



SUNDAY

THE ORIGIN OF
ITS OBSERVANCE
IN THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Contents

1. Introductory.....	1
2. Antiquity, Universality, and Nature of Sun Worship...9	
3. Apostasy from Jehovah Worship to Sun Worship.....	19
4. Apostasy Leads to Sabbath Desecration.....	27
5. Heathen Influences in the Church.....	33
6. The Eclectic Philosophy.....	39
7. Neo-Platonism.....	45
8. Origen's Part in Paganizing the Church.....	51
9. Results of the Philosophical Handling of the Bible...57	
10. The Church Completely Paganized.....	61
11. Pagan Response to the Church's Advances.....	77
12. Constantine.....	87
13. Constantine, the Church, and Sunday.....	99

*“Ask for the old paths,
where is the good way,
and walk therein,
and you shall find rest for your souls.”*

Jeremiah 6:16

SUNDAY:

THE ORIGIN OF ITS OBSERVANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,

Traces the institution from the earliest times, and states concisely the circumstances of its introduction into the Church. Only Protestant historians and writers are quoted.

102 pp. Price 6d., postpaid.

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1. Introductory

THERE is probably no question that has occupied a more prominent place in religious investigations and discussions in the last quarter of a century than that of the change of the Sabbath.

Without stopping to state the causes that first gave rise to this agitation, it is sufficient to say that thousands, both in Europe and America, have been led by it carefully to review the ground of their faith and practice, and to change their practice, accepting the seventh day of the week, instead of the first, as the Sabbath. This fact has tended to increase the agitation of the question as to the true Sabbath.

As men and women who have been reared in Christian families, and who have been Christians from their youth, occupying prominent positions in their churches, have abandoned the time-honored custom of Sunday observance, and calmly and deliberately begun the observance of the seventh day, many others have been led to study anew the comparative claims of the two days.

- That the original Sabbath was the seventh day and not the first is virtually admitted by everyone who argues to uphold the “change” of the day.
- That the Jews kept the seventh day, and were doing so at the time of Christ, is beyond all question.
- That Christ recognized the day that they observed, is also an undoubted fact.
- That the same day that the Jews observed is uniformly called the Sabbath, throughout the New Testament, no one who is acquainted with the Scriptures will deny.

We do not argue anything from apostolic observance; we do not base any argument for the observance of the seventh day

on the fact that numerous religious services were held by Christ and the apostles on that day; but here is a point that is worthy of a place in the argument, and which, of itself, is sufficient to settle the whole matter:

The New Testament was all written from six to sixty years after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, therefore it was well into what is called “the Christian dispensation.” It was written for Christians, by Christian men. Those men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,¹ so that their words were not their own,² but were the words of God.^{3/4}

They were, therefore, not swayed by early training or Jewish prejudice, for the Holy Spirit is not susceptible to such influences. Therefore the fact that the seventh day of the week is everywhere in the New Testament called “the Sabbath day,” is evidence that that is its rightful name—that the term “Sabbath” belongs to it, and to no other day.

The Holy Spirit makes no mistakes; therefore the fact that it calls the seventh day the Sabbath thirty years after the resurrection is ample evidence that the seventh day was still the Sabbath. And, further, it is also evidence that the Holy Spirit designed that all who should read the New Testament should understand that that day is the Sabbath. Therefore the Holy Spirit would have all men now regard the seventh day as the Sabbath.

But now we are met by the fact that nearly all the professed Christians in the world are keeping, with varying degrees of

¹ *2 Peter* 1:21.

² *John* 12:49, 14:10.

³ **1 Corinthians 2** ¹³ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

⁴ **1 Thessalonians 2** ¹³ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe.

strictness, the first day of the week. No one can deny this. Nor can it be denied that this has been the case for centuries.

While there has never been a time when there were not people who kept the seventh day holy, as the Sabbath of the Lord, there is no question but that for more than fifteen hundred years the large majority of professed Christians have disregarded the seventh day, and have observed the first day, although not by any means always as the Sabbath day.

The question therefore naturally arises: How did this come about? If the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Bible, of the New Testament as well as of the Old, why is the professed church of Christ generally keeping another day? This is a fair question, and to answer it fairly is the object of this little publication.

Some have argued that the fact that the day is generally observed is sufficient evidence that it ought to be observed. They consider it almost sacrilege to question the practice of “the church.” They think that when the practice of the church is known, that ought to put an end to controversy and bar all further investigation. To such we would quote the words of the pious and learned Dr. Alexander Carson, in his great work, entitled *Baptism, Its Mode and Subjects*, p. 6:

With respect to religious doctrines and institutions, there is no antecedent probability that those in existence at any time are actually in Scripture. The vast majority of religious rites used under the Christian name are the mere inventions of men; and not a single institution of the Lord Jesus, as it is recorded in the New Testament, has been left unchanged; and it is no injustice to put each of them to the proof, because, if they are in Scripture, proof is at all times accessible.

Our tracing of the Sunday institution, unfortunately, does not lead us into the Bible, for there is no trace of it there. This negative proposition is amply proved by the fact that in both the Old and the New Testament, the seventh day alone is rec-

ognized as the Sabbath.

For the full Scripture argument on the Sabbath question the reader is referred to works especially devoted to that question, notably, *The History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*, by J. N. Andrews.

It is true that there are many who claim that Sunday observance is traceable to Christ and the apostles, as Mosheim, the church historian, says:

The Christians in this century [the first] assembled for the worship of God, and for their advancement in piety, on the first day of the week, the day on which Christ reassumed his life; for that this day was set apart for religious worship by the apostles themselves, and that after the example of the church of Jerusalem, it was generally observed, we have unexceptionable testimony.⁵

But Mosheim has not given in this instance his “unexceptionable testimony,” as he has on almost every other point, for the reason that there is no testimony which a historian would regard as unexceptionable.

If it were true that the apostles set apart the first day of the week for rest and worship, then we could find the record of that setting apart either in the *Acts of the Apostles* or in their Epistles; but that record does not appear. If it did, a child could read it as easily as a doctor of divinity. And in that case we should find no such statements as this coming from those who practice and strongly uphold Sunday observance, even to the extent of desiring a law to compel all to observe it:

Some plant the observance of the Sabbath [by which term the writer meant Sunday] squarely on the fourth commandment, which was an explicit injunction to observe Saturday, and no other day, as a “holy day unto the Lord.” So some have tried to build the observance of Sunday upon apostolic

⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, century 1, part 2, chapter 4, section 4. (Murdock’s translation, London, 1845)

command, whereas the apostles gave no command on the matter at all....The truth is, so soon as we appeal to the *litera scripta* [the literal writing] of the Bible, the Sabbatarians have the best of the argument.⁶

Dr. Charles S. Robinson, of New York, is an eminent Baptist preacher and writer, and in an article in the *Sunday School Times* of January 14, 1882, he said:

It is not wise to base the entire Sabbath [meaning Sunday] argument on the fourth precept of the Decalogue....We shall become perplexed if we attempt to rest our case on simple legal enactment. Our safety in such discussions consists in our fastening attention upon the gracious and benevolent character of the institution.

That is to say, there is no precept in the Bible which authorizes Sunday observance, and the only way to avoid confusion when the matter comes up in argument is to lead the discussion as far as possible away from the subject. Not thus would the learned Dr. Robinson do if infant baptism were the subject of discussion.

Again we quote from the *Christian at Work*, which in one of its issues in January 1884, contains the following:

We hear less than we used to about the apostolic origin of the present Sunday observance, and for the reason that while the Sabbath and Sabbath rest are woven into the warp and woof of Scripture, it is now seen, as it is admitted, that we must go to later than apostolic times for the establishment of Sunday observance.

Acts 20:7 is one of the principal texts from which the observance of Sunday by the apostles is inferred; yet it is on his comment on this very text that the Rev. Dr. Scott says:

The change from the seventh to the first appears to have been gradually and silently introduced, by example rather

⁶ *Christian at Work* (editorial) April 19, 1883.

than by express precept.

We quote again from a prominent Protestant journal:

We rest the designation of Sunday [as a sacred day] on the church having “set it apart of its own authority.” The seventh-day rest was commanded in the fourth commandment....The selection of Sunday, thus changing the particular day designated in the fourth commandment, was brought about by the gradual concurrence of the early Christian church, and on this basis, and none other, does the Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week, rightly rest.⁷

This is in harmony with the statements made by Dr. Scott and Dr. Robinson. Surely all this is enough to warrant us in looking elsewhere than in the New Testament for the origin of Sunday observance.

That many things were “gradually and silently introduced” into the church, without any Scripture warrant, every Protestant believes. He knows that the Roman Catholic Church is full of such things today, as, for instance, auricular confession, image-worship, indulgences, etc. And these blots on the face of professed Christianity came in at an early day. Dr. Killen, a Presbyterian theologian and teacher of church history, says in the preface to his book, entitled *The Ancient Church*:

In the interval between the days of the apostles and the conversion of Constantine, the Christian commonwealth changed its aspect. The bishop of Rome—a personage unknown to the writers of the New Testament—meanwhile rose into prominence, and at length took precedence of all other churchmen. Rites and ceremonies, of which neither Paul nor Peter ever heard, crept silently into use, and then claimed the rank of divine institutions.

This is exactly in harmony with what we have already read concerning the Sunday institution. Being assured, then, both by the silence of Scripture, and by the admission of eminent

⁷ *Christian at Work*, Jan. 8, 1885.

first-day observers, that the observance of the day has no warrant in the Scripture nor in apostolic times, we are prepared to begin our search for it outside of the circle of men whom God sent. In this investigation we expect to establish the following points:

1. Sun worship is the oldest and most widespread form of idolatry,—the form which has from the most ancient times stood in opposition to the worship of the true God,—and the first day of the week has been the day especially devoted to the wild revelries with which the sun-god was worshiped.
2. The church rapidly degenerated after the days of the apostles, being corrupted especially by the infusion of heathen philosophy; and as the result, by the close of the third century AD, the great body of the professed church was scarcely to be distinguished from the heathen. The forms, ceremonies, and festivals of the church had been very largely borrowed from paganism.
3. During the same time paganism as such had been undergoing an outward change. As a system of religion it had been greatly weakened by the large numbers who had left it and had enrolled themselves in the church. Also, partly through the influence of the church and Judaism, and largely by the new philosophy which arose in response to the demand for some new form of error to oppose the advance of truth, paganism had become in a manner monotheistic. That is, it recognized one supreme god, relegating all other gods to a subordinate place; and that one divinity was represented by the sun. Thus the church and the world were mutually preparing to unite.
4. It having been demonstrated that it was impossible to bring about unity in the Roman Empire by the extirpation of Christianity, some of the more politic emperors conceived the idea of uniting Christianity and paganism into one system, thus doing away with the great

cause of dissension in the empire.

5. Sunday was the platform on which paganism and Christianity united; it was the link that united Church and State. The adoption of Sunday by the church marked the completion of the paganizing of the church.

Let the reader watch carefully through the following pages, and see if these points are not established by abundant evidence.

2. Antiquity, Universality, and Nature of Sun Worship

SUN worship is declared to be “the oldest, the most widespread, and the most enduring of all the forms of idolatry known to man.” In the *Old Testament Student* of January, 1886, under the heading “Sun Images and the Sun of Righteousness,” Dr. Talbot W. Chambers, of New York, presented the following comprehensive statement concerning the antiquity and universality of Sun worship:

The universality of this form of idolatry is something remarkable. It seems to have prevailed everywhere. The chief object of worship among the Syrians was Baal, the sun, considered as the giver of light and life, the most active agent in all the operations of nature. But as he sometimes revealed himself as a destroyer, drying up the earth with summer heats and turning gardens into deserts, he was in that view regarded with terror, and appeased with human sacrifices...

In Egypt the sun was the kernel of the State religion. In various forms he stood at the head of each hierarchy. At Memphis he was worshipped as Phtah; at Heliopolis as Tum; at Thebes as Amun Ra. Personified by Osiris, he became the foundation of the Egyptian Metempsychosis.

In Babylon the same thing is observed as in Egypt. Men were struck by the various stages of the daily and yearly course of the sun, in which they saw the most imposing manifestation of Deity. But they soon came to confound the creature with the Creator, and the host of heaven became objects of worship, with the sun as chief...

In Persia the worship of Mithra, or the sun, is known to have been common from an early period. No idols were made, but the inscriptions show ever-recurring symbolic representations, usually a disk or orb with out-stretched wings, with the addition sometimes of a human figure. The leading feature of the Magian rites derived from ancient Media was

the worship of fire, performed on altars erected on high mountains, where a perpetual flame, supposed to have been originally kindled from heaven, was constantly watched, and where solemn service was daily rendered. The remnant of the ancient Persians who escaped subjugation by Islam, now known as Parsees, unite with their reverence for the holy fire equal reverence for the sun as the emblem of Ormuzd.

People who have given the matter but little thought generally suppose that sun worship is the highest and purest form of idolatry. Nothing could be farther from the facts in the case. The following, from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, concerning Baal, which the reader has already learned was one of the names under which the sun was worshiped, gives the secret of the abominations of sun worship:

The Baal of the Syrians, Phoenicians, and heathen Hebrews is a much less elevated conception than the Babylonian Bel. He is properly the sun-god Baal-Shamem, Baal (lord) of the heavens, the highest of the heavenly bodies, but still a mere power of nature, born like the other luminaries from the primitive chaos. As the sun-god he is conceived as the male principle of life and reproduction in nature, and thus in some forms of his worship is the patron of the grossest sensuality, and even of systematic prostitution.

