

SAINT AMBROSE: *His Life and Times*



SAINT

# AMBROSE

HIS LIFE AND TIMES

*by Angelo Paredi*

TRANSLATED BY

*M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J.*

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## Preface

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In an interesting novel that appeared in 1950, Evelyn Waugh represents a conversation that took place at a country estate near Trier between Helena, the mother of Constantine, Minervina, her daughter-in-law, and Lactantius, the famous Christian author who had been called to the imperial court to educate the young Crispus. In a corner of the terrace there is a gibbon, a small Indian monkey, fretting with its golden chain and chattering for fruit.

Helena mentions the atrocities committed against the Christians in the East and the sad days that they have brought. But they are also glorious, Lactantius counters. Minervina questions his sincerity. If they are so glorious, why did he not stay home in Nicomedia? To defend himself, Lactantius replies that there is need of "a special quality to be a martyr" just as one must possess "a special quality to be a writer," a humbler profession, it is true, but nonetheless of some importance: "Suppose," he says, "Suppose that in the years to come, when the Church's troubles seem to be over, there should come an apostate of my own trade, a false historian, with the mind of Cicero or Tacitus and the soul of an animal," and he nods at the gibbon. "A man like that might be refuted again and again but what he wrote would remain in people's minds when the refutations were quite forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

Succeeding centuries have seen the rise of misguided historians, and there have been a number of "gibbons" whose writings on St. Ambrose still cloud his works and reputation. In recent decades, however, he has received much fairer treatment from the hands of historians like E. Bickel, R. Paribeni, W. Ensslin, and Charles N. Cochrane. Of particular significance is the observation which Hans Lietzmann made shortly before he died in 1942: "Ambrose was certainly one of the great men of human history, even before he became a bishop, and he by no means regarded his office as a sinecure when he was the pastor and the political confidant of three emperors. That was also a fact of which the emperors themselves were very conscious. Theodosius was not wrong in giving way to this man, in whom the classical dignity proper to the Roman sense of what the state demands was combined with a profoundly earnest, Christian conception of the meaning of life."<sup>2</sup> And Henri Bremond, in an address on the occasion of his reception into the French Academy, has pointed up the lesson which may be learned from reflection upon the life of St. Ambrose and the age in which he lived: "The great controversies of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries broke out. There was a great stir about metaphysics, couched in Greek terms like *hypostasis* and *ousia*, which enthralled the East but dismayed the Latin world. To what purpose? Had the Church become a school? Had the kingdom of God become an academy? No, Duchesne answers with St. Ambrose and Newman. The truth is that God does not wish to save the world through syllogisms."<sup>3</sup>

This life of St. Ambrose was written to be read. The works cited in the notes have therefore been limited to those that are essential. It is the hope of the author that this study will in its own modest way spread the fame of one who strove strenuously for the good, especially through the example of his own life, and who lived in an age no less tragic than our own. In fact, it is rather startling to realize how closely today's Iron

Curtain resembles the *limes*, or boundary, of the late Roman empire.

The plates and illustrations that have been included in this book should give something of the temper of the times in which St. Ambrose lived. In this English translation, which has been made from the Italian original published at Milan in 1960, it has been possible to clarify a number of details. These improvements are largely due to the publication of two more volumes of St. Ambrose's works by O. Faller in his critical edition in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (LXXIII and LXXVIII). The author wishes to extend a special word of thanks to the Rev. M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J., the translator, for the care he has taken to check the sources from which this biography was written.

Angelo Paredi

Milan, The Ambrosian Library, Spring, 1963.





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## II

# Trier

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*The Roman empire in its decline. The Aristocracy. Trier. The childhood of St. Ambrose. Christian families and the deferment of baptism.*

Both St. Ambrose and St. Augustine were convinced of the providential character of the Roman empire. In his *Commentary on the Forty-fifth Psalm*, the former notes that "the Romans, tired of civil war, conferred the *imperium* on Augustus Caesar, thus bringing to an end their intestine strife. But this also made it possible for the Apostles to travel throughout the whole world as the Lord Jesus had bidden them: 'Go forth and teach all nations.'"<sup>1</sup> And in a sermon preached some years later, St. Augustine echoes these same sentiments in the following terms: "Let the Church march on! The way is open; our road has been built for us by the emperor."<sup>2</sup>

Only a relatively few paid much attention to the Apostles as they walked along the imperial roads. But by the fourth century, Christianity had become so widespread that it almost constituted a state within a state. The crisis of the ancient world, in fact, coincides with its adoption of Christianity. The Roman empire, which to many different races seemed to be the ideal state, came to realize in time that there had risen within it, and still apart from it, a new spiritual community

that was concerned about matters unknown to it before, matters that were outside the sphere of politics, foreign in fact to the interests of this world.

The goal for the historians of the Roman empire is the explanation of this slow separation of the inner from the outer community, the creation of a duality out of an indistinct unity. As one of the keenest observers of ancient history has observed, "the history of antiquity has meaning in so far as it develops and culminates in Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Our intellectual growth implies a realization of norms limiting the manifestations of our physical existence, but this does not mean that later years must be called "decadent" when compared with those of childhood. Similarly, the entrance of the Church into the public life of the fourth century does not mean that it should be blamed for the decline of the ancient world, as it was by the historians of the Enlightenment. It merits no such accusation, even if the first great flowering of Christianity as an organized society attracted into its own orbit, and away from that of the camp and politics, many of the most dynamic individuals and most brilliant minds of the age. Most of the outstanding men of the fourth century were men of the Church—Athanasius, Basil, Damasus, Ambrose, Augustine, and John Chrysostom, to mention but a few of those who are best known. And of all these, the most important for understanding the problem of the relationship between Church and State was the bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose.

St. Ambrose was born in Gaul, probably in 334, at a time when his father occupied one of the highest posts in the prefecture.<sup>4</sup> Since in the fourth century the prefect's headquarters were at Trier on the Moselle river, it is reasonable to suppose that St. Ambrose was born there. He received the name Aurelius Ambrosius, the first name being derived from the *gens Aurelia* to which his mother belonged, and the second from his father.<sup>5</sup> He was the third child in the family, a sister Marcellina, and a brother Satyrus having been born before him.



The *Ambrosii* were obviously Romans, but the Greek names (Soteris, Satyrus, and Ambrose itself) indicate that the family may have had Greek antecedents, though such names were quite common in the late Empire. But even if the family was originally Greek, it had been Romanized for several generations since it had numbered magistrates and even consuls among its members.

In the year 334, Constantine the Younger was also living at Trier. This prince, the eldest of the sons of Constantine the Great and Fausta, born in the year 317, had received from his father the government of Mauritania, Spain, Gaul, and Britain. Constantius, another son, had been given Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, while Constans, the youngest, had received Italy, Africa, and the Danubian provinces. But Constantine's death on May 22, 337, threw the state into a turmoil. Shortly after his death, nine members of the imperial family were murdered by the troops. A meeting of the three Augusti in 338 at Sirmium or Viminacium in Pannonia did not reconcile their differences with respect to the problems of succession. In the spring of 340, the twenty-three-year-old Constantius II suddenly left Gaul, crossed the Alps, and marched against his recalcitrant brother Constans. But when he arrived at Aquileia, he was ambushed and slain by agents of Constans. The latter then annexed Gaul, Spain, and Britain to the territory he already ruled.

Since Ambrose's father had been one of the slain Augustus's high officials, it is quite probable that his own fortunes were closely linked with those of the deceased monarch. The family would then almost certainly have left Gaul to return to Rome.

The high position held by his father, his own subsequent career in the government, the property which he possessed at the time of his election as bishop of Milan would all indicate that St. Ambrose belonged to the Roman aristocracy. At this time Roman nobles passed on the highest posts in the imperial

bureaucracy as if they were hereditary rights. By a kind of tacit agreement, a son succeeded to his father's office. Inscriptions of the fourth century show that provinces were frequently governed by members of the same family. Even emperors who came from the lowest ranks of the army, and were themselves of foreign birth, did not meddle with this tradition since it assured them of experienced assistants.

For members of the senatorial class, posts in the government were a source of enormous wealth. In the general impoverishment that characterized the last stages of the Empire, when the middle class had almost entirely disappeared, the senatorial class was the exception. It was a class of great landed proprietors with vast domains scattered throughout the various provinces that had the appearance of small independent states. Some of the senators still lived in Rome or in other large cities, but the majority dwelt on their fortified estates surrounded by thousands of workmen and slaves. These could be armed to protect their property. This new nobility, in contrast with that of the age of the Antonines, was intellectually impoverished and had little real compassion for the masses bound by imperial edicts to the land or to their respective trades.

Among the nobles, especially among the Christians, there were, of course, obvious exceptions. One of these was Melania the Younger, the sole heiress of Valerius Publicola, who in his turn had been the sole heir of Valerius Maximus, prefect of Rome in 362. A few details from her life can throw some light on the position occupied by St. Ambrose and his family and explain why the Milanese church during the early Middle Ages could possess property in Liguria and Sicily.

Melania owned vast estates on both sides of the Po, and also in Apulia, Campania, Sicily, Gaul, Spain, Britain, and proconsular Africa. One, for example, had four hundred slaves and sixty-two houses for the *coloni*, or serfs. According to an estimate made by Rampolla in 1905, the annual return

of these holdings would have amounted to 116,000,000 French francs.<sup>6</sup> When she was twenty years old, Melania, with the approval of her husband Pinianus, decided to sell the greater portion of her estates so that she could give the proceeds to the poor. At the same time she freed some eight thousand slaves. Considering the value of these slaves alone at this time, her generosity towards them must have represented a loss of many millions.

Melania's fortune, however, in comparison with that of Symmachus, who will appear quite frequently in these pages, was rather modest. He owned a house at Capua, three at Rome, three villas in the Roman campagna, twelve others in different parts of Italy, and lands in Sicily and Mauretania.

Another very wealthy individual was Sextus Petronius Probus. After passing through all the magistracies and being three times prefect of the praetorium, he finally asked for baptism at the age of sixty. Ammianus Marcellinus, who lived for some years at Rome, tells us that Probus owned estates in almost all the provinces, though "a private individual would not be able to say whether they had been justly acquired or not."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Ausonius describes the holdings of his friend Paulinus of Bordeaux, later known as Paulinus of Nola, as "kingdoms."<sup>8</sup> As we shall see later, Paulinus, also the son of a prefect of Gaul, kept in touch with St. Ambrose through his letters. Before making himself poor for Christ, he could have been hailed as a prince since he owned entire towns and cities in Aquitania besides Nola in Campania and Fondi in Latium.

The fame and fortune of these noble Romans can give us some idea of St. Ambrose's own family. Already at the time of Diocletian, members of the family had held high offices in the state, as is clear from the saint's own words when speaking of the virgin Soteris, the martyr of the family: "She preferred the faith to the consulships and prefectures of her ancestors."<sup>9</sup>

From his palace at Trier, the prefect of Gaul had charge of

the administration of justice and the execution of the imperial policies throughout central Europe, from Hadrian's Wall built to keep the Picts and Scots out of Britain to the mountains of Morocco, and from the frontier formed by the Rhine and the Rhone to the Atlantic. The heavy taxes collected by the imperial bureaucracy in North Africa, the Balearic Islands, Spain, Gaul, Belgium, Germany, and Britain flowed to Trier. As the representative of the emperor, the prefect of Gaul promulgated his laws, watched over the governors of the various provinces of the prefecture, received appeals from provincial tribunals, and supervised the maintenance of the roads and the imperial post. He also had to provide the rations and pay of the armies stationed in his territories, though their command was entrusted to dukes and counts (*duces* and *comites*) who took their orders immediately from the emperor.

Under Diocletian, the hierarchy of the imperial functionaries had been divided into four classes, *illustres*, *spectabiles*, *clarissimi*, and *perfectissimi*. The prefects of the praetorium belonged to the first of these, the dukes and counts to the fourth. Under this same emperor the imperial authority was regarded as sacred, and extreme manifestations of respect, such as prostration, were introduced from the East. This court ceremonial was continued under Diocletian's successors. Thus, in 326, on the occasion of his twentieth anniversary as emperor, Constantine appeared in public wearing robes of silk and purple adorned with gold and gems, and bearing on his head a diadem of pearls.

Even the emperor's closest assistants now had to stand in his presence. From this custom came the name of *consistorium* for the sovereign's private council. State officials also shared in the sacred character of the emperor, and the closer they were to his person, the greater was the respect shown to them.

Thousands of lesser officials were needed to maintain the elaborate pomp, and thousands of secret service men (*agentes in rebus*) to secure the safety of the sovereign.

When Ambrose was born, Trier was one of the most important cities of the world. It had been founded by Augustus on the right bank of the Moselle near the place where the river becomes navigable for large vessels. The city itself was the focal point of eight Roman roads and at the center of the natural waterways formed by the Moselle, Saar, Sauer, Ruver, and Kyll rivers. Because of its strategic position, it gradually replaced Lyons as the capital of Gaul. It was destroyed by the Alemanni in 259-262, but then restored more magnificent than before. When Diocletian divided up the empire, Trier became the residence of Galerius Maximianus, the Caesar of the West. Even today numerous traces of the ancient Roman Treveri may be seen at Trier. Among the most impressive of these are the three levels, lateral towers, and inner court of the *Porta Nigra*, the remains of the two great baths, the bridges over the river, and the basilica of Constantine, now a Lutheran church.

Athanasius, the great bishop of Alexandria, lived in exile at Trier from 335 to 337. He had been unjustly condemned by the Arian bishops at Tyre, and then tried again at Constantinople by Constantine the Great. The emperor unfortunately believed the false charges of Eusebius of Nicomedia to the effect that Athanasius had tried to prevent the shipping of grain from Egypt to Constantinople. Flying into a rage, he sent him into exile at Trier.

At Trier, Athanasius found a flourishing Christian community. During his stay in the city he told the faithful about the Egyptian monks, especially about the most famous of them all, St. Anthony, who had gone into the desert about the year 270 after handing over to the people of his village his patrimony of two hundred and seven acres of good Egyptian land.<sup>10</sup> As a young man Athanasius had lived for some time with Anthony in the desert, and it may well be that Marcelina, Ambrose's sister, a girl of about ten at this time, may have heard him speak of this renowned Egyptian monk at her home in Trier.

From the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, we know that a chance discovery of a small monastery outside the walls of the city and the reading of the life of St. Anthony by Athanasius which they found there led two officials attached to the court at Trier to renounce the world. Not to be outdone in generosity, the two young women to whom they were engaged also consecrated themselves to God.<sup>11</sup> A further example of the flourishing state of monasticism at Trier is found in the life of St. Jerome. After completing his studies at Rome, he went to Trier about the year 365. The austerities practiced by the monks which he found there inspired him with a desire to adopt a similar mode of life.

It was in such surroundings, then, that St. Ambrose first saw the light of day, but he tells us nothing of his own childhood in his extensive writings.

To us it seems strange that he never mentions his mother in his works, something which is in marked contrast with the moving account which St. Augustine has left us of his own, St. Monica. It is not that St. Ambrose was insensible to a mother's love. As we shall see later, he could speak of it with feeling.<sup>12</sup> His silence is perhaps, at least in part, to be explained by a fine reserve, too Roman in character to treat of private matters in works for public use, such as were all his writings. Neither does St. Jerome ever mention his mother, though it is certain that she was a Christian.

Ambrose was the youngest of three children. His brother Satyrus was a few years older, and his sister Marcellina ten years older than he. One day when Ambrose was still an infant, the nurse who was watching his cradle in the court of the prefect's palace was astonished to see a swarm of bees swoop down and rest upon the eyes and lips of the sleeping child. Frightened, she called to some members of the household who were walking at a little distance. They came, and Ambrose's father and mother, and even his sister Marcellina, saw the bees enter and leave the mouth of the child without disturbing him. The bees then flew off and were lost in the

blazing sun, as Ambrose's father exclaimed: "This child is destined for great things!"<sup>13</sup> Since bees had already deposited their honey on the lips of Pindar and Plato, and two centuries after their visit to Ambrose were to come down again upon the infant Isidore of Seville, this episode should almost certainly be taken as a bit of folklore symbolizing the future eloquence of the saint, which would be as sweet and nourishing as honey, and an instrument of wondrous deeds. This is the only incident of the saint's childhood recorded by his biographer Paulinus, but we may well imagine that his life passed pleasantly in the palace with its gleaming marbles and mosaics, its statues and colonnades, and its fountains and enclosed gardens. We can also imagine the delight that he and his sister and brother had as they stood on the banks of the Moselle and watched the clumsy barges pass by, loaded down with casks of Rhenish wine for distant ports.

The Christianity of the Ambrosii is demonstrated by the martyrdom of Soteris, already mentioned, who may have been the great-aunt of the bishop of Milan. In a discourse to the Christian virgins of that city, St. Ambrose described her martyrdom in the following terms: "Although she was extremely fair and of noble birth, this virgin preferred her sacred faith to the consulships and prefectures of her ancestors; and though she was ordered to offer sacrifice, she refused to do so. When the cruel persecutor ordered her to be slapped so that she might yield either to the disgrace or pain of the blows, this tender virgin lifted her veil from her head and bared her face, which she only uncovered for martyrdom. She willingly accepted the injury to her features so that what is frequently a source of temptation might be a sacrifice to martyrdom. She rejoiced that the threat to her chastity should be lessened by her loss of beauty. They could disfigure her face with blows, but they could not destroy the beauty of her virtue and the charm of her fair soul."<sup>14</sup>

A further proof of the Christianity of St. Ambrose's family

was the dedication which his sister Marcellina made of her virginity to Christ in a solemn ceremony at Rome on Christmas, 353. Though Ambrose could thus have applied to himself the words of St. Jerome, "From the cradle I was nourished on Catholic milk,"<sup>15</sup> neither he nor Jerome received baptism until much later in life. Jerome was baptized in 367 at the age of twenty, St. Ambrose in 374 at the age of forty. But such delays were not at all unusual. Rufinus was twenty-six at the time of his baptism, Paulinus of Nola thirty, St. Augustine thirty-three, and Satyrus, the brother of Ambrose, over forty. As may be deduced from the lives of Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom, the same custom prevailed in the East. If these cases are to be regarded as exceptional, it is only because others waited still longer to receive the sacrament.

In the first book of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine asks why his own baptism had been deferred.<sup>16</sup> Among the various answers that might have been given for this lamentable practice was that during the centuries of persecution great heroism was required on the part of anyone with an official position in the Roman world to seal his adherence to the new faith through baptism. Since pagan cult practices were intimately connected with the exercise of public office, the holding of such an office was practically precluded by the promises made at the time of baptism. As a consequence of this, the men in many otherwise Christian families put off their baptism until old age so as not to be forced to relinquish their public positions. In the first half of the third century, Origen noted that there were many such instances of weakness and inconsistency.<sup>17</sup>

In the fourth century, when Christianity became a licit religion, and when whole areas were converted to the faith, the practice continued through force of habit, though there was also another important factor entering in—the severe penitential discipline of the early Church. Only the stoutest hearts could look forward without trepidation to the possibility of



long years of penance for a single serious lapse. Baptism was therefore frequently put off until the passions of youth should have been dulled by time. An example for this was certainly found among the most prominent men of the state. Though Constantine raised splendid basilicas at Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and elsewhere, and endowed the churches with gold and other precious gifts, he did not himself receive baptism until he was on the point of death. And this was the case with other emperors of the fourth century as well. St. Augustine recalls the fact that in the early years of the fifth century when there was a general alarm at Constantinople, all the people ran to the basilicas, which were now too small to hold the crowds, and desperately asked for baptism.<sup>18</sup> They even asked to receive the sacrament on the streets and in the squares. And St. John Chrysostom indignantly observes that baptism was not received with eager joy but with fear and trembling by those in the throes of their last agony, after hearing from their doctors that there was nothing more that they could do.<sup>19</sup>

In the fourth century, the children of Christian families were brought to the church for the ceremonies of the catechuminate, but few received the sacrament of baptism itself before reaching the use of reason.<sup>20</sup> Different ceremonies were used for enrolling the children among the catechumens. These varied from place to place. In Africa candidates were enrolled by making a sign of the cross on the forehead and placing a pinch of blessed salt, the symbol of wisdom, upon the tongue. In Gaul the ceremony consisted in the sign of the cross and the imposition of the priest's hands on the candidate, as was perhaps also the case in Rome and Italy in general. It was with these rites, then, that St. Ambrose was as a child initiated into the Christian mysteries.

When a catechumen finally decided to receive baptism, he gave his name to the bishop and thus became one of the immediate candidates, or *competentes*.

