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III

W. H. C. FRENCH

THE CHURCH IN THE REIGN OF CONSTANTIUS II (337-361) MISSION-MONASTICISM-WORSHIP

The reign of Constantius II (338-361) marks a watershed in the history of European religion and civilisation. During the twenty-four years when he was emperor, the Greco-Roman world moved decisively towards Christianity. A pagan contemporary of Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339) would have witnessed changes in his world as great as any that had taken place in antiquity. True, one basic ingredient of the past, namely traditional Classical education leading to careers in law, teaching, and the public service remained intact¹, and these careers were open to all who excelled in the study of literature and in public speaking. Much else, however, was fast disappearing. No longer would a Roman governor be able to inform a Christian bishop brought before him that "the saving gods" of the empire were those whom "everyone knew,"² nor compare sarcastically the merits of Plato and St. Paul to the detri-

¹ See P. R. L. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971), 29-31.

² The Vice-Prefect of Egypt, L. Mussius Aemilianus (later, in 258 Prefect and usurper 261-262) to Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, who had been brought before him in 257, Eusebius, *HE* VII 11.

ment of the latter.³ The pagan world was already passing into history.

In the last seven years of Constantine's reign a series of blows had been dealt the traditional religion and the attitudes and way of life it represented. With the execution of the Neo-Platonist philosopher Sopater in 331 on the trumped up charge of causing a famine in the emperor's new capital, Constantinople, by magic,⁴ power passed irrevocably to the Christian faction at Constantine's court. The Praetorian Prefect of the East, Flavius Ablabius became all-powerful and with him, sharing his influence over the emperor were the two Eusebii, Bishops of Nicomedia and Caesarea respectively. If the pagan cult was not actually banned by edict, as claimed in the *Chronicle* of Jerome/Eusebius (*sub anno* 331),⁵ some of the most celebrated temples and centres of oracles, such as that of Aesculapius at Aegae in Cilicia or of Venus Ourania at Heliopolis near Mount Lebanon had been looted or demolished, and on the emperor's initiative in some cities once revered symbols of the gods were being exposed to public mockery.⁶ No one dared resist. The 'sacred monarchy' had developed far beyond that envisaged by Diocletian and his colleagues. Constantine's latest coinage showing the emperor staring fixedly skyward⁷, foreshadowed the next step taken by his sons when the emperor becomes no longer recognisable as an individual, but is represented to his subjects as a divine figure of majesty, pearl-diademed with a fixed immobile

³ Clodius Culcianus, Prefect of Egypt, 303-306 to Bishop Phileas during the latter's trial as a Christian during the Great Persecution. See *Acta Phileae* (ed. H. MUSURILLO [Oxford 1972]), Chap. 8.

⁴ Eun. *VS* VI 2, 10; for Ablabius' involvement see Zos. II 40 and Eun., *loc. cit.* (ed. W. C. WRIGHT, p. 384).

⁵ Eusebius/Jerome, *Chron. sub anno* 331 p. 233 Helm.

⁶ Eus. *Vit. Const.* III 58 (destruction of temple of Venus); III 56 (Aegae); III 57 (desecration of temples).

⁷ Eus. *Vit. Const.* IV 15: "eyes uplifted as in the posture of prayer to God".

expression on his coinage and statues. As Ammianus Marcellinus described Constantius on his visit to Rome in 357, the emperor was impassive and godlike, keeping his eyes straight ahead, as if he were a clay figure.⁸ Astonishingly quickly, the pictorial art of the mosaicist, even in Roman Britain caught the spirit of the new age. The face of Christ on the Hinton St. Mary mosaic obeyed the rules of space between the features of forehead, nose and mouth, with the staring eyes that were to characterise Byzantine art for centuries to come.⁹ By 350 A.D. the world of the Constantinian dynasty was already light years removed from that of the pagan emperors whose works Constantine had repudiated so completely. His sons, particularly Constantius II consolidated and made irreversible the revolution he had begun.

Here we discuss three aspects of this transition, the first, mission in which the initiative of Constantius is evident throughout, the second and third, monasticism and the cult, reflecting the attitudes of many of the provincials in the new religious age. In all three movements we can trace developments already in existence in the last years of Constantine's reign.

Constantine had seen the value of a religion of universal appeal to promote the interests of his foreign policy. During the latter part of his reign the empire was confronted by threats to its borders in two main areas, from the Goths on the Danube frontier and from the rival empire of Persia. The threat from the Goths and Sarmatians was removed for the time being by a single victorious campaign in 332.

⁸ Amm. XVI 10, 10: *tamquam figmentum hominis*.

⁹ For Hinton St. Mary, see J. M. C. TOYNBEE, "A new Roman mosaic pavement found in Dorset", in *JRS* 54 (1964), 7-14. For the 'Byzantinism' of the representation of the bust of Christ on the mosaic, see K. S. PAINTER, "The design of the Roman mosaic at Hinton St. Mary", in *The Antiquaries Journal* 56 (1976), 49-54.

The Persian threat, however, was increasing steadily from 334. Control of the kingdom of Armenia was the main issue.¹⁰ Down to the time of Julian's disastrous attempt to conquer Persia outright in 363, Rome held the advantage. Galerius' campaign of 298 had secured Adiabene, pushed the Roman frontier to the Tigris and blocked Persian access to Armenia from the south. Meantime, the work of Gregory the Illuminator from the bishopric of Caesarea in Cappadocia (c. 300) had reinforced the Christian message at the Armenian court,¹¹ until in c. 302, King Tiradates III (c. 287-318) became a Christian. As he himself was pro-Roman and had served as a young man in the Roman army the gain for the Roman cause in Armenia was great.¹² In 335 after a period in which Persia recovered influence in Armenia, Constantine attempted to 'solve' the Armenian problem by raising his half-brother Hannibalianus to the rank of king over Armenia and the allied peoples.¹³ Success was to prove only temporary. To the north also, Constantine had consolidated Rome's position, through the apparently fortuitous conversion of the royal house of the Black Sea kingdom of Iberia through the slave-girl, Nyna. The Iberians, according to Sozomen "sent ambassadors to the emperor Constantine, bearing proposals for friendship and fellowship, and requesting that priests might be sent to their nation". Little wonder that Constantine was delighted, for here too, Roman would triumph over Persian

¹⁰ See the essay by N. H. BAYNES, "Rome and Armenia in the Fourth Century", in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London 1955), 186-208, and R. KLEIN, *Constantius II und die christliche Kirche* (Darmstadt 1977).

¹¹ For Christian Armenians c. 250, see Eus. *HE* VI 46, 2. These had their own bishop, Meruzanes, who was in contact with Dionysius of Alexandria (247-264).

¹² Soz. *HE* II 8.

¹³ Amm. XIV 1, 2. Constantius however, had him assassinated in 337/338. His 'kingdom' included the eastern marches of the empire as well as Armenia.

influence.¹⁴ An alliance, the fifth century historian Socrates claims, was concluded on the basis of community of religion.¹⁵ At the other end of Rome's 2000-mile frontier with Persia, among rival trading stations on the Red Sea route to India Christian missions were also beginning to further Rome's interests.

Constantine's claim to be "bishop of those outside the Church" covered ambitions beyond the frontiers of the empire as well as those of being a herald of the Word to his pagan subjects.¹⁶ His letter in 326 to the youthful King Sapor II (309-379) urging him to favour his Christian subjects "and thus win the favour of the Lord of All," hardly admits any other interpretation. Set against his adviser, Eusebius of Caesarea's implicit claim that the kingdom of Christ was co-extensive with the Roman empire,¹⁷ the letter could also foster suspicion that in the event of a conflict between the two empires the Persian Christians might be less than loyal to their sovereign.¹⁸

It is in the framework of Roman and Persian rivalries, as Richard Klein has perceived, that one must place the two main missionary events in Constantius' reign.¹⁹ The stories are well known, that concerning Meropius and Frumentius

¹⁴ Soz. *HE* II 7.

¹⁵ Socr. *HE* I 20.

¹⁶ Made clear by Sozomen in retrospect in his comment on Constantine's letter to Sapor (which he mis-dates by ten years), "for the emperor extended his watchful eye over all Christians of every region whether Roman or foreign", *HE* II 15, 5.

¹⁷ Eus. *Triac.* 1-3. Constantine's sovereignty over the world's affairs was a copy of that of the Divine Word.

¹⁸ Sozomen's account of the reasons for Sapor's anti-Christian measures from 337-340 indicates these suspicions. Bishop Symeon is arrested as a "traitor to the kingdom and religion of the Persians", and the Jews accuse the Christians of being 'pro-Roman', *HE* II 9, 1 and 3.

