

SAINTS AND SINNERS

A History of the Popes

Saints & Sinners

A HISTORY OF THE POPES

Eamon Duffy

Yale University Press
New Haven and London

FOR JENNY

A Note on the Third Edition:

For this new edition I have updated the bibliography, and extensively revised and extended chapter 6 to take account of recent work on Pius XII, of the death of John Paul II, and of the election of Benedict XVI. —E.D.

Published in association with S4C (Wales)

First published as a Yale Nota Bene Book in 2002

Copyright © Eamon Duffy 1997

New material © Eamon Duffy 2006

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U. S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press) without written permission from the publishers.

For information about this and other Yale University Press publications, please contact

U. S. office: sales.press@yale.edu

Europe office: sales@yaleup.co.uk

ISBN-13: 978-0-300-11597-0

ISBN-10: 0-300-11597-0

Library of Congress Catalog card number for the cloth edition 97-60897

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Preface to the Second Edition ix

Preface xi

- 1 'UPON THIS ROCK' c. AD 33-461
 - I From Jerusalem to Rome 1
 - II The Bishops of Rome 13
 - III The Age of Constantine 23
 - IV The Birth of Papal Rome 37
- 2 BETWEEN TWO EMPIRES 461-1000
 - I Under Gothic Kings 48
 - II The Age of Gregory the Great 59
 - III The Byzantine Captivity of the Papacy 72
 - IV Empires of the West 86
- 3 SET ABOVE NATIONS 1000-1447
 - I The Era of Papal Reform 110
 - II From Papal Reform to Papal Monarchy 128
 - III The Pinnacle of Papal Power 138
 - IV Exile and Schism 151
- 4 PROTEST AND DIVISION 1477-1774
 - I The Renaissance Popes 177
 - II The Crisis of Christendom 196
 - III The Counter-Reformation 208
 - IV The Popes in an Age of Absolutism 230

5	THE POPE AND THE PEOPLE 1774–1903	
	I The Church and the Revolution	247
	II From Recovery to Reaction	260
	III Pio Nono: The Triumph of Ultramontaniam	286
	IV Ultramontaniam with a Liberal Face: The Reign of Leo XIII	305
6	THE ORACLES OF GOD 1903–1997	
	I The Age of Intransigence	319
	II The Attack on Modernism	325
	III The Age of the Dictators	332
	IV The Age of Vatican II	354
	V Papa Wojtyla	369
	VI The Way We Live Now	386
	Appendix A: Chronological List of Popes and Antipopes	397
	Appendix B: Glossary	406
	Appendix C: How a New Pope Is Made	415
	Notes	421
	Bibliographical Essay	428
	Index	456

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe debts of gratitude to many people: to Harri Pritchard Jones, 'onlie begetter', and to his wife Lenna, for their friendship and truly Celtic hospitality. To Opus Television and its staff, in particular to Mervyn Williams, for the invitation to write this book, to Heyden Denman, cameraman, and to Amanda Rees, who directed the television series to which this book is the companion volume. To John Gillanders of Derwen, for endless patience and technical wizardry. To Yale University Press and especially to Peter James, the copy-editor, to Sheila Lee, who researched the pictures, to Sally Salvesen, who designed the book and nursed it, (and me), through its final stages, and to John Nicoll, prince of publishers. Once again, Ruth Daniel read the proofs out of the goodness of her heart.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

For this new edition of *Saints and Sinners*, I have taken the opportunity to correct a (thankfully small) number of errors, to expand and revise parts of all but the first two chapters, and to update the Bibliographical Essay. The account of the papacy of John Paul II has been extensively rewritten and augmented, and vigilant readers will detect the modification of some earlier judgements. I have also added a brief appendix explaining the procedures for the election of a new Pope set in place by Pope John Paul II in 1996. The process of revision has greatly benefited from the insights and criticisms of the reviewers of the first edition: I would like to express my particular thanks to Patrick Collinson, T.F.X. Noble and Simon Ditchfield. The illustrations to the first edition elicited much favourable comment, and though it is flattering to the author of a lavishly illustrated book when his publishers reckon his text worth reproducing in its own right, there is inevitably some loss. This edition is less sumptuous than the first, but I hope that the large number of pictures and captions we have retained will continue to extend and deepen the narrative in the text, rather than simply decorate it. I am greatly indebted to Sally Salvesen and to Ruth Applin who designed the new edition. Finally, I renew the heartfelt dedication of this book to my wife Jenny.

Eamon Duffy

Feast of St Mary Magdalene 2001

PREFACE

Nearly 900 million human beings, the largest single collective of people the world has ever known, look to the Pope as their spiritual leader. His office symbolises the rule of God himself over their hearts and minds and consciences. The words of the popes weigh in the halls of power, and in the bedrooms of the faithful. And the papacy is the oldest, as well as arguably the most influential, of all human institutions. The Roman empire was new-born when the first popes ascended the throne of St Peter almost two thousand years ago. When Karol Wojtyla became the 261st Pope in 1978, the dynasty he represented had outlived not merely the Roman and Byzantine empires, but those of Carolingian Gaul, of medieval Germany, of Spain, of Britain, and the Third Reich of Hitler. Wojtyla himself was to play a not inconsiderable role in the collapse of the latest of these empires, the Soviet Union.

In the flux of history, the papacy has been, not a mere spectator, but a major player. As the Roman empire collapsed, and the barbarian nations arose to fill the vacuum, the popes, in default of any other agency, set themselves to shape the destiny of the West, acting as midwives to the emergence of Europe, creating emperors, deposing monarchs for rebellion against the Church. Popes have divided the known and yet to be discovered world between colonial powers for the sake of peace, or have plunged nations and continents into war, hurling the Christian West against the Muslim East in the Crusades.

The history of the papacy is therefore the history of one of the most momentous and extraordinary institutions in the history of the world. It has touched human society and culture at every

point. From contemporary concern with issues of life and death, the morality of abortion or the death-penalty, of capitalism or of nuclear war, to the history of Western art and the major commissions of Michelangelo and Raphael, Bramante and Bernini, the papacy has been and remains still at the heart of many of the most urgent, the most profound and the most exuberant of human concerns.

This book, which is linked to a series of six television programmes, attempts to provide an overview of the whole history of the papacy from the Apostle Peter to Pope John Paul II. It traces the process by which Peter, the humble fisherman of Galilee, became the figurehead and foundation stone of a dynasty which has been able to challenge the most powerful secular rulers, and which commands the religious allegiance of more than a fifth of the world's population. The book is not a work of theology, though no history of the papacy can or should altogether avoid theology. I have tried to include enough theological explanation to enable the non-specialist reader to understand the milestones in the emergence of the papacy as a religious and political institution, but I have not thought it my business to justify or defend that evolution. For Roman Catholics, of course (of whom I am one), the story of the popes is a crucial dimension of the story of the providential care of God for humankind in history, the necessary and (on the whole) proper development of powers and responsibilities implicit in the nature of the Church itself. But by no means all Christians accept such a claim, and for some the papacy, at least in its modern form, is a disastrous cul-de-sac, and a prime cause of Christian disunity. For non-Christians the story of the popes is simply one more of the myriad stories of humanity, another of the multiple forms in which human hope and human ambition have expressed themselves. Whatever the reader's convictions, however, I hope that the narrative offered here provides a framework for understanding one of the world's longest-enduring and most influential institutions.

This is *a* history of the popes: it cannot claim to be *the* history of the popes. No one-volume survey of an institution so ancient and so embedded in human history and culture can be anything

more than a sketch, just as no historian can claim equal competence and grip across a 2,000-year sketch. There is no single storyline, for history does not evolve in lines, and the papacy has been at the centre of too many different human stories and enterprises for it to have a single story of its own. Themes do of course recur. In writing the book I have been struck by the extent to which the mere existence of the papacy, and even its most self-aggrandising claims, have again and again helped ensure that the local churches of Christendom retained something of a universal Christian vision, that they did not entirely collapse back into the narrowness of religious nationalism, or become entirely subordinated to the will of powerful secular rulers. From Barbarian Italy or Carolingian Europe, to the Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of the Dictators, the papacy has helped keep alive a vision of human value which transcended the atavisms of history and the rule of mere force, and has borne witness to the objectivity of truths beyond the shifts of intellectual fashion. For all its sins, and despite its recurring commitment to the repression of 'error', the papacy does seem to me to have been on balance a force for human freedom, and largeness of spirit.

I have tried to ensure that the narrative offered here is reasonably comprehensive, and that it accurately reflects the current state of knowledge of the issues and events it covers. Inevitably, however, the attempt to compress so much into so small a space has involved drastic and painful decisions about what to omit, as well as what to include: I do not expect my judgement about what is central and what marginal to be agreed with by everyone.

Nor is every stretch of papal history equally easy going. Some readers may be daunted by the theological complexities and the historical unfamiliarity of some of the material covered in Chapter Two, which deals with the popes of the so-called 'Dark Ages'. I have dealt with them in some detail, however, because the fundamental orientation of the papacy towards the West and away from the East was decided in those centuries. Similarly, in the section on the Renaissance popes, readers may be surprised to find far more about the relatively obscure Nicholas V than about the far more notorious Alexander VI, the 'Borgia Pope'. This is not

because Nicholas was respectable and pious, and Alexander scandalous and debauched (though both these things are true), but because in my view the career of Nicholas V tells us far more about the nature and objectives of the Renaissance papacy than the more colourful and better-known escapades of Alexander. Readers must judge for themselves. And finally, it is of course too soon to form a mature assessment of the nature or importance of the pontificate of John Paul II, or indeed those of his immediate predecessors. More than any other part of the book, the final chapter is offered as a tentative interim report, and a personal perspective.

I have tried not to clog the text with too many technical aids. A light sprinkling of reference notes identifies extended or contentious quotations, while more detailed guidance to the literature on any given subject will be found in the chapter-by-chapter and topic-by-topic Bibliographical Essay at the end of the book. A Glossary provides brief explanations of technicalities; I have included also a numbered chronological list of popes and anti-popes.