In the course of reflecting upon his early life, St. Augustine

recalls the fact that he had been a catechumen as a child and deplores the deferment of his baptism:

“When I was still a child, I had heard of the eternal life promised to us through the humility of Your Son our Lord God, descending even to our pride; and I was signed with the sign of His cross; and I was seasoned with His salt when I came from my mother’s womb, who greatly trusted in You. When I was still a boy, You saw one day, O Lord, how I was suddenly taken with a pain in the stomach and fell so suddenly sick that I almost died. You saw, O my God, for You were my Protector, with what faith and earnestness of mind I begged the piety of my mother and of Your Church, the mother of us all for the baptism of Your Christ, my Lord God. My mother being much disturbed by this, since with a chaste heart and faith in You she was lovingly concerned for my eternal salvation, hastened to procure as best she could that I should be initiated and washed with Your loving sacraments. . . . But I soon recovered, and my cleansing was put off as if I needed to be defiled still further if I lived longer, since the guilt contracted by the stain of sin is indeed greater and more dangerous after baptism than it is before. . . . I beg of You, my God, for I would gladly know if it would please You, why my baptism was deferred, whether it was for my good that the reins of sin were loosened as it were or not. How is it that even now on all sides we hear it said: ‘Let him alone, let him do what he wants since he is not baptized!’ whereas if there is a question of bodily health we do not say, ‘Let him be still further wounded, for he has not yet been cured?’ How much better would it have been for me to have been quickly cured so that through my own diligence and that of

my friends my soul might under Your protection have preserved the salvation it had received from You?"<sup>21</sup>

In later years St. Ambrose might have made a somewhat similar, though less passionate, reflection. He came to look upon the years of his youth passed without the sacraments as a time in which "he had been lost."<sup>22</sup>



FLA(via) MAX(ima) FAVSTA AVG(usta)

Bronze coin. See H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain*, VI (Paris, 1862), 183, no. 6

Fausta, born about 298, wife of Constantine in 307, mother of Constantius II, became enamored of Crispus, the son of Constantine and Minerva. When he refused her advances, she denounced him to his father, who had him executed in 326. When he later learned what had really happened, he had Fausta put to death in a bath tub of scalding water. See the sources cited by O. Seeck in "Crispus 9," *Realen. der class. Alter.*, IV (1901), cc. 1723-24.

## III

# Rome

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*The Ambrosii at Rome. Education in antiquity. The veiling of Marcellina. The usurpations of Magnentius, Vetrano, Nepotianus. Arianism. Nicea and the reaction to it. Athanasius. Gregory of Cappadocia. Sardica. The Council of Milan. Pope Liberius. George of Cappadocia. Constantius II at Rome. Rome in the fourth century: students, people, grain supply, games. The youth of St. Ambrose. Julian the Apostate.*

The death of Constantine II at Aquileia in his unfortunate attempt to subdue his brother had as its immediate consequence Constans's annexation of Gaul, Spain, and Britain. The high officials who had served under Constantine II apparently shared in his misfortune. At least there was a new prefect of Gaul at Trier in the spring of 340. We have no inkling of what happened to St. Ambrose's father. Paulinus is our only source of information about him, and since he is not mentioned again in the *Vita Ambrosii*, we may presume that he must have died during the course of these months. At any rate, the family returned to Rome, where Ambrose remained from 340 to around 365, that is, during all of his boyhood years.<sup>1</sup>

When a son of a prominent family in antiquity reached the use of reason, he was as a rule handed over to the care of a

pedagogue, a slave specially chosen to instruct him. The great wealth of the *Ambrosii* would make us believe that in St. Ambrose's case this choice was made with great care. Ancient satirists all too often describe the pedagogue as a conniving accomplice in the precociously vicious habits of their young masters, but this was certainly not always the case. In his *Hexameron*, St. Ambrose may have been thinking of his own pedagogue when he wrote: "Things which frequently offend or terrify cowards, the weak, and the impious are, on the other hand, useful for others, just as pedagogues are for children. They seem to be bitter, sharp, and troublesome. They are feared for the whippings they inflict; they check licentiousness and demand discipline; with their threats they restrain the minds of children so that they do not become dissipated; through their austerities they make their charges temperate, and more dedicated to the pursuit of praise than play."<sup>2</sup>

We may gain some idea of the ancient pedagogue from Mardonius, an old Scythian slave to whom Julian, the future Apostate, was entrusted at the age of six in the year 337. In his writings, Julian frequently speaks of Mardonius and describes him as being most diligent in taking him to school, in helping him to repeat his lessons, in guiding him in his choice of reading, and in inspiring him with a love for spiritual things. "Never let the crowd of your playmates flocking to the theaters," Mardonius advised him, "lead you astray so that you crave such spectacles. Do you long for horse races? There is one most cleverly described in Homer. Take up the book and read it! Do you hear others talking about actors and dancers? Let them be! The youths among the Phaeacians dance in a more manly fashion. And you have Phemius for a citharode and Demodocus for a singer. Moreover, in Homer there are many many trees which afford us with more pleasure than those we see: 'Even so near the altar of Apollo on Delos did I once see the young shoot of a date palm burgeoning.' And there is the wooded isle of Calypso, and the caves of Circe, and the garden

of Alcinous. Know well that you can not see anything more delightful than these."<sup>3</sup>

Since Julian was of a somewhat sanguine temperament, we must not believe that he was always convinced by the Stoicism of Mardonius. He even confesses that he at times rebelled.

Because of the high rank of his family, the young Ambrose must have been saved from the humiliations of the *ludus litterarius*, the name at this time for an elementary school.<sup>4</sup> There were many of these in the cities, and from the second century on, they were also to be found in provincial towns. The state took no interest in them as such since they were in the hands of private individuals.

Such a school was usually located in some cramped and



*Roman covered wagon*

A bas-relief in the church of St. Mary of Saal near Klagenfurt.

narrow quarter, usually in a portico opening onto the street with a curtain to cut off the distractions of the passing traffic. From the ages of seven to thirteen, boys and girls were sent to such a school to learn the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Though Quintilian and Augustine are separated by more than two and a half centuries, they substantially agree upon the sad status of teaching in these schools.

Poor devils who did not know how to make a more decent living acted as teachers, since their pay, at least in the first

century, was ridiculously low: eight asses, or about twenty-five cents, per month from each student. From very early in the morning until noon, they had to keep their charges in check; and to hold the attention of their students, they had frequent recourse to a switch.

Quintilian, who did not himself approve of flogging, noted some of its disadvantages: "When children are beaten, the pain or fear frequently produce results of which it is not pleasant to speak and which are likely afterwards to be a source of shame, a shame which unnerves and depresses the mind and induces the child to shun and loathe the light. One is ashamed to note how scoundrels abuse this right of corporal punishment if guardians and instructors are not carefully chosen."<sup>5</sup>

The desperate monotony of these schools only deadened the energies of the poor students. There was no method in the teaching, or the method seems to us to have been somewhat irrational as when, for example, children had to learn the names of the letters of the alphabet in order before they were to see the way they were written. This same technique was used in learning writing and arithmetic. Long hours were spent in counting on one's fingers: one and two on the right hand, and three and four on the left. "One and one makes two, two and two makes four, was for me a hateful chant," wrote St. Augustine when reflecting on what he suffered in his first years at school.<sup>6</sup>

And his memories were really painful. "As a child I began to pray to You, my aid and refuge, and I broke the chords of my tongue praying to You; and small though I was, with no small entreaty I prayed to You that I might not be beaten at school. And when You did not hear me (which should not have been accounted as folly on my part), my elders, and even my parents, who did not wish me to fall into any evil, made sport of the whippings I received and which at the time seemed to me to be a great and grievous evil."<sup>7</sup>

Since the schools were so poor, it is not surprising that at

the end of the fourth century Vegetius deplored the illiteracy of many recruits who could not even keep track of their military expenses.<sup>8</sup>

As a boy, however, Ambrose was more fortunate than Augustine, and he received his elementary instruction at home.

The grammar school, the second step in the educational system in antiquity, roughly corresponded to our modern high schools. In such a school, children were taught how to speak correctly and to read the poets. For several centuries the teaching of grammar at Rome continued to show the same predilection for Greek and Greek culture as it had at its origins. But for the age of St. Ambrose, there is some question about the status of Greek in the schools. From what St. Augustine has to say about it, Greek does not seem to have been seriously studied in Roman Africa in the fourth century. Even St. Jerome, who studied grammar and rhetoric at Rome from about 359 to about 367, had later to learn Greek by himself.<sup>9</sup> It seems certain, however, that at least in the aristocratic circles, from which St. Jerome was excluded in his youth, Greek studies were still cultivated. Most of St. Ambrose's sermons show a dependence upon Greek authors. In November, 384, St. Jerome wrote a letter to Paula to console her for the loss of her daughter Blaesilla, who had died at the age of twenty, already a widow after a marriage that had lasted only seven months. Among the many things which he found to praise in Blaesilla, who had never lived outside of Rome, was the fact that she had spoken Greek so fluently that one would have thought that she knew no Latin.<sup>10</sup>

In the grammar schools, the texts of the poets, especially of Homer and Virgil, were minutely analyzed. There were many questions about style, metrics, music, mythology, history, astronomy, and mathematics, but these were always in some way connected with the explanation of the text. After the *emendatio*, that is, the criticism of the text, came the *enarratio*, or commentary on it, and finally, the *explanatio*, or exegesis of



the text, carried out rather pedantically line by line or phrase by phrase.

A student had to practice reading in a loud voice, memorize passages that had been explained in class, and write themes. These could consist in rendering poetry into prose so as to express the ideas of the poem in one's own words or in freely developing the text.<sup>11</sup>

"I was bidden," writes St. Augustine, "to memorize the wanderings of a certain Aeneas (while I forgot my own errors) and to weep for Dido, dead because she had killed herself for love. . . . The wooden horse full of armed men, the burning of Troy, and the ghost of Creusa herself was for me a most delightful spectacle of vanity. . . . I was given a task, troublesome enough to my soul, under the promise of a reward of praise or the fear of shame and whipping; namely, that I should make a speech on those words of Juno expressing her anger and her sorrow that she could not keep the Trojan king from going to Italy. I had heard that Juno never uttered these words, yet we were bidden to imitate the passages of these poetic fictions and to turn into prose what the poet had expressed in verse. And whoever showed the greatest signs of grief or anger according to the dignity of the person represented and the subject matter received the most applause."<sup>12</sup>

This type of teaching, turned wholly on the past, was bound to be heavy and monotonous. Its usual result was a culture that was formal and pedantic, without interest in research or disinterested speculation. The typical intellectuals of this age manifest a distressing lack of originality of thought.

We do not know if Ambrose took pleasure in these "vain studies" as Augustine candidly confesses of himself.<sup>13</sup>

The most famous teachers in Rome at this time were Donatus and Marius Victorinus. While St. Jerome prides himself in recalling them, they are never even mentioned by St. Ambrose.

In many of his later works, St. Ambrose shows that he was quite familiar with Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, and Seneca, and

among the Greeks, Homer, Plato, and Xenophon. His quotations from Sophocles and Euripides, on the other hand, seem to be taken from Philo.<sup>14</sup>

A young Roman usually finished grammar school at about the age of fifteen or sixteen, or even later. He then passed under the tutelage of a rhetorician until he was twenty or more. These rhetorical studies would thus correspond to a certain extent with those taken in our universities.<sup>15</sup>

In almost every city of the empire there was a rhetorical school where the theory of eloquence was taught and where students gained practice in writing and delivering speeches in defense of some imaginary culprit or in praise of some fictitious individual, or he proposed solutions to hypothetical cases in court. This teaching ought to have been complemented by courses in philosophy and law; but, in the fourth century, law was only studied at Rome, Constantinople, and Beirut, and philosophy only at Athens. In an edict of the year 425 given by Theodosius II to the university at Constantinople, we discover that there were in the city three Latin rhetoricians and ten Latin grammarians, five Greek rhetoricians and ten Greek grammarians, one philosopher and two jurisconsultants.<sup>16</sup>

At Rome, therefore, Ambrose could take courses in rhetoric and law. These were precisely the studies which could prepare him for a career in the imperial service. Seneca, Petronius, Tacitus, and Juvenal all speak disparagingly of the schools of rhetoric. We can gain some idea of them by reading the treatises of the rhetorician Seneca. The reading is so tedious and deadly that the author himself in the last book confesses his shame, as though he had lost too much time on trivialities.

It cannot be seriously maintained that every form of scholastic teaching must inevitably be reduced to empty shams. Rather, it is necessary to say that the schools were languishing at this time because public life itself was languishing and there was no longer room in this despotic and chaotic world for thought. Those of a nobler character were finding an escape in

religion. Petronius was of the opinion "that the young lose their judgment in school where they hear or see nothing of that which occurs in real life, but, instead, pirates chained to a beach, tyrants issuing edicts bidding sons to cut off the heads of their parents, and answers to oracles demanding the sacrifice of virgins to ward off the plague."<sup>17</sup>

When speaking of his decision to quit teaching rhetoric at Milan, Augustine is no less scornful: "I decided in Your sight not to break off violently but to gently withdraw myself from the teaching of eloquence where words were sold so that boys, not meditating on Your law, nor on Your peace, but on a flock of crazy lies and forensic battles, should no longer purchase from me weapons for their madness."<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, in addition to the insignificance of Symmachus, the extravagance of Ausonius, and the ignorance of Nonius Marcellus, there was the added factor that almost all the teachers of the fourth century were pagan.

The aversion which St. Jerome, and still more St. Ambrose, had for rhetoric, philosophy, and mathematics, is thus quite understandable. In his denial of any value to pagan thought and philosophy, St. Ambrose became almost fanatical. But this may have been a kind of reaction to the endless weariness which he had experienced in the rhetorical schools of Rome.

Music formed an integral part of the study of metrics. At this particular period there was a rage for music almost like the enthusiasm that is shown today for popular singers and instrumentalists. Ammianus Marcellinus lamented the fact that houses which in former times were famous for their devotion to serious pursuits now re-echoed with the sound of singing and the tinkling of lyres and flutes. Libraries were shut up like tombs and people amused themselves with lyres as large as carriages, hydraulic organs, and other instruments of enormous size.<sup>19</sup> In his writings, St. Ambrose refers to music and musical instruments and to contests held for singers and musicians.<sup>20</sup> He writes so technically about these matters that it is

obvious that he had received an exceptional education in music. We shall see the practical consequences of this when we take up his reform of the liturgy of his church.

St. Ambrose's first biographer mentions only one incident that occurred during his youth. When the *sacerdotes*, that is, the bishops, entered the house of the Ambrosii, his mother and sister used to kiss their hands. The young Ambrose liked to joke about this manifestation of reverence still very common in Catholic countries in the south. He thought that the companion of his sister Marcellina should also kiss his hand "since," as he said, "he would also become a bishop."<sup>21</sup> This is an extremely valuable bit of information since it confirms the fact that the family was Christian and that it was visited by Pope Liberius.

On the feast of the Epiphany in 353, his sister Marcellina consecrated her virginity to God.<sup>22</sup> Her reception of the veil took place in the Vatican basilica. Before receiving the vow of the young woman and placing the veil upon her head with a solemn prayer, Pope Liberius delivered a touching exhortation. Later, when speaking to the virgins of Milan, St. Ambrose was fond of recalling that great day in which he may also have had a part. Marcellina continued to live at home as she had done before, but Ambrose must have noticed some change in his sister, not only in the greater modesty of her dress but also in her comportment and occupations, even though the Church at the time did not impose any greater obligations in the matter of prayer or the exercise of charity upon those who professed continence than it did upon the ordinary run of Christians.

Marcellina's consecration of herself to a life of virginity should be associated with the fervent spirit of asceticism that had been brought to Rome by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria. After he had been driven for the second time into exile in 339, he had come to Rome to be near Pope Julius and remained there for more than two years as a guest in the home of the patrician Albina. Athanasius already enjoyed great re-

noun for his numerous adventures in his struggle with the Arians. Exiled first by Constantine and later by Constantius II, in the eyes of the people of the West he personified the faith of Nicea. He and the two Egyptian monks who accompanied him never tired speaking about the solitaries of the Thebaid and the prodigies they performed. The first center of monastic life in the West thus took shape in the luxurious palace of the Marcelli on the Aventine. Marcella, the daughter of Albina, was the first conquest of this propaganda of Athanasius. She was later joined by Asella, Fabiola, and Principia, other young women of the Roman aristocracy. The practice of continence and asceticism was not something that had been introduced by Christianity into the world, but the desire to imitate Christ more closely and to carry His cross gave a special character to Christian virginity that elevated it far above the continence of pagan philosophers. During this period, especially in the East, the ardent desire for a solitary and continent life became almost a contagion. St. Basil had to recall the fact that a Christian could not leave his wife to go and become a monk without first obtaining her consent.<sup>23</sup> St. Nilus, who went to live as a solitary on Mt. Sinai after having been governor of Constantinople toward the end of the fourth century, has left an account of his ardent desire for eremitical life and the anguish he experienced on leaving his wife and two small sons: "I took my children, still very young, by the hand and led them to their mother. Giving one of them to her and keeping the other near me, I then disclosed to her what I had in mind. The tone of my voice and the expression on my face made her realize that my decision was final. It would have been useless to try and dissuade me, and she did not attempt it. Seeing that she could not oppose my departure, she gave her consent, but not without anguish. She was choked with grief, and tears ran down her cheeks. . . . You know how painful is the separation of those who are lawfully married. It is a suffering no less terrible than that caused by a sword which pierces one to the quick."<sup>24</sup>

In the general context of decadent paganism, these immoderate religious aspirations can find their explanation and justification.

Three years before Marcellina received the veil, Ambrose must have witnessed the catastrophe that made the eternal city flow red with blood after the usurpation of Magnentius.

In January, 350, a conspiracy against Constans, the Augustus of the West, originated in Gaul. It was begun by Marcellinus, the *comes rerum privatarum*, or minister of finance.

Flavius Magnus Magnentius, a barbarian who had come into Gaul as a prisoner in the time of Constantine the Great and was then in command of a body of troops, was hailed Augustus at the end of a banquet at Autun on the night of January 17. Constans fled toward Spain, but at Elna, at the foot of the Pyrenees, he was overtaken and killed by assassins by order of Magnentius. The latter remained ruler of Gaul, and very soon gained acceptance also in the vicariates and provinces of Spain, Britain, Africa, and Italy. Only the army in Illyricum refused to recognize him. Instead, it proclaimed an old general Vetricius Augustus. Philostorgius tells us that this nomination was due to the quick wit of Constantia, sister of Constans, and of Constantius II, who persuaded Vetricius to don the purple to confound the plans of Magnentius.<sup>25</sup> Constantia was at this time the widow of Hannibalian, who had been killed in the murder of the relatives of Constantine in 337. In that year Vetricius asked her to be his wife, but Constantius II forbade the marriage.

Rome had also recognized Magnentius as Augustus when there occurred a new change of scene. Flavius Popilius Nepotianus, son of Eutropia, and consequently grandson of Constantius Chlorus, was at Rome, and had already been consul in 336. Being convinced that he had a greater right to the purple than the barbarian Magnentius, he gathered together a band of wastrels and gladiators and had himself proclaimed Augustus at Rome on June 3, 350. The usurper of Gaul sent a prefect of the praetorium against him.

Nepotianus shut himself up in Rome and raged against the supporters of Magnentius until the latter sent Marcellinus against him with a large force. With the assistance of a traitor among the senators, the latter succeeded in routing the Romans. Nepotianus was killed, and his head, impaled on a stake, was carried about the streets of the city. A savage repression of the revolt followed immediately with the slaughter of his followers, and among these was Eutropia.

In the fall of 350, after settling affairs in the East, Constantius marched from Antioch toward Constantinople to tend to the situation developing in the West. Magnentius sent Marcellinus to enter into negotiations with him. He asked to be recognized as Augustus, admitting his own inferiority to one who was a higher Augustus. He offered his daughter to Constantius in marriage, and asked in turn for the hand of Constantia, the latter's sister. But Constantius came to terms first with Vetranio with the promise of a pension. In secure possession of superior forces, he rejected the proposals of Magnentius. Later it was reported that his father, Constantine the Great, had appeared to him in a dream, bidding him to vindicate his brother Constans.

On September 28, 351, a great battle took place at Mursa, the modern Eszek, or Osijek, on the banks of the river Drava, between Hungary and Yugoslavia. After his defeat, Magnentius repaired to Aquileia. According to Sulpicius Severus, Constantius II, a sad and eccentric emperor if there ever was one, remained praying all during the battle in the church of the martyrs of Mursa, and the day after went to the field where it had taken place and wept to see the plain covered with tens of thousands of bodies.<sup>26</sup> In 352 Constantius invaded Italy, occupied Sicily, Africa, and Spain, and despite an unfortunate encounter at Pavia, succeeded in forcing Magnentius back into Gaul. Finally, Magnentius, after having been again routed at Mt. Saleon, committed suicide at Lyons on August 10, 353. Constantius II then became the sole Augustus of the Roman world.

At the time, Constantius was thirty-six years old, and in-

fatuated with his imperial dignity. Small in stature, with twisted limbs, ugly, and rather ludicrous, he spoke little, and when he did it was in a low voice. As a persecutor of paganism and of orthodoxy, he numbered among his personal enemies the most prominent men of the age: Julian, Ammianus Marcellinus, Athanasius, and Hilary. Suspicious and given to intrigues, he was eminently successful in making himself hated by all. It may be, however, that he also had some redeeming qualities and that his sorry reputation is at least in part due to the fact that Christian writers could not pardon his Arian intransigency, and pagan writers in their turn his intolerance.

Arianism may be described as the translation into theological terms of an attempt to laicize and nationalize the Church.<sup>27</sup> In making Christ a creature no matter how sublime, it destroyed the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and at the same time undermined the mysteries connected with the life of Christ and the uniqueness of Christianity and the Church's claim to immunity from any interference on the part of the State in carrying out its functions as mediatrix between men and God. Arianism reduced Christianity to the level of every other naturally religious doctrine and, as a consequence, logically denied its own autonomy. Not without some reason it has been maintained that the empire should have instinctively favored Arius and his doctrine in order to regain what it had lost, that is, control over the freedom of the individual conscience which seemed to detract from the absolute power of the Augustus.<sup>28</sup> But if it would be going too far to attribute such an intuition to the political Arianism of Constantine the Great, it would be a still greater error to attribute it to his son Constantius.

But the latter was, at any rate, dominated in his relations with the Church by a group of Arian bishops.

