

dry sunlight of Galilee, restored suddenly to this world and visiting, let us say, a mass in St. Peter's at Rome, at learning that the consecrated wafer upon the altar was none other than his crucified teacher.

Religion in a world community is not many things but one thing, and it was inevitable that all the living religious faiths in the world at the time, and all the philosophy and religious thought that came into contact with Christianity, should come to an account with Christianity and exchanged phrases and ideas. The hopes of the early Nazarenes had identified Jesus with the Christ; the brilliant mind of Paul had surrounded his career with mystical significance. Jesus had called men and women to a giant undertaking, to the renunciation of self, to the new birth into the kingdom of love. The line of least resistance for the flagging convert was to intellectualize himself away from this plain doctrine, this stark proposition, into complicated theories and ceremonies, that would leave his essential self alone. How much easier is it to sprinkle oneself with blood than to purge oneself from malice and competition; to eat bread and drink wine and pretend one had absorbed divinity; to give candles rather than the heart; to shave the head and retain the scheming privacy of the brain inside it! The world was full of such evasive philosophy and theological stuff in the opening centuries of the Christian era. It is not for us here to enlarge upon the distinctive features of Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Philonism, and the like teachings which abounded in the Alexandrian world. But it was all one world with that in which the early Christians were living. The writings of such men as Origen, Plotinus, and Augustine witness to the inevitable give and take of the time.

Jesus called himself the Son of God and also the Son of Man; but he laid little stress on who he was or what he was, and much upon the teachings of the Kingdom. In declaring that he was more than a man and divine, Paul and his other followers, whether they were right or wrong, opened up a vast field of argument. Was Jesus God? Or had God created him? Was he identical with God or separate from God? It is not the function of the historian to answer such questions, but he is bound to note them, and to note how unavoidable they were, because of the immense influence they have had upon the whole subsequent life of western mankind. By the fourth century of the Christian Era we find all the Christian communities so agitated and exasperated by tortuous and elusive arguments about the nature of God as to be largely negligent of the simpler

teachings of charity, service, and brotherhood that Jesus had inculcated.

The chief views that the historian notices are those of the Arians, the Sabellians, and the Trinitarians. The Arians followed Arius, who taught that Christ was less than God; the Sabellians taught that he was a mode or aspect of God—God was Creator, Saviour, and Comforter, just as one man may be father, trustee, and guest; the Trinitarians, of whom Athanasius was the great leader, taught that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were three distinct Persons, but one God. The reader is referred to the Athanasian Creed for the exact expression of the latter mystery, and for the alarming consequences to him of any failure to grasp and believe it. To Gibbon he must go for a derisive statement of these controversies. The present writer can deal with them neither with awe nor derision; they seem to him, he must confess, a disastrous ebullition of the human mind entirely inconsistent with the plain account of Jesus preserved for us in the Gospels. Orthodoxy became a test not only for Christian office, but for Christian trade and help. A small point of doctrine might mean affluence or beggary to a man. It is difficult to read the surviving literature of the time without a strong sense of the dogmatism, the spites, rivalries, and pedantries of the men who tore Christianity to pieces for the sake of these theological refinements. Most of the Trinitarian disputants—for it is chiefly Trinitarian documents that survive—accuse their antagonists, probably with truth, of mean and secondary motives, but they do so in a manner that betrays their own base spirit very clearly. Arius, for example, is accused of adopting heretical opinions because he was not appointed Bishop of Alexandria. Riots and excommunications and banishments punctuated these controversies, and finally came official persecutions. These fine differences about the constitution of the Deity interwove with politics and international disputes. Men who quarrelled over business affairs, wives who wished to annoy their husbands, developed antagonistic views upon this exalted theme. Most of the barbarian invaders of the empire were Arians; probably because their simple minds found the Trinitarian position incomprehensible.

It is easy for the sceptic to mock at these disputes. But even if we think that these attempts to say exactly how God was related to himself were presumptuous and intellectually monstrous—nevertheless we are bound to recognize that beneath these preposterous refinements of impossible dogmas there lay often a real passion for truth—even if it was truth ill conceived.

Both sides produced genuine martyrs. And the zeal of these controversies, though it is a base and often malicious zeal, did at any rate make the Christian sects very energetically propagandist and educational. Moreover, because the history of the Christian body in the fourth and fifth centuries is largely a record of these unhappy disputes, that must not blind us to the fact that the spirit of Jesus did live and ennoble many lives among the Christians. The text of the Gospels, though it was probably tampered with during this period, was not destroyed, and Jesus of Nazareth, in his own manifest inimitable greatness, still taught through that text. Nor did these unhappy quarrels prevent Christianity from maintaining a united front against gladiatorial shows and against the degrading worship of idols and of the god-Cæsar.

