going to die anyway.⁷⁵⁴ To judge by such sentiments, to be true to the faith was synonymous with dying for it. “Let him rejoice therefore who imitates the teacher Christ....And let whoever prays to be Christ’s disciple be zealous to follow him in his struggles, imitating his patience, knowing that though he is burned by men in a fire...even though he suffer so, he will receive his reward from the presence of the Lord.”⁷⁵⁵

In the *Hermas* the sick old lady is the church on earth, but the beautiful young one represents “they who have repented with all their heart.”⁷⁵⁶ What is to become of them? In answer the Shepherd is shown “a type of the persecution to come....If then you are prepared before hand...you will be able to escape it if you serve the Lord blamelessly for the rest of the days of your life.”⁷⁵⁷ Escape is only assured at the end of life. As the Lord told the disciples to be of good cheer just before he was put to death, and promised them escape, even though “in the world ye shall have tribulations,” so the fair maiden assures Hermas that they will escape who repent and remain truthful even to death: they will not escape from death (and certainly none of them wanted to), but they will escape through death the danger that they all dreaded—loss of the life hereafter. Hermas is told of the beasts, “the black is the world, in which you are living.”⁷⁵⁸ This shows that when they spoke of the world the early saints meant the world, and not a state of sin only, in which state Hermas was not living. “The color of fire and blood,” says the instructor,

means that this world must be destroyed by blood and fire [not converted]. The golden part is you, who have fled from this world, for...you who live among them are being tried. Those who remain [and this is the crux] and pass through the flames, shall be purified by them....But the white part is the world to come, in which the elect of God shall dwell [the black and red are this world, not just the world of the wicked, but the world in which the saints are living and being tried, and from which they can escape by death]....Therefore do not cease to speak to the ears of the saints. You have also the type of the great persecution to come, but if you will it shall be nothing.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁴ *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.6, in *PG* 1:836-837.

⁷⁵⁵ *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.6, in *PG* 1:837.

⁷⁵⁶ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.13.4.

⁷⁵⁷ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 4.1.1, 4.2.5.

⁷⁵⁸ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 4.3.2.

⁷⁵⁹ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 4.3.3-6.

The worst the world can do is nothing. “Put on therefore joyfulness...and flourish in it...the mournful man always does wickedly.”⁷⁶⁰

Justin says the Christians have been ordered to suffer all things with patience. “We do not hate our enemies....We do not fear death, knowing that all that lives must die...but who believes us will live forever. They think there is nothing after death...and so believe they are not only removing us from one place to another, but depriving us of life and joy.”⁷⁶¹ How literally these things were conceived is seen in the pagan retort to the Christians: “Why, then, don’t you all just kill yourselves and go to your God without all this delay?”⁷⁶² To this Justin’s answer is not that the pagans have failed to understand that it is a spiritual death of which they are speaking—far from it: he meets the literal charge with a most literal answer: since God intends the human race to exist, he does not want us to kill. He allows us to be killed, but he does not want it so—those who slay are all acting against his will—so much the worse for them; and so much the worse for us if we are the killers. It is important here to note that the fact that God allows a thing to happen, does not mean he wants it to happen. It is foolish to say that God would not allow the Christians to be lost because he does not desire it, for as the apostolic fathers often pointed out, neither did he desire the defection of Israel, but when they sinned it was he who cut them off. It is also significant that Justin does not suggest that one is duty bound to live for the church, but that the earth might fulfill the measure of its existence: “We believe that this world was not created for nothing by God, but for the sake of the human race, and that he delights in those that imitate him.”⁷⁶³ Offenses must come, but woe to them by whom they come. The thing that most impressed Justin about the Christians before he became one of them, was the fact that they were not afraid of death or all the other things commonly thought terrifying “...For who would embrace death if he thought it would deprive him of all good things to come, but exchange this

⁷⁶⁰ Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 10.3.1-2.

⁷⁶¹ Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 57, in PG 6:414-416.

⁷⁶² Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 4, in PG 6:449-452.

⁷⁶³ Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 4, in PG 6:452.

life entirely for one yonder, and not try to escape the officials so as to prolong this life as long as possible?”⁷⁶⁴ Here Justin speaks very specifically of expectations: the Christians, he says, did not behave as if they thought they were missing anything at all by dying; apparently they had no expectations whatever on this earth, and were not even interested in prolonging life out of normal curiosity. What of the church, then? Were they not to see her glory? Not here. Part of the Christians assurance, expressed by Justin, was that “men do not suffer or prosper by chance in eternity, but all is according to plan”—a προαίρεσιν, or free choice which they have already made.⁷⁶⁵ We would not be killed, he says, and wicked men and demons would not have power over us, if it were not the bounded duty of every man to die. We must pay that debt and we do it gladly if you follow me, says the lady of the good way, “I can promise you endless kingdoms.”⁷⁶⁶ Accordingly the Christians flee from what appears desirable; like athletes that take the hard way, they despise death. Like the prophets of old, we must heed God’s voice, even to the point of death.

Irenaeus knows that it is a genuine Christian tradition that persecution to death is necessary to salvation, and to prove it he cites “one of ours,” namely Ignatius’ invitation to the lions. He goes further and lays down the principle that “all who have ever been inspired by the Holy Ghost...have had to suffer persecution, and have been stoned, and slain.”⁷⁶⁷ Because other religions have not enjoyed such treatment, he regards their claims to authenticity as disproven: the true believers are those who are put to death. “The work of the Christian,” he says, “is nothing else than to prepare to die.”⁷⁶⁸ What about building the church: would that not be the first obligation if a church was to be built? In these cases Irenaeus is speaking as an old Christian, for he sought after the old traditions more strenuously than any other, perhaps, save Tertullian.

⁷⁶⁴ Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 12, in *PG* 6:464.

⁷⁶⁵ Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 7, in *PG* 6:456.

⁷⁶⁶ Justin Martyr, *Apologia II Pro Christianis* 11, in *PG* 6:461.

⁷⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 4.33.10, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1078-1079.

⁷⁶⁸ Irenaeus, *Fragments* 11, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1233.

The theme of Tertullian's famous work *De Fuga in Persecutione*, is that a Christian should not flee persecution under any circumstances at all, not even to save his life. There would be no persecution, he says, unless God allowed it: "Whether escape from persecution means life or death, plague or healing, you know who is its author:" God.⁷⁶⁹ Therefore "*fugiendum in persecutionem non esse*. Since persecution comes from God, there is no escaping it anyway...it neither should, nor can be escaped."⁷⁷⁰ Isn't it better to stand firm under God's direction than to try to flee under our own? The Lord's injunction not to fear those who slay the body means just that. Stand up to the devil to the end, for all are exhorted to martyrdom, not to flight. Yet certainly a prudent withdrawal, as was later preached, was the wiser course where one could serve the cause by remaining on the earth as long as possible to build up the church. Yet strangely, such admonition is never met with. "Every servant of God, from the greatest to the least, "says Tertullian, must be determined to die by God's will rather than live by his own."⁷⁷¹ The good pastor dies for his sheep. But what if the church thereby loses its leaders? That happens! says Tertullian, yet there is no other way: if they flee the church will also lose its leaders, for then they will be running with the wolves. This was to be the course of most of the leaders, following the prediction of the scriptures. To flee is to sell out, to have a price, it is "the negation and rebuff of martyrdom."⁷⁷² The Christian buys his salvation with a price, paid to the Antichrist, who seeks not his money but his blood. Caesar we can pay with money; but how pay God? By the blood, which the his son shed for us. But that is not ours to give. When we respond to the words of the sacrament, he says, we have accepted service in God's army, promising not to flee even in the face of death. We must fight the good fight, for our reward, which is glory in the eternal worlds. The field of contest is the prison. In view of the fact that there are men who have suffered death for earthly glory, all that we suffer here is mild considering our celestial glory and divine reward.

⁷⁶⁹ Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 3, in *PL* 2:127.

⁷⁷⁰ Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 4, in *PL* 2:128.

⁷⁷¹ Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 10-11, in *PL* 2:134.

⁷⁷² Tertullian, *De Fuga et Persecutione* 12, in *PL* 2:137.

This life is full of deadly hazards anyway, so what can we lose? Though of course no one wants to be killed, still everyone who has preached the word of God has had to suffer for the truth. From the very beginning this has been the rule, taught by the precept and example of the martyrs, all of whom paid the price. It was not only to the apostles that the Lord promised a fate like his own; there are other persecutions described (Matthew 10:16 ff) which the apostles did not suffer. And what does the Lord mean by “He who endures to the end?” Here the end is nothing in the world but persecution, betrayal, and death, that is the end. Death is then necessary, but it is not in vain, and not without reward. “Who endures to the end will be saved. Is not the end therefore heaven? Is it not *passio*, and *occisio*, and *prima confessio*? And where is the flesh, which is necessary for all these sufferings? Where is the body? Which is the only part of man that can be killed?”⁷⁷³ The rule applies not only to the apostles, but to all, and “endure to the end” means simply “suffer the end.” He cites Matthew 10:22, 25: if the Lord and Master suffered this abuse and death, much the more should his servants and disciples pay the same debt, lest they appear as his superiors, exempt from iniquity: we must *aequari passionibus Domini*.⁷⁷⁴ There were those who rationalized and said the end meant heaven: those who get to heaven will be saved, and thus took the sting out of the verse. To them Tertullian points out that the end is accompanied by dire things surely not found in heaven, and concludes: *in finem sustinendo passura est mortem*.⁷⁷⁵ “How can you really be a victor unless you are a martyr?” he asks. “For those only with the victory who fight the fight, and only fight the fight who shed their blood.”⁷⁷⁶ “It is the *manifesta doctrina* of the church that what the apostles suffered were literal sufferings. The fact that they were actually killed is written in their own blood....And whenever I read that writing, I too learn to suffer.”⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷³ Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace* 10, in *PL* 2:166.

⁷⁷⁴ Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace* 9, in *PL* 2:162.

⁷⁷⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace* 10, in *PL* 2:167.

⁷⁷⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace* 12, in *PL* 2:170.

⁷⁷⁷ *Quae tamen passos apostolos scimus, manifesta doctrina est; hanc intelligo solam Acta decurrens; nihil quaero; carceres illic, et vincula, et flagella, et saxa, et gladii, et impetus Judaeorum, et coetus nationum, et tribunorum elogia, et regum auditoria, et proconsulum tribunalia, et Caesaris nomen interpretem non habent. Quod Petrus caeditur, quod Stephanus opprimitur, quod Jacobus immolatur, quod Paulus*

The scorpions in the church are trying to wriggle out of facing these things. True, the Christians do not want to suffer, any more than other men do; they are like good soldiers, who hate the battle, yet must have the glory and the reward, and so are willing to face it. That is why we fight the fight, and we conquer only when we are slain. “The Christian is no man’s enemy, yet he must needs suffer...we pity human error, and look forward to what is to come, noting their signs daily with great intent.”⁷⁷⁸ But does that assume that he is awaiting the second coming? Actually he is speaking of expected persecutions, and has never mentioned the imminence of the second coming as the chief hope and comfort of the persecuted saints, as it certainly would have been had they believed in it. Tertullian’s silence on this head is as eloquent as his almost morbid preparation for persecutions ahead. The literalness of the Christians led in Tertullian’s day to the same taunt which Justin had to answer: “Fools,” wrote the governor of Asia to all the Christians, “if you are so eager to die, you have cliffs and hangman’s knots to hand.”⁷⁷⁹ Tertullian’s answer to the governor is that he had better stop, since the more he slays the more the cause prospers, and that by persecution he is actually building up what he thinks he is destroying. This was true, and were the enemy of the Christians the pagans only, and not the real enemy, those who go about bearing the name of Christ, the Christians would have had nothing to fear. But the Lord, the apostles, and the apostolic fathers all point at the one source of danger and one only—and it is not the pagans, but the “perverters” who ruin the Christian flock.

Clement of Alexandria must answer the same stock question: “If your God cares for you, why are you persecuted and slain?” His answer is that “these things happen according to prophecy; it was predicted...that we should be put to death for his name. He does not want us to suffer and he warned us it would come.”⁷⁸⁰ But why are you not relieved in your suffering, comes the question. And the answer: because death is our release, and the quicker the better. It is the

distrahitur, ipsorum sanguine scripta sunt....Haec ubicumque jam legero, pati disco; ... Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace* 15:174-175.

⁷⁷⁸ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 1, in *PL* 1:775-777.

⁷⁷⁹ Tertullian, *Liber ad Scapulam* 5, in *PL* 1:783.

⁷⁸⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 4.11, in *PG* 8:1288.

means of a rapid change of abode, and a most welcome one. So there is a relief after all, promised to the suffering saints: their sufferings will have an end and that end is the one defined by Tertullian so plainly—the release of death. “To confess Christ,” says Clement, “before men, means to do it in the courts, and not deny him while being tortured to death. . . . For if the ‘Spirit of the Father’ testifies in us, how can we be such hypocrites as to testify [μαρτυρεῖν] by our voices only?”⁷⁸¹ The final test, death, is a necessary part of the picture, without which the testimony is not complete. Plato’s argument against martyrdom have their place: we must stay alive to preach the gospel, but even the pagans know that we must pass through death to our real reward: the Gymnosophists of India defied Alexander the Great to do his worst to their bodies, since he could not touch their souls. Then he compares I Corinthians 4:9, 11-13 with Plato’s Republic, Book 2: “The righteous man is fortunate even when he is being tortured on the rack and his eyes are being torn out.”⁷⁸²

To reach the blessings of martyrdom, one must travel first a hard winter road, says Origen.⁷⁸³ He then lists Christ’s grim promises of persecution to the apostles, and concludes therefore that persecutions have not come without due warning. The Lord chides those who fear those who have only power to kill the body, but not those who dread the powers that can kill the spirit and the body (this un-Origenian reflection shows that Origen is here keeping to the old tradition). “We have been taught to hate our life for the sake of eternal life. . . . Let us remember each and every one of us who is running the risk of dying the common death, that we are saved from that when we are baptized in blood to share the reward of those who are in heaven having fought the good fight.”⁷⁸⁴

So thoroughly ingrained in the Christian teaching was the doctrine of inevitable martyrdom of all true saints, that those of Cyprian’s day felt themselves defrauded of their basic

⁷⁸¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 4.9, in PG 8:1284.

⁷⁸² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 4.7, in PG 8:1264. See also Plato, *Republic* 2.361e-362a.

⁷⁸³ Origen, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 31, in PG 11:601.

⁷⁸⁴ *ibid.*

Christian rights by being denied the privilege. In the early church, they knew no one had been denied the honor of martyrdom. Cyprian gives them a rationalized consolation that was not very satisfying, and the Pseudo-Cyprian must insist that, in the end, there is really only one foolproof test of salvation, and that is to have given one's life. "The great persecutions are ahead," Cyprian warns his people,

The Lord wants us to rejoice in this, because, when there are persecutions, then too are there crowns of glory...then the heavens open to the martyrs....If we could avoid death, we would rightly fear and shun it: but since mortals must die, let us welcome this special kind of death, and join this exit with the reward of immortality; neither let us fear to be slain who are assured that when we are killed we are crowned.⁷⁸⁵

From the beginning of the world it has been the same story, he says: at the outset it was Abel the just who was slain, and after him the other righteous men, the prophets, and apostles. "Of whom all the Lord himself is an example, teaching that no one should come to his kingdom, except those who followed the way he led..."⁷⁸⁶ There can be no doubt here what is ahead for the righteous, nor their motive and reward in suffering it. Christ has not put an end to the dismal system: those who come after him expect the same rebuff as those who came before, and could follow him not through the church, but through death. In view of persecutions ahead, Cyprian announces that he is going to give words of comfort to the saints; he does not remind them as does Aeneas his suffering Trojans, that they are founding a great work and generations yet unborn will call them blessed, etc., on the contrary, his comfort is that this is the way things must be on this earth; the devil has been waging his war successfully for 6,000 years. He is an expert. Yet salvation comes "by the persecution itself."⁷⁸⁷ And here we have the explanation for the "mysterious" statement in the *Didache* on the same subject. It is a comfort to think that since Abel and the saints have all had to suffer we are not alone, but the host of the martyrs is actually innumerable. So when the day comes for you to stand as a spectacle to be killed, rejoice! Since

⁷⁸⁵ Cyprian, *Epistula ad Thibaritanos, de Exhortatione Martyrii* 56.1 and 3, in *PL* 4:360-362.

⁷⁸⁶ Cyprian, *Epistula ad Sergium et Rogatianum et Caeteros Confessores in Carcere Constitutos* 81.2, in *PL* 4:439.

⁷⁸⁷ Cyprian, *Epistula ad Fortunatum de Exhortatione Martyrii (Capitula Libri Sequentis 11)*, in *PL* 4:681.

we must die to this world anyway. “Dying to this world” is not a figurative expression, as Cyprian explains: “Do not fear to shed your blood; it is necessary to follow the example of Christ.”⁷⁸⁸ For it is absolutely essential for a martyr to realize that a martyr must not fear to lay down his life or shed his blood. That is part of being a witness. And all the apostles and true saints were witnesses. The Pseudo-Cyprian: “While every righteous witness by the example of his life glorifies God, nothing is a more illustrious testimony before men than that of the blood, that is, a contempt of life for God's sake and the suffering of death courageously.”⁷⁸⁹ It is the Pseudo-Cyprian who remarks: “Who does not know, brothers, what a rich abundance the harvest of the church hath brought forth, being watered by the blood of apostles and martyrs?”⁷⁹⁰ “The sufferings of Christ are consummated in the deaths of the martyrs, and so the blood of the pastors confirms the promises of Christ. For there is no more certain instrument than that sealed by the blood of so many martyrs.”⁷⁹¹ A triple testimony is required of us, according to this writer: 1) baptism, 2) confirmation, and 3) *vitam dare* [to give one’s life], if necessary.⁷⁹² The “if necessary” is a qualifying clause that entirely vitiates the force of a sacrament to be put on a par with baptism and confirmation. In the early days of the church it was in full force. Later ages, lacking it, feel cheated. Nay the best testament, says Pseudo-Cyprian, is to give your life. “For alms, fasts, prayers, and other pious exercises can be simulated by hypocrites; but no one embraces death with alacrity unless he is absolutely persuaded that nothing evil can befall those who persist in the love of God.”⁷⁹³ Of all witnesses, this is therefore the only sure one; the only one that can not be simulated. In the time of the Pseudo-Cyprian, people were asking, “How is it possible to be a martyr without effusion of blood?...Why would God defraud of the glory of

⁷⁸⁸ Cyprian, *Liber de Laude Martyrii* 29, in *PL* 4:833-834.

⁷⁸⁹ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 4, in *PL* 4:963.

⁷⁹⁰ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 9, in *PL* 4:967.

⁷⁹¹ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 10, in *PL* 4:967.

⁷⁹² Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 12, in *PL* 4:968.

⁷⁹³ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 12, in *PL* 4:968.

martyrdom one who has not the means of suffering real martyrdom?”⁷⁹⁴ To this the answer that “to live a good life is now to be a martyr, while to live badly is to be a betrayer” was not too satisfying, for this was just as true in early Christian times, and their martyrdoms were plainly something over and above merely living a good life. The literal death and literal survival idea is well illustrated in the *Acts of Paul*, in which the saint, immediately after being beheaded, appears to the solute soldiers that had mocked him and says: “See! Paul, the soldier of God did not die, but I live.”⁷⁹⁵ One of the principle claims of the Montanists that the prophetic power of God was still with them was that they had many martyrs. To which the opposition replied: “Other heretic groups have even more martyrs, but that does not prove their doctrines. The Marcionites claim more martyrs than the Christians, yet they do not acknowledge Christ in truth, as we do.”⁷⁹⁶ The validity of the argument is recognized, however, when the opposition makes the same claim: the heretics are wrong, we have the most martyrs.

Later Eusebius tries to give comfort by opening a new field for martyrdom: it is just as possible to be a martyr within the church as it is to be a victim of the pagans! What is greater than to suffer persecution and loss to keep the church from splitting within? Thereby one suffers for the whole church, while the ancient martyrs suffered only for themselves. Thus the main church taunted the Montanists: Who of you has ever been stoned to death or crucified by Jews? You do not have real martyrs, therefore you cannot be the true church! None of your women has been killed by Jews.⁷⁹⁷ Thus one group can get the edge over the other by specifying that martyrdom should be by Jews: but both are striving for the same objective—each to prove that it has the most martyrs. Plainly it was absolutely fundamental association in the Christian tradition between the true believers who would be martyred, and the false one, who would not. The Montanists believed that, “the sure proof of the power of their prophetic spirit was to be found in the fact that

⁷⁹⁴ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 35, in *PL* 4:982.

⁷⁹⁵ Acts of Paul 10.6, See M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 296.

⁷⁹⁶ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.16, in *PG* 20:472.

⁷⁹⁷ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.16, in *PG* 20:469.

they had so many martyrs,” according to Eusebius.⁷⁹⁸ The Marcionites, on the other hand, have a host of martyrs, whom they call “martyrs of Christ,” but they do not accept Christ's truth (according to us). Thus Zeno addresses the neophytes: “A man is slaughtered, that he may live,” a theme which he develops at length in the bloody imagery of the games, and then after much sadistic gloating, spiritualized: “*O damnatio necessaria! Homo jugulatur, ut vivat.*”⁷⁹⁹

In the fourth century, Hilary reports people as saying, “Would that I lived in the days of Nero or Decius!” of the prophets or apostles!⁸⁰⁰ But now we have a great fight, he declares, a fight against treachery within the church. It was in that fight that Lucifer Calaritanus dared the emperor to martyr him, and exploded with rage and venom when he failed to get his wish. We do not fear your power, he shouts at the emperor, “For we know that God is mighty and will deliver us from your hands as we mount up to the celestial kingdom above, which has been promised us.”⁸⁰¹ This is the jargon of martyrdom, and its old Christian ring led Athanasius to hail Lucifer as the most inspired voice of the age. But it was hollow rhetoric for the emperor refused to persecute. “You lead us to glory through flames, swords, chains, iron bonds,” cries the accusing Lucifer, yet he does not supply one specific instance.⁸⁰² The role of true Christians without the element of martyrdom was unthinkable, and to this day in lands where none but a Roman Catholic may move with comfort, the clergy still carefully cultivate the illusion that their people are a persecuted minority, a small, huddled band of righteous souls—martyrs to the end. Lactantius criticized the blindness and foolishness of the pagans who laughed at the Christians who let themselves be killed even though they were the stronger party and could easily have avoided such persecution. “What so many people do cannot be foolishness,” he declares in the

⁷⁹⁸ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.16, in *PG* 20:472.

⁷⁹⁹ Zeno, *Tractatus* 2.40, in *PL* 11:488.

⁸⁰⁰ Hilary, *Contra Constantium* 4, in *PL* 10:580-581.

⁸⁰¹ Lucifer Calaritanus, *Pro Sancto Athanasio* 1, in *PL* 13:824.

⁸⁰² Lucifer Calaritanus, *Moriendum Esse Pro Dei Filio*, in *PL* 13:1016.

true spirit of the fourth century, “can so many people in all parts of the world be wrong?”⁸⁰³ Persecution is popular with these people, he said, “who allow it even though they need not...so solid is our foundation, that this religion is not only not destroyed by injuries and vexations, but actually grows constantly bigger and firmer.”⁸⁰⁴ Lactantius here fails to see that he is stating a general principle that applies not only to the true church, but to any persecuted body, and he turns into a proof of divinity what was really a dire necessity for the church—to be persecuted. How characteristically shallow his argument is appears when he adds that “whenever peace is guaranteed to the church, those who had formerly deserted return to her, and new people join up,” when they are sure of not being persecuted!⁸⁰⁵ Such was the fourth century’s determination to enjoy the credit, without the danger of martyrdom. “Behold,” cries the ecstatic Lactantius, “the feeble sex and delicate age of those who submit their whole bodies to lacerations and burnings, not by any necessity, since they could avoid it easily, if they would, but voluntarily, because their confidence is in God.”⁸⁰⁶ A psychologist may have something to say regarding these masochistic practices, which have continued through the Christian centuries, but if they are totally different in spirit and nature from the genuine martyrdoms of the early church, they are none the less an attempt to preserve the institution of martyrdom in the church as an indispensable proof of its genuineness. When Valens was persecuting another Christian faction than his own in 363, a woman and her little son might be seen hastening through the streets in great anxiety lest the massacre in the Church of St. Thomas be over and they left out. Just as a soldier is seen at his best in war, so with us, writes Chrysostom: “the Christian is seen at his best when he is being

⁸⁰³ *Cum autem noster numerus semper de deorum cultoribus augeatur, nunquam vero, ne in ipsa quidem persecutione minuat* (quoniam peccare homines, et inquinari sacrificio possunt, averti autem non possunt a Deo; valet enim vi sua veritas); quis est tandem tam excors tamque caecus, qui non videat in utraque parte sapientia?...cum possint ex eo ipso pervidere non esse stultitiam, in quam tanta hominum millia per orbem totum una et pari mente consentiant. Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:589-590.

⁸⁰⁴ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:590-591.

⁸⁰⁵ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:592.

⁸⁰⁶ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:593.

attacked.”⁸⁰⁷ Ambrose says the Arians try to discredit the opposition by claiming that new-found martyr’s bones are not the bones of martyrs at all: to which his irrelevant rebuttal is—let them deny the miracles of the scripture if they can!⁸⁰⁸ All people must be called upon to heed the gospel, says Basil, “and to bear witness [*marturein*] of the truth, even though resisted and persecuted in their effort even to the death.”⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁷ John Chrysostom

⁸⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Epistola* 22, in *PL* 16:1062-1069.

⁸⁰⁹ St. Basil

MOTIVE OF PERSONAL REWARD 119-137 (Section 6)

Since the offering of one's life is the most selfless of acts, it is strange that apparently selfish objective seem always to motivate the early Christians. This is all the more striking because the scripture told them plainly that there was no greater love than that which led a man to give up his life for his friend. Yet the Christian martyrs in dying never claim this merit, and if asked for whom they were giving their lives would invariably have answered, for their own personal salvation. To the Pseudo-Cyprian's question, "Who does not know what a rich abundance the harvest of the church has brought, watered by the blood of apostles and the other martyrs?"⁸¹⁰ a true answer would be: "The apostles and other martyrs themselves." For they preserve a thundering silence on this most obvious and inviting theme. In what is often described as a "feverish" preoccupation with the question of the future that characterizes the earliest Christian writings, it is most remarkable that while individuals are constantly being reassured that all will be well with them, no one ever comes forth with the same comforting news regarding the church. This is the more remarkable since in retrospect this assurance is the one thing which church historians seek most eagerly, and which they are determined to find no matter to what extent of invention and interpretation they must go to get it. They constantly solace themselves with the prediction of sure success and reassurances of earthly security that strangely never occur to the ancients. And this is not because the ancient "thought forms" were of another cast. Every half-educated citizen of the empire had before him the example of Socrates: to this the earliest Christians often appealed. But far better known and far more frequently displayed in art and drama and far more read in the schools from the very first years was the story of another good and pious man, Aeneas, who was constantly reassuring his followers that their sufferings were not in vain because generations unborn would call them blessed, and they were founding a society whose power would fill the earth and whose fame would reach to the stars. This noble comfort to those in straits and afflictions was known to every schoolboy. It is the natural comfort to which

⁸¹⁰ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duplici Martyrio* 9, in *PL* 4:967.

the fathers turn in later trials and persecutions. Why did it never occur to the early Christians, the most sorely persecuted of all?

The fact that no church writer before the middle of the third century predicts a glorious future for the church is very significant in view of the fact that 1) the future of the church was the main subject of discussion and concern to these people—they could not possibly have avoided expressing any legitimate optimism on the subject if there was any; 2) that the persecuted members were looking for every ray of light and hope they could find; 3) that the “glorious future” is a natural theme and heavily exploited by the later writers down to the present day, with Latourette’s preposterous “Light that could not fail;”⁸¹¹ 4) that the *durate* motif of Virgil was a commonplace that would most readily spring to the mind of anyone in a time of hardship.

At the very least one would expect a magnanimous concern for others in the utterances of those about to give their lives for a cause. But that is just the point: they never mention the cause. They are encouraged to think always and only of what personal gain will be theirs by virtue of the sacrifice. The first person is always on their lips. They seem positively selfish in their complete engrossment in their personal reward, their personal glory, and personal, individual salvation. This spirit is reflected all throughout the New Testament, where everyone is advised to seek his own salvation, even to the point of hating father, mother and children. When one considers that the world of the times was a world steeped in factionalism, and that from the third century on the motive and inspiration of every zealous Christian is a fierce partisan spirit, the complete lack of any expression of concern or enthusiasm for the society of the faithful is most strange.

The primitive Christian attitude is expressed in the *Acta Pauli*. When a way to escape is offered the apostles by Longus and Cestus, he tells them: “I am not one to desert the flag of Christ....If I knew that I were to remain dead, then I would do it [not the heroic spirit!], but since I love God and myself, I go to the Lord that I might come again with him in the glory of his

⁸¹¹ Latourette

Father.”⁸¹² Egotistical and personal as this sounds, it is no more so than numerous Pauline utterances in the New Testament. Those who think of Paul as first and last the founder and defender of an institution, ignore his eager concern for his personal future and his pessimistic views of the institution as headed for certain disaster. When Andrew prays that his friends may not free him from the cross, every attempt to save him was miraculously baffled. Now since it mattereth not, soon or late, when one attains to heaven, provided only that the election is sure, should not the apostle rather pray to be saved for the church, putting his private salvation in second place? It is hard to avoid the impression that he would have done so had there been any point at all in living for the church. But there was none. What Andrew teaches us in legend, Ignatius does in history: the thought of living on to fight the fight and build up the work occurs to no one. Their apparently callous indifference, cannot moreover, spring from any sublime confidence in such certain success ahead that it was not thought necessary for the apostles and apostolic fathers to stay around and help. They all knew the church needed them, and desperately, they all warn against worse times ahead and insist that over-confidence is utterly foolish, groundless, and pernicious. Immediately before his martyrdom in India, St. Thomas prays: “let not the Enemy root up the precious plants which Thou hast sown in my heart...”⁸¹³ The modern reader anticipates naturally that the precious plants are converts or at least the seeds of the gospel sown among the heathen, but again the shock and rebuff—the Saint at the end of his mission has nothing of the sort in mind. He continues: “I have forsaken the world and followed thee; O help me...the service on which Thou didst send me I have brought to a successful ending,”⁸¹⁴ in what does that success consist? As with Paul, not in converts won and churches founded, but solely in the assurance of the apostle’s own personal salvation: “the earth hath sent up shoots, and the time of harvest hath arrived, and I shall receive my reward, and I shall bring to an end in rest the

⁸¹² Acts of Paul 10.4

⁸¹³ St. Thomas’ Martyrdom in India, in *Contendings of the Apostles*, 292.

⁸¹⁴ St. Thomas’ Martyrdom in India, 292.

weariness which hath come upon me,” etc.⁸¹⁵ Not a word about the church: “He chose unto Himself [us] Apostles, and made us worthy to preach in His Name in all the world. Behold, I have finished the strife and I have brought [to an end] my service....Behold, he desireth to make me to rest from the sufferings of this world, and to give unto me my reward which is laid up with him...”⁸¹⁶ While the Lord was in the world, according to the *Evangelium of the Twelve Apostles*, “he ate with them [the apostles] on the table of this earth reminding them of the table of his kingdom, for he counted as naught the things of this world.”⁸¹⁷ “Take no joy in the kingdom of this world, O my brother apostles! Is it not only for a time? Have I established this with you...to eat with you on the table of this world? My kingdom remains eternally in heaven and on the earth.”⁸¹⁸ That the last phrase is a neat twist to deprive the passage of its sting, which appears in much earlier texts, such as the *Conversations of the Lord with the Twelve Apostles*. When the Lord appears to the apostles after the resurrection, he tells them, “arise, and I shall disclose to you what is in the heavens and above the heavens. For this reason did my Father send me, that I might conduct you on high, with those who believe on me...”⁸¹⁹ The Lord returns from the short absence following the crucifixion to conduct the apostles and the saints to a heavenly kingdom above. Certainly it cannot be denied that that is what they expected. The prayer in the *Didache* is not for the spreading abroad of the church in the world, but the gathering of the church out of the world. The field in which wheat and tares continue to grow together is not the church, which is not there, it is specifically said: “the field is the world.” (Matthew 13:38). Speaking of a like formula in Serapio XIII, 13; *Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 25, 3, and the Der-Balish text, E. Peterson says, “it is not impossible that the formula asking for the uniting of the saints out of the world in the kingdom of Christ [usually followed by a doxology] represents in the *Didache* the

⁸¹⁵ St. Thomas’ Martyrdom in India, 292.

⁸¹⁶ St. Thomas’ Martyrdom in India, 288.

⁸¹⁷ *Evangelium (Gospel) of the Twelve Apostles*

⁸¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁸¹⁹ *Conversations of the Lord with the Twelve Apostles* or *Evang. XII Ap.?*

general prayer of the church.”⁸²⁰ It seems, he notes, strongly millennialist, and makes a strong distinction between the church and the kingdom of God, which is removed from all evil. “Remember thy church O Lord,” says the *Didache* prayer, “to snatch it up away from all evil and to perfect it in thy love, and bring it together from the four winds, sanctified, into thy kingdom, which thou has prepared for it.”⁸²¹ The church is not established and spread abroad, it is gathered together; it is not the triumphant kingdom, it is snatched out of the world and taken up to where that kingdom is, above the sufferings of this world. This is exactly the picture that meets us in the *Pastor of Hermas*, and it looks to no future for a world-church. “We should suffer all things as Christ did,” says the *Didache*, “For as he suffered for us, we must suffer for...” For whom? Let us ask the reader. The answer is a surprise, though by now it should not be: “...we must suffer for ourselves.”⁸²² Then come a rare statement of concern for others: “By confessing the good confession, we shall not only save ourselves, but strengthen those new in the faith, and give faith to the catechumens; while if we surrender we rob not only ourselves of eternal glory, but become the cause of others falling away as well.”⁸²³ This shows that early Christians were not insensitive to the good of others, and makes silence regarding the church with its endless future and unborn generations all the more significant. Why is interest and concern never expressed for “the saving institution” of the church. Why should we be concerned to build up the catechumens? The *Apostolic Constitutions* asks, “That they may live in God, members of the communion of the death of Christ, in hopes of the glorious community...and be entered in the book of life.”⁸²⁴ The kingdom of heaven is still on the other side, and the catechumens are to be joined to those who look forward to getting there. “What are we working for?” asks *I Clement*: “Life in immortality, glorification in holiness, truth in frankness, faith in conviction, self-control in holiness. And what rewards for those who endure? God alone knows their number and quality [they belong to

⁸²⁰ E. Peterson; also Serapio XIII, 13; Ap. const. VII, 25, ; Der-Balish text

⁸²¹ *Didache* 10.5.

⁸²² ?

⁸²³ ?

⁸²⁴ *Apostolic Constitutions*

eternity]. Let us work to be found among those who hang on to the end and so receive this reward.”⁸²⁵ The whole motive of all the work and suffering undergone by the saints of this time Clement sums up in one word: “resurrection.” Never for a moment does the world enter into the program. Those who suffer as they should without resisting will be gathered to the true church, the congregation of the elect on the other side. “Know brethren,” says *2 Clement*, “that the sojourn in this world of this flesh is a little one and of short duration,...but great is the dwelling in the kingdom of the future and of eternal life.”⁸²⁶ *1 Clement* never mentions any other objective for his “way” and his plan of action than to reach heaven above. For him the Christian is fighting, not building; in the fight he shall most certainly lose his life and so and only so earn his reward, which awaits him not in the tiniest degree in this world, but is laid up for him in the other. “Let us fight,” says *2 Clement* “knowing that though many enter the deadly conflict, only those will be crowned who fight well. Let us fight that we may all be crowned,”⁸²⁷ The poor fighter will be disqualified, but there shall be many such, and they it will be who survive. “It often happens,” says Peter in the *Clementine Recognitions*, “that a defender of the truth is defeated,”⁸²⁸ the fact that he is in the right in no wise guarantees his victory in the contest with Simon Magus. This is not our show, he insists when he tells his followers to bear patiently even with the evil Simon, since “You must bear with patience those whom God suffers, permitting them to function until the predestined day of judgment.”⁸²⁹ Recognition is the test of the gospel; Christ of necessity is only recognized by a few.

In the introduction to his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius seems to give that church every assurance of glory, but it is the usual glory beyond: it is “reserved to glory through suffering”—

⁸²⁵ Τί οὖν ποιήσωμεν, ἀδελφοί; *1 Clement* 33.1, in *PG* 1:273-274; *1 Clement* 35.2-4, in *PG* 1:277-278.

⁸²⁶ *2 Clement* 5.5, in *PG* 1:335-336.

⁸²⁷ ἀγωνισώμεθα εἰδότες, ...ὅτι τοὺς φθαρτοὺς ἀγῶνας καταπλέουσιν πολλοὶ, ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντες στεφανοῦνται, εἰ μὴ οἱ πολλὰ κοπιάσαντες, καὶ καλῶς ἀγωνισάμενοι. ἡμεῖς οὖν ἀγωνισώμεθα, ἵνα πάντες στεφανωθῶμεν. *2 Clement* 7.1-2, in *PG* 1:337-338.

⁸²⁸ *Clementine Recognitions* 2.5, in *PG* 1:1250.

⁸²⁹ *Patienter, fratres, malos ferre debetis, scientes quia Deus cum possit eos excidere, patitur tamen durare usque ad praestitutam diem, in qua de omnibus iudicium fiet; ... Clementine Recognitions* 3.49, in *PG* 1:1303.

the familiar pattern.⁸³⁰ He describes them in the manner of the *Pastor* as “stones in the temple of the Father, prepared for the edifice of God the Father.”⁸³¹ But as in the *Hermas*, this is no church here below, for these stones are “borne aloft into the heights through the instrumentality of Jesus Christ.” What we have here is “a road, which leads up to God.” Like the *Agrapha* which calls this world a bridge: “pass over it and do not delay on it”—it is simply a way through, a road through a dangerous and hostile country.⁸³² That the Church of Ephesus itself is no kingdom of heaven is clear from Ignatius’ picture of a passionate and bitter description: full of defection, apostasy and false preaching. That is the church which remains behind. As for Ignatius himself, “May I be found in the footsteps of the blessed Paul,” and go straight to God.⁸³³ If a glorious future is just opening for the church, this eagerness to be out of the world is inexplicable. “Don’t let the prince of this world take you captive,” he warns the Ephesians, “dragging you away from the life which lies beyond.”⁸³⁴ Ignatius in his complimentary introduction describes the Smyrnaeans as absolute *perfectos in fide immota...et stabilitos in charitate*.⁸³⁵ That certainly smacks of permanence—but not for the church. Those who qualify for these compliments are about to leave the world, but let that not worry them, for the Lord is near. Here he gives an interesting interpretation of “the Lord is near.” It does not refer to his last coming in glory to judge the world at all, but to his coming to receive the martyred saints into his kingdom. “But when the executioners knives near, then God is near, when the beasts are about us, God is about.”⁸³⁶ Certainly the steadfastness of the Smyrnaeans does not refer to their permanence on this earth! “Whilst thou art here,” he tells Polycarp, “be a conqueror; for here is the course, and there are the crowns.”⁸³⁷ One can only conquer where the battle is fought; but the fruits of victory are not to be enjoyed where the

⁸³⁰ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* Introduction, in *PG* 5:643-644.

⁸³¹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 9, in *PG* 5:651-652.

⁸³² *Logia et Agrapha* 46, in *PO* 13:376-377. See also 75, in *PO* 13:404.

⁸³³ Παύλου συμύσται, τοῦ ἡγιασμένου, τοῦ μεμαρτυρημένου, ἀξιομακαρίστου, οὗ γένοιτό μοι ὑπὸ τὰ ἔχνη εὐρεθῆναι, ὅταν θεοῦ ἐπιτύχω..., Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 12, in *PG* 5:655-656.

⁸³⁴ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Ephesios* 17, in *PG* 5:657-658.

⁸³⁵ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos* 1 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:839-840.

⁸³⁶ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos* 4, in *PG* 5:709-710.

⁸³⁷ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 3 (Long Recension), in *PG* 5:863-864.

victory is won, but far from the bloody field. If the church was to be the fruits of their victory, watered by the martyrs' blood, this would of course not be the case. The Church of the Philadelphians is "an eternal and lasting delight—especially when it is in unity with its bishop."⁸³⁸ The qualifying phrase shows the rhetorical nature of the compliment which is not absolute: neither is the church itself everlasting in this world—it is certainly not going to enjoy its glory here, and the passage cannot be taken as indicating its continued success. "The most godly prophets lived like Jesus Christ," he tells the Magnesians, "for which reason they were duly persecuted.... Therefore let us endure, that we too may be found disciples of Jesus Christ...whose disciples the prophets also were....And thus, when they had endured in righteousness, he came and raised them from the dead."⁸³⁹ Again a coming of Christ to bring life, and again the perfect identification of "enduring" with "dying" for the truth. The famous letter to the Romans is both a morbid and egotistical document, if Ignatius actually had a mission to build up the church. If he really expected that "the end of all things is at hand," meaning the end of the dispensation and not of the world, his attitude makes perfectly good sense: "There is no fire in me that loves anything....I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of life....I no longer wish to live after the manner of men."⁸⁴⁰ Escape is the whole theme, not responsibility. Ignatius wants to die, taking all his knowledge with him—knowledge that would be immensely useful to the future of the church, springing as it did from personal association with apostolic men; but he will not impart it for the church cannot receive it, and he will not stay. If there was matchless merit in shedding one's blood, he could do that any time, but he will not wait another minute—not even for the sake of the church. Last of all comes Ignatius' significant letter to his colleague Polycarp. It is strange and desperate talk. He tells Polycarp that he is like a pilot steering a ship through a terrible storm—will it get through? The safe harbor is on the other side, not here in the smiles of an emperor. "Wrestle like God's athlete," he says, "the stakes of the combat are high: immortality

⁸³⁸ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadelphenses* Introduction, in *PG* 5:697-698.

⁸³⁹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 8-9, in *PG* 5:669-670.

⁸⁴⁰ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Romanos* 7-8, in *PG* 5:693-694.

and eternal life.”⁸⁴¹ He should have said, the future of the church. “Do not be afraid of the teachers of false doctrine. Stand firm like a rock beaten by the waves.”⁸⁴² The next sentence dashes any hopes that the false teachers are to be beaten here: “It is the part of a great athlete to be slain and to conquer.” The message is not: be firm and you will beat them! But “be firm and you will fall, and the victory will be yours in heaven.”

Polycarp writes “to the church which is sojourning [*peregrinatur*—a very strong term to express temporary stay] in Philippi.”⁸⁴³ Is this constant addressing by the churches of each other as strangers and pilgrims on the earth a mere rhetorical conceit? The times were far too serious for such theatrical frivolity: They said “here temporarily” because they meant it. A much later age speaks of churches remaining here “firm and steadfast until the end of the world.” He congratulates the saints on their chains which are their crown, “and because the root of your faith, announced since ancient times, remains until now, and bears fruit to the Lord, who [also] endured for our sins until he faced death...in whom we believe and into whose joy and glory many desire to enter...”⁸⁴⁴ The enduring root is compared with the Lord who also endures until death, i.e., it is possible to be enduring and yet to die out of the world—in fact the two are inseparable. The fruit of this enduring root is not what is here but what passes to the Lord, entering into his joy and glory. Then and only then does Ignatius feel he can become the Lord’s fruit. Our whole hope is this, Polycarp continues, that “He who raised him from the dead shall also raise us, if we do his works.”⁸⁴⁵ But to realize this goal we must die first; that is necessary to the goal: “If we serve God in the present time...he has promised to raise us from the dead....So it is a fine thing to be cut off from the desire of this world.”⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴¹ νῆφε ὡς Θεοῦ ἀθλητῆς· τὸ θέμα ἀφθαρσία καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος, Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 2, in *PG* 5:721-722.

⁸⁴² Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 3, in *PG* 5:721-722.

⁸⁴³ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* Introduction, in *PG* 5:1005-1006.

⁸⁴⁴ ...εἰς ὃν οὐκ ἰδόντες πιστεύετε, πιστεύοντες δὲ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε χαρᾷ ἀνεκκλήτῳ καὶ δεδοξασμένῳ· εἰς ἧν πολλοὶ ἐπιθυμοῦσιν εἰσελεῖν..., Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 1, in *PG* 5:1005-1006.

⁸⁴⁵ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 2, in *PG* 5:1007-1008.

⁸⁴⁶ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 2, in *PG* 5:1009-1010.

The desires of this world do not have to be personal to be vicious. The most dangerous form of such lust is that which takes a collective form, and uses “we” with all the force and passion of “I”; it is dangerous because then it invariably goes under the banner of selfless idealism: the cause—the party must control everything; or church alone must rule. The German who covets all the map for Germany is as worldly, if not as sordid, a person as one who covets a whole township for himself. The man who wants his country for party to conquer the world is as greedy and dangerous as one who tries to conquer it for himself.

Polycarp calls upon the whole church to endure with the same endurance that Ignatius, Zosimus and Rufus displayed—all martyrs, the endurance which has been shown “by others of your number, and by Paul himself and by the other apostles, being persuaded that all of these did not run in vain...”⁸⁴⁷ To this assurance that the blood of the martyrs was not shed in vain we have the explanation why it was not lost, and that explanation makes no reference to their having watered the church with their blood, which (to follow later church fathers) would have been shed in vain had the church not been irrigated by it, but states that they did not run in vain because “they are in the place they yearned for, by the side of the Lord, where they always desired to be. For they did not love the present *aeon*, but the one who died for us....Stand firm therefore in these things and follow the example of the Lord.”⁸⁴⁸ The saints heeded the advice and accordingly lost their lives. In closing Polycarp prays not that the work of the church may roll forward and fill the whole earth, etc., but that the people may be kept eligible for the higher kingdom up until the moment of departure. “When the mortal part has perished and put on immortality, then shall it behold God in reality. For God will raise the flesh immortal with the soul, and then having become immortal shall a man behold the imperishable man, if you now believe in him.”⁸⁴⁹ Thus Theophilus. And Barnabas: “All who die hoping for the Messiah will be resurrected....Those who

⁸⁴⁷ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 9, in *PG* 5:1013-1014.

⁸⁴⁸ Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 9-10, in *PG* 5:1013-1014.

⁸⁴⁹ ὅταν ἀπόθῃ τὸ θνητὸν καὶ ἐνδύσῃ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν, τότε ὄψει κατ’ ἀξίαν τὸν Θεόν. ἀνεγείρει γάρ σου τὴν σάρκα ἀθάνατον σὺν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁ Θεός· καὶ τότε ὄψει γενόμενος ἀθάνατος τὸν ἀθάνατον, ἐὰν νῦν πιστεύσῃς αὐτῷ· Theophilus of Antioch, *Apologia Ad Autolyicum* 1.7, in *PG* 6:1035.

fear the Lord will be resurrected to eternal life.”⁸⁵⁰ What the saints look forward to is not a dramatic second coming in which they shall participate, but the resurrection. They are not the naïve Adventists that conventional church histories make them out to be.

In the opening lines of the *Hermas* we learn that the Christian is hopelessly and irreconcilably at odds with the world; by nature the two cannot get along together. Whenever they meet there is a mortal clash, and who wins? This is the devil’s ground until his time is completed. Meanwhile there is only one course open to the citizen of God’s kingdom: and that is to make an exit—a very real exit—from this world: “Either keep the laws of the kingdom in which you are living, or get out.” There is no other choice. The reward of the righteous of all generations according to the Pastor, is not that they build up the church but that they “dwell with the Son of God,” and are “with the angels.”⁸⁵¹ As for the church on this earth, the building on it is about to cease. One more brief chance for repentance is to be given, and then no more will it be possible to repent, for the tower shall then be completed. But that is not the end of the world, for, for those outside the church, it is still possible to go on repenting. The *Hermas* concludes with the same witness as that given by the Lord and the apostles upon completing their missions: henceforth, he says, “whosoever do not keep his commandments...are delivering themselves to death, and each one of them is guilty of his own blood.”⁸⁵² Christianity “does not make poets, does not prepare philosophers, nor skillful orators [this is exactly what Augustine’s Christianity does],” says Justin, “but it makes mortals immortal, perishable people gods, and leads away from the earth [not just *ek kosmou* (from the earth), but *ek ges* (from the land itself)] to mountains above Olympus.”⁸⁵³ This world is a testing ground, he says, and those who pass the test “shall rule with him hereafter,”⁸⁵⁴ this and this only is the kingdom the Christian looks forward to. All adjustments and inequalities are to be taken care of at a future time and place, not here. The

⁸⁵⁰ *Epistle of Barnabas*

⁸⁵¹ Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.27.2-3.

⁸⁵² Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 10.2.4.

⁸⁵³ Justin Martyr, *Oratio ad Graecos* 5, in *PG* 6:237. (See Section 4 fn 40).

⁸⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, [same as 44?](#)

prophecy requires every Christian to be cast out of the world, Justin explains to Trypho, “and by that we do not merely mean that each must give up his worldly wealth, but rather be utterly removed from this world, which will not suffer any Christian to remain alive....Having committed no other evil than bearing our testimony, we are wiped off the earth. As Isaiah says, ‘Behold the righteous is utterly destroyed and none perceives it.’”⁸⁵⁵ The passage is significant as illustrating the literalness and the thoroughness of the destruction of the righteous which Justin expected in his own generation. “We are the ancient people that God promised to Abraham” who was blessed because he “went out of the land in which he lived, and he calls us all, and we have already gone out from the *politeia* in which we were living which is the wicked world. And with Abraham we are seeking the promised land, where we will receive our eternal lot.”⁸⁵⁶

Irenaeus lays down the principle: “All who have ever been inspired by the Holy Ghost—or who ever will—have to suffer persecution, and shall be stoned and shall be put to death.”⁸⁵⁷ To this fate no resistance must be offered, for “the people who have embraced Christianity have thereby forgotten how to fight.”⁸⁵⁸ Why does God allow such brutal treatment of the elect? Because, says Irenaeus, “God wants them to be saved and is preparing them for eternal submission to him. And it is for that reason that he shall at the end again take the church up to himself away from here” (Matthew 24:21).⁸⁵⁹ But what does he mean by “at the end?” Irenaeus hastens to explain: “The last contest is that which the righteous are waging here and now, in

⁸⁵⁵ τὴν γὰρ « ἐκτεθλιμμένη, » τουτέστιν, ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου ὅσον ἐφ’ ὑμῖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις, οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ τῶν κτημάτων τῶν ἰδίων, ἕκαστος τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐκβέβληται, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ κόσμου παντός, ζῆν μηδενὶ Χριστιανῶ συγχωροῦντες....ἡμεῖς δὲ, οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον πράξαντες μετὰ τὸ ἐπιγνῶναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, μαρτυρούμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ,...ὅτι ἀπὸ γῆς αἰρόμεθα. βοᾷ γὰρ Ἡσαΐας, « Ἴδου ὡς ὁ δίκαιος ἀπόλετο, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐκδέχεται τῇ καρδίᾳ· καὶ ἄνδρες δίκαιοι αἴρονται, καὶ οὐδεὶς κατανοεῖ. » Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 110, in *PG* 6:729-732.

⁸⁵⁶ τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἔθνος ὃ πάλαι τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὁ Θεὸς ὑπέσχετο...ὅτι διὰ τῆς ὁμοίας κλήσεως φωνῆ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὸν, εἰπὼν ἐξελεθεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐν ἣ ᾠκει, καὶ ἡμᾶς δὲ ἅπαντας δι’ ἐκείνης τῆς φωνῆς ἐκάλεσε, καὶ ἐξήλθομεν ἤδη ἀπὸ τῆς πολιτείας ἐν ἣ ἐζῶμεν κατὰ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν ἄλλων τῆς γῆς οἰκητόρων κακῶς ζῶντες· καὶ σὺν τῷ Ἀβραάμ τὴν ἀγίαν κληρονομήσομεν γῆν, εἰς τὸν ἀπέραντον αἰῶνα τὴν κληρονομίαν ληψόμενοι,... Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* 119, in *PG* 6:752-753.

⁸⁵⁷ ...*quoscumque requieverit Spiritus Dei, et obediverint Verbo Patris, et secundum virtutem servierint ei, persecutionem patientur, et lapidabuntur, et occidentur.* Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 4.33.10, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1078-1079.

⁸⁵⁸ Irenaeus

⁸⁵⁹ Irenaeus

which, being victorious they are crowned in incorruption.”⁸⁶⁰ With the passing of these martyrs to their glory, the church is being even now taken up “away from here.” This world is a prison, says Tertullian, addressing the martyrs, in which not only the individual gladiators but “the lady mother church” is also incarcerated.⁸⁶¹ The only way either will escape in purity is by suffering martyrdom. You are called, he says, like soldiers who take the *sacramentum*, to die in the cause, and your *sacramentum* is as literal as theirs. The reward of faith is not on earth but in heaven.

People suffer all kinds of physical violence and pain for crowns in the games: can we no less for a heavenly crown? When Basilides taught that martyrdom of the Christians must be atonement for sins committed in the preexistence, Clement of Alexandria makes no objections to the idea of preexistence (which should be the unanswerable rebuttal did not the ancient church believe in the preexistence) but protests: “In that case, how can the most glorious reward laid up in heaven be bestowed upon those who bear witness as a reward for their bearing witness....If God does not cause persecutions, he also does not hinder them, and that not to punish the saints, but to sanctify them.”⁸⁶² Here again physical martyrdom is an absolute prerequisite for the attainment of certain desired ends. Again the “blood of the martyrs” argument is passed by in conspicuous silence.

Nay, it goes much further: “He who suffers for love of the Lord, has suffered for his own personal salvation; and conversely whenever one dies for his own salvation, he endures because he loves the Lord....He has wanted us to suffer, that by suffering we may live in him.”⁸⁶³ How personal! How exclusive! How self-centered! Where are the martyrs who die that their blood might water the church; who would have died in vain had not the church flourished after them? They are in the minds of a later generation of Christians. “Christians bear all pains,” say Clement, “not as the philosophers [and later Christians] do, in the hope that they shall cease and become a pleasure to them [the Aeneas theme!]. But the assurance...of things to come makes them contemptuous not

⁸⁶⁰ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.29.1, in *PG* 7 pt. 2: 1201.

⁸⁶¹ Tertullian, *Ad Martyres* 1, in *PL* 1:691-695.

⁸⁶² Clement of Alexandria

⁸⁶³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 4.7, in *PG* 8:1253-1255.

only of the pains but also of the joys of this world.”⁸⁶⁴ Among which joys none are sweeter than success, power, splendor—all the things in which the church of the fourth century is to glory. Peter was not worried when he saw his own wife led away to death. For don’t you know that the things they hoped for after death were so vivid to those people, that even in the utmost extremity of torture they gave joyful thanksgiving to God.⁸⁶⁵ From this we learn not only that Peter was devoted to his wife right up till the end of their lives, but that the conviction of the early church that nothing was to be expected here did not carry down to later times. Theirs was a mood and an attitude that later Christians have dramatized, philosophized and sentimentalized (such atrocities as *The Robe*), but in which they never really shared. St. Theonas notes the difference of the two attitudes, that which looked forward only to the other side, and that which considered the welfare of the church on this side: “The greatest expectation of Christians,” he says, “is eternal redemption,” therefore, “Do not boast, dear Lucian, that many of the leading men of the palace have been converted to Christianity, but rather thank God who has exalted you with the prince that you might suffuse the odor of Christ’s name to his glory and to the salvation of many.”⁸⁶⁶ According to this source, they call this a persecution, yet all the main court officials were Christians. So determined was the church at all time to be persecuted.

When a Roman governor grimly joked: “you’ll see that Christ of yours in a hurry if you don’t sacrifice to the immortal gods,” St. Aura replied: “Thou hast spoke well, saying that I shall see my Christ.”⁸⁶⁷ She meant it just that way. On the other hand, according to the same source explains: “Only the saints shall see Christ. For if anyone thinks for a moment that he rules here and now even in the church, he does not have the fear of God, and it will do him no good to attend the councils of the saints.”⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁴ Clement of Alexandria

⁸⁶⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 7.11, in *PG* 9:487.

⁸⁶⁶ Theonas, *Epistola ad Lucianum Cubicularium* 1, in *PG* 10:1571.

⁸⁶⁷ St. Aura?

⁸⁶⁸ *ibid.*

By Origen's time the philosophic and dramatic aspects of martyrdom figure prominently: the Macabees become a type, the Stoics are admired. Martyrdom becomes a heroic thing, and not the practical and literal necessity of the early Christians; Origen simply refuses to believe that Christ prayed for the cup to pass by him—that is not in the heroic tradition. But the common people did not think like the schoolmen on the subject; with them it was still strictly a real and necessary thing. "What marvelous stupidity and incredible insolence!" cries a cultivated Roman observer, "They mock at present torments, while they fear and tremble about the unknown things of the future: and since they fear to die after death, in the meantime they are not afraid of death itself. Thus a false hope soothes their fears with revived solace."⁸⁶⁹ Marcus Felix, who despises the vulgar as much as his cultured friend does, and repeatedly declares that the Christianity of the educated minority is as close to the beliefs of educated pagans as that of vulgar Christians is to the uneducated pagans, justifies this attitude with philosophical arguments, which can have meant nothing to the poor fools whom Caecilius has described. He gets typically Roman and rhetorical with the usual worn-out arguments of the schools: death is certain anyway, and the stories of Roman heroes out of Livy, the need of "asserting one's liberty." Stoic commonplace: "What a noble spectacle for God to behold, when a Christian laughs at the torture of death and the horror of the block, maintaining his liberty against kings and princes!"⁸⁷⁰ These are arguments any educated pagan could understand, but it is worlds removed from the real motivation of the great unwashed of whom Caecilius is making fun. Already there are two distinct theories of martyrdom, the one primitive Christian and incomprehensible to rational people, the other

⁸⁶⁹ *Pro mira stultitia et incredibili audacia, spernunt tormenta praesentia, dum incerta metuunt et futura; et dum mori post mortem timent, interim mori non timent. Ita illis pavorem fallax spes solatio redivivo banditur.* Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8, in *PL* 3:269.

⁸⁷⁰ *Quam pulchrum spectaculum Deo, cum Christianus cum dolore congregitur, cum adversum minas et supplicia et tormenta componitur; cum streptum mortis et horrorem carnificis irripiens inculcat; cum, libertatem suam adversus reges et principes erigit.* Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 37, in *PL* 3:367–368.

conventional and rhetorical, among which the “*dabit Deus his quoque finem*” argument is conspicuous.⁸⁷¹

In Cyprian the new attitude to martyrdom is apparent. He emphasizes, as none before him, the importance of being true to the church in persecution, *non deserente fraternitatem*. The feeling is for others: “we do not desert those who have left us, but urge them to return...”⁸⁷² The persecution itself is of a different kind: martyrdom no longer meant certain death, but rather danger and discomfort, to avoid which people left the church in large numbers, only to return when the danger was over. “It pains me,” says Cyprian, “to hear the way the Christians are acting: they are corrupt and indifferent; they should fear to be cut off from their society.”⁸⁷³ On the other hand, the reward of those who endure is a social one and one given here: “The true and illustrious confessor is one of whom hereafter the church will not be ashamed, but will boast.”⁸⁷⁴ It is not God who is ashamed but the society. The word “illustrious” applied to an ancient martyr would have made him smile or scowl—whichever one, the desire to be illustrious was the farthest thing from his mind. To be boasted of was the last thing he desired. “The reward of enduring is for us *laus* and *gloria*,” which is Cicero’s language, not Peter’s.⁸⁷⁵ The proposition that anyone should seek to be praised by his fellows, and seek that above all things is one that comes directly from the pagan world—as Augustine tells us—yet it becomes part of the permanent Christian heritage. Be an example to your fellows of Christian calm, humility and tranquility—qualities enjoying enormous vogue in the schools of philosophy. Speaking of the Christians, Cyprian says, “You are immoral with women; you fight among yourselves, therefore *novi et mutata ad Ecculesiam revertamur*.”⁸⁷⁶ The accusation is the same as that of the apostolic fathers, but what a different orientation! They accuse the church of turning from God and warned it to turn back; Cyprian

⁸⁷¹ *ibid.*?

⁸⁷² ...*quos quidem separatos a nobis non dereliquimus, sed ipsos cohortati sumus et hortamur agree poenitentiam*... Cyprian, *Epistola* 2.2, in *PL* 4:231-232.

⁸⁷³ Cyprian

⁸⁷⁴ Cyprian, *Epistola* 5.4, in *PL* 4:240.

⁸⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁶ *ibid.*

accuses individuals of turning from the church and warns them to turn back. To turn to God is now identical with turning to an institution. But earlier membership and virtue were by no means identified: the apostolic fathers are at considerable pains to show wherein virtue and vice consist—they are what all the world recognized as such, and have nothing whatever to do with belonging to a group. The group itself can take the way of darkness just as well as the way of light. Now Cyprian assumed that for the church the doctrine of the two ways has no application: the church can only go one way; a general defection is unthinkable. Yet for Cyprian the generality have gone bad: let them renew and change themselves (a thing which the scripture says cannot be done) and so let us return to the church. The church is now a mystic and immovable object upon the earth. Cyprian congratulates the martyrs and confessors “in whom Mother Church glories.”⁸⁷⁷ Here, certainly, is a new note, and its source is not far to seek as Cyprian continues: “Endure all persecution to the end, for if torture does not put an end to sorrows, the crowns will....An admiring multitude beholds your celestial struggles....The blood has flowed which shall extinguish the flame of persecution.”⁸⁷⁸ These are the motives so eloquently lacking in the early martyrs: public opinion and the future of the church. Now the dying hero is consoled by the cheers of the multitude whose prosperity and safety have been guaranteed by his personal sacrifice. This is the antique Roman speaking, and his words show how present and available such concepts were in the early Christian world. Does any really Christian martyr take comfort in the fine impression he is making on others? Does any of them give his all that others may thank him for it? Does any seek the approval of the church? The old tradition is still strong, and conflicting: “This is a precious death which buys immortality.”⁸⁷⁹ But it is immortality in the antique, heroic and pagan sense—the immortality of the society as a whole and of the individual in the memory of that society. “And he who once conquered death for us, conquers always

⁸⁷⁷ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:251.

⁸⁷⁸ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:252.

⁸⁷⁹ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:253.

through us.”⁸⁸⁰ This is a new version, but the old theme is repeated: inasmuch as we conquer, we are crowned, “This, then, is the *agon* [struggle] formerly predicted by the prophets, assigned by the Lord, and carried out by the apostles.”⁸⁸¹ It is now no longer the repeated and familiar story, but a special sacrifice made by the apostles. “Hasten the more to the Lord in the consummation of victory, made all the more joyful because after having run the race and received the glory one shall flourish in the praises of the church. O happy church, thus to be illuminated by such divine condescension, made illustrious in or own day by the blood of the martyrs!”⁸⁸² This is the natural reaction; but it is not the early Christian one. Though he must warn the church that “martyrs do not make the gospel, but are made by it,” he ignored the corollary, that martyrs do not make the church.⁸⁸³ He reverts to the old theme: “For what is more glorious or fortunate...than to leave the world behind and seek heaven, to stand among the angels,” etc. etc.⁸⁸⁴ Though this has by now become jargon, Cyprian in this long apostrophe to the beauties of martyrdom never once mentions service to church or fellow-man as a motive. He is simply repeating the well-worn phrases. Let us be loyal the church, he says, even though there appear to be tares in it: for the scripture the tares are not in the church but in the world, and they overwhelm the wheat, which is the church. Cyprian cannot face this: for him it is “in the kingdom here below, the wheat and tares together grow.”⁸⁸⁵ But Cyprian’s church experienced some real persecution. When that hit he reverted to older doctrines:

Though God can do all things, do not be like those who hope to be free from present things, but like those who seek the glory of eternal liberty and security.... in contempt of present things, think of future things, leading to the fruits of the eternal kingdom, etc.⁸⁸⁶

Expect the time of the divine promise...let your minds be firm though you stand in the midst of a collapsing world. As long as we are here the good and bad are mixed...⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁰ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:253.

⁸⁸¹ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:253-254.

⁸⁸² Cyprian, *Epistola ad Martyres et Confessores* 8, in *PL* 4:255.

⁸⁸³ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Clerum Romae Consistentem* 22.3, in *PL* 4:293.

⁸⁸⁴ Cyprian, *Epistola: Moyses, Maximus, Nicostratus, et Alii Confessores Respondent Praecedenti Epistolae* 26.3, in *PL* 4:298-299.

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⁸⁸⁶ Cyprian, *Epistola ad Sergium et Rogatianum et Caeteros Confessores* 81.3-4, in *PL* 4:441.

Let us hail the day when we leave this earth...Paradise is our *patria* and the patriarchs our parents: why should we not rush to meet them?⁸⁸⁸

In this world the primary virtue to cultivate is patience, especially for the Christians, who stand in the forefront of the battle. Expectation and hope are very necessary as motives to keep us going; but they are not for present glory, but that of the future, which is not of this earth.⁸⁸⁹

This is in the old tradition, and seems in direct contradiction to some of Cyprian's other statements. The explanation for this is easy: when faced with an actual possibility that all could be lost, Cyprian willingly admitted that nothing in this world is really important, but with prosperity and security he sang a different tune: the church was to enjoy glory here after all! As for the coming of the Lord, "the Lord is with you inasmuch as you are with him. If you desert him, he will desert you": no promise of immunity is allowed.⁸⁹⁰ Commenting on Matthew 24 he says: "This is no new thing...since Abel the saints have had to suffer thus."⁸⁹¹ "The number of martyrs cannot be numbered...The great rewards await hereafter; the Antichrist threatens, but Christ defends; death overwhelms us, but immortality follows; one who is slain is deprived of the world, but one who is resurrected is given the view of paradise in return...How wonderful...to close one's eyes on the world...and open them on God!"⁸⁹² "The hope of that future time is discerned in which Christ himself labored."⁸⁹³ The martyr despises all the rewards and punishments of this world, because he is thinking only of the next world; "death makes life more certain; death discovers lost glory."⁸⁹⁴ These are the words of comfort for those who might have

⁸⁸⁷ *Sed mitis et lenis contra omnes fluctuantis mundi turbines stabilis, divinae pollicitationis tempus exspectat... Intra unam donum boni et mali interim continemur.* Cyprian, *Liber ad Demetrianum* 19, in *PL* 4:578.

⁸⁸⁸ Cyprian, *Liber de Mortalitate* 26, in *PL* 4:624.

⁸⁸⁹ *Nec sudantibus et laborantibus possunt alia magis quam patientiae subvenire solatia: quae cum apta sint et necessaria in isto mundo universis, tum magis nobis, qui diabolo impugnante plus quatimur; qui in acie quotidie stantes, inveterate et exercitati hostis collectationibus fatigamur... Non enim praesentem gloriam sequimur, sed futuram...* Cyprian, *Liber de Bono Patientiae* 12 and 13, in *PL* 4:654-655.

⁸⁹⁰ Cyprian, *De Exhortatione Martyrii* 8, in *PL* 4:687.

⁸⁹¹ *Nec nova aut repentina haec sunt quae nunc accidunt Christianis... Sic in origine statim mundi Abel justus a fratre primus occiditur...* Cyprian, *Ad Fortunatum de Martyrio* 11, in *PL* 4:693.

⁸⁹² Cyprian, *Ad Fortunatum de Martyrio* 11 and 13, in *PL* 4:699-702.

⁸⁹³ Cyprian, *Liber de Laude Martyrii* 6, in *PL* 4:821.

⁸⁹⁴ Cyprian, *Liber de Laude Martyrii* 7, in *PL* 4:822.

to face death, and here is the old assurance: wholly personal and individual. The Pseudo-Cyprian is the new line:

Whenever a martyr fails to stick it out to the end with what shame the church is covered! Having nothing to answer to the taunts of Satan! Do you not see the whole congregation of the church turn its face away with a blush whenever a virgin lapses from angelic intercourse to...marriage? What sorrow fills all our spirits, when a soldier of Christ under torment renounces his commander!⁸⁹⁵

The great expert on early church institutions and beliefs and the contrasting of them with later developments was Eusebius. In the time of Novatus martyrdom was no longer confined to the persecution of those within the church by those without: “It is not less glorious,” says Dionysus to Novatus himself, “to suffer loss and martyrdom to keep from splitting the church than it is to suffer from worshipping idols.”⁸⁹⁶ The same writer having described how with the passing of external persecution the people of the church began tearing each other to pieces must needs report in the manner of the apostolic fathers the martyrdom of those who bore witness to Christians. The great persecution now comes, as of old, from within the church. But more significant still is Eusebius’ declaration that the motive for martyrdom has changed and is no longer what it was in the early church, “For in those days one was a martyr solely for the sake of one’s own soul, but now one is a martyr for the sake of the whole church.”⁸⁹⁷ The earlier martyrs did not suffer for the church; their blood was not meant to water it, but they thought only of their own individual souls. From the idea that one suffered not for salvation but for the church primarily, it was but a step to the doctrine that a martyr in achieving his goal assured that advantage to the church for which he died; and so we have the cult of martyrs, living and dead, whose virtues were freely exploited by the people of the church and whose steadfastness entitled them to sign certificates for the salvation of anyone they chose thus to favor. Cyprian denounces the practice as an outrageous innovation, and defends the old doctrine, that no martyr could have

⁸⁹⁵ Pseudo-Cyprian

⁸⁹⁶ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 6.45, in PG 20:633.

⁸⁹⁷ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 6.45, in PG 20:633.

more than enough oil for his own personal lamp, and could not by his blood redeem anyone else.

Plainly new conceptions were coming to the fore.

Lactantius while insisting that the proper procedure for Christians in defending their church is not to kill but to die, and not to rage but to suffer, etc., nevertheless sees as the motive for such martyr-like behavior “the defense of one’s religion.”⁸⁹⁸ Here the object is the normal one: to make headway in the world; but for the Christian church it is a new one. His remarks that “whoever prefers to live well for eternity, lives evilly for time...and whoever would live well for time, shall live ill in eternity,” has the purely rhetorical ring of Lactantius: it is a bow to the early church but no more.⁸⁹⁹

The triumph of the church in the fourth century brought with it for good the comforting doctrine that

the church is the mother of all...behold the city that shall live forever, because it knows not how to die. This is the city Jerusalem which is now seen on the earth, but shall be caught up above Elias. She will be transferred to heaven like Enoch so as not to suffer death. This is the hope of the church: to be totally taken away, caught up, transferred to heaven. As Elijah was caught up in a chariot of fire, so too shall the church be caught up. Do you not believe me?⁹⁰⁰

In answer he cites I Thessalonians 4:16. Well might he ask his hearers: “Do you not believe me?” for this doctrine was in glaring contrast with the teachings of the fourth century church. The tradition died hard. But Ambrose has taken up the new position: “By the death of the martyrs our religion is defended, our faith cumulated, the church strengthened.”⁹⁰¹ Here it is the survivors, not the martyrs themselves, who justify the act and celebrate the triumph here upon the earth. As Eusebius says, such was not the hope and belief of the primitive Christians. By the shedding of blood and by suffering rather than by contumelies is the Church of Christ founded. “It grows by

⁸⁹⁸ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.20, in *PL* 6:616.

⁸⁹⁹ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.5, in *PL* 6:754.

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⁹⁰¹ *Morte martyrum religio defensa, cumalata fides, Ecclesia roborata est.* Ambrose, *De Excessu Fratris Sui Satyri* 2.45, in *PL* 16:1384.

persecutions,” says Jerome, “it is crowned by the martyrs.”⁹⁰² The martyrs who before had suffered to be crowned, and for that alone, now suffer that they might crown the church. He points to the Jews, heretics, and most filthy Manichaeans as unwilling to suffer martyrdom, and attest the basic need for martyrs in the church, but the inevitable corollary, that martyrs die for the church is the doctrine Jerome here propounds, not that they are crowned in the kingdom but that they crown the church.

The interpretations that follow from these passages justify the observations of M. Goguel, **that** whereas the piety of the first generation of Christians was that of people who did not live in the present, “but only lived in the future world,” the loss of this spirit in the second generation “gives the impression of decadence.”⁹⁰³ Is this right? Goguel asks. “People now speak in the plural, there is a collective inspiration. It is a new order. Whatever the significance of this, the fact itself is well established.”⁹⁰⁴ **The** strange thing about this “important and radical transformation,” says Goguel, is that “it did not, however, bring with it any crisis and did not even cause any discomfort.”⁹⁰⁵ Why was this? Because, according to Goguel, Paul had spiritualized and actualized it all. Knudsen, noting that when the farewell speeches mention the martyrdom of Christ, they also speak at the same time of a like martyrdom of the disciples, concludes that John 14:3 shows that the actual coming of Christ was thought to take place to the disciples in their hour of death and in the hour of their martyrdom.⁹⁰⁶ This, he says is the old eschatological coming of Christ in Philippians 4:5, and led to a definite concept of an actual coming of the Lord to the saints at their passing away. The Lord was to come quickly and take his saints and his church up to him: that idea, Knudsen believes, is basic for John, where it quite overshadows the eschatology of the Synoptics. In the apostolic fathers, says Frick, the concept of the kingdom of God as something entirely in the future and not here and now at all lives on as a

⁹⁰² Jerome, *Vita Malchi Monachi Captivi* 1, in *PL* 23:55.

⁹⁰³ Goguel

⁹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁰⁶ Knudsen

“pure formal usage, that is, a reminiscence from the primitive Christian age.”⁹⁰⁷ Since the coming of the kingdom is not to be separated from the coming of the Lord, our reward is looked for only after death.⁹⁰⁸ “What gave the Christian contenders their strength,” according to F. Steubing, was the certainty that “victory is ours and is at the door.”⁹⁰⁹ Bilizismus would have this victory at the end of the world and the *parousia*, but it was certain and inevitable. The whole problem is one of time. We know thoroughly well by now where the immediate hope of victory for the martyrs lay, but that does not explain that ultimate and tangible victory of God on this earth at the end of time. That is another thing, but both were part of the early Christian teaching: there would be a final victory for God—at the end of the world; meantime the evil one would rule this world, the saints having departed to their victory above. There is no contradiction here. “It was the confidence in final victory that gave the apostles their objectivity, virility, and serenity,” according to Diétrich, “for it was a question of infinitely more than a personal salvation: it was a question of the triumph of the cause for which the church suffered and fought. What could avail the violence of an enemy that one knew was finished and who knew he was finished?...The important thing was to ‘hold,’ to say faithful no matter what the cost.”⁹¹⁰ There is deliberate vagueness and confusion here: all this is true of the final victory, but when was that to be? The devil knew he was beaten, but not “before the time.” If the triumph of the cause meant “infinitely more than personal salvation” why is it never mentioned, while personal salvation constantly is? “No matter what the cost,” is certainly misleading, for nothing is clearer than that the martyrs knew exactly what the cost would be, and fully expected to pay it, and felt cheated at having to settle for any less. Such stretching and adjusting is unavoidable if one would make out a case for the survival and triumph

⁹⁰⁷ Frick

⁹⁰⁸ See 2 Clement 5:5, in *PG* 1: 335-336.

⁹⁰⁹ F. Steubing

⁹¹⁰ *C'est l'assurance de cette victoire finale qui donne au message apostolique son objectivité, sa virilité, sa sérénité, car il s'agit d'infiniment plus que d'un salut personnel: il s'agit du triomphe de la cause pour laquelle l'Eglise souffre et combat. Que peuvent les violences d'un ennemi qu'on sait perdu et qui se sait perdu?...l'important est de «tenir», de rester fidèle jusqu'au bout et coûte que coûte.* Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 224.

of the church; but it is so obviously forced that even the best Romans are having their doubts. Very recently Father Bligh questioned one of the strongest arguments for the survival of the church when he wrote “Tertullian’s boast [about the blood of the martyrs] is not an article of faith, and has not the universal validity that is sometimes ascribed to it. Bloody persecutions have annihilated the Church for centuries in whole countries. Persia and North Africa, for example, had multitudes of martyrs, and yet lost the faith.”⁹¹¹ With the study of the early church goes the growing suspicion that it would be lost and, dread thought, that it was lost.

⁹¹¹ John Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’: Curse or Blessing?” *Church Quarterly Review* 153 (1952): 300.

NO CRISIS (Section 7)
Pages 138 – 140

Scholars have often pointed out that the disillusionment must have been terrible when the expected *parousia* failed to materialize. Yet signs of such disillusionment are conspicuously missing. “The important and radical transformation” from the eschatology of the first century to that of the second, “did not, however,” says Goguel, “bring with it any crisis and did not even cause discomfort.”⁹¹² Hopwood while insisting that the “grand failure, namely the non-fulfillment of the apocalyptic hope of the return of Christ in the kingdom,” was what produced the primitive church, can also note that “it is significant that there is little, if any, evidence of disappointment because of non-fulfillment of the apocalyptic hopes.”⁹¹³ His explanation for this comes straight from the seminary: “The primitive community came to be ultimately preoccupied...in the wonder of the immediate possession.”⁹¹⁴ What evidence is there for that? If ultimately they were reconciled, where is the initial shock and the first terrible doubts? Where is the crowing triumph of the pagans, who never miss a chink in the Christian armor? “The true problem of the delayed *parousia*,” says Cullmann, is to explain why “in spite of the delay, which was noted and felt by the first Christians, the specific primitive Christian hope was not shaken, that here there was no shift of eschatological concepts, but the Christians, unlike the Jews, retained their characteristic plan of salvation...unchanged.”⁹¹⁵ There had indeed been a measure of fulfillment—the earliest Christians knew that, but the consummation was by no means fulfilled, Cullmann observes, and Hopwood’s arguments about “the spirit and presence of Christ” having demonstrated the power of goodness and so satisfied everyone leaves unexplained the fact that those very ones to whom the demonstration was given were the ones who waited for more, as we are told, and yet were not even mildly disturbed when nothing happened. “It is a most remarkable fact,” writes Bornkam,

⁹¹² Goguel

⁹¹³ Hopwood

⁹¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹¹⁵ Cullmann, “Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem,” 177.

“that the delay of the *parousia* of Jesus did not occasion a crisis in the earliest Christianity.”⁹¹⁶ Though the saints must have been faced with a problem, he assures us, “still it cannot be denied that the failure of the *parousia* was passed over without any substantial shock.”⁹¹⁷ The problem was stated by M. Werner in 1941 and has been warmly discussed since. That this remarkable and conspicuous phenomenon was so late to be recognized is an important illustration of the way that experts have dealt with church history, especially where the unpleasant subject of the passing away of the Christian church is concerned. If no plans were upset by the failure of the *parousia*, then it is obvious enough that an immediate *parousia* was not part of the plan. In the light of this, another glaring fact has very recently been pointed out—namely that as far as the earliest Christian writings are concerned the immediate return of the Lord in the clouds of heaven was not the central part of the doctrine, if it belonged to it at all. This is the only explanation for the behavior of the Christians in view of the terrible blow of disappointment—there was no blow because there was no expectation. The early Christians “did not feel for a moment that they had been deceived or disappointed, by Jesus,” says Bornkamm.⁹¹⁸ Whatever happened was happening according to plan. The apostolic fathers do not sound more pessimistic than the apostles because they have taken a new orientation in view of the failure of the *parousia*, they simply witness by their attitude that what the apostles had expected had taken place, and if they are downcast they are not surprised. All is happening according to plan: the early saints believed that all would happen according to plan, and to judge by their words and behavior, there is no evidence that that plan failed to be fulfilled in every point: “Before they existed, He established all the design of them. And after they existed, according to their ordinances [in accordance with his glorious

⁹¹⁶ *Es ist eine höchst merkwürdige Tatsache, daß die Verzögerung der Parusie Jesu für die erste Christenheit nicht in einem viel stärkeren Maße, als es faktisch der Fall war, eine Krisis bedeutete.* Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 116.

⁹¹⁷ *War die Urgemeinde durch das Nichteintreffen der Naherwartung fraglos vor ein ernsthaftes Problem gestellt, so läßt sich doch gleichwohl nicht verkennen, daß sie das Ausbleiben der Parusie ohne einen wesentlichen Bruch überstanden hat.* Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 116.

⁹¹⁸ *Daß die Gemeinde auch in dieser neuen Situation sich von Jesus nicht betrogen und enttäuscht sah...* Bornkamm, “Die Verzögerung der Parusie,” 126.

purpose], they fulfill their task; and nothing is changed....Now, he created man for dominion over the world and assigned him two spirits by which to walk until the season of his visitation.”⁹¹⁹ The doctrine of the two ways follows, with the explanation: “It is because of the angel of darkness that all the sons of righteousness go astray; so all their sins...are under his dominion [according to God’s mysteries], until his end-time; while all their afflictions and their seasons of distress are under the dominion of his hostility.”⁹²⁰ Note that it is not the children of the world but the children of the promise who fall under the power of darkness until God’s end-time. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls makes it appear that former claims that the early Christians were not in the Apocalyptic tradition. (AU.)(World-wide Church) The so-called *Manual of Discipline* was produced by a sect that was very apocalyptic in its orientation “and very conscious of the dangers of apostasy.”⁹²¹ Habakkuk 2:3b: “If it delays, wait for it; for it will surely come and it will not be late.” Is interpreted in the Dead Sea Commentary of Habakkuk: “it refers to the men of truth who practice the law. Those who do not relax in the service of truth, when the final time is delayed for them; for all the times of God arrive in their due season in accordance with what he has decreed about them in the mysteries of his prudence.”⁹²² Here we have not only the multiplicity of times in the cycles, but the characteristic patterns of hope and delay shadowed forth. In the *Clementine Recognitions*, Peter says: “You ought, brethren, to bear with wicked men patiently; knowing that God could cut them off, yet he suffers them to remain even till the day appointed...why then should not we bear with those whom God suffers?”⁹²³ The Christian policy of non-resistance was reinforced by the conviction that the devil must have his day and that day was by no means over. “The *logos* of God foreknew completely which men and angels were going to be punished, because he foreknew that they would become irredeemably bad; he predicted as much, but he

⁹¹⁹ DSS 1QS3 (Manual of Discipline), 15-18

⁹²⁰ *ibid.*, see 22 and beyond

⁹²¹ *ibid.*?

⁹²² Habakkuk Commentary

⁹²³ *Clementine Recognitions*, 3:45

never said that God made them such.”⁹²⁴ “Our teacher also foreknew what we would have to suffer and foretold it; wherefore we are firm in view of all that we have been taught by him ahead of time, when that happens in actuality which he predicted would happen. Whatever God does, he has declared ahead of time, and thus the event is to be accepted as it was foretold.”⁹²⁵ Speaking of the foundation of the church (?) Iranaeus comments:

What truthful men establish must be true, but it must not be judged by things that are not, but stand firmly on fact. For neither the *hypostasis* nor the *ousia* of the structure passes away completely [since the one who built it is true and firm], yet ‘the fashion of this world passes away,’ that is, in those cases in which there is a falling away [*parabasis*] because of the cunning schemes of man interfering. And for that reason this schema is temporary [or a temporary expedient] God foreseeing all that would happen.⁹²⁶

Here he is explaining why there is not a uniform and uninterrupted continuation of whatever God establishes. He grants that what God establishes cannot of course be utterly destroyed, yet as far as this world is concerned the problem is not as simple as people think; we must take into consideration the facts that this world is a temporary institution, that falling away is quite possible, and that whatever happens is in the knowledge of God and does not frustrate his plan.

⁹²⁴ *ibid.*?

⁹²⁵ *ibid.*?

⁹²⁶ Iranaeus?

APOSTLES CAME LAST (Section 8)
Pages 141 - 152

The closing words of Matthew have often been taken as a guarantee of the continued presence of Christ's church in the world at all times. The early Christians did not consider it so. A very early apocryphal writing, pursuing a theme familiar to texts of its class and characteristic of the oldest surviving Christian writing, says:

And it came to pass after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, that he appeared unto the holy apostles, and said to them: the peace of My Father be with you all; what he gave me, give I you; gather together, and part the world among yourselves into twelve portions, and go ye, every one of you...into the portion allotted to him. And fear not, for I will be with you, and I know what will come upon you, suffering and affliction, from the end of this world.⁹²⁷

In the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, the apostles pray at the ascension: "...let us know what is the end of the world: because we stand in the midst of offenses and scandals of the world...reveal to us and interpret...what is the manner of thy coming, and what is the end, and what offences exist in the world; for lo! Thou art taken up from us, and what we shall do we know not."⁹²⁸ The closeness of the apostles to the end is apparent. The apostles were a unique institution. Others were called "missionaries," in Greek "apostles," but the Twelve were something very special. Just so early fathers often speak of elders as "presbyters" in the church, but when they refer to the *elders* they mean a particular class of men, high and favored, those who knew the apostles; they were the *elders*. Irenaeus speaks of the old doctrine of the millennium as one taught by the elders but which he found "*mythicoterion*."⁹²⁹ The apostles were "the first order the church being very close to prophets," yet, Lightfoot observes, they have something that other prophets do not have.⁹³⁰ What is the *sine qua non* of an apostle? The scholars who have asked this question have come to the conclusion that to be an apostle one had to have actually seen the Lord (I Corinthians 9:1f), and therefore qualify as a special witness. Lightfoot states that the number of such special

⁹²⁷ An early Christian apocryphal source??

⁹²⁸ *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*

⁹²⁹ Irenaeus

⁹³⁰ Lightfoot

witnesses was closed with Paul.⁹³¹ According to Lightfoot, an apostle must 1) have seen the Lord, 2) have miraculous powers, 3) be a powerful preacher.⁹³² Three apostolic groups are now identified: 1) the Twelve, 2) the other apostles of the primitive period, 3) the traveling apostles of the *Didache*. Since “apostle” is the Greek word—the only Greek word—for “missionary,” the latter two may have been but missionaries, and if they seem to modern day scholars to have possessed more than ordinary gifts, such were the possession of all true saints, and do not necessarily mark their missionary possessors as anything more than missionaries. There is no agreement among the experts as to whether all missionaries were called missionaries at first, but certainly the term was not applied only to the apostles proper. What confuses the scholars is that the ordinary missionaries also seem to have had divine powers—would not that make them apostles? Such a conclusion—and it has been general—indicates only too clearly that divine power was unique to the apostolic age, i.e., that it passed away with the apostles. Harnack’s belief was that since prophets and teachers have charisma as well as apostles “all bounds are rubbed out” and a common authority was enjoyed by all;⁹³³ this meant that the qualifications of an apostle had to be over and above all spiritual gifts and unique in their way, i.e. an apostle had to be someone who had seen the Lord and so was a special witness. The Pauline apostolate, it was argued, was the charismatic one, while the Jerusalem apostolate was the formal and traditionalist one.

