

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROMAN STATE RELIGION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

THE Decian persecution, instead of stamping out Christianity, strengthened it. When it was over the Christian churches, pruned of their weaker members, felt stronger than ever, and pressed forward more earnestly in the path of organization and consolidation. The grouping of churches round definite centres became more conspicuous, the gradations of rank among bishops began to assume a more distinct form, a large number of bishops began to be more than simple pastors of congregations, and the lower classes of office-bearers were multiplied. The "great" Church, in short, assumed more than before the appearance of an organized whole.

The apostle Paul had taught his mission churches the secret of mutual support which might come from building up groups of churches arranged according to the provinces of the Roman Empire; and two churches, in the two chief centres of the Empire, Rome and Alexandria, early manifested a genius for attracting within their respective spheres of influence the weaker churches around them. Both were eminently fitted to be the protectors and guides of their fellow Christian communities. They both occupied commanding positions; they were wealthy and could assist poorer churches; and they were generally models of Christian generosity to their weaker brethren. The early pre-eminence of Alexandria and of Rome can be accounted for in the most natural ways. When the local church came to be

almost identified with the personality of its chief pastor, the pre-eminence of the church was merged in the wide influence—almost rule—of its bishop. Perhaps the chief pastor of the Church in Alexandria was the first to stand forth as the undoubted leader of the great majority of Christians and of all the confederated churches of the vast and wealthy province of Egypt and the surrounding lands. In the fourth century and in the beginning of the fifth Athanasius and his successors wielded a personal power and were called Popes, long before the bishop of Rome had attained equal influence in the West. But if the growth of the influence of Rome was slower everything combined to make it surer, more lasting, and of much wider extent. The Church in Rome belonged to the capital of the civilized world. The Roman Empire, down to the time of Diocletian, was, in legal fiction at any rate, the rule of a town-council over the world, and this naturally suggested the commanding influence of a single kirk-session over all the other churches. This suggestion, never wholly realized, loomed before the Roman Church from a very early time; but its partial realization was much later than our period. What presents itself from the middle of the third century onwards to the time of Constantine is the increasing tendency in the churches to form groups more or less compact round central churches occupying commanding positions in the Empire, and the churches of Rome and Alexandria are distinguished examples of such great centres of groups of churches.

The instrument in effecting this grouping was the council or synod. Nothing could be more natural than that the leaders of Christian churches should meet to talk over the affairs of the communities under their charge, and the earliest known instance of this was the journey of Polycarp to visit Anicetus at Rome in 154 A.D.¹ This, however, could scarcely be called the beginning of councils. They, i.e., the councils, are frequently traced back to the meeting at Jerusalem, when the apostles,

¹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* V. xxiv. 16.

the elders, and the whole Church assembled to consider the question of receiving into "fellowship" the uncircumcised Gentile converts of Paul and Barnabas. But since, so far as we know, more than one hundred years elapsed without the example of the Church in Jerusalem being imitated, it can scarcely be urged that this meeting was regarded as the precedent which was followed. Most historians see the real beginnings of the councils in meetings "of the faithful," held frequently and in many places in Asia Minor, when the difficulties created by the Montanist movement (160-180 A.D.) demanded consultation; and the anticipations of councils may be found in that frequent intercourse by means of letters and special messengers which was such a marked feature of the early life of the Christian communities.

It is not easy to know what these earliest councils were like or who formed their members. They were most probably informal meetings of the pastors, elders, deacons and people, and it is likely that all present were permitted to take part in the conference and have a voice in its decisions. The prevailing troubles were talked over and the best way of meeting them. Whatever resolutions were come to had no legal force, but they naturally led to common action within the communities represented. Eusebius gives a graphic account of these earliest gatherings. An elder who had strong views on the Montanist movement found himself in Ancyra where Montanist sympathizers abounded, and where some active partisans had exerted considerable influence on the people. He and a fellow-elder had conferences with the people in the church, which lasted for days. The whole question was debated with earnestness in presence of the people, who were intensely interested in the matter. At length, after long discussions, the Montanist champions were driven away and their sympathizers silenced. The elders of Ancyra begged the visitor to write down his arguments for their use in case the question should be brought up again. It is added that the faithful in many places had frequent conferences which doubtless

resembled those at Ancyra.¹ The technical words used, "brotherhood," "faithful," imply that all Christians, lay and clerical, took part in the discussion and settlement of the matter discussed. Such were these earliest synods.

We next hear of them in the Easter controversy (about 190 A.D.). Eusebius, writing more than a hundred years later, calls them "Synods and Conferences of bishops," but when he quotes contemporary evidence, such as that of Irenaeus, the technical terms used mean that the opinion of the whole Christian "brotherhood" was expressed. Letters were written in the name of the *παροικία* and of the brethren of Gaul;² and "brethren" or the "brotherhood" is the word which even in Cyprian denoted the laity,³ while *παροικία* in these early days "was neither a parish nor a diocese, but the community of Christians living within a city or a district, regarded in relation to the non-Christian population which surrounded it."⁴

Tertullian, writing about 210 A.D., speaks as if it were a common practice to hold councils regularly throughout Greece, and praises the double advantage that accrued from such meetings—the handling of the deeper questions of Christian life for the common benefit and the bringing vividly before the minds of the people the fact of the universality of Christianity.⁵ Afterwards synods were held in Africa, the earliest recorded being about 220 A.D.,⁶ and gradually they spread over the Christian world.

¹ Compare Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* V. xvi. 4, 10; xix. 2.ⁱ

² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* V. xxiii. 2; xix. 2.

³ Cyprian, *Epistles*, xvi. 2 (ix.); xviii. 1, 2 (xii.); xx. 2 (xiv.); xli. 2 (xliii.).

⁴ Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), p. 190.

⁵ Tertullian, *De Jejuniis*, 13:—"Aguntur praeterea per Graecias illa certis in locis concilia ex universis ecclesiis per quae et altiora quaeque in commune tractantur, et ipsa representatio totius nominis christiani magna veneratione celebratur."

⁶ The synod at which Agrippinus presided and which declared that baptism administered by heretics was void; compare Cyprian, *Epistles*, lxxi. 4 (lxx.); lxxiii. 3 (lxxii.).

These synods or councils were the means whereby the grouping of local churches, great and small, around great centres, was effected. They formed such a very important part of the organization of the Church in the third and fourth centuries that it is important to understand what they were and what they became. Dr. Rudolf Sohm,¹ whose life-work has been the study of ecclesiastical law and whose acquaintance with its manifestations in the early centuries is excelled by none, has collected and pieced together all the information that can be gathered from the allusions of earliest Christian literature to this subject, and has worked out something like the following theory of the origin and primitive meaning of the synod. Briefly stated, it is that a synod, in the second and third centuries, was, to begin with, a means whereby a congregation or local church received in any time of perplexity or anxiety the aid of the Church universal represented by esteemed Christians not belonging to the congregation. He combines, and rightly combines, the accounts of such synods as are mentioned above with the accounts transmitted about the way in which the pastors or bishops were chosen and appointed to their congregations or local churches, for it is plain that one of the uses of a synod in the third century was seen in the choice and appointment of the bishop over his flock.

So far as ecclesiastical regulations go, the need which a small and weak congregation had for assistance from without was first recognized when it was made a regulation that a Christian community of less than twelve families, which was required to organize itself under a bishop, was to seek the help of the nearest "well-established" churches. The weak congregation was ordered to ask for the assistance of three selected men, and with them, as assessors, the choice and appointment of the bishop was to be made. These three men associated with the congregation formed a synod of the earliest and simplest

¹ Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, i. 247-343.

type. The regulation dates from the middle of the second century.¹

When this central thought has once been grasped illustrations are abundant. In the conference at Jerusalem about the admission of uncircumcised converts into the Christian Church, a conference in which delegates from Antioch sought the advice of a "well-established" Church, the congregational meeting of the Jerusalem Church appointed delegates to carry down its advice to the congregation or local church at Antioch and to assist the brethren there in coming to a proper decision upon so important a matter. The real synod was held at Antioch,² and its members were the delegates from Jerusalem and the community at Antioch. At the close of the first century disturbances arose in the Church at Corinth, and the Roman Church, a well-established Church, which may or may not have been appealed to, sent a letter of advice and along with it *three* men selected because of their age, repute and experience.³ These, with the congregation at Corinth, formed a synod at Corinth of the primitive type, and no doubt helped the community there out of their difficulties. So with the early synods in Asia Minor. In the perplexity caused by the Montanist movement the congregation at Ancyra sought the aid of Zoticus Otrenus and others; they, together with the members of the congregation at Ancyra, formed the council there and doubtless aided in the other councils which they wrote about to Avircius Marcellus. Judas and Silas, the deputies from Jerusalem to Antioch, were prophets;⁴ the Roman deputies who went to Corinth, Claudius Ephebus, Valerius Bito and Fortunatus, do not seem to have been office-bearers; Zoticus Otrenus and his fellows were elders. There is no mention of bishops with regard to any of these earliest councils, but it is easily conceivable

¹ *Texte und Untersuchungen*, II. v. 7. 8; found in English in *The Sources of the Apostolic Canons* (1895), p. 8.