### § 6

#### *The Struggles and Persecutions of Christianity.*

So far as it challenged the divinity of Cæsar and the characteristic institutions of the empire, Christianity is to be regarded as a rebellious and disintegrating movement, and so it was regarded by most of the emperors before Constantine the Great. It encountered considerable hostility, and at last systematic attempts to suppress it. Decius was the first emperor to organize an official persecution, and the great era of the martyrs was in the time of Diocletian (303 and following years). The persecution of Diocletian was, indeed, the crowning struggle of the old idea of the god-emperor against the already great and powerful organization that denied his divinity. Diocletian had reorganized the monarchy upon lines of extreme absolutism; he had abolished the last vestiges of republican institutions; he was the first emperor to surround himself completely with the awe-inspiring etiquette of an eastern monarch. He was forced by the logic of his assumptions to attempt the complete eradication of a system that flatly denied them. The test in the persecution was that the Christian was required to offer sacrifice to the emperor.

“Though Diocletian, still averse to the effusion of blood, had moderated the fury of Galerius, who proposed that everyone refusing to offer sacrifice should immediately be burnt alive, the penalties inflicted on the obstinacy of the Christians might be deemed sufficiently rigorous and effectual. It was enacted that their churches, in all the provinces of the empire, should be demolished to their foundations; and the punishment of death

was denounced against all who should presume to hold any secret assemblies for the purpose of religious worship. The philosophers, who now assumed the unworthy office of directing the blind zeal of persecution, had diligently studied the nature and genius of the Christian religion; and as they were not ignorant that the speculative doctrines of the faith were supposed to be contained in the writings of the prophets, of the evangelists, and of the apostles, they most probably suggested the order that the bishops and presbyters should deliver all their sacred books into the hands of the magistrates, who were commanded, under the severest penalties, to burn them in a public and solemn manner. By the same edict, the property of the church was at once confiscated; and the several parts of which it might consist were either sold to the highest bidder, united to the imperial domain, bestowed on the cities or corporations, or granted to the solicitations of rapacious courtiers. After taking such effectual measures to abolish the worship, and to dissolve the government of the Christians, it was thought necessary to subject to the most intolerable hardships the condition of those perverse individuals who should still reject the religion of nature, of Rome and of their ancestors. Persons of liberal birth were declared incapable of holding any honours or employments; slaves were for ever deprived of the hopes of freedom; and the whole body of the Christians were put out of the protection of the law. The judges were authorized to hear and to determine every action that was brought against a Christian; but the Christians were not permitted to complain of any injury which they themselves had suffered; and those unfortunate sectaries were exposed to the severity, while they were excluded from the benefits, of public justice. . . . This edict was scarcely exhibited to the public view, in the most conspicuous place in Nicomedia, before it was torn down by the hands of a Christian, who expressed at the same time, by the bitterest of invectives, his contempt as well as abhorrence for such impious and tyrannical governors. His offence, according to the mildest laws, amounted to treason and deserved death, and if it be true that he was a person of rank and education, those circumstances could serve only to aggravate his guilt. He was burnt, or rather roasted, by a slow fire; and his executioners, zealous to revenge the personal insult which had been offered to the emperors, exhausted every refinement of cruelty without being able to subdue his patience, or to alter the steady and insulting smile which in his dying agonies he still preserved in his countenance."<sup>1</sup> f

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. xvi.

So with the death of this unnamed martyr the great persecution opened. But, as Gibbon points out, our information as to its severity is of very doubtful value. He estimates the total of victims as about two thousand, and contrasts this with the known multitudes of Christians martyred by their fellow-Christians during the period of the Reformation. Gibbon was strongly prejudiced against Christianity, and here he seems disposed to minimize the fortitude and sufferings of the Christians. In many provinces, no doubt, there must have been a great reluctance to enforce the edict. But there was a hunt for the copies of Holy Writ, and in many places a systematic destruction of Christian churches. There were tortures and executions, as well as a great crowding of the gaols with Christian presbyters and bishops. We have to remember that the Christian community was now a very considerable element of the population, and that an influential proportion of the officials charged with the execution of the edict were themselves of the proscribed faith. Galerius, who was in control of the eastern provinces, was among the most vigorous of the persecutors, but in the end, on his death-bed (311), he realized the futility of his attacks upon this huge community, and granted toleration in an edict the gist of which Gibbon translates as follows:—

“Among the important cares which have occupied our mind for the utility and preservation of the empire, it was our intention to correct and re-establish all things according to the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans. We were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of reason and nature the deluded Christians who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers; and presumptuously despising the practice of antiquity, had invented extravagant laws and opinions according to the dictates of their fancy, and had collected a various society from the different provinces of our empire. The edicts which we have published to enforce the worship of the gods having exposed many of the Christians to danger and distress, many having suffered death, and many more who still persist in their impious folly being left destitute of any public exercise of religion, we are disposed to extend to those unhappy men the effects of our wonted clemency. We permit them, therefore, freely to profess their private opinions and to assemble in their conventicles without fear or molestation, provided always that they preserve a due respect to the established laws and government. By another rescript we shall signify our intentions to the judges and magistrates; and we hope that our indulgence will engage the Christians to offer up their

prayers to the deity whom they adore, for our safety and prosperity, for their own, and for that of the republic."