Among the things which the apostles were believed to have asked the Lord after his resurrection were: the signs of the times, “and what men are to see the end; and who is he that is to come [not, obviously, the Lord] as thine adversary to contend with the truth; and whether all men err from thee and cleave to error [plainly not an unthinkable proposition, but one that worried the early church]...”⁹³⁴ Then comes the significant remark, “Thou hast authority over the

⁹³¹ *ibid.*

⁹³² *ibid.*

⁹³³ Harnack

⁹³⁴ *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles??*

exit of all of us.” Note the issues that are being considered in those earliest Christian texts: constant preoccupation with the nature of the end. An epistle purported to be from Dionysius Areopagiticus to Timothy, speaks of Paul exactly as the Lord had spoken of himself, and this is no sacrilege, since the Lord had repeatedly said that those who followed him would suffer a like fate and that the servants would follow in the way of the Master.

“Verily...ye shall desire to see him [Paul], that is to say, your teacher, [for] a season, and ye shall see him not.”...And I will continue to weep both by day and by night by reason of the [extinction of the] light of the Church. O my brother Timothy, gather now together all thy scriptures, for from henceforth thou wilt find no man who will be able to interpret for thee the prophecies of the Prophets.⁹³⁵

Though this text may date from the fifth century, it reflects the feeling of the irreparable loss that accompanied the passing of the apostles: “Where now is the career which Paul was hastening to run? Behold, it hath ceased!”⁹³⁶ “This day your disciples have become orphans. Henceforth who shall go up and make peace to exist among those who are at enmity with one another? Henceforth who shall search out and interpret for us the Divine Scriptures?”⁹³⁷ Characteristic of the times in which this was written are the abject fear of death it expresses, so diametrically opposed to the thinking of the apostolic age—with the apostles went all reassurance. In the face of the unknown—men were left with the scriptures, but that was far from adequate. “Henceforth we shall have no desire for the Books of the Prophets, for we shall not be able to find any one who can interpret [them] unto us. Unto whom wilt thou entrust thy disciples, O righteous master?”⁹³⁸ Apparently there is no successor appointed. “I am not such an one as Peter or Paul,” says Ignatius to the Romans, “they were apostles, I am but a condemned man.”⁹³⁹ Clement accuses the Corinthians of greater folly than that of their fathers, who followed apostolic men while they had only ordinary men to follow. “Henceforth we shall not hasten to go to the city of Rome, and we shall no longer say, ‘Come, let us gather together, and let us go to Saint Paul, our master, that we

⁹³⁵ The Epistle of Dionysius the Areopagite to Timothy, in *Contendings of the Apostles*, 43-44.

⁹³⁶ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 45.

⁹³⁷ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 49.

⁹³⁸ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 49.

⁹³⁹ Ignatius, *Epistola ad Romanos* 4, in *PG* 5:689-690.

may hear from him the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.”⁹⁴⁰ Could they not hasten to Rome to hear his successor? Apparently no such idea occurred to anyone. “Where is Paul? And where is Peter?” wails the letter to Timothy, “Where are these prophets who were indeed divine? Woe unto the children who have lost their fathers and mothers! Woe unto the disciples who cannot find their master! Woe unto the sheep when they have not their shepherd!”⁹⁴¹ Of Paul: “If thou hadst told us that thou wouldst remove thyself from us [as if he had not!], and that we should be forsaken men and cast away, and that thou wouldst depart speedily to Christ, we might have sought out and found some one who would interpret for us thy homilies, and epistles, and discourses.”⁹⁴² But though Paul had given ample warning of his departure, he left no such successors. “If they can distort my words as they do while I am still alive,” Peter is reported to have written in a Clementine homily, “what will they not do after I am gone?”⁹⁴³ And Paul “stood in doubt” of what would happen to the Galatians after he left them, since they would only behave when he was with them; and he wept to think of how the ravaging wolves would destroy the church when he was no longer there to protect it.

“The day of the ending of the testimony of each one of the Apostles is well known, and hath been set apart and recognized,” according to the Epistle of Dionysius Areopagiticus.⁹⁴⁴ Those were days of great significance for the church, they were fatal days—as they would not have been were the church destined to continue under fully authorized successors without a hitch. Bearing in mind the remarkable fact that the church is supposed to have settled down without a qualm or a flurry to a new eschatology that abolished the fondest hope and central doctrine of the primitive Christians, it is most wondrous strange that the passing of the apostles, (who themselves regarded that passing “as nothing at all,” all things being one, whether in the flesh or out of the flesh) did afflict the church with a terrible sense of irreparable loss. If they were not disappointed

⁹⁴⁰ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 49.

⁹⁴¹ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 52.

⁹⁴² The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 52-53.

⁹⁴³ Peter quoted in a Clementine homily

⁹⁴⁴ The Epistle of Dionysius to Timothy, 54.

in the failure of the *parousia*, it can only have been because they did not expect it; and if they marked the passing of the apostles as “the going out of the great lights,” it was because they did expect that, and trembled: the gospel was to be preached in all the world to all nations by the apostles, and then the end would come. **The** best key to such thinking is to be found, K. Lake informs us, in Browning’s *A Death in the Desert*:

Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth
 No one alive who knew (consider this!)
 --Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
 That which was from the first, the Word of Life.
 How will it be when none more saith ‘I saw’?

.....

For men said, “It is getting long ago...”
 Till I am found away from my own world
 Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,
 Along with unborn people in strange lands,
 Who say—I hear said or conceive they say—
 “Was John at all, and did he say he saw?”
 Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!”⁹⁴⁵

“We are the twelve holy apostles,” Peter is said to have informed Clement, “for we all have seen with our eyes the glory of his divinity...and this power was not given to any others, except us, for we had a full understanding of God, and a perfect knowledge of him...I am a true witness, that our Lord Jesus Christ...is the Son of the Living God...and that it was he who showed me the glory of his Godhead on Mount Tabor...”⁹⁴⁶ In the *Shepherd of Hermas* the Lord of the tower when he departs does leave others to carry on, but only for a short time, for the angels of the six dispensations soon come “and ordered all the builders to retire.”⁹⁴⁷ **Then** he came for a final inspection, after which “he went away from the tower, with all those with whom he had come, leaving me alone with the maidens.”⁹⁴⁸ “Today the shepherd is not coming here,” say the maidens, and when the shepherd asks, “What shall I do?” their advice is: “Wait for him until the

⁹⁴⁵ Robert Browning, *Death in the Desert*, lns. 129-133, 176, 192-197; see Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 62.

⁹⁴⁶ Peter to Clement (which Clement document?)

⁹⁴⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9.5.1

⁹⁴⁸ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9.7.3, 9.10.7.

evening...and if he come not you shall remain here with us until he come....Until he comes you shall sleep with us.”⁹⁴⁹ The true tower is taken up to heaven and a lesser one must be built up to take its place. Regarding the ones left behind the lady says: “Repentance they have, but they cannot fit into the tower. But they will fit into another and much lower place...and for this reason they shall receive a change of place, that they did have a share in the utterance of the just.”⁹⁵⁰

Only perfect stones fit into the true church, and they with it are all taken up to heaven. The tower to which the old woman and her chair were borne is the eternal church to which ancient patriarchs and apostles belong, “those who have fallen asleep.” The apostles have gone to the Lord, and there is nothing left behind that is in any way the equivalent to them. The church descends by degrees: first the yearning for the presence of the Lord, which produced the Gospels; then for the apostles, whom the apostolic fathers miss so sorely, and finally for the apostolic fathers themselves. “Where is Evodius,” cries Pseudo-John Chrysostom, “the sweet odor [*euodia*] of the church and the successor and imitator of the holy apostles? Where is Ignatius, God’s majordomo [*oiketerion*]? Where is Hippolytus, the kindest and most benevolent?”⁹⁵¹

When Christ says that his followers must lose their lives, he means just that, according to Tertullian, who reminds his contemporaries that it is no use for them to try to soften the hard doctrine by interpreting it as an allegory, parable, enigma, or what-not: “their arguments are worthless, since it will all happen as the scripture predicts: ‘you shall be hated of all men.’”⁹⁵² These things, says Tertullian, must be taken literally, not allegorically. As long as the salt of the earth remains, it seasons the whole world, says Origen, but it goes bad and dissolves when it becomes corrupt. Just so, “as long as the light of the world remains, so long and to such a degree are all things in the world directed by its clear effulgence; but when this very light diminishes in

⁹⁴⁹ Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.11.1-3.

⁹⁵⁰ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.7.5-6.

⁹⁵¹ Pseudo-John Chrysostom, *Sermo de Pseudoprophetis*, (check article by Alice Whealey “Sermo de Pseudoprophetis of Pseudo-John Chrysostom: A Homily from Antioch under Early Islamic Rule” in *Byzantion: Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines* sometime between 1995 and 2002 for where exactly this can be found. HBLL: PA 5000 .B9 in Periodicals).

⁹⁵² Tertullian

the souls of men...then darkness occupies all things, and all things are done in sorrow and amidst calamities.”⁹⁵³ Eusebius at the outset of his history gives eloquent expression to the feeling of immense separation from the apostles; the ties with the early church have become so few and tenuous that he is a lone worker in trying to discover even if they exist,

following along an untrodden path. God must be our guide and we pray for his power, for no human being at this date has it in his power to show us that road, even though there are a few faint shreds of evidence and a few partially transmitted traditions. The apostles are as men sending out their voices to us across an immense gulf, trying to guide us in great darkness—we catch only faint and distant echoes of their voices, fitfully and uncertainly borne to us across the vast inane.⁹⁵⁴

A second century Epistle of the Asiatic bishops to Victor and the Roman Church tells how: “Also throughout Asia the great ones have fallen asleep [in Latin, *magna lumina extincta sunt*],”⁹⁵⁵ the great lights have gone out, one by one; and they shall be resurrected: Philip of the twelve died in Hierapolis as also his two virgin daughters; his third daughter died in Ephesus; John the beloved fell asleep in Ephesus, Polycarp in Smyrna, and so on. The only ties with heaven are now historic ones. The great ones, “the elders” have gone—men of a different stamp and order from any that survive. The ancients from their vast distance try weakly to give us guidance. To help them, Eusebius would gather up the scattered remnant of the past; would rescue the lines of succession in the churches—a very necessary undertaking, he says, since “down to the present time no one has ever made any attempt at such an undertaking from the study of the church writings.”⁹⁵⁶ People had not been encouraged to think of the church as a close perpetuation, or even as a going concern. Polycrates expresses that lack of authority that followed immediately upon the passing of the apostles: “In Asia great lights went out,”⁹⁵⁷ he being an Asian bishop remembers their glory, and that memory is all his claim. “Now brethren, I who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, have been in contact with the brethren, throughout the whole world, and have read through

⁹⁵³ Origen

⁹⁵⁴ Eusebius (beginning of his history)

⁹⁵⁵ Epistle of Asiatic bishops to Victor and the Roman Church

⁹⁵⁶ Eusebius

⁹⁵⁷ Polycrates, Sab II V Golds I.383

the whole scripture, am not to be intimidated by threats....I do not bear my white hairs for nothing...”⁹⁵⁸ To prove historical ties with the apostles was principal concern of the main party in its controversy with Gnostics: the gifts and powers that would prove them apostolic were of the same type possessed by the Gnostics, or they claimed none at all—their only claim to apostolic virtue came through tradition and history. A very early passage from Hegesippus is quoted by Eusebius:

Up to this time the church had remained as a pure and undefiled virgin...keeping the sound doctrine of the Savior. But when the holy chorus of the apostles fell asleep one by one...from that time on a godless false-doctrine took its rise, through the deception of those engaged in false teaching. So that with the death of the last apostle they undertook to teach openly this lying doctrine in direct opposition to the true one.⁹⁵⁹

He explains that while those of the apostolic generation were still alive, the impostors dare not come out in the open, but “lurked in dark corners.” Apostolic authority was adequate check on the false preachers, who already swarmed in the times of the apostles and here is the flat declaration that that authority was removed, the deceivers were free to “fling off the mask” and come out into the open with none to challenge them. “Thou, O church, announcest the coming of the Antichrist,” cries Cyril, “but whether he shall come in thy time or whether he shall come after thy time we do not know. But Christ has...not yet departed from the earth.”⁹⁶⁰ Such words are unthinkable to anyone who could only think of the church as a permanent institution. “For the time that remains do not look below to this earth, for the Lord is coming down out of heaven.”⁹⁶¹ Jerome uses the expression “Church of the Primitives, that one established of and by the apostles,” to describe an institution unique and discontinued; the church of his own day is at best an imitation: “We, too have our senate in the church, the council of presbyters....But when Judea lost her old men, how could she have a council, which required old men?”⁹⁶² The glory of Ignatius, according to John Chrysostom, was that “he actually [or officially] associated with the

⁹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁹ Eusebius

⁹⁶⁰ Cyril, PG 33, 884

⁹⁶¹ same as 34?

⁹⁶² Jerome

apostles,” which justifies John’s saying: “How should we praise him, as a martyr, as a bishop, or as an apostle?”⁹⁶³ Yet Ignatius himself explicitly denies having apostolic authority. To be taught and ordained by an apostle does not make one apostolic. Though he was “third bishop of Antioch after Peter,” Ignatius claimed no apostolic authority. No claim of apostolic authority is made by Clement or any of the wrongly designated “apostolic fathers,” (the term is from the seventeenth century) though the disputes they were aiming to settle had all to do with episcopal authority and could have been solved in a twinkling were any claim to apostolic authority on hand. The writings of the apostolic fathers declare very plainly that apostolic authority was no longer on the earth.

The passing of the apostles has been the subject of much comment by the moderns. Between 60 and 70 A.D., according to Goguel, “*A ce moment* died...the men who had been witnesses of the generative deeds of Christianity....Men were no longer connected with them [these great facts] by living witnesses, but only by the deviation of a tradition.”⁹⁶⁴ He notes that though many Christians of the first generation never saw an eyewitness of Christ, “yet the very fact that they knew that such witnesses existed gave a direct and immediate character to what was told of the story.”⁹⁶⁵ Then with the second generation came a “rarification of inspiration [revelation] accompanied by a transformation of the concept of the ministry [priesthood].”⁹⁶⁶ “When the witnesses of the history of the Gospels had all disappeared...it became necessary...to establish a whole new system of guarantees.”⁹⁶⁷ Hence, he says, the Gospels. Tradition took on a

⁹⁶³ John Chrysostom

⁹⁶⁴ *A ce moment meurent les uns après les autres, les hommes qui avaient été les témoins des faits générateurs du Christianisme....On n’a plus été relié à eux par des témoins vivants, mais seulement par l’intermédiaire d’une tradition.* Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 139.

⁹⁶⁵ *Sans doute, beaucoup de Chrétiens de la première génération, surtout dans le monde hellénique, n’avaient jamais eu l’occasion de voir ou d’entendre un témoin direct de l’histoire évangélique, mais le seul fait que l’on savait que de tels témoins existaient donnait un caractère direct à ce qui était raconté de cette histoire.* Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 139.

⁹⁶⁶ *Cette raréfaction de l’inspiration a eu pour conséquence une transformation de la conception du ministère.* Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 142.

⁹⁶⁷ *La situation a changé quand les témoins de l’histoire évangélique eurent tous disparu et qu’on fût séparé de cette histoire par un intervalle de plus en plus important. Alors on a éprouvé le besoin de*

new and important role which it had not played in the early church. The Lord had said, that with the passing of the witnesses, who were indeed the apostles—the “first generation”—the end would come (Matthew 24:14). And that is what the church expected. There is evidence enough in the New Testament to show that the primitive Christians and the apostles themselves were quite aware that people die, and they themselves would die, and that they would be missed. Then why did they not have a care for the church that was to follow? Why the notorious indifference of the apostles to writing down the precious words which would be life to the future church? Why their reticence and haste? Why their indifference to whether they converted anybody or not? Because they felt confident in the future of the church? But they did not! They gave no cheering assurances of victory in the end. They “stood in doubt” of churches the moment they turned their backs, and they knew that after their departure things would be much worse. Whatever their convictions about the future of the church, they neither talked nor acted like men engaged in laying the foundations of an institution, and they explicitly describe themselves as men bearing witness to a world that will not hear that they might gain their reward in the hereafter. When the apostles who had seen and touched the Lord passed away, “the void left behind by their departure was immense,” writes Dufourcq, and “It seems that the Christian conscience suffered by it: what witness could ever be equal to theirs? As they left the world, the faithful took to fixing their utterances and to writing down the teachings: they wanted to perpetuate their witness, to be absolutely certain that it would not be changed.”⁹⁶⁸ Hence the Gospels. But this fixing process shows that the apostolic power was not felt to be continuous in full force. The “successors,” whoever they are, feel themselves immeasurably inferior to the apostles. But Dufourcq himself bears witness (as Clement of Alexandria does most eloquently) of the inadequacy of the written word for the perpetuation of the gospel:

renforcer et de mieux asserer la tradition par laquelle on la connaissait et de l’entourer de tout un système de garanties. Gogeu, *Les Premiers Temps de L’Église*, 149.

⁹⁶⁸ Dufourcq

This first Life of Jesus...naturally underwent alteration on the death of its authors. While they were alive, the mere fact that they were alive was an unshakable guarantee of the truth of what they said. But then they died, these men who had lived for some years on familiar terms with Christ; they had seen him with their eyes, touched him with their hands...and now—they were dead.⁹⁶⁹


No paper and ink could take their place. So great was the difference between the religion of the first and second centuries that certain scholars, following Holl, have been able seriously to maintain that Jesus “was a literary fiction and could be shown never to have existed.”⁹⁷⁰ The real reason for the total and abrupt change, says Lake, Fawkes, and others, is the extreme “rapidity of evolution” in the church. But this is an oxymoron, for quick and abrupt evolution is not evolution at all, but revolution, and that is exactly what we have here: a complete revolution in a very short period of time. Already in the days of the apostles, the situation for the old church had become grim: “The menace was serious...the apostasies provoked by the false teachers multiplied...In the church at Sardis, which had had such a promising beginning, the faith had almost entirely disappeared; the traditions were forgotten, there were nothing but a few remnants, and their perseverance was by no means certain.”⁹⁷¹ During the sixties the heavy blows fell: the loss of the leaders and missionaries who had founded the church; the breaking of contact with Jerusalem, the persecution by Rome, which carried off all the best. To save itself, the church had to become completely revamped. To save her life, she lost it. Christ and the apostles knew what was necessary to render a church popular and permanent—it was not necessary for the church of the second generation to discover those things by painful experience. But Christ and the apostles refused to make those vital concessions and deliberately embraced the penalty for not observing them: failure and death. They knew what they were doing. But now it has become popular to excuse the new orientation of the second century church on the grounds that the church had to change its tune if it was to survive and flourish. Indeed it had: to survive, the true church would have to adapt itself to the world, and thereby cease to be the true church. “Our fathers have

⁹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁷⁰ Holl

⁹⁷¹ ?

somewhat relaxed the severity of religion, to accommodate themselves to the weaknesses of men.”⁹⁷² It was exactly this relaxation, this necessary concession to popular demand that made the religions of the pagans abominable. “To save her honor she became a whore,” says the proverb.⁹⁷³ But whatever justification might be offered, “with the passing of the last apostle,” to quote Hegesippus, the pure and undefiled virgin which had been the church was no longer such. A history of the virgin church—must therefore end with the death of the apostles. That a church continued there can be no doubt—Christians and the apostles had said the world would march on under the banner of his name a claim to be his disciples, and seek after him—but not find him. We do not deny that there were righteous people in the world that wheat was still there—but mixed with the tares; nor do we deny a useful organization—a lesser and much lower tower would be built in imitation of the real tower, which, says the Pastor, was taken away from the earth. And when he wished to speak to the old ladies and the six angels who were carrying her off, they all averted their faces from the Pastor and left him sad and alone. The great lights went out, the great gifts as Paul predicted, were taken away, the sheepfold was give over to destruction, and the tower was transferred to another word.

The appearance of the transfigured Lord to the apostles on the mount “prefigured celestial honor,” says Hilary,⁹⁷⁴ it was not, therefore the *parousia*, but it prefigured it. Just so Shem, Ham and Japheth in the ark prefigured the chosen people. But Christ refused Peter’s offer to build a temple to him because “it was not yet the time in which he was to come in his glory.”

This is the answer to the claims of Hopwood and others, that any glorious manifestation such as the resurrection or the transfiguration, baptism, or even the Sermon on the Mount, was taken by the ancients as the fulfillment of all their hopes. It was nothing of the sort: though they shared in these great experiences, all to the disciples from Peter down, constantly look forward to more.

⁹⁷² Pascal p. 85

⁹⁷³ ?

⁹⁷⁴ Hilary

THE GAP (Section 9)
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While Frick and others attribute the establishment of the corpus of the New Testament to the second century, it is significant that the books involved were as mysterious to the compilers as to us: "...the Christians of the second and later centuries," says Lake, "knew no more about it than we do..."⁹⁷⁵ This is striking tribute to the effectiveness of apostolic reticence: the apostles did not mean that the gnosis should ever pass beyond them, and it never did. When the feverish expectation for the early saints exhausted itself in a series of disappointments, according to Goguel, "the more intense the expectation had been, the more rapid was its exhaustion."⁹⁷⁶ The same, he says, holds true of the passing of the spiritual gifts—the more vivid they were, the more quickly and completely they passed. The reason for this is not far to seek. Even a cursory examination of the points on which the Lord, the apostles, and the "apostolic fathers" are reticent, will show that the higher and holier the subject, the more carefully guarded it was and the more limited the teaching. Psychologists tell us that the more difficult and late a skill is acquired the more quickly and easily it is lost, the more basic and elementary skills being the last to go when the mind deteriorates. So it was with the church: what was last and hardest to acquire was the soonest lost. The years 70 to 100 A.D. are almost a total blank in the history of the church: "It is as if the church had passed at that moment through a period of inventory, in which the most important thing for it was...to recapitulate and...to cast accounts of what had already been acquired before a positive development could continue, adapted to the new situation brought about by the passage to the second generation."⁹⁷⁷ When "the witnesses of the evangelic history

⁹⁷⁵ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 100.

⁹⁷⁶ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de L'Église*, 145.

⁹⁷⁷ *C'est comme si l'Église avait passé à ce moment par une période de recueillement dans laquelle l'essentiel pour elle était...de se recueillir et...de faire le bilan de ce qui était acquis avant que le développement positif puisse reprendre avec des caractères nouveaux adaptés à la situation dans laquelle le Christianisme a été placé par le passage à la seconde génération.* Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l'Église*, 152.

had all passed away...it was necessary to establish a whole system of guarantees.”⁹⁷⁸ Strange that the apostles, founding a world church, never gave the slightest indication of appreciating any of the problems ahead—prophets though they were. When asked to prophecy about the future of the church, they would only weep. Only three facts are known between 70 and 100 A.D.: 1) the survival of a church at Jerusalem, 2) the Domitian persecution, and 3) troubles in Corinth. But “The long-lost Testament of Hezekiah...is of very great value for the insight it gives us into the history of the Christian Church at the close of the first century,” according to R. H. Charles, who reports that, “Its descriptions of the worldliness and lawlessness which prevailed among clergy, of the covetousness and vainglory and growing heresies among Christians generally, agree with similar accounts in 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Clement of Rome.”⁹⁷⁹ And, alas! They are by no means what one would expect of a church founded upon a rock by the apostles to be—firm and unshakable to the end of the world. Indeed, Lake has noted that we “never would have dreamed” that such conditions could have obtained in the church at such a pure and holy period did we not have the record for it.⁹⁸⁰ Commenting on the *Didache*, Duchesne says, “it is plain that this ritual and these formulas come to us from a milieu very different from that in which St. Justin and St. Clement wrote; from a milieu still filled with an intense enthusiasm. Prophecies have an important role; spirits were excited, fevered, by the expectation of the kingdom of Christ.”⁹⁸¹ Unlike Clement and Justin, the *Didache* “has altogether the aspect of an anomaly; it lies outside the current, of the general line of development both as regards ritual and as regards style.”⁹⁸² It appears already by the mid-second century to be hopelessly out of date. In the time of Ignatius they were already, or rather still, denying the physical resurrection and affirming that the Father of Christ could not be known, two doctrines to which all the later fathers subscribe most fully. “It

⁹⁷⁸ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l'Église*, 149.

⁹⁷⁹ R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1964), 2:155.

⁹⁸⁰ Lake

⁹⁸¹ Duchesne (on *Didache*)

⁹⁸² *ibid.*

seems to have been the *Shepherd of Hermas*,” is Lakes opinion, “which opened the way for that subtle change in doctrine and modified the belief that the Church was a society of saints into the more obviously correct one that it was a society of penitents.”⁹⁸³ For Lake, traditional Christianity is “obviously more correct” in its views than apostolic Christianity.

The philosophical boasts of Christian apologists: their everlasting harping on “The One God,” and their praises of the virtuous life, etc., are echoes from the pagan schools. How perfectly the conventional Christian attitude is anticipated in the schools is seen in a second century fragment in which the pagan judge Saturninus answers that Christians: “We too are religious, our religion is simple, and we swear by the genius of our lord the emperor...”⁹⁸⁴ The Christian says: “If you will listen to us calmly, I will tell you the mystery of simplicity.” To which Saturninus: “I will not offer my ears to such wicked talk against the sacred things.” This is exactly the Christian attitude, most virtuous, of the fourth century. The Rescript to the Corinthians is a tirade which shows what strong attacks were made from the first against the doctrine of resurrection of the flesh.⁹⁸⁵ As early as the *Habakkuk Commentary*, the “exegesis is purely and entirely allegorical. All biblical sentences are considered by him as ‘symbols’ and, consequently, are violently transposed to a new historical and theological plane. This is the way the Neo-Pythagoreans proceeded with regard to Homeric texts. The Essenes treated the biblical texts in a similar way.”⁹⁸⁶ The new spirit of the second century was then, the spirit into which the Jews had already fallen, the spirit of the schoolmen, the scribes and Pharisees from which the early church was as Schwartz observes a complete breakaway and to whom the teachings of Christ were a “slap in the face.”⁹⁸⁷ That explains while the two main trends denounced by the apostolic fathers, denial of the literal resurrection and denial that Christ as God the Word can

⁹⁸³ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 172.

⁹⁸⁴ [second century fragment, The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs, in ANF 10:285](#)

⁹⁸⁵ Rescript to the Corinthians

⁹⁸⁶ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 26.

⁹⁸⁷ Schwartz

have had a physical body, is always described by them as a return to old follies, a backsliding, an about-face, etc.

One of the marks of the gap is the way in which later writers refer to the elders as men of another world, e.g. Irenaeus whose doctrines have become *mysticoteron*.⁹⁸⁸ For all that is is “impregnated with reminiscences of St. Paul and even more, with Stoic expressions.” Bardy finds that the Epistle to Diognetus “resembles too closely a rhetorical exercise; its cleverly balanced parallelisms and antitheses have something a bit disturbing about them, when one thinks of the tragic realities which they are supposed to be expressing.”⁹⁸⁹ In the apocryphal New Testament Thomas in India says, “...but I boast myself of poverty, and philosophy and humility and fasting and prayer.”⁹⁹⁰ While he takes the intellectual direction, Philip takes the more popular, converting a kid and a leopard and slaying a fire dragon 100 cubits long. The *Apostolic Constitutions* concludes with the injunction to avoid all old practices, since “all old things have passed away. Behold, all things are made new!”⁹⁹¹ Justin with his Sophist’s garb and his life-long devotion to Plato is the most famous link between the old spirit and the new. “The ancients who lived conformant to reason were Christians,” he declares, “even though they are held to have been atheists; that goes for Socrates and Heracleitus and the like, and among the barbarians, Abraham, Ananias, Misael and Elias, etc....And those Christians who have lived and shall live in accordance with reason are without fear and worry.”⁹⁹² The Christians are now Israel in an allegorical sense only. All the Old Testament references to Israel, he says to the Jews, “refer to Christians and the Gentiles, not to your Israel.” “We who keep the commandments of Christ are called, and are, the real children of God, and Jacob and Israel and Judah and Joseph and David.”⁹⁹³ From Tertullian’s **Apology** it is clear that the Christians were already outnumbering

⁹⁸⁸ Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.33, in *PG* 7 pt. 2:1212. See the mention of “elders” in the introduction.

⁹⁸⁹ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 212.

⁹⁹⁰ Thomas in India

⁹⁹¹ *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.4, ([find in PG](#))

⁹⁹² Justin Martyr, *Apologia I Pro Christianis* 46, in *PG* 6:397.

⁹⁹³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 123, in *PG* 6:764.

the pagans in many parts of the empire, while insisting with Roman masochism: *Crudelitas vestra gloria est nostra* [your cruelty is our glory].⁹⁹⁴ The constant and exhibitionistic *vestra* and *nostra*, is the powerful note of Mediterranean partisanship which was the plague of the ancient world, and the ancient church. Of course in the new world-church a new order must prevail. The order to flee from city to city applies, says Tertullian, “only to the proper persons of the apostles, not to us...we are not like the apostles led before their councils or whipped in their synagogues, but are thrown rather...before Roman tribunes.”⁹⁹⁵ The apostolic situation is not our situation. Yet since Tertullian, the church has always tried to pretend that it is the same. In refuting the end of the world teachings of the Montanists, the main church discredited the real old Christianity that the Montanists were copying: “it is more than thirteen years since the day of Maximilla’s death,” writes Urbanus, “yet there has been no war in the world, either local or general; nay, even the Christians enjoy enduring peace by the mercy of God.”⁹⁹⁶ One is reminded of *I Clements’* rebuke to the Christians who said, “lo, we have heard these things since the time of our fathers, and they have not come to pass!”⁹⁹⁷ The church has now given up all that sort of thing. Origen must respect the teachings of the early church but the allegorical arts of the University of Alexandria in which he lived and breathed and had his being removed the difficulties. The Trinity is an easy question, he says, “Now it is disputation that concerns us, rather than flat definition,” as in the early church, “for the end of the world is an uncertain thing.” Nay, “the end is really the beginning: *semper enim similes est finis initiis.*”⁹⁹⁸ However like his contemporaries, he implicitly admits a come-down since the apostles when he says that “not even the apostle’s statement on

⁹⁹⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 5, in *PL* 1:782.

⁹⁹⁵ Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 6, in *PL* 1:130.

⁹⁹⁶ Urbanus 5, in *PG* 10:152.

⁹⁹⁷ *I Clement* 23.3, in *PG* 1:259-260.

⁹⁹⁸ *Nunc autem disputandi specie magis quam definiendi, prout possumus, exercemur...Finis ergo mundi et consummatio dabitur, cum unusquisque pro merito peccatorum etiam poenis subjicietur; quod tempus solus Deus agnoscit.* Origen, *De Fine vel Consummatione* 6, in *PG* 11:165-166.

such and such a thing is sufficiently clear.”⁹⁹⁹ Just as Irenaeus is shocked at Gnostics who pretend to know even as much as the apostles. There is perhaps no clearer or more unequivocal statement of the inadequacy of the Christian tradition to answer the fundamental questions of the religion and the necessity for worldly philosophy to spring into the breach than is found in the introduction of Origen’s *De Principiis*, with its flat declaration 1) that the issues are basic to the gospel, 2) that the teaching of the church is wholly absent or wholly inadequate on the subjects, and 3) the constant invitation to the reader to “judge for himself” the probability of propositions which the Church of Christ should have answered from the first.¹⁰⁰⁰ The end to which Origen looks is that of the philosophers, “*in quo fine omnia et in omnibus dicitur esse Deus.*”¹⁰⁰¹ “In this end,” he writes, “it is impossible to think of any material nature as imperishable: all must continue *sine corporibus* being necessarily absorbed in the Trinity, who alone are without material substance and free of all corporeal limitation.”¹⁰⁰² The Bible seems to talk in many places, Origen observes, of other worlds than this one; for example, “I am not of this world,” implies another world of which the speaker is. “It is very hard for us to conceive of this world save as a pure idea-world, a fantasy in the mind; but how the Savior can be there, and how they can maintain that the saints are going to be there with him, I cannot imagine.”¹⁰⁰³ Origen “cannot imagine” what “another world” could be like: philosophy has denied him the literalism of the early saints, and so he is suspended in nothing. When we read in the scripture that the entire church is to be caught up at the end, we must remember, says Origen, that “the literal reading of the scripture is the root of all error,” therefore Origen corrects the scripture: “It should read, ‘In a

⁹⁹⁹ *Quid tamen ante hunc mundum fuerit, aut quid post mundum erit, jam no pro manifesto multis innotuit. Non enim evidens de his in ecclesiastica praedicatione sermo profertur.* Origen, *De Principiis* 1.(preface).7, in PG 11:119.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.(preface), in PG 11:115-121.

¹⁰⁰¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.6.4, in PG 11:170.

¹⁰⁰² Origen, *De Principiis* 1.6.4, in PG 11:170.

¹⁰⁰³ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.3.6, in PG 11:195.

spiritual sense,” he says, and the difficulty is solved.¹⁰⁰⁴ He catches the spirit of the first generation when he talks about the postponement of the end. He speaks of the gospel of hope and expectation: “Yet a little, yet a little,” was the watchword. “The saints could endure blow upon blow gladly for hope upon hope is added, and as Paul says, the sufferings of the present period [*kairos*] are not to be taken seriously.”¹⁰⁰⁵ But the hope in question is that of paradise, and not of the second coming of the Lord. But what a contrast when Origen gives his interpretation of the passages he cites: We should endure suffering, he says for the sake of being joined to God; in the resurrection? Perish the thought! “Not only being removed from this earthly body, but being free of any body at all!”¹⁰⁰⁶ Just as God ordered Abraham, “Depart out of thy land,” so you must take leave of the whole earth, that he might quickly show you the so-called kingdom of the heavens. “So-called” because there is no such place, but only a state of mind. To support the idea that martyrs do not go to a special place, Origen has a new and intellectualized conception of what martyrdom is: Every Christian death is a martyrdom, he says, for we are all in the fight against the flesh; the victors are the elect and to them God shows his treasures “which not bodily creatures can share without first departing from their bodies.”¹⁰⁰⁷ The supreme reward of all virtue, in the best tradition of the Alexandrian school, is to be rid of the body and all that suggests body—a feat of which even the most wicked is capable, and which makes the resurrection a mockery. Origen is frank to admit that he cannot explain the old Christian prejudices regarding a physical resurrection nor the quaint old Christian idea, ineradicably rooted in the scriptures, that Christ had a physical body. Is not the one who deprives himself of all this world’s goods yet remains alive also a martyr? Yes, says Origen, but reason persuades us to concede superiority to those who leave their lives behind as well. Origen glories in Christ’s victory over all Greeks and most of the Barbarians having converted myriads of them to souls subservient to him. “In such a

¹⁰⁰⁴ Origen, PG XI, 333f, 360 (DB: Origen, *De Principiis* 3.7, in PG 11:, 335 and 4.9, in PG 11:360) (WJ: I had a question on this one, I need to see the PG again.)

¹⁰⁰⁵ Origen

¹⁰⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁷ *ibid.*

host,” he explains to Celsus, “there are bound to be many common people, ignorant and uneducated.”¹⁰⁰⁸ But Celsus must not judge Christianity by those people to be a vulgar religion or think it is run entirely by common people, for there are many Christians competent of understanding allegory. “Why God chose one special dispensation to surpass all others is *mystikoteron kai bathyteron*, and cannot be grasped by the common people.”¹⁰⁰⁹ “Why does God choose some people and not others?” It is, he says, “the imponderable economy of God.”¹⁰¹⁰ Origen must accept the Christian doctrine of dispensations, but he is greatly embarrassed by it since it is not consistent with the thinking of the schools. “God does not descend in a spatial sense to men, but in an intellectual sense; and the Son of God was not only then upon the earth, but always with his own disciples (Matthew 28:20)...Since Christians must remain in him to bear fruit, he is also with us topically, down here upon the earth (John 1:26)...But it is absurd to think that he who fills heaven and earth and who is everywhere should not be here.”¹⁰¹¹ Now Christ’s great promises have become mere truisms. It is we Christians and not the Jews who fulfill the words of Isaiah, for we live in the last days, namely, the days where Jesus was among men; we have “gone up to the house of the Lord,” which is the church, in “the tops of the mountains,” which means the words of the prophets, and is “above the hills,” meaning superior to human doctrines, etc. Having neatly allegorized everything, Origen becomes as vulgar and common as the literal-minded Christian riff-raff he despises when he glories and crows that “all nations have, most literally, flowed into it!”¹⁰¹² But “You cannot blame the Christian church for what is taught and believed by the multitudes” he protests to Celsus.¹⁰¹³ “We worship the God the Jews used to

¹⁰⁰⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 1.27, in PG 11:714.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsus*

¹⁰¹⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsus*

¹⁰¹¹ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 5.12, in PG 11:1198–1199. *Sed igitur Deus pro sua bonitate non ratione loci, sed per providentiam, ad homines descendit; et filius dei non aliquando tantum, sed et semper cum suis discipulis est, ...Et sane cum palmas fructum non possit ferre nisi manserit in vite... qui Christus nobiscum, qui in terra sumus, versatur...Iam vero absurdum est, dum illum, cui coelum et terra implet... (DB: I CANT FIND A NEGATOR SO THIS SAYS THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF WHAT NIBLEY WANTS IT TO) nobiscum.*

¹⁰¹² Origen, Letter to Africanus 15, in PG 11:84–85.

¹⁰¹³ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 5.61, in PG 11:1277)

worship,” he says, “not the one they do. But we do not maintain that God was resurrected from the dead with actual flesh and blood. Nor do we claim that this breathing body, sown in corruption and dishonor and weakness will rise again...”¹⁰¹⁴ Jesus appears in different ways to different people. For example, on the Mount he appeared in a more-than usually divine form. The ultimate rule of God on earth when all shall be subject to divine law will only be possible “when all are freed from their bodies.”¹⁰¹⁵ Origen knows the old sources too well not to work out a rather detailed and elaborate picture of the end. He foresees a long and discouraging time before the second coming: this he says is traditional. How does he get around it? Origen is use to dodging old Christian traditions; his technique is always the same: “the glorious coming of the Lord is the advent of wisdom to the mind of the believer,” and the time of pestilence which precedes it really refers to the period of examination of pestilential doctrines through which the questing soul must pass, undamaged if possible, “for many are the famines and pestilences that shall come to all who desire to see the glorious advent of Christ in their souls, but naught shall harm them.”¹⁰¹⁶ We know the predictions of grim things to come, Origen assures us, but takes comfort in the observation that they have not ye been fulfilled: “For many betrayers have not yet appeared in the church [!], and not yet have the false prophets come to deceive many: and even so, the gospel of the kingdom has not yet been preached in all the world.”¹⁰¹⁷ The basic symptom of any psychosis is that the patient does not know that he is the sick man. But if, says Origen, “anyone will have the temerity to assert that the gospel of the kingdom actually has been preached in all the world, as a testimony to all people, then we cannot escape the consequence [since it says ‘and then the end will come,’] that the end has already come!! which would be a very daring assertion.”¹⁰¹⁸ To prove that it would be daring he cites II Thessalonians 3:2-3, which predicts a delay—not of the end but of the second coming. The abomination of desolations is of course to be understood

¹⁰¹⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 6.29, in *PG* 11:1338.

¹⁰¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsus*

¹⁰¹⁶ Origen

¹⁰¹⁷ Origen

¹⁰¹⁸ Origen

spiritualiter: the temple is the scriptures, the Antichrist is the false word, which is often seen to stand in the divine scriptures, showing himself to be God. This Antichrist is slain by Christ “by the spirit of his mouth through those who are capable of preaching it.”¹⁰¹⁹ The false word “sits” in the temple, because it is rationally and firmly constructed, and intellectual letters flee from Judea to the mountains which are spiritual, intelligible and sublime truths. Everything has conveniently become a paper allegory. Those who say “Lo here is Christ!” will do it vainly, because the church is already full of Christ, the coming of the Son of Man being fully realized in it, for he spoke to all men everywhere when he said: “behold I am with you always even to the end of the world.”¹⁰²⁰ As to Matthew 24, “we must inquire what the truth of those words is in the higher and subtler sense,” according to which, e.g., heaven means knowledge of God, etc.¹⁰²⁰ “That the catholic church seems along with other traditions to embrace that of a second coming of Christ when he shall be in glory is plain enough.”¹⁰²¹ Origen admits “it is a question whether real clouds are meant, etc....or whether along with the observation of the simpler word there is yet a moral interpretation...and whether it is all to be considered solely from the moral and intellectual viewpoint which alone can tell us what the scripture really means to say.”¹⁰²² Here Origen is in vigorous transition. Here he disposes of all literalism once for all.

Before disaster hit, Cyprian was reconciled to a stable and sophisticated atmosphere in the church, intellectual, literary, scholarly, calm—what a contrast to what had been! He speaks of taking time to prepare things pleasant to the ear, and his *lenes aures* has a suspicious resemblance to the “itching ears” of the Christians which Paul predicted would bring forth a new type of doctrine—a false one. There is, he says “only one reliable tranquility, one solid and firm and perpetual security, and that is when one removes himself from the disquieting turmoil of worldly

¹⁰¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰²⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰²¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰²² *ibid.*

affairs and raises his eyes from earth to heaven.”¹⁰²³ This is the stock problem of the philosophers, and their stock solution: it had been for centuries, and thanks to St. Augustine was going to continue so for yet centuries to come. Whether by reading or by prayer it is possible to talk with God and to have God talk to one here and now. From letters of his friends, Cyprian declares, he can see with his very eyes the martyrs entering heaven, and following them behold the angels, powers and dominations set in heaven.¹⁰²⁴ Who are better judges of proper doctrine than those willing to give their lives for it, the Roman clergy asked Cyprian, while he pleaded that all must keep careful watch, not, as the early fathers argued, lest one lose one’s eternal life, but *pro corpore totius Ecclesiae* [for the body of the whole church]. Then came the Golden Age: “Incredible as it seems,” cries the saint, “the persecution is over! Our security has been restored by the operation and vengeance of God...tranquility and serenity have shone forth resplendent....The day that has been sought with the offerings of all has come, and after the long night and the horrible and vile mists, the earth is flooded with the light of the Lord.”¹⁰²⁵ This is a new solution indeed! The long night that was predicted has already come—and gone. “We say ‘Our Father’ because he has begun to be our Father and to cease being the Jews’ Father. Thy kingdom come, means that we ask it to be sanctified in us. For when has God not reigned? Or where? The kingdom of God is Christ himself for whose coming we yearn every day...that is, the heavenly kingdom, which is also the earthly....The Jews had the kingdom but lost it.” “We do not suffer,” he boasts, “because we see with the spirit rather than the flesh, we conquer the infirmity of the body by the firmness of the spirit,” etc.¹⁰²⁶ These are the usual Stoic boasts, paraded abroad for public admiration.

The final victory, says Cyprian, is not that of the church over the pagans, but of the individual over avarice, libido, ambition, anger, pride, etc. These are the things which persecute

¹⁰²³ Cyprian, *Epistola* 1.14, in *PL* 4:225.

¹⁰²⁴ Cyprian, *Epistola* 25.2, in *PL* 4:295-296.

¹⁰²⁵ Cyprian, *De Lapsis* 1, in *PL* 4:479.

¹⁰²⁶ Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 18, in *PL* 4:577.

the soul everyday. “The wish to remain long in this world is that of one whom this world delights....Since the world hates the Christian, why do you love that which hates you?”¹⁰²⁷ That is the old talk of persecution days. But what if persecutions cease? “If the tyrant is absent, the torturer, the despoiler, still sexual passion is not absent, providing us with daily material for martyrdom. What tortures more gravely afflicted the body than the effects of nature tormented the patriarchs?”¹⁰²⁸ Yet at the same time Gregory Thaumaturgus when asked, what about those who are forced to eat meat offered to idols and to serve in brothels? Answered: “those who have yielded to the insolent demand of the Barbarians by force are to be held guiltless!”¹⁰²⁹ There is nothing worse than death now. The whole concept of martyrdom has lost its meaning. One thinks of Wilde’s motto, “I can resist everything but temptation,” when one reads of these Christian stalwarts who refused to yield to anything but force!¹⁰³⁰

The Jewish ark (σκηνή), says Methodius, was an imitation of the church and an exact model of the heavenly dwelling which we now serve. “For it came pure and perfect from heaven to men, not until they were ready and only by degrees....with the resurrection the revelation was complete and we saw God the Holy Tabernacle face to face...and no longer in part or darkly.”¹⁰³¹ So the church of the third century was way ahead of Paul, who never realized how easy it was to have any revelation one wanted if one knew the rules of rhetoric. In every age those who flee to the *logos* are received by the church and formed into the image of Christ in her womb: In certain periods of time they emerge as citizens of the blessed *aeons* and so have to be washed.¹⁰³² What a satisfying method of achieving all ends! “The disciples of Christ, dispersed through the provinces, laid the foundation of the church everywhere,” says Lactantius, “an almost incredible

¹⁰²⁷ Cyprian, *De Mortalitate* 7.24, in *PL* 4:622.

¹⁰²⁸ Cyprian

¹⁰²⁹ Gregory Thaumaturgus/Neocaesarea, *Epistola Canonica*, in *PG* 10:1021.

¹⁰³⁰ Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Act 1

¹⁰³¹ ἦλθε γὰρ ἀκραιφνὲς εἰς ἀνθρώπους, ὡς πέφυκεν, οὐπω τάλιθες, οἱ μὴδὲ βαστάσαι φέρομεν ἄκρατον ἐνταῦθα θεάσασθαι τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν, ὅποτε μὴδὲ τὰς ἡλιακὰς φέρομεν ἰδεῖν ἀκτίνας....Τὸ γὰρ ἀληθὲς ἀκριβῶς μετ’ ἀνάστασιν δηλωθήσεται, ὅποτε πρόσωπον κατὰ πρόσωπον τὴν ἁγίαν σκηνὴν...ἀλλ’ οὐ δι’ αἰνιγμάτων καὶ ἐκ μέρους ἐποπτεύσομεν. Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 5.7, in *PG* 18:109-112.

¹⁰³² Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 8.6, in *PG* 18:148.

miracle: because he descending instructed them in power and virtue, by which they were able to found and confirm the new annunciation; and he also showed them all that was to transpire in the future, which Peter and Paul preached at Rome...saying that after a short time God would send a king who would overcome the Jews,” etc.¹⁰³³ Typically Roman is Lactantius’ comfort to the persecuted, not “we shall have our glory,” but always, “we shall have our revenge!” “While he pays lip-service to ‘Christian ideals,’” says Cochrane of Lactantius, “he sees in them merely a ‘better way of life’...the purpose of the evangel is fulfilled if it serves merely to enlighten and inspire. Superficial even by classical standards, this gospel points to nothing but a progressive amelioration of conditions...a new era of softer manners in which the lion will lie down with the lamb.”¹⁰³⁴ His system “subtly defers to an indefinite future its promise of an earthly millennium, resting its real hopes meanwhile upon the state.”¹⁰³⁵ “Those who stress Old Testament continuity in the early church must reckon,” says B. Thompson, “with the fact that Lactantius makes a time and a half as many references to the Sibyl as he does to the combined number of Old Testament prophecies!”¹⁰³⁶

“At that time,” wrote Eusebius,

lived Quadratus, who, with the daughters of Philip is reported to have had the gift of prophecy; and there were many others like him, who held the first line [*taxin*] after the succession of the apostles; they and the likes of them settled the foundations to which the apostles had laid preliminary groundwork, rounding out to the fullness the preaching, and sowing the saving seed to the kingdom of heaven throughout all parts of the oikoumene....The Gnostics made trouble, indeed, but this did not last for long; the truth was too much for them—[what starry-eyed optimism is this!] All the slanders and inventions of the adversary were quickly quenched in an easy victory, and the glory of the one true Catholic Church went on irresistibly increasing and expanding, the wise, pure, noble, liberating seed ever more broadcast, etc. etc. shining forth to every nation of the Greeks and barbarians.¹⁰³⁷

¹⁰³³ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 4.21, in *PL* 6:516-517.

¹⁰³⁴ Cochrane

¹⁰³⁵ *ibid.*, Pg 196

¹⁰³⁶ B. Thompson

¹⁰³⁷ *Scribit Irenaeus, alterius sectae, quae Gnosticorum dicitur, Hi magicas Simonis praestigias non clam ut ille, sed palam ac publice tradendas esse censebant...sed hae daemonis artes nequaquam in diuturnum tempus ei processere, quippe cum veritas ipsa seipsam astrueret et commendaret, progressuque temporis clarius in dies elucesceret. Et adversariorum quidem inventa a semetipsis confutata, confestim extincti sunt. Catholica autem Ecclesia, quae sola vera est, semperque sui similis et constans, novis quotidie incrementis augebatur: gravitate, sinceritate, ac libertate, modestia denique et sanctitate vitae cujusdam*

This is Eusebius' thesis, and he proves it simply by stating it. Other histories, he says, tell of military victories but he tells of the world-victories of peace, and hopes thereby to receive even more lasting renown than other historians. Now the eternal reward for the Christians has become an earthly and a literary one! Eusebius gloats over Irenaeus' childhood recollection of Polycarp, who had actually seen John, and thereby gives strong support to Browning. He solemnly testifies before God that if that blessed and apostolic elder learned anything he would say, "Dear God, to what an age as thou preserved me!"¹⁰³⁸ Not much of a testimony, but Eusebius clutches it fiercely and jubilantly. This is horizontal testimony. For Eusebius the church is all allegory: At the altar stands the High Priest, Christ himself, offering the bloodless and spiritual sacrifice of prayer. "This is the heavenly Jerusalem, the celestial Zion, the *ultra mundum positam civitatem Dei*... Let us at this celebration keep it before the eyes of our mind."¹⁰³⁹ He does not see the tragic significance of Constantine's super-martyrium for the apostles at Constantinople, The purpose of which was to preserve the memory of the apostles forever.¹⁰⁴⁰ What would the early Christians have said to such a building, with such a purpose?! Yet what could be more logical once one had settled for the doctrine of the continuing church? Eusebius himself blatantly announces the social gospel of which Cochrane gravely accuses Lactantius: "The final proof of Christ's divinity," he says, "is his matchless fame, and the fact that his teaching where embraced leads to milder and humaner institutions and manners; it is the greatest civilizing agent in Asia."¹⁰⁴¹ Now these are exactly the arguments that the pagan Caecilius uses for the Roman state religion, and they are perfectly true. To this level Christianity has sunk, and remains today. Isaiah's prophecy that the lion will lie down with the lamb is for Eusebius fully consummated when the rich and poor stand side by side in the church—as if they could not do that in any pagan temple or, later, mosque! By

philosophiaequae divinae, omnium oculos non Graecorum modo, verum etiam barbarorum per ingens.
Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.37 and 4.7, in PG 20:294 and 318–320.

¹⁰³⁸ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.20, in PG 20:485.

¹⁰³⁹ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 10.4, in PG 20:379.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.58, in PG 20:1210.

¹⁰⁴¹ Eusebius, *Constantini Oratio ad Sanctorum Coetum* 1, in PG 20:1236.

the tropological devices of the schools, Eusebius can show us that every good thing said in the Old Testament about the Jews really applies not to them but to the Christians. “After Christ had been put to death and received back into heaven by the Father, he founded upon the earth an eternal, indestructible church...then the Gentiles tried to overthrow it, rejecting Christ’s gifts and blessings: strife and anger resulted but all these efforts failed entirely, overcome by virtue”—the wheat overcame the tares after all.¹⁰⁴²

Once the church as a going concern was established it was necessary to reconcile totally conflicting ideas all along the line. Why is it called “church” asks Athanasias, and the answer: “because it is gathered out of the world.” And why catholic? Because it scatters out into the world!¹⁰⁴³ Now Athanasius loudly proclaims the very thing against which Christ and the apostles had warned: they had all said that the name of Christ would be sure to be used by all the impostors. “It is our supreme boast,” he writes, “to be called Christians, as being not this named by men, but because we are enlightened by God himself.”¹⁰⁴⁴ The name guarantees the genuineness of the brand—though Ignatius had warned that that very name was being used and would be used as a brand on everything. Everything now moves the same way. Once the thesis is granted—sure proof that there had been serious doubts before. For what is less like the early Christians, and yet what is more natural, once the theory of the continuing church is granted, than Hilary’s assertion that Christ complained at the scarcity of followers due to the false prophets who refuse to enter the ship which is the church?¹⁰⁴⁵ The fourth century cannot conceive of Christ as not trying to convert the entire world. The apostles he says, preached the gospel to all the world, giving the sacrament of fire and water to all bodies; and they seem to have had an easy time of it. For him leisure and permanence, not haste, were the mood of the apostolic

¹⁰⁴² Eusebius, PG XX, 1236

¹⁰⁴³ Athanasius

¹⁰⁴⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴⁵ Hilary

missions.¹⁰⁴⁶ The multitude that followed Christ from the city to the desert was really following from the synagogue to the church; the withered fig is the synagogue, of course, and its sterility is eternal damnation. Christ's own explanation of the parable of the vine is overlooked for a more favorable one in which the vine is Israelites, etc. The dark times prophesied for the future all apply to the Jews, and have no bearing on the Christians. The mistake of those who say "Lo here is Christ," lies in supposing that Christ can be in a place, since God is not to be locally contained, nor thought to extend from any one point, but is everywhere in full sight of all present and future, like lightning. Where the scripture says nobody will have Christ, therefore believe them not, Hilary says everybody will. If Hilary is right, then anyone who says "Lo here is Christ" is right, since he is everywhere. Hilary is only right if they say "He is here only." Yet every church says just that! Hilary's only comment on the second coming is: *Sic erit de grano sinapis arbor ingens*, the favorite passage of those who would argue the continuation of the church.¹⁰⁴⁷ A less appropriate passage to identify with the sudden and explosive events of the end-time cannot be imagined! The blasted fig-tree was the tree from which Adam made clothes; the branch of that tree is the Antichrist, its blossoms are the day of judgment—since blossoms signify sin. The tree of allegory begins to bear unlimited fruit—the man is utterly irresponsible. The thief in the night, whom Christ says is himself, is for Hilary the devil—hardly the same thing. Why does Christ say no man knows the time nor the hour, while he claims that all things are delivered unto him? Because, says Hilary, "the word does not contain faith in future things in itself, but rather faith in things already accomplished."¹⁰⁴⁸ As to the uncertain time, "O inestimable mercy of divine goodness!...the time is left undefined, that God may indulge us with a longer time for penitence..."¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴⁸ Hilary

¹⁰⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Why did Christ enter the world secretly? And not in the splendor to which the fourth century was accustomed? Answer: “Lest the devil appear wise in his knowledge...”¹⁰⁵⁰ Just as man did not recognize the devil in Paradise, so the devil did not recognize Christ in the earth. Christ was humble not to teach men but to escape the devil. Why fool the devil? Was not he stronger? Were the hosts of angels unable to preserve the babe from the devil? The fourth century was ashamed of Christ’s humility. The most crushing argument that Ambrose can think of for the worship of Christ is that important people worship him: “Do kings adore him, and you Photians deny his divinity? Do emperors wear the sign of the cross on their diadems, and the Arians dare to minimize his power?”¹⁰⁵¹

For Ambrose Cain and Abel are (of course) Jew and Christian.¹⁰⁵² God’s promise to Abraham prefigures the church; Sarah is the synagogue while sterile, the church while fertile; “Abraham is plainly the mystery of the church, which possesses the entire world as her inheritance.”¹⁰⁵³ Noting that the apostles were sent as sheep among wolves, Ambrose sagely observes that “no one might move if he found himself placed in the midst of wolves,” how could the apostles succeed? We know the ancient answer to the question, but it is not Ambrose’s: “By the bounty of Christ, the wolves become sheep....No one need fear the wolves therefore, since the scripture says ‘then shall the wolves and the lambs pasture together (Isaiah 55:25).’”¹⁰⁵⁴ “We have received the Holy Spirit,” he says, “which not only remits our sins, but also makes us his priests to remit the sins of others.”¹⁰⁵⁵ The proof Ps. 138! Smitten by the Levitical sword, the carnal sense dies in us, that our spirit might live. Do people miss the glories and wonders of old? Rhetoric can supply the defect. Speaking of the transfiguration, Ambrose will not yield an inch to

¹⁰⁵⁰ Hilary

¹⁰⁵¹ *Reges adorant, et Photiniani divinitatem eius negant? Clavum crueis eius diademati suo praeferunt imperatores, et Ariani potestatem eius imminuunt?* Ambrose, *Oratio de Obitu Theodosii*, in PL 16:1466.

¹⁰⁵² See Ambrose, *De Cain et Abel* 1.2, in PL 14:336

¹⁰⁵³ *Secundum personam autem Abrahae evidens myterium Ecclesiae, quae totum orbem fidei haereditate possedit...*, Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.10.77, in PL 14:517.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Sed nemo moveatur, si in medio luporum mittitur. Beneficio Christi et lupus ipse mutatus est....Nemo iam veretur lupos, cum his pascimur, sicut scriptum est: “Tunc lupi et agni simul pascentur,”* Ambrose, *Expositio in Psalmum CXVIII*, in PL 15:1340-41.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Expositio in Psalmum CXVIII*, in PL 15:1340-1341.

the experience of the apostles: “Even today Moses teaches,” he says, “even today Elijah speaks, and today we can see Moses in yet greater glory. Why not, since even the Jews saw him, but the Jews did not ascend the mountain. Let us ascend the mountain to see the full glory of the countenance of God.”¹⁰⁵⁶ Yet he admits the unique superiority of the apostles when he says, speaking of Peter’s confusion, “If Peter did not know, how could you ever hope to know?” And again, “Peter’s wavering is stronger than our strength.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Ambrose knocked himself out to turn everything into an allegory in which the church inevitably triumphs over the synagogue. It must be borne in mind that nothing is easier than reasoning by allegory.

The close and anxious clinging to the scripture for all authority; though the scripture could be interpreted to mean what one wanted it to, still, as something to cling to is always there. Men did not trust their authority, so they glued themselves to the book—a thing that anyone can do—yet they did not trust the book, for they said it could not be read without very special license. There are honest jokes and pleasantries, says Ambrose, yet we must abhor them, “since whatever is not found in the holy scriptures may not be usurped....I believe Luke 6:21 forbids not only excessive but all pleasantries.”¹⁰⁵⁸

When the apostle writes, “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,” (I Corinthians 1:26) says Jerome, he is of course not referring to our enlightened age, “this is the founding of the rudiments of the infant church, planted like a seed of mustard to grow gradually into a tree....But in our day Rome does possess what the world before knew not. At that time wise, mighty and noble Christians were rare; but today there are many monks, wise men, mighty men, and noble.”¹⁰⁵⁹ That he misses the apostle’s point is no more important than that the whole church missed it with him: it is another order and another world. Rules for widows laid

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Et hodie Moyses docet, et hodie Elias loquitur, et hodie in maiore gloria videre possumus Moysen. Quis enim non potest, quando et populus Judaeorum eum videre potuit, imo videt? Vidit enim in gloria faciem Moysi....sed in montem non ascendit....Ascendamus in montem, deprecemur Dei Verbum, ut in specie et pulchritudine sua nobis appareat....*, Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam* 7.10-11, in *PL* 15:1789.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Si Petrus nescivit, quemadmodum tu potes scire?* Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam* 7.18, in *PL* 15:1791.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, in *PL* 15:59.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Jerome

down in I Timothy 4:12 were alright when adapted to the needs of the “crude and primitive church which Christ instituted.”¹⁰⁶⁰ And how the spirit has changed: “I am ashamed to say it, and yet it must be said: Noble women are neglecting their sons by letting them associate with men of the lowest classes, even servants: and in the name of religion, and under the shadow of continency they desert their husbands like Helen following Paris without fear of Menelaus!”¹⁰⁶¹ St. Jerome is shocked that well-to-do youths are allowed to rub elbows with lower classes in the name of religion. Jerome is disturbed by the new church buildings. It is very significant that in spite of its vast membership, the church was not interested in erecting buildings until the fourth century. This is a clear reflection of the old Christian tradition that the church’s time on the earth was to be a short one, for Jerome rebukes the new building program: “We live as if we were to die tomorrow, but we build as if we were going to live forever on this earth....The past is lost, the present flees, the future is not.”¹⁰⁶² Viewing the gloomy predictions of the New Testament, Jerome brushed them aside: “The persecutors will all be killed and the church will fill the world. The persecution shall be short, and after it the earth shall bear an abundant harvest for the church,” etc.¹⁰⁶³ At first, he says, church was “humble and very small, having not the law, neither the prophets, neither the word of God; it was unstable and shaken by tempest for many centuries, tossed about amidst the errors of various idolatries, but finally settled down in Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁶⁴ This is the “mustard-seed” theory of the church, and one can readily see how radically it differs from the dispensation theory. Of course all the prophecies in Isaiah apply in their punishments to the Jews only, in their blessings to Christians only. Though there are some in the church who believe in the literal salvation of Israel, “such a thought is be condemned, since we know that

¹⁰⁶⁰ Jerome

¹⁰⁶¹ Jerome, *Epistola* 128.3, in *PL* 22:1098.

¹⁰⁶² Jerome, *Epistola* 128.4, in *PL* 22:1099.

¹⁰⁶³ Jerome, *PL* 25, 3240

¹⁰⁶⁴ Jerome

these things are to be fulfilled spiritually, and not carnally.”¹⁰⁶⁵ If the Hebrew text insists that all these things apply to Jerusalem, the Septuagint is different.

In his prayer for peace, Basil asks God’s peace on the holy, only catholic and apostolic church which is in all the earth, from one end to the other, “Give us heavenly peace, but also give us peace for this life.”¹⁰⁶⁶ They now want both where as the early saints knew one had to accept the one or the other. Basil’s many letters to monks and nuns who had lapsed, inviting them to give up their sins and return to salvation, remind one of *Hermas*’ warning, that there was a definite time limit for such repentance. But no one thinks any more of those time-limits which so preoccupied the thinking of the early church. Now the elect can be lost—and always return. It is commendable for Christians to build churches as eternal monuments of commemoration says Basil, a thing at which any early Christian would have scratched his head.¹⁰⁶⁷ The Lord had promised that tares would remain and prevail until the end of the world. But Basil calls the church to reform, “that not a single tare be left mixed in.”¹⁰⁶⁸ He wrote an essay showing that “no man should pray for a knowledge of hidden things, nor prophecy, nor should a woman be without uncovered head,”¹⁰⁶⁹ and another proving that “the *parousia* of the Lord is not to be understood in a spatial or physical sense, but that he is to be expected to appear continually in the glory of the Father throughout the whole civilized world.”¹⁰⁷⁰ In Basil the old word of comfort: “endure and you will have your reward on the other side,” has been completely supplanted by the more logical and comforting one: “History shows that persecutions do not shake the church, but pass quickly. Therefore the present troubles will pass.”¹⁰⁷¹ If we look not to the present, he says, anticipating an ancient formula, to which however, he gives an amazing twist: instead of adding as all the early fathers do, “but to things to come,” “to the future world,” etc., Basil adds, “but we look just a

¹⁰⁶⁵ Jerome

¹⁰⁶⁶ Basil, *Liturgia*, in *PG* 31:1629.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Basil, *Epistola* 49, in *PG* 32:385.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Basil, *Epistola* 114, in *PG* 32:529.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Basil (an essay)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Basil (a different essay)

¹⁰⁷¹ Basil

little ahead,” i.e. to the times when the persecution will let up and everything go smoothly as before.¹⁰⁷²

The church has existed through the *aeons*, says Epiphanius, through the incarnate *parousia* of Christ: the *parousia* has come, and remains an eternal mystery.¹⁰⁷³ Chrysostom glories and gloats over the miraculous success of the church. “The paradoxical thing is that it was not only Christ who was successful after his death, but the disciples as well, despised and persecuted men who once they were dead, became even more honored than kings; their tombs are visited by kings and governors.”¹⁰⁷⁴ This is indeed the mark of the prophets, but the condemnation of the men who visit their tombs. Had not the Lord often said that the wicked world hails the prophets and adorns their tombs—after they are dead; had he not said that the world would hail him and call upon his name—after he had been rejected and departed? Chrysostom forgets that this great paradox is not a success story at all, for the people who whitewash the tombs of the prophets, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers we would not have put the prophets to death as they did,” prove thereby, Jesus said, that they were the legitimate successors of their wicked parents. While the Lord was here they refused to accept him; after he is gone he refuses to accept them, though they call upon his name all the day long. Their change of heart is a false one, for, he says, if he were to come again they would put him to death again. Where is the success after death? We cannot imagine the struggles the ancient apostles had, says Chrysostom, “in those days the Christian congregation was full of fighting, as the faith was simple and naive in those days it needed the greatest care, the laity needed to be nursed along like a new-born babe. The apostles had to work much harder than the ancient prophets; it is not the same thing to follow after many teachers as it is to be the first to sow the

¹⁰⁷² Basil

¹⁰⁷³ Epiphanius

¹⁰⁷⁴ Chrysostom

seed.”¹⁰⁷⁵ This is an interesting picture: an inescapable corollary of the doctrine of the mustard-seed is that since the church grows in grace and truth, the earliest saints must have been a much weaker lot than the present. Of course in the light of all that is known about the earliest saints, the opposite is true. “Things are very different now from what they were in Ignatius’s day,” says John Chrysostom, “Today bishops have a well-trodden road, well paved, with many guides to go with them...now no dangers threaten a bishop, but profound peace reigns everywhere...to the utmost bounds of the world,” etc.¹⁰⁷⁶ As for the *parousia*, “how can he dwell in the heavens who fills both heaven and earth and who is everywhere?”¹⁰⁷⁷ John is worried about Paul’s tears. Why did the apostle weep? Simple: it was a rhetorical trick; “for who would not be moved, seeing the apostle weeping and groaning, unless he were more unfeeling than a stone?”¹⁰⁷⁸ Why does he say you will see evil times, if it was not to happen soon? Because he is thinking of his successors. When he says “take heed of yourselves, etc.” he means “remember me, for the memory of Paul would be a sufficient stimulus to endurance.”¹⁰⁷⁹ As for his tears, “they did not express his feelings but were rather employed as a disciplinary device, as a cure for the failing of the word of his preaching which he beheld.”¹⁰⁸⁰ But one thing is certain, the apostles conquered the world and their miraculous success is the proof of their divinity.¹⁰⁸¹ One thinks of Father Bligh’s declaration, that “failure is the hallmark of authenticity” where the works of God on earth are concerned. A striking indication of change of sentiment in the church even in Chrysostom’s own day is his discussion of the Antichrist: calamities must precede him, and Elijah must come. The Thessalonians doubted that. “Did we not hear while we were still children all about the name of

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Quando multa bella intus et foris, quando fidei planta imbecillior adhuc diligentiae magis indigebat, quando veluti modo genitus infans Ecclesiae...* Chrysostom, *Ad Homilliam in S. Ignatium Martyrem*, in PG 50:590-591.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Chrysostom, *Ad Homilliam in S. Ignatium*, in PG 50:590.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Chrysostom

¹⁰⁷⁸ Chrysostom.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Chrysostom.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Chrysostom.

¹⁰⁸¹ Chrysostom, *In Matthaicum Homiliam*, in PG 58:690. This passage doesn’t have much to do with the quotation.

the Antichrist, a thing that everybody used to talk about, and how all would bow the knee? Thus the devil deceived our tender years.”¹⁰⁸²

With the possession of political power in the empire, says Gibbon, the Christians “contracted the insolent vices of prosperity, and the habit of believing that the saints alone were entitled to reign over the earth.”¹⁰⁸³ To gain over the support of the state, says Harnack, the church “did more than one ought to have done. On the other hand, she had attained this one point, that no Christian should wantonly assail her claim to be the Christian society.”¹⁰⁸⁴ This statement is very significant: it had by no means been clear to all through the first three centuries that any one group of Christians was indubitably and undeniably the church. That was only a concession won by one of many conflicting groups at a relatively late date. The claim that it was the generally recognized leader only dates from the fourth century. So far had the church moved away from the type of the primitive church that now those wishing the Christian life “fled not only the world, but worldliness in the church.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Origen and the Alexandrians were among the founders of the monastic movement, which says Harnack, was after all only an attempt to get back to the primitive church, when they “took existing forms of knowledge, and threw over them the aegis of Revelation.”¹⁰⁸⁶ “The church was already—in the middle of the third century—to a high degree secularized...she had dangerously lowered her standard of life,” writes Harnack,

her doctrine already rivaled the admired systems of the philosophers; but she had herself become too deeply imbued with their philosophy; her aims were deranged, her methods disturbed....By that which Neo-Platonism lent her, she sought to hide the gaps caused long since by the loss of the change of her purely religious ideals. But the supra-mundane God of Neo-Platonism was not the God of the gospel.¹⁰⁸⁷

Thus the main church used philosophy in exactly the same way and for the same purpose that the Gnostics did. Jerome notes that the past of the church had concentrated with particular holiness

¹⁰⁸² Chrysostom, *Ad Thessalonicenses* 2.1, in *PG* 62:470.

¹⁰⁸³ Gibbon, *The History of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, 347.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Harnack

¹⁰⁸⁵ Harnack?

¹⁰⁸⁶ Harnack

¹⁰⁸⁷ Harnack

on Rome, where “the Christian name, daily exalting itself, crushed Gentile things under foot, the highest achievement of Christianity triumphant and dominant;” but, he adds, “for all that Rome is no place for a monk or any honest person!”¹⁰⁸⁸ If Italian cynicism is capable of great frankness, that frankness can be very revealing. In Jerome’s century “long distances separate them [the Christians] from the spiritual enthusiasm of the early church,” writes Duchesne, “from those tiny communities of ancient days which were recruited with jealous care, each member watching and confirming his brethren while the heart of all were directed with eager expectancy to the speedy return of the Christ. Now everyone was Christian, or nearly everyone: and this implied that the profession involved but little sacrifice.”¹⁰⁸⁹ The implications of this have not been lost on contemporary Catholic writers who flatly deny in the face of unanimous ancient testimony that success and respectability either had or should have had an adverse effect on the morals of the church. “The signs of the true primitive church have entirely disappeared from Christianity today,” wrote Fawkes, “and no church can claim to have them.”¹⁰⁹⁰ The signs being 1) Enthusiasm: tongues, miracles, prophecies, and 2) The “shadow of the impending end,” which meant that “the Christians of the first days lived for the moment.”¹⁰⁹¹

The characteristic of early Christianity was that it “would not stoop to conquer. It made claims of seemingly the most extravagant order, from which it would not abate one jot. Its exclusiveness preserved its integrity. It alone had the courage to be exclusive.”¹⁰⁹² After this it is enlightening to see the later church’s attitude to Tertullian: his fatal weakness was that he was uncompromising, “he understood the force of the gospel, but he did not see the sweetness of it because he himself was hard and did not want to change. He did not see in Jesus the mild and humble master who would not extinguish the smoking wick nor break the fretted reed.”¹⁰⁹³ It

¹⁰⁸⁸ Jerome

¹⁰⁸⁹ Duchesne

¹⁰⁹⁰ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 113. (SEE NOTE ABOVE)

¹⁰⁹¹ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 114.

¹⁰⁹² Samuel Angus, *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1925), 281.

¹⁰⁹³ M. Guilloux

would be interesting to know from what scripture M. Guilloux is quoting. Anyone who is uncompromising is called hard by those who will compromise, as Cyprian was by the Roman clergy, but if Tertullian was “hard” he was honest, moral, intelligent and deeply concerned with his own salvation, and only one thing could possibly induce him to leave the main church: not its softness, no personal peeves against members of the clergy, nothing trivial or personal would ever sway Tertullian to jeopardize his salvation. Only the deep and final conviction, born of study, observation and prayer, that the main church no longer represented the Church of Christ, could have led him to take the momentous step. The intellectual drift of the church towards philosophy which is recognizable in Gnosticism, since it cannot be denied, is made, characteristically, an object of congratulation by the modern clergy. The story of how the church won over the intellectuals, says Lebreton, is “glorious to Christ and consoling to the Christians.”¹⁰⁹⁴ How, an early Christian would ask, could the opinions of men, however educated, reflect glory on the Son of God? Does Paul, who has seen heavenly visions, take comfort in the good opinion of the intellectuals? But Lebreton goes further, the spirit of Christianity was the same as that of the pagan cults. “This divine intimacy,” he writes, “source of light and power, is it not that of which the pagans dreamed, whether philosophers being carried into an ecstasy or the common people whom we see pressing into the processions on the Syrian Goddess of the Great Mother? To belong to the Goddess, to be one of the people, her protégés, her intimates, that was the ambition for which they paid so dearly.”¹⁰⁹⁵ The price they paid was a hangover. Christianity allowed them that same feeling of intimacy “without the febrile exaltation, but with a joyous serenity” that had not after effects.¹⁰⁹⁶ Has not M. Lebreton heard of Epicurus or Socrates, or read Marius; or has he not heard that the early Christians were supposed to be full of enthusiasms, living from day to day in febrile expectation of signs in the heavens, and filled with overpowering charismatic gifts? What M. Lebreton’s own gentle ecstasies amount to is the claim that Christianity gave the pagans

¹⁰⁹⁴ Lebreton

¹⁰⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁶ *ibid.*

exactly what they were looking for, and so was bound to succeed. But Christ offered the world what it was not looking for, and so was rejected.

One of the marks of the complete transition from the old faith to the new was the identification of the kingdom of God—a glorious expectation in the early church, a complete fulfillment in the fourth century. While in the Greek Church all expectation of the end was done away, according to Frick, in the mystical unity of the Gnostic with his God, in the West the active realization of the kingdom of God on earth took the place of its expectation from above.¹⁰⁹⁷ This was in absolute contradiction to the ingrained belief of the ancient church that God would bring the kingdom in his way when he chose and in the manner in which he chose; and that it would be brought to a world under the rule of the Antichrist. This says Frick is the natural development of the church which changed from the primitive Christian *communio sanctorum* to a missionary church and finally to a popular and state church, an education institution.¹⁰⁹⁸ The Protestant concept of man himself accomplishing the kingdom of heaven on earth by programs of social betterment has recently been abandoned by F. A. M. Spencer and others, and the weakness of it has been recognized by the Catholics, who see that such a philosophy has nothing necessarily divine in it. But their explanation is even more unrealistic, for they not only deny that man can make heaven on earth, but must—unless they recognize the obvious failure of the church to establish a heaven on earth—claim that that heaven is already here, fully realized and in full operation. Of course it is invisible, mystic, oppressed, “failure is the hallmark of genuineness,” now a Catholic father proclaims.¹⁰⁹⁹ But this is simply the emperor’s new clothes. There is no limit to the glories that one might claim, if one is not to be called upon to produce evidence; if they are to remain mystical, hidden, invisible, intellectual, etc. who cannot play that game? On one point Frick is specific, the development of the church did mean *abfall vom evangelium*, the

¹⁰⁹⁷ Frick, “Die Geschichte des Reich-Gottes-Gedankens in der alten Kirche bis zu Origenes und Augustin,” 152-153.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Frick, “Die Geschichte des Reich-Gottes-Gedankens in der alten Kirche bis zu Origenes und Augustin,” 153.

¹⁰⁹⁹ ?

dissolution of the original concepts.¹¹⁰⁰ This is seen 1) in the conditioning of grace, 2) in the church itself as the final goal of all: church and kingdom of God come very close together, nay, they absorb each other. The kingdom of God thus ceases to be a thing for whose coming we pray, for it is already here—fully, literally, in all its fourth-dimensional and invisible glory. Then comes the usual explanation: further development and success of the church absolutely required the abandonment of all its quaint old fashioned ideas: It was a natural and inevitable thing, though it meant a relapse into Jewish nomism. As a popular church the church addressed itself to new assignments: It was now a school. It turned from inspiration to the study of the scriptures for its knowledge of God.¹¹⁰¹ In Karl Holl’s words, the church progressed through a series of reforms.¹¹⁰² Some modern comments on this process are unintentionally revealing. This the high-church Powicke writes,

The history of the church is the record of the gradual and mutual adaptation of Christianity and Paganism to each other. The complete victory of the former has always been a remote vision....The influence of the church penetrated social relationships through and through, and it is foolish to feel surprise if Christianity suffered in the process...from the first the church was victim as well as victor.

Where is Angus’ uncompromising Christianity? Passed away with the apostles, who would not compromise and knew the price they would have to pay for their unwillingness to adapt their teachings in any way to the tastes and predilections of the world. The German Catholic Karl Adam has been gratifyingly frank in treating the debt of his church to paganism.

The whole *glaubenswissenschaft* of the church from the apologists and the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools on...to the present is dominated by trust in the illuminating power of reason. Her concept of faith is based on the assumption that human reason alone and unaided can working from the so-called *praeambula fidae*, i.e. the spirituality of the human soul and the existence of God, can attain to knowledge of God? And that it can test the reliability of revelation with the means of philosophical thinking.¹¹⁰³

¹¹⁰⁰ Frick, “Die Geschichte des Reich-Gottes-Gedankens in der alten Kirche bis zu Origenes und Augustin,” 154.

¹¹⁰¹ Handwritten: “Aug.” : Augustine?

¹¹⁰² Karl Holl

¹¹⁰³ Karl Adam

As for paganism, “it is not all decadence. From the contaminated springs of human nature there break out in paganism noble and pure impulses, thoughts, and desires—not only in science and art, but also in Religion and custom. The seeds of truth are round, as the church fathers constantly aver, everywhere.”¹¹⁰⁴ “It only remains to free these seeds from the heathen growths and so release them for the kingdom of God.”¹¹⁰⁵ The most important thing about this confession is that this whole attitude is correctly dated to the schools of Alexandria and Antioch and the days, not of the primitive Christians, but of the apologists. Stroheker regards the fateful period from Constantine to Theodosius I as a breathing space which made it possible to rescue much of antiquity for the Middle Ages. “The story of the Christian church in the third and fourth centuries,” says J. Morris, “is very largely the story of how those who believed in direction from above [socially, not from heaven!] came to control the Christians, and to find a concordat with the state.”¹¹⁰⁶

In 200 A. D. Christianity preached a new world that knew no compromise with the old, a city of God attainable and worth fighting for....In 500 A.D. the new world was Christian; it was a very different Christianity. The church triumphant was not millenarist. It belonged to the world of the rulers, not of the ruled. But it was never allowed to forget its humble origins.¹¹⁰⁷

This was the Christian heritage: men did not have justice, says Froissart, but they were never allowed to forget it; they did not have the gospel: but they were never allowed to forget it¹¹⁰⁸—the Christian world became a world of seekers after what was lost. The quest for the real church is the obsession of the Middle Ages, as Powicke says.

¹¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁶ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 13.

¹¹⁰⁷ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 14.

¹¹⁰⁸ Froissart

LOSS OF GIFTS (Section 10)

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Nothing sets off the conventional church from primitive Christianity more than the absence in the former of the charisma, the spiritual gifts whose possession is the mark of divine support and authority. That the gifts were lost, none will doubt, but Gibbon argued that such gifts never did exist in the church, since there is no record of their disappearance.¹¹⁰⁹ In answer to this, Bishop John of Bristol rightly pointed out that the loss, however sudden, would not have been instantaneous, and that, as a negative thing and widespread throughout the church would naturally not be marked by a single day in the calendar.¹¹¹⁰ The conventional explanation of the great silence is that “the miraculous powers conferred upon the apostles were the credentials” to prove their divinity,

We might, therefore, infer from the purpose for which they were conferred that they would in process of time be withdrawn. That they have been withdrawn is a fact which few Protestants will controvert....My conclusion then is, that the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands....and ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the apostles had been laid....before the middle of the second century.¹¹¹¹

There is much evidence for this catastrophe, but little comment on it. John explains why that should be: “Many [Christians] would not observe [the cessation of gifts], none would be willing to observe it; for all must naturally feel a reluctance to believe that powers, which had contributed so essentially to the rapid diffusion of Christianity, were withdrawn....a fact, which...would certainly be urged by the enemies of the gospel as an argument against its divine origin.”¹¹¹² The bishop finds in the fathers of the second century “a suspicion, that the power of working miracles was withdrawn, combined with an anxiety to keep up a belief of its continuance in the

¹¹⁰⁹ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2 vols. (New York: The Modern Library, 1932), 776-780.

¹¹¹⁰ John Kaye, Bishop of Bristol, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries: Illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian*, 2nd ed. (London: Griffith Farran Browne & Co.), 48-49.

¹¹¹¹ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 48-49.

¹¹¹² Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 49-50.

Church....The silence of ecclesiastical history respecting the cessation of miraculous gifts in the Church is to be ascribed...[to a reluctance] to believe...[and an anxiety] to conceal the truth.”¹¹¹³ We grant the fact, but the interpretation is not so much an attempt to explain as to avoid the true explanation of what happened. Why should the Christians be so determined not to admit the loss of the gifts? Because they had a sentimental attachment to them and because their loss would be misinterpreted by the enemies of the church, is the conventional explanation, but it explains nothing. It was not only enemies of the church that insisted that it make good its claims, the apologists constantly use the argument of continued spiritual gifts in their arguments with the Jews, Montanists and Gnostics. Long before the Christians, Livy argued that “I am well aware that, through the same disregard of religion...no prodigies are now either reported to the government or recorded in history.”¹¹¹⁴ The signs were to follow, not precede, belief. Prophets, apostles, evangelists, and teachers were all by their nature inspired offices and they were to remain in the church “till we all come to a unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:11), with no mention of the classic system of deacons, priests and bishops. All the officers named have in common the function of inspired teachers. They are to teach the saints, not convert the world. Babylon is not to be converted but is being saved for the burning at the end. The program of the church is to keep its people undefiled as long as possible, to build up and perfect the saints in preparation for the great reward that is promised. When the *Didache* instructs the people to “elect for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord,” it does not forget that they are substitutes: “they shall function for you as prophets and teachers.”¹¹¹⁵ But prophets they are not. A bishop by all accounts must be a man of learning, but a prophet may and must not teach his art. A bishop the people must choose and elect—they have no say as to who shall be a prophet, and may not even test prophets and apostles, for they are chosen by the Lord alone, “for to each man God wants to give

¹¹¹³ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 50.

¹¹¹⁴ Livy

¹¹¹⁵ ...ὁμῖν γὰρ λειτουργοῦσι καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν λειτουργίαν τῶν προφητῶν καὶ διδασκάλων. *Didache* 15.1.

a particular gift,”¹¹¹⁶ a passage almost identical with one in the *Hermas*: “For God wants to give to all particular gifts.”¹¹¹⁷ The church to be the church must live in the spirit. “The Lord is angry,” says the Pastor, “with you....You have been corrupted by the things of daily life.”¹¹¹⁸ The Holy Ghost is not an abstraction but a “*besondere Groesse neben Gott dem pater pantokrator*” and Jesus Christ, specifically in dependence on the belief of the church as a community.¹¹¹⁹ Ignatius is described by contemporaries as “the disciple of the apostle John, and a man apostolic to everyone, teaching ‘with a spiritual accent,’ taking care lest the weak-headed and indifferent fall away from the church.”¹¹²⁰ He was as near to an apostle as one could get without being one—yet an apostle he certainly was not. Likewise, Polycarp is described as “an apostolic and prophetic man of our own times, who became bishop of the church in Smyrna. For every utterance which proceeded forth from his mouth either was fulfilled or shall be.”¹¹²¹ Yet he, the last of the old school, was not a general officer of the church. In a letter attributed from the Corinthians to Paul, they report the arrival of the false teachers Simon and Cleobius, who teach “that prophets are not necessary...and that there is no resurrection of the flesh, and that man was not made in God’s image.”¹¹²² Here are doctrines that won complete ascendancy in the later church. They are consistent in their intellectual, sophisticated and rationalizing tone with each other and represent the new orientation that won out in the church, whose intellectual leaders were soon to abhor the crass literalism and “old wives tales” of the old school.

The general impression the early Christians made upon outsiders is reflected in the *Slavonic Josephus*: “They believed that their teacher was alive, even though he had died, and that he could free them from bondage, and many accepted the message...especially of the lowest

¹¹¹⁶ Didache 1.5.

¹¹¹⁷ Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 2.4

¹¹¹⁸ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 1.3.1

¹¹¹⁹ ?

¹¹²⁰ Ignatius (If you give a reference from the ANF, be sure to include what (ancient) document it is from, that will help me find it in the Patrologia)

¹¹²¹ Description of Polycarp, what source? (Again with the quote I would appreciate the source info)

¹¹²² Acts of Paul 7.1, see *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 289.

class: shoe-makers, sandal-makers, artisans. And they performed marvelous signs, actually, whatever they would!”¹¹²³ The Clementine writings repeat that prophecy is the only possible source of knowledge of God; that it is clear, simple, and regular. The church must have it, but it cannot be had among or by people who sin, “for the Holy Spirit leaves one who has sinned.” But who, asks a Clementine homily, sits on the throne of the prophet today? Scribes and Pharisees—even as they usurped the throne of Moses, they bring book-learning on the place of revelation.¹¹²⁴ “Since the prophetic gift must remain in the church, according to the apostles, until the final [or consummating—*teleias*] *parousia* of the Lord, the Montanists cannot be the true church, since they have been without that gift for fourteen years since the death of Maxilla.”¹¹²⁵ Here prophecy is the surest test of the true church. The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* describes how: “after a time they will seek to perform miracles, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and they will not be able, because of their little faith.”¹¹²⁶ Then follows a description of the complete destruction of the righteous and the corruption of the church. The peculiar advantage of the Christian religion which marks it as the only true religion, is that it enjoys the guidance of prophets, who lived long before any of the so-called philosophers and who alone have a true knowledge of God; “they spoke without fear or favor, saying only those things which they had seen and heard, being full of the Holy Spirit....They did not have to use philosophical demonstrations to prove their case, but were solemn witnesses of the truth.”¹¹²⁷ They were simply instruments upon which the spirit of God could play, and only such direct revelation as they received could lead to the “sure and unshakeable knowledge of God.”¹¹²⁸ In arguing with the Jews, Justin appeals to the same gifts:

For among us the prophetic gifts are to be found until the present. From which fact you must agree that what was anciently possessed by your race has now been transferred to

¹¹²³ A. Berendts, *Die Zeugnisse vom Christentum im Slavischen “De Bello Judaico” des Josephus*, (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1906), 10-11.

¹¹²⁴ Clement, Homilia 3.17-18, in PG ([Check PG for source info](#))

¹¹²⁵ Clementine homily, PG X, 155

¹¹²⁶ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them*, trans. J. Rendel Harris, (1900; reprint, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 31.

