Volume 3: Nicene & Post-Nicene Christianity
From Constantine the Great to Gregory the Great
A.D. 311-600

CONSTANTINE'S REIGN

We cannot pass on to the Nicene period without summarizing the reign of Constantine. He was the first Christian Caesar, the founder of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire, and one of the most gifted, energetic, and successful of the Roman emperors. He was the first representative of the imposing idea of a Christian theocracy, that is, a system or policy which assumes all subjects to be Christians, connects civil and religious rights, and regards church and state as the two arms of one and the same divine government on earth. At the same time, however, Constantine also stands as the type of an undiscriminating and harmful conjunction of Christianity with politics, of the holy symbol of peace with the horrors of war, of the spiritual interests of the kingdom of heaven with the earthly interests of the state.

Constantine's moral character was not without noble traits, among which was a chastity rare for the time and a liberality and beneficence bordering on wastefulness. Many of his laws and regulations breathed the spirit of Christian justice and humanity. Altogether he was one of the best, the most fortunate, and the most influential of the Roman emperors, Christian and pagan.

Yet he had great faults. He was far from being so pure and so venerable as Eusebius, blinded by his favor to the church, depicts him. It must, with all regret, be conceded that his progress in the knowledge of Christianity was not a progress in the practice of its virtues. His love of display and his prodigality, his suspiciousness and his despotism, increased with his power.

The very brightest period of his reign is stained with gross crimes which even the spirit of the age and the policy of an absolute monarch cannot excuse. After having reached, upon the bloody path of war, the goal of his ambition, that is, the sole possession of the empire, yea, in the very year in which he summoned the great council of Nicea, he ordered the execution of his conquered rival and brother-in-law, Licinius, in breach of a solemn promise of mercy. Not satisfied with this he soon afterwards caused, from political suspicion, the death of his nephew, the young Licinius, a boy of hardly eleven years. But the worst of all is the murder of his eldest son Crispus in 326.

After Constantine's victory over Licinius, he became sole head of the whole Roman empire. He now issued a general exhortation to his subjects to embrace the Christian religion, still leaving them, however, to their own free conviction. In the year 330 he transferred the seat of his government to Byzantium and thus fixed the policy, already initiated by Domitian, of orientalizing and dividing the empire.

Constantine diligently attended divine worship. He kept the Easter vigils with great devotion. He would stand during the longest sermons of his bishops. He himself even composed and delivered discourses to his court in the Latin language from which they were translated into Greek by interpreters appointed for the purpose. He dwelt mainly on the truth of Christianity, the folly of idolatry, the unity and providence of God, the coming of Christ, and the judgment.

He continued in his later years true, upon the whole, to the toleration principles of the edict of 313, protected the pagan priests and temples in their privileges, and wisely abstained from all violent measures against heathenism in the persuasion that it would in time die out.

When, after a life of almost uninterrupted health, he felt the approach of death, he was received into the number of catechumens by the laying on of hands and then formally admitted by baptism into the full communion of the church in the year 337. He died a few days later on Pentecost, May 22, 337, trusting in the mercy of God and leaving a long, fortunate, and brilliant reign. From the time of the fifth century he began to be recognized in the East as a saint. The Latin church, on the contrary, has never placed him among the saints but has been content with naming him "the Great" in just and grateful remembrance of his services to the cause of Christianity and civilization.

DEATH OF CONSTANTINE TO THE DIVISION OF THE EMPIRE

With the death of Constantine, the monarchy also came, for the present, to an end. The empire was divided among his three sons, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius. Their accession was not in Christian style but after the manner of genuine Turkish, oriental despotism. They trod upon the corpses of the numerous kindred of their father, excepting two nephews, Gallus and Julian, who were saved only by sickness and youth from the fury of the soldiers. Three years later followed a war of the brothers for the sole supremacy. Constantine II was slain by Constans (340) who was in turn murdered by a barbarian field officer and rival, Magnentius (350). After the defeat and suicide of Magnentius, Constantius, who had hitherto reigned in the East, became sole emperor.

Constantius departed from his father's wise policy of toleration and entered upon a violent suppression of the heathen religion.   He prohibited, under penalty of death, all sacrifices and worship of images in Rome, Alexandria, and Athens, though the prohibition could not be carried out. Hosts now came over to Christianity but for the most part with the lips only and not with the heart.

By the laws of history, the forced Christianity of Constantius must provoke a reaction of heathenism. And such reaction in fact ensued, though only for a brief period, immediately after his death.

Julian, surnamed the Apostate, a nephew of Constantine the Great and cousin of Constantius, was born in the year 331, and was therefore only six years old when his uncle died. The general slaughter of his kindred, not excepting his father, at the change of the throne, could beget neither love for Constantius nor respect for his court Christianity.

With his step-brother, Gallus, Julian received a nominally Christian training under the direction of the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was baptized, educated for the clerical order, and ordained a lector. But he was never committed in heart and apostasized from Christianity in 351, his 20th year. But while Constantius lived, he concealed his pagan sympathies with consummate hypocrisy. In 361, at the sudden death of Constantius, he became sole head of the Roman empire.

The ruling passion of Julian, and the soul of his short but active reign, was his fanatical love of the pagan religion and bitter hatred of the Christian. He considered it the great mission of his life to restore the worship of the gods and to reduce the religion of Jesus to utter extinction. But he failed in his goals and met his end in 363 in his war with Persia.

Julian was succeeded by Jovian (363-364), a Christian general chosen emperor by the army. He concluded with the Persians a necessary peace, restored to the church her privileges, and declared universal toleration in the spirit of Constantine. He died at the age of 33 after a brief reign of 8 months.

Jovian's successor, Valentinian I (died 375), though generally inclined to despotic measures, declared likewise for the policy of religious freedom and, though personally an adherent of the Nicene orthodoxy, kept aloof from the doctrinal controversies. His brother and co-emperor, Valens, who reigned in the East until 378, favored the Arians and persecuted the Catholics.

Under this reign, heathenism was for the first time officially designated as *paganismus,* that is *peasant-religion* because it had almost entirely died out in the cities and maintained only a decrepit and obscure existence in retired villages.

The same toleration continued under Gratian (375-383), son and successor of Valentinian. Under the influence of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, he laid aside the title and dignity of *Pontifex Maximus*, confiscated the temple property, abolished most of the privileges of the priests and vestal virgins, and withdrew, at least in part, the appropriation from the public treasury for their support.

In 384, Gratian's brother, Valentinian II (383-392), rejected the renewed petition of the Romans for the restoration of the altar of Victoria. The prefect Symmachus asked the emperor to make a distinction between his private religion and the *religio urbis*,[1] to respect the authority of antiquity and the rights of the venerable city which had attained the dominion of the world under the worship of the gods. His plea was rejected, however, through the influence of Ambrose. The same petition was renewed in 389 before Theodosius but was rejected, again through the influence of Ambrose.

The final suppression of heathenism is usually, though not quite justly, ascribed to the emperor Theodosius I. He is counted among the best emperors of Rome for his victories over the Goths, his wise legislation, and his personal virtues and thus bears the distinction of "the Great." A native of Spain, he was called by Gratian to be co-emperor in the East in a time of great danger from the threatening barbarians (379), and after the death of Valentinian he rose to the head of the empire (392-395).

In the year 391 Theodosius prohibited, under heavy fine, the visiting of a heathen temple for a religious purpose, and in the following year even the private performance of libations and other pagan rites. The practice of idolatry was henceforth a political offense.

Yet Theodosius by no means pressed the execution of these laws in places where the heathen party retained considerable strength. He did not exclude heathens from public office and allowed them at least full liberty of thought and speech. He stood in such favor with the pagans that after his death he was enrolled by the Roman senate among the gods.

He issued no law for the destruction of temples but only continued Gratian's policy of confiscating the temple property and withdrawing entirely the public contribution to the support

---

1 The religion of the state.

of idolatry. But in many places, especially in the East, the fanaticism of the monks and the Christian populace broke out in a rage for destruction. Many monuments and centers of heathen worship were destroyed. Yet there were important protests from the church against this pious vandalism, from Chrysostom of Antioch and Augustine. In the west the work of destruction was not systematically carried on, and the many ruined temples of Greece and Italy at this day prove that even then reason and taste sometimes prevailed over the rude caprice of fanaticism. With the death of Theodosius the empire again fell into two parts which were never afterward reunited. The final dissolution of heathenism in the Eastern empire may be dated from the middle of the fifth century. In the year 435 Theodosius II commanded the temples to be destroyed or turned into churches. But heathens in civil office and in court appear as late as the beginning of the reign of Justinian I (527-567). This despotic emperor prohibited heathenism as a form of worship in the empire on pain of death and in 529 abolished the last intellectual seminary, the philosophical school of Athens which had stood for nine hundred years.

In the West heathenism maintained itself until near the middle of the sixth century. Although some remnants remained in private religious conviction, heathen customs, and popular usages, in general it may be said that the Greco-Roman heathenism as a system of worship was buried under the ruins of the western empire which sunk under the storms of the great migration.

Nevertheless, the better genius of ancient Greece and Rome still lives in the immortal productions of their poets, philosophers, historians, and orators, no longer enemies but friends and servants of Christ. The classic literature had prepared the way for the gospel, in the sphere of natural culture, and was to be turned thenceforth into a weapon for its defense. It passed, like the Old Testament, as a rightful inheritance into the possession of the Christian church which saved those precious works of genius through the ravages of the migration of nations and the darkness of the middle ages. The ancient classics, delivered from the demoniacal possession of idolatry, have come into the service of the only true and living God. They fulfill their true mission as the preparatory tutors of youth for Christian learning and culture. This is the noblest, most worthy, and most complete victory of Christianity, transforming the enemy into friend and ally.

UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE

We have seen how Christianity gradually supplanted the Greco-Roman heathenism and became the established religion in the empire of the Caesars. Since that time the church and the state, though frequently jarring, have remained united in Europe. The church could now act upon the

state, but so could the state act upon the church. This mutual influence became a source of both profit and loss, blessing and curse, on either side.

Clergy and people very soon and very easily accommodated themselves to the new order of things. The heathen, who now came over in a mass, had all along been accustomed to a union of politics with religion, of the imperial with the sacerdotal dignity. They could not imagine a state without some cultus[2] whatever might be its name.

But the elevation of Christianity as the religion of the state involved great risk of degeneracy to the church. The Roman state, with its laws, institutions, and usages, was still deeply rooted in heathenism and could not be transformed by a magical stroke. The Christianizing of the state amounted therefore in great measure to a paganizing and secularizing of the church. The world overcame the church as much as the church overcame the world.

The gradual establishment of Christianity gave the church peculiar privileges which the heathen worship and priesthood had heretofore enjoyed.   Among these special privileges were:

1.   The exemption of the clergy from most public burdens

Included in these burdens were military duty, low manual labor, and in a measure taxes for the real estate of the church. This led many to press into the clerical office without an inward call.

2.   The enrichment and endowment of the church

This included the right of the church to receive legacies. As a consequence bishops and monks used unworthy influences with widows and dying persons, although Augustine positively rejected every legacy which deprived a son of his rights. The wealth of the church was converted mostly into real estate, or at least secured by it, and the church soon came to own the tenth part of all the landed property. The various churches of Rome in the sixth century owned many houses and lands not only in Italy and Sicily, but even in Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt. They also had enormous treasures in money and gold and silver vases. The control of these revenues was vested in the bishops and accordingly could be used for the furtherance of the kingdom of God or perverted to the fostering of indolence and luxury, thus promoting moral

---

2   A cultus can refer to a system of religious beliefs and has that meaning here. In biblical studies it more often refers to a set of rituals, as in *Levitical cultus*.

corruption and decay.