² Acts xv. 27, 30-34. ³ Clement, 1 *Epistle*, lxxv. 1.

⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* V. xvi.

⁵ Acts xv. 32.

that when "well-established" churches were asked to send delegates, "select men," to advise and assist, no men could be more suitable than were the bishops of the churches appealed to, and that bishops always formed a portion, if not the whole, of the advising deputies or assessors. The point to be observed however is that in the earliest councils or synods, whether assembled for the purpose of the appointment of a pastor or bishop or for the purpose of giving counsel in times of trouble or anxiety, the main part of the synod is the congregational meeting of the church to which the delegates come. It is also pre-supposed in the earliest times that "well-established" congregations did not need the assistance of a synod in the appointment of their chief pastor, and that everything from selection to ordination could be done within the congregation.

When the third century was reached it soon became the custom, though we do not find any ecclesiastical regulation on the subject until much later,¹ that the choice and ordination of the chief pastor was performed through a synod in *all* local churches, whether "well-established" or not, and that the neighbouring bishops were called in to be assessors to assist the congregational meeting. The desire to make the unity of the whole Church visibly manifest doubtless inspired the demand that a synod, i.e., at least three bishops or pastors from the neighbouring churches should assist at the selection of the chief pastor in a vacant congregation and confirm the choice of the people by their ordination. Still through the whole of the third century the primitive idea prevailed that the congregational meeting

¹ The earliest appearance of this usage as a fixed ecclesiastical law is to be found in the twentieth canon of the council of Arles (314 A.D.):—"De his qui usurpant sibi, quod soli debeant episcopos ordinare, placuit ut nullus hoc sibi praesumat nisi assumptis secum aliis *septem* episcopis. Si tamen non potuerit septem, infra tres non audeat ordinare." This twentieth canon of Arles reappeared in the fourth canon of Nicea (325 A.D.), then almost continually (Council of Laodicea, canon 13; Council of Antioch, canon 19; Council of Toledo [4th] canon 19) until the regulation became incorporated in canon law. It appears in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, iii. 20.

was an integral part of the synod. In the case of a vacant pastorate the new pastor was chosen both by the neighbouring bishops and by the Christian people with the elders at their head, and, even when the selection came to be mainly in the hands of the assembled bishops, the assent of the people was always necessary. The ordination, which, in the course of the third century, was placed exclusively in the hands of the assembled bishops, was the sign of the visible unity of the Church, extending far beyond the bounds of the local church, and made the ordained pastor not only the minister of the Church over which he was ordained, but also a minister of the Church universal.¹

¹ It is impossible to avoid seeing how the mode of appointment and ordination of the chief pastor now practised in the great Presbyterian Church in its many branches corresponds both in essentials and even in some unessentials with the mode in use in the third century as that is described in the letters of Cyprian and in the canons of Hippolytus. It is to be premised that the bishop of the third century was in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the chief pastor of a single congregation and in the hundredth was at the head of a collegiate Church such as we see in the Dutch and in some German branches of the Presbyterian Church; and that bishop and pastor are interchangeable terms (Cyprian, *Epist.* lxvi. 5; compare also Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VII. xxviii. 1, where certain bishops are called "pastors of the communities in Pontus"). We have the following picture common to both. When the office of chief pastor becomes vacant there is a natural anxiety among the people and especially among the elders to secure a good successor. They correspond with neighbouring ministers (Cyprian, *Epist.* lxvii. 5; lv. 8) and receive testimonies in favour of one or of another. When they are ready for an appointment, the ministers of the bounds (the bishops of the province) meet formally in the presence of the elders and of the people of the church (the brotherhood, Cyprian calls them, lxvii. 5); an examination is made of the state of feeling in the congregation, of the unanimity of choice ("the suffrage of the whole brotherhood," Cyprian, lxvii. 5; lix. 6), and objections are called for, if there be any, against the life or doctrine of the person nominated (Cyprian, lxvii. 5); then follows the solemn ordination in presence of the assembled congregation. He who has been chosen kneels before the president or moderator who places his hands on his head; all the ministers present join with the president in laying their hands on the head of the bishop or pastor-elect; the president prays over him the prayer of consecration in which God, Who gave the Holy Spirit in the early times to His apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, is asked to bestow the same Spirit on the

Synods assembled for other purposes than the selection and ordination of chief pastors exhibit the same fact that the congregational meeting was an integral part of the synod. Thus in Carthage, Cyprian insisted that the neighbouring bishops were to be asked to assist at the determination of what was to be done in the case of the lapsed, because it was a matter which concerned "not a few, nor of one church," or it could have been decided in the congregational meeting, "nor of one province, but of the whole world."² It had to be settled by the presence of the African bishops at Carthage and by correspondence with Rome. But in any case the presence of the congregation of Carthage was presupposed, and the African bishops were an addition for the time being to the ordinary meeting of the elders and the brotherhood.²

The same thought is seen working at Rome. The Roman elders (there being no bishop) dealing with the same question of the lapsed, called to their aid some of the bishops who were near them and within reach, and some whom, placed afar off, the heat of persecution had driven from their congregations.³ When the conduct of Novatian was causing great anxiety, Cornelius, the bishop, called together his elders and invited five bishops to assist them in their deliberations. When they had settled what was to be done they called together a great meeting of the congregation, and there the decisive resolution was brought forward and accepted.⁴ So with other Roman synods on the

pastor-elect, who is named in the prayer (*Directory for the Ordination of Ministers*, sec. 8; *Canons of Hippolytus*, iii. 11-19). In both cases the presence of the ministers of the bounds (bishops of the province) implies that the act done within the individual congregation is an act of the Catholic Church and that the chief pastor in the local church is also a minister of the universal Church of Christ.

¹ Cyprian, *Epistle* xix. 2 (xiii.).

² Compare the phrases—"secundum arbitrium vestrum et omnium nostrum commune consilium," *Epist.* xliii. 7 (xxxix.); "Cum episcopis, presbyteris, diaconis, confessoribus pariter ac stantibus laicis," *Epist.* lv. 5 (li.); and so on in many passages. But compare above, p. 316 n.

³ Cyprian, *Epistle* xxx. 8 (xxx.). ⁴ Cyprian, *Epistle* xlix. 2 (xlv.).

same questions; the elders, deacons and the congregation at Rome were always present, and the whole meeting was one of the Roman congregation with several (once sixty) bishops added to assist them in their deliberations.¹ The same conception of the synod existed in the East. The celebrated synod held at Bostra in Arabia (244 A.D.) at which a large number of bishops were present, and where Origen held a distinguished place is a case in point. The question was the orthodoxy of the pastor of Bostra, Beryllus by name. The discussions, in the course of which Beryllus renounced his errors, took place ἐπὶ τῆς παροικίας,² from which we may conclude that the synod included the congregational meeting, for *paroikia* always means in early ecclesiastical usage the brotherhood or congregation, and not parish or diocese in the modern sense of these terms. Indications of the same usage are to be found in the account of the celebrated synods held at Antioch about Paul of Samosata, the pastor of the church there. A great number of bishops, elders and deacons were present, and took part in the discussions which must have included the congregational meeting, as the bishop was deposed, and Domnus was ordained in his place at the last Synod. Here we have the interesting fact that the chief discussion was between Malchion, one of the elders of the Church at Antioch, and his bishop, and that the assembled bishops who came from a distance took the side of the elder against his pastor. The whole aspect of the matter presents the appearance of a congregational meeting enlarged by the presence of a number of bishops from without; the theological differences between the pastor and the elder, which had no doubt been frequently discussed before a smaller audience, were brought before the assembled bishops and congregation. Malchion, who led the charge against his pastor, signed the decisions of the synod along with others.³

¹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* VI. xliii. 2. ² *Ibid.* VI. xxxiii. 3.