¹⁹ R. KLEIN, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 10), 217-220 (relating to Theophilus 'the Indian') and 250. Emphasised by I. SHAHÎD, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks 1984), 93.

being found in Rufinus, Sozomen, Socrates, Theodoret and Gelasius of Cyzicus,²⁰ while the anti-Nicene (Eunomian) historian Philostorgius is the detailed source for the story of Theophilus 'the Indian'.²¹

Meropius was a Tyrian merchant who was also known as a Christian 'philosopher'. Already in Constantine's reign he had journeyed far afield, down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean to trading stations in south India where there were Christians.^{21a} On this occasion probably c. 337, he was accompanied by two young relatives, Aedesius and Frumentius. On his return journey from India he landed somewhere on the coast of the kingdom of Axum (Eritrea?). There he was set upon by natives and killed.²² His companions, however, were spared, and eventually handed over to officers of the royal court. There they flourished and in a career reminiscent of the story of Joseph in the *Book of Genesis*, Frumentius rose to high office in the kingdom and was appointed tutor to the king's children. Finally, he became joint-ruler of the kingdom. In this capacity he was able to secure advantages for Roman traders in the country and strengthen Christian influence among them, including building churches for their use.²³

Rufinus who got the story from Aedesius, does not say that the brothers converted the royal house of Axum, though there is a strong likelihood that they at least sowed the seeds for this. A series of twelve inscriptions set up in honour of "Azanos king of the Axumites and Himyarites",

²⁰ Rufin. *Hist.* X 9; Socr. *HE* I 19, 3; Soz. *HE* II 24; Thdt. *HE* I 23; Gelas. *Cyz.* *HE* 9.

²¹ Philost. *Epitome of Ecclesiastical History* II 6 and III 4-6.

^{21a} See R. E. Mortimer WHEELER, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London 1954), Chs. 11 & 12.

²² There had been a cooling of relations between Rome and Axum leading to a breach of treaty relations, Socrates and Sozomen, *loc. cit.*

²³ Rufin. *Hist.* X 9; Socr. *HE* I 9; Soz. *HE* II 24.

lauding his victories over his enemies, show a progression from the king's claim to be "son of the invincible god Ares", to recognition of "the might of the Lord of Heaven" (Inscription 11), to an outright confession of Jesus Christ as his "Lord and Helper" in terms of the Nicene profession of faith (Inscription 12). His coinage also seems to show a similar development.²⁴ Frumentius was a steadfast upholder of Nicaea. When he and his brother were at last given leave to return home to visit their aged parents, Aedesius stayed in Tyre to become a presbyter there. Frumentius, on the other hand, went to Alexandria and not to his own metropolitan at Antioch for ordination, and it was from Athanasius that he received his commission to continue the work of conversion in Ethiopia and consecration as bishop²⁵.

It is difficult in the circumstances not to put two and two together, and place Ezana's conversion c. 350 after Frumentius' return to Ethiopia. His brother Aedesius having remained in Tyre would know nothing of this and so would not include it in his account of the events to Rufinus.

Up to this point the interests of the court at Constantinople and those of the see of Alexandria had run parallel. The extension of the latter's influence in Axum would automatically benefit the empire. Constantius grasped this

²⁴ See A. DIHLE, *Umstrittene Daten. Untersuchungen zum Auftreten der Griechen am Roten Meer*, Wiss. Abh. der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Bd. 32 (Köln/Opladen 1965), 51-55, and E. DINKLER, "König Ezana von Aksum und das Christentum; ein Randproblem der Geschichte Nubiens", in *Aegypten und Kusch*, ed. E. ENDESFELDER and colleagues (Berlin 1977) 121-132.

²⁵ Socrates, Sozomen, *loc. cit.*

The dating is uncertain, as our authorities claim that Athanasius had "only recently" been invested with the dignity of bishop (i.e. in 328), but it must be much later than this, and perhaps "investment" here means "restoration" to his see in 346.

latter aspect, but his inveterate hostility towards Athanasius prevented him from using the best team available for the work. The letter which he sent c. 357 to Ezana and his brother Sazana suggests that both princes were Christians, or at any rate very favourably disposed towards Christianity. The emperor sets out unmistakably his interest in the spread of non-Nicene Christianity in Axum and his objective of bringing about the religious unity of mankind under the guardianship of the Roman emperor. He wrote "It is altogether a matter of the greatest care and concern to us, to extend the knowledge of the supreme God; and I think that the whole race of mankind claims from us equal regard in this respect, in order that they may pass their lives in accordance with their hope, being brought to the same knowledge of God, and having no differences with each other in their inquiries about justice and truth. Therefore considering that you are deserving of the same provident care as the Romans, and desiring to show equal regard for your welfare, we bid that the same doctrine be professed in your churches as in theirs. Send therefore speedily into Egypt the Bishop Frumentius to the most venerable Bishop George and the rest who are there, who have especial authority to appoint to these offices, and to decide questions concerning them".²⁶ Frumentius was to submit to examination of his administration and to undertake to preach a faith in agreement with that of "the venerable George" (Athanasius' supplanter, 357-361). The recipients of the letter were told with singular lack of tact that Athanasius was a man "guilty of ten thousand crimes", a fugitive who had been deprived of his see. In his present state of belief Frumentius would himself "unsettle and disturb the churches and blaspheme the supreme God",

²⁶ Athan. *Apol. Const.* 31, in *PG XXV* 636. Transl. by J. STEVENSON, *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* (London 1966).

bringing unsettlement and destruction to any nations (i.e. tribes or subject peoples of Axum) that he visited.²⁷

At the back of the emperor's mind however, was the assertion which Byzantine rulers and later, the Tsars, were to make, that the care of all Christians whether within or outwith the political boundaries of the empire lay in their hands. Mission under Constantius became a trump card in foreign policy in which, however, church and state must act in harmony if it was to be fully effective.

The story of Theophilus confirms this view. Rivalry with Persia does not feature in the accounts of Frumentius' mission, but it is much more in evidence in that of Theophilus. The main area of the latter's activity was the Himyarite portion of the Axumite kingdom in southern Arabia. Here Roman and Persian traders were rivals, and the interests of their countries continued to clash through the sixth century down to the time of Mahomet.²⁸ From Philostorgius²⁹ we learn that Theophilus was probably a native of the island of Socotra, an important staging point on the route from Adana (Aden) to India.³⁰ For some reason (possible royal lineage) he was seized as a hostage in the Roman interest and taken to Constantinople c. 330. There he prospered. He accepted a clerical career, was made deacon by Eusebius of Nicomedia, and later advanced to priest and bishop. Unlike Frumentius he was a

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See A. MOBERG, *The Book of the Himyarites* (Lund 1924), Introduction (war between pro-Byzantine and pro-Persian factions in the Himyarite Kingdom in 522-524), and J. RYCKMANS, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au VI^e siècle* (Istanbul 1956).

²⁹ That none of the fifth century ecclesiastical historians mention Theophilus is due probably to the Arian slant of his mission (A. DIHLE, *op. cit.* [*supra* n. 24], 56 n. 54).

³⁰ Philost. *HE* III 4. I follow Dihle (p. 50) and Klein (p. 217) in opting for Socotra, but for discussion of other possibilities, see I. SHAHĪD, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 19), 97-99.

supporter of Constantius' religious policy, and his choice as leader of a lavishly equipped embassy to the Himyarite kingdom by the emperor gains in significance. It suggests that from the outset Constantius had a clear aim of combining mission with search for commercial advantages. The mission c. 340 was extremely successful. A number of Christian churches were founded, including one in the Himyarite capital, Tapharon (Zafra) and another at Aden itself. The local dynasty under its ethnarch was also converted to Christianity. Not content with these successes, Theophilus sailed first to his native island of Socotra, then probably north-east to a point near the mouth of the Persian Gulf where he established another church in a place defined by Philostorgius as a "Persian market" (*emporion*),³¹ before moving on to India itself. There he found that the prevalent teaching among the Christians was 'Anhomoean' (anti-Nicene) and needed no reform. Years later in 357 he may also have been the bearer of Constantius' letter to the princes of Axum. Philostorgius says little of his work there, and it failed to induce an anti-Nicene stance among the Christians there.³² His astonishing activity, however, illustrates clearly the emperor's aim of spreading the Homoean interpretation of the faith as widely as possible, and using Christian mission as a weapon against his Persian opponents.

While supporting Roman interests through mission beyond the southern frontiers of the empire, Constantius

³¹ Philost. *HE* III 4. Again location and sequence of events is difficult, as Philostorgius mentions the erection of this church before Theophilus' return to Dibos (Socotra). The 'India' he refers to, with its already established Christians, however, seems more likely to be south India than anywhere in east Africa.