¹¹²⁷ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles ?*

¹¹²⁸ *ibid ?*

us. And just as false prophets appeared among your true prophets, so among us even now are many of them and many false teachers, whom the Lord warned us not to follow, knowing what would happen after his ascent to heaven...¹¹²⁹

He admits that things are going badly, as predicted, but rests his whole case on the fact that some prophetic gifts still survive in the church. “The Jews,” says Origen, “no longer have any sign that the power of divinity still abides with them, for they no longer have prophets and wonders; of which things some traces are yet still to be found among the Christians.” The argument is the same as Justin’s, but particularly significant is that, coming at a later date than Justin, Origen can only claim traces of the heavenly gifts in the church. “I perceive in the language of the Fathers, who lived in the middle and end of the second century,” says Bishop John of Bristol,

something which betrays, if not a conviction, at least a suspicion, that the power of working miracles was withdrawn, combined with an anxiety to keep up a belief of its continuance in the church. They affirm in general terms that miracles were performed, but rarely venture to produce an instance of a particular miracle. Those who followed them were less scrupulous, and proceeded to invent miracles; very different indeed in circumstance and character from the miracles of the gospel, yet readily believed by men who were not disposed nicely to examine into the evidence of facts which they wished to be true... In every succeeding age miracles multiplied in number, and increased in extravagance, till at length, by their frequency, they lost all title to the name...¹¹³⁰

This is the process here illustrated, “the combined operation of prejudice and policy,” as Bishop John describes it, “—of prejudice which made them [the Christians] reluctant to believe, of policy which made them anxious to conceal the truth.”¹¹³¹ It can be fully demonstrated that Tertullian’s reason for leaving the main church was his final and reluctant conviction that the divine powers of the early Christians were no longer in its possession.¹¹³² He missed revelation, and he joined the Montanists because they claimed to have it. Though he recognizes the doctrine, still accepted by Christians at large (who will not accept the unavoidable corollary of the doctrine), that revelation was to cease with the apostles (it did!), all he would do is extend the time a little: Montanus was “inspired by the same Spirit as the apostles, though it was his office to close as it

¹¹²⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, ([See link to English trans on spreadsheet](#))

¹¹³⁰ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 50.

¹¹³¹ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 50-51.

¹¹³² Tertullian

were the Christian revelation.”¹¹³³ So he gave orders for such rules of complete abstinence as celibacy which, for example, were not known to the apostles. He would not concede to the church the power of forgiving sins unless it had charismatic powers as well—indeed the two were inseparable:

The power to do miracles and that of forgiving sins have the same source, and if the blessed apostles enjoyed such power it was by a special gift of God, and not by virtue of any special training....Show me then some examples of such power today, and I will concede your right to forgive sins. But if you claim your authority simply by virtue of your office...and cannot show the powers of apostle or prophet, you must be lacking in the authority you claim....If the Lord himself took such pains [Matthew 9] to put his power to the proof, not presuming to forgive sins without a power great enough to heal the sick, certainly I may not claim power to forgive sins without at least an equivalent demonstration of divine power.¹¹³⁴

In the last work he wrote while still a member of the main church, Tertullian argued that neither scripture nor tradition was adequate foundation for the church: there had to be continual and direct manifestations for power from above.¹¹³⁵ The one miracle that later writers have to exploit is the miracle of the church itself. In appealing to this, Arnobius reinforces his claim by citing the miracles of the apostles—he has plainly no modern instances to which to refer; “but you claim,” he tells the pagans, “that your records of miracles are older than ours! What of that? Is not antiquity the complete mother of errors?”¹¹³⁶

Speaking of the gift of prophecy, a third century fragment says, “In those days the angel of the prophetic spirit would come upon a man and fill him, and he being filled with the Holy Spirit would speak as the Lord desired. This will plainly be the spirit of divinity.”¹¹³⁷ Speaking of the church in his own day, Hilary says “The church has received neither such authority nor such power from God,” as in the olden days; it is best for us therefore “that we never disturb what is fixed and solid, but rather preserve those things established by our ancestors.”¹¹³⁸ Tertullian saw

¹¹³³ *ibid.*

¹¹³⁴ Tertullian

¹¹³⁵ Tertullian

¹¹³⁶ Arnobius, PL V, 794-6

¹¹³⁷ Third Century Fragment

¹¹³⁸ Hilary

the danger of confusing the tradition of revelation with revelation itself: the church should be, he says, not a *numerus Eposcoporum*, but a *nomos spirituales*, speaking by direct inspiration from God.¹¹³⁹ The charge which Basil brings against the Pepuzans (Montanists) is that “they blasphemed the Holy Ghost openly by claiming that their leaders had the power [*prosegoria*] of the Paraclete.”¹¹⁴⁰ Since it no longer had the power, the only position the church could take was that it was wrong to have it or claim it. Whatever the validity of this charge, it certainly shows how completely the church had become divested of anything that might be called direct power from God.

“The apostles,” writes Eusebius,

...speaking the common tongue...emboldened by a godlike and supernatural power, neither could nor wanted to announce the doctrine of their teacher with rhetorical skill and technical perfection, but rather were wholly in the power of the revealing holy spirit that worked in them; the miraculous power of Christ expressing itself through them was all they used as they preached the kingdom of heaven to all the world, and they gave almost no thought at all to having their speeches written down.¹¹⁴¹

Speaking of the missionaries of the early church, he says, “At that time the Holy Ghost was yet still to be found among them...and by its operation worked miracles, so that all at once entire populations would turn to the worship of the One God. We can not name them [these early missionaries] all, but their tradition remains.”¹¹⁴² Note that the possession of the miraculous powers is always considered as identical with the possession of the Holy Ghost, so that one cannot claim the one without having the other—it is because the later church wanted to do just that, that Tertullian broke with it. The possession of the Holy Ghost is the greatest and rarest treasure of all, yet to this day churches blandly lay claim to this while expressing shock and horror when asked if they possess any of the other gifts. After milking every detail of the martyrdoms in Gaul, so that his church may lose none of the credit that may be due it for past deeds (which “count as nothing” in the estimation of the apostolic fathers), Eusebius observes:

¹¹³⁹ Tertullian

¹¹⁴⁰ Basil, *To Amphilochius, Concerning the Canons*

¹¹⁴¹ Eusebius, 3.24.2

¹¹⁴² Eusebius

“There were still at that time many wonderful manifestations of divine charisma given to the various churches strengthening their faith.”¹¹⁴³ Then he cites the famous thundering legion miracle which every church, pagan and Christian, was claiming as its own. That the Christians should have clung so desperately to this extremely problematical miracle, claiming that as a result of it the Emperor Markus Aurelius himself joined the church, is eloquent witness to their spiritual bankruptcy. Here we find the argument that miracles since they were limited to the age of the first missionaries, were meant only to aid them in their work. “These credentials were withdrawn when there was no longer any need for them,” is the explanation for their disappearance. But when would such a time be? When has the Christian missionary work ever ceased? “In the time of Irenaeus,” says Eusebius further, “the church still had the gifts.”¹¹⁴⁴ Then he becomes enthusiastic: “we still have miracles,” he says, “the dead have been raised and lived with us for numbers of years. The manifestations cannot be numbered which the church has experienced every day throughout all the world through the grace of God, having good effect upon the Gentiles and granting aid and comfort to the church.”¹¹⁴⁵ This blasts the argument that, once the apostles had done their work further gifts were no longer in order—the church looked for them eagerly. Yet Eusebius, like Tertullian, while making sweeping claims for the gifts of the church, when he wishes to furnish a concrete instance can only produce the most shabby and dubious instances imaginable. St Augustine was in the same case. Eusebius’ argument against the Montanists is that prophecy had been dead among them for fourteen years, while “The apostle claims, that the gift of prophecy must remain in all the church until the final appearance of the Lord.”¹¹⁴⁶ Eusebius and his contemporaries believed this. Miltiades must rebuke those who would prophesy, “in ecstasy,” having fits, for, says he, that is not the way the prophets of the Old

¹¹⁴³ Eusebius

¹¹⁴⁴ Eusebius

¹¹⁴⁵ Eusebius

¹¹⁴⁶ Eusebius

Testament and New Testament operated.¹¹⁴⁷ He furnishes no modern example of how it should be done. Describing the plague in Egypt in his time, and telling how, “many Christians deliberately exposed themselves, welcoming death, while others died in curing others,” he comments: “such a death is not to be deemed inferior to martyrdom from faith and constancy.”¹¹⁴⁸ Yet he makes no mention of any miraculous healing. The spiritual gifts were sorely missed by the people of the fourth century, for it could not be denied that the scripture insisted that they were a necessary fixture of the true church, an argument often employed, as we have seen, to prove the claims of this or that Christian group. John Chrysostom must repeatedly answer Christians who, he says, are “always and everywhere demanding, what has become of the gift of prophecy? Why do men no longer speak in tongues? Why do our leaders no longer receive manifestation from on high as did the ancients?”¹¹⁴⁹ John’s answer is not to declare such questions out of order, but to make a pathetic attempt to answer them by rhetoric and logic. If the Montanists’ gifts are genuine, Epiphanius asks, “why have none since Montanus, Priscilla, and Maxilla had them?”¹¹⁵⁰ But the strangest argument is that Montanus is wrong “since every gift to the church was given to the true holy church, and since he is not in the church, he does not have the gifts...”¹¹⁵¹ This silly circular argument is typical, but it commits the church dangerously to rivaling the sensational claims of the Montanists. In matter of doctrine, Epiphanius explains, such as the nature of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, there is no difference between us and the Montanists. The only difference is that they say we must also receive the charismatic gifts. Well, the holy church does have the gifts...”¹¹⁵² What are they? The scripture, of course! All Christians, he says, “are included in the testament and inheritance, but they receive no dowry from the Holy Ghost as the true church does. That is something special.” What does this wonderful gift turn out to be? An intellectual insight into the

¹¹⁴⁷ Miltiades

¹¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁹ John Chrysostom

¹¹⁵⁰ Epiphanius, PG 41, 856

¹¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵² *ibid.*

scripture—the easiest thing in the world for any pious student to claim with full conviction. “The Lord had sealed the church, and filled her with the *charismata*. For when it was necessary, he spoke through his prophets; the ancient saints prophesied everything, being filled with the Holy Spirit, saying necessary and useful things for their advantage. But what did they [the Montanists] ever have revealed to them that was useful?”¹¹⁵³ It is a strange business, this identifying of the true church by the possession of gifts and powers which it has long ceased to possess! In New Testament times, according to Chrysostom, there were “far more prophets than in Old Testament times.”¹¹⁵⁴ This proves for him the superiority of the new order to the old. But why do they not still have prophets? That is not necessary, he explains, “since to teach by precept and by life is better than anything else.”¹¹⁵⁵ This is his favorite answer to those who ask, what have become of the gifts? “To be honest,” he replies, “is better than all gifts;” which is true, but entirely beside the point.¹¹⁵⁶ The scripture he cites to support his argument, Matthew 7:22f, is also beside the point: why are we not all apostles? The answer, of course, is that it is not necessary for all to be apostles. But the question asked the apostle was, why are not all apostles, while the question asked of Chrysostom’s contemporaries was a very different one: “why are not any apostles?”¹¹⁵⁷ In quoting Paul’s answer, Chrysostom explains that it is not necessary for all to be Apostles, which is true, but does not touch the question, which in this case is “why don’t we have any apostles any more?”¹¹⁵⁸ The early church, he says, consisted of fishermen, money-changers, dock-workers, day laborers, etc, “Yet they possessed a tremendous power: do you see their authority? Their commission? Their irresistible power?”¹¹⁵⁹ That was what people missed. Today, says Clement of Alexandria(?), the written word must perform the offices of recollection and inspiration once exercised directly from heaven, for “The men of old possessed a marvelous

¹¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁴ John Chrysostom

¹¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

power, which the church no longer has.”¹¹⁶⁰ Explaining the cessation of the gift of prophecy,

Jerome writes:

Therefore, if Peter the apostle, upon whom the Lord founded the church, declared at that time that prophecy and the promise of the Lord was completed, how can we concern ourselves with any other time? If you answer that Philip’s four daughters prophesied, and Agabus, and the apostles, and Paul after that, we answer that we do not reject prophecy but only those who desire to prophecy without being authorized by the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹¹⁶¹

This is precisely the objection that the scribes and Pharisees had to Christ’s prophesying—he said things that were not in the scripture. The very essence of prophecy, of course, is that it goes beyond the controlled and intellectual exercises of the school.

In the Donatist controversy much was made of the “five gifts of God to the church,” but though often mentioned, they are extremely vague and of a rhetorical nature. Of a venerable tradition there can be no doubt, but the fourth century plainly did not know what to make of it. For example, the chair, the angel, the seal are all found in the *Hermas*, the *Didache*: the church sits in a chair, it is brought by an angel, and an angel spreads out the sign or seal in heaven and sounds the trump, etc. But for the later church, the second gift, the angel, is the office of bishop.¹¹⁶² Where are your five gifts? Optatus asks the Donatists, who claimed in fact to have six gifts. Whatever the answer, the church was still resting its case on its claim to gifts. When did Novatus get his authority? Pacianus asks, “Immediately after the passion of the Lord? After the principate of Decius, i.e., some 300 years after the passion?”¹¹⁶³ Then he adds the significant tests: “Has he ever spoken in tongues? Or prophesied? Has he ever raised the dead? For he must possess something of these gifts, if he would introduce a new law of the gospel.”

Olaf Linton has traced the difficulties and controversies attendant upon the examination of the hard problem of the charismatic gifts in modern times. Sohm and Harnack play the principal roles. Gibbon says that Tertullian wrote *De Corona* long before he became a

¹¹⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria ?

¹¹⁶¹ Jerome, *To Marcella*

¹¹⁶² ??, PL XI, 956

¹¹⁶³ Pacianus, *Epistola 3: Contra Tractatus Novatianorum* 1, in PL 13:1063-1064.

Montanist;¹¹⁶⁴ the fact that it is almost impossible to tell what writings of his were produced while he was in the church, and what when he was out of it, show that Tertullian never changes his beliefs: what he sought as a Catholic he also sought as a Montanist and finally as one of the *Spiritales*—he never ceased to seek it, but he never found it. Why did he seek it? Because he was convinced that the church had once had it, and that the true church would still have it. “The Holy Spirit,” he writes hopefully, “has now removed all ambiguities by a clear and explicit development of the whole mystery of the gospel through the new prophecy which had been poured out abundantly from the Paraclete.”¹¹⁶⁵ The immense success of the Montanists was an expression of the universal and deeply rooted conviction of Christians that more and greater things were to come after the apostles: had not the Lord promised that when the Paraclete came his disciples would do yet greater things than he? The great advantage of Christianity in competition with the old religions, says F.C. Baur, was “in the religious feelings and cravings which the old religions failed to satisfy...the human heart has a desire which will not be denied to know and to have intercourse with the supernatural. The prevalence of an all-denying skepticism does not quench the desire, but rather intensifies it.”¹¹⁶⁶ Sohm’s theory, propounded in 1892, was that the primitive church was *ohne Recht—charismatisch regiert*; its organization was not legalistic but charismatic, based entirely on *freie Anerkennung*.¹¹⁶⁷ Teaching is by the divine gift, and those so endowed were called of God, not elected by the society, and so spoke directly in the name of God, with prophetic power: such were the apostles, prophets and teachers; all had the apostolic gift, the spiritual power; all were high priests. The primitive church being directed from above was strictly authoritarian, all its doings were in the name of God, not of the community, i.e. its power was not legal power, nay, since its power was spiritual it could not be legal also! The

¹¹⁶⁴ Edward Gibbon, *History of Christianity: Comprising All that Relates to the Progress of the Christian Religion in “The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” and a Vindication of some Passages in the 15th and 16th Chapters*, (New York: Peter Eckler Publishing Co., 1825), 133.

¹¹⁶⁵ Tertullian

¹¹⁶⁶ F. C. Baur

¹¹⁶⁷ Sohm, 1892

ordinances of the church were the source of its overt function and organization, but all that was priestly, not administrative; even the administration of church property was sacral. The essence of the apostolate was charisma, according to Harnack.¹¹⁶⁸ Without charisma there was no authority at all in the church: authority is not a formal concept. “The workings of the spirit,” wrote Gunkel in 1888, “were not as it were an intensification of the natural spirit that is in all men, but an absolutely supernatural thing, and hence divine....The whole Christian life was regarded as a supernatural wonder.”¹¹⁶⁹ When was the prophetic gift lost? Harnack dates its disappearance at the end of the second century, when the “teachers” were no longer prophets, but mere preachers.¹¹⁷⁰ Primitive Christianity, Manson argued, did not distinguish between inspired and uninspired offices, for them all offices in the church had to be inspired (a belief maintained at all times and with great insistence by the Mormons).¹¹⁷¹ Eduard Meyer would explain the Christian hunger for divine gifts on psychological grounds: the masses yearned for release from the misery of this world, “For that purpose the *mystik* of revelation was indispensable....The *Reich der Schatten*...was transformed into a reality, indeed, into the only reality, while the actual world degenerated to a lifeless shadow-world.”¹¹⁷² A. Loisy holds that the *Pastor of Hermas* “*marue la fin noh seulement de l’apocalyptique mais de la prophetie chretienne. Qui le montanisme ne pourra ressusciter. On sent que le regne de l’inspiration est a son terme, que celui de l’episcopat et de la tradition vont comcencer.*”¹¹⁷³ He places the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Secrets of Enoch*, the *Hermas*, and the oldest parts of the New Testament in the full apocalyptic tradition. Bossuet lamented that Tertullian would have been as brilliant a luminary as the church ever had “*sans sa triste sévérité, qui à la fin lui fit préférer les rêveries du faux*

¹¹⁶⁸ Harnack

¹¹⁶⁹ Gunkel, 1888

¹¹⁷⁰ Harnack

¹¹⁷¹ T. W. Manson, “The New Testament Basis of the Doctrine of the Church,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 1 (1950), 9-11.

¹¹⁷² Eduard May

¹¹⁷³ A. Loisy

prophète Montan a l'Église catholique."¹¹⁷⁴ That if ever is Hamlet with Hamlet left out. He did not cling to the false reveries when he found they were false, and he never preferred them to true revelation. His choice was between false charisma or none—and it was a cruel one. After noting that Tertullian was rational, thorough, and uncompromising, Bossuet insists that he was duped by reveries, but "*Il faut avoir perdu tout le goût de la vérité, pour ne pas sentir [in Tertullian]...une force de raisonnement qui nous enlève.*"¹¹⁷⁵ Tertullian knew what he was doing, and he knew what he wanted—and that was his undoing. It was "in the storms of the second century," according to Eduard Schwartz, that the "old free *charismata* of the apostolate and the teaching vanished away. Prophecy flared up for the last time in the second half of the second century in Asia Minor....The lay priesthood sank to dismal remnant from forgotten times, and from the bishop, priest, and deacon was formed a spiritual class [Stand] which received the unexplained name of *cleros*."¹¹⁷⁶

By its very nature, such a thing as the charisma could not exist long in the world, the doctors tell us, unmindful that the statement applies with equal force to the church itself, which, as we have seen, can never be without the divine gifts. If the world cannot support such institutions as prophecy, tongues and visions, neither can it support the church that lives by them. While the first period of Christianity was one of "*pneumatisme*," Goguel observes, it was Hellenism which made Christianity durable: the Hellenic, not the Palestinian communities had survival value.¹¹⁷⁷ The activity of the spirit became stabilized and limited as tradition grew, weakening "*pneumatisme*." As we have seen, Goguel associates with this *pneumatisme* a feverish expectation for the end of the world. How reluctant the church was to lose the inspiration of the first age may be seen in the fascination that Montanism had even for the most orthodox. William

¹¹⁷⁴ Jacques Bègne Bossuet, *Oeuvres de Bossuet*, ed. Girardin Saint-Marc and Henri Patin (Paris: F. Didot, 1862), 483.

¹¹⁷⁵ Bossuet, *Oeuvres de Bossuet*, 483.

¹¹⁷⁶ Eduard Schwartz

¹¹⁷⁷ Maurice Goguel, "La Seconde Génération Chrétienne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 136 (1949), 37.

Voelker has recently called attention to the striking and significant preoccupation of Eusebius with Montanism.¹¹⁷⁸ The father of church history seems almost obsessed by the problem that was bothering everybody: “are the pneumatic elements of Montanism genuine?”¹¹⁷⁹ As it turned out, they were not. But the question would never have been asked had the main church had any real claims to the spiritual gifts for which everyone yearned. Eusebius himself loves to cite miracles to prove their continuance in the church. He brings forth “masses of citations which are all meant to prove the fact, that the pneumatic [spiritual, supernatural] element had always been a mainspring in the history of the Christian church, thereby providing powerful proof of its divinity.”¹¹⁸⁰ After all, this was Eusebius’ project: to prove that the church of his day was really apostolic. To do that he needs the charismatic very badly, but in his own day they were no more. In speaking of “spiritual gifts,” it is important to understand that “for Paul and his successors,” to quote Professor Nock, “Spirit and ‘spiritual’ had none of the idealizing and abstract character which they are liable to suggest to us. Spirit was an active power showing itself in concrete tangible manifestations, as well as in the rational or ecstatic inspiration and in the special holiness or normal piety of individuals...”¹¹⁸¹ Most recently H. Greeven has studied the subject of Paul’s conception of prophets and teachers. For Paul, he says, “to be a prophet was not a fitful changeable state of ecstasy, but had to be a constant capacity that remained ever with those who possessed it.”¹¹⁸² Whereas prayer, hymns and blessings could occur in the early church either “in the spirit” or “in the mind,” prophecy, though addressed to the understanding, was entirely of an inspired character. Moreover, only by the spirit of prophecy did the early Christians believe that one could receive a testimony and know the truth of things. Prophecy was the most immediate bond between heaven and earth, according to Greeven, and the principal assurance to the saints

¹¹⁷⁸ William Voelker

¹¹⁷⁹ Eusebius

¹¹⁸⁰ Eusebius

¹¹⁸¹ Professor Nock

¹¹⁸² Heinrich Greeven, “*Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus: zur Frage der ‘Ämter’ im Urchristentum*,” ZNW 44 (1952-53). ([Check source/German](#))

that they were living in the last times and that God had not deserted them.¹¹⁸³ A church without prophecy is a church “left to its own resources.”¹¹⁸⁴ Paul values prophecy above all other things for the church, as a guarantee of the presence of Christ—but not in the nebulous “spiritual” sense of the modern theological seminary.

Ake V. Ström has tried to evaluate the “inspirational” quality of the *Pastor*, the last work of inspiration in the church, and tells us it belongs to the *zyklothyme* type of prophecy, though “*Hermas* also had automatic inspiration.”¹¹⁸⁵ At present the Roman Church defines revelation as “*non est hominum opus aut philosophum aliquod inventum...nec cum progressu scientiae intelligi aut demonstrari possunt...Requiritur notitia certa de facto revelationis.*”¹¹⁸⁶

¹¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸⁵ Ake V. Ström

¹¹⁸⁶ Catholic source?

RATIONALIZED CHARISMA (Section 11)
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One of the most interesting developments following the loss of the charismatic gifts was the attempt made to “keep up a belief of [their] continuance in the Church.” The “suspicion that the power of working miracles was withdrawn,” which the bishop of Bristol detected in the writers of the second century, was being boldly stated by clergy and laymen after the Council of Nicaea.¹¹⁸⁷

The astonishing bankruptcy of the second generation of Christians has been the subject of much recent comment. With the second century, the church began as *Enteschatologisierung*, Oscar Cullmann reports, but the cause was not, as Albert Schweitzer, Buri, and Werner insist, the failure of the *parousia*, but rather due to the Hellenizing influences at work in the church.¹¹⁸⁸ It was worldly thinking of the schools that accelerated the *Entpneumatisierung* that made the later church so utterly different from the original one. Those who attribute the radical and complete reorientation of the second century church to failure of the end, and make the expectation of an early end the central doctrine of the New Testament are entirely wrong, according to Cullmann. F. Buri as an existentialist uses this argument to discredit orthodox Christianity: it was the *Zentralglaube* of the church, he claimed, and it failed, long ago.¹¹⁸⁹ Harnack pointed out that in the second century “pure religious enthusiasm began to wane, old ideals received a new form, and the self-reliance and responsibility of individuals grew weaker. The ‘priests and kings of God’ began to clamor for priests, and to come to terms with the kings of the earth.”¹¹⁹⁰ “The main problem for the second generation of Christians,” wrote Lake in 1911, “was to accommodate to a society which after all showed no signs of passing away, beliefs and doctrines which had been based on the expectation of its transitoriness. In the end, therefore, it was the Christian doctrine

¹¹⁸⁷ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 50.

¹¹⁸⁸ Cullmann, “Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem,” 187.

¹¹⁸⁹ F. Buri (see Buri citation in Cullmann above)

¹¹⁹⁰ Adolf von Harnack, *Monasticism, Its Ideals and History, and the Confessions of St. Augustine*, (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901), 25.

and practice which underwent the change, and society which remained.”¹¹⁹¹ We thank Dr. Lake for the statement of the fact, his explanation for the cause we need not accept. After all had it not been predicted from the beginning that the doctrine and practice would undergo change, and that society as it was would remain? The wheat did not overcome the tares, to be sure, but is that what the disciples had been taught to expect? Who said the tares would not win? As Spencer notes, there could not be an immediate *parousia* if the tares were to do serious damage to the crop—an extended growing period—for tares—was plainly indicated.¹¹⁹² Having been taught to expect what actually happened, the saints were not in the least surprised or upset when it did happen. Scholars are perplexed to no end by their reaction, since it is absolutely opposed to the expectations which the scholars attribute to them. The clear and vivid conception of modern students of how things were simply does not agree with the words and actions of the ancients themselves: things were not that way at all. “Such was primitive Christianity,” writes Fawkes in 1917, “It was short-lived; before the middle of the second century it had disappeared. And it had disappeared so completely that we cannot now even imagine it—a charismatic religion, for which a tribal theology is an open question and the end of all things imminent.”¹¹⁹³ That the first church was something so different that we cannot even imagine it now we may admit, but by the same token we cannot grant Mr. Fawkes the luxury of telling us exactly what went on in the minds of its members regarding their future. It is plainly the Gnostic crisis, Loisy claims, that forces the church to turn towards the past in the *Hermas*, “to ransack its archives, catalogue and complete them, to define its own faith. *Hermas* leads us up to the eve of this decision...”¹¹⁹⁴ True, with *Hermas* the door is closed, the tower completed, the time of repentance past. The beginning of the world church is the end of the ancient one, but where *Hermas* has a great deal to say about the

¹¹⁹¹ Lake, “Christian Life in Rome,” 25.

¹¹⁹² Spencer, “Second Advent,” 6-7.

¹¹⁹³ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 115.

¹¹⁹⁴ *De toute évidence, c’est le débordement de la crise gnostique, avec l’afflux désordonné de ses spéculations et de ses fictions, qui a obligé l’Eglise à se retourner vers son passé, à trier ses archives, à les cataloguer et à les fermer, à définir sa propre foi. Herma nous conduit jusqu’à la veille de cette décision...* Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 45.

end of the true tower, the beginning is for him only that of the imitation tower that follows it. Bietenhard has recently argued that the tragedy of the early church was its sharp break with the Jews, since a strong orthodox Jewry would have been a strong defense against idolatry and other pagan forms. “*Am sterben Israel,*” he quotes Schlatter, “*starb auch die Urkirche;* and its death damaged the *Gesamtkirche;* for into the gap moved sectarian Christianity, on the one hand Mohammed, on the other bishop, monk, and pope.”¹¹⁹⁵ For better or for worse, it was all very different; but the threat came not from the pagans but from within the church itself, and it is hard to see how any amount of Orthodox Jews in the world could have prevented it. The second generation heretics, Goguel notes, actually thought they were the church. And why not, since the official doctrine “had not been defined in an authoritative manner by appropriate organs.”¹¹⁹⁶ Among internal heresies Goguel includes “the persistence, in certain groups, of archaic forms of thought, which in the overall development of the church, had been left behind.”¹¹⁹⁷ Among such quaint and antiquated thought forms Goguel cites belief in Peter’s speech at the beginning of Acts. What value a religion can possibly have if it’s thought forms, expressing eternal and unchanging verities, not to say mysteries, continually wear out I cannot imagine. It is true that apostolic beliefs were no longer understood and that the teachings of the early church had been left far, far behind—but that church was the Church of Jesus Christ. Why did the church of the second generation produce not a single great man, where that of the first generation had swarmed with them? The fact is an amazing one, but true. M. Goguel’s explanation of it does not explain but simply describes conditions: it was because the second generation was occupied with practical problems and interested not in theories but in attitudes *pratiques* that “no great personality appeared.”¹¹⁹⁸ This is as if the moron managing a super-market were to announce: “I have not produced any great poetry or discovered any new principles of nuclear physics this

¹¹⁹⁵ Bietenhard

¹¹⁹⁶ Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 53.

¹¹⁹⁷ Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 54.

¹¹⁹⁸ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l’Église*, 151.

week, because we have been busy with inventory!” Preoccupation with mundane matters was not the cause but the result of spiritual bankruptcy. Because “the great lights went out” people were reduced to trivia: they still wanted prodigies and prophets, they yearned for them. They did not deliberately give them up to address themselves to their daily affairs; but like St. Augustine later, they turned with immense reluctance from the burning bush that had ceased to burn to the humdrum realities of everyday life—much less inspiring, but at least still available. The circumstances which allow great men to develop or to shine, says Goguel, were not present in the second generation. What drive! In any age anyone is excused from being a great man on that ground. Great men have a way of appearing not in the most favorable, but in the most adverse times. And where the greatness is spiritual and moral is not all that is dull, depressing, and commonplace the greatest challenge of all? And was not the moral need of the second generation at least as great as that of the first? On the plane of the moral life also, writes Goguel, the second generation gives the impression of having been “a period of decadence.”¹¹⁹⁹ “A certain torpor appears in the seven churches,” a “*tiedeur*”—laxity and exhaustion: the very thing that true Christianity was supposed to overcome.¹²⁰⁰ The morality of the first generation had been that of the eschatological man, he says, while that of the second generation was the morale of neo-legalism. And he notes that Paul died at Rome, isolated and abandoned. Viewing the second century idea of the church, de Zwaan marvels; “...One wonders the more that the main stream of Gospel-tradition could pass through these narrows,”—who said it did?—“for this second century impresses one as decidedly more ‘intellectual’ in another sense than we sometimes may be; more hard and fast, less spontaneous and, in a sense, more cramped.”¹²⁰¹ This is certainly the mood that would follow the sudden withdrawal of apostolic authority: over-caution, a lack of sureness which marks the Christian church forever after in its proclamations and avowals [those pro*** *] in

¹¹⁹⁹ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l'Église*, 159.

¹²⁰⁰ Goguel, *Les Premiers Temps de l'Église*, 156.

¹²⁰¹ J. de Zwaan, “Some Remarks on the ‘Church Idea’ in the Second Century,” in *Aux sources de la tradition Chrétienne, Mélanges offerts À M. Marurice Goguel À l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire* (Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950), 278.

their overwrought rhetoric always protests too much. The mood is apparent as early as the letter to Diognetus. The ideal of the church in the writers of the second century “gets tinged by allegory and seems to derive largely from the Septuagint....It is not only the eschatological atmosphere which is changing, it is the very mind of these utterances.”¹²⁰² “Had this been otherwise,” de Zwaan muses, “for these same people have conserved the Gospel tradition and composed the canon of the New Testament, one might have better understood the living force behind the church-idea, the kind of faith, which sustained them.”¹²⁰³ But the second century spoils everything. All is loss and indifference. “...c’est la tiédeur qui domine...,” says Bardy, citing Revelation and the close of Clement of Alexandria’s *Quis dives salvetur* as illustrations.¹²⁰⁴

What J. Morris finds in Acts is “The belief of Christians whose faith is the imminent restoration of a temporal independent Jewish state under Christian leadership....The Jewish Christian Church...never recovered from the disaster of 70 A.D. and altogether perished in 135 A.D.”¹²⁰⁵ And while “The influence upon Christianity of centuries of Jewish experience, embodied in the Old Testament, was immense; the influence of the short lived Jewish Christian church was negligible.”¹²⁰⁶ Note that Morris chooses to call “the Jewish Christian church” was the original Church of Jesus Christ—and its influence on Christianity has been truly negligible.

The complete change in orientation between the two centuries is already apparent in the apostolic fathers. The Diognetus letter has already been mentioned. In the *Apostolic Constitutions* a bishop is required to be “conscientious and zealous in the study of church-books, much devoted to reading that he might interpret the scriptures carefully, expounding the gospel in accordance with the prophets and the law...carefully considering the word, so that if possible all might be

¹²⁰² de Zwaan, “Some Remarks on the ‘Church Idea’,” 278.

¹²⁰³ de Zwaan, “Some Remarks on the ‘Church Idea’,” 278.

¹²⁰⁴ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 304.

¹²⁰⁵ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 3.

¹²⁰⁶ Morris, “Early Christian Orthodoxy,” 3.

interpreted according to rule,” etc.¹²⁰⁷ Throughout the bishop is strictly an interpreter, not a revealer. As early as the *127 Canons of the Apostles* it is declared that “Every believer no longer has the gift to drive out devils or raise the dead or speak in tongues.”¹²⁰⁸ Why not? The usual explanation: because those who had those gifts had them for a reason,

that they might be a sign to those that believed and strengthen them. Since men refused to accept the preaching of the word, the action of the signs was sent by way of demonstration. But the unbelievers and hypocrites still would not believe, just as the Egyptians would not believe Moses and the Jews would not believe Christ. Therefore we see that miracles only serve as a lesson to those who are humble, and it is for them that God worked these wonders.¹²⁰⁹

The RC editor has tried to take all the sting out of this passage by inserting one little word into it: miracles were “as a sign” to those who would not believe, etc.¹²¹⁰ The extreme form of this theory of eye-wash miracles is the practice of having the apostles do their miracles in the theater. “To-morrow” says John, “come ye to the theatre, as many as desire to see the power of God.”¹²¹¹ So next day all Ephesus duly came to the show to see a miracle as they later did to hear Paul preach. But granted that the only purpose of miracles was to impress the heathen, how does that justify their disappearance—has the work of converting the pagans ever ceased in any Christian church? Do not far more unconverted than converted still remain in the world? When the philosopher Crato challenges John to restore certain gems “if God is indeed thy master,” John forthwith complies, the jewels are restored and “then the philosopher Crato with all his followers at his feet turned about and believed and was baptized....And an infinite *turba* began to adhere to the apostles.”¹²¹² This is just the sort of miracle that apostles do not perform in apostolic times. “It is very significant for the early church,” says Quispel, “that the writers of the Acts are not on the whole interested in describing sensational miracles; they seek rather to convey an inner moral in

¹²⁰⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions*

¹²⁰⁸ *127 Canons of the Apostles*, in *PO* 8:624. “Il n’est pas nécessaire que tout fidèle chasse les démons, ou ressuscite les morts, ou parle les langues.”

¹²⁰⁹ *127 Canons of the Apostles*, in *PO* 8:624-625.

¹²¹⁰ *127 Canons of the Apostles*, in *PO* 8:625.

¹²¹¹ Acts of John 30, see James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 234.

¹²¹² Acts of John

poetic figures. The identification of man with Christ was not more *geometrico* intended, but symbolically, in order to express the truth in as many different ways as possible...”¹²¹³ Voelker cites many passages from Clement of Alexandria to show that “all communion of the faithful with God took place only in the form of prayer.”¹²¹⁴ Gnosis, he says “*ist in erster linie* *Beschauung*, but in the mind.” “In the place of Christ and the atonement” says Brandt, “came office, sacrament, church or liturgy, *ascesis*, ethics—it was all over with the eschatology of the first love....Next, everything acquired a false accent—becoming mystic and magic, norms, escapism and slide-rule casuistry in the meticulous estimating of sins.”¹²¹⁵ When Irenaeus denies that there ever was a gnosis does he realize what he is saying?¹²¹⁶ That he and his know as much of the kingdom of heaven as anyone ever did, for nothing has been lost. He actually claims that the scripture contains everything there is to know, and that any man can understand it all, every syllable, as it stands. He insists that the apostles possessed not an iota of knowledge not found in the scriptures; yet the most shocking charge against the Gnostics is that they presume to rival even the apostles in their knowledge! Origen, who claims that traces of ancient gifts still remain in his church, which is therefore the true one, also notes that traces of the old virtue still linger: “The head of the church in each city,” he says, is “on the whole superior to those men on the civil town-council.”¹²¹⁷ What a come-down for the saints of the most high! What a feeble claim to superior virtue! No longer are Christians and pagans living in separate worlds; they can be compared on common ground. “According to our system” says Origen to the Gnostics, “Those who teach the word ecclesiastically are prophets of Christ. Whoever teaches other doctrines are prophets of the Antichrist....All the *persuasoria* for the defense of the world of the Antichrist are the signs and wonders of the Antichrist himself.”¹²¹⁸ We can always keep miracles and prophets

¹²¹³ Quispel

¹²¹⁴ Voelker

¹²¹⁵ Brandt

¹²¹⁶ Irenaeus

¹²¹⁷ Origen

¹²¹⁸ Origen

by simply redefining the things. In Origen the schoolmen of Alexandria triumph: we are now faced with a paper heaven and a paper hell, with classroom prophets and antichrists, paper glory, paper revelation and paper damnation. The people who cry “Lo here is Christ; Lo there!” are those, says Origen, “who do not know that Christ is not to be seen outside of the scriptures.”¹²¹⁹ And “lo here!” refers to this or that text of the Bible used to vindicate this or that doctrine. “But this is not Christ but one falsely bearing his name.”¹²²⁰

The sorriest come-down for the charismatic powers is the use of Christ’s name in the shabby magical spells that turn up on Egyptian papyri of a very early date. The editor of these is thrilled to discover that the name enjoyed such high prestige in the world, even among the pagans, that it figures in popular cures and curses. But is this not the very thing that Christ said would be done with his name? Instead of illustrating, as our editor concludes, the growing power of the gospel, it shows only the fulfillment of its predicted degradation. “Write on a sheet of tin: ‘I conjure thee in the name of the god of the Hebrews Jesus,’” is followed by the usual mumbo-jumbo.¹²²¹ And again, with a sign of the cross, “Flee hated spirit, Christ pursues you. The Son of God grabs you...”¹²²² The instructions for the employment of the amulets show how Christian gifts were exchanged for pagan methods. Irrelevant snatches of New Testament are thrown together purely for their charm value. Not only do the amulets follow old pagan forms, much older than the sixth and seventh centuries to which they belong, says Wessely, who is anxious to prove their antiquity, but the texts are accompanied by old rites found “*meme dans les exorcismes en vieux haut-allemand.*”¹²²³ As if that were something in their favor!

In all his *Church History*, Eusebius, Eduard Schwartz has noted, “is unable to produce the slightest evidence for any divine revelation; had any report at all of such ever reached him, he

¹²¹⁹ Origen

¹²²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²²¹ Charles Wessely, *Les Plus Anciens Monuments du Christianism Écrits sur Papyrus*, in *PO* 18:417.

¹²²² Wessely, *Les Plus Anciens Monuments du Christianism Écrits sur Papyrus*, in *PO* 18:418.

¹²²³ Wessely, *Les Plus Anciens Monuments du Christianism Écrits sur Papyrus*, in *PO* 18:176.

would under no circumstances have passed it by.”¹²²⁴ His great work is strong evidence, therefore, for the complete cessation of revelation in the church. Lactantius tells how Constantine put the labarum as a symbol on his shields, but nothing of the revelation that was later said to have led to its discovery. From which, Schwartz concludes, it is clear that the legend was invented many years after in order to give the authority of revelation to the imperial insignia.¹²²⁵ The Council of Chalcedon brought the serious charge against Dioscurus, that he was “a friend of the visionary and heretical Eutyches.”¹²²⁶ “Do not wonder that God lets you live as an apostate king,” says the savage Lucifer to the Emperor Constantius, “since your sacrilegious predecessors were not to be called to the worship of the Only God even by signs and wonders.”¹²²⁷ To what signs and wonders does he refer? Where are the signs and wonders that would so strongly speak for the true church now? When the Novatians gave expression to the widespread suspicion that the true church had vanished, Pacianus challenged them: “If the true church is lost,” he cries, “where is your authority?...‘you did have martyrs and confessors’ you say of us, ‘but by receiving those who denied you perished.’...But can you prove that by receiving the *lapsi* the whole church perished?”¹²²⁸ Then he proves the survival of the charismatic gifts in his church by a syllogism: bishops are called apostles (Philippians 2:25, is give as proof of this!): “If therefore the power of washing and anointing came from the ancients far back as charisma to the bishops, who passed it on down...we must have it.”¹²²⁹ Recognizing the inseparable nature of apostolic power and the divine gifts, he proves by a word that the power was transmitted, and argues from that that the gifts must be there too. The use of language in the rhetorical manner of disputation could achieve not only all the powers of revelation but the very presence of God for the church: From Luke 6:8 we learn that Jesus knew what was in the apostles’ hearts, says Ambrose.

¹²²⁴ Eduard Schwartz

¹²²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²²⁶ Evagrius II, 4

¹²²⁷ *ibid.*?

¹²²⁸ Pacianus, *Contra Novatianos*, in *PL* 13:1065.

¹²²⁹ Pacianus, *Contra Novationos*, in *PL* 13:1057.

Ergo, this is what is meant by “knowing God as we walk with him.” Hence the mind of the just man not only is present with God, but even converses with him. Ergo when a sinner reads these divine scriptures, he hears the voice of god as if walking at evening. . .even as God is perceived walking who walks not: thus he is heard speaking who speaks not!¹²³⁰

Truly rhetoric is the reconciler of opposites and the confounder of values. Rhetoric carries the eloquent Goldenmouth even further: The present church is far greater than the ancient one for the Jews said, “let Moses speak to us, and let not God speak to us.”¹²³¹ The shortest route to position and power, to a bishopric, in fact, in the church of 400 was, according to John Chrysostom the way of “useless, ornamental, worldly learning.”¹²³² Chrysostom was worried at being constantly asked what had happened to the gifts in the church, and it is hard to believe that either his hearers or himself were completely satisfied with his explanations—neat tricks of rhetorical legerdemain that undoubtedly brought forth bursts of satisfying applause, but arguments that churchmen prefer to avoid. Our perfection is of a totally different nature from that of the ancient patriarchs he explains (an admission which for some would settle once for all the claims of Christianity to authority).¹²³³ We do not receive the same reward, but we must show forth even greater virtue if we would achieve the same as they. Great *charis* of the Spirit is being poured out even now, but we are adults, where they were children. Now the fight is much more glorious and the rewards much greater than then: it was earthly then, now it is heavenly! Like all professional orators, John preferred the abstract to the concrete, and like all shallow thinkers was convinced that it represented a higher and more spiritual plane of experience than any crass literalism. Yet he betrays his real yearning for the specific when he cites as proof of divine power miracles

¹²³⁰ *cum legimus quia Jesus sciebat cogitationes eorum (Luc. VI, 8): cum legimus: Quid cogitatis mala in cordibus vestris (Matth. IX, 4)? Ergo dum haec recensemus, quasi deambulantes cognoscimus Deum....Iusti enim est facie ad faciem videre; quia iusti mens non solum Deo praesens est, sed etiam cum Deo disputat....Ergo cum legit peccator has Scripturas divinas, audit vocem Dei quasi ambulantis ad vesperam....Illic ergo, sicut supra habes, quia sentiebatur deambulans Deus qui non deambulabat: sic audiebatur loquens Deus, qui non loquebatur. Ambrose, Liber de Paradiso 14.68-69, in PL 14:326-27.*

¹²³¹ John Chrysostom, PG 63, 221

¹²³² John Chrysostom, *De Sacred.* 158

¹²³³ John Chrysostom

performed by the bones of the martyrs—especially those of the Maccabees!¹²³⁴ And is in ecstasies when he tells how the severed tongue of Romanus gave a most correct and academic oration. Yet he consoles his contemporaries, that they are far above the ancients in needing nothing so childish as miracles! His favorite argument to explain the loss of gifts is a classic of clerical smoothness: “Isn’t it a thousand times better to be virtuous, he asks, than to speak in tongues?”¹²³⁵ Dare to deny that! At times, says Jerome, virtue is to be preferred to strength and to miracles—true, but beside the point. “The house of Christ,” says Jerome, “is the church; the dignity of the minister represents the old priesthood, and that of the teacher [*doctorem*] the prophet.”¹²³⁶ The pathetic way pagan and Christian claimed the feeble miracle of the thundering legion and found crosses in the sky is evidence enough for a hunger for miracles. Through the centuries the Christian church has found it safest to confine itself to claims of an allegorical nature: “The early undivided church,” according to Pusey, “is the truth, the voice of the whole church, and in it, of God, to you.”¹²³⁷ “There have never been so many saints as in our days,” cries the jubilant Buzy, “that is to say, so many miracles,” since “the church requires for beatification two miracles since the death of the candidate and two others for their canonization.”¹²³⁸ Does not that prove that the church is blessed with greater charisma than ever? It does not. A syllogism proves nothing. According to modern Catholic doctrine, *fons revelationis scriptus* is the Bible, and the other *fons revelationis* is the tradition *ecclesiastica*, and “there is no other source of [public] revelation beside the canonical books and the apostolic tradition.”¹²³⁹ What a severe limitation on God!

¹²³⁴ John Chrysostom (see spreadsheet notes)

¹²³⁵ John Chrysostom (see spreadsheet notes)

¹²³⁶ Jerome (see spreadsheet notes)

¹²³⁷ Edward Bouverie Pusey to Rev. Dr. Hook, 1845, in *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, vol. 2, Henry Parry Liddon (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893), 489.

¹²³⁸ Denis Buzy, “L’Adversaire et l’Obstacle,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 24 (1934), 430-431.

¹²³⁹ Catholic doctrine (see spreadsheet notes)

The second generation, says Goguel, “was necessary to unify, organize, select and test the inspired creations of the first.”¹²⁴⁰ Men without inspiration are officiously passing on the experiences of revelation. This is history in retrospect, but there is every indication that the second century did not think of it that way. They had no desire to make cheese in order to preserve the milk. They never speak of “the coming triumph of the church over the empire” which Mr. Goguel sees as the theme of Revelation!¹²⁴¹ They simply want more of the same, and if they fail to have it, it is because something disastrous has happened. Knopf on the other hand sees in Revelation “the classic evidence for the penetration of Jewish apocalyptic into Christianity,” and notes that “no book of the New Testament is so often referred to by name in the second century as this one.”¹²⁴² And for what qualities? Its sound organizational and practical appeal? “For us,” says Knopf, “the fantastic concepts of the apocalyptic lie far, far removed.”

*** bread of the starving second generation.

¹²⁴⁰ *Cette seconde génération, période d'organisation, s'oppose à la première qui avait été une période de création, mais en même temps elle la prolonge et stabilisant et en organisant ce qu'elle avait créé et acquis...* Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 39.

¹²⁴¹ *...le Royaume de Dieu comme devant s'établir sur les ruines de l'Empire romain...* Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 43.

¹²⁴² Knopf

GNOSIS (Section 12)
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The fate of the early church is seen in nothing more clearly than the rise, prosperity and ultimate absorption (not extermination) of the Gnostics. That the gnosis should be the knottiest problem in church history is an eloquent testimony to the determination of scholars to avoid the simple and obvious when it is also unpleasant. Gnosticism was a fake gospel: it imitated all the gifts and powers, rites and ordinances of the primitive church; it claimed to possess the all-important teaching that Christ imparted to the apostles after the resurrection and which is deliberately left out of the New Testament. It claimed all that, and to make good its claim resorted to all sorts of Oriental clap-trap, hocus-pocus, apocryphal tradition, allegorical and mystical interpretation of scripture, etc. That was obviously faked but it was necessary to fill a vacuum, for the Gnostics-so-called did not have the wisdom they claimed. But Gnosticism itself was a vacuum phenomenon. Had the real gifts, powers, authority, ordinances and doctrine which they copied been in force in the church, the poor imitations of the “Self-Styled Gnostics” would have gotten nowhere. As it was, the people of the church rushed to the pretenders like thirsty animals to water. Gnosticism-so-called promised them what the church could no longer give them—and which all felt the church should supply. The Montanists tried hard to make a noise like the ancient apostles: even the great Tertullian in desperation gave them a try. He has told us why: because here was a group that at least claimed the *charismata*, which he failed to find in the main church. As it turned out the claim was a false one, but even as late as Eusebius students of the ancient church felt strongly drawn towards those sects who claimed to have what the ancient Christians had had. They missed it, and they yearned for it; and in the churches of their time they did not find it—only half-baked efforts to regain it by programs of violent self-stimulation and deception.

For 135 years scholars have propounded strange explanations for the strange phenomenon of Gnosticism. The wide range and variety of their interpretations suggest an extreme scarcity of evidence on the subject, and yet actual references to the Gnostics-so-called

are both numerous and voluminous. The difficulty of finding the true place for the Gnostic teaching in church history lies not in its aloofness, but in its stifling proximity to orthodox Christian doctrine. The Gnostics are a very embarrassing phenomenon: had the church retained even a little of its ancient integrity or authority there would have been no Gnostic crisis. And the Gnostics are neither won over nor exterminated. What happened to them? The specific teachings and practices which anti-Gnostic writers denounce as false are the very ones that soon find a home in the church. The philosophical orientation which marked the Gnostics as uninspired pretenders became the church's own orientation. The Gnostics were false, and yet they were not different. They were fantastic, but it was not the fantastic side of their teachings that posed the real threat. They were liars, but they were Christians. They were popular, and they were very, very numerous—and their more attractive and popular teachings were never abolished.

In 1818 Neander saw the roots of the gnosis in “the schools and sects that were already present among the Jews,” whose existence and teachings were best attested in Philo.¹²⁴³ Ten years later J. Matter described Gnosticism as “*une série de systèmes* in which the last philosophers of antiquity, profiting from the opinions of their predecessors, sought to resolve better than they had the problems which had so long disturbed them.”¹²⁴⁴ In the *Antignosticus*, Neander says there was in the church “a tendency which in its striving after knowledge approximated Gnosticism, recognized a real mental want which lay at its base, and sought to satisfy it by substitution for a false gnosis a true one founded on Christian principles.”¹²⁴⁵ That is the very point: Why was it necessary to substitute for the false gnosis a new one? Why was that not already at hand to obviate the necessity for any false gnosis? The “true gnosis founded on Christian principles,” was the teaching that Christ had given the apostles, the teaching that the false Gnostics claimed to have. They did not invent the idea of a gnosis—it was given to them by the apostles. The true

¹²⁴³ August Neander, 1818

¹²⁴⁴ Jacques Matter, *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme, et de son Influence sur les Sectes Religieuses et Philosophiques des Six Premiers Siècles de l'Ère Chrétienne*, (Paris: Chez F. G. Levrault, 1828), 45.

¹²⁴⁵ August Neander, *Antignosticus*, (Introduction)

gnosis had certainly once been in the church, for all the earliest references to the Gnostics are careful to specify that they are not real Gnostics at all—they are only “So-called Gnostics, self-styled Gnostics, false-Gnostics,” etc. Where then was the real gnosis which they were copying? If it were still to be had in the church it would not be necessary to found “a new gnosis on Christian principles,” in imitation of and in competition with the false one! In 1835 F. C. Baur noted that hardly another subject in church history was so much studied “as that of the earliest gnosis.”¹²⁴⁶ Before Massuet, he says, all church historians treated the gnosis simply as insane and depraved. But Massuet showed that the doctrines were really Platonic. Mosheim on the other hand, emphasized the Oriental element in Gnostic teaching. Baur himself defines the gnosis as *das Wissen von dem Verhältniss zwischen Heidentum und Christentum*.¹²⁴⁷ By general definition it is “*das absolute Wissen*.” What Baur, Mosheim and Massuet emphasize is the materials the Gnostics drew upon to support their claims. This is the common weakness of students of the gnosis: to fix upon one facet of their teaching as peculiar and fundamental whereas they were immensely eclectic because they had to be. “With the name and the notion of ‘Gnosticism,’” says Baur, “we enter upon a totally different field of the history of the early church...in a word, Christianity is now to be apprehended not as a principle of salvation, but as a principle of the world...It is merely the name of Christianity that connects them with the rest of the phenomena which form the history of the early church.”¹²⁴⁸ Why should this be unique to the Gnostics, did not the apostolic fathers denounce this very trend in their day? What is totally different? Every aspect of Gnosticisms against which anti-Gnostic writers protest is denounced by the apostles and apostolic fathers. The progress from faith to knowledge was no new or revolutionary departure, it was, as Lipsius observed in 1860, characteristic of the original nature of Christianity itself. Christianity was from the first “*die Wahrheit des Heidentums, ...ein absolutes Weltprinzip*,”¹²⁴⁹

¹²⁴⁶ F. C. Baur, 1835

¹²⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁴⁸ Baur

¹²⁴⁹ Lipsius, 1860

i.e. just what Gnosticism later claimed to be. Lipsius introduced the theory that the religious syncretism of later classical antiquity was a *vorbereitung* for Christian universalism. Knock and others have recently refuted this claim, but to regard ancient culture as a preparation for Christianity smacks of the enthusiastic reasoning that sees divine providence in the fact that rivers run at the bottom of valleys rather than along the tops of the hills, where they would do great harm: whatever came out of Christianity would automatically be called the “result” of whatever had gone before. Only recently did Eduard Schwartz point out what should have been the obvious fact that Christ is not a product of his world or background.¹²⁵⁰ Lipsius duly noted that the *logos* doctrine, allegorical interpretation of the scriptures, and other characteristic marks of post-apostolic Christianity are held by it in common with the Gnostics, in whose teachings these things were also basic. But what he calls the *Grundmerkmal* of Gnosticism was “the relationship between *pistis* and *gnosis*.”¹²⁵¹ He notes that the absorption of *kirchlichen Glaubenssubstanz durch das absolute Wissen* is characteristic of Gnosticism, is also a noticeable trend in the contemporary Catholic Church as well. Gnostic opinions, he says, were gradually dropped from the church: but what were they doing there in the first place? The false *gnosis*, he says, “could only be overcome through the opposition of a catholic *gnosis*, by fighting fire with fire; just so, he notes, “the church was only able to get the best of Montanism by opposing it with a counter-claim to the gifts, claiming to be equipped in the same manner with specially gifted psychic individuals who stood in the same relationship to the layman that the Montanist prophets did to theirs.”¹²⁵² We have the answers of early Christian writers to the claims of the Montanists and the Gnostics: never do they refer to older, apostolic gifts which they claim to possess, but can do no more than challenge the upstarts to produce a historical record equal to their own. What Gnosticism and Montanism have in common, says Lipsius, is the distinction of pneumatics and psychics, a

¹²⁵⁰ Eduard Schwarz (See side note on R. Holl.)

¹²⁵¹ Lipsius

¹²⁵² Lipsius

distinction “which is constantly being repeated in various forms within the Christian church.”¹²⁵³

It was the Montanists who took the dualism of “this world” vs. “the world to come,” and revived it, fanning it again to fanatical heat. Syria is the home of the gnosis; the book of Baruch is the transition from Judaism to gnosis. The dissolution of Gnosticism came with the relaxing of the contrast between the pneumatics and the psychics, which was accompanied by ever closer approximation to Catholic doctrine. For the boundaries between Catholic and heretic were very fluid. Certainly they were in Justin’s day. In 1875, Lipsius traced the earliest use of the word to the Karpodratians and Ebionites and the year 170 A.D.¹²⁵⁴ Justin never uses it. In the same year Mansel concluded:

It is probable, therefore, that the adoption of the terms *Gnosis* and *Gnostic*, as special designations of a philosophy and its professors, arose from the language of Christianity, and was intended to distinguish the Gnostic teaching as the rival and the assumed superior of the Christian church....The knowledge professed by the Christian church was a knowledge given by divine revelation and accepted in faith...the knowledge professed by the Gnostic teachers, on the other hand, was a knowledge designed to subordinate the revelation of Christ to the speculations of human philosophy.¹²⁵⁵

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Why does Gnosticism impress students first and foremost by its preoccupation with the supernatural? The Gnostics used philosophy, because like the church itself (as Augustine so eloquently demonstrates) it had no other choice once revelation had ceased; but it dressed that philosophy up in such a way as to give the impression of being continued revelation. It claimed wisdom beyond the scope of any human philosophy, and precisely therein lay its appeal. Any Christian sect designed to supplant revelation by philosophy, to prefer the open book to the burning bush, would fail of any popular appeal, and the Gnostics enjoyed immense popularity, stealing most of the members away from the rival church for a while. “The generic name ‘Gnostics’” wrote C.W. King in his book on the subject in 1887,

is used to designate several widely different sects, which sprang up in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire almost simultaneously with the first planting of Christianity...in all probability their main doctrines had made their appearance

¹²⁵³ *ibid.*

¹²⁵⁴ Lipsius, 1875

¹²⁵⁵ Henry L. Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, (London: 1875), 7-8.

previously in many of the cities of Asia Minor. There, it is probable, these sectarians first came into definite existence under the title of *'Mystae,'* upon the establishment of a direct intercourse with India and here Buddhist philosophers, under the Seleucidae and the Ptolemies.¹²⁵⁶

The persistence of Gnosticism in the sects of the Middle Ages was studied by Doellinger. And what is it these sects all have in common? Invariably the claim to being as nearly as possible identical with the primitive church. In treating the "*hauptprobleme der Gnosis*" in 1907, Bousset singled out details of doctrine which are important, but without any of which the system would still have flourished.¹²⁵⁷ The constant tendency of students of Gnosticism is to pick out features for their striking peculiarity rather than for their importance in the Gnostic system. Without what would Gnosticism cease to be Gnosticism, is the question, and not, what is the most striking and peculiar doctrine of the Gnostics. For there were a great variety of conflicting systems and doctrines among the Gnostics—yet they were all Gnostics by virtue of a single common claim: the claim to possess the gnosis. What could be simpler? And what was the gnosis? No clearer or more precise definition could be asked for than that which Eusebius gives us, quoting Clement (see below). In the same year as Bousset's quest, Buonaiuti wrote a book, *Gnosticismo*, in which he defined his subject: "Gnosticism, by definition, might be called as it were a system which, full of faith in the capacity of unaided reason, believes it can solve the various problems of existence with certitude and independently of any exterior illumination: the word gnosis was adopted from the ancients as synonymous with 'knowledge.'"¹²⁵⁸ Gnosis thus is the cult of reason.

It was through "a necessary and general reinterpretation [*Umdeutung*] of the Old Testament" according to Harnack, that the gnosis came into existence as "a determined, intellectual, philosophical element in the society," a thing "which was totally removed from the apocalyptic dreams" of the early times, and absolutely rejected all polytheism and popular superstition; "it put all emphasis on the One God, the Savior Jesus and a spiritual worship of

¹²⁵⁶ C. W. King, *The Gnostics and Their Remains*, (London: David Nutt, 1887), 3.

¹²⁵⁷ Bousset, 1907

¹²⁵⁸ Ernesto Buonaiuti, *Lo Gnosticismo*, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Francesco Ferrari, 1907), 11.

God.”¹²⁵⁹ It was all away from literalism, in a word. Hence the Gnostic systems, according to Harnack, represent “an acute *Verweltlichung*, specifically, a Hellenizing, of Christianity,” which called for rejection of the Old Testament.¹²⁶⁰ The difference between this and the Catholic development, says Harnack, was simply that the latter was more gradual, though in the end the same thing took place: “The traditional religion, of which men suddenly expected [suspected] to find a likeness reflected in a totally strange image, was strong enough to reject it; but the slow and, it might be said, considerate alterations to which it was subjected met with only minor opposition, and in fact were as a rule not even noticed.”¹²⁶¹ Both churches went the same way: the gnosis did quickly what the Catholic Church did more slowly—that is the main difference between them: “It is hence by no means a paradox,” says Harnack, “to maintain that Gnosticism, which as a dogma-historical factor is simply mysteriosophistic Hellenism, won half a victory in Catholicism.”¹²⁶² “In a word,” says Harnack, the Gnostics “were the theologians of the first century....They are those Christians who attempted to win Christianity for Hellenism and Hellenism for Christianity, in order to make this easier; and to maintain the absoluteness of Christianity they gave up the Old Testament.” By a more gradual method it was not necessary to give up the Old Testament, but only to reinterpret it by the seven tropes, and St. Augustine is being hailed today as the genius who first brought about the fusion of Classical and Christian culture which is the groundwork of Western Civilization. He accomplished thus the program of the Gnostics, who in him “win half a victory.” The trend to philosophy with the rejection of the original “old wives tales of the vulgar,” is not merely the foundation of the Gnostic movement, it is also, as Harnack observes, the dominant feature of all church history at the time.¹²⁶³ It was already deplored by the apostolic fathers. But the significant and qualifying feature of the Gnostic systems is not that they are philosophy, but that they claim to be revelation: The knowledge of the

¹²⁵⁹ Harnack

¹²⁶⁰ Adolf von Harnack, *Grundriss der Dogmengeschichte*, (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1889), 32.

¹²⁶¹ Harnack

¹²⁶² Harnack

¹²⁶³ Harnack

gnosis was not a natural one, but rested on revelation, and imparted through Holy *Weihen*.”¹²⁶⁴ This seems anything but “a total break with the apocalyptic dreams” of earlier times—it looks like more of the same, and indeed Harnack must admit that the Gnostic reflection was always “*vor der Phantasie unterstutzt*.”¹²⁶⁵ What then happens to his claims of pure intellectualism? It is true that “to regard the fantastic details of the Gnostic systems as the essence of the thing is...unhistorical and incorrect.”¹²⁶⁶ This is as we have said, the common weakness of most Gnostic studies. But it is equally incorrect to regard the essence of Gnosticism as a rationalist revolt against old fashioned revelation when it constantly expresses itself in fantastic appeals to the supernatural. One thing is certain: the gnosis was anything but an appeal to pagan popular religion: it insisted “on the highest level of monistic-monotheistic doctrine, as rigid and absolute as only monotheistic doctrine of the schools could be. It was accordingly “the university religion,” the religion for the intellectuals. Yet its appeal was to the Christian masses. Its essence was not intellectual. “The great Gnostics both as philosophers and as Christians follow strict monotheistic tendencies and influences. The God whom they define as bottomless Abyss and put forth as Love is All in All.”¹²⁶⁷

De Faye, in 1913, pointed out that Gnosticism in its main source, the *Pistis Sophia*, almost becomes Manichaeism.¹²⁶⁸ Why did Augustine become a Manichaean? Because he was looking for revelation, for tangible contact with the things of heaven, for something better than poor Numa had who lacking prophets, had to resort to magic and philosophy—this literal thing was what Augustine sought and failed to find in the Christian church in which he had been raised. And so he turned to Manichaeism, close cousin to Gnosticism—not for its fantastic elements, but in spite of them, for they were only the expression of that literal contact with other worlds which

¹²⁶⁴ Harnack

¹²⁶⁵ Harnack

¹²⁶⁶ Harnack

¹²⁶⁷ Harnack

¹²⁶⁸ Eugene De Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme: Étude Critique des Documents du Gnosticisme Chrétien aux II^e et III^e Siècles*, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1925), 257-289.

for Augustine was the essence of revealed religion. Faye says the great popularity of Gnosticism in the third century was due to its resemblance of the schools of philosophy—but these were not popular with the masses and the third century gnosis was far from the early gnosis. The common aspiration of all the earliest Gnostics was to possess *une science superieure*. This was no school knowledge: “They were haunted by the dream of a gnosis unknown to the rest of the human race.”¹²⁶⁹ Now this is exactly what the early Christians had actually had; it was the possession specifically of this gnosis that the first Gnostics-so-called claimed for themselves. It was not the Gnostics but the pseudo-Gnostics that Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus attacked, says Faye, “all of them, Basilides, Valentine, Ptolemy, Heracleon, believed that they possessed the secret of a heavenly [sublime] knowledge.”¹²⁷⁰ Had they had it, they would have been real Gnostics, as the apostles were, but they were always and only false-Gnostics. “They all believed that this secret had been transmitted to them in mysterious ways. They believed, or pretended to believe, that Jesus himself had made the depositaries of this knowledge those apostles on which they made special claim. Furthermore they found their gnosis in the scriptures especially in the words of Jesus and in the epistles of Paul.”¹²⁷¹ The reason for insistence on dark and hidden sources of knowledge is obvious: they could not, as the apostles had, produce evidence for their revelation. Their miracles if determined, were faked; their ecstasies artificially stimulated. But they knew and everyone knew what they were imitating. To answer the claims of the Gnostics, the main church must maintain not only that the false-gnosis is a fraud, but, to save her own face, that there never had been a gnosis, though it is mentioned no less than 27 times in the New Testament, and if the only gnosis was a fraud the careful insistence on the term pseudo-gnosis would have been false and misleading. B. W. Bacon in 1916 made gnosis the Greek equivalent of revelation, or

¹²⁶⁹ De Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme*, 431.

¹²⁷⁰ De Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme*, 431.

¹²⁷¹ De Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme*, 431.

torah, the revealed law, and distinguished between Pauline and Johannine gnosis.¹²⁷² In 1924 J. P. Steffes described the Christian Gnosticism as being a development of an earlier “pre-Christian Gnosticism.” This was a “naturalistic, universal, transcendental religion of revelation and redemption.”¹²⁷³ Hardly a philosopher’s ideal. Leisegang’s work on the gnosis appeared in 1924. He defines gnosis as “the knowledge of the hyper sensual [*Übersinnlichen*], which is obtained in and beyond the corporeally perceived world as the moving force of all occurrences visibly invisible in eternal mystery [secret].”¹²⁷⁴ The problem of the origin of the gnosis is being fiercely debated, says Leisegang. The church fathers looked upon it as Greek wisdom. The Greeks themselves approved and praised the gnosis accordingly. Moderns have tried to trace it to this or that Oriental country. The gnosis which we know, Leisegang believes, “is a mosaic of innumerable tiny stones of disparate nature and origin.”¹²⁷⁵ Again the preoccupation with the source of materials used in the building: as if they would prove what the true nature and design of the building was! The spiritual-intellectual structure of the Gnostic systems was Greek, says Leisegang; the material worked into it was largely Oriental. Leisegang’s study on Gnostic thought is like an article on buckets devoting itself to careful chemical analysis of all the various substances that may be put into buckets; this would produce a milk school, a water school, a soup-school, and what-not. All of which would be useful but not fundamental to defining the function of a bucket as such.

Lake, distinguishing sharply between true Gnosticism (such as that of Clement of Alexandria and Origen) and false, concludes that “one may fairly say that this Epistle [Ephesians]

¹²⁷² Benjamin W. Bacon, “The ‘Son’ as Organ of Revelation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 9 (1916): 382-415.

¹²⁷³ J. P. Steffes, 1924

¹²⁷⁴ Hans Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1924), 1.

¹²⁷⁵ Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, 1.

is the primary statement of Christian Gnosticism.”¹²⁷⁶ It is closely connected with the idea of the church, more prominent in Ephesians “than in any other Epistle.”¹²⁷⁷

A new study on Gnostic survival into the Middle Ages appeared in 1927, by Alphantery.¹²⁷⁸ In the following year Frick announced that the ultimate basis of the gnosis was a yearning for *Erlösung*.¹²⁷⁹ Could not the church supply it? If so, why did all rush over to the Gnostics? The Gnostics turned the old eschatology into an allegory, devoid of any limits of time. This has been a recent trend in the Christian churches, but it was Irenaeus, in answering the Gnostics who first, according to Frick, viewed the history of salvation in terms of a fundamental evolution. In this as in so many things, Irenaeus fights Gnostic fire with the same fire and ends up seeing almost eye to eye with the wreckers whose depredations he deplored. In a study appearing in 1934, Hans Jonas describes the gnosis as primarily an attempt to contact the other world.¹²⁸⁰ “According to the popular Greek view,” Jaeger writes in Aristotle, “knowledge of the divine, the gnosis of the Orientals, is a thing that must be forever unobtainable to mortals...”¹²⁸¹ That clearly explains the choice of the word by New Testament writers, and that is exactly the sense in which Paul uses it. Bardy attempts to discount the real influence of the false gnosis, though in so-doing he robs Cardinal Newman of the only logical way of explaining the great danger to the church predicted in the New Testament, without accepting a general apostasy. He also admits that his claim cannot be proved. “Unfortunately,” he writes, “we are poorly informed as to the actual success of all these sects, and it would be as inaccurate to exaggerate it as to deny it....one has no right to say that the defenders of orthodoxy don’t know what they are talking about and attack

¹²⁷⁶ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 149.

¹²⁷⁷ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 148.

¹²⁷⁸ P. Alphantery, “Le Gnosticisme dans les Sectes Medievales Latines,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 7 (1927), 395-411.

¹²⁷⁹ *Die gnostischen Spekulationen haben ihren letzten Grund in der Sehnsucht nach Erlösung*. Frick, “Die Geschichte des Reich-Gottes-Gedankens in der alten Kirche bis zu Origenes und Augustin,” 45.

¹²⁸⁰ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

¹²⁸¹ Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 164.

imaginary adversaries.”¹²⁸² But it is a fact, that from the beginning of the third century the heretic danger was removed from the church, which was assured of a victory which was from then on as prompt as it was definitive. And, we might observe, from the beginning of the third century on, Christian theology assumes its permanent philosophical orientation, its allegorical exegesis, and its final rejection of all primitive Christian ideas. The Gnostic attempt to act like primitive and inspired apostles was a failure; the Gnostic methods won a permanent victory over the church. Attacking Bauer’s theory that the first-century heresies were older than the “*grande Église*” and represented a revolt against the new regimentation, Bardy quotes Harnack’s remark that these early heresies could not have existed without a certain *Christlichkeit* to revolt against.¹²⁸³ Like the reformers, they were not older, but they pretended to go back to something far older. That they did not does not vindicate the groups that opposed them. A lack of authority in a monarch does not authorize anyone at all to take his place and assume the authority which he does not have; but neither does the discrediting of such usurpers vindicate the man they would supplant.

Bultmann, the oracle of the Existentialists, announces that “Investigation is recognizing more and more, that the gnosis was in reality a religious movement of pre-Christian origin, which penetrated the West in various forms from the Orient as a competitor of Christianity.”¹²⁸⁴ No one denies that the gnosis was present among the Christians from the beginning. The false-gnosis is not first mentioned in 170 A.D. but is called by name in the New Testament, where it is effectively veiled by the loose translation: “science falsely-so-called.” The material these false Gnostics used came largely from the East—but that explains nothing. “The gnosis,” says Bultmann, “is the expression of various types of mythological and philosophical tradition, and therefore may be characterized as a syncretistic phenomenon,” though it is more than that.¹²⁸⁵ “In general, the gnosis is a dualistic *Erlösungsfrömmigkeit* and as such seems related to the Christian

¹²⁸² Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 307.

¹²⁸³ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 313.

¹²⁸⁴ Bultmann

¹²⁸⁵ Bultmann

faith....Hence gnosis and Christianity have influenced each other in many ways—from the beginning of Christianity on.”¹²⁸⁶ And just as genuine Christianity distinguished itself from the gnosis by combating it, so there were those in the church who bitterly fought Christianity. What is being recognized with increasing clearness is that Gnosticism has a close resemblance to the earliest Christianity. This is exactly in agreement with our contention that the Gnostics were imitators whose specific claim was to have the gnosis: the earliest Christian doctrine. Now it is conceived that “Gnostic communities, who developed their rites and doctrines under various influences [including philosophical traditions] arose in part as *Taufsekten* in the Jordan area. Sometimes Gnostic motifs would find concrete form in older mystery cults, e.g. the Gnostic *Erlöser* becomes identical with the Phrygian Attis that penetrate the literature and influence Philo and Neo-Platonism in spite of Plotinus’ opposition.”¹²⁸⁷ It is nice to bring everything one knows into the picture, but again one must be warned against the commonest sin of religious scholarship: the stating of a possible explanation for something as a proven fact.

Quispel, the present leader of Gnostic studies, follows a contemporary tendency to temper positivism with recognition of the fact that the primitive Christians had experiences which do not correspond to anything experienced by modern researchers. Then he makes the usual mistake of trying to sound the depths of such imponderables in the light of his own knowledge. The early Christian was thought to receive a guarding angel at baptism, who would breathe into him the gnosis; this guarding angel was a sort of alter ego that comes to one who is reborn. By the second century, says Quispel, “Gnosticism was in all probability the dominant and wide-spread form of Christianity” in various eastern lands, especially Egypt and Edessa.¹²⁸⁸ First surveys of the new Gnostic library discovered in an Egyptian field indicate the Gnosticism was a world-religion and that it was the parent of Manichaeism. Quispel believes that the great Gnostics “Hellenized and Christianized a pre-Christian Oriental gnosis,” and that their grandiose systems

¹²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁸⁷ *ibid.?*

¹²⁸⁸ Quispel

were only “projections of human experiences and sentiments.”¹²⁸⁹ This was the material that lay to hand when men cast about for something to support their claims to the gnosis. Is it any wonder that they used it? “We can only understand the Gnostic myths,” says Quispel, “when we realize that they do not describe a true prehistory, but are a poetic expression of the suffering of man, who is cast into the world, and knows that he does not belong there. The protagonist in the Gnostic drama is man...man is a part of the heavenly preexistent man, who before the beginning of times, like a child in *statu nascendi*, fell headlong into the world of birth and death. Man is a fallen god, who remembers heaven.”¹²⁹⁰ He longs to return to God through the rediscovery of himself. This, says Quispel, is the essence of all mysticism, in this, Christian and Hellenistic mystic overlap. But the Christian gnosis differed from the pagan in believing that the self was not a natural part of human nature, but a supernal gift of grace to a few elect ones: *non natura sed indulgentia*. Whereas the Christian Gnostics separated understanding (*psyche*) and self (*pneuma*), the pagans separated *ratio* (self) and *psyche*; and the Christians believed that man could not unaided return to his origin and know his self. Man of himself is helpless: “The redeemer came, awakened the soul from its sleep and lets the smoldering spark of the Spirit flare up.”¹²⁹¹ The Gnostics, according to Quispel, are the founder of all Christian mysticism. Minucius Felix’ Christian philosophy, Quispel notes, comes straight from Cicero, and his discourse on Christian monotheism is simply copied out of Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*.¹²⁹² The proof for God *ex concensu gentium* was an old chestnut with the Greeks; the division of religion into popular, poetic, and philosophic belongs to the Greek philosophers and goes back to Posedonius and the Middle-Stoics. It is certainly not necessary to labor the point, for the Christian apologists of the third century have done it for us. The remarkable thing is that church historians have been so reluctant to believe them. What Quispel is pointing out is that conventional Christian philosophy

¹²⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹²⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹²⁹² *ibid.*

is not Christian in origin. “There is not one word of Minucius Felix,” says Quispel, “which may be called typically Christian.”¹²⁹³ Tertullian in his early writing adopts the Stoic doctrine that the soul is naturally monotheistic: just as the Gnostics Christianized Oriental mysticism, so the Christian apologists Christianized Greek philosophy, is Quispel’s verdict, and this is the double heritage of Christianity. “Whatever happens in later centuries is nothing but the continuation of this process, and in this process the old doctrine was forgotten, that man is not naturally a Christian, but must become a Christian.”¹²⁹⁴ “Not the faintest trace of Paul’s teaching regarding sin and atonement remains in the early Christian apologists,” writes E. Aleith, “Not one of the old theologians penetrated the nature of Paul’s faith....The Alexandrians, following the Gnostic pattern, distinguished between gnosis and *pistis*, with the understandable result that they [the fathers of all subsequent Christian theology] completely emptied Paul’s teachings of meaning.”¹²⁹⁵ “Gnosticism began,” says Cochrane, “by identifying evil with the world of matter [*hyle*]. It then proceeded to assert an absolute antithesis between matter and spirit.”¹²⁹⁶ In a recent study of the Iranian background of the gnosis, Widegren finds “thoroughgoing parallelism between man and world” in both: “this is pantheism, which easily becomes dualism.”¹²⁹⁷ “The gnosis *an sich* is a general human attitude to existence. But as a historical phenomenon it is mainly an Indo-Iranian movement, transmitted by Iranians in the Near East; that is confirmed by an analysis of the Gnostic *Leitmotiv* and symbols of the *Kunstsprache*.”¹²⁹⁸ W. Völker in his new study of Clement of Alexandria’s concept of the true Gnostic finds that Clement makes gnosis and *sophia* synonymous, betrays a close affinity to Stoic jargon, and accepts the contemporary

¹²⁹³ *ibid.*

¹²⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁹⁵ E. Aleith

¹²⁹⁶ Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture, A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 159.

¹²⁹⁷ George Widegren, “Der Iraische Hintergrund der Gnosis,” *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1952), 97.

¹²⁹⁸ Widegren?

and fashionable version of Plato.¹²⁹⁹ He borrows constantly from terminology of the mysteries. For him, *nous* is the bearer (*Träger*) of the gnosis, for though gnosis is a gift of divine grace it requires human cooperation—the fulfilling of certain conditions. For Clement, worldly knowledge, philosophy and faith are all bound together in a well-knit unity in the gnosis. The consummation and goal of gnosis is *theoria*, the constant contemplation of God. There is still no agreement on the origin of the gnosis, Voelker observes, “though the most commonly accepted explanation is that Plato and the Stoics are Clement’s authority.”¹³⁰⁰ Monasticism came completely under the influence of Clement’s type of Gnosticism, according to Voelker. Since Harnack’s convincing description of the monastic movements as an attempt to escape from the world-church back to the institutions and blessings of the early church, the falling of those movements into Gnostic categories certainly supports our claim that the gnosis was also an attempt to revive and continue the ways of the primitive church.

The origin of the gnosis according to the earliest Christian source is set forth in Eusebius’ quotation from Clement: “To James the Just, and to John and Peter after the resurrection the Lord transmitted the gnosis; they handed it on to the other apostles, and they in turn to the seventy, one of whom was Barnabas.”¹³⁰¹ The apostles preached “the gnosis of the whole gospel concerning God, and the life-giving sojourn...”¹³⁰² The Gnostics, he further tells us, claim their doctrine rested on secret teaching handed down from ancient times. Later, he describes how

When the holy society of the apostles had ended their lives in various ways and that generation passed away of those who had heard the divine wisdom with their own ears, at that moment the conspiracy of godless error took its rise through the deception of false teachers, who upon the death of the last of the apostles first came out openly and henceforward undertook to oppose the preaching of the truth with what they falsely styled gnosis.¹³⁰³

¹²⁹⁹ W. Völker

¹³⁰⁰ Voelker

¹³⁰¹ Eusebius, 2.1.4

¹³⁰² *ibid.*

¹³⁰³ *ibid.*

The Gnostics sprang up like mushrooms, says Irenaeus. Irenaeus makes it very clear that they are members of the church and almost indistinguishable from other Christians. Marcion was the only one who even suggested changing the scripture; they constantly appealed to the name of Christ. They met with no opposition from any organized head of the church. Here plainly the Gnostics are those who pretend to know specifically what Christ taught to the apostles after the resurrection. They did not have that knowledge and dared not come out openly as long as they were around who could show them up—the generation that had actually known the apostles. To meet the challenge that was implicit in their claim, it was easy to lay hand on the mystical clap-trap that was already enjoying wide circulation and popularity in the world. This important thing about the Gnostics is not the stuff they used to back up their claim, but the nature of their claim. Eusebius opens his history with mention of “who and what sort of men and when, out of a desire for false innovations took utterly false ways and announced themselves as bearers of what they falsely called the gnosis.”¹³⁰⁴ All such impostors, he tells us, took their rise within the church.

The earliest sources on the gnosis agree with Clement’s definition of what it was. The First Doctrine of the *Pistis Sophia* tells how Jesus spent 11 years after the resurrection teaching his disciples the mysteries of the heavenly “places.”¹³⁰⁵ When Jesus sits with his disciples on the Mount of Olives he receives his first “vesture.” These are elements common to all the earliest Christian writings. For the rest the *Pistis Sophia* is full of wild stuff: they darkly insinuate that they know the gnosis, what Jesus taught to the disciples after the resurrection, but when asked to tell what it was, this sort of stuff was their answer, and written in and all over it is the Gnostic secret: they are bluffing. Dupont-Sommer was surprised to find typically Pythagorean doctrines in the Jewish *Wisdom of Solomon*, which, he notes, is in line with the Alexandrian gnosis.¹³⁰⁶ A third century papyrus presenting Gnostic cosmology bears the title *Dialogue of Christ with the*

¹³⁰⁴ Eusebius, see beginning of EH

¹³⁰⁵ *Pistis Sophia*, trans. and ed. G. R. S. Mead, (New York: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896), 1.

¹³⁰⁶ Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 98.

Disciples, showing clearly what the Gnostics claimed to have. A fragment cited by Leisegang promises “Knowledge of who we are and what we have become; whence we have our origin and where we are going; whither we are hastening and from what we have been delivered; what of our birth, and what of our rebirth.”¹³⁰⁷ Dionysius accuses the pagan quacks of Egypt of all the identical crimes charged against the early Christians. The *Conversation of Jesus*, found in 1897, begins like the *Pistis Sophia*: “It came to pass, as our Lord Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead on the third day, that his disciples gathered together about him.”¹³⁰⁸ Schmidt and Wajnberg have supplied a bibliography of works used by the Gnostics purporting all to be the teachings of Jesus to the apostles after the resurrection.¹³⁰⁹ These works were very secret and enjoyed great protection in their secrecy from the fact that the words of the lord after the resurrection were closely guarded by the apostles themselves. The church that the false-Gnostics challenged with their claims to possess the post-resurrection teaching was not in a position to answer the challenge by producing the real teachings of the risen Lord to the apostles. But for a long time they did not use the argument they later fell back on, that there never had been such teachings. Instead, they admitted that there had been by producing works of their own which they claimed belonged to that category. This idea became basic, according to Schmidt, in church literature. “Both the Gnostics and the main church,” writes Schmidt, “could appeal for their claims regarding the special revelations of Jesus after his resurrection to the common general belief that the resurrected Lord gave the last and highest revelations to his disciples; for according to Acts 1:4, he continued his teachings right up to the time of his ascension. These last teachings were specifically those concerned with the kingdom of God.”¹³¹⁰ This statement is significant: both the Gnostics and the opponents appealed to the firm belief of the Christians that the Lord had imparted the gnosis after the resurrection. Neither of them had it; both pretended to have it. The

¹³⁰⁷ Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, 1.

¹³⁰⁸ *Conversation of Jesus*, found 1897

¹³⁰⁹ Carl Schmidt and Isaak Wajnberg, (check *Gespräche Jesu mit seinen Jüngern nach der Auferstehung*)

¹³¹⁰ Carl Schmidt, *ibid.*?

first to pretend were the Gnostics, and vast numbers of Christians rushed to their camp. But they did not have it, for they were careful to wait until the apostles had withdrawn before displaying their wares. The great hunger with which people rushed to them—even the best men like Tertullian, and the yearnings expressed by Eusebius, show that the main church did not have the gnosis either, and only laid claim to it in reply to the Gnostic challenge. Many favorite Gnostic doctrines, such as that of the seven heavens, are not by that fact un-Christian: the Gnostics used everything. Yet in the *Acta Pauli* the heresies common to all Gnostic missionaries are listed as 1) that it is not necessary to have prophets, 2) that God is not the ruler of the physical universe, 3) that there is no resurrection of the flesh, 4) that God did not form man, 5) that Christ did not come in the flesh nor was he born of Mary, 6) that the world is not of God but by the angels.¹³¹¹ This is simply the philosophizing trend in Gnosticism, and only those select and peculiar doctrines which did not at the time square with those of the main church. Most of these doctrines are those embraced by the third century apologists, in whom Gnosticism won its victory over the church. The fact that these are by no means the teachings of the early church in no way indicates that they did not pretend to be, but only that all doctrine was so distorted that any humbug was possible. That had been predicted, and the way the main church became in time reconciled with those very doctrines shows how completely early Christian teachings were lost sight of. Yet the tradition of the secret teaching remained on in the church: “This gnosis,” says Clement of Alexandria, “has come down by transmission in unwritten form from the apostles to a few people....As soon as the Savior had taught it to the apostles it was handed on in unwritten form, and so has come down to us.”¹³¹² But when Clement sets himself to describing this divine knowledge, he seems to be quoting Pindar. How close Clement is to those whom even he describes as false-Gnostics is seen in his declaration, that even the doctrines of Valentinus and Basilides are “all right for a race that

¹³¹¹ *Acta Pauli* ([Check source on spreadsheet](#))

¹³¹² Clement of Alexandria, PG 9, 500f

is saved under physical [natural] laws,” but to expect immortality here is silly, since God has provided death as a gift to those he favors.

VICTORY OVER THE PAGANS (Section 13)
Pages 218 – 227

Conventional church histories cast ancient paganism in the role of villain in their drama. He is a cruel and bloody monster of unlimited power who is none-the-less miraculously overcome by the humble little band of bewhiskered ancients dressed as Sophist teachers. Paganism is a paper-maché dragon without a soul to speak in its defense. The pious and eloquent writer of church history can make his dragon charge and withdraw at will, breathe fire and smoke in any desired quantities and prevail or be prevailed upon as the exigencies of the dramatic art require. Paganism is the indispensable foil and the fundamental prop of all conventional church history. For it provides the indispensable ingredient in the plot: the inevitable victory of Christianity, “the light that could not fail.”¹³¹³ But the victory is as hollow as the defeat, for the pagan religion had lost its universal religious appeal long before it ever clashed with Christianity. Cicero exposes it more completely than any Christian apologist ever did. Its weakness was as apparent to heathen as to Christian observers. The Lord, the apostles and the apostolic fathers take no heed of this man of straw. For them the combat is another one entirely. Where paganism did display vitality—in philosophy, education, rhetoric, and ritual—it completely conquered the church, where it rules today as a survival from the Classical past. Pliny’s letter plainly shows the bankruptcy of paganism as a popular religion.¹³¹⁴ Never do we read in the apostolic fathers admonitions against falling into paganism, worshipping pagan gods or offering incense in temples. “In vain do they worship me” the Lord had said, and what he warns against is that “Many shall come in my name,” etc. not in the name of Jupiter or Apollo. It is discord and rending and tearing within the church which alone worries the apostolic fathers; from that source, says Clement, comes destruction. The *Apostolic Constitutions* denounced the indifference of the Christians, and shames them by comparing them with the diligent pagans who get up at five in the morning to go to early

¹³¹³ Latourette, *Unquenchable Light* (?) p.218f

¹³¹⁴ Pliny re: paganism as popular religion (See *Letters*, trans. By William Melmoth, rev by W.M.L. Hutchinson (London: William Heinemann, 1915), vol. II, X:96.)

rites in their temples.¹³¹⁵ The Hermas reminds his readers that non-members are in a better way than they are: for them repentance is still open, but for those in the church the tower will soon be finished and repentance no longer possible. “Your spirit is old, and already fading away,” he tells them, “and has no power through your weakness and double-mindedness.”¹³¹⁶ Just as pruning increases the power of a vine to bear, so persecution by the pagans only strengthens the church, says Justin, and he is right.¹³¹⁷ This is no miraculous paradox, but a very well-known religious phenomenon. The fathers meant it literally when they said that persecution from outside did not hinder but actually helped the church. How then should we regard the survival of the church as miraculous? It has often been noted that the ancient persecutions of the church did not kill great numbers of people; by comparison with Christian persecutions, i.e. the extermination of the Manichaeans, and Donatists, they were rather mild. But while none of the earliest Christians expressed the slightest alarm at the prospect of pagan persecution, and many have observed its wholesome effect, all are alarmed at what goes on within the church, and none ever see any wholesome results from that evil. There was the enemy; there was the real danger. The antichrist was not one who said there was no Christ, but the one who claimed to be Christ. The wolves were not imperial soldiers but Christian teachers. The scriptures were not rejected but twisted and diligently misinterpreted. The priesthood was not denied but imitated. The name of Christ was not suppressed but used as never before—everything was labeled with it. The rites and ordinances were not abolished but corrupted. The people were not called to strange gods, but to Christ—Lo here, and lo here! They shall call upon me, the Lord had said, and I shall not answer; they shall seek me and not find me; in vain do they worship me.

