A ABOUT 2000 years ago a Jewish carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, a visionary and a miracle worker, walked through Palestine. In the year A.D. 33 he decided to go, together with some of his friends, to the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem. Those friends were deeply impressed by him and regarded him as the Messiah, who had been promised to the Jews in the O.T. Since, however, the title of Messiah, "the Christ" in Greek, was dangerous in the unruly Jewish country, he was arrested—one of the friends played the unworthy part of informer in this catastrophe—and the representative of the Roman occupying power, one Pontius Pilate, a fairly brutal professional soldier, decided to let him be hanged on the gallows as a traitor. This is a fairly simple story, which happened many times in Palestine, as we can learn even from the very scanty source-material which is still at our disposal.

Now, however, the unexpected and indeed miraculous happened. The companions, who at the arrest of their master had shown anything rather than heroism, suddenly came into the open and declared that this very Jesus had appeared to them, two days after his execution, alive in his body, and that he was God, the Son of God. There are two things which are indeed astounding in this annunciation by the companions of Jesus: The first is that devout Jews, and there is no doubt that Jesus and his companions were devout Jews, could make such a statement at all. "There is no God, but God", this watchword of Islam, comes from the most sacred prayer of Judaism, the sh'm'ah, "Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God", and in the ocean of polytheism, which was the Roman Empire, it was the firm foundation of Judaism that there was only one God, and that Judaism served only the Highest God. But here was a
group of Jews, devout Jews, who professed that Jesus is God, the Son of God; not a prophet, in the way in which in later time the Muslim would proclaim their Muhammed, but "the Lord", Adonai, the name which in its deepest devotion Judaism accorded to the God of heaven and earth.

This is already sufficiently surprising; but what is still more surprising is the second fact, that the companions of Jesus, in Jerusalem and amongst the very eye-witnesses of his execution, found a very considerable number of people who accepted their claim. Where is the man who in his right senses will honestly admit the possibility that a hanged criminal will appear alive amongst his friends two days after his execution? This alone is already against all reason; and it has to be added that the reports about the visitations of the disciples by the risen Lord are ambiguous and contradictory not only amongst each other, but partly even in themselves, so that the conclusion is at least near at hand that they did not agree with each other right from the beginning. At any rate it is true to say that they are so discordant that the reasonable historian should lay them aside as unsuitable for the establishing of historical truth. This would undoubtedly be done by historians, if the pleading of pious conviction did not prevent many from doing so. For from that first Easter Sunday of A.D. 33 onwards the pious convictions first of a few, then of many, and finally of an innumerable multitude of men have found their whole happiness in the call: "The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed." However, it must not be forgotten that right from that first Easter-day the cold voice of reason has countered this enthusiastic call with the proud reply of "swindle", so that no Christian should be allowed to refuse the trial of his belief.

II

This introduction has had to be put in front of our considerations because it will first of all be necessary to come to an agreement about what is to be understood by "Christianity". Are we to understand by this term the teaching of Jesus Christ, or the teaching of his companions, his Apostles, even assuming that the two are identical, which would be incorrect in the case of
CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

St. Paul, and perhaps of other N.T. authors? That might be a welcome solution provided that the teaching of that Jesus of Nazareth were indeed at our disposal. It is true that Adolph Harnack, so many years ago when I had the privilege of sitting at his feet, referred his pupils time and time again to this standard; and he makes the point also most emphatically in his great little book *The Essence of Christianity*, but it is also true to say that there will not be many nowadays who will agree with him about the content of this teaching of Jesus. And already amongst the Apostles there was the most profound disagreement about the Christian doctrine: "But if anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast", was what the apostle St. Paul wrote to the Galatians (Gal. i. 8), not because he wanted to prevent anyone from doing so in the future, but because the companions of James the Just, of St. Peter, and of St. Barnabas, were most zealous in doing this very thing. And it has to be remembered that this was only one case, if the most notable one, in which the Apostles were at variance with one another; but it will be sufficient to show that it would not be quite easy for the historian to maintain that the teaching of the Apostles and "Christianity" are really one and the same thing.