³² The suggestion of I. SHAHĪD that Theophilus was the bearer of Constantius' letter to the Princes of Axum is very attractive (*op. cit.*, 91-92). The emperor would have chosen a senior official as ambassador, and who better than Theophilus himself originally a subject of Axum? The question, however, remains open.

did not neglect the situation nearer home on the Danube. In his missionary policy towards the Goths he found himself the heir to his father's actions. Though the Goths had been heavily defeated in 332, they were still a threat, especially in the first years of his reign when his elder brother Constantine II showed increasing signs of bidding for supreme power. In the event of dynastic conflict the Goths could hold the balance of power. In the period of danger, 337-340, Constantius possessed one advantage. Due largely to the influence of Christians captured by the Goths in the 250s during their raids into Asia Minor, there was a sizable minority of Gothic Christians who were more attached to eastern than western theological thinking³³. Among these was a young lector named Ulphilas (c. 311-383) of mixed Cappadocian and Gothic parentage who in 338 accompanied a Gothic mission to Constantinople³⁴. Once again, Eusebius of Nicomedia, just translated from Nicomedia to the capital, may have seen the potential value of a clerical supporter among the peoples beyond the Roman frontier and whose friendship was important to the empire. Regardless of ladders of ecclesiastical promotion, he consecrated Ulphilas as "bishop of the Goths".³⁵

The move achieved what may have been its immediate aim. The Goths did not side with Constantine II when in 339 he advanced east against his brothers. But Constantine met his end near Aquileia early in 340, and tensions resumed among the Goths themselves. In c. 345 Ulphilas was forced to leave his homeland and cross the Danube

³³ Philost. *HE* II 5. He adds that "not a few ecclesiastics were among the prisoners taken by the Gothic invaders of Asia Minor". Socr. *HE* II 41 suggests that Ulphilas was at one time a Nicene and that the Goths had been represented by a Bishop Theophilus at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Philostorgius ignores these events.

³⁴ Accepting R. KLEIN's chronology, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 10), 255 n. 142.

³⁵ Philost. *loc. cit.*

with a minority of Gothic Christians. For the next thirty years the Goths were deeply divided into Christian and pro-empire versus Gothic national factions. Ulphilas never returned; for all the honour in which he was held and the ultimate importance of his translation of the Bible into Gothic, he remained a refugee bishop. Despite his acceptance of the emperor's anti-Nicene theology his influence on the conversion of his people was relatively small, until in 376 events entirely outside his control brought the Goths once more into immediate political and religious relationships with empire and its authorities.³⁶

During Constantius' sole rule, from 350-361, apart from Constantinople itself three major sees were the focal points of mission to areas beyond the boundaries of the empire. In the north-east was Caesarea in Cappadocia, the bishopric of Gregory the Illuminator, and down to 374 the city where the Catholicus (Head) of the Armenian Church was consecrated.³⁷ Antioch was still the 'mother Church' of the Christians in Persia and only ceased to be so by decision of the synod held by Mar Dadiso, the Catholicus of the Persian Christians, in 424.³⁸ In the south, Alexandria had attained the same pre-eminence with regard to Christians in Ethiopia and southern Arabia. In all these areas there was friction between Rome and Persia. Constantius had an obvious interest to ensure that the bishops of these sees were men whom he could trust. Adversaries, such as Athanasius or weak characters such as Stephen of Antioch were unacceptable. The Persian angle places the emperor's relations with the bishops concerned in a fresh and more

³⁶ On the events leading to the defeat of the Roman army at the hands of the Goths at Adrianople in 378, see A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602* (Oxford 1964), 152-154.

³⁷ See N. H. BAYNES, "Rome and Armenia" (*art. cit. supra* n. 10), 187-188.

³⁸ Cited from J. STEVENSON, *Creeeds, Councils, and Controversies* (London 1966), 259-260.

favourable light. Politics as well as doctrine contributed to the emperor's reservations about Athanasius, just as twenty years later they contributed to the emperor Valens' mistrust of Basil of Caesarea.

II

The active propagation of Christianity in sensitive areas beyond the frontiers could hardly have become so important, had it been for the equally successful spread of Christianity among the empire's subjects. It was about the reign of Constantius that Sozomen wrote in the fifth century, "Religion daily progressed and the zeal and wonderful doings of the priests, and of the ecclesiastical philosophers attracted the attention of the Greeks and led them to renounce their superstitions".³⁹ The emperor was himself a zealot, "bestowing the greatest possible care on the houses of prayer," repairing some and erecting others, such as at Emesa⁴⁰ "in a style of extraordinary magnificence". From the moment he presided over the council of eastern bishops at the dedication of the Church of the Golden Dome at Antioch in 341 until he spent the winter of 360-61 crossing the seas of the decisions of the councils of Ariminum and Seleucia, Constantius absorbed himself in propagating Christianity among his subjects, and using his wide interpretation of a non-Nicene orthodoxy as one of his principal means of uniting them in loyalty to himself.

His actions consolidated a process of silent acceptance of Christianity by his subjects that had begun in the latter stages of the Great Persecution. As has often proved the case, Lactantius was an acute witness of trends as well as

³⁹ Soz. *HE* III 17, 1.

⁴⁰ Soz. *HE* III 17, 3 "churches everywhere", including Emesa.

events of the time. He points out at the end of Book V of the *Divine Institutes*, how the general onslaught against the Christians (under Galerius) and the latter's steadfastness in face of death had raised questions among many thoughtful people as to why the Christians should abominate the gods to the extent of preferring death to sacrificing to them.⁴¹ This in turn made them open to argument, and this process of re-orientation and conversion was assisted by evidence of cures by Christians. Lactantius makes clear that miracles and exorcisms were only the final step on a long road that had begun with admiration for Christian attitudes⁴². This last point is made clear in the story of Pachomius. Pachomius had been conscripted into the army of Maximin in his war against Licinius in 313. While billeted in Thebes he was impressed by what he saw of the local Christians. "They do all manner of good to everyone". "They treat us with love for the sake of the God of heaven."⁴³ He accepted the ideal as his own, prayed to the Christian God and became a Christian. In contrast, put to the test at the end of Constantine's reign of defying the emperors' orders or submission, the pagan provincial priesthood showed no stomach for a fight. There were no pagan martyrs.

Thus within the empire, Constantius' reign sees the dual movements of a steady stream of converts to Christianity, and very large expansion of the Church's influence and property. For the east, Sozomen speaks specifically of those who professed the Christian religion increasing in number through conversions from the pagan multitudes.⁴⁴ In the province whence his family came, namely Phoenicia,

⁴¹ Lact. *Inst.* V 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ The *Vita prima* of Pachomius. Cited from Ph. ROUSSEAU, *Pachomius: The making of a community in fourth-century Egypt* (Berkeley 1985), 58.

⁴⁴ *HE* III 17, 5 (end).

he records how the inhabitants of many cities embraced Christianity spontaneously, "without any edict of the emperor, overturned adjacent temples and statues and erected houses of prayer in their stead."⁴⁵ His testimony is supported by that of Athanasius, himself a witness of the building of a great new church at Aquileia c. 345.⁴⁶ He asks sarcastically, "why if Christ is a man as they (the pagans) claim, and not God the Word, is not his worship prevented from passing to the region where they are, by their gods". The Word had destroyed their (the pagan) religion and put their illusion to shame.⁴⁷

Athanasius was an active propagandist against paganism as he was against his Meletian and Arian opponents. In the west he had a kindred spirit in Hilary of Poitiers himself a convert from paganism. Hilary had witnessed the rapid increase of bishoprics in Gaul, from nine at the time of the Council of Arles in 314, to 34 at that of Serdica in 342/43,⁴⁸ and how in 352 the usurper Magnentius (reputedly a pagan) attempted to trump Constantius' use of the *labarum* on his copper coins as a symbol of Christianity, by minting at Amiens a large copper coin whose entire reverse was filled with the X ⁴⁹. No wonder that Hilary could describe how, "every day the believing people increases, and professions of faith are multiplied. Pagan superstitions are abandoned, together with the impious fables of mythology, and the

⁴⁵ *HE* II 5, 1-3. The priests, it is claimed, were "unsupported by the people".

⁴⁶ See H. LECLERCQ, Art. "Aquilée", in *Dict. d'Archéol. chrét. et de Liturgie* (= *DACL*) I 2 (1924), col. 2661, and Athan. *Apol. Const.* 15, in *PG* XXV 613 B. The church was crowded on feast days.

⁴⁷ Athan. *De inc. verbi* 49 (ed. and transl. R. W. THOMSON).

⁴⁸ The names are preserved by Athan. *Apol. sec. contra Arianos* 50, 1, in *PG* XXV 337 B, who counted the Gallic bishops among his supporters.

⁴⁹ See J. M. WHITTAKER, "Coins and Christian Symbolism", in *Spinks Numismatic Circular* 87 (Jan. 1974), 2-3 and P. V. HILL, J. P. C. KENT and R. A. G. CARSON, *Late Roman Bronze Coinage A. D. 324-498* (London 1965), pl. iii 19.

altars of the demons and the vanity of idols. Everyone is moving along the road to salvation".⁵⁰

These are examples of open mission in the decade 350-360. Even more interesting because ultimately just as lasting was the obscure person-to-person contact, such as the role of Christian women in their families at this period, and the individual decisions that have left their mark on some of the country houses that were reaching a climax of prosperity in many parts of the west, including Roman Britain.