An example of this is found in the worship of Baal-peor (*Numbers 25*), and in general in the Canaanitish high places, where Baal, the male principle, was worshiped in association with the unchaste goddess Ashera, the female principle of nature.

The frequent references to this form of religion in the Old Testament are obscured in the English version by the rendering "grove" for the word "Ashera," which sometimes denotes the goddess, sometimes the tree or post which was her symbol. Baal himself was represented on the high places not by an image, but by obelisks or pillars (Masseboth, E. V. wrongly, "images"), sometimes called chammanim or sun-pillars, a name which is to be compared with the title Baalchamman, frequently given to the god on Phoenician in-

scriptions.

Concerning Astarte, or Ashtoreth, the female counterpart of Baal, Prof. George Rawlinson says:

The especial place of her worship in Phoenicia was Sidon. In one of her aspects she represented the moon, and bore the head of a heifer with horns curving in the crescent form, whence she seems to have been sometimes called Ashtoreth Karnaim, or, "Astarte of the two horns." But, more commonly, she was a nature goddess, "the great mother," the representation of the female principle in nature, and hence presiding over the sexual relation, and connected more or less with love and with voluptuousness. The Greeks regarded their Aphrodite, and the Romans their Venus, as her equivalent. One of her titles was "Queen of heaven;" and under this title she was often worshiped by the Israelites.⁸

This was one of the goddesses that Solomon worshiped in his old age:

1 Kings 11

⁴ For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

In Egypt, as we have already learned, "sun worship was the kernel of the State religion." This is shown by the fact that the kings identified themselves with its representative, thus making contempt of sun worship treason against the State. Professor Rawlinson says:

Ra was the Egyptian sun-god, and was especially worshiped at Heliopolis [city of the sun]. Obelisks, according to some, represented his rays, and were always, or usually, erected in his honor. Heliopolis was certainly one of the

⁸ *Religions of the Ancient World*, pp. 106, 107.

places which were thus adorned, for one of the few which still stand erect in Egypt is on the site of that city.

The kings for the most part considered Ra their special patron and protector; nay, they went so far as to identify themselves with him, to use his title as their own, and to adopt his name as the ordinary prefix to their own names and titles. This is believed by many to have been the origin of the word Pharaoh, which was, it is thought, the Hebrew rendering of Ph'Ra—"the sun."⁹

These obelisks were not simply representations of the sun's rays, although that might have been the remote idea. They were obscene symbols, connected with the idea that the sun represents the generative principle in nature. They are found in various forms in every part of the world. The "conical black stone" of Syria was one form. Thousands of these are found in India today. Among some of the savage tribes of Africa the obelisk has degenerated into a simple pole, and among the North American Indians it is the "totem."

Osiris was one of the names under which the sun was worshiped in Egypt. The sacred bull Apis, which the Egyptians worshiped, was the principal form of Osiris. On this we quote the following, from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

According to the Greek writers Apis was the image of Osiris, and worshiped because Osiris was supposed to have passed into a bull, and to have been soon after manifested by a succession of these animals. The hieroglyphic inscriptions identify the Apis with Osiris, adorned with horns or the head of a bull, and unite the two names as Hapi-Osor, or Apis Osiris. According to this view the Apis was the incarnation of Osiris manifested in the shape of a bull.

There were certain marks which distinguished the sacred bull, and when one was discovered, he was conducted in great state to the temple, and for forty days was attended by nude women. See the prohibition in *Leviticus* 18:23.

⁹ *Religions of the Ancient World*, p. 20.

With these facts concerning sun worship in mind, the reader will readily appreciate the terrible indignation and the horror that seized Moses when he found the Israelites, so soon after the awful events of Sinai, dancing around the golden calf which they had made in representation of the Egyptian god Apis.

As frequent reference is made in the Bible to the worship of "the host of heaven,"¹⁰ the following will be interesting as showing how the principle of sun worship runs through the worship of the constellations:

The mythology of Hercules is of a very mixed character in the form in which it has come down to us. There is in it the identification of one or more Grecian heroes with Melcarth, the sun-god of the Phoenicians. Hence we find Hercules so frequently represented as the sun-god, and his twelve labors regarded as the passage of the sun through the twelve signs of the zodiac.

He is the powerful planet which animates and imparts fecundity to the universe, whose divinity has been honored in every quarter by temples and altars, and consecrated in the religious strains of all nations. From Meroe in Ethiopia, and Thebes in Upper Egypt, even to Britain, and the icy regions of Scythia; from the ancient Taprobana and Palibothra in India to Cadiz and the shores of the Atlantic; from the forests of Germany to the burning sands of Africa; everywhere, in short, where the benefits of the luminary of the day are experienced, there we find established the name and worship of a Hercules.

Many ages before the period when Alcmena is said to have lived, and the pretended Tyrrhian hero to have performed his wonderful exploits, Egypt and Phoenicia, which certainly did not borrow their divinities from Greece, had raised temples to the sun, under a name analogous to that of Hercules, and had carried his worship to the side of Thasus and to Gades. Here was consecrated a temple to the year, and to the

¹⁰ *Deuteronomy* 4:19, 17:3; *2 Kings* 17:16, 21:3, 5; 23:4-5; *2 Chronicles* 33:3, 5; *Jeremiah* 8:2, 19:13; *Zephaniah* 1:5; *Acts* 7:42.

months which divided it into twelve parts, that is, to the twelve labors or victories which conducted Hercules to immortality.

It is under the name of Hercules Astrochyton, or the god clothed with the mantle of stars, that the poet Nonnus designates the sun, adored by the Tyrians. "He is the same god," observes the poet, "whom different nations adore under a multitude of names; Belus on the banks of the Euphrates, Ammon in Lybia, Apis at Memphis, Saturn in Arabia, Jupiter in Assyria, Serapis in Egypt, Helios among the Babylonians, Apollo at Delphi, Esculapius throughout Greece."¹¹

Thus we see the universality of sun worship. It was the controlling principle in all forms of idolatry. Whatever other gods than the sun were worshiped by men, they were either regarded as subordinate deities, or else as representing the sun in some of its aspects—the idea of generation, reproduction, being the one thing everywhere present. Of the nature of the worship of Hercules, as representative of the sun, the same authority just quoted has the following:

At Erythrae, on the coast of Ionia, was to be seen a statue of Hercules, of an aspect completely Egyptian. The worship of the god was here celebrated by certain Thracian females, because the females of the country were said to have refused to make to the god an offering of their locks on his arrival at Erythrae. The females of Byblos sacrificed to Adonis their locks and their chastity at one and the same time, and it is probable that the worship of Hercules was not more exempt, in various parts of the ancient world, from the same dissolute offerings. In Lydia, particularly, it seems to have been marked by an almost delirious sensuality. Married and unmarried females prostituted themselves at the festival of the god. The two sexes changed their respective characters; and tradition reported that Hercules himself had given an example of this, when, assuming the vestments and occupation of a female, he subjected himself to the service of the voluptuous Omphale.

¹¹ Anthon's *Classical Dictionary*, article "Hercules".

This method of celebrating the worship of the Egyptian Hercules makes more plain the reason why the Lord said to the Israelites, who had just come from Egypt,

Deuteronomy 22

⁵ The woman shall not wear that which pertains unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord your God.

As we have already intimated, sun worship is found today, in various forms, in all parts of the heathen world. But all that we are especially concerned with in this investigation is sun worship down to the third or fourth century AD. The following, from the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, article "Sun," brings us down to the times of the Romans:

The worship of the sun as the most prominent and powerful agent in the kingdom of nature was widely diffused throughout the country adjacent to Palestine. This worship was either direct, without the intervention of any statue or symbol, or indirect.

Among the Egyptians the sun was worshiped under the title of Ra....Among the Phoenicians the sun was worshiped under the title of Baal. At Tyre, Gaza, and Carthage human sacrifices were offered to him. Among the Chaldeans the sun was worshiped under the title of Tammuz; and that the Arabians worshiped the sun we know from Theophrastus.

Still more propagated was the worship of the sun among the Syrians (Aramaean). Famous temples were at Heliopolis, Emesa, Palmyra, Hierapolis. Sun-worship there was very old, and direct from the beginning; and even in later times, sun and moon were worshiped at Hierapolis without the intervention of any image.

Among the pure Semites, or Aryans, direct worship to the sun was paid from the beginning, and still later. Thus among the Assyrians, and afterwards among the Persians, whose sun worship is one and the same....

In later times the sun was worshiped among the Persians under the form of Mithras, which finally became the Sol

Deus Invictus [the invincible sun-god] throughout the west, especially through the Romans.

This sun worship was not confined to the early part of Roman history, but was the one prominent form of idolatry during the existence of the empire. Note the phrase, *Sol Deus Invictus* (the invincible sun-god), in the last quotation. The glory of the Romans was their power in arms. It was the terror of the Roman arms that made the Romans masters of the world.

The sun-god being the patron of the Roman emperors, they attributed the success of their arms to it; and the fact that the Romans made such rapid and steady progress, being “always victorious in war,” with the sun as their acknowledged guide and protector, would have a powerful influence in establishing the sun as the one grand object of worship.

In this connection let it be understood that “worship,” as used by and of the heathen, has not the same spiritual significance that it has among Christians. There is not, among the heathen, any sentiment of love for their gods, similar to what Christians feel for their Heavenly Father. The heathen worship is prompted solely by fear or by selfish desire for earthly gain. Offerings to the gods were simply bribes to the demons to buy off their displeasure or to secure their assistance in some worldly enterprise.

The Romans were a people whose existence depended on their success at arms. This success they attributed to their sun-god, and consequently were very devoted to him, as heathen devotion goes. The title which they gave him, “the unconquered sun-god,” sufficiently indicates their sole motive in honoring him.

A few instances of the Roman devotion to the sun must suffice. We are told that at Baalbek, in ancient Coele-Syria,

...the most imposing of the huge edifices, erected upon a vast substruction, unequaled anywhere on earth in the size of

its stones, some of them being sixty feet long and twelve feet in both diameters, is a great temple of the sun, two hundred and ninety feet by one hundred and sixty, which was built by Antoninus Pius [who reigned from 138 to 160 AD].

When the Emperor Aurelian returned from his victory over Zenobia, the queen of the East, he made magnificent presents to the temple of the sun, which he had begun to build in the first year of his reign, 270 AD Gibbon says of this:

A considerable portion of his oriental spoils was consecrated to the gods of Rome; the Capitol, and every other temple, glittered with the offerings of his ostentatious piety; and the temple of the sun alone received above fifteen thousand pounds of gold. This last was a magnificent structure, erected by the emperor on the side of the Quirinal Hill, and dedicated, soon after the triumph, to that deity whom Aurelian adored as the parent of his life and fortunes.

His mother had been an inferior priestess in a chapel of the sun; a peculiar devotion to the god of light was a sentiment which the fortunate peasant imbibed in his infancy; and every step of his elevation, every victory of his reign, fortified superstition by gratitude.¹²

The first act of Diocletian after he was chosen emperor was of superstition to the sun. Numerian had died in an unknown manner, and it was necessary that Diocletian, who had been commander of the late emperor's body guard, should not be chargeable in any way with his death, if he would have the confidence of his subjects.

Conscious that the station which he had filled expose him to some suspicions, Diocletian ascended the tribunal, and, raising his eyes towards the sun, made a solemn profession of his own innocence, in the presence of that all-seeing deity.¹³

Constantine also, often erroneously called the first Christian

¹² *Decline and Fall*, chapter 11, paragraph 43.

¹³ *Decline and Fall*, chapter 12, paragraph 41.

emperor, was superstitiously devoted to the sun as the chief god, although his “liberal” mind did not ignore other gods.

His liberality restored and enriched the temples of the gods; the medals which issued from his imperial mint are impressed with the figures and attributes of Jupiter and Apollo, of Mars and Hercules; and his filial piety increased the council of Olympus by the solemn apotheosis of his father Constantius.

But the devotion of Constantine was more peculiarly directed to the genius of the sun, the Apollo of Greek and Roman mythology; and he was pleased to be represented with the symbols of the god of light and poetry. The unerring shafts of that deity, the brightness of his eyes, his laurel wreath, immortal beauty, and elegant accomplishments, seem to point him out as the patron of a young hero.

The altars of Apollo were crowned with the votive offerings of Constantine; and the credulous multitude were taught to believe that the emperor was permitted to behold with mortal eyes the visible majesty of their tutelar deity; and that, either waking or in a vision, he was blessed with the auspicious omens of a long and victorious reign.

The sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Decline and Fall*, chapter 20, paragraph 3.

3. Apostasy from Jehovah Worship to Sun Worship

OF CONSTANTINE'S devotion to the sun, and through it to himself and his own interests, more will be said later. We wish now to call attention to the fact that the universality of sun worship, as it has been brought before us, settles it beyond a doubt that in every age it was sun worship especially that disputed with the true worship of Jehovah for the allegiance of mankind.

When the people of God apostatized from him, it was always some form of sun worship that seduced them. When Job would plead his peculiar uprightness, he urges the fact that he had never worshiped the sun or the moon. He says:

Job 31

²⁶ If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness,

²⁷ And my heart has been secretly enticed, or my mouth has kissed my hand,

²⁸ This also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for I should have denied the God that is above.

Kissing the hand was a common act of reverence to the gods. In the *Octavius*, of Minucius Felix, chapter 2,¹⁵ the writer, in speaking of a walk which he and his friend were taking on the banks of the Tiber, says:

Caecilius, observing an image of Serapis, raised his hand to his mouth, as is the custom of the superstitious common people, and pressed a kiss on it with his lips.