³ The Synods held about Paul of Samosata are described in Eusebius *Hist. Eccles.* VII. xxvii.-xxx.). The case is a curious one. Complaints

Dr. Sohm completes his theory by these additional suggestions. He holds that the power of a synod was always proportional to the power of the local meeting it incorporated. If the bishops came to the assistance of the body of elders in a church, their decision had only the force of a regulation issued by a session of elders. It had to be submitted to the congregational meeting before it became authoritative. If, on the other hand, the meeting of bishops incorporated a congregational meeting, then its decisions were authoritative at once, for the final decision always lay with the congregational meeting.¹ He also believes that any synod, even if only the minimum of three bishops was present with the congregation, was believed to represent and ideally was the whole Catholic Church of Christ,² taking into its embrace the congregation or local church which required aid, and that in

against his orthodoxy, and many other things, seem to have been brought forward by members of his congregation, or at least by a section of them headed by Malchion, one of the elders and the head of a high school in Antioch. It was an instance of an orthodox elder and a portion of the congregation accusing their pastor of heresy. These men called to their aid a number of bishops. These bishops assembled at Antioch, apparently in Paul's church, and Paul presided at the meetings. At the first synod no conclusion was come to; so at the second; at the third, Paul was deposed and Domnus was ordained in his place (probably in 268 A.D.). At this third synod the chief discussion was between Paul and his elder, Malchion; their speeches were taken down in shorthand, and copies were in existence in the sixth century. The result of the decision of the synod was a division in the congregation at Antioch, the larger portion evidently siding with their pastor Paul, who retained possession of the Church buildings and of all the property. It is more than likely that political feeling lay behind this prosecution. The Romans, under the Emperor Aurelian, wished to gain possession of Antioch, which then belonged to Queen Zenobia. There was a Roman party in Antioch; and Paul was a resolute partizan of Zenobia. Six years later, when the queen was conquered by Aurelian, and Antioch came within the Roman Empire, the Church property was taken from Paul and given to the portion of the congregation which had opposed him. As all Christians were still outlaws in the eyes of Roman law, it is scarcely probable that this decision followed from the supposed heresy of Paul. It is more easy to believe that it was meant to be a punishment dealt to the anti-Roman faction. Compare Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Eng. Trans., iii. 38 f.

¹ Cyprian, *Epistle* xlix. 2 (xlv). ² Tertullian, *De Jejunio*, 13.

consequence its decisions were believed to express the utterances of the Spirit of God promised to the Church of Christ.

We may accept or reject Dr. Sohm's interesting theory. It appears to me to be too ideal to be an exact representation of all the facts of the case. But it seems to be made plain from the evidence he marshals, that there was a close connexion between the congregational meeting and the synods which played such an important part in the federation of the churches in the third and following centuries. The congregational meeting was the primitive type of the later synod. These congregational meetings had taken an important place in the churches from the beginning.¹ We have seen how they formed the centre and source of authority in the apostolic period; how they had the supreme power in their hands in the churches to which Ignatius sent his letters, and how even Cyprian deferred to them.² They were the authority in the churches in their primitive democratic stage.

If left to itself the democratic genius of Christianity might have evolved an organization which, starting from the unit of the congregational meeting, and rising through a series of synods with widening areas of jurisdiction, might have culminated in a really representative oecumenical council or synod which would have given a visible unity of organization to the whole Christian Church, and at the same time would have preserved its primitive democratic organization.

Cyprian's unscriptural and non-primitive conception of the pastor or bishop as an autocrat, claiming a personal obedience so entire that any act of disobedience was to be punished by spiritual death or expulsion from the Church, contradicted the democratic ideal which the congregational meeting embodied. His principle that the bishop was an autocrat deriving his power from God directly by a species of divine right which owed nothing to the power of the Spirit working in and through the Christian people, might be based on a misapplication of Old Testament

¹ Compare above, p. 54 ff.

² Compare above, p. 200 f.

texts and on an intrusion of the Old Testament priesthood into the New Testament Church, but in reality it was the introduction into the Christian Church of the Roman ideas of authority and imperial rule. These early centuries were times of imperial government, and democratic rule, save within limited areas and subject to autocratic checks, was a thing unknown. It is true that the Roman method of government admitted a great deal of local self-government of various kinds, but these popular assemblies had strictly limited spheres of action and had no control over the imperial officers who practically ruled the provinces in the name of the emperor or of the senate.¹ Cyprian's conception of the autocracy of the bishop accorded so well with the atmosphere of imperialist rule in which the Church of the third century lived that it could scarcely avoid being largely adopted. In spite of Cyprian's own limitation of the autocratic idea to the office of bishop it suggested another form of organization beginning with the bishop, rising through metropolitans, etc., to an episcopus episcoporum, who in that age could be none other than the bishop of the Church in the capital of the empire. No sooner had Cyprian's conception of the autocracy of the bishop of the local church been accepted than the path was clearly marked for an ascending scale of autocrats up to the bishop of Rome, and the appellation of Pontifex Maximus sarcastically employed by Tertullian became the legitimate title of the head of the Church in the capital city.

Thus there were two ideals of organization within the Christian churches. On the one hand, an autocratic organization which starting with the bishop as the autocrat of the individual Christian community ascended through metropolitans to the Pope; and, on the other, that which, starting from the congregational

¹ Marquardt, *Roemische Staatsverwaltung*, i. pp. 503-16, gives the details known about the provincial assemblies under the Imperial Government; their powers (507-9); the provinces where they existed (509-16) and the powers of the imperial officials (517 ff.). A good deal of information on the subject is also to be found in Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire*.

meeting, ascended through provincial councils of varying importance to an oecumenical council of the whole Church. These two ideals, mutually antagonistic as they were, subsisted side by side within the Christian Church in the end of the third and continued to do so in the succeeding six or seven centuries. Neither was powerful enough to overcome the other. The imperialist conception proved the stronger in the West, as was natural, and the other was the more powerful in the East, but neither in the East nor in the West was the one able to vanquish the other.

In the end of the third century and onwards councils or synods became a regular part of the organization of the whole Church, and they became more and more meetings of bishops only, at which presbyters and deacons with the people of the church of the town where the council met were present but almost entirely as spectators. It was natural that these councils should meet in the provincial capitals, for the roads and the imperial postal system by which travellers could journey all converged towards those towns which were the seats of the Roman provincial administration. Conferences require chairmen, and various usages obtained with reference to the natural chairman. Frequently the oldest bishop was made the president of the assembly, and this continued to be the practice for a long time in many parts of the empire. But gradually it became the custom to place in the chair the head of the Christian community of the town in which the council met. The bishops of these towns then began to be called *metropolitans*, but the title was for a long time merely one of courtesy only, and did not carry with it any ecclesiastical rank with specific authority attached to it. In the fourth century these *metropolitans* were entrusted with the right to call the provincial councils and even with some superintendence over the election and ordination of the bishops of the province. Of course the man made the office, and metropolitans who had great personal gifts and force of character insensibly gave their churches and their successors an influence which lasted. In this growth of the metropolitan organization we can detect

a disposition to be guided by the civil organization of the empire.¹

The second third of the third century also witnessed changes in the organization of the individual local churches. The tendency was for the bishop to become more than the pastor of a single congregation. It worked both in country districts and in towns. Perhaps one of the chief causes of this was that it had become the custom to require from the chief pastors the devotion of their whole time to their ecclesiastical duties, and this implied that the Church had to provide the means of livelihood at least for the bishops.

We have already seen that whenever a small group of Christians found themselves together, even when they were fewer than twelve families, they were ordered to constitute themselves into a Christian Church with an organization of bishop, elders, deacons, reader and "widows."² The smallest Christian community was in this way an independent church. But this was possible only so long as the bishop did not depend for his living on a stipend coming from the congregation. A paid pastorate altered matters. The alteration took two forms, both of which can be seen working among churches in the mission field.

