

## **Volume 2: Ante-Nicene Christianity**

**A.D. 100-325**

### ***CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION***

Following is a brief summary of Christian persecution during the Ante-Nicene period.

***Trajan, 98-117.*** Christianity is strictly forbidden. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bythnia, condemns many Christians to death. Trajan wishes to suppress Christianity by ignoring it, but governors are allowed to punish it as a secret union and illegal religion. Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem, is crucified in 107 at the age of 120, and Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, dies in the Roman colosseum that same year.

***Hadrian, 117-138.*** Represented as both a friend and foe of the church. He directs his proconsul to punish only those who should be convicted of transgression of the laws by an orderly judicial process. But no doubt he regarded, like Trajan, the mere profession of Christianity as itself such a transgression. The Christian apologies, which took their rise under this emperor, indicate a very bitter public sentiment against the Christians and a critical condition for the church.

***Antoninus Pius, 137-161.*** Protected the Christians from the tumultuous violence which broke out against them on account of the frequent public calamities. But he could not control the conduct of the provincial governors and the fury of the people against an illegal religion. The persecution of the Church at Smyrna and the martyrdom of its bishop Polycarp took place under Antoninus in 155. The death of Polycarp, the last witness of the apostolic age, checked the fury of the populace and the persecution was suspended.

***Marcus Aurelius, 161-180.*** He considered the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with its moral consequences, as vicious and dangerous to the welfare of the state. A law was passed punishing every one with exile who endeavored to influence the people by fear of the Divinity. Melito, around the year 170, writes: "The race of the worshippers of God in Asia is now persecuted by new edicts as it never has been heretofore." The empire was visited at that time by a number of fires, a destructive flood of the Tiber, an earthquake, insurrections, and a pestilence which spread from Ethiopia to Gaul, all blamed on the Christians. The churches of Lyons and Vienne in the south of France underwent a severe trial. Also martyred during this reign is Justin Martyr at Rome in 166.

**Commodus, 180-192.** Son of Aurelius who despite his cruelty and debauchery was accidentally made to favor the Christians by the influence of a concubine.

**Septimius Severus, 193-211.** Many local persecutions even though he was much more Oriental than Roman in spirit and thus less concerned to maintain the old state religion.

**Caracalla, 211-217.** State of things continued as before.

**El-Gabal (Heliogabalus), 218-222.** Tolerated all religions in hopes of merging them into his favorite Syrian worship of the sun.

**Alexander Severus, 222-235.** Was addicted to a higher kind of religious eclecticism and syncretism, a pantheistic hero-worship. He placed the busts of Abraham and Christ in his domestic chapel with those of Orpheus, Apollonius of Tyana, and the better Roman emperors. He also had engraved on the walls of his palace and on public monuments the gospel rule, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This no doubt represented nothing more than toleration.

**Maximinus the Thracian, 235-238.** The assassin of Severus, he again resorted to persecution and gave free course to the popular fury against the enemies of the gods.

**Gordianus, 238-244.** Left the church undisturbed.

**Philip the Arabian, 244-249.** Was supposed by some to be a Christian. It is certain that Origen wrote letters to him and to his wife.

**Decius Trajan, 249-251.** Resolved to root out the church as an atheistic and seditious sect. In the year 250 he published an edict to all the governors of the provinces enjoining return to the pagan state religion under the heaviest penalties. This was the signal for a persecution which in extent, consistency, and cruelty, exceeded all before it. In truth it was properly the first which covered the whole empire and accordingly produced a far greater number of martyrs than any former persecution. The authorities were especially severe with the bishops and officers of the churches and many perished. The bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, was able to escape this persecution but incurred much censure by his course. He fully vindicated himself by his pastoral industry during his absence and by his subsequent martyrdom.

**Gallus, 251-253.** The persecution received a fresh impulse through the incursions of the Goths and the prevalence of a pestilence, drought, and famine.

**Valerian, 253-260.** Was at first mild towards the Christians but in 257 changed his course and made an effort to check the progress of their religion without bloodshed by the banishment of ministers and prominent laymen, the confiscation of their property, and the prohibition of religious assemblies. These measures, however, proving fruitless, he brought the death penalty again into play. Cyprian met his death on September 14, 258.

**Gallienus, 260-268.** He gave peace to the church once more and even acknowledged Christianity as a *religio licita*.<sup>1</sup>

**Various Emperors, 268-303.** The calm Gallienus gave to the church continued forty years; for the edict of persecution, issued by the energetic and warlike Aurelian (270-275) was rendered void by his assassination. The six emperors who rapidly followed from 275 to 284 left the Christians alone.

During this long season of peace the church rose rapidly in numbers and outward prosperity. Large and even splendid houses of worship were erected in the chief cities and were provided with collections of sacred books and vessels of gold and silver for the administration of the sacraments. But in the same proportion discipline relaxed, quarrels, intrigues, and factions increased, and worldliness poured in like a flood.

The last and most violent persecution of Christianity took place during the reign of the emperor Diocletian, 284-305. All former persecutions of the faith were forgotten in the horror with which men looked back upon this last.

In the first twenty years of his reign Diocletian respected the toleration edict of Gallienus. His own wife Prisca, his daughter Valeria, and most of his eunuchs and court officers, besides many of the most prominent public functionaries, were Christians, or at least favorable to the Christian religion. Diocletian himself was a superstitious heathen and an oriental despot claiming for himself divine honors. Although he long postponed the religious question, he had to meet it at last lest paganism should surrender to Christianity without a last desperate effort to save itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Latin for *legal religion*.

The chief instigator of the renewal of hostility was one of Diocletian's three co-regents, his son-in-law, Galerius, a cruel and fanatical heathen. He prevailed at last on Diocletian in his old age to authorize the persecution which gave to his glorious reign a disgraceful end.

In 303 Diocletian issued in rapid succession three edicts, each more severe than its predecessor. A fourth was issued, the worst of all, on April 30, 304 by Maximian, another co-regent. Christian churches were to be destroyed, all copies of the Bible burned, all Christians deprived of public office and civil rights, and all without exception were to sacrifice to the gods upon pain of death.

The persecution began on the 23rd of February with the destruction of the magnificent church in Nicomedia and soon spread over the whole Roman empire, except Gaul, Britain, and Spain where Constantius Chlorus, the third co-regent, and his son Constantine the Great ruled. They were disposed, as far as possible, to spare the Christians, but even here churches were destroyed and many suffered martyrdom.

The persecution raged longest and most fiercely in the East under the rule of Galerius and his barbarous nephew Maximin Daza. In 308 Maximin issued a fifth edict of persecution which commanded that all males with their wives, servants, and children should sacrifice and actually taste the accursed offerings, and that all provisions in the markets should be sprinkled with sacrificial wine. This monstrous law introduced a reign of terror for two years and left the Christians no alternative but apostasy or starvation.

Eusebius was a witness of this persecution in Caesarea, Tyre, and Egypt, and saw with his own eyes, as he tells us, the houses of prayer razed to the ground, the Holy Scriptures committed to the flames, the pastors hunted, tortured, and torn to pieces in the amphitheater. He describes the heroic sufferings and death of several martyrs, including his friend Pamphilus.

In this, as in former persecutions, the number of apostates who preferred the earthly life to the heavenly was very great. But as the persecution raged the zeal and fidelity of the Christians increased and martyrdom spread as by contagion. Even boys and girls showed amazing firmness. The number of martyrs cannot be estimated with any degree of certainty. During the eight years of the persecution the number of victims, without including the many confessors who were barbarously mutilated and condemned to a lingering death in the prisons and mines, must have been large.

This persecution was the last desperate struggle of Roman heathenism for its life. At the close of the contest the old Roman state religion was exhausted. Diocletian retired into private life in 305. In 313, when all the achievements of his reign were destroyed, he destroyed himself.

Galerius, brought to reflection by a terrible disease, put an end to the slaughter shortly before his death by a remarkable edict of toleration in 311. In that document he declared that the purpose of reclaiming the Christians from their willful innovation and the multitude of their sects to the laws and discipline of the Roman state was not accomplished. Therefore, he would now grant them permission to hold their religious assemblies provided they did not disturb the order of the state. This edict virtually closes the period of persecution in the Roman Empire.

For a short time Maximian continued to oppress and vex the church in the East and the pagan Maxentius (son of Maximian and son-in-law of Galerius) did the same in Italy. But the young Constantine had already in 306 become emperor of Gaul, Spain, and Britain. He crossed the Alps and under the banner of the cross he conquered Maxentius at the Milvian bridge near Rome, and the heathen tyrant perished with his army of veterans in the waters of the Tiber on October 27, 312. A few months afterwards Constantine met at Milan with his co-regent and brother-in-law Licinius and issued a new edict of toleration (313) to which Maximian also, shortly before his suicide (313) was compelled to give his consent. This second edict went beyond the first of 311 for it was a decisive step from hostile neutrality to friendly neutrality. It prepared the way for the legal recognition of Christianity as the religion of the empire.