Most Church historians therefore try to identify Christianity with the teaching of the Church, and for the later centuries this is indeed a convenient if not altogether commendable way out. However, it leads into grave difficulties when applied to the first century of Christianity. For who or what was this Church of the first century? Who were the men who brought the message of Jesus the Christ to Rome so successfully that St. Paul could write already c. A.D. 54 to the Christians at Rome "all over the world they are telling the story of your faith" (Rom. i. 8), a remark which presupposes not only a numerous, but at the same time, as appears from the content of the Epistle, an almost incredibly well instructed audience? Who was it who had instructed Apollos, the Jew of Alexandria, as he is called in the Acts of the Apostles (Acta xviii. 24), in the gospel, whose teaching is expressly approved by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians (1. Cor. iii. 6)? Who were the "men of Cyprus
and Cyrene” who, again according to the Acts of the Apostles (Acta xi. 20), began to preach the gospel to the Gentiles at Antioch? Who had converted the Jews at Damascus, whom St. Paul set out to persecute, no more than at the most two years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acta ix. 2 f.)? We do not know any of the answers to these questions; neither do we know the content of their teachings, apart from the fact that they all seem to have professed that Jesus Christ was the Lord, was God. There is really no more to be said about all this; but once more we are exposed to the question: Are present-day Christians really entitled to claim that those Christians who more than 250 years later, together with the Emperor Constantine, adopted the then prevailing Christian faith, should be identified in any way with these earliest Christians? Does it not appear from the scarce remnants of that earliest Christianity that those earliest Christians had something quite different in mind, something which did not come true at all, the immediate second coming of Jesus Christ as the Judge of all the world? Can it be held that the Roman Empire did adopt the real, original Christianity of “Christ and His Apostles”? Or should it not be admitted plainly that the Church which took that political recognition for its foundation, as it did, actually adorned itself with false feathers?

III

To answer these questions honestly and clearly, let us state that the continuity of Christianity was imposed upon Christianity from the outside, by the very Roman Empire which finally adopted it. It had been the Roman procurator of Judæa, Pontius Pilate, by whose decision Jesus had been crucified. It was the Roman administrative powers at Antioch which, if we may trust the witness of the Acts of the Apostles (Acta xi. 26), officially imposed upon the movement the name of “Christians”. It was the Roman Emperor Nero who first made membership of this group of Christians, the “name” of Christian, a crime worthy of the supreme penalty. It was finally the Roman pro-consul, Pliny the Younger, who, by his report to the Emperor Trajan, produced the first lasting imperial edict concerning the
procedure in all the trials of the Christians. The identity of Christianity during the period from the first to the fourth centuries cannot be proved historically from inside the movement, but can indeed be amply shown by the reaction of the political power, by the reaction of the Roman Empire, to those whom it had called since the beginning "the Christians". It was in and by their conflict with each other that Christianity and the Roman Empire grew into a community of fate, which did not end until Napoleon the First decreed that the Holy Roman Empire had seen its last day and was to be dissolved, in the year 1806.

At the same time it cannot be held that the attitude of the Emperors during those first three centuries of Christianity was altogether or at least largely consistent, neither is it true that the character of the Emperors is reflected in their attitude towards Christianity. They were not always the best Emperors who persecuted the Christians, neither were they always the most remiss and oblivious of their duty who showed them leniency. Domitian, whose memory was condemned after his death, persecuted the Christians most cruelly; but the same is also true of that very great Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Hadrian, on the other hand, one of the greatest Emperors Rome ever saw, promulgated in favour of the Christians his edict to the governor of Asia, Minucius Fundanus, which, however, did not find very much favour with the provincial authorities; whereas the son of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, again an Emperor whose memory was condemned after his death, released, under the influence of his Christian concubine Marcia, a considerable number of Christians who had been exiled presumably under Marcus Aurelius—to the mines on the isles of Sardinia and Corsica. Nevertheless, even under these Emperors persecutions of Christians took place. Under Hadrian they were most important in the very capital, the city of Rome, whilst under Commodus, under a very slack rulership, they occurred mostly in the provinces. There are reliable reports about them from Africa, Asia Minor, and Syria. For throughout this early period of Christianity the persecution of the Christians was a permanent and stark reality, a fact which is not always taken into account by the secular, and even by the ecclesiastical historians.
And this leads us to a further consideration. It is true to say that the constitution of the Roman Empire was that of a military dictatorship. *Imperator*, the official title of the supreme Roman ruler, had been from of old the title of the victorious Roman military commander, and as such it had been adopted by the Emperor Augustus. However, throughout the Empire there was a division of competence between the earlier local and the imperial administration which was by no means free from friction and rivalry, as can be seen already from St. Luke's report about the enmity between Pilate and Herod Antipas (Luke xxiii. 11). Yet amongst those local authorities we have to count even the public assemblies, although in the great majority of cases they were no more than chance gatherings. They served as a kind of safety valve for the democratic reminiscences especially in the Greek speaking cities of the Roman Empire, and it was policy to satisfy their demands if they involved nothing more serious than the burning of a few Christians. Until the end of the second century it may safely be held that persecutions normally broke out by popular demand, and this was consistent with the internal policy of the imperial government, as it had been inaugurated by Trajan, and confirmed by Marcus Aurelius. The Roman government apparently attached no great importance to the Christians, and this was obviously the reason also why no closer inspection of their doctrines and organizations took place. The government just did not care at all for the distinctions between the various heresies of the Christians. This appears quite clearly from the, as I believe, semi-official pamphlet "A true Word", written by a most loyal Alexandrian, Celsus.