Eamon Duffy

College of St Mary Magdalene, Cambridge

Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, 1997

CHAPTER ONE

'UPON THIS ROCK'

c. AD 33-461

I FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME

Round the dome of St Peter's basilica in Rome, in letters six feet high, are Christ's words to Peter from chapter sixteen of Matthew's Gospel: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum* (Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church and I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven). Set there to crown the grave of the Apostle, hidden far below the high altar, they are also designed to proclaim the authority of the man whom almost a billion Christians look to as the living heir of Peter. With these words, it is believed, Christ made Peter prince of the Apostles and head of the Church on earth: generation by generation, that role has been handed on to Peter's successors, the popes. As the Pope celebrates Mass at the high altar of St Peter's, the New Testament and the modern world, heaven and earth, touch hands.

The continuity between Pope and Apostle rests on traditions which stretch back almost to the very beginning of the written records of Christianity. It was already well established by the year AD 180, when the early Christian writer Irenaeus of Lyons invoked it in defence of orthodox Christianity. The Church of Rome was for him the 'great and illustrious Church' to which, 'on account of its commanding position, every church, that is the faithful everywhere, must resort'. Irenaeus thought that the Church had been 'founded and organised at Rome by the two glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul,' and that its faith had been reliably passed down to posterity by an unbroken succession of bishops, the first of them chosen and consecrated by the Apostles themselves. He named the bishops who had succeeded the Apostles, in the process providing us with the earliest surviving list of the popes - Linus, Anacletus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, and so on

down to Irenaeus' contemporary and friend Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome from AD 174 to 189.¹

All the essential claims of the modern papacy, it might seem, are contained in this Gospel saying about the Rock, and in Irenaeus' account of the apostolic pedigree of the early bishops of Rome. Yet matters are not so simple. The popes trace their commission from Christ through Peter, yet for Irenaeus the authority of the Church at Rome came from its foundation by two Apostles, not by one, Peter *and* Paul, not Peter alone. The tradition that Peter and Paul had been put to death at the hands of Nero in Rome about the year AD 64 was universally accepted in the second century, and by the end of that century pilgrims to Rome were being shown the 'trophies' of the Apostles, their tombs or cenotaphs, Peter's on the Vatican Hill, and Paul's on the Via Ostiensis, outside the walls on the road to the coast. Yet on all of this the New Testament is silent. Later legend would fill out the details of Peter's life and death in Rome – his struggles with the magician and father of heresy, Simon Magus, his miracles, his attempted escape from persecution in Rome, a flight from which he was turned back by a reproachful vision of Christ (the 'Quo Vadis' legend), and finally his crucifixion upside down in the Vatican Circus in the time of the Emperor Nero. These stories were to be accepted as sober history by some of the greatest minds of the early Church – Origen, Ambrose, Augustine. But they are pious romance, not history, and the fact is that we have no reliable accounts either of Peter's later life or of the manner or place of his death. Neither Peter nor Paul founded the Church at Rome, for there were Christians in the city before either of the Apostles set foot there. Nor can we assume, as Irenaeus did, that the Apostles established there a succession of bishops to carry on their work in the city, for all the indications are that there was no single bishop at Rome for almost a century after the deaths of the Apostles. In fact, wherever we turn, the solid outlines of the Petrine succession at Rome seem to blur and dissolve.

That the leadership of the Christian Church should be associated with Rome at all, and with the person of Peter, in itself needs some explanation. Christianity is an oriental religion, born in the religious and political turmoil of first-century Palestine. Its central figure was a travelling rabbi, whose disciples proclaimed him as the fulfilment of Jewish hopes, the Messiah. Executed by the Romans as a pretender to the throne of Israel, his death and resurrection were interpreted by ref-

erence to the stories and prophecies of the Jewish scriptures, and much of the language in which it was proclaimed derived from and spoke to Jewish hopes and longings. Jerusalem was the first centre of Christian preaching, and the Church at Jerusalem was led by members of the Messiah's own family, starting with James, the 'brother' of Jesus.

Within ten years of the Messiah's death, however, Christianity escaped from Palestine, along the seaways and roads of the *Pax Romana*, northwards to Antioch, on to Ephesus, Corinth and Thessalonica, and westwards to Cyprus, Crete and Rome. The man chiefly responsible was Paul of Tarsus, a sophisticated Greek-speaking rabbi who, unlike Jesus' twelve Apostles, was himself a Roman citizen. Against opposition from fellow Christians, including Jesus' first disciples, Paul insisted that the life and death of Jesus not only fulfilled the Jewish Law and the Prophets, but made sense of the world, and offered reconciliation and peace with God for the whole human race. In Jesus, Paul believed that God was offering humanity as a whole the life, guidance and transforming power which had once been the possession of Israel. His reshaping of the Christian message provided the vehicle by which an obscure heresy from one of the less appetising corners of the Roman Empire could enter the bloodstream of late antiquity. In due course, the whole world was changed.

Paul's letters to the churches he founded or visited make up the largest single component of the New Testament, and the story of his conversion and preaching dominates another major New Testament text, the Acts of the Apostles. He was, without any question or rival, the most important figure in the early history of the Church. But he was never its leader. From the start, the Church had no single centre: it was founded at Jerusalem, but Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, and already there were flourishing churches throughout the Empire at Antioch (where the disciples of Jesus were first called 'Christians') at Corinth, at Ephesus and at Rome itself. Paul's authority was immense, even beyond the churches he himself had founded. But he had never known Jesus, and did not feature in the foundation stories of Christianity. Though he claimed and was conceded the status of 'Apostle', he was not one of the 'Twelve', and had not walked the roads of Palestine with the Son of God. With Peter, however, it was a different matter.

The New Testament speaks with many voices. It is not a single book, but a library, built up over half a century or so from traditions of

the remembered sayings and actions of Jesus, early Christian sermons, hymns and liturgies, and the letters of the great founding teachers of the early Church. Despite that, the Gospels do offer a remarkably persuasive portrait of Peter the Apostle, a Galilean fisherman whose original name was Simon Bar Jonah. Warm-hearted, impulsive, generous, he was, with his brother Andrew, the first to respond to Jesus' call to abandon his old life and become 'fishers of men'. Ardent loyal and constantly protesting his devotion to Jesus, Peter is just as constantly portrayed in all the Gospels as prone to misunderstand Jesus' mission and intentions, angrily rejecting Christ's prophecy of his Passion, refusing to have his feet washed at the Last Supper, snatching up a sword in a misguided attempt to protect Jesus when the Temple police come to arrest him in Gethsemane. Peter acts first and thinks later. His denial of Christ in the courtyard of the High Priest – and his subsequent bitter repentance – are all of a piece with the other actions of the man as he emerges from the sources.

In all the Gospels he is the leader, or at any rate the spokesman, of the Apostles. Throughout the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke Peter's name occurs first in every list of the names of the Twelve. In each Gospel he is the first disciple to be called by Jesus. At Caesarea Philippi, at the turning-point of Jesus' ministry, it is Peter who recognises and confesses him as the Messiah, thereby explicitly expressing the Church's faith in its Lord for the first time. Peter is the first of the inner circle of disciples permitted by Jesus to witness his transfiguration on the mountain, and it is Peter who (foolishly) calls out to Christ in wonder and fear during it.

Of all the evangelists, it is Matthew who insists most on the centrality of Peter. In particular, Matthew elaborates the account of Peter's Confession of Faith at Caesarea Philippi. In his version, Jesus declares Peter's faith to be a direct revelation from God, and rewards it by renaming Simon 'Kephas', Peter, the Rock. He goes on to declare that 'upon this Rock I will build my Church, and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven', the text that would later come to be seen as the foundation charter of the papacy (Matthew 16:13–23). There is an equivalent scene in the final chapter of the Gospel of John. Christ, in an exchange designed to remind us of Peter's three-fold betrayal of Jesus during the Passion, asks Peter three times, 'Do you love me?', and in response to the Apostle's reiterated 'You know

everything, you know that I love you,' Jesus three times commands him, 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' For John, as for Matthew, Peter is the privileged recipient of a special commission, based on the confession of his faith and trust in Christ (John 21: 15-17). The special status of Peter in the Gospels, his commission to bind and loose, to feed the sheep of Christ, flow from his role as primary witness and guardian of the faith. In the subsequent reflection of the Church that complex of ideas would decisively shape Christian understanding of the nature and roots of true authority. The office of Peter, to proclaim the Church's faith, and to guard and nourish that faith, would lie at the root of the self-understanding of the Roman community and their bishop, in which it was believed the responsibilities and the privileges of the Apostle had been perpetuated.

Unsurprisingly, the relationship between Peter and Paul seems to have been uneasy, and Paul's attitude to Peter prickly and defensive. Paul himself provides the evidence for this unease in the earliest New Testament document to mention Peter, the Epistle to the Galatians. Anxious to vindicate his independent claims, he seems determined to concede as little as possible to the senior Apostle. Nevertheless, he recognises Peter's special place. It is to Peter, he tells us, that he went for information after his conversion, staying with him for fifteen days and seeing no other Apostle except James, the Lord's brother. He tells us also that Peter was charged with the mission outside Palestine to the Jews of the diaspora, while he, Paul, was sent to the Gentiles. In chapter two of the Epistle, Paul tells of his famous rebuke to Peter at Antioch, when he 'withstood Peter to his face', protesting against the fact that the leader of the Apostles had tried to conciliate hard-line Jewish Christians worried about breaches of the kosher laws, by abandoning his previous table-fellowship with Gentile converts. Paul tells this story to vindicate his own independent authority, and maybe his superior fidelity to Gospel teaching, over against Peter's notorious proneness to cave in to hostile criticism. The whole account, however, derives its rhetorical power from Paul's awareness of the shock-value for his readers of his temerity in 'withstanding [even] Peter to the face'. If Peter's authority were not recognised by Paul's readers as being especially great, Paul's rebuke would not have carried the *frisson* of daring which the passage clearly intends.