3. The better support of the clergy

They now received a fixed income from the church funds and from imperial and municipal treasuries, whereas before they were entirely dependent upon voluntary contributions of the Christians who were for the most part poor. To this was added the contribution of first-fruits and tithes. Where these means of support were not sufficient, the clergy turned to agriculture or some other occupation, and so as late as the fifth century, many synods recommended this means of subsistence.

This improvement was attended with a proportional degeneracy in moral character. It raised the clergy above oppressive and distracting cares for livelihood, made them independent, and permitted them to devote their whole strength to the duties of their office, but favored ease and luxury. It allured a host of unworthy persons into the service of the church and checked the exercise of free giving among the people.

4. The legal validity of the episcopal jurisdiction

The Christians were accustomed from the beginning to settle their controversies before the church rather than carry them before heathen tribunals. But down to the time of Constantine, the validity of the bishop's decision depended on the voluntary submission of both parties. Now this decision was invested with the force of law, and in spiritual matters no appeal could be taken from it to the civil court. This elevation of the power and influence of the bishops had a salutary check upon the jurisdiction of the state and, on the whole, was conducive to the interests of justice and humanity. At the same time, however, it also nourished hierarchical arrogance and entangled the bishops, to the prejudice of their higher functions, in all manner of secular suits. Augustine felt this part of his official duty a burden.

5. The episcopal right of intercession

The privilege of interceding with the secular power for criminals, prisoners, and unfortunates of every kind now passed to the Christian ministry, especially bishops, and became an essential

function of their office. This right often obstructed the course of justice, but it also, in innumerable cases, especially in times of cruel, arbitrary despotism, protected the interests of innocence, humanity, and mercy.

6. The right of asylum in churches

Slaves now found sure refuge from the rage of their masters, debtors from the persecution of inexorable creditors, and the conquered from the sword of their enemies until the bishop by his powerful mediation could procure justice or mercy. The benefits of this law come most impressively to view amidst the ragings of the great migration and frequent intestine wars.

7.   The civil sanction of the observance of Sunday and other festivals of the church

Later emperors declared the profanation of Sunday to be sacrilege. They prohibited the collecting of taxes and private debts (368 and 386), and even theatrical and circus performances (386 and 425). But this interdiction of public amusements, on which a council of Carthage (399 or 401) with reason insisted, was probably never rigidly enforced, and was repeatedly supplanted by the opposite practice, which gradually prevailed all over Europe.

While in this way the state secured to the church the well-deserved rights of a legal corporation, the church exerted in turn a most beneficent influence on the state. As early as the second century, under the better heathen emperors and evidently under the irresistible influence of the Christian spirit, legislation took a reformatory, humane turn. Now, above all, the principle of *justice* and *equity, humanity* and *love,* began to assert itself in the state. The reformatory motion was thwarted to a considerable extent by popular custom, but reform was at last set in motion and could not be turned back even by the overthrow of the empire. It propagated itself among the German tribes.

The reign of Constantine was a turning point. He enacted many laws which distinctly breathe the spirit of Christian justice and humanity: the abolition of the punishment of crucifixion, the prohibition of gladiatorial games and cruel rites, the discouragement of infanticide, and the encouragement of the emancipation of slaves. Even Julian borrowed from the church many of his measures for the reformation of heathenism.

It now became necessary to collect the imperial ordinances in a *cod*ex or *corpus juris*. Of the

8

first two attempts made in the middle of the fourth century only some fragments remain. However, one-hundred years later Justinian I committed to a number of lawyers the great task of making a complete revised and digested collection of the Roman law from the time of Hadrian (117-138) to his own reign. Thus arose, in the short period of seven years (527-534), the celebrated *Codex Justinianeus*, which thenceforth became the universal law of the Roman empire and the basis of the legal relations of the greater part of Christian Europe to this day.

Reforms took place in many areas, but one of the greatest and most beautiful victories of Christian humanity over heathen barbarism and cruelty was the abolition of gladiatorial contests. These bloody shows, in which human beings, mostly criminals, prisoners of war, and barbarians, by hundreds and thousands killed one another or were killed in fights with wild beasts for the amusement of the spectators, were still in full favor at the beginning of the period before us. Constantine had put a prohibition on them in 325 but with no permanent effect. Honorius (395-423) abolished them in 404 but this put a stop only to the bloody combats of men. Christianity finally succeeded in closing the amphitheater. Only in Spain and South America to this day are fights with wild animals glorified.

One historian offers the following assessment of the importance of this reform and role of the church in achieving it:

> There is scarcely any other single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, and this feat must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian church. When we remember how extremely few of the best and greatest men of the Roman world had absolutely condemned the games of the amphitheater, it is impossible to regard, without the deepest admiration, the unwavering and uncompromising consistency of the patristic denunciations (Lecky, H*istory of European Morals*, quoted by Schaff, II:343).

We must now turn to the dark side of the union of the church with the state. By taking in the whole population of the Roman empire, the church became a church of the masses but at the same time a church of the world. Christianity became a matter of fashion. The number of hypocrites and formal professors rapidly increased, while strict discipline, zeal, self-sacrifice, and brotherly love proportionally ebbed away. Many heathen customs and usages, under altered names, crept into the worship of God and the life of the Christian people.

Yet the pure spirit of Christianity could by no means be polluted by this. On the contrary it retained even in the darkest days its faithful and steadfast confessors, conquered new provinces

9

from time to time, constantly reacted both within the established church and outside of it, in the form of monasticism, against the secular and the pagan influences, and in its very struggle with the prevailing corruption produced such church fathers as Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Augustine.

The secularization of the church appeared most strikingly in the prevalence of mammon worship and luxury compared with the poverty and simplicity of the primitive Christians. The aristocracy of the later empire had a morbid passion for outward display and the sensual enjoyments of wealth without the taste, politeness, or culture of true civilization. This uncontrollable progress of avarice, prodigality, voluptuousness, theater going, intemperance, lewdness, in short, all the heathen vices which Christianity had come to eradicate, carried the Roman empire and people with rapid strides toward dissolution, and gave it at last into the hands of the rude but simple and morally vigorous barbarians.

When the Christians were awakened by the crashings of the falling empire and anxiously asked why God permitted it, Salvian, the Jeremiah of his time, answered, "Think of your vileness and your crimes, and see whether you are worthy of the divine protection."

With the union of the church and the state begins the long and tedious history of their collisions and their mutual struggles for the mastery: the state seeking to subject the church to the empire, the church seeking to subject the state to the hierarchy. On the one hand the political rulers, as the highest members and the patrons of the church, claimed a right to a share in her government. On the other hand the bishops and patriarchs, as the highest dignitaries and officers of the state religion, became involved in all sorts of secular matters and in the intrigues of the Byzantine court.

Now it may be easily supposed that the Christian emperors claimed the same oversight of the Christian religion established in the empire which their predecessors had had of the heathen. But they found here a stricter separation between the religious element and the political, the ecclesiastical and the secular, and were obliged to bind themselves to the already existing doctrines, usages, and traditions of the church which claimed divine institution and authority.

This took place first under Constantine and developed under his successors, particularly Justinian, into the system of the ***Byzantine imperial papacy***, or of the supremacy of the state over the church. Constantine once remarked at a banquet that he also, as a Christian emperor, was a divinely appointed bishop, a bishop over the external affairs of the church, while the internal affairs belonged to the bishops proper. He made therefore a distinction between two divinely

authorized episcopates: one secular or imperial corresponding with the old office of *Pontifex Maximus*,[3] and extending over the whole Roman empire and therefore ecumenical or universal; the other spiritual or sacerdotal, divided among the different diocesan bishops, and appearing properly in its unity and totality only in a general council. The relation between the imperial and the sacerdotal episcopacy and the extent of their respective jurisdictions in a Christian state were unsettled.

This question became thenceforth the problem and the strife of history both sacred and secular, ran through the whole medieval conflict between emperor and pope, and between imperial and hierarchical episcopacy. In general, from this time forth the prevailing view was that God had divided all power between the priesthood and the kingdom, giving internal or spiritual affairs, especially doctrine and worship, to the former and external or temporal affairs, such as government and discipline, to the latter. Frequent reciprocal encroachments and collisions were inevitable.

The voice of the catholic church in this period conceded to the Christian emperors in general, with the duty of protecting and supporting the church, the right of supervision over its external affairs, but claimed for the clergy, particularly for the bishops, the right to govern her within, to fix her doctrine, and to direct her worship. The church, at the time of her marriage to the state, had already grown so large and strong so as to withstand all material alteration by imperial caprice and all effort to degrade her into a tool. The Apostolic Constitutions place the bishops even above all kings and magistrates. Chrysostom says that the first ministers of the state enjoyed no such honor as the ministers of the church. The people looked, in blind faith and superstition, to the clergy as their guides in all matters of conscience, and even the emperors had to pay the bishops, as the fathers of the churches, the greatest reverence, kiss their hands, beg their blessing, and submit to their admonition and discipline.

An inevitable consequence of the union of church and state was the restriction of religious freedom in faith and worship and the civil punishment of departure from the doctrine and discipline of the established church. In the ante-Nicene age, heresy and schism were met only in a moral way, by word and writing, and were punished with excommunication from the rights of the church. After the Nicene age all departures were now treated also as crimes against the Christian state and were hence punished with civil penalties; at first with deposition, banishment, confiscation, and afterwards even with death.

---

3   Latin, literally, *greatest of the priests*. In pagan Rome, the position was held by the emperor or someone appointed by the emperor. Eventually, it came to used of the Roman Catholic pope.

In 380 Theodosius the Great, in connection with his weak co-emperors Gratian and Valentinian II, issued the following edict to the inhabitants of Constantinople, then the chief seat of Arianism:

> We the three emperors, will, that all our subjects steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by St. Peter to the Romans, which has been faithfully preserved by tradition, and which is now professed by the pontiff Damasus, of Rome, and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the institution of the apostles and the doctrine of the gospel, let us believe in the one Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of equal majesty in the holy Trinity. We order that the adherents of this faith be called *Catholic Christians*; we brand all the senseless followers of other religions with the infamous name of *heretics*, and forbid their conventicles assuming the name of churches. Besides the condemnation of divine justice, they must expect the heavy penalties which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict.

From Theodosius therefore dates the state-church theory of the persecution of heretics and the embodiment of it in legislation. His primary design, it is true, was rather to terrify and convert than to punish. From the theory, however, to the practice was a single step. His rival and colleague Maximus took the Spanish bishop Priscillian and six of his respectable adherents of his Manichean-like sect to be tortured and beheaded at Treves in 385. This was the first shedding of the blood of heretics by a Christian prince for religious opinions. But the better feeling of the Christian church shrank from it with horror.

MONASTICISM

In the beginning of the fourth century, monasticism appears in the history of the church and thenceforth occupies a distinguished place. Some have held that monasticism came from heathenism and was an apostasy from apostolic Christianity. But such a view can hardly be reconciled with the great place of this phenomenon in history. Furthermore it would involve the entire ancient church and its greatest and best representatives both east and west, such as Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine, in an acceptance of a heathen practice.

In this whole matter we must carefully distinguish two forms of **asceticism**, antagonistic and irreconcilable in spirit and principle, though similar in form: the **Gnostic dualistic form** and the **Catholic form**. The former of these certainly did come from heathenism, but the latter sprang independently from the Christian spirit of self-denial and longing for moral perfection. And in

12

spite of all its excrescences, it has fulfilled an important mission in the history of the church.

The germs of the Christian monasticism may be traced as far back as the middle of the second century, and in fact faintly even in the anxious ascetic practices of some of the Jewish Christians in the apostolic age. This asceticism, particularly fasting and celibacy, was commended more or less distinctly by the most eminent ante-Nicene fathers and was practiced, at least partially, by a particular class of Christians including Origen. As early as the Decian persecution, about the year 250, we meet also the first instances of the flight of ascetics or Christian philosophers into the wilderness there to work out the salvation of their souls undisturbed.