Of the Christian women, the most famous is of course, Monica, Augustine's mother (331-387). There are few clearer examples of the changes in private *mores* between the third and fourth centuries, than the predominant role the woman of the house now often assumed in determining the religion of her family. Augustine leaves no doubt as to where the home influence on him lay. "I was a believer, like all the household," he wrote, "except my father, but he could not cancel in me the rights of my mother's piety."⁵¹ Though Augustine's Christianity was far from his mother's in many respects, as he says, he could never be satisfied with a religion which was not centred on Christ.⁵² Augustine is the best known example, but he was one of a number. Thus, the sarcophagus, found at Arles of the Consul for the year 328, Flavius Ianuarius, featured the Raising of Lazarus. The memorial had been prepared by the Consul's wife, a Christian, for a husband whose allegiance in the first quarter of the fourth century would almost have been to 'the gods of Rome'.⁵³ Another from the Christian catacomb at Sousse (Hadrumentum) records

⁵⁰ Hil. *In psalm.* 67, 20 (ed. A. ZINGERLE, *CSEL* XXII [Wien 1891], p. 295).

⁵¹ Aug. *Conf.* I 10, 17; compare II 4, 8.

⁵² *Conf.* V 14, 25.

⁵³ J. M. ROUQUETTE, «Trois nouveaux sarcophages chrétiens de Trinquetaille (Arles)», in *CRAI* 1974, 254-277.

Eustorgius, an Epicurean praising his wife as “a most rare and unique lover of wisdom” and a “wonderful example of charity,” inscribing her funerary mosaic with a Christian symbol. Their son bore the Christian name of Quodvult-Deus. As James Stevenson commented, “Here is a family in the process of becoming Christian”.⁵⁴

In Britain, the story of one of the large villas out of many provides another example. Lullingstone in Kent had a history of occupation from before the Roman conquest until the early years of the 5th century. During the second century its owner must have been a distinguished individual, at least locally, for among the discoveries made by the excavators, were three busts made of Greek marble resembling emperors of the mid-2nd century, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.⁵⁵ Sometime later these busts had been carefully stored away in deep cellars into which a mass of debris including remains of rafters and painted wall plaster had fallen. To the surprised gaze of the excavators the plaster began to fit into patterns; the remains of a design covering the whole wall of a ground floor room could be reconstructed. This showed six standing figures between pillars supporting a shallow tiled-roof building. The arms of the figures were outstretched like those of *orantes* in the Roman catacombs⁵⁶. Then, to confirm suspicions that this was indeed a Christian wall-painting were found the remains of two large $\chi\rho$ (chi-rho) enclosed in a laurel wreath. The villa had a chapel approached by an antechamber and vestibule cut off from the main part of the house.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ J. STEVENSON, *The Catacombs. Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity* (London 1978), 142. Many of the examples in this section have been taken from my chapter “From Pagan to Christian Society”, Ch. 16 of *The Rise of Christianity* (London 1984).

⁵⁵ G. W. MEATES, *Lullingstone Roman Villa* (London 1955), 81-85.

⁵⁶ G. W. MEATES, *op. cit.*, 126-134.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-142.

The excavators were lucky also in finding evidence for fairly precise dating, for the antechamber and vestibule had been used as a work-room for bleaching and dyeing during Constantine's reign. In the narrow footing trench which had been dug during the reconstruction for Christian purposes was found a coin of Constantius II (*Fel. Temp. Reparatio*). As the discoverer writes, "the finding of this coin beautifully confirmed those of Magnentius and Constantius Gallus, the last to be dropped before the wooden floor of the Christian ante-room was laid".⁵⁸ About A.D. 355, or a little later, was the time when the rooms were decorated and put to new use.

The silent progress of Christianity among other villa-owners of southern Britain at this time has been attested by further archaeological discoveries⁵⁹. The new religion is shown not to have been one of confrontation as it was in North Africa, but rather of adaptation and absorption, such as we find in the career and outlook of the poet Ausonius in Gaul. How it happened, what influences were at work, the congregations even, that used and donated magnificent Water Newton altar-set are at the moment unknown.⁶⁰ All that can be said is that in parts of the Gallic provinces as elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world the age of Constantius II was the age when Christianity was replacing permanently the worship of the gods.

In the east we know rather more about the agents of conversion. One example may suffice. Sozomen tells how c. 340 his grandparents were converted to Christianity⁶¹.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁹ See Charles THOMAS, *Christianity in Roman Britain to A.D. 500* (London 1981), 104 ff.

⁶⁰ For Water Newton, see K. S. PAINTER, *The Water Newton Early Christian Silver* (London, British Museum Publications, 1977).

⁶¹ Soz. *HE* V 15, 15-17. See also Ramsay MacMULLEN, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven 1984), Ch. 9: "How complete was conversion?".

They lived in a large village near Gaza which was also a centre of the worship of Syro-Greek deities extending back for centuries. Then his friend Alaphion became ill and nothing that pagan or Jewish doctors and wonder-workers could heal him. However, there was a monk, named Hilarion in the neighbourhood and Sozomen records that "simply by calling on the name of Christ, he expelled the demon and Alaphion and his whole family immediately embraced the faith". Sozomen's grandparents followed. The first monasteries and churches were founded in the district by Alaphion's family.⁶²

III

These events took place c. 335-345. The miraculous cure illustrates one of the means by which Christianity was advanced by monks and holy men.⁶³ Their existence was a new phenomenon, and as Peter Brown has pointed out, the rise of the holy man is the *leitmotiv* of the religious revolution of late Antiquity.⁶⁴ At this stage the power of the ascetic, whether orthodox, Marcionite or Valentinian dissenter, or Manichaean heretic was beginning to play an essential part in the religious life of the east Roman provinces. The career of Hilarion himself illustrates the connections between the first phases of Egyptian and Syrian monasticism.⁶⁵

⁶² Soz. *ibid.*

⁶³ R. MacMULLEN, *op. cit.*, 25-29 and 111-112, on the influence of miraculous cures and exorcisms on conversions.

⁶⁴ Peter BROWN, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London 1982), 148.

⁶⁵ For Hilarion, see Jerome, *Vita Hilar.*, in *PL* XXIII 29-54, and independently, Soz. *HE* V 10 and 15, 5. For his visit to Antony in Egypt in c. 307, see Hier. *Vita Hilar.* 3.

Ostensibly, the origins of the ascetic movement may be traced to movements within Judaism and Christianity in the first century. The *Gospel of Thomas*, if the product of an early Aramaic-speaking Christian community also found its way to Egypt by the 3rd century, and at Oxyrhynchus fragments were discovered apparently associated with *Matthew's Gospel*.⁶⁶ In *Thomas* however, the Sayings of Jesus emphasise the inwardness of the kingdom and the virtue of a solitary, ascetic way of life. "Jesus said: Blessed are solitary (*monachoi*) for you will find the kingdom, for you come from it and you shall go thither again" (*Logion* 49). The same sentiment is repeated in *Logion* 75. Perfection was to be sought and achieved through the way of life adopted by the anchorites. Meantime, Eusebius of Caesarea describes a different, communal type of monasticism of the Therapeutae that existed outside Alexandria in the 1st century, and speaks of them as though they were Christians⁶⁷. Their way of life was characterised by chastity and contemplation under the guidance of a 'presbyter'. There and at Q'umran the prototypes of early Christian monasteries were already in existence.

The question, then, is why it took two and a half centuries before monasticism established itself? The urban character of post-Pauline Christianity as well as that of the empire itself in the first two and a half centuries A.D. may provide part of the answer. There was practically no scope for a strong religious movement whether pagan or Christian based purely on the countryside. Only after c. 240

⁶⁶ For arguments favouring *Thomas* as an independent source see H. MONTEFIORE, in *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960-1961), 220-248. For third-century fragments of *Matthew's Gospel* being found near those of *Thomas* (*POxy.* 1) during excavations, see *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* I (1898), p. 4; also, *POxy.* 654 and 655.

⁶⁷ Eus. *HE* II 16-17. That communal asceticism was an ideal in Eusebius' time seems clear from this text. "We think that these words of Philo are clear and indisputably refer to our communion." (II 17, 18).

when the towns throughout the empire show signs of economic decline do the villages and their language and culture of their inhabitants come back into their own, and relationships between town and village change to the benefit of the latter. The idea that the monastic movement in the east was the result of economic and social distress in the countryside needs drastic modification. Both in Egypt and Syria there appears to have been a move away from great estates worked by a semi-servile colonate, towards smaller holdings belonging to independent farmers.⁶⁸ Antony's parents belonged to this class, wealthy and not uneducated, with a holding of some 300 aroura, but also Coptic-speaking and Christian.⁶⁹ Tensions were caused not so much by poverty as by "extortions of the magistrates" and "grumbles of the tax-collector", two evils which those who joined Antony's growing band of ascetics sought to escape.⁷⁰ In addition, there was the rivalry to the Church both in Egypt and Syria provided by the arrival of ascetic Manichaean missionaries between 280-290.⁷¹ These missionaries also appealed to the religious sense of an increasingly articulate rural population. In that period some *manistan* (monasteries) seem to have been established. The encyclical of Bishop Theonas of Alexandria c. 300 warning his congregation against the propaganda of Manichaean missionaries who

⁶⁸ A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire*, 772 (Hermopolis).