The picture of Peter which emerges from Paul's writings, as the most authoritative Apostle and head of the mission to the Jews of the

Mediterranean diaspora, is developed and elaborated in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles. Though other disciples play important roles, here in these early chapters of Luke's continuation of his Gospel Peter is the dominant figure. He leads the Pentecost proclamation of the resurrection, presides over the meetings of the young Church, works many miracles, is rescued from prison by an angel, and even pre-empt's Paul's later role as Apostle to the Gentiles by baptising the centurion Cornelius, having received a vision from heaven revealing that this was God's will. Mysteriously, however, Peter fades out of the Acts of the Apostles, and of the New Testament, after his escape from prison in chapter twelve. Luke tells us enigmatically only that Peter sent word of his escape to James, now the leader of the Jerusalem church, and then 'departed and went to another place'. Of his subsequent career the New Testament has nothing at all to say.

Neither Paul, Acts nor any of the Gospels tells us anything direct about Peter's death, and none of them even hints that the special role of Peter could be passed on to any single 'successor'. There is, therefore, nothing directly approaching a papal theory in the pages of the New Testament. Yet it is hard to account for the continuing interest in Peter in the Gospels and Acts unless Peter's authority continued to be meaningful after his death. Matthew, whose Gospel was probably written for the church at Antioch, clearly thought so. He follows his account of the giving of the keys of the kingdom to Peter, the commission to bind and loose, with an extended section of instructions about the ordering of Church life. In it the authority of the community is backed up with the promise that 'whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 18:18). Peter was widely believed to have founded the church at Antioch, and this unmistakable echo of Christ's words to him about binding and loosing in Matthew 16:18-19 seems to imply that, for Matthew, Peter's authority continued within his community.

The same sense that Peter's authority is perpetuated within the Christian community is in evidence in the New Testament writings attributed to Peter himself. The First Epistle of Peter claims to have been written by the Apostle, in a time of persecution, from 'Babylon', an early Christian code-name for Rome. Many scholars have detected an early Christian baptismal sermon buried under the letter format, however, and the elegant Greek style of the letter makes it very unlikely

indeed that it is Peter's unaided work. Possibly it represents Peter's teaching mediated through an educated amanuensis. Whether he wrote it or not, however, Peter is presented in the letter not merely as an apostle and witness of the saving work of Christ, but as a source for the authority and responsibilities of the elders or governing officials of the Church. He writes to 'the elders among you', uniquely for an apostle, as 'a fellow elder', thereby underlining the continuity between the authority of the Apostles and that of the elders who now lead the Church which the Apostles had founded. The other hearers of the letter are urged to submit to the elders, whose role is presented as that of shepherds, tending the flock of Christ, the Chief Shepherd, and leading by humble example. This imagery might of course be derived directly from any number of Old Testament passages in which God is depicted as the Shepherd of his people, but its similarity to the Johannine commission to Peter, 'feed my lambs, feed my sheep', is very striking, and can hardly be a coincidence.

A general belief in the precedence of Rome emerged in the Christian writings of the second century, and was accepted apparently without challenge. From its beginnings, this was rooted in the claim that both Peter and Paul had ended their lives in martyrdom at Rome under the Emperor Nero. On this matter, the New Testament is not much help. The last chapter of John contains a mysterious reference to Peter in old age having to 'stretch out his arms' and being led where he does not wish to go: the early Church believed this referred to his crucifixion (John 21:18). As we have seen, I Peter places Peter in Rome, and is very much a letter of comfort in the face of persecution. It is shot through with references to the 'fiery ordeal' and sufferings which its hearers are enduring, but it says nothing direct about Peter's own death. The Acts of the Apostles, similarly, ends with Paul in Rome, preaching 'quite openly and unhindered', with no hint of a coming martyrdom.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt the ancient tradition that both Peter and Paul were put to death in Rome during the Neronian persecution of the mid 60s AD. The universal acceptance of this belief among early Christian writers, and the failure of any other Church to lodge competing claims to the possession of the Apostles' witness or their relics, is strong evidence here, especially when taken together with the existence of a second century cult of both saints in Rome at their 'trophies' – shrines at their graves or cenotaphs over

the sites of their martyrdoms. These monuments were mentioned by a Roman cleric around the year AD 200, and their existence was dramatically confirmed by archaeology in this century. Building-work in the crypt of St Peter's in 1939 uncovered an ancient pagan cemetery on the slope of the Vatican Hill, on top of which Constantine had built the original Christian basilica in the fourth century. As excavation proceeded, it became clear that Constantine's workmen had gone to enormous trouble to orientate the entire basilica towards a particular site within the pagan cemetery, over which, long before the Constantinian era, had been placed a small niched shrine or trophy, datable to c. AD 165. This shrine, though damaged, was still in place, and fragments of bone were discovered within it, which Pope Paul VI declared in 1965 to be the relics of St Peter. Unfortunately, controversy surrounds the methods and some of the findings of the excavations, and we cannot be sure that the shrine does in fact mark the grave of Peter. The fragments of bone discovered there were at the foot of the wall and not in the central niche. We cannot be certain that they are his, especially since executed criminals were usually thrown into unmarked mass graves. It is possible that the excavation uncovered the site of Peter's execution, rather than his burial. Whether it is Peter's grave or his cenotaph, however, the mere existence of the shrine is overwhelming evidence of a very early Roman belief that Peter had died in or near the Vatican Circus.

The early written sources support this tradition. A letter written around AD 96 on behalf of the Roman church to the Christians at Corinth speaks of Peter and Paul as 'our Apostles', suffering witnesses of the truth who, 'having born testimony before the rulers', went to glory. Writing to the Roman Christians about the year 107, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, declared that 'I do not command you, as Peter and Paul did,' a clear indication that he believed that the Apostles had been leaders of the Roman church. Two generations further on, Irenaeus wrote that the Church had been 'founded and organised at Rome by the two glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul.'²

For all these reasons, most scholars accept the early Christian tradition that Peter and Paul died in Rome. Yet, though they lived, preached and died in Rome, they did not strictly 'found' the Church there. Paul's Epistle to the Romans was written before either he or Peter ever set foot in Rome, to a Christian community already in existence. First-century Rome had a large and thriving Jewish popu-

lation, perhaps as many as 50,000 strong, scattered throughout the city but especially concentrated in Trastevere, across the river from the city proper, and organised in over a dozen synagogues. The Roman Jews were an expansive and self confident group, eager to make converts, and they had strong links with Palestine and Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the first centre of the Christian mission, and so it is not surprising that Jews believing in Christ found their way to Rome by the early 40s. By AD 49 they had become a significant presence in the Roman synagogues, and their beliefs were causing trouble. According to the pagan historian Suetonius, the Emperor Claudius became alarmed by the constant disturbances among the Jews over 'Chrestus' (a common early form of the name Christ), and expelled them from the city in AD 49. This expulsion can hardly have included all 50,000 Jews, but Jewish Christians certainly were obliged to leave the city, for two of them surface in the pages of the New Testament. The Jewish Christian tent-maker Aquila and his wife Priska or Priscilla were among the victims of Claudius' purge. They moved to Corinth, where they befriended the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:2), accompanying him when he moved on to Ephesus. They eventually returned to Rome, however, where their house became the meeting place of a church (Romans 16:3-5).

Of a church, notice, not of *the* Church, for Christian organisation in Rome reflected that of the Jewish community out of which it had grown. The Roman synagogues, unlike their counterparts in Antioch, had no central organisation. Each one conducted its own worship, appointed its own leaders and cared for its own members. In the same way, the ordering of the early Christian community in Rome seems to have reflected the organisation of the synagogues which had originally sheltered it, and to have consisted of a constellation of independent churches, meeting in the houses of the wealthy members of the community. Each of these house churches had its own leaders, the elders or 'presbyters'. They were mostly made up of immigrants, with a high proportion of slaves or freedmen among them – the name of Pope Eleutherius means 'freedman'.

To begin with, indeed, there was no 'pope', no bishop as such, for the church in Rome was slow to develop the office of chief presbyter, or bishop. By the end of the first century the loose pattern of Christian authority of the first generation of believers was giving way in many places to the more organised rule of a single bishop for

each city, supported by a college of elders. This development was at least in part a response to the wildfire spread of false teaching – heresy. As conflicting teachers arose, each claiming to speak for ‘true’ Christianity, a tighter and more hierarchic structure developed, and came to seem essential to the preservation of unity and truth. The succession of a single line of bishops, handing on the teaching of the Apostles like a baton in a relay race, provided a pedigree for authentic Christian truth, and a concrete focus for unity.

A key figure in this development was Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop from Asia Minor arrested and brought to Rome to be executed around the year 107. *En route* he wrote a series of letters to other churches, largely consisting of appeals to them to unite round their bishops. His letter to the Roman church, however, says nothing whatever about bishops, a strong indication that the office had not yet emerged at Rome. Paradoxically, this impression is borne out by a document which has sometimes been thought of as the first papal encyclical. Ten years or so before Ignatius’ arrival in Rome, the Roman church wrote to the church at Corinth, in an attempt to quieten disputes and disorders which had broken out there. The letter is unsigned, but has always been attributed to the Roman presbyter Clement, generally counted in the ancient lists as the third Pope after St Peter. Legends would later accumulate round his name, and he was to be venerated as a martyr, exiled to the Crimea and killed by being tied to an anchor and dropped into the sea. In fact, however, Clement made no claim to write as bishop. His letter was sent in the name of the whole Roman community, he never identifies himself or writes in his own person, and we know nothing at all about him. The letter itself makes no distinction between presbyters and bishops, about which it always speaks in the plural, suggesting that at Corinth as at Rome the church at this time was organised under a group of bishops or presbyters, rather than a single ruling bishop.

A generation later, this was still so in Rome. The visionary treatise *The Shepherd of Hermas*, written in Rome early in the second century, speaks always collectively of the ‘rulers of the Church’, or the ‘elders that preside over the Church’, and once again the author makes no attempt to distinguish between bishops and elders. Clement is indeed mentioned (if Hermas’ Clement is the same man as the author of the letter written at least a generation before, which we cannot assume) but not as presiding bishop. Instead, we are told that he was the elder responsible for writing

'to the foreign cities' – in effect the corresponding secretary of the Roman church.