With Constantine a new period begins. The church ascends the throne of the Caesars under the banner of the once despised but now honored and triumphant cross. New vigor and luster are given to the empire of Rome. This sudden political and social revolution seems marvelous, and yet it was only the legitimate result of the intellectual and moral revolution which Christianity had silently and imperceptibly wrought in public opinion. The very violence of the Diocletian persecution betrayed the inner weakness of heathenism. The Christian minority with its ideas already controlled the deeper current of history. Constantine, as a sagacious statesman, saw the signs of the times and followed them.

### ***VENERATION OF MARTYRS***

The price paid by this army of martyrs was thankfully remembered in well-deserved and altogether natural veneration. However, this respect quickly degenerated into the worship of

saints and relics. The day of the death of a martyr was called his heavenly birthday and was celebrated annually at his grave by prayer, reading of a history of his suffering and victory, oblations, and celebration of the holy supper.

But the early church did not stop with this. Martyrdom was taken, after the end of the second century, not only as a higher grade of Christian virtue, but at the same time as a baptism of fire and blood, an ample substitution for the baptism of water, as purifying from sin and as securing an entrance into heaven. Origen even went so far as to ascribe to the sufferings of the martyrs an atoning virtue for others, an efficacy like that of the sufferings of Christ. According to Tertullian, the martyrs entered immediately into the blessedness of heaven and were not required, like ordinary Christians, to pass through the intermediate state. Their prayers before the throne of God came to be thought peculiarly efficacious for the church militant on earth.

The veneration thus shown for the persons of the martyrs was transferred in smaller measure to their remains. The church of Smyrna counted the bones of Polycarp more precious than gold or diamonds. The remains of Ignatius were held in equal veneration by the Christians at Antioch.

Besides the excessive veneration given to deceased martyrs, it was also paid to surviving confessors. The intercessions of the confessors for the fallen commonly procured restoration to the fellowship of the church. Their voice had peculiar weight in the choice of bishops, and their sanction not rarely overbalanced the authority of the clergy. The heathen Lucian in a satire describes the unwearied care of the Christians for their imprisoned brethren, the heaps of presents brought, the testimonies of sympathy brought by messengers from far distances. Tertullian censures this excessive attention. Cyprian protests against the abuse of their privileges, from which he had himself to suffer, and earnestly exhorts them to a holy walk that the honor they have gained might not prove a snare to them and be lost through pride and carelessness.

### ***LITERARY ADVANCES***

Besides the external conflict, Christianity was called to pass through an equally important intellectual and literary struggle with the ancient world. It at first found as little favor with the representatives of literature and art as with princes and statesmen. In the secular literature of the latter part of the first century and the beginning of the second we find little more than ignorant, careless and hostile allusions to Christianity as a new form of superstition which then began to

attract the attention of the Roman government.

The hostility of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees to the gospel is familiar from the New Testament. The attacks of the later Jews are essentially mere repetitions of those recorded in the Gospels, denial of the Messiahship of Jesus and horrible vituperation of his confessors.

The Greek and Roman writers of the first century, and some of the second, either from ignorance or contempt never allude to Christianity at all. Tacitus and the younger Pliny, contemporaries and friends of the emperor Trajan, are the first to notice it, and they speak of it only incidentally and with stoical disdain and antipathy.

The direct assault upon Christianity by works devoted to the purpose began about the middle of the second century and was very ably conducted by a Grecian philosopher named Celsus. He, with all his affected or real contempt for the new religion, considered it important enough to be opposed by an extended work of which Origen, in his Refutation, has faithfully preserved considerable fragments. His book, on the whole, is a very superficial, loose, and light-minded work and gives striking proof of the inability of the natural reason to understand the Christian truth.

In the same period the rhetorician Lucian attacked the Christian religion with the same light weapons of wit and ridicule. More earnest and dignified, but for this very reason more lasting and dangerous, was the opposition which proceeded directly and indirectly from Neo-Platonism.<sup>2</sup> This system presents the last phase of the Grecian philosophy, a fruitless effort of dying heathenism to revive itself against the irresistible progress of Christianity in its freshness and vigor.

Porphyry<sup>3</sup> was one of the leading Neo-Platonists who made a direct attack upon Christianity and was, in the eyes of the church fathers, its bitterest and most dangerous enemy. Towards the end of the third century he wrote an extended work against the Christians, in fifteen books, which called forth numerous refutations from the most eminent church teachers of the time. Still Porphyry would not wholly reject Christianity. He distinguished the original pure doctrine of Jesus from the second-handed, adulterated doctrine of the apostles. In another work he says that

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2 A philosophical system developed at Alexandria in the third century A. D. by Plotinus (205-270) and his successors. It is based on Platonism with elements of mysticism and some Judaic and Christian concepts. Its central belief is that there is a single source from which all existence emanates and with which an individual soul can be mystically united.

3 C. 232 - c. 304.

we must not calumniate Christ, who was most eminent for piety, but only pity those who worship him as God. He had many Christian ideas and phrases, but such things show how Christianity in that day exerted, even upon its opponents, a power to which heathenism was forced to yield an unwilling assent.

These assaults of argument and calumny in the second century called forth the Christian apologetic literature, the vindication of Christianity against the Jewish zealot, the Grecian philosopher, and the Roman statesman. The apologetic literature began to appear under the reign of Hadrian and continued to grow until the end of our period. Most of the church teachers took part in their day.

The first apologies were written by Quadratus, bishop of Athens, Aristides, philosopher of Athens, and Aristo of Pella. More valuable are the apologetical works of the Greek philosopher and Justin Martyr which we possess today in full, the former writings being entirely lost or preserved only in scattered notices of Eusebius. After Justin, in the Greek church, comes Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, and Hermias in the last half of the second century, and Origen, the ablest of all, in the first half of the third.

The most important Latin apologists are Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Arnobius and Lactantius, all of North Africa.

The apologists do not confine themselves to the defensive, but carry the war aggressively into the territory of Judaism and heathenism. They complete their work by positively demonstrating that Christianity is the divine religion and the only true religion for all mankind.

## ***CHURCH ORGANIZATION***

In the external organization of the church, several important changes appear in the period before us. The distinction of clergy and laity, and the *sacerdotal* view of the ministry<sup>4</sup> becomes prominent and fixed; subordinate church offices are multiplied; the *episcopate*<sup>5</sup> arises; the beginnings of the Roman primacy appear; and the exclusive unity of the Catholic church develops itself in opposition to heretics and schismatics. The germs of the papacy likewise betray themselves, particularly in Cyprian, together with a protest against it.

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4 Sacerdotalism is the belief that priests act as mediators between God and man.

5 The *episcopate* refers to a body of bishops; the term can also be used for the jurisdiction of a bishop.

The characteristics of the pre-Constantinian hierarchy are, first, its grand simplicity, and secondly, its spirituality, or freedom from all connection with political power and worldly splendor. Whatever influence the church acquired and exercised, she owed nothing to the secular government which continued indifferent or positively hostile until the protective toleration edict of Constantine (313). The ante-Nicene fathers expected the ultimate triumph of Christianity over the world from a supernatural interposition at the second Advent. Origen seems to have been the only one in that age of violent persecution who expected that Christianity, by continual growth, would gain the dominion over the world.

The consolidation of the church and its compact organization implied a restriction of individual liberty, in the interest of order, but also a temptation to the abuse of authority. But it was demanded by the diminution of spiritual gifts which were poured out in such extraordinary abundance in the apostolic age. It made the church a powerful republic within the Roman empire and contributed much to its ultimate success, especially in times of danger and persecution.

The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The majority of Jewish converts adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic institutions and rites, and a considerable part never fully attained to the height of spiritual freedom proclaimed by Paul, or soon fell away from it. He opposed legalistic and ceremonial tendencies in Galatia and Corinth. And although sacerdotalism does not appear among the errors of his Judaizing opponents, the Levitical priesthood, with its three ranks of high priest, priest, and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon.

After the gradual abatement of the extraordinary spiritual elevation of the apostolic age, the distinction of a regular class of teachers from the laity became more fixed and prominent. This appears first in Ignatius who writes, "Whoever is within the sanctuary (or altar) is pure; but he who is outside the sanctuary is not pure; that is, he who does anything without bishop and presbytery and deacon, is not pure in conscience." Yet he nowhere represents the ministry as a sacerdotal office. Tertullian was the first who expressly and directly asserts sacerdotal claims on behalf of the Christian ministry, although he also strongly affirms the universal priesthood of all believers. Cyprian goes still further and applies all the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood to the officers of the Christian church, and may therefore be called the proper father of the sacerdotal conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency

between God and the people.