At the same time, however, monasticism provided an alternative for martyrdom, which ceased with the Christianization of the state. In the burning deserts and awful caverns of Egypt and Syria, amidst the pains of self-torture and the mortification of natural desires, the ascetics now sought to win the crown of heavenly glory which their predecessors had more quickly and easily gained by a bloody death. This was the first stage in the development of the monastic institution.

The second stage is hermit life or **anchoretism**. It arose in the beginning of the fourth century and gave asceticism a fixed and permanent shape, pushing it even to external separation from the world. Not content with partial and temporary retirement from common life, the consistent anchoret secludes himself from all society, even from kindred ascetics, and comes only exceptionally into contact with human affairs. This mode of life was founded by Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony and came to perfection in the East. It was too eccentric and unpractical for the West and thus less frequent there.

The third step in the progress of the monastic life brings us to **coenobitism** or cloister life, monasticism in the ordinary sense of the word. Cloister life is a regular organization of the ascetic life on a social basis. It formed the transition from isolated to social Christianity. The most eminent church teachers generally prefer the cloister life.

Finally, the same impulse which produced monastic congregations led afterward to monastic orders, unions of a number of cloisters under one rule and a common government. In this last stage, monasticism has done most for the diffusion of Christianity and the advancement of learning. It has fulfilled its practical mission in the Roman Catholic Church and still wields a mighty influence there. At the same time it became in some sense the cradle of the German Reformation. Luther belonged to the order of St. Augustine, and the monastic discipline of Erfurt was to him a preparation for evangelical freedom, as the Mosaic law was to Paul a schoolmaster to lead to Christ. And for this very reason Protestantism is the end of the monastic

life.

Monasticism was from the first distinguished as the contemplative life from the practical. There were three monastic vows:

- Voluntary *poverty*
- Voluntary *celibacy*
- Absolute *obedience*

These vows are supposed to constitute a higher virtue and to secure a higher reward in heaven. But this threefold self-denial is only the negative side and a means to an end. It places man beyond the reach of the temptations connected with earthly possessions, married life, and independent will and facilitates his progress toward heaven. This devoted life is employed in continual prayer, meditation, fasting, and castigation of the body.

With all the austerities and rigors of asceticism, the monastic life had its spiritual joys. It turned the solitude into a paradise of freedom and sweet communion with God and his saints. But for others the same solitude became a fruitful nursery of idleness, despondency, and the most perilous temptations and ultimate ruin.

Even in the most favorable case monasticism falls short of harmonious moral development. It lacks the finer and gentler traits of character which are ordinarily brought out only in the school of daily family life and under the social ordinances of God. Its morality is rather negative than positive. There is more virtue in the temperate and thankful enjoyment of the gifts of God than in total abstinence; in charitable and well-seasoned speech than in total silence; in connubial chastity than in celibacy; in self-denying practical labor for the church than in solitary asceticism which only pleases self and profits no one else.

Catholicism cannot dispense with the monastic life. It knows only moral extremes and nothing of the healthful mean. But evangelical Protestantism, rejecting all distinction of a twofold morality, assigning to all men the same great duty under the law of God, placing the essence of religion not in outward exercises but in the heart, not in separation from the world and from society but in purifying and sanctifying the world by the free spirit of the gospel, is death to the great monastic institution.

THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

The rule of St. Benedict, on which his fame rests, forms an epoch in the history of monasticism. In a short time it superseded all contemporary and older rules of the kind and became the immortal code of the most illustrious branch of the monastic army. It also became the basis of the whole Roman Catholic cloister life. It consists of a preface or prologue, and a series of moral, social, liturgical, and penal ordinances in seventy-three chapters. It shows a true knowledge of human nature, the practical wisdom of Rome, and adaptation to Western customs. We see in it simplicity combined with completeness, strictness with gentleness, and humility with courage. The Rule of St. Benedict gives the whole cloister life a fixed unity and compact organization, which, like the episcopate, possessed an unlimited versatility and power of expansion. For the rude and undisciplined world of the middle age, the Benedictine rule furnished a wholesome course of training and a constant stimulus to the obedience, self-control, order, and industry which were indispensable to the regeneration and healthy growth of social life.

Formal entrance into the cloister was to be preceded by a probation or novitiate of one year (subsequently changed to three) so that no one might prematurely or rashly take the solemn step. At the close of the probation he could leave without hindrance or be examined in the presence of the abbot and monks. Then appealing to the saints, whose relics were in the cloister, he made the irrevocable vow and therewith cut off from himself forever all return to the world.

This vow was threefold, consisting of the following elements:

- *Stabilitas,* perpetual adherence to the monastic order

- *Conversio morum,* especially voluntary poverty and chastity which were always regarded as the very essence of monastic piety

- *Obedientia coram Deo et sanctis ejus,* absolute obedience to the abbot as the representative of God and Christ; this obedience is the cardinal virtue of a monk.

The life of the cloister consisted of a judicious alternation of spiritual and bodily exercises. Herein lies the great excellence of the rule of Benedict, who proceeded here upon the true principle that idleness is the mortal enemy of the soul and the workshop of the devil. Seven hours were to be devoted to prayer, singing of psalms, and meditation; from two to three hours to religious reading; and from six to seven hours to manual labor indoors or in the field, or instead of this to the training of children who were committed to the cloister by their parents.

Benedict had no idea of the vast historical importance which this rule was destined to attain. He probably never aspired beyond the regeneration and salvation of his own soul and that of his brother monks. He became the founder of an order that spread with great rapidity over the whole of Europe, maintained a clear supremacy, formed the model for all other monastic orders, and gave to the Catholic church an imposing array of missionaries, authors, artists, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes, such as Gregory the Great and Gregory VII. In less than a century after his death the conquests of the barbarians in Italy, Gaul, and Spain were reconquered for civilization. The vast territories of Great Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia were incorporated into Christendom or opened to missionary labor. In this progress of history the monastic institution, regulated and organized by Benedict's rule, bears an honorable share.

The patronage of learning was not within the design of the founder or his rule. The joining of this to cloister life is due to Cassiodorus, who in 538 retired from high civil office in the Gothic monarchy of Italy into a monastery founded by himself at Vivarium in Lower Italy. Here he spent nearly thirty years as monk and abbot, collected a large library, encouraged the monks to copy and to study the Holy Scriptures, the works of the church fathers, and even the ancient classics, and wrote for them several literary and theological textbooks.

The Benedictines, already accustomed to regular work, soon followed this example. Thus this very mode of life became an asylum of culture in the rough and stormy times of the migration and the crusades and a conservator of the literary treasures of antiquity for the use of modern times.

THE LOWER CLERGY

As the authority and influence of the bishops, after the accession of Constantine, increased, the lower clergy became more and more dependent upon them. The **episcopate**[4] and the **presbyterate**[5] were now rigidly distinguished. Yet the memory of their primitive identity lingered. Jerome, at the end of the fourth century, reminds the bishops that they owe their elevation above the presbyters, not so much to Divine institution as to ecclesiastical usage, for before the outbreak of controversies in the church there was no distinction between the two. At that time *presbyter* was a term of age and *bishop* a term of official dignity.

---

4   Body of bishops.

5   Body of presbyters or elders.

In the episcopal or cathedral churches, the *presbyters* still formed the council of the bishop. In town and country congregations where no bishop officiated they were more independent. Preaching, administration of the sacraments, and care of souls were their functions. In the fourth century arose the office of *archpresbyter*, whose duty it was to preside over the worship and sometimes to take the place of the bishop in his absence or incapacity.

The *deacons*, also called Levites, retained the same functions which they had held in the preceding period. In the West, they alone, not the lectors, were allowed to read in public worship the lessons from the Gospels. They were also permitted to baptize and preach. Though subordinate to the presbyters, the deacons frequently stood in close relation with the bishop and exerted a greater influence. Hence they not rarely looked upon ordination to the presbyterate as a degradation. After the beginning of the fourth century, an *archdeacon* stood at the head of the college, the most confidential adviser of the bishop, his representative and legate and not seldom his successor in office.

The office of *deaconess*, which, under the strict separation of the sexes in ancient times, and especially in Greece, was necessary to the completion of the diaconate, continued in the Eastern church down to the twelfth century. In the West, on the contrary, the office was shorn of its clerical character by a prohibition of ordination passed by the Gallic councils in the fifth and sixth centuries and was at last wholly abolished.

Sundry extraordinary church offices included *stewards* who administered the church property under the supervision of the bishop; *secretaries* for drawing the protocols in public ecclesiastical transactions; *nurses* in connection with the larger church hospitals; and *buriers of the dead*.

THE BISHOPS

The bishops now stood with sovereign power at the head of the clergy and of their dioceses. They had come to be universally regarded as the vehicles and propagators of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the teachers and lawgivers of the church in all matters of faith and discipline.

The traditional participation of the people in the election of the bishops still continued, but gradually sank to a mere formality and at last became entirely extinct. The bishops filled their own vacancies and elected and ordained the clergy. Besides ordination, as the medium for communicating the official gifts, they also claimed from the presbyters in the West, after the

fifth century, the exclusive prerogatives of confirming the baptized and consecrating the chrism[6] or holy ointment used in baptism. In the East, on the contrary, confirmation is performed also by the presbyters and, according to the ancient custom, immediately follows baptism.

To this spiritual preeminence of the bishops was now added, from the time of Constantine, a civil importance. The bishops also became state officials of weight and enjoyed the various privileges that accrued to the church from this connection. Among these were the following:

1. An independent and legally valid jurisdiction
2. Supervision of the church estates
3. Partial charge of the city property
4. Superintendence over the morals of the people including the emperor
5. Influence upon the public legislation
6. Exemption from civil jurisdiction; they could neither be brought as witnesses before a court nor be compelled to take an oath

As their dioceses grew larger their power and revenues increased. Kneeling, kissing of the hand, and like tokens of reverence came to be shown them by all classes. At the end of the fourth century we have these words from Chrysostom.

> The heads of the empire (hyparchs) and the governors of provinces (toparchs) enjoy no such honor as the rulers of the church. They are first at court, in the society of ladies, in the houses of the great. No one has precedence over them.

To this position corresponded the episcopal insignia, which from the fourth century became common: the ring, the shepherd's staff, and the shoulder cloth, or *pallium*, after the example of the ephod of the Jewish high priest.

But this very power and this temporal advantage of the episcopate became also a lure for avarice and ambition and a temptation to the lordly and secular spirit. There were those who rivaled the most exalted civil officials, nay, the emperor himself, in worldly pomp and luxury. Not seldom were the most disgraceful intrigues employed to gain the holy office. Jerome sketches a sarcastic description of the Roman priests, who squandered all their care on dress and perfumery, curled their hair with crisping pins, wore sparkling rings, paid far too great attention to women, and looked more like bridegrooms than like clergymen. Gregory Nazianzen, himself a bishop in

---

6   A consecrated mixture of oil and balsam used in anointing in church sacraments such as baptism and confirmation; also called ***holy oil***.

the Greek church, frequently mourns the ambition, official jealousies, and luxury of the hierarchy and utters the wish that the bishops might be distinguished only by a higher grade of virtue.

The episcopate, notwithstanding the unity of the office and its rights, had organization within its hierarchy. The lowest rank in the episcopal hierarchy was occupied by *country bishops*. These were the presiding officers of those rural congregations which were not supplied with presbyters from neighboring cities. Above them stood the *city bishops* and above them towered the bishops of the capital cities of the various provinces. They were styled *metropolitans* in the East and usually *archbishops* in the West. They had the oversight of the other bishops of the province, ordained them, summoned and presided over provincial synods, and confirmed the organism of the hierarchy.