“You will find fewer pagan doors with lights and laurel over them than you will find Christian,” said the shocked Tertullian.¹³¹⁸ False teaching, he says, damages the church just as

¹³¹⁵ *Apostolic Constitutions*

¹³¹⁶ Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 3.11.2

¹³¹⁷ Justin

¹³¹⁸ Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, Ch. XV

much as the coming persecution of the Antichrist can. While persecution makes martyrs and so actually strengthens the church, heresies make apostates which can only weaken it. While there is something to be said for persecution, dissensions and schisms are *sine dubio mala*—here is no blessing in disguise! There is no cause for surprise at the heresies, he says, but there is most certainly cause for alarm: “A fever does not fill us with wonder but with distress, and so we avoid it as much as possible, since it is not in our power to abolish it....Heresies do not win out by any virtue of theirs, but are helpless against anyone equipped with real faith. But we are like boxers or gladiators who are beaten by inferior opponents because we lack vitality.”¹³¹⁹ The old genuine straightforward integrity of the early Christians has vanished, Tertullian observes: “already that glory is extinguished, and by the very ones who should have before all preserved it [not by the pagans],” and he goes on to describe the woeful moral softness of the church.¹³²⁰ “God has long ago removed all external threats to the church,” Origen notes, but he is not encouraged: “For now the trouble-makers are causing dissention within the congregation of the faithful, and they are not being opposed by our leaders as in ancient [former] times.”¹³²¹ Persecution, Cyprian notes, has produced a few martyrs, but by all accounts corruption has produced many false teachers. The innumerable apostates were not those who left the church, but those who left the truth and continued teaching and corrupting the church. The “apostate dragon” is thoroughly at home right in the church, if we believe the apostolic fathers. His method of operation may be studied in the letter of the Roman Church to Cyprian:

Behold almost the whole inhabited world lies desolated, with tumbled wreck and ruin scattered everywhere....Until now we seem to have escaped this ruin: let us seek unity in the church: go easy on those who have lapsed...let us have patience lest the state of the church be disturbed and avoid the interior persecution. Do not let them think the church is their enemy just because they lapsed and fell away....God is indulgent, if firm: he opens two ways to all.¹³²²

To which Cyprian replies:

¹³¹⁹ Tertullian


¹³²⁰ Tertullian, *Pudic.* 1

¹³²¹ Origen, *PG XI*, 937

¹³²² Roman Church to Cyprian

They are offering peace to the church who do not have it themselves; they are bringing *lapsi* into the church who are themselves *lapsi*...¹³²³

It is not persecution alone that is to be feared...It is easy to be on guard against such obvious threats...more to be feared is the enemy who, in times of peace, creeps in unnoticed....They call themselves Christians, and walking in the darkness firmly believe they have the light. The Antichrist deceives them by the name of Christ.¹³²⁴

Lactantius makes the same reflection on the course of the church: “Thus that human life which in the first centuries was passed in brilliant light is now enfolded by mists and darkness.”¹³²⁵ The immense and world-wide success of the apostles, says Eusebius, which brought the preaching of Christ to the entire human race throughout the world, was followed by the world of the enemy of salvation within the church in the form of Simon Magus.¹³²⁶ Like the pagans, Simon is a convenient whipping-boy: the devil who attacked the church was Simon, whose frontal attack came to grief—so that settles that. After telling of the persecutions of the old days, Basil says, “But today a harder and more insidious affliction has come upon us, requiring greater care. For it is not earthly houses that are being torn down: it is for the captivity of the churches that we mourn; it is not physical pangs that we suffer, but the imprisonment of minds that goes on every day.”¹³²⁷ The  editors do not hesitate to describe this as some persecution that the heathen are waging against the church, for to admit the evil case of the ancient church is something they will not do. The real danger in contrast to the apparent is clearly pointed out by John Chrysostom:

In the early church not only was all the world fighting the bishops, but many of the faithful themselves as well...who still were on a far from firm foundation and were very shaky, and who often kicked against the pricks. This caused no less sorrow to the teachers than the attacks of those enemies outside the church. In fact the fight against external plots and schemes etc. actually caused them great joy because of the sure reward it provided. But the other danger had no redeeming qualities.¹³²⁸

Today says John, our enemies are our own relations and neighbors, and even the learned are sorely afflicted. “The apostles gladly welcome persecution from outside. The internal wounds and

¹³²³ Cyprian to Roman Church

¹³²⁴ *ibid.*

¹³²⁵ Lactantius

¹³²⁶ Eusebius

¹³²⁷ Basil

¹³²⁸ John Chrysostom

the blows of the brethren were the real yoke they had to bear, and that still presses upon the church. For in all of Paul's writing you can see him in tears and sorrowing for the members, and fearing and trembling constantly for the converted ones."¹³²⁹ Surely the historians are barking up the wrong though very convenient, tree. "That spiritual evils enter the church no one doubts," writes Jerome, "...they think to escape the notice of God because he does not punish them instantly. As a result, the church of God is turned into a den of thieves"—but it is not the pagans who do it.¹³³⁰

John A. F. Gregg, who became a Catholic bishop, in his study of the Decian persecution found that only six Christians died for the faith out of 20,000 members in Rome.¹³³¹ And what of the others? They left the church until it was safe to come back. In the apocalypse the cult of Augustus, says Lebreton, appears as the great enemy of the church, "the temple of Rome and Augustus at Pergamon is the throne of Satan...from that time on, and for three centuries, the cults of Caesar will be the greatest obstacle to the Christian faith, it is that which shall make the most martyrs."¹³³² Insofar as that imperial cult had any vitality at all, it won a complete and smashing conquest of the church in the fourth century. But it was not the imperial cult that turned love to hate, sheep to wolves, invented false doctrines, denied the literal resurrection, inspired the sordid rivalries for church office, tickled men's ears with allegory, raised up hosts of false preachers of Christ; the apostate dragon was born of the church. The antichrists "came out of us," says John, not out of a pagan temple (1 John 2:19). But M. Lebreton must have paganism the villain if he is to make out any case at all for the victory of Christianity. The great and universal apostasy, as Bardy points out, meant a victory for paganism: it was renunciation of Christ and relapse into paganism and Judaism.¹³³³ But his is exactly the apostasy of which the scripture does not speak.

¹³²⁹ John Chrysostom

¹³³⁰ Jerome

¹³³¹ John A. F. Gregg, *The Decian Persecution: Being the Hulsean Prize Essay for 1896*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1897), 107.

¹³³² Lebreton

¹³³³ See Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 304.

The apostate dragon does not openly denounce Christ—that is just the point. He puts the name of Christ as a label on everything he does, say Ignatius. “The foundations of the Christian faith rested mostly on the eye-witnesses,” says Schermann, “...the metaphysical foundations of all these problems it had never concerned the apostles either to establish or to prove. The Spirit testified, and their miraculous powers left no doubt...therefore the greatest danger to the church lay in the philosophy of the time—the cult of reason.”¹³³⁴ Almost every single primitive Christian writing whether of the apostles or of their disciples warns specifically against that thing, which was right inside the church and which very soon won over completely. It was not the pomp and majesty of the imperial cult that threatened the church at first—it won its easy victories in the fourth century after philosophy had done its work.

From Josephus we learn that the world of the early Christians was a world of false prophets and deceivers. Impostors gained enormous followings; false messiahs abounded. Jesus himself was commonly treated as a *goes*, one of the lunatic fringe. The type swarmed within the church.¹³³⁵ “The man in the chair,” says the Pastor, “is a false prophet, who is corrupting the understanding of the servants of God.”¹³³⁶ The *Apostolic Constitutions* prescribes three witnesses for everything in the church, “because there are many impostors, sly talkers, who have three tongues, spiteful characters, others out to fleece the sheep of Christ—whose words if you accept uncritically will scatter the flock and turn them over to the wolves.”¹³³⁷ All this is inside the church. The *Apostolic Constitutions* denounces “those who in the name of Christ make war on Christ...false Christs.”¹³³⁸ “Though God gives out gifts as he chooses,” says the *127 Canons of the Apostles*, there are liars who pretend to have them and who cultivate appearances.”¹³³⁹ “There will be raised up unto them,” says the *Assumption of Moses*, speaking of the chosen people,

¹³³⁴ Schermann

¹³³⁵ (handwritten: “Lucian”)

¹³³⁶ Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 11.1.

¹³³⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions*

¹³³⁸ *Apostolic Constitutions*

¹³³⁹ *127 Canons of the Apostles*, in PO 8:632.

“kings bearing rule, and they will call themselves high priests of God: they will assuredly work iniquity in the holy of holies.”¹³⁴⁰ An agraphon quoted in a Clementine homily tells how: “A false gospel must needs come first, brought by a deceiver....And after that towards the end the first Antichrist must come again, and then the real Christ, our Jesus, shall appear, and after that the consummation of eternal light and the darkness becomes nothing.”¹³⁴¹ “The fourth beast,” says *IV Ezra*, “has overcome all the beasts that are past. Thou has wielded power over the world with great terror. Thou has dwelt so long in the civilized world with fraud, and has judged the earth, but not with faithfulness....Therefore thou shalt disappear, O thou eagle.”¹³⁴² Here we have the imperial cult: but it is not specifically attacking the church. On the other hand, when on the Mount of Olives the apostles ask Christ about the future, he says: “There will be false Christs. They will sin enormously; this liar—he is not Christ” (Matthew 24:3-5, 23-24). Enoch and Elijah shall teach men “Who is the seducer who must come into the world and do wonders and prodigies.”¹³⁴³ “And now I know this mystery,” says Enoch, “that sinners will alter and pervert the words of righteousness in many ways, and will speak wicked words, and lie, and practise great deceits, and write books concerning their words.”¹³⁴⁴ In the *Evangelium of the Twelve Apostles*, Peter tells how on the mount he “saw the time that is to be after us, full of offences and evils and sins and lying: and men in that time will be crafty, perverse and depraved, men that know not God and understand not the truth; but a few of them shall understand their God because of his works which they behold daily...and they know the Lord, as if they did not discern him; for this name only is called upon by them that are believers.”¹³⁴⁵ In the second century S. Melito of Sardis announces: “That which has never yet happened has now fallen upon the society of the pious, spreading throughout Asia with new doctrines. For now the nameless sycophants and the

¹³⁴⁰ *Assumption of Moses* 6:1.

¹³⁴¹ Clementine Homily

¹³⁴² *IV Ezra* 11:40-41, 45.

¹³⁴³ *Apocalypse of Peter*, cf. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 512.

¹³⁴⁴ *Book of Enoch* 104:10.

¹³⁴⁵ *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 31.

lovers of what belongs to others, throwing things into confusion are openly stealing; by night and day they plunder those who have done no wrong.”¹³⁴⁶

It is Justin’s teachings that

the devils made their religion to look as much like Christianity as possible, and that they anticipated it...having learned of Christian baptism to come through the prophets, they made a close imitation of it. They come in his name, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Take heed of the pseudo-prophets who shall come among you....There shall rise up many pseudo-Christ and pseudo-apostles and lead many of the faithful astray.¹³⁴⁷

There are, and have been, he says, many speaking atheism and blasphemy and teaching falsely—in the name of Jesus. Nay, “The church is full of false teachers, all operating under the name of Christ. And all the things we suffer at the hands of our own people, he said would come upon us in the future, so that nothing is unfulfilled in word or deed of what he said.”¹³⁴⁸ For Irenaeus, it is the devil himself who apostatizes—of course, he was never a member of the church, but he makes a convenient straw man to save the face of the church. He sits in the temple at Jerusalem and gives out that he is Christ: but this is all to come. In his preface, Irenaeus speaks of the new false doctrines which on his own authority he is going to attempt to refute: it is all forgery, he says, debasement, and it is very clever.¹³⁴⁹ It is at the end of the world that the whole deception shall be made known, and a separation between deceivers and righteous become apparent. The Antichrist is described by Origen as a faithful mirror-image of the Lord: “We have not only the word of Christ,” he says,

we have also the word of the Antichrist; the truth of Christ and the simulated truth of the Antichrist; the wisdom of Christ and the simulated wisdom of the Antichrist; we find that all true virtues are Christ and all simulated virtues are Antichrist, including even simulated chastity, patience, love, etc. But Christ, unlike the Antichrist, never says in the scripture, “I am Christ,” but demonstrates his truth by his works and his virtues; it is always the impostors who say “I am Christ.” As far as the real Christ is concerned, only the Father in heaven testifies of him.¹³⁵⁰

Just as Christ was predicted as a lion, says Hippolytus,

¹³⁴⁶ S. Melito of Sardis (S.=Saint?)

¹³⁴⁷ Justin

¹³⁴⁸ Justin

¹³⁴⁹ Irenaeus

¹³⁵⁰ Origen

in the very same manner the Antichrist is also described as a lion...Christ is a lion, and the Antichrist is a lion. Christ is a king, and the Antichrist is a king. Christ is taken as a lamb, the Antichrist goes about as a sheep...and just like him, he sends out his apostles—pseudo-apostles....The Savior appears in the form of a man, and the Antichrist shall come in the form of a man. The beast ascending out of the earth, he says, is the coming kingdom of the Antichrist. This one makes the inhabitants worship the first beast, i.e. Augustus whom the Antichrist shall imitate.¹³⁵¹

This is a most interesting prophecy that the false Church of Christ will adopt the imperial cult, as happened in the fourth century. The unrighteous judge who fears not God and respects not man is called the Antichrist, as being a son of the devil, and the shadow of Satan (he is not the devil, but he is human). “He will seize the kingdom for himself and rule it as God would not have it. Jerusalem will become a widow.”¹³⁵²

“We will not run the risk of stating for sure what the name [number] of the Antichrist is,” says Eusebius, “...but we know he appeared not long before our time, almost in our own generation, towards the end of the reign of Domitian.”¹³⁵³ “The church is full of false teachers,” says Saint Siricius, “who would destroy it did not the Lord of Sabaoth break their snares. These are they who subtly boast that they are Christians...many heresies from the apostles’ time to our own we have come to know and to examine as experts. But never have such dogs been so numerous and so dangerous as they are today, having suddenly broken loose with great success.”¹³⁵⁴ “Before the 6000 years are up,” says Hilarion, “the ten kings must come; and the daughter of Babylonia who now obtains must be removed from the midst of the earth. To whom shall suddenly come one *potens* over them, called the dragon in the Apocalypse....This will be the Antichrist proper....And those will be the times of the Antichrist which times must needs be mortal, just as Antiochus tried to make one nation apostate.”¹³⁵⁵ “The apostles have told us to expect many heresies,” writes Siricius, “but never such dogs have rent the church as they do

¹³⁵¹ Hippolytus, PG X, 768

¹³⁵² *ibid.*?

¹³⁵³ Eusebius

¹³⁵⁴ Saint Siricius

¹³⁵⁵ Hilarion, *De Mundi Duratione* 17, in *PL* 13:1105.

today. By their interpretations they are perverting the Old Testament and the New Testament.”¹³⁵⁶

The Antichrist will first seize the Roman *Imperium* by false magic, according to Cyril; then he will at first seem to rule like a well-instructed, prudent, gentleman; next he will deceive the Jews and rule with great wickedness, and finally turn against the Christians. Then the second coming will do away with him.¹³⁵⁷ The Antichrist, he says, usurps the name of Christ and makes all the same claims that Christ does. “Many of the holy fathers teach that in the time of the Antichrist public worship of the church will cease.”¹³⁵⁸ Many antichrists will come, he teaches, and many have already come. “I am not sure,” writes Sulpicius Severus, “whether or not Nero is the Antichrist that so many believe he was.”¹³⁵⁹ Then he describes John as foreseeing the Antichrist on Patmos, long after the deaths of Peter and Paul. “The Antichrist is a great mystery,” says Chrysostom, “What is the apostasy? The Antichrist himself is called *Apostasia*, man of sin, son of utter destruction. Who, then, is he? Satan? By no means, but a man endued with all his attributes [energy]....He shall not lead to idolatry, he shall not preach paganism, but be the undoing of all the gods to set himself up as the only legitimate object of worship.”¹³⁶⁰ Saint Romanus describes the Antichrist as resembling the Lord to the last hair, imitating his expression, his gait, and his voice, “and he shall lead the sheep forth out of the sheepfold, and many shall heed him and be destroyed...”¹³⁶¹ Klausuer in the new *Reallexikon* says the expectation of *pseudochristoi* and pseudo-prophets was confined almost entirely to the Jews, and that the consistency and unity of the many traditions and theories in the New Testament is the result of deliberate invention: that is how they avoid the obvious.¹³⁶² The unifying idea of the New Testament is that of a great Satanic earthly kingdom followed by Jesus as Lord of the *Endzeit*. It is “very questionable” whether the obstacle is the Roman emperor or the Roman *imperium*. Most significant, according to this

¹³⁵⁶ Siricius

¹³⁵⁷ Cyril, PG 33, 885

¹³⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁵⁹ Sulpicius Severus

¹³⁶⁰ John Chrysostom

¹³⁶¹ Saint Romanus

¹³⁶² Klausuer, *Reallexikon*

account, is that the whole system has nothing to do with political concepts, but is entirely concerned with the conflict between true and false revelation. All the many antichrists are sent by the Antichrist whom they represent, the Antichrist, says Jesus “comes and is even now in the world.”¹³⁶³ What Christianity finally settled for would seem, to follow Hopwood, to have been exactly what Christ predicted it would:

The experiential synthesis of these future and present aspects of the Kingdom was reached by the primitive Church in due course. The apocalyptic hope failed in the non-fulfillment of the desired consummation; inasmuch as the failure became apparent, so the experience of the kingdom as a present possession came to the fore...as the consummation was more and more delayed, the community became all the more aware of the kingdom as being possessed here and now in the world.¹³⁶³

This is a classic example of what Irwin calls the abiding sin of Biblical students: assuming as proven anything that they can conceive of as possible.¹³⁶⁴ Piper insists that “Antichrist” is a Hellenistic word. “To a Greek mind,” he writes, “*ψευδόχριστος* designates an impostor who assumes to himself a false title, pretending to be the Christ without having his power or commission, whereas the Semitic equivalent means one, who has supernatural power but uses it in the wrong way and for antidivine purposes.”¹³⁶⁵ We assume, following Mr. Irwin, that Piper has excellent reasons for saying what he does, but we should be glad to know those reasons. He is discussing Antichrist, but defines pseudo-Christ, another term entirely, and a very rare one. But does not Hopwood’s conclusion fulfill the Lord’s prophecy that a time would come when everyone would claim the spiritual or real presence of Christ, saying lo, here is Christ—whether in the communion cup, the communion of believers of the church as the mystic body and presence of Christ, or Christian churches ever since the passing of the primitive church, claiming that in them Christ was actually present—in some cases only spiritually, but then what do they say Christ is but a spirit? Christ was as present as he ever would or could be: Catholics and Protestants vie with each other today in their claims of the presence. It was

¹³⁶³ P. G. S. Hopwood, *The Religious Experience of the Primitive Church*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 245-256. ([is this right or is it -246](#))

¹³⁶⁴ Irwin

¹³⁶⁵ Piper, “1 John and the Primitive Church,” 444-445.

predicted that the claim here is Christ would become general, but at the time when that was so none making that claim would have a right to it: Believe none of them!

THE WORLD-CHURCH (Section 14)
Pages 228- 262

The fourth century is the key to the history of Christianity. In that century Babylon became converted.¹³⁶⁶ The implications of this were not lost on the thoughtful. Two conflicting moods run through the century—a sense of triumph and a sense of loss. As has often been observed, the church can no more than the individual win the world without losing its soul, and in the fourth century the church won the world. Duchesne glories in this, the conversion of Babylon, forgetting that in the original Christian plan Babylon is not to be converted at all, but is reserved for the burning. The conflict between the two is never missing. The fathers who gloat over the civil victories of the church are still aware that those victories were not part of the original program. Whenever the peace and progress of the church are interrupted by internal or external troubles the churchmen suddenly remember the original program, revert in a rush to the old eschatology, and scan the heavens for signs.

When the Christian church found itself to be the world-church, it was necessary to find doctrinal support for its strange position. A world-church this side of the millennium was not part of the original plans: not only does one seek it there in vain, but the flat declaration is made again and again that the world cannot and will not love and receive the gospel. But the world did receive what was given to it as the gospel. If it really was that, whence it's highly unscheduled popularity? Logic and allegory rushed to the support of the new order; and since both had to be used ultimately on the scripture, the "revelation" of Christianity, extensive scriptural support is not lacking. Only the Bible passages cited to justify the worldly success of the church set an all-time record for the use of strained and farfetched interpretation of irrelevant or even contrary passages that must be stretched out of all shape to serve their purpose. The basic contradiction is presented and smoothed over by Duchesne:

Once a Christian, the emperor wished forthwith to convert the empire also, and not only to convert it, but to make the new religion what no one had ever been able to make the

¹³⁶⁶ Duchesne

old one, a universal and official institution, a state religion....The church resigned itself to this. We nowhere find that it raised any objections on the ground of principle. It was considered very natural. The triumph of Christ, or his religion, his church, and of his followers had been foretold by the prophets, announced in the gospel, and claimed by the Christian conscience. In the days of old, Christians had cursed the Babylon of the Seven Hills; now they were conquering her and were going to convert her. What triumph could be more desirable?¹³⁶⁷

This is an interesting interweaving of conflicting concepts. There was no objection to the emperor's move on principle—but that was in the fourth century. The triumphant Messiah had been announced no less to the Jews than to the Christians, the whole issue between them was when was that triumph to be? “Right now!” the Jews said rejecting the untriumphant Christ. “At the end of the world, and not until then,” said the early Christians, as Duchesne says, they had “cursed the Babylon of the Seven Hills,” destined to utter destruction; but the fourth century was out to convert her. Here was a complete reversal of policy. The church had gone back to the old folly of the Jews: it was not enough that “the triumph of Christ, or his religion, his church and of his followers had been foretold by the prophets,” etc, it had to be right now, and all that old superstition about the second coming and the end of the world could be forgotten.

The reconciling of the scriptures with the idea of a permanent world-church is accomplished by two main procedures: 1) that of projecting or stretching certain passages by a pious paraphrase beyond their original content or intent, and 2) the rather surprising one of simply giving it the lie—flatly reversing the scripture both in word and meaning. An example of the first is found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*: “...and may the Lord be with you; now and through the endless ages, as he himself said to us...behold...I am with you all the days [an accusative of extent of time—not dative] until the completion of the period.”¹³⁶⁸ Words addressed only to the apostles are here carried over to the general public, and “until the end of the period,” is now turned into “for ages without end” thus suppressing the unpleasant fact that there was to be an end. History is reconstructed in retrospect to make it appear that a world-church belonged to the

¹³⁶⁷ Duchesne, II: 516

¹³⁶⁸ *Apostolic Constitutions*

apostolic order: “In the time of the apostles,” says the *Apostolic Constitutions*, “all the Romans believed on Christ and became righteous.”¹³⁶⁹ This is a natural projection of the teaching that the apostles preached everywhere. As Augustine later says, since the apostles were sent out from God, their teaching must have been irresistible, ergo the Romans must have been converted, and if they were converted they must have repented their sins and become righteous.¹³⁷⁰ This is a type of reasoning dearly loved by the Roman Church. By it one can “prove” anything. As an example of direct refutation of the scripture, we have Irenaeus’ announcement, made to bolster up the claims of a continuing church, that “The devil does not rule in this world. It is God.” This means that he is at a loss to explain the predominance of evil in the world, but at least he saves the church. “The Apostate Angel can blind man and lead them astray,” says Irenaeus, “he works jealously to get man into his power.”¹³⁷¹ But he fails, even in this world, because “the word of God conquers him through man...and subjects him to man (Luke 10:19), that as he has overpowered man by apostasy, in turn his apostasy shall be cancelled by the return of man to God.”¹³⁷² The early Christians believed that the only cure for the universal apostasy would be Christ’s coming to earth. Here Irenaeus attributes the special power given to the apostles over deadly creatures as a general power given to all men over all evil, while the devil is denied his rank of prince of this world.

Tertullian was speaking against the tide of opinion when he refuted those who would save themselves in persecution and live to fight another day for the church: “A soldier dead in battle is better than one safe in flight.”¹³⁷³ You cannot flee and be a Christian, he says, when everyone is fleeing. To flee was to live for the church in this world, but, says Tertullian, God does not want that, that is not the plan. Already Tertullian faces the probability that all have gone astray. He believed that was true of the great church, but what a hard teaching if the true church

¹³⁶⁹ *Apostolic Constitutions*

¹³⁷⁰ St. Augustine

¹³⁷¹ Irenaeus

¹³⁷² Irenaeus

¹³⁷³ Tertullian

was nowhere to be found. He ended his life seeking and hoping that the church was still somewhere, but what supported him in that was not scripture (and how eagerly he would have exploited such comforting scripture had he been able to find it), but his lawyer's reasoning: "is it likely," he asks, "that so many different groups of Christians should have all erred in the same direction...when a single thing is found diffused among many, it cannot be an error, but an inheritance."¹³⁷⁴ The reasoning is good, but will not hold until it can be shown that error cannot have been suffused among the churches at very early times as well as truth; and in the writings of the apostles and apostolic fathers we have a powerfully affirmative answer, for the branches of the church they addressed, even in that apostolic age, were already all shot through with error—and everywhere the same consistent error. Peter and Simon worked side by side from the first, and Justin says the Christian missionaries were everywhere followed up by Jewish ones. Then Tertullian asks, "is it conceivable that after the performance of so many works of faith, so many exhibitions of courage, so many marvelous operations of the spirit, so many sacred rites and ordinances, finally that so many martyrs should be crowned in a vacuum?"¹³⁷⁵ The answer to that is the repeated admonition of the apostolic fathers: "For the whole time of your faith will profit you nothing..."¹³⁷⁶ "The greater the blessings and gifts received the greater the danger [not the security] of the church..."¹³⁷⁷ "Do not think for a minute that what happened to the Jews cannot happen to us, for after all their sufferings and all the marvelous providences of God to them—they were finally abandoned,"¹³⁷⁸ etc. In a word the apostolic fathers must warn again and again against the very argument that Tertullian is using. Small wonder that it is not found in the scripture! This is Tertullian's famous "blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" argument, but as Father Bligh has recently pointed out, that argument is not borne out in history save in

¹³⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁷⁵ Tertullian

¹³⁷⁶ apostolic fathers?

¹³⁷⁷ apostolic fathers?

¹³⁷⁸ apostolic fathers?

those cases where it applies to any religious organization, true or false.¹³⁷⁹ The fatal flaw here is, of course, the assumption that unless a permanent church resulted from their sacrifice, the martyrs have died in vain. The martyrs were not crowned in a vacuum, but in heaven, and they were told always that whether the world was converted or not was none of their business. The assumption that unless they are crowned on earth and hailed by succeeding generations of men they are crowned in a vacuum makes a mockery of all the heavenly rewards for which the martyrs gladly spurned all the things of this world.

Again, Tertullian raises the question: “But may not the churches in the process of time have perverted the doctrine originally delivered to them by the apostles? May not all have wandered from the truth?”¹³⁸⁰ And another logical answer derived by projecting an irrelevant passage of scripture: “The promise of the Holy Spirit, made by Christ to the church, precludes the possibility of a universal defection from the true faith.”¹³⁸¹ How does it? If it is true that the true church (the promise was specifically to the apostles, however—he is projecting here) must always have the Holy Spirit, does it necessarily follow that the true church will always be upon the earth? They are two different propositions. The Jews, as early fathers are fond of pointing out, once had the true faith, but lost it; and the same fathers remind the Christians that the same can happen to them. So the fact that the Holy Spirit is always in the church says nothing as to where the church is or how it prospers. The apostles were rejected and put to death though they had the Holy Spirit. And the scripture insists that those with that spirit will do the marvelous works of the Lord and the apostles, “and yet greater works.” But what church claims those greater works that the true church must have? Tertullian’s search for contemporary miracles is a pathetic failure, and he ended up with the conviction that the power of the ancients had been withdrawn.

Clement of Alexandria, by arguments based on the syllogisms of the schools is able to demonstrate not only that the church survives, but that its members enjoy complete perfection:

¹³⁷⁹ Father Bligh

¹³⁸⁰ Tertullian

¹³⁸¹ Tertullian

Christ, he reasons, became perfect at the moment of baptism (that is the way he stretches Matthew); in being baptized we are following Christ, therefore we become perfect at the moment of baptism.¹³⁸² This is as if one were to say: a) it is necessary to obey traffic signals to be a perfect citizen (which is true), b) I obey traffic signals, therefore c) I am a perfect citizen.

“One is loathe,” writes honest Hippolytus, “to accept the hard news of the Antichrist to come. But there is nothing we can do about it: the prophets have spoken.”¹³⁸³ “For if the former sayings of the prophets had not gone into fulfillment neither would these be expected. But if they were fulfilled at their appointed times [*kairous*], as predicted, these too shall be fully accomplished.”¹³⁸⁴ It is all foreseen, he says, “just as Moses knew from the first that his people would reject the Savior of the world and go astray, preferring an earthly king to a heavenly,” so in the present case.¹³⁸⁵ What comfort is there then? The world, he says, is a sea in which the church is a storm-tossed ship: “But she is not destroyed; for she has on board the experienced pilot Christ; and bears within her the charm [*tropaion*] against death, like the cross of Christ. The commandments are the iron anchor, the angels are the crew, by whom the church is always operated and protected.”¹³⁸⁶ Now this is the natural comfort that would occur to anyone discussing the future of the church and it is the very sort of thing one seeks in vain in the early church. While he sticks to scripture and tradition, Hippolytus is on safe ground, but where do we find the comforting allegory of the church? Note that he is not sure whether he is talking of the imperishable heavenly church or the earthly one. He seeks to claim for the church on earth the immunities of the church in heaven by introducing the angels into it—but what ancient authority has he for this? The ancients would have made the most of such comfort were they allowed it. But that Christ the pilot remains on board the ship as it ploughs through the waves is not the

¹³⁸² Clement of Alexandria

¹³⁸³ Hippolytus

¹³⁸⁴ Hippolytus

¹³⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁸⁶ *ibid.*

language of the New Testament or the fathers, in which he always descends to “take up” his elect out of the world where neither he nor they are long to remain.

Minucius Felix, as Quispel? observes, is already the complete pagan philosopher. When we talk of the final destruction of the world, “what philosopher does not believe or does not know that all things shall pass away?”¹³⁸⁷ But as for the coming of Christ, that is pointless when “all the world is a house in which God lives, and we live not only in sight of him, but in his very bosom.”¹³⁸⁸ For this blessed state what progress is to be expected? After the second century the church has only one foe and victory over him is assured: that is paganism, “whose persecutions only strengthen the church and purify it like gold in the fire, its truth and exaltation becoming every day more resplendent; and when through the benevolence of a good prince peace is given to the church, then the good works of the Christians shine the more in the presence of the unbelievers, and the Father in Heaven is glorified.”¹³⁸⁹ Always there is an air of rhetorical perfection, of wishful thinking and of complete historical unreality in these proclamations of the necessary, inevitable, and infallible ascent of the church. Modern priests see through the shallow declamations, but they are essential to establish a case for the continued church, for in the scripture such a case is not to be found. As Eusebius so dramatically describes it, peace brought to the church the very opposite effect to that described by Theonas; it was a frightful disaster, and the pagans were impressed indeed, but with scandal and shock, at the way the Christians behaved.¹³⁹⁰

Tertullian was in no doubt as to what was meant by “enduring to the end,” but Origen sees another and an easier way out. It refers, he says, to the internal struggles in the church, which will come to an end. Hence “we are not afraid, for it is necessary that these things come to pass

¹³⁸⁷ Quispel?

¹³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁸⁹ ? in text handwritten ‘(The***s)’ Theonas mentioned below?

¹³⁹⁰ Eusebius

before we see the perfection of knowledge which is Christ.”¹³⁹¹ Christ and Antichrist have now become abstractions of the schools. “But the end which we seek is not immediate. We must become firmly established in peace and not moved by them; for a pacific end if far from all these things.”¹³⁹² For him the victory of the martyrs is the philosopher’s victory in and over one world. By a projection of the scriptures Origen gets a world-church out of the mission of the apostles: Christ prophesied, he says, that his gospel should be preached in all the world: and sure enough “the word being preached with power has conquered the whole of human society.”¹³⁹³ Nothing is said in the scripture about the apostles conquering—it is an unwarranted projection. “There is not,” says Origen, “a tribe of men on earth to be seen which has escaped receiving the teaching of Jesus.”¹³⁹⁴ Everywhere it was resisted, he says, by kings, senates, governors and citizens, animated by the demons—but he says nothing of the terrible inroads of the apostate dragon within the church, that was the real danger, but Origen looks the other way: “But the *logos* of God which is stronger than all things though hindered, took from the hindrance only strength for increase, and ever progressing gathered in even more souls. For God so willed it!”¹³⁹⁵ Well enough, but where does God reveal that that is his will? Where is the scripture—even allegorical—with which Origen is usually so lavish? He puts his own interpretation on what happened and then says that since it happened, God so willed it. After having spent hundreds of pages answering Celsus’ lying charges, Origen is faced with a question which apparently he cannot answer. Celsus notes that the Christian scripture is full of predictions about false teachers and sects within the church and asks how the church can be pure in view of such corruption. “Celsus here makes false charges,” says Origen, “I will not bother to answer him!”¹³⁹⁶ Yet he immediately goes on to answer in detail three more books of charges not nearly so serious. Why

¹³⁹¹ Origen

¹³⁹² *ibid.*

¹³⁹³ *ibid.*

¹³⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁹⁵ Origen

¹³⁹⁶ Origen (answering Celsus’ questions)

would not Origen touch this question? Because Celsus is lying? But he is lying in his other charges to which Origen devotes a thousand pages. See how he tries to shrug off Paul's dire predictions of the Antichrist; "Paul in teaching about this so-called Antichrist, described in a rather vague manner the nature of his sojourn with the human race and the time of it and its purpose. And consider whether Paul does not discourse on these things most seriously and in a way not to be with the least degree of levity."¹³⁹⁷ The remark is a sobering one in another sense than Origen meant it to be: it shows that the philosophical Christians found such old fashioned teachings simply laughable. When the Lord predicts, however, that his disciples shall be hated of all men, Origen has no intention of taking it literally, since there is not sufficient proof that every single individual in every part of the world has actually hated the Christians. How could they be hated of all men if all men includes themselves? Perhaps, he says, this was said by way of exaggeration, using "all" for "many." The Lord was not making a meticulous census: he simply wants to make it clear that the apostles will be rejected everywhere, but that is what Origen cannot afford to admit, and so he takes to philosophical hair-splitting: There is indeed a "simple tradition" of the end, says Origen, but opposed to that is a "moral interpretation," which is to be preferred by educated people.¹³⁹⁸ Christ's advent is to the soul, and the soul that strives to meet it finds opposition—that is Antichrist. "Very few indeed," he writes on this subject, "really investigate the truth, while those with itching ears multiply apace."¹³⁹⁹ The true seekers shall find rest, however, which is "the awareness of the comprehension of divine mysteries and of truth, and whoever remains in the doctrine [*proposito*] or the apostolic tradition and the first founding of the churches shall be saved."¹⁴⁰⁰ Here is a definite conflict between the "simple" literal, early tradition, and the "moral" or philosophical interpretations which Origen prefers. It is clearly marked, but he will not make an issue of it and declares those who stick to the tradition to be

¹³⁹⁷ Origen

¹³⁹⁸ Origen

¹³⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*

justified. Earlier Justin had commented on the same split, but professed he was not sure just which of the two schools would be saved, though probably, he says, both of them will be.

In view of real persecutions, Cyprian will not deny the reality of the Antichrist, but writes

Let none of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by fear of future persecution, or by the imminent advent of the Antichrist as not to be armed with the scripture. The Antichrist is coming, but after him comes Christ: the enemy will rage and terrify, but then, the Lord will follow immediately behind him to avenge our sufferings and wounds. The adversary will rage and threaten, but there is also he who can liberate from his hands.¹⁴⁰¹

What is wishful thinking here is the word “immediately,” which leads to the peculiar conclusion that Christ and Antichrist come almost hand in hand, Cyprian announcing in the same breath that the terror will be no terror at all; that the time dreaded by the early saints, the wintertime of the wolves and the dark night in which no man can work, was to be but a short moment. Thereby he supplies the comfort and reassurance which the church needs regarding its survival, while taking recognition of the established tradition that the Antichrist must come. Peter, says Cyprian, by his denial, in spite of which the church was built upon him, “demonstrates (John 6:68) that though the wicked and proud multitude, not wishing to obey, may fall away, still the church will not fall from Christ, those being the members of the church who cling to their pastors. Whence you may know that the bishop is the church and the church is the bishop, and who is not with the bishop cannot be in the church.”¹⁴⁰² All this he reads out of John 6:68! This quite overlooks the repeated prediction of the scriptures that the pastors and leaders of the church would be the one most responsible for its corruption; that to follow them while it guarantees the existence of a church does not by any means guarantee the purity or integrity of that church. But Cyprian has already fallen into the standard error of assuming that if anything at all survives that must be the true church, though Christ and the apostles had said that the worship of his name would survive, but fraudulently. Note also that Cyprian makes an interesting distinction between the “multitude” of the church, those who comprise it, and the church itself. The church is not its members, but its

¹⁴⁰¹ Cyprian

¹⁴⁰² *ibid.*

officers, in a word “the church is the bishop.” Therefore the people may all fall away but the church still stands. But what if the pastors themselves fall away? Cyprian prefers not to talk about that, though that was the primary danger of apostasy according to the ancient apostles. Most important in Cyprian’s teaching is the emergence of a new concept of the church as an independent abstract entity, a mystic, self-contained body, self-existent, unaffected by human vicissitudes. This is a comfortable and useful device for guaranteeing the continuation of the church on earth. The possibility of conjuring up a mystical lady whom nothing could touch lay ready to hand in the schools, where allegory was running riot. The church is now the mystic bride of Christ, “no one can have God for a father, who does not have the church for a mother.”¹⁴⁰³ This is a new reading for Tertullian’s “the true Christian has God for a father and true piety for a mother.”¹⁴⁰⁴ True piety is an abstraction; what is easier than to slip another abstraction in its place. “The spouse of Christ cannot commit adultery,” says Cyprian, “for she is uncorrupted and chaste.”¹⁴⁰⁵ Compare this with the ancient statement of Clement: “Up to this time the church has remained a pure and uncorrupted virgin. But, when the chorus of apostles fell asleep, and those who had heard the divine word from their lips had all departed, then the evil ones came forth openly etc.”¹⁴⁰⁶ Cyprian is using a useful sophism: A virgin cannot be defiled, for in that case she would not be a virgin—to prove that the church cannot be defiled; but he refuses to carry his argument out: “the true church cannot be defiled—and remain the true church.” “Those who are blessed,” says the apostle, “if they fall away, cannot be renewed unto repentance:” they cannot fall away and remain blessed—but that does not prove that blessed ones cannot lose their blessings, which is the very thing the apostle is warning against.

Pseudo-Cyprian gushes over the triumphs of the church, “that blessed vine sprung from Christ, taking over the whole world, spreading from the east to the west, from the north to the

¹⁴⁰³ Cyprian

¹⁴⁰⁴ Tertullian

¹⁴⁰⁵ Cyprian

¹⁴⁰⁶ Clement

south.”¹⁴⁰⁷ “Though the devil never ceases to oppose us, perhaps the times will come hereafter in which, by the bounty of Christ, no tyrannical persecutions shall afflict the church: yet never shall future conflicts cease to be nor martyrdoms in which we might glorify God.”¹⁴⁰⁸ Here he wants to eat his cake and have it: the martyr church and the safe church; the big world-church taking all the credit for being a courageous little band of martyrs—nay by a well-known sophism it is possible to take more credit: “The church hails those who die as martyrs with special plaudits; but the numberless host of the celestial theater applaud those who give the testimony of a life of integrity.”¹⁴⁰⁹ Note the morbid Roman love of applause, attributed to God. The Pseudo-Cyprian indulges lavishly in the sort of boasting in which the apostolic fathers foresaw the ruin of the church: “The carnal Jew receives an earthly promised land from God; but the Christian a celestial one...in a future age. The rule is not now Jerusalem’s but ours; here is the camp, the host, the leader, here is virtue, here the spouse, the bride, here the king, here Christ, here life, here rebirth, here eternity.”¹⁴¹⁰ This antithesis of carnal Jew and spiritual Christian is not only most comforting, but is an inevitable product of the predominant rhetorical education of the day: the rhetorical antithesis was one of the three basic devices of rhetoric employed mechanically and easily and worked ad nauseam in subsequent Christian literature.

“If Christianity is false,” asks Arnobius, “how has it been possible for it to fill the whole world in such a short time? How has it been able to unite all the world?”¹⁴¹¹ Then from the argument of success, he turns to the argument of miracles and, most significantly, he does not produce a single example of a contemporary Christian miracle, but can only affirm that “the miracles of the apostles, sent throughout the entire world, are historical facts.”¹⁴¹² But the pagans were also claiming miracles, “and you claim that your records of miracles are older than ours!”

¹⁴⁰⁷ Pseudo-Cyprian

¹⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹¹ Arnobius

¹⁴¹² *ibid.*

What of it? Is Arnobius' answer, "is not antiquity the great mother of error?"¹⁴¹³ Church councils of a later date, pleading antiquity as their strongest support, should keep that in mind.

"To Eusebius," writes Cochrane, "the glorious and unexpected triumph of the church constituted decisive evidence of the *operatio Die*, the hand of God in human history. At the same time, by an easy and natural confusion of thought, it suggested the dangerous error that Christianity was a success-philosophy."¹⁴¹⁴ Now Eusebius is the father of church history, and he has established this error as the basic premise of that church history: that the church was a brilliant success in the world. Why was it "an unexpected triumph" if the ancient church had really had the spirit of prophecy? This was not the prophesied outcome of things, this "unexpected triumph" of the true church; but then, no one had prophesied ever that the true church would triumph. That becomes the darling thesis of the rationalizers of a later day. Actually the prophecies were fulfilled: those who thought they were the true church triumphed, and those who put the apostles to death sincerely believed that "they were doing God a favor." It never would occur to such people that anything but right could triumph in them. Eusebius opens his *Church History* with the announcement that he is going to take as his theme, "the lines of succession from the holy apostles," even though he has no assurance that such line exist, and when he comes to grips with the problem must admit that the documentary evidence is totally inadequate.¹⁴¹⁵ This has been the method followed by his own successors: can one have any doubt as to what is going to be the solution of a book entitled *The Unquenchable Light*? The answer is not only implicit in the statement of the problem—it is explicit: there is no problem, no doubt, no question—for an unquenchable light has only one possible history. Only slightly more subtle are those titles, dearly loved by Roman Catholics, such as *L'Eglise Naissante*, which load the dice at the outset. Whatever happens in the course of church history is viewed as the unfolding of a predestined plan to a predestined end: plan and end are not learned from the documents but

¹⁴¹³ *ibid.*, PL V, 794

¹⁴¹⁴ Cochrane, p. 148

¹⁴¹⁵ Eusebius, beginning of *Historia Ecclesiastica*

assumed from the outset as traditional. “Thus, by the power and support of heaven,” writes Eusebius, “the divine word spread irresistibly like the rays of the sun, constantly increasing and filling the whole world, and as the scripture predicted, the voice of the blessed evangelists went forth to all the world, and their utterance to the extreme limits of the inhabited world. And so in every village and city were established churches of myriads, embracing entire populations.”¹⁴¹⁶ Again and again Eusebius gloats on the vast numbers that poured into the church from the very first, and in the great rapidity with which it fled and flourished. When one considers Polycarp’s own view on the future, Eusebius’ account of his answer to a Roman proconsul looks like history in retrospect: “I will reason with you,” the saint tells the dignitary, “For we have been taught to respect rule and authority as established by God. But as for them [the common people], I consider it beneath me to give them an answer. They are like a few flames that soon will go out.”¹⁴¹⁷ Not only the ingrained snobbery of the statement but the view that not the saints but the sinners were about to come to an end is the sort of thing Eusebius looks for. If peace and plenty come to the church against all predictions and expectations, what is that but the grace of God marvelously manifest? The argument and authority of numbers greatly impressed Eusebius: Novatus, for example, was so viciously blind that “he was not even turned away from his empty headed and unspeakable foolishness to the church by the sight of the innumerable hosts that flocked to the true church.”¹⁴¹⁸ In the theatrical and passionately partisan manner of the fourth century, all the enemies of the church are promptly and efficiently disposed of: the people having returned to grace, after the persecution had passed, God punished their wicked persecutor Maxentius, who was eaten alive by worms in an incredibly spectacular manner. The fourth century wants its reward and revenge and wants it now; whoever now lifts his finger against the church has doomed himself to a quick and terrible end. No need for enduring to the end any more, for God now interceded with full and immediate vengeance. So Maxentius repented and immediately put

¹⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹⁷ Eusebius’ account of Polycarp

¹⁴¹⁸ Eusebius

a halt to all persecution. Characteristic of the transition time are innumerable tales of the immediate conversions of monsters, whose wickedness consisted not in their characters but simply in being on the wrong side. But the church was winning everywhere. “The gospel was quickly preached to all the world for a witness,” he says in the *Praeparatio*, “and then came [not the end!] the church, established by his power from among all the nations, not visibly yet nor set up anywhere, but to be in the divine foreknowledge unassailable and invulnerable, and never ever to be overcome by death, to be set up and remain unshakeable, as upon an unshakeable rock, made firm by his own power!”¹⁴¹⁹ “After the gospel had been preached to all the world, the church followed, strongly rooted and binding men to heaven, utterly beyond the power of its enemies...and not even subject to the gates of death. The Jews were destroyed for daring to oppose it.”¹⁴²⁰ The whole thing was prophesied, says Eusebius: the fate of Christ, the Jews, the apostles, and the church, it is all read as a projection of the single sentence “upon this rock.” Now this one scriptural passage which may guarantee the future of the church comes into constant use. That there should be only one such passage, and that drafted by violent methods from a context worlds removed from that into which it was thrown, is eloquent proof of the radically unscriptural nature of the new approach to church history that made Eusebius most truly the father of church history in the conventional sense. Michah, says he, predicts “the appearance on earth of Christ and of the house of God, his church, and the coming to earth of his word and law, and the destruction of all the nations.”¹⁴²¹ This was the pattern, indeed, as we have seen, but that it should happen at the first, rather than at the second coming of Christ, was the new doctrine—and that was the classic error of the Jews as well. What happens after the appearance of Christ? He asks, and cites his great discovery: “The universal God himself promises to build like a wise architect and builder, the house of the church, signifying no other house than the church. There will all the liturgies be done. The church is mentioned by name in Psalms 44: 7-8; while Canticles is plainly

¹⁴¹⁹ Eusebius, *Praeparatio* I:3

¹⁴²⁰ Eusebius, PG 21,33

¹⁴²¹ Eusebius recounting Michah’s prediction?

the secret doctrine of Christ and the church.”¹⁴²² When Isaiah sees the desert blossom as the rose, “he means the church blooming among the Gentiles.”¹⁴²³ The Jewish Jerusalem was often shaken and attacked, but this new city he says will be unshakeable. He says the palisades of this new city will be unshakeable. Though much besieged, it shall remain forever invulnerable, being set upon a rock. For he cannot lie who said: “Upon *thn petran* I will build my church and the gates of hell, etc.” but he can be copied. So Decius, Valerian, Aurelian all met violent deaths because they persecuted the Christian church. Diocletian was struck by lightning for the same reason. God would take no nonsense; Babylon would be converted by force if necessary. Success become the supreme test of the true church: “That rustics and fishermen should become law-givers to the whole human race...hand down written laws, and govern the world...what greater proof of their divine calling?”¹⁴²⁴ “They fought their enemies with such courage that they and their successors and those who followed them down to our own time willingly allowed themselves to be put to death.”¹⁴²⁵ With what result? “Whoever after his death brought all the cities and nations of the world to submission, both Greek and Barbarian, and brought perfect peace to the entire world? What philosopher or hero has ever done so much?”¹⁴²⁶ The wonderful thing is that Eusebius, during a very brief period of peace in the church, actually believes that these amazing results have been achieved. In view of that, all doctrine and theory, all prediction and prophecy must be revamped; the voice of other ages pales into insignificance beside the tremendous fact of actual achievement. Eusebius calls the world to witness not what has been predicted, but what has actually happened, for which he can find no evidence in scripture save by a new wildly enthusiastic interpretation.

“The church, whose great and eternal temple had Christ for its builder, must necessarily contain in him an eternal priesthood.” Thus Lactantius, with his usual rhetorical transpositions,

¹⁴²² *ibid.*

¹⁴²³ *ibid.*

¹⁴²⁴ Eusebius

¹⁴²⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴²⁶ *ibid.*

arguing in a circle: “Whereas the rites of the gods are mere form, our religion is firm and solid, because it teaches justice, which is always on our side, [one can hear the apostolic fathers groaning at this complacency], because it is entirely in the soul of the worshipper...this, a *bona mens*, a pure breast, and innocent life...What place can there be in such for an evil mind or base desires?”¹⁴²⁷ We are good because we are good, or better, because we are we. You are bad because you are not. “The prophets announced that Christ, being born physically from the line of David, would set up an eternal temple to God, which is called the church, and would call all nations to the true religion of God. This is the house of faith, this is the immortal temple, in which if a man shall not sacrifice, he shall not have the reward of immortality.”¹⁴²⁸ What a loose and merry throwing about of tantamounts! Persecution, says Lactantius, is very popular with the Christians, who allow it even though they as the majority could avoid it. His explanation for that? “So solid is our foundation, that injuries and vexation not only do not destroy our religion, but only increase it and make it constantly stronger.”¹⁴²⁹ So everybody is coming over to our side, so impressed are they; “and so, if divinity should grant us peace, both those who had left would return to us and a new host would join us for this miracle of virtue.” “Since therefore our number constantly increases at the expense of the worshippers of the god, and never, not even in persecution, diminishes, who is so blind as not to see that *sapientia* must be on our side?”¹⁴³⁰ Yet they go right on thinking we are silly to let ourselves be put to death when we don’t need to. “But what thousands of people do cannot be silly. Can so many people in all parts of the world be wrong?”¹⁴³¹

The caution of a transition appears in the words of Athanasias, who will not allow himself the ecstatic gushing of a Eusebius—he had seen too many ups and downs to think that

¹⁴²⁷ *Quibus ex rebus apparet, prophetas omnes denuntiassse de Christo...ut...constitueret aeternum templum Deo, quod appellatur Ecclesia...Cuius templi, et magni, et aeterni quoniam Christus fabricator fuit, idem necesse est habeat in eo sacerdotium sempiternum.* Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 4.14, in *PL* 6:487.

¹⁴²⁸ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.20, in *PL* 6:617-618.

¹⁴²⁹ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:590-592.

¹⁴³⁰ Ignatius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:589-590.

¹⁴³¹ Ignatius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:589-590, see pg. 194 fn 65.

victory was a sure thing. “This catholic church,” he writes, “by correctly reading and accurately interpreting the divine scriptures, has build herself up upon the [*thn*] rock, the perfect dove, she who holds the key to the correct and blessed faith locked in the apostolic strong-box.”¹⁴³² Upon the unshakeable rock of the scripture the waves of heresy beat in vain. The indiscretion of referring to the rock as the scripture instead of Peter has got this letter proclaimed spurious.

Though Christ was rejected by the world, the apostles were not. This strange conclusion is based on the argument that the apostles were ordered to preach the gospel in all the world. Since that was God’s order, says Augustine, how could it fail of fulfillment? “The world not knowing God was obscured by fogs of ignorance,” writes Hilary, “but the apostles brought in the light of knowledge, and the knowledge of God shone forth, and from their insignificant beginnings, wherever they went, light ministered to darkness.”¹⁴³³ A sweet sentiment, but the exact opposite of what the ancients taught. This is the sort of thing one would like to believe happened, but it forgets entirely that the apostles were not to succeed where the Lord had failed. “The light of Christ is not to be hidden under a bushel, neither darkened by the doings of the synagogue: but suspended aloft by the passion of the cross, the eternal light is offered to all who are in the church.”¹⁴³⁴ The proof for this? Matthew 5:16! The command “let your light so shine,” is now used to prove the continuity of the church. “It is peculiar to the church,” says Hilary, “that she conquers where she suffers, that she is understood where she is challenged, and acquires where she is deserted.”¹⁴³⁵ And he prays that “the holy Catholic Church of the Lord will be free from all dissension and schism, that the rule of the church and the holy tradition of the ancestors might endure firm and solid forever, neither to be disturbed by new sects, perverse traditions, especially those dealing with the bishopric or in their expositions; but that we might always keep

¹⁴³² Athanasias

¹⁴³³ Hilary

¹⁴³⁴ Hilary

¹⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

to the apostolic way.”¹⁴³⁶ This reflects the interesting illusion of purity up until now. In every age of the church there have been just such dissensions, and every age has been convinced that the trouble first began with it and that accordingly the church had ever remained a pure and uncorrupted virgin up until that moment. For who could bear to think that the corruption of his day was but the corruption not of the pure old faith, but of an older corruption, and that by defending the status quo he was only defending an earlier corruption instead of the ancient and undefiled faith? Like Hilary, every father from the days of the apostles who deplores the evil ways of the church assumes that though these things plagued the church in his day it had not been so formerly, though the earlier fathers often remind their readers that it has always been so.

For Zeno the world is a raging sea and the waves thereof are the Jews and Gentiles who *inaniter* rage against God. But Nineveh is the church, for the time shall come when, all nations believing on Christ, the whole earth shall be handed back to God as a single blessed city. “Rejoice brethren, in Christ,” he cries, “who hath...turned the tares into a rich harvest!”¹⁴³⁷ This is an example of direct refutation of the scriptures, and yet it is the only corollary of the doctrine of converted Babylon. Christ had said exactly what would happen to the tares—and it was certainly not this, as F. A. M. Spencer has pointed out. And the neat rhetorical touch: “Just as the Jews passed through the sea into the desert, we after baptism pass into paradise.”¹⁴³⁸ To which an editor’s note: “The author calls paradise not heaven but the church. The real paradise was Eden, and so *per allegoriam* it is applied to heaven; then by a similar allegory, to the church.”¹⁴³⁹ “Nothing can resist Christ,” cries Adamantius, “who possesses all authority, to whom all society is rightly subject, and the assembly of bishops...to which kings and all princes are gathered together to give their assent, becoming fellow workers for the truth, striving to wipe out and shut

¹⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴³⁷ Zeno

¹⁴³⁸ Zeno?

¹⁴³⁹ Editor of this edition of Zeno

out falsehood.”¹⁴⁴⁰ Eusebius of Vercelli’s creed says, “We believe that the holy Catholic Church, bought with his blood, will reign with him forever.”¹⁴⁴¹ “It is well known,” writes Basil, “that the ancient saints had to suffer persecution, that individually and collectively [by cities] they were tested for the name of the Lord, who trusted in him. But just the same all these things passed over, and none of those disturbances lasted forever. So even now if we hang on, everything will be all right in the end here.”¹⁴⁴² This is the new definition of enduring to the end.

Like hail and winter torrents that damage soft things but hurt only themselves on harder objects, thus the furious attempts against the church proved weaker than the strength of rain in Christ. And just as the storm-clouds vanish and the foods subside, thus even now after the present storms have raged for a short time more, they will cease to be. So let us not look at the present but at things just ahead.¹⁴⁴³

When the ancient Christians said this they meant death and paradise. This is the natural comfort that one misses in the words of the apostles.

“Thou, O church, announcest the coming of the Antichrist,” cries Cyril, “and whether he shall come in thy time or after thee we know not. Christ...has not yet left the earth [translated “Christ will never again leave the earth!]. If anyone else comes saying Lo here, etc., believe him not. Look no more in the time that remains to this earth below, for the Lord shall come down from heaven.”¹⁴⁴⁴ The editors of the Patorl have made violent efforts to alter this interesting throwback to the old eschatology. “The ancient church endured through trials and afflictions,” says Cyril, “and received the crown of endurance. Now, in these times of peace...we have the support and honor of kings...for while the rulers of nations have boundaries, we are infinite, etc.”¹⁴⁴⁵ The church is the bride of Christ, having the type and being the pattern of Jerusalem which is above, who is free and the mother of us all. Who before was barren but now has many children. God having repudiated the first, gave to the second catholic church “apostles, prophets,

¹⁴⁴⁰ Adamantius, PG XI, 1881

¹⁴⁴¹ Eusebius

¹⁴⁴² Basil

¹⁴⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴⁴ Cyril, PG 33, 884

¹⁴⁴⁵ Cyril, PG 33, 1048

teachers, powers...” for which Cyril not strangely fails to draw the obvious conclusions that the absence of those gifts of recognition certainly comprise another repudiation, for if God can and has repudiated his own before, why should he not do it again? Cleverly non-committal is Cyril’s assurance: “By teaching well and behaving ourselves properly in the holy Catholic Church, we shall possess the kingdom of the heavens, and be elected to eternal life.”¹⁴⁴⁶ While following the orthodox old Christian line, Hilarion makes such a certain case for the dissolution of the true church, that the only way he can save it is by the surprising announcement that the Antichrist will come “for the destruction of infidels” a strange office indeed for the prince of infidels!¹⁴⁴⁷ It is with a comfortable logic that Pacianus refutes all Novatian charges of decadence in the church: “Can the serpent have had his poison for so long and yet Christ not have the medicine for it?” he asks in defense of indulgences.¹⁴⁴⁸ “If the devil slays in the world, cannot Christ get around him.”¹⁴⁴⁹ And in virtual admission of the charges, he cites Ezekiel 18:4, 20 etc. as proving “that those may be saved who are surrounded with sinners,” and asks, “Will you bind all the inhabited world for the sins of a few? Will you condemn all the church for the weakness of a small part of it? Do you have wheat without tares? Are you the only ones who have no weeds?”¹⁴⁵⁰ From I Corinthians 13:14 he draws the heartening but perfectly illogical conclusion, that

Ergo the church is a full and complete and solid body, and already diffused throughout the entire world, not like you Novatians, and presumptuous and miserable little band [exactly the terms the pagans once used against the early Christians, who gloried in the charge!] separating yourself from the rest of society. The church has countless children, who fill the whole earth, she honors the good, chastises the proud, cures the sick, loses none. She has no spot on her garment (Ephesians 5:27) which means, she has no heresies.¹⁴⁵¹

Note the easy new orientation: it is now the church who has assumed the office of God as the only judge: judgment day holds no terrors. To be clean is not to be free from the vices so fully

¹⁴⁴⁶ Cyril

¹⁴⁴⁷ Hilarion, *De Mundi Duratione* 17, in *PL* 13:1105.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Pacianus

¹⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

described by the early fathers, but to weed out non-conformists. The church is now the only judge of her own righteousness; she cannot possibly cease to be the one true pure church, because now she alone can cancel her contract, because she declares herself to be so—and as such has the only right to make such a declaration. This silly circular argument is a great favorite with Roman Catholics of a later day. This is no moralizing of ours—the implications of this easy and worldly type of reasoning annoyed Pacianus’s dearest friend, who needs reassurance: “Finally, brother Sympronianus, don’t be ashamed of being one of the many. See the far flung Catholic flocks! You quote ‘where one is, there am I, and where two are there is a church...’ How much the more so where there are even more?”¹⁴⁵² Thus amusingly turning a strong argument against numbers into a pure argument of numbers. Quoting Genesis 22:18, he asks, “Are all nations blessed in your sect? God’s blood was not shed for so few, neither is Christ so poor. The church of God must fill the whole earth.”¹⁴⁵³ The proof? Psalms 112: 3. He reports further misgivings when he asks his friend, “How can you claim that the church has fallen away?” The charge is significant, the answer sophistic: “No artisan despises his work, nor deems vile what he has made. And why do you think Christ suffered for sinners, unless he did not want to destroy that which he had made?...He is not going to lose [or destroy] one of those which he has accepted: would he do all his work as a sham or pretense?”¹⁴⁵⁴ These immoral arguments should exonerate all evil doers from any sense of responsibility forever more. Tertullian asks, can the martyrs have been crowned in a vacuum? Insisting that he shall say what make a successful martyr. Pacianus insists that Christ must have failed unless he accomplished a purpose which he defines as setting up a universal church. “To not condemn the church as long as God can forgive his people,” he cries, admitting sin, but discounting it by infinitely convenient mercy.¹⁴⁵⁵ Duchesne says the Christians of this time were Christians in name only, “which is the only way in which the world can be

¹⁴⁵² Pacianus

¹⁴⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.*

Christian.”¹⁴⁵⁶ For that very reason the Lord knew that his church could have no great popular appeal unless it turned to another Christ who is not Christ. Pacianus reports on this very state of things:

You see, then, the church as a queen in golden and variegated garments, being composed of many bodies, many populaces in great variety. The picture does not have a uniform color. One part of the garment conceals, another reveals. Some cling...and some parts are dirty. There is purple for martyrs, silk for virgins, and some sordid patches. On any great tree do not some branches suffer from the weather?¹⁴⁵⁷

With such rules, of course, it is quite impossible that the church as a whole—any church—could be lost: any corruption could be explained, and whatever survived could be put forth as the real thing.

“The devil attacked from the beginning,” says Gregory the Theologian, “but does not have the strength to bring the whole race to its knees. For the illustrious spark of the word, flaring up and flying, passed through the whole world, was followed up by those who nursed it more...”¹⁴⁵⁸ This is the poetic and wishful picture so easy to repeat with rhetorical variations. “A church,” says Ambrose,

in gentleness and faith has captured the lands of her enemies without any bloodshed; for faith alone hath waged the battle. And the more does she deserve her triumph, because they were not won with perfidy; but she grows, because she is not overcome but only tested by her persecutions....For the people of the church do not fight, as the Jewish people did, with military arms and iron spears. They fought in figure, but we in spirit: they fought those of other races, we wage the war within ourselves, against the passions of our own bodies.¹⁴⁵⁹

How beautiful, and how false! And beautiful rationalizing: Genesis 27:30 proves (if it proves this it proves anything you want!) for Ambrose that “the rule was meant to be given to the church before the synagogue.”¹⁴⁶⁰ What happened? “The synagogue sneaked in ahead, that sin might abound.” Why? “For the demonstration of superabounding grace.” “Like Mary, the church is immaculate, yet married. She conceives us a virgin by the Spirit, she brings us forth as a virgin

¹⁴⁵⁶ Duchesne

¹⁴⁵⁷ Pacianus

¹⁴⁵⁸ Gregory the Theologian

¹⁴⁵⁹ Ambrose

¹⁴⁶⁰ Ambrose

without pain. And just as Mary the wife of one was with child by another, just so the churches are filled by grace and the Spirit, etc.”¹⁴⁶¹ There is no limit to allegory; it is the old school game. Referring to Luke 8:44, “Perhaps this unguent can be administered by none other than the church, who possesses flowers of infinite odor and variety, and rightly takes on the form of a sinner, because Christ also received the form of a sinner.”¹⁴⁶² It is most convenient to have the Jews at hand to receive all of God’s rebukes and the Christians all of his blessings. “The church is the light on a bushel. Jewish Jerusalem is extinguished for killing the prophets, but Jerusalem which is in *coelo*, in which our faith fights, is set upon the highest mountain, which is Christ, therefore the church cannot be hidden by the darkness and ruins of this world, but shining with the brilliance of an eternal sun, illuminates us with spiritual grace.”¹⁴⁶³ Here is pure rhetoric sloshing about without restraint: What is real? What is “spiritual?” what is allegorical? What is just words? For Ambrose the church enjoys all the immunities of heaven with all the prerogatives of earth. For Epiphanius, Abraham’s circumcision in his ninety-ninth year proves that the Jewish superstition came later than Hellenism. By a very mystical and allegorical interpretation of Canticles, it is easy for Epiphanius to prove that there can be only one true church, and that his church is it. He simply wallows in metaphor, every lush figure and image is pasted onto the church, the paradise of the Creator, the city of the holy king, the bride of Christ, the holy virgin dedicated to one man only, the blessed kingdom without darkness, our holy mother, the church. “Great things shall be said of thee, O city of God.”¹⁴⁶⁴ One must read the sickening “gush and slobber” of contemporary rhetoric to realize how naturally this sort of stuff flowed from fourth century pens. It was pure panegyric.

¹⁴⁶¹ *Bene desponsata, sed virgo; quia est Ecclesia typus, quae est immaculata, sed nupta. Concepit nos virgo de Spiritu parit nos virgo sine gemitu. Et ideo fortasse sancta Maria alii nupta, ab alio repleta; quia et singulae Ecclesiae Spiritu quidem replentur et gratia; iunguntur tamen ad temporis speciem sacerdotis.*, Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam 2.7*, in *PL 15:1635-36*.

¹⁴⁶² Ambrose, ?

¹⁴⁶³ Ambrose, ?.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Epiphanius

No man labored more to establish by the persuasive arts of rhetoric a faith in the continued survival of the church than Saint John Chrysostom. And no man has told us more about the doubts and suspicions that filled the minds of his contemporaries and challenged his eloquent campaign. People after the Council of Nicea really wondered what had happened to the old church. It was no longer there, but it should be. There was the rub. One can rationalize with the moderns that the church had to change to survive—who doubts that? And with the ancients that on logical grounds something of the true church simply must survive—evil times were predicted, but does that mean the whole church must go? But it is plain that in Chrysostom’s time people were sure something was all wrong. First of all, John notes, the gospel was preached in every part of the world and not a single person failed to hear it. The proof of that? Psalms 18:5 and Psalms 44:17: “Thou has placed them as leaders over all the earth,” plainly refers to Peter and Paul, and therefore proves the triumph of the church. This type of circular argument is greatly favored by the fourth century and later fathers: chose a passage that fits your case; apply it to your case; conclude that it is a clear reference to your specific case, no matter what its context in the Bible, and is therefore proof of your claims. “While the laws of kings passed away in their lifetime, those of the fishermen [apparently Paul too was a fisherman] remain firm and steadfast even after their deaths in spite of all the machinations of the demons.”¹⁴⁶⁵ What proves that? Nothing in the New Testament to be sure, but Psalms 44:18: “Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy ways.” What could be more obvious? Psalms 2:1 and Hosea 11:9 obviously prove the universality of the church, as Hosea 2:2 does its invulnerability; and from Isaiah 2:4 we learn that the church was not only to be unshakeable and immovable, but was to rule the entire world in peace. What is easier or more natural than to read “church” for the Israel of the promise? It was only a step to making the kingdom of heaven itself identical with the church, a step finally completed by Augustine. The most wonderful thing about Matthew 16:18, says John, is that Christ not only founded the church throughout the world, but also made it unconquerable, and

¹⁴⁶⁵ John Chrysostom

unconquered it has remained through so many wars against it. We actually have the complete, absolute, universal and instantaneous conversion of the world! And by whom? “By eleven uneducated, ordinary, slow-tongued, unimposing, poor, insignificant, etc. etc. men. It was the Eleven who actually converted the world. And after them just such people as themselves undertook the reformation [*diorthosin*] of the world.”¹⁴⁶⁶ John’s own orations on the depraved morals of Christendom in his time are a fine commentary on their success; but that he must overlook, for he is under urgent necessity of proving somehow or other that the true church has not disappeared from the earth. In the heroic work of spreading the gospel paganism was the only obstacle. It surrendered almost instantly, however, and miracle of miracles, instead of tares “all the earth became an immeasurable paradise, a blooming meadow,” Genesis 1:11 proves that, with, of course, no mention of tares.¹⁴⁶⁷ Christ said “I will build my church,” and with the greatest of ease [*eukolias*] it was accomplished.¹⁴⁶⁸ All the armed might of paganism was helpless before it. John is a classic example of how easy it is to make out a case for the victory of the church as long as one is free to pick and choose one’s own protagonist. If one defines the victory of civilization as the elimination of Gila monsters, then the West has become extremely civilized, but if one defines it as the elimination of vice and crime it is another story. The settlement with paganism was an issue, but it was not the issue that concerned the early saints. “They built so many churches everywhere in the civilized world against the most savage resistance. No churches of stone, but of souls, and that is much harder. All the emperors waged futile war against the church. But then Christ never said they would overcome it.”¹⁴⁶⁹ They are not the Antichrist; they are not the betrayers, the wolves who all come from within! Julian the Apostate failed miserably, says John, but of the apostate dragon he has nothing to say. John leaves us in no doubt that he believes the Peter personally administered the rule of the world. And why not? Was not the whole

¹⁴⁶⁶ John Chrysostom

¹⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*

civilized world committed into his hands? And what of the Jews? They lost the priesthood, and if they think the possession of holy books can save them, they are wrong, for “holy books do not make the synagogue holy.”¹⁴⁷⁰ A lesson wasted on the church. The church is like Noah’s ark, which receives all things into it, only the church is better, “for whereas the ark received a crow and sent out a crow, the church receives a raven and sends out a dove! It takes in a wolf, and it sends out a sheep.”¹⁴⁷¹ Rhetoric has done what the early church could not: for its sheep turned to wolves. “Whereas the Jews had only certain specified times and places to celebrate, we hold continual festival...and every day is a feast day. And as for places of celebration: they are scattered over the whole surface of the earth.”¹⁴⁷² John marvels often how the ancient apostles were able to pilot the church through the wildest storms “in perfect security.” “By so much the more are those who led the church in those days to be marveled at and admired than those who manage it today.”¹⁴⁷³ “Things are very different now from what they were in Ignatius’ day,” he tells us, “Today bishops have a well-trodden path to follow, on which many predecessors have passed....Now there is no threat of danger to bishops, but everywhere deep peace prevails...even to the uttermost limits of the inhabited world. And the secular rulers are careful and scrupulous in professing the same faith we do.”¹⁴⁷⁴ Not only the church but the world was under their complete authority: The ancient apostles “had much greater political power than any bishops do today, of course, since Peter had the keys” a most interesting observation; where are the keys suppose to be now? John actually goes on to describe Peter’s tremendous task of governing the city of Antioch, of which he was bishop, as well as the entire empire. What a commentary on church history. Chrysostom, one of the most influential and learned men of his times, has not the remotest idea of what the ancient church was like, but basing his whole reconstruction the scripture alone, he projects a promise to Peter into the actual realization of political world rule in his person. The

¹⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, PG 50, 590

delightful thing about this is that it is based on perfect logic—the logic which the Roman Church still employs to prove its case. But he has a very suspect theory of succession.

For just as one removing a great stone from a foundation, makes hast to replace it completely by an equivalent stone, lest the whole structure shake and decay, just so when Peter was about to leave here [Antioch], the grace of the Spirit installed in his place another teacher the equal of Peter, lest the edifice already erected become any weaker than that perfect one he had received.¹⁴⁷⁵

But the only equal of an apostle is an apostle; and the only equal of Peter is Peter. Yet all hasten to admit that Peter and the other apostles were worlds above any men alive in their day. The office might carry the authority of the man, once he has passed or the man the authority of apostolic office once it is passed, but from the ancient church both the man and the office passed away. Early persecutions failed, says John, because Christ himself is the shepherd; so that in persecution the *logos* only increases, since “these things are not human nor of us, but from above and of heaven they have their roots, and God is in charge everywhere, and of course no one can overcome God in battle.”¹⁴⁷⁶ In that case, how can there be any battle at all? “Neither deceit nor force can prevail. Fathers may betray their children and children turn against their parents, mothers may become unnatural, etc. But in spite of all this the foundations of the church are not thereby shaken...because of that saying which is ‘that the gates of hell shall not prevail.’ Since God said this, the church cannot fail.”¹⁴⁷⁷ This is the classic and enduring argument. That saying and that alone guarantees the future of the church. The fact that it was never used in the early church has led Protestants to argue that it is a late interpolation. Why should it be? The silence is even more significant if the passage had existed from the first. John goes one better those who describe the church as a storm-tossed but unsinkable ship: “The church is a ship on a stormy sea,” he says, “but Christ sees to it that she is never storm-tossed but always rides in perfect tranquility.”¹⁴⁷⁸ The storm this becomes utterly pointless. The struggle becomes meaningless

¹⁴⁷⁵ John Chrysostom

¹⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*, PG 50, 592

¹⁴⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, PG 51, 78

¹⁴⁷⁸ John Chrysotom

where not only defeat but even discomfort are out of the question. “More wonderful still,” cries Goldenmouth, “not only does the storm no shake the ship, but the ship actually dissolves the storm itself. Constant persecutions have not only not broken the church, but have been broken by the church.”¹⁴⁷⁹ By what power? The power of Matthew 16:18! “How often have the Gentiles tried to make that prediction fail—and failed themselves....Like a tower of adamantine stones bound with iron, it is attacked on all sides by the enemy who does not shake it or even disturb its harmony; they do not do it the least harm, but exhaust themselves in the process.”¹⁴⁸⁰ “When Christ says that the foundation laid by the prophets was perfect and strong enough to receive the new philosophy, he then sent the apostles to build the church on that foundation. How do we know this? From the Book of Acts.”¹⁴⁸¹ “Christ said ‘I am with you’ to the apostles whom he sent out: he himself preceded them, made all things easy before them and smoothed the way.”¹⁴⁸² In view of this John’s next sentence sounds strange, “and yet the apostles met only hardship and refusal: every port was barred to them: every door was shut against them, every ear was closed to them.” The first sentence is John’s happy theory, of which not a word in the scripture. The second is fact too well know to be passed over. How does he reconcile the two? By simply erasing the second, with a useful “nevertheless” in his next sentence: “But nevertheless the instant they went forth and spoke every difficulty was removed.” That is John again, restoring our confidence by a gesture. “All ears were closed to the apostles, but none the less they won, and thousands of Jews became their followers—all Jews.”¹⁴⁸³ Then a significant question: “But why are the Jews now unbelieving?” What has happened to the success of the apostles? In a very short time the church filled the uttermost ends of the earth. From John 12:24 (!) we learn that “the larger the church became, the easier and faster it grew—3000 converts in one day, 5000 in another. This was by the grace of God, and what is most wonderful, the church was safest when she was most

¹⁴⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*, PG 51, 79

¹⁴⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸³ *ibid.*

persecuted.”¹⁴⁸⁴ Only rhetoric can reconcile the two conflicting ideas of the persecuted rejected church and the super-successful mushroom church. After listing all the terrible demoniacal forces that attack the church, John adds his cheerful “But nonetheless all of these were dissolved and wiped out, while the church, increasing mounted to such heights that she has actually surpassed the heavens.”¹⁴⁸⁵ The proof for this amazing claim is only too obvious: does not the scripture say “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my world shall not pass away?” Isn’t then the church which is the only depository of God’s word actually more permanent and therefore “more holy than heaven itself?” The church was like snow, he says, that seems to cover everything in a moment, but you say the snow also passes. Not so the church! For though it has had many opponents they have all given in. Like water that must freeze in a general temperature, so all opposition has irresistibly been brought around to the Christian way.¹⁴⁸⁶

In the end, all John’s conviction rests on the worldly success and splendor of the imperial church. This speaks more strongly than the scriptures even when it refutes them directly. “With the triumph of the church came the triumph of civilization,” says John, “who was once a wolf has now become a sheep,” thus neatly reversing the scripture, “what was once tares has now become wheat” (he does it again) “who once cut down the vine now tends it. Who was once lead has now become gold.”¹⁴⁸⁷ So the wolves become sheep, the wheat overcomes the tares, and the vineyard falls not, as the Savior predicted, into the hands of impostors but into good hands! How much better that sounds than the gloomy old Bible! “Don’t talk to me about theories,” cries the elated orator Chrysostom, “The fact is that the sheep have overcome the wolves. For the church is actually more firmly rooted than heaven itself. People will accuse me of arrogance in saying this, but the fact remains. How much easier it would be to extinguish the sun than to black out the

¹⁴⁸⁴ John Chrysostom

¹⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁶ *ibid.*, PG 55, 484

¹⁴⁸⁷ John Chrysostom

church!”¹⁴⁸⁸ The proof is Matthew 24:35. Who said that? he asks with a rhetorical flourish that was to be copied by armies of later churchmen, “Christ himself did.” But that is just the point, Christ did not say that. He said “My words [plural, not the *logos*] shall not pass away” and from that saying John projects a syllogism. It may have been in John’s opinion tantamount to saying it, but actually it is not what Christ said. “Hear of Greeks and Jews! Nothing can uproot the church. All attempts to do so have failed,” (he lists them). “Our opponents have vanished, but the opposed has surmounted heaven. Don’t tell me that ‘the church stands upon the earth but is governed in heaven.’ Where do you get that? The facts prove that the eleven apostles conquered the world, and transformed the wolves into sheep.”¹⁴⁸⁹ Note the obvious conflict between the traditional teaching and what John wants people to believe.

If one would seek the opposite pole from the grave admonitions and warnings of the apostolic fathers let him consider this sentiment of the Goldenmouth: “The people of Constantinople love to hear rhetoric in the church. It is true they go to the theater and riot one day only to behave themselves the next. But we need not worry: Christ is the pilot. Therefore the boat may be pitched and tossed, but it can never sink.”¹⁴⁹⁰ “Christ made the church greater than heaven! For the church is holier [*timiotera*] than heaven! Why is there a heaven? For the sake of the church—and not a church for the sake of heaven...”¹⁴⁹¹ Then to prove that the church is holier than heaven John brings forth an argument that is the epitome of priestcraft: Isaiah, he reasons, had a vision of God on his throne (Isaiah 6:1), though he was a married man! Moses and Abraham were married yet saw God. Peter, the foundation of the church, had a mother-in-law. These heavenly men were married. Yet our priests are not married and are therefore purer and holier: and so our church is holier than heaven!¹⁴⁹² Such an interpretation of marriage as a

¹⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁹ John Chrysostom

¹⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹² *ibid.*

degrading of holiness Clement had said was a sure sign of “the apostate dragon.”¹⁴⁹³ But who would be more likely to glory in the purity of his church than just this apostate dragon?

The apostles, according to Chrysostom, “wrote their bishops for the purpose of giving the church a perfect protection, and providing perfect guidance for the entire world until the coming of Christ.”¹⁴⁹⁴ Here the eloquent man goes too far. If the church were to remain, the apostles cannot have avoided this responsibility. Yet as Eusebius discovered and as their writings attest, they certainly entertained no such idea of the nature and purpose of their writings, of which they are very niggardly. John turns Paul’s prophecy of grim things ahead into proof of a long future for the church, for why should Paul predict things unless he thought about the future? And if he thought about a future, the church was surely going to have one!

Paul was concerned about the future of the church as much as about the present. He was a prophet and his warning against the wolves [it was not a warning only but a confident prediction] was to serve as a guide by which those yet unborn might take heed and be sober. He was foreseeing the wolves at a far distant time: just so a father loves not only his children but also his grand children and great-grandchildren.¹⁴⁹⁵

The argument will not hold up here, for Paul makes it only too clear that the wolves are not far distant but very near, but the point is a good one. If the apostles were founding the firm and unshakeable everlasting church of Chrysostom, they certainly would have taken great heed for the future. That they did not puzzles and alarms Father Buzy, but the fact remains. The only time the future of the church is mentioned at all is in these bleak predictions of Paul’s and so Chrysostom must make the most of them, using every trick of the rhetorician’s art to convert these grim and melancholy prophecies into capital for the future church. Paul in his great anxiety for the future of the church, John argues, was really like a king building around his beloved city indestructible and unshakeable walls to protect not only his own generation but all succeeding generations, giving instructions not for his own time (Paul’s own words are that “the time is short”) but in view of

¹⁴⁹³ Clement, (see above references to ‘apostate dragon’)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Chrysostom

¹⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.*

future contingencies. That is how Paul is acting.¹⁴⁹⁶ Paul's own refrain is that "the time is short,"—so much for his view of the future; but any mention of a future at all must be grist to John's mill. In asking Christ about the future, he says, the apostles were not concerned about their own, but about the others, each in general and in particular. Looking to the future Peter, the administrator of the entire inhabited world (*oecumene*), and the foundation of the church, left all he had and followed Christ, thus exhibiting his faith in the future of the church, for the promise in Matthew 19:27f is that they shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel!¹⁴⁹⁷ As an example of determined reasoning: "Peter's whole concern was for the future of the church on this earth, for he asked the Lord (Matthew 19:16) 'What shall I do to have eternal life?'"¹⁴⁹⁸ It would be hard to imagine a more effective non sequitur. "Don't you see the concern of the apostles?" he asks, "Don't you see how Peter feared both for the present and for the future? The same with Paul..."¹⁴⁹⁹ John then quotes 2 Timothy 3:1, but instead of discussing it quickly diverts his discourse to another subject. But why, we may ask, does Peter view the present and future with fear? Has not John assured us repeatedly that there can be no danger for the true church, which cannot even be discomfited for a moment? John shows how determined he is to prove a future for the church from Acts 20:26, 28: "The 'grievous wolves' prove what I said, that Paul was not only in fear and agony for those of his own time only, but of those who would be after his departure."¹⁵⁰⁰ It is plainly those immediately after his departure to whom Paul refers, and as John notes he thinks of them only with "agony and dread," but any reference at all to a future of the church is such a rare thing that John must make the best of this extremely unfavorable passage. The use of the future tense proves one thing, for John, "what I maintained, is namely that there was to be a future for the church."¹⁵⁰¹ He passes by in perfect silence that powerful declaration

¹⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰¹ *ibid.*

that that future was to be short and a bad one, to construct a syllogism on his one point. His argument runs thus: a) The apostle is thinking of the future, b) therefore, the apostle is guiding the future, c) therefore, the apostle is strengthening the future church, d) therefore, the apostle is making the future church absolutely invulnerable! Thus a neat syllogism converts Paul's word into the exact opposite of what they were meant to convey.

In Acts 20:29, a "double war" is predicted for the church, "1) the departure of Paul and 2) the coming of the wolves. When the teacher is no more at hand the destroyers make their attack....What then? Would he desert in such a condition without any consolation? But to do that would be to increase terror, oppress the minds of one's hearers, dissolve their nerve, and paralyze their hands."¹⁵⁰² Would Paul do a thing like that? Would Paul have deserted the church to such a desperate future? No! Verse 28 proves that "though Paul departs, the Paraclete is present. Do you not see how he gives wings to their spirit, reminding them of the divine teacher in whom he himself will be present in power? Why then does he inspire them with fear? That he might drive out indolence..."¹⁵⁰³ Paul had a double task: "Not to cause his hearers to lose heart, lest they become all the more lax, and not to let them be afraid lest they fall into resigned terror. He calls upon the Spirit in verse 28 to drive out fear, and upon the wolves to cast out laxity."¹⁵⁰⁴ What Paul says about the wolves must not be taken too seriously, for "since the Lord gave the apostles such great power, the wolves could not prevail."¹⁵⁰⁵ "Do not be afraid," said the Lord, "that I am sending you among wolves as sheep," why not? Chrysostom invents out of whole cloth a speech which he does not hesitate to put into the mouth of the Lord. This is the rhetorical license of quoting a speaker as saying quite other words from those he did say, on the grounds that in the orator's opinion his paraphrase is "tantamount" to what was said: "Do not fear," John quotes the Lord to suit his taste, "for I was able to make the opposite, and see to it that you need not endure

¹⁵⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*

anything bad, and not be like sheep subjected to wolves, but be in your work more terrible than lions.”¹⁵⁰⁶ If one wishes to make a direct refutation of the scripture, what can be safer than giving it the authorization of the Lord himself by putting one’s own invented speeches in his mouth? No language could more strongly express the hopeless case of the truth in the devil’s world than “sheep among wolves,” but a rhetorician can discount this sort of thing with ease: “I send you forth as sheep among wolves, for as long as we are sheep we conquer. Even though a myriad of wolves surround us, still it is we who prevail and gain the upper hand. But if we become wolves we lose. The shepherd will help us, for he does not want wolves but sheep.”¹⁵⁰⁷ How conveniently the deep wisdom of God always jumps with the most immediate desires of men! The charge that because of rhetoric words have lost their meaning, and nothing means anything is well-founded one. By a simple rhetorical device any passage in the world can be robbed of all its force or turned into its exact opposite: wolves among sheep—but the sheep win, the wolves are beaten. By this system fire does not burn, water does not wet, the damned cannot be damned, down is up, black is white, etc. “For when he said, ‘I send you as sheep,’ he meant to say, ‘Do not fall down. I know, very well I know, that in this, nay in all things you are going to be absolutely invulnerable.”¹⁵⁰⁸ **But** rhetoricians love this sort of thing; the paradox is their delight: “Oh strange and marvelous [paradoxical] things! The Romans conquered countless myriads of Jews at the time, but couldn’t conquer twelve men, opposing them naked and unarmed.”¹⁵⁰⁹ The apostles had nothing but hardship; “They were not loved: they were hated. Still the Lord had commanded that the gospel should be preached throughout the whole world, and then the end would come.”¹⁵¹⁰

The church is holier than heaven or earth. It is the mountain of the Lord’s house. All who fight against the church simply destroy themselves without doing her the slightest damage. The

¹⁵⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

church is a mountain because it is firm, immovable, lofty, unconquerable. I Corinthians 2:24 shows “that the reward of the apostles is found effective everywhere and at every moment.” It is the same with “the good odor” that fills the world. Since God triumphs always, that can only mean that the apostles triumph everywhere!¹⁵¹¹ Single handed, the apostles actually subjugated the entire world. Like his contemporaries, Chrysostom cannot deny the Antichrist, who “shall sit not only in the temple at Jerusalem, but in every single one of the churches, no matter where!”¹⁵¹² But who this Antichrist is, John Chrysostom cannot or will not tell us. At the end of his days John is found still trying valiantly to reconcile his two views and achieving his goal by firm rhetorical resolve—“so and so is the case and yet, nonetheless, in spite of all that, etc., the opposite is also the case.” We hear him speaking to bare walls, deploring the vast emptiness of the magnificent buildings, erected at government expense, in which he, the greatest orator of his day, speaks Sunday after Sunday to a few dull old women. Is this the glorious irresistible conquest of the glorious irresistible church? And those who do come the church, he says, exchange lewd looks with the women, talk business, greet their relatives, and pass the time of day, “right in the presence of God Himself!” Still he will not be discouraged, for logic is stronger than experience. “Still, what is stronger than the church of God? A strong wall? Walls crumble with age, but the church never grows old. Barbarians scale walls, but demons never dent the church. How many people have attacked the church? But the church has always won.”¹⁵¹³ In view of that, he asks, why don’t people come to church? “If those who stay away would only tell us why!” he cries in vexation.¹⁵¹⁴ He describes the people of the church as utterly indifferent and utterly depraved—nay, he doubts that there is a chaste adult person in Antioch—but of course all that in no way affects the church! What is the church? Whatever mystical essence it may be, certainly only Chrysostom’s type of church could survive in Chrysostom’s type of world.