With the exaltation of the clergy appeared the tendency to separate them from secular business and even from social relations, such as marriage, and to represent them, even outwardly, as a caste independent of the people and devoted exclusively to the service of the sanctuary. They drew their support from the church treasury.

Even with this growth of the distinction of clergy and laity, however, the idea of the universal priesthood continued from time to time to assert itself. It showed itself in the custom of requiring the baptized to say the Lord's Prayer before the assembled congregation. The congregation also, at least in the West, retained for a long time the right of approval and rejection in the choice of its ministers, even of the bishop. Even Cyprian declares it his principle to do nothing as bishop without the advice of the presbyters and deacons, and the consent of the people.

Finally, we notice cases where the function of teaching was not restricted to the higher officers of the church but was actually exercised by laymen or, at most, only presbyters. These men include Origen, Hermas, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Arnobius, and Lactantius.

The expansion of the church, the development of her cultus,<sup>6</sup> and the tendency towards hierarchical pomp, led to the multiplication of offices below the diaconate. About the middle of the third century the following new offices are mentioned: subdeacons, readers, acolyths, exorcists, precentors, janitors, catechists, and interpreters.

### ***THE EPISCOPATE***

The most important and also the most difficult phenomenon of our period in the department of church organization is the rise and development of the *episcopate*,<sup>7</sup> or body of bishops, as distinct from the *presbyterate*,<sup>8</sup> or body of ruling elders of an individual congregation. As the church became an institution for the education of its people, she incurred the danger of secularization. This secularization began with the growing power of the bishops even before Constantine.

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6 A system of religious belief and, especially, rituals.

7 Body of bishops or overseers.

8 Body of presbyters or elders.

Hippolytus reproaches two Roman bishops of his time (202-223). Bishop Paul of Samosata was deposed in 269 on almost incredible charges not only against his doctrine but still more against his moral character. Origen complains that there were overseers of the people of God, especially in the larger cities, who sought to outdo the pomp of heathen potentates, surrounding themselves with a body-guard and making themselves inaccessible to the poor.

The origin of the episcopate is not certain. Was it a continuation and contraction of, and substitute for, the apostolate,<sup>9</sup> or was it an expansion and elevation of the presbyterate?

The arguments for the *apostolic origin* of the episcopacy are as follows:

1. The position of James who evidently stood at the head of the church at Jerusalem and is called bishop.
2. The office of the assistants and delegates of the apostles, like Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphroditus, Luke, and Mark, who had something of a supervision over several churches and congregational officers.
3. The angels of the seven churches of Asia, who, if regarded as individuals, look very much like the later bishops and indicate a monarchical shaping of the church government in the days of John.
4. The testimony of Ignatius of Antioch presupposes the episcopate, in distinction from the presbyterate, as already existing, though as a new institution yet in its growth.
5. The statement of Clement of Alexandria that John instituted bishops after his return from Patmos. The accounts of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Jerome state that John nominated and ordained Polycarp bishop of Smyrna.
6. An uncertain tradition in Eusebius where Symeon is elected bishop of Jerusalem after the death of James.
7. The tradition of the churches of Antioch and Rome which trace their line of bishops back to apostolic institution and kept the record of an unbroken succession.

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<sup>9</sup> Body of Apostles.

8. A passage in Irenaeus which speaks of "second ordinances of the apostles."
9. An equally uncertain conclusion drawn from an obscure passage in the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians where the apostles instruct that approved men should follow them in office after they die.
10. The philosophical consideration that the universal and uncontested spread of the episcopate in the second century cannot be satisfactorily explained without the presumption of at least the indirect sanction of the apostles in the first century.

The contrasting view is the *post-apostolic origin* of the episcopacy. According to this view, the episcopate developed as a separate office where the bishops had their origin in the presidents of the original congregational presbyterate, or body of ruling elders. The arguments for this view are as follows:

1. The undeniable identity of presbyters and bishops in the New Testament.
2. At the close of the first and even in the second century the two terms are still used in like manner for the same office.
3. The express testimony of the learned Jerome that the churches originally were governed by the common council of the presbyters. It was not until a later period that one of the presbyters was placed at the head to watch over the church and suppress schisms.
4. The custom of the church of Alexandria where, from the evangelist Mark down to the middle of the third century, the twelve presbyters elected one of their number president and called him bishop.

The only satisfactory conclusion from these various facts and traditions seems to be that the episcopate proceeded, both in the descending and ascending scale, from the apostolate and the original presbyterate conjointly as a contraction of the former and an expansion of the latter, without either express concert or general regulation of the apostles. It arose, instinctively, as it were, in that obscure and critical transition period between the end of the first and the middle of the second century.

The episcopate reached its complete form only step by step. In the period before us, we must

note three stages in this development, each connected with the name of a major church father:

- Ignatius in Syria (died 107 or 115)
- Irenaeus in Gaul (died 202)
- Cyprian in North Africa (died 258).

The episcopate first appears, as distinct from the presbyterate but as a congregational office only (in distinction from the diocesan idea or group of churches), and as yet a young institution, in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch. The writings are subject to grave suspicion of fraudulent interpolation, yet they, in any case, reflect the public sentiment before the middle of the second century.

In passages from the Greek text we find episcopacy connected with celibacy, the term "catholic" (meaning *universal*) for the first time being applied to the church, and episcopacy a condition of catholicity (that is, to be part of the universal church, a local congregation needed an ordained bishop). Peculiar to the Ignatian view:

- The bishop appears as the head and center of a single congregation and not as equally the representative of the whole church.
- The bishop is the vicar or representative of Christ and not, as in the later view, merely the successor of the apostles.
- Finally, there are no distinctions of order among the bishops, no trace of a primacy, as later developed.

Irenaeus, on the other hand, represents the institution as a diocesan office, rather than an office of a local congregation, and also as the continuation of the apostolate. He exalts the bishops of the original apostolic churches, above all the church of Rome, and speaks with great emphasis of an unbroken episcopal succession as a test of apostolic teaching and a bulwark against heresy.

The old catholic episcopalianism reached its maturity in the middle of the third century in the teaching and example of Cyprian, bishop and martyr of the church in North Africa. He represents the claims of episcopacy in close connection with the idea of a special priesthood and

sacrifice and is the typical high-churchman of the ante-Nicene age.

Cyprian considers the bishops as the bearers of the Holy Spirit who passed from Christ to the apostles, from them by ordination to the bishops, and who propagates himself in an unbroken line of succession giving efficacy to all religious exercises. "The bishop," says Cyprian, "is in the church, and the church in the bishop, and if any one is not with the bishop he is not in the church."

Though the bishops were equal in their dignity and powers as successors of the apostles, they gradually fell into different ranks according to the ecclesiastical and political importance of their several districts.

On the lowest level were the bishops of the country churches who stood between the presbyters and the city bishops. Among the city bishops the metropolitans rose above the rest, that is, the bishops of the capital cities of the provinces. Still older and more important were the apostolic mother-churches such as those at Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Among these the most prominent were the bishop of Antioch, to whom all Syria fell as his metropolitan district; the bishop of Alexandria, whose district was all Egypt; and the bishop of Rome, whose district was central and lower Italy without definite borders.

### ***ASCENDANCY OF THE ROMAN SEE***

Among the great bishops of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, the Roman bishop combined all the conditions for a primacy, which, from a purely honorary distinction, gradually became the basis of a supremacy of jurisdiction. We examine here the causes which have gradually raised it to its towering eminence among the governing institutions of the world.

The historical influences which favored the ascendancy of the Roman see were the following.

1. The high antiquity of the Roman church, which had been honored even by Paul with the most important doctrinal epistle of the New Testament. It was properly the only apostolic mother-church in the West and was thus looked upon from the first by the churches of Italy, Gaul, and Spain with peculiar reverence.
2. The labors, martyrdom, and burial at Rome of Peter and Paul. The whole Roman

congregation passed through the Neronian persecution and must have soon afterwards reorganized.

3. The political preeminence of that metropolis of the world, which was destined to rule the European countries with the scepter of the cross as she had formerly ruled them with the sword.
4. The executive wisdom and the catholic orthodox instinct of the Roman church, which made itself felt in this period in the three controversies of the time: the date to celebrate Easter, penitential discipline, and the validity of heretical baptism.

From the time of Paul's epistle (58) to the close of the second century, we have no express and direct information about the internal state of the Roman church. But in an incidental manner it is mentioned more than any other. Since Rome was the battlefield of orthodoxy and heresy and a resort of all sects and parties, it attracted from every direction what was true and false in philosophy and religion. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian all conceded it a position of singular preeminence.