In May, 325, some three hundred bishops assembled for the Council of Nicea (the modern Iznik in Turkey). Constantine had gone to the trouble of inviting them from all over the



Roman world, placing at their disposal the carriages of the public post. The council condemned Arius and his followers. Christ was defined as being of the same nature as the Father: ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρὶ, *consubstantialis patri*. The formula is non-biblical and had been rejected some decades earlier by the Council of Antioch in their condemnation of Paul of Samosata, who had given it a Sabellian meaning; that is, he had taught that the Son is only a manifestation of the Father, not a person distinct from Him. But in 325 the Council of Nicea decided that the formula expressed their opposition to Arianism in affirming that Christ is God just as the Father is God and is in no sense inferior to Him. The Arian bishops were deposed, and Constantine sent them into exile. But in 328, only three years after the council, during which time Athanasius had become bishop of Alexandria, Constantine agreed to recall three Arian bishops from exile, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Marus of Chalcedon, and Theognis of Nicea. These were relying upon the favor and protection of Constantine's mother and sister.

Unfortunately, the teacher of a number of Arian priests and bishops and the source of their errors, Lucian of Antioch, had died as a martyr at Nicomedia under Maximinus Daia in 311-312. He had been buried at Drepanum on the eastern bank of the Sea of Marmara at the entrance to the Gulf of Nicomedia. The town was later known as Helenopolis from the fact that Helena had been born there. She had, moreover, a very great devotion to the martyr buried there.

This was the beginning of a very sad affair. The three Arian bishops that had been rehabilitated won over the sympathies of Constantine and used them to destroy the Council of Nicea. All the orthodox bishops were deposed and exiled one after another, beginning with the bishop of Antioch, the populous capital of the East. The episcopal sees represented not only positions of great honor, but also of great material resources. Ever since Constantine in 321 had recognized the juridical status of the churches and their capacity to inherit, church

properties, already common in the third century, were constantly being increased.

Then it was Athanasius's turn. After many unsuccessful attempts, the Arian cabal succeeded in bringing an accusation against Athanasius at the Council of Tyre in the summer of 335. He received an order to appear. With forty-nine Egyptian bishops who, however, were not able to participate in the deliberations because they were not invited, he went to Tyre.

There are always malcontents and all the more so when the one in command is as resolute as Athanasius. The principal charge laid against him was that he had broken the chalice of Ischiras, a self-appointed priest of the Mareotis, the region between Alexandria and the Libyan desert, who had arrogated to himself the right of celebrating the Eucharist in his village. Macharius, a priest, commissioned by Athanasius to visit the districts of the Mareotis, had forbidden this and had perhaps made use of some external sign to make the prohibition still more impressive. At the trial in Tyre, which was based on such trivialities, the Arians had civil servants and soldiers at their disposition. They decided to send six bishops to Egypt to make an investigation on the spot. Here, for the first time, there appear as members of this inquisition two young bishops of Pannonia, Ursacius and Valens. They will appear again later in the struggle with St. Ambrose. The six members of the commission behaved scandalously in Egypt. The priests and deacons of the Mareotis, who would have testified that Ischiras was not a priest and that no chalice had been broken, were not even able to get a hearing, while in the meantime the military escort of the bishop beat and killed the faithful, and the bishops themselves feasted on days of fast.

Athanasius realized that all that was sought at Tyre was his condemnation, so he departed. The council was still in session when a letter arrived from Constantine inviting all its members to come to Constantinople. On October 30, 335, when the emperor was returning to the city on horseback, he was sud-

denly confronted by Athanasius, who stopped him in the middle of the street and asked that he be heard along with his accusers.<sup>29</sup> The emperor gave his consent. The audience which followed has already been noted: it ended with the first exile of Athanasius to Trier.

In November of this same year Arius, also through the intervention of the emperor, was readmitted into the Church by means of an ambiguous profession of faith. But this could not be effected at Alexandria since the people rose up, causing Constantine to fear a rebellion. It was then decided that Arius should be readmitted at Constantinople, but on the evening before the reconciliation, while he was being conducted through the city in triumph, in the square where the porphyry column with the statue of Constantine stood, he felt himself suddenly stricken and entering a public restroom he died, as his bowels burst according to the account of ancient historians.<sup>30</sup>

To compensate themselves for the death of Arius, the bishops gathered at Constantinople condemned and deposed Marcellus of Ancyra because he supported Athanasius and Nicea.

Finally at noon, on Pentecost, May 22, 337, Constantine died in his villa of Ancyra near Nicomedia after receiving baptism on his deathbed from Eusebius, the Arian bishop of Nicomedia. On November 23, 337, Athanasius returned to Alexandria.

From the very beginning of his rule, Constantius II entrusted himself to the guidance of a group of Arian bishops. In 338, these bishops first sought to have the condemnation of Tyre in 335 and the results of that notorious inquest recognized by Pope Julius at Rome. But later, with Constantius's approval, they nominated a successor to Athanasius in the person of Gregory of Cappadocia, who was immediately consecrated bishop and sent into Egypt.<sup>31</sup> Even if Athanasius had been legitimately deposed, which was not the case, his successor should at least have been elected by the clergy and people of Alexandria, and then consecrated by the bishops of

the province, as was the universal custom at this time. Philagrius, the prefect of Egypt and a personal enemy of Athanasius, received orders from Constantius to install the new bishop. On March 18, 339, he expelled Athanasius after storming a church in which some were wounded and others slain. The building itself was then set on fire and burned along with the neighboring baptistry. Four days later Gregory entered the city. Accompanied by soldiers he passed from one church to another to take possession of them. On Good Friday he had thirty-four people seized and beaten in a church because they had resisted him. Athanasius wrote a letter of protest to all the bishops of the world, and it forms one of the most moving pages in Patristic literature. He begins by recalling the Levite of Ephraim whose wife, according to the Biblical account, had been slain by the wickedness of the men of Gabaa. He placed her body on an ass, and coming to his house he cut it up into twelve pieces and sent a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel to arouse their indignation so that they might avenge the offense.<sup>32</sup> This is what Athanasius says they have done to his church. What has just happened surpasses all the horrors of the persecutions. This is what makes the pagans blaspheme and persuades them to believe that the consecration of bishops in the Church is no more than a question of bribery and violence on the part of the civil authorities. If the bishops remain silent there is danger that the evil will spread: their episcopal sees will become objects of trade and commerce. He then recalls the acts of violence, the murders, the violations of virgins, and the profanations and burnings of the churches.

Julius, the bishop of Rome, answered this letter by summoning a council to which he invited Athanasius. The council, which was assembled at Rome in 341, recognized Athanasius as the only lawful bishop of Alexandria. In the letter which Julius wrote to the bishops of the East to notify them of its decisions he placed his finger on the source of the evils—that

discouraging lack of Christian spirit which the bishops manifested by their scandalous rivalry: "Dearly beloved, it is not in keeping with the Gospel for the decisions of the Church to be condemnations to death and exile."<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, although he was recognized at Rome, Athanasius was not able to return to his see. In 342, Pope Julius together with the bishops Hosius of Cordova and Maximinus of Trier asked Constantius, the Augustus of the West, to intercede with Constantius II. A council was agreed upon, to be held in 343 at Sardica in the Balkans, the modern Sophia. Ninety-four bishops from the West and seventy-six from the East came for the meetings, but the Arian bishops of the East refused to take part in them until Athanasius and Basil of Ancyra should have been summarily condemned. Hosius tried every means of compromise, but in vain. The Arians, confident in the support of Constantius II, suddenly left Sardica, and as they were leaving, they sent out an encyclical letter which condemned not only Athanasius but also Pope Julius and all his other supporters. The bishops who remained proceeded with the regular business of the council. The faith of Nicea was reaffirmed. Athanasius was declared innocent; the bishops who had usurped his see were excommunicated along with Ursacius and Valens. The final statement of the council was a solemn declaration of the right of the Church to its spiritual independence and the expression of a desire that the civil magistrates should not occupy themselves with matters about which only the Church could decide. In the matter of ecclesiastical discipline, the Council of Sardica ordered that an end should be put to the abuse of ordaining a rich layman, lawyer, or public official as bishop. Only one who was already within the hierarchy of the Church should be elected. Another abuse was the passing of a bishop from one see to another. Who was ever seen passing to a smaller or poorer church? Here was another proof of ambition and self-interest. Every bishop changing his see should be deposed and excommunicated. It was just at this time that

Valens of Mursa was doing everything he could to obtain the see of Antioch.

But since the bishops of the Orient, for the most part Arian, had taken no part in the council, the legislation of Sardica remained largely theoretical.

Constantius II fell under the ever increasing influence of the bishops of the East even though their former leader, Eusebius of Nicomedia, had died toward the end of 341. He put the imperial post at their disposal so that they could travel far and wide arresting bishops who had been reconciled at Sardica and persecuting their supporters. One of the leaders of the Arian faction was Stephen, bishop of Antioch. The scandal which occurred at Antioch on Easter, 344, can furnish us with some idea of their way of acting.

At Antioch, where Constantius II was busy making preparations for his war against the Persians, there arrived as delegates from the Council of Sardica, Vincentius of Capua and Euphrates of Cologne. They brought with them a letter from Constans asking Constantius II to permit the return of the exiled bishops to their own churches. But Stephen, the Arian bishop of Antioch, tried to discredit them with an ugly trick. The hotel in which the two orthodox bishops were staying was some distance from the others. Scoundrels hired by Stephen bribed a servant of the hotel. They procured a woman of the street and led her into the room where the bishop of Cologne was sleeping. The night was rent by the shouts of the surprised bishop and of the woman, who was dumbfounded at finding herself in the presence of an old man and bishop. The villains immediately ran into the room in order to be able to tell later what had happened. The bishops, however, had the outer gates shut at once, and the woman and those who had brought her were arrested. The following day Salianus, the head of the band given by Constans as an escort to the legates, came to the hotel and asked Constantius II for an inquest. Stephen was deposed. The Christian communities

even in the East would have nothing to do with bishops of this kind.<sup>34</sup>

When after two years on the episcopal throne, Eusebius of Nicodemia died at Constantinople, his followers were extremely anxious to get as his successor the Arian Macedonius. But since the faithful were still loyal to their exiled bishop, Paul of Thessalonica, there was such an outbreak of violence in 342 that the general Hermogenes, a *magister militum*, was slain and his body dragged through the streets. Constantius II then hastened from Antioch to Constantinople. He drove Paul out of the city and punished the people by cutting in half the free distribution of grain which they had been receiving from the governor.

Meanwhile, on June 25, the intruder, Gregory of Cappodocia, died at Alexandria. Constantius then recalled Athanasius, but the latter put off his return for more than a year. He feared some trick and also wanted everything to be in order, one of the requirements being a return to the faith of Nicea. Eventually he decided to leave Aquileia. He passed through Róme, where the faithful rejoiced to see again the famous bishop who had been for years a guest of their church. He then went to Antioch, where he found Constantius II. The emperor swore that all the accusations against the bishop had been destroyed. Athanasius's reception at Alexandria on October 21, 346, was a triumph.

In the West, Ursacius and Valens, sensing the change of wind, came to Rome to offer their submission to Pope Julius. They abjured their Arianism and accepted Athanasius into their communion. The Council of Sardica had deposed them, but Pope Julius in his desire for peace restored them to their sees.

A kind of truce lasted from 346 to 350. Constantius was being continually threatened by the Persians and did not wish to antagonize his brother Constans, a Catholic and favorable to the Catholics. But when, through the usurpation of Mag-

nentius, Constans was removed from the scene and, even worse, when Constantius II became the sole ruler of the Roman world after the death of Magnentius in August, 353, the sad effects of Caesaropapism were soon felt even in the West. This began with the removal of Photinus, the anti-Arian bishop of Sirmium. Though he was not orthodox, he was deposed and sent into exile. He was replaced by Germinius, an Arian bishop who came from Cyzicus. Athanasius was accused of having entered into secret agreements with Constans and Magnentius. In the meantime, on April 12, 352, Pope Julius died, and on May 17, his successor, Liberius, was elected.

Early in 353, while Constantius was at Milan, Athanasius sent Serapion of Thmuis with four other Egyptian bishops to the court. At this same time Athanasius received a letter from Constantius through an imperial messenger granting his request to be present *ad comitatum*, that is, at the court. Since Athanasius had made no such request he understood that his enemies had sent the prince a forged letter. He accordingly replied that he was ready to appear but he wanted an order to that effect. It did not come.

Towards the end of 353, Pope Liberius sent two legates, Vincentius and Marcellus, bishops of Campania, to Arles, where Constantius was spending the winter, to ask the emperor to summon a general council at Aquileia. Unfortunately, Ursacius and Valens were at this time living at the court and dominating it. They had already carefully renounced the retraction they had made at Rome to Pope Julius after their condemnation at Sardica. In general, the bishops of the West had not as yet taken any part in the Arian controversy. It was thus easy for Constantius to obtain the signatures of the bishops of Gaul to a condemnation of Athanasius at a council held at Arles in the fall of 353. Even the papal legates were induced to add their signatures to the condemnation. Paulinus, the bishop of Trier, was the only one who refused. Then, as Hilary of Poitiers observes with bitter sarcasm, "The other



bishops judged him to be unworthy of the Church, while the emperor judged him to be deserving of exile."<sup>35</sup> On this occasion Constantius had the opportunity of showing his animosity to Pope Liberius by accusing him of ambition and intrigues. When the pope learned what had happened at Arles, he wrote another letter of protest renewing his demand for the summoning of a real council which would confirm the faith of Nicea and settle various other problems.

Constantius feigned consent. Instead of at Aquileia, the council was held at Milan between January and May, 355. There, together with a few bishops from the East, were assembled at least thirty bishops of the West. Pope Liberius sent as his legates Lucifer, bishop of Cagliari, the priest Pancratius, and the deacon Hilary. At Milan, as it had been at Arles, Constantius's first item on the agenda was the condemnation of Athanasius. Eusebius of Vercelli, however, asked that the bishops should first sign the creed of Nicea, and he brought out a copy of it for this purpose. Dionysius, the bishop of Milan, picked up a pen and was on the point of signing the parchment when Valens of Mursa rushed up and seized both pen and parchment, shouting out that such a procedure was inadmissible.<sup>36</sup> Such violence in a crowded church so distressed and angered the Catholics of Milan that it was thought best to transfer the place of meeting to the imperial palace.

Determined to carry the day, Constantius summoned the three orthodox leaders, Lucifer, Eusebius, and Dionysius. He tried to influence them with threats and promises, but in vain. Contrary to the other thirty bishops who capitulated, these three bishops remained steadfast and would neither condemn Athanasius nor deny the faith of Nicea.

As Athanasius wrote later, they believed that "exile was a part of their ministry." Lucifer was sent in chains to Germanicia in Syria, Eusebius to Scythopolis in Palestine, and Dionysius perhaps to a mountain village of Cappadocia, all being placed under the surveillance of Arian bishops. They

were followed by the regrets and esteem of their flocks. Pope Liberius wrote a letter to commend and console them. The Arians invited to the see of Milan Auxentius, a Cappadocian who did not even know how to speak Latin, the language of his new subjects.

Pope Liberius remained to be dealt with. Constantius sent him a eunuch of the court with a letter asking for his signature to the condemnation of Athanasius. In his efforts to win over the pope, he sent along with the letter a number of valuable gifts. But Liberius refused to sign. The eunuch placed the gifts on the Confession, that is, on the altar over the tomb of St. Peter in the Vatican basilica, but the pope had them thrown out of the church. The prefect of the city was then ordered to seize Liberius and send him off to Milan. Ammianus Marcellinus writes that because of the populace, who were devotedly attached to him, the pope had to be spirited away at night, and that with the greatest difficulty.<sup>37</sup> St. Ambrose at the time was about twenty years old, and he must have shared in the popular dismay at the loss of Liberius.

A stenographic report of the dramatic encounter between pope and emperor in the imperial palace at Milan has been preserved. Since he continued to resist the condemnation of Athanasius, Liberius was sent into exile at Beroea (the modern Stara Zagora in Bulgaria), where he was kept under the watchful eye of Bishop Demophilus, one of the Arian leaders.

During this same year of 355, the nonagenarian bishop Hosius was summoned from Spain to the court at Milan. When the Arians were unable to win him over, he was dismissed by Constantius, who later wrote him a number of letters.

In the meantime measures were being taken in Egypt to secure the banishment of Athanasius. During the summer an imperial notary failed to overcome the resistance of the people and the magistrates. Another notary was then sent to Alexandria, but this time with troops and an imperial officer.

On the night of February 8, 356, while Athanasius was

celebrating a vigil with his people in the church of Theonas, the building was surrounded by soldiers. They broke down the doors and killed some of the faithful, but Athanasius managed to escape. After eight months of lay rule, the Church of Alexandria, on February 24, 357, received a new bishop, George of Cappadocia. The latter was the son of a Cilician laborer. He had held an administrative post at Constantinople but had been dismissed for his unscrupulous conduct. Later he engaged in a number of different occupations. For a time he provided various military installations with pork for the soldiers, and then he decided to enter the clergy of one of the churches in Cappadocia. About the year 345 he met Constantius and became such a good friend of his that he was told to visit Julian, who at this time was sequestered in the magnificent palace of Macellum at the foot of Mount Argaeus (the modern Erciyas Dagi) near Caesarea in Cappadocia.<sup>38</sup> After he had come to know George, the fifteen-year-old Julian decided that Christians fought each other like wild beasts. At his own home, not far from Macellum, George had a beautiful library. Julian was allowed to use it, and there he eagerly read the works of Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea along with those of pagan rhetoricians and philosophers, and among these latter the writings of Porphyry and Iamblicus in particular, the last of the Neoplatonists.

When Julian as emperor was informed of the murder of George at Alexandria in 362, he wrote to the prefect of Egypt to gather up the remains of his library, which he had come to esteem as a youth, and send it to him at Antioch.

After his appointment as bishop of Alexandria, George entered the city in February, 357, and succeeded in staying there for eighteen months.<sup>39</sup> He banished sixteen Egyptian bishops, sent those of the clergy who remained faithful to Athanasius to the mines, and forbade assemblies in the city. When Duke Sebastian, whom the emperor had nominated as his right arm, discovered that secret meetings were being held in the

cemeteries, George reacted at once. He ordered the virgins and the other women to be flogged with thorned branches and the men to be banished. On the side he engaged in various business enterprises. He got control of the salt beds, the areas employed for the cultivation of papyrus, and even monopolized the funeral processions. In August, 358, the Alexandrians, tired of it all, attacked him in church. He fled and was not seen for another three years. Athanasius, in his turn, was wandering about the desert, but always secretly so as not to be taken by the agents of Constantius.

A successor to the exiled Liberius was appointed in the person of the Roman archdeacon Felix. He was consecrated in the imperial palace at Milan by three Arian bishops in the presence of three eunuchs who represented the people. Although he gained acceptance with a few of the clergy at Rome, most of the faithful refused to recognize him, regarding him as being nothing more than a heretic and intruder.

In Gaul, however, toward the end of 355, a return to orthodoxy was being set in motion through the efforts of Hilary of Poitiers. Hilary was a noble pagan convert living a holy life with his wife and daughter when, about the year 353, the bishop of the city died. Hilary was enthusiastically elected as his successor by the people of Poitiers. Upon the return of the bishops from Milan after the condemnation of Athanasius, Hilary realized that he would have to oppose their decision. But the Arian Saturninus of Arles in a council at Béziers, probably in the spring of 356, succeeded in quashing Hilary's opposition. Constantius was thus able to exile Hilary as he had earlier the other orthodox bishops. From 356 to 360, as a consequence, Hilary was banished to Asia Minor.

Constantius could now boast that he had subjected nearly all of the churches of the empire to his own theological tenets. In addition to his own victories over the bishops, his generals had defeated Magnentius and various German tribes. The emperor decided that it would be proper to go to Rome with a powerful force to celebrate his different triumphs.

In the fourth century Rome still preserved a great deal of her ancient splendor. Ammianus Marcellinus, Rutilius Nama-tianus, Themistius, Ausonius, and Prudentius all agree in sing-ing her praises: Rome was the queen of the world, an ocean of beauty, the first city of the world.

At this time, Rome was still a very large city, though its population had somewhat declined from the 800,000 or so inhabitants that lived there during the flourishing period of the second century.<sup>40</sup> The *regionarii*, or rudimentary guides to the city, of this period list 1,782 *domus*, or private palaces, and 46,290 *insulae*, or apartments, each with five or six separate quarters for rent. These apartments were often five and six stories high, heaped up on dark narrow streets, without run-ning water, and offering few conveniences to the masses of citizens. The homes of the wealthy, on the other hand, were well equipped and richly adorned with marble and mosaics.

Pagan priests banded together in sacred colleges drew large profits from the numerous temples scattered throughout the various regions of the city. Eleven huge public baths provided convenient social centers for thousands of the citizens. The Baths of Caracalla had some 1,600 marble seats for visitors, and the Baths of Diocletian almost twice that number. Con-nected with the baths were shops, gymnasia, libraries, and gardens, walks, and covered porticoes. And in addition to these large public establishments there were 856 smaller baths under private management. Then, too, there were the various fora with their arches, columns, temples, and basilicas. Among the most impressive of these was the Forum of Trajan with its enormous covered market, basilica used as a court of law, and column standing between two great libraries.

The Circus Maximus, which served as one of the sites for horse races, had seats for 150,000 spectators. The theaters of Balbus with 7,700 seats, of Marcellus with 14,000, and of Pompey with 17,000 were always active during the summer. Finally, there was the Colosseum with its 45,000 seats and standing room for 5,000 more. Throughout the whole of the

fourth century it continued to be a site for gladiatorial combats and wild beast hunts.