In a few years Constantine the Great was reigning, first as associated emperor (312) and then as the sole ruler (324), and the severer trials of Christianity were over. If Christianity was a rebellious and destructive force towards a pagan Rome, it was a unifying and organizing force within its own communion. This fact the genius of Constantine grasped. The spirit of Jesus, for all the doctrinal dissensions that prevailed, made a great freemasonry throughout and even beyond the limits of the empire. The faith was spreading among the barbarians beyond the border; it had extended into Persia and Central Asia. It provided the only hope of moral solidarity he could discern in the great welter of narrow views and self-seeking over which he had to rule. It, and it alone, had the facilities for organizing *will*, for the need of which the empire was falling to pieces like a piece of rotten cloth. In 312 Constantine had to fight for Rome and his position against Maxentius. He put the Christian monogram upon the shields and banners of his troops, and claimed that the God of the Christians had fought for him in his complete victory at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, just outside Rome. By this act he renounced all those pretensions to divinity that the vanity of Alexander the Great had first brought into the western world, and with the applause and enthusiastic support of the Christians he established himself as a monarch more absolute even than Diocletian.

In a few years' time Christianity had become the official religion of the empire, and in A.D. 337 Constantine upon his death-bed was baptized a Christian.

## § 7

### *Constantine the Great.*

The figure of Constantine the Great is at least as cardinal in history as that of Alexander the Great or Augustus Cæsar. We know very little of his personality or his private life; no Plutarch, no Suetonius, has preserved any intimate and living details about him. Abuse we have of him from his enemies, and much obviously fulsome panegyric to set against it; but none of these writers give us a living character of him, he is a party symbol for them, a partisan flag. It is stated by the hostile Zosimus that, like Sargon I, he was of illegitimate birth; his father was a distinguished general and his mother, Helena, an innkeeper's daughter of Nish in Serbia. Gibbon, however,

is of opinion that there was a valid marriage. In any case it was a lowly marriage, and the personal genius of Constantine prevailed against serious disadvantages. He was comparatively illiterate, he knew little or no Greek. It appears to be true that he banished his eldest son Crispus, and caused him to be executed at the instigation of the young man's stepmother, Fausta; and it is also recorded that he was afterwards convinced of the innocence of Crispus, and caused Fausta to be executed—according to one account by being boiled to death in her bath, and according to another by being exposed naked to wild beasts on a desolate mountain—while there is also very satisfactory documentary evidence that she survived him. If she was executed, the fact remains that her three sons, together with two nephews, became the appointed heirs of Constantine. Clearly there is nothing solid to be got from this libellous tangle, and such *soufflé* as is possible with these scanty materials is to be found admirably done by Gibbon (chap. xviii). Gibbon, because of his anti-Christian animus, is hostile to Constantine; but he admits that he was temperate and chaste. He accuses him of prodigality because of his great public buildings, and of being vain and dissolute (!) because in his old age he wore a wig—Gibbon wore his own hair tied with a becoming black bow—and a diadem and magnificent robes. But all the later emperors after Diocletian wore diadems and magnificent robes.

Yet if the personality of Constantine the Great remains phantom-like, if the particulars of his domestic life reveal nothing but a vague tragedy, we can still guess at much that was in his mind. It must, in the closing years of his life, have been a very lonely mind. He was more of an autocrat than any previous emperor had been—that is to say, he had less counsel and help. No class of public-spirited and trustworthy men remained; no senate nor council shared and developed his schemes. How much he apprehended the geographical weakness of the empire, how far he saw the complete disaster that was now so near, we can only guess. He made his real capital at Nicomedia in Bithynia; Constantinople across the Bosphorus was still being built when he died. Like Diocletian, he seems to have realized the broken-backed outline of his dominions, and to have concentrated his attention on foreign affairs, and more particularly on the affairs of Hungary, South Russia, and the Black Sea. He reorganized all the official machinery of the empire; he gave it a new constitution and sought to establish a dynasty. He was a restless remaker of things; the social confusion he tried to fix by assisting in the develop-

ment of a caste system. This was following up the work of his great predecessor Diocletian. He tried to make a caste of the peasants and small cultivators, and to restrict them from moving from their holdings. In fact, he sought to make them serfs. The supply of slave labour had fallen off because the empire was no longer an invading but an invaded power; he turned to serfdom as the remedy. His creative efforts necessitated unprecedentedly heavy taxation. All these things point to a lonely and forcible mind. It is in his manifest understanding of the need of some unifying moral force if the empire was to hold together that his claim to originality lies.

It was only after he had turned to Christianity that he seems to have realized the fierce dissensions of the theologians. He made a great effort to reconcile these differences in order to have one uniform and harmonious teaching in the community, and at his initiative a general council of the Church was held at Nicæa, a town near Nicomedia and over against Constantinople, in 325. Eusebius gives a curious account of this strange gathering, over which the emperor, although he was not yet a baptized Christian, presided. It was not his first council of the Church, for he had already (in 314) presided over a council at Arles. He sat in the middle of the council of Nicæa upon a golden throne, and, as he had little Greek, we must suppose he was reduced to watching the countenances and gestures of the debaters, and listening to their intonations. The council was a stormy one. When old Arius rose to speak, one, Nicholas of Myra, struck him in the face, and afterwards many ran out, thrusting their fingers into their ears in affected horror at the old man's heresies. One is tempted to imagine the great emperor, deeply anxious for the soul of his empire, firmly resolved to end these divisions, bending towards his interpreters to ask them the meaning of the uproar.