The first exercise of a sort of papal authority is found towards the close of the first century in the letter of the Roman bishop Clement (died 102). The letter, however, was sent not in the bishop's own name but in that of the Roman congregation which speaks always in the first person plural. The Roman church here, without apparently being asked, gives advice with superior administrative wisdom to an important church in the East, dispatches messengers to her, and exhorts her to order and unity in a tone of calm dignity and authority as the organ of God and the Holy Spirit. This hierarchical spirit arose from the domineering spirit of the Roman church rather than the bishop or presbyters.

Irenaeus calls Rome the greatest church, acknowledged by all, founded by the two most illustrious apostles Peter and Paul, the church with which, on account of her more important precedence, all Christendom must agree. This is surely to be understood, however, as a precedence only of honor, not of jurisdiction.

The celebrated Hippolytus, in the beginning of the third century, was a decided antagonist of the Roman bishops Zephyrinus and Callistus. Nevertheless we learn from his writings that at that time the Roman bishop already claimed an absolute power within his own jurisdiction, and that Callistus laid down the principle that a bishop can never be deposed or compelled to resign by

the presbytery even though he had committed a mortal sin.

Cyprian is clearest both in his advocacy of the fundamental idea of the papacy and in his protest against the mode of its application in a given case. Starting with Peter, upon whom the Lord built his church and entrusted the feeding of his sheep, in order to represent thereby the unity in the college of the apostles, Cyprian transferred the same superiority to the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. Accordingly he called the Roman church the chair of Peter and the fountain of priestly unity, the root and mother of the catholic church. Yet he asserts with equal energy the equality and relative independence of the bishops as successors of the apostles who had all an equally direct appointment from Christ.

Still more sharp and unsparing was the Cappadocian bishop Firmilian who charged the bishop of Rome with folly in recognizing heretical baptism and not furthering the unity of the church.

From these testimonies it is clear that the growing influence of the Roman see was rooted in public opinion and in the need of unity in the ancient church. It is not to be explained at all by the talents and the ambition of the incumbents. Of the thirty popes of the first three centuries there was only one, Clement, who could compare as a church leader with an Ignatius, a Cyprian, and an Ambrose; or as a theologian with an Irenaeus, a Tertullian, an Athanasius, and an Augustine.

### ***CHURCH DISCIPLINE***

The growing influence and power of the church is to be seen also in the area of church discipline. The ancient church was distinguished for strict discipline. Prior to Constantine the Great this discipline rested on purely moral sanctions and had nothing to do with civil constraints and punishments. A person might be expelled from one congregation without the least social injury. But the more powerful the church became, the more serious were the consequences of her censures, and when she was united with the state, ecclesiastical offenses were punished as offenses against the state, in extreme cases even with death.

The object of discipline was, on the one hand, the dignity and purity of the church, and on the other the spiritual welfare of the offender. The extreme penalty was excommunication, or exclusion from all the rights and privileges of the faithful. This was inflicted for heresy and schism, and all gross crimes such as theft, murder, adultery, blasphemy, and the denial of Christ

in persecution. After Tertullian these and like offenses, incompatible with the regenerate state, were classed as *mortal sins*<sup>10</sup> in distinction from *venial sins*<sup>11</sup> or sins of weakness.

Persons thus excluded passed into the class of penitents and could attend only the *catechumen worship*.<sup>12</sup> Before they could be re-admitted to the fellowship of the church they were required to prove the sincerity of their penitence by the absence from all pleasures, from ornament in dress, from nuptial intercourse, by confession, frequent prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other good works. Under pain of a troubled conscience and of separation from the only saving church, they readily submitted to the severest penances. Tertullian considered works of penance as a "satisfaction" paid to God.

The penitents were distributed into four classes.

1. The WEEPERS, who prostrated themselves at the church doors in mourning garments and implored restoration from the clergy and the people.
2. The HEARERS, who were allowed to hear the Scripture lessons and the sermon.
3. The KNEELERS, who attended the public prayers but only in the kneeling posture.
4. The STANDERS, who could take part in the whole worship standing but were still excluded from the communion.

The course of penance was usually three or four years long. After the fulfillment of this probation came the act of reconciliation. The penitent made a public confession of sin, received absolution by the laying on of hands of the minister, was again greeted by the congregation with the brotherly kiss, and admitted to the celebration of the communion. From the ministry alone was he forever disqualified.

In reference to the propriety of a restoration in certain cases, there was an important difference of sentiment which gave rise to several schisms. All agreed that the church punishment could not forestall the judgment of God at the last day but was merely temporal. But it was a question whether the church should restore the grossest offender on his confession of sorrow or leave him

10 A major sin that deprives the soul of sanctifying grace, causing damnation if unpardoned at the time of death.

11 A minor sin committed without deliberate intent that does not estrange the soul from sanctifying grace.

12 A catechumen is one who is being taught the fundamental doctrines of the faith; hence, not yet a full member of the church.

to the judgment of God.

The strict, puritanic party took ground against the restoration of those who had forfeited the grace of baptism by a mortal sin. Otherwise the church would lose her characteristic holiness and encourage loose morality. The moderate party held the principle that the church should not refuse absolution and communion, at least on the death-bed, to any penitent sinner.

It is remarkable that the lax penitential discipline had its chief support from the end of the second century in the Roman church. But here we perceive also how the looser practice in regard to penance was connected with the interest of the hierarchy. It favored the power of the priesthood which claimed for itself the right of absolution. It was at the same time a matter of worldly policy since it promoted the external spread of the church, though at the expense of the moral integrity of her membership. And it facilitated both her subsequent union with the state and her hopeless confusion with the world. No wonder the church of Rome, in this point as in others, triumphed at last over all opposition.

During the third century, four schisms grew out of this controversy on the restoration of the lapsed.

1. The Roman schism of HIPPOLYTUS. Hippolytus was a worthy disciple of Irenaeus and the most learned and zealous divine in Rome during the pontificates of Zephyrinus (202-217) and Callistus (217-222). He was an advocate of strict views on discipline in opposition to the latitudinarian practice. Hippolytus charges Callistus and his predecessor with the patripassian heresy, which leads to a temporary schism that lasts until 235. Hippolytus himself dies as a martyr in 235 or 236, and the remembrance of the schism is lost in the glory of his supposed or real martyrdom.
2. The schism of FELICISSIMUS at Carthage. This schism originated with five presbyters who were dissatisfied with the hasty and irregular election of Cyprian to the bishopric in 248. At the head of this opposition party stood the presbyter Novatus and the deacon Felicissimus, whom Novatus ordained without the permission or knowledge of Cyprian.

After the outbreak of the Decian persecution this personal rivalry received fresh nourishment and new importance from the question of discipline. Cyprian opposed the restoration of the lapsed, yet so great was the multitude of the fallen that he allowed an exception *in periculo*

*mortis*.<sup>13</sup> His opponents saw this as an unchristian severity, least of all becoming to him who, as they misrepresented him, fled from his post for fear of death. They gained the powerful voice of the confessors who in the face of their own martyrdom freely gave their peace-bills to the lapsed (a regular trade was carried on in these indulgences<sup>14</sup>). An arrogant confessor, Lucian, wrote to Cyprian in the name of the rest that he had granted restoration to all apostates and begged Cyprian to make this known to the other bishops.

A council was held at Carthage which, though it condemned the party of Felicissimus, took a middle course on the point in dispute. It decided for the restoration of those who proved themselves truly penitent, but against restoring the careless who asked for restoration merely from fear of death. When persecution was renewed under Gallus, Cyprian abolished even this limitation and accommodated his principles to the practice of the Roman church. His antagonists elected their own bishop but were shortly compelled to yield to the united force of the African and Roman churches. This conflict strengthened Cyprian's episcopal authority and led him in his doctrine of the unity of the church to the principle of absolute exclusiveness.

3. The NOVATIAN schism in Rome. It broke out soon after the African schism and, like it, in consequence of an election of a bishop. But in this case the opposition advocated the strict discipline against the lenient practice of the dominant church. At the head of this party was the Roman presbyter Novatian. He fell out with Cornelius who, after the Decian persecution in 251, was nominated bishop of Rome, and at once showed great indulgence towards the lapsed. Novatian, against his will, was chosen bishop by the opposition. Cornelius excommunicated him. Cyprian took sides with Cornelius, whom he regarded as the legitimate bishop of Rome. Nevertheless the Novatian sect, by virtue of its moral earnestness, propagated itself in various provinces of the West and the East down to the sixth century.
4. The MELETIAN schism in Egypt arose in the Diocletian persecution, about 305, and lasted more than a century. But owing to the contradictory character of the accounts it is not so well understood. The Council of Nicea endeavored to heal the division but was unsuccessful. The Meletians afterwards made common cause with the Arians.