Constantius entered the city on April 28, 357, and remained there until May 29. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, he rode into the city on a golden chariot gleaming with precious stones.<sup>41</sup> He was surrounded by a large military force. The soldiers of the different corps carried large banners, and their standards were adorned with gold and jewels. Cavalrymen dressed in Persian fashion with their whole bodies covered with armor were a particular object of attraction. Constantius himself, though he was hailed on all sides, remained in a statueque pose, without turning his face either to the right or to the left. But this was typical of his constant endeavor to preserve the imperial dignity. As Ammianus notes on at least two occasions, Constantius was never seen spitting, blowing his nose, or wiping his mouth in public.

During the course of his stay in Rome, Constantius addressed the senators and nobles in the curia, and the people in the forum. He visited the sights of the city, the baths, the amphitheater, and the Pantheon; but when he came to the Forum of Trajan, "he stood fast in amazement," in the words of Ammianus, "turning his attention to the huge complex about him that beggars description and which will never again be imitated by mortal men." Ormisda, a brother of the king of Persia and a refugee at the Roman court from the time of Constantine, was standing near him at the time. When Constantius asked him what he thought of Rome, he replied that his greatest satisfaction was to have learned that even there men were mortal. As a memorial of his own visit, Constantius decided to erect a superb obelisk in the Circus Maximus. This was one which his father had previously brought from Heliopolis to Alexandria.

In his visit to Rome, Constantius was accompanied by his wife Eusebia and his sister Helena, the wife of Julian, who was at this time in Gaul. The Christian nobles at Rome thought

that this would be an opportune time to ask for the return of Pope Liberius. Since this would have been a dangerous request for the men to make, it was made by a delegation of women dressed in all their finery. Among them may well have been Ambrose's mother and sister. They begged the emperor to have compassion on the city, deprived as it was of its shepherd and exposed to the ravaging of wolves. When Constantius replied that Rome already had a shepherd to rule her, they told him that no one entered a church when Felix was in it. Although he himself subscribed to the faith of Nicea, he communicated with those who denied it. The emperor is then supposed to have said that Liberius was about to return, and "better than before," that is, as an Arian. But the accuracy of this report is quite doubtful. At any rate, it is certain that when some time later Constantius sent a letter to Rome to inform the people that Liberius would return and would govern the Church there together with Felix, the people cried out in jest as they heard the letter being read by the prefect of the city in the circus: "This is good! Just as there are two distinct factions in the circus with different colors for each, so there will be a different bishop for each party in the Church." Their laughter then turned to anger, and all cried out together: "One God, one Christ, and one bishop!"

After two years, the rigors of exile caused the unfortunate collapse of Pope Liberius's resistance. He signed a formula of compromise (but which, however, did not deny the faith of Nicea), accepted the excommunication of Athanasius, and wrote letters to the bishops of the East and of Campania to intercede with Constantius for his return to Rome.<sup>42</sup> But the emperor left him waiting for another year. Finally, on July 29, 358, Liberius was able to re-enter Rome. He was given a triumphal reception. Felix had to withdraw to an estate he owned on the Via Portuensis. In the fall of this year, he attempted to occupy the Basilica Julia (Santa Maria in Trastevere) with some of his followers, but he failed to do so since

the people themselves intervened. From then on he remained isolated until his death on November 22, 365.

During these eventful years, Ambrose was following the course of rhetoric at Rome, and we may well believe that he was passionately interested in the various shifts in Constantius's religious policy. Though he was a Christian, the emperor was a persecutor of both pagans and Catholics. Rome at the time was still two-thirds pagan, and the Catholic minority had little knowledge of, and still less sympathy for, Arianism.

While he was at Rome, Constantius had the altar of Victory removed from in front of the senate, giving as his reason the offense which this altar gave to the Christian senators. It had been placed at the entrance of the hall, and it was customary for senators before entering the building to burn a grain of incense upon it. The statue of Victory, on the other hand, stood at the end of the hall on a base about a yard wide, which can furnish us with some idea of the size of the statue itself. The latter was a noble war prize taken from Tarentum which Augustus had placed on its pedestal in the senate on August 29, 29 B.C. Before this venerated symbol, the senate swore fidelity to the new ruler, and each year before this same statue it offered prayers and vows for the prosperity of both the emperor and the empire.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of the older students at Rome were pagan. They came there from all over the empire. Their life, like that of university students at Athens and Carthage, was not exactly tedious. From the life of St. Basil, who was a student at Athens about the year 350, and from the writings of Libanius, Himerius, and Eunapius, we are well informed about student activities in this ancient Greek city, and they could not have been much different at Rome during this same period. There were student frays almost every day.<sup>44</sup> Newcomers were frequently treated to blows from clubs wielded by members of the different scholarly or athletic factions. The professors



themselves had few scruples about mixing into the turmoil. Himerius, a famous professor of rhetoric, was once so seriously wounded that he had to postpone his lectures.

Some teachers, to secure a larger number of students, would entertain them with good dinners or even in some worse way. A new student was initiated with a solemn procession intended to parody the ceremonies at Eleusis.

St. Augustine in his *Confessions* has left a vivid description of university life at Carthage. Among the students was a group known as the *eversores*, or "spoilers," who preyed upon the simplicity of the newcomers.<sup>45</sup> Student life was so free that St. Augustine's mother found it necessary to exhort her son not to fall into fornication and above all not to commit adultery.<sup>46</sup> At Rome the students were no better than they were at Carthage, as Augustine found out when he arrived there in 383. He failed to collect the tuition that was due to him since the students were squandering it on other interests. St. Jerome, who studied rhetoric at Rome from 360 to 365, later spoke with regret of the errors of those years. In a letter written in 384 to a young girl with the rather strange name of Eustochium, he recalls the temptations that plagued him even in the desert:

"How often, when I was living in the desert, in that vast solitude parched by the burning rays of the sun which gives a savage dwelling place to hermits, did I imagine that I was among the pleasures of Rome? I used to sit alone because I was filled with bitterness. My unshapely limbs were rudely clothed in sackcloth, and my skin from long neglect had become as black as an Ethiopian's. Tears and groans were my daily portion; and, if drowsiness ever overcame my struggles against it, my bare bones, which were scarcely knit together, clashed against the ground. Of my food and drink I shall say nothing, since even when they are ill, solitaries take nothing but cold water, and for them to

eat anything cooked is regarded as self-indulgence. And yet, through fear of hell I had condemned myself to such a prison, where my only companions were scorpions and wild beasts, I often imagined that I found myself amidst bevvies of girls from Rome. My face was pale and my body chilled with fastings, but my mind was burning with desires, and the fires of lust kept boiling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead."<sup>47</sup>

In another letter which he wrote in 375-376 to friends at Aquileia commending his young sister to them, he speaks of "the slippery path of youth" on which he himself "had fallen."<sup>48</sup>

The merry bands of students created such a turmoil with their none-too-innocent amusements that on March 12, 370, Valentinian issued an edict forbidding students from the provinces to continue their studies at Rome beyond their twentieth year.<sup>49</sup>

Still, the students could not have been so very much different from the rest of the people of Rome. We have already pointed out the enormous capacity of the theaters, the baths, and the circuses. The imperial grain supply had to provide free rations for more than one hundred and fifty thousand heads of families during the second century. If we take into account the fact that there must have been at least three or four members to each family, this means that at least half a million people were dependent upon the public dole. In addition to these there were the relatively few very wealthy senatorial families, mounting up to a few hundred at the most. Neither the very poor nor the very wealthy had any real work to do. Between these two classes were the businessmen, for the most part merchants and shopkeepers. Even these did not work more than seven hours a day during the summer and six in winter. Moreover, the actual working days during the course of the centuries had been greatly reduced by the introduction

of new feast days. No people have had so many feasts as the Romans of the imperial centuries. During this period there were some one hundred and ninety obligatory feast days each year. Thus for every work day there was a feast day, except when there were two of the latter. And this does not include the extraordinary feasts such as those marking the arrival of Constantius at Rome in 357. To keep the people occupied and amused, new baths, theaters, and amphitheaters were erected in or about the city.

The circuses were thronged from morning till night. When there was a spectacle, there were as many as a hundred races a day. The gaily dressed crowds came to them in tens and hundreds of thousands. Sports parties now supplanted the ancient political factions. They were distinguished by the different colors worn by the horses and their jockeys. There were the Whites, the Greens, the Blues, and the Reds. Bets were placed in every part of the circus. The fans were so keen for their favorite horses that we find the names of the latter in the mosaics on the floors of the baths. On the floor of a bath in Numidia has been found the name of a horse that had been victorious at Rome. It may still be read today: *Vincas non vincas, te amamus Polydoxe*—"Whether you win or not, we love you Polydoxus."

Interest in the theater seems to have been somewhat less. During the Empire, and also in the fourth century, women appeared upon the stage, though they played mostly the part of mimes. Two types of drama were particularly popular. There were the highly tragic plays with violent plots such as the *Banquet of Thyestes* or the *Madness of Ajax*, and there were those of a romantic character. The indecency and morbid sensuality of the mimes and erotic plays were so bad that we shall see Ambrose obtaining a decree from Gratian freeing actresses who became converts from the obligation of continuing in their profession. It was obviously regarded as being incompatible with a Christian life.

St. Augustine spends a whole chapter of his *Confessions* describing the shows in the theater "full of portraits of my misery and of fuel for the flame that burned me."<sup>50</sup> The "tragedies" often became just that in reality since it became customary to substitute a condemned criminal for the actor at the end of the play. The torments thus ceased to be imaginary. In the tragedy *Hercules on Mt. Aetna*, for example, the hero actually died in anguish in the flames, and in the *Laureolus*, the mime was actually nailed to the cross. Aberrations such as these, which seem incredible to us, were tolerated for centuries. It is not surprising, then, that Ambrose and other Fathers of the Church did not hesitate to openly condemn such perversions.

The amphitheaters provided even worse spectacles. At times there were shows where the contestants fought with blunted weapons, or where chariots were drawn by wild animals, or where elephants wrote Latin phrases on the sand. But these were the exception. As a rule the combats were all too real. Thousands of Romans, from morning till evening for whole days together, were intoxicated at the sight of continuous slaughter and barbarous sacrifices. Already in the time of Nero, Seneca had protested against the debasing influences of such sights. At certain times the spectacles became even more cruel. Men and women were left naked in the arena as prey to wild beasts without any means of defense. Christians were often condemned to this penalty *ad bestias*. Among the most moving accounts of the early persecutions are the descriptions of the deaths of Perpetua and Felicitas in the amphitheater at Carthage and of Blandina and her companions in that of Lyons.

In 326 Constantine forbade condemnations *ad bestias*, but we do not know to what extent this edict was observed. Certain it is that the butchery in the amphitheaters continued throughout the whole of the fourth century. Toward the end of 393, Symmachus experienced one of the greatest disappoint-

ments of his life. He had made extensive preparations for the games which he presided over to celebrate the appointment of his young son as quaestor. One of the most sensational numbers on the program was to have been a battle fought by twenty-nine Saxon prisoners whom Symmachus had obtained at considerable expense. But on the very day of the feast the barbarians got an unfortunate notion into their heads. Without considering the resentment of the people or the popularity of the young quaestor, which was bound to be diminished by their act, they strangled each other with their "impious" hands. Typically, Symmachus consoled himself for his loss "by thinking of Socrates and philosophy."<sup>51</sup>

Just as the boys of antiquity tricked "their pedagogues, their teachers, and their parents with countless lies in their love for play and their desire to see frivolities,"<sup>52</sup> so a passion for the games in the amphitheaters obsessed their elders. Alypius, who had gone to Rome some time before Augustine to study law, "was incredibly carried away by his ardent longing for the gladiatorial shows. At first he utterly detested and opposed such spectacles, but one day he accidentally met some of his friends and fellow-students as they were returning from dinner. With a kind of friendly violence they dragged him off to the amphitheater even though he stoutly resisted. . . . When they had reached the amphitheater and taken the seats they could, the whole place was seething with the cruelest pleasures. Alypius closed the doors of his eyes and forbade his mind to indulge in such great evils. If he had only also stopped his ears! For when one of the contestants fell, a great shout of the whole crowd beat mightily upon him, and being overcome by curiosity, and prepared, he thought, to despise and overcome anything that he might see, he opened his eyes and was struck a deeper wound in his soul than the gladiator was in his body. . . . For as soon as he saw that blood, he drank in a kind of savagery, nor did he turn away but fixed his gaze upon it, and unawares drank in the Furies

themselves, and was charmed with the wickedness of the fight and drunk with bloodthirsty joy. . . . He watched the sight, he cried out, was inflamed, and carried away from there such a madness that it spurred him on to return, not only with those who had dragged him there, but to run ahead of them and to drag along others as well."<sup>53</sup>

In his short work *On the Spectacles*, written in the very first years of the third century, Tertullian had pointed out the pagan origins of the different spectacles, circus, theater, and amphitheater, and had showed the Christians that it was their duty to refrain from such idolatry, hatred, and impurity. To those who claimed that Christ had not forbidden the games in His preaching and that the sun itself looks down upon them without being stained by the sight, Tertullian replied: "Yes, and the rays of the sun enter into the sewers, and are no less pure for that. Would that God did not see men sinning, so that we might all escape His judgment! But He sees lies, adulteries, frauds, idolatries, and the shows themselves; and it is precisely on this account that we will not look at them, lest the All-seeing see us. You are, sir, making a comparison at the same level between the criminal and the Judge: the criminal who is a criminal because he is seen, and the Judge who is a Judge because He sees. Outside the limits of the circus are we intent on playing the madman? Outside the gates of the theater are we bent on lewdness, outside the racetrack on arrogance, and outside the amphitheater on cruelty because outside the porticoes, the tiers, and the curtains God also has eyes? In no place is there ever any excuse for that which God has forever condemned."<sup>54</sup>

But the Christians of the fourth century were different from those of the time of Tertullian. St. Ambrose at Milan and St. Augustine at Hippo wore themselves out in trying to keep their people in church when the shows were going on. There was an even worse problem in Constantinople, a city without a tradition but predominantly Christian. St. John Chrysostom

describes a Holy Week of the last years of the fourth century. On Wednesday a torrential downpour threatened to flood the fields with their ripening grain and even the city itself. The people kept chanting the litanies in the churches. Their prayers were answered, and the rains came to an end on Thursday. Greatly relieved, the people left the churches on Good Friday for the circus.<sup>55</sup> The following day, Holy Saturday, they flocked to the theater. And yet this was a Christian community which, if we can judge from the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, was as a rule quite fervent. It is not surprising then that as a youth Ambrose should have witnessed the combats of the amphitheater. In explaining a psalm when he was bishop of Milan, he recalled that one day when he was still young he had seen an athlete throw his adversary and kick him in the face as a token of derision.<sup>56</sup>

However, as a number of beautiful paragraphs in his sermon on the death of Valentinian II would seem to indicate, Ambrose's own youth was free from serious disorders. He praises the young who despite the storms of passion manage to preserve themselves in true sobriety. Because of the self-control and abstinence that the sweet yoke of Christ demands, it can be burdensome to youth, but those who will have borne it from childhood will experience its joys.

On the other hand, this same funeral oration could indicate the opposite as well. St. Ambrose notes that the time of youth is a slippery one. Yet this may simply be a rhetorical commonplace. In his writings he makes so few references to his early years that novelists are the only ones who can possibly discuss whether or not he passed his early years unstained. In a letter on the Arian persecution of Justina, St. Ambrose goes out of his way to note that women are the most serious source of temptation for men,<sup>57</sup> and in his treatise on the education of virgins, after praising a woman who trains those whom she has brought forth in pain to virtue, he goes on to answer an objection: "But you men say that a woman is a temptation

to a man. Yes, this is true, and the more beautiful she is, the greater the temptation. . . . But it is not a defect in a woman to be what she was born. . . . We cannot find fault with the work of the divine Artist."<sup>58</sup> From this we can judge that his own outlook was quite normal.

In addition to the pagan, there was also the Christian Rome, with its still lively recollections of the numerous martyrs who had consecrated the soil about the city with their blood. Ambrose must have been particularly aware of this since the death of Soteris was well remembered in the family. Although he was still only a catechumen, he must have frequently visited the catacombs as others were accustomed to do. As we have already seen, St. Jerome together with his friends Bonosus and Rufinus of Aquileia studied at Rome between the years 360 and 365, and in his commentary on the prophet Ezechiel he tells us something of the practices of the Roman Christians at this time: "When I was studying literature at Rome in my youth, I was accustomed on Sundays to visit the tombs of the apostles and martyrs along with companions of my own age and with the same ideals. We frequently went down into the crypts cut deep in the earth, and all along the walls could be seen tombs. So great was the darkness that it seemed as if the words of the prophet, 'They shall descend alive into hell,' were being realized. A small opening allowed a shaft of light to descend from above, and this diminished a little the fear of the darkness. We walked on with slow steps, plunged as it were in a dark night that recalled Virgil's line: 'Horror and silence on every side terrified our soul.'"<sup>59</sup>

At this time Jerome, since he had not as yet received baptism, was, like Ambrose, only a Christian in desire and family tradition. But it is not likely that he was acquainted with Ambrose, much less on intimate terms with him. Like Augustine, Jerome came from a middle-class family which would have had few, if any, dealings with the aristocracy to which Ambrose belonged.



Even after the return of Pope Liberius to Rome, the struggle against the Arians only increased in intensity during the final years of Constantius's reign, and it had many repercussions within the Christian families of the Roman aristocracy. There is still extant from the year 356 a letter of Bishop Hosius of Cordova, who was at the time some ninety years old, in which he tells Constantius that he is worn out with the constant threats and continuous pressure being exerted by the emperor: "I have been a confessor from the very first, when a persecution broke out in the time of your grandfather Maximian; and if you will persecute me, I am ready again to endure anything rather than to shed innocent blood and betray the truth. But I cannot approve of your conduct in writing in this threatening manner. Cease to write thus; adopt not the cause of Arius, nor listen to those in the East, nor give credit to Ursacius, Valens and their fellows. . . . Cease to use force; write no letters, send no counts; but release those who have been banished. . . . When was any such thing done by Constantians? . . . Remember that you are a mortal man. Be afraid of the day of judgment, and keep yourself unstained for it. Do not interfere in the affairs of the Church or give commands to us concerning them. . . . It is written, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"<sup>60</sup> But in the end Hosius was exiled for a year to Sirnium, where his signature was also wrung from him.<sup>61</sup> During this same time Athanasius is even more outspoken in his *Apology for His Flight*, his *Apology to Constantius*, and his *History of the Arians for the Monks*. In these works the great champion of orthodoxy lists the many bishops who were being held in exile far from their large and influential sees. He condemns the tortures to which even the virgins of the Church had been subjected: "These worthy Arians who have slandered me, and by whom conspiracies have been formed against most of the bishops, having obtained the consent and cooperation of the magistrates, first stripped them, and then

caused them to be hung up upon the rack and scourged on the ribs so severely three different times that not even real criminals have ever suffered the like."<sup>62</sup> Constantius himself is described as the precursor of the Antichrist: "For having put on the profession of Christianity, and entering into the holy places, and standing therein, he lays waste the churches, transgressing their canons, and enforcing the observance of his own decrees. Will any one now venture to say that this is a peaceful time for Christians, and not a time of persecution? A persecution indeed, such as never arose before, and such as no one perhaps will again stir up, except 'the son of lawlessness,' do these enemies of Christ exhibit, who already present a picture of him in their own persons. Wherefore it especially behooves us to be sober . . . lest this be that 'falling away,' after which he shall be revealed, of whom Constantius is surely the forerunner."<sup>63</sup>

Lucifer of Cagliari composed similar works. From about the year 356 is his *De non conveniendo cum haereticis*—"On Not Associating with Heretics." In 359 appeared his *De non parcendo in Deum delinquentibus*—"On Not Sparing Those Sinning Against God," and in 360 his *Moriendum esse pro Dei filio*—"One Must Die for the Son of God." These bitter invectives were sent to the court in the hope that Constantius would amend his ways.

In his turn, Hilary of Poitiers in the spring of 360 wrote from Constantinople a scorching attack on the emperor in the form of a letter to the bishops of Gaul entitled *Contra Constantium imperatorem*: "It is now time to speak since the time to keep silent has passed. Let us await the coming of Christ since the Antichrist has conquered. Let the shepherds cry out since the hirelings have fled. Let us lay down our lives for our sheep since the thieves have entered in and the raging lion goes about. . . . Almighty God and Creator of all! would that You had granted me to live and make my confession in You and Your only-begotten Son in the days of Nero or Decius . . . since there would then have been no doubt that

they were persecutors. . . . But now, instead, we fight against a deceitful persecutor, against a fawning adversary, against the Antichrist Constantius, who does not strike us on the back but pats the stomach. He does not condemn us so that we may be reborn to life, but he enriches us to lead us to death. He does not hurl us into prison so that we may be free, but he showers us with honors so as to enslave us. He does not tear our sides, but conquers the heart; he does not behead us with a sword, but slays our souls with his gold. . . . He confesses Christ so as to be able to deny Him. . . . He builds churches to destroy the faith. He always uses Your name, O Christ, in his discourses, yet he does everything he possibly can to destroy faith in You as being God equal with the Father. . . . I say to you Constantius what I would have said to Nero, or what Decius or Maxentius would have heard from me: 'You fight against God, you rage against the Church, you persecute the saints, you hate the preachers of Christ, you destroy religion. . . . You lie when you say that you are a Christian: you are a new enemy of Christ. Distribute the episcopal sees to your followers and substitute evil bishops for good; imprison the priests; send your armies into the fields to terrify the Church. . . .' The persecution of Constantius is a diabolical work. . . . He condemns to the mines the servants of the Lord. He has brought about the death of Paulinus, the saintly bishop of Trier. He spreads terror and confusion through the churches of Alexandria, Milan, Rome, and Toulouse, banishing the bishops, beating the priests and deacons, and profaning even the mystery of the body and blood of Christ."<sup>64</sup>

While this was going on, Ambrose was passing from youth to early manhood. With other members of his family he must have been saddened at the sufferings of the orthodox at the hands of the Arians. In the light of these sad events and the general persecution of Catholic bishops by Constantius, some of the demands and claims which Ambrose himself made later as a bishop cannot be said to have been excessive.