⁶⁹ Athan *V. Anton.* (in *PG* XXVI 837-976) 2. A. E. R. BOAK quotes a possible parallel to the social status and standard of education of Antony's family, "An Egyptian Farmer of the Age of Diocletian and Constantine", in *Byzantina Metabyzantina* 1 (1946), 42. Aurelius Isidorus could read but not write.

⁷⁰ *V. Anton.* 44. He was also conscious of the oppression of the poor by the rich, quoted in *Sayings of the Fathers* XV 1.

⁷¹ For Manichaean missions at this period, see P. BROWN, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire", in *JRS* 59 (1969), 92-103, and for the Manichaean challenge to Egyptian Christianity, see G. G. STROUMSA, in Ch. 17 of *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. A. PEARSON and J. E. GOEHRING (Philadelphia 1984).

“opposed marriage”,⁷² was another sign both of the strength of the appeal of the Manichees and growing rivalry between two ideals of asceticism even before the Great Persecution.

Antony in Egypt and Hilarion in Syria represented the ascetics’ search for individual perfection. The popularity of their movement however, was beginning by c. 320 to force some sort of communal organisation on their initiators. We hear of monks (not merely ‘solitaries’) at the time of the Great Persecution in Egypt, and in the reign of Constantine the Meletian opponents of Athanasius had monasteries⁷³. During the decade 320-330 the 5000 followers of Amoun and his wife in the Nitrian desert, south-west of Alexandria were being organised into separate small communities that came together for a weekly Eucharist⁷⁴. It was only a step to fully fledged communal monasticism initiated by Pachomius in c. 323.

The reign of Constantius II saw both the solitary and cenobitic (communal) types of the ascetic life come to fruition. The solitaries in Egypt and Syria emerge as men of power and judgement vested with divine authority, the successors to the confessors and martyrs of the previous century.⁷⁵ Those who felt themselves wronged flocked to Antony. The anonymous Coptic writer on whose work Athanasius’ *Life* is founded⁷⁶ wrote that, “he became the

⁷² *PRyl.* 469. Athanasius (*V. Anton.* 68) praised Antony for having nothing to do with Manichees (some ascetics clearly did).

⁷³ For Meletian monasteries, see H. I. BELL, *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London 1924), Part ii, and E. R. HARDY, *Christian Egypt. Church and People* (Oxford 1952), 53. Antony also would have nothing to do with them (*V. Anton.* 68).

⁷⁴ Athan. *V. Anton.* 60, and Palladius, *H. Laus.* 8.

⁷⁵ See P. BROWN, *Society and the Holy*, 103 ff. (Chapter on “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity”).

⁷⁶ See T. D. BARNES’ convincing argument that the Syriac version of the *Life of Antony* pre-supposes a Coptic original which was re-worked in Alexandria to be accepted traditionally as Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*, “Angel of Light or Mystic

teacher of all Egypt”, that, “he comforted many who had been saddened (i.e. wronged) and made friends those who had been at enmity with each other.”⁷⁷ A century later Sozomen wrote, “many came out to him and compelled him to intercede for them with the rulers and men of power”.⁷⁸ Far from being a destructive force in society, Antony helped to maintain peace in village communities and acted as a sort of ombudsman which took the edge off their grievances, and encouraged a sense of loyalty to the authorities which the western peasantry never evolved. Constantius, like his father listened to what Antony had to say ⁷⁹. Whatever his reservations about the creed of Nicaea he never risked a break with the monastic leader whose devotion to Athanasius and his beliefs was unassailable. Pachomius was also a Copt, born in Chenoboskion in the Thebaid. After his release from the army he was baptised in his native village of Chenoboskion and adopted the ascetic life, associating with an older hermit named Palamon. The call however, to communal life was strong and was confirmed by a voice (a dream?) commanding him to establish a monastery in the deserted village of Tabennesi and “attract many followers there”.⁸⁰ This took place probably c. 320-25, and until his death in 346 Pachomius gradually built up a confederation of nine monasteries for men and two for women at various places along the Nile fifty miles north and south of Tabennesi.⁸¹

Initiate? The Problem of the *Life of Antony*”, in *JThS* N.S. 37 (1986), 353-368.

⁷⁷ Athan. *V. Anton.* 87. His assistance to judges: *ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁸ Soz. *HE* I 13, 9.

⁷⁹ Athan. *V. Anton.* 81.

⁸⁰ Ph. ROUSSEAU, *Pachomius* (see n. 43), 59.

⁸¹ See P. de LABRIOLLE, «Les débuts du monachisme», in J. R. PALANQUE, G. BARDY, P. de LABRIOLLE, *De la paix constantinienne à la mort de Théodose* (Paris 1948), 339.

Twenty five years is a long time, and recent research has demonstrated that Pachomius' Rule evolved only gradually.⁸² There was probably always a conflict in his mind between his ideal to "know the whole will of God", and "minister to the race of men in order to reconcile them to Himself"⁸³ and his inclination towards a disciplined organisation of his followers, derived perhaps in part from his experiences in Maximin's army. While no 'Rule' as envisaged by Jerome in the 390s existed at least until Pachomius founded his second monastery at Phbow,⁸⁴ the problem of how to inculcate the spirit of *koinonia*, mutual support with prayer and service to the community by work with one's hands, without formalism was insoluble, and resulted in practices which would harden into the accepted Rule of Pachomius. From the outset the day's routine had little variation. The monks lived, as the *Vita Prima* states, "a coenobitic life. So he (Pachomius) established for them in a rule an irreproachable lifestyle and traditions profitable for their souls. These he took from the Holy Scriptures: proper measure in clothing, equality in food, and decent sleeping arrangements."⁸⁵ The incipient rigidity may be detected in the arrangement of cells into 'houses' with some 20 monks to a house. No one was allowed to visit another cell without permission. The monk was completely at the orders of his 'house-leader' (*praepositus*). He would be assigned work by him and, wearing his simple belted tunic, a goatskin and cowl, would after prayers be lined up with others of his house and marched to his task. He would eat

⁸² Ph. ROUSSEAU, *op. cit.*, 67-68 and 75-76. Monks needed to "govern each other", but not through a set book of rules. The ideal was community (κοινωνία).

⁸³ *Vita prima* 23. Cited from Ph. ROUSSEAU, *op. cit.*, 61.

⁸⁴ Ph. ROUSSEAU, *op. cit.*, 73, evenso, "colonisation was more in evidence than legislation".

⁸⁵ *Vita prima* 25. See Rousseau's chapter on "The Day's Routine", *op. cit.*, 77-86.

at a common table, and sleep propped up in a special inclined seat to enable him to keep awake for a maximum period for prayer.⁸⁶

The high degree of organisation and commitment of the Pachomian monks resulted in the economic success of the monasteries. The original choice of Tabennesi suggests that far from dropping out of rural life, Pachomius had had some idea of his monastery restoring prosperity to what had become a deserted area. His monastery became known as 'the village'. By the time of his death, the original simple barter and sale of products made by the monks on the spot had widened into the acquisition of property and the growth of specialisation among the monastic craftsmen⁸⁷. It is probably under Theodore who governed the monastic confederation from 350-368, that the picture of the Tabennesiots painted by Palladius in 419-420 took shape. Tabennesi then had 1300 monks, but other houses such as at Panopolis in the north were smaller and contained only 200-300 monks. Palladius describes how they would be divided into sections known by a letter of the Greek alphabet, and each monk would have his trade. "One works the land as a labourer, another in the garden, another at the forge, another in the bakery, another in the carpenter's shop..." It was a parallel yet complementary economy, held together by religious conviction, locally by the solemn Communion on Saturdays and Sundays, and yearly for all the monasteries by the great assembly of 'Founder's Day' in honour of Pachomius held on 13th August.⁸⁸

Despite some bitter opposition from fellow Christians including some bishops and clergy, which resulted in his

⁸⁶ *Vita prima* 79.

⁸⁷ Ph. ROUSSEAU, *op. cit.*, 153-156 and 189.