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13 Latin for *in mortal peril*, that is, in danger of dying.

14 In Roman Catholic theology, an indulgence is a remission of temporal punishment still due for a sin that has been sacramentally absolved.

## ***CHRISTIAN WORSHIP***

Christian worship, as might be expected from the humble condition of the church in this period of persecution, was very simple, strongly contrasting with the pomp of the Greek and Roman communions, yet by no means puritanic.

Until about the close of the second century the Christians held their worship mostly in private houses, or in desert places, at the graves of martyrs, and in the crypts of the catacombs. This arose from their poverty, their oppressed and outlawed condition, their love of silence and solitude, and their aversion to all heathen art.

The first traces of special houses of worship occur in Tertullian, who speaks of going to church, and Clement of Alexandria, who mentions the double meaning of the word *ecclesia*.<sup>15</sup> About the year 230 Alexander Severus granted the Christians the right to a place in Rome. After the middle of the third century, the building of churches began in great earnest since the Christians enjoyed over forty years of repose (260-303).

The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice.

The ante-Nicene church clearly distinguished the Christian Sunday from the Jewish Sabbath and put it on independent Christian ground. It was not a continuation of, but a substitute for, the Jewish Sabbath. She did not fully hold to the perpetual obligation of the fourth commandment insofar as it was a weekly day of rest rooted in the physical and moral necessities of man. But on the other hand, the church took no secular liberties with the day. She regarded Sunday as a sacred day, the weekly commemoration of Christ's resurrection and the pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, and therefore as a day of holy joy and thanksgiving.

The yearly festivals of this period were Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany. Strictly speaking the ante-Nicene church had two annual festive seasons, the *Passover* in commemoration of the suffering of Christ, and *Pentecost* in commemoration of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, which began with Easter and ended with Pentecost proper. The Jewish passover also lasted a whole week and after it began their Pentecost or feast of weeks.

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<sup>15</sup> The group of people vs. the place where they met. The Greek word *ekklesia* is usually translated *church* in the New Testament.

## The Observance of Easter

Respecting the time of the Christian Passover and of the fast connected with it, there was a difference of observance which created violent controversies in the ancient church. The paschal controversies are a complicated chapter in ancient church history and are not yet sufficiently cleared up. They were purely ritualistic and disciplinary and involved no dogma, yet they threatened to split the churches since both parties laid too much stress on external uniformity. Following is a brief summary of the subject of controversy.

The Christians of Asia Minor celebrated the Christian Passover uniformly on the fourteenth of Nisan, on whichever day of the week that might fall, with a solemn fast. They fixed the close of the fast accordingly and on that day partook of the communion and lovefeast. The communion on the evening of the 14th of Nisan was in memory of the last paschal supper of Christ. From this day of observance, the Asiatic Christians were afterwards called *Quartadecimarians*.

The Roman church on the contrary celebrated the death of Jesus always on a Friday, the day of the week on which it actually occurred, and his resurrection always on a Sunday after the March full moon, and extended the paschal fast to the latter day, considering it improper to terminate the fast at an earlier date and to celebrate the communion before the festival of the resurrection. This Roman practice created an entire holy week of solemn fasting and commemoration of the Lord's passion while the Asiatic practice ended the fast on the 14th of Nisan, which might fall sometimes several days before Sunday.

Hence a spectacle shocking to the catholic sense of ritualistic propriety and uniformity was frequently presented to the world. One part of Christendom was fasting and mourning over the death of our Saviour while the other part rejoiced in the glory of the resurrection.

The gist of the paschal controversy was whether the Jewish paschal-day (be it a Friday or not) or the Christian Sunday should control the idea and time of the entire festival. The history of the controversy divides into three acts.

1. The difference came into discussion first on a visit of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, to Anicetus, bishop of Rome, between A.D. 150 and 155. It was not settled, yet the two bishops parted in peace with Irenaeus instructed to celebrate the holy communion in his church.

Irenaeus writes, "The very difference in our fasting establishes the unanimity in our faith." The Christians of the days of Polycarp knew how to keep the unity of the Spirit without uniformity of rites and ceremonies.

2. A few years afterwards, about 170, the controversy broke out in Laodicea where a difference had arisen either among the Quartadecimanians themselves or among these and the adherents of the Western observance. The accounts are incomplete and obscure, but the protests against the Quartadecimanian practice were mild and charitable.
3. Much more important and vehement was the third stage of the controversy between 190 and 194 which extended over the whole church and occasioned many synods and synodical letters.

The Roman bishop Victor required the Asiatics, in an imperious tone, to abandon their Quartadecimanian practice. Against this Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, solemnly protested in the name of a synod held by him appealing to an imposing array of authorities for their primitive custom. Victor turned a deaf ear to this remonstrance and branded the Asiatics as heretics and threatened to excommunicate them.

But many of the Eastern bishops, including Irenaeus, who agreed with Victor on the disputed point, earnestly reproved him for such arrogance and reminded him of the more Christian and brotherly conduct of his predecessors. Irenaeus proved himself on this occasion, as Eusebius remarks, a true peacemaker and his vigorous protest seems to have prevented the schism.

In the course of the third century the Roman practice gained ground everywhere in the East. The Council of Nicea in 325 established it as the law of the whole church. They considered it unbecoming in Christians to follow the usage of the unbelieving, hostile Jews. They ordained that Easter should always be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon succeeding the vernal equinox (March 21) and always after the Jewish passover. But the desired uniformity in the observance of Easter was still hindered by differences in reckoning the course of the moon and the vernal equinox. Hence even to this day the Oriental churches differ from the Occidental Christians in the observance of Easter. All these useless ritualistic disputes might have been avoided had Easter, like Christmas, been made an immovable feast at least as regards the week, if not the day, of its observance.

Easter was followed by the festival of Pentecost which rested on the Jewish feast of harvest. It

was universally observed as early as the second century in commemoration of the appearances and heavenly exaltation of the risen Lord and had throughout a joyous character. It lasted through fifty days, which were celebrated as a continuous Sunday, by daily communion, the standing posture in prayer, and the absence of all fasting. Subsequently the celebration was limited to the fortieth day as the feast of the Ascension and the fiftieth day, or Pentecost proper (Whitsunday) as the feast of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the Christian Church.

The feast of the Epiphany is of later origin. It spread from the East towards the West, but here, even in the fourth century, it was resisted and condemned as an oriental innovation. It was in general the feast of the appearance of Christ in the flesh, and particularly of the manifestation of his Messiahship by his baptism in the Jordan. When the East adopted from the West the Christmas festival, Epiphany was restricted to the celebration of the baptism of Christ. In the West it was afterwards made a collective festival of several events in the life of Jesus, such as the adoration of the Magi and the first miracle of Cana.

From the middle of the second century down to the close of the fifth, the public service of the church was divided into the worship of the catechumens and the worship of the faithful. The former consisted of scripture reading, preaching, prayer, and songs, and was open to the unbaptized and persons under penance. The latter consisted of the holy communion with its liturgical appendages. None but the proper members of the church could attend it. Before it began, all catechumens and unbelievers left the assembly at the order of the deacon and the doors were closed or guarded.

The earliest witness for this strict separation is Tertullian. He demands that believers, catechumens, and pagans should occupy separate places in public worship and reproaches the heretics with allowing the baptized and the unbaptized to attend the same prayers, and casting the holy even before the pagans. The Alexandrian divines furnished a theoretical ground for this practice by their doctrine of a secret tradition for the *esoteric*, that is, the higher and deeper doctrines, as opposed to the lower or elementary (*exoteric*) doctrines. The former were to be withheld from the uninitiated out of reverence and to avoid giving offense to the weak and to the heathen.

We have here the beginnings of the Christian mystery-worship, "the Secret Discipline". We find its full development in the liturgies of the fourth century, but it disappeared from the Latin church after the sixth century with the dissolution of heathenism and the universal introduction

of infant baptism. The Eastern church, however, has retained in her liturgies to this day the ancient form for the dismissal of catechumens, the special prayers for them, the designation of the sacraments as "mysteries," and the partial celebration of the mass behind the veil.

### The Lord's Supper

The celebration of the Eucharist or holy communion with appropriate prayers of the faithful was the culmination of Christian worship. It was partaken by none but the believing and baptized who lived according to the commands of Christ.

In the ancient church the Lord's Supper was universally regarded not only as a sacrament but also as a sacrifice, the true and eternal sacrifice of the new covenant superseding all the provisional and typical sacrifices of the old. It took the place particularly of the passover, or the feast of the typical redemption from Egypt. This eucharistic sacrifice, however, the ante-Nicene fathers conceived not as an unbloody repetition of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross but simply as a commemoration and renewed appropriation of that atonement. Above all, it was a thank-offering of the whole church for all the favors of God in creation and redemption.