Still above the metropolitans stood the *five Patriarchs*, the oligarchical summit, so to speak, the five towers in the edifice of the Catholic hierarchy of the Greco-Roman empire. These patriarchs were the bishops of the four great capitals of the empire, which was divided during the reign of Constantine, that is, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople. To these four was added, by way of honorary distinction, the bishop of Jerusalem. They ordained the metropolitans; rendered the final decision in church controversies; conducted the ecumenical councils; published the decrees of the councils and the church laws of the emperors; and united in themselves the supreme legislative and executive power of the hierarchy. They did not, however, form a college but each acted for himself. In prerogative they were equal but differed in the extent of their dioceses and influence. In order of ecclesiastical and political importance, the greatest was Rome followed by Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

This order of importance and influence was the subject of many ecumenical councils. The patriarch of Constantinople was first officially recognized at the first ecumenical council held there in 381. It was conceded second place next to the bishop of Rome and on purely political consideration, that New Rome was the residence of the emperor. Many Greeks took this as a formal assertion of the equality of their bishop with the bishop of Rome understanding the word "next" or "after" as referring only to time and not to rank. The Roman see[7] was not satisfied with this, since they claimed the primacy on different grounds, that is, the primacy of the apostolic church founded by the Apostle Peter. They were unwilling to be placed in the same category with the Constantinopolitan fledgling. The decree was also unwelcome to the patriarch of Alexandria who had hitherto held the second rank and was now required to take the third.

---

7   A *see* is the official seat, center of authority, jurisdiction, or office of a bishop; from the Latin word for *seat*.

The fourth ecumenical council, held at Chalcedon[8] in 451, confirmed and extended the power of the bishop of Constantinople. The first part of the canon assigns to him the second rank among the patriarchs which is simply a repetition and confirmation of the third canon of the council of Constantinople. The second part sanctions his supremacy also over the dioceses of Asia Minor and Pontus, which already was actually exercised by Chrysostom and his successors.

The council of Chalcedon followed consistently the oriental principle of politico-ecclesiastical division. Its intention was to make the new political capital also the ecclesiastical capital of the East and to advance its bishop over the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch, and also to make him as nearly as possible equal to the bishop of Rome.

But the jealously of the bishop of Rome was now aroused since he perceived a rival in Constantinople far more dangerous than a rival in Alexandria or Antioch. After much protestation from the papal delegates the imperial commissioners summed up the result as follows:

> From the whole discussion, and from what has been brought forward on either side, we acknowledge that the primacy over all and the most eminent rank are to continue with the archbishop of Old Rome; but that also the archbishop of New Rome should enjoy the same precedence of honor, and have the right to ordain the metropolitans in the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Thrace.

The council was called upon to declare whether this was its opinion, whereupon the bishops gave their full, emphatic consent. After the council, the Roman bishop Leo himself protested in three letters, the first addressed to the emperor Marcian, the second to the empress Pulcheria, and the third to Anatolius, patriarch of Constantinople. But this protest could not change the decree of the council nor the position of the Greek church in the matter. The bishops of Constantinople asserted their rank and were sustained by the Byzantine emperors.

Now that the empire was geographically and politically severed into East and West, we cannot but expect in like manner a double head in the hierarchy. This we find in the two patriarchs of old Rome and New Rome, the one representing the Western or Latin church and the other the Eastern or Greek.

With the organization of the church in the East being so largely influenced by the political constitution, the bishop of the imperial capital could not fail to become the most powerful of the

---

8   A ancient Greek city on the Bosporus but now part of Istanbul.

four oriental patriarchs. From Justinian I he received supreme appellate jurisdiction and the honorary title of *ecumenical patriarch*, which he still continues to bear. While the patriarchates of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria were distracted and weakened in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, and after the year 622 reduced to but a shadow by the Mohammedan conquests, the patriarch of Constantinople made important advances southwest and north. In its flourishing period, between the eighth and tenth centuries, it embraced, besides its original diocese, Calabria, Sicily, all the provinces of Illyricum, the Bulgarians, and Russia. However, he never exercised a papal supremacy over his colleagues in the East, still less the sole dominion of the entire church. Toward the bishop of Rome he claimed only equality of rights and coordinate dignity.

The Roman patriarch, however, had great advantages over the patriarch of Constantinople. His authority rested on an ecclesiastical and spiritual basis, the unbroken succession from Peter the apostle. Constantinople was purely of political origin. Old Rome had a far longer and grander imperial tradition to show and was identified with the bloom of the empire. New Rome marked the beginning of its decline. The very remoteness of Rome from the imperial court was favorable to the development of a hierarchy independent of all political influence and intrigue. The bishop of Constantinople had to purchase the political advantages at the cost of ecclesiastical freedom. Further, the popes maintained the powerful prestige of almost undeviating ecumenical orthodoxy and doctrinal stability amidst the great Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the Nicene and post-Nicene age. The see of Constantinople was sullied with the Arian, Nestorian, Monophysite, and other heresies and was, even in matters of faith, dependent on the changing humors of the court. And finally, though the Greek church down to the fourth ecumenical council was unquestionably the main theater of church history and the chief seat of theological learning, yet according to the universal law of history, "Westward the star of empire takes its way," the Latin church already had the future to itself. While the Eastern patriarchates were facilitating by internal quarrels and disorder the conquests of the false prophet, Rome was boldly and victoriously striking westward and winning the barbarian tribes of Europe to the religion of the cross.

THE LATIN PATRIARCH

These advantages of the patriarch of Rome over the patriarch of Constantinople are at the same time the leading causes of the rise of the papacy which we must now pursue more closely.

The papacy is undeniable the result of a long process of history. That Providence which moves

the helm of the history of world and church according to an eternal plan lays in the depths of the past the foundations of mighty institutions that they may appear thoroughly furnished as soon as the time may demand them. Thus the origin and gradual growth of the Latin patriarchate at Rome looked forward to the middle age. It formed part of the necessary external outfit of the church for her disciplinary mission among the heathen barbarians. The Catholic hierarchy, with its pyramid-like culmination in the papacy, served among the Romanic and Germanic people, until the time of the Reformation, a purpose similar to that of the Jewish theocracy and the old Roman empire respectively in the inward and outward preparation for Christianity.

The Roman bishop claims that the four dignities of bishop, metropolitan, patriarch, and pope (or primate of the whole church) are united in himself. The first three must be granted him in all historical justice, the last is denied him by the Greek church, the Evangelical, and all non-Catholic sects.

As metropolitan, the bishop had immediate jurisdiction over the seven ***suffragan bishops***, afterward called ***cardinal bishops***. As patriarch he rightfully stood on equal footing with the four patriarchs of the East but had a much larger district and primacy of honor. The Roman bishops called themselves not patriarchs, but popes,[9] that they might rise the sooner above their colleagues; for the one name denotes ***oligarchical power***,[10] the other ***monarchical power***.[11] But in the Eastern church and among modern Catholic historians the designation "patriarch" is also quite currently applied to Rome.

The Roman patriarchal circuit primarily embraced the ten suburban provinces, but in its wider sense it extended gradually over the entire west of the Roman empire, thus covering Italy, Gaul, Spain, Illyria, southeastern Britannia, and northwestern Africa. The decrees of the ecumenical councils know no other Western patriarchate than the Roman, and it was the sole medium through which the Eastern church corresponded with the Western.

For all orthodox churches in the West, the Roman see was the common center for counsel as well as for protection from the Arian Goths, Vandals, and Suevi. The Roman bishops were consulted in almost all important questions of doctrine or of discipline. In time their responses took on the tone of apostolic authority rather than paternal counsel. The first extant decretal is the Epistola of Pope Siricius to the Spanish bishop Himerius, A.D. 385, which contains a legal enforcement of priestly celibacy. However, this patriarchal power was not from the beginning

---

9   The word *pope* is from the Latin word for *father*.

10 Rule by a small group.

11 Rule by one individual.

and to a uniform extent acknowledged in the entire West. Not until the latter part of the sixth century did it reach the height we have above described.

THE PAPACY

At last the Roman bishop, on the ground of his divine institution and as successor of Peter, the prince of the apostles, advanced his claim to be primate of the entire church and visible representative of Christ, who is the invisible supreme head of the Christian world. This is the strict and exclusive sense of the title ***Pope***. This claim, however, has never been fully realized. The fundamental fallacy of the Roman system is that it identifies papacy and church, and therefore, to be consistent, must unchurch not only Protestantism but also the entire Oriental church. Consequently the papacy, as a historical fact, or so far as it has been acknowledged, is properly nothing more than the Latin patriarchate run to absolute monarchy.

It is an undeniable fact that the greatest dogmatic and legislative authorities of the ancient church bear as decidedly against the specific papal claims of the Roman bishopric as in favor of its patriarchal rights and an honorary primacy in the patriarchal oligarchy. The subsequent separation of the Greek church from the Latin proves to this day that she was never willing to sacrifice her independence to Rome or to depart from the decrees of her own greatest councils.

Here lies the difference, however, between the Greek and the Protestant opposition to the universal monarchy of the papacy. The Greek church protested against it from the basis of the oligarchical patriarchal hierarchy of the fifth century, that is, upon a principle of church organization that preceded the papacy in the history of the world. The evangelical church protests against it on the basis of a freer conception of Christianity, seeing in the papacy an institution, which indeed formed the legitimate development of the patriarchal system, and was necessary for the training of the Romanic and Germanic nations of the middle ages, but which has virtually fulfilled its mission and outlived itself. The papacy stands between the age of the patriarchal hierarchy and the age of the Reformation like the Mosaic theocracy between the Old Testament patriarchal period and the advent of Christianity.

LEO THE GREAT (A.D. 440-461)

The first pope, in the proper sense of the word, is Leo I, who justly bears the title "the Great" in the history of the Latin hierarchy. In him the idea of the papacy became flesh and blood. The

time, place of birth, and earlier life of Leo are unknown. He distinguished himself first under Coelestine (423-432) and Sixtus III (432-440) as archdeacon and legate of the Roman church. After the death of the latter, and while himself absent in Gaul, he was elected pope by the united voice of clergy, senate, and people. His feeling at the assumption of this high office he himself thus describes in one of his sermons:

> Lord, I have heard your voice calling me, and I was afraid: I considered the work which was enjoined on me, and I trembled. For what proportion is there between the burden assigned to me and my weakness, this elevation and my nothingness? What is more to be feared than exaltation without merit, the exercise of the most holy functions being entrusted to one who is buried in sin? Oh, you have laid upon me this heavy burden, bear it with me, I beseech you; be you my guide and my support.

Leo's private life is entirely unknown, and we have no reason to question the purity of his motives or of his morals. His official zeal, and all his time and strength, were devoted to the interests of Christianity. But with him the interests of Christianity were identical with the universal dominion of the Roman church. He was animated with the unwavering conviction that the Lord himself had committed to him, as the successor of Peter, the care of the whole church.

Leo made out of a primacy of grace and personal fitness a primacy of right and succession. He tells the Romans that the true celebration of the anniversary of his accession is to recognize, honor, and obey, in his lowly person, Peter himself. He speaks frequently and emphatically of his authority. He pronounces resistance to his authority to be impious pride and the sure way to hell, thus making obedience to the pope necessary to salvation.

Besides shaping the polity and doctrine of the church, Leo did immortal service to the city of Rome in twice rescuing it from destruction. When Attila, king of the Huns, was seriously threatening the capital of the world (A.D. 452), Leo, with only two companions, trusting in the help of God, ventured into the hostile camp and was able to change the wild heathen's purpose. In 455 when the Vandal king Genseric pushed his ravages to Rome, Leo obtained from him the promise that at least he would spare the city the inflictions of murder and fire. But the barbarians subjected it to a fourteen days' pillage, transporting the enormous spoils to Carthage. Afterward the pope did everything to alleviate the consequent destitution and suffering and to restore the churches.

Leo died in 461 and was buried in the church of St. Peter. His collection of sermons, 96 in all, is the first we have from a Roman bishop.   In his inaugural discourse he declared preaching to be

his sacred duty. The sermons are short and simple and were delivered mostly on high festivals and on the anniversaries of his own elevation.