The views that prevailed at Nicæa are embodied in the Nicene Creed, a strictly Trinitarian statement, and the emperor sustained the Trinitarian position. But afterwards, when Athanasius bore too hardly upon the Arians, he had him banished from Alexandria; and when the Church at Alexandria would have excommunicated Arius, he obliged it to readmit him to communion.



## § 8

*The Establishment of Official Christianity.*

This date, A.D. 325, is a very convenient date in our history. It is the date of the first complete general ("œcumenical") council of the entire Christian world. (That at Arles we have mentioned had been a gathering of only the western half.) It marks the definite entry upon the stage of human affairs of the Christian Church and of Christianity as it is generally understood in the world to-day. It marks the exact definition of Christian teaching by the Nicene Creed.

It is necessary that we should recall the reader's attention to the profound differences between this fully developed Christianity of Nicæa and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. All Christians hold that the latter is completely contained in the former, but that is a question outside our province. What is clearly apparent is that the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth was a *prophetic teaching* of the new type that began with the Hebrew prophets. It was not priestly, it had no consecrated temple, and no altar. It had no rites and ceremonies. Its sacrifice was "a broken and a contrite heart." Its only organization was an organization of preachers, and its chief function was the sermon. But the fully fledged Christianity of the fourth century, though it preserved as its nucleus the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, was mainly a *priestly religion*, of a type already familiar to the world for thousands of years. The centre of its elaborate ritual was an altar, and the essential act of worship the sacrifice, by a consecrated priest, of the Mass. And it had a rapidly developing organization of deacons, priests, and bishops.

But if Christianity had taken on an extraordinary outward resemblance to the cults of Serapis, Ammon, or Bel-Marduk, we must remember that even its priestcraft had certain novel features. Nowhere did it possess any quasi-divine image of God. There was no head temple containing the god, because God was everywhere. There was no holy of holies. Its widespread altars were all addressed to the unseen universal Trinity. Even in its most archaic aspects there was in Christianity something new.

A very important thing for us to note is the rôle played by the emperor in the fixation of Christianity. Not only was the council of Nicæa assembled by Constantine the Great, but all the great councils, the two at Constantinople (381 and 553), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), were called together by the

imperial power. And it is very manifest that in much of the history of Christianity at this time the spirit of Constantine the Great is as evident as, or more evident than, the spirit of Jesus. He was, we have said, a pure autocrat. The last vestiges of Roman republicanism had vanished in the days of Aurelian and Diocletian. To the best of his lights he was trying to remake the crazy empire while there was yet time, and he worked without any councillors, any public opinion, or any sense of the need of such aids and checks. The idea of stamping out all controversy and division, stamping out all thought, by imposing one dogmatic creed upon all believers, is an altogether autocratic idea, it is the idea of the single-handed man who feels that to work at all he must be free from opposition and criticism. The history of the Church under his influence now becomes, therefore, a history of the violent struggles that were bound to follow upon his sudden and rough summons to unanimity. From him the Church acquired the disposition to be authoritative and unquestioned, to develop a centralized organization and run parallel to the empire.

A second great autocrat who presently contributed to the stamping upon Catholic Christianity of a distinctly authoritative character was Theodosius I, Theodosius the Great (379-395). He forbade the unorthodox to hold meetings, handed over all churches to the Trinitarians, and overthrew the heathen temples throughout the empire, and in 390 he caused the great statue of Serapis at Alexandria to be destroyed. There was to be no rivalry, no qualification to the rigid unity of the Church.

Here we cannot tell of the vast internal troubles of the Church, its indigestions of heresy; of Arians and Paulicians, of Gnostics and Manichæans. Had it been less authoritative and more tolerant of intellectual variety, it might perhaps have been a still more powerful body than it became. But, in spite of all these disorders, it did for some time maintain a conception of human unity more intimate and far wider than was ever achieved before. By the fifth century Christendom was already becoming greater, sturdier, and more enduring than any empire had ever been, because it was something not merely imposed upon men, but interwoven with the texture of their minds. It reached out far beyond the utmost limits of the empire, into Armenia, Persia, Abyssinia, Ireland, Germany, India, and Turkestan. "Though made up of widely scattered congregations, it was thought of as one body of Christ, one people of God. This ideal unity found expression in many ways. Inter-communication between the various Christian communities was

very active. Christians upon a journey were always sure of a warm welcome and hospitable entertainment from their fellow-disciples. Messengers and letters were sent freely from one church to another. Missionaries and evangelists went continually from place to place. Documents of various kinds, including gospels and apostolic epistles, circulated widely. Thus in various ways the feeling of unity found expression, and the development of widely separated parts of Christendom conformed more or less closely to a common type."<sup>1</sup>