The consecrated elements were regarded in a twofold light, as representing at once the natural and the spiritual gifts of God which culminated in the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The earthly gifts of bread and wine were taken as types and pledges of the heavenly gifts of the same God who has both created and redeemed the world.

Upon this followed the idea of the self-sacrifice of the worshiper himself, the sacrifice of renewed self-consecration to Christ in return for his sacrifice on the cross and also the sacrifice of charity to the poor. Down to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the eucharistic elements were presented as a thank-offering by the members of the congregation themselves and the remnants went to the clergy and the poor. This subjective offering of the whole congregation on the ground of the objective atoning sacrifice of Christ is the real center of the ancient Christian worship and particularly of the communion.

The writers of the second century keep strictly within the limits of the notion of a congregational *thank-offering*. The African fathers in the third century are the first to formulate the later Roman Catholic idea of a *sin-offering*, especially Cyprian, the steadfast advocate of priesthood and of episcopal authority. The ideas of priesthood, sacrifice, and altar, are intimately connected, and a

Judaizing or paganizing conception of one must extend to all.

### Baptism

The ordinance of baptism was regarded in the ancient church as the sacrament of the new birth or regeneration, and as the solemn rite of initiation into the Christian Church, admitting to all her benefits and committing to all her obligations. Justin Martyr gives the following account of baptism:

Those who are convinced of the truth of our doctrine, and have promised to live according to it, are exhorted to prayer, fasting, and repentance for past sins, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are led by us to a place where is water, and in this way they are regenerated, as we also have been regenerated; that is, they receive the water-bath in the name of God, the Father and Ruler of all, and of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost.

Tertullian describes the effect of baptism thus:

When the soul comes to faith and becomes transformed through regeneration by water and power from above, it discovers, after the veil of the old corruption is taken away, its whole light. It is received into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; and the soul, which unites itself to the Holy Spirit, is followed by the body.

Tertullian already leans towards the notion of a magical operation of the baptismal water. Yet the subjective condition of repentance and faith was universally required. Baptism was not only an act of God, but at the same time the most solemn surrender of man to God, a vow for life and death, to live henceforth only to Christ and his people. The keeping of this vow was the condition of continuance in the church; the breaking of it must be followed either by repentance or excommunication.

Tertullian and other fathers argued the necessity of baptism to salvation. Exception, however, was made in favor of the bloody baptism of martyrdom as compensating for that of water. This would lead to the evangelical principle, that not the omission, but only the contempt of the sacrament is damning.

The effect of baptism, however, was thought to extend only to sins committed before receiving it. Hence the frequent postponement of the sacrament which Tertullian very earnestly recommends. Many, like Constantine the Great, put it off to the bed of sickness and of death. They preferred the risk of dying unbaptized to that of forfeiting forever the baptismal grace.

But then the question arose, how could forgiveness of sins committed after baptism be obtained? This is the starting point of the Roman doctrine of the sacrament of penance. Tertullian and Cyprian were the first to suggest that satisfaction must be made for such sins by self-imposed penitential exercises and good works, such as prayers and almsgiving. Tertullian held seven gross sins, which he denoted mortal sins, to be unpardonable after baptism and to be left to the uncovenanted mercies of God.

The institution of *sponsors*, first mentioned by Tertullian, arose no doubt from infant baptism, and was designed to secure Christian training without thereby excusing Christian parents from their duty.

The CATECHUMENATE<sup>16</sup> or preparation for baptism was a very important institution of the early church. It dates substantially from apostolic times. As the church was set in the midst of a heathen world and addressed herself in the missionary preaching in the first instance to the adult generation, she saw the necessity of preparing the susceptible for baptism by special instruction under teachers called "catechists," who were generally presbyters and deacons. The catechumenate preceded baptism (of adults) whereas at a later period, after the general introduction of infant baptism, it followed. The catechumens or hearers were regarded not as unbelievers but as half-Christians. They were accordingly allowed to attend all the exercises of worship with the exception of the celebration of the sacraments.

The duration of this catechetical instruction was fixed sometimes at two or three years, but might be shortened according to circumstances. Persons of decent moral character and general intelligence were admitted to baptism without delay. The Councils allowed immediate admission in cases of sickness.

CONFIRMATION was the medium of the communication of the Holy Spirit and of consecration to the spiritual priesthood. It was originally closely connected with baptism but later came to be separated from it, especially in the case of infants, and to be regarded as a sacrament by itself.

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16 The word can be used of *the state of condition of a catechumen* (one who is being taught the principles of Christianity); it can also be used, as here, for *the time during which one is a catechumen*.

Cyprian is the first to distinguish the baptism with water and the baptism with the Spirit as two sacraments. However, the term sacrament was used very indefinitely at that time and applied to all sacred doctrines and rites.

While the church was still a missionary institution in the midst of a heathen world, infant baptism was overshadowed by the baptism of adult proselytes. In the following periods, upon the union of church and state, the order was reversed.

At the same time it seems an almost certain fact, though disputed by many, that with the baptism of converts, the *optional* baptism of the children of Christian parents in established congregations comes down from the apostolic age. Pious parents would naturally feel a desire to consecrate their offspring from the very beginning to the service of the Redeemer, and a precedent was found in the ordinance of circumcision. This desire would be strengthened in cases of sickness by the prevailing notion of the necessity of baptism for salvation.

The apostolic fathers make, indeed, no mention of it. But their silence proves nothing as they hardly touch upon baptism at all. An exception is Hermas, and he declares it necessary to salvation, even for the patriarchs in Hades (therefore, as we may well infer, for children also). Justin Martyr expressly teaches the capacity of *all* men for spiritual circumcision by baptism, and his "all" can with the less propriety be limited since he is here speaking to a Jew.

According to Irenaeus, Polycarp's pupil and faithful bearer of Johannan tradition, Christ passed through all the stages of life, to sanctify them all, and came to redeem, through himself, "all who through him are *born again* unto God, *sucklings, children, boys, youths, and adults.*" This profound view seems to involve an acknowledgment not only of the idea of infant baptism, but also of the practice of it, for in the mind of Irenaeus and the ancient church baptism and regeneration were intimately connected and almost identified. In an infant, in fact, any regeneration but through baptism cannot be easily conceived. A moral and spiritual regeneration, as distinct from sacramental, would imply conversion, and this is a conscious act of the will, an exercise of repentance and faith, of which the infant is not capable.

The only opponent of infant baptism among the fathers is the eccentric and schismatic Tertullian of North Africa. He condemns the hastening of the innocent age to the forgiveness of sins, and entrusting it with divine gifts, when infants would not be entrusted with earthly property. But the very manner of Tertullian's opposition proves as much in favor of infant baptism as against it. He meets it not as an innovation but as a prevalent custom. He meets it not with exegetical or

historical arguments, but only with considerations of religious prudence.

Tertullian's opposition to infant baptism is founded on his view of the regenerating effect of baptism and of the impossibility of having mortal sins forgiven in the church after baptism. This ordinance cannot be repeated and washes out only the guilt contracted before its reception. On the same ground he advises healthy adults, especially the unmarried, to postpone this sacrament until they shall be no longer in danger of forfeiting forever the grace of baptism by committing adultery, murder, apostasy, or any other of the seven crimes which he calls mortal sins. On the same principle, his advice applies only to healthy children, not to sickly ones, if we consider that he held baptism to be the indispensable condition of forgiveness of sins and taught the doctrine of hereditary sin.

Tertullian's opposition had no influence, at least no theoretical influence, even in North Africa. His disciple Cyprian differed from him wholly. In his day it was no question whether the children of Christian parents might and should be baptized for on this all were agreed. The question concerned whether baptism should be administered as early as the second or third day after birth or, according to the precedent of the Jewish circumcision, on the eighth day. Cyprian and a council of sixty-six bishops held at Carthage in 253 under his lead, decided for the earlier time yet without condemning the delay. It was in a measure the same view of the almost magical effect of the baptismal water, and of its absolute necessity to salvation, which led Cyprian to hasten and Tertullian to postpone the holy ordinance, one looking more at the beneficent effect of the sacrament in regard to past sins and the other at the danger of sins to come.

### ***ASCETIC TENDENCIES WITHIN THE CHURCH***

Here we enter a field where the early church appears most remote from the free spirit of evangelical Protestantism and modern ethics and stands closer to the legalistic and monastic ethics of Greek and Roman Catholicism.