The first Leo and the first Gregory are the two greatest bishops of Rome in the first six centuries. Between them no important personage appears on the chair of Peter, and in the course of that intervening century no material advance is made in the idea and power of the papacy. In truth, they went farther in Leo's mind than in Gregory's. Leo thought and acted as an absolute monarch, Gregory as first among the patriarchs; but both under the full conviction that they were the successors of Peter.

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Above the patriarchs, even above the patriarch of Rome, stood the ecumenical or general council, the highest representatives of the unity and authority of the old Catholic church. They referred originally to the Roman empire but afterward included the adjacent barbarian countries so far as those countries were represented in them by bishops. They rise up as lofty peaks or majestic pyramids from the plan of ancient church history and mark the ultimate authoritative settlement of the general questions of doctrine and discipline which agitated Christendom in the Greco-Roman empire.

The Synodical system in general had its rise in the apostolic council at Jerusalem and completed its development, under its Catholic form, in the course of the first five centuries. Apart from the predominance of the emperor and his commissioners, the character of the ecumenical councils was thoroughly hierarchical like the episcopate. In an age of absolute despotism, the councils sanctioned the principle of common public deliberation as the best means of arriving at truth and settling controversy. They revived the spectacle of the Roman senate in ecclesiastical form and were the forerunners of representative government and parliamentary legislation.

In matters of discipline the majority decided. In matters of faith unanimity was required, though, if necessary, it was forced by the excision of the dissentient minority. The meetings were opened and closed with religious solemnities in liturgical style. The vote was always taken by heads until the council of Constance when it was taken by nations. This was to avoid the preponderance of the Italian prelates.

Augustine justly subordinates these councils to the Holy Scriptures which are the highest and the perfect rule of faith, and supposes that the decrees of a council may be, though not set aside and

repealed, yet enlarged and completed by the deeper research of a later day. While the Holy Scriptures present the truth unequivocally and infallibly and allow no room for doubt, the judgment of bishops may be corrected and enriched with new truths from the word of God by the wiser judgment of other bishops; the judgment of the provincial council by that of a general; and the views of one general council by those of a later. Augustine, therefore, manifestly acknowledges a gradual advancement of the church doctrine which reaches its corresponding expression from time to time through the general councils, but a progress within the truth without positive error.

In this Augustine presumed that all the transactions of a council were conducted in the spirit of Christian humility, harmony, and love. But together with abundant talents, attainments, and virtues, there were gathered also at the councils ignorance, intrigues, and partisan passions. These had already been excited on all sides by long controversies and now met and arrayed themselves, as hostile armies, for open combat. For those great councils, all occasioned by controversies on the most important and difficult problems of theology, are, in fact, to the history of doctrine, what decisive battles are to the history of war. Religion is the deepest and holiest interest of man, and religious passions are likely to be the most violent and bitter. Especially so in a time when all classes, from imperial court to market stall, took the liveliest interest in theological speculation and were drawn into the common vortex of excitement. Yet in all these outbreaks of human passion, we must not forget that the Lord was directing the church through the billows and storms.

THE DONATIST SCHISM

Donatism was by far the most important schism in the church of the period before us. For a whole century it divided the North African churches into two hostile camps. The Donatist controversy was a conflict between separatism and catholicism; between the idea of the church as an exclusive community of regenerate saints and the idea of the church as the general Christendom of state and people. It resulted in the completion by Augustine of the catholic dogma of the church. It also was the germ of the subsequent Protestant distinction of the visible and invisible church.

The Donatists, like Tertullian in his Montanistic writings, started from an ideal and spiritualistic conception of the church as a fellowship of saints which in a sinful world could only be imperfectly realized. They laid chief stress on the subjective holiness or personal worthiness of its several members and made the catholicity of the church and the efficacy of the sacraments

dependent upon that. By the toleration of those who are openly sinful, the church loses her holiness and ceases to be a church. Unholy priests are incapable of administering sacraments, for how can one give what he does not himself possess? He who would receive faith from a faithless man receives not faith but guilt.

Hence, like the Montanists and Novatians, the Donatists insisted on rigorous church discipline and demanded the excommunication of all unworthy members, especially of such as had denied their faith or given up the Holy Scriptures under persecution.

In opposition, Augustine lays chief stress on the catholicity or universality of the church and derives the holiness of individual members and the validity of ecclesiastical functions from it. He finds the essence of the church, not in the personal character of the several Christians, but in the union of the whole church with Christ. From the objective character of the church as a divine institution flows the efficacy of all her functions, the sacraments in particular.

In regard to church discipline, the opponents of the Donatists agreed with them in considering it wholesome and necessary, but would keep it within the limits fixed for it by the circumstances of the time and the fallibility of men. Many things must be patiently borne that greater evil may be averted, and that those still capable of improvement may be improved.

The beginnings of the schism itself appear in the Dioclesian persecution. The rigoristic party, favored by Secundus of Tigisis and led by the bishop Donatus of Casae Nigrae, saw in flight from danger, or in the delivering up of the sacred books, only cowardice and treachery which should forever exclude from the fellowship of the church. The moderate party advocated prudence and discretion, at the same time casting suspicion on the motives of the martyrs and confessors.

So as early as 305 a schism was imminent in the matter of an episcopal election for the city of Cita. But no formal outbreak occurred until after the cessation of the persecution in 311. The difficulty then arose in connection with the hasty election of Cecilian to the bishopric of Carthage. The Donatists refused to acknowledge him because in his ordination the Numidian bishops were slighted, and the service was performed by the bishop Felix of Aptungis whom they declared to be a *traditor*, that is, one who had delivered up the sacred writings to the heathen persecutors. Secundus and seventy Numidian bishops assembled at Carthage and deposed and excommunicated Cecilian who refused to appear. They elected the lector Majorinus in his place. (After his death in 315 he was succeeded by Donatus, a gifted man of fiery energy and eloquence and styled THE GREAT, from whom the party took its name.)

27

Each party endeavored to gain churches abroad to its side and thus the schism spread. The Donatists appealed to the emperor Constantine, who referred the matter to the Roman bishop. The decision went in favor of Cecilian, and he was now, except in Africa, universally regarded as the legitimate bishop of Carthage. The Donatists remonstrated and a second investigation entrusted to the council of Arles led to the same result. The Donatists appealed to the judgment of the emperor himself and he likewise declared against them at Milan in 316 and soon afterward issued penal laws against them, threatening them with the banishment of their bishops and the confiscation of their churches.

Persecution fed the flame of their fanaticism, and they declared that no power on earth could induce them to hold church fellowship with the "rascal" Cecilian. Constantine perceived the fruitlessness of the forcible restriction of religion and by an edict of 321 granted the Donatists full liberty of faith and worship. He exhorted the Catholics to patience and indulgence.

Constans, the successor of Constantine, resorted again to violent measures. An insurrection ensued but was suppressed by military force. Several leaders of the Donatists were executed, others banished, and their churches closed or confiscated. Donatus the Great died in exile. Under Julian the Apostate the Donatists again obtained freedom of religion along with all the other heretics and schismatics. But under the subsequent emperors their condition grew worse both from persecutions without and dissensions within.

At the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth, Augustine made a powerful effort to reconcile the Donatists with the Catholic church. He wrote several works on the subject and set the whole African church in motion against them. They feared his superior dialectics and avoided him wherever they could. The matter, however, was brought by order of the emperor in 411 to a three days' arbitration at Carthage. It was attended by 286 Catholic bishops and 279 Donatist bishops. The balance of skill and argument was on the side of Augustine, and the imperial commissioner, a friend of Augustine, decided in favor of the Catholics.

More stringent civil laws were now enacted against the Donatists, banishing their clergy from the country, imposing fines on the laity, and confiscating their churches. In 415 they were even forbidden to hold religious assemblies upon pain of death.

Augustine himself, who had previously consented only to spiritual measures against heretics, now advocated force to bring them into the fellowship of the church, out of which there was no salvation. New eruptions of Donatist fanaticism ensued. But the controversy came to an end in

428 when the Arian Vandals conquered Africa and devastated the African church. A remnant of the Donatists perpetuated itself into the seventh century until the entire African church sank under the Saracenic conquest.[12]

WORSHIP OF MARY, SAINTS, AND RELICS

The worship of Mary, saints, and relics began in a sound religious feeling of reverence, love, and gratitude but quickly became immersed in all kinds of superstitious and idolatrous excess. The worship of Mary was originally only a reflection of the worship of Christ, and the feasts of Mary were designed to contribute to the glorifying of Christ. The system arose from the inner connection of the Virgin with the holy mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. As mother of the Saviour of the world, the Virgin Mary unquestionably holds forever a peculiar position among all women and in the history of redemption. It is perfectly natural, nay, essential, to sound religious feeling to associate with Mary the fairest traits of maidenly and maternal character, and to revere her as the highest model of female purity, love, and piety.

The Catholic church, however, both Latin and Greek, did not stop with this. After the middle of the fourth century it overstepped the wholesome Biblical limit and transformed the "mother of the Lord" into a mother of God; the humble "handmaid of the Lord" into a queen of heaven; the "highly favored" into a dispenser of favors; the "blessed among women" into an intercessor above all women. At first she was acquitted only of actual sin, afterward even of original sin. Thus the veneration of Mary gradually degenerated into the worship of Mary.

Nearly all unbiased historians regard the worship of Mary as an echo of ancient heathenism. It brings plainly to mind the worship of Ceres, Isis, and other ancient mothers of the gods, just as the worship of saints and angels recalls the hero-worship of Greece and Rome. Polytheism was so deeply rooted among the people that it reproduced itself in Christian forms. The popular religious need had accustomed itself even to female deities and very naturally betook itself first of all to Mary as the worthiest object of adoration.

The *Nestorian* controversy[13] of 430 formed an important turning-point not only in Christology but in Mariology also. The leading interest in it was, without doubt, the connection of the virgin with the mystery of the Incarnation. The perfect union of the divine and human natures seemed to demand that Mary might be called in some sense the *mother of God*. The church, however,

---

12 Islamic conquest of Africa.

13 Nestorianism was the belief that within Jesus are two distinct persons, one divine and one human.

did not intend by that to assert that she was the mother of the uncreated divine essence or that she was herself divine, but only that she was the human point of entrance or the mysterious channel for the eternal divine Logos.

Nestorius and the Antiochian school, who were more devoted to the distinction of the two natures in Christ, took offense at this and preferred the expression *mater Christi.*[14] Upon this broke out the violent controversy between him and the bishop Cyril of Alexandria, which ended in the condemnation of Nestorianism at Ephesus in 431. Thenceforth the predicate "mother of God" became a test of orthodox Christology and the rejection of it amounted to the beginning or the end of all heresy. The overthrow of Nestorianism was the victory of Mary-worship.

Soon a reaction appeared in favor of Nestorianism, and the church found it necessary to condemn the opposite extreme of Eutychianism[15] or Monophysitism.[16] This was the purpose of the council of Chalcedon in 451 to give expression to the element of truth in Nestorianism, that is, the duality of nature in the one divine-human person of Christ. Nevertheless the "mother of God" was expressly retained, though it had originated in a rather monophysite view.

From this doctrine of Mary follows the logical conclusion that she herself is divine and therefore an object of divine worship. Though she was and continues to be a created being, a human mother, a certain degree of divine homage and invocation of her powerful intercession with God seemed unavoidable and soon became a universal practice. Instances of a formal invocation of Mary occur in the late fourth century. In the beginning of the fifth century, the worship of saints appeared in full bloom and then Mary, by reason of her singular relation to the Lord, was placed at the head as the most blessed queen of the heavenly host. To her was accorded the *hyperdulia*[17] and from that time numerous churches and altars were dedicated to the holy Mother of God, the perpetual Virgin. Justinian I, in a law, implored her intercession with God. His general Narses was unwilling to go into battle until he had secured her protection. Pope Boniface IV, in 608, turned the Pantheon in Rome into a temple of Mary and martyrs. The pagan Mt. Olympus was changed into a Christian heaven of gods. Subsequently even her images were divinely worshiped, and she became almost coordinate with Christ, a joint redeemer, invested with most of His own attributes and acts of grace. She became the center of devotion, cultus, and art, the popular symbol of power, glory, and the final victory of catholicism over all heresies. It was not

---

14 Latin for *mother of Christ*.

15 The belief that the divine and human in the person of Christ were blended together so as to constitute but one nature in opposition to Nestorianism.