¹⁵¹¹ Chrysostom, PG 61, 429.

¹⁵¹² Chrysostom

¹⁵¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*

Jerome make full use of rhetorical license in interpreting whatever suits him in the scripture as a victory for the church. When in Numbers 19 the cherubim leave the temple, they found the church of God. The Good Samaritan carrying his charge to the stable is carrying him to the church. In Acts 2:14, says Jerome, we have the complete fulfillment not only of the universal preaching but also of the ministry of the Paraclete.¹⁵¹⁵ This removes these future events as arguments for the indefinite postponement of the second coming. Jerome sees all evil fulfilled in the Jews, all good in the Christians. In the world of rhetoric all things flow where we want them to: the more unreal and preposterous a situation the more spiritual and miraculous.

We according to the prior sense [of Isaiah 40:1ff], believe in the universal church: which was first congregated of the Jewish people, and the light which arose over it, transmitted by the apostles to the Gentiles...which departed from the synagogues, and rises in the churches. We walk in the light of the apostles which shines in the world....Kings walk in the splendor of the nascent church [first use of the term?]. . .which things we see daily fulfilled in the abolition of idolatry and of the madness of persecution, as the Roman princes go over to the faith and tranquility of Christ.¹⁵¹⁶

Isaiah 40:10ff is now fulfilled: “Those nations and their kings who would not serve the church with a good will...shall perish the death that is prepared for the impious, and whatever is in them shall return to desolation, since they would not receive God as their guest.” How often Old Testament phrases, serving God, obeying God, etc. are now applied instead to the church. The church has actually supplanted God as an object of worship, for as Chrysostom says, God cannot possibly be known, while the church is as real as vivid as a Christmas tree, and yet, like God, a pure spiritual abstraction.

If fourth century fathers must use the most desperate devices to squeeze a drop of hope for the future of the church from the scriptures, the Bible is maddeningly full of those very promises, applied to the Jews, which the church seeks and misses so sorely for herself. How the Christians would have welcomed the claim that “it is impossible to comprehend the height of the heavens or the depths of the earth, and even so shall it be impossible to conceive that God should

¹⁵¹⁵ Jerome

¹⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*

ever entirely cast off the seed of Israel.” But since this applies to the Jews, such a promise means absolutely nothing: it is to be taken in the same sense as “the eye of a needle,” i.e. it is a deliberate exaggeration. In that sense and in that sense only, Israel will never be deserted. Or if you insist on it, not all the Jews will be rejected, because of course the ancient patriarchs will be saved. Otherwise the Jews boast in vain. But how different when it applies to our side. Ezekiel 36 is speaking of us, and this is literal! It tells how, “when our persecutors have all been killed, the mountains of Israel, that is the apostles and apostolic men, shall bring forth trees, and extend branches, and make the wine in which the believing people shall be drunken...” And, lest we despair in persecution, it adds: “The time of his coming is near. For he who is coming shall come, and not delay. Whence...is promised the advent, and he promises that after the heat of persecution the earth shall bring forth an abundance of people...and the church shall be inhabited as it was in the beginning, that is, before the persecution.” Two passages of scripture furnish Jerome the proof that “the church shall endure to the end of the world, and though smitten by persecutions, shall never be overthrown; it shall be tempted but not overcome. And that is because the Lord God Omnipotent, or its Lord and God, that is of the church, has promised it: and his promise is a law of nature.”¹⁵¹⁷ One is curious to know what those two priceless texts are on which Jerome rests his blessed assurance. They are Psalms 26:13: “My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the Lord.” And, as if that did not settle the matter, Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” This is as if one were to claim to be related to Abraham Lincoln, and to prove that claim would quote the Gettysburg address. Then if we still doubted he would expand upon the noble and upright character of Lincoln, and shame us for casting aspersions on it. Those who force Bible texts to prove a case for the church love to insist that it is God who is speaking and God cannot lie, and God’s will cannot be frustrated, etc. “Before the coming of Christ,” says Theodoret, “the devils had the run of the earth and had men completely in their power, infesting everything. But with the coming of

¹⁵¹⁷ Jerome

the light they beat a hasty retreat, all of them, and their dwelling places were left desolate.”¹⁵¹⁸

What proves that is Matthew 8:29, which really proves exactly the opposite for the devils declare that their time has not yet come.

By the time of Augustine, says Frick, church and kingdom of God were identical, and it only remained for succeeding centuries “to bring about the practical realization of this equation.”¹⁵¹⁹ In the Middle Ages, “in the church human self-esteem was gratified,” writes Powicke, “*nam non ecclesia propter coelum, sed propter ecclesiam coelum*” was the rule.¹⁵²⁰ “By Gregory VII’s time,” he says, “the visible church on earth, under the guidance of the pope had become the accepted embodiment of the city of God....Henceforward the church set its face against any distinction between the church visible and invisible.”¹⁵²¹ The church cannot be shaken says a Byzantine hymn “because Christ says: I am the light eternal that does not set.”¹⁵²² Again new scripture is put into the Lord’s mouth: He said he was the light of the world who would only be in it a short time; this is edited to say that he would never leave it, by simply transferring the eternal nature of the light to mean its eternal presence in the earth. “In heaven and upon the earth there is but one glorious perfect chorus,” says the hymn, “of angels and men a united symphony. All we Christians have a wall in war and a calm in storms...praise to the church! Lady take me into your arms and keep me safe forever...thou hast turned away mine enemies and I have escaped my pursuers.” The church performs the functions which in the Psalms are ascribed to God. From the time.

¹⁵¹⁸ Theodoret

¹⁵¹⁹ Frick

¹⁵²⁰ Powicke

¹⁵²¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵²² Byzantine hymn

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In the preceding citations one can detect a growing kinship between the ideas, ideals, and pretenses of the church and those of the Roman Empire. When Constantine held a great feast to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his coronation, “you would have thought,” says Eusebius, “it was the Golden Age of Christ’s rule!”¹⁵²³ It is the emperor as emperor who rebuilds the New Jerusalem. A great deal has been written on this subject in recent years. If one sought a heavenly city of the blood of all races, a world ruling community imposing godly peace on all mankind, one had the perfect example to hand the Roman Empire. “As early as the time of Hadrian,” writes Gibbon, “. . .the capital had attracted the vices of the universe, and the manners of the most opposite nations.”¹⁵²⁴ The intemperance of the Gauls, the cunning and levity of the Greeks, the savage obstinacy of the Egyptians and Jews, the servile temper of the Asiatics, etc. . . all went “under the proud and false denomination of Romans.”¹⁵²⁵ One thinks immediately of the great imperial Christian conglomerate that sprung into existence in the fourth century: “They were Christians,” says Duchesne, “but in name only.”¹⁵²⁶ The idea of a universal all-embracing world-ruling mother is dominant in both cases: and there can be no doubt where the Christians got it from. Long ago F. C. Baur observed that “this universalism [of Christianity] was the very goal to which the history of the world had been tending for centuries before.”¹⁵²⁷ It was “but a step in the same path,” that Alexander’s Empire and the Roman Empire had trod. “Thus the universalism of Christianity necessarily presupposes the universalism of the Roman Empire. . . the universalism of Christianity is essentially nothing but that universal form of consciousness which the development of mankind had arrived in the time when Christianity appeared.”¹⁵²⁸ Speaking of the

¹⁵²³ Eusebius

¹⁵²⁴ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1873), 260.

¹⁵²⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 260-261.

¹⁵²⁶ Louis Duchesne

¹⁵²⁷ F. C. Baur

¹⁵²⁸ F. C. Baur

birth of Christ, Baur says, “he who regards this as simply and absolutely a miracle, steps at once outside of all historical connection.”¹⁵²⁹ Usener noted that “the authority of the Roman Church constantly needed a worldly power on which to lean.”¹⁵³⁰ And he notes that when the emperor favored the Arians the church did not then desert its dependence on Rome, but leaned on the Roman Senate. “Christian love of Rome surpassed all provincialism,” wrote L. Chavanne in his special study, “and actually doubled the contempt and at times the hatred for strangers, for barbarians, for anyone who escaped the domination and civilizing influence of The City par excellence.”¹⁵³¹ They regarded the conversion of Rome as the last and the happiest transformation of the Eternal City. They were at pains to show that Christianity was in no way to blame for the fall of Rome. The fierce loyalty of Prudentius to Rome was based, according to Chavanne, not only on his position as an official in the old government, but also in the interests of his church. For Ambrose as for Prudentius, “conversion to Christianity is the final step in human progress, Christianity crowns the work of the Roman Empire; all opposition is vain.”¹⁵³² Speaking of Roman rhetoric, Boissier says: “with time the debris of old paganism, mixed with Christian sentiments, formed an entirely harmonious whole.”¹⁵³³ “In Prudentius the accord between the church and the school is as perfect as one could wish.” Dante carries on the tradition of Prudentius in full force in his *de Monarchia*. In 1901 Stryzowski describe a wooden sculpture showing Roman soldiers defending the wall of the empire against the barbarians, which is shown by its symbolism to depict at the same time “the defense of the faith,” the imperial soldiers manning the walls of “the fortress of the faith.”¹⁵³⁴ In the fifth century St. Michael appeared on coins in the place of, but with the form and insignia of Nike, and pagan Victory with globe, cross, and crown became an angel. “Rarely has any great enterprise started under circumstance more

¹⁵²⁹ F. C. Baur, I:1.

¹⁵³⁰ Hermann Karl Usener

¹⁵³¹ L. Chavanne

¹⁵³² Ambrose? or is this still Chavanne?

¹⁵³³ Boissier

¹⁵³⁴ Josef Stryzowski, 1901

promising” than Christianity in the empire, says Kidd.¹⁵³⁵ “Christ was born under Augustus, crucified under Tiberius. Hence some of the apologists made it one of their pleas for toleration that the church was coeval with the empire. They meant that the coincidence of time was designed by God, that these two great institutions were intended to help one another, and ought not to be hostile. There was substantial truth in this opinion.”¹⁵³⁶

Rostovtzeff has described Diocletian’s pinning down of everything as a massive imposition of the state upon society, solving its problems in the most direct and brutal way at the expense of all the higher values of civilization.¹⁵³⁷ Yet the writings of the fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries proclaim as a glorious ideal the very thing which Diocletian accomplished; it is the sort of thing they are craving. They gave theoretical and divine sanction to everything that was done, nay, they are way ahead of the emperors on the road to absolutism, constantly urging him on and chiding him for his hesitation. The simple and brutal absolutism of Diocletian and Constantine was imposed upon the world by popular demand. Constantine deferred to Christianity; he yielded to the pleas of Christian fathers when he cracked down on the opposition; he assumed dominion over the church on the urgent request of the fathers. The ideology of the thing came first, the thing itself followed. Beside the list of evils in the new system of Oriental despotism given by Rostovtzeff may be set an exactly parallel list of virtues proclaimed by the fathers of the church. “The prominent feature of the spiritual life of the Empire,” writes Rostovtzeff, “was the increase of religiosity. Religion was gradually becoming paramount for almost everybody.”¹⁵³⁸ At the moment when it reached an all-time high, “the Christians...grew tired of being outcasts and of fighting the state. The time was ripe for a reconciliation of state and church, each of which needed the other.”¹⁵³⁹ In art “the figure of Christ...is based on the

¹⁵³⁵ Kidd

¹⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵³⁷ Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 541

¹⁵³⁸ Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 509.

¹⁵³⁹ Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 509.

conventional classical figure of the ideal orator or philosopher....The unity of Rome lived on in the Catholic Church, which became the religious and political school-master of the young kingdoms.”¹⁵⁴⁰ “*Die Kirche*,” writes Gelzer, “shows us the most intimate tie between *Imperium* and *sacerdotium*...” The time of Theodosius and Honorius saw the fixing of the canons of monumental Christian art; with the end of the fourth century cult ceremonies became for the first time the subjects of a grandiose church art. Christ teaching the Twelve Apostles first appears under Theodosius, while the Sermon on the Mount appears already under Constantine. The “procession to the throne of Christ” becomes the motif at city gates; Christ in glory, Christ on the throne, Christ receiving universal submission, such are the new and theatrical motifs, a Constantinian *Grundtypus* of Italian origin. The monumental apsis-paintings of Constantinople spread throughout the church. “It is a new art,” says Gerke, “to be explained only in terms of the new, energetic political *Weltanschauung*.”¹⁵⁴¹ Though it was not a renaissance but a new thing, consciously employing Greek classical forms. In the time of Theodosius “Christian art founds for the first time a great, unified theme for painting and plastic, which were to represent the majesty of the omnipresent Christ, and was the product of a Christian *Weltanschauung* which had become political....Here the newly formed state-political Christianity created its first monumental art...”¹⁵⁴²

The tendency of modern writers is to hail the emergence of the new imperial church as a good thing, a vast and holy nucleus for all subsequent orientation of Western Civilization. “One of the most imposing facts in the history of mankind,” writes Mr. Westbury-Jones, “is the contemporaneous establishment of the Empire of the Caesars and the rise of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The only two powers which have claimed absolute dominion over mankind appeared together.”¹⁵⁴³ And with enthusiasm he quotes Westcott: “Peace won by arms ushered in

¹⁵⁴⁰ Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff

¹⁵⁴¹ F. Gerke

¹⁵⁴² Theodosius II

¹⁵⁴³ J. Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, (New York: Kennikat Press, 1971), 1.

Him who revealed the peace of the life of God.”¹⁵⁴⁴ “The Empire meant a universal peace;” it provided a system of law “which enabled Christianity to acquire the exact soil in which it could take root;” and then in an ecstasy of rhetorical paradoxing “A Roman procurator was the unjust judge who brought about the redemption of the world...Roman law provided the Cross which became the symbol of Christianity.”¹⁵⁴⁵ “The establishment of the Empire was a prime necessity for the early success of Christianity.”¹⁵⁴⁶ And then the final touch: “The form which Christian theology assumed in the age following that of the apostles...cannot be understood if we lose sight of the great lawyers who became leaders of the church; and who used their great gifts and their special training in Roman jurisprudence to develop and defend Christian doctrines.”¹⁵⁴⁷ But that is not all, for this man Justinian was a truly Christian character, “the Christian Legislator.” Mr. Jones has told us more clearly than he means to just what Christianity is to him: Justinian. We will readily grant that a Roman Empire had to pave the way for such a God-man, but we have great difficulty identifying him with either Christ or the apostles with whom he claimed to be equal. For Brezzi, Constantine showed the way and opened the door to the church to lead us all into a better world.¹⁵⁴⁸

Cochrane has dealt at length with the Roman concept of restoration and reconstruction. In the restored Republic of the *Pax Augusta*, Virgil saw “the culmination of effort extending from the dawn of culture...”¹⁵⁴⁹ This is the line of thought followed by Eusebius in the *Preparatio*, with Christianity in the place of Rome. Cochrane believes that Constantine by the Edict of Milan “pointed to an utterly novel idea—the project of a Christian commonwealth. Through this idea...*Romanitas* was to secure a fresh lease of life under the aegis of the church. The Edict of

¹⁵⁴⁴ Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, 1, quoting Westcott, *Epistles of St. John*, 250.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, 27-28.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, 27.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, 27.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Brezzi

¹⁵⁴⁹ Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture, A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1944), 27.

Milan may thus be described the great charter of the *New Republic*.¹⁵⁵⁰ Constantine's "recorded utterances are full of allusions to the 'deity' [*divinitas*] to which, like his father, he gave unqualified allegiance; until, with the lapse of time, that vague concept slowly assumed the lineaments of Jehovah."¹⁵⁵¹ "What Eusebius looked for," says Cochrane, "in the age of Constantine was nothing less than a realization of the secular hope of men, the dream of universal perpetual peace which classical Rome had made her own, but of which the *Pax Romana* was merely a faint and imperfect anticipation."¹⁵⁵² But what the great hopes boiled down to was an "era of 'godly and righteous' legislation, of generous but not excessive reform, which was to be the net contribution of Constantinianism to the Kingdom of God....From the fate which overtook this liberal-social-democratic programme, it is possible to forecast the probable outcome of analogous movements in modern times."¹⁵⁵³ "What he [Constantine] saw in Christianity was simply a talisman by virtue of which *Romanitas* would be assured of material prosperity such as official paganism had failed to give it."¹⁵⁵⁴

Under Constantine "Christianity and world empire, no longer opponents, are viewed as having been made for each other by God in his all-wise providence. This *Regnum Christianum* is certainly not the *civitas dei*, the kingdom of God on earth. The Constantinian theology had not so completely removed itself from all eschatological expectation....That theocratic ideal first became a full realization under Justinian, and had powerful influence in the Byzantine Empire and Russian Czardom, but it arose under Constantine."¹⁵⁵⁵ It was "*Gemeingut* of the Christian world within the empire," that Rome was the type and model of the heavenly city long before Jerusalem.¹⁵⁵⁶ "The intimate interweaving of *Romanitas* and *Christianitas*," writes Straub,

¹⁵⁵⁰ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 179-180.

¹⁵⁵¹ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 182-183.

¹⁵⁵² Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 185.

¹⁵⁵³ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 196-197.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 215.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Cochrane

¹⁵⁵⁶ Cochrane

“brought political existence very near to the dangerous identification with religious existence.”¹⁵⁵⁷ He illustrates this by Jerome’s “*Quid saluum est si Roman perit?*” In the fourth century the church relaxed that “tragic *Spannung* between Christian self-assertion and duty to the state.”¹⁵⁵⁸ The Christian apologists, Straub observes, wanted to lead the world out of its troubles. They wanted to strengthen the “*Friedensreich*” the Rome-Christian axis in which the human race could live in Christian unity. They pray for salvation but with equal fervor for the salvation of the earthly empire.”¹⁵⁵⁹ “They wanted to rescue *Romanitas*, that heritage which had grown precious and beloved, for the new age.”¹⁵⁶⁰ He notes that the fact that the German barbarians became Arians “confirmed...the inclination of the Christians, to remain true to *Romanitas* and to assert their Roman character.”¹⁵⁶¹

Recently Gage has shown that the labarum belonged to the astral symbolism of the restitution of Rome, and the Chi is the astrological symbol of the restitution of Saturn; it represents Christ as Chronocrator over the twelve zodia.¹⁵⁶² Cabrol and Leclercq have shown the labarum to be a common pre-Christian symbol of empire in the Near East.¹⁵⁶³ “How characteristic it is of the age,” writes Alföldi of the founding of Constantinople, “that the first believer in Christ to sit on the throne of the Caesars could only reach a close definition of the position of his new Rome in face of the old in the pagan conceptions of late Roman thought, in the pagan idiom! This same method of casting reflections to and fro between the two capitals can be traced farther in the spiritual shaping and the material realization of the new Rome.”¹⁵⁶⁴ An Italian now undertakes to remove any possible moral objections to a complete identification of *Romanitas* with

Christianitas points out that Revelation does not describe Rome but Satan as the adversary of the

¹⁵⁵⁷ Johannes Straub, “*Parens Principum*,” *Nouvelle Clío* III-IV (1952).

¹⁵⁵⁸ Johannes Straub, p. 72

¹⁵⁵⁹ Johannes Straub

¹⁵⁶⁰ Johannes Straub

¹⁵⁶¹ Johannes Straub

¹⁵⁶² Apparently in: J. Gage, “*Stauros Nikopoios La Victoire Imperiale dans l'Empire Chrétien*,” *Revue d'Histoire et de Philos. Religieuses*, 13 (1933).

¹⁵⁶³ Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq

¹⁵⁶⁴ Andrew Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 112.

church "...Not the Roman Empire or Caesar, but their idolatry, was the enemy."¹⁵⁶⁵ Bousset has shown that it was only the Judaizing zealots who really hated the Roman Empire.¹⁵⁶⁶ If the Apocalypse had been anti-Roman, it would have had in the church *un'eco antiroamno*. There was no such echo, therefore this is not an anti-Roman voice. G. Manthey, studying the presence of the pagan *Pax Perpetua* formula on Roman Christian coins, concludes that this is "the first crystallization of the idea of Roman *pax* which prevailed in the empire without interruption from 130 to 324 A.D.," which "entered among the Christian symbols."¹⁵⁶⁷

With the passing of the Edict of Milan "A great sigh of relief and thankfulness went up to God from the Christians of those days," says Father Bligh, but he asks, was the edict a blessing?¹⁵⁶⁸ "To the adult Christian of the West in 313 the Edict meant a reaffirmation of the *status quo*; toleration was what he was used to, and the persecution had been an exceptional phase."¹⁵⁶⁹

"It is superstition [δεισιδαμονίον]" wrote Polybius, "which maintains the cohesion of the Roman state."¹⁵⁷⁰ The state was a religious, world-embracing institution. Even in the time of the Republic Cicero objected to the Jews, that "the religion of the Jews is at present most odious to the glory of Rome."¹⁵⁷¹ That glory was a holy thing. The citizens were addressed as *quirites sanctissimi*, and reminded that their concern "individually and collectively was to watch over the *dignitas publica*."¹⁵⁷² In the center of the picture was the actual city of Rome itself: from the first an artificial settlement and a melting pot, a holy ritual center.¹⁵⁷³ Meyer says he used to think Rome was a different kind of community with it populous of farmers, but later he learned

¹⁵⁶⁵ An Italian?

¹⁵⁶⁶ Bousset

¹⁵⁶⁷ G. Manthey

¹⁵⁶⁸ Bligh, "The 'Edict of Milan'," 295.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Bligh, "The 'Edict of Milan'," 298.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Polybius, *Histories* 6.56. [London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1972; pg 395] see Gk.

¹⁵⁷¹ Cicero, *Pro L. Flacco Oratio*, 69.

¹⁵⁷² ???

¹⁵⁷³ Meissner, P. 55; is fn 49 the same?

differently: Rome was a typical polis from the first.¹⁵⁷⁴ Moreover the ideal of peace, not war, predominated from the first—always as an ideal: “It may seem strange,” writes Marsh, “...that the Romans should have constructed their whole army for the day of peace that never came. Such is, nevertheless, the fact. The Roman Republic had no standing army. It persistently refused to regard war as a Norman condition.”¹⁵⁷⁵ Caesar spoke a familiar language when he presented himself to the Romans as “father and protector [*custos*] of the human race, son of Saturn,” for already in his day “*Romana potential caelo aequavit.*”¹⁵⁷⁶ As dictator Caesar already conceived the plan “to build the Roman people a monumental place of assembly with rows of pillars a hundred feet high!”¹⁵⁷⁷ At the end of the Republic security was the desire of all, a positive obsession with Cicero. And none knew better than the Romans that religion lay at the root of security, “its matrix lies in *religio*, undoubtedly the most characteristic element of Italian experience. What we see in Vergil is thus a Catonism...with its foundations widened and deepened...”¹⁵⁷⁸ Effort and organization were the keynotes to the system, according to Cochrane—“the gospel of salvation...through will.” Thus the mood as well as the physical groundwork for the Western church was set down by pagan Rome. “Aeneas is thus the pilgrim father of antiquity...accordingly, Vergil gives authentic expression not merely to the Roman temper but in considerable degree to that of Western civilization as a whole.”¹⁵⁷⁹ Vergil’s “epic is charged with a sense that, with the rise of Rome, fate has given birth to something novel in the evolution of peoples.”¹⁵⁸⁰ “The permanence of *Romanitas* was ensured by the fact that it made possible a realization of what have been called ‘the essential and indestructible elements of the private personality’....Amid the wreckage of empires founded on tyranny and exploitation, it

¹⁵⁷⁴ Eduard Meyer

¹⁵⁷⁵ Marsh

¹⁵⁷⁶ Caesar

¹⁵⁷⁷ Caesar

¹⁵⁷⁸ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 61.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culutre*, 65.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 65.

stood alone as the project of a world-community united by ties of the spirit.”¹⁵⁸¹ Rome specialized in tyranny and exploitation and the great empires of antiquity had that ideal here attributed solely to Rome, but the point to note is that what is now put forward as the boast and glory of Christianity is by no means the invention of Christianity. The old Roman concept of *pietas fides*, strained beyond the breaking-point in the Civil Wars was converted into a new thing— submission was the new form of reliability, absolute submission the emperor. As Rome decayed it became less and less possible to trust anyone on any other grounds than those of absolute and unquestioned submission. “With the conquest of the Mediterranean, this nation of intelligent peasants, suddenly transformed into a great imperial power, was plunged into a state of unparalleled moral and intellectual confusion.”¹⁵⁸² “Vergilianism” was the solution. “Viewed in the light of his imagination, the *pax Augusta* emerged as the culmination of effort extending from the dawn of culture on the shores of the Mediterranean,” Virgil “supposed with most of his contemporaries that the war to end war had been fought and won at Actium.” Small wonder that he seemed so much like a Christian to later ages, that he became a saint in the Middle Ages—for he not only “constitutes the supreme embodiment of the optimism of his age” as a great reconstruction and restoration of the glories of the past, and as the moral foundation for empire, but in so doing he also lays the foundation of the imperial church. “*Alme Sol*,” cried Horace at the launching of the empire, “mayest thou never see a greater thing than the City of Rome!”¹⁵⁸³ And he describes Mede, Sytyian, Indian etc. submitting to the *fides, pax, honor* and *pudor* of Rome, just as pharaohs and kings of the Four Quarters interpreted every embassy to them as an act of submission. Note the typically Roman love of abstract terms. In the first three pages of Pliny’s *Panegyric to Hardian* are over a hundred such. This amazing avoidance of the concrete, this “spiritualizing” of concepts, a characteristic child of rhetoric made of the empire from the first a spiritual thing, a lofty ideal, which allowed the panegyrists in all seriousness to “hail even the

¹⁵⁸¹ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 72-73.

¹⁵⁸² Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 29.

¹⁵⁸³ Horace, *Carmen Saeculare* 9-12.

most miserable weakling on the throne as a Conqueror of the World,” the whole thing was “*realitaetsfeindlich*.”¹⁵⁸⁴

The classic delineation of the heavenly world-kingdom of eternal peace is Aristides famous panegyric to Rome. A single wall about the empire now protects everyone within it.¹⁵⁸⁵ The whole *oecumene*, released from its old burden of local responsibilities now hold as it were one ceaseless festival. The way is now open for Hesiod’s *dike* and *aidos* to return to earth.¹⁵⁸⁶ This world-state shall continue to bloom until the rocks disappear beneath the sea and trees cease to grow; and all that time it shall not cease to be the support of all that is good. Is not this the very unscriptural church that is to remain “firm and steadfast until the end of the world?” “Everywhere cities shine with glorious radiance and grace and all the earth is adorned like paradise. Religious rites and festivals are everywhere: the sun never sets on them. Pity those outside this system! They should be in, too, because the earth is the mother of all and the common fatherland of all.”¹⁵⁸⁷ Rome is of course the center of all, all things come together there, there is no profession or no product you cannot find there. The Persian Empire had its limits, but not the Roman: no one escapes us. As Homer tells how the snow covers all the works of man and nature with a single uniform whiteness, so it is with our city...it is no wonder that such a city rules all the *oecumene*; the *logopoioi* love to rhapsodize on the theme of Asia being ruled by a single man “wherever the sun shines.” What is a dream and an ideal with them is realization with us.¹⁵⁸⁸ This is the very figure used by Chrysostom to describe the Christianizing of the world under the empire. Here is perfect equality under the law for rich and poor alike. Rome has moved into a vacuum bringing serenity with her: the world has forgotten war. The Greeks also dreamed of world-rule, dreaming of a dominion which they were unable to carry out in actuality...they never enjoyed true rule...but Rome makes one city of the entire world: one community. The land and the islands of

¹⁵⁸⁴ ? Cochrane?

¹⁵⁸⁵ Aelius Aristides, (220 (385)

¹⁵⁸⁶ Hesiod

¹⁵⁸⁷ Aelius Aristides

¹⁵⁸⁸ Aelius Aristides

the sea like a single country and a single tribe constantly hearken and obey without protest...all the world stands singing hymns and giving praises—a twofold prayer 1) for itself to the gods and 2) to the emperor ¹⁵⁸⁹for itself. Just as the poets say that before the rule of Zeus, all things were full of rebellion and uproar and unrest, but with the coming of divine dominion all that ceased, the Titans were driven underground, etc. So Rome brought law and order to a world full of disturbance and revolt. The gods, seeing that Rome has brought law and order into the world, gladly seconded her rule, even as all the world cooperates. ¹⁵⁸⁹This is identical with the later Christian doctrine that God, seeing the Roman rule was good, must always have meant it so. The all-seeing sun beholds under Roman rule nothing of violence or injustice of which there formerly was so much. It seems to me that neither Homer nor Hesiod were ignorant of the Roman rule, says Aristides, who is not even going to spare the prophetic element in his rhetorical picture—leaving not a single point for the Christian to claim as their own. For those inspired poets, he says seeing ahead prophesied, and pitied those who lived before Rome. The Asiatics, he admits, have the very same vision, but their poets are not telling the truth, for their ruler does not reign over Libya and Europe and all the oceans: ¹⁵⁹⁰only Rome satisfies these conditions...the whole ocean has become like one big Roman harbor. The emperors after the second century gave themselves the names of Pius and Felis as “an expression of the old Roman belief in the close relationship between piety and good fortune.”¹⁵⁹⁰ All this is far older than Christianity, for it is the spirit of the Hellenistic world with its *evergetes*, *philadelphuses*, *epiphaniuses*, etc. The *Pax Perpetua* symbol on the Roman coins, celebrating the *aeternitas* of the emperor and the empire as victor *dominusque omnium gentium*, was taken over whole by the Christian emperors, who did not drop their holy Roman functions nor cease to be *pontifex maximus* in joining a church that once opposed all that. Propertius does not drop a syllable of all this praise to Roman and empire: Rome is the great

¹⁵⁸⁹ *ibid.*?

¹⁵⁹⁰ Aelius Aristides

miracle: *Omnia Romanae cedent miracula terrae*.¹⁵⁹¹ To produce a heaven on earth was the duty and aim of the emperor from the beginning—to guarantee perfect peace, security, and happiness to all within the empire with a minimum of effort on their part. The one thing expected of all was ritual subjection: the joining in the vast universal acclamation of the king on the throne. Let no dissenting voice exist and his power would be perfect. “Without a mob,” says Heitland, “it was not possible to make the imperial capital impressive to provincial and foreign visitors.”¹⁵⁹² The show was everything. The empire was a huge, continuous, overpowering ritual. The dazzling focus of the whole thing was Rome the city: “the epitome of all cities of the world,” Athenaeus called it, noting that entire nations had actually migrated thither en masse.¹⁵⁹³ “The city, the city!” cried Cicero in the days of the Republic, “my dear Rufus—stick to that and live in its light! Residence elsewhere—as I made up my mind early in life—is mere eclipse and obscurity to those whose energy is capable of shining at Rome.”¹⁵⁹⁴ “The city is a single house, and a thousand towns are contained in it,” wrote Photius; it was 21 miles in circumference, far and away the greatest thing in the world.¹⁵⁹⁵ “First among cities,” wrote the Christian Ausonius, “home of the gods, Golden Rome.”¹⁵⁹⁶ In the days of the Republic Varro describes how “nearly all heads of families have deserted scythe and plough, and sneaked within the city walls, preferring to keep their hands astir in theatre and circus rather than amidst corn-crops and vineyards...”¹⁵⁹⁷ The movement continued with ever-growing force. Even for Augustus, says Dessau, “Rome was not merely the capitol of the empire...it was the creator, the life of everything.”¹⁵⁹⁸ All were encouraged to hasten to the bosom of this life-giving mother. “To be without a *patria* is not to be endured,” said Seneca, “therefore behold this vast number which the roofs of this immense city

¹⁵⁹¹ Propertius, *Elegies* 3.22.17.

¹⁵⁹² William Emerton Heitland

¹⁵⁹³ Athenaeus

¹⁵⁹⁴ Cicero, *Epistularum ad Familiares* 2.12.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Photius

¹⁵⁹⁶ Decimus Magnus Ausonius

¹⁵⁹⁷ Marcus Terentius Varro

¹⁵⁹⁸ Hermann Dessau

can hardly contain: the greater part of this throng has no *patria*...and they steam in from every part of the world.”¹⁵⁹⁹ Even the Emperor Julian was staggered to behold how “the whole human race from every part of the world had come together in Rome.”¹⁶⁰⁰ “The wandering birds love their own nests,” says Cassiodorus, “how much more should Rome be loved by her children!”¹⁶⁰¹ “Throughout the world cities were founded or remodeled on Roman lines...little careful copies of Rome.”¹⁶⁰² And in these people enjoyed a make-believe Golden Age: “No grave imperial responsibilities imposed on the governing bodies a moral obligation set public duty above person interest, etc.”¹⁶⁰³ With the complete shift in orientation of the empire the divine element was retained and intensified: “Under the sacred college, justice was no longer conceived as the expression of the popular will or of universal reason, and was not of right but of grace. Accordingly, altars were set up in the law-courts and, in order to plead, litigants were required to sacrifice to the imperial majesty, addressing ministers as agents of the ‘divine’ will.”¹⁶⁰⁴ This, then, was the very literal ‘idolatry’ that the Christians had resisted head-on, but if Cochrane insists that Constantine put an end to it, he forgets that the status of Constantine and his successors if no longer gods themselves lost none of its force, for they were still the vessels in which God’s full authority on earth was concentrated.

The Roman world, whether for the moment dazzled by the prestige of the imperial physician or...ready for the most desperate expedient, appears to have accepted his ministrations without much visible indication of the skepticism which they deserved....Those ministrations consisted of carefully regulated doses of the highly volatile compound...calculated to rejuvenate the body politic by ‘humanizing’ the relations between men and women....The imperial programme...reveals a striking correspondence between the notions of Christianity entertained by emperor and sophist...[which does] most emphatically suggest that both were representative products of the mentality prevalent in court circles at the time.¹⁶⁰⁵

¹⁵⁹⁹ Lucius Annaeus Seneca

¹⁶⁰⁰ Emperor Julian

¹⁶⁰¹ Flavius Marcus Aurelius Cassiodorus

¹⁶⁰² *ibid.*?

¹⁶⁰³ ?

¹⁶⁰⁴ ?

¹⁶⁰⁵ Cochrane?

“In the place which the church did not occupy,” as the directing force and inspiration of Christianity, “the state established itself. There were no objections to this on theory.” That puts it mildly; the churchmen shouted themselves hoarse with enthusiasm. “While adopting the diadem and jewelled robes instituted by his immediate predecessors, Constantine also assumed the titles—*pius, felix, invictus*—conventional to them, albeit such epithets were more becoming to pagans than to an adherent of Christ.”¹⁶⁰⁶ Yet the titles stuck, to be worn later by the same men who took to themselves the high title of the state church, *Pontifex Maximus*, after the Emperor Valens had cast it aside as unbecoming a Christian monarch in 382. In the time of Constantine the common people of the empire were thoroughly saturated with the belief “that the *Imperium* coincided with the *orbis terrarum*, with the *oecumene*, by which was understood the complex of countries from the Atlantic Ocean to India.”¹⁶⁰⁷ The people of the empire were humanity as such, the culture of the empire was civilization itself, everything without the pale was No-man’s-land and barbarism. The essence of civilization was the *civitas* and all cities were united in Rome. “The people of the empire,” writes Vogt, “should indeed have been reminded most emphatically, that they were not the only inhabitants of the earth, and that universal peace on earth remained a lovely dream. But ecstatic proclamations of Constantine only fed their fancy the more, proclaiming in official language “*das Gluecksgefuehl und den Schaffensdrang der Stunde...*”¹⁶⁰⁸ Recently Piganiol has emphasized what Christian writers have been only too prone to de-emphasize, that Constantine showed the greatest respect for Rome and the senate as going concerns. He celebrated at Rome the *decennalia* of 315 and the *vicennalia* of 326. “He did not permit the Roman mint to strike coins bearing the Christogram, while he authorized the minting of coins for Isis to celebrate the *vota* of January 3.”¹⁶⁰⁹ Though he is supposed by many to have been converted to the Christian cause in 312, “it was precisely at that moment that his coins begin

¹⁶⁰⁶ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 188-189.

¹⁶⁰⁷ *ibid.*?

¹⁶⁰⁸ Vogt

¹⁶⁰⁹ Piganiol

to proclaim the veneration of the prince for the sun, whose name does not disappear until 320.”¹⁶¹⁰ Even after 320 the solar theology was not condemned by the prince. The dedication of Constantinople was accompanied by certain symbolic demonstrations in which Tyche figured prominently, and “there is no question but that Sopatros or some other of those philosophers, mystics, and astrologers who had taken part in the preparations for the dedication of the new capital thought it out. The mass of divine attributes aimed at representing Constantinople as Queen of Peace, of Victory, and of Plenty—like the real world conqueror, Rome.”¹⁶¹¹

In the church after Constantine we see “the most intimate ties between *imperium* and *sacerdotium*. The supervisory function exercised by the old Roman emperors as chief *Pontifices* were retained at least by the old church without any misgivings and with a certain naiveté.”¹⁶¹²

Gelzer and Batiffol have shown that the church councils of the Christian Empire represent the imperial senate so far as *res divinae* are concerned. The senate of pagan Rome had discussed both civil and religious matters, and the *res divinae* as the more important came first upon the agenda. Since the victory of Christianity there only remained for the senate the consideration of profane matters; the church council, formed on the model of the Roman senate become the supreme authority in *rebus divinis*. The emperor nominates and summons the senators: it is he who determines the composition of the church councils: he bears the expense of the bishops’ journeyings, and put the imperial post at their service. The presidency belongs to the emperor or his delegates: Constantine presided in person at the council of Nicaea....In the senate the presiding magistrate does not vote, so in the councils. The Gospels take the place of the Altar of Victory. The decrees of councils, like the *senatus consulta* are of no effect without the signature of the emperor.¹⁶¹³

Even under the most “Oriental” emperors of the fourth century, “*Romanitas* did not wholly lose its ancient character....The Roman Empire was now, as always, like nothing so much as itself.”¹⁶¹⁴

Claudian’s firm belief that anyone who was not a Roman was absolutely beneath contempt, demented, mad, brainless, insane, depraved, presumptuous, audacious, treacherous, impious, barbaric, base, immoral, etc. etc. was shared by the good Christians of his time.¹⁶¹⁵ When Athaulf

¹⁶¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹² ??? Still Piganiol?

¹⁶¹³ ???

¹⁶¹⁴ ???

¹⁶¹⁵ Claudian

failed to supplant *Romania* by *Gothia* as world-civilization, since it was clear to all that there would only be one world civilization, there was nothing for it but to give out that he was not the founder of Gothic, but rather the restorer of Roman civilization. His contemporary Orosius, a Christian, can for the life of him simply not conceive of anything that could really destroy the Roman Empire, in its glory he puts his incurable optimism in better things to come.

The Christian counterpart of Aristides is Prudentius. The world state for him is the Christian-Roman state, differing in nothing but the addition of a name from the Rome of Aristides. And the name changes nothing: “Many gods,” he writes, “have brought Rome through prosperous days,” but this prosperity is deserved.¹⁶¹⁶ Rome is great because Rome is good. All the world gladly consents to submit to such a rule; God has taught all men to bow the neck to Roman law uniting all men in a single family under a single name; the world has become *unum et commune forum*, “Believe me, the way was prepared for Christ when he came by the Roman Empire....The world now receives thee, Christ, having been bound in a single nexus by peace and Rome.”¹⁶¹⁷ As for those who are not Romans, neither can they be Christians, “and the distance is as great between Romans and barbarians as between men and inarticulate beasts!”¹⁶¹⁸ “Under the empire,” writes Coulton, “...the emperor was deified because the *Pax Romana* was so complete and made people so happy.”¹⁶¹⁹ This memory was the dream of the Middle Ages. “If we wish to understand the Middle Ages, we must grasp not only what the *Pax Romana* of those four centuries actually was, but also what [after it had been broken up] men believed that it had been, and dreamed that it would be again.”¹⁶²⁰ Thus when Charlemagne set up his empire, “He was inventing many things which he believed himself to be imitating....No man doubted the existence of this Golden Age in the past under God....All men, therefore, took it for granted that the central

¹⁶¹⁶ Prudentius

¹⁶¹⁷ Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.614, 618-621, 634-635, in *PL* 60:228-230.

¹⁶¹⁸ Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.815-816, in *PL* 60:245.

¹⁶¹⁹ George Gordon Coulton, *Studies in Medieval Thought*, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd: 1940), 13-14.

¹⁶²⁰ Coulton, *Studies in Medieval Thought*, 14.

aim of ideal politics must always be the reconstitution of the empire in its former strength and beneficence. In no other form could they conceive the peace they yearned for...¹⁶²¹ The early church conceived of peace in a totally different form, but the people of the church were now, by mass conversion, the people of the empire.

F. C. Baur, observing that “he who regards this [the birth of Christ] as simply and absolutely a miracle, steps at once outside of all historical connection,” goes on to note that “some of the early Christian apologists considered it to be a fact of great significance that their religion had appeared precisely at the time at which the Roman Empire arrived at the summit of its power, and came to embrace the whole world in its dominion.”¹⁶²² By this view it was possible to fit the historical and the miraculous together. Without any reference to Christ, the Romans themselves had seen in the world dominion of Rome a tremendous miracle, calculated to convert the most stubborn barbarian to bow the neck to a rule so obviously designed and helped by heaven. The early church would none of this, but Eusebius capitalizes on the world-miracle of Rome to support sudden and miraculous world-conquest of the apostles. The two are just alike, they are twin facets of a single divine dispensation. How totally removed such a concept was from the early Christian idea is seen in the charges of Caecilius against the Christians in Minucius Felix, in Celsus’ and Pliny’s accusations, and in Tacitus’ verdict. The specific objection to the Christians in every one of these cases is precisely that they will not play the Roman game. That all the splendor, power and culture to which other people, regardless of their religious beliefs, were only too glad to pay allegiance, to which in the end only a “cultural” or formal allegiance was required anyway, was not only indifferent to the Christians but utterly obnoxious. Why can’t you people be decent, urbane, civilized? is always the question. What objection have you to playing the game like everybody else? Why do you make it hard for yourselves by holding your secret meetings, slinking down back-alleys, making a great show of your loathing for all that the

¹⁶²¹ George Gordon Coulton

¹⁶²² F. C. Baur

rest of us hold dear? If you don't want to be like the others, at least your don't need to spit on ancient wholesome and venerable things inherited from our fathers' fathers, etc. Tertullian probably knew more about the early church than any man of his time: that is the church he thought he was joining, and which he left when he discovered his mistake. And "his apostasy from *Romanitas* is complete."¹⁶²³ For him *Romanitas* and Christianity are complete antitheses. He was no wild fanatic, but he did represent a point of view which Constantine, as is plain from his letters rebuking the fathers for taking theological discussion too seriously, simply could not understand or tolerate: "What he saw in Christianity," says Cochrane, "was simply a talisman by virtue of which *Romanitas* would be assured of material prosperity such as official paganism had failed to give it."¹⁶²⁴ His remark to the devout Novatian bishop bears this out: Constantine was impressed by the man's high moral character, his integrity, and sincerity, but he had no patience with anyone narrow-minded enough to think that only a minority of people were sufficiently virtuous to get to heaven, "Take a ladder and climb up to heave all by yourself," the emperor gives, and the good bishops standing by—among them Eusebius—applauded with delight.¹⁶²⁵ A minority church, forsooth! What claims to holiness could such have?

Recently Alfonsi has decried in no less a writer than *I Clement*, invoking God for the protection of Rome and her government and expressing *con nuovo spirito* the very wishes poured forth by good Romans at the secular games, "and by that he wanted to show, along with the loyalty of the Christians, associations with the new only God, political and religious and yet perfectly legitimate."¹⁶²⁶ Tatian, on the other hand, does all he can to minimize the superiority of citizens of the empire over barbarians. He thinks the claim of the Greeks to be the true representative is simply silly, and his argument for the equality of those within and without the empire is the very same one commonly used to support Roman claims: "There should be only one

¹⁶²³ Tertullian

¹⁶²⁴ Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 215. (Referring to Constantine).

¹⁶²⁵ Constantine to Tertullian

¹⁶²⁶ Alfonsi

common *politeia* of all men.”¹⁶²⁷ Christian philosophy is much more ancient than Greek, letters and civilization did not begin in the West but in the East. It is not the values of paganism which he sets over against those of Christianity—for Tatian they are identical, and the pagans have no right to them, because Christianity really had them first! Tatian is another schoolman: that explains his attitude. Irenaeus has much the same attitude as Tatian and argues the dependence of Greek civilization on Oriental or “barbarian” only because that is necessary if he is 1) to have all civilization begin with the Jews, and 2) to discredit the pride and monopoly of the Greeks. The second generation had already lost the great spiritual gifts and turns to the only available source of inspiration: the school. From an early time all the school-educated fathers denounced classic civilization only out of envy. Justin never ceased to wear with pride his Platonic robes, or to point out to the pagans that there is no quarrel at all between Christian and pagan intellectuals.¹⁶²⁸ Minucius Felix argues the same—the misunderstanding is all caused by the vulgar and literal minded in both camps, where the cultivated people are concerned there is not the slightest cause for misunderstanding, for Christian teachings are identical with those of the schools.¹⁶²⁹ Clement of Alexandria exerts himself to show not that Greek philosophy is false, but purely and simply that the Jews had it first, and that theirs was a “faint and incomplete” version of the real thing—although it was of the real thing.¹⁶³⁰ Numa, the founder of the Roman state religion, was a Pythagorean, according to Clement, and “being helped by Moses” forbade the Romans to make graven images.¹⁶³¹ In a long discourse he shows the superiority of Brahmin, Scythian and other barbarian philosophers to the Greeks, and sees Moses as the source of all their inspiration. Tertullian on the other hand, cites barbarian superiority only to discredit Rome which to him is Babylon, “she who fights against the saints of God.” The Roman *Imperium*, says this Roman lawyer, was conceived and grew up in crime. Its greatness stems from its godlessness. All its

¹⁶²⁷ Tatian

¹⁶²⁸ Justin

¹⁶²⁹ Minucius Felix

¹⁶³⁰ Clement of Alexandria

¹⁶³¹ *ibid.*

trophies are but abominable idols. “We know only one Republic,” he says, “the world,” thus turning the world-state argument against the Romans who used it: “We have no need for participating in your meetings, nothing is further from us than public affairs.”¹⁶³² Particularly abhorrent were the games, less because of their nastiness, which was limited only to some type of show, than because of their blatant and powerful persuasion—from start to finish those tremendous shows were simply propaganda show for the party or person who sponsored them. The tradition that Rome was Babylon was strongly rooted in the church, and is retained as mere convention by Paulins of Nola. It keeps cropping up again and again. The apostles and prophets were not only barbarians, but taught the equality of all men, Greek and barbarian, says Theodoret.¹⁶³³ Even the seven wise men do not have Greek names! There is no place, according to Theodoret, in a church where democracy and equality reign, for any artificial distinctions between civilized and uncivilized, Greek and barbarian. “If the barbarians seem so to us,” he reminds his hearers, “we seem no less so to them, and the speakers of the various Greek dialects are barbarians to each other!”¹⁶³⁴ Christ the King calls us to liberation, and bids us declare our freedom from kings, says Basil.¹⁶³⁵ Maximin points out that Rome is the Babylon on the seven hills. Anderaes Caecus calls her a great whore; Peter himself is credited with having called Rome Babylon, and the venerable doctors follow suit, treating Rome as a “mystical Babylon.” The Romans are the iron rod of Christ. The Roman Empire is going to be revived by the Antichrist.

Origen points to the coincidence of the birth of Christ with the founding of the Empire of Augustus, and sees in that the providential removal of the multitude of kings that would have made the preaching of the gospel difficult, and the establishment of world peace without which it would have been impossible to proclaim a religion “that forbids to strike one’s enemies.” The distinction between Greek and barbarian is a false one, says Origen, it should be between Jew,

¹⁶³² Tertullian

¹⁶³³ Theodoret

¹⁶³⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶³⁵ Basil

Greek and barbarian!¹⁶³⁶ The strange idea that Christ wanted to make things as smooth and easy as possible for the apostles whom he sent out as sheep among wolves is a necessary corollary of the theory of apostolic success. “She, she,” cries Lactantius of Rome, “is the city which sustains all things. We must pray to God of heaven, that by his orders the coming of the abominable and dreaded tyrant may be postponed as long as possible...for upon the passing of the empire the world itself will pass.”¹⁶³⁷ This is an old idea expressed earlier by Tertullian. “The facts themselves proclaim,” he says, “that all things would collapse into complete ruin with a short time were not the City of Rome there, firm and unshaken—as long as it is there, there could seem to be nothing of that sort to be afraid of.”¹⁶³⁸

But it is Eusebius who formulates the official doctrine for all time to come. Eusebius was writing the history of the church for the future, carefully revamping the whole thing in retrospect to fit into the new imperial pattern, according the Voelker’s new study. The facts he presents represent a “carefully calculated selection” from which all that would detract is carefully omitted.¹⁶³⁹ But why the new departure? Because of the fundamental shift in relationship between the church and Rome: “The basic new arrangement of relationships between church and state, as they were inaugurated by Constantine’s religious policy, are the foundation of Eusebius’ *Church History*.”¹⁶⁴⁰ Therefore, says Voelker, he places great emphasis on the doctrine of close affinity between empire and Christianity. For him Christianity is the official religion of the empire. Accordingly he always paints the emperors in the best possible light, depicts Augustus as one of the founders of Christianity, and develops a special theory of persecution: it comes not from the emperors but from God, as a form of divine chastisement. The whole of the ecclesiastical history culminates in the rule of Constantine, the glorious restoration of the unified empire in all its former splendor, but with Christianity as the state religion. For him the Christians, to fit into such

¹⁶³⁶ Origen

¹⁶³⁷ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.25, in *PL* 6:813.

¹⁶³⁸ Tertullian

¹⁶³⁹ Walther Voelker

¹⁶⁴⁰ Walther Voelker

a scheme, must necessarily never have been a very unpopular religion, but from the very first preaching of the apostles an instantaneously successful institution, invulnerable and unconquerable thanks to special protection from God—an obviously and impressively powerful group from the first. His picture of the church “bears the unmistakable characteristics of his time,” that love of bigness, power, success, *gloria*, that was the obsession of the fourth century and has remained the obsession of the Roman Church ever since.¹⁶⁴¹ Eusebius describes the primitive church as the official imperial church, for he must prove that they are the same; “he claims for the primitive church a rich literature and a flourishing school system which it never had.”¹⁶⁴² To assuage his real worry

(it is always cropping out) that a changed church might be another church, he must argue that the church has not changed; and he makes every effort to establish as many personal ties as possible between his own church and the ancient one. He quotes a letter of Melito of Sardis to the emperor: “The Roman Empire and the Christian church have grown up together.... Only Nero and Domitian opposed us, and that because they were misinformed. But your pious ancestors corrected that, Suppressing any who attacked us. The church and the empire were born together; they must flourish together.”¹⁶⁴³ Yet immediately after this Eusebius describes a few martyrdoms in Gaul with meticulous detail, milking every opportunity to make it seem that the church which all the emperors loved was really the persecuted church of the martyrs! A more glaring contradiction cannot be imagined. Eusebius glories in the pro-Christian emperors and their Christian families. “How could one describe those innumerable hosts flowing into the church or the vast multitudes of those gathered to her bosom in every city.”¹⁶⁴⁴ Because of this tremendous influx, he reports, a great program of church building had to be undertaken in every city: a new type of super-building was devised. This astonishing expansion, he says, is still going on in his

¹⁶⁴¹ Walther Voekler

¹⁶⁴² Walther Voekler

¹⁶⁴³ Eusebius, quoting letter from Melito of Sardis to the emperor

¹⁶⁴⁴ Eusebius

day, and nothing can stop it or slow it down, “the divine and heavenly hand has undertaken to bring the church through and protect it, and its people must be worthy of it.”¹⁶⁴⁵ The tables are neatly turned when the Christian writer starts employing the identical formulas in denouncing the heathen that they had used against the Christians. The bronze tablet of Maximin speaks of the Christians as insane, abject, held in darkness, stupid rather than impious. While backing up the claims of the imperial cult by instances of indisputable miracles, it even called upon the Christians to repent and return to the faith of their fathers, as indeed the imperial cult was—the faith which had made Rome the greatest name on earth, and to accept the venerable and wholesome rites: who will deny that they made better people? “Everyone knows the world-calamities that have overtaken us since the Christians came into power.... Restore the quiet skies and smiling fields that we once knew, etc. etc.”¹⁶⁴⁶ In view of the little of pagan apologetic that has been allowed to survive, that simply mouths what later became Christian commonplaces, one wonders if the pagan and Christian worlds were not at this moment almost perfect mirror images of each other. “The *logos*,” say Eusebius, “when it had joined to itself the spirits of the highest emperors of the Roman world, cleared the entire inhabited world of all impious and evil men.”¹⁶⁴⁷ A very nice achievement, that. Every turn of fortune in the career of Constantine is for Eusebius “an inexpressible heavenly miracle.” Licinius for daring to oppose his hero was “a wild beast attacking the church, there was nothing but treachery and evil in his nature.”¹⁶⁴⁸ The surprising thing is that Eusebius finds the greatest folly of Licinius in daring to attack the church, which was so strong that the bishops, being forced over to Constantine’s side made him invincible.¹⁶⁴⁹ Constantine himself in Eusebius’ description always considers his church-work nothing but a natural projection of his past political actions. Having given the empire peace, he would give the church peace; having settled the political troubles of the world he must settle the spiritual ones;

¹⁶⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴⁶ Bronze Tablet of Maximin, IX, 7.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Eusebius

¹⁶⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴⁹ *ibid.*, V.C I,47, 56

having held a triumph for the conquest of his political enemies, he repeated with an identical celebration for having crushed the devil, and abolished every shred of error and immorality from the face of the earth. Constantine's great discovery was not that Christianity was the true religion, but that "it does not pay to go against the Christians," they were too strong: and in a world that worshipped power and understood nothing else, this could only mean that they were "right."¹⁶⁵⁰ "It is hard to fight yourself," he writes to dissenters, "but harder to fight against the whole human race!"¹⁶⁵¹ For he had never been told that that is exactly what the ancient Christians had always done. The pious Eusebius, describing the very worldly splendors of the big triumphal banquet cannot keep from bursting out: "You would have thought it was the Golden Age of Christ's rule!"¹⁶⁵² Just as the grand entry of the emperor at the opening of the Council of Nicea, a carefully staged pageant in which the emperor appeared a mass of paint and jewels makes him gasp: "you would have thought it was an angel from heaven."¹⁶⁵³ That is exactly the impression desired by the imperial stage-manager—but it is a poor way to procure genuine visitations from heaven. The same act that abolished the shrines of the pagan holy one set up Christian shrines to the martyrs in their place. Just so, Remigius at Rheims ordered Clovis "burn what you have been praying to, and pray to what you have been burning!"¹⁶⁵⁴ Which, aside from being a typical rhetorical turn simply substituted one object for devotion for another—the devotion itself has not changed: the praying and the burning are to continue as before, only with a switching of props, that is all. Such was to be the pronounced policy of Gregory the Great in 600. Once their images had been laid low "at a nod from the emperor," the Gentiles instantly and without hesitation recognized the true God, according to Eusebius, who shows how plainly the "conversion" was simply a change of props. No clearer demonstration of Constantine's hopeless conviction that tricks, machines, and special orders could accomplish all things, can be imagined than the huge

¹⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵⁴ Remigius at Reims

engine he ordered constructed for harnessing apostolic power. It was a vast martyrrium, built to preserve the memory of the apostles forever, and it was so designed that the combined virtue of the Twelve Apostles would be focused through the special arrangement of relics of their flesh only a single focal point in the center of a great dome, where the remains of the emperor were to be deposited: thus any time anyone prayed to any of the apostles the efficacy of that prayer would be channeled to the point where the emperor's bones would receive the full impact of its spiritual power! For Eusebius, Constantine's troops are a holy army, taught religion by the emperor himself. The *chrismon* was made compulsory. In Palestine he adorned all the "mystic caves" including the cave of the assumption. The Roman Empire "as if moving into the vacuum left by the passing of the multiplicity of pryncedoms who had kept the world in constant disunity and turmoil; untied the entire human race in bonds of concord, quickly and easily conquering the whole world in conjunction and cooperation with the doctrine of salvation. This was a mighty miracle. Such is the only way. Christianity and the Roman *imperium* worked together and in the same instant all error and superstition were overcome and an end was put to all war and hostility among the members of the human race. One *imperium* was set up over all the earth and all men became brothers, having one father, God and one mother—true piety. The world became one big happy family and the Zion of the prophets was established forever. Except for Christ himself, there was never another ruler like Constantine. "Christianity and the *Pax Romana* burst upon the world together as if germinated from a single seed: the twin blessings of the universe—the Roman Empire and the blessed teaching....Only Palestine labored under the curse of democracy, but the twin powers as a single thing restored law and order there."¹⁶⁵⁵ Today, says Eusebius, the Roman military and the fear of imperial power are a decisive check on those who would plot against the church of God. "Who seeing the Roman autocrats and rulers physically supporting the gates of the church of God does not see the fulfillment of this prophecy?" (Matthew 16:18).¹⁶⁵⁶

¹⁶⁵⁵ Eusebius

¹⁶⁵⁶ (In Is. LX, PG 24, 493).

“The predicted Antichrist is coming,” says Cyril, “as soon as the times of the Roman Empire are fulfilled,” following a very ancient belief; moreover “the Antichrist will seize the Roman authority by a magic and wicked manipulation.”¹⁶⁵⁷ If one wished, one might press this point to unpleasant conclusions for the church that still claims the power and authority of Rome.

A third or fourth century uncial has Peter calling Rome, “the capital of fornication.”¹⁶⁵⁸

Ambrose beseeches the emperors “do not allow the faith of the Roman Church to be disturbed, we pray your clemency, since the Roman Church is the head of the whole Roman world.”¹⁶⁵⁹ “Barbarians,” Ambrose affirms, “are all those who are not Romans...and they are also Gentiles.”¹⁶⁶⁰ Now you cannot be a Roman without being a Christian and vice versa. At the same time Didymus of Alexandria was denouncing such a doctrine, claiming that the day of Pentecost was a foretaste of that happy time “when there will be no Greek, Barbarians, Scythian, etc. but Christ will be all in all.”¹⁶⁶¹ What gives Ambrose his sense of absolute authority? Eltester asks, and answers: “the knowledge of the Christian, that he stands in the service of one who is higher, which lets him operate without considering the results. No pride of the free-born man against the tyrant lies in this, but simple obedience to God.”¹⁶⁶² If Eltester thinks about it a bit he will discover that this was simply a case of sliding back into Oriental and Asiatic concepts at the expense of the hard-won and heroic ideal of the West. As Muller has noted, there was never an Asiatic tyrant who did not firmly believe himself to be the humble servitor of the God of heaven.¹⁶⁶³ With the Middle Ages, Asia conquered Europe and settled down to rule it; The imperial cult embodies the rituals and doctrines of the Asiatics. As opposed that, how often did the earliest Christians compare themselves to Socrates and the antique heroes? Let us avoid the

¹⁶⁵⁷ Cyril

¹⁶⁵⁸ Third or fourth century uncial

¹⁶⁵⁹ *Tamen totius orbis Romani caput Romanam Ecclesiam, atque illam sacrosanctam apotolorum fidem ne turbari sineret, obsecranda fuit clementia vestra...*, Ambrose, *Epistolarum Classis* 1.11.4, in *PL* 16:986.

¹⁶⁶⁰ *Barbaros vero eos qui Romani non sunt, quorum genus adversum est, et sunt gentiles.*, Ambrose, *Commentaria in Epistolam ad Romanos* 1:14, in *PL* 17:57.

¹⁶⁶¹ Didymus of Alexandria

¹⁶⁶² Eltester

¹⁶⁶³ Muller

cheap and easy conclusion that Christianity of the Middle Ages was something new and wonderful in the way of a spiritual force—what of force it maintained was the force of ancient ideas and institutions that carried over and which, since it would not overcome, it embraced. This is well illustrated in Constantine’s behavior towards pagan shrines—wherever possible, he ordered them utterly destroyed. But where that was not possible he ordered continuation of rites and festivals under Christian supervision. The greatest of all these shrines in the Near East, that of Mamre, was a particular object of the emperor’s zeal to convert, yet only a generation after his death, the lady Aetheira visited the shrine and found it flourishing indeed, but completely reverted to paganism.

Ambrose loves the imperial doctrine that the church enjoys all the immunities of heaven with all the prerogatives of earth. Just as Christ visited a woman in Mary, he says, to the Holy Ghost visited one in Helen, the Mother of Constantine, telling her where to find the nails to the holy cross which she had discovered—a miraculous event which somehow entirely escapes the notice of her ardent biographer, Eusebius.¹⁶⁶⁴ Of one nail she made a diadem and of the other bits for his horses, and sent them to Constantine her son. The true nail of the cross in horses’ mouths, forsooth. “Maria was visited, that Eve might be liberated; Helen was visited, that the emperors might be redeemed...that in imitation of the Lord it might be said of the Roman emperor: thou has placed a crown upon his head.” (Psalms 20:4).¹⁶⁶⁵ Here the imperial family is right on the inside in the divine—not merely the political but the sacral—rule of the world. To establish the absolute holiness of imperial power, God crowns the emperor with a nail from the cross itself. “Thereby he congratulates the church, while the Jews blush for shame.”¹⁶⁶⁶ Ambrose is very

¹⁶⁶⁴ *Et quia iam feminam visitaverat Christus in Maria, Spiritus in Helena visitavit...*, Ambrose, *Oratio de Obitu Theodosii* 1.46, in *PL* 16:1464. See 1.43-48, in *PL* 16:1463-65.

¹⁶⁶⁵ *De uno clavo frenos fieri praecepit, de altero diadema intexuit: unum ad decorem, alterum ad devotionem vertit. Visitata est Maria, ut Evam liberaret: visitata est Helena, ut imperatores redimerentur...ut ad imitationem Domini dicatur de imperatore Romano: “Posuisti in capite eius coronam de lapide pretioso.”*, Ambrose, *Oratio de Obitu Theodosii* 1.47-48, in *PL* 16:1464-1465.

¹⁶⁶⁶ *Ex illo gratulatur Ecclesia, erubescit Judaeus...*, Ambrose, *Oratio de Obitu Theodosii* 1.49, in *PL* 16:1465.

serious about the holy status of kings above men. His most crushing argument against the Arians is: “Kings adore, yet the Photinians deny his divinity? The emperors actually wear a nail from his cross in their diadem, and the Arians would diminish his power?”¹⁶⁶⁷ Yet strangely Ambrose at times admits the terrible things that had been handed down in the church about Rome, “bringing slaughter and rapine to all the earth,” the fourth beast of Daniel, to be overthrown by the low kingdoms.

According to Cyril, the Antichrist will first seize the Roman *imperium* by false magic; next he will at first seem to rule in a learned and prudent way and gently; then he will deceive the Jews and rule with great wickedness; next he will turn against the Christians; and then the second coming will do away with him.¹⁶⁶⁸ The old story always keeps cropping up—Eusebius in becoming the father of church history cannot completely overshadow the fact that there was another and very different type of church history handed down from much earlier times, a church history which had become totally incompatible with the claims and pretensions of the fourth-century church.

“For Jerome” writes Straub, “as well as for his heathen contemporaries, Rome was the symbol of the imperishableness of the earthly empire of peace, guaranteed in his eyes by the fact that Christ’s incarnation took place in the days of Augustus.”¹⁶⁶⁹ “Mighty city,” he cries, “world-ruling city, city praised by the apostolic voice, tell me the meaning of your name. It means fortitude in Greek, exaltation in Hebrew....The curse with which the Savior threatened you in Apocalypse 17-15, can be driven off by penitence, after the example of Nineveh.”¹⁶⁷⁰ How determined he is to make out the case for Rome, though he knows perfectly well that by the ancient Christian “Rome was called Babylon.” When Rome fell he was staggered: Who could

¹⁶⁶⁷ Ambrose, see pg. 260 fn. 78

¹⁶⁶⁸ Cyril

¹⁶⁶⁹ Johannes Straub

¹⁶⁷⁰ Jerome

have believed it? is his bewildered reflection. For “in the siege of Rome all the word perishes.”¹⁶⁷¹

With some ingenuity Epiphanius seeks to tie up the royal and the ecclesiastical authority in a single package: “The church receives royal power from Christ in two ways,” he explains: “through David as the eternal divine king. The priestly power she receives through him again as high priest.”¹⁶⁷² This authority was literally inherited by “James who was called the brother of the Lord being the oldest son of Joseph in the flesh, receiving his office as brother of the Lord, becoming an apostle and the first bishop: he was legally a Jewish high priest.”¹⁶⁷³ For Prudentius, “our Stilicho” won his battles because “Christ was here with us and pure virtue....One alone rules and preserves our royal palaces—Christ.”¹⁶⁷⁴ “The solemnities of this day are celebrated by all cities everywhere,” writes Ausonius, “...following the Roman custom, Constantinople, Antioch, Carthage, Alexandria, all follow and imitate the example of Rome.”¹⁶⁷⁵ And what are the holy rites in question? The celebration of Gratian’s consulship: the pattern for this sort of thing is pagan, not Christian. Just so the Christian Ausonius describes Rome, “Golden Rome,” as “first among cities, home of the gods.”¹⁶⁷⁶ For Prudentius, Straub observes, “the barbarian has no place in the Christian Roman world, since he has not yet embraced its culture...i.e. become a Roman Christian or, if you will, a Christian Roman.”¹⁶⁷⁷ The barbarian is a interloper and an outsider. For Prudentius church and *imperium* are absolutely identical: Laurentius becomes a consul of the heavenly Rome in the regulation consular garment forever! *Civitas* Christians and *civitas Romana* “are for him congruent if not actually identical.”¹⁶⁷⁸ “The *arche* of the church, “ says Chrysostom, “is as far above that of the state as heaven is above earth! Rather it is far, far higher....It is as far

¹⁶⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷² Epiphanius

¹⁶⁷³ *ibid.*, PG 41: 393.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Prudentius

¹⁶⁷⁵ Decimus Magnus Ausonius

¹⁶⁷⁶ Decimus Magnus Ausonius

¹⁶⁷⁷ Straub

¹⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.*

above it as the soul is above the body...”¹⁶⁷⁹ Here is no jarring note—we are merely dealing with a set theme of the schools, the superiority of the mind and “spiritual” things to material things. As for St. Augustine, he leaves us in no doubt “as to his loyal attachment to the *Imperium Romanum*....He does not seek to overcome the empire as *civitas suo genere melior*, but only to bring Christians out of the *civitas terrene sive diaboli*.”¹⁶⁸⁰ He is “spiritual” too. Orosius defends the state through thick and thin: The ancient Romans had to kill people in order to give Roman law to the world, he reminds us, and asks, can’t we allow the Goths the same right? “We may some day call a great king one whom now we call a savage enemy.”¹⁶⁸¹ Though it is hard on us, he argues, God has brought the barbarians as invaders into the empire in order to convert them! Now it is the empire that converts the world. What about the miraculous work of the apostles, completed to embrace the entire earth? Or the fabulous and instantaneous success of their successors? Eusebius had been perfectly sure that all barbarians who had not let themselves be converted had been properly exterminated as wild beasts, unfit to live. With Orosius as with Eusebius, however, it is primarily the empire, not the clergy, that converts the world. “On the whole,” says Straub, “the whole problem is too big for Orosius to handle, and he stands on the threadbare arguments of the greatness of Rome which the pagans themselves had given up.”¹⁶⁸² So in the fifth century we get the wonderful spectacle of Christian fathers taking comfort for the future of the church in the firm conviction that the Roman Empire was indestructible, while the pagan children of the empire, the actual devotees of its imperial cult had lost that confidence and clearly and accurately predict the fall of the empire! The completely worldly, boastful, nay Asiatic attitude of the faithful is revealed in Byzantine hymns which describe how the fathers of the holy synods “cast their anathemas as from a sling at the leaders of the heretics, whom the

¹⁶⁷⁹ Chrysostom

¹⁶⁸⁰ Straub?

¹⁶⁸¹ Orosius

¹⁶⁸² Straub

multitude of the orthodox and the saints then trampled with their feet.”¹⁶⁸³ We need not discourse on the wild and endless mobbings of the time in which various holy factions put such sacred if abstract language into actual practice.

Julius Maternus would force on the emperors the obligation and franchise for unlimited persecution and extermination of all upon whom the clergy put the finger. Autocracy now receives determined support from the clergy. “When the God of all gave the scepter of the world to the Romans,” writes one,

profound peace filled the world, justice ruled and everything was perfect unity; war became the business only of specialists who were entirely under the control of the emperor. Those many weak nations who tried to shake off the Roman yoke were suppressed: For it is not for them to beat about freely as they choose. The Roman army beat them down like wild beasts. This was the blessed time foreseen by the prophets!¹⁶⁸⁴

How is this? Because in the Roman army Christ conquers, and “he is peace.” Which does not prevent our authority from comparing that army with a consuming fire. The very same laws by which all things are subject to God are those, according to Orosius, which Rome has subjected the world—the laws of the Republic, of conscience and of nature are all the same. Repeatedly Theodoret proclaims the advantages of Roman coercion on the world for the spreading of the Christian religion. The essential oneness of the human race is for Theodoret proof of God’s intention to unite them all under Rome: having made all men of one clay, he teaches all as a single man, and knows no distinction between Greek and barbarian. Strangely this most democratic of doctrines is the franchise for absolute Roman rule in the world. “The empire of the most noble Romans,” wrote Cosmas, “cooperates with the empire of the Lord Christ, having gradually taken over the rule of the world, to remain unshaken until the end of the world.”¹⁶⁸⁵ Luke 1:32 proves this! “For under the Roman Empire the two achieve perfection together, and

¹⁶⁸³ Byzantine hymn

¹⁶⁸⁴ one of the clergy???

¹⁶⁸⁵ Cosmas

shall never be destroyed while the world endures.”¹⁶⁸⁶ Matthew 11:13, “The kingdom that will never be destroyed” is a figurative term

embracing together both the Roman Empire and that of the Lord Christ. While Christ was still in the womb, the Roman Empire received strength from God as handmaiden to the economy of Christ....At the moment of Christ’s birth the eternal Augustuses were also announced to the world, and sent out the messages proclaiming their rule over it (Luke 2:2). At that time the Lord Christ was also born and was deemed worthy to pay a head-tax to the land and government of the Romans!¹⁶⁸⁷

What greater honor could be shown the creator of the world! Again and again come the repeated declarations that with the passing of the Roman Empire the Antichrist is to rule the world. The empire has been able “to grow and penetrate every corner of the world,” and Constantinople as the new Rome is the “Queen City” not only of Europe but of Asia as well, “the queen of cities and of all the world, the New Rome, Constantinople.”¹⁶⁸⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenitu teaches his son how to be the real ruler of the world. He tells him how the imperial stoles and the camelauca (typical Asiatic garments) were brought to Constantine the Great by an angel from heaven as the palladium of the civilized world; how divine lightnings strike any emperor who dares to touch them without authorization; how God has given the formula for Greek fire to the emperors as a guarantee of his affection for his people, etc., the stuff was brought from heaven by an angel, only Christians may have it, anyone attempting to convey it to any barbarian interest will be instantly consumed by fire from heaven. The identity of empire and kingdom of heaven is complete.

Barbarian embassies introduced into the presence at Constantinople saw a first-class theatrical presentation of heaven: even flying winged angels swinging around the throne on wires were not lacking! Church and empire grew up together, says Nicephorus, only Nero and Domitian dissenting.¹⁶⁸⁹ Immediately upon the birth of Christ, writes Zosimus, “the Roman Empire entered upon a period of rapid success and immense prosperity; all the provinces of the world fell like

¹⁶⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸⁸ ???

¹⁶⁸⁹ Nicephorus

ripe plums under the Roman power.”¹⁶⁹⁰ So much for those who dare say the Christianity had an adverse affect on the Roman Empire! Only under sole and mightiest emperor can piety and good fortune be joined together in eternal union, says Nicephorus, forgetting that such a union had been the fundamental corollary of the existence of Rome from the beginning.¹⁶⁹¹ But are we confusing the Roman with the Byzantine Empire? “Some dare to say,” John Cinnamus writes, “that the *imperium* of Byzantium and that of Rome are not the same: that makes me weep.”¹⁶⁹² He points to the long periods during which there was no authority at all to carry on in western Rome: no high priest, no emperor, just a lot of usurpers. The idea that their society was actually God’s kingdom on earth was ingrained into the inhabitants of the late Roman Empire with paralyzing effect: “People seem to think that it would always be this way: if the Turks ever reached the column the archangel would come with a flaming sword, the mother of God would always be ready with a miracle.”¹⁶⁹³ The emperor was crowned by God—*theosteptos*—and God would never desert him. “Throughout the so-called Middle Ages,” writes N. Lenkeith, “the people of Italy considered themselves Romans...their Roman pretensions extended...to all forms of life and culture....The Pseudo-Bede writes that ‘as long as the Coliseum stands, Rome will stand;’...In Florence, the statue of Mars ruled the course of peace and war.”¹⁶⁹⁴ Roman and Christian were the same, and Pope Gregory rejected the demands of the Lombard Aistulf “chiefly because the pontiff had a feeling of revulsion for the barbarians. The Romans...despised Lombard laws, disliked their costumes, customs, and smell.”¹⁶⁹⁵ “The Germans in Italy...met scorn with contempt.”¹⁶⁹⁶ And Liutprand writes: “we can find no better term of opprobrium to insult our enemies than the word: Roman. This single word stands for everything we consider ignoble,

¹⁶⁹⁰ Zosimus

¹⁶⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹² John Cinnamus

¹⁶⁹³ ??

¹⁶⁹⁴ Nancy Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome*, (London: The Warburg Institute, 1952), 1-2.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome*, 4.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome*, 5.

cowardly, sordid, obscene,—in short, vicious.”¹⁶⁹⁷ The ideal always remained stronger than the fact, and “it is rather puzzling to see how the Italians have repeatedly made themselves believe that on the battle fields also they were the children of Rome.”¹⁶⁹⁸ They explained their constant defeats by saying: “Italy...in spite of her Roman virtues is rendered helpless by internal dissensions, lacerated by civil strife...”¹⁶⁹⁹ What is puzzling about that? Is not this the very method employed by the church writers at all times to control facts? Isn’t the church “unshakable” even while it shakes and totters crazily? Isn’t the church a pure virgin while completely given to corruption from top to bottom? Wasn’t a ready explanation to have for every defect in a body which was constantly described as flawless and perfect? “Throughout the Middle Ages, the ‘Romans’—popes, emperors, nobles and people—talked, and at times acted, as if Rome were still the Rome of the Caesars. The Roman Catholic Church soon learned to bridge the gap between the Rome of the martyrs and the Rome of the pagan persecutors. The lay population, rabble and noblemen, called itself by the glorious name of *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, and the emperor—when his interest demanded it—acted as though there were no break between Augustus and his own consecrated person.”¹⁷⁰⁰ What is more, “the papacy did not scorn the refulgence of ancient Rome,” and to this days shines with that borrowed and worldly splendor.¹⁷⁰¹ “Very early the attempt is made to prove that the empire is not the result of brutal conquest...God did not merely tolerate the warlike exploits of the Romans, he actually inspired them.”¹⁷⁰² And thus the Romans appear as the chosen people. Identity of the Roman Catholic Church with Rome went so far as to give a strong handle to enemies of that church, who attacked it as a pagan institution. In 1143 the Roman people rebelled against Pope Innocent II, took control of the city, gathered on the Capitoline Mount, proclaimed the Republic, swore that they would restore the senate and the

¹⁶⁹⁷ Liutprand

¹⁶⁹⁸ Liutprand

¹⁶⁹⁹ Liutprand

¹⁷⁰⁰ ? Is this still Liutprand?

¹⁷⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰² *ibid.*?

ancient dignity of the city of Rome, and stamped SPQR on their money. On the famous diptych of Rambon we see “Christ on the Cross, beneath him the she-wolf with the twins Romulus and Remus, and above him winged victories.”¹⁷⁰³ As late as the thirteenth century Romans were saying: “Rome is Sovran, she creates the empire, she is the mother of kingdoms, the capital of the world, the example of goodness, the mirror of all cities. All glorious prince...all others who have sway among the pagans...must turn to Rome with reverence and the affection of a pure heart; for it is Rome who protects kingdoms, governs the empire, and exalts the throne of every ruler.”¹⁷⁰⁴ Dante thought of himself as “a prophet...with a message from God,” his work being “to forward the revival of the Roman Empire as the vehicle of justice among men.”¹⁷⁰⁵ In these cases the empire is actually substituting for God. One might protest that this is blasphemous usurpation, since the church makes the identical claim. But not only are church and empire identical, as we have seen, but by all accounts the claims of the empire must be given priority over those of the church, which simply adopted and copied those claims, letter for letter, while at the same time adopting the ritual, liturgy and vestments of the imperial cult. Rome had put in her claims long before the church, stripped of every vestige of revelation and hence ever copying, ever imitating, ever laying her eggs in nests that other have built, started crying; “the same here!” The support of the empire in the end was, as Rostovzeff notes, “the feeling of awe” which the emperors were able to inspire.¹⁷⁰⁶ To this pretense to glory and to the elaborate machinery by which it was fostered and preserved the world church laid claim, but only after the system had been set up and in operation for hundreds of years; nor was the church able to preempt the wonderful stuff for herself throughout all the Middle Ages during which Rome went on taking quite as much credit as the apostles. Only in modern times has it been possible with the final dissolution and discrediting of the holy Roman Empire to reconstruct the past so as to make it seem that all the

¹⁷⁰³ ??

¹⁷⁰⁴ ???

¹⁷⁰⁵ Dante

¹⁷⁰⁶ Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, (page #)

gilt and glory has ever been the sole, unique and exclusive possession of Mother Church. Even Erasmus could express the attitude of the Middle Ages to which he clung in refusing to join Luther as dual respect for church and empire: "If I joined Luther I could only perish with him, and I do not mean to run my neck into a halter. Popes and emperors must decide matters....Peace on any terms is better than the justest war."¹⁷⁰⁷

¹⁷⁰⁷ Erasmus

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While the fourth century adopted a concept of church history which was the exact opposite of that of the early church, both recognized one essential feature of Christianity—it was an all or nothing religion. The world either accepts it or rejects it—Laodocianism is an intolerable and untenable position in the face of the tremendous message of the gospel. The fourth century did not hesitate to accept the bold corollary of the theory of a victorious church, namely, that a world in which the true Church of Jesus Christ is predominant can be no less than heaven on earth. The doctrine, finally fixed for good by St. Augustine, that the church on earth is identical with the kingdom of heaven, is a perfectly logical one, but it imposes fatal checks and controls on any church claiming to be the true one. If the true church has, as the fathers of the fourth century claim, conquered the world, has it brought to earth the Golden Age foreseen by the prophets. The fourth century fathers stuck by their guns: it has! Heaven is here and now! Modern churches hedge: they will not submit themselves to the proof: the church is the visible presence of God on earth, it is the continued sojourn of Christ among men, it is paradise in our midst, etc., yet after many centuries the world, specifically that part of the world in which that church has had the greatest influence, is still a vale of tears. The fact is too obvious to deny, and modern day priests exploit it in an appeal for sympathy. One is reminded of one claiming to be a great artist and, achieving only chaos on the canvas, pathetically explaining to his public that the greater the art, the more the impossibility of expression in the crass media of this world. In the same breath we are told that Christianity is the solution of all the world's problems, and that after 2000 years of Christianity, problems are still as far as ever from being solved. The world is blamed for this—the wicked benighted world—by men who then relate with great elation how the irresistible force of Christianity completely conquered and subjected the world and has had it under close tutelage for these many centuries. But the fourth century had the long years of bitter disillusionment ahead of it, not as modern Christianity does, behind it. It burst with optimism. The sudden and enormous

growth of the church as it blossomed in the sun of imperial favor was enough to make anyone think that the gloomy predictions of an earlier age might have been in error, and that the sheep and the wheat had won after all. Yet there was a way of saving those traditions intact while insisting on the present and final triumph of the church; that was by the cultivation of a concept which plays an important role in the fourth century but which church historians ignore entirely. This was the remarkable theory that the predicted passing of the true church had already taken place, and that the church that came forth gloriously in the fourth century was actually a new foundation. This we shall examine after considering 1) the transition from the old order to the new and 2) some declarations regarding the literal realization of the heavenly order on earth in the fourth century.

“From the latter half of the second century,” writes Harnack,

the church found herself confronted with the dilemma, whether to begin a world-mission on a grand scale by affectively entering the Roman social system—of course, to the rejection of her original equipment and force—or to retain these, to keep the original forms of life, but remain a small and insignificant sect....It was a great crisis, and—it was not the worst Christian who cried a halt. Now for the first time were voices heard in the church, warning bishops and congregations against the advancing secularization...and demanding a return to pristine simplicity and purity.¹⁷⁰⁸

It had to be one or the other, not until the fourth century did the church work out a method by which she could have both. The surprising and unexpected turn of fortune for the church came before the fourth century, by the beginning of which Christianity was the predominant religion in many parts of the empire. At the end of the third century Cyprian exclaims with wonder how, “Incredible as it seems, the persecution is over. Our security has been restored by the revenging work of God...tranquility and serenity now shine forth; the day has come for which we all have prayed, and after a long and horrible night of darkness, the world shines with the effulgent radiance of God.”¹⁷⁰⁹ Lactantius is trying to make up his mind: his system, says Cochrane,

subtly defers to an indefinite future its promise of an earthly millennium, resting its real hopes meanwhile upon the state. And by thus delivering the future of Christianity into the

¹⁷⁰⁸ Harnack

¹⁷⁰⁹ Cyprian, PL IV, 479

hands of the new Machiavelli, it clearly forecasts that era of ‘godly and righteous’ legislation, of generous but not excessive reform, which was to be the net contribution of Constantinianism to the kingdom of God.¹⁷¹⁰

It is Eusebius who fixes the new orientation of thinking from all time, as Walter Völker’s recent study shows. Völker follows Eduard Schwartz, who can see “the self-confidence and hope of victory of Christendom strengthened by the Edict of Toleration,” though “already in the time of persecutions the feeling of a superiority that was sure to conquer was present among the Christians...”¹⁷¹¹ But though it was not instantly invented, Eusebius, says Völker, has a totally new concept of church history. For him the spread of Christianity meets almost no opposition and succeeds everywhere almost without effort; Eusebius is completely dominated by the spirit of his times: the god-emperor always wins by a nod. In fact the trouble with his idea of the victory of the church is that it is all too easy, “There is in his work a certain monotony,” says Völker,—it is all too easy: Eusebius loves, after describing the might, depravity, and savagery of the opposition, to tell how, in spite of everything, at a single nod from God, “all opposition was instantly overwhelmed,” and time and again all problems are solved in a twinkling not by God’s nod but “at a nod from our God-beloved emperor”—always at a mere nod.¹⁷¹² And this is the basic attitude which becomes standard in the writing of church history, for “for centuries on end his successors viewed the earliest development of church history exactly in the way Eusebius describes it to us.”¹⁷¹³ For Eusebius the old eschatology of “the elders” has become something *muthikotera*—neither to be accepted nor rejected, but strange and distant. On the other hand, while he doubts the views of the apostolic age, he accepts those of the pagan poet Virgil as a more accurate estimate of things to come, and insists that the famous *Fourth Eclogue* predicts the Golden Age of Christ’s rule in the church on earth. Chrysostom sees a sort of evolutionism, in which the churchmen of his own day actually surpass in virtue the patriarchs of old and the saints

¹⁷¹⁰ Cochrane, pg. 196

¹⁷¹¹ Schwartz or Völker

¹⁷¹² Völker

¹⁷¹³ *ibid.*

of apostolic times. “I repeat,” he says, “the same measure of virtue was not required of them as is required of us today.”¹⁷¹⁴ For example, “Today, to be perfect is to sell all one’s goods....But in those times such a specific demonstration of virtue was not required. What then? Do we live more blamelessly than the patriarch?...Noah was perfect, not absolutely, but for the times in which he lived.”¹⁷¹⁵

By the victory of Christianity, we mean, according to Venuti in his study on the subject, specifically the victory of the church in the fourth century.¹⁷¹⁶ But it was not easy to reconcile such a victory with what had been predicted, and the wise men of the age had serious doubts before Eusebius’ doctrine won the day. “Now,” says Hilary in a burst of rhetorical antithesis,

the church rests her case on the importance of her members, though the members who consecrated her lived in terror and persecution. She flees from sacrifices who was propagated by those fugitives who sacrificed. She boasts of being cultivated by the world, who formerly could not belong to Christ unless the world hated her. This situation, which everybody now notes and comments upon, shows us the difference between the church which was transmitted to us, and the church which is now degraded and lost.¹⁷¹⁷

Jerome is worried by the new trends, especially as seen in the new building program of the imperial church:

We live as if we were going to die tomorrow [referring to the “eat, drink, and be merry philosophy”], yet we build as if we expected to live forever on this earth. Our walls shine with gold, our ornamented ceilings shine with gold, the capitols of or columns shine with gold, while outside the door, naked and starving, Christ perishes, a pauper. So the world has always been: it forgets the past, avoids the present, longs for the future.¹⁷¹⁸

Another significant aspect of the new buildings is pointed out by **Basilk**, who declares it “commendable for Christians to build churches to the eternal memory” of the saints of old.¹⁷¹⁹ An early Christian would have scratched his head at this: do we build monuments to God as if he were something of the past? Eternal memorials in stone covering the earth are the clearest declaration of a complete present severance from heaven: the church now looks to an endless

¹⁷¹⁴ Chrysostom

¹⁷¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹⁶ Venuti

¹⁷¹⁷ Hilary, PL 10, 611

¹⁷¹⁸ Jerome

¹⁷¹⁹ Basilc//Basil?

future here below and builds monuments for future ages, and these monuments are to preserve the memory of things now long past, which can only be experienced in memory. Piganiol sees a cautious transition to a new a permanent world-order in the name which Constantine gave to his great new churches, names which declare his intention of preserving in these buildings the liberal-philosophic tradition of the pagan world in equal permanence with the saints: “To his churches Constantine gave the philosophical designations of *Sophia*, *Eirene*, *Dynamis*, and it is probable exactly in 328, that he placed a radiant Apollo on the top of the column erected in the midst of the new forum.”¹⁷²⁰ This, says Eltester was but the first phase of a trend which reached its fruition under Justinian: as yet in the fourth century “This *regnum christianum* is certainly not yet the *civitas die*, the kingdom of God on earth,” but it was going to become so in the theology of St. Augustine and the royal rites of Byzantium and the Czars.¹⁷²¹ While the church in the fourth century was quickly soaking up the splendors of the imperial cult, it was just as deliberately squeezing out what remained of the old Christian dye, and when Revelation was accepted into the canon of the scripture by popular demand it was “against the determined opposition of the fourth-century bishops.” After 400 A.D., says Sickenberger, “interest in apocalyptic dies out more and more, and in the East the book of Revelation was actually rejected, as it would have been in the West, had the bishops had their way.”¹⁷²²

The new theory of church history was the child of new experiences. Eusebius is simply speaking the language of his times. Chrysostom speaking of this very thing, says, in the general temperature everything must freeze: all minds had to yield to the force of events and accept Christian victory as inevitable. Already Hippolytus can announce that Psalms 95:11, has already come to pass, “for the churches of Christ fill all the islands, increase every day, spreading the saving doctrine throughout the world.”¹⁷²³ Kings and princes now bow to the church says

¹⁷²⁰ Piganiol

¹⁷²¹ Eltester, p. 14

¹⁷²² Sickenberger

¹⁷²³ Hippolytus

Adamantius, and becoming her ardent assistants everywhere are attempting to shut the doors to falsehood and cast it out entirely; the church alone reigns triumphant, etc.¹⁷²⁴ With the resurrection, cries Methodius, all revelation was completed, and we saw God face to face and no longer in part through enigmas.¹⁷²⁵ “The gnosis was almost instantly quenched,” says Eusebius, “and in its place remained only, as you might know, the church, unchallenged and all-powerful...our doctrine, so that today no shameful doctrine dares to show itself, or to challenge our faith, as false doctrines used to.”¹⁷²⁶ “So now there were no more enemies of God in all the world,” says he, describing how under Constantine heaven on earth has become a reality: “these are the glorious sights we have all been waiting for...”¹⁷²⁷

With the death of Licinius all evil men were wiped out, only peace and blessing remained for the human race, the pure rays of the sun banished the clouds of tyranny and the Roman Empire became a perfect unity: a single body filled the whole world, a single monarchical authority ruled supreme....God had given the single rule of all the world to Constantine, and so banished fear from the world and filled all the race with hymns of joy...etc. etc.¹⁷²⁸

The Golden Age is really here. Constantine brought pressure to bear “against the cursed heterodox, and they flocked back into the church in droves, like people returning from exile. As a result the catholic church of God alone shone forth, not a single heretical organization or a single schismatic remaining on earth!”¹⁷²⁹ “Christ quickly converted the world. Who else could have expelled the demon who had ruled over all men since the beginning of time?...Now in all the world stand the altars where all the human race offers the ministry of intellectual and rational sacrifices; throughout the entire world bloody sacrifice has ceased.”¹⁷³⁰ Immediately and not through any gradual process, the entire inhabited world was filled with his words. That the mountain of the Lord’s house is not in Palestine is seen from the passage, “the knowledge of the

¹⁷²⁴ Adamantius

¹⁷²⁵ Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 5.7, in *PG* 18:109-112.