Christian life was viewed as consisting mainly in certain outward exercises rather than an inward disposition, in a multiplicity of acts rather than a life of faith. The qualitative view of morality yielded more and more to quantitative calculation by the number of outward meritorious and even supererogatory works: prayer, fasting, alms-giving, voluntary poverty, and celibacy. This necessarily brought with it a Judaizing self-righteousness and over-estimate of the ascetic life which developed, by an irresistible impulse, into the hermit-life and monasticism of the Nicene

age. All the germs of this asceticism appear in the second half of the third century and even earlier.

Asceticism in general is a rigid, outward self-discipline by which the spirit strives after full dominion over the flesh and a superior grade of virtue. It rests upon a lively, though morbid, sense of the sinfulness of the flesh and corruption of the world, the desire for solitude and exclusive occupation with divine things, and upon the ambition to attain extraordinary holiness and merit.

In the ancient church there was a special class of Christians of both sexes who, under the name of "ascetics" or "abstinents," though still living in the midst of the community, retired from society, voluntarily renounced marriage and property, devoted themselves wholly to fasting, prayer, and religious contemplation, and strove thereby to attain Christian perfection. They shared with the confessors the greatest regard from their fellow Christians, had a separate seat in the public worship, and were considered the fairest ornaments of the church.

This catholic asceticism starts from a literal and overstrained construction of certain passages of Scripture. It asserts the divine origin and destiny of the human body and therefore aims, not to mortify it, but to perfectly control and sanctify it. But in practice it falsely substitutes the bodily appetites and affections, or sensuous nature, for the flesh, or the principle of selfishness, and really joins in the Gnostic and Manichean<sup>17</sup> hatred of the body as the prison of the spirit.

The Alexandrian fathers furnished a theoretical basis for this asceticism in the distinction of a lower and higher morality. The ascetics, and afterwards the monks, formed or claimed to be a moral nobility above the common Christian people as the clergy stood in a separate caste of inviolable dignity above the laity. Origen quite distinctly propounds the catholic doctrine of two kinds of morality and piety, a lower for all Christians and a higher for saints or the select few. He includes in the higher morality works of supererogation, which include martyrdom, voluntary poverty, and voluntary celibacy.

In the ante-Nicene period, sacerdotal celibacy did not as yet become a matter of law but was left optional, like the vow of chastity among the laity. The first step in the direction of clerical celibacy was the prohibition of *second* marriage to the clergy on the ground that Paul's direction concerning "the husband of *one* wife" is a restriction rather than a command.

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17 The syncretic religious philosophy taught by the Persian prophet, Manes (ca. 216-276), combining elements of Zoroastrian, Christian, and Gnostic thought; it was a dualistic philosophy that considered matter as intrinsically evil and mind as intrinsically good.

The second step was the prohibition of marriage and conjugal intercourse *after* ordination. This implies the incompatibility of the priesthood with the duties and privileges of marriage.

The Latin Church took the third and last step, the *absolute prohibition* of clerical marriage, including even the lower orders, but this belongs to the next period.

### ***DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH***

We now come to the several doctrines of the church, and as we do we must ever bear in mind that Christianity entered the world not as a logical system but as a divine-human fact. We must not be, therefore, surprised to find in the period before us, even in the most eminent teachers, a very indefinite and defective knowledge, as yet, of important articles of faith. The center of Christianity is the divine-human person and the divine-human work of Christ. From that center, a change passed through the whole circle of existing religious ideas, in its first principles and its last results, confirming what was true in the earlier religion and rejecting what was false.

Almost all the creeds of the first centuries, especially the Apostles' and the Nicene, begin with confession of faith in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of the visible and the invisible. The doctrine of the unity of God, as the eternal, almighty, omnipresent, just, and holy creator and upholder of all things, the Christian church inherited from Judaism and vindicated against the absurd polytheism of the pagans, and particularly against the dualism of the Gnostics.

It was the universal faith of the church that man was made in the image of God, pure and holy, and fell by his own guilt and the temptation of Satan who himself fell from his original state. But the extent of sin and the consequences of the fall were not fully discussed before the Pelagian controversy in the fifth century.

The Messiahship and Divine Sonship of Jesus of Nazareth is the foundation stone of the Christian church, and the denial of the mystery of the incarnation is the mark of antichristian heresy. The whole theological energy of the ante-Nicene period concentrated itself, therefore, upon the doctrine of Christ as the God-man and Redeemer of the world. This doctrine was the kernel of all the baptismal creeds and was stamped upon the entire life, constitution, and worship of the early church.

But the logical definition of this divinity and of its relation to the Old Testament fundamental doctrine of the unity of the divine essence (that is, the development of the dogma of the Trinity) was the work of three centuries and was only fairly accomplished in the Nicene age. In the first effort of reason to grapple with these unfathomable mysteries, we must expect mistakes, crudities, and inaccuracies of every kind.

The dogma of the DIVINITY of Christ is the center of interest. It comes into the foreground, not only against rationalistic Monarchianism<sup>18</sup> and Ebionism,<sup>19</sup> which degrade Christ to a second Moses, but also against Gnosticism which dilutes and destroys any idea of a specific sonship. Justin Martyr developed the first Christology. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus, and other church fathers also wrote expressly on this subject.

The Savior's HUMANITY was asserted as clearly and forcibly as his divinity. Heresies were refuted in the writings of Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, among others.

The doctrine of the MUTUAL RELATION of the divine and the human in Christ did not come into special discussion nor reach a definite settlement until the Christological controversies of the fifth century. Yet Irenaeus, in several passages, teaches unequivocally a true and indissoluble union of divinity and humanity in Christ.

The doctrine of the HOLY SPIRIT was far less developed, and until the middle of the fourth century was never a subject of special controversy. Yet the ante-Nicene fathers, with the exception of the Monarchians and perhaps Lactantius, agreed in the two fundamental points, that the Holy Spirit, the sole agent in the application of redemption, is a supernatural divine being, and that he is an independent person, closely allied to the Father and the Son yet hypostatically<sup>20</sup> different from them both.

Here now we have the elements of the dogma of the Trinity, that is, the doctrine of the living, only true God, Father, Son, and Spirit, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. This dogma has a peculiar, comprehensive, and definitive import in the Christian system as a brief summary of all the truths and blessings of revealed religion.

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18 Any of several Christian heresies of the second and third centuries that attempted to maintain monotheism and the unity of the Godhead but thereby denied the independent divine essence of God the Son.

19 A heresy that combined elements of Judaism and Christianity; it denied the deity of Christ, regarding him merely as an inspired messenger, and rejected much of the New Testament canon.

20 The term *hypostasis* means *substance, essence, or underlying reality*; it can be used for any person of the Trinity; in the case of Jesus, it refers to the essential person in which the human and divine natures are united.

As the doctrines of the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit were but imperfectly developed in logical precision in the ante-Nicene period, the doctrine of the Trinity, founded upon them, cannot be expected to be more clear. The Roman bishop Dionysius (A.D. 262), a Greek by birth, stood nearest the Nicene doctrine. His view has come down to us in a fragment in Athanasius:

Then I must declare against those who annihilate the most sacred doctrine of the church by dividing and dissolving the unity of God into three powers, separate hypostases, and three deities...But the divine Logos must be inseparably united with the God of all, and in God also the Holy Ghost must dwell so that the divine triad must be comprehended in one, viz. the all-ruling God, as in a head.

The divine adorable unity must not be thus cut up into three deities; no more may the transcendent dignity and greatness of the Lord be lowered by saying, the Son is created; but we must believe in God the almighty Father, and in Jesus Christ his Son, and in the Holy Ghost, and must consider the Logos inseparably united with the God of all; for he says, "I and my Father are one"; and "I am in the Father and the Father in me." In this way are both the divine triad and the sacred doctrine of the unity of the Godhead preserved inviolate.

That this goal was at last happily reached was in great part due again to those controversies with the opponents of the church doctrine of the Trinity that filled the whole third century.

The theological development of the doctrine of redemption began with the struggle against Jewish and heathen influences, and at the same time with the development of the doctrine of the person of Christ, which is inseparable from that of his work, and indeed fundamental to it. The apostolic scriptures, in the fullness of their inspiration, everywhere bear witness of this salvation wrought through Christ as a living fact of experience. But it required time for the profound ideas of a Paul and a John to come up clearly to the view of the church; indeed, to this day they remain unfathomed.

Yet we do find in an anonymous epistle to an unknown heathen, Diognetus, this beautiful and forcible passage on the mystery of redemption. This shows that the root of the matter was apprehended by faith long before a logical analysis was attempted.

When our wickedness had reached its height, and it had been clearly shown that its

reward--punishment and death--was impending over us...God himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities. He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors!