Here it will be well to summarize the Arian developments

during the last three years of Constantius's reign. In the summer of 357, the three Arian bishops Valens, Ursacius, and Germinius drew up a formula of the faith at Sirmium which aimed at avoiding the terminology of Nicea (*homoousios*: Christ is of the same nature as the Father) as well as that of the moderate Arians (*homoiousios*: Christ is like the Father). It was then presented to the bishops for their signature. Pure Arianism was to become the official doctrine of the state. But then the Eastern bishops split up into different factions. For some (the Anomoeans) the formula was not Arian enough, and for others (the Homoeousians, the moderate Arians), it was too Arian. Toward the end of 357 Leontius, bishop of Antioch died. When the psalms were chanted in church he had been accustomed to cough at the end of the "Glory to the Father," since the orthodox Christians wanted to say "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit," but the Arians, "Glory to the Father by means of the Son in the Holy Spirit." Both parties would listen to the bishop, but after the first words he would cough until the end.<sup>65</sup>

There had now been installed at Antioch as his successor a certain Eudoxius. He had not been elected by the bishops of the province but had obtained his post through the eunuchs of the court. In his preaching Eudoxius showed himself to be a thorough-going Arian. Basil of Ancyra then gathered a council at Ancyra before the Easter of 358. After this, he took a new moderate formula to Sirmium and had Eudoxius disowned by Constantius, who wrote a letter to the Antiochians.<sup>66</sup> They should not believe that he had nominated Eudoxius, and they should not trust certain ambitious individuals who changed their episcopal sees merely to increase their revenues. Basil and the other moderate Arians were thus making some advance toward the orthodox position.

In the summer of 358, Liberius was brought from Thrace to Sirmium. Hilary of Poitiers certainly interpreted Basil's formula in a good sense, and he looked upon the moderate Ari-

ans as his brothers. Probably Pope Liberius also extended his hand to Basil. In 359 the extreme Arians regained control of Constantius. Two councils were held. The first convened in May at Rimini, where some four hundred bishops were assembled. Constantius paid the expenses for all, including those incurred in traveling, though some bishops of Gaul refused this assistance as being improper. Only a minority, about eighty bishops, were Arian, but the prefect Taurus had received orders not to yield. After seven months of negotiations and threats, all the bishops capitulated and signed as Constantius demanded. At Seleucia in Isauria (modern Turkey) where one hundred and fifty eastern bishops were assembled, a quaestor of the sacred palace was charged with the task of reducing Basil and the moderate Arians, who constituted the majority, to obedience. Here less was effected than at Rimini. Finally, early in January 360, as a complement to Rimini and Seleucia, a council assembled at Constantinople, where Constantius was in residence, consecrated a new formula, that of Acacius. This omitted both the *homoousios* of Nicea and the *homoiousios* of Basil of Ancyra, that is, of the moderate Arians. This apparent compromise secured the supremacy of the Arians in the East to the time of Theodosius. But during these same months a new regime was set up in the West with the proclamation of Julian as Augustus at Paris (February, 360). The Church in the West was thus freed from the baleful intervention of Constantius and could at last breathe again.

Even though he was himself a pagan, Ammianus Marcellinus condemned Constantius for the trouble he caused the Church: "He stirred up many controversies, and, as these became widespread, he nourished them with contentious words. And since bands of bishops hastened here and there on the public post-horses to the 'synods,' as they are called, he cut the sinews of the courier-service as he tried to adapt the whole ritual to his own will."<sup>67</sup>

But under Julian the Church experienced still further per-

secution. The son of Julius Constantius and Basilina, Julian was born at Constantinople in 331. His father, Julius Constantius, was a half-brother of Constantine the Great who during the reign of the latter had had to wander about like the hero of the *Odyssey* to escape the jealousy of his stepmother Helena, who as a girl had worked in an inn.<sup>68</sup> Constantius Chlorus, of Serbian stock and the father of Constantine, had abandoned her after the birth of the future emperor in order to marry Theodora, the daughter of Maximinus. Basilina, Julian's mother, on the other hand, was a noble Christian whom Julius Constantius, a widower and by this time father of Gallus, had married in 330, when she was still very young. Julian could not have remembered his mother for she died when he was only a few months old, but he always preserved a tender regard for her.

In the dark tragedy in which six or seven members of the imperial family lost their lives, Julian also lost his father. He was only six years old at the time. He was then entrusted to the care of Eusebius, the famous Arian bishop of Nicomedia, who was also a relative of Basilina. At the end of 341 Eusebius died. The young Julian does not seem to have been at all close to him. After the death of Eusebius, Julian was sent with his brother Gallus to the imperial estate at Macellum. This was a delightful spot under the cloudy summit of Mt. Argaeus in the very center of Cappadocia and of Asia Minor. But it was also a prison. Far from everything which he had known and loved, separated from his fond pedagogue Mardonius, and under the constant surveillance of a band of eunuchs in the service of Constantius, Julian found his greatest consolation in the books of the palace. While there, from his tenth to his sixteenth year, he experienced a great enthusiasm for the intellectual life. His religious training was, however, in the hands of individuals who were not of a spiritual frame of mind themselves. Among these could be numbered George of Cappadocia, whose later boldness as Arian bishop of Alexandria we

have already seen. Julian was baptized at Macellum, instructed in the sacred mysteries, and at a Mass on Easter received the Eucharist. He was even admitted into the clergy by being made a lector. As was customary at the time, when still only thirteen or fourteen years old, he read the Sacred Scriptures to the people in church, perhaps at Caesarea. Still more, he could read and did read other Christian writings in the sumptuous rooms at Macellum. He also had the opportunity to venerate the tombs of the martyrs in the neighboring cities, to visit the hospitals and the places of refuge which the bishops vied with each other in building.

He admired the great charity that existed among the faithful despite the desperate struggles that engaged their bishops. He himself practiced charity and understood its efficacy as a means of propagating the faith.

Toward the end of 347 he was able to leave Macellum to attend school at Constantinople and later at Nicomedia, where he became acquainted with Libanius. At this time Hellenism was enjoying a veritable renaissance. In Neoplatonic speculations, enthusiasm for the poetry and religion of ancient Greece was associated with the practices of the Oriental mystery religions, which in turn were explained in a symbolic sense and were carried out in secret societies. Aedesius of Pergamum, Maximus of Ephesus, and Priscus were more devotees of a mixture of magic and spiritualism than they were philosophers.

Julian now hesitated no longer in his choice between the ancient culture of Greece and the Church. When his brother Gallus became Caesar in 351, Julian was able to make use of the inheritance which he had received from his maternal grandmother and went in search of teachers of Neoplatonism and theurgy at Pergamum and Ephesus. It was perhaps at Ephesus that he renounced his Christian baptism in a crypt dedicated to Mithra. As one of his modern biographers has observed, "The apostasy of Julian is above all the act of a mystic deluded by the promise of heavenly immortality and

beatific visions. . . . When he began to worship the ancient gods, he was carrying out a mystic vocation and obeying the guardian deities of his dynasty and the empire, and he let himself be guided by their voices."<sup>69</sup> In his writings, Julian makes frequent reference to his consecration to Mithra. He declares himself to be a faithful "soldier" of this god who is his "father." But more than this, he identifies Mithra with the sun god Helios, the highest expression of the supreme One in the philosophy of Plotinus.

In 354, after committing numerous atrocities at Antioch, Gallus was summoned to court by Constantius, but before he reached his destination he was murdered at Flanona near Pola. Julian then received an order to come to Milan. On his way he was able to visit Troy, where he met Pegasius, the Christian bishop of the city. While Pegasius was guiding him about the tombs of the heroes and the temples of the ancient Gods, Julian was surprised to see that their cult was still observed and that the bishop himself did not make the sign of the cross nor hiss through his teeth before the statue of Athena as Christians usually did. There were at this time numerous apostates from the faith, and for a variety of different reasons. Pegasius himself later became a pagan priest.

Accusations had been brought against Julian at Milan, and he had to wait six months before he obtained an audience. Eusebia, the wife of Constantius, finally intervened in his favor. She obtained permission for him to continue his studies at Athens. This proved to be a source of intense satisfaction for Julian, but he was able to remain at this ancient center of culture for only a few months in the summer of 355. There he met a number of famous philosophers. His passionate interest in the strange speculations of the Neoplatonists received an added incentive. He was initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, which were explained to him as being the embodiment of the highest philosophical truths. At Athens he also made the acquaintance of a number of Christians, both



teachers and students. Two of the latter became famous bishops: Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. With the coming of fall, however, Julian was ordered back to Milan. He wept tears of desperation, begging the goddess Athena to let him die rather than permit his return to court. But he realized how futile it would be to resist the emperor and left without delay. In his own words, "Athena guided me wherever I went. She sent me Helios and Selene as my guardian angels."<sup>70</sup>

At Milan, on November 6, 355, Constantius crowned Julian with a diadem and placed the purple of a Caesar on his shoulders. The soldiers who had gathered for the ceremony beat their shields upon their knees as a sign of their own approval.

What did Julian think of the new honor? Gregory of Nazianzus, who had known him at Athens at this period, has left a rather terrible portrait of him with his restlessly moving head, his wild, wandering eyes, his shifting feet, his nostrils breathing hate and scorn, his proud and insolent face, and his constant paroxysms of uncontrolled laughter.<sup>71</sup> But this was a description which Gregory gave in later life, when he saw all the evil that Julian had effected in the false pursuit of an imagined good. We, on the contrary, are inclined to pity him, as Julian pitied himself once the excitement of the moment had passed. He well knew, as he had read in one of his favorite authors, Dio Chrysostom, that riches, an inherited throne, a crown and purple robe, and citizens and soldiers flocking together to hail one as a king bestow nothing more than a perilous power. And after the thunderous hurrahs he returned to the silence of the palace, where he repeated to himself a line from Homer: "By purple death I'm seized and fate supreme."<sup>72</sup>

Five years in Gaul, at Paris, and on the frontiers of the Rhine, proved that this Greek sophist who never spoke of Rome and whose heart was in Athens possessed great talent both as a military leader and as a politician.<sup>73</sup> After conquer-

ing the Alemanni in 356, in a second campaign in 357 he obtained an even greater victory at the Battle of Strasbourg. In 358 and 359 the Rhine again became safe for Roman commerce. Among his other accomplishments, Julian freed twenty thousand prisoners from German captivity. His own life was austere. As a loyal follower of Mithra he resisted every form of sensuality and showed himself kind and open to others. He would rise at midnight from his poor hard bed and, after a prayer to Hermes, would begin his work.

He did everything he could to diminish the hateful burden of the provincial taxes. He instituted a regime of strict economy, even going so far as to have everything that was superfluous removed from his table, while he ate the same rations as the troops. He was careful to see also that justice was administered impartially.

In February, 360, while Constantius was still occupied with his preparations for an invasion of Persia in the East, the troops at Paris acclaimed Julian Augustus. Reluctantly he was forced to accept the crown. In the summer of 360 he reconquered the last stretch of the Rhine to the sea, and sailing rapidly he returned up the river from Xanten to Basel. Negotiations with Constantius proved to be fruitless. Toward the end of 360, Helena, the sister of Constantius whom Julian had married in 355, died. The following year Eusebia, the wife of Constantius, also died. She had always favored Julian. The rupture between the two cousins was thus inevitable. In the summer of 361, Julian marched from Gaul toward the Danube. Then with a small fleet he sailed from Regensburg to Bonmünster. In early October he was at Sirmium. Pushing on toward Constantinople, he finally arrived at Nish in Serbia. From here he sent out a white paper to the principal cities of the empire in defense of his own actions. He asked them to choose between the two rivals, one of whom had expelled the barbarians from the frontiers and the other, Constantius, who had invited these same barbarians to take up arms against

the forces under Julian's command. He also wrote a letter to the senate of Rome which was publicly read to it by the prefect of the city.

Ambrose, who was twenty-seven at this time, certainly heard the comments which the senators had to make on Julian's criticism of, and attacks upon, Constantine the Great and Constantius.

Julian was more fortunate in the measures which he took to bring the provinces of the West quickly into line. Since the two praetorian prefects had fled to Constantius, he placed Mamerlinus in charge of Illyricum and Italy. He appointed Maximus, a senator, prefect of Rome, and was able to secure grain supplies for the city despite the fact that Constantius's lieutenants intercepted the regular transport of grain from Africa. He was thus able to check the revolts of the people which had disturbed the peace of the city even during the preceding year.

But Constantius, after leaving Antioch to encounter Julian in the West, died of a violent fever on November 3, 361, at Mopsucrene (near Adana in modern Turkey). Like his father before him, he received baptism on his deathbed. His body was carried to Constantinople. To the Christians who accompanied the bier, it seemed as if they heard angels on the Taurus mountains singing the praises of the dead emperor.<sup>74</sup>

The leaders of the court in the East sought in vain for someone whom they could set up against Julian. Finally, about the middle of November, cavalrymen arrived at Nish bearing the official report of Constantius's death and the obedient submission of the eastern provinces.

The trials of Julian's brief rule of twenty months were all experienced in the East, but they had strong repercussions in the West, and especially at Rome, where paganism maintained its traditional position despite the laws of Constantine and Constantius in favor of the Christians. The aristocracy in particular was largely pagan. The Ambrosii, though Christian, were related to the powerful pagan family of the Symmachi,

whose head at this time was Lucius Aurelius Avianius Symmachus, later to become prefect of the city in 364-365.<sup>75</sup> We shall see his son Quintus Aurelius Symmachus contending with St. Ambrose in a celebrated struggle over the altar of Victory in front of the senate.

Another famous family was that of Probus, of the Anician clan. This also was closely connected with the Ambrosii. Probus himself was the powerful protector of Ambrose and his brother in the early years of their careers. Through their family connections with the Symmachi, the Ambrosii were also on terms of friendship with the Nicomachi and the Albini. Volusianus, prefect of Italy in 355, and of Rome in 365, and cousin of the emperor Julian, was a member of the latter clan. In such surroundings paganism was a matter of vital import since it opened the way to public careers and to the rich revenues of the pagan priesthoods.

Moreover, there were thorny problems connected with family relationships and marriages. One would like to say that there were also intellectual and religious problems as well. But paganism, at least with respect to the traditional religion of Rome, was at this time practically dead. Interest in non-Christian religions was largely confined to the worship of Mithra, and this was carried out in an exotic fashion. Further, a marked decline in intellectual interests had set in. The best known writer at Rome during this time was the Quintus Aurelius Symmachus mentioned above. He was of the same age as Ambrose and highly esteemed by his contemporaries as a man of great talents. But his letters are almost too silly to read, and even his panegyrics show a depressing poverty of thought.

In the palaces of the Symmachi and of other Roman nobles, Ambrose as a young man must have often heard that paganism meant a love of tradition, of the charms of poetry, a cultivation of the classics (Nicomachus Flavianus and Praetextatus in these very years were having the ancient texts transcribed and emended), a passion for ruling, and something which was not

necessarily identified with the degradation of the amphitheater and with the immorality of the stage and baths. But Ambrose must also have felt the poverty of this ideal, the painful void, its radical inability to furnish an answer to the problems of the world and of the human soul.

These great pagan lords, so enthralled with the past, eagerly followed the various steps which Julian took to restore the old religion. And, as Ammianus tells us, he began "with plain and formal decrees ordering the temples to be opened, victims to be brought to the altars, and the worship of the gods to be restored. And in order to add to the effectiveness of these ordinances, he summoned to the palace the bishops of the Christians who were at odds with each other and the people who were also at variance, and politely advised them to set aside their differences and each without fear or opposition to observe his own beliefs."<sup>76</sup> The bishops who had been exiled by Constantius were thus able to return to their sees.

Ammianus believed that the emperor had acted in this way to increase the conflicts among the Christians and thus render them less harmful. The actual result of his efforts was, however, quite different from any such intent. In various places, with the apparent approval of the emperor, the pagan reaction to Christianity became violent, and in some cities of the East, Christians were even tortured and put to death.<sup>77</sup>

Julian's next effort in the restoration of paganism was the creation of a priestly organization modeled after the hierarchy of the Church. He wrote "pastoral letters" to the new pagan bishops to encourage them to give good example by the austerity of their lives and their acts of piety and benevolence. They were also ordered to preach in the temples. But as has been well observed, "all these ascetic and devotional regulations, this new mystical hierarchy, were in reality unprecedented innovations, though they were set forth as being a return to the old deities. . . . The ministers of the new order repaired the sanctuaries, re-erected the statues, renewed the

splendor of the old processions, listened to the oracles speaking again in the whisperings of the forests and the murmur of the fountains, re-established the power of the sun and stars, and mounted the pulpit to preach philanthropy by appealing to the authority of Homer and Plato. But no matter how hard they tried, when the priests who organized these displays of empty splendor turned from the altar to see what effects their zeal was producing, they frequently met the indifferent gaze and smiling banter of a public that was indifferent to the sad plight of the temples."<sup>78</sup>

During the first months of his reign, although he openly favored paganism, Julian remained reasonable and tolerant toward the Christians. His abolition of the exemptions and privileges of the Christian clergy may be regarded simply as a part of his general policy of economic, political, and social reform. "But after the spring of 362, he yielded to new influences. We can see the sectarianism of a theocrat gradually replacing the prudence and moderation of an enlightened monarch."<sup>79</sup>

On June 17, 362, Ambrose could have seen the new scholastic laws posted up at Rome. With these ordinances, which were published simultaneously in all the cities of the empire, Julian manifested his open opposition to Christianity. Anyone seeking a post as teacher or professor would have to secure a statement from his local senate attesting his good character, and this would then in turn have to be ratified by the emperor. A circular letter sent out by the emperor explained how this decree was to be interpreted. Those who instruct the young should not have opinions that are irreconcilable with the exercise of their profession. Their integrity must be above reproach. To claim to admire the classics and at the same time to look upon them as being nothing more than inventions of the devil shows a lack of logic and frankness. It means that one has sold himself for a few coins and he is thus not worthy of the office of teaching. Christian teachers are free, and they need not change their own opinions, but they ought to make a choice. Either

they should cease teaching what they do not take seriously or, if they wish to continue teaching, they should begin to teach by their own example.<sup>80</sup>

Julian's attitude was thus that of one who believed that the paganism of the classics studied in school was still alive, whereas by this time it was really dead and buried, its only survival being purely literary.

The law seemed to be innocent enough and without any great significance, but in reality it was cruel and revolutionary since up till this time the schools of the empire had enjoyed full liberty.

Many Christian teachers preferred to abandon their chairs rather than to deny their faith. Among these were Prohaeresius at Athens and Marius Victorinus at Rome. The latter, "a teacher of very many noble senators," was so famous for his eloquence that a statue had been erected to him in the Forum of Trajan. In 355 he became even more renowned when he was converted "to the wonder of Rome and the exaltation of the Church."<sup>81</sup>

Even among the pagans there were those who deplored Julian's narrow-mindedness. His great admirer Ammianus Marcellinus condemned the scholastic law as being "inhuman and deserving to be buried in everlasting silence."<sup>82</sup>

Julian's next move was the composition of a polemical work, *Against the Galileans*, that is, against the Christians. In writing it, he drew upon the lessons which he had learned from his teachers as a youth and his own experiences as a Christian. He criticizes the biblical narratives. In commenting on the first pages of Genesis, for example, he criticizes the account that God wished to create woman in order to give man a helpmate like himself: "A wonderful helpmate, who does not only not help him, but who betrays him!" He compares Moses with Plato, denies the prophecies of the Old Testament, and maintains that with the exception of St. John none of the evangelists would say that Christ is God, and he speaks sarcastically of

the sacraments. In the next century Cyril of Alexandria wrote that many lost their faith through reading the works of Julian.<sup>83</sup> Though they had been written in Greek, Ambrose would have seen them in the hands of the more ardent pagans.

In June, 362, Julian left Constantinople for Antioch, where he remained until March, 363, when he set out on his last campaign, his ill-fated expedition against the Persians. Antioch at this time was a brilliant and luxurious city whose inhabitants gave themselves over freely to every kind of pleasure and amusement. They found Julian, with his shaggy beard that marked him as a philosopher, and his austere and studious habits, little to their liking. Even the pagans found him irksome and excessively devout. They were further irritated by the fact that while the poor of the city had great difficulty in finding enough to eat, Julian slaughtered herds of cattle and hundreds of birds in his sacrifices to the gods. And his soldiers so stuffed themselves with meat and wine that they had to be carried from the temples to their quarters on the shoulders of passers-by. The resentment of the Antiochians, however, only sharpened the ill humor of the emperor. He accordingly attacked them in his bitterly sarcastic *Misopogon*, or "*Beard-Hater*."