Christendom retained at least the formal tradition of this general unity of spirit until 1054, when the Latin-speaking Western church and the main and original Greek-speaking church, the "Orthodox" church, severed themselves from one another, ostensibly upon the question of adding two words to the creed. The older creed had declared that the "Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father." The Latins wanted to add, and they did add "*Filioque*" (= and from the son), and placed the Greeks out of their communion because they would not follow this lead. But already, as early as the fifth century, the Christians in Eastern Syria, Persia, Central Asia—there were churches at Merv, Herat, and Samarkand—and India had detached themselves on a similar score. These extremely interesting Asiatic Christians are known in history as the Nestorian Church, and their influence extended into China. The Egyptian and Abyssinian churches also detached themselves very early upon similarly inexplicable points. Long before this formal separation of the Latin and Greek-speaking halves of the main Church, however, there was a practical separation following upon the breaking up of the empire. Their conditions diverged from the first. While the Greek-speaking Eastern Empire held together and the emperor at Constantinople remained dominant in the Church, the Latin half of the empire, as we have already told, collapsed, and left the Western church free of any such imperial control.

Moreover, while ecclesiastical authority in the empire of Constantinople was divided between the high-bishops, or patriarchs, of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, authority in the West was concentrated in the Patriarch, or Pope, of Rome. The Bishop of Rome had always been recognized as first among the patriarchs, and all these things conspired to justify exceptional pretensions upon his part to the quasi-imperial authority. With the final fall of the Western Empire, he took over the ancient title of *pontifex*

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, art. "Church History," p. 336.

*maximus* which the emperors had held, and so became the supreme sacrificial priest of the Roman tradition. Over the Christians of the West his supremacy was fully recognized, but from the beginning it had to be urged with discretion within the dominions of the Eastern emperor and the jurisdictions of the other four patriarchs.

Ideas of worldly rule by the Church were already prevalent in the fourth century. Saint Augustine, a citizen of Hippò in North Africa, who wrote between 354 and 430, gave expression to the developing political ideas of the Church in his book *The City of God*. *The City of God* leads the mind very directly towards the possibility of making the world into a theological and organized Kingdom of Heaven. The city, as Augustine puts it, is "a spiritual society of the predestined faithful," but the step from that to a political application was not a very wide one. The Church was to be the ruler of the world over all nations, the divinely-led ruling power over a great league of terrestrial states. In later years these ideas developed into a definite political theory and policy. As the barbarian races settled and became Christian, the Pope began to claim an overlordship of their kings. In a few centuries the Pope had become in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, the high priest, censor, judge, and divine monarch of Christendom; his influence extended in the west far beyond the utmost range of the old empire, to Ireland, Norway and Sweden, and over all Germany. For more than a thousand years this idea of the unity of Christendom, of Christendom as a sort of vast Amphictyony, whose members even in wartime were restrained from many extremities by the idea of a common brotherhood and a common loyalty to the Church, dominated Europe. The history of Europe from the fifth century onward to the fifteenth is very largely the history of the failure of this great idea of a divine world government to realize itself in practice.

## § 9

### *The Map of Europe, A.D. 500.*

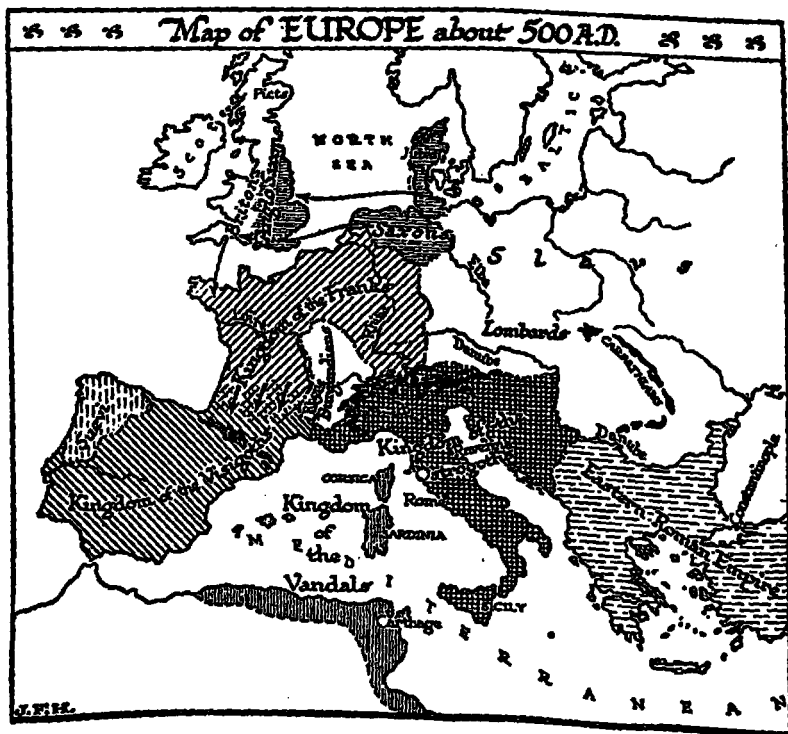
We have already given an account in the previous chapter of the chief irruptions of the barbarian races. We may now, with the help of a map, make a brief review of the political divisions of Europe at the close of the fifth century. No vestige of the Western Empire, the original Roman Empire, remained as a distinct and separate political division. Politically it was completely broken up. Over many parts of Europe a sort of

legendary overlordship of the Hellenic Eastern Empire as the Empire held its place in men's minds. The emperor at Constantinople was, in theory at least, still emperor.