IV

Whilst it is, therefore, true to say that the government regarded all the varying shades of Christianity, Catholics, Gnostics of all 'sorts, Montanists, and Judaeo-Christians of various denominations, as nothing but Christians, and whilst the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in one of his edicts even seems to have thought that he could subsume them all under the still wider description of "new religions", which were to be prohibited without any distinction whatsoever, one group of Christians were not so
minded. They were the Catholics, presumably by that time the most numerous Christian group. From the report about the Lyonnese martyrs, preserved for us in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius (Euseb., E.H., V. i. 3 f.) it appears how deeply they felt about the divergencies and schisms within Christianity, and how they succeeded in winning over the Montanist, Alcibiades, who was kept in the same prison, to partake in their Holy Supper, although he had previously made his Communion with water and bread only (Euseb., E.H., V. iii. 3). Both the separation and the fusion of the different Christian sects were significant features of the ecclesiastical history of the second century. It was the time in which a standard for Christian orthodoxy was created, consisting of the three apostolic bequests, the canon of the apostolic writings of the N.T., the apostolic regula fidei, now usually described as the "Apostles' Creed", and the apostolic ministry. The way in which this standard was achieved is still under discussion, and it may well be true that it was different in the different provinces of the Church; but there can be no doubt that by the end of the century all three of them were ready to hand, and that they were immediately put into service by the great fighters against heresy who were active at the end of the century, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and several others. By the end of the second century, therefore, the Catholic Church finally achieved its separation from the Christian heresies, and established itself as an universal organisation which, in intention if not in fact, covered the whole world. By doing so the Catholic Church also set itself three tasks in particular, that of worship, that of the administration of charity, and finally that of mission-arizing. It has to be remembered that of these three only the last-mentioned had been expressly commanded in the N.T. by the risen Lord (Matt. xxviii. 19 f.); but it cannot be denied that already then the missionary task came last on the list. This fact was to be the cause of serious embarrassment for the Catholic Church in subsequent times, especially when the great spiritual force of Gnosticism found its last vigorous expressions in Manichaeism and in Islam.

The rise of the Catholic Church was a novelty within the Roman Empire. Previously no world-wide religious organizations
like the Catholic Church had existed within its boundaries. Admittedly, there were other world-religions. Above all there was the Isis religion, the religion of the Magna Mater, and—probably more important than all the others—the religion of the sun-god, Mithras, which was so dear to the Roman army. However, what seems to have been lacking particularly was not only the universal membership of the faithful, but the universality of the episcopal ministry, which already in the middle of the third century enabled Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, for instance, to administer over a year and a half the see of Rome, which had been vacated by the martyrdom of Pope Fabianus; or at the same time made it possible for bishop Alexander of Caesarea in a similar way to serve the Church at Jerusalem, the bishop of which, Narcissus, had for reasons which now seem obscure, taken refuge in the desert. The fact that the episcopal ministry was regarded as equal, irrespective of any local conditions causing factual differences between the more or less important sees, is borne out by the contemporary rise of the synods where all the bishops of some larger districts, normally coinciding with the provinces of the Empire, were gathered together with equal rights. In contrast to this rise of ecclesiastical administration, the Roman Empire saw in the course of that terrible third century, with its plague and barbarian invasions, an almost complete disintegration of the traditional imperial administration as established in the first century under the Julo-Claudian dynasty.