Everything we know about the church in Rome during its first hundred years confirms this general picture. The Christians of the city were thought of by themselves and others as a single church, as Paul's letter to the Romans make clear. The social reality behind this single identity, however, was not one congregation, but a loose constellation of churches based in private houses or, as time went on and the community grew, meeting in rented halls in markets and public baths. It was without any single dominant ruling officer, its elders or leaders sharing responsibility, but distributing tasks, like that of foreign correspondent. By the eve of the conversion of Constantine, there were more than two dozen of these religious community-centres or *tituli*.

Rome was the hub of empire, the natural centre for anyone with a message to spread – which was of course why the Apostles Peter and Paul had made their way there in the first place. Early Christianity jostled for space cheek by jowl with the other blossoming new religions of empire, a fact graphically illustrated by the presence of Mithraic shrines under the ancient churches of San Clemente and Santa Prisca (the reputed site of the house of Paul's friends Aquila and Priscilla). Late into the second century the language of the Christian community in Rome was not Latin but Greek, the real *lingua franca* of an empire that increasingly looked east rather than west. The Christian congregations in Rome themselves reflected the cosmopolitan mix of the capital city, and many had strong ethnic and cultural links back to the regions from which their members had migrated. As a result, the life of the Roman Church was a microcosm of the cultural, doctrinal and ritual diversity of Christianity throughout the empire. By the early second century, for example, the churches in Asia Minor had begun to keep the date of the Jewish Passover, fourteenth Nisan, as a celebration of Easter, whether or not it fell on a Sunday. Those Christian congregations in Rome who came from Asia Minor naturally maintained this regional custom, and this marked them off from 'native' congregations, who celebrated Easter every Sunday, and had not yet evolved a separate annual commemoration. Despite these differences, the governing elders of the 'native' Roman congregations maintained friendly relations with these foreign communities, sending them portions of the consecrated bread from their own celebrations of the eucharist as a sign of their fundamental unity.

This variety in the customs of Roman Christians was not confined to their calendar. Christianity all over the Roman world in the first and second centuries was in a state of violent creative ferment. What would come to be seen as mainstream orthodoxy coexisted alongside versions of the Gospel which would soon come to seem outrageously deviant, 'heretical'. But the *outré* and the orthodox were not always easy to distinguish at first sight, and the early Christian community in Rome had more than its fair share of competing versions of the Gospel. For Rome was a magnet, attracting to itself a stream of provincial elders, scholars and private Christians, eager to see and learn from so ancient a church, above all eager to visit the resting place of the two greatest Apostles.

Among them came a succession of teachers and thinkers determined to make their mark in the greatest city of the empire. They included the arch-heretic Marcion, who arrived in the city in AD 140. Marcion denied that matter could be redeemed, rejected the whole of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament scriptures, and taught a radical opposition between the angry Creator God of the Old Testament and the loving God and Father of Jesus Christ. He was a wealthy shipowner from the Black Sea, and by way of credentials presented the Roman church with a handsome sum of money (22,000 sesterces, roughly the annual income of a noble citizen). For a largely lower-class urban organisation with its own overstretched social welfare system for widows, orphans and the elderly, and with an expanding aid-programme to needy churches elsewhere in the empire, wealth on this scale was an eloquent testimonial. Marcion was able to function as an accepted Christian teacher in Rome for several years before his expulsion from communion by the elders of Rome in AD 144: his money was returned.

But Marcion was merely the most influential of a succession of such deviant teachers round the mid century – men like Tatian, the Syrian philosopher who came to reject the whole of Hellenic civilisation as incompatible with the Gospel, or Valentinus, who taught a bizarre *gnostic* system (from the Greek word for *knowledge*) in which thirty 'aeons' or spiritual powers emanate from the Supreme God, in male and female pairs, Christ and the Holy Spirit forming one such pair. All these men to begin with at least operated within the loose framework of the Roman church, and Valentinus for a time even entertained hopes of election as bishop or ruling elder.

II THE BISHOPS OF ROME

It was against this mid-century background of ritual and doctrinal confusion that the 'monarchic episcopate', the rule of the church by a single bishop, was accepted in Rome. Throughout the Mediterranean world the rule of bishops came to be seen as a crucial defence against heresy. As Irenaeus wrote in his *Treatise against the Heresies*, 'It is within the power of anyone who cares, to find the truth and know the tradition of the Apostles . . . we are able to name those who were appointed bishops by the Apostles in the churches and their successors down to our own times.'³ There is no sure way to settle on a date by which the office of ruling bishop had emerged in Rome, and so to name the first Pope, but the process was certainly complete by the time of Anicetus in the mid-150s, when Polycarp, the aged Bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome, and he and Anicetus debated amicably the question of the date of Easter. Polycarp, then in his eighties, had known John, the 'beloved disciple,' in his old age. He therefore strongly urged direct apostolic authority for the practice of the churches from Asia Minor (and their satellite ethnic congregations in Rome itself) of keeping Easter at Passover. Anicetus contented himself more modestly with defending the practice of 'the presbyters who had preceded him' in having no separate Easter festival.

By now the pressure of heresy and the need for a tighter organisation was forcing the Christian movement as a whole to sharpen and refine its self-understanding, to establish its boundaries and clarify its fundamental beliefs. As part of that process of development and self-analysis, the Roman church began to reflect more self-consciously on its apostolic pedigree. It was in the time of Anicetus that the earliest attempts were made to compile a succession-list of the Roman bishops, drawing on the remembered names of leading presbyters like Clement. It was probably under Anicetus, too, that the shrine-monuments to Peter and Paul were first constructed at the Vatican and the Via Ostiensis. This architectural embodiment of the church's claims to continuity with the Apostles would continue into the next century, and from at least AD 230 onwards successive bishops were buried in a single 'crypt of the popes' in the Catacomb of San Callisto, the burial-ground on the Appian Way which the Church had acquired some time in the late second century.

Such monuments were the architectural equivalent of the succes-

sion-lists, expressions of the increasingly explicit sense of continuity between the contemporary Roman church and the Apostles. The earliest list to survive for Rome is the one supplied by Irenaeus, and in it this symbolic function is very clearly at work. Irenaeus underlines the parallels between Apostles and bishops by naming precisely twelve bishops of Rome between Peter and the current incumbent, Eleutherius. The sixth of these bishops is named Sixtus. It all seems suspiciously tidy.

The list is certainly a good deal tidier than the actual transition to rule by a single bishop can have been. The bishops laboured steadily to extend their authority and to regulate the life of the church in the city – Pope Fabian's division of the city during the 240s into seven regions, each under the supervision of a deacon, looks like part of this long-term effort at better order. But well into the third century Christianity in Rome would remain turbulent, diverse, prone to split. We know of several such dissident groups, such as the Theodotians, active at the end of the second century in the time of bishops Victor and Zephyrinus. Financed by a wealthy Byzantine leather-seller and a banker (both called Theodotus), these 'Theodotians' taught that Jesus was merely a very good man who had been adopted by God at his baptism and then raised to divinity at his resurrection. They failed to secure official acceptance of their views, but their economic clout meant that they were able to form a separate church and to pay the salary of their own rival bishop. In the next century, other dissidents like Hippolytus or Novatian, more orthodox than Marcion or Valentinus but all the harder to deal with on that account, would also find backers for a challenge to the authority of the official bishop of Rome.

From the start, then, the Roman bishops had to face difficult problems of unity and jurisdiction. The consequences of that preoccupation for the future were already becoming clear in the time of the last Bishop of the second century, Victor (189–98). Victor was the first Latin leader of the Christians of Rome, a sign that the church was spreading out of the immigrant milieu in which it had first taken root. He brought a Latin rigour to his office. He was a disciplinarian, determined to kick the dissident elements in the Roman church into line, and he adopted stern measures. It was Victor who excommunicated the Theodotians, and he also deposed a number of clergy who had been spreading gnostic teaching within the 'mainstream' communities

in the city. But his most momentous exercise of authority was provoked by the perennial problem of the date for the celebration of Easter.

Our information about this incident comes from the extended account in Eusebius' *Church History*, written more than a century after the event. As Eusebius tells it, Victor picked a fight with all the churches outside Rome which were celebrating Easter at Passover, fourteenth Nisan (the so called Quartodecimans) instead of on the Sunday after Passover, which by now had been adopted in Rome and the West more generally. According to Eusebius, this developed into a full-scale confrontation between Victor and the churches of Asia Minor, whose position was vigorously defended by Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus. After a series of regional synods all over the Mediterranean world had been held to debate the issue, Victor solemnly excommunicated all the Quartodeciman churches. He was respectfully rebuked by Irenaeus, who reminded him of the more tolerant attitude of earlier Roman presbyters, who, despite their disagreement, used to 'send the eucharist' to the churches which kept the Quartodeciman date for Easter.