A very common modern form is to appoint one man the pastor of several village churches among which he itinerates, while one or more elders and deacons are stationed in the little Christian village communities to watch over the spiritual interests of the people. Inscriptions seem to prove that this form existed in the uplands of Batanea among the small and scattered villages there, and it probably existed in other places.³

When a small group of villagers had been won to Christianity through the evangelizing work of a congregation in the neigh-

¹ Compare Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), pp. 169, 170; also articles on *Metropolitan*, *Primate*, and *Patriarchate* in the *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*.

² *Texte und Untersuchungen*, II. v. pp. 7-24; *The Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, pp. 7-27.

³ Hatch, *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, 194.

bouring town, there was often a great unwillingness to sever the connexion between them and the mother Church. We learn from Justin Martyr¹ that the Christians came in from the country to attend the services of the town congregation. It was always held that a bishop could delegate his special function pertaining to public worship to his elders or even to his deacons. This principle could easily be applied to the outlying mission districts of a congregation, and the little mission congregations became *filials* or daughters of the town congregation, and were served by the subordinate office-bearers of the mother Church. Thus the bishop became the pastor in several congregations and multiplied himself through his elders who became his delegates in the pastoral office. In doing this the Church followed civil procedure, for rural authorities under Roman rule were frequently placed under the nearest municipality. But we have abundant evidence that for many a century multitudes of the small rural congregations remained independent churches, under bishops who were often enough uneducated peasants.²

The same principle worked in towns also, and perhaps more strongly there. The bishop was held to be the head of the Christian community in one place, whatever its size might be. He was the pastor; he baptized; he presided at the Holy Supper; he admitted catechumens to the full communion of the brotherhood. By the middle of the third century the work, in most large towns, was more than one man could overtake. Take the case of Rome. We have no record of the number of the Christian community, but we know that at the close of the Decian persecution, i.e., a little after the middle of the third century, the number of widows, sick and poor cared for by the Church was more than fifteen hundred, and that the bishop had to assist him forty-six elders, fourteen deacons and sub-deacons, with ninety-two men in what are called minor orders—acolytes,

¹ Justin Martyr, *Apology*, i. 67:—"On the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together to one place."

² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* VI. xliii. 8.

exorcists, readers, and door-keepers.¹ At the close of the century and during the Diocletian persecution there were over forty Christian basilicas, or separate Christian congregations in Rome itself.² In Alexandria the number of Christians could not have been much fewer. It is evident that one man could not fulfil the pastoral duties for such a multitude. At first the idea of the unity of the pastorate was strictly preserved. For example, it was for long the custom in Rome that the bishop consecrated the communion elements in one church, and that the consecrated elements were carried to the other congregations whether they met in churches or in private houses, to be distributed to the communicants by the elders there in charge.³ The bishop was the one pastor in every congregation; the elders and the deacons belonged to the whole local Christian community; they served all the congregations and were not attached to any one; the organization was collegiate as we see it existing at present in the Dutch Presbyterian Church. All communities, however, were not so conservative as that of Rome. In Alexandria, for example, while the Christians who lived in the outlying suburbs were at first reckoned to be members of the bishop's congregation and had no separate constitution for the churches in which they met, this was found to be inconvenient. Special presbyters were set over the outlying congregations, and thus something like a parish system under the bishop was begun. But the original pastoral status of the bishop was always preserved by one portion of the pastoral duties being invariably retained in his hands—the admission of the catechumens to the full communion of the Church. This is still

¹ Compare the letter of Cornelius, bishop of Rome, to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* VI. xliii. 11.

² Optatus of Milevis, *De Schismate Donatistarum*, ii. 4 (Vienna ed. [1893], p. 39).

³ This custom existed in the time of Innocent the First (450 A.D.) and is described by him in a letter he wrote to Decentius, bishop of Eugubium in Umbria; compare the fifth section. The custom preserved the conjunction of ideas strongly insisted upon by Cyprian between the one sacrament and the one bishop.

retained in the modern episcopal system, and the fact that the bishops alone are entitled to receive the young communicants at confirmation—for confirmation is simply the reception of young communicants—remains to witness to the original simple pastoral functions of the primitive bishops.

The middle of the third century also was the time when the ministry became much more complicated so far as its subordinate officials were concerned. Sub-deacons, exorcists, readers, acolytes, doorkeepers, and even grave-diggers, were added to that body of men who were called the clergy.

Before the close of the third century the associated churches, grouped now around recognized centres, had developed a somewhat elaborate organization both in their relations to each other and in the arrangement of the ministry within the individual local churches. Ecclesiastical archaeologists are disposed to recognize the influence of the political organization of the Roman Empire in much of this elaboration.¹ This is a perfectly natural explanation and there is abundant evidence to confirm it. Yet it may be that there was something more specific on which the leaders of the Christian churches had their eyes fixed. If it should ever become possible for the associated churches to come to terms with the empire, as was done in the fourth century, there was an organization which the Christian Church would necessarily displace. This was the great provincial organization for providing for the due exercise of the official religion of the empire. No account of the Church and its ministry during the early centuries can avoid some reference to that great Pagan State Church (if the term may be used), as it existed towards the close of the third century when the associated Christian churches were rapidly approaching the

¹ This has been done with great erudition and much original investigation by the late Dr. Hatch. The results of his work are to be found in his Bampton Lectures, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), and in many of his articles in the *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* on *Orders, Ordination, Primate, Patriarchate*.

attainment of their end, and were about to give their religion to the Roman Empire.

The subject is a difficult one. Information has to be sought for in inscriptions on tombs, on public buildings, on coins and in fast fading frescoes on the walls of houses in Pompeii. It is full of details which are only partially known, and yet enough has been preserved to enable us to learn something about it as a whole.¹

It is the universal testimony of historians that religion had lost most of its power during the later years of the Republic. The temples were in ruins and the practices of religion were

¹ Among the more important books and articles on the subject of the imperial cult the following may be named. They all discuss the subject as a whole or describe some important parts. G. Boissier, *La Religion Romaine d'Auguste aux Antonins* (1878), 2 vols.; Otto Hirschfeld, *Zur Geschichte des römischen Kaisercultus* in the *Sitzungsberichte d. k. pr. Akademie d. Wissensch.*, Berlin (1888), pp. 833 ff.; also his *I Sacerdoti municipali nell' Africa* in the *Annali dell' Istituto di corrispondenza archaeologica* for 1866, pp. 22-77; V. Dury, *Formation d'une Religion officielle dans l'Empire Romaine* in the *Comptes rendus of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, vol. xiv. (1880), pp. 328 ff.; E. Desjardins, *Le Culte des Divi et le Culte de Rome et d'Auguste* in the *Revue de Philologie*, vol. iii. (1879), pp. 33 ff. R. Mowat, *La Domus divina et les Divi* in the *Bull. epigr. de la Gaule*, vol. v. (1885), pp. 221 ff., 308 ff., and vi. (1886), pp. 31 ff., 137 ff., 272 ff.; P. Giraud, *Les Assemblées provinciales sous l'Empire Romaine* (1890); Lebegue, *L'Inscription de l'ara Narbonensis* in the *Revue Archéologique* (1892), vol. xliii. new series, pp. 76-86, 176-84; M. Krascheninikoff, in the *Philologus* (1894), vol. liii. (new series, vol. vii.), pp. 147 ff.; E. Beurlier, *Le Culte Impériale, son histoire et son organisation depuis Auguste jusqu'à Justinien* (1891) (by far the most complete treatise on the subject). *Handbuch der roemischen Alterthümer* by Mommsen and Marquardt; *Roemische Staatsverwaltung* by Marquardt, 2nd ed. i. 197 f.: iii. 71 ff., 463 ff.; *Roemisches Staatsrecht* by Mommsen, ii. 752 ff.; G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Roemer* (1902), pp. 71 ff., 82 f., 284 f., 488 ff. (this gives the most succinct account); Beaudouin, *Le Culte des Empereurs* (1891). A very full account of the literature on the subject will be found in Roscher's *Lexikon*, ii. 901 ff. by Drexler. I have quoted only the books known to me personally. A number of references to the cult of the emperors will be found in Ramsay's *The Church in the Roman Empire* (1893), pp. 133, 191, 250, 275, 249, 304, 323 n., 324, 333, 336 n., 354, 373, 396, 398, 465 f., and in Mau's *Pompeii, its Life and Art* (1899), pp. 14, 61, 89 f., 98, 100, 103 f., 106 f., 111 f., 122 ff., 264 ff.