Augustus in particular had founded the position of the Roman Emperor upon the religious conception of the “mediator”. He was “the last of the gods, and the first among men”. However, in order to maintain such a position it was necessary that the Emperor himself keep aloof from any established religion. Amongst men he was much rather the representative of the deity than its worshipper. During the first 150 years of the Roman Empire religion had been widely treated as the personal concern of the individual; but in so far as it touched the influence of providence upon the political field the divine assistance was realized by and through the person of the Emperor. The turning point was reached, however, when the Emperors, since the days of Hadrian, appeared in philosophers’ beards, announcing in
this way that they regarded themselves as mere humans, and wished to indulge in the greater liberty assigned to mere humans. Marcus Aurelius in particular has clearly expressed this decision of his in his "Meditations", and it was very widely heard. For in this way the Emperor resigned from his position above human religion, and thus became subject to religion; and it was thus only natural that since the end of the second century amongst the Christians, most notably by Tertullian, the question began to be discussed whether or not the Emperor himself could become a Christian. Tertullian's answer was that he might indeed secretly do so, and that in fact the Emperor Tiberius had adhered to Christian convictions; but it would not be possible to reconcile the Christian faith with the imperial office. As a matter of fact, the Emperors adopted, from the days of Commodus, the religion of the sun, the religion of the army. By this very decision, however, they deprived themselves of their most potent protection. For before they had taken this step they had been held sacrosanct because of their mediating position in all religious matters; now, however, being amongst the rest of the faithful, this numinous protection was no longer at their disposal. From the days of Commodus, who was murdered in the first night of A.D. 193, I believe that it was only Septimius Severus, who amongst all the Emperors of the third century did not suffer a violent death, until first Diocletian, and more successfully Constantine, once more changed the religious position of the Emperor. After Constantine the murder of the Emperor became again the exception rather than the rule. This makes the development of the relations between the Church and the Empire in the third century so noteworthy. For it was under those Emperors, who were certain neither of their troops nor even of their personal hangers on—for example Commodus was murdered by that very concubine Marcia who had inspired his pro-Christian policy—that both the systematic persecutions and the debates between the imperial court and the leaders of the Church came to the fore.

Already after the first third of the second century Christian writers, the Apologists so-called, had produced pamphlets in
defence of Christianity, one or the other of which had been directly addressed to an Emperor, above all to the "philosopher" Emperors, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. When the house of Septimius Severus came to the throne, a whole range of highly educated Syrian ladies, the mothers of the various successors of Septimius Severus, took the lime-light. One of these at least, Julia Mammaea, the mother of Alexander Severus, who himself was said to have placed a statue of Jesus Christ beside the various other wise men, Socrates, Zoroaster, and Moses, in his private chapel, did exchange letters with the greatest Christian scholar of her day, with Origen. Another great Christian scholar, the schismatic bishop of Rome, Hippolytus, also seems to have been ordered to court by her or one of her predecessors. However, these ladies were the last members of the Roman imperial court who still showed a lively interest in philosophical questions. After them there followed mere military simplicity, and fifty years later we see the Christian bishops of Syria on their part approach the Emperor Aurelian for his decision when the possession of the cathedral at Antioch was under dispute between the deposed Patriarch Paul of Samosata and his successor Domnus. In between there lies the obscure episode of the Emperor Philippus Arabs, of whom it is said that he and his wife actually adhered to Christianity, but were excommunicated in A.D. 248 by the Patriarch Babylas of Antioch because of the assassination of the son of his predecessor. Some grain of truth may even be contained in this anecdote.

Far more important for the relations between the Church and the Empire, however, were the systematic persecutions to which the Catholic Church in particular was exposed during the middle of the third century. After the murder of Alexander Severus in A.D. 235, whose praetorian prefect, the famous lawyer Ulpianus, had arranged a collection of all the imperial laws dealing with the treatment of the Christians, a collection which unfortunately is now lost, there followed the most brutal of all the barbarians upon the throne of the Caesars, Maximinus Thrax. However, it was hardly his brutality, but rather the effect of Ulpianus's collection, that under him the special persecution of the Christian clergy was ordered. This measure meant that now for the first time, in
A.D. 236, the Roman government at last realized that in the Catholic Church it was faced with a world-wide organization. On the negative side it meant that by this decree the old edict of Trajan that Christians should not be sought out by the police was abandoned with regard to the clergy. A new era was dawning.