This is a baffling incident, not least because any fragments of eucharistic bread sent on the long sea journey to the churches of Asia Minor would have gone mouldy or hard long before they reached their destination. It has become the focus for centuries of debate about papal authority, for both the friends and the enemies of the papacy have seen in Victor's high-handed actions an assertion of Roman jurisdiction over the whole of Christendom, as the Pope tried to make Roman custom the norm for all the churches. In fact, it is far more likely that Eusebius misunderstood his source materials. He wrote in the fourth century, at a time when his hero, the first Christian Emperor Constantine, was trying to impose uniformity on the Church on this very issue of Easter. Eusebius tells the story of the Quartodeciman controversy as a sort of rehearsal for Constantine's concerns. The tell-tale detail of the sending of the morsels of eucharistic bread, however, suggests that the dispute actually arose in the first instance within the city of Rome, and should be seen as primarily an internal affair. Victor was not brawling randomly around the Mediterranean spoiling for a fight, but trying to impose uniformity of practice on all the churches within his own city, as part of a more general quest for internal unity and order. The churches of proconsular Asia may

well have protested at this condemnation of a custom which they believed they had derived from the Apostle John, but Victor's excommunication was aimed at Asian congregations in Rome, not fired broadside at churches over which he had no direct jurisdiction.⁴

Bishop Victor, then, was probably not taking the first steps towards universal papal jurisdiction. All the same, some notion of the special authority of the Roman church was already widespread. At the beginning of the second century, Ignatius wrote extravagantly about the Roman church as 'she who is pre-eminent in the territory of the Romans . . . foremost in love . . . purified from every alien and discolouring stain'. Ignatius admonished other churches, but for the church at Rome he had only praise. As the century advanced, that note of deference was echoed by others. We have already met in Irenaeus the claim that 'it is necessary that every Church, that is, the faithful everywhere, should resort to this Church [of Rome], on account of its pre-eminent authority, in which the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously . . .'⁵

This 'pre-eminent authority' sprang, above everything else, from the fact that Rome preserved the witness of not one but both of the greatest Apostles; as Irenaeus' contemporary, the African theologian Tertullian, wrote, Rome was the 'happy Church . . . on which the Apostles poured forth all their teaching, together with their blood'. It was a 'happiness' that Roman Christians themselves were increasingly proud of, and devotion to Peter and Paul deepened in the third century. A new cult centre based at what is now the church of San Sebastiano emerged in the mid century, and hundreds of surviving graffiti there, invoking Rome's two great patron saints, convey the fervour of Roman popular devotion to them: 'Paul and Peter, pray for Victor,' 'Paul, Peter, pray for Eratus,' 'Peter and Paul, protect your servants! Holy souls, protect the reader.' From the year 258 a joint feast of Peter and Paul was celebrated at Rome on 29 June, a sign of the centrality of the two Apostles in the Roman church's self-awareness.⁶

To this apostolic prestige was added the fact that the church at Rome sat at the hub of empire. This was not necessarily a short-cut to stardom in early Christian eyes, for there was a strong anti-Roman tradition in the early Church. Rome was the harlot city soaked in the blood of the saints, the centre from which spread out wave after wave of persecution. The Book of Revelations' gloating vision of the coming ruin of Rome, 'Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great' (Revela-

tions 14:8), remained a persistent strand so long as the empire continued to persecute the church, and survived even into the Middle Ages. But by the same token, the church at Rome bore the brunt of persecution, as the deaths of Peter and Paul under Nero showed, and its witness was all the more glorious for being in the eye of empire. The conviction that the Apostles had 'founded' the church at Rome sprang above all from the fact that the shedding of their blood there was the ultimate witness, *marturion*, to the truth of their Gospel.

But Christianity's rapid growth in the capital had more mundane consequences. The church in Rome, even under persecution, was wealthy. Because of the cosmopolitan nature of the Christian community there, the Roman church was especially aware of the ecumenical character of the faith, its spread through the whole Roman world. That awareness lay behind the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians in AD 96, which was a demonstration of the Roman church's sense of responsibility for other churches. The Roman community continued to show that broad concern in practical ways, by sending money as well as advice and reproof to churches in need. In the mid second century, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, wrote a letter of grateful acknowledgement for financial aid sent by Pope Soter. He went on to say that Soter's accompanying letter was being read out during services in Corinth, as the Epistle of Clement still was from time to time.⁷ As aristocratic converts entered the Church, moreover, the Bishop of Rome, even in the age of persecution, was an increasingly influential person. Pope Victor was able to use the fact that the Emperor Commodus' mistress, Marcia, was a Christian, to get Christian prisoners released from the penal colony of the Sardinian mines. The habit of appealing to the Bishop of Rome in doctrinal disputes, which in later controversies would become a crucial lifeline for embattled supporters of orthodoxy, sprang both from the sense of the dignity of a community which had inherited not only the teaching but the eloquent blood of the two Apostles, and, more mundanely, from the fact that the Pope was an important grandee, a patron.

But the prestige of the church of Rome was not at this stage primarily a matter of the bishop's status or authority. It was the church of Rome as a whole which basked in the glory of the Apostles and commanded the respect of other second- and third-century Christian communities. About the year AD 200 the allegorical epitaph of Abercius, Bishop of Heropolis in Asia Minor, recorded that he had

gone to Rome at Christ's command, 'to behold an empire and to see a queen in a golden robe and golden shoes; I saw there a people with a shining seal.'⁸ The honourable status of the Roman church, the 'people with a shining seal', persisted even when there was no bishop in charge. In the long vacancy in the bishopric after the death of Pope Fabian in the Decian persecution (AD 250-1), the presbyters and deacons of Rome went on exercising the oversight and care for other churches which had become characteristic of their church, sending four letters of advice and encouragement to the churches of North Africa, letters which were copied, circulated and read aloud during worship just as the letters of Clement and Soter had been. The letters breathe the distinctive sense of dignity and responsibility which was becoming the mark of the Roman church: 'The brethren who are in chains greet you, as do the priests and the whole Church which also with deepest concern keeps watch over all who call on the name of the Lord'.⁹

By the beginning of the third century, then, the church at Rome was an acknowledged point of reference for Christians throughout the Mediterranean world, and might even function as a court of appeal. When under attack for teaching heresy, the great Alexandrian theologian Origen would send letters appealing for support not only to the bishops of his own region, but to faraway Bishop Fabian at Rome, where he himself as a young man had made a pilgrimage. For the earliest Christians apostolic authority was no antiquarian curiosity, a mere fact about the origins of a particular community. The Apostles were living presences, precious guarantors of truth. The apostolic churches possessed more than a pedigree, they spoke with the voices of their founders, and provided living access to their teaching. And in Rome, uniquely, the authority of two Apostles converged. The charismatic voice of Paul, bearer of a radical authority rooted not in institution and organisation but in the uncompromising clarity of a Gospel received direct from God, joined with the authority of Peter, symbol of the Church's jurisdiction in both heaven and earth, the one to whom the commission to bind and to feed had been given by Christ himself.

Yet we should also bear in mind that all these signs of the special status of the church and Bishop of Rome were a matter of degree, not of kind. No other community could claim succession to two Apostles, but apostolic authority and the responsibilities and status it

brought could be matched elsewhere. Other bishops and other churches sent gifts abroad, wrote letters of advice, rebuke or encouragement, and broke off communion with churches which were believed to have fallen into grave error. Irenaeus and Tertullian, in praising the glory of the Roman church, were praising the most notable example of a wider phenomenon. Come, urged Tertullian, 'recall the various apostolic churches . . . Achaia is very near you, where you have Corinth. If you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi, if you can travel into Asia, you have Ephesus. But if you are near Italy, you have Rome, whence our authority [in Africa] is derived close at hand.'¹⁰

Africa, in the person of its greatest theologian before Augustine, acknowledged the weight of Rome's authority. Yet even Africa might qualify and withdraw that allegiance. One of the most divisive issues in the life of the Church of the third century was the question of the treatment of those who lapsed from the faith during periods of persecution. Christianity had prospered within the empire, and by the early third century was a force to be reckoned with. In Rome, it was already a substantial property-owner, and by AD 251 the church employed forty-six elders, seven deacons, seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes and fifty-two lesser clerics, readers and door-keepers: it had over 1,500 widows and other needy people receiving poor-relief. Its total membership in the city may have been as many as 50,000.

In an empire which was now threatened by internal breakdown and by the external pressure of the Gothic hordes, the visibility and expansion of Christianity provided an ideal scapegoat. Pope Callistus (c. 217-22) was murdered in Trastevere by a lynch-mob who were probably angered by recent Christian expansion in the crowded district. Rome celebrated a thousand years of prosperity under its ancestral gods in 247. The ills of the empire were now laid at the door of the growing numbers of those who refused to honour those gods. Riots against Christians became commonplace, and in 250 the Emperor Decius launched an official pogrom against the Church. Leading Christians were rounded up, and forced to offer sacrifice, in return for which they were given a certificate of compliance. Bishops and other leaders were specially targeted, and many of these behaved with great courage. Pope Fabian (236-50) was among the first to be arrested, and died from brutal treatment in prison. But there was also mass surrender – the Church's very success in recruiting huge numbers of the superfi-

cially committed backfired, and all over the empire Christians queued up to comply with the law. The overworked officials in charge of the sacrifices had to turn crowds away, telling them to come another day.

Christianity laid immense weight on the value of suffering for the faith. The word martyr means 'witness', and the martyr's death was the ultimate witness to the truth. By contrast, those who broke under persecution, offering the pinch of incense or the libation to the gods which the Roman state made the test of good citizenship, or those who simply surrendered the holy books or vessels of the Church – these people were considered apostates who had sacrificed their salvation. Opinion was bitterly divided about their ultimate fate and, more pressingly, about whether they could ever again be restored to membership of the Church. In Africa, the Christian community would eventually split down the middle on the issue. A hard-line party emerged in the fourth century, called Donatists after one of their leaders. They believed that any contact with lapsed clergy, including those *traditores* or traitors who without offering pagan sacrifice had nevertheless handed over books or Church goods, contaminated a church and all its members, and invalidated the sacraments which were administered in it. The Donatists formed a separatist pure Church, with their own elders and bishops.

The Roman church had its own bitter experience of persecution, and of both heroism and failure under persecution. Both experiences were manifest in its bishops. To the heroism of Pope Fabian was added that of Pope Sixtus II (257–8), arrested in 258 while presiding over worship in one of the funerary chapels in the catacombs. To avoid reprisals against his congregation he surrendered himself to the officers in charge of the raid, and was summarily beheaded with his deacons. By contrast, in the later persecution under Diocletian in 303, Pope Marcellinus (296–304?) would cave in to pressure. He surrendered copies of the scriptures and offered sacrifice to the gods. He died a year later in disgrace, and the Roman church set about forgetting him.

In Rome as in Africa, hard- and soft-line responses to the problem of the lapsed developed. In the wake of Pope Fabian's death, the church in Rome delayed electing another bishop till persecution eased. In the interim, the brilliant presbyter Novatian played a leading role in running the church, and all the indications are that he expected to become bishop in due course. Instead, the majority of the clergy and their lay supporters elected a far less able man, Cor-

nelius (251-3). Novatian refused to accept the election, and his supporters had him consecrated by three bishops from the south Italian countryside: he set up as a rival to Cornelius. The key to this fiasco almost certainly lay in the two men's attitudes to the lapsed. Novatian was a hard-liner, believing that those who had denied the faith could never again be received into the Church, while Cornelius favoured the restoration of the repentant after they had done appropriate penance. It seems likely that the less able man was elected to implement this more realistic and humane pastoral policy.