16 The belief that in the person of Jesus there was but a single divine nature.

17 That is, the highest degree of veneration, in distinction from that which belongs to all saints and angels, but below the worship given to God.

until the time of the Reformation that a large part of Latin Christendom was freed from this unscriptural semi-idolatry, and believers concentrated their affection and adoration upon the crucified and risen Saviour of the world, the only Mediator between God and man.

The system of saint worship is only a culmination of the worship of Mary. This veneration of the saints increased with the decrease of martyrdom and with the remoteness of the objects of reverence. Almost all the catholic saints belong to the higher degrees of the clergy or to the monastic life, and the monks were the chief promoters of their worship.

In the first three centuries the veneration of the martyrs in general restricted itself to the thankful remembrance of their virtues and the celebration of their death as the day of their heavenly birth. But in the Nicene age, it advanced to a formal invocation of the saints as our patrons and intercessors before the throne of grace. Churches and chapels now came to be built over their graves and consecrated to their names. Their relics were preserved with scrupulous care and believed to possess miraculous virtue. Earlier it was the custom to pray for the martyrs. Now such intercessions for them were considered unbecoming and their intercession was invoked for the living.

But here rises the insolvable question: How can *departed* saints hear at once the prayers of so many Christians on earth unless they either partake of divine omnipresence or divine omniscience? Augustine felt this difficulty and concedes his inability to solve it.

Nevertheless, martyr-worship became excessive and was a new form of the hero-worship of the pagans in the way it was practiced. This is no surprise, for the great mass of the Christian people came fresh from polytheism and could not divest themselves of their old notions and customs at a stroke. The despotic form of government and servile subjection of the people favored the worship of saints. Even the best church fathers never separated the merits of the saints from the merits of Christ but considered the former as flowing out of the latter. Among the Latin fathers, Ambrose of Milan is one of the first and most decided promoters of the worship of saints. "May Peter, who so successfully weeps for himself, weep also for us, and turn upon us the friendly look of Christ." Accordingly we cannot wonder that the Virgin Mary and the saints are interwoven also in the prayers of the liturgies, and that their merits and intercession stand by the side of the merits of Christ as a ground of the acceptance of our prayers.

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

The Arian controversy relates primarily to the deity of Christ, but in its course it touches also the deity of the Holy Spirit, and embraces therefore the whole mystery of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of God, which is the very center of the Christian revelation. The church always believed in the Trinity of revelation and confessed its faith by baptism into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. But to bring this faith into clear and fixed knowledge, and to form the baptismal confession into doctrine, was the hard and earnest intellectual work of three centuries. In the Nicene age minds crashed against each other, and fought the decisive battles for and against the doctrines of the true deity of Christ, with which the divinity of Christianity stands or falls.

The controversies on this fundamental question gave occasion for the first two ecumenical councils of Nicea and Constantinople. At last the orthodox doctrine triumphed, and in 381 was brought into the form in which it is to this day substantially held in all orthodox churches.

The external history of the Arian controversy falls into three stages:

1. From the outbreak of the controversy to the temporary victory of orthodoxy at the council of Nicea; 318-325.

2. The Arian and semi-Arian reaction, and its prevalence to the death of Constantius; 325-361.

3. The final victory, and the completion of the Nicene Creed; to the council of Constantinople, 381.

The roots of the Arian controversy are to be found partly in the contradictory elements of the Christology of the great Origen and partly in the antagonism between the Alexandrian and the Antiochian theology. Origen attributed to Christ eternity and other divine attributes which logically lead to the orthodox doctrine of the identity of substance. But he also taught with equal clearness a separateness of essence between the Father and the Son, and the subordination of the Son, as a second or secondary God beneath the Father, and thus furnished a starting point for the Arian heresy. The eternal generation of the Son from the will of the Father was, with Origen, the communication of a divine but secondary substance. This idea, in the hands of the less devout and profound Arius, who with his more rigid logic could admit of no intermediate being between God and the creature, deteriorated to the notion of the primal creature.

Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, deduced from the Origenistic doctrine of the eternal generation

of the Son the homoousion or consubstantiality[18] of the Son with the Father. Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria after 313, accused Alexander of Sabellianism,[19] and taught that Christ, while he was indeed the creator of the world, was himself a creature of God, therefore not truly divine.

Arius and his followers, for their denial of the true deity of Christ, were deposed and excommunicated by a council of a hundred Egyptian and Libyan bishops at Alexandria in 321. Several bishops, especially Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius of Caesarea, defended him. Alexander issued a number of circular letters to all the bishops against the apostates. The controversy soon involved the entire church, and transformed the whole Christian East into a theological battle-field.

Constantine, in pursuance, as he thought, of a "divine inspiration," summoned the first universal council, to represent the whole church of the empire, and to give a final decision upon the relation of Christ to God.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA, 325.

In the year 325, the twentieth of his reign, Constantine summoned the bishops of the empire by a letter of invitation, putting at their service the public conveyances, and liberally defraying from the public treasury the expenses of their residence in Nicea and of their return. The whole number of bishops assembled was at most 318, about one-sixth of all the bishops of the empire. The formal sessions began about Pentecost, or at the latest after the arrival of the emperor on the 14th of June. The opening address was given by the emperor in the official Latin tongue and translated immediately into Greek.

> It was my highest wish, my friends, that I might be permitted to enjoy your assembly. I must thank God that, in addition to all other blessings, he has shown me this highest one of all: to see you all gathered here in harmony and with one mind. May no malicious enemy rob us of this happiness, and after the tyranny of the enemy of Christ [Licinius and his army] is conquered by the help of the Redeemer, the wicked demon shall not persecute the divine law with new blasphemies. Discord in the church I consider more fearful and painful than any other war. As soon as I by the help of God had overcome

---

18 The equivalent Latin term.

19 A version of Monarchianism holding that the Godhead was differentiated only into a succession of **modes of operation**. The "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" were not different persons in a triune Godhead but different modes in which the singular Godhead operated.

my enemies, I believed that nothing more was now necessary than to give thanks to God in common joy with those whom I had liberated. But when I heard of your divisions, I was convinced that this matter should by no means be neglected, and in the desire to assist by my service, I have summoned you without delay. I shall, however, feel my desire fulfilled only when I see the minds of all united in that peaceful harmony which you, as the anointed of God, must preach to others. Delay not therefore, my friends, delay not, servants of God; put away all causes of strife, and loose all knots of discord by the laws of peace. Thus shall you accomplish the work most pleasing to God, and confer upon me, your fellow servant, an exceeding great joy.

Among the fathers of the council, besides a great number of obscure mediocrities, were several distinguished and venerable men. Eusebius of Caesarea was most eminent for learning; the young archdeacon Athanasius, who accompanied the bishop Alexander of Alexandria, for zeal, intellect, and eloquence.

In the beginning the council was divided into three parties. The orthodox party, which held firmly to the deity of Christ, was at first in the minority, but in talent and influence the more weighty. Athanasius evinced more zeal and insight than all and gave promise already of being the future head of the orthodox party. The Arians numbered perhaps twenty bishops, and were lead by the influential bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. The majority, under the leadership of the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, took the middle ground between the right and the left, but bore nearer the right, and finally went over to that side.

The Arians first proposed a creed, which however was rejected with tumultuous disapproval and torn to pieces, whereupon sixteen of the eighteen signers of it abandoned the cause of Arius.

Then the church historian Eusebius, in the name of the middle party, proposed an ancient Palestinian Confession, which was very similar to the Nicene Creed soon to be accepted, and acknowledged the divine nature of Christ in general biblical terms, but avoided the term in question, *homoousios, **of the same essence***. The emperor had already seen and approved this confession, and even the Arian minority were ready to accept it.

But this last circumstance itself was very suspicious to the extreme right. They wished a creed to which no Arian could honestly subscribe, and especially insisted on inserting the expression *homoousios,* which the Arians hated and declared to be unscriptural, Sabellian, and materialistic. The emperor saw clearly that the Eusebian formula would not pass and gave his voice for the disputed word.

Hosius of Cordova appeared and announced that a confession was prepared which would now be read by the deacon. It is in substance the well-known Nicene Creed. Almost all the bishops subscribed to the creed, This is the first instance of such signing of a document in the Christian church. Eusebius of Caesarea also signed his name after a day's deliberation. Only two Egyptian bishops persistently refused to sign and were banished with Arius to Illyria. The books of Arius were burned and his followers branded as enemies of Christianity.

This is the first example of the *civil* punishment of heresy; and it is the beginning of a long succession of civil persecutions for all departures from the Catholic faith. Before the union of church and state, ecclesiastical excommunication was the extreme penalty. Now banishment and afterwards even death were added, because all offenses against the church were regarded as at the same time crimes against the state and civil society.

The council of Nicea is the first and most venerable of the ecumenical synods, and next to the apostolic council at Jerusalem the most important and the most illustrious of all the councils of Christendom. It is the most important event of the fourth century, and its bloodless intellectual victory over a dangerous error is of far greater consequence to the progress of true civilization than all the bloody victories of Constantine and his successors. It forms an epoch in the history of doctrine, summing up the results of all previous discussions on the deity of Christ and the incarnation and at the same time regulating the further development of the Catholic orthodoxy for centuries. It is acknowledged alike by the Greek, Latin, and Evangelical churches, and to this day, after a course of fifteen centuries, is prayed and sung from Sunday to Sunday in all countries of the civilized world. The wild passions and the weaknesses of men, which encompassed the Nicene council, are extinguished, but the faith in the eternal deity of Christ has remained, and so long as this faith lives, the council of Nicea will be named with reverence and with gratitude.

THE ARIAN AND SEMI-ARIAN REACTION, 325-361.

The victory at the council of Nicea over the views of the majority of the bishops was a victory in appearance only. Some of the bishops had subscribed the *homoousios* with reluctance or from a regard to the emperor. With a change of circumstances they would readily turn in opposition. The controversy now for the first time fairly broke loose, and Arianism entered the stage of its political development and power.

35

Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicea threw all their influence against the adherents of the *homoousios.* Constantine himself was turned by Eusebius of Caesarea, his sister Constantia, and by a vague confession of Arius, to think more favorably of Arius and recall him from exile. Athanasius, who after the death of Alexander in April, 328, became bishop of Alexandria and head of the Nicene party, refused to reinstate the heretic in his former position. Athanasius was condemned and deposed for false accusations by two Arian councils and banished by the emperor to Treves in Gaul in 336 as a disturber of the peace of the church.

Arius, having been formally acquitted of the charge of heresy by a council at Jerusalem, 335, was to have been solemnly received back into the fellowship of the church at Constantinople. But on the evening before the intended procession, in 336, he suddenly died at the age of over 80 years.

On the death of Constantine, (337), Athanasius was recalled from his banishment (338) by Constantine II and received by the people with great enthusiasm. Some months afterwards (339), he held a council of nearly a hundred bishops in Alexandria for the vindication of the Nicene doctrine. But this was a temporary triumph.