generally neglected. When the wars which followed the death of Julius Caesar had given the young Octavius the heritage of his mighty uncle, and that master of statecraft set himself to the task of restoring an empire exhausted by long years of civil war, he recognized that a people without a religious faith is in a state of hopeless decadence. One of his earliest tasks was to attempt to revive the ancient religious rites of the Roman people, and contemporary records tell what patience and wealth he lavished on the work. His political needs mingled largely in this successful attempt to revive the religious instincts of his subjects. He felt the need for some common sentiment to bind together the provinces and peoples of his unwieldy Empire. A state which acknowledged no limits of race and of nationality required something more than the will of the emperor and the dread of his legions to unite it into a harmonious whole. He saw that religion might be the moral cement he sought, but the religion needed to be as universal as the empire. To select one of the myriad cults which a manifold paganism presented would have availed him nothing. He turned instinctively to that outburst of popular devotion which had proclaimed his uncle a god in his lifetime, and which, after his death, had demanded that the mighty Julius should be proclaimed as a god with temples reared in his honour, sacrifices offered, and a special priesthood instituted to the new divinity.¹ Out of this popular deification of Julius Caesar there came, fostered by the guiding hand of Octavius, now called Augustus, a universal worship of the Emperor of Rome which took a three-fold shape. In almost every part of the empire, Rome alone excepted, the Emperor Augustus was worshipped as a god during his life-

¹ Julius Caesar was added to the gods of Rome by a decree of the senate and people in 42 B.C.:—*Genio Deivi Iuli, parentis patriae, quem senatus populusque Romanus in deorum numerum rettulit*; cf. Mommsen, *Staatsrecht*, ii. 733. His temple or *aedes Divi Iulii* in *Foro* was consecrated in 29 B.C., and a special *flamen* was appointed for the service of the new divinity. But Julius Caesar was never reckoned as the first of the *Divi Imperatores*; they began with Augustus.

time; there was the institution of the *Divi*, where the dead emperors and some near relations of the imperial house, wives, fathers, uncles and brothers were, by solemn decree of the senate, elevated to the rank of gods of the state and were voted temples, priests, and sacrifices; lastly there was the worship of *Rome and Augustus*, and Augustus in this instance was not so much the name of a particular man as the title of the supreme ruler—a title which itself implied that the prince was something more than man.¹

The worship of the emperor during his lifetime was never part of the state religion of the Roman Empire, but it was a cult largely practised. Private persons, societies, even communities without sanction from the government built temples, consecrated chapels and instituted priesthoods in honour of Augustus while he was alive.² This was not always done openly; it was some time veiled by affecting to recognize the living emperor as embodied in one of the ancient gods. Thus the *ministri Mercurii Maiae* in Pompeii became first the *ministri Augusti Mercurii Maiae*, and then simply the *ministri Augusti*, and Livia was honoured as Ceres, Vesta and Rhea. But this worship of the living rulers was never part of the state religion.

The state religion was, to begin with, the worship of the *Divus Julius* along with that of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, *Apollo*, *Vesta* and *Mars Ultor*, in Rome; the worship of *Rome and Divus Julius* for Roman citizens in the provinces, and the worship of *Rome and Augustus* for provincials.

The beginning of this new state religion for the provinces

¹ "Imperator cum Augusti nomen accepit, tanquam praesenti et corporali Deo, fidelis est praestanda devotio."

Mommsen says that the word *augustus*, like the Greek *σεβαστός*, had always a religious colouring (worshipful); that it implied power so great as to be revered; that the title was not shared by any one during the lifetime of the Emperor; that Tiberius refused at first to accept it; and that it was at last imposed upon him by a special decree of the senate (*Staatsrecht*, ii. 812).

² "Cultores Augusti, qui per omnes domos in modum collegiorum habebantur," Tacitus, *Annals*, i. 73.

was perhaps the decree of Augustus of date 29 B.C., when, in reply to memorials from the communities of Bithynia and of Asia, he issued an order that the provincials were to worship *Rome and Augustus*, and the Roman inhabitants of these provinces *Rome and the Divus Julius*.¹ The new cult of *Rome and Augustus* in Spain dates from 26 B.C.; this worship became the state religion in Roman Gaul from 12 B.C., and it was organized in Roman Africa on the same lines as in Gaul. Thus for the earlier portion of the reign of the first emperor the state religion in the provinces for all but Roman citizens was the worship of *Rome and Augustus*.²

It is a question whether this worship of *Rome and Augustus* did not remain the permanent legal form which the imperial cult took in the provinces. Authorities differ and the evidence is not clear enough to admit of a decided answer.³ Upon the whole the balance of evidence seems to be that even during the lifetime of the first emperor the official religion became the

¹ Compare *Dio Cassius*, li. 20; *Tacitus, Annals*, iv. 37; *Suetonius, Augustus*, 52.

² *Roma* was never a goddess for the Roman people. The beginnings of the deification of the city of Rome came from the East and were originally symbolic of the trust placed in the Roman State by cities and provinces in the East which had entered into treaties with the great western power and had experienced its protection. The earliest instance known is that of Smyrna, which in 195 B.C. built a temple to *Roma* the protecting deity of the city; the cult spread rapidly; even in Athens there was a temple to *Dea Roma*. In the East it was also the custom to associate as a divinity along with the city great Roman generals whose successes in arms had benefited the towns which created them objects of worship. Augustus had such precedents for *Rome and Augustus* as the earlier *Rome and Flaminus*. (*Plutarch, Flaminus*, 16.)

³ Beaudouin (*Le Culte des Empereurs*) insists that from first to last the official religion, recognized in legal documents as the State religion in the provinces, was not that of the *Divi Imperatores* but always that of *Rome and Augustus*. This is scarcely probable; still before coming to an accurate conclusion the inscriptions found in every province would need to be gone over and analysed province by province; this has been done so far as I know for two provinces only—that of Narbonne by M. Beaudouin himself and that of Africa by Prof. Otto Hirschfeld.

worship of *Augustus* simply (*Rome* being left out) and *Augustus*¹ being taken to mean, not the person of the emperor but the symbol of the deification of the Roman state personified in its ruler. After the death of the first emperor a new development took place. Augustus, who during his lifetime had never allowed himself to be called *Divus*, but only *Filius Divi Julii*, was by solemn decree of the senate on September, 17, 14 A.D. (he had died at Nola on the 19th of August preceding) awarded divine honours, and took rank among the superior gods of Rome.² He was the first of a long line of *Divi Imperatores*, and the state religion assumed the form it continued to maintain in strict legal conception till the time of Diocletian and practically till the conversion of Constantine and the changes which followed that important event.

So far as Rome itself was concerned these *Divi Imperatores*, i.e., the series of emperors who were consecrated after death³ by decree of the senate, along with the *Genius*⁴ of the reigning

¹ *Suetonius* says distinctly:—"Templa quamvis sciret etiam proconsulibus decerni solere; in nulla tamen provincia nisi communi suo Romaeque nomine recepit" (*Augustus*, 52). Yet the evidence from inscriptions would leave us to infer that the cult of Augustus was instituted in many provinces without any mention of *Roma*.

² "D.XV. (Kal. Oct.) nefastus prior ludi in circo feriae ex senatus-consulto quod eo die divo Augusto honores caelestes a senatu decreti; Sex. Appuleio, Sex. Pompeio cos."

³ Some emperors were never consecrated *Divi*; of the eleven emperors from Augustus to Nerva only four—Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian and Titus—were deified, but after Nerva the consecration of the emperor after death became the rule which had very few exceptions. On the other hand as the years passed the consecration of members of the imperial family, which was common in the early years of the empire, almost ceased. Livia was made *Augusta* on the death of her husband Augustus and *Diva* after her own death. Neither Caligula nor Nero was deified, but Drusilla, the sister of Caligula, and Claudia and Poppea the daughter and wife of Nero became *Divae*. The daughter of Titus, the father, sister, wife of Trajan, the wife and mother-in-law of Hadrian and the wives of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius were consecrated.