It is from this custom that we get our word "adore," Latin *ad orem*—to the mouth.

¹⁵ See Christian Literature Company's Edition of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, p. 173.

We have seen that sun worship was the State religion of the Egyptians; and the golden calf which the Israelites made and worshiped when they thought they were deprived of their leader, shows how firm a hold Egyptian idolatry had upon them. In their long sojourn in Egypt they had largely forgotten the true God, and the fact that they were slaves would render it difficult, if not impossible, for those who held Him in remembrance to worship Him. The Psalmist tells us that God

Psalm 105

⁴³ ...brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness:

⁴⁵ That they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws.

This they could not do in Egypt. The warnings to the Israelites were mostly against some of the abominations connected with sun worship, showing that their danger lay all on that side.

When Balak, king of the Moabites, was unable to accomplish anything against the Israelites by the intended curses of Balaam, he easily weakened them by the seductive arts of the worship of Baal, the sun-god.

Numbers 25

³ And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor;¹⁶ and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

After the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam set up two calves of gold, one at Bethel and one at Dan, so that the people might worship them, and thus be kept from going to the temple of the Lord, at Jerusalem.

1 Kings 12

³⁰ And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.

This, like the worship of the golden calf in the wilderness,

¹⁶ Concerning Baal-peor see the quotation from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, on [p. 10](#).

was the worship of the sun under the form of Apis. So completely did this form of religion seduce the people of the kingdom of Israel from the worship of the true God, that it resulted at last in the utter destruction of the nation, according to the word of the prophet of God:

1 Kings 14

¹⁵ For the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and He shall root up Israel out of this good land, which He gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves [*ashera*, sun-images], provoking the Lord to anger.

Rehoboam, king of Judah, did likewise, building pillars and Asherim, and causing the people to do

1 Kings 14

²³ For they also built them high places, and images, and groves [*ashera*], on every high hill, and under every green tree.

²⁴ And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.

But it would be tedious to recount all the instances of Israelitish apostasy from God to the ever-present sun worship. We can only refer to a few instances. Ahab did more than any other king to cause Israel to sin:

1 Kings 16

³⁰ And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.

³¹ And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him.

³² And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

³³ And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

In his day there were only seven thousand loyal Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him:

1 Kings 19

¹⁸ Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.

Ahaziah, his son, followed in his father's steps:

1 Kings 22

⁵¹ Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel.

⁵² And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin:

⁵³ For he served Baal, and worshiped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

See also *2 Kings* 16:2-4; 17:6-18. As for the kingdom of Judah, after Israel had been scattered, we read that Manasseh...

2 Kings 21

³ ...reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them.

⁴ And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name.

⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.

⁶ And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

⁷ And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever.

Later on, King Josiah effected a reformation, and brought

the people for a time back to the worship of the true God.

2 Kings 23

⁵ And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets,¹⁷ and to all the host of heaven.

⁶ And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.

⁷ And he broke down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove.

⁸ And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba, and broke down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city.

¹⁰ And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

¹¹ And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

¹² And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, did the king beat down, and broke them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

¹³ And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abom-

¹⁷ Margin, "twelve signs, or constellations;" see p. 13 concerning Hercules.

ination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.

¹⁴ And he broke in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.

Surely the apostasy of Israel had been great; and notice that it was sun worship in its various forms that seduced them from the worship of Jehovah.

Even after the terrible experience of the siege of Jerusalem, those who remained in the city did not forsake their sun worship. The prophet Ezekiel was given a view of the abominations that they were committing, which he describes in chapter 8. He beheld them practicing abominable rites in the temple, weeping for Tammuz, the Assyrian Adonis, and lastly, greatest of all the abominations, worshiping the sun.

Ezekiel 8

¹⁵ Then said he unto me, Have you seen this, O son of man? turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations than these.

¹⁶ And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east.

Thus it appears that sun worship in some phase was the special form of false religion with which in all ancient times the true religion had to contend. Whoever left the worship of the one true God went over to sun worship, as the one thing that stood ready to receive him, and which existed for the sole purpose of winning souls from their allegiance to the true religion.

But since not only in the days of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but in every age, even into the Christian era, sun worship has been the chief form of idolatry, it follows that the

church in the days of the apostles, as well as in the days of the prophets, had this foe ever at hand to lure its members to apostasy.

4. Apostasy Leads to Sabbath Desecration

IN THE 17th chapter of *Jeremiah* we find a warning and a prophecy that was uttered but a very few years before the final captivity of Israel. The chapter opens thus:

Jeremiah 17

¹ The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;

² While their children remember their altars and their groves [asherim] by the green trees upon the high hills.

These “groves” were the sun-images, the abominations of the heathen, which the children of Israel had been commanded to dash in pieces and cut down.

Exodus 34

¹³ But you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves:

¹⁴ For you shall worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:

We see, therefore, that the sin against which Jeremiah was made to proclaim was the sin of sun worship, into which, as already shown, the Israelites were so frequently seduced by the inhabitants of the land. Now read the special warning and prophecy which the Lord through the prophet gave his people, in view of this very sin:

Jeremiah 17

¹⁹ Thus says the Lord unto me: Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem;

²⁰ And say unto them, Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates:

²¹ Thus says the Lord: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no

burden on the Sabbath-day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

²² Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath-day, neither do any work, but hallow the Sabbath-day, as I commanded your fathers.

²³ But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.

²⁴ And it shall come to pass, if you diligently hearken unto me, says the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath-day, but hallow the Sabbath-day, to do no work therein;

²⁵ Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever.

²⁷ But if you will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath-day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem did not heed this warning. Accordingly, God brought upon them the judgment threatened, as we read in the following scripture:

2 Chronicles 36

¹¹ Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

¹² And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord.

¹⁴ Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place;

¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

¹⁷ Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary...

¹⁹ And they burnt the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

²¹ To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years.

These two passages of Scripture connect most forcibly the abominable idolatry into which the Jews plunged, and violation of the Sabbath. It was for their idolatry, for following the abominations of the heathen in their lascivious sun-festivals, that the people were punished, and carried into captivity; and yet it is stated that their captivity was for gross violation of the Sabbath,¹⁸ showing that idolatry and Sabbath-breaking went together.

The reason for this is that the true observance of the Sabbath is the highest act of recognition of God. God is distinguished from all false gods by the fact that He alone can create:

Psalm 96

⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.

Jeremiah 10

¹⁰ But the Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation.

¹¹ Thus shall you say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.

¹⁸ See also *Nehemiah* 13:15-18.

¹² He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens by His discretion.

God's eternal power and godhead are known by His works.

Romans 1

²⁰ For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...

Psalms 111

² The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

³ His work is honorable and glorious; and His righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has made His wonderful works to be remembered.

The Jewish translation gives the exact rendering of verse 4 thus:

“He has made a memorial for His wonderful works.”

God wants His works to be remembered, because it is only by these that He can be kept in mind as Creator and Sanctifier; and the Sabbath is that which He has made as the memorial of His works.¹⁹ And so the Lord, in recounting His dealing with the children of Israel, and His efforts to induce them to give up idolatry, especially when He was delivering them from Egypt, with its abominable sun worship, said:

Ezekiel 20

¹² Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.

There is one more factor that should be brought in here. As the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—was the day which, when properly kept, would fix the minds of men on God as the Creator, the only Life-giver, so there was a day es-

¹⁹ See *Genesis* 2:1-3; *Exodus* 20:8-11.

pecially devoted to the sun, which the nations substituted for God, as the source of life. That day was the first day of the week. *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* says that Sunday is...

...so called because this day was anciently dedicated to the sun, or to its worship.

The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* says of it:

Sunday (*Dies Solis*, of the Roman calendar; "day of the sun," because dedicated to the sun), the first day of the week, was adopted by the early Christians as a day of worship.

The *North British Review* styled Sunday,

...the wild solar holiday of all pagan times.²⁰

And Dr. Chambers in the *Old Testament Student*, says that *Dies Solis*, day of the sun, was...

...its old astronomical and heathen title.²¹

Now what appears from all this? Just this: That whenever the Jews apostatized from God and plunged into some form of sun worship, they ignored God's memorial, the Sabbath, and instead performed superstitious and lascivious rites on the day of the sun, the first day of the week, which was "the wild solar holiday of all pagan times." This is just as sure as is the fact that sun worship was the universal form of idolatry.

Let it be well understood, however, that there was nothing of a Sabbatical nature connected with the day of the sun. The heathen knew nothing of a Sabbath day. Their worship was not solemn and spiritual, but was hilarious, and was marked by festivities. Their feast-days to their gods were holidays, not sacred days.

In all pagan countries religion was an affair of the State, and their religious days were public holidays, as the Fourth of July

²⁰ Vol. 18, p. 409.

²¹ January, 1886.

in America or the Bank Holidays in England. No idea of sacredness attached to them, and labor was not forbidden, but the people generally abandoned themselves to wild sports, feasting and dancing. As Mosheim says of the heathen:

Their festivals and other solemn days were polluted by a licentious indulgence in every species of libidinous excess; and on these occasions they were not prohibited even from making the sacred mansions of their gods the scenes of vile and beastly gratification.²²

So Israel's apostasy was always accompanied by Sabbath-breaking and by the keeping of Sunday, according to the heathen custom. This marks an important point in our investigation of the origin of Sunday observance in the Christian church.

Since sun worship was the prevailing religion in the Roman Empire, it is easy to imagine what would be the tendency of those members of Christian churches that should apostatize, or were only partially converted from heathenism. The same circumstances would produce the same results after Christ as before Christ. But we will not anticipate.

²² *Commentaries* (edited by Murdock, New York, 1854), Introduction, chapter 1, section 11.

5. Heathen Influences in the Church

VERY early in their history the Christian churches that were founded by the apostles came under heathen influence. These churches were, outside of Judea, planted in the midst of the heathen, and were largely composed of converts from heathenism. To the heathen they looked for their accersions. The apostles had to warn the flock continually against the subtle influence of the heathen philosophy. To the Colossians Paul wrote:

Colossians 2

⁸ Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

To Timothy he gave this warning:

1 Timothy 6

²⁰ O Timothy, keep that which is committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called;

²¹ Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.

These two texts describe in terms as accurate as they are brief the philosophy of the heathen world. It was this philosophy, so flattering to human pride, that was responsible for the gross abominations of idolatry, as the principle on which it was based was responsible for idolatry itself. The apostle Paul describes it and its results in the following words:

Romans 1

²¹ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

²³ And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to

four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

²⁴ Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves;

²⁵ Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

It is not necessary here to give a detailed account of the pagan philosophy. The text just quoted sufficiently indicates that it was wholly of man—the product of the unregenerate human heart. While those who taught the people took the title of “philosophers”—lovers of wisdom— they had not, nor did they profess to have, any sort of an idea as to what wisdom is. Nor did they think that it is possible for man to find out.

Their philosophy, therefore, was simply vain and idle speculation as to the cause of things. As the inspired history says of the Athenians: They

Acts 17

²¹ ...spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.

It is evident that it is impossible that there should have been any system or consistency in philosophy which was simply the product of fervent and unfettered imagination; for while one philosopher’s fancy might lead him in one direction, another’s would lead him in another channel.

Nay, as with so many modern professors of “science falsely so called,” the views advanced by any philosopher today might be rejected tomorrow for others directly contrary; and these, in turn, might be regarded next week as but the slough-skin of thought.

However, from the time of Plato, there were certain views which were quite generally held, which may be briefly stated as follows:

The Platonists believed that all men are not simply the offspring of Deity, but that they are a part of Him—that every man is essentially divine. It follows from this that they believed in the pre-existence of souls. Further, since divinity is always the same, the divine essence in man must have had as great wisdom before it entered into the human body as it ever could have. Therefore, they held that all knowledge is inherent in man, but latent until it is developed by circumstances.

The man, therefore, who would know wisdom, according to this philosophy, must simply look within. Self-contemplation, or, at least, the following of the leadings of one's own mind, would show him wisdom, although never so surely that he might positively affirm, "This is truth."

This is the secret of the contemptuous question which the haughty Roman governor put to Jesus,—“What is truth?” He had never been taught in philosophy that such a thing actually exists.

Still further, from the idea that men are essentially divine, the conclusion was inevitable that whatever they may do is right, and that one's own impulses and desires are the only standard of right and wrong. To see how such a philosophy as this would lead to all the gross immoralities indicated in the latter part of the first chapter of *Romans*, one has only to have some knowledge of human nature. If his knowledge of himself is not sufficient to show him its corruption, *Mark* 7:21-23, *Jeremiah* 17:9, *Romans* 8:7, and *Galatians* 5:19-21, will enlighten him.

The fact that the apostle Paul warned the brethren against this subtle evil shows that the church was in danger from it. Indeed, the evil was already working in the church, for the apostle said,

2 Thessalonians 2

⁷ The mystery of iniquity does already work.

And if the evil was working in the church in spite of the personal labors of the apostles, what might we not expect when the church was deprived of their labors? Let us take a glance at the church for the first three centuries, and we shall see how soon and how greatly the fine gold became dim, and the wine mixed with water.

The learned Mosheim, writing of the first century, says that...

...it is not to be denied, that even in this century the perverse Jewish custom of obscuring the plain language of Scripture by forced and frigid allegories, and of diverting words from their natural and proper meanings, in order to extort from them some recondite sense, found admirers and imitators among Christians.²³

Thus early were men beginning to depart from the simplicity of the word. But it was not till in the second century, after all the apostles had passed away, that we find very marked evidences of degeneracy. In this century quite a number of philosophers and learned men came over to the Christians, and Mosheim expresses himself as unable to decide whether the church received more benefit than injury from these men. It seems to us that it is easy to see that the church received more injury than benefit from them.