¹⁷²⁶ Eusebius

¹⁷²⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷²⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷²⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷³⁰ *ibid.*

Lord shall cover the earth,” which can only refer to the church of God established throughout all the *oecumene*, purging the earth of all evil like the “waters” of which the prophet speaks.

Whereas the church was anciently afflicted, says Cyril, “Today in time of peace, by grace of God, kings give her honor and aid, as do all nations and races. For while the rules of nations have boundaries to their kingdoms, only the holy catholic church throughout the world rules with a power that knows no boundaries; for the only bounds God has set to her are the bounds of peace.”¹⁷³¹ The true church must be a world-church, writes Optatus, since all the earth has been promised her by God the Father himself; there is not the tiniest part of the earth’s surface which is not in her possession; the whole earth is given over to her along with the peoples that inhabit it; all the earth is the exclusive possession of Christ alone.¹⁷³² The proof? Psalms 2:8! Language farther from that of the primitive church cannot be imagined, though this passage recalled with almost shocking vividness the last words of the *Didache*, found also in other early prophetic writings, that one would come claiming to be Christ, “and the whole earth shall be given over into his hands!” Optatus’ crushing argument against the Donatists is that their church, being local, cannot offer to God the universal acclamation demanded by the Psalms. Of course this devastating argument does Optatus’ own church no good, for if the Donatist church never succeeded in becoming literally and absolutely universal in the sense in which Optatus insists, neither has any other Christian church: what it illustrates is the new orientation of Christian thought: all victory was to be here on earth, and it was to be an earthly and earthy rule and victory. The Psalm says, “sing unto the Lord, all the earth!” yet the Donatists think that they alone of all people are given a special hearing. Our church, on the other hand is really found throughout all the world. But is it really universal, asks the Donatist? We are trying to make it so, says Optatus, and that must serve for an answer. For John Chrysostom all the ultimate promises to Israel by the prophets are completely fulfilled in the church. “The gospel has actually been

¹⁷³¹ Cyril

¹⁷³² Optatus

preached in all places, cities, inhabited and uninhabited countries, to kings, commanders, common citizens, wise men, fools, barbarians, wherever the sun shine upon the earth,” and so Isaiah 2:10 has been literally fulfilled.¹⁷³³ The holy sepulcher, a small place, is valued more highly than courts or whole kingdoms. With the crucifixion heaven and earth were purified. For the blood dripped from his side upon the earth, and all her impurity was wiped out. In the days when all the earth was defiled there had to be one pure spot for worship. But now all the earth is pure and the holy of holies is everywhere. Ambrose thanks the emperors that “all the churches of God have been restored to the Catholics in the East, while in the western regions hardly two heretics can be found. Through all the vast tracts and regions of the earth, even unto the ocean itself, but a single, unchallenged communion of believers remains.”¹⁷³⁴ McGiffert tells us of St. Augustine, that “the most significant of all his teachings for its affect on Western history,” was that based on his belief that the millennium had already arrived.¹⁷³⁵

It was not the Christians who first reconstructed a glorious future in retrospect. Virgil has his Aeneas suffering and enduring all with an eye to building up a world-filling and world-conquering Rome of the future which very closely resembles the fourth century fathers’ conception of their church. Ovid conceives the same “glorious future” of Rome all in retrospect (Ovid Fact II); and glories in the unspeakable miracle of the survival and success of Rome in the face of all opposition. People sought in the religion of the emperors the same security, peace and deliverance from the ills of the world that they later thought to find in Christianity. “As with one acclaim,” says Angus, “there arose from the hearts of the men of the Greco-Roman period the cosmic prayer: *παῦε παῦε τὴν ἀσυμφωνίαν τοῦ κόσμου*. [Peace, peace to a world in conflict!]”¹⁷³⁶ During the Punic Wars the Roman masses “received a powerful impulse towards every kind of religious observance in the desperate desire to obtain that *pax deorum* which the succession of

¹⁷³³ John Chrysostom

¹⁷³⁴ Ambrose

¹⁷³⁵ McGiffert

¹⁷³⁶ Angus, *Mystery-Religions and Christianity*, 68. Angus quotes from Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5.8.22, see M. Marcovich, ed., (New York: W. De Gruyter, 1986).

disasters showed had been somehow violated.”¹⁷³⁷ “*O Melibeus,*” cries Virgil, “a god hath given us this peace, for he will always be a god to me who brings peace to the race...”¹⁷³⁸ Philo describes how on the death of Tiberius all the world was in peace, Greek with barbarian and barbarian with Greek, the military and civilian worlds living together in blissful harmony, the four regions of the world to the limits thereof enjoyed profoundest peace.¹⁷³⁹ This is exactly the condition, described in the very same set phrases, standardized by the panegyrists, in which later Christian fathers are to glory.

The “last days” of Israel’s prophets refers to us, is Origen’s announcement: “For no more does nation make war against nation, neither do they learn war.”¹⁷⁴⁰ “The storms are over, the skies are clear and cloudless,” says Eusebius, “rays of heavenly light flood all the *oecumene* and shine forth in all the churches of Christ; nor is any outsider denied entry but all may share our prosperity. All men are now free from tyranny. The lords of the earth are passing all the laws in our favor now!”¹⁷⁴¹

Our enemies have all been utterly stamped out—not even their name remains! Christ alone now reigns victorious....Every region, every land, every city, Greek and barbarian, he has filled with his royal palaces while demolishing the temples of the gods....Unshakably founded on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,—the headstone of the corner being Jesus Christ himself—the church is the living temple of the Living God!¹⁷⁴²

Such utterances are significant from Eusebius, in view of whose position and background Cochrane can say of him, that “it is not too much to see in his most extravagant utterances an authentic voice of the times.”¹⁷⁴³ “The church is truly called Paradise,” says Optatus, “but it must be understood to correspond to the utmost limits of the inhabited world.”¹⁷⁴⁴ All earth had become a paradise. “The old rule of things was war,” says Chrysostom, “war without truce....But

¹⁷³⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷³⁸ *O Meliboe, deus nobis haec otia fecit. | namque erit ille mihi semper deus...* Virgil, *Ecloga I.6-7.*

¹⁷³⁹ Philo

¹⁷⁴⁰ Origen

¹⁷⁴¹ Eusebius

¹⁷⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴³ Cochrane

¹⁷⁴⁴ Optatus

today this is no more so. We in the midst of profound peace erect trophies of victory far greater and more illustrious than those set up by the ancients—including the prophets even.”¹⁷⁴⁵ John gives an amusing proof that the blessed time foreseen by the prophets has at last arrived: “we have in the church not only good men but those who act like wolves, lions, and bulls...yet in the church they all become one!”¹⁷⁴⁶ Is not that “the lion lying down with the lamb?”

“Today...bishops are never in danger, but everywhere there is the profoundest peace to the limits of the *oecumene*, rulers anxiously corroborating our faith...”¹⁷⁴⁷ “Before the coming of Christ all men bore arms and there was no end to war between cities and nations. But today the greater part of the *oecumene* is at peace.”¹⁷⁴⁸ The prophecies of the second coming and the millennium are this fulfilled in the first coming of Christ—all has already been realized. That is the great shift in the concept of church history. The millennium can now be forgotten, the old eschatology quietly dropped. Hence-forward the main concern of the fathers and the church is a perpetual police action to maintain that perfect peace, to disturb which even in the slightest is for St. Augustine the very quintessence of sin. “If we wish to understand the Middle Ages,” writes Coulton,

we must grasp not only what the *Pax Romana* of these four centuries actually was, but also what [after it had been broken up] men believed that it had been, and dreamed that it would be again...no man doubted the existence of this Golden Age in the past under God...all men, therefore took it for granted that the central aim of ideal politics must always be the reconstruction of that empire in its former strength and beneficence. In no other form could they conceive the peace they yearned for.¹⁷⁴⁹

To agree with what had been prophesied from the first, it was necessary for the fourth century millennium, which caught everybody by surprise by coming too soon, to follow upon the long period of darkness predicted by all inspired voices. But how can the church have been on the earth, steadily flourishing and growing, during the long dark rule of the Antichrist? Only by compressing that rule into a very short time indeed. Nevertheless, after all was said and done

¹⁷⁴⁵ Chrysostom

¹⁷⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴⁹ Coulton, *Med. Thot.* pp. 14f

there had to be such a time, and so we get the enthusiasts of the new church of the fourth century proclaiming the astounding news that the Christian church had actually died out in the earth, and that the glorious new day of the age of Constantine was actually a restoration and rebirth.

With the triumph of Constantine “defeatism and despair were succeeded by unbounded confidence and hope, hope that...nothing less than the Golden Age of Saturn would be restored.”¹⁷⁵⁰ For as the Fourth Eclogue teaches, the concept of his as a system of recurrent cycles and the hope for the return of a Golden Age that had already been experienced on earth under the beneficent rule of God, were by no means Christian inventions.¹⁷⁵¹ When the Emperor Vespasian failed to bring “a new Golden Age” to the eastern provinces, general unrest and fanaticism produced those persecutions described in the *Acts of the Heathen Martyrs*. “Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt were in the fourth century actually a sort of new promised land for the Latin peoples,” says Leclercq.¹⁷⁵²

The deep night before the dawn was the time of persecution and especially of complete disintegration in the second half of the third century. “The flock is being destroyed,” cries Cyprian,

in accordance with our sins. Let us pray with groanings as becomes those who are placed amidst ruin and lamentation, the remnants of the fearful, the numerous languishing host and the tiny group of those who stand firm. Let us plead that peace may come later...even for a restoration [*redintegrationem*] of the church, the security of our salvation, for calm after showers, light after dark, etc.; may the persecutors be checked and the *lapsi* reformed.¹⁷⁵³

Here the end of all things has become the end of persecutions, but the present collapse of the church is evident. “They wreck the peace which the mercy of God had once procured for the church what time we were lead back into his church by divine protection.”¹⁷⁵⁴ “Therefore since all now plead for peace saying: we have regained the peace which he had lost, by doing penance



¹⁷⁵⁰ Eusebius?

¹⁷⁵¹ *Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas; | magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo: | iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna; | iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.* Virgil, *Ecloga IV.4-7*.

¹⁷⁵² Leclercq

¹⁷⁵³ Cyprian

¹⁷⁵⁴ *ibid.*, PL IV, 258

and confessing Christ publicly.”¹⁷⁵⁵ When it was safe to do so they were all eager to confess the name: *pacem temere atque importune extorquentes*.¹⁷⁵⁶ May God give us many such ornaments (martyrs) Cyprian prays, “that when the strength of his church has been restored they might flourish among us.”¹⁷⁵⁷ The wolves and deceivers are swarming, he announces in a later letter, “claiming that they want to restore the church.”¹⁷⁵⁸ Then finally at the end comes the glad declaration: “Incredible as it seems, the persecution is over! Through the action and vengeance of God our security has been restored....The day for which all yearned has come and, after the black and horrible mists of a long night, the earth gleams radiant with the light of the Lord.”¹⁷⁵⁹ While the persecution lasted it was God’s wrath, but once past it is seen to have been an awful mistake, the work of wicked heathens now silenced by God’s vengeance. The fall of the race, says Lactantius, was due to the desertion of divine religion when, under the reign of Jove, it became corrupted.¹⁷⁶⁰ “But God...sent a messenger, who restored the golden age... And so the type of that golden age has returned....There may not be dissensions and wars when men know they are the sons of a single God...the world will be a paradise.”¹⁷⁶¹ But that is still future for Lactantius: “The resurrection cannot take place in view of the predominance of evil in the world....The Sybil has told of the renovation of the world and the return of the golden age.]...Not all the nations shall be utterly extinguished at the time, for a few must be left so that God can stage his grand triumph here.”¹⁷⁶² Writing to Lucifer of Caliaris, Athanasius says: “With such confessors and servants of God as you alive, we are ready to believe that the state of the catholic church might be restored

¹⁷⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵⁶ Cyprian, Epistola XVII

¹⁷⁵⁷ Cyprian

¹⁷⁵⁸ Cyprian

¹⁷⁵⁹ *ibid.*, PL IV, 479.

¹⁷⁶⁰ See Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.6, in PL 6:567-569.

¹⁷⁶¹ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.7-8, in PL 6:570-575.

¹⁷⁶² Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 7.22-24, in PL 6:805-809.

[*renovari*], and that what the heretics have tried to divide our Lord Jesus Christ has through you restored intact...”¹⁷⁶³

With the victory of Constantine, “once more, as in the far-off days of Augustus Caesar, the Roman world was stirred by a sense of fresh hopes and fresh beginnings,” says Cochrane, “But if Constantine lacked a Virgil to proclaim his virtues, he at least had his Eusebius.”¹⁷⁶⁴ The same spirit animated the church and more and more Virgil and Isaiah became combined. We have seen how Cyprian blamed the Christians for the sufferings of the church while it was being persecuted, but once persecution ceased, decided that the wicked pagans were all to blame. Eusebius points out vividly how persecution came on the heels of corruption; thereby the righteous were eliminated—for all the others, the overwhelming majority—left the church the minute there was any danger, only to return as soon as the danger was passed. Every successive persecution thus saw a purging of the righteous and a neat and complete escape of the wicked, who thus lived to flee another day. Heavier and heavier drafts were made upon a fund of virtue that was rapidly dwindling to nothing, until by the time almost no true saints remained at all, everyone was presuming to sponge off their virtue. Finally everyone was enjoying the fruits of martyr’s faith when there were no more martyrs to be had. Cyprian has described the process very fully. “Hand in hand with the phenomenal growth of the church, the new freedom, its people became over-confident, neglectful, quarrelsome and finally full of civil war,” leaders accusing leaders and congregation attacking congregation; riots and mobs were everywhere; fraud and hypocrisy were the order of the day, until the chastening hand of God brought persecution.¹⁷⁶⁵ This is Eusebius the historian, not the theoretician. The church, he says, fell into complete discredit and confusion; it was only after the churches had been entirely overthrown by this sort of thing, the whole church committing suicide, that the Diocletian persecution came.¹⁷⁶⁶ That took

¹⁷⁶³ Athanasius to Lucifer of Caliaris

¹⁷⁶⁴ Cochrane, p. 183

¹⁷⁶⁵ Eusebius? (or is this Cyprian?)

¹⁷⁶⁶ Eusebius

care of the few who were willing to be martyrs. All the others, those who had brought the church to ruin, fled in a body to safety. The Edict of Maximian ending the persecution makes it clear why the Christians had been persecuted in the first place: “The Christians themselves have deserted the creed of their own ancestors, becoming full of arrogance and pride: they have divided themselves into sects and parties, neither heeding the cult of the gods nor holding to that of the Christians.”¹⁷⁶⁷ This is no mere rhetoric, Eusebius himself admits that the Christians had utterly lost their balance. But all was past with the decree of Constantine. “Throughout all the cities festivals of restoration or renewing were held; everywhere the dedication of new church buildings marked the dawn of a new age, formally declaring a new order of things and the launching of a new church.”¹⁷⁶⁸ The tenth book of the Ecclesiastical History is largely devoted to this theme. It quotes at length from speeches made at the dedications of new churches, and these all speak of a world in which all things are made new. “Praise be to God,” says one, “through whom we joyfully claim to retain for ever and ever that peace from foreign annoyances, that constant state of mind which we hold firm and unshakable.”¹⁷⁶⁹ The panegyric speech for the restoration of the churches: “Now we sing unto the Lord a new song... what lies ahead is only the bright and shining day, unshadowed by a single cloud.”¹⁷⁷⁰ The persecutions are over; in every city new churches are going up and festive dedication services are being held. Bishops are holding synods; pilgrims crowd the roads; communities are in friendly relationships to each other, in the perfect harmony and unity of the body of Christ. It is a mystic resurrection of the church: “Bone to bone and joint to joint... the whole being animated by a single spirit...”¹⁷⁷¹ “The church, who has suffered terribly because of our sins, now rejoices with us—our mother. Our shepherd has utterly repulsed the wolves and brought his sons together again in unity; his enemies no longer exist;

¹⁷⁶⁷ Edict of Maximian (is this in Eusebius’ history?)

¹⁷⁶⁸ Eusebius

¹⁷⁶⁹ Eusebius, E.H. X

¹⁷⁷⁰ ?

¹⁷⁷¹ Eusebius?

they are as if they had never been!”¹⁷⁷² Paulus of Tyre in his dedicatory speech for a new cathedral: “The church is the holy city, the City of God. We have been rescued from our own corruption: we of the church were not half dead, but dead and buried with our tombstone set in place.”¹⁷⁷³ What an admission! And the cure is a short persecution in which only the strong were destroyed; immediately followed by a bedazzling triumph with the granting of every slightest wish. “We already stank of the odor of the grave,” says Paulinus.¹⁷⁷⁴ And again another tells us, “the enemies of the church are no more; the prophecies of Psalms 36:14f have been literally fulfilled....They are no more, but we arise and stand erect.”¹⁷⁷⁵ “After a moderate and short castigation, the church again exults and blossoms as a lily, casting her divine odor upon all mortals.”¹⁷⁷⁶ The water has burst forth in the desert and we were washed and regenerated...the captivity and the abomination of desolation have passed, God has been placated, has purified us and raised us up and said: ‘And the second glory of this house, the last, shall be greater than the first!’ The revived church, we are told, is much greater and larger than it was! It has a broad and attractive portal, inviting in those who are not of our faith. No one can pass by it without being tempted by the escape it offers from former solitude. Thus they find themselves compelled to enter. Everything in the new building is designed to give pleasure and comfort to all.”¹⁷⁷⁷ After this sort of gush which would have made an ancient Christian quake with horror, Eusebius adds the final touch: “Just as Christ in the resurrection exchanged his soiled body [a “sordid” body of flesh, forsooth] for the glorious transfiguration, so this new building which we now dedicate is decked like a bride.”¹⁷⁷⁸ For a little while I will leave thee and turn my face from these in my wrath, etc. But in the end, arise! Exult! etc. All the millennial prophecies are now fulfilled

¹⁷⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷³ Paulus of Tyre

¹⁷⁷⁴ Paulinus

¹⁷⁷⁵ “Another”

¹⁷⁷⁶ ?

¹⁷⁷⁷ ?

¹⁷⁷⁸ Eusebius

(Leviticus 26:12).¹⁷⁷⁹ Under Constantine, says Eusebius, the New Jerusalem was actually built.¹⁷⁸⁰ “At a nod from God all that is evil has disappeared...at a nod from God and by his power all who had opposed bowed their backs, confessed, and submitted.” To celebrate the victory God covers the earth with churches, the trophies of his victory; in every town and village, in every country-side and desert, everywhere are churches, churches, churches, all to the universal monarch and king; and all this on the very day after we had given up all hope! What greater miracle would there be? The philosophers and polytheists have been supplanted everywhere. That is, the philosophers have now joined the church. For “you see those zealous for the philosophic life as well as servants of God swarming in the lands, just as the winter storms of persecution have passed. Just as the Jews suffered instantaneous destruction, so we enjoy new life.”¹⁷⁸¹ “Not one stone shall be left upon another...that was what was prophesied for the Jews. ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail’...that is what was prophesied for us.”¹⁷⁸² “In place of the great and haughty city that has been removed, God found another city, the catholic church, reaching from one end of the earth to the other, and set up in it the government.”¹⁷⁸³ “Making all things new” plainly refers to the church.¹⁷⁸⁴ All things are grist to the rhetorician’s mill. While he struts and puffs, Eusebius describes the opposition as boastful; and the irresistible juggernaut of the church in her hour of delirious vengeance he depicts in the same brush as a humble virgin. Why not? The words are there to use.

During the persecution Basil points out that the fight is not that of Christian versus pagan, or even of Catholic versus Arian, but of intimate internal corruption and dissention, “which has brought the church to the last extremity of weakness, and been the ruin of the churches.”¹⁷⁸⁵

¹⁷⁷⁹ Eusebius, HE X, 4, 871

¹⁷⁸⁰ Eusebius, V.C. III, 33

¹⁷⁸¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁵ Basil

Basil's whole interest is to call the church "back to the old order."¹⁷⁸⁶ But it never returned. The Nicene Council meant the founding of a new order: "only that faith which by authority of the apostles was founded [*fundata*] at Nicaea," says Damasus, "is to be retained in perpetual firmness; in that the Orientals and Occidentals glory with us."¹⁷⁸⁷ Jeremiah 31:15 refers to the church, says Hilary: "This church, which was long sterile, but is now fecund."¹⁷⁸⁸ He makes it clear that he does not here refer to the Jews or any pre-Christian church, nor to the actual destruction of the church. His argument to show that the church would not have been completely destroyed is a queer one: martyrs he says are not really dead, but live in heaven; therefore it cannot really be said that they were killed; therefore the church was not destroyed! But Gregory the Theologian describes the "consummation" of destruction on the church. "It is completed. Not a shred or tatter remains, but like in the land which had been swept by the force of a violent storm, nothing but tatters remains. Ours is the sheer disaster, the precipice; ours the demolished organization [*systema*], I say it with tears of lamentation."¹⁷⁸⁹

John Chrysostom's view of the new order has been described: "All things are now new" is his theme: "The spirit, the body, the service, the life, the office, all is new....The Jerusalem below and the Jerusalem above are not one; the physical temple has become the spiritual temple; circumcision has become baptism, manna has become the body of the Lord, in the place of a myriad of priests is now but one high priest."¹⁷⁹⁰ Jerome since he may interpret the scripture tropologically, sees no reason why Virgil read by the same perfect license might not serve as proof for survival of the church: does not the *First Georgic* (the passage about the moon) tropologically interpreted, he asks, mean "That the church by peace and persecutions grows or wanes, and having been oppressed by the temptations of the darkness bursts out again in her

¹⁷⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁷ Damasus

¹⁷⁸⁸ Hilary

¹⁷⁸⁹ Gregory the Theologian

¹⁷⁹⁰ Chrysostom, PG 61, 476

pristine splendor, receiving her splendor from the sun of justice?”¹⁷⁹¹ After the persecution the church shall be glorious as of old, and know that the Lord has restored his people to their pristine state. The punishment and restoration of the Jews is made to apply very awkwardly to the persecution of the Christians with all sorts of chronological contradictions and absurdities. “After persecution the Lord restored peace to Jerusalem, and slew the adversary with the spirit of his mouth...again Jerusalem, that is, the church, shall receive her pristine glory, and will be in her place. The tabernacles of the people will receive their ancient peace when the false doctors have been expelled: but by the **hole** of God peace will be restored to the churches.”¹⁷⁹² The holy church existed with Adam and before Adam, says Epiphanius, and being revealed at the coming of Christ, “and now today after all these heresies and fornications she is again hailed by us.”¹⁷⁹³ The virgin which Clement says became a whore, is now a virgin again!

¹⁷⁹¹ Jerome

¹⁷⁹² Is this still Jerome?

¹⁷⁹³ Epiphanius

HOLY EMPIRES (Section 17)
Pages 309 – 329

The lasting coexistence of church and empire was only possible where each accepted the other. As what? Each claimed to be holy; to deny that claim was to reject the whole institution from top to bottom. Neither was a product of expediency or convenience in theory: men cannot swear solemn allegiance to a creature of practical necessity: supernatural claims are the cornerstone of every government that is to bind men by anything but brute force.

Kingship was an ancient and popular institution in Rome, so popular that when the institution was abolished politically it was retained, with the title in ritual: the state cult was always a king-cult, and those competing for popular favor could always secure a kingly title and kingly power by getting themselves made directors of public games. There they could appear crowned in glory to be acclaimed by the multitude as father and benefactor. The basic ritual offices of the king—the giving of donatives, the greeting at the new year later became the sole prerogative of the emperor. The patricians never succeeded in their attempt to displace the kingship entirely by the rule of their class—for the one sure way to the people’s heart still lay through the kingly offices vividly recalled in the great festivals. And so the “Social War” was really a war of secession. The bearer of the *imperium* is “as a person identical with the bearer of the *auspicium*,” both offices figuring as indispensable elements of the triumph: the occasion on which by acclamation the victorious imperator is hailed as the embodiment of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on earth. Moreover triumph and circus are also organic and inseparable parts of the same ritual complex. In the prehistoric ritual of Rome a man sat in glory at the games as god among the people. Patrician consuls had to go out of their way to show that they still acknowledged that even the consular office in its ritual form—that of the chariot-riding magistrate—“still belonged to the people.” When the first king of Rome disappeared, we are told, the people immediately suspected the *patres* of dirty work; it was popular enthusiasm that sustained Numa, the holy king and true founder of the state religion: under him “the multitude

was brought into perfect harmony, like some mighty organ,” and basked in the sunlight of an almost Golden Age.¹⁷⁹⁴ While Christian fathers were proclaiming the paradise of the prophets in the fourth century, the heathen Marcellinus explains the good times in more conventional Roman terms: “the tranquility of Numa has returned.”¹⁷⁹⁵ The Roman emperor, like the fabled kings of old, was the giver of life and abundance to his people; he was the *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of the nation, who alone enjoyed the prerogative of public *liberalitas* when he chose. Piganiol sees a pre-historic Sabine plebian town on the capitol governed by priest kings, the *rex-sacrorum* of later times, a plebe-king who served as intermediary between the people and the great plebe mother-goddess, the moon.¹⁷⁹⁶

Close affinities between the Roman *imperium* and Hellenistic kingship have often been observed. Just what the ties between the two were we need not try to determine, though it is certain that there were such ties, and that both such divine rules were being proclaimed throughout the ancient world long before the time of Christ. Strabo says that even in his day the Codrids in Ephesus were still called kings, “enjoying certain special honors, such as presidency at the games, the right to wear purple as a sign of a royal family, to carry a staff representing a *sceptrum*, and to preside in the cult of the Eleusinian Demeter.”¹⁷⁹⁷ This reads like a list of rights reserved to the Roman emperor, and descended, ritually, from the time of the kings. Basic in Hellenistic kingship is the doctrine that the king is first and foremost a benefactor of mankind and that kingship is by its very nature universal rule—since Zeus is the model of kingship and the essence of his rule is its universality. That is why Alexander qualifies as the first and greatest of Hellenistic rulers. “He was the most honorable of all men...and insisted on being honored not alone by the whole human race, but if possible by the birds and the beasts of the mountains as

¹⁷⁹⁴ ?

¹⁷⁹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 14.6.6.

¹⁷⁹⁶ Piganiol

¹⁷⁹⁷ Strabo

well!”¹⁷⁹⁸ The king must be a world-king, the common bond between gods and men, god’s example to the human race, whom they must carefully imitate in all things. “Do you not see,” says Dio Chrysostom to the throng at Alexandria, “that just as a king is the cynosure of all eyes and so must do nothing off-color, so the *demos* when met together in ritual congregation must always be on its best behavior?”¹⁷⁹⁹ For Dio the setting is all-important in supporting the authority of divine kingship. A big ritual show is always indicated. The Hellenistic view saw in that idea of “the *oecumene* as the rule of the entire world no unattainable goal,” and no more did Rome.¹⁸⁰⁰ But the only way one could prove his right to such a rule was to win it. Alexander did just that, but the recognition of him as “the creator of the absolute state,” was not merely recognition of a *fait accompli*, rather it was a familiar and natural reaction to the fact that he had shown himself *kallinikos*. For the right to rule was established by a victory, and the actual investment of authority came by the acclamation that acknowledged the victor—“David hath slain his tens of thousands.” (1 Samuel 21:11). Though from the first the *imperium* borrowed properties from the East, such as the *tesserae*, yet these were merely useful additions to a native doctrine of kingship, and Dio tells us that there is no Greek word that corresponds to the Roman *auctoritas*.¹⁸⁰¹ For a hundred years after Augustus “only he passed as legitimate emperor who had been approved by a public meeting held in the Roman forum.”¹⁸⁰² Some have argued that the cult of the emperors at Rome “was founded on the cult of the *Lares*.” At the games the populace would hail the emperor with a title that shocked the *patres* with its royal implications: “*O Dominum aequum et bonum*,”¹⁸⁰³ for the emperor gave equal favor to all as he cast out his gifts without favor or reserve to all the human race. If Nero adopted the Alexandrian style of acclaiming the emperor, the actual practice of acclaiming was no oriental invention but as old as Rome; it was built up in time to a

¹⁷⁹⁸ ?

¹⁷⁹⁹ Dio Chrysostom

¹⁸⁰⁰ ?

¹⁸⁰¹ Dio Chrysostom

¹⁸⁰² *ibid.*?

¹⁸⁰³ ?

tremendous musical extravaganza with interesting solo variations in the rhetorical formality of the panegyric, the one type of oratory that retained some vitality in the fourth century. The vocabulary of the panegyric is exactly that taken over by the Christian *laudes*, which praise god in precisely the same manner and using the very same set formulae and highly technical jargon which had been developed for praising emperors. “The gods became, so to say, helpmates of the emperor...until, with the design of a divinity as comes *Augusti*, heaven appears as a copy of the imperial court...”¹⁸⁰⁴ Eduard Meyer has pointed out that divine kingship and the rule of law, far from being mutually exclusive, are necessary adjuncts to each other, for “an absolute monarchy can only be a legally governed state when it is ruled not by arbitrary will but by law. This is only possible when the ruler is elevated to a god,” i.e. when his will is law.¹⁸⁰⁵ Close to its religious nature is the absolute necessity for strong popular appeal, and “the emperors realized the importance of impressing and catching the popular imagination.”¹⁸⁰⁶ “Pomp and splendor and festivals, shows and magnificent buildings became indispensable properties of government.”¹⁸⁰⁷ Religion remained ever the keynote in Rome, for religion was to the Romans a power “by which a man was so to speak bound, tied, and hindered in his actions being as it were deprived of his own will.”¹⁸⁰⁸ A democracy cannot rule an empire, Dio states, “for it has not the harmony necessary to moderation.”¹⁸⁰⁹ Only a single man can do that, the panegyrists claim. Fundamental attributes of the emperor in cult were his eternity: “the emperor is *your* eternity, his palace is the eternal house, his images are eternal countenances, his decrees eternal laws, and these pompous and pagan expressions were never so used...as after the conversion of Constantine...”¹⁸¹⁰ Well into the fifth century not only the people but also the nobles continued to adore the images of the Augustuses, and the Tyche of Constantinople was an object of superstitious devotion which

1804 ?

1805 Eduard Meyer

1806 ?

1807 ?

1808 ?

1809 Dio Chrysostom

1810 ?

shows, Cumont observes, that the titles *aeternus* and *aeternitas* retained their pagan significance all along.¹⁸¹¹ The same holds true of the rites of consecration, the emperor's mounting to heaven ritually on a *thensa*. Bickermann compares the miracles performed by Vespasian with those attributed to the Kings of England and France. The Roman imperial apotheosis was, he says, of popular origin and was a product of Roman society, not of Hellenistic origin. "The Christian emperor at his coronation suddenly becomes *dominus noster*, and *praesens et corporalis deus*."¹⁸¹² The all-important element of victory, the indispensable proof of divine favor and the right to rule, is as conspicuous as ever under Christian emperors. From the iconography of the Byzantine Empire Gage says one can clearly trace the steps by which "two mystical triumphs which appeared in irreconcilable opposition, steadily grew nearer to each other and then interpenetrated each other until that day on which they would be united under the sign of the victorious cross."¹⁸¹³ Some claim that this fusion was the result of the conversion of Babylon: the Christian version overcame the pagan: yet the symbol was a pagan one to begin with, and denounced by the Christian and never used by them until the fourth century. The Christians were looking forward to celebrating the triumph of Christ when, and only when, he came in his glory. They yearned for it but they were careful not to anticipate it. To yearn for heavenly demonstrations as all Christians did is one thing, to attempt in one's yearning to produce them by *pia fraus* as the Gnostics did is another. Again and again the early fathers must warn: "Do not act as if that which you desired was already realized;" do not pretend that the millennium is already here; do not by living apart pretend that you have already left the world, etc. The saints here are to live by faith, and faith is the substance of things hoped for only, and the evidence of things not seen. Let us not, then pretend that they are not merely hoped for but realized, and that they are seen when they are not. The rhetorical trick which Augustine employs is to be especially avoided,

¹⁸¹¹ Cumont

¹⁸¹² "Der christliche Kaiser wird dagegen bei seiner Thronbesteigung mit einem Male zum *dominus noster* wie zum *praesens et corporalis deus*." Elias Bickermann, "Die Römische Kaiserapotheose," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 27 (1929): 21, citing Vegetius 2.5.

¹⁸¹³ Gage

namely that of regarding the hope as itself the fulfillment. If the Christian church started celebrating triumphs it was not with the consent of early Christian tradition but a borrowing and an innovation. The nature of the earliest liturgy makes that perfectly clear: the *laudes* and liturgies are simply word for word the old imperial acclamations. “The pagan emperors had been traditionally devoted to self-advertisement,” writes Cochrane, “but it remained for the first Christian sovereign to discover a more effective instrument of propaganda than any hitherto devised. As the emperor himself became more and more the tool of designing churchmen, the pulpits of the empire resounded with fulsome adulation of the political saint whom it was not considered impious to designate as ‘equal to the apostles.’”¹⁸¹⁴ But the pulpit was simply the *cathedra* of the teacher, and the language of the pulpit was taken over wholly from the rhetoric of the schools, and if the Christian pulpit was not designed for the purpose of praising the emperor, it was designed after pagan models for typically pagan discourses aimed at praising God to ears that demanded pagan rhetoric. The delivering of panegyric orations of praise and thanksgiving to the emperor had become the main business of the consulship, once that office became a mere sinecure; such was the professional function of St. Augustine before he joined the church. It is no wonder that the fourth century is the great century of the panegyric and that it is the century that fixed the ritual of the church for all time to come around the panegyric theme. Sedulius’ *Carmen Paschale* is simply a Christian *Carmen Saeculare*, slavishly imitating not the best but the worst in classical literature; it is a ghastly rhetorical elegy on Christianity. His *Carmen de Incarnatione* is a Virgilian *Centio*—that is thoroughly typical, new wine in old vessels.

According to Ferrero, the church “intellectualized” the Roman Empire. “The church of the Middle Ages was therefore the most splendid edifice that the intellectual classes have so far created.”¹⁸¹⁵ In the same way, children at play “intellectualize” a locomotive from an apple-crate. Nothing in the world is easier than building up in the imagination or putting on paper something

¹⁸¹⁴ Cochrane

¹⁸¹⁵ Ferrero

that you would like to see in reality but cannot. Since the Roman Empire had never been anything but a glorious ideal, what was there left to do in the Middle Ages but to speculate about it? And what could be easier? The Pythagorean theorem or any simple demonstration in Euclid is a more imposing intellectual edifice than any gaudy theatrical concepts of heaven on earth, profoundly conventional and unoriginal as the idea has always been. And as for carrying out in ritual what one cannot realize in fact, is that not one of the oldest devices of children's minds. In Byzantine times "the daily life had a background of regulation and ceremony as stiff as the daily apparel. The authorities interfered everywhere: prices, profits, hours of labor, all were controlled from the bureau of the Prefect of the City."¹⁸¹⁶ And all in the spirit of holy ritual. "If there was one thing that held together the fabric of the empire and guaranteed its existence," says Rostovtzeff, "if there was any institution popular among the masses, it was the imperial power and the personality of the reigning emperor. Everything else was discredited...the idea of imperial power stood intact..."¹⁸¹⁷ Therefore Diocletian "emphasized the supernatural and sacred character of his power, which was expressed by the identification of the emperor with God and the Oriental ceremonial introduced at court."¹⁸¹⁸ Rostovtzeff sees Constantine's organization of the civil administration and the army both following the Hellenistic pattern. Part of that pattern as of the native Roman one, was the primacy of the emperor in state religion, which was a necessary corollary to the universal pagan concept of the inseparability of state and religion: the ancient states were all sacral states—that is why early Christianity offered such a jarring note: that Jesus should exploit popular ritual concepts to make himself a king was the most understandable thing in the world—hundreds of men had done that before him in all parts of the ancient world, and everybody including his own followers naturally expected him to do the same. When he refused, and when following him the apostles refused all offers to make their church a state church, an unbridgeable gap was established between Christian and pagan. It could only be closed by the

¹⁸¹⁶ ?

¹⁸¹⁷ Rostovtzeff

¹⁸¹⁸ *ibid.*

surrender of Christian ideas and the acceptance of the darling pagan doctrine of a state church—a universal church for a universal state.

As is well known, the Jews were not untainted by Hellenistic and much earlier Oriental concepts of kingship. For Philo the single mind of the divine ruler imposing law and order on the world made sick by mob-rule is like God, who is pure mind (for he has “conceived a hatred of...the body without giving reasons”), bringing order into a world of primal chaos. When Agrippa appeared in the theater in his silver suit his flatterers, in the best Roman fashion, began dutifully to cry, that “he was a god; and they added ‘be thou merciful to us.’”¹⁸¹⁹ The Epistle of Aristeas, championing the Septuagint of the second century B.C. contains a “concept of God [which] is in many ways quite modern,” and depicts the model monarch as “a benevolent despot and a philosopher king.”¹⁸²⁰ “You will do well,” says a philosopher advising the king, “to observe how God bestows his benefits on the human race.”¹⁸²¹ “Imitate God,” says another, “who draws all men to himself by his benignity.”¹⁸²² “If you understood everything,” says yet another, “you would be filled with pity, for God also is pitiful.”¹⁸²³ And of course the world ruler is not a cruel autocrat, for “what need was there for wrath, when all men were in subjection and no one was hostile to him? It is necessary to recognize that God rules the whole world in the spirit of kindness, and without wrath at all, and ‘you’ said he, ‘O King, must of necessity copy his example.’”¹⁸²⁴ The king who wants loyal soldiers must make them absolutely sure that he will take care of them at all time.

“It was long since established,” writes Gibbon,

as a fundamental maxim of the Roman constitution that...the care of religion was the right as well as the duty of the civil magistrate. Constantine and his successors could not easily persuade themselves that they had forfeited, by their conversion, any branch of the

¹⁸¹⁹ ?Philo?

¹⁸²⁰ Epistle of Aristeas

¹⁸²¹ Epistle of Aristeas 7:37, *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, ed. Rutherford H. Platt (USA: Penguin Group, 1974), 410.

¹⁸²² Epistle of Aristeas 7:33 , 8:9, *Forgotten Books of Eden*, 410, 414.

¹⁸²³ Epistle of Aristeas 8:11, *Forgotten Books of Eden*, 414.

¹⁸²⁴ Epistle of Aristeas 9:32, *Forgotten Books of Eden*, 422.

Imperial prerogatives....The emperors still continued to exercise a supreme jurisdiction over the ecclesiastical order; the sixteenth book of the Theodosian code represents...the authority which they assumed in the government of the Catholic Church.¹⁸²⁵

Father Duchesne admits that this was the practice “if not the theory in the church.”¹⁸²⁶ Yet it was the theory as well, and he observes that when the emperors actually took over the rule of the church “there was no objection to this on theoretical grounds.”¹⁸²⁷

The prayer of *I Clement* for the empire is exactly that of the *Ludi Saeculares*, L. Alfonsi has shown: *incolumitatem sempiternam, victoriam, valetudinem populo Romano Quiritibus diutis.*¹⁸²⁸ “The question may be raised,” says Lake, “whether *Kingdom of God*—the phrase, not the concept—like *Gospel*, and perhaps *Apostle* was not a Christian contribution to the vocabulary of the Greco-Jewish religion.”¹⁸²⁹ Yet, he tells us, the Romans “had all felt the wonder and miracle of the Empire which they administered.”¹⁸³⁰ Before Christian times the Jews believed the Sanhedrin was a “world-ruling corporation with the same significance as the Roman Senate,” and that to carry out its world-ruling functions its members actually had to know 70 languages.¹⁸³¹ For them “the kingdom of God is nothing if not world-embracing: i.e. ‘ecumenical,’ ‘catholic.’”¹⁸³² Moreover the year-rites of the Jews, like those of all other major peoples of antiquity were the core of the religious ritual and represented nothing less than a universal assembly of all men and the *palingenesia kosmou*. The liturgies attributed to Clement are simply a very formal and very lavish panegyric employing the conventional superlatives of the philosophers, who in turn had taken their cue from the religious festivals. The picture of the Throne of Glory, the great assembly, the formal acclamation of the power and acceptance of the rule of the one on the throne is right out of the books—not the Christian ones. Tatian tells us that the emperors are always

¹⁸²⁵ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter XX, (Publ. info, vol # (2?))

¹⁸²⁶ Duchesne

¹⁸²⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸²⁸ L. Alfonsi

¹⁸²⁹ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 232.

¹⁸³⁰ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 217.

¹⁸³¹ *ibid.*?

¹⁸³² *ibid.*?

preceded by *vexillas* in public, that when they die their images “are always consecrated in the form of a cross,” that they themselves are always consecrated at death, certain people being always willing to provide the necessary testimony and swear that they had seen Caesar ascending into heaven.¹⁸³³ Not that Eusebius makes much of the claim that Constantine swore that he saw the strange sign in heaven, even though two entire armies were reported to have seen the same sign yet not a single testimony except that of the emperor’s has been preserved. Tertullian describes the emperor as “second only to God,” as “constituted by God to rule,” and hence receiving unhesitating support from the Christians.¹⁸³⁴ But though he is loyal to the state and prays for its continuance as the last obstacle to the Antichrist, Tertullian utterly loathes the theatrical displays of power by which the glory of Rome and its ruler were proclaimed: this was the very thing that proved especially enticing to Christians of a later day. Hippolytus says the Antichrist being about to take over the rule of the world will imitate Augustus, i.e. coming in the name of Christ he shall adopt the imperial Roman cult.¹⁸³⁵

Those who dispute about Constantine’s motives do not disagree that he insisted on uniting in his own mind pagan and Christian concepts. For himself he proved Christianity by the Sibylline books and the *Fourth Eclogue* of Virgil. Gallienus, Aurelian, and Constantine, all had the same dream, according to Piganiol, “to find a common faith that could unite all their peoples. I could never believe that Constantine could be a partisan, a sectarian...”¹⁸³⁶ His desire to satisfy all men made him, in Vogt’s words, “the great builder of the bridge of world-history.”¹⁸³⁷ “No student of the Middle Ages can evade Constantine,” writes Baynes, who believes that, far from being the product of his times, he was “an erratic block which has diverted the stream of human

¹⁸³³ Tatian

¹⁸³⁴ Tertullian

¹⁸³⁵ Hippolytus

¹⁸³⁶ Piganiol

¹⁸³⁷ Vogt

history.”¹⁸³⁸ “The idea of sovereignty in the Rome of the Middle Ages rests on the constitutional reforms of Constantine,” says Alfoeldi, “when, willy-nilly, he had built the pagan tradition of Rome into the spiritual foundations of his Christian Empire.”¹⁸³⁹

In his long introductory discourse on priesthood and kingship, Eusebius shows them to be inseparably one: there is only one office of supreme rule in the universe and so Christ means the same as king, which means the same as priest, prophet, and world ruler.¹⁸⁴⁰ The victory given to Constantine was from heaven as a reward for his piety; the impious lay prone at his feet; the adversary perished quicker than it can be told and left not even his name behind. Constantine became the *cosmocrator*; he brought the Golden Age. In an orgy of technical and philosophical words Eusebius describes the state and triumph of his hero with a fulsome verbosity that would put an ordinary schoolman to shame. So saturated is he with the gospel of success that he can announce in the *Praeparatio*, that the final proof of Christ’s divinity is his matchless fame, and the fact that his teachings were embraced leads to milder and humaner institutions and manners. It is the greatest civilizing agent in Asia. One thinks he is listening to the ardent Caecilius in the *Octavius* making all the identical arguments to support the claims of the imperial state church. It is in the *Vita Constantini* that Eusebius pulls out all the stops. His 30-year festival was “a panegyric of the entire human race,” for God had made Constantine the greatest ruler who ever lived: Cyrus was not so great because he got beat, Alexander, because he did not live so long.¹⁸⁴¹ Constantine destroyed the giants who fight with God—a bit of pure pagan schoolery. Of all men, he alone is the actual *autocrator* of all people, and he wants all to be happy; his rule is not to be bound by space or time—it is absolutely universal, for he has established it “for endless ages.” He inherited his imperial office from the beginning of time and transmitted it to his sons until the end

¹⁸³⁸ Norman H. Baynes, “Constantine the Great and the Christian Church,” in *Proceedings of the British Academy 1929*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1929) 341.

¹⁸³⁹ Alfoeldi

¹⁸⁴⁰ Eusebius, (introduction of priesthood/kingship)

¹⁸⁴¹ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*

of time; he is in the best Hellenistic tradition *philanthropos* and *euergeticos*.¹⁸⁴² “God had investigated my ministry commensurate with his own will. He wants me to reduce all the world to virtue and uniformity and expel all evil from it.”¹⁸⁴³ The great painted billboard showing the emperor and his children trampling on a dragon transfixed with a spear caused Eusebius to marvel that this pagan subject should fit so well with the predictions of the prophets. Of all the human race Constantine alone appeared worthy to be God’s assistant in good deeds. One of the most shocking things about the disorder among the Christians before the Council of Nicaea was that fighting Christian mobs and bishops “reached such a pitch of insanity that they even dared to insult the images of the emperor.” At the Council, Constantine gave the church all that the Jews had so sorely missed in Christ; everything about the emperor was calculated for photogenic effect: “As for his soul, it was perfectly clear that that was adorned with piety and the fear of God. This appeared in the fact that he lowered his eyes, from the blush on his face, and in the manner of his walk.”¹⁸⁴⁴ Of course he was taller, handsomer and stronger than any of those around him (he saw to that). As to his *vicennalia* celebration to which all bishops were invited, “one would have thought himself beholding the image of the kingdom of Christ, and have thought the whole thing a dream rather than a reality!”¹⁸⁴⁵ He ordered all his soldiers to pray on Sunday and composed the prayer for them to repeat. Heathen soldiers were not exempt from repeating this prayer, asking for long life and victory for the emperor and his family—a prayer perfectly familiar from pagan days. He held forth in scholarly discourses on religion to packed houses, “hastening to hear the emperor philosophize,” and his theme was always divine right and the need for a single rule in the world—his own. In all this immense display of wisdom, Eusebius is sure that his hero is receiving direct revelation from heaven. He is not alone in this, and even refuses to go as far as some of the clergy who maintained that Constantine hereafter would be co-ruler

¹⁸⁴² *ibid.*, I:43.

¹⁸⁴³ is the I:43 for this quotation?

¹⁸⁴⁴ *ibid.*?

¹⁸⁴⁵ *ibid.*?

with the Son of God! His funeral was a Roman, not a Christian, apotheosis. Though the emperor at his baptism just before his death had laid aside his red robes in favor of white ones more fitting his new profession, it was in the official scarlet that he lay in state under a thousand candles in a solid gold casket; and right in the cosmic martyrdom the emperor was depicted making his ascent to heaven, as the pagan emperors had done before him, in the divine quadriga. He was, Eusebius states unequivocally, the greatest man who ever lived—which put the apostles and prophets in a very new perspective in the church history of which Eusebius is the father and founder.¹⁸⁴⁶ He is thrilled to report that at Rome they not only mourned the death of Constantine loudly, but proved their zeal by their works, and “setting up images of him honored him as much when he was dead as they had while he was alive.”¹⁸⁴⁷ Like the phoenix bird rising from its ashes, images of the emperor rose up everywhere in all the provinces of the empire. Irenaeus was shocked when certain Gnostics placed flowers on a portrait which was held to be an actual painting of Christ ordered by Pilate: what scandalized him was not what pictures were venerated, but that any pictures were venerated at all.¹⁸⁴⁸ But under the new order the devotional acts of paganism were approved as long as the objects of that devotion were Christian. He overcame both the physical and the spiritual enemies of the human race. “God chose Constantine for his champion, and he the one king of all, faithful image of the one Ruler of all...imitating his Savior, in being alone able to save, saved the godless and taught them piety.”¹⁸⁴⁹ So Constantine shares with God and Christ their most particular possession—their absolute uniqueness. Constantine saved the human race from a lawless and bestial way of life, bringing them over to reason and law; it was a double victory, over bad men and over bad demons. And if the emperor is the faithful image of God, what is more natural than to call God “the invisible emperor,” as Eusebius does?¹⁸⁵⁰

¹⁸⁴⁶ *ibid?*.

¹⁸⁴⁷ *ibid.?*

¹⁸⁴⁸ Louis Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church from its Foundation to the end of the Third Century* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912), 127.

¹⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵⁰ Eusebius

Of course Eusebius recites on occasion, but only very briefly, the stock school denunciations of earthly pomp and glory. Gregory of Nazianen’s discourse on the subject is typical—“The heart of the king is in the hand of God,” your *imperium* does not consist in gold or armies, courts, exalted thrones, etc.¹⁸⁵¹ But no one had any objections if these things were added, for they quite forgot the pointed warning of Clement of Alexandria, that pictures and ornaments will invariably come to be the focal point of attention and though not bad in themselves, will unfailingly shift the emphasis to material glory.¹⁸⁵² For Cyril “Constantius is the boast and glory of all the world.”¹⁸⁵³ Basil cannot express his joy at the vast amounts of jewels and gilt that are being loaded on the holy sepulchers by “the emperors of our day.”¹⁸⁵⁴ For Epiphanius “The throne of David and the royal seat” are one and the same, “the priesthood, it is, in the holy church, for the Lord has transmitted to his holy church the royal dignity and the high-priestly one joined together in a single unit, establishing in her the throne of David never to be empty forever and ever.”¹⁸⁵⁵ He is amazingly literal in his identification of the royal with the priestly power. With the coming of Christ, he explains to earth the *principium* departed from Judah and fell, both kingship and priesthood on Alexander the Great! Next Herod received it, ruling Judea while Augustus ruled Rome. Next the royal *cathedra* devolved upon the church in Christ, the church receiving the royal honor in the flesh. “And the throne is set up in the holy church forever, being both a kingly and a priestly honor.”¹⁸⁵⁶

Employing strictly imperial imagery, John Chrysostom tells how

Whatsoever region of the earth the sun visits, the evangelical word has passed through and the entire *oecumene* has been saved. Now the world sings Christ’s epinician ode. His work is to bring to an end the hard war with the devil, to bind and to disable him. Christ invites us all to his victory celebration. Our victory is much greater than that of Moses over the Egyptians, for we have overcome the devil himself!¹⁸⁵⁷

¹⁸⁵¹ Gregory of Nazianen (is this in Eus.?)

¹⁸⁵² Clement of Alexandria

¹⁸⁵³ Cyril

¹⁸⁵⁴ Basil

¹⁸⁵⁵ Epiphanius

¹⁸⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵⁷ John Chrysostom

For John God in his glory can only be described in terms of the cult and the ornamentation of the emperors. In his work *De Regno* Synesius tells us that the king must imitate God, that he is the image of God, that he passes through the empire as the sun over the earth; that royal power is God's gift to the human race.¹⁸⁵⁸ Maternus describes Christ and the Father presiding like Caesar and Augustus at the Easter rites: "The Son having returned [from battle] receives from his Father the promised scepter and mounts the throne of equal power with him."¹⁸⁵⁹ It would be interesting how far the idea of the Trinity was affected by the earlier necessity of working out a system of father and son reigning as equals in the empire and yet with differing degrees of power. The gap is not so wide as might seem. Julian caused to be painted, in juxtaposition with his own figure on the public pictures a gigantic picture of Jupiter coming out of heaven and presenting to him the symbols of imperial power, a crown or a purple robe. He would place pictures of the gods beside his own, we are told, so that people could not worship him without worshipping the latter. Exactly so, Constantine placed his own tomb in such a relationship to the apostolic relics that no one could venerate an apostle without worshipping him. "The emperor" says a panegyrist of Julian, "hath taken upon himself the direst tasks that we might live at peace...the most sacred emperor has taken care that all things flow to us easily, and that we might pass chaste but happy days."¹⁸⁶⁰ When an Italian hermit met Alaric and "boldly denounced the indignation of heaven against the oppressors of the earth," "the saint himself was confounded" when the chief solemnly declared "that he felt a secret and preternatural impulse which...compelled him to the gates of Rome."¹⁸⁶¹ Thereby he "removed the popular and almost superstitious reverence of the nations for the majesty of the Roman name," but it would only be possible for him to counter inspiration with inspiration where the boundaries between the two were fluid, and this shows how easy it was to confuse the emperor's inspiration with that of the apostle, i.e. the pagan with the new popular

¹⁸⁵⁸ Synesius, *De Regno*

¹⁸⁵⁹ Maternus

¹⁸⁶⁰ panegyrist of Julian (is this Mamertinus noted below?)

¹⁸⁶¹ ?

and superstitious Christian brand.¹⁸⁶² In their addresses to the emperor, all the Christian orators had to do was transfer the pagan style and imagery to a new setting. There was little they could add and little they would want to change, for pagan rhetoric had already reached limits of exaggeration beyond which it was impossible to go, and St. Augustine insists that all Christianity had done in opening a new door was to give the old rhetoric a new lease on life. Mutual respect is reflected in Ambrose's attitude to pagan and Christian emperor: "If a pagan emperor raised an altar to Christ," he says, being very proud of the fact, "how much more should the Christian emperor be devoted to him!"¹⁸⁶³ "You," he says to the pagans, "ask the emperors for peace for your gods; but we ask from Christ peace for the emperors themselves."¹⁸⁶⁴ This is a purely rhetorical trick, but the intimate interplay of divine and imperial powers, is the same on both sides, the matter of priority being one of quantity, not quality. "The church has snatched the *regnum* from the synagogue," is his strange boast, "Christ has been snatched [*rapitur*] when having been killed by the others, he was buried by us."¹⁸⁶⁵ Tichonius actually suggests a geographical division of God's rule and the devil's on this earth: there is a certain area of the earth, the North, where the devil lives; while the Lord lives in the South.¹⁸⁶⁶ The whole world there is one monster church, he says, church taking over wholly the most literally heathen concepts of world *imperium*.

Mamertinus' panegyric to Julian might have been directed to his Christian predecessor and successor without the slightest suspicion of an irregularity: under his rule the clouds have been banished, the world has been blest with abundant harvests, to be sure, but the greatest abundance is the miracle of the divine bounty expressed in the person of the prince; he describes

¹⁸⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶³ Ambrose, ?

¹⁸⁶⁴ Ambrose, ?

¹⁸⁶⁵ *Rapuit igitur Ecclesia Synagogae regnum....rapitur Christus, cum ab aliis occiditur, sepelitur a nobis...*, Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam* 5.115, in *PL* 15:1753-1754.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Tichonius

the happy Isles of the West and asks, “do we not live in such a paradise under the emperor?”¹⁸⁶⁷ To match the godly triumphs of the emperor, Juvencus leaves us poems praising God in strictly imperial terms; his *Triumphus Christi Heroicus* has Christ triumphing in hell as the emperor on earth; Constantine is constantly described as triumphing over the chief enemy of civil and ecclesiastical peace, the old serpent himself, in the most literal terms.¹⁸⁶⁸ “We see the Roman emperors physically bowing their necks to the yoke of Christ,” says Jerome, “and building churches at public expense, and issuing general laws against Gentile persecutions and heretical deceptions,” while to the church they give the spiritual gifts of eloquence.¹⁸⁶⁹ The Council of Chalcedon “submitted everything to the emperor’s sacred supremacy,” and brought against the opposition the crushing charge that it was friendly to a visionary churchman.¹⁸⁷⁰ The shift of authority could not be more complete.

The Byzantine system was an absolute unity of state and church in which, says Schneider, ceremony was not a mere matter of form but “a reality on a new and higher level of existence.”¹⁸⁷¹ New it might have been to the Christian world, but certainly not to the ancients. Teitinger has shown that Diocletian and Constantine did not import their court ritual from Persia and the Orient but “rather simply brought together older forms and systematically incorporated them into their political institutions.”¹⁸⁷² The whole Middle Ages is sustained and guided by the monumental Christian art of the first Christian emperors, an art that reached its fullness in Theodosius, after whose time “the art of the West bears ever a sacral character.”¹⁸⁷³ But this is no Christian invention: for Claudian Theodoius and his son are the two noblest inhabitants of Olympus and the triumphs of Theodosius are proofs of the justice and testimony of the

¹⁸⁶⁷ Mamertinus’ panegyric to Julian

¹⁸⁶⁸ Juvencus, PL 19, 385ff

¹⁸⁶⁹ Jerome, PL 24, 593

¹⁸⁷⁰ ? Council of Chalcedon

¹⁸⁷¹ Schneider

¹⁸⁷² Teitinger

¹⁸⁷³ *ibid.*?

providence of the gods, “teaching us that the gods are present.”¹⁸⁷⁴ All this oversize splurge and pompous elaboration, this “panegyric in stone,” is meant to remind men “that the gods are present.” Namatianus hails his Rome as “genetrix of men and of gods: we are not far from heaven in thy temples,” and that proximity to heaven is exactly the mood and purpose of the pompous pagan architecture that was adopted by the church.¹⁸⁷⁵ Namatianus reminds us that Rome is the superior and the final culmination to a long line of world-empires—the idea that the church is such a culmination is no inspired revelation but strictly a product of the rhetorical schools. It is hard to believe that the incredible adulations of Corippus are the address of a Christian poet to a sixth century Christian emperor, and yet it is a strictly correct performance; he compares the emperor to the Nile which “swells itself by a miracle within itself and thus becomes the soul and source of life and joy to all living things.”¹⁸⁷⁶ The same concern that pagan emperors showed to gain the favor of the rabble was not exercised to woo the Christian mob, which rioted with even greater abandon on the slightest provocation. Who shall say what elections, doctrines, and conversions were brought about by the sudden and dangerous whim of this or that city mob. Barbarian delegates to Constantinople were as impressed by the big show as anyone, at the sight of the lights and the sound of the chanting in Sancta Sophia during a festival these visitors were almost overwhelmed by the *philanthropia* of God in wanting all men to be saved, and when at a given signal all the people fell upon their faces crying *kyrie eleison*, the barbarians, though they remained standing were immensely impressed. The coronation or official appearances of the emperor on crown-days, i.e. great religious festivals were identical in Byzantium and Uruk, Assyria, Persia, and among the ancient Germans, according to Schneider.¹⁸⁷⁷ It was an overwhelming spectacle of power and glory, and it is exactly this that the church takes over. An audience with the Byzantine emperor, Isapostolos, “differed in no detail from the strict etiquette”

¹⁸⁷⁴ ?

¹⁸⁷⁵ Namatianus

¹⁸⁷⁶ Corripus

¹⁸⁷⁷ Schneider

of an audience with Chosrau in Persia. In bad times both Chosray and Justinian fasted on salad, salt and vinegar. As in ancient Babylon the emperor was the center of a peculiar cult, as in Babylon it was the emperor who guaranteed the universal harmony of things; the Middle-Byzantine *imperius*, says Schneider, is not that of late antique culture: here is not apotheosis of the ruler, for God is the ruler of the empire, as in the Orient. The Byzantine like the Oriental emperor was shut up in the shrine-palace and not to be seen by the public; the official greeting for him was foot-kissing, the *proskunesis*; the Byzantine processions were Oriental-Babylonian, and so was the music that accompanied them. “Pagan gods gave way to Christian saints at the cross-roads,” says Father Bligh, forgetting the constant admonition of the early fathers, that not the label but the doctrine or the rite itself was the important thing.¹⁸⁷⁸

Justinian like Leo the Isaurian called himself “the High-Priest Emperor, showing that “the *basileus* governed the church just as he did the state. He designated the bishops to be elected and removed them at will. It was he who fixed and imposed the dogmas....It was his duty to propagate the orthodox faith over all the inhabited earth—*oecumene*, over which God...promised him dominion.”¹⁸⁷⁹ “The passive and unresisting obedience which bows under the yoke of authority, or even of oppression, must have appeared in the eyes of an absolute monarch the most conspicuous and useful of the evangelic virtues.”¹⁸⁸⁰

We are now in the area of ancient Oriental monarchies. The Byzantine emperor describing the power of the imperial office to his sons says

his enemies flee from him as from a consuming fire, his countenance makes them tremble, he has been placed upon an unshakable foundation, shining like the sun before God;...He has chosen thee and set thee apart from the womb, and given thee his own dominion over all men...that the nations may bring their gifts to thee and that the inhabitants of the earth might fall down and do obeisance before thee.¹⁸⁸¹

¹⁸⁷⁸ Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’,” 314.

¹⁸⁷⁹ ?

¹⁸⁸⁰ ?

¹⁸⁸¹ Byzantine emperor to sons

At dinner on the steppes where the Huns were entertaining some Roman ambassadors one of the barbarians began to extol Attila, the world-conqueror of whom his simple people were understandably proud comparing him with Justinian, when a Roman representative, Vigila caused an uproar by announcing “it is not right to compare God with a man, for Attila is a man, but Theodosius is a god.”¹⁸⁸² Against the Bulgars and Moagyars, Otto the Great “girded on...the sword of Constantine, grasped the invincible spear of Charlemagne, and waved the banner of St. Maurice; holiest of all was the holy lance with a head made of the nails of the true cross.”¹⁸⁸³ Since Germanic kings had ever waved the holy sword of Tiu, the invincible spear of Wotan and the banner of Thor no great amount of conversion is indicated by the Christian labels. The very pagan Attila claimed equally holy inspiration in the finding of the long-lost sword of empire, worshipped by the Scythians. In Islam when court theologians proved that the title “King of the Kings of the Earth” borne by the caliph was no more blasphemous than “Judge of Judges,” some honest judges resigned in protest, but the titles stuck. When a Turkish prince kissed the ground before a caliph at his coronation in 979, a horrified Arab general asked: “O man, is he a god?” But the Turk continued his ground-kissing and received a right reward for it, while the custom was retained. It is plainly of Asiatic origin. In Egypt from the beginning subjects kissed the ground before the king.

Though the idea of Hellenistic kingship mixes a good deal of rationalism and philosophy with Oriental monarchy all the essentials were retained, and Xenophon’s essay on authority shows that Hellenistic kingship even in its most idealistic aspects is the old Asiatic product.¹⁸⁸⁴ His picture of Cyaxeres on the throne exactly corresponds to Eusebius’ description of Constantine at Nicaea. Though he lives before Hellenistic times, the thoroughly mediocre, solid, practical Xenophon, the typical western man in the street, is enthusiastic in his support of the Persian

¹⁸⁸² ?Vigila is the speaker

¹⁸⁸³ ?

¹⁸⁸⁴ Xenophon, essay on authority

imperial religion which he says is supremely practical, dignified, and satisfying.¹⁸⁸⁵ The Persian king is a good shepherd, he does everything to insure a high level of general prosperity; he wears the pallium and the stole, and the tiara: his system of government was entirely feudal and medieval in form and fixtures. The Persian doctrine of glory came very close to the Roman: it was a sort of *Lichtglanz*. *Qarano* equals majesty, cognate with Latin *gloria*, “a completely spiritually conceived fire,” originally born of Persian fire-worship.¹⁸⁸⁶ It was a special possession of majesty. Pagliano has argued that *imperium* is also an invention of the Achemenid form of empire, an Iranian invention.¹⁸⁸⁷ According to Horace one man and one alone conquers the Medes, Indians, Scythians, Egyptians, and Britons, and one man alone gives the *Pax Romana* and rules from sunrise to sunset, for none, Goths, Chinese, Persians, dare break a Julian edict!¹⁸⁸⁸ The childish fantasy of the Middle Ages, according to Alfoldi, was greatly attracted by Byzantine splendor, and what they most admired was the throne of Solomon there, the Magnaura, the organ, the golden lion that roared, the mechanical birds on the golden tree, etc.¹⁸⁸⁹ The caliphs inherited the same stuff from the Sassanids, and though all kings eventually copied it, the East had easy priority: the Roman emperors had to adopt the show in their *Prestigekampf* with the East. The whole conventional view of church history assumes that Christ was seeking prestige above all things. Schneider proves that the Byzantine ritual was not taken over from the Greeks, but that it was taken over from the East.¹⁸⁹⁰ It was the Babylonian system under which the kingship, like everything else, was thought to have existed in heaven before it was upon the earth. The Babylonian king is not God in his own right: everything he has is loaned him by God; nor is he even a high priest, as the Assyrian king is. Following Babylonian concepts, the Byzantine Church itself is “a reproduction of the universal *kosmos*, and the ordinances are the same on earth as in

¹⁸⁸⁵ Xenophon

¹⁸⁸⁶ ?

¹⁸⁸⁷ Pagliano

¹⁸⁸⁸ See Horace, *Carmina* 4.14.

¹⁸⁸⁹ Alfoldi

¹⁸⁹⁰ Schneider

heaven.”¹⁸⁹¹ Aristied goes to some pains to show that the Roman *imperium* is actually the realization of what so many Asiatic rulers tried to be.¹⁸⁹² G. Bagnani would clear Roman law of all responsibility for the divine right element in Christian monarchy, which is of Oriental and Hellenistic origin, according to him, and owes its perpetuation in the West especially to the coronation of Charlemagne. “That mystical unction that set the sovran above the rest of humanity as ‘God’s anointed’ was never fully accepted in the west.”¹⁸⁹³ Zoraras’ description of a good ruler exactly describes the good ruler of the *Thousand and One Nights*.¹⁸⁹⁴ But then could one ask for a better description of the ideal khan than the praise of a good king in opening lines of *Beowulf*?¹⁸⁹⁵ The emperor could not be anything but a good one in the Greek polis; and Aurelian made the most of such local obligation to his subjects by tying all claims of imperial divinity up with the *Sol Invictus*. With boundless enthusiasm Eusebius describes Constantine as behaving like a perfect world ruler when he plunders the dead whom he has slain and as victor distributed all their booty with unstinting hand to his soldiers.¹⁸⁹⁶ What a frank revelation of the true nature of his rule! In Basil’s liturgy God is hailed ten thousand times ten thousand, and all the people pray that the Patriarch of Alexandria may ever trample his enemies under his feet and stamp upon them.¹⁸⁹⁷ The fathers describe the orthodox way as the royal road which alone leads to the presence of the king: a figure of which their Hellenistic philosophic predecessors were quite fond. Just before the coronation of 1953, Dawson produced a study on “The Tradition of Christian Monarchy” in which while noting that monarch “is the only political institution which is older than Christendom” (a highly questionable statement) notes also that it is “the only political institution which has been officially adopted by the church. He traces all surviving royal rites to

¹⁸⁹¹ ?

¹⁸⁹² Aristied

¹⁸⁹³ G. Bagnani

¹⁸⁹⁴ Zoraras

¹⁸⁹⁵ *Beowulf*

¹⁸⁹⁶ Eusebius

¹⁸⁹⁷ Basil’s liturgy

beginnings in the tenth century.”¹⁸⁹⁸ “No state can exist without a focus of loyalty,” he reminds us. Though the main virtues of monarchy “are not the product of Western cultural influence...they have been accepted without question for ages as the foundation of the state,” which depends for its existence above all upon “what the Chinese used to term the mandate of heaven.”¹⁸⁹⁹ Readers of lives of Genghis Khan will recognize the non-Chinese nature of the expression: it is typical of the Khans of the steppes. If the West was bound and determined to accept its monarchical doctrines from outside, it achieved remarkable independence of anything that might have been tainted historically with the slightest suspicion of early, that is, genuine, Christian doctrine. And when Dawson urges that to be completely authentic the English royal rites should be Catholic he is trusting in the “new ingredient” theory to justify the first adoption of the very essence of paganism by the Christian church.

¹⁸⁹⁸ Dawson, *The Tradition of Christian Monarchy* (article or book?)

¹⁸⁹⁹ *ibid.*

MORAL DECLINE (Section 18)
Page 330 – 340

The often treated moral decline of the Romans need not concern us here. How the evil mores and idleness came to be the curse of the people was told in republican times by many a writer who blamed it on the corruption of foreign blood and the baneful influence of the Oriental phenomena of decline which really were characteristic of Rome from the very beginning of her existence. At Rome, we have seen “it was a moral force that was the mainspring of the whole machine, and it was precisely this moral force that was failing fast,” at the time of the Civil Wars, after “the wholesome fear of rival powers was at an end.”¹⁹⁰⁰ “Rome was not a true nation or an organic state,” writes Heitland, “The chances of such a consummation had been extinguished by her conquests...”¹⁹⁰¹ What was worse, “there was no point at which to make the beginning of a fruitful crusade: each element of the political compound was progressively corrupting the others.”¹⁹⁰² “With the conquest of the Mediterranean,” writes Cochrane, “this nation of intelligent peasants, suddenly transformed into a great imperial power, was plunged into a state of unparalleled moral and intellectual confusion.”¹⁹⁰³ The prophet who came forth to save the world was Virgil who, “more than any other man, charted the course of their imperial future.”¹⁹⁰⁴ But Virgil was the prophet of wishful thinking; the Romans had fallen far too low to be moved by gentle appeals to shame and pride. Virgil rebuked little; that was the business of the satirists. “History and satire...adopted a somewhat peevish and moralizing tone which...was to be imitated later against obsolete evils.”¹⁹⁰⁵ Roman moralists, with their ingrained rhetorical training, infallibly attacked the wrong thing, while “high and low alike...the Romans indulged in a riot of sensationalism and emotionalism which, while it promoted social disintegration, at the same time

¹⁹⁰⁰ ?

¹⁹⁰¹ Heitland

¹⁹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰³ Cochrane

¹⁹⁰⁴ *ibid.*?

¹⁹⁰⁵ *ibid.*?

stimulated that fierce competition for *dominationes* and *potentiae* which laid the political fabric in ruins.”¹⁹⁰⁶ Many saviors came: “To this distracted world there came a message of salvation, the gospel of Epicurus...”¹⁹⁰⁷ Lucretius offered “salvation through enlightenment,” which was not a stimulant but a sedative.¹⁹⁰⁸ “The universal corruption of manners needs a powerful philosophy to uproot it,” said Seneca,¹⁹⁰⁹ and the schools turned out armies of volunteers, “who should be saviors of their cities,” said Lucian, but had been totally spoiled for any such calling by the vicious careers of the current education.¹⁹¹⁰ Sestio describes the ideal of the *optimates* as social security: “*otium cum dignitate*, founded on the official religion, executive authority, senatorial influence, law, popular courts, good faith...imperial prestige, military and financial strength.”¹⁹¹¹ But they have all become mere words when Empictetus can tell the emperor: “What can Caesar do? If he punishes all who revile him he will have no one left to rule.”¹⁹¹² The imperial attempt to achieve the effect by stage-dressing, the solemn and splendid state-rituals of the games, produced the very evils it concealed, which Friedlaner calls 1) slavery, 2) sloth, and 3) show.¹⁹¹³ A vicious logic pampered the worst in human nature as if it were a holy virtue: the fighters in the arena were enemies, barbarians, criminals, slaves, i.e. not human beings “whose existence was indifferent if not harmful to society.”¹⁹¹⁴

The satirists were not unaware that the root of all evil was money.

The whole of the Roman Empire in its decline was dominated by a blind lust for gold....Many attempts were made to effect a radical cure....But it was all in vain....In the twinkling of an eye they [officials] would assemble a vast fortune by deceit and violence, only to waste their days in revelry and debauch, to parade their magnificent clothes and build grand palaces.¹⁹¹⁵

¹⁹⁰⁶ *ibid.*?

¹⁹⁰⁷ ?

¹⁹⁰⁸ Lucretius

¹⁹⁰⁹ Seneca

¹⁹¹⁰ Lucian

¹⁹¹¹ Sestio

¹⁹¹² Empictetus

¹⁹¹³ Friedlaner

¹⁹¹⁴ *ibid.*?

¹⁹¹⁵ ?

“Strangers reading this history may wonder that whenever the story refers to Rome there is nothing but seditions and whoredoms and vile deeds,” says Ammianus, but so it was in the fourth century.¹⁹¹⁶

Did not Christianity have the cure for this? It claimed to. But those who have gloried in the amazing—nay, miraculous parallel between the histories of Rome and the church are careful to ignore the equally striking parallel between their moral histories. In both “a moral force was the mainspring of the whole machine,”¹⁹¹⁷ and if pagan writers deplore the rapid failing of this force in Rome, the early fathers were far more terrible and specific in describing the moral decay of the church which they beheld. If Rome’s chance of becoming an organic society “was extinguished by her conquests,”¹⁹¹⁸ the conquests of the church had the same effect and the tremendous expansion of the third century was followed by the mad disorganization of the fourth. John Chrysostom describes with great clarity and at merciless length that mutual corruption by which “each element of the ecclesiastical compound was corrupting the others,” so that reform had become impossible.¹⁹¹⁹ If Rome turned to the philosophers for salvation, so did the church of the fourth century. If Rome condoned vice rather than correcting it for the sake of an appearance of peace the church did the very same thing, as Cyprian passionately declares.

But Christianity being what it was, it was impossible for it not to promise moral salvation to a world that would embrace it. Cyprian gives a vivid account of the collapse of civilization and the complete moral depravity of his own times, and insists, “this is not because we do not worship your gods, but because you do not worship our God.”¹⁹²⁰ Not only does Christianity hold the answer, it is just that lofty philosophy for which the world is looking: “we live in the spirit rather than in the flesh, conquering the infirmity of the body by the firmness of the mind,” which is the usual Stoic boast, and it is here boastfully used, since it parades the stock virtues of philosophy

¹⁹¹⁶ Ammianus

¹⁹¹⁷ ?

¹⁹¹⁸ ?

¹⁹¹⁹ John Chrysostom

¹⁹²⁰ Cyprian

before the world for public admiration.¹⁹²¹ “Origen had thought that such a conversion to Christianity would secure the permanence of the Empire,” says Bligh.¹⁹²² “All the evils by which the human race afflicts itself,” says Lactantius, “are the direct result of the unrighteous and impious worship of the gods.”¹⁹²³ Remove this one evil, he says, and you will have heaven on earth. Prudentius tells Symmachus that if the Christian religion alone existed all the problems of the day would be solved.¹⁹²⁴ The attitude was not peculiar to Christians, it was characteristic of the time immediately preceding the fall of Rome. Straub observes, “that everybody expected the solution of all political problems would be brought about solely by the right faith in the right God.”¹⁹²⁵ All violence, bloodshed and lust will disappear, Orosius declares as soon as only the Christian religion is left; the whole human race will thereby become a single community.¹⁹²⁶ This is shifting from dangerous ground taken by Prudentius to the extremely safe grounds that as long as one non-Christian remains in the world the church is not responsible for any of the wickedness in it! The apostolic fathers, repeatedly instructing their people to flee the world and its ways, represented a tradition of opposition to those vices which had brought about a general social calamity. Their prescription had been a sound one but their followers had not heeded it: they did the very thing they warned against—exploiting the name of Christ as a special mark of divinity for themselves while adopting all the vices and folly of the world. Ignatius tells the people to flee faction within the church exactly as the orators were combating it in the larger world.

But put to the test Christianity did not put an end to the evils of the time, which increased even faster under Christian than they had under pagan rule. By the time Christianity became the sovran cure for the empire it had long since lost its moral integrity. The Christians had long since ceased to be distinguished for the austerity of their lives as a group: a really moral Christian was a

¹⁹²¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹²² Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’,” 313. See PG XI, 1622

¹⁹²³ Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.8, in PL 6:575.

¹⁹²⁴ Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*

¹⁹²⁵ Straub

¹⁹²⁶ Orosius

nine-days wonder, even among the bishops. Speaking of Origen's assurance that conversion to Christianity would save the empire, Father Bligh laments, "Alas! things did not turn out that way. It takes time for the leaven to spread through so large a mass, and the conversion of Constantine had come too late....It was not until after the fall of Rome that the old culture and the new religion were finally fused into unity. Meanwhile, corruption and oppression continued unabated, and brought the tottering Empire to its fall."¹⁹²⁷ Granted Christianity did not actually cause the fall of the empire, as some have maintained, could not the wholesale Christianizing of officials have abated corruption and oppression? To say that one must wait until the last dissenter in the remotest corner of the world becomes a good Christian before the fruits of Christianity can appear is a feeble dodge that amounts to a confession of bankruptcy. Membership in the church did not induce people to bury their social differences but only intensified them, for political reformers used Christianity as a cloak for their operations, and it is now claimed that the Donatian trouble was not so much a revolution of religious fanatics as "the work of a spirit of independence which found in a deviated Christianity the best tool for affirming itself."¹⁹²⁸ Donatus and Parmenian were the heirs of the indomitable hatred of a Jurgurtha or a Tacfarinas, "which Christianity did not at all allay."¹⁹²⁹ Christianity did not quench the destroying lust for gold: "The opponents of Pope Damasus asserted that he had bought up the whole court, and, even if the story is not true, the mere fact that such rumors could be disseminated throws a lurid light on general conditions."¹⁹³⁰ Such conditions did not exist in the face of Christianity but as a part of it: it was a peculiar mark of the times, says Barkherot, that "one could be zealously religious and at the same time very immoral."¹⁹³¹ After the controversy between the Christian supporters of Damasus and Ursinus for the Bishopric of Rome in 366, 137 corpses were left in the Sicinian Basilica. During the late fourth century, when the people of the world were hesitating between Christianity and

¹⁹²⁷ Bligh, "The 'Edict of Milan'," 313.

¹⁹²⁸ ?

¹⁹²⁹ *ibid.*?

¹⁹³⁰ ?

¹⁹³¹ Barkherot

paganism, they rushed into a period of unparalleled moral degeneracy, says Buse.¹⁹³² In what condition were they then to make a godly choice? Clement of Alexandria has given us a terrible picture of the general situation in the church in the third century, and his report is borne out by Tertullian's declaration that "the old pure, true integrity of the early Christians was no more to be found in the church," but that glory is now being extinguished, and by those very ones who should before all strive to preserve it, namely the clergy.¹⁹³³ "Grant you," he says ironically, "that to have continence you must first have incontinence, and that fire is fought with fire....But the remedy is simply not there where the crime is indulged; and when the remedy is not there the crime will only get worse."¹⁹³⁴ The whole thing, he says, is that they want to sin without sinning. They want to eat their cake and have it. In the empire "the age of gold turned to rusty iron....The old security was gone forever."¹⁹³⁵ The chance of Christianity saving the day was spoiled when the leadership of the church was seized by the rich, and quickly secularized. The "unshakably orthodox" Montanist movement "rejected the authority of the urban bishops, modeled on the traditions of civil government," and supported an attempt to save the church from capture by the moneyed interest.¹⁹³⁶ But the movement failed, and the empire went its course.

When St. Augustine wishes to prove that the promises to the Jews have failed, he can point to the wide discrepancy between the claims of those people and their accomplishments: "How different were the actual accomplishments of the rule of Jerusalem from that which God had promised!"¹⁹³⁷ The promises regarding the son of David were in no wise fulfilled in Solomon, but rather in Christ. And how different were the apocalyptic promises of the fourth century church from its accomplishments! That same Chrysostom who was perfectly sure that the earthly paradise of the prophets had at last been achieved must note that Christian Romans surpass their

¹⁹³² Buse

¹⁹³³ Tertullian

¹⁹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹³⁵ *ibid.?*

¹⁹³⁶ ?

¹⁹³⁷ St. Augustine

pagan ancestors in immorality. Any chance of getting people to give up their sins, he says, is almost out of the question, since things have gone so far that if one becomes too stern in rebuking immorality the people will turn huffy and stay away from church. This is exactly the sort of thing one can expect when one has succeeded in converting the wicked world overnight—the achievement of which Chrysostom boasts so brashly. “Why, tell me,” he asks, “does one hear all this talk everywhere about fate? Why is everybody preferring astrology to reality? Why do some worship Tyche or mere chance—accident? Why do they think that everything is simply the result of chance?”¹⁹³⁸ He gives a livid description of the sex-crimes that had become everyday affairs of the clergy, and tells how their wickedness is matched only by their vanity. Their conversation, he says, is the sly talk of professional quacks, that is vulgar, mercenary, rubbish. They are loquacious and nasty; their costumes ingenious and eye-catching. The Christianizing of the *imperium* is actually an evil for the church, he says, for “whenever a pro-Christian emperor comes to the throne the Christians become more lax; while the anti-Christian emperor, then they shine and are seen to better advantage, with martyrs crowns and good works.”¹⁹³⁹

The disease of the church has gone so far, according to Basil, that the contagion has seized those who have been laboring conscientiously to be fair and just in everything: they too have finally given in and become corrupted, “so that today everybody has become like everybody else...applying himself with all zeal to getting the best of his neighbor. Everyone is busy testing the loyalty of everyone else, so that we all seem to be worse than insane. For while wild animals associate with their own species, we make the most savage war upon each other.”¹⁹⁴⁰ The church made a brave attempt to reform itself as well as the wicked world in the monastic movement, which Harnack describes specifically as an attempt to escape from the wickedness of the church—when the church became the world-church, one could no longer serve God properly unless he fled from it to the wilderness! “But these men were fain to confess that the sense of

¹⁹³⁸ John Chrysostom

¹⁹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴⁰ Basil

peace came upon them but rarely and for a moment. In its place came terrible fantasies...the aging world was enraptured with this refinement of enunciation, and with the wild dreams of the monks dwelling miserably in the desert.”¹⁹⁴¹ So their escape became anything but what it was meant to be. What do we see? “On the one side, a secular church...so knitted with the national life as to be indistinguishable from it...On the other, a monasticism without historic aims, and therefore without historic development.” All Monastics gave the Christian world, according to Harnack, was “an ugly varnish.” The converted barbarians outside the empire fell away everywhere. Theodore the Alan tells of the decay and passing away of Christianity among his people. “Alas! That weeds and rushes should overgrow the foundation of the apostles!” he cries, “and that the whole thing should utterly go up in flames!” The structure stands, but utterly “emptied of the spirit,” so that “the Alans are Christians in name only.”¹⁹⁴² But who were otherwise? In the times of the chansons de geste, a handful of clergy were still ruling over “the still reluctant world,” its hopes which had so often and so boastfully been put forth as accomplished facts remaining ever unfulfilled. The only difference between the Christians and the Moslems in the villages of the East was that “in many places, even, I would say the Christians are more degraded.”¹⁹⁴³

It will not be necessary to dwell at length upon the terrible corruption of the fourth and fifth centuries. The survival of ancient Christianity in the earth was only possible “only permanently possible if society underwent a radical change.”¹⁹⁴⁴ But it was infinitely easier to change its own ways than to change those of the world. The introduction of allegorical systems of interpreting texts made it possible to reconcile the Bible with Plato, not however by reading Plato allegorically and manipulating his text to make it agree with the Bible, but by applying those “aggressive” operations to the holy writ so that God “might be thought of as it is proper to think

¹⁹⁴¹ Harnack

¹⁹⁴² Theodore the Alan

¹⁹⁴³ ?

¹⁹⁴⁴ Is this quoted previously?

of him,”¹⁹⁴⁵ and the absurdities and “old wives tales” of literalism might not corrupt the pure intellectualism of the schools. In the same way, it was the pagan, not the Christian morality that held its own. Constantine undertook “ineffective prohibition of gladiatorial exhibitions and the abolition of crucifixion as a form of punishment, no doubt out of respect for the memory of Christ. With this tasteless expression of Christian sentiment,” says Cochrane, “may be compared the enactment which forbade the branding of human beings on the face because the face is made in the image of God,”—and not out of any consideration for human beings.¹⁹⁴⁶ “The new religion failed to check the process of social decay which was demoralizing and degrading the middle classes, while, at the same time, it transformed the free peasant into a serf...”¹⁹⁴⁷ From the fourth century on the Byzantine Empire “subsisted 1058 years in a state of premature and perpetual decay.”¹⁹⁴⁸ While the rulers “measured their greatness by the servile obedience of their people,” the people in their turn were “an inflammable material, allowing very trivial pretexts to moment the flame of commotion,” and spending their days in perpetual rioting.¹⁹⁴⁹ “It would take an Epimenides to clean up Rome,” says Amianus of conditions in 369 A.D., “so great is the vice and madness of the place.”¹⁹⁵⁰ We are simply fooling ourselves, writes Hilary, and “the perpetual cause of impiety is that while proclaiming seven fold our devotion to the apostolic faith we refuse to accept the evangelic faith: while we defend our impieties before the world we trick the ears of the simple by our deceptive words and gaudy eloquence.”¹⁹⁵¹ In a consolation to a sick friend, Basil describes the normal life of the times as one of jaded disillusionment, animated only by a silly and universal passion for “success.”¹⁹⁵² “Reverence for Augustine,” writes Father Bligh, “forbids me to say that his justification of persecution was wrong; but its fruits were evil in the

¹⁹⁴⁵ ?