Cornelius was a mild and unambitious man, who basked in the support of his fellow bishops – he gathered sixty of them at Rome to back his claims over those of Novatian, and collected letters of communion from those further afield. In particular, he won the approval of Cyprian of Carthage, the leading African Bishop. Cyprian had a very exalted view of the episcopal office, and emphasised the dignity of every bishop in his own church. He accepted the special standing of the see of Rome, 'the chair of Peter, the primordial [or "principal"] church, the very source of episcopal unity'. But Cyprian did not mean by this that other bishops were subordinate to the Pope. He himself, like many other bishops in the early Church, used the title 'Pope', which only came to be confined to the Bishop of Rome from the sixth century. Christ had indeed founded the Church on Peter, but all the Apostles and all bishops shared fully in the one indivisible apostolic power. There were, therefore, limits to Cyprian's deference to Rome, and that deference was to be stretched to its limits within a couple of years, with the election as pope of an aristocratic Roman, Stephen.

Stephen (254-7) was a member of the Julian family, and he was a bishop in the mould of Pope Victor, not Pope Cornelius. He was imperious, impatient, high-handed. He quickly got himself into Cyprian's bad books by rashly readmitting, not merely to communion but to office, a Spanish bishop who had been deposed for lapsing into paganism during the Decian persecution. Further provocation came when Stephen failed to take action against a Novatianist Bishop of Arles who was refusing the sacraments to the repentant lapsed even on their deathbeds. The Bishop of Lyons reported the matter to Cyprian – an interesting comment in itself on their understanding of shared episcopal responsibility for all the churches, as opposed to an exclusively papal role. Cyprian had then vainly pleaded with Stephen to excommunicate the Bishop of Arles. The

request was of course also a tacit acknowledgement of Rome's superior jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the Pope evidently resented Cyprian's interference. The final breach came when Stephen intervened directly in Africa, and challenged Cyprian's practice about the rebaptism of heretics. Though Cyprian was a moderate in his willingness to receive back the repentant lapsed, he refused to recognise any sacraments administered in the hard-line breakaway churches of the Novatianists, who had established themselves in Africa. Converts baptised by Novatianist clergy were now seeking admission to Catholic communion: they were rebaptised as if they were pagans.

Behind Cyprian's practice here was a stern doctrine which denied that any grace could flow to human beings outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church. Rome took the milder view, which would eventually become the accepted teaching, that every baptism was valid provided it was duly performed in the name of the Trinity, whatever the status of the minister, and whether or not he was in heresy or schism. Stephen therefore ordered that returning schismatics should not be rebaptised, but simply admitted again to the Church by the laying on of hands.

Cyprian, however, refused to accept this ruling, and organised two synods of African bishops to condemn it. The Pope was not mentioned, but it was obvious who was the target of Cyprian's remarks in his preamble that 'none of us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops or exercises the powers of a tyrant to force his colleagues into obedience'.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the clergy he sent to Rome to inform the Pope of these moves were turned away unheard. Enraged by the African bishops' temerity, Stephen wrote to the churches in Asia Minor who followed Cyprian's tougher line on rebaptism of heretics, threatening to cut off communion with them, though he died before he could carry out this threat.

The incident had a broader significance. Though his letter does not survive, we know from Cyprian's comment on it that Stephen had backed up his condemnation of the African churches with an appeal to Matthew 16: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.' During Pope Cornelius' lifetime, Cyprian had written a treatise on the *Unity of the Catholic Church*, in which he had bolstered his own authority and that of the Pope against the Novatianist schism by stressing the unique role of the See of Peter as the foundation of unity. He now rewrote the treatise, editing out these

passages and denying that the Bishop of Rome had any special claim on Christ's promise to Peter. It was indeed the foundation of the See of Rome – but it was also the charter for every other bishop, all of whom shared in the power of the keys given to Peter. For Cyprian, therefore, it was folly for Stephen to 'brag so loudly about the seat of his episcopate and to insist that he holds his succession from Peter'.¹² Significantly, however, even at the height of his confrontation with Stephen, Cyprian avoided open attacks on the authority of Rome, and he suppressed the details of the Pope's maltreatment of his envoys. Rome remained a fundamental symbol of the unity of the episcopate, with whom an absolute breach was unthinkable.

The death of Stephen in 257, and the heroic martyrdom in the following year of his successor the Greek Pope Sixtus, followed six weeks later by Cyprian's own execution, defused this potentially disastrous confrontation – Sixtus, Cornelius and Cyprian would all in due course be commemorated together in the most solemn prayer of the Roman Church, the Canon of the Mass. But in many ways this was the first major crisis of the papacy, and it was charged with significance for the future. Stephen's invocation of Matthew 16 is the first known claim by a pope to an authority derived exclusively from Peter, and it is the first certain attempt by a pope to exert a power over other bishops which was qualitatively different from, and qualitatively superior to, anything they possessed. Till the reign of Stephen, the Roman church's primacy had been gladly conceded, rooted in esteem for a church blessed by the teaching and the martyrdom of the two great Apostles to the Jews and to the Gentiles, and augmented by the generosity and pastoral care for other Christian communities which had marked the Roman church in its first two centuries. With the confrontation between Stephen and Cyprian, the divisive potential of papal claims became clear.

III THE AGE OF CONSTANTINE

The Roman empire in the third century was divided by civil war, and swept by plague and disease. It was ruled by a bewildering succession of emperors (twenty-five in forty-seven years, only one of whom died in his bed) thrown up by an army increasingly staffed by terrifying foreigners. In the ferment of oriental religions and new philosophies, old certainties were dissolving: it was for many an age of acute anxiety. For the Church, by contrast and partly in conse-

quence, it was an age of growth and consolidation. In the melting-pot of empire, Christianity alone seemed to offer a single overarching intellectual and moral frame of reference, a simple code conveyed in vivid stories by which men and women could live. The parables of Jesus struck home where the arguments of the philosophers faltered. The Church's episcopal framework provided a remarkable network crossing the whole civilised world and a little beyond, and its charitable activities offered a life-line to the (Christian) poor in a state which no longer had the resources or the will to help them. In the Decian persecution, the resolution of the martyrs had offered an example of certainty and courage in sharp contrast to the weary routine which characterised much official pagan religion. In the freedom from persecution which descended on the Church for the last forty years of the century, Christianity became a dominating presence in many of the cities of the empire, especially in the East. The steps of the Emperor Diocletian's favourite palace at Nicomedia commanded a fine view of the Christians' new basilica in the town.

It was Diocletian, tough Dalmatian career-soldier and great reforming emperor, who launched the last great Roman persecution of the Church. Diocletian had been content to tolerate Christianity for twenty years (his wife and daughter were probably Christians) but his Caesar (military second-in command), Galerius, was a fanatical pagan, and Christianity was clearly an obstacle to Diocletian's vision of a reformed empire based on a return to traditional (that is pagan) values. In 298, pagan priests conducting the auguries at Antioch complained that the presence of Christian officials was sabotaging the ceremonies (the Christians had defended themselves from demons during the ceremony by making the sign of the cross). This was enough to trigger a confrontation which had been long brewing, and the persecution commenced. The aim at first was to oust Christians from the civil service and army, to close down and destroy churches, and to compromise the clergy. Under Galerius' influence, the persecution escalated and became a bloodbath. The toll was worst in the East and in North Africa, with most of the West relatively unscathed, but Rome was scandalised by the cowardly surrender of Pope Marcellinus, and the legacy of the persecution was to be a permanent schism in the African church over the question of communion with the lapsed. Christianity, however, was now too entrenched in the empire to be stamped out in this way. Galerius,

who had succeeded Diocletian on the latter's retirement in 305, died in 311. He detested Christianity, but he was forced to issue an edict of toleration for Christians on his deathbed. And in the following year the fortunes of the Church changed irrevocably with the accession of Constantine as emperor.

Constantine had been declared emperor by the troops at York in 306 on the death of his father, Constantius, commander-in-chief of the imperial armies in the West. Like his father, he had originally worshipped Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun, but his mother Helena was a Christian, and his sister Anastasia's name means 'Resurrection'. Constantine himself now moved towards Christianity. He achieved mastery of Rome in October 312, defeating the rival Emperor Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome. Constantine attributed this improbable victory to divine intervention, but just which divinity he credited is a matter of debate. Years later he told the historian Eusebius that while still in Gaul he had prayed before battle to Sol Invictus for help. Next day he had seen in the sky a cross of light, and the words 'In this [sign] conquer.' For his struggle with Maxentius Constantine had banners made bearing this 'labarum', the cross being formed by the Greek monogram for Christ, the Chi Ro: the emblem was painted on the shields of his soldiers.

Constantine was not a sophisticated man, and this identification of the Unconquered Sun with Christ seems to have presented him with no problems. By 312, however, Constantine was certainly widely believed to be a Christian. When the Arch of Constantine was erected to commemorate his victory over Maxentius the inscription prudently omitted any mention of the 'Immortal Gods', vaguely attributing his triumph to the 'prompting of the Divinity'. His conversion to Christianity was probably gradual. The Chi Ro symbol would not appear on his coins until 315, and for five years after his accession Constantine continued to issue coins depicting himself as a devotee of the Unconquered Sun, or carrying images of the pagan gods.

From the moment of his accession, however, the fortunes of Christianity throughout the empire changed for ever. Whatever the state of his private conscience, Constantine had identified the Church not as the principle obstacle to unity and reform, but as its best hope. Christianity would provide imperial Rome with the common set of values and the single cult which it so badly lacked. From a persecuted sect, Christianity became the most favoured religion. A stream of edicts

granted religious freedom 'to Christians and all others' (the order of the words here was crucial). Confiscated Church property was returned (without compensation to the purchasers), Christian clergy were exempted from the responsibilities of public office, and public funds were allocated for the work of the Church.