For the noble simplicity and the majestic dignity of the Christian religion were lost, or at least impaired, when these philosophers presumed to associate their dogmas with it; and to bring faith and piety under the dominion of human reason.²⁴

One of the most noted of these philosophers who came over to Christianity was Justin Martyr, who lived from about 110 to 165 AD. Bishop A.C. Coxe, in his laudatory preface to the writings of Justin, says that:

²³ *Ecclesiastical History*, century 1, part 2, chapter 3, section 2.

²⁴ Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 1, chapter 1, section 12.

After trying all other systems, his elevated tastes and refined perceptions made him a disciple of Socrates and Plato. So he climbed toward Christ.

As well talk of climbing toward the stars by burrowing in the ground. But this shows that Justin's Christianity, when he at last joined the church, was simply a matter of philosophical taste. Bishop Coxe himself says as much in the same preface, remarking that:

He wore his philosopher's gown after his conversion, as a token that he had attained the only true philosophy.

Dr. Philip Schaff says that Justin is...

...the first of the church Fathers to bring classical scholarship and Platonic philosophy in contact with the Christian theology....With him Christ was the absolute reason, and Christianity the only true philosophy.²⁵

That means that he interpreted Christianity by the means of Platonic philosophy. Dr. Killen says that after his conversion he...

...still wore the philosopher's cloak, and continued to cherish an undue regard for the wisdom of the pagan sages. His mind was never completely emancipated from the influence of a false system of metaphysics.

Farrar says that he depreciates the law, allegorizes, and expounds Scripture in an arbitrary, untenable manner, owing to his theory of inspiration, which was...

...derived from heathen philosophers.

Later he writes that,

²⁵ *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, sec. 122 (Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1872).

Following in the footsteps of the rabbis, he denies the plainest historical facts.²⁶

Mosheim refers to him as an example of those who persisted in recommending the study of philosophy, and initiating youth therein. And Neander styles him...

...the precursor of the Alexandrian church teachers,

–the first in whom we observe Christianity in contact with the Platonic philosophy.

We need not dwell longer on Justin Martyr. We simply wish to call attention to the fact that the first so-called Father of any note was essentially pagan in his conception of Christianity. We might demonstrate this by quotations from his own works, but it is not necessary, as we use him only to introduce the Alexandrian philosophy, of which he was the precursor.

It was especially by this that the church was paganized. It was from Alexandria that the church imbibed the most of its errors. The darkness that overspread the face of Egypt in the time of the plagues was not so dense nor so disastrous as the spiritual darkness which floated from Egypt over the face of the Christian church.

To Alexandria and the renowned Fathers who taught there we now give special attention.

²⁶ *History of Interpretation*, p. 173.

6. The Eclectic Philosophy

NEAR the close of the second century, a new system of philosophy was started, called the "Eclectic."

This philosophy was adopted by such of the learned at Alexandria, as wished to be accounted Christians, and yet to retain the name, the garb, and the rank of philosophers. In particular, all those who in this century presided in the schools of the Christians at Alexandria. Athenagoras, Pantaeus, and Clemens Alexandrinus, are said to have approved of it.

These men were persuaded that true philosophy, the great and most salutary gift of God, lay in scattered fragments among all the sects of philosophers; and therefore, that it was the duty of every wise man, and especially of a Christian teacher, to collect those fragments from all quarters, and to use them for the defense of religion, and the confutation of impiety. Yet this selection of opinions did not prevent them from regarding Plato as wiser than all the rest, and as especially remarkable for treating the Deity, the soul, and things remote from sense, so as to suit the Christian scheme.²⁷

As Clement of Alexandria was the chief exponent of this system of philosophy, we shall, for brevity's sake, confine our attention to him. Murdock, the translator of Mosheim, gives us in a note the following sketch:

Titus Flavius Clemens, whether born at Athens or Alexandria, was a pagan in early life, and devoted himself to philosophy. He traveled in Greece, in South Italy, in Coelo-Syria, in Palestine, and lastly in Egypt, where he was a pupil of Pantaeus, the master of the Christian school at Alexandria. Becoming a Christian, he was made a presbyter of the Alexandrian church, and succeeded his preceptor Pantaeus as master of the catechetic or divinity school. He taught with great applause during the reign of Severus (193-211 AD), and had

²⁷ Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 1, section 6.

Origen and other eminent men of the third century for pupils....

Clement had vast learning, a lively imagination, great fluency, considerable discrimination, and was a bold and independent speculator. That he had true piety, and held the essential truths of the gospel, is admitted by all; [it is not necessary to call in question his sincerity; but his teachings show that he had a very meager knowledge of the gospel]; but no one of the Fathers, except Origen, has been more censured, in modern times, for an excessive attachment to philosophy or metaphysical theology.

He was a true eclectic, which he also professed to be; that is, he followed no master implicitly, but examined and judged for himself. Yet his education, and the atmosphere in which he lived, led him to lean towards Platonism and Stoicism. His great error was, that he overrated the value of philosophy, or human reason, as a guide in matters of religion. He also indulged his imagination, as all the learned of this age did, to excess; and construed the Bible allegorically and fancifully.²⁸

In his *Commentaries*, Mosheim tells us that there can be no question but that

Clement is to be ranked amongst the first and principal Christian defenders and teachers of philosophic science, deed that he may even be placed at the head of those who devoted themselves to the cultivation of philosophy with an ardor that knew no bounds, and were so blind and misguided as to engage in the hopeless attempt of producing an accommodation between the principles of philosophic science and those of the Christian religion.²⁹

The high place which Clement gave to the Greek philosophy may be learned from two passages in his writings. In the following he places it on a level with the Bible, and supports his position by manufacturing a text of Scripture:

²⁸ Note 9 to *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 2, section 5.

²⁹ Century 2, section 25, note 2.

Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration. “For thy foot,” it is said, “will not stumble, if thou refer what is good, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us, to providence.” For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of the others by consequence, as philosophy. Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. “For this was a school-master to bring the Hellenic mind,” as the law the Hebrews, “to Christ.” Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.³⁰

We cannot see how anybody who knows what the gospel is, can imagine that the writer of such a passage was ever acquainted with its essential principles. In chapter eight he says that

...we shall not err in alleging that all things necessary and profitable for life came to us from God, and that philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them—being, as it is, a stepping stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ.

Elsewhere he argues, by a fanciful and absurd use of the record of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, that it is absolutely necessary to study philosophy in order to understand Christianity,—that as Hagar was Sarah’s handmaid, so philosophy is the handmaid of religion.

As a direct consequence of such teaching as this, by so renowned a church Father, two things resulted:

1. The Scriptures were twisted out of all sense and positively contradicted, and
2. The church was filled with men who, while professing to be Christian, were still pagan, for the reason that

³⁰ Stromata, book 1, chapter 5.

there was nothing in the instruction which they had received to cause them to think that Christianity was anything else than another phase of paganism.

Of Clement's estimate of the Scriptures let the following serve as a sufficient example:

For many reasons, then, the Scriptures hide the sense. First, that we may become inquisitive, and be ever on the watch for the discovery of the words of salvation. Then it was not suitable for all to understand, so that they might not receive harm in consequence of taking in another sense the things declared for salvation by the Holy Spirit. Wherefore the holy mysteries of the prophecies are veiled in parables—preserved for chosen men, selected to knowledge in consequence of their faith; for the style of the Scriptures is parabolic.³¹

The idea that the meaning of the Scriptures had to be hidden, to avoid the danger of their being misunderstood, may strike the reader as ludicrous; but, according to the custom which was fast forming at that time, it was a sure preventive. We shall refer to this later, in connection with the results of Origen's teaching.

The motive which induced Clement and his fellows to exalt philosophy is thus set forth:

The Christian teachers were well aware of what essential benefit it would be in promoting their cause, not only with the multitude, but also amongst men of the higher orders, could the philosophers, whose authority and estimation with the world was unbounded, be brought to embrace Christianity. With a view, therefore, of accomplishing this desirable object, they not only adopted the study of philosophy themselves, but became loud in their recommendation of it to others, declaring that the difference between Christianity and philosophy [paganism] was but trifling, and consisted merely in the former being of a nature somewhat more perfect than the latter.

³¹ Stromata, book 6, chapter 15.

And it is most certain that this kind of conduct was so far productive of the desired effect, as to cause not a few of the philosophers to enroll themselves under the Christian banner. Those who have perused the various works written by such of the ancient philosophers as had been induced to embrace Christianity, cannot have failed to remark, that the Christian discipline was regarded by all of them in no other light than as a certain mode of philosophizing.³²

³² *Ecclesiastical Commentary*, century 2, section 26, note.

7. Neo-Platonism

EVEN if no one had gone beyond Clement in love of heathen philosophy, and in lowering the standard of Christianity toward the level of paganism, the results would have been fatal to the church. For let it be remembered that Clement stood at the head of the great theological seminary at Alexandria, where the young men who were to be the teachers of the heathen received their instruction.

But the matter did not stop here. It has been well said that:

...apostasy is like the descent of falling bodies; it proceeds with ever accelerating velocity.

It was not enough that the church should teach the heathen that their pagan philosophy was a system especially devised by the Lord for the purpose of preparing them for Christianity; the next step was to teach them that they were in reality Christians already, and had always been such. How this came about we shall let Mosheim tell in the following paragraphs:

This [eclectic] mode of philosophizing received some modification, when Ammonius Saccas, at the close of the century, with great applause, opened a school at Alexandria, and laid the foundation of that sect which is called the New Platonic. This man was born and educated a Christian, and perhaps made pretensions to Christianity all his life. Being possessed of great fecundity of genius as well as eloquence, he undertook to bring all systems of philosophy and religion into harmony, or attempted to teach a philosophy, by which all philosophers, and the men of all religions, the Christian not excepted, might be joined into one concordant body.

And here, especially, lies the difference between this new sect and the eclectic philosophy which had before flourished in Egypt. For the eclectics held that there was a mixture of good and bad, true and false, in all the systems; and therefore they selected out of all what appeared to them consonant

with reason, and rejected the rest.

But Ammonius held that all sects professed one and the same system of truth, with only some difference in the mode of stating it, and some minute difference in their conceptions; so that by means of suitable explanations, they might with little difficulty be brought into one body.

He moreover held this new and singular principle, that the prevailing religions, and the Christian also, must be understood and explained according to this common philosophy of all the sects, and that not only the fables of the vulgar pagans and their priests, but also the interpretations of the disciples of Christ, ought to be separated from their respective religions.

The grand object of Ammonius, to bring all sects and religions into harmony, required him to do much violence to the sentiments and opinions of all parties, philosophers, priests, and Christians, and particularly by allegorical interpretations, to remove very many impediments out of his way.

The manner in which he prosecuted his object, appears in the writings of his disciples and adherents, which have come down to us in great abundance. To make the arduous work more easy, he assumed, that philosophy was first produced and nurtured among the people of the East; that it was inculcated among the Egyptians by Hermes, and thence passed to the Greeks; that it was a little obscured and deformed by the disputatious Greeks; but still, that by Plato, the best interpreter of the principles of Hermes and of the ancient oriental sages, it was preserved for the most part entire and unsullied; that the religions received by the various nations of the world were not inconsistent with this most ancient philosophy; yet it had most unfortunately happened, that what the ancients taught by symbols and fictitious histories, according to the oriental fashion, had been understood literally by the people and the priests; and thus the ministers of Divine Providence, those demons whom the Supreme Lord of all had placed over the various parts of our world, had erroneously been converted into gods, and had been worshiped with many vain ceremonies; that, therefore, the public religions of all nations should be corrected by this ancient philosophy;

and that it was the sole object of Christ to set bounds to the reigning superstition, and correct the errors which had crept into religion, but not to abolish altogether the ancient religions.³³

The reader will have no difficulty in agreeing with Mosheim that no set of men ever occasioned greater evils and calamities to the Christian church than did these Neo-Platonists. In Neo-Platonism there was the germ of every evil. Monkery, Spiritualism in the church, purgatory, prayers to and for the dead, and, in short, Jesuitism,—an utter deadening of the moral perceptions,—sprang from this Egyptian philosophy like the frogs which at one time defiled the land.

But that which led to all these unchristian and abominable practices was the unprincipled manner in which Ammonius and his disciples handled the Scriptures and to this we direct our attention.

It had long been a recognized principle among philosophers that “the end justified the means,” and that truth was valuable only as it would bring about certain desired results. But if there was a certain point which they thought it was necessary to make, and they could gain it better by telling a falsehood than by telling the truth, they did not scruple to lie.

It was only by the application of this principle (or, rather, lack of principle) that Ammonius was able to construct his system of philosophy. In order to make it appear that all systems of philosophy, together with Christianity, were really one system, he had to distort those systems, putting upon the teaching of philosophers a construction which the words would not warrant. But it is manifest that none of those systems of philosophy could suffer so much by this process as Christianity did.

The difference between them was only technical, while

³³ Mosheim’s *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 1, sections 7,8.

Christianity had nothing in common with any of them. It is evident, therefore, that in the general average, Christianity had to stand really all the loss. The case is thus stated by Mosheim:

When once this passion for philosophizing had taken possession of the minds of the Egyptian teachers and certain others, and had been gradually diffused by them in various directions throughout the church, the holy and beautiful simplicity of early times very quickly disappeared, and was followed by a most remarkable and disastrous alteration in nearly the whole system of Christian discipline.