Irenaeus is the first of all the church teachers to give a careful analysis of the work of redemption, and his view is by far the deepest and soundest we find in the first three centuries. Athanasius, in his early youth at the beginning of the next period, wrote the first systematic treatise on redemption. But it was left for the Latin church, after the epoch-making treatise of Anselm, to develop this important doctrine in its various aspects.

Christianity--and human life itself, with its countless problems and mysteries--has no meaning without the certainty of a future world of rewards and punishments for which the present life serves as a preparatory school. The doctrine of the future life was among the first in the consciousness of the Christians and an unfailing source of comfort and strength in times of trial and persecution. It stood in close connection with the expectation of the Lord's glorious reappearance.

Of the resurrection of the body the Greeks and Romans had no conception, except in the form of shades and spectral outlines which were supposed to surround the disembodied spirits and to make them to some degree recognizable.

The Jewish doctrine is far in advance of heathen notions and conjectures but presents different phases of development. The Mosaic writings are remarkably silent about the future life and emphasize the present rather than future consequences of the observance or non-observance of the law. The Pentateuch contains, however, some remote and significant hints of immortality as in the tree of life, the mysterious translation of Enoch, the prohibition of necromancy, the patriarchal phrase "to be gathered to his fathers", and in the self-designation of Jehovah as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," which implies their immortality.

In the later writings of the Old Testament the doctrine of immortality and resurrection comes out

plainly. Daniel's vision reaches out even to the final resurrection of "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth to everlasting life," and of "some to shame and everlasting contempt." But before Christ the general place of departed souls remained, like the Greek Hades, a dark and dreary abode and is so described in the Old Testament.

The Jewish Apocrypha and later Jewish writings show some progress. They distinguish between two regions in Sheol, Paradise for the righteous and Gehenna for the wicked. They emphasize the resurrection of the body and the future rewards and punishments. The Talmud adds various fanciful embellishments.

The Christian doctrine of the future life differs both from the pagan and, to a lesser extent, from the Jewish concepts in the following important points:

1. It gives to the belief in a future state the absolute certainty of divine revelation.
2. It connects the resurrection of the body with the immortality of the soul.
3. It views death as the punishment of sin and therefore as something terrible. But its terror has been broken and its sting extracted by Christ.
4. It qualifies the idea of a future state by the doctrine of sin and redemption, and thus makes it to the believer a state of absolute holiness and happiness, to the impenitent sinner a state of absolute misery.
5. It gives great prominence to the general judgment, after the resurrection, which determines the ultimate fate of all men according to their works done in this earthly life.

Among the darkest points in eschatology is the middle state, or the condition of the soul between death and resurrection. The prevailing view was that the soul continued in a conscious, though disembodied state, by virtue either of inherent or of communicated immortality. The nature of that state depends upon the moral character formed in this life either for weal or woe, without the possibility of a change except in the same direction.

The catholic doctrine of the *status intermedius*<sup>21</sup> was chiefly derived from the Jewish tradition of

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<sup>21</sup> Latin for the *intermediate state*, a term in theology that refers to the time between death and resurrection.

Sheol, from the parable of Dives and Lazarus,<sup>22</sup> and from the passages of Christ's descent into Hades. The utterances of the ante-Nicene fathers are somewhat vague and confused but receive light from the more mature statements of the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers. They may be reduced to the following points:

1. The pious who died before Christ from Adam down to John the Baptist (with rare exceptions as Enoch, Moses, and Elijah) were detained in a part of Sheol awaiting the first Advent, and were released by Christ after the crucifixion and transferred to Paradise.
2. Christian martyrs and confessors, to whom were afterwards added other eminent saints, pass immediately after death into heaven to the blessed vision of God.
3. The majority of Christian believers, being imperfect, enter for an indefinite period into a preparatory state of rest and happiness, usually called Paradise or Abraham's Bosom. There they are gradually purged of remaining infirmities until they are ripe for heaven.
4. The locality of Paradise is uncertain.
5. Impenitent Christians and unbelievers go down to the lower regions of Hades into a preparatory state of misery and dreadful expectation of the final judgment.
6. The future fate of the heathen and unbaptized children was left in hopeless darkness, except by Justin and the Alexandrian fathers, who extended the operations of divine grace beyond the limits of the visible church.
7. There are in the other world different degrees of happiness and misery according to the degrees of merit and guilt.
8. With the idea of the imperfection of the middle state and the possibility of progressive amelioration is connected the commemoration of the departed and prayer in their behalf.
9. The connection with prayers for the dead show a strong tendency to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. However, the ante-Nicene idea of the middle state of the pious excludes, or at all events ignores, the idea of penal suffering which is an essential part of the Catholic conception of Purgatory. It represents the condition of the pious as one of

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 16:19-31.

comparative happiness.

Yet alongside this prevailing belief there are traces of the purgatorial idea of suffering the temporal consequences of sin and a painful struggle after holiness. Tertullian and Cyprian taught that a special satisfaction and penance was required for sins committed after baptism, and that the last farthing must be paid (Matt. 5:20) before the soul can be released from prison and enter into heaven.

After the general judgment we have nothing revealed but the boundless prospect of aeonian<sup>23</sup> life and aeonian death. There never was in the Christian church any difference of opinion concerning the righteous who shall inherit eternal life and enjoy the blessed communion of God forever and ever. But the final fate of the impenitent who reject the offer of salvation admits of three answers to the reasoning mind.

1. EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT of the wicked. This always was and always will be the orthodox theory. It was held by the Jews at the time of Christ, with the exception of the Sadducees who denied the resurrection. The generality of this belief among Christians is testified by Celsus.
2. The final ANNIHILATION of the wicked. This removes all discord from the universe of God at the expense of the natural immortality of the soul and on the ground that sin will ultimately destroy the sinner and thus destroy itself.
3. The APOKATASTASIS<sup>24</sup> or final restoration of all rational beings to holiness and happiness. Origen was the first Christian universalist. However, in his later writings he seems at least to have modified it by exempting Satan from final repentance and salvation. But his view was rejected by Jerome and Augustine and at last condemned as one of the Origenistic errors under the Emperor Justinian (543). Since that time universalism was regarded as a heresy.

The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is, the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. This view was held by such distinguished teachers as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.

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23 The Greek word for *eternal* or *everlasting*.

24 The Greek word for restoration.

The Jewish chiliasm rested on a carnal misapprehension of the Messianic kingdom, a literal interpretation of prophetic figures, and an overestimate of the importance of the Jewish people and the holy city as the center of that kingdom. It was developed shortly before and after Christ in the apocalyptic literature of the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, 4th Esdras, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Books.

The Christian chiliasm is the Jewish chiliasm spiritualized and fixed upon the second, instead of the first, coming of Christ. It distinguishes, moreover, two resurrections, one before and another after the millennium and makes the millennial reign of Christ only a prelude to his eternal reign in heaven, from which it is separated by a short interregnum of Satan. The millennium is expected to come not as the legitimate result of a historical process but as a sudden supernatural revelation.

In connection with this, the general expectation prevailed that the return of the Lord was near. This hope, through the whole age of persecution, was a copious fountain of encouragement and comfort under the pains of martyrdom.

Among the Apostolic Fathers, Barnabas is the first and the only one who expressly teaches a premillennial reign of Christ on earth.

The opposition to chiliasm began during the Montanist movement<sup>25</sup> in Asia Minor. Caius of Rome attacked both Chiliasm and Montanism and traced the former to the hated heretic Cerinthus. Origen opposed chiliasm as a Jewish dream and spiritualized the symbolical language of the prophets.

But the crushing blow came from the great change in the social condition and prospects of the church in the Nicene age. Christianity, contrary to all expectation, triumphed in the Roman empire and was embraced by the Caesars themselves. The millennial reign, instead of now being anxiously awaited and prayed for, began to be dated either from the first appearance of Christ or from the conversion of Constantine and the downfall of paganism and to be regarded as realized in the glory of the dominant imperial state-church. Augustine, who himself had formerly entertained chiliastic hopes, framed the new theory which reflected the social change and was generally accepted. The apocalyptic millennium he understood to be the present reign of Christ

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25 A movement based on the teachings of Mintanus in the second century, who claimed that the Holy Spirit dwelt in him and employed him as an instrument for purifying and guiding men in the Christian life.

in the Catholic church, and the first resurrection the translation of the martyrs and saints to heaven where they participate in Christ's reign.

From the time of Constantine and Augustine, chiliasm took its place among the heresies and was rejected subsequently even by the Protestant reformers as a Jewish dream. But it was revived from time to time as an article of faith and hope by pious individuals and whole sects.

In a free spiritual sense, however, millenarianism will always survive as the hope of a golden age of the church on earth, and of a great sabbath of history after its many centuries of labor and strife. The church militant ever longs after the church triumphant, and looks "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."