In the East Arianism prevailed. Constantius, second son of Constantine the Great, and ruler in the East, together with his whole court, was attached to it with fanatical intolerance. Eusebius of Nicomedia was made bishop of Constantinople (338), and was the leader of the Arian and the more moderate, but less consistent semi-Arian parties in their common opposition to Athanasius and the orthodox West. Hence the name *Eusebians.* Athanasius was deposed for the second time and took refuge with the bishop Julius of Rome (339 or 340). Julius held a council of more than fifty bishops in the autumn of 341 in defense of Athanasius and for the condemnation of his opponents. The whole Western church was in general more steadfast on the side of the Nicene orthodoxy and honored Athanasius as a martyr of the true faith. On the contrary, a synod at Antioch, under the direction of the Eusebians, confirmed the deposition of Athanasius and although they set forth four creeds which rejected Arianism, they avoided the orthodox formula, particularly the vexed *homoousios.* Thus the East and the West were in manifest conflict.

To heal this division, the two emperors, Constantius in the East and Constans in the West, summoned a general council in 343 at Sardica in Illyria. The Nicene doctrine was here confirmed. But the Arianizing Oriental bishops, dissatisfied with the admission of Athanasius, took no part in the proceedings and held an opposition council where they confirmed the decrees of the council of Antioch.

Constantius was compelled by his brother to restore Athanasius to his office in 346. But after the death of Constans in 350, he summoned three successive synods in favor of a moderate Arianism. He forced the decrees of these councils on the Western church, deposed and banished bishops like Liberius of Rome who resisted them, and drove Athanasius from the cathedral of Alexandria with five thousand armed soldiers. In their exile, the faithful adherents of the Nicene faith were subjected to all manner of abuse and vexation.

Thus Arianism gained the ascendancy in the whole Roman empire, though not in its original rigorous form, but in the milder form of *homoiousianism* or the doctrine of ***similarity of essence***, as opposed on the one hand to the Nicene *homoousianism, **sameness of essence***, and on the other hand to the Arian *heteroousianism, **difference of essence***.

The Nicene orthodoxy was thus apparently put down. But now the heretical majority, having overcome their common enemy, made ready their own dissolution by divisions among themselves. They separated into two factions. The right wing, the Eusebians or Semi-Arians, maintained that the Son was not indeed of the ***same*** essence but was yet of ***like*** essence with the Father. The left wing, or the decided Arians, taught that the Son was of a ***different*** essence and even ***unlike*** the Father and created out of nothing.

A number of councils were occupied with this internal dissension of the anti-Nicene party. A proposed compromise satisfied neither party. Constantius endeavored to suppress the quarrel but in vain. His death in 361 opened the way for the second and permanent victory of the Nicene orthodoxy.

THE FINAL VICTORY OF ORTHODOXY AND THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE, 381.

Julian the Apostate (361-363) tolerated all Christian parties in the hope that they would destroy one another. With this in view, he recalled the orthodox bishops from exile. Even Athanasius returned but was soon banished again as an "enemy of the gods." He was recalled once again under Jovian (363-364). For a time the strife of the Christians among themselves was silenced in their common warfare against revived paganism. The Arian controversy took its own natural course. The truth regained free play, and the Nicene spirit was permitted to assert its intrinsic power. It gradually achieved the victory. After the death of Athanasius in 373, Arianism regained dominion for a time in Alexandria.

In 379 Theodosius I (the Great), educated in the Nicene faith, ascended the throne, and in his long and powerful reign (379-395) externally completed the triumph of orthodoxy in the Roman empire. In 380 he issued the celebrated edict which required all his subjects to confess the orthodox faith and threatened the heretics with punishment. After his entrance into Constantinople, he raised Gregory Nazianzen to the patriarchal chair and drove the Arians, after their forty years' reign, out of the church in the capital.

To give these forcible measures the sanction of law, and to restore unity in the church of the whole empire, Theodosius called the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in May, 381. At this council the Nicene Creed, with some unessential changes and an important addition respecting the deity of the Holy Spirit, was adopted. The emperor ratified the decrees of the council and as early as July, 381, enacted the law that all churches should be given up to bishops who believed in the equal divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The public worship of heretics was forbidden. Thus Arianism and the kindred errors were forever destroyed in the Roman empire, though kindred opinions continually reappear as isolated cases and in other connections. But among the different barbarian peoples of the West who had received Christianity during the ascendancy of Arianism, this doctrine was perpetuated two centuries longer.

IMPORT OF THE CONTROVERSY

To the superficial and rationalistic eye, this great struggle seems a metaphysical subtilty and a fruitless logomachy, revolving about a Greek iota (*homoousios/homoiousios*). But it enters into the heart of Christianity and must necessarily affect in a greater or lesser degree all other articles of faith. The historian Dr. Baur writes:

> The main question was whether Christianity is the highest and absolute revelation of God, and such that by it in the Son of God, the self-existent absolute being of God joins itself to man, and so communicates itself that man through the Son becomes truly one with God, and comes into such community of essence with God, as makes him absolutely certain of pardon and salvation. From this point of view Athanasius apprehended the gist of the controversy, always finally summing up all his objections to the Arian doctrine with the chief argument that the whole substance of Christianity, all reality of redemption, everything which makes Christianity the perfect salvation, would be utterly null and meaningless if he who is supposed to unite man with God in real unity of being, were not himself absolute God, or of one substance with the absolute God, but only a

38

creature among creatures. The infinite chasm which separates creature from Creator remains unfilled; there is nothing really mediatory between God and man, if between the two there be nothing more than some created and finite thing, or such a mediator and redeemer as the Arians conceive the Son of God in his essential distinction from God: not begotten from the essence of God and coeternal, but created out of nothing and arising in time...While, therefore, according to Athanasius, Christianity is the religion of the unity of God and man, according to Arius the essence of the Christian revelation can consist only in man's becoming conscious of the difference which separates him, with all the finite, from the absolute being of God. What value, however, one must ask, has such a Christianity when, instead of bringing man nearer to God, it only fixes the chasm between God and man?

Athanasius met the theological objections of the Arians with overwhelming dialectical skill and exposed the internal contradictions and philosophical absurdities of their positions. For if the Son is a creature, man remains still separated, as before, from God. No creature can redeem other creatures, and unite them with God. If Christ is not divine, much less can we be partakers of the divine nature and children of God.

THE NICENE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the essential deity and the personality of the Holy Spirit completed the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. The essential points of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, briefly stated, are these.

1. There is only *one* divine *essence* or *substance*. Father, Son, and Spirit are one in essence, that is, consubstantial. They are in one another, inseparable, and cannot be conceived without each other.

2. In this one divine essence there are *three persons* or, to use a better term, *hypostases,*[20] that is, three different modes of subsistence of the one same undivided and indivisible whole, which in the Scriptures are called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These distinctions are not merely different attributes, powers, or activities of the Godhead, still less merely subjective aspects under which God presents himself to the human mind, but each person expresses the whole fullness of the divine being with all its attributes, and

---

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.

the three persons stand in a relation of mutual knowledge and love.

3. Each divine person has his *property,* a characteristic individuality, expressed by the Greek word *idiotes* and the Latin *proprietas.* This is not to be confused with *attribute*, because the divine attributes of eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, wisdom, holiness, love, etc., are inherent in the divine *essence* and are the common possession of all the divine hypostases. The *idiotes*, on the contrary, is a peculiarity of the individual *hypostasis* and therefore cannot be communicated or transferred from one to another.

4. The divine persons are in one another, mutually interpenetrate, and form a perpetual *intercommunication* and *motion* within the divine essence.

5. A distinction is made between two trinities: an *immanent*[21] trinity of constitution, which existed from eternity, and an *economic*[22] trinity of manifestation. This distinction did not receive formal expression until a much later period, although the Nicene doctrine already contained it in substance.

6. Finally, there is a certain *subordinationism* of hypostasis,[23] in order and dignity. Father, Son, and Spirit all have the same divine essence, yet not in a coordinate way, but in an order of subordination. The Father has the essence originally and of himself, from no other. The Son, on the contrary, has his essence by communication from the Father. The same subordination is still more applicable to the Holy Spirit.

THE POST-NICENE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF AUGUSTINE

While the Greek church stopped with the Nicene statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Latin church carried the development onward under the guidance of the profound and devout speculative spirit of Augustine in the beginning of the fifth century to the formation of the **Athanasian Creed**. Of all the fathers, next to Athanasius, Augustine performed the greatest service for this dogma, and by his discriminating speculation, he exerted more influence upon the scholastic theology and that of the Reformation than all the Nicene divines. The points in which he advanced upon the Nicene Creed are the following.

---

21 In the sense of *inherent*; a Trinity based on the inherent nature of the Godhead. The phrase *ontological Trinity* is more often used in modern books of theology.

22 In the sense of how the Persons of the Trinity *functioned* with respect to each other.

23 A hierarchical ranking of the Person of the Trintiy.

1. He eliminated the remnant of subordinationism, and brought out more clearly and sharply the consubstantiality of the three persons and the numerical unity of their essence. Yet he too admitted that the Father stood above the Son and the Spirit in this way: that he alone is of no other, but is absolutely original and independent; while the Son is begotten of him, and the Spirit proceeds from him, and proceeds from him in a higher sense than from the Son.

2. Augustine taught the procession of the Holy Spirit **from the Son** as well as from the Father, though from the Father mainly.

The Nicene Creed, coming from the first ecumenical council (325), contains only the statement "...We believe...in the Holy Spirit." The second ecumenical council at Constantinople (381) did not produce a separate creed but added an explicit affirmation of the deity of the Holy Spirit to oppose Macedonianism,[24] which denied it. "We believe...in the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified..." Thus, the resulting Nicene-Constantinople Creed affirms only that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father," though not with an exclusive intent. It was intended simply to give the Spirit a relation to the Father as immediate as that of the Son. The Spirit was not created by the Son but eternally proceeds directly from the Father, just as the Son is from eternity begotton of the Father.[25]

Augustine's view [that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son] gradually met universal acceptance in the West. It was even inserted into the Nicene-Constantinople Creed by the council of Toledo in 589 by the addition of the word *filioque*,[26] together with an anathema against its proponents, by whom are meant, however, not the Greeks but the Arians.

---

24 Macedonianism, from *Macedonius*, is another name for Pneumatomachism; the teaching denies the deity of the Holy Spirit. In general, the Arians considered the Holy Spirit the first being created by the son.

25 The doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit are ontological and highly philosophical. Neither is considered an act in time. They are statements of **being**. The Son is eternal, not created, but his being or person is eternally "generated" by the Father. This idea is based primarily on the Greek word, *monogenes*, used in John 3:16 and translated in the KJV as *only begotten*. Some modern conservative theologians say the doctrine of eternal generation is going beyond Scripture and represents a misunderstanding of the true meaning of *monogenes*, which may be simply *only*. By analogy, the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit is also a statement of **being**. The Holy Spirit is eternal, not created, but his being or person eternally "proceeds" from the Father (and maybe the Son!).

26 This is the Latin word meaning *and from the Son*. With this word inserted, the Nicene-Constantinople Creed reads, "We believe...in the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified..."

Here to this day lies the main difference in doctrine between the Greek and Latin churches, though the controversy over it did not break out till the middle of the ninth century under patriarch Photius (867). This doctrinal difference [whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone or from the Father and from the Son], however insignificant it may appear at first sight, is characteristic of both branches of the church and illustrates the contrast between the **conservative and stationary theology** of the East, after the great ecumenical councils, and the **progressive and systematizing theology** of the West.