It cannot be said, however, that the persecution was conducted with any exceptional energy. For such an effort the times were too troubled, and the rule of Maximinus itself was too much hated by the majority of the inhabitants of the Empire. After he had been murdered, and after a very obscure period in which no less than four Emperors and pretenders met with a violent death, there followed the episode of Philippus Arabs of which we have spoken already. The first real catastrophe for the Christians throughout the Empire occurred under his successor, the Emperor Decius.

With Decius we reach the climax of disintegration of the Augustan Empire. It was the nation of the Goths who were penetrating from the Black Sea into the apparently best protected regions in Asia Minor and the Balkans. In the East the re-established power of Persia threatened the Eastern half of the Empire. The frontiers on the rivers Danube and Rhine had also long been in serious danger. Gaul and Britain were on the verge of defection. The Roman masters saw only one way of squeezing out of those districts which had not suffered too much devastation the men and moneys for the defence. It was the appeal to patriotism. Every inhabitant of the Empire was called upon to bring sacrifices to the gods of Rome and to the Emperor. Such sacrifices had been demanded of the Christians since the days of Trajan, but only here and there, sporadically, and the Christian martyrs had refused the demand. But under Decius no distinction was made between Christians and pagans. The fairly numerous certificates on papyrus for those who had sacrificed, which have been found amongst Egyptian papyri in the course of the last seventy years, serve to make this point quite clear. They show that absolutely no religious distinction was made by the simple fact that religion is not mentioned upon them. Everyone was subjected to the performance of this religious-patriotic duty whatever his faith may have been, and
it is not known that—apart from the Jews, for whom presumably special arrangements were made—any religious scruples were raised by anybody who was not a Christian. Such refusals were met with terrible punishment, for such are the demands of patriotism. Eventually the Catholic Church just managed to weather this storm, but it became evident on this occasion that the preceding—mostly local—persecutions had not prepared the Christians sufficiently for the sufferings of universal persecution. It was not patriotism which caused them to deny their faith, however, but sheer fright.

It must not be overlooked that there were numerous Christians who willingly underwent martyrdom. This fact has been neglected far too often by our modern historians, and yet it was what really mattered in the future course of history. Hundreds and thousands of Christians of all those regions where Christianity was most widely spread, as Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa, Rome, and Syria, were arrested, tortured, and subsequently subjected to capital punishment or to work in those murderous lead and copper mines, for which free and even slave labour was practically unobtainable. There were even more who by keeping absolutely quiet or moving from their normal place of habitation managed to escape the attention of the political administration. However, there were also the others, and our sources suggest that they were even in the majority, who submitted to the demand of the state. Certainly they were much more numerous than the martyrs. There were those who, not satisfied with sacrificing, even encouraged their fellow Christians to do so, and denounced them if they refused to follow their example. There were others who only secretly, and somewhat ashamedly, put their little piece of incense upon the heathen altar, probably the vast majority of the "fallen ones" (lapsi). Christian Latin provided a special term for them, thurificati, but it is impossible to say, whether these two groups were actually distinguished in the treatment of their application for re-admission to the Church. There were finally the many who for a small bribe obtained from the officials the certificate of their having sacrificed without having actually performed the ceremony at all, the so-called libellatici. It had long, as we hear from Tertullian, been a bad tradition amongst
the bishops of the Church, that they "would buy the peace of Christ with bribes"; so there were at least certain precedents for the paying of security money by the *libellatici*. However, once more it must not be forgotten that the prisons in many of the cities of the Roman Empire were indeed filled to over-flowing with faithful Christians during that terrible year of A.D. 250, that the torturers worked almost without interruption in order to convince the recusant Christians, and that the hangmen worked over-time. Admittedly, 251 saw a certain relaxation of the zeal of the persecutors; but it was nevertheless a surprise when the persecution was suddenly stopped in the autumn of that year, because the Emperor Decius had lost a battle and his life in the war against the invading Goths. In Africa at least, and presumably in other provinces too, the Christians gathered together for services of thanksgiving, described most impressively by their great bishop, Cyprian, in his pamphlet *De lapis*.