⁴ To worship the genius of the emperor was not to worship the living man; the genius of a man was his spiritual and divine part; the genius of anything was its ideal reality which lasted while the external form

emperor, took their place among the greater gods of Rome, equal if not superior to them. They formed a compact group of new divinities. Their names appeared in the official oath. In republican days officials had been sworn in by a solemn oath to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and to the Penates of Rome; the oath was now changed (to take an example from the time of Domitian) to *Per Jovem et divom Augustum et divom Claudium et divom Vespasianum Augustum et divom Titum Augustum et genium imperatoris caesaris Domitiani Augusti deosque Penates*. Their names appeared among those of the deities to whom the great sin-offering made by the Arval Brethren was offered. At the installation of Nero the Arvales offered to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, to Juno, to Minerva, to Felicitas and "genio ipsius (Nero), Divo Augusto, Divae Augustae (Livia), Divo Claudio."

In the provinces, where the gods of the people were not the Roman deities, these *Divi Imperatores* were the gods of the state and, along with the Genius of the reigning emperor, were the divinities which were everywhere worshipped. In the eastern provinces, where the people had been habituated to the worship of the reigning sovereign, the cult of the *Divi* seems to have been inextricably mixed with the worship of the reigning emperor; but in the west the two seem to have been clearly distinguishable, and the worship of the *Divi* was looked upon as the state religion (as it was *legally* everywhere), and it was left to private persons and to cities to worship the emperor while yet living.

Christianity has so impregnated European thought that most modern historians, until within recent years, were inclined to regard all this worship of the rulers of the Roman Empire as merely a form of slavish adulation. We forget that when polytheism is the religious atmosphere in which thought lives, there is no such gulf between man and God as Christianity has

changed. When the Republic became a monarchy the *genius* of the emperor naturally took the place of the *genius* of the Roman people

made us know. If this worship of the *Divi Imperatores* be tested by any standard that can be applied to a polytheistic religion, it will be found to be as real a religion, any one of the multitudinous cults that paganism has produced. The household shrines of Pompeii attest how deeply it entered into the private life of the Italian people. There gathered round it the worship of the old heroes of the fatherland, the all-pervading ancestor-worship, the feelings of awe, reverence and thanksgiving which came from the contemplation of a mighty and for the most part beneficent power.

It had long been the custom in the East to worship the head of the state, and this worship had been adopted by the Greeks as soon as they became an Asiatic power. Long before Augustus laid the foundation of his new state religion it had been foreshadowed in Greece and in Asia Minor.¹ The worship of the genius of Rome personified in the *Divi Imperatores* and in the *Genius* of the reigning emperor, took root almost at once and spread amazingly. The worship of the personal reigning sovereign needed to be restrained rather than encouraged. Everywhere we find that the desire of the people to adopt the new cult went in advance of the attempts to spread and sustain it. All over the empire from centre to remote circumference this imperial cult was received with enthusiasm. It did not displace the ordinary religions in which the peoples had seen brought up. There was no need for that in polytheism. It was added to the religions with which they were familiar, and this everywhere. Thus it became the one *universal* religion

¹ Otto Hirschfeld, founding on this, declares that the Imperial cult was neither a development of Roman customs and institutions nor an original creation in the new world of imperialism; it was appropriated entirely from the oriental Greeks. This it seems to me is only partially true. The worship of the ancient kings, Picus, Faunus, etc., was thoroughly Roman; and there was but a step between it and the worship of the *Divi Imperatores*. The worship of ancestors was thoroughly Roman; and it was a stepping stone to the worship of the deceased *pater patriae*. In India at present many a government official whose rule has been beneficial in a remarkable degree is worshipped as a god.

for the whole empire and took its place as the ruling cult, the religion of the great Roman state. Subjects were free to practise any religion which was national; but no one, without being liable to charge of treason, might neglect to pay religious homage to the *Genius* of the emperor and to the *Divi Imperatores*.

Only Jews and Christians refused to bend before the new divinities. It was this imperial state religion which confronted Christian confessors everywhere; refusal to sacrifice to the emperor (either the living ruler in the East, or the *Divi* and the *Genius* in the West) was the supreme test to which Christians were subjected, and which produced martyrdoms; Pergamos, the centre of the imperial cult for its district, is called in the Apocalypse the place "where Satan's throne is."

This imperial cult required priests to preside over the worship rendered to the imperial divinities. Its great officials were curiously interwoven with many of the ancient priestly colleges at Rome. It gave rise to special colleges of sacred men who belonged exclusively to the new cult, and it had priests of its own all over the empire. The priests of the imperial cult in Rome would demand a special description applying only to themselves, but for our immediate purpose the organization in the capital may be neglected. What concerns our present enquiry is the position and rank of the priests of the cult in the provinces. It should also be remembered that the organization of this special priesthood differed somewhat in the East from what it was in the West; and this difference may be very generally described by saying that in the West the worship of the *Divi Imperatores* was such a new thing that it required a new priesthood, while in the East the new imperial cult seems to have been largely engrafted upon the worship of the local divinities, which necessarily implied a great variety of organization which space does not permit us to describe.

These explanations premised, it may be said that a network of imperial priesthoods was spread over the whole Roman Empire throughout all its provinces and in all its chief municipalities,

and that amidst the myriad cults which the paganism of the times produced, there was this one great pagan state religion in which all shared and to which all gave honour, and whose priesthood stood conspicuously forward as the guardians of the worship of the imperial divinities.

This priesthood was of two kinds—the priests who were the representatives of the state religion for a whole province, and the priests who were at the head of the religious administration for the municipalities. The priests of the imperial cult for the provinces were great personages. They were directly responsible to the emperor alone who, as Pontifex Maximus, was the supreme religious as well as the supreme civil head of the empire. It is difficult to say whether they occupied an hierarchical position of authority over the priests at the head of the imperial cult in the municipalities during the first two and a half centuries. The probability seems to be that they may have done so in the West from the beginning, but not in the East. From the last quarter of the third century, however, when a great reorganization was introduced, the priests who superintended the imperial worship in every province were made the overseers of all the priests of the cult within the province, and not only so, but they had the oversight of the priests of every pagan cult whatsoever who were within the province. There was thus from the beginning a pagan hierarchy with its Pontifex Maximus in Rome, its metropolitans at the head of every province, and the municipal flamens at the head of the organization in the municipalities; and from the last quarter of the third century these pagan metropolitans had the strict supervision everywhere of the whole religious administration within their provinces.

These pagan priests of the imperial cult who presided over the provinces were functionaries of very high rank. They were chosen from among the wealthiest and most illustrious of the provincials, and were men who for the most part had held high office in the civil sphere. Great privileges were accorded to them. They presided over the provincial assemblies which the

imperial government had created in every province. They had the right of audience of the emperors when they went to Rome on the business of the province. They wore a distinctive dress—a robe with a band of purple; they were preceded by lictors; they had special seats at all public spectacles. They claimed to rank next in precedence to the civil head of the province, who directly represented the emperor.

The cult in the municipalities was more varied, but the priest at its head had a very honourable position. He was a man who had usually filled the highest municipal offices, and he was *ex officio* a member of the municipal council. Everywhere in province and in municipality the office carried with it high civil rank and rights of precedence.

This was the religion and these were the priests that the Christian Church, or rather the associated churches, had to supplant ere it could come to terms with the state and become the acknowledged religion of the empire. Christianity could not become the religion of the empire until this great state religion had been overthrown and its priests abolished or their offices secularized. The question arises—Did the churches seek to adapt themselves to the form and organization of this great imperial religious system in such a way that when the hour of Christian triumph came the Christian leaders could at once step into the position of those who held the leading places in it and who formed that great pagan hierarchy?

The answer seems to be that in two marked particulars at least the Christian churches did copy the great pagan hierarchy. They did so in the distinction introduced into the ranks of bishops by the institution of metropolitans and grades of bishops, and they did so also in the multiplication of the lower orders of clergy on the model of the organization of the state temple service.