This very important and deeply-to-be-regretted change had its commencement in the century now under review [the second], but it will be in the succeeding one that we shall have to mark its chief progress. One of the earliest evils that flowed from this immoderate attachment to philosophy, was the violence to which it gave rise in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. For, whereas, the Christians had, from a very early period, imbibed the notion that under the words, laws, and facts recorded in the sacred volume, there is a latent sense concealed, an opinion which they appear to have derived from the Jews, no sooner did this passion for philosophizing take possession of their minds, than they began with wonderful subtlety to press the Scriptures into their service, in support of all such principles and maxims as appeared to them consonant to reason; and at the same time most wretchedly to pervert and twist every part of those divine oracles which opposed itself to their philosophical tenets or notions.³⁴

As stated in another place:

This great design of bringing about a union of all sects and religions, the offspring of a mind certainly not destitute of genius, but distracted by fanaticism, and scarcely at all under the dominion of reason, required, in order to its execution, not only that the most strained and unprincipled interpretations should be given to ancient sentiments, maxims, docu-

³⁴ *Commentaries*, century 2, section 33.

ments, and narratives, but also that the assistance of frauds and fallacies should be called in; hence we find the works which the disciples of Ammonius left behind them abounding in things of this kind; so much so, indeed, that it is impossible for them ever to be viewed in any other light than as deplorable monuments of wisdom run mad.³⁵

This is exactly in harmony with:

Romans 1

²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, section 28.

8. Origen's Part in Paganizing the Church

OF ALL the disciples of the new Platonic philosophy, Origen was by all means the greatest, both in learning, according to the popular standard, and in the position which he held in the church. His education was completed under Clement of Alexandria and Ammonius Saccas. At the age of eighteen he was advanced to the position of head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, succeeding Clement. Murdock says that:

He was in general orthodox, according to the standard of that age,

–which is not a very high rating. Killen rightly calls him...

...the father of Christian mysticism;

–and Waddington says that he was the founder of the scholastic system of theology. His direct teaching inculcated many errors; but his views in regard to the Scriptures tended to undermine the whole fabric of Christianity. His idea was that...

...as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture.

The “corporeal” sense, which is the simple meaning of Scripture, he did not wholly despise, but he built the most on the “psychical” sense, or the soul, and the “spiritual sense,” neither of which could be deduced from the words.

This “spiritual” sense which Origen lauded was not that understanding of the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit alone can reveal, but that which was evolved solely by human speculation. It was arrived at by the method adopted by Ammonius in common with other pagan philosophers, of evolving some notion from one's “inner consciousness,” and then making the

Bible responsible for it. But we shall let Origen explain himself, as he does in the following lucid (?) passage:

But as there are certain passages of Scripture which do not at all contain the “corporeal sense” (as we shall show in the following paragraphs), there are also places where we must seek only for the “soul,” as it were, and “spirit” of Scripture.

And perhaps on this account the water vessels containing two or three firkins apiece are said to lie for the purification of the Jews, as we read in the Gospel according to John; the expression darkly intimating, with respect to those who are called (by the apostle) “Jews,” secretly, that they are purified by the word of Scripture, receiving sometimes two firkins, i.e., so to speak, the “psychical” and “spiritual” sense; and sometimes three firkins, since some have, in addition to those already mentioned, also the “corporeal” sense, which is capable of (producing) edification. And six water vessels are reasonably (appropriate) to those who are purified in the world, which was made in six days—the perfect number.³⁶

Of course, in order to get this “psychical” and “spiritual” sense out of the Bible, that is, to get out of it something that was never in it, much violence had to be done to the sacred record. Origen paved the way, not only for the reception of his vagaries, but for the utter disuse into which the Bible very soon fell, by boldly declaring that the Bible contains many falsehoods. In the following passage the italics are ours:

But since, if the usefulness of the legislation, and the sequence and beauty of the history, were universally evident of itself, we should not believe that any other thing could be understood in the Scriptures save what was obvious, *the word of God has arranged that certain stumbling-blocks, as it were, and offenses, and impossibilities, should be introduced into the midst of the law, and the history*, in order that we may not, through being drawn away in all directions by the merely attractive nature of the language, either altogether fall away from the (true) doctrines, as learning nothing worthy of God,

³⁶ Origen, *de Principiis*, book 4, chapter 1, section 12.

or, by not departing from the letter, come to the knowledge of nothing more divine.

And this also we must know, that the principal aim being to announce the “spiritual” connection in those things that are done, and that ought to be done, where the Word found that things done according to the history could be adapted to these mystical senses, he made use of them, concealing from the multitude the deeper meaning; but where, in the narrative of the development of supersensual things, there did not follow the performance of those certain events, which was already indicated by the mystical meaning, *the scripture interwove in the history (the account of) some event that did not take place, sometimes what could not have happened; sometimes what could, but did not.* And sometimes a few words are interpolated which are not true in their literal acceptation, and sometimes a larger number.

And a similar practice also is to be noticed with regard to the legislation, in which is often to be found what is useful in itself, and appropriate to the times of the legislation; *and sometimes also what does not appear to be of utility; and at other times, impossibilities are recorded for the sake of the more skillful and inquisitive,* in order that they may give themselves to the toil of investigating what is written, and thus attain to a becoming conviction of the manner in which a meaning worthy of God must be sought out in such subjects.³⁷

This theory, it will be seen, makes the Scripture interpreter the sole judge of what is “worthy of God,” so that the ultimate authority is not the Scriptures, but the interpreter. But Origen thus continues in the next section:

It was not only, however, with the [Scriptures composed] before the advent [of Christ] that the Spirit thus dealt; but as being the same Spirit, and [proceeding] from the one God, He did the same thing both with the evangelists and the apostles,—as even these do not contain throughout a pure history of events, which are interwoven indeed according to

³⁷ *Ibid.*, section 15.

the letter, but *which did not actually occur*.

Nor even do the law and the commandments wholly convey what is agreeable to reason. For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? and the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? And *who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? and again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree? And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that any-one doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally...*

And what need is there to say more, since *those who are not altogether blind can collect countless instances of a similar kind recorded as having occurred, but which did not literally take place*. Nay, the Gospels themselves are filled with the same kind of narratives; e.g., the devil leading Jesus up into a high mountain, in order to show him from thence the kingdoms of the whole world, and the glory of them. For who is there among those who do not read such accounts carelessly, that would not condemn those who think that with the eye of the body—which requires a lofty height in order that the parts lying (immediately) under and adjacent may be seen—the kingdoms of the Persians, and Scythians, and Indians, and Parthians, were beheld, and the manner in which their princes are glorified among men?

And the attentive reader may notice in the Gospels innumerable other passages like these, so that he will be convinced that *in the histories that are literally recorded, circumstances that did not occur are inserted*. And if we come to the legislation of Moses, *many of the laws manifest the irrationality, and others the impossibility, of their literal observance*.

Much more of a similar nature might be quoted, but this is

sufficient to show Origen's estimate of the Scriptures, and to indicate the nature of his interpretation. If the reader now recalls the statement of Mosheim, that:

Origen unquestionably stands at the head of the interpreters of the Bible in this century,

—he will know that the Bible was not very highly honored in the third century AD.

9. Results of the Philosophical Handling of the Bible

AS WILL be seen at a glance, the teachings of Clement and Origen could result in nothing else than the lessening of the authority of the Bible upon the people. Their teaching substituted their own opinions and fancies for the simple instruction of the Scriptures.

When the people were taught by their most eminent teachers, in whom they had confidence, that the Bible did not mean what it said, that many impossible things were inserted on purpose to deceive the ignorant, and that even those portions which might be understood literally had also a mystical meaning which was far more important than the simple meaning, and which could be explained only by those who were specially endowed by their training in philosophy, the inevitable result must have been that they would not attempt to read and understand the Bible for themselves, but would take just what their instructors gave them.

And that is exactly what did happen, as we see in the Catholic Church today. Few, however, realize that this withholding of the Bible from the common people began in the third century, not by expressly forbidding them to read it, but by making them feel that it was useless for them to do so.

Let it not be forgotten that these teachers to whom the people were thus led to leave the entire work of Bible instruction, were men who were insanely devoted to heathen philosophy and to its methods.

As is clearly shown by the quotations from Clement and Origen, the two most noted teachers, they did not at all believe the Bible, but only the fancies of their own darkened and disordered mind. The fact that a thing was commanded in the

Bible did not give it any weight with them, for they freely attributed falsehoods even to the law. Contrariwise, the prohibitions of the Bible would not stand in the way of their doing anything which their “reason” should teach them was necessary.

In short, the Bible, even as early as the third century, became only a plaything in the hands of these men. Its name only was used to give sanction to whatever theory or practice those professedly Christian philosophers devised out of their own hearts. Thus the way was open for the introduction of any heathen custom. When the people were deprived of the light of the Bible, they had no protection against error. Jesus said:

Matthew 6

²² The light of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness.

²³ If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Christ left his word—the holy Scriptures—to be the light of the body, the church. If the church had walked in its light, it would have been full of light, and would itself have been the light of the world. But when the heathen philosophers, whom it allowed to become its teachers, turned the Bible itself into darkness, perverting it to support their vagaries, how great was the darkness of the body!

With the Bible practically taken out of the hands of the people, there was no way in which they could distinguish the difference between Christianity and paganism. Added to this was the fact that those who, through “philosophy and vain deceit,” had taken the Bible from them, were setting forth that there was no difference between Christianity and paganism, that they were different parts of one system, and that the study of pagan philosophy was actually necessary to an un-

derstanding of the gospel.³⁸ Is it any wonder, then, that:

It came to pass that the greater part of these Platonists, upon comparing the Christian religion with the system of Ammonius, were led to imagine that nothing could be more easy than a transition from the one to the other, and, to the great detriment of the Christian cause, were induced to embrace Christianity without feeling it necessary to abandon scarcely any of their former principles.³⁹

This did not occur without a protest.

All Christians were not agreed as to the utility of philosophy and literature. Those who were themselves initiated into the depths of philosophy, wished that many, and especially such as aspired to the office of bishops and teachers, might apply themselves to the study of human wisdom, for the purpose of enabling them to confute enemies of the truth with more effect, and of rendering them better fitted for the guidance and instruction of others.

But a great majority thought otherwise; they wished to banish all [human] reasoning and [pagan] philosophy out of the confines of the church; for they feared that such learning might injure piety....

By degrees, those obtained the ascendancy who thought that philosophy and erudition were profitable, rather than hurtful, to religion and piety, and laws were at length established, that no person entirely illiterate and unlearned should be admitted to the office of teacher in the church. Yet the vices of the philosophers and learned men, among other causes, prevented the opposite party from ever being destitute of patrons and advocates.⁴⁰

This voice of protest would naturally become weaker and weaker as the philosophizing party grew larger. Although there never came a time, even in the darkest of the Dark Ages, when God did not have men who had not bowed the knee to

³⁸ See the account already given of Ammonius Saccas and Neo-Platonism.

³⁹ Mosheim, *Commentaries*, century 2, sec. 32, note 2.

⁴⁰ Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, ch. 1, sec. 13.

Baal, yet they soon became so few, in proportion to the multitude, and were so obscure and despised, that their voice was not heard. As Mosheim says:

By the Christian disciples of Ammonius, and more particularly by Origen, who in the succeeding century [the third] attained to a degree of eminence scarcely credible, the doctrines which they had derived from their master were sedulously instilled into the minds of the youth with whose education they were intrusted, and by the efforts of these again, who were subsequently for the most part, called to the ministry, the love of philosophy became pretty generally diffused throughout a considerable portion of the church.⁴¹

Farrar says that:

Half the sermons of the day were borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, from the thoughts and methods of Origen.⁴²

And so, with the knowledge of this flood of pagan philosophy, pagan thought, and of pagan men who thought it not necessary to change their principles, we are prepared to behold the Church completely paganized.

⁴¹ *Commentaries*, century 2, sec. 27.

⁴² *Lives of the Fathers*, volume 2, p.249.

10. The Church Completely Paganized

WE HAVE already quoted from Dr. Killen the following statement:

In the interval between the days of the apostles and the conversion of Constantine, the Christian commonwealth changed its aspect....Rites and ceremonies, of which neither Paul nor Peter ever heard, crept silently into use, and then claimed the rank of divine institutions.⁴³

Dr. Schaff says:

Not a few pagan habits and ceremonies, concealed under new names, crept into the church, or were baptized only with water and not with the fire and spirit of the gospel.⁴⁴

And Bingham says:

As to those festivals which were purely civil, we are to observe, that some of them were of long standing in the Roman Empire, and no new institution of Christians, but only reformed and regulated by them in some particulars, to cut off the idolatrous rites and other corruptions that sometimes attended them.⁴⁵

But the “idolatrous rites and other corruptions” were not cut off from these festivals when they were brought into the church, as we shall see. It will easily be imagined that those pagan philosophers, who thought it not necessary to give up their heathen principles upon adopting Christianity, did not think it necessary to give up their practices either; and that this was the case we have abundant evidence.

There is so great an amount of testimony on this point that, although we can use but a small fraction of it, we shall run the

⁴³ Dr. Killen, *The Ancient Church*, Preface.

⁴⁴ Volume 2, section 74.