¹⁹⁴⁶ Cochrane

¹⁹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴⁸ *ibid.?*

¹⁹⁴⁹ *ibid.?*

¹⁹⁵⁰ Amianus

¹⁹⁵¹ Hilary

¹⁹⁵² Basil

centuries which followed, and we may suspect that, if he had had as much experience to reflect upon as we have, Augustine would have reverted to his first opinion.”¹⁹⁵³ How little he understands the times!

“It is extremely difficult,” says Chrysostom commenting on conditions in his city of Antioch, “not to be a Sodomite today.” “Children,” he says,

are carefully trained in the social graces and seemly speech [for intellectual content had long since been eliminated by the educationists] while their minds are cesspools, from which we not only do not try to rescue them, but from which we refuse to let them escape! Would anyone dare to say that people living in such vice could possibly be saved? How is that? Because the very few who escape moral vice do not escape the ruinous passion for money and fame....Our people do not act like rational human beings at all, but like men in the dark who see and hear nothing, they boldly will do anything with complete unconcern for consequences. The fathers of such wild children overlook everything in silence and do absolutely nothing about it. Yet how they would carry one if a child of theirs were to be kidnapped!¹⁹⁵⁴

At the same time Julian tells how the people of Carthage spoiled their children, the only restraint on their incredibly immoral behavior being the Christian admonition at the beginning of the day “to do no wrong!”¹⁹⁵⁵ John Chrysostom can think of only one cure—to send the children to monasteries! In this he strongly supports Harnack’s contention that the monastery was primarily a means of escaping from the wicked Christian world. “What good,” John asks,

does it do to pay high salaries to teachers and raise up a host of experts when the actions of our society speak so much more loudly than their safe, conventional platitudes? A philosophy for the mind is as much harder than manipulating the jargon of education as doing is than speaking. Should we, then, teach more philosophy? But that is the very thing that has brought us to this condition by destroying all ultimate certainty!¹⁹⁵⁶

The old virtues went with that. It is the intellectuals, says John, who have turned the social order upside down. Now we need stern judges. But what good could they do? Have we not, he asks with a shudder, already passed the point of no return? Would not strict measures not simply throw everything into confusion? There is no limit to greed or vice, and they can only lead to revolution, war, private feuds, the ruination of cities, general bondage, murder and all the countless ills of

¹⁹⁵³ Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan,’” 309.

¹⁹⁵⁴ John Chrysostom

¹⁹⁵⁵ Julian

¹⁹⁵⁶ John Chrysostom

life, and when these come it is usually with plague, famine, earth-quake, and drought. After attending the shows—where the audience first to last is Christian—John says one feels like running right home and taking a bath. The boys all try to look like girls and the old men like boys. It turns ones stomach. “You cannot be a member of this congregation,” cries the zealous reformer, “and still attend the theaters. You cannot come in here like mad dogs, defiled all over, to the sacred table.”¹⁹⁵⁷ Should he be surprised then that he, the greatest orator of the age, spoke Sunday after Sunday, to empty walls? “The worst enemy of our society is the complete lack of integrity that has overtaken not only the ignorant magistrates but the general public as well.”¹⁹⁵⁸ When he was made Bishop of Constantinople he was shocked even after what he had seen in Antioch: the mad Sunday crowds amaze him. “How would we explain to a stranger,” he asks, “if he should come here and ask: ‘Is this the city of the apostles? Is this the Christ-loving community?’ There is nothing but rioting on this holy day. Is that to be borne? Is that to be tolerated? I shall not cease constantly talking on this theme and making myself a public nuisance to improve matters. Just three days ago we had a terrible flood—and today everyone is at the games rather than holding a litany!”¹⁹⁵⁹ Great evil comes from the unwillingness of the youth to marry young: shortage of money they say is the reason, and so they go into the military service and then into business and all the time they are unmarried. Shortage of money, alas, is the root of all evil.

The barbarian invasions were not the cause of ruin. Even in Gaul, where they were much the worst, “the ravages of Vandals and Huns were soon repaired, and the settlements of Visigoths and Burgudians did not seriously interfere with the habits of the cultivated Gallic aristocracy.”¹⁹⁶⁰ A dialogue by one Paulinus of circa 400 says that the real enemy is not the

¹⁹⁵⁷ John Chrysostom

¹⁹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶⁰ quoted in earlier chapter?

Sarmatian, Vandal and Alan but the interior *pestis* of sin.¹⁹⁶¹ Ambrose says the same: he saw people dying like flies during the famine only because their fellow-Christians in the cities, who had more than enough, would not share with them. The very peasants who raised the grain with which Rome was fed were locked outside the gates to starve by the Romans.¹⁹⁶² But it is the celebrated Salvian who pulls out all the stops on the wickedness of the times.

Wherever Salvian travels he finds the same conditions.

The church herself, who should strive to appease God in all things—what else does it do but arouse his anger? Except for a very few individuals who shun evil, what else is the whole congregation of Christians but the very dregs of vice?...For almost the whole body of the church has been reduced to such moral depravity that among all Christian people the standard of holiness is merely to be less sinful than others....They are usually planning fresh crimes in the very midst of their prayers and supplications. While men's voices do one thing, their hearts do another.¹⁹⁶³

All over the empire people are going over to the barbarians, escaping from the insecurity and depravity and oppression of Christian civilization, especially they do it to escape the crushing burden of taxation which is necessary to support the rich, who pay no taxes at all. In this Christian world the old pagan auspices and the pagan chickens are still going strong, and the games are as bloody and vicious as ever. He gives a correct psychological report on the lust and sadism of the spectacles, and the cheap and shallow arguments in their favor. "Christ's name seems now to be not a binding oath but a mere expletive."¹⁹⁶⁴ For example, "a short time ago I tried to get a man not to seize the last stitch of a poor debtor, but he said: 'I have made a vow to seize that man's property.' Consider then whether I should fail to accomplish what I have sworn by the name of Christ."¹⁹⁶⁵ This is the ultimate in that degradation of the name of Christ which the Lord and the apostles predicted. So far are people sunk in vice that that ancient rule no longer applies by which those who are corrupted by prosperity are corrected through adversity. "In what cases have the dwellers in our cities, who are licentious in prosperity, began to be chaste in adversity? Italy has

¹⁹⁶¹ Paulinas

¹⁹⁶² See Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum III:7*, in PL 16:167-169.

¹⁹⁶³ Salvian

¹⁹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

already been devastated by many disasters: have the vices of the Italians therefore ended? The barbarian's arms clashed about the walls of Cirta and Carthage while the Christian congregation of the city raved in the circuses and wantoned in the theater. While they are having their throats cut they continued to fornicate, etc. ¹⁹⁶⁶Treves was captured four times, but after each fresh disaster the morals of the city became not better but worse, until finally "that city could more easily exist without inhabitants than any of its citizens could do without crime!"¹⁹⁶⁷ Spain was as bad as Aquitaine and Africa was worse than either. A chaste man was simply not to be found in Africa. "The Roman people expires and it dies laughing. So gross is the immorality in the Roman cities that banished, crushed, and ruined people would not for a moment give up their usual vices. Is it any wonder that the Goths and Vandals mock us?"¹⁹⁶⁸ We think no matter how bad we are and how upright the barbarians are, God will always and necessarily save us instead of them, because we are we and they are barbarians. Speaking of Bordeaux, his native city, Salvian says, "To say nothing of immoral persons, who have turned the place into a huge house of ill fame, almost all the family ties in the city have been abolished. The men have give themselves up to complete licentiousness; every woman was treated like a harlot; you can imagine the lot of children and the mob."¹⁹⁶⁹ "Inhuman avarice, an evil characteristic of most of the Romans," drives them to "frauds, forgeries, perjuries," though the latter is "the special department of the people of Africa."¹⁹⁷⁰ All nations have some good characteristics, "but among the people of Africa practically without exception there is nothing but evil," they do however, specialize in certain vices: impurity and blasphemy.¹⁹⁷¹ Africa has always seethed with the firs of fornication: "It is as unusual and rare for an African not to be unchaste as it is for him not to be an



¹⁹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷¹ *ibid.*

African.”¹⁹⁷² Readers of St. Augustine will know that this appalling statement is no exaggeration—Augustine himself was a typical African. St. Augustine’s city, Carthage, is “a sinkpot of lust and fornication.”¹⁹⁷³ The church there, says Salvian, is “completely under the care of the priests and clergy, whom I prefer not to discuss....You could scarcely find one chaste man among thousands, if you searched most diligently, even in the church.”¹⁹⁷⁴ They have surpassed the Romans in the only field of expertise left open to them—that of lust. And to surpass the Romans in that was no mean accomplishment. That monasticism was an escape from the Christian community is borne out by Salvian’s description of how “whenever a servant of God from the monasteries of Egypt or the sacred places of Jerusalem or the holy retreats of the desert came into Carthage...as soon as he appeared to the people, he met with contumely; sacrilege, and curses...so that a man uninformed and looking one would think that some strange and unheard-of monster was being expelled from the city.”¹⁹⁷⁵ In Christian Carthage the servants of God are scarcely allowed to appear in the streets and public squares without mockery and cursing. Certain men think that this was not persecution because they were not actually put to death, a very popular argument against the Donatists who claimed they were being persecuted when they were driven from their homes. It cost the monk Telemachus his life at the hands of a Christian mob to put an end to bloody games. “The sight of a spectacle drives out morality and invites the most trifling contentions; it is the wrecker of honorable conduct, the ever-flowing spring of squabble, a thing which antiquity commences as a matter of religion, but which a quarrelsome posterity has turned into a sport.”¹⁹⁷⁶ Thus Cassiodorus, noting that the Christian spectacles are more degenerate than the pagan. The circus factions were never so wild and abandoned as when the rival members were all Christians. Theological fine points became the pretext for the biggest and noisiest and bloodiest mob-fights yet; Egypt, Alexandria, Constantinople, all went wild over

¹⁹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷³ *ibid.?*

¹⁹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷⁶ Cassiodorus

pious rowdyism. Rome is no place for a monk, says Jerome of the city he adores, “either we offend people by failing to greet them, or we fail to see them and are accused of pride. We must repay visits, and occupy gilded positions in the midst of the murderous tongues of ministers. Christ’s villa, on the other hand, is a place of rustic quiet.”¹⁹⁷⁷ Here the monastery is a country house for dignified and quiet retreat, and monasticism simply continues the well-established custom of intellectually minded Romans, to withdraw to such places for philosophical contemplation. That is all Augustine’s retreat in Cassiciacum was, but it laid the foundations of Western Theology.

After the barbarians struck, “the crowds that so lately fled before the sword of the barbarian were soon recalled by the hope of plenty and pleasure....In less than seven years the vestiges of the Gothic invasion were almost obliterated.”¹⁹⁷⁸ When Attila finally withdrew from threatening the people of Venice, hard on his heels came Christian Pippin whose actions exactly resembled those of Attila in every detail.

When the church went the way of the world it was not hard in the name of broad-mindedness to make every possible concession to the weakness of men. Novatus, campaigning for a return to the ancient simplicity and integrity of Christian morals was accused of being “unmerciful and hard,” and what was still worse, of bucking the opinions of “the most populous churches,” for whatever the largest number wanted must be right. This was the moral corollary of the theory that the largest of many competing churches must always necessarily be the true one. If public opinion controlled the policy of the church, it was natural that public opinion should not bow to the scriptures but the other way around. “Parents often teach their children the very opposite of what discipline taught by the gospel” says Chrysostom.¹⁹⁷⁹ The most shocking sexual aberrations have become general, and the worst of it is “nobody worries, no one is alarmed in the least, nobody is embarrassed, nobody blushes, but everybody shrugs it off with a laugh and

¹⁹⁷⁷ Jerome

¹⁹⁷⁸ ?

¹⁹⁷⁹ John Chrysostom

considers as idiots those who would check it.”¹⁹⁸⁰ It had become the popular practice to defer baptism to the hour of death, and thus enjoy a life of sin with a perfect guarantee of heaven to follow. The practice was recommended by the pious Monica to her son Augustine. This business of eating one’s cake and having it was the obsession of the age. Everyone in Constantinople was utterly shocked at the sight of a woman walking through the market place, yet at the games they sat bare-headed in the midst of the crowd. Everywhere, says Jerome, one hears fervid professions of virginity, while what one sees everywhere is immorality. The old pagan Romans, he says, were properly sobered by the chastening hand of God, but not so the Christian Romans!¹⁹⁸¹ And could anything be more thoroughly Roman and more thoroughly degenerate than James’ Letter to Innocent? In the Apocrypha we read of an old man who after 74 years of debauchery entered his usual locale, the town brothel, with a copy of the gospel on his person: “Depart, old man, depart,” screams the madame, “thou art an angel of God, touch me not, nor approach me, for I see in thee a great mystery.”¹⁹⁸² For the old man was actually bearing the deposited wisdom of an apostle in a document which automatically imparted angelic perfection regardless of the life of the bearer. This is only slightly more absurd than the claims of Optatus and Lucifer of Clarius. Alföldi decided that the influence of the Christians on the legislation of Constantine “is considerably weaker than one would have supposed.”¹⁹⁸³ That is because of the extreme cruelty and lack of humanity in that legislation, which cannot be the product of Christian influence. Why not? Does not the legislation rather prove that the Christians were cruel and inhuman, or must it be made to agree with preconceptions of what the Christians should have been? IF all other things did not agree with the nature of that lawgiving one might suspect something was wrong. But if the evidence leads us to conclude that Christian influence was behind the laws we must face the facts, and not say that cannot have been, since Christians are too nice for that. From the third century

¹⁹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸¹ Jerome

¹⁹⁸² Apocrypha

¹⁹⁸³ Alföldi

Christianity spread by mass conversions, which as has often been pointed out, is no conversion at all. “What we call abuses or superstitions in the medieval church,” says Powicke, “were part of the price paid for, not obstacles to, its universality. . . . The church is constantly hastening after the saints, so that in learning from them it may also control them.”¹⁹⁸⁴ How easily a pious rhetorical turn can convert a shallow cynicism into a wistful paradox. Powicke tells us plainly that the church sold out, and then smilingly assures us that it had to if it was to become popular; he tells us that the church wants to be holy, but it also wants to be a warm bed for all humanity just as it is.¹⁹⁸⁵ This is now explained as

the mystery of the church. . . in so far as Jesus Christ is its Lord it is the guarantor of the Spirit and the promises of the kingdom; and in so far as it is incarnated in the present world, it is an assembly of sinful men; astonishing mélange of grandeur and misery. Her misery is our misery. . . the misery of a world that is not yet saved except only in hope, and lives, fights, suffers, and hopes under the sign of the patience of God.¹⁹⁸⁶

Allowed such latitude of interpretation, any church can claim to be the Church of Christ and refuse to accept the slightest responsibility for being morally above average, on the grounds, for sooth, that its members are human.

¹⁹⁸⁴ Powicke

¹⁹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

MISGIVINGS (344-380) (Section 19)

Having joyfully identified the victorious empire with the victorious church, the doctors predicted that one would help the other to inevitable success. Prudentius boldly put forth the emperor's success in defending Rome against the barbarians as the sure test of the Christian religion which he represented.¹⁹⁸⁷ Accordingly, when Rome fell it was especially the Christians who suffered from the shock, since the course of events greatly weakened their confidence in their cause, and the pagans could rightly accuse them of ruining the empire since the Christians themselves had accepted the challenge to make good and suggested the test of success as the surest proof of divinity. "Christianity has now been on earth for about 300 years," Arnobius announces, "They have been good years for the empire: a time of expansion and prosperity."¹⁹⁸⁸ Though he claims the Christians cannot be blamed for any adverse turn of fortunes (since in all the wars Rome has been waging there have been Christians on both sides!), still he insists that Christianity must take the credit for the successes of Roman arms. He also conveniently forgets that during almost the whole of that Golden Age the Romans had been strongly opposing Christianity and worshipping idols. All the fathers of the time have to answer the charge, which soon becomes monotonous: "after the Christian people began to be in the earth, the whole world began to perish and fall under many types of evil."¹⁹⁸⁹ Arnobius' answer is: "I would not deny that this accusation is perfectly valid...if it can only be shown that we are the cause."¹⁹⁹⁰ The mere coincidence of the birth of Christ with the birth of the empire established a miraculous causal relationship between the two; but the coincidence of Christian influence with imperial disaster proves nothing! Moreover, Arnobius protests that the gloomy picture is greatly exaggerated: nature is behaving rather well; business is about normal; true, there are catastrophes and disasters in many places, but when were there not? When was the human race immune to

¹⁹⁸⁷ Prudentius

¹⁹⁸⁸ Arnobius

¹⁹⁸⁹ Is this an actual quotation?

¹⁹⁹⁰ Arnobius

famine, frost, etc? he asks. This is the very type of argument that Augustine uses in *The City of God*, and the best it can hope to do is to demonstrate that things are not much worse under Christian rule than they were under pagan. But how does that suit with the recent and noisy Christian boasts that if only the church had its way heaven on earth would become a reality, and the confident assurance as soon as an emperor favored the Christian cause that the Golden Age had actually arrived? Had not the Christian apologists loudly insisted that the only obstacle to a perfect world was the refusal of the world to accept their religion? “After Christ came into the world,” says Arnobius, “not only did the fury not increase but in most cases actually diminished.”¹⁹⁹¹ They time the great prosperity of the empire with the presence of Christ and the apostles on earth, carefully omitting to note that at that time the empire was thoroughly pagan. Why don’t your gods help you? Lactantius taunts the pagans in their litanies, explaining that he allows Christians to suffer for special reasons, especially to increase their numbers by impressing the curious.¹⁹⁹² Eusebius is sure that the great plague in Armenia was God’s punishment on a pagan emperor:¹⁹⁹³ though Armenia was then a Christian country and it was especially the Christians who suffered! To the Romans who note that the catastrophes have followed directly everywhere upon the neglect of the imperial cult Ambrose replies: did not they occur also when all the world was pagan? It has not been many years, he points out, since pagan temple rites have been abolished: why have the gods waited so long to be avenged?¹⁹⁹⁴ This is a poor answer to the question, why has the church waited so long to give us a Golden Age, but the thing to note is that both Christians and pagans are playing the same game: each asking identical questions of each others’ gods, and giving identical answers to explain the laxity of their own. How different are the promises of the Jews to their fulfillment! says Augustine, and in this lack of fulfillment he sees

¹⁹⁹¹ Arnobius

¹⁹⁹² See Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 5.13, in *PL* 6:589-593.

¹⁹⁹³ Eusebius

¹⁹⁹⁴ Ambrose

sure proof of misplaced confidence.¹⁹⁹⁵ But does not that rule hold of the Christians? Augustine found no clear satisfactory answer. How hopelessly confused and identified the two sides are in a single mood, tradition and method of argumentation may be seen from Eusebius' solemn assurance that when Constantine persuaded the Egyptians to give up their silly superstitions the Nile in response miraculously rose more generously than it had before.¹⁹⁹⁶ One of the silliest Egyptian superstitions was that the god-king made the Nile to rise: when the Nile rose for the Christians it was a miracle; when it rose for the pagans it was a silly superstition.

Though they naturally put up a brave front, the Christians were severely jolted by the turn of events at the end of the fourth century. Histories are prone to mention only one of the great shocks that jarred the church in the fourth century: the unexpected barbarian victory over Christian emperors; but the shock that preceded it was actually worse: the great conventions of bishop which the emperor called to settle violent and bloody disagreements based ostensibly on doctrinal issues but in reality serving as a facade to a relentless struggle for power among the churches, came as a shock of disillusionment to Christians everywhere; it was a shock from which the church never recovered. It was the councils of the fourth and fifth centuries that finished off any lingering belief that the church was uniquely other-worldly in its nature and left an undertone of cynicism which haunts all the Middle Ages. Before treating this let us consider the minor shock, that administered by the smashing military successes of the heathen against the armies of God.

When Rome fell in 406 Christians everywhere asked, "How does it happen that God sends such plagues specifically in a Christian age? How could the city fall in which Peter and Paul were buried and where the relics of so many martyrs were worshipped?"¹⁹⁹⁷ The obvious answer, was that relics are plainly of no avail—had not the apostolic fathers repeated the refrain: past virtues and sufferings will profit you nothing, unless matched by present ones? But that went

¹⁹⁹⁵ Augustine

¹⁹⁹⁶ Eusebius

¹⁹⁹⁷ Is this an actual quotation?

against the whole trend of thought that had been patiently built up for a generation: “How was it possible that the dream of the eternal survival of the kingdom of peace, that seemed to be announced by the holy writ itself, could have been so abruptly destroyed?”¹⁹⁹⁸ It was not in the logic of the thing. Jerome is stunned and incredulous: “who ever would have believed it?” he cries. “For the last twenty years, Roman blood has been shed from Constantinople to Julian Alps...the Goths, Sarmatians, Quadi, Alans, Huns, Vandals, the Marcomans devastate, destroy, and plunder,” and it is the Roman Christian world that suffers.¹⁹⁹⁹ Jerome had insisted that the two were identical, and in disaster the rule still holds—to attack Rome is to attack Christianity, “Churches are torn down, horses are stabled at their altars, the relics of the martyrs are dug up.”²⁰⁰⁰ To express his sorrow the saint then aptly quoted not the Bible but Virgil (*Aeneid* 2), with the comment: “The Roman world falls, and yet we still hold our heads high. What do you think not of the spirit of Corinth, Athens, Sparta,” etc?²⁰⁰¹ Here the Christian world is listed by Jerome among the heroic defenders of western civilization against the Asiatic barbarians: Christian civilization is Western civilization. Everywhere the fall of Rome was recognized as the “sign of disaster which was at first interpreted by all contemporaries as the chilling signal of general collapse.”²⁰⁰² The Eternal City, mother of men and gods, queen of the earth, etc. etc. had fallen. Christians and pagans at first were extremely reluctant to believe that Rome was actually beaten. Rome was to conquer, civilize, and Christianize the world; that was the Christian program in the fourth century, and it gave the Christians “a violent aversion for barbarians: Rome’s enemies were necessarily their enemies.”²⁰⁰³

But the earlier shock to thinking and non-thinking Christians alike was the first and immediate reaction of the church upon coming to power: it was terribly disillusioning—it seemed

¹⁹⁹⁸ ??

¹⁹⁹⁹ Jerome

²⁰⁰⁰ Jerome

²⁰⁰¹ *ibid.* (quoting *Aen.2*)

²⁰⁰² ??

²⁰⁰³ ??

that the churchmen could hardly wait to get at each others' throats. Just before Jerome cried out "who would have thought it?" as he saw Christian Rome bow before the barbarians, John Chrysostom used the same phrase in another connection: "how can such an overthrow possibly have occurred?" he asks in bewilderment, "everybody seems to be stark raving mad, and God lets it go on! What has happened? What is wrong?"²⁰⁰⁴ What happened when the church came to its own was not the bursting forth of a flower, but, in Nazarius' words, it was like the bursting of an abscess in which poisons had been building up for the climax.²⁰⁰⁵ The vast, endless, bloody tumults that filled all the great Christian cities of the world were Christian performances—the pagans stood by and held their sides with laughter as those who had so long depicted themselves in pathetic terms as a persecuted minority (even when their numbers were overwhelming), as long as the emperor was on the other side, now with the emperor on their side proceeded to tear each other to bits. What have we got, cried Proclus, "after all that long struggle, after those endless controversies, ten thousand books written against errors... what comes of it all? Nothing! All this has only filled us with confusion and rioting: not only us the clergy but the Christian multitudes, who after all they have been told, can't even hold a church festival without rioting!"²⁰⁰⁶ A Byzantine hymn shows that the mobs considered their bishops as throwing rocks at each other in the synods, just as they did in the streets.²⁰⁰⁷ One can imagine how Constantine reacted to this. Just when that emperor had brought a Golden Age to the earth, says Eusebius, "and by grace of God bestowed upon the church the most shining and profoundest peace," hell suddenly broke loose among the Christians themselves.²⁰⁰⁸ "Just when I had restored pristine peace and unity to all the world!" cried the emperor and he wrote imploringly to the Christian bishops and their congregations to stop fighting: "give me back my peaceful days and quiet nights!"²⁰⁰⁹ But the

²⁰⁰⁴ John Chrysostom

²⁰⁰⁵ Nazarius

²⁰⁰⁶ Proclus

²⁰⁰⁷ Byzantine Hymn

²⁰⁰⁸ Eusebius

²⁰⁰⁹ Also from Eusebius?

people of God hearkened not. Within a matter of weeks after their glorious liberation, their entire Christian community from one end of the empire to the other, was in riotous uproar. “Since that day,” says Eusebius, “to the present time the churches have been devastated and the whole world plagued with discord.”²⁰¹⁰ In vain did the emperor command all to lay aside their differences and agree; in vain did he celebrate with explosive splendor the assured triumph of each new peace-bringing edict. No sooner was the ink dry on the imperial letters announcing the final and definitive triumph, by imperial order, of all right over all wrong than the emperor would take to his bed with nervous headaches while the couriers poured in from all directions announcing new and brilliant riots in all the great Christian communities. The whole thing became a farce, the jokes went the rounds in the marketplace and rocked the audiences at the theaters. “For shame!” the emperor cries to the feuding bishops, “pagan philosophers can disagree like gentlemen, why can’t you, who are supposed to be a holy brotherhood?”²⁰¹¹ But for all Constantine’s efforts, the discord in the church only spread and grew hotter. At Nicaea as soon as the emperor gave his eloquent opening speech pleading for tolerance and brotherhood, and turned the floor over to the bishops the godly assembly became a madhouse.

The career of Athanasius is a good index to the spiritual state of the church. The flights, hidings, deposings, reinstallations, passionate polemics, shrewd politics, daring maneuvers, clever psychological tricks, power politics, threats, banishments, proscriptions—all were organic in the society of bishops that made up the backbone of the Christian church. The detailed accounts of the Nicene Council that formulated the faith of the Christian world for all time—as if the scriptures had overlooked that—would be a splendid farce if the issues and results had not been so grave. [Let us hear how it would sound in the mouth of a news-caster, reporting the world-shaking developments from day to day.]

²⁰¹⁰ Eusebius

²⁰¹¹ Constantine (From Eusebius?)

The church had embraced the emperor unmindful that there would soon come emperors who did not always think as the churchmen wanted them to. Constantius was maddening: he would not persecute, he refused to be mean or intolerant, the men of God with their vilest epithets could not even get him to scowl! But he listened to arguments on the other side! And with that his everlasting mild, tolerant smirk; it was not to be borne; it was worse than any persecution. Hilary, Optatus, and Ambrose, the biggest churchmen of their day, struggled in purple rage, but the emperor kept his temper and killed them with exasperation. It was not the sort of a contest conducive to spirituality.

For unlimited gloom and grim foreboding, it would be hard to surpass Saint Basil's report on the present state of the church. "With what shall we compare the church?" he begins.

It is like a naval battle during which there is a lull; at the present moment the experienced fighters are viewing each other with hatred and calculating suspicion; and now I see disaster approaching from either direction. The fleet is in violent turmoil and at the same time enveloped in a dense fog, so that no one can tell his friends from his foes or recognize the military ensigns... There is terrible disorder and confusion because people despair of coming through alive yet feel no limitations of any kind upon what they are free to do. Add to this the paralyzing disease of personal ambition to shine which is so effective that even as a ship is subsiding for its plunge to the bottom those aboard it will not desist for a moment from their fierce wrangling for priority. The enemy is closing in on all sides; the sea and the winds become violent so that the ships are dashed against each other and destroyed; many flee the scene, others kill each other off by mutual treachery—sedition which takes the form both of individual treason and group conflicts. All is noise and uproar, so that no one can tell what the captain or pilot of a ship is trying to say—leadership has become impossible.²⁰¹²

Well, asks Basil,

is not this pitching and rolling of the churches worse than any storm at sea? By it the boundaries set by the fathers and the whole foundation they laid and even the fortress of dogma itself are shaken to the bottom. Everything totters and shakes from top to bottom reeling about upon a rotten foundation. We fall upon each other only to be distracted when others fall upon us. If your enemy does not hit you first, your ally does. This much we do have in common, that we all hate each other. It is all against all. And on top of all that the crew members are so badly distinguished that they are often killed by their allies, others by their enemies, and still others by the sheer incompetence of their leaders.²⁰¹³

What is to be done about it? Nothing much can be done according to Basil:

²⁰¹² Basil, (present state of the church?)

²⁰¹³ *ibid.*

In these days we must keep quiet; love has withdrawn, no longer seeking its own, feeling that in the end in spite of all the misfortunes of time and event she will conquer. Let us take an example from the boys in the fiery furnace and each bear his own burden in secret; heed not the multitude as you stand all alone in the fiery furnace singing your hymns. Do not fear the darkening clouds...do not weaken and turn against the Holy Spirit as all the rest have done. Some use the Arian controversy to stir up much violence to gain and conceal their crooked private ends. The war knows no truce...and so the unbelieving laugh...the faith becomes hesitant and minds fall into ignorance because of clever imitations of the truth. While we take thought for our own security and give not a thought to our neighbor, utterly failing to realize that the misfortunes of the whole society will destroy every single individual in it, we accordingly see the churches deserted and betrayed. Instead of bringing the brethren together for general discussion of the problems of the church, as in the good old days, letters now fly from city to city, each one treating its neighbor with suspicion.²⁰¹⁴

I am as sad as anyone that without the least provocation the greatest of the churches have fallen out of their ancient bonds of brotherhood—anything like an overall action in the church is now out of the question.²⁰¹⁵ PG 32, 756.

Everything is well in the world except one thing, says Gregory the Theologian, and that is the constant divisions between the churches. He says he cannot think of anything “but the common suffering of the churches, which unless they are moved at once by a zeal for reform, shall presently be overwhelmed by completely hopeless situation.”²⁰¹⁶ Anarchy is the only word to describe the state of things in Julian’s time: but it was worse under Christian emperors. Still it is not to the emperor that one must turn for the explanation of the complete unbalance of the times: it was the internal corruption, the gross private immorality of the Christians, that lay at the root of the matter. “The sober and simple are held in contempt,” says John Chrysostom, “everyone worships success, and success means to be rich, to have fine things, to help yourself to what you want and to do whatever you want to: to do that is to ‘shine and be a success.’”²⁰¹⁷ These are the things, John notes, that people desire who do not believe in God. In the times in which we live it is not often apparent that God governs the universe. Manners and religion are overthrown by a sort of gigantic open conspiracy in which everyone conspires to weaken his

²⁰¹⁴ *ibid.*, PG 32, 701

²⁰¹⁵ *ibid.*, PG 32, 756

²⁰¹⁶ Gregory the Theologian, PG 37, 239.

²⁰¹⁷ John Chrysostom

neighbor's faith. The only cure John can see is escape to the desert! He recommends monasticism as a refuge from the state of the church. "Is this to be tolerated? Is this to be borne?" The people are all deserting the church for the shows, "and that after a long course of sermons, and after so much teaching, they go off and leave us for races and games, filling the entire city with disorder, yelling, laughter, etc. While I sit at home and wince with renewed pain every time I hear another shout from the circus."²⁰¹⁸ "Many people come to church only once a year, some come twice, some more. But the times is not the important thing: in what state do they come? They anoint themselves with holy unguents and immediately leave the church to roll in filth. They are all full of dirty words and thoughts."²⁰¹⁹

Church histories have maintained a careful silence on the subject of the general effect of the fourth and fifth century councils upon the condition of faith in the church. From 325 on the influence of the councils on faith was an adverse one. The great Eusebius himself was one of the recalcitrants at Nicaea: he seriously doubted the authority of the council to employ non-Christian terminology as a solution to doctrinal difficulties, and in the end it was not any apostolic authority which brought him around to an agreement—in fact it never occurs to him to mention such authority—but the authority of the emperor. He clearly and repeatedly states that it is specifically because the God-beloved emperor gave his approval that he feels justified in following. Of all the men who ever lived Constantine alone was qualified to call such a meetings, says Eusebius; God chose him as his only co-worker in the great enterprise.²⁰²⁰ Not since the time of the apostles had there been a general assembly of the church. Why not? Because, says Eusebius, no one had had the authority to call such a meeting.²⁰²¹ The supreme authority of the emperor at Nicaea, the one thing which induced Eusebius to accept the judgments of the council as authoritative, is to our eyes the one thing which would make it most suspect. It is a singular commentary on the extreme

²⁰¹⁸ John Chrysostom, PG 56, 263

²⁰¹⁹ John Chrysostom

²⁰²⁰ Eusebius

²⁰²¹ *ibid.*

vagueness of idea of a general authority in the church at the time. When the emperor finally took hold all were immensely relieved to have found a general authority in the church, and “there was no opposition on the grounds of theory.”²⁰²² But the emperor himself was at first by no means clear where he stood in the matter. He begged the bishops to settle their differences like brethren among themselves without his intervention; he plainly indicated that he did not want the job, that he was perfectly willing to go along with whatever the bishops could agree on, and it was only when they proved their total incapacity to agree that he stepped in. In his closing speech at Nicaea Constantine said, “among the bishops it is for God alone to judge who are the greater and who the lesser.”²⁰²³ But this leaves everything up in the air. If shortly after “it did not occur to Athanasius that he might better his fortunes by an appeal to Rome,”²⁰²⁴ it is far more significant that it did not occur to Constantine—born and raised in the West of Latin-speaking Christian parents—that in the primacy of Rome he might have a solution to the maddening question, of who should be running the church. Had Rome had any primacy at all Constantine would have been the first to exploit it, and no voice would have been raised in opposition once he had given his open support. But he did not even appeal to Rome in an experimental way, for “the papacy had not yet come into existence,” and “in the place which it did not yet occupy the state installed itself,” reluctantly but without any alternative.²⁰²⁵ Jovian sent Athanasius back to Egypt with instructions to “govern the churches and the people of that country as he might see fit,” and the saint complied.²⁰²⁶ But is such the nature of apostolic authority? It was rather a council of desperation, and expediency and emergency are the inspiration of Athanasius’ writings on authority. “Bestir yourselves,” he writes in an encyclical letter, “lest the faith of the church be utterly destroyed. For there is great danger of it if God does not quickly correct things through you.”²⁰²⁷ Where is the unshakeable church?

²⁰²² Eusebius?

²⁰²³ Eusebius?

²⁰²⁴ Eusebius?

²⁰²⁵ Eusebius?

²⁰²⁶ Athanasius?

²⁰²⁷ Athanasius

Then Athanasius treats a subject on which all were expressing concern: what is the business of a council if not to change and innovate, and what happens to the old faith in that case—does the perfect gospel of Christ need change and improvement? “The canons and **Tyroi** of the church are not new,” says he, “but have been handed down from our fathers well and without alteration. Neither is what is being done now the beginning of the faith, but it comes from the Lord through the disciples down to us. Arise, lest these ancient customs be lost!”²⁰²⁸ Though he assures us that there is no need to fear that the traditions of the real church have been lost, he warns us plainly that they can be. Here he is dealing with the natural charge—it was far more than a mere suspicion—that the new statement of church doctrine by the councils really amounted to the beginning of a new doctrine. If the doctrine were not new, why did it need new formulation in strange technical words not found in the Bible? Is not the scripture, the complete revelation, capable of expressing its own doctrines? Athanasius himself expresses the misgivings that naturally arise from contemplating the activities of an ecumenical council: “What is left to the **cath**olic church to teach of salvation if now they make investigations into the faith, and set up a present-day authority to issue official interpretations of what has already been said?”²⁰²⁹ He tells of one who made a request for a clear statement of doctrine and had to wait over a year for an answer, and the answer was not “Thus we believe,” but “thus has the catholic faith been officially interpreted.”²⁰³⁰ And why do church officials rush so officiously about the empire looking for a doctrine? And why do “the so-called clergy dash back and forth trying to find out how they should believe about our Lord Jesus Christ? If they had been believing all along, they wouldn’t possibly be searching now for something they don’t have?”²⁰³¹ Everyone is laughing at us, he says, and saying ‘These Christians don’t know what to think of Christ!’ which of course weakens

²⁰²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰²⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰³⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰³¹ Athanasius?

our authority.²⁰³² “What is the use of all these synods?” he asks, “since one at Nicaea settled everything?”²⁰³³ “In vain do they dash hither and yon under the pretext that synods are necessary to settle important matters of doctrine. For the holy scriptures are sufficient for all that.”²⁰³⁴ He never says, interestingly, that these synods are illegal or unauthorized—his one objection is they are unnecessary.

We contradict those who were before us, depart from the traditions of our fathers, and think we must hold a synod. Then we are seized by misgivings that if we come together and simply agree our diligence will be wasted; so we decide that the synod ought to be divided into two groups so we can vote, and so we get the emperor’s support and nullify the acts of Nicaea which we are pretending to be clarifying and simplifying.²⁰³⁵

Could one ask for a better description of the state of the mind in which the creeds of Christendom have been hammered out—the zeal of the busy, self-important committee-men; the fussy, fuzzy preoccupation with procedure, the urge to hold meetings come what may. “All these synods are unnecessary,” he repeats (not illegitimate!—apparently no one knew just what their legal status was), “and they are unnecessary because we have the scripture [again—not because we have a See of Rome to settle our problems of doctrine]; and if the scripture is the subject of debate in the synods, we have the writings of the fathers. The men at Nicaea were not unmindful of this. As for these other synods, they simply don’t make sense, and they never get anywhere.”²⁰³⁶ One waits in vain for the definitive and final authority in doctrinal disputes. Is not the claim of Rome that the whole purpose of the *prima sedes* is “to settle the more important doctrinal issues?”²⁰³⁷ Surely Athanasius had spent enough time in Rome to know that synods are unnecessary where such a directing power exists. Apparently nobody ever told him about the powers of the supreme Pontiff in these matters.

²⁰³² Athanasius

²⁰³³ *ibid.*

²⁰³⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰³⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰³⁶ Athanasius

²⁰³⁷ ??

It was not only the experts who were perplexed and dubious, however, and it was not only the post-Nicaean councils that gave pause. The great word *ousia* put forth at holy Nice as the key to that solution which Athanasius regards as absolutely final, simply scandalized the common people. According to that authority: they did not understand it “because it was not contained in the scriptures,” and in the end it had to be dropped so completely “that not the faintest memory of *ousia* as referring to God should remain, since the holy scriptures never once refer to *ousia* when speaking of the Father and the Son.”²⁰³⁸ Yet Eusebius had insisted that the word *homoousious*, proposed by the God-beloved emperor himself (though with a frank statement that he didn’t know what it meant) was the whole contribution of the mighty Nicene Council to Christian doctrine.²⁰³⁹ Is it surprising that people had doubts? “Who can call such people Christians,” cries Athanasius, “or how can we speak of faith among men who have neither reason nor writings that aren’t changing all the time, but to suit every circumstance are everlastingly being altered and reversed?”²⁰⁴⁰ He is equally impatient of the general public when it protests: “We can’t understand all those big words!” Is that any reason for rejecting them them? asks Athanasius. Our answer is an affirmative, but not his: if you can’t understand them yourselves, he advises, at least respect the holiness of the men who do understand them!²⁰⁴¹ Thereby he confirms all the worst aspects of the synods. There are, he informs us in a very significant writing *On Synods*, people in the church who repudiate the Nicene Council 100%, while there are others who accept everything but the key-word *homoousion*.²⁰⁴² To the latter, he says, one must talk as brothers to brothers; they can be brought around. His argument to them is, as Eusebius’s had been long before, strictly one of authority: “If anyone finds fault with those men who met at Nicaea for having used language foreign to those who lived before them, such charges amount to criticizing also the

²⁰³⁸ Athanasius

²⁰³⁹ Eusebius

²⁰⁴⁰ Athanasius

²⁰⁴¹ Athanasius

²⁰⁴² Athanasius, *On Synods*

synod of the seventy and all the other synods that have agreed with Nicaea!”²⁰⁴³ A feeble defense at best, but what we learn from it is that there was serious doubt among church-members as to whether the decisions of Nicaea were valid.

A writing attributed to Athanasius, but of doubtful origin, seeks to confirm the authority of the church by an attempt that is definitely a last resort. In a church divided almost equally between factions that claimed each to be the true old church while the other was an impostor, where could authority be located? As we have seen and Duchesne has pointed out, the later Roman solution apparently occurred to nobody outside of Rome. But this Pseudo-Athanasius comes up with another answer.

For the common people who cannot understand the mysteries and the deep things of the scripture the one way to teach the infallibility of the church is to tell them about the holy places. For from the beginning of his *parousia* Christ gave to his church holy places. If our opponents say that we hold these places by force we answer that though Palestine has often been occupied by barbarians Christ has never allowed his holy places to fall into the hands of heretics: Just recently they were seized but immediately handed over into the hands of the Catholic Church.²⁰⁴⁴

This is indeed a convenient rule to go by but it is the counsel of desperation, and would only be suggested to a church that was very unsure of itself.

“It is a thing equally deplorable and dangerous,” says Hilary in a famous passage, that there are as many creeds as opinions among men, as many doctrines and inclinations, and as many sources of blasphemy as there are faults among us; because we make creeds arbitrarily, and explain them arbitrarily. The *homoousion* is rejected, and received, and explained away by successive synods....Every year, nay every month, we make new creeds to describe invisible mysteries. We repent of what we have done, we defend those who repent, we anathemize those whom we defended. We condemn either the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other’s ruin.²⁰⁴⁵

Naturally efforts have been made by churchmen to discount or discredit this passage, yet there are far more damning ones in Hilary. To the emperor he writes:

The faith that has been corrupted—is reformation possible? The faith is sought after as if it were not something to be had. The faith has to be written down: as if it were not in our

²⁰⁴³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴⁴ Athanasius/Pseudo-Athanasius

²⁰⁴⁵ Hilary

hearts. Having been reborn by faith, we are now being taught the faith as if our rebirth was without the faith. We learn about Christ after we have been baptized, as if there could be any baptism at all without a knowledge of Christ.²⁰⁴⁶

The synods are described as a declaration of bankruptcy, a clear indication that we have lost the faith; a substitute to fill a vacuum. A formula was agreed on at Nicaea but what good did that do? Those who agreed to it immediately set to work undoing all the work of the council by subtle reinterpretations of the formula that was to solve all problems. “I will not doubt it because I do not understand it,” says Hilary, expressing the conventional view of those official pronouncements whose whole purpose was to make understandable to all what was not so before, “neither will I ever interpose with stupidity and impiety to set myself up as judge of thy divine nature. For my infirm reason and feeble speech can never judge thee!”²⁰⁴⁷ Exactly, and that was precisely the objection to the synods. Hilary’s conclusion to his twelve books on the Trinity is that it is *inenarrabilis*!²⁰⁴⁸ Answering the commonest misgiving about the Nicene council, he says, “There was nothing new in the Nicene Creed. And I ask why today that is torn up by the roots which was at that time piously accepted, now being impiously denied?”²⁰⁴⁹ Then he quotes the Nicene Creed, and says “The most holy synod does not here introduce some new prior substance.... Then why do we deny it? It is true the 80 bishops once rejected it; but 318 more? recently accepted it.”²⁰⁵⁰ This shows that people were by no means convinced by the Nicene Creed, that they pointed to the condemnation of the non-biblical terms by the earlier synod of Antioch, which specifically condemned the *homoousios*. Hilary then gives the strange reason for accepting the authority of the 318 bishops, that 318 is a holy number (Genesis 14:14). This arguing from coincidence of numbers was a favorite Gnostic trick; one only uses it when one’s other arguments are pretty weak, and yet it is appealed to repeatedly by the fathers as sure evidence for the authenticity of the Nicene decrees. The mystic number, incidentally, was only

²⁰⁴⁶ Hilary

²⁰⁴⁷ Hilary, (PL 10, 98)

²⁰⁴⁸ Hilary, (PL 10, 469).

²⁰⁴⁹ Hilary

²⁰⁵⁰ *ibid.*

arrived at by a bit of figure juggling—an easy art for an age that specialized in the manipulation of mystic numbers. But Hilary knows people are still unsatisfied: “But you say: ‘The ambiguity of *homoousios* seems rather scandalous to me.’ And another will say, ‘But what disturbs me is the bareness of the expression.’”²⁰⁵¹ These were serious charges.

Since the whole argument is about words, and since the whole controversy has to do with the subject of innovation, and since the occasion of the discussion is certain ambiguities, and since the dispute is about authority, and since we are quarreling about our investigations, and since the problem is to reach a consensus, and since each side is beginning to be anathema to the other, it would seem that hardly anybody belongs to Christ any more. We are blown about by winds of doctrine and as we teach we only become more upset, and the more we are taught the more we go astray.²⁰⁵²

What a commentary on the results of Nicaea: Here Hilary is discussing general conditions, he is not denouncing separatists and heretics nor arguing the case of a main church that is immune to the evils he describes, he is depicting as Basil was, the state of the church in his day. He says he is depicting “the faith of our miserable age,” as a whole. “Last year’s faith, what is the changeful stuff that it contains? First it silenced the *homoousion*, then it preached it, then excused it, then it condemned it. And where does that sort of thing lead to? To this, that neither we nor our predecessors were in a position to be sure of preserving any sacred thing intact.”²⁰⁵³

Thirty years later the main argument used by Chrysostom to support Nicaea was that it had been accepted without a murmur by a devout generation; and all through Christian times the faith of our fathers has been held up as simple, uniform, unvarying—a belief made possible by the careful neglect and the carefully wishful construction of church history. Nothing more frivolous or unstable could be imagined. “We ask what the faith is, as if we didn’t have any faith. We must write out the faith: as if it were not written in our hearts. Regenerated through faith, we now have it taught to us, as if our regeneration had been without faith. We learn about Christ after baptism—as if baptism could be anything in the first place without Christ!”²⁰⁵⁴

²⁰⁵¹ Hilary

²⁰⁵² Hilary, is this the same reference as 65?

²⁰⁵³ Hilary

²⁰⁵⁴ Hilary, see fn 60

We avoid believing that of Christ which he told us we should believe, so that we might establish a treacherous unity in the false name of a peace, and we rebel with new definitions of God against what we falsely call innovations, and in the name of the scriptures we deceitfully cite things that are not in the scriptures: changeful, prodigal, impious, changing established things, abolishing accepted doctrine, presuming irreligious things.²⁰⁵⁵

To see such policies in the time of the Reformation is not surprising, but we have Hilary's word for it that such was also the spirit of the great age of the councils. The authentic psychological and social picture can hardly have been Hilary's invention. "Among this shipwreck of the faith, there is only one safe port—to retain the first original faith confessed and comprehended at baptism....Not for that reason to condemn, however, as irreligious and impious what the synod of the fathers agreed upon, but only its misuse by human temerity for contradiction, to introduce dangerous innovation under the guise of emendation."²⁰⁵⁶ During the Council of Constantinople Hilary wrote to the emperor, "I only ask of you during the present synod...to deign to hear a few things from me out of the scriptures....You are seeking the faith, emperor: hear it, then, not from fresh documents, but from the books of God....Bear in mind that this is not a question of philosophy, but of the teaching of the gospel!"²⁰⁵⁷ Even the best synod, therefore, spoils the perfect simplicity of the Gospels, since "whatever has been the object of emendation is suspect"—"for every emendation is condemned by every subsequent emendation," and if a thing has been emended once, there is no reason why the process cannot be repeated, with the result that what you get "is not an emendation of an emendation, but rather what begins to be a damnation condemnation!"²⁰⁵⁸ Even when they are made with the best intention and actually effect an improvement, "emendations that are not indispensable can be the beginning of perversity": "Why do you condemn your own work? The apostle preached one faith and one baptism....For who condemns the faith by emending it, is really admitting that it was a faith of damnation; for if your faith is supplanted [abolished] by another, in turn that one will be

²⁰⁵⁵ Hilary

²⁰⁵⁶ Hilary?

²⁰⁵⁷ Hilary

²⁰⁵⁸ Hilary

abolished by another.”²⁰⁵⁹ These arguments are sound when we are dealing not with man-made rules and doctrine but with absolutes handed down from heaven—when men begin to edit and revise the damage is done: this condemns all synods, no matter how lofty their intentions.

A very grave result of the great synods was that they made the gospel a creature of popular opinion, each side naturally seeking the greatest public support, that side invariably prevailing which got it. The church, says Hilary, now “places great weight in the importance of the people who belong to it,”²⁰⁶⁰ whereas what consecrated the church in the first place was the terror of persecution. “She drives out the *sacerdotes* [referring again to the monastic movement, here specifically described as the driving out of holy people by the church] who were originally propagated by fugitive *sacerdotes*.”²⁰⁶¹ “She glories in being sought after by the world, who [formerly] could not belong to Christ unless the world hated her. This contrast between the church that was once transmitted to us but has now been lost to us is proclaimed by the facts themselves as they are seen and commented on by everybody today.”²⁰⁶² The apostles brought almost the whole human race from the worship of idols to that of the true God even while they were being persecuted; whereas today the church itself is the persecutor: “But now, O, for shame! It is the opinion of the world that recommends the divine faith....The church is frightened at the thought of exile and jail: she compels people to believe in her for her own sake who was once believed in exile and in prison.”²⁰⁶³ In his own person Hilary illustrates the hopeless contradictions that inevitably follow the councils, for he denounces the great Athanasius as an impious, criminal blasphemer, because while Athanasius charges Hilary with having changed sides, Hilary naturally insists “it is not we but you who have changed sides!”²⁰⁶⁴ We always believe what the old church and the scripture teach, it is always you who are the innovators.

²⁰⁵⁹ Hilary

²⁰⁶⁰ Hilary

²⁰⁶¹ Hilary

²⁰⁶² Hilary

²⁰⁶³ Hilary

²⁰⁶⁴ Hilary

Philostorgius writes somewhat later: “At the time of the Nicene Council it was fashionable on both sides to believe that God was absolutely incomprehensible, unknowable, inexpressible, not only to men but to the Son of God Himself! With the exception of a small handful of men including Eusebius of Nicodemia [the pro-Arian!] the rest of the godless band was sucked off into wild errors.”²⁰⁶⁵ What language to use of the most godly of synods within a century of its occurrence! It shows us that the impression of the councils was not altogether a happy one. The entire church was split from top to bottom by the Council of Chalcedon, according to Evagrius, the only element of authority remaining entirely with the emperor. One short section in Eusebius’ history should be enough to catch the faith-promoting spirit of the councils:

Since the Oriental bishops did not understand the language spoken at the Council of Sardis in 349, they were entirely satisfied with the Nicenum; but the general public rioted and called for a retrial of Paulus and Athanasius; 300 Western bishops showed up but only 76 Eastern ones, who complained of the shortness of the warning they had received and the hardships they experienced in getting there—they blamed these on Julius of Rome. The Oriental bishops refused to sit with the Occidental, and claimed they had come for one purpose only, the trial. When Hosius of Spain insisted that Athanasius and Paulus be admitted, the Oriental bishops walked out and held a synod of their own at Philoppolis, where they damned the *homoousios*, putting ‘unequal glory’ in its place. The Western bishops in Sardis condemned the action and deposed the accusers of Athanasius and confirmed the *homoousios*. The Orientals replied in kind. When the emperor of the East refused to accept Athanasius and Paulus the emperor of the West threatened war.²⁰⁶⁶

And so it went. The result of a move to determine just what the official position of the church was ended by making everyone uncertain as to where he stood. At a council in Antioch Bishop Akakius of Antioch asked the pointed question: “If the Nicaean faith has been changed once it has been changed often, what then is wrong with one more change?”²⁰⁶⁷ To which Bishop Eleusius replied: “Let us stick to Antioch. If we do not agree with those who have gone before, that means we do not recognize their authority, as if they did not have the Holy Spirit. Yet it is from these very bishops that we have our authority! So if they did not have authority, neither do

²⁰⁶⁵ Philostorgius

²⁰⁶⁶ Eusebius, (II, 20)

²⁰⁶⁷ Bishop Akakius of Antioch (where is this recorded? Eusebius?)

we!”²⁰⁶⁸ The point was well taken, but the damage had been done. Others were to draw the same conclusion: if we have the truth, why a council? And if we do not, where can any council get its authority? Doubt and confusion are implied in every word of Phoebadius’ defense of the Nicene creed: What was lacking? he asks, “men of blessed memory, gathered from all parts of the world, searching through the sacred volumes, stating the perfect rule of the Catholic faith in circumspect language, giving to those that erred a *formam credendi*”²⁰⁶⁹—what more could you ask? Piety, universal representation, diligent study, careful language—such virtues are to be recommended in the drawing up of any official document, but such are qualities available in any society; when the purpose of the document is to settle once for all the mystery of God’s nature they do not go nearly far enough.²⁰⁷⁰ If they must use new terms let them be revealed terms and not the jargon of the schools. “No one is supposed to use the word *substantia*,” Phoebadius comments, and acidly asks, what is wrong with that? “What a terrible crime! What a monstrous sin! Then he explains that it simply means anything that is of itself. “The word must be explained lest it fool the uneducated, since it is not found anywhere in the divine scriptures.”²⁰⁷¹ After all these years that objection had not been explained away! “They cite the authority of the venerable Hosius against us,” says Phoebadius, referring to the extremely aged and most respected figure in the empire, one who had been the closest friend and special trouble-shooter for Constantine himself, but Hosius’ opinion is cancelled by the dictum “the authority of a prejudiced opinion counts for nothing, because it sets up itself against itself. Either he [Hosius] is wrong now or else he always was: if he is wrong now he has changed [and therefore his opinion is not to be trusted], if he has not changed he was always wrong. Ergo he has no authority.”²⁰⁷² Word-juggling like this was the daily fare of the age of councils—is it any wonder that people lost faith?

²⁰⁶⁸ Bishop Eleusius (same source as 81)

²⁰⁶⁹ Phoebadius

²⁰⁷⁰ (Conc. Eph. Can. vii)

²⁰⁷¹ Phoebadius

²⁰⁷² *ibid.*

Basil had to search in the writings of the ancients to justify the vocabulary he used in theological discussion. “Why do you call me an innovator, an inventor of fancy new terms, since I can show that whole nations and cities...men who were pillars of the church...the first and foremost preachers of the word used such language?”²⁰⁷³ But his main concern was the state of doubt and confusion that had thrown the church of his day into a terrifying tailspin. He blames the tragic state of affairs particularly on the doctrinal uncertainty which the councils instead of eliminating had only made worse. Basil’s essay on the state of the church is one of the most significant documents ever sidestepped by a writer of church history. It all began, says Basil, when the Arian controversy split the church into warring factions: The heritage of that long and bitter quarrel, he says, is the general disintegration of the church, “so that through general hostility and through individual suspicions, was established a universal hatred that knows no relenting.”²⁰⁷⁴ Now no observation was commoner at the time of the Nicene Council than that the extremely technical and abstruse doctrinal issues were merely a pretext to give vent on all sides to this boiling, black hatred which had been building up everywhere throughout the church. The doctrine did not cause the trouble; Alexander of Alexandria, with whose decision against Arius the whole thing began, could not make up his mind for a long time as to whether Arius was not in the right doctrinally. But power-politics were a different matter. Like a tiny spark that sets off a pile of tinder (we would say powder) that is just waiting to explode; that is how Eusebius describes what happened. But where did the tinder come from; whence this horrible hatred waiting to invest the whole church on the slightest pretext? How had the church been training its members if hatred and violence become the rule of its life the moment it comes to power? Listen to Basil:

Since everyone is either Judaizing or paganizing, the scriptures and the apostles cannot act as umpire, and everything is approved or damned depending only on the party one happens to belong to. The whole thing is more like a general uprising, a conspiracy to trip everybody up—the principle of unity is a purely negative one, the self-appointed and the

²⁰⁷³ Basil

²⁰⁷⁴ Basil, essay on the state of the church

office-seekers in the churches divide up the government among themselves, having abolished the administration of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁷⁵

What good is protest? “I should be quiet,” says Basil,

since no man’s voice can be heard through such a tumult....One can only keep his peace in these times. For the time is an evil one, a time in which everyone kicks the fallen and no one reaches a helping hand. Why is this? Because the love of all [the scripture had only said of many!] hath waxed cold, brother-love has vanished and the name of harmony is forgotten; there is no more Christian sympathy, there are no more tears of pity....There is only such blazing universal hatred that every man rejoices more in the misfortunes of his neighbor than he does in his own prosperity and good deeds.²⁰⁷⁶

At a time like this the church is entirely leaderless,

The injunctions of the gospel having been thrown into complete confusion by the disorder attendant on an unspeakable fight for the leadership; everybody is pushing himself. Terrible anarchy has descended upon the people as a result of this desire to be top-man. Whence the utterly silly and vicious counsels of the leaders? No one will listen to anyone else, everyone wants to give orders and in his complete ignorance of things, considers himself fit for the job.²⁰⁷⁷

In this dire strait he appeals not to Rome but to Athanasius of Alexandria to unite the Western and the Eastern churches, for both are together in the same boat, and arrest: “The present decline—or rather complete collapse—of the churches....Things are getting worse and there will be nothing to stop it, unless within a very short time the churches be forced somehow into some totally different course. I have often meditated upon the utter depravity of the churches.”²⁰⁷⁸ Of course neither Basil nor anyone else can imagine what it might be that may save the churches, and indeed nothing appeared. “When we consider the state of things,” he wrote to Athanasius, “we find that any salutary energies are bound hand and foot. In you we find the doctor of the failings in the churches...all the church has been undone, as you know. The cause of our shipwreck is both internal and external, caused 1) by the violent motion of the sea, and 2) by the rioting of those on board, attacking and shoving each other.”²⁰⁷⁹ Writing to his successor he again employs the figure of the ship: “The times are hard, crying desperately for a pilot, because of the

²⁰⁷⁵ Basil

²⁰⁷⁶ Basil

²⁰⁷⁷ Basil

²⁰⁷⁸ Basil

²⁰⁷⁹ Basil, to Athanasius of Alexandria

unceasing pitching and onrushing waves that assault the church.”²⁰⁸⁰ And again, “the church will soon founder unless the Lord remembers us and leadership quickly comes from somewhere. Our calamities resound throughout the empire; the teachings of the fathers are held in complete contempt; the apostolic traditions are held as nothing. The inventions of the innovators have gained complete sway in the churches.”²⁰⁸¹ The Catholic editor of the text in the *Patrologia* sagely comments that this refers to the persecution by the wicked Emperor Valens—with whom it obviously has nothing to do; the editor’s position, however, does show that he realizes that this story is hard on the claims of the church to continued divinity and a high degree of holiness especially in the fourth century—Basil says much too much on the subject, and he is massively supported by the corroborating testimony of host of contemporaries.

The Arian controversy itself was not as important as the effect it had on the main church, which as many times before, fought fire with fire to its own detriment. As a result of the Arian fighting, he says, “All churches are thrown into confusion. The hieratic dignity had departed. The shepherds have deserted their flocks. . . . Servants have risen against their masters: it has become a general pretext for personal revenges, and burdened with the load of hatred they bear the people scheme hateful things against piety itself.”²⁰⁸² “Reading your epistle,” he writes to a friend,

I imagine myself again in the good old days, when the churches of God were flourishing, rooted in the faith, living in love as a single body, etc. In those days the persecutors could be plainly distinguished from the persecuted, the congregation increased in number even as they waged their struggle, and the blood of the martyrs watered the churches. In those days Christians brought peace to each other; that peace which the Lord left us, of which now not a trace remains to us, so cruelly have we treated each other.²⁰⁸³

Nothing is so rare today as a real feeling of fellowship with a spiritual brother, or a peaceful word, or spiritual communion. . . . Reading your epistle, I seem really to be carried back to the ancient blessedness of the churches, when very few were suffering from the disease of academic investigation and people lived in peace and keeping the commandments and serving the Lord, preserving intact the faith in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.²⁰⁸⁴

²⁰⁸⁰ Basil

²⁰⁸¹ Basil

²⁰⁸² Basil

²⁰⁸³ Basil

²⁰⁸⁴ Basil

It is from a certain desire for fame...that we are emboldened to work out new and involved expressions, by which the churches become rotten. ²⁰⁸⁵

Again the misgivings about the Creeds:

There are those who will not accept the opinion of 50 bishops or regard them as authorities, because, they say, they were not partakers of the Holy Spirit, nor did they manage the churches with the grace of God, but rather seized the presidencies animated by a lust for celebrity and dynastic power. Yet they accept the authority of the bishops whom these men ordained! This amounts to rejecting the unanimous opinion of the whole human race as if all people except themselves were deaf, dumb, and blind!²⁰⁸⁶

Gregory the Theologian speaks in the same vein: “It seems that God’s loving care which preserved the churches before our times has in the present age been withdrawn entirely. And my soul has been so baptized by calamities that my private personal afflictions are not to be reckoned more as calamities in view of the all-engrossing common agony of the church.”²⁰⁸⁷ A remarkably frank statement of Gregory reveals the extremely shaky foundation of authority in the church. Speaking of the Apollinarists, he says, “If, then, people holding such opinions are allowed to share in the authority of a council, let your glorious perspicacity in Christ take heed lest we all end up with the conviction that their propositions are more true than our own doctrine!”²⁰⁸⁸ The lack of confidence is as evident in the shepherds as in their flocks.

Quite as serious as misgivings regarding doctrine and authority in the fourth century were the frequent and pointed questions arising on all sides as to what had become of the spiritual gifts without which, it seemed the church lacked a fullness of divine sanction. That orthodoxy and the charismatic gifts went together in popular thinking appears from certain questions addressed to Antiochus: “How does it happen that heretics often perform miracles?”²⁰⁸⁹ To which the significant answer: “It is not proper to entertain such a question.” To the question, “Will all heretics be damned,” the reply is, “There are heresies and heresies, but all the big ones will be

²⁰⁸⁵ Basil

²⁰⁸⁶ Basil

²⁰⁸⁷ Gregory the Theologian

²⁰⁸⁸ Gregory

²⁰⁸⁹ ? to Antiochus

damned.” But the cessation of miracles really worried the church until it was able to provide a new type of miracle without limit. Irenaeus had asked, according to Ambrose, “why the Lord rained down manna upon the people of the patriarchs, but rains no more today.” The answer, says Ambrose, is, “If you only knew it, he does rain, nay daily he rains down manna upon his servants from heaven. Yes, and it is even physical manna...the perfect bread from heaven, the body born of the Virgin, etc. But there is also a spiritual manna, that is, a rain of spiritual wisdom...”²⁰⁹⁰

This is the inevitable answer that any church-goer of the fourth century could confidently expect: this rhetorical reaction was as certain, as mechanical, as automatic as clock-work, and it is no real answer at all, but a shabby, shopworn device for making rhetoric serve for the burning bush that would no longer burn. John Chrysostom specializes in these verbal miracles, laboring mightily to make his shining eloquence fill in for the Holy Ghost.

John has been often approached by worried members on the matter of the cessation of the heavenly gifts in the church. The loss of the gift of tongues seems to have caused particular distress, and Chrysostom’s efforts to explain it away are pathetic. Speaking in tongues, he says, is after all a coarse, objective, physical demonstration—we do not need such! To speak in tongues is certainly not as great a gift as that of prophecy, since prophecy is the interpretation of tongues; and surely to prophesy is not as great a thing as to give an oration that can be understood by all.²⁰⁹¹ As always in the fourth century, rhetoric has the answer to everything. John may be perfectly right, yet he has completely avoided the issue, which is not whether tongues is the greatest of gifts, but why the gift of tongues has ceased to coexist with other gifts, which, though more important, still did not supplant it in the early church. All the *charismata*, says John, are worthless without charity. He makes a great point of this by way of explaining why those gifts are

²⁰⁹⁰ *Quaeris a me cur Dominus Deus manna pluerit populo patrum, et nunc non pluat. Si cognoscis, pluit, et quotidie pluit de coelo manna servientibus sibi. Et corporeum quidem illud manna hodie plerisque in locis invenitur, sed nunc non est tanti res miraculi; quia venit quod perfectum est. Perfectum autem panis de coelo, corpus ex Virgine, de quo satis Evangelium te docet....Sed est spiritale manna, hoc est, pluvia spiritalis sapientiae...*, Ambrose, *Epistolarum Classis* 2.64.1, in *PL* 16:1272-1273.

²⁰⁹¹ John Chrysostom

not more in the church—charity is more important than they are. Why are men no longer called from heaven? he asked. His answer is a sad one: if you have faith you do not need to be so called; and if, on the other hand, you do not have faith “being designated by a voice from heaven is not going to contribute in the least to your salvation.”²⁰⁹² The Jews had voices from heaven and saw miracles: did that save them? The answer to this, as Saint Augustine clearly saw, is that it is only too easy for people not to have revelations from heaven! The unbelieving ask, says John, “whence comes it that while it is perfectly clear that Paul was called from heaven and so constrained, no one has ever called me that way?” The answer: “Do you have faith? If you believe Paul was called, that sign should be enough for you. So believe, then. You too are called from heaven if you have a receptive heart.”²⁰⁹³ Again the evasion of the issue: “you, too,” is not “you too” at all, but a wholly different kind of call from heaven to that which Paul received. Christ gave the church wonderful gifts in the beginning, it is true, “but when the church became strong and tall and filled the whole earth then for the future Christ took away the props. In the beginning the charismatic gifts were granted even to the unworthy...but today they are not even given to the worthy.”²⁰⁹⁴ That fact proves, for John, not that the church is missing because the gifts which are the hallmark of its divinity are missing—he cannot afford to admit that—but that the church was never meant to have the gifts. His interpretation of the facts does not bind us for an instant, of course—he was bound to interpret them only one way no matter what they were. No man more eagerly exploited anything that might look like a miracle, but while he joyfully admits that any miracle proves the divinity of this church, he will not for a minute face the consequences of the argument of a lack of miracles. What interests us is his clear and repeated, though reluctant, admission 1) that miraculous gifts have ceased in the church and 2) that whatever might be supplied in their place, people were not satisfied for a minute with the new claims to miracles—they felt everywhere that these were not the miracles and gifts which the Church of Christ should

²⁰⁹² John Chrysostom

²⁰⁹³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹⁴ *ibid.*

possess, and there was widespread worry and misgiving caused by a general awareness that the old powers had been withdrawn. John himself knows perfectly well that none of his highly rationalized explanations for the cessation of the heavenly gifts is the real one: “Why are there no miracles today?” he answers in a moment of frankness when he says, why should there be? “What good does it do the church to beget hosts of children when she only sees those children on holidays?”²⁰⁹⁵ He is commenting on the universal neglect of church-going: “Today only [it was Easter] the church does not look on bare and naked walls, a complete lack of people, but is clothed with a splendid gathering of her children as it used to be in the old days.”²⁰⁹⁶ He gives non-attendance of church as an indirect explanation for the cessation of gifts, yet he had lived in the old days to which he and Basil look back so lovingly and longingly—and where were the gifts then? It is plain from the complaints put to John that people were using the cessation of gifts as an excuse for not going to church—they simply lost interest because the church, when it had had all the glory and treasure of the empire poured upon it, when John himself had promised with perfect confidence that a paradisiacal reign was about to burst upon the earth, simply failed to deliver. Again, “Why in the time of the ancient apostles did the unworthy receive heavenly gifts...and why were they shown wonderful manifestations, and why did they reject divine powers, taking no heed of the best ministrations? They were granted through God’s philanthropy, not through any merit of the recipients.”²⁰⁹⁷ So the church need not feel bad at no longer having them. But does God throw around his gifts with no regard whatever to merit and zeal? If not, the fourth century church must have lost the qualifications for receiving heavenly gifts. That John cannot afford to admit, so his only alternative is the fantastic argument that God bestows his priceless gifts with no regard whatever to the merit of the recipients. We do not need miracles, John assures his followers, to prove that we are apostolic: we do that by good deeds. But cannot the Buddhists do good deeds? “In this all shall know that ye are my apostles” (John 13:35). In what? In the

²⁰⁹⁵ John Chrys.

²⁰⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹⁷ *ibid.*

working of miracles? In raising the dead? It does not say that. But in what? “That ye love one another.” Unwittingly John has here blasted the favorite explanation of the Christian church for the loss of the gifts: these miraculous gifts, it is always explained, were the credentials of the apostles to the world—they prove to all the supernatural endowment of the church. “Not a bit of it!” cries John, when people ask him what has become of the supernatural endowment, “Love is not a thing of miracles but of daily living....Do you know the identifying mark [*gnorisma*] of the disciples? Do you know the sign of the apostolate? Seek no further: if you have love, you are an apostle, nay the first of the apostles!”²⁰⁹⁸ This passage is very significant. It shows how clearly people connected the miraculous gifts of the early church with the apostolic authority. No comment is necessary on Chrysostom’s eloquent but pitifully inadequate answer: what comfort is it really to be told that if one only has love one is the first of the apostles? In a sense he may well be—in a sense an orator of John Chrysostom’s skill could make him out to be anything. But after the “Golden Voice” had been left behind in the church, would the old lady hobbling home with her heart full of love really think she could qualify for the apostolate in the sense in which she thought of apostles? The church was asking one question; John was magnificently answering another. “Seek diligently for the ministry of the apostles, and you will receive nothing less than the apostles did.”²⁰⁹⁹ John again promises the apostolic things for which the people are plainly asking, but what he will not promise is what is being asked: the ministry and power of apostles, which he has already said has been taken away from the earth, being no longer necessary. “For marvelous manifestations do not make apostles, but an upright life.”²¹⁰⁰ How true! And how irrelevant! How cleverly John must dodge the issue. “Miracles don’t make apostles,” he says,²¹⁰¹ and rightly; but then, who said they did? The point is that apostles do make miracles, and if the one is absent from the church, so must the other be. “Why did God give charismatic gifts to the

²⁰⁹⁸ John Chrys.

²⁰⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

ancient church and not to us?”²¹⁰² Again the admitted fact, and again the forced explanation: “Because those gifts were necessary to spreading the word everywhere, because the faith at its beginning and inception was like a newly-planted tree, with which the gardener works extra hard: but when the tree grows strong then he takes down the supports.”²¹⁰³ Yet no one is more clamorous than John in declaring the weak and sickly state of the faith in his own day, and for this very reason people were clamoring for the signs to strengthen them. What John is saying is that heavenly power had been replaced in due time by earthly power. But was this ever the plan? The shift satisfied no one—all, including John, are distressed by it. “The spirit does not see with the eyes of the body,” and the gift of tongues, a “corporeal, tangible thing and easily grasped by the limited capacity of unbelievers....For the unbeliever needs such reassurance,”²¹⁰⁴ but should believers not be ashamed of themselves to ask for such tangible demonstrations? John has quite forgotten that “these signs shall follow them that believe.” **But** his sour grapes explanation was not convincing. “Everywhere I hear all the time,” he complains, “people asking: Why do we no longer have the gift of tongues?” And he tries his hand at another answer: “It is not that God holds us in contempt, but it is rather a special sign of honor! How is that? Because men in those days were crude, coarse, and literal-minded, and had not the remotest conception of what the inner grace is, which is experienced by faith alone. That is why signs were given. For some of the spiritual gifts are invisible and grasped by faith alone,” and these are of course the higher ones.²¹⁰⁵ Who would ask for the burning bush when he could just as well read Chrysostom? The answer: everybody! In an oration devoted to the subject, “**Why** Miracles No Longer Occur in the Church,” John lists all the things which in the past have been sent down from heaven to earth and then asks the usual question: “For what reason are there no such signs today?...I hear that question time and again, constantly and endlessly the same thing, over and over: ‘Why did all the

²¹⁰² *ibid.*

²¹⁰³ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

baptized speak in tongues in those days, but no more today?”²¹⁰⁶ The explanation is interesting, but the admission is damning. The one is the theory, the other the incontrovertible fact. It is not necessary to have revelation from heaven to call a priest or a teacher, we are told, but only pure intent. But alas, says John, we do not even have that today! “If we overlook the most obvious things, why should God give us revelations....In those days nothing was done by human agency, but men became priests by prophecy. What does it mean ‘by prophecy’? By the Holy Ghost,” for only in such a way can a man be called by God himself.²¹⁰⁷ Well then, what has happened to such a method of calling? Suddenly John becomes very vague and rambles: “this must surely be preserved, since all virtue must necessarily have been preserved by God,”²¹⁰⁸ but though we are told but a very threadbare argument why it must be, we are given no concrete proof of any kind that it has been. It must be preserved in the true church, to be sure, but when the soundness of the church is the very point at issue it cannot be used as an argument to support the claims that should support it. That people were losing interest because figurative and allegorical miracles did not impress them is seen in John’s charge against the people of Antioch: “though Christ is about to appear in the holy mysteries, still the church is empty and deserted. You no longer heed the sermons. Some of you have followed false teachers pied-pipers—but what is the excuse of the majority?”²¹⁰⁹ They do not follow anybody. It is safe to say that if the appearance of the Lord in the mysteries were anything but a figure of speech people would have ceased their hankering for other miracles and flocked to the church. They did neither: the glory of the Hellenistic Mass left them unimpressed.

While the pilot and sailors are doing their best to bring all safely to port, you carry on your petty controversies on the deep, spending all your time with everyday affairs, buzzing about in the market-places and lawcourts, but appearing here [in church] hardly once or twice the course of an entire year. Don’t you know that God had set up churches

²¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁰⁹ John Chryso. to Antioch

in all the cities like harbors in a stormy sea, where one can rest from the hubbubs of life?²¹¹⁰

Here is a frank enough support for Harnack's thesis that monasticism was an escape from the Christian world. The church is now not the fullest and most perfect representation of the life of Christian society but a place of refuge from that society. Far from bringing regeneration to the world, the church of Chrysostom's time was desperately fighting a losing battle to hold a position of importance in the world. Christians who will not entertain the proposition that the strict, peculiar and exacting standards of the early church could not have failed to convert and delight the whole human race, because they were God's standards, would do well to ponder this situation. Even the denatured Christianity of John Chrysostom's day asked far more from people than they were willing to give. Early Christianity, said Lake, could not have survived without completely changing the social milieu in which it would survive;²¹¹¹ but this church of John's, having conceded everything to society that it would not gainsay or antagonize, now peevishly complains that that society so cheaply bought does not take it seriously. "Can't you spare just two hours from business out of seven days to go to the church and rest?" John asks the citizens of the greatest and, next to Jerusalem, the oldest, Christian community on earth.²¹¹² "You send your servants and your children to church: why don't you come yourself? There are many things a Christian must know, and they can only be learned in the church. Whence the shocking ignorance of our time? It is because nobody is willing to take time. For much free time is required of one who would enjoy the teachings of this philosophy."²¹¹³ Men conceded the church all she asked, but they would not give her their serious attention. Apparently the church had not yet conceded enough to the world. To bring the two into harmony was the work of following centuries, and the chief reforms of the Mass that took its pompous rise in the fourth century in Chrysostom's own Antioch all aimed at shortening, sweetening, and simplifying it: to make church-going a pleasure

²¹¹⁰ John Chryso.

²¹¹¹ Lake, "Christian Life in Rome," 25.

²¹¹² John Chryso.

²¹¹³ *ibid.*

to people who found it a bore. The brief and painless course of the Mass today is as much a concession to vulgar taste of the late empire as the movies, paper-caps and sensationalism of the modern Protestant churches are to the weak and lazy spirit of our own age. “As I look out over this vast spiritual sea,” he cries, addressing his congregation at Easter, “and contemplate the boundless wealth of the church, I am saddened to realize that such a throng is to be seen only at festivals, and I weep to think that with all the countless children the church has brought forth these are not to be reached save only on the occasion of some celebration. How marvelous it would be if the people turned out this way for every meeting!”²¹¹⁴ If people would only come for fun, then fun was the answer. The church, says John, must be all things to all men if it is to be the great popular throng he envisages, people should go to church because they like to do that more than anything else. It is the mud and rain that are keeping many away from church, he consoles himself in another sermon.²¹¹⁵ “There are not many here in attendance today,” he says on another occasion,

what can be the reason? We are celebrating the memory of the martyrs, and no one is here to respond to us. They martyrs shed their blood: can you not spare a few minutes? Do we spend the whole day in bodily concerns and cannot spend two hours in spiritual? You sit in the theater until the show is over, why do you walk out in the middle of church? Men and women stand in church eyeing each other unabashed. You would be ashamed to size women up in such a calloused way in the market place, but you do it in church!²¹¹⁶

Human nature, especially around the Mediterranean, has not changed since then. Accordingly the church has: two hours is now considered more than twice the time necessary for mass—it has now been made as brief and pleasant as possible with music provided frankly for no other purpose than to entertain an otherwise bored public.

Still, John will make the utmost efforts to provide his church with apostolic gifts and powers and the apostolic office itself:

“But they were apostles” they say. And what of that? Don’t you share what the apostles had? Don’t you go among the cities as they did? Was not their condition the same as

²¹¹⁴ John Chryso.

²¹¹⁵ John Chryso., (PG 63, 461f)

²¹¹⁶ John Chryso.

ours? “But they had the power of working miracles” [literally they had the signs] you say. But the signs did not make them the marvelous men they were. Have we any right to use their marvelous power as an excuse for our own lax indifference? Even if you raise 600 dead people, it will still be your moral qualities that make you great!²¹¹⁷

These feelings ran high in the church. “Distress and disgust,” writes Harnack, “with the everyday life started the movements as if with an irresistible natural force; the church of Constantine drove into solitude and the desert those who wished to devote themselves to religion.”²¹¹⁸ What a commentary on the great “Triumph of Christianity” in the fourth century! For the spiritual refugees “not only was the world, in every sense of the word, to be avoided, but the secularized church as well...Her foundation was regarded as insecure, and men doubted not to make up for the loss of her sacramental advantages by asceticism and unceasing contemplation of what is holy.”²¹¹⁹ The church “taught that the loftiest aim of the gospel was the contemplation of God...Yet this line of thought appears in her only as the incongruous complement of the shallow morality into which she had reduced Christianity...Hardly a single man demanded a reform of Christianity generally,” though “there was a great distrust of the priestly office: How many fled when an attempt was made to impose that office on them!”²¹²⁰

One other doubt continued to rankle the Christian mind, and rankles still. The Jews were still there. According to the calculations of Christian theology in the fourth century Judaism should have disappeared entirely with its complete displacement in the earth by the True Covenant. Why did Israel continue? “The church answered by affirming the final purchase of Israel: it remains that it might be saved, when the proper time had arrived.”²¹²¹ But, says our guide, this was not a good answer, for the claim of the church triumphant is that the time had certainly arrived. Something had gone wrong. “Why this delay?” Augustine’s answer was that the Jews, like Cain, were kept around as an horrible example and witnesses to the faith preached by

²¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹¹⁸ Harnack

²¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

²¹²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹²¹ Harnack still?

the prophets.²¹²² However satisfying this explanation might be logically, says Simon, the survival of the Jews still remained as a constant threat and danger, and insolent taunt, to the claims of the church, and Augustine's *Tractatus Adversus Judaeos* shows that in the end the Christians had no answer—and were greatly worried by the fact.²¹²³ The two churches lived on, hating and suspecting each other, each triumphantly announcing that while the other was a demonstration of depravity, it could not possibly fall. The Jews are a large fly in the elegant compound of church history, a constant reminder that God can desert his people—the apostolic fathers made the most of that lesson, but world Christianity prefers devoutly not to think of it, and to castigate its own defects with a sort of hysterical determination, in others: the suppression of the Jews is a mass repression of the Christian conscience, an attempt to control the past. More than anything else, the constant and irritating presence of the chosen people frustrates what would have otherwise been an easily successful Christian game of controlling the past.

When D. F. Strauss a hundred years ago asked the question “Are We Still Christians?”²¹²⁴ the Christian world, according to H. Schumacher, “was outraged by the brutal question and the unfeeling answer he gave to it.”²¹²⁵ But today, says the same writer (a Roman Catholic) it is taken for granted that we are not, for no one accepts supernaturalism anymore. This is precisely the situation of the fourth century. It is not only in a modern perspective that the implications of the sad spiritual state of the fourth century church become apparent. As we have seen, Chrysostom's contemporaries were quite aware of the dire corollaries flowing from a generation of doubt and squabbling. They have been sometimes stated quite bluntly. John's own apology for refusing holy office completely confirms what Harnack has said. “Do not think that the church owes her glory to the emperor alone,” he writes, thereby admitting that both he and his contemporaries did so, to a degree, “for even though the power of government should vanish and the rules become

²¹²² Augustine

²¹²³ Augustine, *Tractatus Adversus Judaeos*, PL 42, 52

²¹²⁴ D. F. Strauss

²¹²⁵ H. Schumacher

unbelieving, the powers of the Son will be but the more glorious. For it is not the same with us as with the Greeks.”²¹²⁶ In a single oration John says that the contention has never been worse in the church than at that day, even though it was very bad among the immoral Corinthians. He describes how the battle-scarred bishops (scarred from fighting with each other) all came to Nicaea bearing the wounds of Christ. He proves with a sort of hysterical determination, that the temple will never be rebuilt and that there will never be an end to the Jewish captivity. Indeed in his case also a measure of his mistrust of his own position is found in the savage fury with which he speaks of the Jews whenever he mentions them. To understand with the mind is far better than to speak with the tongues; to have charity is far better than to raise the dead. True, but besides the point—who is going to raise the dead without charity anyway, and who is going to speak in tongues without also qualifying in understanding the gospel? “The dignity of the teacher and the priest is a great and wonderful one, and must truly come by the election of God.”²¹²⁷ How do we obtain this divine election?

The ancients had this power and so do we, without human passions....For even if we do not have the same spirit as the apostles, then at least it is sufficient to have good intentions to be elected by God himself. Since not even the apostles had the Spirit when they elected Matthew, but chose him by lot, having first prepared themselves for the thing by prayer. Just as they did not have revelation but merely prayed, even so today it is done among us.²¹²⁸

What would happen to men’s confidence when the aged and saintly Hosius, the emperor’s right-hand man and go-between, a key figure of the Nicene Council, could be described by Hilary as wicked and depraved, simply because he held a different view of doctrine. Because of him, says Hilary, “Everywhere there is a scandal, everywhere there are schisms, everywhere there are deceptions. Hence they sign one credo at one time and another at another.”²¹²⁹ Yet when he is confused, it is another story: “If my explanation is not clear, please bear in mind that it is not I but my words that are at fault...my nature, not my will, is defective.

²¹²⁶ John Chryso., (PG 47, 343)

²¹²⁷ John C.

²¹²⁸ *ibid.*

²¹²⁹ Hilary

Whatever I say, remember, is the conscience of the true common faith.”²¹³⁰ Why can this not apply to the other side? “Because of one, two, or at most a tiny handful of criminals the whole order of the world is completely turned upside down.”²¹³¹ Where is the firm and fixed church? Where is the rock, if “one or two criminals” can overturn everything? “If they had any honor they would like Jonah ask to be cast into the sea so the storms would cease.”²¹³² How naïve! All that is wrong with the vast world-church is a couple of troublemakers: get rid of them and all will be lovely. Can we blame the simple soldier Constantine if at Nicaea he was so childish that “the professed object of Constantine was to legislate the millennium in a generation”²¹³³—is he a whit more naïve than Hilary? Zosimus saw in Constantine’s naïve ignorance the basic cause for the fall of the ancient world, but Constantine was not alone. Everybody was convinced that he was right, and when disaster followed the shock was one from which the Christian world never recovered. All through the Middle Ages Catholics continued to believe with perfect confidence that Constantine had actually achieved heaven on earth, and the struggle and hope of the church was not for a bringing down of the kingdom from above but to reestablish the Holy Roman Empire, the world as it was in the fourth century. This still remains the ideal. When the agents were sent out to all the cities to enforce the decree of Chalcedon, the result was not a Falangist peace but mobs and bloody repressions everywhere. Many, like the Novatians drew the only logical conclusion from all this, but it was a conclusion which none, including the Novatians, could afford to face: “If the church is lost,” Pacimus asks a Novatian friend,

where do you get your authority? The Holy Spirit has not left the principal mother, so where could you have got it from? Whence does your congregation receive the Spirit, not being blessed by an anointed priest? “You did have martyrs and confessors,” you say, “but by receiving those who denied the faith they perished.”...But could you ever convince anybody that because the *lapsi* were received into the church the whole church was ruined?²¹³⁴

²¹³⁰ Hilary

²¹³¹ Hilary

²¹³² Hilary

²¹³³ ? Hilary?

²¹³⁴ Pacimus

So he cites Jeremiah and Ezekiel: “Behold even those are saved who stand in the midst of sinners.” This is a neat admission of the damning charge brought against the church, and an extremely far-fetched explanation for it, since the meaning of the Old Testament passages is that the righteous though among the sinner do not share with them—it is the old Christian doctrine of in the world but not of the world with which Pacianus will now call to support of unlimited acceptance of betrayers into the church.

“We must admit,” says Duchesne, “that if Christianity had no share in bringing about the downfall of the empire, on the other hand it equally did nothing to arrest it.”²¹³⁵ Yet Christianity had promised again and again that once given full recognition she would cure all the ills of the empire. Duchesne’s excuse for this is that the church being “not only universal but politically indifferent, it could show but little interest in any other city but the City of God, in any other future than that beyond the grave. The church aimed at making saints.”²¹³⁶ This is true of the early church, but certainly not of the fourth century or the present one. It is an old and convenient game the priests play, and have played in every age—throwing themselves with passionate dedication into worldly affair, intriguing in cottage and palace, pulling strings in thrones and parliaments, and when faced with the results of their manipulations and intrigue, draw their holy robes about them and disclaim any interest whatsoever in the things of this world. It is their duty to win and run the world for Christ, it is not their duty to answer for their misrule. But what about the insistence of Catholic historians that the early church was an infant institution, a tender shoot, a newborn thing whose life was all in the future and whose whole significance lay in the promise of vast things to come? Duchesne in saying the church was not interested in the future is telling the truth about the primitive church, but he completely refuted the most elementary claim of orthodox church history—that the church did live for an earthly future. Just when Augustine had “realized the union between the heavenly and the early cities” the misfortunes of the empire

²¹³⁵ Duchesne

²¹³⁶ *ibid.*

forced him to recognize that the time had passed or would pass soon for being a Roman citizen, and that it would thereafter be necessary to think of being a Christian.²¹³⁷ “Indeed it was an ephemeral one, the solemn reconciliation of the church and the Roman Empire, sealed at the end of a deadly war which had lasted for more than two centuries....Henceforward the Christian spirit disengaged itself from the Roman Patriotism on which it took its stand in the fourth century.”²¹³⁸

Does Monsieur Chavanne realize how sordidly opportunistic this all sounds? By divorcing the church from the Roman cause to which the fathers of the fourth century had sworn such passionate allegiance, her apologists have not exonerated her from the responsibility of the condition of the Christian world, but made her more responsible than ever. The church belatedly deserted the sinking ship on which she had so eagerly sought passage, but only when it had: henceforward far from the rock of independent revelation on which she once stood; henceforward her element was to be a poisonous sea—she was to swim and wallow in it and make herself thoroughly at home there—for so she must do if she would survive. Yet in a pinch the church continued to tie herself closely to the rickety craft—she climbed into the longboat, and then tied it to the ship, always ready to cut adrift if the other should founder, always relying for support and refuge on the other in case of a blow. “A Christian emperor might well claim to have some say in Church affairs,” writes Father Bligh, “What were the limits of his rights in this respect? Christians have continued to ask themselves this question without ever finding an altogether satisfactory solution.”²¹³⁹ At the end of the Ancient World, “the dream of a united Christendom, in which paganism would be transformed under the beneficent guidance of the official disciples of Christ, was seen to have been a dream. The church had tried to control and never ceased to influence the world, but it could not identify the world with the church in one kingdom of God.”²¹⁴⁰

²¹³⁷ Augustine

²¹³⁸ Monsieur Chavanne

²¹³⁹ Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’,” 303.