⁸⁸ Pall. *H. Laus.* 32; Hier. *Reg. Pachom. praef.*, and Soz. *HE* III 14, 16-17.

trial before a synod at Latopolis in the autumn of 345 for making impossible spiritual claims,⁸⁹ Pachomius' concept of monasticism flourished. It is among the most important developments of Constantius' reign. Pachomius showed that the ascetic life did not necessarily involve break with society. His monasteries served the people around them. They provided an example to others, such as John Cassian and later, the Cistercians in the 12th century, who sought perfection for themselves by bringing uninhabited areas in a harsh landscape into cultivation for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Pachomius and Antony were both intensely loyal to Athanasius.⁹⁰ Indeed, the mutual respect between the Bishop and monastic leaders had far-reaching effects on Egyptian Christianity. While connections between Alexandria and the rest of Egypt were undoubtedly improving ecclesiastically from the time of Dionysius 'the Great' (Bishop, 247-264), there can be little doubt that Athanasius' immediate grasp of the importance of the monks, and his visit to Tabennesi in 329, outbid the Meletians for their support and hence predominance in the monastic movement. Had he not succeeded, Upper Egypt might have gone Meletian, as Numidia sided with the Donatists, and Athanasius and his successors become cast in the role of Caecilian, the leaders of a minority Church in Egypt.

At the same time, Pachomius' movement, though inspired by the literal understanding of Scripture may have had its unorthodox leanings. It looks increasingly likely that the compilers of the Gnostic library found at Nag-Hammadi included monks of the monastery of Chenoboskion some three miles away though on the opposite side of the Nile. The cartonage forming the backing of some of the

⁸⁹ Ph. ROUSSEAU, *op. cit.*, 172-173.

⁹⁰ Anthony's visit to Alexandria to see Athanasius during the latter's brief return from his first exile is an instance.

codices indicates that the texts were being copied between 348-360. One copyist, who calls himself "Gongessus" (Concessus) with the spiritual name Eugnostus, described the contents of Codex iii which included the Valentinian *Apocryphon of John* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour* as "God-written".⁹¹ Indeed, from the point of view of beliefs and attitudes there was much that united orthodox, Gnostic, and Manichaean ascetics. Identity and allegiance were all-important, however, and by giving this to Athanasius, the Pachomians forged an unbreakable alliance between Coptic monasticism and the one-time 'alien city' of Alexandria and the Word-Flesh Christology of its bishops.

In Syria also, the ascetic movement tended to blend with the heretical, while at Antioch there was no Athanasius to direct its leadership to the ultimate advantage of the see.⁹² Even Bishop Meletius of Antioch (361-381) was unsympathetic to the ascetics clanking their chains. There was in addition, no Pachomius in Syria. The monks were individualists readier to crowd the wildernesses with quarrelling individual cells than unite in a common life.⁹³ Some combined asceticism with hard labour with their hands,⁹⁴ but others saw no purpose in productive work. Instead, they imposed on themselves extraordinary burdens, such as wearing iron collars or chains, or eating grass like animals (the Boskoi).⁹⁵ One, Julian was described as so rigid in his

⁹¹ Described briefly in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. J. M. ROBINSON (New York 1977), 16-19, and discussed at length with somewhat negative conclusions by A. VEILLEUX, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt", = Ch. 16 of *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. A. PEARSON and J. E. GOEHRING, 278-283.

⁹² For Syrian monasticism see A. A. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* I-II, CSCO 184 and 197 = Subsidia 14 and 17 (Louvain 1958 and 1961).

⁹³ Jerome's view, *Epist.* 15 and 17 to Pope Damasus.

⁹⁴ For instance Serenus, "All my life I have been sowing, reaping and making baskets", *Apophthegmata Patrum, De abbate Sereno* 2, in *PG* LXV 417 B.

⁹⁵ On the Boskoi, see A. A. VÖÖBUS, *op. cit.*, I 319.

austerities that he was said "to live as though he was incorporeal, for he seemed to be freed from the flesh and posses nothing but skin and bone".⁹⁶

It was from these and like ascetics that the sects were developing. The Messalians (Syriac, "men of prayer") were to be found in Constantius' reign "in numerous monasteries."⁹⁷ They believed that baptism did not entirely free the individual from possession by demons. Only a life devoted wholly to prayer sufficed, but in addition to shunning all work, they were indifferent to ecclesiastical discipline and their liturgy was suspect. The Audians too, were a purely Syrian sect, combining an anthropomorphic view of the Deity with Manichaean dualism and contact with the Manichees.⁹⁸ In both Syria and Egypt, the resurgence of long-suppressed native cultures found its expression in ascetic Christianity and a religious literature written in their own Syriac and Coptic language.⁹⁹

Generally speaking, however, these new forces if opposed to aspects of the social order imposed by Macedonian and Roman conquerors, were not destructive to imperial unity. Surprisingly, the monastic movement in the east developed as a force making for the cohesion of the empire. Monkish influence on popular religious belief did

⁹⁶ Theodoretus, *Historia religiosa seu ascetica* 26, in *PG* LXXXII 1472 B; Pall. *H. Laus.* 42; and Soz. *HE* III 14.

⁹⁷ For the Messalians, see Thdt. *HE* IV 10, and Epiphanius, *Panarion haer.* 80.

⁹⁸ The Audians are described by Thdt. *HE* IV 9.

⁹⁹ The linguistic resurgence was not anti-Hellenic, although occasionally urban bishops, such as John of Jerusalem refused to sing the liturgy in Syriac though he knew the language (*Peregrinatio Etheriae* 47) and there was hint of cultural as well as social antipathy in the story of Eulogius and the cripple (*H. Laus.* 21) in the lifetime of Antony. Antony himself never seems to have mastered Greek: "He did not know Greek" (*H. Laus.* 21). I consider the revival of Coptic and Syriac as literary languages the results of the greater prosperity of the countryside where they would have been used as a matter of course.

not evolve towards national or particularist movements.¹⁰⁰ It was directed rather, against intellectual heresies such as Arianism, Eunomianism or even Apollinarianism (otherwise popular in the east).¹⁰¹ With the spread of monasticism to Asia Minor through Eustathius of Sebaste by the end of Constantius' reign the patterns of religious life in the east were becoming fixed. From thenceforward, the Byzantine world would never be without its 'holy men'.

In the west, Sozomen claimed that there was little organised monasticism.¹⁰² One movement¹⁰³ could be compared to it and indicates what might have happened in the east in different circumstances. The North African Circumcellions emerge about A.D. 340 under their leaders, "the captains of the saints Fasir and Axido".¹⁰⁴ From Optatus of Milevis, a contemporary (flor.c. 365) they appear extreme adherents of the Donatist Church, though unfettered by ecclesiastical discipline and guided by apocalyptic hopes were engaged in perpetual warfare against the Devil. His power was seen at work in the secular authorities and landowners. Aspiring to martyrdom, they meantime led lives of turbulent and aggressive asceticism.

The description given by Optatus of their activities is so vivid that it must come from first-hand knowledge. He says (III 4):

¹⁰⁰ To this extent, A. H. M. JONES' article, "Were ancient heresies national or social movements disguise?", in *JThS* N.S. 10 (1959), 280-298 is justified in denying the connection. It is less so for Donatism in North Africa.

¹⁰¹ Soz. *HE* VI 27, 10.

¹⁰² Soz. *HE* III 14, 38.

¹⁰³ The Circumcellions were regarded as a sort of monk in later times. Thus, Isidore of Seville, *Eccl. off.* II 6, 7 *qui sub habitu monachorum usquequaque vagantur*, and Praedestinatus (c. 435), the Circumcellions were *veluti monachos*.

¹⁰⁴ Optatus of Milevis, *De schismate Donatistarum* III 4, ed. C. ZIWSA, *CSEL* XXVI (1895), p. 82.

For when men of this sort were, before the attainment of unity wandering about in every place, and in their insanity called Axido and Fasir "Captains of the Saints", no man could rest secure in his possessions. Written acknowledgements of indebtedness had lost their value. At that time no creditor was free to press his claim, and all were terrified by the letters of these fellows who boasted that they were "Captains of the Saints". If there was any delay in obeying their commands, of a sudden a host of madmen flew to the place. A reign of terror was established. Creditors were hemmed in with perils, so that they who had a right to be supplicated on account of that which was due to them, were driven through fear of death, to be themselves the humble suppliants. Very soon everyone lost what was owing to him—even to very large amounts, and held himself to have gained something in escaping from the violence of these men.

Even journeys could not be made with perfect safety, for masters were often thrown out of their own chariots and forced to run, in servile fashion, in front of their own slaves, seated in their lord's place. By the judgement and command of these outlaws, the condition of masters and slaves was completely reversed." (Transl. J. Stevenson, extract from *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* [London 1966], 202.)

An enormous amount has been written about the Circumcellions, largely relating to their legal status.¹⁰⁵ Were they a distinct *ordo* in North African society, or simply a loose grouping of peasants, perhaps engaged in seasonal harvesting,¹⁰⁶ but essentially concerned with a religious struggle, as the "champions" (*agonistici*) against the material forces of evil? Optatus' description leaves no doubt as to their connection with Donatism and in particular, Dona-

¹⁰⁵ See H. J. DIESNER, "Die Circumcellionen von Hippo Regius", ch. from *Kirche und Staat im spätrömischen Reich* (Berlin 1963), 78-90, and W. H. C. FREND, "Circumcellions and Monks", in *JThS* N.S. 20 (1969), 542-549, as examples.