M. Desjardins, the learned author of the *Geographie Historique et Administrative de la Gaule Romaine*,¹ has investigated carefully

¹ Desjardins, *Geographie Historique et Administrative de la Gaule Romaine*, iii. 417, 418.

the geographical organization of the imperial cult for ancient France, and has compared it with the Christian ecclesiastical administration which succeeded it after the conversion of Constantine. The result he has come to is, that the pagan organization was everywhere the forerunner of the Christian. His conclusion is that, almost without exception, every city which had a *flamen* to superintend the worship of *Rome and Augustus* or of the *Genius* of the reigning emperor and of the *Divi Imperatores*, became the seat of a Christian bishopric when diocesan episcopacy emerged—and the diocesan system began in Gaul—and every city which had a provincial priest of the imperial cult became the seat of a metropolitan archbishop. The Christian hierarchy, modelled on the earlier pagan hierarchy, stepped into its place. When the Bishop of Rome claimed to be the *Pontifex Maximus* and to rule the Christian metropolitans, and when the metropolitans claimed rights over the bishops of their provinces, and when these claims were largely acceded to, then the pagan hierarchy of the imperial pagan worship was christened and became the framework of the visible unity of the Church of Christ.

The same result appears when the other principle of association—that of councils—is investigated. M. Paul Monceaux, in his thesis *De Communi Asiae Provinciae*,¹ has shown how the councils of the Church established themselves in the cities where the old assemblies of pagan times had met under the presidency of the provincial priests of the imperial cult, and how these Christian councils had frequently the same number of members as attended the pagan assemblies. The organization of the imperial cult or the Roman pagan state religion was copied, to be supplanted, by the Christian churches.

The investigations which have led to these results have not been prosecuted with regard to every province of the empire and there is still room for a great deal of archaeological research but where the subject has been examined the results show the

¹ Monceaux, *De Communi Asiae Provinciae*, pp. 117 ff.

close resemblance between the pagan and the succeeding Christian organization. The Abbé Beurlier, whose monograph *Le Culte Impérial* is the most detailed account of the subject yet published, appreciates the force of the arguments of MM. Desjardins and Monceaux, but explains that this close correspondence did not necessarily imply that the Christian Church copied the organization of the state religion of pagan Rome. He thinks that the leaders of the Christian churches followed so closely in the footsteps of the pagan religious administration because the Christian Church found it necessary to cover the same ground, and took advantage of the same imperial administration and its land divisions.¹ He admits that the organization of the imperial state religion did not exactly follow the civil administration; that some provinces had no provincial priest, and that others had more than one; and that the organization of the Christian Church followed these deviations. But he is of opinion that all this can be explained by natural causes common to the needs of both organizations. "The geographical reasons which had grouped together cities to render a common worship to *Augustus*, and which had led them to establish the centre of the cult sometimes in the capital of the province, sometimes at a point where several provinces met, or, as in Asia, in a certain number of cities rivalling each other in size, acted in the same way in grouping together the bishops of the small towns of the province, and consequently in gradually increasing the jurisdiction of the bishop in the principal centres."

There are, however, coincidences which the distribution of population and the geographical utility of centres will not fully account for. The Christian bishops—the metropolitans and their urban bishops—had assigned to them under the Christian emperors who followed Constantine the same powers to investigate contraventions of religious arrangements which in the pagan days belonged to the provincial and municipal priests of the imperial cult. Nor will it explain how Christian bishops

¹ Beurlier, *Le Culte Impérial*, pp. 304-307.

of important centres demanded and obtained from Christian emperors the same places of civil precedence which belonged to the provincial priests of the *Divi Imperatores*. The fact that the chief ecclesiastic in England has to this day precedence of every one save princes of the blood comes down through long generations, a legacy from the state paganism of the old Roman empire. "The conquering Christian Church," as Mommsen says, "took its hierarchic weapons from the arsenal of the enemy."²

The modelling of the Church on the organization of the imperial cult grew more intimate as the decades passed, and the resemblance between them stronger when the recognition of the Christian religion by the state gave the leaders of the Church more opportunities. The pagan title of *Pontifex Maximus*, applied in scorn by Tertullian³ in the beginning of the third century to an overweening Bishop of Rome, was appropriated by the Christian bishop of the capital and still remains, and with it the implied claim to be the ruler over the whole religious administration of the empire. The vestments of the clergy, unknown in these early centuries—dalmatic, chasuble, stole and maniple—were all taken over by the Christian clergy from the Roman magistracy;³ the word *Bull*, to denote a papal rescript, was borrowed from the old imperial administration—but these things take us far beyond our period.

The imitation of the pagan priesthood was also seen within our period in the multiplication of subordinate ecclesiastical offices. The second half of the third and the fourth century witnessed an increase in the lower orders of the clergy, both in the East and in the West. The organizing genius of the Roman Church led the way. The institution of these minor orders, as they were called, can almost be dated. They began about the year

¹ Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (1886), i. 349.

² Tertullian, *De Pudicitia*, 1.

³ Bock, *Geschichte der Liturgischen Gewänder des Mittelalters* (1859); Marriott, *Vestiarium Christianum* (1868); also, but not so exact, Stanley's *Christian Institutions* (1881), pp. 148 ff.

236 A.D. So far as the West is concerned, the minor orders seem to have reached their completion by the beginning of the fourth century, if not a little earlier.¹ We find included in the *clergy*, besides the bishops, elders and deacons, subdeacons, readers, exorcists, acolytes, door-keepers and grave-diggers. The subdeacons are evidently developed from the deacons. The readers and the exorcists represent the old *prophetic ministry*.² The acolytes and the door-keepers were added to the *clergy* in imitation of the officials in the state temples during the days of paganism.

The service of priests in the state temples was so arranged that there was a higher and a lower priesthood, and that the members of the latter were looked upon as the personal attendants of the former. The one was set apart for the performance of the sacrifices and other holy mysteries, the others were their servants who performed the menial parts of the services. At first they were slaves; afterwards they were usually freed-men; these servant priests could never rise to be priests of the higher class. They had different names, all of which conveyed their menial position; they were the body-servants, the messengers, the robe-keepers, etc., of the higher priests. Besides these

¹ The final form which the new organization of the congregation took, says Harnack, "was characterized by four moments:—(1) by the quality of the sacrificing priesthood, who now took the position of higher clergy, and were settled in it by a solemn consecration; (2) by a comprehensive adoption of the complicated forms of the heathen worship, of the temple service, and of the priesthood, as well as by the development of the idea of a magical power and real efficacy of sacred actions; (3) by the strict and perfect carrying out of the clerical organization in the sense that everything, however old, of dignities, claims and rights should be excluded, or at any rate made over and subordinated to this organization; and (4) by the dying out, that is by the extermination, of the last remains of the *charismata*, which under the new ideas were dangerous, seldom appearing, and often compromising and discrediting as far as they rose above the ranks of harmless." *Sources of the Apostolic Canons* (1895, Eng. Trans.), p. 83.

² Compare Harnack's masterly constructive bit of historical criticism, his essay on *The Origin of the Readership and of the other Minor Orders*, appended to *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, pp. 54 ff.

servants of the sacred persons, there were servants of the holy places or temples. There was always a keeper (*aedituus*), and he had various servants under him, whose duty it was to open, shut and clean the sacred place; to show strangers its curiosities; to allow those persons who had permission to offer prayers and present offerings according to the rules of the temple, and to refuse admission to all others. All these attendants of the lower class—whether servants of the higher priests or servants of the sacred place—were included in the temple ministry, and had in consequence their definite share in the temple offerings.¹

The acolytes and the door-keepers (*ostiarii*, *πυλωροὶ*) correspond to these two classes of the lower priesthood in the pagan state temples. The *acolyte* (*ἀκόλουθος*) was originally an attendant, a scholar, a follower, or more definitely the boy or man-servant who followed his master when the latter went out of his house. They were the servants of the Christian priests doing all manner of services for them, carrying their messages or letters,² and in general acting like the *calatores* of the state temples. The door-keepers or *ostiarii* had the same duties in the Christian churches that the *aeditui* had in the state temples. "He had to look after the opening and the shutting of the doors to watch over the coming in and out of the faithful, to refuse entrance to suspicious persons, and, from the date of the more strict separation between the *missa catechumenorum* and the *missa fidelium*, to close the doors, after the dismissal of the catechumens, against those doing penance and against unbelievers. He first became necessary when there were special

¹ Compare what Marquardt says about the state temples and their attendants and about the state priests in his *Staatsverwaltung*, Pt. ii. (*Handbuch der Römischen Alterthümer*, Mommsen and Marquardt, VI.).