⁴⁵ *Antiquities*, book 20, chapter 1, section 2.

risk of being charged with piling it up indiscriminately, without regard to order. Indeed, as it all applies to the same time, it makes little difference which comes first. We first quote the following:

It is certain, that to religious worship, both public and private, many rites were added, without necessity, and to the offense of sober and good men. For the chief cause of this, I should look at once to the perverseness of mankind; who are more delighted with the pomp and splendor of external forms, than with the true devotion of the heart, and who despise whatever does not gratify their eyes and ears. But other and additional causes may be mentioned, which were clear, undoubtedly, of any bad design, but not of indiscretion.

First, there is good reason to suppose that Christian bishops multiplied sacred rites for the sake of rendering the Jews and the pagans more friendly to them. Both had been accustomed to numerous and splendid ceremonies from their infancy, and felt no doubt that in them was comprised a portion of religion. When, accordingly, they saw the new religion without such things, they thought it too simple, and therefore despised it. To obviate this objection, the rulers of the Christian churches deemed it proper for them to worship God in public with some increase of ceremony.

Secondly, the simplicity of the worship which Christians offered to the Deity, gave occasion to certain calumnies, maintained both by the Jews and the pagan priests. The Christians were pronounced atheists, because they were destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests, and all that pomp in which the vulgar suppose the essence of religion to consist. For unenlightened persons are prone to estimate religion by what meets their eyes. To silence this accusation, the Christian doctors thought it necessary to introduce some external rites, which would strike the senses of the people; so that they could maintain themselves really to possess all those things of which Christians were charged with being destitute, though under different forms.

Fourthly, among the Greeks and the people of the East nothing was held more sacred than what were called the

“mysteries.” This circumstances led the Christians, in order to impart dignity to their religion, to say, that they also had similar mysteries, or certain holy rites concealed from the vulgar; and they not only applied the terms used in the pagan mysteries to Christian institutions, particularly baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but they gradually introduced also the rites which were designated by those terms. This practice originated in the Eastern provinces; and thence, after the times of Adrian (who first introduced the Grecian mysteries among the Latins), it spread among the Christians of the West. A large part, therefore, of the Christian observances and institutions, even in this century, had the aspect of the pagan mysteries.⁴⁶

In a note appended to this passage, Mosheim gives us the following picture:

It will not be unsuitable to transcribe here, a very apposite passage, which I accidentally met with in Gregory Nyssen’s *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus*, in the *Works of Thaumaturgus*, as published by Vossius, p. 312, who gives the Latin only:

“When Gregory perceived that the ignorant and simple multitude persisted in their idolatry, on account of the sensible pleasures and delights it afforded, he allowed them in celebrating the memory of the holy martyrs, to indulge themselves, and give a loose to pleasure (i. e., as the thing itself, and both what precedes and what follows place beyond all controversy, he allowed them at the sepulchers of the martyrs, on their feast days, to dance, to use sports, to indulge conviviality, and to do all the things that the worshipers of idols were accustomed to do in their temples on their festival days), hoping, that in process of time they would spontaneously come over to a more becoming and more correct manner of life.”

The piety of Gregory Thaumaturgus we shall not stop to call in question; but we certainly cannot offer a very high tribute to his knowledge of human nature if he thought that indulgence in pleasure and hilarity would tend to cause men to

⁴⁶ Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, ch. 4, sec. 1-3 and 5.

come to a better mode of life. As well expect that the Niagara rapids will spontaneously turn just at the edge of the precipice and flow the other way. What it was that this eminent church Father allowed his flock to do, when he permitted them

...to dance, to use sports, to indulge conviviality and to do all things that the worshipers of idols were accustomed to do in their temples on their festival days,

–may be learned from the following statement, also by Mosheim:

Of the prayers of pagan worshipers, whether we regard the matter or the mode of expression, it is impossible to speak favorably; they were not only destitute in general of every thing allied to the spirit of genuine piety, but were sometimes framed expressly for the purpose of obtaining the countenance of heaven to the most abominable and flagitious undertakings. In fact, the greater part of their religious observances were of an absurd and ridiculous nature, and in many instances strongly tinged with the most disgraceful barbarism and obscenity. Their festivals and other solemn days were polluted by a licentious indulgence in every species of libidinous excess; and on these occasions they were not prohibited even from making the sacred mansions of their gods the scenes of vile and beastly gratification.⁴⁷

To this all the historians give witness. Farrar speaks of the same thing, and notes the year in which Gregory gave this order, saying:

In 258 he sanctioned the annual feasts in commemoration of the martyrs, hoping that they would help to allure the pagan population, who were accustomed to such festivities.⁴⁸

It is not necessary to do more than call attention, in passing, to the fact that many modern church authorities seem to have

⁴⁷ *Commentaries*, Introduction, chapter 1, section 11.

⁴⁸ *Lives of the Fathers*, p. 329.

taken lessons from Gregory Thaumaturgus. But we will hear further of this matter of Christian conformity to pagan customs. Milman says of the church:

The whole ceremonial was framed with the art which arises out of the intuitive perception of that which is effective towards its end. That which was felt to be awful was adopted to enforce awe; that which drew the people to the church, and affected their minds when there, became sanctified to the use of the church. The edifice itself arose more lofty with the triumph of the faith, and enlarged itself to receive the multiplying votaries.

Christianity disdained that its God and its Redeemer should be less magnificently honored than the demons of paganism. In the service it delighted to transfer and to breathe, as it were, a sublimer sense into the common appellations of the pagan worship, whether from the ordinary ceremonial, or the more secret mysteries....The incense, the garlands, the lamps, all were gradually adopted by zealous rivalry, or seized as the lawful spoils of vanquished paganism and consecrated to the service of Christ.

The church rivaled the old heathen mysteries in expanding by slow degrees its higher privileges....Its preparatory ceremonial of abstinence, personal purity, ablution, secrecy, closely resembled that of the pagan mysteries (perhaps each may have contributed to the other); so the theologic dialect of Christianity spoke the same language.

The festivals in honor of the martyrs were avowedly instituted, or at least conducted on a sumptuous scale, in rivalry of the banquets which formed so important and, attractive a part of the pagan ceremonial. Besides the earliest Agapae, which gave place to the more solemn eucharist there were other kinds of banquets, at marriages and funerals, called likewise Agapae; but those of the martyrs were the most costly and magnificent....

The day closed with an open banquet, in which all the worshippers were invited to partake. The wealthy heathens had been accustomed to propitiate the Manes of their departed friends by these costly festivals; the banquet was almost an

integral part of the heathen religious ceremony. The custom passed into the church; and, with the pagan feeling, the festival assumed a pagan character of gaiety and joyous excitement, and even of luxury.⁴⁹

The reader will recall the words of Paul to the Corinthian church,⁵⁰ and will see that this tendency to allow even the Lord's Supper to degenerate into a drunken heathen festival, existed very early. Knowing this, it is easy to imagine the lengths to which the church might go when it came to be overrun with unconverted heathen, and the apostles themselves were dead, and their words of warning made of no effect. But Milman proceeds in his account of the martyr festivals and their likeness to paganism:

As the evening drew in, the solemn and religious thoughts gave way to other emotions; the wine flowed freely, and the healths of the martyrs were pledged, not unfrequently, to complete inebriety. All the luxuries of the Roman banquet were imperceptibly introduced. Dances were admitted, pantomimic spectacles were exhibited, the festivals were prolonged till late in the evening, or to midnight, so that other criminal irregularities profaned, if not the sacred edifice, its immediate neighborhood.

The bishops had for some time sanctioned these pious hilarities with their presence; they had freely partaken of the banquets, and their attendants were accused of plundering the remains of the feast, which ought to have been preserved for the use of the poor.

Dr. Schaff writes:

We cannot but see in the martyr-worship, as it was actually practiced, a new form of the hero-worship of the pagans. Nor can we wonder in the least. For the great mass of the Christian people came, in fact, fresh from polytheism, without thorough conversion, and could not divest themselves of

⁴⁹ *History of Christianity*, book 4, chapter 2,

⁵⁰ *1 Corinthians* 11:17-22.

their old notions and customs at a stroke.⁵¹

Nor were they very likely to try to break off these old customs, when their most honored instructors gave license to them, and taught that the heathen philosophy which led directly to such practices, was really no different from Christianity.

Even some orthodox church teachers admitted the affinity of the saint-worship with heathenism, though with the view of showing that all that is good in the heathen worship reappears far better in the Christian.

The Greeks, Theodoret thinks, have the least reason to be offended at what takes place at the graves of the martyrs; for the libations and expiations, the demigods and deified men, originated with themselves.⁵²

Testimony to an unlimited extent might be given upon the matter of martyr-worship in the early church, and its identity with pagan hero-worship; but we wish only to show the fact that the church as a whole very early became permeated with paganism, and that there was no knowledge of the Bible to counteract the degeneracy, but that the church referred to the practices of the heathen as the warrant for their own doings.

Not only was pagan hero-worship continued in the church under the form of martyr-worship, but the very gods of ancient heathenism were worshiped under different names. Schaff says that we can but

...agree with nearly all unbiased historians in regarding the worship of Mary as an echo of ancient heathenism. It brings plainly to mind the worship of Ceres, of Isis, and of other ancient mothers of the gods; as the worship of saints and angels recalls the hero-worship of Greece and Rome. Polytheism was so deeply rooted among the people that it reproduced it-

⁵¹ *Church History*, volume 2, section 84.

⁵² *Ibid.*

self in ancient forms.⁵³

In this state of things we may be assured that the prevailing sun worship had its full share of influence in the church. The first feature of importance is Easter. Pagan influence in the church at a very early period is shown by this festival, since it was in the second century that the celebrated controversy concerning it occurred.

The word itself is pagan, *Eostre* being “the god of the dawn or of the spring.” It is not the continuation of the Jewish Passover, and has no manner of connection with that feast. In *Acts 12:4*, the translators of our common version have given us the word “Easter” instead of “Passover”, but it is correctly rendered in the *Revised Version*. The word “Easter” is not found in the Bible. The controversy concerning this festival was on this wise:

In the East we find the churches in the second century keeping a festival which corresponded in point of time to the Jewish Passover. It is supposed that this was in memory of the death of Christ, although there was never any instruction given to the church to celebrate the death of Christ in any such way. The festival was doubtless simply a concession to the prejudices of the Jews, who were more numerous in Asia, just as, where the pagans were more numerous, the church adopted pagan festivals, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to make them more willing to profess Christianity.

But unity of practice was greatly desired in all the churches, and Rome’s arrogance had already gone to such a length that she assumed the right to fix the standard of unity. She was the chief city and capital of the world, and why should she not set the fashion in matters of religion as well as in other things?

Now the Roman Church was mostly composed of pagans, and heathen influences surrounded it. Consequently it had no

⁵³ Volume 2, section 81.

care to conciliate the Jews, but found it expedient to lean towards paganism; and the pagans had a festival which they celebrated in honor of the return of spring, about the time of the vernal equinox. This was adopted by the Church of Rome and the churches which it influenced.

The bishop of Rome commanded the Eastern churches to celebrate their spring festival at the same time that he did. They refused. But Jewish influence could not prevail against the great body of pagans, and at the Council of Nice, 325 AD, the Roman custom was made universal. Easter was henceforth celebrated by all the churches. The time was fixed, as now, to the first Sunday after the full moon which followed the 21st of March. Green says that:

Eostre, the god of the dawn or of the spring, lends his name to the Christian festival of the resurrection.⁵⁴

This is true, but not the whole truth. The truth is that Eostre, the heathen god of light, gave not simply the name but the festival itself. The so-called “Christian festival of the resurrection” is nothing else but the old heathen festival. Dr. Schaff is very free to note the adoption of heathen festivals by the church, because he does not think that the practice is to be condemned. He says:

The English Easter, Anglo-Saxon Oster, German Ostern, is at all events connected with East and sunrise, and is akin to *eos oriens*, aurora. The comparison of sunrise and the natural spring with the new moral creation in the resurrection of Christ, and the transfer of the celebration of Ostara, the old German divinity of the rising, health-bringing light, to the Christian Easter festival, was the easier, because all nature is a symbol of spirit, and the heathen myths are dim presentiments and carnal anticipations of Christian truths.⁵⁵

The word “Easter,” from *Eostre* or *Ostara*, is by some traced

⁵⁴ *History of the English People*, book 1, ch. 1, sec. 20.

⁵⁵ *Church History*, vol. 1, sec. 99, note 5.

to Ishtar, or Astarte, the Assyrian counterpart of Baal, the sun-god, corresponding to the Latin Venus. Sacred eggs were connected with her worship. But whether Easter may or may not be traced to Astarte, with her licentious worship, it is certain that it is nothing but a relic of sun worship.

All we care for in the above is the admission that Easter is only a relic of nature-worship. We do not accept the suggestion of the identity of Christianity and pagan nature-worship; but we note with sorrow that the pagan worship of the creature rather than the Creator very early corrupted the Christian church. The reader will not fail to note that it was sun worship, and that alone, that fixed the time of the Easter festival, and that in this concession to heathenism there was a long step taken toward the exaltation of “the venerable day of the sun,”—the weekly sun festival, Sunday.

This spirit of concession to paganism was manifested in the adoption of the heathen festival which now bears the name of Christmas. The following is from Dr. Schaff:

The Christmas festival was probably the Christian transformation or regeneration of a series of kindred heathen festivals—the Saturnalia, Sigillaria, Juvenalia, and Brumalia—which were kept in Rome in the month of December, in commemoration of the golden age of universal freedom and equality, and in honor of the unconquered sun, and which were great holidays, especially for slaves and children.⁵⁶

Let the reader note that it was sun worship that the church was adopting in joining in the celebration of the winter festival. Dr. Schaff, although he defends the Christmas festival, plainly declares that it was borrowed from the heathen, and that it was in honor of the birthday of the sun, the orb of day, and not the Son of God. He says:

Had the Christmas festival arisen in the period of the persecution, its derivation from these pagan festivals would be

⁵⁶ *Church History*, vol. 1, sec. 77.

refuted by the then reigning abhorrence of everything heathen; but in the Nicene age this rigidness of opposition between the church and the world was in a great measure softened by the general conversion of the heathen.