The thing which calls for an explanation is that at this juncture, even before the persecution was finally ended, the masses of the fallen streamed back to the Churches, and clamoured for re-admission. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly an illustration of the fact that the appeal to patriotism had not found a real echo amongst these so-called *lapsi* and, so I believe, among many of the heathen population of the Empire either. Many of those who came back must have felt genuine penitence at their lapse, and the blood of the martyrs was truly the seed of the Church. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that during the third century the Catholic Church developed into the greatest welfare organization ever seen in Greek and Roman time. In many places it can be claimed to have been the only chari'able organization. Hundreds of churches of this period have been excavated by French archaeologists in North Africa, and each of them proved to have a store-house for corn and oil attached to it. He who was separated from the Church lost not only his hope of eternal salvation, but also what may be described in modern terms as his social security. This too should be considered as one of the reasons why the lapsed in such great numbers returned to the Church. Their return was facilitated for many of them by the written recommendation, as we would
say, or absolution, as they claimed, given them by one or the other of the martyrs, something which up to that time had never failed. In short, what had been spared in the Christian Church by the persecution was now put in jeopardy by the return of the lapsed. In the schism of Novatianus, which was caused by the differences about their treatment, the Catholic Church was split in two. It may well be regarded as the grace of providence that the Emperor Valerianus decided to renew the persecution in A.D. 257, and to continue it till he was defeated in A.D. 260, and captured by the king of Persia. For this new crisis established the institutional authority of the bishops over the spiritual authority of the martyrs, and in this way saved the Church.

These two general persecutions of the Church were followed by forty years of peaceful relations between the Empire and the Church. We have just seen that the main burden of the conflict during the middle of the third century was borne by the Catholic Church. Nothing, as far as I can see, is said in our sources about the attitude of the heresies during these persecutions. This does not mean that they had just quietly vanished during those ten years of crisis. On the contrary, during the following forty years we see the beginning of a development, the effects of which were to continue right down to the middle ages. Outside the Roman Empire, in Mesopotamia, in those regions which were under Persian rule, a Church—if it may be so called—had arisen, which was very different from the Catholic Church within the Roman Empire, so much so that one might even hesitate to call it a Christian Church. Its fathers were some of the great Gnostic leaders of the second century, Bardesanes, Marcion, and Tatian. The latter two had seceded intentionally from the Church at Rome to which they had belonged during some period of their lives; and it may be assumed that the differences between the Persian and the Roman Churches were not entirely accidental, caused by the political and local distance between the two, but based upon doctrinal discrepancies, as the Catholics averred. In this Mesopotamian Church there arose at this very time, in the middle of the third century, a new prophet in the person of Mani, who between A.D. 260 and 270 sacrificed his life for his new doctrine. His call to a life of radical asceticism was widely
heard at a time which was so profoundly subjected to the miseries of wars and plagues as the third century. It presented a striking contrast to the Catholic Church which was on the way to respectability. A new world-religion, Manichaeism, made its appearance. We find its traces all over the continent of Asia, in Persia and in India as much as in Turkestan, Mongolia, and China. And they are equally wide-spread within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, in Egypt, North Africa, Spain and Gaul. At a later time there was a further invasion originating with the Bogomils in the Balkans, who received their inspiration as it seems in northern Asia Minor, and spread it amongst the Albigenses in Italy and France, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This illustrates the universal appeal of their ideal of a complete renunciation of the world in the face of a Christianity, which in its social life had become more or less settled.