He excluded "the Galileans" from administrative offices and positions in the provinces on the pretext that their own law forbade them to make use of the sword. Several miles from Antioch there was a resort by the name of Daphne, rich in springs and pleasant groves. It had once been famous for its oracle of Apollo, but in more recent years it had drawn crowds of Christians to the tomb of the martyr Babylas, who was buried there. In August, 362, Julian visited the temple of Apollo and found it in a lamentable condition despite the wealth of the town. He saw only one poor priest there, and he happened to be sacrificing a goose from his own flock. The emperor decided to restore its voice to the oracle by purifying the surrounding area. He ordered the bones of St. Babylas to be transferred to the common cemetery of Antioch. The Christians, however,



turned this translation of his relics into a triumphal procession. On the night of October 22 the temple of Apollo was destroyed by fire. The Christians were accused of arson, though the fire may have been started by lightning. In revenge, Julian ordered most of the splendid Christian basilicas of Antioch to be stripped of their treasures and closed, and he burned down the chapels at Miletus that had been erected in honor of the martyrs. During this same month of October he sent orders to Egypt to have Athanasius, who had returned seven months before to Alexandria, expelled since his presence there was prejudicial to the city: "During my reign that infamous wretch has dared to baptize Greek women of high rank!"<sup>84</sup>

In different cities during the course of these months violence broke out against the Christians, not because the emperor had issued specific orders to this effect, but because it was known that he would condone it. Many churches were sacked and profaned, and Christians were murdered at Gaza and Alexandria.

At Heliopolis in Syria, Constantine had closed and destroyed temples of the gods, not with the intent of persecuting the pagans, but for the sake of public morality since sacred prostitution was practiced there. It now seemed to be a good time for revenge. Fanatics massacred a deacon, dragged the Christian virgins from their convent, stripped them, and tossed them naked to the sport of the rabble, and then, cutting them to pieces, tossed their remains to pigs.<sup>85</sup> At a later date, St. Ambrose was to remind Theodosius in a celebrated letter of the fact that Jews and pagans burned many Christian basilicas during Julian's persecution.<sup>86</sup>

Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem failed because of the earthquakes which devastated Palestine. Ammianus writes that flames were seen coming from the ground and burning the workmen and their scaffolding. This same incident is mentioned by St. Ambrose in his letter to Theodosius just mentioned.<sup>87</sup>

The cult which the Christians offered to the martyrs, espe-

cially in the East, assumed grandiose proportions. Julian reproached them for filling everything with sepulchers, and he praised those cities that burned the tombs of the Galileans. Finally, on February 12, 363, he published an edict prohibiting the celebration of funerals of any kind during the day.<sup>88</sup> Funeral processions should take place only in the evening or at night, so as not to contaminate the eyes of the living, since the purity of the day is consecrated to the gods of Olympus and to chaste works.

At Rome, in March, 363, where Julian had given permission for the replacing of the altar of Victory in front of the senate, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine was destroyed by fire. The Sibylline books only narrowly escaped a similar fate. It was a wretched augury for the Roman expedition against the Persians which was just getting under way. On June 26, about seventy miles north of Ctesiphon, the capital of Persia, at a spot twenty miles southeast of the modern city of Baghdad, Julian was pierced in the side by a lance hurled by an unidentified assailant during the course of a sudden assault by a band of Persians. He died the following night, at the age of thirty-two, after losing a great quantity of blood.<sup>89</sup>

Julian's biographers today do not so much blame or praise his tragic destiny as show respect for his sincere and noble, though misguided, soul. But it was otherwise in the summer of 363 when news of his death spread throughout the empire. The Christians give vent to unrestrained manifestations of joy, and in the cities of the East there were some revolts, popular uprisings, and even at times savage acts of revenge.

At Rome the senate decreed his apotheosis. Many of the pagans took his death as a warning. In his commentary on the prophet Habacuc, written in 392, St. Jerome recalls the fact that he was a student at Rome at the time of Julian's death, and that he heard a pagan remark in jest: "And the Christians claim that their God is patient!"<sup>90</sup>

St. Ambrose's ancient biographers make no mention of the

young man during these eventful years, but the fact that he lived for twenty-five years at Rome during these sharp and bitter struggles explains his own firmness as a bishop while carrying out his mission in the Church and in the State.



D(ominus) N(oster) FL(avius) CL(audius)  
IVLIANVS P(ius) F(elix) AVG(ustus)

*Bronze coin: Bust with crown, cloak, and breastplate.*

See Cohen, *Monnaies*, VI, p. 368, no. 73.

SECVRITAS REIPV(licae): Apis bull with two stars

Julian the Apostate was born at Constantinople towards the end of 331. He was proclaimed Augustus at Paris in 360, and died June 26, 363, in Persia after an unsuccessful attempt to capture Ctesiphon.

### IIII

## Sirmium

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*Election of Valentinian: his character, his religious policy. Ambrose enters upon an administrative career and goes to Sirmium. The administration of justice. The tax structure. The social castes. Church and State in the fourth century. The peace of Constantine. The Christians: lights and shadows. The accession of Liberius.*

The unexpected death of the Emperor Julian at so early an age caught both the army and his ministers by surprise. They were not prepared to pick a successor but there was no time for delay. The army was in the heart of Persia, far from its bases, and surrounded on all sides by enemies. Both the generals that had come from Gaul and those from the East agreed upon offering the purple to Salutius, a pagan philosopher, one of Julian's former friends. But Salutius, pleading his age and poor health, refused the offer. Then, perhaps through a compromise between the officers of the East and the West, Flavius Jovianus, an energetic Christian soldier in his thirties, born in Pannonia, was chosen instead. Jovian continued with the retreat which Julian had already begun. Accepting the humiliating terms of the truce offered by the Persians, he crossed the desert during the summer, and in October, 363, finally arrived at Antioch. He immediately abolished the anti-Christian laws of Julian,

aiming, apparently, at a return to the policy of tolerance of Constantine the Great. The situation itself suggested such a policy. The pagan Themistius, a famous orator down to the time of Theodosius, declared in his speech for the assumption of the consulate by Jovian on January 1, 364, that, since God has placed a religious feeling in the hearts of all men, everyone should be permitted to worship Him as he thinks best, without violating that freedom of conscience which God has Himself given to men.<sup>1</sup>

A law of January 11, 364, restored to the Christians their right to teach in the schools.<sup>2</sup>

But on the morning of February 17, 364, even before he reached Constantinople, Jovian was found dead in his room at Dadastana (a town not far from the modern Ankara).<sup>3</sup> His death was perhaps due to the fumes of a charcoal brazier which had been placed near his bed. The army continued on its march, and at Nicea (the modern Iznik in Turkey) the military and civil leaders decided to nominate as emperor Flavius Valentinianus, a tribune of the imperial guard. The choice was partly the fruit of a compromise between Christians and pagans, and Valentinian always remained in the middle of the road, refusing to take a position against either party.<sup>4</sup> A pagan of Pannonian stock, he had been converted to Christianity before Julian's disastrous campaign in the East. A pagan historian, Zosimus, tells us that one day when Valentinian was accompanying Julian into a pagan temple at Antioch, Maximus of Ephesus sprinkled him with lustral water. Angered at this, he tore away the part of his cloak that had been touched by the water. For this impetuous act, the emperor dismissed him from his post and sent him into exile.<sup>5</sup> Modern critics discount this episode as being without foundation; and Valentinian's religious policy, which may be seen in his enactments preserved in the Theodosian Code, would seem to support them. It should, however, be noted that Ambrose seems to allude to the incident in his discourse on the death of Valentinian II where he states

that his father because of his love for the faith had refused military service and the honors of the tribunate.<sup>6</sup>

Valentinian I was an absolute monarch, cruel at times, and since he had become accustomed to the rough discipline of the camps, he could not endure the softness of Roman society. He believed that authority should be upheld by severity.<sup>7</sup> His fits of rage carried him at times almost to the point of madness. On one occasion, at a hunting party, a page loosed a Spartan hound ahead of time since the dog in its eagerness had snapped at him. As a punishment, Valentinian had the boy beaten to death with clubs and buried on the same day. On another occasion, an armorer presented him with a beautifully embellished breastplate. Instead of giving the man the reward he expected, the emperor had him slain since the armor was a bit lighter than he had specified. A certain Africanus, an energetic lawyer, after administering one province, aspired to govern another. When the master of the cavalry, Theodosius, supported this request with the emperor, Valentinian rudely replied: "Go, count, and change his head for him since he wants a change in his province," and through this sentence, as Ammianus notes, an eloquent man perished simply because he was trying to improve his position like many others. The emperor kept two cruel she-bears, which he called Goldflake and Innocence, in cages near his bedroom. Their savage disposition was maintained by their attendants so that the emperor could enjoy the way they dispatched condemned criminals.

These tales are told by Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary historian with a reputation for seriousness and impartiality.<sup>8</sup> But recent studies have shown that his pages dealing with Valentinian are extremely biased.<sup>9</sup> He describes incidents that were simply impossible, and does little more than express the hatred of the Roman senators for an emperor who had dared to allow torture to be used on them when they were brought to trial. But if Valentinian was often rough and violent, he knew how to defend valiantly the frontiers of the empire. He was

greatly interested in the general welfare of the state, and was not without a measure of culture. He knew Greek, and to pass the time he busied himself with painting and sculpture, and with some success. St. Ambrose does not speak ill of him, but rather in a sermon delivered after his death describes him as being already "in heaven," where he meets his second son slain by his enemies in the very flower of his age.<sup>10</sup>

One month after his proclamation as Augustus, Valentinian, at the earnest request of his soldiers, who were being urged on by the pagan party, chose a colleague in the person of his brother Valens. The latter was proclaimed Augustus on March 28, 364. The opposition would really have preferred a person outside the family. The pagan faction in disgust began a separatist movement which culminated in the revolt of Procopius in the East. He had been one of Julian's generals, but his revolt only lasted from September, 365, until May, 366.

In the summer of 364, in a castle near Nish in Serbia, the two brothers proceeded to make a division of the empire. Valentinian yielded to his brother the rich prefecture of the East, which extended from the lower Danube to the confines of Persia and took in Egypt as well. He retained for himself Italy, Illyricum, Gaul, Britain, Spain, and Africa. Later, at Sirmium they set about dividing and redoubling the administrative offices. Two courts and two consistories were thus established. After appointing new generals and new magistrates, the two brothers embraced and departed from each other. Valentinian went to Milan where he remained for a whole year. Valens went to Constantinople.

At this juncture, Ambrose enters upon his administrative career. The reorganization of the empire by Valentinian brought about many changes of position within the imperial bureaucracy. While in residence at his palace in Milan, probably in May, 365, Valentinian nominated Volcacius Rufinus as the new prefect of the *praefectura praetorio Italiae Illyrici et Africae* with its headquarters at Sirmium. Paulinus, the first biographer

of the saint, tells us that Ambrose, having completed his studies at Rome, left the city to take up his duties as a lawyer in the prefecture of the praetorium.<sup>11</sup> Since the records show that he left Rome and only later came to Milan, it must be concluded that he went to Sirmium where Probus was then stationed, and which was at the time the capital of the prefecture comprising Italy, Illyricum, and Africa. He was accompanied to his new post by his brother Satyrus. During this same year, 365, Symmachus left Rome for Regium as the *corrector* of Lucania and Calabria, and Albinus for Constantina as *consularis* of Numidia.

Sirmium (the modern Stremska Mitrovica in Yugoslavia) was at this time a great city. Important roads linked it with Milan and Rome to the west and south by way of Aquileia, with Thessalonica and Constantinople in the east, and with the Danube, the Roman frontier, and the cities on the Rhine to the north. Situated as it was on the banks of the Save not far from its confluence with the Danube, it was not only the chief city in Illyricum, as the nearby Belgrade is for Yugoslavia today, but it was also the meeting place of the East and West. During these years the prefect at Sirmium had jurisdiction over almost all of the Danubian basin as well as over Italy and a large part of North Africa. His tribunal received and passed sentence on appeals made from the decisions of provincial governors.

A position as a lawyer at the prefecture was a modest one to which even provincials of curial rank could aspire. But for young men of the nobility it was the first step in a career that could bring great wealth. For Ambrose it proved to be a providential experience since it put him in daily contact with the working class and their various problems and needs, far from the leisured and decadent atmosphere of Rome.

St. Jerome and Ammianus Marcellinus both speak ill of the lawyers of the fourth century. When the former was a student at Rome, he frequently visited the courts and listened to the arguments of the most celebrated lawyers, but he was scan-



dalized at seeing how they frequently broke off from the matter at hand to hurl insults at their colleagues.<sup>12</sup> Ammianus, in his turn, sketches various types of legal opportunists. There were those who sold the cases of the weak to military officials or influential people at court, and in this way obtained wealth and honors for themselves. Others sniffed the seeds of possible discord and parked on the porches of widows and orphans, and wherever they saw the possibility of some dispute between friends or relatives they stirred up implacable hatreds. If you pretended that you deliberately killed your mother, you could find lawyers who would promise you many ways of escaping punishment since they knew that you were rich. Finally, there were those who had quit their literary studies too soon and went about in constant search of food and dinners, and who were, moreover, so stupid that they could not remember ever having possessed a single book. As a consequence, when they were in a group of educated people, if they heard the names of authors, they thought that mention was being made of some strange fish or other food.<sup>13</sup>

One of the many serious evils in the system of government at this time was the wretched administration of justice. The same officials possessed administrative and judicial powers. The governor of a province was the judge of first instance in all civil and penal cases in his province. The vicar of a diocese and the prefect of the praetorium were judges for appeals, the latter for those of the whole prefecture.

Although the laws were in themselves good enough, an ordinary subject could not find a remedy against the wrongs inflicted by officials. These were both administrators and judges, and they could be bribed.

In his correspondence, Symmachus includes letters addressed to friends giving them directions on how to judge this or that case so that the sentence will be in his favor.<sup>14</sup> Ammianus relates the case of a government employee in Mesopotamia who was falsely accused of owing money to the public treasury. Be-

cause the powerful judges were interested in obtaining a conviction, and he did not have the money to pay the alleged debts, he admitted his obligations in writing. Then collecting a good many military secrets, he made an agreement with the Persian commander on the opposite side of the Tigris river. When the day for payment drew near and he saw that the count of the imperial largesses (minister of finance) was more and more inclined to favor his adversaries, he fled in desperation with his wife, children, and other relatives to the Persians. This incident occurred in the last months of the reign of Constantius II.<sup>15</sup> In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine tells us that Alypius "had been an assessor to the count of the Italian bounties. At that time there was a most influential senator to whom many were indebted for favors they had received, and many also stood in terror of him. This man wanted to obtain something forbidden by the laws through his usual influence. Alypius opposed it. He was promised a bribe, but he despised it with all his heart. Threats were made, which he trampled under foot. In the meantime, all were admiring such a rare spirit which did not wish to have such a man for his friend or fear him as his enemy, though it was very well known that he had innumerable means of doing good or harm to others. The judge for whom Alypius was acting as an assessor, although he was himself opposed to the request, did not openly refuse it, but handed the matter over to Alypius, saying that he was not permitted to handle it himself. And if he had, Alypius would have withdrawn from his service."<sup>16</sup>

In a similar fashion we see St. Ambrose when he was bishop congratulating Titianus, whom he calls his "little son," on the departure of Rufinus, the master of the offices, to another position, since Titianus would now no longer have reason to fear the suit in which he was then embroiled.<sup>17</sup>

The outcome of such disputes, however, frequently was disastrous. Toward the year 368, a former state official and three of his assistants, in a perfectly legal accusation, brought a

charge against the count of Italy. The latter was ordered by the judge to answer the charge according to the laws, but the count complained about the accusation to Valentinian as if it were a personal offense. The emperor then ordered Diodorus and his three assistants to be put to death. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Christians still venerated their memory and called the place where they were buried at Milan "the Square of the Innocents."<sup>18</sup>

In his funeral oration for Satyrus, St. Ambrose tells us that his brother had been greatly admired at the tribunal of the praetorian prefecture. And the saint's first biographer states practically the same of Ambrose himself without mentioning any particulars. In 367, perhaps in May or June, Sextus Petronius Probus was named prefect at Sirmium. This noble Roman had been proconsul in Africa in 358 at the age of twenty-three. After serving as prefect of Italy at Sirmium, he was appointed prefect of Gaul in 380, and in 383 he was again made prefect of Italy. Despite the generous encomia lavished upon him by Ausonius and Claudianus, it is quite possible that the numerous high positions which he held in the government were not so much due to his administrative talents as to the influence which he possessed. The only way he could preserve his enormous wealth was by purchasing positions of authority. And these posts also provided him with means of further gain. Ammianus humbly confesses that it was not for him to decide whether or not Probus had secured his possessions justly or not in almost all the provinces.<sup>19</sup> He was, at least in name, a Christian, and, at the age of sixty, when he was on the point of death, he received baptism. Many nobles in the provinces governed by Probus lost everything. Others were constrained either to emigrate or to commit suicide because of his malfeasance.

When Probus arrived as prefect at Sirmium in 367, he found there the two brothers Ambrose and Satyrus. They also pertained to the Christian nobility of Rome, and he certainly

helped them in their careers. Paulinus expressly states that Probus made Ambrose a member of his council.<sup>20</sup> Later, likely about the year 370, Ambrose was named *consularis*, or governor, of the province of Aemilia-Liguria; and he left Sirmium for Milan.<sup>21</sup> Satyrus also received an appointment as a provincial governor but we do not know where.

Because of their family connections and their father's former rank, the two brothers, as we have already observed, were destined to become high officials in the state. It was only natural that after the completion of their studies and some years of experience in lower positions they should attain the office of governor.

At this late date it is impossible to determine what their special responsibilities must have been under Probus, but it is certain that they must have had numerous occasions to become acquainted with the many griefs and hardships experienced by the provincials.

During his five years at Sirmium the future bishop obtained an intimate knowledge of the ills that afflicted the body politic. The most serious problem was that of taxation. The collection of taxes was so pitiless that it eventually brought about the almost complete destruction of the middle class and small owners. One of the difficulties was that Rome never had a regular budget. As a consequence, whenever it was confronted with some new need, it had to have recourse to special taxes. In the trying decades of the third century, these special demands took on the character of organized looting that seriously disrupted the flow of commerce. Instead of taxes in money, the emperors of the third century revived the more primitive system of collecting taxes in kind. This took the form of repeated collections of foodstuffs for the army, the city of Rome, and for state officials. Raw materials and manufactured goods were collected in a similar fashion. These contributions, which were emergency measures at the beginning, gradually evolved into a regular tax over and above what was regularly assessed. It was,

moreover, difficult to foresee the future needs of the state. Depending upon the circumstances of a particular time, the *annonae*, as these special assessments were called, could be greater or lesser. They thus retained to a certain extent the appearance of emergency measures. The emperor annually fixed the amount for payment during the current year, but no one could foresee what he would have to pay the following year. Under Diocletian the system was simplified but rendered more inequitable. Everyone who was cultivating a piece of land had to declare how much he was farming and how many men and animals he was employing; and he was assessed accordingly. Since the tiller of the soil came to form a single unit with the land, he became bound to it and lost his freedom of movement. Artisans and shopkeepers, in addition to the payment of a uniform tax, had to hand over to the state a certain quantity of goods at a special price. Merchants in the cities, in addition to excise taxes, had to pay every five years the traditional crown gold, and on the occasion of the nomination of an emperor or some other great public event, they had to contribute other gifts as a token of their good will and congratulations. Some of the taxes were collected directly by the state. Among these were those on inheritances, manumissions, auctions, and imports. But most were collected by the cities and paid into the treasury of the province. From the time of Hadrian the richest members of a community were made responsible for these collections. In the third century the pressure of the state on the municipal bourgeoisie steadily increased. The *curiales*, that is, the members of the municipal senates, ended up as being unpaid hereditary employees of the state, obliged to act as tax collectors and to make up out of their own resources the arrears of the other members of the community. To prevent them from shirking their duties they were kept under the watchful eyes of bands of public officials.

Constantine was able to provide some relief for the economic problems of his day by stabilizing the currency. But this was of

a short duration. The unjust and oppressive taxes and the ever increasing dishonesty and violence of the members of the imperial administration made a sane economy impossible. Since it was impossible to rebel, a wave of hopeless resignation spread over the whole empire.

If a farmer succeeded in bettering his property and adding to it, he knew that he would be raised to the rank of a *curialis*, and this meant further oppression, slavery, and ultimate ruin. Prudence advised against making fruitless efforts of improvement. Desperate means were sometimes used to improve one's condition: a peasant would try to enter the army or take up brigandage, a soldier would desert, a *curialis* would become a public official, a soldier, or a tenant, but it would all be in vain.<sup>22</sup>

The best way to eke out an existence was to attach oneself to some great landowner. Such a one was powerful enough to resist the demands of the imperial agents and to carry on like an independent prince.

Even in St. Ambrose we can read how laborers in order to support themselves had recourse to armed robbery.<sup>23</sup>

In such circumstances it is easy to see how a caste system should have arisen. Social position and profession were handed down from father to son. State employees enjoyed exemption from taxes and from mandatory services required of other individuals, and at the end of their career they received titles of honor, but their sons had to continue their work. Employees in the state industries, whether in the mints, or in the cloth mills, or elsewhere, were bound to the shops for life. Craftsmen of different trades were banded together into corporations, and they had to marry women engaged in the same type of work. In the cities such unions were official and obligatory. There were corporations of bakers, masons, coachmen, carpenters, blacksmiths, woodcutters (who provided the firewood to heat the baths), gladiators, mimes, musicians, and actors. The latter

were practically slaves to the amusement for the people. Not only were actors and jockeys forbidden to give up their trade but they could not even leave their city. The soldiers, who were with difficulty recruited from the lower strata of society, had to serve for twenty years or more. They could marry, but by law their sons belonged to the army. If they tried to flee, they were pursued by the laws, as were those of the other categories as well.