For the church in Rome, it was a bonanza beyond their wildest imaginings. The meagre early entries of the official papal chronicle, the *Liber Pontificalis*, based on scraps of half-remembered information or simply invented, suddenly explode into lavish detail in the entry for Pope Sylvester (314–35). Page after page lovingly enumerates Constantine's benefactions, above all, the great basilican churches he would build in and around the city: a cathedral, baptistry and residence for the Pope at the Lateran, raised partly in the palace of his wife Fausta and partly on the ruins of the barracks of the imperial horseguards, who, unluckily for them, had fought for Maxentius; the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in the old Sessorian Palace; the great cemetery churches on the Vatican over the shrine of Peter, and at the third-century site of the joint cult of Peter and Paul, San Sebastiano. But the buildings were only the tip of the iceberg. To maintain them, massive grants of land and property were made – estates in Numidia, Egypt, in the Adriatic islands, on Gozo, farms in Tyre, Tarsus, Antioch, gardens, houses, bakeries, and baths in Rome itself. And then there was the avalanche of precious metals: for the Lateran, seven silver altars, weighing 200 pounds apiece, over a hundred silver chalices, a life-sized silver statue of Christ enthroned, surrounded by the twelve Apostles and four angels with spears and jewelled eyes, a chandelier of gold hung with fifty dolphins; in the baptistry, a golden lamb and seven silver stags from which water poured into a porphyry font.¹³

These benefactions were intended to establish the worship of Christ on a properly imperial footing. The Lateran basilica was immense, bigger than any of the secular basilicas in the Forum, capable of accommodating crowds of up to 10,000. But Constantine drew back from the symbolic imposition of Christianity in the historic heart of Rome. His two main city churches, at the Lateran and at Santa Croce, were on the fringes, near the walls, not at the centre, and, like St Peter's, they were built on imperial private property, not on public land. Rome remained pagan still, and Constantine's departure in 324 for his new capital, Constantinople, at Byzantium on the

Bosphorous and closer to the heartlands of empire in the Eastern and Danube provinces, left the city to the domination of conservative senatorial families. Their hereditary paganism was as precious to them as Protestantism would be to the Cabots and Lowells in nineteenth-century Boston, a mark of true *Romanitas* and of old money, and a witness against the vulgarity and populism of the Emperor's unpleasant new religion.

For Constantine, Christianity meant concord, unity in the truth. God had raised him up, he believed, to give peace to the whole civilised world, the *oecumene*, by the triumph of the Church. As he rapidly discovered, however, the Church itself was profoundly divided. The providential instrument of human harmony which God had placed in his hand turned out to be itself out of tune. Undaunted, he set himself to restore the unity of Christians, confident that for this, too, God had given him the empire. It was an aim and a confidence which his successors would share, and the imposition of unity on the churches at all costs became an imperial priority: ironically, it was a priority which set them on a collision course with the popes.

Constantine's first encounter with Christian division was not long in coming. In North Africa a new bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, had been consecrated in AD 311, and one of the officiating bishops was suspected of having handed over copies of the Scriptures during the great persecution. In a now familiar move, hard-line Christians announced that Caecilian's ordination was invalid because of the involvement of this *traditor*, and they set up their own bishop. Neighbouring bishops and congregations took sides, the hard-liners soon earning the name Donatists from their leading bishop, and once again the church in North Africa found itself deeply divided. Within six months of his seizure of power, Constantine had been approached by the Donatists, asking him to appoint bishops from Gaul (where there had been no *traditores*) to decide who was the true Bishop of Carthage.

This extraordinary appeal to an unbaptised emperor, whose conversion to Christianity may well not yet have been known in Africa, was highly significant. It had long been the custom for disputes in the African church to be referred to the bishops of Rome for arbitration or judgement, but this was an unattractive option for the Donatists, since Roman theology denied that the involvement of a 'traitor' bishop could invalidate a sacrament. Whether Constantine

appreciated the politics of the appeal to himself, rather than to Pope Miltiades (311–14), is doubtful, but he wrote to the Pope, commanding him to establish an inquiry in collaboration with three bishops from Gaul, and to report back to him. It was the first direct intervention by an emperor in the affairs of the Church.

Caecilian and Donatus both came to Rome for the hearing, but in the meantime Miltiades had taken steps to transform the commission of inquiry into a more conventional synod, by summoning fifteen Italian bishops to sit with him and the Gallic bishops. Predictably, the synod excommunicated Donatus and declared Caecilian the true Bishop of Carthage in October 313. Miltiades set about coaxing Donatist bishops back into mainstream or 'Catholic' communion by promising that they would be allowed to retain episcopal status. Doggedly, the Donatists appealed once more to Constantine, and once more he responded with scant respect for papal sensibilities. He summoned a council of many bishops to Arles, appointing the bishops of Syracuse and Arles to oversee its proceedings. Miltiades had by now died and the new Pope, Sylvester I (314–35), did not travel to Arles. Nevertheless, with a better sense of the Pope's prerogative than the Emperor, the synod duly reported their proceedings in a deferential letter to Sylvester, lamenting that he had been unable to leave the city 'where the Apostles to this day have their seats and where their blood without ceasing witnesses to the glory of God'. They asked the Pope to circulate their decisions to other bishops, a clear recognition of his seniority.

Constantine's dismay at the divisions of Christian North Africa was to be redoubled when, having overthrown the pagan rival Emperor in the East, Licinius, he moved to his new Christian capital, 'New Rome', Constantinople. For the divisions of Africa were as nothing compared to the deep rift in the Christian imagination which had opened in the East. It was begun in Egypt, by a presbyter of Alexandria, Arius, famed for his personal austerities and his following among the nuns of the city. Arius had been deposed by his Bishop for teaching that the Logos, the Word of God which had been made flesh in Jesus, was not God himself, but a creature, infinitely higher than the angels, though like them created out of nothing before the world began. Arius saw his teaching as a means of reconciling the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation with the equally fundamental belief in the unity of God. In fact, it emptied Christian-

ity of its central affirmation, that the life and death of Jesus had power to redeem because they were God's very own actions. But the full implications of Arianism were not at first grasped, and Arius attracted widespread support. A master-publicist, Arius rallied grass-roots support by composing theological sea-shanties to be sung by the sailors and stevedores on the docks of Alexandria. Theological debate erupted out of the lecture-halls and into the taverns and bars of the eastern Mediterranean.

The theological issues were mostly lost on Constantine, though many of the clergy he surrounded himself with were supporters of Arius, including the fluffy-minded Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, historian of the Church and Constantine's chosen official biographer. It was obvious, nonetheless, that something had to be done to settle a dispute that threatened to wreck Constantine's vision of Christianity as the cement of empire. In 325 he summoned a council of bishops to meet at Nicaea to resolve the issue. Only a handful of Westerners attended, including the bishops of Carthage and Milan. Pope Sylvester sent two priests to represent him.

The Council of Nicaea, summoned by the Emperor, who presided over some of the sessions, was an event of enormous significance for the Christian Church. In due course, 'ecumenical' or general councils, of which this was the first, would come to be recognised as having binding authority in matters of faith. The Council was an unqualified disaster for the Arian party. Arius and his followers were condemned, and the Council issued a Creed containing the statement that Christ was 'of the same essence' (*homoousios*) with the Father, a resounding affirmation of his true divinity.

Nicaea was the beginning, not the end, of the Arian controversy. The defeated Arians had been frogmarched into agreement by an emperor determined to sew things up quickly. They were silenced, not persuaded, and after the Council was over, they regrouped and returned to the attack. Modified forms of Arius' teaching would win support throughout the Eastern empire for the next three generations, and Constantine's son and successor in the East, Constantius, himself adopted Arian beliefs. Constantine remained firmly committed to the Nicene faith – it was, after all, *his* Council. But he longed for a settlement of the disputes, and never abandoned hope that some form of words could be found which would paper over the differences between the two sides. Constantine himself was finally bap-

tised on his deathbed in 337 by his Arian chaplain, Eusebius of Nicomedia. His body lay in state in the white robe of the newly baptised, and all around him his Empire began to fall to pieces.

The chief defender of the orthodox faith at Nicaea had been the deacon, Athanasius, from 328 Bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius was the greatest theologian of his age and a man of epic stamina and courage, but he was undiplomatic to the point of truculence, and as bishop he was not above strong-arm methods of enforcing discipline. In 335 his enemies, who were many, took the opportunity of the forthcoming anniversary celebrations of Constantine's thirty years as emperor to call for the renewed pacification of the Church. They persuaded Constantine that Athanasius had threatened to cut off Egyptian corn supplies to Constantinople if the Emperor interfered with him, and they succeeded in having Athanasius deposed, excommunicated and exiled to Gaul. One by one, his supporters were then picked off.

These struggles convulsed the Christian East: the fierce monks of the Egyptian deserts, led by St Anthony of Egypt, rallied to Athanasius and the Nicene faith. But for a generation all this was heard in the West only as a faint echo. Western theologians did not trouble themselves with Greek subtleties, and Latin, which had replaced Greek as the language of the Roman church relatively late in the third century, did not yet even possess adequate technical terminology to handle the debate properly. The Pope had played no part at Nicaea, though as a matter of honour his legates signed the Conciliar decrees before all the bishops, immediately after the signature of Hosius of Cordoba, president of the Council. But successive bishops of Rome endorsed the teaching of Nicaea, and saw support for Athanasius as support for the apostolic faith. As a stream of Athanasius' supporters made their way as refugees into the West, they were received with open arms at Rome, sometimes without much scrutiny of their theological views. In AD 339 Pope Julius (337-52) publicly received Athanasius himself into communion, and summoned his Arian enemies, gathered at Antioch, to come to Rome for a council to resolve the issue. He received a stinging reply, delayed till the date he had set for the meeting in Rome had passed, challenging his right to receive into communion a man condemned by a synod of Eastern bishops. Rome, they conceded, was a famous church, well known for its orthodoxy. Nevertheless, all bishops were equal, and

the basis of Rome's spiritual authority, the Apostles Peter and Paul, had come there in the first place from the East. The Pope must choose the communion of a handful of heretics like Athanasius, or the majority of the bishops of the East.