VI

It must not be assumed, however, that the approach to respectability by the Catholic Church in the late third century had closed the door to asceticism. It does not seem probable that the new ascetic movement which started within the Church during this period, was sparked off by Manichaeism, although I cannot help feeling that it was influenced by it. I believe, however, that at the bottom of it there was a renewed and re-inforced eschatological expectation. The terrible sufferings of the time were interpreted as the travails of the new Aeon; the coming of the Lord in judgement was eagerly expected. To the rulers of the Roman Empire hermitism and monasticism, the names by which this new movement is described, was a most unwelcome development, for by it the economy of the Empire was deprived of a very considerable portion of its labour force, which could ill be spared in view of the other losses by plague and war; and the new eschatological movement in the Catholic Church also bore a revolutionary aspect, as all eschatological movements throughout history have done. Admittedly, the expectation was stronger in the West than in the East, where the Church in those days tended towards the doctrine that heaven and earth should be regarded as two completely separate realms. Nevertheless, even there the
Church was by and large a pacifist organization, and it has to be remembered that it was the successful generals of these forty years who succeeded in establishing the Roman Empire once more. The climax of this period of restoration was reached when a great politician came to the throne, the Illyrian, Diocletian. By appointing the outstanding generals of his time as his co-rulers, and by inspiring them by religious means with an entirely unexpected loyalty to his own person, he managed not only to secure the Roman frontiers at the Rhine, and the Danube, and the Euphrates, but also succeeded in giving the Empire a new constitution, centrally as well as regionally. With this turning of the supreme ruler of the Empire towards the problems of its internal policy, the question of its religion once more assumed supreme importance. As soon as the administrative questions were settled we see Diocletian outlaw the non-Roman form of Christianity, Manichaeism. More difficult was the problem of the Catholic Church, whose influence coincided by and large with the frontiers of the Empire. Beyond its frontiers it was only amongst the Goths that the Church could claim considerable missionary successes. Within the Empire the Christian Church had penetrated all classes of the people. There is no reason to doubt the assertion made by Eusebius that even Diocletian's own wife and daughter had been baptized, and it is also credible that one of the "Caesars", Diocletian's subordinate Emperors, Constantius Chlorus, one of the rulers in the West, showed much sympathy for the new faith. Nevertheless, Diocletian decided to persecute Christianity. The principal reasons for this step were military. Considerable disciplinary difficulties seem to have been caused by Christian officers and other ranks; and it seems certain that numerous Christian conscripts refused to enlist in the army. Thus the first steps taken by the government were directed towards an army purge. However, once the step had been taken towards differentiating between "true" Romans and Christians it proved impossible to limit the aim of the persecution. One edict against the Christians followed another in quick succession, and the years from A.D. 303 to 305 were filled with the most brutal and most thorough persecution the Church had yet experienced. However, in A.D. 305 Diocletian resigned
his throne, and compelled his colleague, Maximian, to do the same. It is a plausible assumption that the failure of the persecution was one of the chief reasons for his doing so.

With the abdication of the two Emperors Diocletian and Maximian the persecution in the West came practically to an end. For the new Augustus of the East, Galerius, failed in his attempt to seize the rulership of the West for one of his creatures, and the two successful usurpers there, Constantine and Maxentius, had no heart for its continuation. In the East, however, it was cruelly and aimlessly continued, until in A.D. 311 the Emperor Galerius on his death-bed issued an edict of toleration, in order to obtain for himself the intercessions of the Christians. Diocletian's newly founded order had lost the battle for spiritual supremacy, and the Empire was once more plunged into chaos and civil wars. It seems certain that only a few Christians had offered armed resistance; it is also true to say that considerable numbers of Christians once more lapsed under the pressure of the persecution. Very ugly scenes of mutual recrimination in the African Church are still on record; and it is very probable that the Roman pope Marcellinus himself had betrayed his Master. However, it is true to say that the Christians in the most highly civilized provinces, Africa, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Syria, defeated Diocletian's persecution by their very numbers. For since it proved impossible to win them over at the outset of the persecution, the policy of violent destruction aimed at them recoiled on the organization and especially on the economy of the Empire. The provinces in North Africa in particular were never again fully established under the Roman rule, but remained intractable and sullen.

Diocletian's abdication was followed by nine years of usurpation and civil war. When one of these usurpers, Constantine, had defeated another of them, Maxentius, in the battle at the Milvian bridge, in October 312, he declared himself publicly in favour of Christianity. The Christians' battle for Rome, which had been begun by St. Paul, was at last won for the Church. During the remainder of the century the Roman Emperor occupied once more the position of mediator between heaven and earth, in a similar way to that in which it had been held by Augustus—and
Constantine at least was fully aware of the fact that he had to copy the first founder of the Roman Empire with regard to his religious position. In the eastern half of the Empire the Emperor continued in this position right into the middle ages, theoretically until the Turks replaced the cross on the Hagia Sophia by their half-moon. To the other fetters, says Eduard Schwartz, somewhat cynically but not without reason, with which Constantine held the Empire in bondage, he added a religious one in the form of the Nicene Creed. However, at the time when in the West the Roman Empire succumbed to the storms of the peoples' migration, St. Augustine re-stated the eternal problem of the earthly state as viewed by Christian theology: *Vacante enim iustitia, quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia*, without the justice of God, what else are the states than great bands of robbers?