Besides, there lurked in those pagan festivals themselves, in spite of all their sensual abuses, a deep meaning and an adaptation to a real want [this by way of excuse]; they might be called unconscious prophecies of the Christmas feast.

Finally the church Fathers themselves confirm the symbolical reference of the feast of the birth of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the Light of the world, to the birth festival of the unconquered sun, which on the twenty-fifth of December, after the winter solstice, breaks the growing power of darkness and begins anew his heroic career.⁵⁷

This feast celebrating the birthday of the sun (*dies natalis invicti solis*)...

...is the feast of the Persian sun-god Mithras, which was formally introduced in Rome under Domitian and Trojan.⁵⁸

This is all that Christmas is, for, as Schaff truly says,

The day and month of the birth of Christ are nowhere stated in the gospel history, and cannot be certainly determined.

But this would not be the case if the Lord had designed that it should be celebrated. The fiction that Christmas is the birthday of Christ was invented by the church in order to conceal the fact that out of wicked compliance with paganism they were celebrating the birth festival of the heathen sun-god.

Besides it was very easy for a church that was more than half Christian to fail to distinguish any difference between the Son of God—the Sun of Righteousness—of whom they heard as the Christian Divinity, and the sun which was the center of heathen worship.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Schaff.

And, as we have seen, the Neo-Platonism which Clement and Origen foisted upon the church held that there was really no difference between Christianity and paganism. Thus the church Fathers contributed to the confusion. In such a time, when, as Wylie says,

Instead of reaching forth to what was before, the Christian church permitted itself to be overtaken by the spirit of the ages that lay behind her,

–when paganism was coming in like a flood, and overwhelming the church, it was inevitable that “the wild solar holiday of all pagan times” should be adopted along with other heathen customs. The logic of events would necessitate this conclusion, even if facts did not warrant it.

Sunday was the chief pagan holiday, in honor of the sun-god; the church was modeling its legitimate ceremonies as nearly as possible after the plan of the heathen “mysteries,” and was boldly adopting everything pagan that was in sight; so, as in ancient times the church of God rejected the Sabbath when it joined the heathen in their licentious revels, it could not be otherwise than that when, in the early centuries of the Christian era, it apostatized to heathenism, it should forsake the Sabbath of the Lord for the day of the sun.

But, as in the case of Christmas, the church found an excuse for adopting Sunday. The Bible calls Christ the “Sun of Righteousness,” and the people could easily be made to think that in celebrating the festival of the sun, they were doing homage to Christ, especially since their knowledge of Christianity came principally through the philosophers, who taught them that Christianity was simply a modification of their old superstition.

In nothing is the church’s conformity to paganism more clearly manifest than in its adoption of Sunday. Tertullian was a voluminous writer for the church as against the heathen, yet

in his address, *Ad Nationes*, he defends the growing observance of Sunday on the ground that it was nothing more than the heathen themselves did. Thus, after answering the charge that Christians worshiped the cross, by showing that the heathen did likewise (for the figure of a cross was an object of worship by the heathen before the church began to pay idolatrous worship to it), Tertullian proceeds to say:

Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity. What then? Do you do less than this? Do not many among you, with an affectation of sometimes worshiping the heavenly bodies, likewise, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise? It is you, at all events, who have even admitted the sun into the calendar of the week, and you have selected its day, in preference to the preceding day as the most suitable in the week for either an entire abstinence from the bath, or for its postponement until the evening, or for taking rest and for banqueting.⁵⁹

Here we find not only that Sunday was the chief heathen festival-day, but also that one of the foremost “Fathers” in the church boldly pleaded heathen custom as an excuse for adopting it. If it be said that the fact that the Christians also regarded Sunday as well as the heathen was only a coincidence, and that there must be some Scripture authority for it, we can refer the reader to the light estimation in which the Scriptures were held by those “church Fathers.”

Not only may we refer to what has already been quoted from Clement and Origen, but we may quote Tertullian’s own words to prove that the absence of Scripture authority was not a bar to any practice which the church of the philosophers thought fit to adopt. In his treatise on “The Chaplet,” he speaks as follows concerning the propriety of wearing the

⁵⁹ *Ad Nationes*, chapter 13.

laurel wreath:

How long shall we draw the saw to and fro through this line, when we have an ancient practice, which by anticipation has made for us the state [of the question]? If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it. For how can anything come into use, if it has not first been handed down?

Even in pleading tradition, written authority, you say, must be demanded. Let us inquire, therefore, whether tradition, unless it be written, should not be admitted....To deal with this matter briefly, I shall begin with baptism. When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the gospel. [They thought that they could make an improvement on the Lord's plan.]

Then, when we are taken up (as new-born children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week....As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead [a heathen custom] as birthday honors.

We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday. We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground. At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign [of the cross].

If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Chapters 3, 4.

Here Scripture is disregarded and set at naught for custom; but where appeal was had to custom, it was always a custom originating with the heathen. And now to what we have already read concerning churchly conformity to heathen customs, read the following:

Leo the Great speaks of Christians in Rome, who first worshiped to the rising sun, doing homage to the pagan Apollo, before repairing to the basilica of St. Peter.⁶¹

When the church not only perpetuated the worship of the heathen gods and goddesses under different forms, but openly worshiped the heathen sun-god Apollo, and even the sun itself, is it at all surprising that they continued the heathen sun-festival, Sunday, along with other festivals?

The watchword of the age seemed to be unity. Cyprian had declared unity to be more essential than orthodoxy. It was not, in general, thought worthwhile to consider the particulars of any views held by one who differed with “the church.” The fact that he was not within “the pale of unity” was sufficient to mark him as a heretic.

But the idea of “the church” was that it ought, like the Jewish theocracy, to be identical with the State. The fact that the State was pagan could not long stand in the way, when the ideal became prevalent that there was really no essential difference between Christianity and paganism; and we have already seen how the church was practically demonstrating that identity by adopting all heathen customs.

We shall now proceed to show that paganism on its part was apparently approaching Christianity, thus rendering the union the easier, and that when at last the marriage was consummated, the weekly heathen festival of the sun was the bond of union.

⁶¹ Schaff, volume 2, section 74.

11. Pagan Response to the Church's Advances

WHILE the church was doing everything in its power to court paganism, paganism was preparing for the union. Of course there could not be any union on equal terms. The church had everything to lose and nothing to gain. Although it was primarily the bride of Christ, it, harlot-like, sought the embraces of the world.

All the real advances were made by the church; paganism seemed to be meeting Christianity more than half way, but it changed only its form and not in any respect its character. It adopted one supreme deity in place of its hundreds of gods, making the sun the one god, and relegating all the other gods to an inferior position.

This made it easy for Christianity and paganism to unite, for Neo-Platonism had infused into the church the idea that the numerous gods of the heathen were divinities subordinate to Christ, and that he did not intend to do away with demon-worship, but only to assign to it its proper place. Accordingly the church was continuing it under the form of martyr-worship, of which Schaff says, in language similar to that which we have already quoted from him:

In the Christian martyr-worship and saint-worship, which now spread with giant strides over the whole Christian world, we cannot possibly mistake the succession of the pagan worship of gods and heroes, with its noisy popular festivities.⁶²

It only needed, therefore, as will readily be seen, that paganism should come to worship one divinity as supreme, to make it possible for the church to unite with it on equal

⁶² *Church History*, vol. 2, sec. 74.

terms. But in this unnatural union the bride did the wooing and the groom took her name. In the marriage between Christianity and paganism, the former gave up its character, and the latter its name. But let Milman tell how paganism yielded to the church's solicitations:

In no respect is the progress of Christianity more evident and remarkable than in its influence on heathenism itself....There had been an unperceived and amicable approximation between the two religions.

Heathenism, as interpreted by philosophy, almost [and altogether] found favor with some of the more moderate Christian apologists....The Christians endeavored to enlist the earlier philosophers in their cause; they were scarcely content with asserting that the nobler Grecian philosophy might be designed to prepare the human mind for the reception of Christianity; they were almost inclined to endow these sages with a kind of prophetic foreknowledge of its more mysterious doctrines.

"I have explained," says the Christian in Minucius Felix, "the opinions of almost all the philosophers, whose most illustrious glory it is that they have worshiped one god, though under various names; so that one might suppose, either that the Christians of the present day are philosophers, or that the philosophers of old were already Christians."

But these advances on the part of Christianity were more than met by paganism. The heathen religion, which prevailed at least among the more enlightened pagans during this period, and which, differently modified, more fully developed, and, as we shall hereafter find, exalted still more from a philosophy into a religion, Julian endeavored to reinstate as the established faith, was almost as different from that of the older Greeks and Romans, or even that which prevailed at the commencement of the empire, as it was from Christianity. It worshiped in the same temples; it performed, to a certain extent, the same rites; it actually abrogated the local worship of no one of the multitudinous deities of paganism.

But over all this, which was the real religion, both in theory and practice, in the older times, had risen a kind of spec-

ulative theism, to which the popular worship acknowledged its humble subordination. On the great elementary principle of Christianity, the unity of the supreme God, this approximation had long been silently made. Celsus, in his celebrated controversy with Origen, asserts that this philosophical notion of the Deity is perfectly reconcilable with paganism....

From this time, paganism has changed not merely some of its fundamental tenets, but its general character; it has become serious, solemn, devout. In Lucian, unbelief seemed to have reached its height, and as rapidly declined. The witty satirist of polytheism had, no doubt, many admirers; he had no imitators. A reaction has taken place; none of the distinguished statesmen of the third century boldly and ostentatiously, as in the times of the later republic, display their contempt for religion. Epicureanism has lost, if not its partisans, its open advocates. The most eminent writers treat religion with decency, if not with devout respect; no one is ambitious of passing for a despiser of the gods....

This was the commencement of that new Platonism which, from this time, exercised a supreme authority, to the extinction of the older forms of Grecian philosophy, and grew up into a dangerous antagonist of Christianity.⁶³

But this Neo-Platonism did not become a dangerous antagonist to Christianity until it was brought into the bosom of the church, when it drove Christianity entirely out. It was this Neo-Platonism working in paganism to produce a seeming reformation, and in Christianity to produce a real deformation, that formed the basis of the union of the two religions.

For the heathen desired unity as much as did the Christians. None of the Roman emperors were blind to the disadvantage to the State of having discordant elements within it. With them the State was everything. Those who really persecuted the Christians did so, not out of hatred to them, as men, but because they considered Christianity to be subversive of the best interest of the empire. The persecution, therefore, was

⁶³ *History of Christianity*, book 2, ch. 8.

simply for political ends—to secure the peace and unity of the State.

Nevertheless, the church flourished. In times of persecution Christianity prospered; the church prospered and grew, whether there were persecution or not, but mostly, of course, when there was not. And so, in time, the Christians were recognized as a power—as a factor in politics that it would not do to ignore. Only a madman like Galerius was so foolish as to think to produce unity in the empire by the suppression of the Christians. The wiser emperors endeavored to produce unity by a fusion of the two elements, pagan and Christian.

The first recorded effort is that of Elagabalus. He was a Syrian youth who had been consecrated to the office of high priest in the temple of the sun, at Emesa, and who, from that position, was elevated to the throne of the Empire of Rome, reigning from 218 to 222 AD.

He did not seem, however, to regard his call to the throne as an elevation, for he was even more the high priest of the sun than the emperor of Rome. He valued the power of the throne only as it enabled him to carry on and promote the wild, unbridled worship of the sun. Of his licentiousness, his effeminacy, and his defiance of all decency, it is not necessary to speak. But with it all he was extremely religious; indeed, his excesses were the result of his religion.

His one purpose as emperor is thus set forth by Milman:

It was openly asserted, that the worship of the sun, under his name of Elagabalus, was to supersede all other worship. If we may believe the biographies in the Augustan history, a more ambitious scheme of a universal religion had dawned upon the mind of the emperor. The Jewish, the Samaritan, even the Christian, were to be fused and recast into one great system, of which the sun was to be the central object of adoration.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *History of Christianity*, book 2, ch. 8.

This was perfectly in harmony with the teachings of Neo-Platonism, which was just coming into prominence through the influence of Origen. But Elagabalus outraged even the Roman sense of decency, and, besides, the time was not yet ripe for such a fusion. Paganism had not yet become sufficiently monotheistic in form, nor had Neo-Platonism sufficiently deformed Christianity to make the union possible.

Next after Elagabalus came the Emperor Alexander Severus:

From the policy of the court, as well as the pure and amiable character of the successor of Elagabalus, the more offensive parts of this foreign superstition disappeared with their imperial patron. But the old Roman religion was not re-instated in its jealous and unmingled dignity. Alexander Severus had been bred in another school; and the influence which swayed him, during the earlier part at least of his reign, was of a different character from that which had formed the mind of Elagabalus. It was the mother of Elagabalus who, however she might blush with shame at the impurities of her effeminate son, had consecrated him to the service of the deity in Emesa. The mother of Alexander Severus, the able, perhaps crafty and rapacious, Mamma, had at least held intercourse with the Christians of Syria. She had conversed with the celebrated Origen, and listened to his exhortations, if without conversion, still not without respect.