From this it should be apparent why the strength of a Roman army from the middle of the fourth century on was in proportion to the number of barbarians serving in it. The fate of the farmers has already been mentioned, but it is further indicated by the following constitution of Theodosius: "A tiller of the soil may not go where he wants but must remain in the service of his patron, and no one can take him into his own service with impunity since the first patron has the right to recover the fugitive." The reason for this is that "everyone should endure his own fate."<sup>24</sup>

These various factors also explain the decline in population. Legitimate marriages now imposed burdens which were so impossible that many preferred temporary unions with slaves. Even though St. Ambrose considered it his special duty to exhort individuals to the practice of virginity rather than to enter into the married state, it is rather symptomatic of the times that he exhorts his people not to despise marriage and not to degrade themselves by illegitimate unions with slaves.<sup>25</sup> The decline in population is well indicated by references in the letters of both Symmachus and St. Jerome to thousands of acres of once fertile land that had returned to woods or deserts.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, even during these years of decline, life on the great estates and in the large cities could be gay and brilliant and that the great lords continued to surround themselves with all sorts of luxuries. But the young official at Sirmium was too intelligent not to understand the sad

realities. He was not one to be wrapped up in his own personal problems, and he must have given considerable thought to means of improving the system of government.

Ambrose's years at Sirmium, even apart from his activity on the council of the prefect, also offered him the opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with the religious situation, specifically with the attitude of the civil authorities toward paganism and Christianity.

Men could still remember the last great persecution of the Church.<sup>27</sup> In the winter of 302-303, when Galerius went with Diocletian to Nicomedia, he convinced his senior of the need to suppress the new religion. In the third century, the Church had already acquired a considerable amount of strength and prestige. As one modern historian has observed, "oppression, compulsion, persecution were the mottoes of the State; love, compassion, consolation were the maxims of the Church. The Church, unique in this respect among the other religious communities, not only administered spiritual relief but promised and gave practical help in the miseries of actual life, while the State oppressed and persecuted the helper."<sup>28</sup>

Scholars differ widely in their evaluation of Diocletian and his accomplishments. Some have spoken highly of his moral principles and of the substantial goodness of his reforms. Others have maintained that these latter provide "the plainest proof of Diocletian's utter incapacity to invent anything new."<sup>29</sup> Despite the numerous possibilities at hand for a reorganization of the state, he simply took "the old beaten track which led directly to ruin and slavery."<sup>30</sup>

In such a case, then, just as in the first persecution under Nero the Christians served as a scapegoat for the burning of Rome, so in the last persecution under Diocletian they would have been used to distract the people from the emperor's notoriously unsuccessful financial reforms and to restore his lost favor with the general public. A remote preparation for the persecution, moreover, had been made by the anti-Christian



propaganda of the philosophers Porphyry and Hierocles, and there was the added irritant of certain Christian sects such as the Montanists and Marcionites which maintained that military service was essentially wrong. But whatever were its causes, the first edict of this persecution, which was to be the longest and most severe in the history of Rome, was posted at Nicomedia on February 24, 303. The wife of Diocletian, Prisca, and his daughter, Valeria, abjured their faith, but countless others, including great dignitaries at court, refused to comply with the emperor's order.

On May 1, 305, beneath a statue of Zeus on a small hill near Nicomedia, Diocletian took off his crown and purple cloak and placed them on Galerius. He then retired to cultivate cabbages in the splendid gardens of his palace at Salona on the Adriatic coast. But the persecution continued, and it continued with varying degrees of intensity until April 30, 311, when Galerius, again at Nicomedia, published the edict of toleration which marked its end.

The right of Christians to exist as such and to possess property had been already publicly recognized by Alexander Severus almost a century earlier, but there was always the old Roman religion at hand to instigate new persecutions in the name of tradition. Moreover, there was a new religious movement in the empire that had gained ever increasing importance during the third century. This was a kind of all-embracing, abstract theism that worshiped a *summus Deus*, or "supreme God," a deity that appealed alike to the better minds of the Roman ruling class, to Neoplatonic philosophers, and to the devotees of the Eastern religions, a great many of whom could be found in the army and even among the emperors.<sup>31</sup> At one time this syncretistic theism seemed to be the most formidable antagonist of the God of the Christians. Naturally speaking, the fact that Christ and not Mithra became the God of all these worshippers was due in no small part to Constantine.

The night before the decisive battle with Maxentius at the

Milvian bridge on October 27, 312, "Constantine was warned in his sleep that he should have the shields of his soldiers marked with the heavenly sign before beginning the battle. He did as he was commanded and had the shields marked with an 'X' crossed from top to bottom by an 'I' bent over at the top representing the name of Christ."<sup>32</sup> These words of Lactantius have been endlessly discussed, and scholars have come up with the most diverse conclusions. However, it is now generally agreed that Constantine yielded to a religious impulse, though some maintain that this was of a merely superstitious and pathological order and others that it was genuinely supernatural. Here as elsewhere the decision depends pretty much upon one's point of view, whether it be from heaven or from earth.<sup>33</sup>

Political and military considerations would rather have argued against such a move. The Christians, especially in the West, were a small minority. Even in the cities, where they were most numerous, they did not constitute a twentieth of the population. Nevertheless the external manifestations of Constantine's adherence to the new faith multiplied after his victory. When he entered Rome on October 29, 312, he accepted from the senate a statue representing his imperial divinity, but he wanted a cross to be put in its hand. He remained at Rome until January 1, 313. Then he went to Milan for the wedding of his sister Flavia Julia Constantia and Licinius. It was in February, 313, that the two Augusti reached the decisions that came to be known as the Edict of Milan. A formal edict proclaiming tolerance and religious peace was probably never issued as such. The name has simply been given to the measures which they took by mutual agreement at Milan to stop the persecution, and to remedy its wrongs by revoking the confiscations of the preceding years and restoring to the Church the right to possess property that she had already enjoyed before the outbreak of the persecution in 303.<sup>34</sup>

The terms of this agreement are known from letters of Constantine written in February, April, and October, 313, and from

the famous rescript of Licinius published at Nicomedia on June 13, 313. On the morrow of the most furious persecution, Christianity was not only tolerated but it enjoyed equal rights with the official pagan religion. Constantine, moreover, freed the Catholic clergy from the obligations of public office and service. Such exemptions had already been granted to other professions, including doctors, athletes, and professors, since their work itself contributed to the common good. Another indication of Constantine's devotion to Christianity may be seen in the monogram "X" engraved on his helmet in a coin from the mint of Pavia issued in 315. Rivalry between Licinius and Constantine gave rise to the persecution of Licinius in the East in 320. After defeating Licinius in 324, Constantine became the sole ruler of the empire and published laws in favor of the Church in the East, which had suffered so much more than that of the West. All the faithful who were still enslaved or banished were freed; the churches regained their lost patrimonies; and the relatives of the martyrs, or, if these were lacking, their respective churches, received the goods that had been confiscated from those who had suffered for the faith. In 318, Constantine compared episcopal jurisdiction with that of magistrates, and, in 333, he gave civil cognizance to the sentences pronounced by bishops. Many of his other decrees also give evidence of Christian influence. Thus he revoked Augustus's laws against celibacy; he made various provisions for public morality, among which were those which condemned concubinage and gave protection to those who were weak, to the innocent, and to prisoners and slaves. However, he was no persecutor of paganism. No temples were destroyed or closed simply because they were pagan. Seeming exceptions to this general rule, such as we find at Heliopolis and Alexandria, are to be explained by the scandalous character of the cults practiced there. Though he tolerated pagan institutions, it was obvious that he personally favored those of the new religion.<sup>35</sup> At Constantina in Africa he donated the land for, and paid for the

construction of, a Christian basilica. He had another sumptuous basilica erected at Nicomedia in Asia Minor and placed in it the trophies of his victory over Licinius as a dedicatory offering to the Savior. He also raised up a great basilica at Antioch, two at Jerusalem (the Martyrion on the site of the Crucifixion and the Anastasis over the Holy Sepulcher), one at Bethlehem, and others at Naples, Capua, Ostia, and Albano. At Constantinople, in addition to many smaller churches, he constructed two basilicas, one of the Apostles and the other of Irene, or Peace. For the churches in his capital city, he had fifty precious manuscripts of the scriptures copied out. Rome also owes many churches to Constantine: the small basilica of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus on the Via Labicana, the basilica of St. Lawrence on the Via Tiburtina, the basilica of St. Agnes on the Via Nomentana, and the basilica of the Holy Cross. He donated the old palace of the Laterani, formerly used as an imperial residence, to the Roman pontiff, either Pope Miltiades or Pope St. Silvester, and built alongside it the basilica of the Savior. Finally, he erected basilicas over the tomb of St. Peter on the Vatican hill and over that of St. Paul on the Ostian Way. Something should also be said about their elaborate gold trappings. For example, in addition to endowing the churches with altars, chalices, patens, and lamps of various kinds, he placed gold crosses, each weighing one hundred and ten pounds, over the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul. He also provided endowments for the churches in lands and mobile properties. The Lateran basilica thus received an annual income of 5,390 gold coins. Since each of these at the time of Constantine weighed 4.55 grams, the income was the equivalent of at least 31,000 dollars. From the same sources the baptistery of the basilica received annual revenues of 10,054 gold coins, or some 70,000 dollars. The annual income of St. Paul's basilica from its properties amounted to 4,070 gold coins.

It is no wonder, then, that a rich philosopher and enthusiast for paganism like Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, who was pre-

fect of Rome in 367 and praetorian prefect of Italy in 384, could say with a smile to Pope Damasus: "Make me bishop of Rome and I will at once become a Christian!"<sup>36</sup>

The favors which Constantine lavished on the Church did not, however, remove all traces of paganism from his own personal life. Though he was extremely generous with the Church, he did not become an actual member of it through baptism until on the point of death. Worse still, as has already been noted, because of his despotic and fickle temperament he made numerous mistakes in letting himself be influenced by a faction of Arian bishops. The servility of these bishops and the confusion they created through their personal rivalries provided numerous occasions for the head of the state to intervene in matters that were of a purely ecclesiastical character. Such intervention under Constantine was still something of an exception, but under Constantius II the abuse came to be regarded as a constitutional prerogative with disastrous results for the unity of the Church.

With a stubbornness worthy of a better cause Constantius profoundly disturbed the normal operations of the Church. In addition to his constant meddling with, and tyranny over, the affairs of the Church was his intolerance of paganism. In this he received the support of a number of fanatics such as the converted Sicilian senator, Firmicus Maternus, who between the years 346-350 wrote a violent attack on paganism, exhorting the emperors Constantine II and Constans to extirpate it completely: "Greater authority must be used so that wretched men may be brought over completely to a sound frame of mind so that after they have been cured no trace of the former pestilence may remain. . . . Most pious emperors remove without fear the ornaments of the temples. Let the fire of your mints or the flames of your refineries melt down these gods, and transfer all their revenues to your own use and control."<sup>37</sup> During these years temples in Syria, Egypt, Phrygia, and Cappadocia were, as a matter of fact, pulled down. In his legislation, Constantius

left no doubt as to his own will in the matter: there are strict provisions for the abolition of pagan worship and the closing of the temples. In many large areas of the empire these provisions remained a dead letter, but in others, especially where Christians were in charge of the administration, as in a number of Eastern provinces, the temples were actually closed. Julian's brief attempt to restore paganism has already been mentioned, but even though he failed in this the pagan reaction did not end with him.

When Ambrose began his political career, relations between Church and State were dominated by the religious policy of Valentinian I, which was one of non-intervention. According to his decrees, no religion approved by antiquity was to be regarded as illegal though, as his predecessors had done before him, he condemned both magic and astrology. The pagan Ammianus Marcellinus praises this emperor, who had been raised by the Christians to the throne after the death of Julian, for his religious tolerance.<sup>38</sup>

In Pannonia, Ambrose discovered that the country regions were for the most part pagan, and strongly attached to their traditional deities, just as they were in Italy. On the other hand, there were powerful groups of Christians in the cities, and they were becoming the majority. The attitude of the pagan aristocracy and the more cultured strata of society was on the whole one of hostility. Their antipathies were fostered by the writings of such individuals as Julian the Apostate and the rhetorician Eunapius of Sardis. In the anti-Christian polemic of these pagan apologists, Christianity was described as a kind of barbarism, a disease of the intellect, a hatred of light and life, and a mixture of various gloomy practices such as the worship of the martyrs, which seemed to them to be something indecent and disgusting. With brilliant irony in his *Against the Galileans*, Julian highlights the failure of certain Christians and even bishops to live up to their evangelical calling. When he was at Sirmium, Ambrose must have frequently heard expressions of contempt for

the Christians coming from the high officials with whom he associated. For the pagans of the fourth century, the followers of Christ were a stupid lot lacking both feeling and intelligence.<sup>39</sup>

At Sirmium, however, there was also a flourishing Christian church, but during these years under the rule of an Arian bishop, Germinius. Unfortunate as this was, it did not mean the apostasy of the ordinary Christian. As Hilary of Poitiers notes in a work written in 365, "Under the priests of anti-Christ the Christians do not perish since they judge the faith of their bishops from their words. They hear that Jesus Christ is God, and they believe what is said. . . . The ears of the people are thus purer than the hearts of their bishops."<sup>40</sup>

In the year 356, Martin, a young layman of Savaria (today, Szombathely in Hungary) began an anti-Arian campaign. His zeal, however, brought down upon him the wrath of the Arian bishop of the city, and he was beaten and expelled.<sup>41</sup>

Even more spectacular was an unfortunate incident which occurred at Sirmium in 366, and which must certainly have come to Ambrose's attention. Three stalwarts of the city, Heraclian, Firmian, and Aurelian were thrown into prison for their opposition to Arianism. On January 13, 366, they were publicly questioned by the bishop in the church at Sirmium in the presence of the clergy and magistrates of the city and those of the public who cared to attend. When Heraclian defended his faith, the bishop, Germinius, became angry: "Was it perhaps Eusebius [of Vercelli] and Hilary [of Poitiers] that put these ideas into your head?" he asked. When Heraclian replied, Germinius was only further incensed and ordered the defendant to be struck on the mouth. The dispute then continued. Heraclian quoted Isaias, and Germinius St. Paul, both with little understanding. They then argued the divinity of the Holy Spirit without reaching any accord. The clergy and people fanatically demanded that the three should be put to death, but Germinius, having recovered his temper, opposed any such

radical measure: "No, no, my brothers! They do not know what they are saying. If bishops have fallen into error, how much more simple fellows like these here before us."<sup>42</sup>

From the working class with which he must have come into contact as an advocate at Sirmium Ambrose could have learned some edifying lessons. Though the middle class was disappearing at this time, the lower class of free workers, who were replacing slave laborers, was increasing. Even if governmental regulations made such a life difficult, it was not entirely impossible. Work had acquired a new dignity. The laziness and sloth of both the very wealthy and of the unemployed mobs in the city found their clearest condemnation in the example of Christ and His apostles. For several centuries Christianity had been fighting the pagan contempt for manual labor and for the small merchant or salaried employee.<sup>43</sup> In the third century Tertullian had openly maintained that the least Christian worker knew more of the nature and perfections of God than Plato.<sup>44</sup> At the end of the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom described the poor shop of the Christian worker, who was both healthier and happier than the rich man at his leisure.<sup>45</sup> In their faith and in their prayer the Christians found the calm necessary for any undertaking. Labor was regarded as something ennobling even when it was obligatory and oppressive as it was in the corporations of the fourth century. In an epitaph of 341, a Christian woman is described as having been a "worker," almost as if this were a matter for boasting.<sup>46</sup>

In such surroundings, Christianity could give an excellent account of itself. Ambrose could see the good moral influence that the large numbers of Christians exercised in Sirmium, but here, as elsewhere, there were also sorry contrasts. Alongside the heroism of the ascetics and the sacrifices of the virgins there was the poor example too often given by the higher clergy, especially among the Arians.

Two letters of St. Jerome, one written to a young patrician woman Eustochium in 384, and another to Nepotian written in



394, can give some idea of these evils, even though Jerome obviously exaggerates. According to him, clerics, monks, nuns, and Christians living in the world are all only Christians in name. For one who was still outside the Church, like Ambrose at Rome and Sirmium, the Christian communities to which he was being invited by his family traditions were not without their defects. And, as a matter of fact, the Church, though holy in its origins and in its ends, is made up of real men, men as they are and not necessarily as they should be. During these years of serious moral decline, those who were being converted in ever increasing numbers were not always guided by the highest motives. They frequently brought with them into the Church their pagan way of life and thus contributed to lowering the intellectual and spiritual tone of the communities. St. Jerome aptly summarizes the situation by saying that the Church had become greater in power and wealth after the age of the martyrs, but weaker and poorer in virtue.<sup>47</sup>

A noble Christian woman, Fabiola, for example, after separating from her dissolute husband, entered into a second marriage while her first husband was still alive.<sup>48</sup> Sabinian, a deacon who had fled from Italy to escape the vengeance of an angry husband, renewed his exploits in Palestine.<sup>49</sup> A prominent Christian woman struck an old woman in St. Peter's basilica so hard in the face that she bled. She had been distributing alms to the poor in the church and became angry when the unfortunate beggar returned for a second coin.<sup>50</sup>

Though such incidents were certainly the exception, a reading of St. Jerome, even allowing for his usual polemic, leaves one with the impression that there were considerable disorders among the Christians of the fourth century. Thus he writes: "I cannot bring myself to speak of the many virgins who daily fall and are lost to the bosom of the Church, their mother. . . . The very clergy, who ought to inspire matrons with respect by their teaching and authority, kiss them on the forehead, and putting forth their hands (so that, if you knew no better, you might

suppose them in the act of blessing), take wages for their visits. They, meanwhile, seeing that priests cannot do without them, are lifted up into pride; and, having experienced both, they prefer the license of widowhood to the restraints of marriage, calling themselves chaste livers and nuns. After an immoderate supper they retire to rest to dream of the apostles. . . . There are others—I speak of those of my own order—who seek the priesthood and the diaconate simply that they may be able to see women with less restraint. Such men think of nothing but their dress; they use perfumes freely, and see that there are no creases in their leather shoes. Their curled hair shows traces of the tongs; their fingers glisten with rings; they walk on tiptoe across a damp road so as not to splash their feet. When you see men acting in this way, think of them rather as bridegrooms than as clergymen. Certain persons have devoted the whole of their energies and life to the single object of knowing the names, houses, and characters of married ladies.”<sup>51</sup> And in another letter to Nepotian, he advises him: “Seek for no worldly gain under Christ’s banner, lest having more than when you first became a cleric you hear men say to your shame, ‘Their portion shall not profit them.’ . . . It is a shame to have to admit that whereas pagan priests, actors, jockeys, and prostitutes can inherit property, clerics and monks may not do so legally. And this is a disability which was not enacted by persecutors but by Christian emperors. I do not complain of the law, but I grieve that we have deserved such a harsh statute. . . . It is a disgrace to you if the consul’s lictors or soldiers keep watch before your door, and if the judge of the province has a better dinner with you than in his own palace. If you plead as an excuse your wish to intercede for the unhappy and the oppressed, I reply that a worldly judge will defer more to a clergyman who is self-denying than to one who is rich; he will pay more regard to your holiness than to your wealth.”<sup>52</sup> Jerome also inveighs against the custom of unmarried ascetics of different sexes living together: “How comes this plague of the

*agapetae* to be in the Church? Whence come these unwedded wives, these novel concubines, these prostitutes, as I will call them, though they cling to a single partner? One house holds them and one chamber. They often occupy the same bed, and yet they call us suspicious if we fancy anything amiss. A brother leaves his virgin sister; a virgin, slighting her unmarried brother, seeks a brother in a stranger. Both alike profess to have but one object, to find spiritual consolation from those not of their kin; but their real aim is to indulge in intercourse. It is on such that Solomon in the Book of Proverbs heaps his scorn. 'Can a man take fire in his bosom,' he says, 'and not burn his clothes?' <sup>53</sup>

In the third century, St. Cyprian had already condemned this manner of living together as a source of scandal. In the letter which the bishops of the East wrote to the pope at Rome in 267-268 complaining about Paul of Samosata, one of their accusations was that he kept two young women in his house.<sup>54</sup> And, late in the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom wrote two works condemning such asceticism. But he was not excessively severe: though he was himself ready to believe in the virtue of these virgins who lived with men who were practicing celibacy, he was not able to make others believe it, and such an abuse caused both Jews and pagans to deride the Church.<sup>55</sup>

The few extant texts referring to the *agapetae* are not sufficient to make us believe that they were widespread throughout the Christian world, but it is reasonable to suspect that at Sirmium and at Rome Ambrose may have learned of scandals connected with them. Later, as bishop of Milan, he took energetic measures to preserve the integrity of his flock. We see him, for example, purifying the Christian worship of the martyrs from pagan intemperance.