This was a direct challenge to the Pope's authority. The gap between Eastern and Western perceptions of the place of Rome in the wider Church was clearly growing. Just how wide that gap might become was revealed three years later in 343, at the disastrous Council of Sardica. There had been a bloodbath in the imperial family as rivals scrabbled for power on the death of Constantine, and the empire was now ruled by his two surviving sons. Constantius, in the East, was a declared Arian. Constans, who ruled the West from Milan, was an ardent Catholic, and a strong supporter of Athanasius and Pope Julius. Worried by the theological rift which threatened the fragile unity and stability of empire, the brothers agreed that a joint council of East and West should be held at Sardica (modern Sofia in Bulgaria). Eighty bishops from each side attended, and the assembly was to be chaired by the leader of the Western delegation, Hosius of Cordoba, veteran president of the Council of Nicaea.

Sardica was a fiasco, which widened the rift it had been called to heal. For a start, Athanasius and his friends were allowed to sit as equals among the Western bishops, despite the fact that the Arians now wanted their case reviewed by the Council. The enraged Easterners refused to enter the assembly, and set up their own rival council, which excommunicated Hosius, Athanasius and the Pope. In retaliation the Westerners restored Athanasius, excommunicated his leading opponents, passed a series of canons defining Rome's right to act as a court of final appeals in all matters affecting other bishops throughout the empire, and sent a dutiful letter to Julius as their 'head, that is to the See of Peter the Apostle'.¹⁴ The Canons of Sardica became fundamental to Roman claims to primacy. They were inscribed in the records of the Roman church in a place of honour immediately after those of Nicaea, and in the course of time they were mistakenly believed to have been enacted at Nicaea. The claim of Rome to be head of all the churches was thus thought to have the strong backing of the first and greatest of all the general councils.

Over the next few years, the unwavering support of Constans bolstered the Catholic party, and Constantius was even pressured into restoring Athanasius (briefly) to his see. But Constans was killed

in 350, and Constantius became master of the whole empire. It was a disaster for the Nicene faith, and for the papacy. Like his father, Constantius saw Christianity as an essential unifying force within the empire. The debates about the person of Christ had to be solved, and he set about solving them by suppressing all support for Athanasius and the creed of Nicaea. Pope Julius died in 352. He had handled the Arian troubles with a firm and steady courage, but also with tact and courtesy to his opponents. His successor, Liberius (352–66), a cleric with an enthusiastic following among the pious matrons of Rome, was equally committed to the Nicene cause, but was a man of less steadiness and skill. Lobbied by Eastern bishops to repudiate Athanasius, Liberius unwisely appealed to Constantius to summon a general council to reaffirm the faith of Nicaea. Instead, at two synods, held at Arles in 353 and Milan in 355, Constantius arm-twisted the assembled bishops into condemning Athanasius. The handful who refused were exiled from their sees.

Liberius was appalled, and repudiated his own legates, who had caved in to pressure and subscribed to the condemnation of Athanasius. The influential court eunuch Eusebius (not to be confused with Eusebius of Caesarea) was sent to Rome to put pressure on the Pope. Liberius turned him away and, when he discovered that he had left an offering from the Emperor at the shrine of St Peter, he had the gift cast out. To the Emperor he wrote that his opposition was not to uphold his own views, but the 'decrees of the Apostles: . . . I have suffered nothing to be added to the bishopric of the city of Rome and nothing to be detracted from it, and I desire always to preserve and guard unstained that faith which has come down through so long a succession of bishops, among whom have been many martyrs'.¹³ The enraged Emperor had the Pope arrested and taken north to Milan, where he confronted him. Arian clergy round the Emperor suggested that Liberius' resistance was nothing more than a hint of old Roman republicanism, designed to curry favour with the Senate. The Emperor rebuked the Pope for standing alone in support of Athanasius, when most of the bishops had condemned him. Liberius reminded the Emperor that in the Old Testament Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego had stood alone against the idolatrous tyrant Nebuchadnezzar, and scandalised courtiers accused the Pope of treason – 'You have called our Emperor a Nebuchadnezzar.' The Pope remained firm, and was exiled to Thrace. In a final act of defiance, he sent back the 500 gold

pieces the Emperor had allocated for his journey expenses, suggesting, with a nod in the direction of Judas, that they should be given to the Arian Bishop of Milan.¹⁶

Liberius' courageous conduct in the face of imperial pressure pre-figured the struggles between papacy and empire which would dominate the history of medieval Europe. But his resolve did not last. Constantius detested Liberius, but knew he could not long retain control of the Church without the support of the Pope: the pressure was kept up. In the misery of exile, surrounded by imperial clergy and far from home, Liberius weakened. He agreed to the excommunication of Athanasius, and signed a formula which, while it did not actually repudiate the Nicene Creed, weakened it with the meaningless claim that the *Logos* was 'like the father in being' and in all things. In 358 he was finally allowed to return to Rome.

He found the city deeply divided. On Liberius' exile in 355, the Emperor had installed a new pope, Liberius' former archdeacon Felix. Consecrated by Arian bishops in the imperial palace in Milan, Felix was an obvious fellow traveller, but imperial patronage was a powerful persuader, and many of the Roman clergy had rallied to him. Constantius was now unwilling simply to repudiate Felix, and commanded that Liberius and he should function as joint bishops. The populace of Rome would have none of it. There was tumult in the streets in support of Liberius, the crowds yelling 'One God, one Christ, one bishop', and Felix was forced to withdraw. He built himself a church in the suburbs, and lived there in semi-retirement, retaining a following among the city clergy and people. Liberius' credibility had been badly damaged by his ignominious surrender in exile, but painfully he rehabilitated himself, helping to organise peace-moves among the moderates on both sides of the Arian debate while insisting on loyalty to the Nicene formulas. Athanasius, if he did not quite forgive him, attributed his fall to understandable frailty in the face of pressure.

Liberius' successor Damasus (366-84), who had served as deacon under both Liberius and Felix, would inherit some of the consequences of his predecessor's exile. His election in 366 was contested, and he was confronted by a rival pope, Ursinus, whom he only got rid of with the help of the city police and a murderous rabble. Damasus was a firm opponent of Arianism and, with the support of a new and orthodox emperor, would resolutely stamp out heresy within the

city. But the street battles and massacres of Ursinus' supporters with which his pontificate had begun left him vulnerable to moral attack, and very much dependent on the goodwill and support of the city and imperial authorities.

Damasus was also wary of taking sides in the quarrels which were still tearing apart the Church in the East. Hard-pressed supporters of Nicaea in the East like Basil the Great repeatedly begged his support. Damasus stalled, and sent a series of lofty letters eastwards, addressing his fellow bishops there not as 'brothers', the traditional formula, but as 'sons', a claim to superiority which was noticed and resented. With no intention of embroiling himself in the nightmare complexities of the Eastern theological debates, he thought the right procedure was for the bishops of the East to establish their orthodoxy by signing Roman formulas. His position was enormously strengthened by the accession as emperor of the Spanish General Theodosius, a devout Catholic who detested Arianism and who in February 380 issued an edict requiring all the subjects of the empire to follow the Christian religion 'which Holy Peter delivered to the Romans . . . and as the Pontiff Damasus manifestly observes it'. In the following year Theodosius summoned a general council at Constantinople – the first since Nicaea – and this Council, at which no Western bishops were present and to which Damasus did not even send delegates, succeeded in formulating a creed, incorporating the Nicene Creed, which provided a satisfactory solution to the Arian debates. This Constantinopolitan/Nicene Creed is still recited every Sunday at Catholic and Anglican eucharists.

But, in addition to its doctrinal work, the Council of Constantinople issued a series of disciplinary canons, which went straight to the heart of Roman claims to primacy over the whole Church. The Council decreed that appeals in the cases of bishops should be heard within the bishop's own province – a direct rebuttal of Rome's claim to be the final court of appeal in all such cases. It went on to stipulate that 'the Bishop of Constantinople shall have the pre-eminence in honour after the Bishop of Rome, for Constantinople is new Rome'.¹⁷

This last canon was totally unacceptable to Rome for two reasons. In the first place it capitulated to the imperial claim to control of the Church, since Constantinople had nothing but the secular status of the city to justify giving it this religious precedence. Worse, however, the wording implied that the primacy of Rome itself was derived not

from its apostolic pedigree as the Church of Peter and Paul, but from the fact that it had once been the capital of empire. Damasus and his successors refused to accept the canons, and the following year a council of Western bishops at Rome issued a rejoinder, declaring that the Roman see had the primacy over all others because of the Lord's promise to Peter – 'Tu es Petrus' – and because both Peter and Paul had founded the see. The bishops went on to specify that if Rome was the first See of Peter, then the second was not Constantinople, but Alexandria, because it had been founded from Rome by St Mark on the orders of Peter, and the third in precedence was Antioch, because Peter had once been bishop there before he came to Rome.

Damasus's pontificate exposed the growing rift between Eastern and Western perceptions of the religious importance of Rome. The troubles of Liberius had made it clear that imperial oversight of the Church, and the overwhelming imperial priority of unification, might put Pope and Emperor at odds. But Rome itself was increasingly remote from the centre of imperial affairs. No emperor since Constantine had lived in Rome, and even the Western emperors based themselves in the north – at Trier, Arles and especially Milan. Milan had been the centre of Constantius' attempts to impose Arianism on the West, and an Arian bishop, Auxentius, remained in office till his death in 374.

Auxentius was succeeded as bishop by an impeccably orthodox career civil servant, the unbaptised Governor of the city, Ambrose, and it was Ambrose, not Damasus or his successor Siricius (384–99), who would become the dominant figure in the life of the Western Church in the last quarter of the fourth century. Ambrose set himself to increase the influence of the see of Milan, taking on the metropolitan role over the north Italian bishoprics formerly exercised by Rome, involving himself in episcopal appointments as far away as the Balkans, attracting clergy and religious to the city from Piacenza, Bologna, even North Africa. He presided over the creation of a series of great churches which would establish Milan as a Christian capital, in a way which Rome itself, still dominated by paganism, could not hope to do. The Basilica Nova at Milan, now buried under the present Duomo, was a gigantic church, almost as big as the Pope's cathedral church of St John Lateran, and unique outside Rome. Inheriting a bishopric in which Arianism was deeply entrenched, Ambrose set himself at the head of a movement to restore Nicene orthodoxy, mobilising the bish-