²¹⁴⁰ Bligh??

Hilary's attitude to Hosius exactly reflects that of Christians in the fifteenth century to those of doubtful faith, and the cause for the attitude was the same in both cases. "The Inquisition had revealed the shallow character of the wholesale conversions made toward the end of the fourteenth century by fear...Assimilation on the whole had failed...Men who refused to see the light could not but be 'depraved.' 'Depravity' was the word of the day...also 'Pestilence.'"²¹⁴¹
Change fourteenth to fourth century and you have the identical situation.

²¹⁴¹ ?????

Preservation, Restoration, Reformation (381-409) (Section 20)

In his famous work, *The Truth About the Christians*, one of the charges Celsus brings against the Christians is that, whereas “In the beginning, when the Christians were few in number they all thought alike; but when they became numerous and spread out everywhere they divided into sects, each of which claimed to be the depository of the pure old original form of Christianity passed down from the beginning, while all the others were upstarts and innovators.”²¹⁴² This is a very serious charge to have been brought against the church before the year 200. It is well enough known that this was to be the fate of the church in after years, but is this, delivered possibly in the 2nd century, just a smear? Origen has the last word—Celsus is dead and gone, Origen is speaking to a Christian world, waiting eagerly to hear his rebuttal. It is a surprising one—he says, in the first place, that though of course the church was small at the very beginning, it immediately became very large, people following Jesus in vast numbers because of his powerful preaching—so Celsus is wrong on his first point, the church was never small.²¹⁴³ He is also wrong on his second point, according to Origen, for the church was never of one mind!²¹⁴⁴ Opinions differed from the first, as can be seen from the disagreements among the apostles themselves. And what is wrong with that? Origen would like to know—do not philosophers and medics disagree, and is it not by disagreement that they come to that discussion and investigation that gets to the bottom of things? No serious and vital institution is without such disagreements, he says, and since there are among the Christians many trained in Greek philosophy, “it is necessary for them to group themselves into sects...and to name themselves after the leaders who they believe interpret the truth best....Why therefore should we not excuse even heresies found among the Christians?”²¹⁴⁵ This sort of answer was the best that could be given in light of the facts as Origen knew them—it

²¹⁴² « Ἀρχόμενοι μὲν, φησὶν, ὀλίγοι τε ἦσαν, καὶ ἓν ἐφρόνουν· ἐς πλῆθος δὲ σπαρέντες, αὐθις αὖ τέμνονται καὶ σχίζονται, καὶ στάσεις ἰδίας ἔχειν ἕκαστοι θέλουσι· τούτου γὰρ ἀρχήθεν ἔχρηζον. » Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.10, in *PG* 11:932.

²¹⁴³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.10, in *PG* 10:932.

²¹⁴⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.11, in *PG* 11:932-933.

²¹⁴⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.12-13, in *PG* 11:933-936.

is not an answer to delight the church of a later day. The important thing, of course, is not Origen's explanation for conditions, but his admission that they existed—from the very first, he admits, there had been sects, and each of these naturally thought it had the pure old doctrine. Groups claiming that they preserve the faith in its purity are not to be distinguished from those claiming a call to restore or revive it and those coming forward to reform it. Preservation, revival, and reformation are the constant preoccupations of churchmen throughout the world from the first century on. That is extremely significant. One might expect some crackpot along about the fifth century to suspect that the true faith had disappeared—but that all the leaders of the church should have had to wrestle with this problem from the first demands the close and respectful consideration which it has never received. First to notice is the eager, pathetic concern, of the people of the church, lay and clergy for the survival or preservation of the old apostolic church. We have seen that the fathers of the fourth century looked back on the Christianity of the good old days, of which, Basil, John and Gregory tell us, not a shred remains. We have seen how concerned the leaders of the church and the general public were after the Council of Nicaea. But that kind of concern had already become traditional in the church: the failing of the spiritual gifts had long had a disquieting effect. “The general opinion of Christians in those days,” says John of Bristol speaking of the time of Tertullian, “founded as they conceived on apostolic authority, was that the spirit of prophecy would remain in the Church, until the second coming of Christ. They felt, therefore, a predisposition to lend an attentive ear to one who assumed the character of a prophet.”²¹⁴⁶ This strong predisposition of accept Montanism clearly shows how hungry the people of the church were for something which the church was no longer giving them. The shallow imposition of Montanus was greeted by cries of tearful joy not only by the rank and file but by the man who knew more about the primitive church perhaps than any other man alive—Tertullian himself, who became an ardent convert and worker in the Montanist cause. A century later Eusebius was deeply moved by a sense of yearning, a lingering hope that “there might be

²¹⁴⁶ Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, 15.

something to it,” when he contemplated Montanism.²¹⁴⁷ Tertullian’s activities as “a fanatical protagonist of the new movement,” were a “recognition of spiritual prophetism in opposition to the new formed officialdom of the church.”²¹⁴⁸ But neither the Montanists nor Tertullian thought for a moment of their church as a “new movement.” For them it was simply the old church preserved. We have seen that the Gnostics (of which Montanism is only another expression) insisted that they had the gnosis, which the main church had lost. The Marcosians among the first had tried to make it appear that they still had the gift of prophecy, and took drugs and practiced special exercises to get themselves “inspired.” Simon made magical imitations of the apostles’ miracles. Valentinius faked revelation. It was all phony, yet everyone rushed over to the Gnostics. Just so with Montanism—it was a fake, and in time Tertullian being an honest seeker, found out that it was a fake—but that same honesty would not let him remain in the big church either. It was to be the same story with the Manichaeans: they filled with the shreds and tatters of Oriental mysticism a vacuum which the main church could not fill at all, and so the great Augustine, born and raised a Christian, for the nine most enthusiastic years of his life, was their ardent disciple, as Tertullian had been of the Montanists—and for the same reason: because they offered something which both men felt deeply that the true church should have, but which the main church certainly did not have.

All along in the early days we find upstart sects claiming to be “apostolic.” Had not Celsus said (and Origen did not deny it) that every sect in his day claimed to be the pure original church while all others were upstarts? All the fuss about Papias and Polycarp is significant. Irenaeus in proving that he represented the old apostolic church put forth as an argument—his main one—that once when a young child he had actually seen Polycarp. He was thus a living link with the apostles, for Polycarp had seen John.²¹⁴⁹ Well might K. Lake say that the best

²¹⁴⁷ Eusebius

²¹⁴⁸

²¹⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.20, in PG: ([find in PG](#))

commentary on the times is Browning's *Death in the Desert*.²¹⁵⁰ Papias, says Eusebius, "while he does not claim ever to have seen or heard an apostle, took careful notes from all 'the elders' who were eyewitnesses, not being overjoyed like everybody else at every wild report that went the rounds; he would ask for specific reports on what Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew or any other of the disciples had said or done."²¹⁵¹ A strange precaution if apostolic authority were to survive undiminished. Stranger still that the apostles themselves, as Eusebius notes with wonder, took no interest in the vital work of recording their thoughts and revelations—nay seemed to have an actual antipathy towards doing what would of all things help the church most if the church were to carry on through the centuries. Papias frankly states that he prefers the living voice to what is in the books.²¹⁵² "It would be worthwhile," Eusebius reflects, "to have such a collection of ancient sayings and miracles as that which Papias made."²¹⁵³ Among such things, once taught by the elders but in Eusebius' time completely dropped, was the teaching of the millennium. Why had the church not kept Papias' priceless book? In the middle of the 2nd century Justin commented at length upon the great variety and number of Christian sects, almost all of whom he considers to be good and bona fide Christians.²¹⁵⁴ When Trypho notes, however, that there are also among the Christians "Men who confess Jesus and are called Christians, but who I learn eat food offered to idols, and claim that there is no harm in that."²¹⁵⁵ Justin's reply is that there are indeed "many who confess Jesus the crucified and do not follow his teachings, but those that come from the spirits of error, but we are the disciples of the true and pure teaching of Jesus Christ, being more firm and faithful in the hope announced by him."²¹⁵⁶ This is exactly

²¹⁵⁰ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 62.

²¹⁵¹ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.39, in PG: ([find in PG \(towards beginning of section\)](#)) chopped up: see Liz' file).

²¹⁵² Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.39, in PG ([find in PG, see Liz' file for quote](#))

²¹⁵³ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.39, in PG ([find in PG](#)).

²¹⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 35, in PG ([find in PG: check chapter, possibly full text](#))

²¹⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 35, in PG ([find in PG](#))

²¹⁵⁶ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 35, in PG ([find in PG](#))

what Celsus said—that there were many sects, and each claimed to be the pure church and accused the others of being impure.

The Montanists claimed that they were salvaging the primitive church—the powerful testimony of Tertullian gives them a pretty good case. In their wickedness they also claimed, wrote Urbanus, “That every bit and all of the church under the whole heaven was teaching blasphemy.” On the other hand, “they call us the Catholics slayers of the prophets because we do not receive their idiotic prophecies.”²¹⁵⁷ This is Celsus’ accusation again: each sect takes comfort in the biblical prediction that there would be false prophets—that takes care of the opposition, they are the predicted false prophets for sure, we are the pure old church. The thing that most strongly appealed to Tertullian and others was the Montanist claim that somewhere in the world at least prophecy still survived. For to them prophecy was the hallmark of God’s presence among men. It was a great hunger for prophecy, says Eusebius, which caused the Cataphrygian heresy to spread like wildfire, and after the main church won a smashing victory over it, Montanus came along to carry on the tradition, “babbling and speaking foreign things, prophesying in opposition to the tradition and succession of church practice from above....Then everybody, as if glorying in the possession of the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy, forgetful of their contradicting the Lord, began to ‘prophesy.’”²¹⁵⁸ But prophecy was not everything: the Montanists also placed great store by their claim to possess the apostolic office. “Among us,” writes Jerome, “bishops hold the place of the apostles: but they put the bishop in third place. Their highest office is that of patriarch in Pepuza; the second rank they call genonas, and the bishops come third.”²¹⁵⁹ Part of their old-church practice was an insistence on purity and a consequent embarrassment at having to admit they were defective in it, says Jerome, “whereas we when we do penitence are very easily promised forgiveness.”²¹⁶⁰ (1.c.) It is interesting that the Montanists chose not the old Jerusalem

²¹⁵⁷ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.16, in *PG* ([find in PG](#))

²¹⁵⁸ Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 5.16, in *PG* ([find in PG](#))

²¹⁵⁹ Jerome, Letter XLI to Marcella, (PL 22, 476). ([check in PL](#))

²¹⁶⁰ Jerome, Letter XLI to Marcella, (1.c.) ([check same in PL](#))

but a place amid the mountains of the West in which to await the second coming. Plainly this refers to a genuine old Christian tradition, for with all the charges of inconsistency and absurdity thrown against the Montanists, no one ever thinks to criticize or see anything wrong with the idea that they should choose a desolate spot in the hills of Western Asia Minor, “and they say that the Jerusalem shall come down from above to that spot. For which reason they repair thither to perform their mysteries in that place, where they claim they perform holy ordinances.”²¹⁶¹ They said that they were the prophets which God had promised to send to the people, before the second coming, and that they had all the gifts and powers of the primitive church. There was nothing wrong with the claims. Everyone felt there should be such a church—but making the claim and proving it were two different things. “It is plain,” wrote Epiphanius, “that they do not have the real charismatic gifts, for they go out of their way to argue, persisting in the spirit of error and wild imaginings.”²¹⁶² If their gifts were genuine, he asks, “why have none since Montanus, Priscilla, and Maxilla had them? Maxilla said, ‘After me there will be no prophecy, but all shall be completed.’ Yet the end did not come after her time, which was many years ago. That proves her a false prophetess.”²¹⁶³ Throughout the East conferences were held everywhere to discuss Montanism. That such a feeble performance could have so impressed the Christian world is an eloquent commentary on the poor diet the big church was giving it.

The tradition beginning with the Gnostics, passing down to the Cataphrygians and Montanists never ceased from the Christian world; in every century it rankles. “There are many,” says Philastrius in the late fourth century, “who daily assert that there are prophets, and who preach that there should be prophecy, not knowing that ‘The Law and the Prophets’ were up to John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:13), and that the end of the law and the prophets was completed in the presence of Christ, and thereby consummated.²¹⁶⁴ These people, knowing full well that the

²¹⁶¹ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Vol 2, #48 (see reference on sheet, patrologia?)

²¹⁶² Epiphanius

²¹⁶³ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Vol 2, #48 (patrologia?)

²¹⁶⁴ Philastrius

apostles were prophets, could not see how the successor to an apostle could be anything but a prophet, unless such a succession was only to certain apostolic functions and not to all of them.

Methodius mocks the pretensions of Justin of Naples as “a man no nearer to the apostles than the rest of us either in time or in virtue.”²¹⁶⁵ Proximity to the apostles had become a norm of truth—a riskier one could not be imagined, since the very churches to which the apostles wrote their letters stood on very shaky ground. Mani was absolutely crazy, Eusebius believes, for “he said he was the Paraclete and like Christ anointed himself twelve apostles.”²¹⁶⁶ Crazy he may have been, yet he appealed to the best in Augustine who during the happiest years of his life was a devoted and ardent disciple, believing he had found in Mani true Christianity; yet when he left the Manichaeans, he says, the bottom of his world fell out and he spent the ensuing years in black despair.²¹⁶⁷ His attitude to Catholicism even after he joined it was one of caution, reserve, and to quote Troeltsch, “abysmal pessimism.”²¹⁶⁸ Socrates describes the Novatians as trying to be primitive Christians.²¹⁶⁹ Pacianus makes fun of them for avoiding the name of Novatians and blushing when it was applied to them: they would be primitive Christians and nothing else. “Why do you scold us for using rhetoric and quoting Virgil?”²¹⁷⁰ he asks his Novatian friend: the answer would be that the primitive Christians would have done the same.

When they weren’t actually claiming to be direct descendants of the first church, men and groups would still continue to claim a degree of inspiration which aimed at restoring that church. At the end of the second century “once again arose, loud and penetrating, the cry to establish life on the ground of the expectation of the Lord’s speedy return. There were congregations which, led by their bishops, withdrew to the desert; there were congregations which sold all their

²¹⁶⁵ Ἰουστίνος δὲ ὁ Νεαπολίτης, ἀνὴρ οὔτε τῷ χρόνῳ πόρρω ὢν τῶν ἀποστόλων οὔτε τῇ ἀρετῇ, ... Methodius, *Ex Libro de Resurrectione* 4.6, in *PG* 18:313.

²¹⁶⁶ Eusebius

²¹⁶⁷ Augustine

²¹⁶⁸ Troeltsch

²¹⁶⁹ Socrates Scholasticus

²¹⁷⁰ Pacianus

possessions in order to be able to meet the coming Christ.”²¹⁷¹ But if these were a departure from the main church, it was the church more than they, according to Harnack, which really departed from the old Christian traditions: “The church herself...entered the world-state by the open door in order to establish herself permanently, to preach Christianity in its streets....In the middle of the third century we find the church furnished with all the forces that a state and its culture could offer her, entering on all the relations of life, and ready for any concession which did not concern her creed.”²¹⁷² The last qualification is one which every church historian must make if he is to save anything at all of the real church, but it is a qualification in word only, without any support in fact. An examination of the doings and decisions of the councils through the centuries will show clearly enough that one cannot separate creed from practice and that once the church begins to compromise there is no limit. A church which was willing to make any concessions to the world is not the same as a church that would make none. It was a church that wanted to eat its cake and have it. But as Harnack notes, the main church was by no means the only church; it never was, it was never universal, because there were always Christian groups that challenged its claims. The crazy Phrygians Athanasius reports as insisting that the full truth was first revealed to them, and “that the faith of the Christians actually began with them.”²¹⁷³ This is simply the claim that they are the pure old church. In that case, says Athanasius, what of the fathers and the blessed martyrs and those who descend in their faith from them? There is an ominous note in Basil’s announcement that the corruption that is spreading like wildfire through the whole church only began in the East: “The gospel began with us, and so did also the seeds of apostasy, spreading from here throughout the entire *oecumene*.”²¹⁷⁴ This awareness of general and universal corruption in the church could only inspire the enthusiasm of the sects to salvage the true gospel from the wreckage. The main church in its glory had simply failed to deliver, and everybody

²¹⁷¹

²¹⁷² Harnack

²¹⁷³ Athanasius

²¹⁷⁴ Basil (PG 32:908)

knew it. After Montanus, says Bardy, after the passing of the Gnostic, “For still a long time after the first disillusionment there could still be found Christians, even bishops, only too eager to let themselves be fooled by new promises: every announcement of the end of the world provoked a crisis which the calmer spirits could cure only by dint of great effort.”²¹⁷⁵ This was not an isolated phenomenon, limited to a few crackpots and extremists—it was and ever remained a major threat to the church. Eusebius tells us for example of a Bishop Nepos in Egypt, who tried to revive the old doctrine of the millennium using Revelation as a text. The bishop of Alexandria opposed Nepos bitterly, though he greatly admired his pure character and his great gift for writing hymns—another annoying fact: it was not the worst, but the best and most gifted men who most often expressed discontent with the main church. The trouble with Nepos, says Eusebius, was that he was too literal-minded and naïve.²¹⁷⁶ If Christ and the apostles were still here, says Eusebius, we could ask them about these things. In their absence, however, the best we can do is to put an allegorical interpretation on the scripture and make it fit our needs.²¹⁷⁷ Nepos was therefore taking unfair advantage when he wrote his book *Refutation of the Allegorizers*, calling for continued apostolic authority. Again in the time of Origen and Clement of Alexandria one Judas “went off the track with the crazy idea that the *parousia* of the Antichrist was then at the doors,” of course Daniel was his guide, and his book caused an immediate sensation, “stirring up terribly the forces of persecution that were against us at that time and throwing the masses into complete confusion.”²¹⁷⁸ The rude and simple, literal-minded people who followed Novatus called themselves the Katharoi—those who had kept themselves pure, and regarded all others as being out of the church—for they were the true Christian church. Novatus regarded himself, says Eusebius, “as the fixer of dogma, the defender [shield-bearer] of Ecclesiastical knowledge.”²¹⁷⁹ The title of Hyperaspistes shows that he thought of his function as a preservative one primarily. A

²¹⁷⁵ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 311.

²¹⁷⁶ Eusebius

²¹⁷⁷ Eusebius, (HE VII, 24)

²¹⁷⁸

²¹⁷⁹ Eusebius, (HE VI, 43)

Novatian tract, held up to ridicule by Pacianus, said that ever since the Decian persecution the line of descent from Christ had been interrupted, and the outrageous thing is that he felt called to put things right again: “Novatians to the rescue! Justice will be liberated! By the authority of Novatianus whatever is wrong will be said right!”²¹⁸⁰ “The Lord has sent me,” Maximilla announced to the world, “for this work of preaching, and, whether I will or not, to learn the gnosis of God as one set apart, a mouthpiece, an interpretress—forced to be such whether I will or no.”²¹⁸¹ This, says Epiphanius in a feeble rebuttal, proves she was a false prophetess, for Christ came of his own free will! Apparently preachers must always be self-chosen on that pattern. Epiphanius speaks of other sects calling themselves apostolic; their sacraments and mysteries, he says significantly, are very different from ours. Then he says an interesting thing: “The church is like a ship, made not of one board but put together from many different ones. Yet each one of those heresies thinks it is the only timber in the ship, and so misses the whole idea of what the church is like.”²¹⁸² Again is Origen’s insistence not on uniformity, but on variety in the church—only crack-pots and extremists believe the church should be a one-piece vessel.

While the councils continued to wrangle and revivalists and sectarians sought to get the church back on the old track—their track—another interesting development was taking place within the church. The journal of the Lady Sylvia, now known for the first time by her right name of Aetheria kept during her pilgrimage in the Holy Land about the year 380 is one of the most remarkable documents in existence.²¹⁸³ What the good woman is seeking is tangible contact with the holy ones of old—and that is what she finds, infallibly and delightfully, wherever she goes. All the properties of the Old and New Testaments are awaiting her inspection at their proper and official places. The bush that had burned for Moses was still thriving and covered with blossoms, one might enter and pray in the cave in which Jesus was born, in which he was raised, in which

²¹⁸⁰ Pacianus?

²¹⁸¹ Maximilla

²¹⁸² Epiphanius

²¹⁸³ Aetheria, Peregrinatio Aetheriae/ Itenerarium Egeriae / Silviae vel pontius Aetheriae peregrinatio ad loca sancta

he taught his disciples, in which he was transfigured, in which he ate the last supper, in which he was buried, met with his disciples after the resurrection, and finally the cave in which the Lord ascended to heaven. It was a great time for cave-cults. Grottos have always played a major role in popular religion around the Mediterranean and Christianity gladly complied. In every page of Sylvia's travels we meet with the deep yearning for some tangible connection with the Bible to offset the allegorical pap that was disgusting the revivalists but which was the only reality the church had to offer. The quest of the Middle Ages was on. In 14th century Ghent "after each Mass was a sermon, lasting an hour and half: the monks and the priests tried to show the great similitude between them and the people of Israel...who have been kept in bondage by the Earl of Flanders."²¹⁸⁴ In the East, in Egypt and Syria, every popular uprising for liberation from the hated Western rule and culture was in the name of restoring the true old churches, from the fourth century on "old national Oriental traditions revived" and opposition to Hellenic culture intensified. The general corruption of the church, in fact, seems to have been taken as an axiom through the Middle Ages. In vain the main church sneered and mocked at little separatist groups "you think that you are the only people on earth who receive the exhortations of the Holy Ghost, but we can show you that the Holy Ghost speaks to that church which is universal, for does not the Psalm say 'Let all the earth sing a song to God?' But you alone of all the inhabitants of the earth pride yourselves on being different from all the rest and claim that you alone have the right to receive that order." It was vain, because for all the silly sophistical arguments to show that the true church must be the biggest church the fact remained that as long as even the littlest Christian community existed to challenge her claims the Catholic Church could not claim to be universal, and what was even more obvious, that God's people in the days of Israel as in those of the apostles did pride themselves on being small and peculiar—not a large and universal—people. Against the logical and rhetorical appeals of the schoolmen the revivalists could set the whole scripture.

²¹⁸⁴ Ghent

That the claims of the heretics who made the loss of the true church and the true authority their theme were not wild vaporings was clearly seen in the attitude the leaders of the main church itself took whenever things really went bad. As long as things went their way, Basil and Chrysostom, Jerome, Hilary, Eusebius, etc, could be very magnificent, indulging in a full-hearted and typically Mediterranean gloating over all the opponents of the church. But when sudden reverses of fortune abolished security in a night they all reverted to the old eschatology and took to conning Revelation and Daniel, suddenly remembering that they were members of a faithful and persecuted little band that looked not to the things of this world. In short, it was not only the crackpots who remembered that the church should have been something very different from what it had become—deep down, everybody knew it.

Nothing is more natural than that men in times of grave calamity should come to view all the things of this world—its hopes and promises and rewards—as a snare and a delusion. The well-known “Pessimistic Literature” of the Egyptians is of great age and “seems to have sprung up under the influence of the catastrophes which overwhelmed Egypt at the close of the VI Dynasty.”²¹⁸⁵ The great name in this category of composition, one who might well be called the father of Pessimistic Literature, Nefer-Rohu, who while he declares that the world has reverted to barbarism, prophesies that a king will come who will drive out the Asiatics, defend Egypt by a wall and bring to the land a rule of righteousness in which evil will vanish. It was the persecutions of the second and third centuries, according to Caspari, that led the church forever after to conceive of the Antichrist as primarily a political figure;²¹⁸⁶ after the fourth century the medieval “Endchrist” was developed, the Antichrist who would follow the fall of the Roman Empire. Accordingly when things went wrong the churchmen would always remember the Antichrist and were ever ready to tag the label on anyone who displeased them much.

²¹⁸⁵

²¹⁸⁶ Caspari

Persecution, says Voelker, was followed by a reawakening of the old “*enthusiasmus*” which was the quaint and old-fashioned quality of the primitive church of which the second generation had, according to historians, so wisely rid itself.²¹⁸⁷ The church that Tertullian left because it displayed the forms while it denied the power of godliness only took that unfortunate stand because it had to—it denied the gifts not on grounds of theory but of fact—it did not have them, therefore, since it claimed to be the true church, it could only insist that the true church should not have them. But nothing is more comical than to see the rush and scurry of the churchmen to claim for their church anything at all that might be interpreted as a miracle. When a Roman army in Germany was saved from dying of thirst by a providential shower of rain, everybody hastened to give his church credit for the “miracle.” Dio Cassius credits it to the prayers of the Egyptian magician Arnuphius who was with the army; on the Antonine column it is attributed to Jupiter Pluvius, and since there were Christians in the Army, Tertullian attributes the rain to their prayers.²¹⁸⁸ The pathetic “miracles” in Augustine are of the same order. The way these coincidences are exploited by the fathers clearly indicates that however loudly they may have protested that only fools and fanatics insist on the survival of the spiritual gifts, the church knows perfectly well that those gifts belong to it by right and should always be there. The recent phenomenal rains and the lights in the sky, says Tertullian, “all these are signs of the imminent wrath of God; we must preach and announce and beseech while yet the time remains to us.”²¹⁸⁹ Eusebius was absolutely convinced from his studies that the gift of prophecy must remain in the church until the second coming of Christ, and his great charge against the Montanists is not that they claimed that gift—he was rather impressed by that—but if they ever had it they had lost it. The great troubles that accompanied the Arian controversy naturally drove many to think as old Christians in the days of trial and persecution. “This,” says Athanasius, “is the greatest

²¹⁸⁷ Voelker

²¹⁸⁸ Dio Cassius / Antonine column / Tertullian

²¹⁸⁹ Tertullian

persecution the church has ever known. They are attacking our ancient traditions!”²¹⁹⁰ He quite forgets that what the real saints were persecuted for was not their traditions but their innovations.

Viewing the state of the church, Hilary can only declare—this is it!

Christ is to be expected, because the Antichrist is here. The pastors lament, because the hirelings have fled...the thieves have entered in, and the ravaging lion is abroad. The angel of Satan had transformed himself into an angel of light. Such a persecution it is as has never been since the beginning of the world. God will cut the time short; let us endure to the end. Let us suffer with Christ that we may reign with him. I have long foreseen this terrible time.²¹⁹¹

This is the language not of the victorious world church, but of the suffering old church of brief duration and no worldly expectations. It is notable that what these men call the greatest persecutions are not persecutions by the pagan monster on the imperial throne—not a bit of it—the real persecution is what Christians are doing to Christians. Lactantius’ preoccupation with the predictions of Revelation is meticulous and exact: no modern-day revivalist ever took the apocalypse more literally than the Christians of his time.

Another interesting tendency is to glorify the church in times of prosperity but to turn to the other world in times of disaster with an almost cynical disregard for *ecclesia*. In the day of her power the church is rankly worshipped; the church is the great miracle that proves the existence of God; the church is the revelation of Christ on earth—one need look no farther for his coming; the church is the kingdom of heaven, one need expect no higher glory than that apparent in her ritual, etc. etc. But a few heavy jolts to lay bare the basic instability of society and the forces of nature and the most devout will suddenly look right through the church, their eyes focused on something far beyond. St. Basil, who feels the full impact of social disaster in his day, almost never mentions the church at all; for him it is no miraculous, self-existent, independent, mystical, eternal, supernatural entity at all. “Men are not theologians today,” he says, “but technologists. The wisdom of this world has first call on the church, pushing aside the claims of the cross....The

²¹⁹⁰ Athanasius

²¹⁹¹ Hilary

wolves are in power. The old people mourn the passing of what was; the young grow up in pitiful ignorance.”²¹⁹² Because of her sins the whole church is going into bondage. “I believe the mystery of iniquity is already at work,” writes St. Cyril, “I am frightened by the wars of the nations, by the schisms of the churches, by brother-love turning to brother-hate. May it not happen that these things are to be fulfilled in our day?”²¹⁹³ Of course he who has seen the church in her glory asks, “will God allow it? Will he allow one to come with all power and lying wonders?”²¹⁹⁴ Alas, the answer is, he will allow it, “as a means of enabling the saints to win eternal glory on the other side.”²¹⁹⁵ He too, in the face of disaster, forgets the glorious future of the church and speaks the language of the other-side Christians of the early days. “The Antichrist will come when the appointed times of the Roman Empire are fulfilled and the end of the rest of the world is near.”²¹⁹⁶ When will that be? “The apostasy is now, this is the end.”²¹⁹⁷ Another contemporary of Nicaea, Gregory of Naziansis, is always comparing himself to Jeremiah, the church being the Jews on the eve of their destruction. Gregory the Theologian writing on the state of the church at the same time foresees immediate end and reports present dissolution of everything: “Our order is dissolved,” he says, “We have not done well to sit in exalted places. The officials, teachers of what is good to the congregation, are themselves under-nourished; our soul-doctors are themselves ailing, walking corpses teeming with every conceivable disease; our guides themselves do not know the way.”²¹⁹⁸ The church is being shaken to its foundations by the devil.

The men of the fourth century who with great exultation foresaw church and empire moving inexorably forward side by side to the conquest of the world, had no choice when the empire was beaten time and again by the barbarians, but to see in those disasters the sure presages

²¹⁹² St. Basil

²¹⁹³ St. Cyril

²¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁹⁸ Gregory the Theologian / of Naziansis

of the end. “When the empire fell, nothing remains for Ambrose (as for Jerome) but to lament the suffering of the world and the imminent end of the days.”²¹⁹⁹ After Ambrose got control of the emperor it was in pagan rather than in Christian circles, Straub observes, that people spoke of the coming destruction of the *Imperium*. Prudentius boldly put forth the coming victory of the Christian emperor over the barbarians as sure proof of the divinity of the Christianity religion.²²⁰⁰ It was the Christians more than the pagans who had to undergo a violent readjustment of their thinking with the fall of the empire. But the pattern was readily at hand—all they had to do was read the scriptures to discover intact the old eschatology which the schoolmen had brushed aside as “old wives’ tales.” But church and world were wedded again when Augustine made the kingdom of heaven absolutely identical with the church: henceforward one could not at will ignore the earthly failings of the church, for, being on earth, the kingdom cannot claim that it is here temporarily, by mistake, in a hostile environment—now it is fully right and proper that the kingdom endure upon earth, fully set up, in its power and glory, and no otherworld nonsense. “Western Monasticism,” says Harnack, “in contrast to the Eastern, maintained the apocalyptic element of Chiliasm, which, it is true, lay dormant for long periods, but at critical moments constantly emerged.”²²⁰¹ Monasticism was an example of such an emergence, Harnack believed, which lost the apocalyptic element in proportion as it allowed itself to be used by the church. The church becomes the steady enemy of the old eschatology, with which it constantly has to deal. In every century the church has had to deal with the saints—those who went back to the thought-patterns of the early church—by suppressing them. “The church is always running after the saints,” says Powicke, so she can control them.²²⁰² Indeed, for Harnack this is the *leitmotiv* of the church history through the Middle Ages and down to the present time. Constantly people, led by the scriptures, have reverted to the old promises and concepts to which the world church has,

²¹⁹⁹ Straub?

²²⁰⁰ Prudentius

²²⁰¹ Harnack

²²⁰² Powicke

necessarily, a violent antipathy. Chrysostom in evil times remembers that the Lord had said “that the time had come when the door of this my bounty would be closed.”²²⁰³ Like the other fathers, he cannot admit that it has already come, but like them he is convinced that it is very near. His comfort is that the victory of the church is also near, but that cannot come until the end of the world. Yet this was the same John who time and again had gloried in the almost instantaneous victory of the apostles over all evil in the world,—a complete smashing, universal victory for the right. He reports a great earthquake in his city of Antioch and tells how it made the people very pious—the rank and file too became primitive Christians—for a few weeks—when things went wrong. There were hymns in the market places and the churches were packed. With his incurable fourth-century devotion to appearances John immediately declared that the heavenly order had been restored. After the earthquake John himself stops speaking for a while like a fourth-century rhetorician, glorying in the power and splendor of the church, and takes the tone of an apostolic father: “If we keep the faith unshaken by our good works, then we may have with us an unshaken foundation for the church.”²²⁰⁴ He worries no more about poor attendance at church, “for it is not a multitude of bodies we want to see in the church, but a multitude of hearers.”²²⁰⁵ And what is this world? “A foul nest stuck together of scraps and mud. The greatest houses are no better than swallows’ nests: comes the winter and they promptly collapse.... Well, I say this is the winter now. God is going to purge the world with great destructions.” Christ “said that when the gospel had been preached to all nations then the end would come,” says John, “and since the gospel has been preached to almost all the *oecumene* nothing remains but that the end is at the door. Let us fear and tremble, beloved, for the end is very near. Yet we go on being trivial, vicious, and silly.”²²⁰⁶ “Let us build upon the rock, for the storms are coming.... There is great danger for those

²²⁰³ John Chrysostom

²²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

who lead the church...the Christian spirit must be ardent..."²²⁰⁷ It was the evil of the time that induced John to say these things. Left to themselves the fathers of the fourth century instantly gravitate into the orbit of the schools and look forward to long careers of success for themselves and prosperity for the church. It is real trouble that forces John to say:

We go on electing unqualified men...so that in our day it has reached the point where, unless God very quickly snatches us from the danger and saves us and his church all will be lost....Pray tell me, where do you think all these riots come from that now fill the churches?...All this corruption comes from the head: if the head is sick, of course the whole body will suffer....Some are actually filling the churches with murder, leading whole cities to riot and revolt, all because they are fighting to be elected bishops.²²⁰⁸

Jerome is even more eloquent for the West than Chrysostom is for the East. When the hope of the empire was blasted in 378 the fathers suddenly turned to eschatology, returning to old Christian concepts, ancient *topoi*, that "the earth was unstable and the empire would surely fall."²²⁰⁹ Rome has fallen, cries Jerome, Greece has fallen, "the Orient seems to be immune from these evils, but its turn is coming next: the wolves of the north are even now attacking the eastern cities."²²¹⁰ To express his grief the Saint then quotes—Virgil! to the effect that a hundred tongues could not tell his woes. And why has this happened? "Because of our sins the barbarians are strong. Because of our crimes the Roman army is beaten!"²²¹¹ Civil war, in fact, is killing more than the enemy, he says. As the ancient Israelites went into bondage to Nebuchadnezzar, "so we miserable ones have so displeased God that by the rage of the barbarians his own rage is felt against us....O the shame of it! The Roman army, conqueror and ruler of the world, is being chased by timid barbarians!...While we are dying and being overthrown every day we go right on thinking that we are indestructible."²²¹² So deeply had the lovely lesson of the indestructible heavenly order been ingrained in the thinking of the fourth century. It was impossible to believe

²²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, (Sacred. 218)

²²⁰⁹ Jerome?

²²¹⁰ Jerome

²²¹¹ *ibid.*

²²¹² *ibid.*

that Roman Christian Civilization was anything but God's own world order. "Who will ever believe it?" cries Jerome, "Rome fighting on her own home territory [*in gremio suo*, "on her home base"] not for glory but for survival! Not ever fighting, in fact, but rather trying to buy off her life with gold and goods. The cause for all this is that we are fighting like a lot of half-barbarians among ourselves."²²¹³ A review of Roman history follows.

As for the church, our house upon this earth as well as our home in heaven, if we are lazy and slow to good works, it will be brought low. And the whole structure which was designed to elevate to the peak of heaven shall collapse to earth, bringing ruin to its inhabitants. When our hands weaken the storms overcome us, and this is as true of the church as it is of private individuals: that through neglect of the leaders the whole structure collapses, and where there is no incentive to crime there is always found a pretense to virtue.²²¹⁴

In view of the great and unexpected calamities Jerome not only reverts to old church eschatology but actually junks the darling faith and confidence of the fourth century: that though individuals might go astray the church never could, that though the pretenders might swarm in the end the true church would always prevail. Now under terrible blows of misfortune Jerome is forced to admit that if individuals can lose the light and go to ruin, so can the church. "The stake is not broken and useless and destroyed—it would be impiety to say that: but the stake is taken away from the place of the believer, that is, the church—because of daily increasing impiety."²²¹⁵ The church is indeed indestructible, but that does not mean that it must always remain in the same place, where the people are not righteous it is taken away. "This means," says Jerome commenting on Luke 18:8, "that Christ deserts [literally "undoes," "disestablishes"] his church because of daily increasing unrighteousness."²²¹⁶ And where is this unrighteousness? Jerome agrees with his Eastern counterpart John Chrysostom: it begins always at the top: "For it is the custom of the leaders of the churches to oppress the common people in their pride."²²¹⁷ "The pride of the important ones, the iniquity of those in charge, often drive people from the church,

²²¹³ *ibid.*

²²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²²¹⁷ *ibid.*

driving away from the Lord those who he himself hath saved....That is why there is a famine in the lands, a famine to hear the word of God.”²²¹⁸

But how could the church expect to be free of wickedness and still be a world church? Jerome realizes the difficulty of the problem. “It needs must be that in the net of the whole church should be both good and bad. For if all were pure, what would be left over to the judgment of God?”²²¹⁹ This weak and silly argument was the common answer to the charges of necessary evil in a world-church. A little thought shows its shallowness. Chrysostom uses it in a shocking way. Does the greatness, power and wisdom of a judge depend on the number and the depravity of the criminals brought before him? “If all were pure” within the church would God’s judicial functions actually be in jeopardy? If it is necessary to preserve a goodly batch of evil-doers against the judgment, must such be preserved within the church? Jerome falls back on the classic argument: “The wheat and the tares must grow up together.”²²²⁰ Here he boldly corrects the Lord’s priceless interpretation of this parable—the only fully interpreted parable in the scripture: “The field is the world,” Jesus had said. “I do not affirm that the field is the world,” says Saint Jerome, “but I understand by the field the congregation of the Christian population.”²²²¹ As if in this case Christ had left any room for this or any other interpretation. Having put the Lord to rights, Jerome is free to continue:

Just as you find mixed wheat and tares in fields, even so in the terrestrial churches [at least he concedes that much to the Bible] you will find some wheat and some weeds. This should teach us, when sinners turn up from time to time in our congregations, not to be scandalized, nor to say: “Behold, a sinner in the holy community! If that is allowed, what is wrong with my sinning?” As long as we are in this present world, that is in the field and in the net, both good and bad are contained in it. But when Christ comes, then there will be a separation and 1 Corinthians 4 will be fulfilled.²²²²

But if sin is to be expected in the church, why does God persecute the church for the sinners that are in her? Why is she to be punished for that which by her very nature she cannot possibly

²²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²²¹ *ibid.*

²²²² *ibid.*

avoid? “An angry God gives the church over to persecutions,” says Jerome, “because of vice and sinning, that she may come forth from the fuller’s fire of the world as pure as gold and silver.”²²²³ Strange reasoning indeed! God insists on including all the dross and defilement of the world in his church for the sake of making it universal, and then he becomes angry and by violent means removes—to the exact amount that he once mixed it in—all the dross and defilement! The church is no longer the body of the elect that its name implies: it is now the universal catch-all; in the ancient times only the sheep ever heard the Master’s voice; only the gold and silver were allowed in to the church, and those were kept pure and undefiled by passing through the fires of persecution and being taken out of the world. The totally opposite doctrine of a universal world-church is opposed to this and required generations of cunning lawyers and rhetoricians to make a case for it. Having admitted that God would purge the church, Jerome is ready to treat the dangerous ground of restoration—ground that the fathers, without the pressure of real and violent set-backs that needed explaining, preferred to avoid. “Hence the Lord, promising again peace and mercy, says he shall return again to build up the church [*eam aedificaturum*, “to reestablish it”]...which things, foretold thus by all the prophets, refer to the celestial Jerusalem, which having been destroyed by ruin, is to be built up by virtue. Which things we more properly interpret as referring to the church.”²²²⁴ The church is now in the place of fallen Israel, not an enviable position, but a significant admission. Can the men whose wickedness brought about its fall qualify to reestablish the church on a heavenly foundation? Can the generations of wickedness that broke the covenant and forgot the law reestablish the law and the covenant of their own authority? The heavenly Jerusalem can be established from only one direction. There is no doubt that Jerome had come to this as a result of experiences almost too terrible for him to believe. With the fall of Rome, which he admits with horror and incredulity is just that and

²²²³ *ibid.*

²²²⁴ *ibid.*

nothing else—he closely associates the fall of the church: the two formed a single society, and that society was destroyed because of its wickedness.

This desolation which we have described befalling the city of Rome we know also to have come upon every city in the world! For other regions have been desolated by calamity, others wiped out by the sword, others tortured by famine, others swallowed up by the earthquakes. Let us therefore with all our heart and mind despise this world as a thing marked for extinction.

What a comedown from the confidence and glory of half a century earlier!

The poet Juvencus represents an almost pathological attempt to accept Christian denial of the world while being totally unable to conceive of any type of success of immortality that is not bestowed here on earth. It is a state of mind that was to mark the harassed careers of great Catholic churchmen from that day to this—a morbid attempt to play a role written wholly for an earthly setting while constantly assuring other-worldly attitudes. A pose of resignation that has no value beyond impressing the gallery it feigns to despise. A studied indifference to the world that lost its whole effect lacking an appreciative worldly audience. In short the impossible assignment of making an earthly career of the kingdom of heaven. “Nothing on this earth is immortal,” says Juvencus, “neither the world of men nor their governments, nor Golden Rome itself.... Yet men have always striven for immortal fame.”²²²⁵ What shall we do in that case? We shall turn from writing perishable pagan poetry to writing the same meters on Christian themes, which since they are immortal cannot perish. Thereby we shall gain greater and more lasting fame than Virgil or Ovid. By simply writing on Christian themes, Juvencus is sure he can gain the immortality he wants—the immortality here on earth for which every poet yearns. He despises nothing of pagan immortality but the proper names it invokes: simply change them and continue as before. As “thoroughly Virgilian” as Jerome was Ciceronian, he is the true ancestor of the churchmen whose highest glory is to be seen of men on the cover of *Time*.

As the heavy jolts continued to be administered to Christian civilization from barbarian armies, the forces of nature, and especially from internal disorders which were chronic, the

²²²⁵ Juvencus

fathers continued to carry water on both shoulders. The Scythians, says Nicephorus, are indeed the ministers of divine wrath—but they don't have to overdo it! “The afflictions of the empire are out of all proportion to our deserts.”²²²⁶ We would much prefer, he insists, “moderate correction for immoderate follies.”

The twentieth century has reopened the question. How can the Christian world have behaved with such infinite folly and brought such disasters upon itself? At present Communism offers an easy solution to the problem. But Communism is not the cause but the punishment. Communism itself is caused along with other plagues. It is not self-produced. It is a vacuum phenomenon, as Hitler was. Maggots destroy only foul and putrid matter, they cannot touch sound tissue. A society that is by its own confession swarming with maggots has no call to blame the little parasites for its condition anymore than one who never bathes can lay his troubles to lice. We live in a world of small obnoxious creatures, all of which can do us harm, millions of them surround us every moment of the day and night, but protection against them comes not by hourly ablutions and gargles of Lysol but simply by achieving a state of general good health, mental, moral, and physical. It is only by our own organic integrity, and not by the foolish and impossible attempt to sterilize all the environment around us that we survive at all.

“‘You are not primitive,’ was the charge brought against Rome by Anglican and Puritan alike.”

Thus Fawkes, “Newman was too well informed and too astute to deny it. He met it by an effective *tu quoque*: ‘Neither are you.’”²²²⁷ This was the astute and informed answer of Augustine to the pagans when they charged the Christians with having failed to bring the reign of peace on earth and with not being a particularly blessed or upright people: “Neither are you.” But whereas the pagan wins the argument, since he never claimed the supernal qualities for his society that the Christian did for his, Newman’s retort while it silences his opponents does his own case no good: for his church most certainly and emphatically and repeatedly and unequivocally did and does

²²²⁶ Nicephorus

²²²⁷ Fawkes, “Christian Institutions and Beliefs,” 111.

claim to be the primitive one. It no longer claims that where the informed and the astute are concerned, but it most certainly does proclaim it by precept and insinuation in popular arts: painting (the angels of Bethlehem dressed as altar-boys), radio, television and movies, where Peter officiates at a high Mass with post-Tridentine ordinances. A bishop of Rome writing to the bishop of Gubbio in the fifth century laments the fact that the public naturally assumes that whatever it sees done in the churches goes right back to the apostles: this natural assumption can be only too easily exploited among the illiterate.²²²⁸

Following the well-worn pattern, a chain of modern disasters has brought the churchmen of every camp back to something like the old eschatology and a most definite reversion to literalism. A hundred years ago Newman exploded a bombshell with his announcement that “here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”²²²⁹ He was justifying his church for having changed often as Karl Adam does today. Both men would have us overlook the number one fact that the whole merit of the church as such, and its whole excuse for being on any other level than that of a social reform club is that it is not a “here below” institution, and so far as its concepts of God and man, heaven and hell, good and bad, life and death, etc, are concerned to change is not to be perfect but to be completely disqualified as an inspired and heavenly establishment. The Protestants with their everlasting obsession with the words (and little more than the words) “vital,” “dynamic,” and “progressive,” look with a sort of amused indulgence on the crudeness, naïvete, and literalism of the early church. But like the Catholics, they feel implicitly that the true church really should be as much like the primitive church as possible. Accordingly, what Olaf Linton calls the “Consensus” of the 1880’s, reconstructed the primitive church most near to the heart’s desire of its investigators.²²³⁰ They thought they were being strictly scientific, says Linton, while they were really expressing their own conditioning in all things; they were reformed and congregational in their orientation, ergo, so was the primitive

²²²⁸ 5th C. letter from b. of Rome to b of Gubbio

²²²⁹ Newman

²²³⁰ Olaf Linton

church, they were politically inclined and democratic, idealistic and individualistic—so of course were the early Christians. Sohm recognized the tendency and pointed it out, but to no avail: the doctors were free to build up a primitive church entirely to their liking, because “the sources were very scarce and fragmentary. It was necessary, if anything at all was to be made of them to interpret the sources first of all and fill them out. They read them ‘as the nature of the thing required,’”²²³¹ which really meant, Linton shrewdly observes, “they read the passages with modern eyes.”²²³² They were mostly Pietists theologically, and so it cometh about that they discovered the primitive Christians to be Pietists at heart. As nineteenth century individualists, they were all convinced that the early Christians based all on the convictions of the pious individual, the religious experience of the times stemming entirely from these, who joined together spontaneously and informally in natural communities of like-minded, tolerant liberals—the first churches. They knew, said Renan, “little else than the law of love.”²²³³ All scriptural passages that might tend to confound or embarrass this beautiful picture were declared forthwith to be “*Tendenzschriften*.” “I do not suppose,” wrote Renan, “Second Peter has a single defender among true critics.”²²³⁴ A true critic being one who would not defend Second Peter.

The publication of the *Didache* in 1883 ??? shock to such complacency and Harnack’s subsequent discovery that there was not only an active priesthood in the primitive church of the *Didache* but actually two priesthoods “was in opposition to everything that had ever been claimed before.”²²³⁵ After that there was nothing for it but to reconcile what the “Consensus” believed were absolutely opposite and mutually exclusive things: the office and the spirit, an eschatological-supernatural religion and an “*Immanuenz-reiligion*” of individual conviction. Gunkel and Weiss were able to show that cult practice need not necessarily by pure mechanical formality at all, that there are even such things as “enthusiastic” cults, nay, “even cult and

²²³¹ Sohm

²²³² Olaf Linton

²²³³ Renan

²²³⁴ *ibid.*

²²³⁵ Harnack?

prophecy are not opposites but actually belong together.”²²³⁶ The old antithesis between *Ordnung* and *Geist*, *Amt* and *Geit* was done away in a great reevaluation. It is conceivable that revelation and inspiration instead of being precluded by the holding of an office, might in the early church actually have depended on the holding of an office, and that such an office be regarded not as the enemy of all inspiration but as an indispensable condition for inspiration. The church, the organization spurned by the “Consensus” is the main object of theological study today, both by Catholic and Protestant writers, according to Linton. “There is everywhere a sense for the original society,” sectarianism has receded and in its place is “a new feeling for the general church seen in the ecumenical movement...a new feeling for the uniqueness of the church.”²²³⁷ The great problem today, says Linton, is “what was the relationship between office and spirit in primitive Christianity?”²²³⁸ A world which can even ask that question is in no position to answer it. To realize that the church really played a central role in the thinking of the first Christians and to restore the church to its pristine position are two different tasks. It is late indeed to lock the barn door so many centuries after the horse has gone. It has all changed and changed and changed says Newman. We will go back to what it was, say the Protestants, unaware as ever that one does not control heavenly things simply by taking thought.

“The whole future of religion, both as a subject of speculation and as an approach to reality,” wrote Lake, “depends on the investigation of mysticism. Is it a form of auto-intoxication or a revelation of a truth?”²²³⁹ Recently A.D. Nock, while noting that there is “no direct borrowing from pagan mysteries” by early Christianity, insists that “we must again do justice to the high seriousness and continued vitality of early paganism and to the essential unity of much of man’s behavior towards the unseen.”²²⁴⁰ Karl Adam again. It is the search for something over and beyond philosophy to fill that place that revelation had in the early church. Today the reality of

²²³⁶ Gunkel and Weiss

²²³⁷ Olaf Linton

²²³⁸ *ibid.*

²²³⁹ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 173.

²²⁴⁰ A.D. Nock

the ancient church is admitted. One may be a good man now without belonging to the church, but “actually,” writes Pauck, “it is impossible to be a Christian believer apart from the social reality of the ‘church.’ The history of the Christian people proves,” he boldly announces, “that there never was a living faith in Christ apart from the ‘church’ . . . There is a rediscovery of the ‘church’ in our time . . . a reorientation of contemporary Protestantism. Christians have come to realize that . . . they are a minority,”²²⁴¹ exactly as in the days of Jerome and Chrysostom. “Face to face with this fact, they have been compelled to understand themselves again, like their predecessors of old, as a ‘peculiar people,’” but it is far too late “to renew them again unto repentance.”²²⁴² Pauck is always careful to put the word “church” in quotation marks—it is a peculiar thing, an unknown “X,” its existence, importance, and nature is clear from the operations in which it is involved, but what is it? We have not the right to say, as the Christian world now does after a thousand years of ignoring the kingdom of heaven, “X,” whatever it is, is ours; we will have “X” for our own, though as yet we know it only as a historical something that must have existed 2000 years ago. What the church was is actually the subject of the most diligent investigations of Catholic and Protestant scholars at the present moment. Since they claim to be members of the church it is high time they got an inkling of what it was—for both are beginning to realize that in spite of all sophistry about a changing world, to belong to the real church one must belong to the church exactly as it was; and that cannot be a reproduction in wax, no matter how perfect. Years ago the greatest scholar of his day, Eduard Meyer, made mock of the Mormons for being a flesh and blood and spirit reproduction of the primitive christians.²²⁴³ Little did he realize what a compliment he was paying. Detached and objective, representing no church and with no religious axe (though with plenty of others!) to grind, Meyer spoke the final word. Others have loudly proclaimed themselves to be perfect likenesses of primitive Christianity; one group alone has had

²²⁴¹ Pauck

²²⁴² *ibid.*

²²⁴³ Eduard Meyer

an expert and unbiased judge, far and away the most competent scholar of the time, pronounce the same on its behalf—and that with no intent to please, but only to belittle.

There is little enough to go on if one would discover what went on in the early church. “The traditional or Catholic position,” says Lake, “argues that, for some reason, the earlier writers—the Synoptics—left out the sacramental teaching of Jesus and were supplemented by the later writer, John the Apostle, who remembered discourses of Jesus which had been disregarded or not understood at the time they were spoken. There are many books expounding this theory...”²²⁴⁴ And what a sloppy, hit-or-miss, lackadaisical concept of the founding of the church it must rest on! Lake’s own suggestion is that the best preparation for understanding it is to read Browning’s *Death in the Desert*, which represents the church as drifting utterly without inspiration or control.²²⁴⁵ There has been much speculation as to whether and how Paul could have changed the whole concept of the church. When scholars turned from concentrating on the question of the organization of the primitive church to that of its primacy in Christian thought it became clear that the church—whatever it was or whatever its organization, “dominated the thought of primitive Christianity.”²²⁴⁶ How could the object of this engrossing and dominating thought so completely escape us? “Today,” Radermacher wrote in 1931, “the idea of the church is coming to its own, whereas formerly they spoke of religion of Christianity rather than of the church, of personal faith rather than of church dogma, from the relationship between the soul and God and Christ rather than from the church society.”²²⁴⁷ How completely the true nature of this all-important “church” escaped the experts is seen in the fact that Kattenbusch announced as a surprising discovery in 1921 the fact that “in the New Testament *ekklesia* never appears with an adjectival epithet serving as a title, while as early as the apostolic fathers the most glorious

²²⁴⁴ Lake, *Introduction to New Testament*, 62.

²²⁴⁵ Browning, *Death in the Desert*

²²⁴⁶ ?

²²⁴⁷ Radermacher, 1931

epithets turn up.”²²⁴⁸ Plainly the church was viewed with wholly different eyes in the two generations, and the explanation for the modest tone of the original Christians towards the church was as Kattenbusch and the rest could see, not that it was unimportant to them, but that as far as they were concerned it belonged entirely to the other world. They show none of the inclination to glorify the church before men which became the abiding vice of succeeding generations. “It lies in the very nature of the church that boasts divine origin,” wrote Eduard Schwartz, “that it will have nothing to do with any historical evolution, and will to the best of its ability remove any evidence that might refute the claims of any of its institutions to the authority of being pristine.”²²⁴⁹ The Catholic theologians who announce that “here below to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often,” only take their desperate stand because an overwhelming weight of evidence forces them to—wherever it is possible and as long as possible they deny all change. They must be forced to yield point upon point—though once a few are conceded the gates are down and there may be no limit.

The new concessions to the importance of the church in primitive Christianity are part of a wider return to literalism, forced on the teachers of religion by the calamities of the times. These same evils which, as Pauck observes, have forced the Christian world to remember that the church was originally by its very nature a persecuted minority, and so come to think of themselves in the same case, have brought a new understanding to others. The fathers of the fourth century in the days of their glory decided that the Antichrist was not going to be so bad after all, that the winter time of the just would, surprise! be but a short and gentle castigation, that the night in which no man could work was a matter of some months at most, and that apparently the church was to be safe no matter what. Just so the comfortable and magnificent divines of the nineteenth century despised nothing so much as the “crass literalism” that sees real persecutions, real calamities, real bloodshed in the signs of the times. Eduard Meyer writhes and retches at

²²⁴⁸ Kattenbusch, 1921

²²⁴⁹ Eduard Schwartz

Joseph Smith's literalism—there was nothing in the Christian world like it since the primitive Christians made fools of themselves, the Mohammedans even have never been guilty of anything like such a blasphemous mixture of the coarse, tangible, matter-of-fact with spiritual and intellectual values. “Saint Jerome cites as an example of nonsense,” wrote Arnold Lunn in his controversy with Haldane in 193x, “the idea that God really sits on a throne in heaven ‘as if he were a commander or judge, and that the angels stand round to obey his commands.... Literalism is a Protestant, not a Catholic, failing.”²²⁵⁰

But now the tables are turned and Catholic and Protestant are vying with each other in the new literalism. Toynbee proclaims “coming centripetal counter movement” of the most literal kind imaginable, and warns us that “if our first precept should be to study our own history... for the part which the West has played in the unification of mankind, our second precept, in studying history as a whole, should be to... give religious history the primacy. For religion, after all, is the serious business of the human race.”²²⁵¹ “No one is ‘compelled’ to accept the Creeds,” writes Austin Birch, “...but if he accepts the necessity of Creeds he must accept them *ex animo*, and must not ‘bowdlerize’ them.”²²⁵² He points out that there is a “central doctrine” to every religion: it is not enough to believe in social betterment, to have sympathy with the religion in question, attend its ceremonies or sign the roster of its members, etc., one must actually believe certain specific doctrines peculiar to that religion. And the “central doctrines” peculiar to Christianity are the very ones to which Christians have been loath to subscribe because of their literalness. F. A. M. Spencer, once a “liberal, ameliorist, social-gospel worker,” now discovers that by accepting the literal return of Christ we remove the strain “of having to contort his message, ignoring a considerable portion of it [the *Tendenzschriften*] and making unwarranted deductions from other parts, to suit our preconceptions. It gives a sense of relief, of illumination, of enlargement. We begin to see now. The world has not reformed itself or allowed itself to be reformed by God in

²²⁵⁰ Arnold Lunn, 193x

²²⁵¹ Toynbee

²²⁵² Austin Birch

love. But then Christ did not say that it would.”²²⁵³ The failure of the church to save the world is now producing the same results as in the fourth century: “God in love” has not reformed the world and faced with that fact the clergy, once sublimely confident that “God cannot fail” suddenly realize that an invulnerable and irresistible church was never part of the program. The world is getting desperate, Spencer announces, exactly as the disillusioned Basil and Hilary had, God must soon announce himself or all will be lost. “Yet in what way could God most adequately reveal himself to humanity?” he asks, and gives the answer that would have once shocked his church beyond expression:

Surely through a human person....Are we to hope that increased evangelistic ardour and ecclesiastical efficiency will produce in the near future what preachers and prophets and pastors have not succeeded in accomplishing during all the centuries since Christ appeared on earth—namely the general conversion of living faith in God, needed to forestall the creeping degeneration and maybe sudden destruction with which mankind is threatened?²²⁵⁴

To match this Protestant reversion to literalism the Catholics have come out in 1950 with the *Munificentissimus Deus Bull*, announcing that

after repeated supplications we have again and again addressed prayers to God and invoked the light of the Holy Spirit...by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul and by our own authority we pronounce, declare, and define as a divinely revealed dogma that the Immaculate ever Virgin Mother of God Maria, having completed the course of her earthly life, was bodily and in spirit taken up to celestial glory.²²⁵⁵

As is well known, the pope preserves the deposit of the apostles intact, he may not add to it. Had that deposit contained in itself the answer to the question the centuries-long deadlock on the subject would never have existed nor would a special intervention have been necessary to solve it.

J. Ternus, S. J. in explaining this “revelation” hastens to reassure us that it adds absolutely nothing to what was known, “Since through the dogmatization,” he explains in a neat sophism,

we are not given any new content of revelation, but rather a new presentation of the content of what has already been objectively revealed. The theologian has now to apply himself to the scientific study of the faith in order to provide proof, showing how that

²²⁵³ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 18.

²²⁵⁴ Spencer, “Imminence of the Parousia,” 241-242.

²²⁵⁵ *Munificentissimus Deus Bull*, Art.44, 1950

dogmatic truth is actually contained in the sources of belief, the scriptures and the tradition, and exactly how and in what ways this truth could win its way through to the full light of a formally defined dogma.²²⁵⁶

Brother Ternus is trying like mad to say that the pope has provided information that was already there; that he has not had a revelation, yet tells the world something it can only have known through revelation. What interests us in this is the new turn to literalism. Into that heaven in which the idea of God on his throne with his Son beside him is something which Jerome and Lunn view as utterly ridiculous, in which any idea of a defined or tangible being is out of the question, Maria now ascends—with her body! The only person in all that celestial glory to be so equipped, since on no matter are the fathers more emphatic than that God is absolutely and completely incorporeal and the Son, his Word, is equally so. Since 1950 we are presented with the nearest thing to a literal revelation and the content of that revelation the nearest thing to a literal doctrine that the Roman Church has yet produced.

In the lush days of the intellect, Eduard Meyer expressed the universal and unvarying opinion of all thinking people, that in the early church “the more educated people emphatically combated the coarse sensuous concepts (of the others), and finally the church got rid of them altogether.”²²⁵⁷ Now the church wants them back. Finally, wonder of wonders, “there are signs that the doctrine of apostolic succession is in the process of restatement in terms of the idea of a continuing body whose nucleus is the original apostles, a body to which new members can be, as it were co-opted.”²²⁵⁸ It will be recalled that one of the charges brought against the early cults that tried and claimed to be a continuation of the primitive church was that they went on having apostles. And now, in the middle of the twentieth century, we recognize the soundness of their reasoning. To recognize the need for apostles in what is to pass as the true church is one thing: the recognition of the defect does not authorize whoever recognizes it to correct it. The recognition of the fact that a royal line has died out in a country does not authorize the one who discovers it to

²²⁵⁶ J. Ternus, S.J.

²²⁵⁷ Eduard Meyer

²²⁵⁸ ?

crown either himself or anybody else as continuing that royal line, and the recognition that apostles are necessary does not authorize one to set them up at will. Yet that is what our dignified churchmen would do.

Modern Efforts (410-422) (Section 21)

The valiant and determined struggles of the fourth century fathers to force out of the scriptures even the merest hint of an admission that the church might not pass away after all has been carried on down to the present. How simple it is to attribute to the early church a sentimental regard for the church of the future which is nowhere expressed in the New Testament! The great Caesar Baronius supplies us with a touching example of such wishful thinking when he marvels at that “wonderful divine dispensation which has brought it about that these most sacred swaddling clothes (of Christ) should in memory of such an event have been preserved for future times, in whose honor has been erected a most noble basilica and an annual feast day is celebrated by the Christian population.”²²⁵⁹ This recognizes the logical fact that the early church should have had careful concern for the future if it was building for the future. At the same time it offers a pathetic example of the eagerness of the later church to establish some kind of real and tangible contact with the divine things of old, things whose divinity is now guaranteed by their antiquity. When divinity and antiquity are identical quantities, we may be sure that all true glory lies in the past.

All modern church history is conditioned, and that conditioning is expressed in the titles of works, which do not so much sum up the fruits of investigation as lay down the lines investigation is to follow. Neander’s *Planting and Training of the Christian Church* is an example. “Within 150 years the prophecy of Jesus was accomplished,” wrote Renan.²²⁶⁰ “The grain of mustard had become a tree which began to cover all the world.” Tertullian and Justin, he says, confirm this interpretation. This has since become a very favorite verse. But in speaking of the mighty tree the Lord specifically states that it is the kingdom of the heavens, which, as we have noted, was not identified with the church until the time of Saint Augustine. On the earth it is held in contempt, but whenever it achieves full stature it harbors the birds of heaven—heavenly

²²⁵⁹ Caesar Baronius

²²⁶⁰ Renan

beings, not mortals. For Eduard Meyer, Matthew 11:25ff and Luke 10:21f are nothing less than Jesus's "shout of triumph for the success of Christianity."²²⁶¹ Venuti's *Victory of Christianity* is another loaded title: for him that victory comes with the fourth century.²²⁶² The spiritual gifts promised in Mark 16:17f "testify to the victory of the forces of good over those of evil; they were open evidences that in the clash of the two great world-powers, God and Satan, the latter was being cast down; this casting-out of devils, this taking-up of serpents, prophesied the entire overthrow of 'the old serpent...the deceiver of the whole world.'"²²⁶³ So Sharman, eager to make a contribution. "In theology," wrote Lebreton in 1918, "archaism is dangerous; the more one is convinced by theology and by history that the church has progressed in the understanding of the deposited revelation, the more reluctant one is to turn from the common instruction of the scholastics to appeal to the teaching of a few ancient fathers."²²⁶⁴ Even so Duchesne argues that the fourth century possessed far greater knowledge than the second or third. Where did it come from? Not from revelation, of course, but from study. But did the 4th century know more than the apostles? If not it cannot surpass the second century unless that century has lost knowledge, and once it is admitted that apostolic knowledge can be lost, Iranaeus' great argument for the survival of the church collapses. Another loaded title, Mouzon's *The Program of Jesus*: "He organized his society that men might continue to live as he lived and work as he worked, so that the kingdom of God might come and his will be done."²²⁶⁵ His program was to be worked out in history from below, not from above, so that "If we fail, he fails." Followed inevitably by the rhetorical: "And he shall not fail!"²²⁶⁶ Most patronizing. Catholic rhetoric is no less stereotyped:

Only the Christians know the God whom they worship [though they describe him as utterly incomprehensible]: the church is truly the pillar of light which moves through the world plunged in night, and towards its light run the souls of men [the exact opposite of John 1:3, etc]. Only the martyrs, the great saints, are dazzled by its splendor here below;

²²⁶¹ Eduard Meyer

²²⁶² Venuti, *Victory of Christianity?*

²²⁶³ Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus About the Future*, 341. See also, Rev. 12: 9, 10.

²²⁶⁴ Lebreton, 1918

²²⁶⁵ Edwin DuBose Mouzon, *The Program of Jesus* (George H. Doran company: New York, 1925).

²²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

but they are only the avant-coureurs of the immense army of the faithful which marches in the light of Christ and which, little by little, ascends to him.²²⁶⁷

The big church is more sober than the saints of old: they were dazzled, fanatical; the new church has its cake and eats it. It enjoys the light of heaven, but in the cozy security of the library. As is well known, there was a very active interchange of letters between churches during the time of the apostolic fathers; in an age of *scribendi cacoethes* nothing is more natural than that the fever should continue, especially since as we are repeatedly told, letter-writing was the only way any kind of uniform action could be achieved among churches. Yet a letter written from Rome to the Fayum in 250 A.D. is proof for Christianity not only that the churches kept up contact among themselves, but that “Christianity was going to vanquish idolatry, thanks to its divine superiority and also to its grandiose organization, which united the world by its idea.”²²⁶⁸ “Only those who accept the dogma of the divinity of Christ as the central fact in a long process of divine revelation can escape bewilderment in the contemplation of the spread of Christianity.”²²⁶⁹ Thus Powicke. But did not Buddhism spread as far and as fast, to far more people and far more deeply? And did not Islam? Is it the business of the historian to “escape bewilderment” at the price of accepting any explanation that is offered? All these great movements are bewildering, and all are under God’s supervision. But who can contemplate the evils of a great world war and “escape bewilderment”? “How,” asks Buchberger, “can we rest the Christian faith on Christ as a distant historical fact?”²²⁷⁰ We do not need to, is the answer, for Christ is ever present, since “*Die kirche ist der fortlebende christus*. Thus we are able in faith to grasp historical revelations as something present.”²²⁷¹ If members of the church “do not dispose personally of the gift of miracles,” says Buzy, “they participate none the less in a general manner in the miracles of the collectivity, and in this miracle of a church, champion of right and virtue, which resists the thousand year pressure of

²²⁶⁷ ?

²²⁶⁸ Letter from Rome to Fayum? or is this someone else writing about that letter?

²²⁶⁹ Powicke, pg.24

²²⁷⁰ Buchberger

²²⁷¹ *ibid.*

evil and vice, and who succeeds in saving her church in spite of all the attacks of the Antichrist.”²²⁷² This is Chrysostom all over; when he follows the scripture Monsieur Buzy must note repeatedly that it was precisely the obstacle to the Antichrist which was going to be removed, allowing a free hand to the adversary. This he admits puzzles him, but he overrides all by airily declaiming: “in spite of all this...” Now he tells us that the miracle is that the Adversary was never to be allowed a free hand, and never to prevail at all.²²⁷³ The Antichrist has been a going concern for 19 centuries, he can now announce, and we agree—but with full understanding that when the Antichrist was to rule his rule was to be unchallenged, and that he would come in the name of Christ. These two fundamental aspects of his nature Buzy conveniently ignores. It comes as a surprise to F. A. M. Spencer to discover that “Jesus...conceived of the continuance of both redeemed and unredeemed earthly conditions” after the second coming.²²⁷⁴ He also thought of people being born and dying after the *parousia*, though “in the reconstituted world death would have lost its strength and its terror.”²²⁷⁵ In

the parable of the seed sprouting, the corn growing and ripening, and the eventual harvest, Jesus seems to have meant that he was initiating a process of spiritual growth in mankind which would have to reach a certain stage before he would come back in visible glory. The length of the interval would be determined by the time taken for this to happen. As the husbandman would find nothing worth reaping for some while after sowing the seed, so would the Messiah meet with very inadequate response if he should return within a few years.²²⁷⁶

One thing Spencer here admits: that the sudden culmination of everything in the immediate future was not the essence of early Christian teaching. Naturally he wants to make the best of things and gives us a bit of Victorian social evolutionism, but the parable of the tares shows the field lying useless until the end of the world, during which time it does not improve. As to spiritual growth, will he or anyone maintain that we do find a spiritual growth in the church after the apostles? The

²²⁷² Buzy

²²⁷³ *ibid.*

²²⁷⁴ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 13.

²²⁷⁵ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 14.

²²⁷⁶ Spencer, “Second Advent,” 6-7.

apostolic fathers are a marked step down from spiritual certainty; the school of Alexandria another, the squabbles of the fourth century another, and scholasticism touches spiritual bathos.

The believer knows that “A falling away must come,” writes Fascher, “but he also knows that he need not despair, because Christ will plead for him.”²²⁷⁷ The proof for this in the best Chrysostomian manner, is Romans 8:33f, which says nothing of the survival of the church but only of the saving of the individual at the judgment. But Fascher continues with his 4th century pleading: “...and because every persecution reawakens the miracle of the Spirit in the church. God will show that the gospel is not human opinion but comes from his *dynamis*. He will preserve his Christendom even to the end (1 Corinthians 1:8f). In this faith rests at all times and in every generation ‘the victory, which overcomes the world.’”²²⁷⁸ But Fascher really wants to argue that there will be no end at all! This insistence on the end spoils everything: this is the equivalent of saying, “Christ guarantees that his Christendom shall exist as long as it endures!” In history, according to Buchberger, we have “the revelation and glorification of the Eternal God through the realization and expansion of the kingdom of God on earth...the kingdom of God unfolds itself in man.”²²⁷⁹ The system, he admits, cannot receive thoroughgoing application in Saint Augustine’s system.

By a neat overlapping of words, Schermann makes it appear that the bestowing of the apostolate on Matthias in the first chapter of Acts is proof that the apostles transmitted their authority to future ages. Yet Matthias was a contemporary, who left the world when the other great lights went out. This case proves for Schermann not the necessity of maintaining a full quorum of apostles during the missionary period of warning and bearing witness, but shows “how very much concern the apostles had for the continuation of the ministries.”²²⁸⁰ If that is so, why did no other apostles ever follow? “When the people abandoned the apostles,” writes Dufourcq,

²²⁷⁷ Fascher

²²⁷⁸ Fascher

²²⁷⁹ Buchberger

²²⁸⁰ Schermann (is this the same as Sherman above?)

“as they had abandoned Jesus, the church was driven out of Jerusalem, dispersed through the countryside, carried with it the gospel of Jesus into all the little Jewish communities.”²²⁸¹ Is this what was intended? Did the conversion of Jewish communities have any permanent results? Hopwood takes full seminary liberties in divining the whole scheme of the church: “Jesus had revealed the divine kingdom as an experience actually present among men....The seed is growing secretly here and now; already, as the mustard seed, the kingdom is present in its minute beginnings. The kingdom was not even ‘among you.’ It was difficult, however, for the primitive church to grasp this fact.”²²⁸² Indeed, the primitive church, untrained in the social gospel, was totally unaware of it. Those silly people failed to interpret the parable as Mr. Hopwood does, and so also failed to see that the kingdom is here and now.

Only less “loaded” than his *Unquenchable Light* is Latourette’s *Expansion of Christianity*, which invades the world as a steadily rising tide, wave after wave, irresistibly and fatally—for by his very chapter headings Mr. Latourette has irrevocably decreed it.²²⁸³ “One cannot escape the feeling,” writes a reviewer of Latourette’s work, “that Dr. Latourette finds his diminishing periods of recession a little too neatly and easily.”²²⁸⁴ That commentary suits all those who have labored to prove that Christianity was destined to glory from the first. They find evidence easily by the simple process of inventing it out of the strangest things. To say that the light has not been quenched to date is one thing, but to affirm that it is an unquenchable light, and then to write history on that assumption is to play with loaded dice. “In vain the obstacles accumulated against the church,” writes Bardy of the period between the crucifixion and Constantine, “coming from within and without...political power, intellectual objections, moral repugnance. None of these obstacles could long hold out against the invincible force of

²²⁸¹ Dufourcq

²²⁸² Hopwood

²²⁸³ Latourette, *Expansion of Christianity*

²²⁸⁴ Review of *Expansion of Christianity*

Christianity.”²²⁸⁵ This is as if one were to boast that all the forces of nature combined could not prevent the founding of the Pickwick club. Who would want to stop that sort of thing? The church of Constantine’s day was such an organization as the most worldly would not fail to embrace nor the most vicious hesitate to join. The church had changed its nature from something the world simply could not stand to something the world loved—the apostles would none of that, but later apologists, including the moderns, patiently explain that it had to make a change if it was ever to be successful. Or to use the ancient metaphor, the virgin had to become a whore to become popular. The lady survived and prospered in spite of opposition—but no longer as a virgin. The apologists are so amazed at the phenomenon of mere survival that they forget the price at which that survival had to be bought—a price which the primitive church was in no wise willing to pay. The two attitudes well illustrated in the cases of the early saints and later *lapsi*. “The obstacles which opposed conversion are numerous and real—there is no need to try to minimize them. But they did not remain insurmountable, as one might think if one took literally the exaggerations of some logicians.”²²⁸⁶ A strange perversion, for a modern casuist to accuse the primitive Christians, of all people, of being “logicians.” Apostasy pure and simple must have been very rare in the early church, according to Bardy, since “once one had been one conquered by the Savior, when one had grasped the depth of his teaching about God, man, and the world, it is indeed difficult to go back again without preserving the ineffaceable imprint of such lessons...they fell into heresy rather than apostasy properly called.”²²⁸⁷ The greater the light and the knowledge, the greater the danger of losing all, say the apostolic fathers over and over again. These who have had the blessings are the very ones about whom Paul worries most; these are they who when they fall cannot “renew them again unto repentance.” But Bardy the logician finds this illogical. “Of the first converts not much was required [save, incidentally, that they give their lives!]...Why under such conditions should one be surprised if, when the first fervor had passed, a certain number of

²²⁸⁵ Bardy

²²⁸⁶ Bardy, *La Conversion au Christianisme*, 249.

²²⁸⁷ Bardy

believers fell back into their old ways and renounced Christ?”²²⁸⁸ A normal thing—nothing to be alarmed about, certainly: yet Paul was gravely alarmed. The French writers are specialists in soft language. And what about the passing of that “first fervor”? Wasn’t that fervor the essence of genuine Christianity?

In a work in which she confidently unfolds for us “*le dessein de Dieu*,” Diétrich has a section entitled, “The Last Days, or the Time of the Church.” Since the first title is extremely common in early Christian times, one could wish for just one single mention of the second part to balance it: what Diétrich takes for granted, that whenever the apostles or others said “the last days,” they were thinking “the days of the church,” the ancients themselves neglect to mention; and how the last days can run on for thousands of years and still be the time of the end she does not explain. The scripture clearly tells us that the last days are the time of the Antichrist, and if Diétrich insists on putting her church in that place it is vain to protest. The time in question began, according to Diétrich, with the ascension. “The descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost created the Church Militant.”²²⁸⁹ O military ghost!

The church is the new Israel to which was transmitted until the final resurrection the torch of the faith... The church is on earth as a visible witness for the invisible Lord who reigns in heaven; it is his mouth and his hand... The ‘mystery of the church’ is of a double nature: in so far as Jesus Christ is her Lord, she is the guarantee of the Spirit and of the promises of the reign; in so far as she is incarnated in the present world, she is an assembly of sinful men; astonishing mixture of grandeur and misery! Her misery is our misery... the misery of a world which is not yet saved, except in hope, and lives, fights, suffers, and hopes under the sign of the patience of God.²²⁹⁰

Diétrich carefully avoids the true enemy of the church to attack the beloved and indispensable straw-man: Matthew 24:10-13 describing love turning to hate, etc. refers according to Diétrich, to the persecutions of the second half of the 1st century by the pagans, “such persecutions as are being revived in our own day.”²²⁹¹ Refreshingly frank is Monsieur Simon’s statement that “*le*

²²⁸⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁸⁹ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 191.

²²⁹⁰ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 210-217.

²²⁹¹ Diétrich, *Le Dessein de Dieu*, 226.

*christianisme est-il venu tres vite a renverser les positions.*²²⁹² There is something of opportunism in this about-face, he admits, but it had to be, for the continued existence of the Jews, children of promise, posed embarrassing problems. These problems are gingerly sidestepped by most commentators, who if they can find plenty of promises for the Jews, find not a single unambiguous one for the Christians. The attitude of the first apologists, insisting on the novelty of their message, the claim to be a *tertium genus*, the last arrivals but masters of the future: “this is the spontaneous attitude of youth.”²²⁹³ According to Simon. But who were the apologists? Products of the schools without exception; children of rhetoric drilled in the arts of persuasion and double talk—a less spontaneous group cannot be imagined. They played up the “New Religion” idea, because the charge of newness was the commonest one they were called upon to answer, and since it could not be denied they could do nothing else. If this is a spontaneous attitude, why do not the Christians before the school-bred and pagan-educated apologists have it? It was not the Christians who brought the subject up but the pagans, and as soon as the Christian doctors got their second wind they categorically denied the charge of newness.

Monsieur Lebreton’s new *History of the Church* is based entirely on the assumption of the permanence of the church.²²⁹⁴ Early Christian eschatology is not mentioned; early Christian ideas as to their own future are passed by in silence. Monsieur Goguel in his work on *The Second Christian Generation* is possibly more frank than he means to be. The second generation, he says, was a dull, unoriginal period, poor in great personalities. It begins with three great crises, “which must have either made Christianity disappear altogether or at least altered and denatured it; in this period the church took those attitudes which enables it...at least, to survive and preserve its

²²⁹² Simon

²²⁹³ Simon

²²⁹⁴ Jules Lebreton, *The History of the Primitive Church*, 1949

spirit.”²²⁹⁵ What he means by preserving its spirit I do not know since it becomes dull and uninspiring. As if one were to say, “The lady became a street-walker, acquiring new attitudes, it is true, but these at least enable her to subsist and to preserve her virtue.” Easy to say and quite reassuring, but absurd. Before the second generation the church lacked these necessary qualities of survival: they knew that and they had no intention of acquiring those qualities! “In one sense,” says Goguel, “one may figure that there was a decadence. There was not that powerful gushing forth that marked the birth of the faith. But it was necessary that that pouring forth should weaken a bit [a delicate touch, this]. Otherwise nothing durable could have come out of it.”²²⁹⁶ A “slight diminution” indeed! If it was really necessary, the diminution of that titanic outpouring would have to be more than Goguel’s “somewhat a little, slight bit,” and if that tiny bit is what saved the day, a wee bit more spirit would have destroyed everything durable in the church?

In all of Batiffol’s writings and translations, it is clear that he has made up his mind. He declares as much in his title, *L’Eglise Naissante*. He begins by a declaration that strongly supports our suspicions that the history of the early church is a thing produced in retrospect. “The history of primitive ecclesiology is made up of some traits which, strongly supported from the beginning, acquires in each succeeding generation a more vigorous relief and more expressive.”²²⁹⁷ In other words, it is something that has been worked on and built up. The heresies that constantly sprang from the church “had no other effect on her than to give her the occasion for defining herself more firmly and more clearly.”²²⁹⁸ This is a classic example of writing history in reverse: whenever the church split, whichever side lost automatically became the outcast and the dissenter; for at the base of most controversies lay the elementary issue: which is the true old church—the winner was always by definition the true old church, acquiring the right to that title

²²⁹⁵ *Une période dans laquelle se sont produites des crises qui auraient pu faire disparaître le christianisme ou, au moins, l’altérer et le dénaturer et dans laquelle on été prises des attitudes qui lui ont permis... du moins, de subsister et de préserver son esprit...* Goguel, “La Seconde Génération Chrétienne,” 34-35.

²²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁹⁷ Pierre Batiffol, *L’Eglise Naissante et le Catholicisme*, (Paris: Lacoffre, 1909).

²²⁹⁸ *ibid.*

through money, arms, and imperial influence. Survival is the only test of holiness: but as Father Bligh has recently discovered, failure is the hallmark of authenticity where the true church is concerned.²²⁹⁹ But how does he know that heretics always and instantly drew away from the church? All the prophecies were that the teachers of false doctrine would be highly successful in the church, that the wolves would destroy the sheep. Batiffol piously says, not so—they really did no harm at all! To accept the claims of rediscovery of the gospel by the Reformation, “it would be necessary...that it have been lost, and that, by a degeneration as rapid as it was primitive, Catholicism should have come under its sway.”²³⁰⁰ This is a good description of exactly what was predicted and what happened; it is to examine this specific question, says Batiffol, that he has written his book, *L’Eglise Naissante*; but that very title precludes all further examination—Batiffol has already made up his mind what his “*examen critique*” is going to discover: the church was infallibly moving towards a glorious future, because it was only “the infant church,” not the sick old woman that *Hermes* saw! “The perpetual possession of the church, and the testimony which she gives to herself, are the titles which Moehler vindicated in the *Symbolique* of 1832.”²³⁰¹ Ten guesses whether the church would prove her case to herself or not! For Batiffol, things are so arranged in the Church of Christ that the right side always wins the argument and so claims truly the title of the right church. This is the implicit assumption that lies at the base of all arguments for the survival of the church. It is a convenient rule of thumb that solves all questions at a single blow. “In spite of what some scholars believe to have been a Gnostic victory, the Jesus whom men knew in Galilee and Judea was cherished in the churches through which flowed the continuing Christian stream.”²³⁰² These lovely words (we do not recall the exact scriptural reference) are based upon the absolute certainty that whatever Latourette says is the real Jesus must be the real Jesus. Would Gnosticism have prevented people from cherishing that image?

²²⁹⁹ Father Bligh

²³⁰⁰ Batiffol, *L’Eglise Naissante*

²³⁰¹ *ibid.*

²³⁰² Latourette

Remember, Irenaeus in his introduction says that even an expert can hardly distinguish between a Gnostic and any other Christian: the Gnostics had not the slightest intention of throwing away anything of Jesus that people already had—they wanted more yet. “In spite of obstacles Christianity won,”²³⁰³ says Latourette, who can hardly be surprised at finding that his “Unquenchable Light” continues to burn. “By AD 500 it was the professed faith of the vast majority within the Roman Empire....A rich and voluminous literature had been produced, a Christian church had been brought into existence and had become, next to the state, the strongest institution in the empire. Christian theology had made its appearance.”²³⁰⁴ So this is what Latourette calls “winning!” This is indeed a guppy-race: if every author can name his own definition of victory, then any author is free to make his church win or lose at will. But we take the Lord’s and the apostles’ definition of victory: was it to convert the majority of people in the Roman Empire? They went about it in a way that had to be totally changed before success was possible, and declared that nothing was further from their minds than the conversion of the world. Was it to produce “a rich and voluminous literature”? Then why did not the apostles write a word they were not forced to? Was it to build a big strong church by the side of and closely resembling the state? Was it to produce a Christian theology—or did the apostles not know the answers for which the theologians seek? These are the goals that glitter for Mr. Latourette, and sure enough the church reached them!

“It is slander against Jesus,” cries Monsieur Simon, “to say that he ever said he would restore the temple! The temple is come, that is he...that is his church. Christ comes not to destroy or rebuild the temple, he is the temple.”²³⁰⁵ A man who can make Christ the temple at one moment, and his church the temple at the next (the church being apparently a new member of the Trinity) has no trouble discounting any adverse utterance of the Lord, no matter what. Karl Billmeyer’s definition of church history assumes the major problem of church history as solved:

²³⁰³ Latourette

²³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²³⁰⁵ Simon (See section 1 for same reference)

“Church history as a theological discipline has the task, to give a clear, concise, scientifically grounded general picture of the development of the visible institution of salvation founded by Christ.”²³⁰⁶ Whether that institution survived, what or where it is, whether and how a perfect institution can or should undergo “*Entwicklung*”—such questions do not occur. In that case, the business of church history is simply that of Catholic theology in general, to prove what is already known, without ever daring to deviate a hair’s breadth from the prescribed and predetermined conclusion. The whole thing, Billmeyer tells us, is not to be scientifically discovered, but only “scientifically confirmed.” And woe to the scientist who fails to confirm it!

“The universal Church has been promised permanence,” writes Father Bligh, “but not particular churches;” (come now, Father Bligh, you can rescue them by the simplest of syllogisms! After all, a very little slanting achieved your “promise” to the universal church!) “and when a sufficient number of Christians is killed in a country, the faith perishes there....But in spite of all these evils, persecution must not be called a curse. God does not curse his Church.”²³⁰⁷ If Bligh were not a priest, we should know it now by this familiar Irish trick: he conjures up the word ‘curse,’ (where do the scriptures even hint that persecution is a curse?), and then he indignantly rejects it. He is trying to forestall the natural conclusion of his own proofs that God does allow great evil to befall the church: “God does not curse it, therefore it cannot be destroyed.” The conclusion is implied, not stated, for so it would be too obviously false: is a martyr cursed by being put to death? We are left with the idea that though it may and has been destroyed 60 or 80 percent, it can never be destroyed 100 percent. Why not, if evil can prevail at all? What about the world-ruling Antichrist? With remarkable frankness Bligh writes, “There is no guarantee that the civil power will always choose the side of orthodoxy.”²³⁰⁸ Not always, maybe, but why not at every important crisis? Does not Matthew 16:18 say, upon this rock I will build my church? What has that to do with it, says Bligh, what indeed? Is it not always assumed

²³⁰⁶ Karl Billmeyer

²³⁰⁷ Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’,” 300-301.

²³⁰⁸ Bligh, “The ‘Edict of Milan’,” 309.

that this guarantee that orthodoxy will always win in the end? Of course the deduction is extravagant, but what other guarantees do we have? The assumption of such a guarantee is the foundation of all Christian churches. But if this passage cannot be stretched out as a guarantee that right will always prevail in the struggles of the church, neither can it be made to guarantee the invulnerability of the church on this earth, for it is not specifically stated either that the church shall be built on Peter or that it shall be on this earth or when it shall be built, nor is it even stated that it shall be “built upon” a rock! Fourth century fathers invariably alter the New Testament text to read ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν—Jerome, *super hanc petram*—instead of what the Bible itself says: ἐπὶ τῇ πέτρᾳ, a very different idea. Just how these things are to be interpreted is not our concern here, but it is our concern to note that Matthew 16:18 is one of the most corrupt and ungrammatical verses in the entire Bible: argument about its meaning is not only possible but inevitable. It is not a clear and unambiguous statement, and it never occurred to the churchmen before the fourth century to use it as an argument for the continuation of the church.