While he was still at Sirmium, Ambrose must certainly have heard of the death of Pope Liberius. After his return from exile, this beleaguered pontiff had remained undisturbed at Rome. He had not taken part in the Council of Rimini in 359,

where all the bishops of the West had finally surrendered to the Arian pretensions of Constantius, and he had to see to it, practically by himself, that the decisions and the creed of Nicea were restored to their earlier efficacy. In this he had the support of Hilary of Poitiers, who passed through Rome on his way back from exile about the year 360. In a decree, probably issued in 362, Liberius condemned the Council of Rimini and fixed the conditions for the return of the Arians to the Church. Some extremists reproached him for his indulgence, but his moderation was really a credit to him.

When Felix died, December 22, 365, his followers had the good sense not to persist in their schism. Consequently, because of the meekness of Liberius, a union between the two hostile parties was effected. Although the clergy of Felix and of Liberius were thus officially reconciled with each other, they continued to look upon each other with some suspicion. By at least some of his subjects, Liberius was accused of having been overly generous with the Felicians.

Liberius died on September 24, 366. The intransigent anti-Felicians gathered together in the Julian basilica in the Trastevere. Among them were seven priests and three deacons. They elected the deacon Ursinus as pope, and he was hurriedly consecrated that same day, Sunday, September 24, by the bishop of Tivoli. Meanwhile, the great majority of the faithful and of the clergy, including former followers of Felix, elected the deacon Damasus as pope in the basilica of Lucina. Damasus had himself been a Felician. Since it was getting late in the day, the following Sunday was set for his ordination and consecration. As the group was breaking up it learned of the election that had taken place in the Julian basilica. Excitement ran high and many rushed to the church in the Trastevere. The Ursinians put up such a stout resistance that in the ensuing brawl some were killed and others injured. The following Sunday, October 1, Damasus, in accordance with a

long-established tradition, was consecrated by the bishop of Ostia in the Lateran basilica.<sup>56</sup> The prefect of Rome, Viventius, instead of trying to settle the dispute between the two parties went into the suburbs of the city until the tempers of the people should have boiled down. Later, at the request of Damasus and others, he decided to expel the leaders of the Ursinians from Rome.

But their followers continued to meet together. Their priests were therefore arrested. But these were soon released in a popular uprising by their friends, who then seized the basilica of Sicinius (later known as the Liberian basilica and St. Mary Major) and converted it into a kind of fortress. On October 26, the supporters of Pope Damasus, including even some priests, laid siege to the basilica. At least one hundred and thirty-seven people were slain in the fighting that ensued. After giving this figure, Ammianus Marcellinus goes on to say that it is quite natural that those who wish to become bishop of Rome should do everything in their power to achieve it: "For when they obtain it, they will be free from care since they will be enriched by the gifts of matrons, and they will ride seated in carriages wearing elegant garments, and they will serve such fine banquets that their entertainments will surpass the dinners provided by kings. These men could be truly happy if, despising the greatness of the city behind which they conceal their faults, they would live in the fashion of certain provincial bishops, whose great temperance in food and drink, poverty of apparel, and eyes fixed upon the earth, commend them to the Eternal Deity and to His true worshipers as pure and devout men."<sup>57</sup>

The following year the emperor Valentinian, thinking that by this time peace must have been restored, allowed Ursinus and his followers to return to Rome. On September 15, 367, Ursinus solemnly re-entered the city. Subsequent rioting, however, forced the new prefect, Praetextatus, to again send

him into exile on November 16. The Liberian basilica was restored to Damasus. Detained in Gaul, Ursinus did not appear again upon the scene for many years.

In the palace of the governor at Sirmium, where the prefect was also a member of the Roman aristocracy, the tragic events at Rome were closely followed.

During the years which he spent at Sirmium, Ambrose may have occupied himself with religious as well as legal matters if the Latin translation of the Greek *War of the Jews* by Flavius Josephus is to be attributed to him. During the Middle Ages this work was ascribed to Hegesippus, which is merely an alternate form of the name Josephus.<sup>58</sup>

It was probably about the year 370 that Ambrose was named *consularis*, or governor, of Aemilia-Liguria. As he sent him off to his new position, Probus, the praetorian prefect, counseled him: "Go and conduct yourself not as a judge but as a bishop."<sup>59</sup>

# IV

## Milan

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*Roman Milan. Ausonius's description of the city. The people. The inscriptions. Christian Milan. The bishops of the city. Auxentius. Ambrose as governor.*

In the Peutingerian map, the Roman city of *Mediolanum*, later to be known as Milan, is merely indicated by two towers. But because of its strategic position, it was bound to grow extensively.<sup>1</sup> The Roman *itineraria*, or early pilgrim guides, mention five roads radiating from Milan: the first toward Bergamo, Verona, Aquileia, and the Balkans; the second toward Como, Spluga, Chur, and the countries of the North; the third toward Lodi, Piacenza, Ravenna, and Rome; the fourth toward Pavia, Turin, and Genoa; and the fifth toward Novara, Vercelli, Ivrea, Aosta, and the Great and Small St. Bernards.

References to Milan in ancient writers are extremely rare. Cicero mentions a treaty made between Rome and the conquered city of Milan. Plutarch, to show that Caesar was not fastidious in his eating, notes that the great general was once entertained by Valerius Leo on his way through the city. When he was served asparagus seasoned with "ointment," that is, with butter, and not with the olive oil customary at Rome, he ate it without complaint, though his Roman friends showed their disgust with the fare.<sup>2</sup>

In the first century before Christ, the primitive Insubrian settlement had become a *municipium*, or free city, with its own laws, but later, perhaps in the age of the Antonines, it became known as a "colony." This was not due to an influx of colonists like the five thousand, including five hundred Greek immigrants, that came to Como during the rule of Caesar. It was given this title in the second century as a mark of honor, while still retaining its earlier constitution as a municipality. At the end of this same century, Milan became the most important city beyond the Po. In the middle of the third century Gallienus and Valerian besieged Milan, where Manlius Acilius Aureolus had been proclaimed emperor by his troops before they eventually slew him. Milan was also among the nine greatest cities of the empire to which the Roman senate in A.D. 235 sent special notices of the nomination of Marcus Aurelius Tacitus as emperor. When Diocletian in 286 took as his colleague Marcus Aurelius Maximianus, a son of a colonist in the environs of Sirmium, the latter chose Milan as his place of residence. Finally, in 293, with the definitive organization of the tetrarchy, Milan became the official seat for the Augustus of the West, just as Nicomedia, and later Constantinople, was the official residence of the Augustus of the East. Throughout the whole of the fourth century, Milan retained its privileged position as a capital, but in 404 this was transferred to Ravenna.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly among the most notable events in the history of imperial Milan was the meeting of Constantine and Licinius in February, 313, for the marriage of the latter to the former's sister. On this occasion the two Augusti brought to a final halt the last persecution of the Church and defined the terms of religious peace. Constantine later reunited the whole empire under his sole authority, but it was again divided after his death. Of his three sons, Constantius II lived for the longest time at Milan, and it was here that this emperor in 355 proclaimed his nephew Julian as Caesar. Valentinian I stayed with



his court at Milan from November 1, 364, to near the end of November, 365, when he took up again his official residence at Trier. During the first years of his reign, Gratian also lived at Trier, but in March, 381, he transferred his court and the offices of the empire of the West back again to Milan.

Throughout the third and fourth centuries the empire was suffering from various invasions of barbarians. During the reign of Valerian (270-275), bands of Marcomanni had devastated the land about the city. Such incursions prompted Maximian to surround the city with a new circuit of walls.

The most complete description of imperial Milan comes from the pen of Ausonius, who passed through Milan in 379 on his return from Rome to Bordeaux. His epigram of eleven lines may be translated as follows: "At Milan everything is marvelous. It has an abundance of everything: countless beautiful homes, men of great eloquence, a light-hearted populace, a site enlarged by a double wall, a circus and a covered theater which are the delight of the citizens, temples, a royal palace, a splendid mint, famous baths dedicated to Hercules with their porticoes filled with marble statues, and walls surrounded by a moat. All of these objects rival one another in beauty and grandeur, and they do not suffer in comparison with those of Rome."<sup>4</sup>

In his description of Milan, Ausonius fails to mention an amphitheater, one of the most popular places of amusement in a typical Roman town.<sup>5</sup> But we know that such a structure must have existed from a reference to it in Paulinus's *Life of St. Ambrose*,<sup>6</sup> from an epitaph of the gladiator Urbicus,<sup>7</sup> from a street still known as the Via Arena, and, finally, from possible references to it in the writings of St. Ambrose himself.<sup>8</sup>

As with many other cities in antiquity, it is not easy to determine the population of Milan during the fourth century. The walls of the city were two and one half miles in circumference and embraced an area of approximately two hundred and seventy-five acres. Claudius Mamertinus, in an oration in

honor of Maximian, mentions the large crowds that gathered to watch the passage of Diocletian and Maximian in a carriage through the streets of the city.<sup>9</sup> From such isolated data, A. De Marchi has come to the conclusion that there were probably about 130,000 people dwelling in the city at this time.<sup>10</sup>

Certain it is, however, that the establishment of the imperial court at Milan meant an influx of thousands. The posts in the imperial bureaucracy and army had to be staffed with men of many different categories. The relatively few Milanese inscriptions frequently mention the corporations of the *fabri* and of the *centonarii*. The former were employed in the construction of buildings and the latter made the awnings which were soaked in vinegar and water to put out fires. They were thus a kind of "fire department." Their corporation was divided into twelve centuries, which were in turn divided into decuries.

The metalworkers, or those employed in the treasury, were enrolled in a third corporation, which was also divided into twelve centuries. The size of these corporations would seem to indicate the flourishing state of the laboring classes during the fourth century in Milan. But there is epigraphical evidence for other types of activity as well. There is still extant the epitaph of a businessman who had interests on both sides of the Alps, and who was at the same time the patron of the boatmen of Como. Another merchant from Apulia dealt in military cloaks, and another from Ravenna was a wholesaler of shoes. Publius Julius Macedon traded in cloth and skins. There was also a merchant from Metz who specialized in cloth for the army. Then there is the epitaph of a distinguished citizen who made his fortune as a banker. These various activities would lead us to believe that Milan was a center of foreign as well as local trade. Among the inscriptions are references also to *sagarii*, or *castrensiarii*, the fabricators of military cloaks. This seems to indicate that Milan was an important textile

center at an early date, as it later was during the Middle Ages and still is even in our own day.

Another inscription refers to a corporation of muleteers of the Porta Vercellina and Jovia. Justus, a shoemaker of the gens *Atilia*, in addition to his name has left a picture of his worktable on his epitaph. Under the arch of the East gate may still be seen the dyer or tailor of the family of the *Novellii* cutting a piece of cloth, the emblem of his trade. Other examples of the same sort may be found in other epitaphs preserved in the Archeological Museum at Milan. On the tomb of his freedman, a patron has written: "His poorest works equalled the best of other artisans, and no one could equal what he himself did well." Such esteem for manual labor indicates a society in which work was no longer despised as it had been in ancient Rome but regarded rather as a source of wealth and honor.

The inscriptions also support St. Ambrose in what he will have to say as a bishop about the passion of his Milanese for horse races and theatrical productions.

A young man who died at the age of twenty-eight complains of his premature death on his tombstone and reminds the passer-by of his great enthusiasm for horses. On a stone in the Ambrosian library may still be seen a portrait of the actor *Pilades* as he lifts his mask and, as it is said, receives the applause of the *cives Mediolanenses* in the theater which stood near the church of St. Victor. *Urbicus*, a promising young gladiator who died at Milan when he was twenty-two, is represented in his armor with his dog beside him. On his epitaph he refers to his victories in the amphitheater. This was dedicated to him by his fond wife who had lived with him for seven years.

Other voices from ancient Milan may be found in the lament of a mother for her son who died at twenty-four, whom she calls an *animula iucundissima*, or "most delightful little soul"; in the delightful idyl of two children carved on a

stone slab with a puppy as their playmate, in the gratitude of two students expressed on the tomb of their former teacher; in the bequest of twenty-four thousand sesterces of the pious and generous Albucia Magiana for three religious corporations; and finally, in the will of the devoted freedwoman Mirsile who left four hundred sesterces so that each year the tomb of her patron might be decorated with roses.<sup>11</sup>

Milan was also famous for its schools. Virgil left Mantua to complete his studies in this city. In the early second century, Pliny the Younger asked a boy at Como if he were a student. "Yes," was the answer he received. "And where?" "At Milan." "But why not here?" And then his father answered for the lad: "Because there are no suitable teachers here."<sup>12</sup> For the fourth century, we have a number of pages in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine describing his own career as a professor of rhetoric in the city.

Though Ausonius was nominally a Christian, his works are almost completely pagan in character, as is evident particularly in the obscene nuptial canto which he made up from lines drawn from Virgil. His reference to temples in his description of Milan should, as a consequence, be understood of pagan rather than of Christian structures. In the Archeological Museum there are some thirty marble statues of pagan deities. More than a third of the extant votive inscriptions are dedicated to Jupiter. There are six dedicated to the *Matronae*, divinities of Celtic origin worshiped in Northern Italy before the advent of the Romans.<sup>13</sup> Of the remaining inscriptions, three are dedicated to Hercules, two to Mercury, and one to Minerva. Among the Milanese inscriptions referring to priestly offices, there is one of a pontiff who was at the same time an employee of the city, another of a pontiff who was also a decurion, another of a flamen of Titus, another of a flamen of Trajan, another of a priest for the worship of Augustus and Rome, another of a priest for the youth of Milan, and still others of the same general nature. Six inscriptions refer

to the cult of Cybele, the Great Idaean Mother. Albucia Magiana left a sum of money to the dendrophori, the cannophori, and the Martenses. The first two of these three sacred colleges took part in the processions in honor of Cybele on March 15th and 22nd.

There was at least one Mithraeum in imperial Milan, as there was in all of the cities of the Late Empire where troops were stationed. Evidence for this is found in the inscription of Publius Acilius Pisonianus. He had been a *pater patratus*, that is, a high dignitary in the cult of Mithra, and he states that at his own expense he had reconstructed a Mithraeum and a Mithraic grotto that had been destroyed by fire on land purchased at public expense.

A damaged inscription refers to a certain Gaius Gallio Atticus who in a solemn rite had sought the divine will by casting lots. As bishop, St. Ambrose warned his flock about the malice of such practices.<sup>14</sup>

A number of inscriptions from Milan furnish us with some information with respect to the religious attitudes and aspirations of the people whom St. Ambrose was to rule as governor. Here as elsewhere in the Roman world, the pagans of the fourth century were syncretistic. They worshiped not only the native Celtic gods and those introduced by the Romans but also Eastern deities such as Mithra and Cybele. The wife of the gladiator Urbicus, who died at the age of twenty-two, takes pride in the fact that he had fought thirteen times in the arena, and in the last two lines of his epitaph she recommends his Manes, or, as we would say, his departed soul, to the piety of the passers-by. In another inscription a dying girl consoles her father, who stands by her bed, with the thought that her misfortune has been decreed by fate. Another epitaph records the cry of sorrow which a mother directs to her son, a soldier of the Second Legion, who died far from home at the age of twenty-seven, and who perforce was left unburied by his companions: "Alas! you have deceived me, leaving me alone!"<sup>15</sup>

Some further notion of the pagan attitude towards death may be derived from the papyri of Egypt. Here as at Milan men were confronted with the sorrow of a death without any real hope for the future. Thus we read in a letter of a certain Hephastion of the third century: "Since the gods have had no compassion on me, I will have none for them."<sup>16</sup> Eudaimonis, the mother of Apollonius, a recently deceased councilman, practically despairs at her loss, though she was naturally pious: "I have not taken a bath, and I have not worshiped the gods."<sup>17</sup>

Christians, on the other hand, did not exaggerate their grief and their misfortunes. In a letter of the fourth century, a Christian woman even in the midst of great suffering calls God good. While the prayers of the pagans were centered almost exclusively upon the goods of the present life, Calonike, a Christian, asks her mother, even though she is far away, to pray for her salvation, since "there is no one with me, neither brother, nor sister, nor friend; no one, that is, but God alone."<sup>18</sup> Timius informs his wife Sophia of the grave straits into which he has fallen, but he also tells her of his calm trust since "God will take care of us."<sup>19</sup>

From the first half of the fourth century comes the collection of letters addressed to the Egyptian monk Paphnutius. They contain numerous requests of individuals who hoped that through his prayers they might overcome some difficulty, especially of a spiritual nature. But even before the discovery of the papyri, there was known the request which the sinful woman Thais addressed to him that she might be forgiven her sins. Similarly, another woman sent Basil of Caesarea a list of her sins so that through his prayers they might be forgiven.

This is the kind of world that Ambrose must have also found at Milan. Although the Church of Milan could boast of a few martyrs during the last persecution, the history of the Church itself prior to the coming of St. Ambrose consists of little more than a list of bishops.<sup>20</sup> Mirocles is the first bishop

of Milan about whom we know anything more than the name. With fifteen other Italian bishops and three bishops from Gaul, he took part in the council held under Pope Miltiades on Friday, October 2, 313, in the Lateran palace at Rome.<sup>21</sup> Before these nineteen prelates appeared Caecilian, the bishop of Carthage, and Donatus, his rival. The latter claimed that Caecilian should not be regarded as a bishop since he had been ordained by one who had been accused of being a *traditor* during the last persecution, that is, by one who had handed over (*tradidisse*) the sacred books to the police. This dispute marks the origin of the Donatist schism, which for more than a century was to torment the Church of North Africa. The bishops voted unanimously in favor of Caecilian, but the matter was not ended since the Donatists were able to persuade Constantine that they should be heard again at a new council to be held at Arles. At this council, which met for the first time on August 1, 314, Mirocles, the bishop of Milan, was also present.

The ancient episcopal catalog of Milan lists Mirocles as the sixth occupant of the see. From this it has been deduced, after corrections were made in the figures given in the list, that the Church of Milan had its origins about the year 206. Others, however, with more probability, have set the date back to the second half of the second century without attempting to be more precise. Whatever may have been the exact time of its origin, it is interesting to note that the formation of the Church at Milan more or less corresponds with the transformation of the ancient municipality into the Colonia Antoniniana, or Aelia, or Aurelia Augusta Mediolanum, which took place at the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century. Both of these events indicate the growing importance of the city.

Among the more prominent successors of Mirocles was St. Protasius. He is mentioned by St. Athanasius and took part in the Council of Sardica in the fall of 343.

St. Eustorgius succeeded Protasius. He is called a *confessor*

by St. Ambrose, quite possibly because he had suffered for the faith during the persecution of Diocletian before becoming bishop.

During the episcopate of Eustorgius, two councils were held at Milan, in 345 and again in 347-348, to condemn Photinus, the heretical bishop of Sirmium.

Dionysius succeeded Eustorgius. He has already been mentioned in connection with the Council of Milan of 355.

The violence which Valens, the Arian bishop of Mursa (Osijek in Yugoslavia), used on Dionysius during the first session of the council angered the crowd which filled the church. Since the emperor deemed it wise to transfer the conciliar meetings from the church to the halls of the imperial palace, it seems likely that the Christians made up a considerable portion of the city's populace. Athanasius, who is one of the chief sources for these events, tells us that Dionysius, Lucifer of Cagliari, and Eusebius of Vercelli were all accompanied on their painful way into exile by the admiration and regrets of their respective subjects. In later years, St. Ambrose as bishop was to recall frequently, and with emotion, his predecessor Dionysius, who, after many years of banishment, asked God for the favor of dying far from his see so that he would not have to witness on his return the confusion into which his flock had been thrown by the misrule of the Arians.

Dionysius actually did die in exile, and the court influenced by the Arian bishops Ursacius and Valens chose as his successor Auxentius. The latter was an ambitious schemer from the East who did not even know Latin, the language of his new flock.

Auxentius was already notorious for his activities in Egypt some years before.<sup>22</sup> He had there been a collaborator of Gregory of Cappadocia, whom the Arian faction had installed as bishop of Alexandria in 339. St. Ambrose tells us that Auxentius occupied the see at Milan "with arms and soldiers."<sup>23</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers in his attack on Constantius of the spring



of 360 reproaches this Arian bishop with having "terrified with his madness the pious people of that city by entering the church with soldiers and tearing the priests away from the altar."<sup>24</sup>

In the summer of 359, Auxentius set out for the Council of Rimini where more than four hundred bishops of the Western provinces were assembling. The great majority of these were orthodox. Some eighty Arian bishops, as a consequence, withdrew from the assembly and held meetings of their own. Among the leaders of this dissident group was Auxentius. Matters dragged on at great length. In October they were concluded with the capitulation of almost all the orthodox. The last months of the reign of Constantius II were thus marked with the seeming collapse of the Catholic position. In all the major cities of the East the episcopal sees were occupied by Arians while the legitimate bishops were in exile. Nevertheless the ordinary Christians continued to adore Christ and offer to Him their prayers as the true Son of God.

After Julian declared that the exiled bishops could return to their sees, Athanasius was able to take up his residence again in Alexandria, Hilary at Poitiers in Gaul, and Eusebius at Vercelli in Italy. But Hilary was also concerned about the state of the Church in Milan. In a synod assembled at Paris toward the end of 360, he had Auxentius, Ursacius, Valens, and other Arian leaders condemned. But, unfortunately, the weight of this condemnation was not sufficient to bring about the flight of Auxentius from Milan. In the final months of 364, Hilary and Eusebius came to Milan to insist with Valentinian I that he should banish Auxentius. The emperor wanted to avoid any kind of outbreak in the city. He did, however, permit a meeting of ten bishops in the presence of two officials of his court. Auxentius was persuaded to sign an almost perfectly orthodox profession of faith. But this was not enough to satisfy Hilary. When he protested, Valentinian ordered him to leave Milan at once. Early in 365, Hilary published his work *Against*