¹⁰⁶ For this view, see E. TENGSTROM, *Donatisten und Katholiken* (Göteborg 1964), 51-52.

tists who refused to accept the logic of Constantine's conversion. The activities of the Devil, traditionally identified with persecution were now transferred to other evils of the day. Heavy taxation and no system of credit meant that small landowners and the peasantry were faced with the problem of chronic debt.¹⁰⁷ A single storm in early June (as I have witnessed myself near Constantine) could wipe out a complete grain harvest. Then, destitution, slavery and sale of children into slavery awaited the unfortunate.¹⁰⁸ These were the sort of grievances Fasir and Axido were pledged to resolve by force, and they would no doubt have justified their actions by reference to the *Old Testament*. "Captains of the Saints" would recall Gideon's Three Hundred (*Jud.* 7,1-22) and other heroic examples from Israelite history. With a living tradition of separation between Church and state rather than its integration as in the east, western movements of radical religion would not be placing loyalty to the authorities high on their scale of values.

The Circumcellions were, however, a religious movement. The women that accompanied them were *sanctimoniales* (i.e. women under vows).¹⁰⁹ They were characterised by the Donatist writer, Tyconius c. 380 as "superstitious folk" who spent their time visiting the tombs of martyrs, allegedly for the salvation of their souls.¹¹⁰ In throwing themselves to death over cliffs they were taking a short cut to martyrdom, to be commemorated with the date of their

¹⁰⁷ Heavy taxation as the cause of Firmus' revolt in 372, which some Donatists supported, see Zos. IV 16. In general P. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971), 36: "The land tax had trebled within living memory by 350".

¹⁰⁸ Slave-raiding and sales of children into slavery, see Aug. *Epist.* 10, ed. J. DIVJAK, *CSEL* LXXXVIII (Wien 1981).

¹⁰⁹ Aug. *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* II 9, 19.

¹¹⁰ T. HAHN, *Tyconius-Studien* (Leipzig 1900), 68, and compare Aug. *Epist. ad catholicos contra Donatistas* 19, 50: *ad eorum sepulchra* [Circumcellion martyrs] *ebriosi greges vagorum et vagarum* ... (i.e. male and female Circumcellions).

anniversary or 'redditio' in stone for posterity, thus assuring themselves of their place for lasting memory in their local church's Calendar.¹¹¹

IV

It has been a great pity that the chance offered when compiling a complete catalogue of inscriptions relating to martyrs and their shrines, was not taken to research into the liturgy of the Donatist Church as well as its Catholic rival.¹¹² It is in the realm of cult that a survivor from the third century would have found most difference from what he had grown up in. Gone were the house-churches except in some villas, in which Christians had worshipped down to the Great Persecution; gone too were many of the lay initiatives that allowed everyone in the congregation to take the initiative in song or prophecy.¹¹³ The plan of the churches all over the Greco-Roman world and not least in North Africa was basilican. The raised apse at the east end emphasised the superior status of the presiding clergy. In front of the apse would be the altar enclosure. The Donatist churches, however humble would have the additional feature of a stone slab covering martyr's relics (cf. *Rev.* 6, 19) beneath the altar-table. The congregation in both Catholic and Donatist Churches would be standing either side of the nave, men and women separated from each

¹¹¹ Aug. *Contra Gaudentium* I 28, 32 and L. LESCHI, "A propos des épitaphes chrétiennes du Djebel Nif-en-Nisr", in *Revue africaine* 83 (1940), 30-35.

¹¹² Y. DUVAL, *Loca sanctorum Africae. Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV^e au VII^e siècle* (Roma/Paris 1982). See the writer's review in *JAC* 27/28 (1984/1985), 243-246.

¹¹³ Thus, Tertullian, *Apol.* 39, 18: "and each from what he knows of the holy Scriptures, or from his own heart is called before the rest to sing (or prophesy) to God". Tertullian on the conduct of the *Agape* in Carthage c. 197.

other¹¹⁴. Most North African churches had a baptistery attached, the size of the baptismal font, as at Timgad or Djemila like a modern plunge-bath, indicating the importance attached to this rite, especially in the Donatist churches. Both Catholics and Donatists however, shared much of the liturgy, Optatus and Augustine comment on the sameness of ecclesiastical organisation, use of Scriptures, sacraments, responses, and at Eastertide the solemn intonation of *Psalm 22* on Good Friday.¹¹⁵

Differences were those of emphasis. Donatist sermons would comment on Scripture in a way that allowed invective against the Catholic opposition¹¹⁶. The cult of martyrs celebrated rowdily in both Churches, was restrained among the Catholics by the Church's more obvious control over the authentication of martyrs and their relics¹¹⁷. The Donatists on the other hand, were "the Church of the Martyrs". There would be songs and hymns in their honour and their anniversaries would be kept, sometimes even by a solemn re-dedication of their relics involving a new coat of hard white plaster over the receptacle containing their relics.¹¹⁸ The faithful would seek burial within the churches as near as possible to the martyrs' tombs.¹¹⁹ The Donatists too,

¹¹⁴ Aug. *Civ.* II 28: "churches ... where a seemly separation of sexes is observed".

¹¹⁵ Optatus, *De schismate Donatistarum* III 9, and Aug. *In psalm.* 54, 16. See P. MONCEAUX, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* IV (Paris 1912), 148.

¹¹⁶ Optatus IV 5: *lectiones dominicas incipitis et tractatus vestros ad nostras iniurias explicatis.*

¹¹⁷ Optatus I 16: *Martyris sed necdum vindicati* (one of the immediate issues at the outbreak of the Donatist schism). But for rowdy Catholic celebrations, see Aug. *Epist.* 22 and 29.

¹¹⁸ For an illustration, see A. BERTHIER *et alii*, *Les vestiges du christianisme antique dans la Numidie centrale* (Alger 1943), 109 and Pl. ix 15 (Bahira); and for the Donatist cult of martyrs, see W. H. C. FRENCH, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford 1952), 318, and P. MONCEAUX, *op. cit.*, 149-152.

¹¹⁹ L. LESCHI, "Basilique et cimetière donatistes de Numidie (Ain Ghorab)", in *Revue africaine* 78 (1936), 27-46.

were conservative in matters of liturgy. They retained the Agape,¹²⁰ but feasts of non-African origin, such as the Epiphany, imported from the east, were rejected, as was any deviation from the text of the African Bible in use in Cyprian's day¹²¹. In contrast, the Catholics used the Itala increasingly, and at the end of the century, the *Vulgate*.¹²²

North Africa tended towards ecclesiastical and liturgical isolation in the mid-4th century. Information, however, about the remainder of the west at this time is scanty. It is reasonable to suppose that at Rome the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus would have remained the core of the Eucharistic service. In addition, Rome had become a centre of pilgrimage. By the end of Constantine's reign crowds would be thronging to visit the tombs of the Apostles bringing renewed fervour to the cult of the apostles as martyrs as well as founders of the Roman see.¹²³

One recent discovery has suggested that even on the edges of 4th century Christendom a sophisticated eucharistic cult was developing. The Water Newton treasure consisting of 27 silver objects, formed part of a Eucharistic set. The find included a silver two-handled chalice, a large paten inscribed with a cross, a wine-strainer, flagon, richly decorated jug and fragments of a hanging lamp. Bowls for the *lavatio* had been given by rich donors, one of whose votive inscription round the rim in a dactylic hexameter (*sanctum altare tuum omine subnixus*) suggests the existence of

¹²⁰ P. MONCEAUX, *op. cit.*, 149 and 154. The celebration of the *Agape* is suggested by the large number of fragments of glass cups found in Donatist churches. See A. BERTHIER *et alii*, *op. cit.*, Pl. xx 39b.

¹²¹ P. MONCEAUX, *op. cit.*, 149; 153-4.

¹²² P. MONCEAUX, *op. cit.*, 155.

¹²³ Socr. *HE* IV 23 (end): Ammon's visit to the Martyrium of Peter and Paul.

a rich liturgical language in development¹²⁴. The discovery of parallel examples to this treasure at Hama (Homs) in Syria suggests also like the celebration of the Epiphany in Gaul, that much of the liturgy in Gaul and Britain may be eastern rather than Roman or North African in inspiration.¹²⁵

As one would expect, most of our detailed knowledge of the liturgy practiced in the mid-4th century comes from the eastern provinces. Two liturgical synaxes of this period have survived, namely that attributed to Serapion, Bishop of Thmuis in the Nile delta in c. 350, and the other, a commentary designed for the newly-baptised written by Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem in 348.¹²⁶ The accounts complement each other, and show the extent of the development that had taken place since the incidental references to the cult made by Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria.¹²⁷ At that time the Agape had already become obsolescent in the east and the Eucharist was divided into the two sections of Word and Sacrament that it was to retain thereafter. The Mass of the Catechumens included lessons from Scripture followed by a commentary, by the singing of psalms and hymns, and a sermon. After the catechumens had been dismissed offerings would be brought forward to the altar.¹²⁸ In his *XIII Homily on Leviticus* Origen alludes to the commemoration of Christ's Passion made in the

¹²⁴ K. S. PAINTER, *The Water Newton Early Christian Silver*, 15-16. *Omne* = (D)omine.