In Britain, the quite barbaric Teutonic Angles, Saxons and Jutes had conquered the eastern half of England; in the west of the island the Britons still held out, but were gradually being forced back into Wales and Cornwall. The Anglo-Saxons seem to have been among the most ruthless and effective of the barbarian conquerors, for, wherever they prevailed, their language replaced the Keltic or Latin speech—it is not certain which—used by the British. These Anglo-Saxons were as yet not Christianized.

Most of Gaul, Holland, and the Rhineland was under the fairly vigorous, Christianized, and much more civilized kingdom of the Franks. But the Rhone valley was under the separate kingdom of the Burgundians. Spain and some of the south of France were under the rule of the Visigoths, but the Suevi were in possession of the north-west corner of the peninsula.

Of the Vandal kingdom in Africa we have already written;



and Italy, still in its population and habits Roman, came under the rule of the Ostrogoths. There was no emperor left in Rome; Theodoric I ruled there as the first of a line of Gothic kings, and his rule extended across the Alps into Pannonia and down the Adriatic to Dalmatia and Serbia.

To the east of the Gothic kingdom the emperors of Constantinople ruled definitely. The Bulgars were still at this time a Mongolian tribe of horse-riding nomads in the region of the Volga; the Aryan Serbs had recently come southward to the shores of the Black Sea into the original home of the Visigoths; the Turko-Finnish Magyars were not yet in Europe. The Lombards were as yet north of the Danube.

The sixth century was marked by a phase of vigour on the part of the Eastern Empire under the Emperor Justinian (527-565). The Vandal kingdom was recovered in 534; the Goths were expelled from Italy in 553. So soon as Justinian was dead (565), the Lombards descended into Italy and settled in Lombardy, but they left Ravenna, Rome, Southern Italy, and North Africa under the rule of the Eastern Empire.

Such was the political condition of the world in which the idea of Christendom developed. The daily life of that time was going on at a very low level indeed, physically, intellectually, and morally. It is frequently said that Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries relapsed into barbarism, but that does not express the reality of the case. It is far more correct to say that the civilization of the Roman Empire had passed into a phase of extreme demoralization. Barbarism is a social order of an elementary type, orderly within its limits; but the state of Europe beneath its political fragmentation was a social disorder. Its *morale* was not that of a kraal, but that of a slum. In a savage kraal a savage knows that he belongs to a community, and lives and acts accordingly; in a slum, the individual neither knows of nor acts in relation to any greater being.

Only very slowly and weakly did Christianity restore that lost sense of community and teach men to rally about the idea of Christendom. The social and economic structure of the Roman Empire was in ruins. That civilization had been a civilization of wealth and political power sustained by the limitation and slavery of the great mass of mankind. It had presented a spectacle of outward splendour and luxurious refinement, but beneath that brave outward show were cruelty, stupidity, and stagnation. It had to break down, it had to be removed before anything better could replace it.

We have already called attention to its intellectual deadness.

For three centuries it had produced neither science nor literature of any importance. It is only where men are to be found neither too rich and powerful to be tempted into extravagant indulgences nor too poor and limited to care for anything beyond the daily need that those disinterested curiosities and serene impulses can have play that give sane philosophy and science and great art to the world; and the plutocracy of Rome had made such a class impossible. When men and women are unlimited and unrestrained, the evidence of history shows clearly that they are all liable to become monsters of self-indulgence; when, on the other hand, they are driven and unhappy, then their impulse is towards immoderate tragical resorts, towards wild revolts or towards the austerities and intensities of religion.

It is not, perhaps, true to say that the world became miserable in these "dark ages" to which we have now come; much nearer the truth is it to say that the violent and vulgar fraud of Roman imperialism, that world of politicians, adventurers, landowners and financiers, collapsed into a sea of misery that was already there. Our histories of these times are very imperfect; there were few places where men could write, and little encouragement to write at all; no one was sure even of the safety of his manuscript or the possibility of its being read. But we know enough to tell that this age was an age not merely of war and robbery, but of famine and pestilence. No effective sanitary organization had yet come into the world, and the migrations of the time must have destroyed whatever hygienic balance had been established. Attila's ravages in North Italy were checked by an outbreak of fever in 452. There was a great epidemic of bubonic plague towards the end of the reign of Justinian (565), which did much to weaken the defence of Italy against the Lombards. In 543 ten thousand people had died in one day in Constantinople (Gibbon says "each day"). Plague was raging in Rome in 590. The seventh century was also a plague-stricken century. The Englishman Bede, one of the few writers of the time, records pestilences in England in 664, 672, 678, and 683, no fewer than four in twenty years! Gibbon couples the Justinian epidemic with the great comet of 531, and with the very frequent and serious earthquakes of that reign. "Many cities of the east were left vacant, and in several districts of Italy the harvest and the vintage withered on the ground." He alleges "a visible decrease of the human species, which has never been made good, in some of the fairest countries of the globe." To many in those dark days it seemed that all learning and all that made life seemly and desirable was perishing.