The wisdom of changing an ancient and generally received formula of faith may be questioned. It must be admitted, indeed, that the Nicene Creed has undergone several other changes which were embodied in the Constantinople Creed and adopted by the Greeks as well as the Latins. But in the case of the *Filioque*, the Eastern Church, which made the Nicene Creed, was never consulted, and when the addition was first brought to the notice of the bishop of Rome by Charlemagne, he protested against the innovation. His successors, however, acquiesced in it, and the Protestant churches accepted the Nicene Creed with the *Filioque*, though without investigation. The Greek Church has ever protested against it since the time of Photius and will never adopt it. She makes a sharp distinction between the **procession** of the Spirit, which is an eternal and internal process in the Holy Trinity itself, and the **mission** of the Spirit, which is an act of revelation in time. The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father alone (though through the Son), but was sent by the Father and the Son on the day of Pentecost. The Latin Church is concerned for the dignity of the Son, as being of one substance with the Father, and infers the double procession from the double mission.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

The post-Nicene or Augustinian doctrine of the Trinity reached its classic statement in the third and last of the ecumenical confessions, called the *Symbolum Athanasianum,* beyond which the orthodox development of the doctrine in the Roman and Evangelical churches to this day has made no advance. This creed is unsurpassed as a masterpiece of logical clearness, rigor, and precision. And so far as it is possible at all to state in limited dialectic form, and to protect against heresy, the inexhaustible depths of a mystery of faith into which the angels desire to look, this liturgical theological confession achieves the task.

The origin of this remarkable production is veiled in mysterious darkness. Like the Apostle's Creed, it is not so much the work of any one person, as the production of the spirit of the church.

As the Apostles' Creed represents the faith of the ante-Nicene period, and the Nicene Creed the faith of the Nicene period, so the Athanasian Creed gives formal expression to the post-Nicene faith in the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation of God.

It probably originated about the middle of the fifth century, in the school of Augustine, and in Gaul, where it makes its first appearance and acquires its first ecclesiastical authority. But the precise author or compiler cannot be discovered. The Athanasian Creed closes the succession of ecumenical symbols, symbols which are acknowledged by the entire orthodox Christian world, except that Evangelical Protestantism ascribes to them not an absolute but only a relative authority and reserves the right of freely investigating and further developing all church doctrines from the inexhaustible fountain of the infallible word of God.

THE PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY

The Pelagian controversy turns upon the mighty antithesis of sin and grace. It embraces the whole cycle of doctrine respecting the ethical and religious relation of man to God and includes, therefore, the doctrines of human freedom, or the primitive state, of the fall, of regeneration and conversion, of the eternal purpose of redemption, and of the nature and operation of the grace of God. It comes at last to the question of whether redemption is chiefly a work of God or of man, whether man needs to be born anew or merely improved. The soul of the Pelagian system is human freedom; the soul of the Augustinian system is divine grace.

Pelagius was a simple monk born about the middle of the fourth century in Britain. He was a man of clear intellect, mild disposition, learned culture, and spotless character. Even Augustine, with all his abhorrence of Pelagius' doctrines, repeatedly speaks respectfully of him.

Faith for Pelagius was hardly more than a theoretical belief. The main thing in religion was moral action, the keeping of the commandments of God by one's own strength. In 409 Pelagius composed a brief commentary on the Epistles of Paul. He converted the advocate Coelestius to his views, and it was from this man, younger, more skillful in argument, more ready for controversy, and more rigorously consistent than his teacher, that the controversy took its rise.

In 411 these two friends passed through Hippo, intending to visit Augustine, but found that he was just then at Carthage occupied with the Donatists. Pelagius proceeded to Palestine, but Coelestius applied for presbyters' orders in Carthage, the very place where he had most reason to expect opposition. The deacon Paulinus of Milan, who was just then in Carthage, warned the

bishop Aurelius at Carthage against Coelestius. At a council held by Aurelius at Carthage in 412, Paulinus appeared as his accuser. He asserted that six or seven errors were found in the writings of Coelestius.

1. Adam was created mortal, and would have died, even if he had not sinned.
2. Adam's fall injured himself alone, not the human race.
3. Children come into the world in the same condition in which Adam was before the fall.
4. The human race neither dies in consequence of Adam's fall, nor rises again in consequence of Christ's resurrection.
5. Unbaptized children, as well as others, are saved.
6. The law, as well as the gospel, leads to the kingdom of heaven.
7. Even before Christ there were sinless men.

Coelestius refused to recant the errors charged against him and was excluded from the communion of the church. He immediately went to Ephesus and was there ordained presbyter. Augustine had taken no part personally in these transactions. But as the Pelagian doctrines found many adherents even in Africa and Sicily, he wrote several treatises in refutation of them as early as 412 and 415.

In 414 the controversy broke out in Palestine where Pelagius was residing. Paul Orosius, a young Spanish ecclesiastic studying with Jerome at that time, appeared against Pelagius in June, 415, at a diocesan synod convoked by the bishop John of Jerusalem. Orosius informed the synod that a council at Carthage had condemned Coelestius and that Augustine had written against his errors. John, who made little account of the authority of Augustine, undertook the defense of the accused. He permitted Pelagius, although only a monk and layman, to take his seat among the presbyters. After much discussion, it was resolved that the matter should be laid before the Roman bishop, Innocent.

A second Palestinian council resulted still more favorably to Pelagius. The synod, of which John of Jerusalem was a member, did not go below the surface of the question, nor in fact understand it, but acquitted the accused of all heresy. Jerome justifiably called it a "miserable synod." Jerome's polemical zeal against the Pelagians cost him dearly. In the beginning of the year 416, a mob of Pelagianizing monks, ecclesiastics, and vagabonds broke into his monastery at Bethlehem, maltreated the inmates, set the building on fire, and compelled the aged scholar to take to flight. Bishop John of Jerusalem let this pass unpunished.

POSITION OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

The question took another turn when it was brought before the Roman see. In 416, two North African synods condemned the Pelagian error and communicated their sentence to Pope Innocent. Innocent expressed his full agreement with the condemnation of Pelagius, Coelestius, and their adherents. But soon afterwards, in 417, Innocent died, and was succeeded by Zosimus (417-418). Coelestius appeared personally in Rome and succeeded by his written and oral explanations in satisfying Zosimus. This temporary favor of the bishop of Rome towards the Pelagian heresy is a significant presage of the indulgence of later popes for Pelagianizing tendencies.

The Africans were too sure of their cause to yield submission to so weak a judgment that was in manifest conflict with that of Innocent. In a general African council held at Carthage in 418, they defined their opposition to the Pelagian errors in eight (or nine) canons, which are entirely conformable to the Augustinian view. Here is a brief summary of them.

1. Whoever says that Adam was created mortal, and would, even without sin, have died by natural necessity, let him be anathema.

2. Whoever rejects infant baptism, or denies original sin in children, so that the baptismal formula, "for the remission of sins," would have to be taken not in a strict, but in a loose sense, let him be anathema.

3. Whoever says that in the kingdom of heaven, or elsewhere, there is a certain middle place, where children dying without baptism live happy, while yet without baptism they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, i.e., into eternal life, let him be anathema.

The fourth canon condemns the doctrine that the justifying grace of God merely effects the forgiveness of sins already committed, and the remaining canons condemn other superficial views of the grace of God and the sinfulness of man.

At the same time, the Africans succeeded in procuring from the emperor Honorius edicts against the Pelagians. These things produced a change in the opinions of Zosimus, and about the middle of the year 418, he issued an encyclical letter to all the bishops of both East and West, pronouncing the anathema upon Pelagius and Coelestius and declaring his concurrence with the decisions of the council of Carthage in the doctrines of the corruption of human nature, of baptism, and of grace.

45

THE AUGUSTINIAN SYSTEM

Augustine (354-430) had already in his *Confessions*, in the year 400, set forth his deep and rich experiences of human sin and divine grace. He is the brightest star in the constellation of the church fathers and diffuses his light through the darkest periods of the middle ages, and among Catholics and Protestants alike, even to this day.

The Augustinian doctrine of sin is summed up as follows. This fearful power is universal; it rules the species, as well as individuals; it has its seat in the moral character of the will, reaches thence to the particular actions, and from them reacts again upon the will; and it subjects every man, without exception, to the punitive justice of God. Yet the corruption is not so great as to alter the substance of man, and make him incapable of redemption.

Concerning grace, Augustine asserts the following:

- Grace is *absolutely necessary* to Christian virtue, not merely auxiliary, but indispensable, to its existence. It is necessary "for every good act, for every good thought, for every good word of man at every moment." Without it, the Christian life can neither begin, proceed, nor be consummated.

- Grace is, moreover, *unmerited*. As a man without grace can do nothing good, he is, of course, incapable of *deserving* grace; for, to deserve grace, he must do something good.

- Grace is *irresistible* in its effect. Not, indeed, in the way of physical constraint imposed on the will, but as a moral power, which makes man willing, and which infallibly attains its end, the conversion and final perfection of its subject.

- Grace, finally, works *progressively* or *by degrees*. It removes all the consequences of the fall, but it removes them in an order agreeable to the finite, gradually unfolding nature of the believer.

Augustine did not stop with this doctrine of sin and grace. His personal experience of the wonderful and undeserved grace of God, together with various passages of the Scriptures, especially the Epistle to the Romans, and the logical connection of thought, led him to the doctrine of the unconditional and eternal purpose of the omniscient and omnipotent God. It is

absolutely inconceivable that God created the world or man blindly, without a fixed plan or that this plan can be disturbed or hindered in any way by his creatures. Besides, there prevails everywhere, even in the natural life of man, in the distribution of mental gifts and earthly blessings, and yet much more in the realm of grace, a higher guidance, which is wholly independent of our will or actions.

Augustine, strictly speaking, knows nothing of a *double* decree of election and reprobation but recognizes simply a decree of election to salvation. The decree is eternal, unconditioned, and immutable. His deep moral convictions revolted against making any allowance for sin by tracing its origin to the divine will, and by his peculiar view of the inseparable connection between Adam and the race, he could make every man as it were individually responsible for the fall of Adam.

Augustine's doctrine of predestination was the immediate occasion of a theological controversy which lasted almost a hundred years, developed almost every argument for and against the doctrine, and called forth a system holding middle ground, that is *Semi-Pelagianism,* to which we now briefly turn.

SEMI-PELAGIANISM

Semi-Pelagianism is a somewhat vague and indefinite attempt at reconciliation, hovering midway between the sharply marked systems of Pelagius and Augustine, taking off the edge of each, and inclining now to the one, now to the other. The system was formed in Southern France in the fifth century during the latter years of Augustine's life and soon after his death. Its leading idea is that divine grace and the human will jointly accomplish the work of conversion and sanctification and that ordinarily man must take the first step. It rejects the Pelagian doctrine of the moral soundness of man, but rejects also the Augustinian doctrine of the entire corruption and bondage of the natural man, and substitutes the idea of a diseased or crippled state of the will. It admirably suited the legalistic and ascetic piety of the middle age and indeed always remained within the pale of the Catholic church, and never produced a separate sect.

Semi-Pelagianism prevailed in Gaul for several decades. Under the lead of Faustus of Rhegium, it gained the victory in two synods, at Arles in 472 and at Lyons in 475, where Augustine's doctrine of predestination was condemned, though without mention of his name.

VICTORY OF SEMI-AUGUSTINIANISM

These synods were only provincial and were the cause of a schism. In North Africa and Rome the Augustinian system of doctrine, though in a somewhat softened form, attained the ascendancy. In the decree issued by Pope Gelasius in 496, the writings of Augustine and Prosper Aquitanus are placed among books ecclesiastically sanctioned, those of Cassian and Faustus of Rhegium among the apocryphal or forbidden. Capable advocates were found even in Gaul in the beginning of the sixth century.

These transactions terminated at length in the triumph of a moderate Augustinianism, or of what might be called Semi-Augustinianism. At the synod of Orange in the year 529, at which Caesarius of Arles was leader, the Semi-Pelagian system was condemned in twenty-five chapters or canons, and the Augustinian doctrine of sin and grace was approved, without the doctrine of absolute or particularistic predestination.

The synod of Orange, for its Augustinian decisions in anthropology and soteriology, is of great importance. The decisions of the council were sent by Caesarius to Rome and were confirmed by Pope Boniface II in 530. Yet the strict Augustinianism always had its adherents and became prominent again in the Gottschalk controversy in the ninth century. It gained a massive acknowledgment and an independent development in Calvinism, which, in fact, partially recast it, and gave it its most consistent form.