¹²⁵ W. H. C. FRENCH, "Syrian Parallels to the Water Newton Treasure?", in *JAC* 27/28 (1984/1985), 146-150.

¹²⁶ The text of both liturgical documents is given by Dom G. DIX, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster 1945), 163-164 (Serapion) and 187-196 (Cyril of Jerusalem).

¹²⁷ Or. *Hom. 7 in Lc.*; *Hom. 13 in Ex.* 1; also Dionysius of Alexandria, *Ep. ad Xystum*, ed. C. L. FELTOE, p. 58; and see J. H. SRAWLEY, *The Early History of the Liturgy* (Cambridge 1913), 49-52.

¹²⁸ Or. *Hom. 13 in Lev.* 3.

Eucharist in accordance with the Lord's command "Do this in remembrance of me". Athanasius also refers to the reading of lessons before the Communion and the role of the deacon to read a psalm, to which the people responded, "For his mercy endureth for ever", and to the offering of oblations.¹²⁹

The sacramentary of Serapion fills out this picture.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, the papyrus text comprises a collection of prayers without apparent regard to their place in the service. Thus, the Mass of the Catechumens, with the first prayer of the Lord's Day, the prayer for the catechumens and their benediction, together with the prayer following the sermon are grouped towards the end of the text, while this opens with the Offertory Prayer spoken by the bishop. The Offering and Prayer of Institution are conflated. In the text itself, the consecrated bread is defined as the "likeness of the Body of the Only Begotten", with the emphasis on "the remission of sins". There is no place for transubstantiation in the thinking of the compiler, and where sacrifice is mentioned it is "living" and "unbloody". Further, in contrast to Western usages, prayer is made for the sending of the Holy Spirit in order to make the bread become "Blood of the Truth". The spiritual and symbolic aspects of the Eucharistic offering remain typical of the Alexandrian Liturgy of St. Mark, which with its long intercessions found their way into the Nubian Monophysite and Ethiopian liturgies.¹³¹

The second document is Cyril of Jerusalem's "slow motion" explanation of the Mass of the Faithful for the

¹²⁹ Athan. *Hist. Arian.* 81. For informal prayers and psalms at evening service, see Soz. *HE* III 6, 10 (A.D. 339).

¹³⁰ I follow J. H. SRAWLEY's paraphrase, *op. cit.*, 62-71.

¹³¹ An example is published by the writer, in *Studia Patristica* 15 (Berlin 1984), 545-553.

benefit of newly baptised.¹³² At the beginning of this part of the service, the deacon brings water to wash the hands of the bishop and presbyters (the inscribed bowls found at Water Newton would in all probability have been used for this purpose), and calls for the congregation to greet one another with a Kiss of Peace. The celebrant then continues the service with the *Sursum Corda* and the Response, "It is meet and right so to do", and proceeds to the Invocation and Prayer of Institution. There is one major difference from the Markan liturgy in that the Holy Spirit is called upon to "make" the bread into the Body of Christ so that it is sanctified "and changed". This is far more definite than the simple "becoming" of the Markan version, and must be accounted one of the points of contact between the eastern and western concepts of the nature of the Eucharist.

The plain description of the service does little justice to the place the liturgy was already gaining in the lives of Christians throughout the east. It was becoming a unifying force overtopping boundaries of class, province and race. It was still in the process of formation in detail, and the Mass of the Catechumens in particular gave scope for individual initiatives. Thus at Antioch two laymen, though future bishops of Antioch and Tarsus respectively, Flavian and Diodore, "Zealous in the cause of orthodoxy", were the first who divided the choir and taught them to sing the Psalms of David responsively, and they themselves held services round the tombs of martyrs.¹³³ The doxology was used also at Antioch as a means of proclaiming particular doctrines. Thus, bishop Leontius (344-355) "repeated", we are told, "the doxology in an undertone so that only those nearest him could hear the words 'for ever and ever', indicating his anti-Nicene stance."¹³⁴ Sozomen describes

¹³² See J. H. SRAWLEY, *op. cit.*, 198-200.

¹³³ Theodoretus, *HE* II 24, c. 355 A.D.

¹³⁴ Thdt. *HE* II 24, though on the hostile evidence of Athanasius.

how in the same deeply divided city some offered praise to "the Father and the Son", while others in the same congregation glorified the Father "by the Son" denoting their belief that the Son was inferior to the Father. Not surprisingly rioting sometimes broke out among the factions¹³⁵. Sermons too, were sometimes great occasions, as when in a great service at Antioch in 361 before the emperor himself, Meletius proclaimed his own acceptance of the Creed of Nicaea in a sermon on *Prov.* 8, 22¹³⁶. Another time, at Constantinople in 360, Bishop Eudoxius preached on the surprising theme, "The Father is impious and the Son is pious". The congregation in the newly built Hagia Sophia was electrified, until he added, "Be calm, the Father is impious, because he worships no one; the Son is pious because he worships the Father", a neat piece of subordinationist theology which was heartily approved¹³⁷.

The liturgy would contribute to maintain the cohesion of the empire in the east for centuries to come. By the end of the reign of Constantius II, the main order of the different services had become established in an era when Christianity was becoming accepted with enthusiasm. Its acceptance marked the 'race of Christians' off from pagans and barbarians. Not only in east and west were new churches being built, and great new Christian quarters were arising outside the old city centres, but congregations were erecting their own places of worship. In 359 the Novatianists for instance, harassed in Constantinople transported their church stone by stone to a new location at Sycea.¹³⁸ In

¹³⁵ Soz. *HE* III 20.

¹³⁶ The text was chosen by Constantius as a key text, and Meletius was expected to interpret it in an anti-Nicene manner. The congregation was disappointed. Meletius stated that, "Three persons are conceived in the mind; we speak as if addressing one". Constantius exiled him on the spot. Thdt. *HE* II 31.

¹³⁷ Socr. *HE* II 43; Soz. *HE* IV 26.

¹³⁸ Socr. *HE* II 38.

North Africa we find tribesmen and individual Christians commemorating their construction of new churches in the Numidian countryside.¹³⁹

The reign of Constantius II saw irreversible changes in the lives and outlooks of peoples through the length and breadth of the Roman empire. The stony-faced individual whose chief virtues seem to have been a superhuman perseverance and a determination to continue the work of his father did more than merely conserve an imperial legacy. With him the triumph of Christianity was assured, and the Byzantine age of European history begins. Mission, monasticism, and liturgy in his reign illustrate different yet converging aspects of this triumph.

¹³⁹ For instance at Guzabeta, north of Timgad, where one tribe, the Mucronienses gave five columns to the church and another, the Guzabatenses gave six and decorated the church, assisting the priest Rogatus and the deacon Aemilius in building it. See S. GSELL and H. GRILLOT, "Ruines romaines au nord de l'Aurès", in *MEFR* 14 (1894).

DISCUSSION

M. Dible: Wie man sich die Anfänge einer vom Kaiser gesteuerten Mission ausserhalb der Reichsgrenzen vorzustellen hat, zeigen die Befunde im Axumiten- und Himyaritenland. Ezana hat seine Titulatur entsprechend den Eroberungen und Feldzügen erweitert. Der Name Äthiopien erscheint deshalb in den griechischen Inschriften nach den Feldzügen am Oberen Nil als Teil der Titulatur. Die zuletzt gefundene Inschrift (ed. pr. in *Journal des Savants*, 1970, 260 ff.), die einzige, in der Ezana als Christ, nicht nur als Monotheist redet, die also spät sein muss, nennt Äthiopien aber nicht. Darum ist ihre Echtheit umstritten. Vielleicht war Frumentios nur Bischof der im Axumitenreich ansässigen Bürger des Römerreiches, genoss die Sympathien der heidnisch gebliebenen Dynastie, missionierte aber nicht unter den Einheimischen. Erst die spätere kirchliche Tradition machte dann wegen des Synchronismus mit Frumentios, den König Ezana zum ersten christlichen Negus. Die Situation in Südarabien um die Mitte des 4. Jh. ist vergleichbar: Auch hier lässt sich im Zusammenhang mit der Mission des Theophilos eine Bekehrung Einheimischer nirgends nachweisen, auch hier gute Beziehungen des christlichen Römerreiches zu epichorischen Potentaten, auch hier ein inschriftlich dokumentierter, damals aufkommender Monotheismus, von dem sich nicht sagen lässt, ob er jüdisch oder christlich inspiriert war — ganz wie an Axum. Die Ausbreitung des Christentums in Armenien und im Perserreich sah ganz anders aus.

(Le manuscrit de la suite de cette discussion s'étant égaré, nous en sommes réduits à n'imprimer que cette première intervention.)