How far the common lot was unhappier under these conditions of squalor and insecurity than it had been under the grinding order of the imperial system it is impossible to say. There was possibly much local variation, the rule of violent bullies here and a good-tempered freedom there, famine this year and plenty the next. If robbers abounded, tax-gatherers and creditors had disappeared. Such kings as those of the Frankish and Gothic kingdoms were really phantom rulers to most of their so-called subjects; the life of each district went on at a low level, with little trade or travel. Greater or lesser areas of country-side would be dominated by some able person, claiming with more or less justice the title of lord or count or duke from the tradition of the later empire or from the king. Such local nobles would assemble bands of retainers and build themselves strongholds. Often they adapted pre-existing buildings. The Colosseum at Rome, for example, the arena of many great gladiatorial shows, was converted into a fortress, and so was the amphitheatre at Arles. So also was the great tomb of Hadrian at Rome.

In the decaying and now insanitary towns and cities, shrunken bodies of artisans would hold together and serve the needs of the cultivating villages about them by their industry, placing themselves under the protection of some adjacent noble.

## § 10

### *The Salvation of Learning by Christianity.*

A very important share in the social recrystallization that went on in the sixth and seventh centuries after the breakdown and fusion of the fourth and fifth was taken by the Christian monastic orders that were now arising in the Western world.

Monasteries had existed in the world before Christianity. During the period of social unhappiness among the Jews before the time of Jesus of Nazareth, there was a sect of Essenes who lived apart in communities vowed to austere lives of solitude, purity, and self-denial. Buddhism, too, had developed its communities of men who withdrew from the general effort and commerce of the world to lead lives of austerity and contemplation. Indeed, the story of Buddha, as we have told it, shows that such ideas must have prevailed in India long before his time, and that at last he repudiated them. Quite early in the history of Christianity there arose a similar movement away from the competition and heat and stress of the daily life of



men. In Egypt, particularly, great numbers of men and women went out into the desert and there lived solitary lives of prayer and contemplation, living in absolute poverty in caves or under rocks, and subsisting on the chance alms of those whom their holiness impressed. Such lives would signify little to the historian—they are, indeed, of their very nature lives withdrawn from history—were it not for the turn this monastic tendency presently took among the more energetic and practical Europeans.

One of the central figures in the story of the development of monasticism in Europe is Saint Benedict, who lived between 480 and 544. He was born at Spoleto in Italy, and he was a young man of good family and ability. The shadow of the times fell upon him, and, like Buddha, he took to the religious life and at first set no limit to his austerities. Fifty miles from Rome is Subiaco, and there at the end of a gorge of the Anio, beneath a jungle growth of weeds and bushes, rose a deserted palace built by the Emperor Nero, overlooking an artificial lake that had been made in those days of departed prosperity by damming back the waters of the river. Here, with a hair shirt as his chief possession, Benedict took up his quarters in a cave in the high southward-looking cliff that overhangs the stream, in so inaccessible a position that his food had to be lowered to him on a cord by a faithful admirer. Three years he lived here, and his fame spread as Buddha's did about a thousand years before under similar circumstances.

As in the case of Buddha, the story of Benedict has been overlaid by foolish and credulous disciples with a mass of silly stories of miracles and manifestations. But presently we find him no longer engaged in self-torment, but controlling a group of twelve monasteries, the resort of a great number of people. Youths are brought to him to be educated, and the whole character of his life has changed.

From Subiaco he removed farther southward to Monte Cassino, half-way between Rome and Naples, a lonely and beautiful mountain in the midst of a great circle of majestic heights. Here, it is interesting to note that in the sixth century A.D. he found a temple of Apollo and a sacred grove, and the country-side still worshipping at this shrine. His first labours had to be missionary labours, and it was with difficulty that he persuaded the simple pagans to demolish their temple and cut down their grove. The establishment upon Monte Cassino became a famous and powerful centre within the lifetime of its founder. Mixed up with the imbecile inventions of marvel-

loving monks about demons exorcised, disciples walking on the water, and dead children restored to life, we can still detect something of the real spirit of Benedict. Particularly significant are the stories that represent him as discouraging extreme mortification. He sent a damping message to a solitary who had invented a new degree in saintliness by chaining himself to a rock in a narrow cave. "Break thy chain," said Benedict, "for the true servant of God is chained not to rocks by iron, but to righteousness by Christ."

And next to the discouragement of solitary self-torture it is Benedict's distinction that he insisted upon hard work. Through the legends shines the clear indication of the trouble made by his patrician students and disciples who found themselves obliged to toil instead of leading lives of leisurely austerity under the ministrations of the lower-class brethren. A third remarkable thing about Benedict was his political influence. He set himself to reconcile Goths and Italians, and it is clear that Totila, his Gothic king, came to him for counsel and was greatly influenced by him. When Totila retook Naples from the Greeks, the Goths protected the women from insult and treated even the captured soldiers with humanity. When Belisarius, Justinian's general, had taken the same place ten years previously, he had celebrated his triumph by a general massacre.