² Acolytes are mentioned as carrying letters in Cyprian's *Epistles* frequently:—xlv. 4 (xli.); xlix. 3 (xlv.); lii. 1 (xlv.); lix. 1, 9 (liv.); lxxviii. 1 (lxxviii.); lxxix. The point is, of course, not that Christian bishops should have persons to carry their letters, but that these acolytes acting as the servants of the bishops should be reckoned among the *clergy*.

church buildings, and when they, like temples, together with the ceremonial of divine service, had come to be considered as holy, that is since about 225 A.D." * The significant thing is not that the Christian churches should have given servants to their bishops and elders or attendants to their buildings for public worship, but that these officials should be classed among the clergy. It is this that was taken over from the pagan state religion.

The Church, however, did not copy its pagan models slavishly. It broke the pagan rule that the higher ministry was to be reserved for men of a certain rank, and that there was a social gulf between the acting and the serving priesthood. It made those lower orders the recruiting ground for the higher, and in this way constructed a ladder by which deserving men could climb from the lowest to the highest ranks of service within the Church of Christ.

Thus the ministry of the Church of the fourth century had become so closely fashioned after the organization of the imperial state religion that when the time of the Church's triumph came, which it did early in the century, very little change of previous state arrangements was needed to instal the new religion in the place of the old. The influences of religion on the state, and the support given by the state to religious rulers and teachers, acted through an administration which, so far as external organization was concerned, was surprisingly like the one that had gone before—only now the cisterns stored and the conduits distributed a wholesome water. The gradations in the hierarchy, the times and places of its synods, the additions to its lower ministry, were all borrowed from the methods of the old imperial paganism.

This need not be a matter of reproach. The Church and its leaders had a lofty aim before them in all these changes; and the evangelical life could be and was sustained under this com-

plicated ministry. The Church acquired an external polity which gave it not merely such a *sense* of unity as it had not previously possessed, but also endowed it with the power of acting as one great organization in its work of Christianizing the Roman Empire and the cultivated paganism which died hard. The Church undoubtedly lost its old democratic ideals; the laity counted for little and the clergy for much; but the times were becoming less and less democratic, and the principles of democratic government were scarcely understood unless when applied within very small areas. In the centuries which came long afterwards it can be seen how this centralized government helped to preserve the Church in the dissolution of the empire in the West in those times which are called "The Wandering of the Nations." On the other hand, there were evils. The spirit of compromise with paganism, which this imitation even of the externals of a pagan religious administration could scarcely fail to produce, did lead to much corruption both in the beliefs and in the life of the Christian Church. These need not be here dwelt upon. The evangelical life in the Church was strong enough to enable her to conquer for the Christian faith, not merely persecuting Rome, but the barbarian nations which overthrew the western portion of the empire. That only need be remembered now.

It is enough to say that the chief seeds of evil which lay in this new organization of the Church which had assumed a definite form by the beginning of the fourth century, were the two pagan ideas introduced mainly by Cyprian of Carthage: (1) that of a special priesthood, in the sense that a man (the bishop) could, by reason of the power ascribed to him of forgiving sin, and, flowing from that, the right claimed for him of exacting implicit obedience, stand practically in the place of God towards his fellow-men; and (2) that of a sacrifice in the Eucharist, unique in kind, propitiatory, differing essentially from all other acts of worship that imply self-surrender to God and from all services of self-denying love, and possessing

* Harnack, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, p. 88.

an efficacy independent of the faith and the piety of the worshippers. It was these thoughts, not the organization which enclosed them, which were to breed evil more abundantly as the centuries passed.

A study at first hand of the contemporary evidence belonging to the first three centuries—and this has been accumulating wonderfully during the last quarter of a century—reveals the important fact that changes were being continually made. Almost every ancient document as it unexpectedly appears, rescued from nooks in eastern convent libraries, dug out of Egyptian sands, unrolled from bundles of forgotten parchments, tells us something new about the organization of the early churches. The unvarying lesson they teach is, that there was anything but a monotonous uniformity in the ecclesiastical organization of the churches of the early centuries. They all speak of changes, experiments, inventions in administration made by men who were alive to the needs of their times and who were unfettered by the notion that there is only one form of government possible to the Church of Christ and essential to its very existence as a Church. The changes made from half-century to half-century, and in different parts of the Church contemporaneously, are all multiplied proofs that it belongs to the Church to create, to modify, to change its ministry from age to age in order to make it as effective an instrument as possible for evangelising the world. They teach, in short, that it is the Church that makes the ministry and not the ministry that makes the Church.

The close of the third century is the limit of our period; it saw the last stage in the growth of the Church before it became absorbed within the administration of the Roman empire.

But the use of the word *Church* is very misleading. There was no one all-embracing institution, visible to the eye, which could be called the Church of Christ. What did exist was thousands of churches, more or less independent, associated in groups according to the divisions of the empire. The real bond of

association was the willingness of the leaders of the individual Christian communities to consent to federation, for the terms of communion were never exactly settled. The federation was constantly liable to be dissolved. When the party in Rome which favoured a stricter dealing with the lapsed formed a second and rival congregation and placed Novatian at the head of it as bishop, he and not Cornelius was in communion with many of the Eastern bishops and their churches. It was only the magnanimity of Cyprian which prevented the breaking up of the federation on the question of the re-baptism of heretics. Hundreds of the associated churches broke away from the confederation in what was commonly called the Donatist schism. *Church* is therefore scarcely the word to use; *associated churches* is the really accurate phrase.

It should also be remembered that according to the view of Cyprian every bishop occupied a thoroughly independent position, and could accept or reject the conditions of federation and decline to be bound by the action of the associated churches. Examples of such bishops are to be met with very late.¹ But besides such sporadic cases, there were rival associations of churches outside what historians misleadingly call the Catholic Church of Christ. In some parts of the empire they were more numerous than the Catholics, and everywhere they were, to say the least of it, as sincere and as whole-hearted Christians. Marcionites, Montanists, and many others, lived, worked and taught, following the precepts of Jesus in the way they understood them, and suffered for Christ in times of persecution as faithfully as those who called them heretics and schismatics. The state of matters was much liker what exists in a modern divided Christendom than many would have us believe.

It is very doubtful whether the great body of associated churches would of itself have been able to overcome these non-conformists of the early centuries and stand forward as the one

¹ Compare article *Autocephaloi* in the *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, and Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), p. 180.

Christian Church, including all or all but a very few Christian communities. That this state of things did actually come to pass was due to the constraints and persecutions of the imperial government, which never tolerated these Christians, and whose persecution was almost continuous after the Council of Nicea till the dissolution of the empire. It was the State which first gave a thoroughly visible unity to the associated churches. The imperial unity was the forerunner of the Papal. The State supported the associated churches by all the means in its power. It recognized the decisions of their councils and enforced them with civil pains and penalties; it also recognized the sentences of deposition and excommunication passed on members of the clergy or laity belonging to any one of the associated churches and followed them with civil disabilities.¹ It did its best to destroy all Christianity outside of the associated churches, and largely succeeded. The rigour of the state persecution directed against Christian nonconformists in the fourth and fifth centuries has not received the attention due to it. The State confiscated their churches and ecclesiastical property (sometimes their private property also); it prohibited under penalty of proscription and death their meeting for public worship; it took from these nonconformist Christians the right to inherit or bequeath property by will; it banished their clergy; finally, it made raids upon them by its soldiery and sometimes butchered whole communities, as was the case with the Montanists in Phrygia and with the Donatists in Africa.² And this glaringly un-Christian mode of creating and vindicating the visible unity of the Catholic Church of Christ was vigorously encouraged by the leaders of the associated churches who had the recognition and support of the State.³

¹ Compare the evidence collected from the imperial codes by Dr. Hatch in his *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, p. 176 n.

² Procopius, *Historia Arcana*, 11.

³ Compare letter of Ambrose written to the Emperor Theodosius, in the name of the Council of Aquileia demanding the suppression by force of

Safe within the fold of the State, they could speak of themselves as the one Catholic Church of Christ outside of which there was no salvation; they could apply to their own circle of churches all the metaphors and promises of Old Testament prophecy and all the sublime descriptions of the Epistle to the Ephesians, while their fellow-Christians who were outside state protection were being exterminated. Such strange methods do men think it right to use when they try in their haste to make clear to the coarser human vision the wondrous divine thought of the visible unity of the Church of Christ!

non-conformist ordinations and meetings for public worship: Ambrose, *Opera*, Epist. I. x. (Migne's *Patr. Lat.* xvi. p. 940).