Now the monastic organization of Benedict was a very great beginning in the Western world. One of his prominent followers was Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), the first monk to become pope (590); he was one of the most capable and energetic of the popes, sending successful missions to the unconverted, and particularly to the Anglo-Saxons. He ruled in Rome like an independent king, organizing armies, making treaties. To his influence is due the imposition of the Benedictine rule upon nearly the whole of Latin monasticism.

Closely associated with these two names in the development of a civilizing monasticism out of the merely egotistic mortifications of the early recluses is that of Cassiodorus (490-585). He was evidently much senior to Pope Gregory, and younger by ten years than Benedict, and, like these two, he belonged to a patrician family, a Syrian family settled in Italy. He had a considerable official career under the Gothic kings; and when, between 545 and 553, the overthrow of those kings and the great pestilence paved the way for the new barbaric rule of the Lombards, he took refuge in a monastic career. He founded a monastery upon his private estates, and set the monks he

gathered to work in quite the Benedictine fashion, though whether his monks actually followed the Benedictine rule that was being formulated about the same time from Monte Cassino we do not know. But there can be no question of his influence upon the development of this great working, teaching, and studying order. It is evident that he was profoundly impressed by the universal decay of education and the possible loss of all learning and of the ancient literature by the world; and from the first he directed his brethren to the task of preserving and restoring these things. He collected ancient MSS. and caused them to be copied. He made sun-dials, water-clocks, and similar apparatus, a little last gleam of experimental science in the gathering darkness. He wrote a history of the Gothic kings, and, what is more significant of his sense of the needs of the time, he produced a series of school books on the liberal arts and a grammar. Probably his influence was even greater than that of Saint Benedict in making monasticism into a powerful instrument for the restoration of social order in the Western world.

The spread of monasteries of the Benedictine order or type in the seventh and eighth centuries was very considerable. Everywhere we find them as centres of light, restoring, maintaining, and raising the standard of cultivation, preserving some sort of elementary education, spreading useful arts, multiplying and storing books, and keeping before the eyes of the world the spectacle and example of a social backbone. For eight centuries thenceforth the European monastic system remained a system of patches and fibres of enlightenment in what might otherwise have been a wholly chaotic world. Closely associated with the Benedictine monasteries were the schools that grew presently into the medieval universities. The schools of the Roman world had been altogether swept away in the general social breakdown. There was a time when very few priests in Britain or Gaul could read the Gospel or their service books. Only gradually was teaching restored to the world. But when it was restored, it came back not as the duty work of a learned slave, but as the religious service of a special class of devoted men.

In the East, also, there was a breach of educational continuity, but there the cause was not so much social disorder as religious intolerance, and the break was by no means so complete. Justinian closed and dispersed the shrunken and intellectually degenerate schools of Athens (529), but he did this very largely in order to destroy a rival to the new school he

was setting up in Constantinople, which was more directly under imperial control.

Since the new Latin learning of the developing western universities had no text-books and literature of its own, it had, in spite of its strong theological bias to the contrary, to depend very largely upon the Latin classics and the Latin translations of the Greek literature. It was obliged to preserve far more of that splendid literature than it had a mind to do.

## § 11

### *Byzantine Art.*

From the transfer of the seat of Empire to Byzantium onward a new type of architecture and a new artistic spirit appears in the world, the Byzantine. It reached a high development under the Emperor Justinian (527-565), of whom we shall tell in the next chapter; it declined and rose to a fresh culmination in the eleventh century. It is still a living artistic tradition in Eastern Europe. It expresses the restraints and impulses of the new official Christianity. Oriental qualities and particularly Egyptian and Persian tendencies are imposed upon the classical tradition. Splendour takes the place of frankness and grace.

One characteristic of its decoration is a peculiar rigidity; all the flexibility of Greek and Roman painting and sculpture has gone, and in its place we have mosaics showing flat, symmetrical, erect figures in full face. Hardly ever is there a profile or any stir of foreshortening. It is as if that natural body which the Greeks idolized had become reprehensible, a thing of fear. So a great and solemn dignity is attained. The huge mosaic figures of God the Creator, the Virgin and Child, the mighty Saints, seem to brood over the spectators from the great domes upon which they are put. Painting and the illumination of books displayed the same glowing stiffness. Sculpture, on the other hand, decayed, and highly coloured lattices of carved ornament displaced modelled forms. Gold, silver, and enamelled work were done with an unprecedented brilliance. Textile fabrics brought from the east were often frankly Persian in design. Presently Islamic influence was to come in, with a still completer suppression of bodily form.

Music also became massive and important. The music of the early Christian centuries was devout and enthusiastic rather than elaborate, and it derived from Semitic rather than from Hellenic sources. Secular music was flatly prohibited. "A Christian maiden," said St. Jerome, "ought not to know