Alexander, though he had neither the religious education, the pontifical character, nor the dissolute manners of his predecessor, was a Syrian, with no hereditary attachment to the Roman form of paganism. He seems to have affected a kind of universalism; he paid decent respect to the gods of the capitol; he held in honor the Egyptian worship, and enlarged the temples of Isis and Serapis.

In his own palace, with respectful indifference, he enshrined, as it were, as his household deities, the representatives of the different religions or theophilosophic systems which were prevalent in the Roman Empire,—Orpheus, Abraham, Christ, and Apollonius of Tyana. The first of these represented the wisdom of the Mysteries, the purified nature-

worship, which had labored to elevate the popular mythology into a noble and coherent allegorism...

In Apollonius was centered the more modern Theurgy,—the magic which commanded the intermediate spirits between the higher world and the world of man; the more spiritual polytheism which had released the subordinate deities from their human form, and maintained them in constant intercourse with the soul of man.

Christianity, in the person of its Founder, even where it did not command authority as a religion, had nevertheless lost the character, under which it had so long and so unjustly labored, of animosity to mankind. Though He was considered but as one of the sages who shared in the homage paid to their beneficent wisdom, the followers of Jesus had now lived down all the bitter hostility which had so generally prevailed against them. The homage of Alexander Severus may be a fair test of the general sentiment of the more intelligent heathen of his time....

In the reign of Alexander Severus, at least, commenced the great change in the outward appearance of Christianity. Christian bishops were admitted, even at the court, in a recognized official character; and Christian churches began to rise in different parts of the empire, and to possess endowments in land.⁶⁵

Here we find the two streams beginning to unite. But not all at once did the complete mingling take place. It was not for Alexander Severus to see one universal religion in the Roman Empire. But during the reign of Aurelian (271-275 AD) there occurred a circumstances which is very significant as showing the influence of paganism in the church.

Aurelian was a devoted worshiper of the sun. Even in the midst of a campaign in Syria, when much was at stake,

...his principal concern seems directed to the re-establishment of a temple of the sun,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

—although he was by no means dilatory in war. Returning in triumph to Rome after the victory over Zenobia,

A considerable portion of his oriental spoils was consecrated to the gods of Rome; the capitol, and every other temple, glittered with the offerings of his ostentatious piety; and the temple of the sun alone received above fifteen thousand pounds of gold. This last was a magnificent structure, erected by the emperor on the side of the Quirinal Hill, and dedicated, soon after the triumph, to that deity whom Aurelian adored as the parent of his life and fortunes.

His mother had been an inferior priestess in a chapel of the sun; a peculiar devotion to the god of light was a sentiment which the fortunate peasant imbibed in his infancy; and every step of his elevation, every victory of his reign, fortified superstition by gratitude.⁶⁶

But at the very time when Aurelian was thus exhibiting his devotion to the sun, he was connected with the affairs of the church in the most extraordinary manner. Paul of Samosata had been made bishop of Antioch. He was rich, and lived in princely style. Whether because of his dissolute life, or from envy, charges of heresy had been brought against him, and he had been excommunicated by a synod of bishops. But he enjoyed the special favor of Zenobia, who had made him a civil magistrate, as well as a bishop, and as long as she retained her power, his position was secure.

Paul had staked his success upon that of his warlike patroness; and, on the fall of Zenobia, the bishops appealed to Aurelian to expel the rebel against their authority, and the partisan of the Palmyrenes, who had taken arms against the majesty of the empire, from his episcopal dignity at Antioch.

Aurelian did not altogether refuse to interfere in this unprecedented cause, but, with laudable impartiality, declined any actual cognizance of the affair, and transferred the sentence from the personal enemies of Paul, the bishops of Syria,

⁶⁶ Gibbon, chapter 11, section 43.

to those of Rome and Italy. By their sentence, Paul was degraded from his episcopate.⁶⁷

In this we see both the influence which Rome had already attained in the affairs of the church, and also the affiliation of the church with the great patron of sun worship. It shows that the Christianity of the age and paganism were getting to be on very good terms. But the time of complete union was not yet.

Diocletian might seem born to accomplish that revolution which took place so soon after, under the reign of Constantine. The new constitution of the empire might appear to require a reconstruction of the religious system. The emperor, who had not scrupled to accommodate the form of the government without respect to the ancient majesty of Rome, to the present position of affairs; to degrade the capital itself into the rank of a provincial city; and to prepare the way, at least, for the removal of the seat of government to the East,—would have been withheld by no scruples of veneration for ancient rites or ancestral ceremonies, if the establishment of a new religion had appeared to harmonize with his general policy. But his mind was not yet ripe for such a change, nor perhaps his knowledge of Christianity and its profound and unseen influence sufficiently extensive.⁶⁸

This goes to the very heart of the matter, and mentions the secret of the union which was afterwards consummated. It was State policy. Diocletian had no personal hostility to Christianity; he was rather favorable than otherwise, and there would have been no persecution under his reign if it had not been for his colleagues.

That persecution, however,—the last that occurred until the church herself went into the business,—demonstrated the futility of trying to produce unity in the empire by the extinction of Christianity. It was that very persecution that did

⁶⁷ Milman's *History of Christianity*, book 2, ch. 8.

⁶⁸ Milman's *History of Christianity*, book 2, ch. 9.

much toward hastening the union of the church with paganism, under the successor of Diocletian, the crafty and politic Constantine.

12. Constantine

CONSTANTINE is supposed by many actually to merit the title of “first Christian emperor.” As to his Christianity, and the motives that led him to favor the church in a special manner, even elevating it to the throne of the world, we shall learn presently.

Eusebius tells us in his *Life of Constantine*, that it was when Constantine was in Gaul, meditating an attack upon Maxentius, that he first decided to recognize the God of the Christians. His motive was purely a selfish one. Attributing magical power to his opponent, he concluded that it would not do for him to depend on his military forces alone; he also must have supernatural assistance in his battles.

He considered, therefore, on what god he might rely for protection and assistance. While engaged in this inquiry, the thought occurred to him that of the many emperors who had preceded him, those who had rested their hopes in a multitude of gods, and served them with sacrifices and offerings, had in the first place been deceived by flattering predictions, and oracles which promised them all prosperity, and at last had met with an unhappy end, while not one of their gods had stood by to warn them of the impending wrath of heaven.

On the other hand, he recollected that his father, who had pursued an entirely opposite course, who had condemned their error, and honored the one supreme God during his whole life, had found him to be the Saviour and Protector of his empire, and the giver of every good thing.⁶⁹

But it must not be supposed that Constantine thought that there was but one God. He acknowledged the gods of the heathen as gods, but regarded the Christians’ God as the most powerful of all, and consequently the one that could help him

⁶⁹ *Life of Constantine*, book 1, ch. 27

most in his conquests.

Of believing in God for the salvation of the soul from sin, he had no idea. He was still, and, in fact, always remained, a heathen in reality, and the heathen idea of a god was one whose wrath was to be appeased, or whose favor in any enterprise was to be won, by bribes.

The story of the cross with the inscription *in hoc signo vinces*, "by this sign conquer," shows that his conversion was solely for military purposes. It is not within our province to enter upon the history of that myth; we only refer to it for the purpose of pointing out the fact that Constantine's so-called conversion was for the purpose of benefiting the State, and he was the State.

John Clark Ridpath, LL.D., professor of history in De Pauw University (Methodist) gives this picture of Constantine and his relation to the church:

Of religious convictions Constantine had none. But he possessed an intellect capable of penetrating the condition of the world. He perceived the conclusion of the great syllogism in the logic of events. He saw that Destiny was about to write *Finis* at the bottom of the last page of paganism. He had the ambition to avail himself of the forces of the new and old, which, playing on the minds and consciences of men, were about to transform the world.

As yet the Christians were in the minority, but they had zeal and enthusiasm. The enthusiasm of paganism, on the contrary, had yielded to a cold and formal assent quite unlike the pristine fervor which had fired the human action in the time "When the world was new and the gods were young."

So, for policy, the emperor began to favor the Christians. There was now an *ecclesia*, a church, compact, well organized, having definite purposes, ready for universal persuasion, and almost ready for universal battle. Against this were opposed the warring philosophic sects of paganism. While biding his

time, watching the turns of the imperial wheel, and awaiting the opportunity which should make him supreme, he was careful to lay hold of the sentiments and sympathies of budding Christendom, by favoring the sect in Gaul.

In the same year of his triumph, the emperor issued from Milan his famous decree in favor of the Christian religion. The proclamation was in the nature of a license to those professing the new faith to worship as they would, under the imperial sanction and favor.

Soon afterwards he announced to the world that the reason for his recognition of Christianity was a vision which he had seen while marching from Gaul against Galerius. Gazing into heaven, he had seen a tremendous and shining cross with this inscription:

“In hoc signo vinces,” “Under this sign conquer.”

The fiction served the purpose for which it was invented. As a matter of fact, the double-dealing moral nature of Constantine was incapable of any high devotion to a faith either old or new.

His insincerity was at once developed in his course respecting the Roman Senate. That body was the stronghold of paganism. Any strong purpose to extinguish heathenism would have led Constantine into irreconcilable antagonism with whatever of senatorial power still remained. Instead of hostility, however, he began to restore the ancient body to as much influence in the State as was consistent with the unrestricted exercise of his own authority. In order further to placate the perturbed spirits of paganism, he himself assumed the office of Pontifex Maximus; and when the triumphal arch was reared commemorative of his victory, he was careful to place thereon the statues of the old gods, as well as the emblems of the new faith.⁷⁰

Bower simply mentions the fact that a deputation of bishops visited Constantine and were consulted by him in 311 AD, which was before he left Gaul, and that one of them was Ho-

⁷⁰ *History of the World*, volume 1, ch. 63, pp. 881-883.

sus, of Cordova. This was doubtless for the purpose of determining what strength the Christians could bring to the cause of the empire.

All historians agree in ascribing to Constantine the character of an astute politician, and that this dominated everything. Politicians do not differ much, in whatever age they live. Votes and influence are the only things that the modern politician considers in making an alliance with any party; and we may be sure that Constantine did not espouse the cause of the church until he felt confident that it could help him in his schemes.

His acts subsequent to the Council of Nice, a consideration of which does not come within the scope of our argument, show that he regarded the welfare of the church only as it contributed to the peace of the State. He labored for unity in the church simply because he desired harmony in the empire. Mosheim says:

Constantine the Great left the old form of the Christian community untouched; yet, in some respects, he improved and extended it. While, therefore, he suffered the church to continue, as heretofore, a sort of distinct republic within the political body, he nevertheless assumed a supreme power over this sacred community, with such liberty of modeling and controlling it as public good should need. Nor did any bishop call in question this power of the emperor.⁷¹

Here we see the same servile deference to the will of the emperor as was manifested in the appeal to Aurelian. When Constantine presumed to mould the church “as the public good should need,” by which is meant the political welfare of his family, and the church basely yielded to his manipulation, the union of the church with paganism was complete.

If the real distinctions between paganism and Christianity had not already been broken down, the bishops would not

⁷¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, century 4, part 2, ch. 2, sec. 1.

thus tamely have submitted to imperial interference. And we must not suppose that there were not protests, but the protestants were too few in number to make their voices heard.

Schaff adds this testimony as to Constantine's policy:

Unquestionably every age produces and shapes its own organs, as its own purposes require. So in the case of Constantine. He was distinguished by that genuine political wisdom which putting itself at the head of the age, clearly saw that idolatry had outlived itself in the Roman Empire, and that Christianity alone could breathe new vigor into it, and furnish it moral support.

Especially on the point of the external Catholic unity his monarchical politics accorded with the hierarchical episcopacy of the church. Hence from the year 313 he placed himself in close connection with the bishops, made peace and harmony his first object in the Donatist and Arian controversies, and applied the predicate "catholic" to the church in all official documents.

And as his predecessors were supreme pontiffs of the heathen religion of the empire, so he desired to be looked upon as a sort of bishop, as universal bishop of the external affairs of the church. All this by no means from mere self-interest, but for the good of the empire, which, now shaken to its foundations, and threatened by barbarians on every side, could only by some new bond of unity be consolidated and upheld until at least the seeds of Christianity and civilization should be planted among the barbarians themselves, the representatives of the future.

His personal policy thus coinciding with the interests of the State, Christianity appeared to him, as it proved in fact, the only efficient power for a political reformation of the empire.⁷²

The bishops, as Mosheim says, readily yielded themselves to Constantine's political schemes, because with Constantine as virtual head of the church, the success of his schemes meant

⁷² *Church History*, volume 2, sec. 2.

their advancement.

When we say that the yielding of the church to Constantine's control indicated that the church and paganism were virtually one already, we speak advisedly, for Constantine himself was as much a heathen as ever any of the philosophers had been. Like Diocletian, he had no scruples against recognizing any god that he thought would benefit the State, and so he recognized Christ, yet not in any sense as a Saviour from sin.

He was not wiser than the professed Christians themselves, who, as we have already seen, confused the Son of God—the Sun of Righteousness—with the sun that had so long, and under such various forms, been an object of worship by the pagans.

Bishop Coxe is as zealous for the traditions of the Fathers as any churchman could be, yet in his “elucidations” at the close of the fourth book of Tertullian against Marcion, he has this to say of Constantine:

The Christian church never became responsible for his life and character, but strove to reform him and to prepare him for a true confession of Christ at some “convenient season.” In this, there seems to have been a great fault somewhere, chargeable perhaps to Eusebius or to some other Christian counselor, but, when could anyone say—“The emperor is sincere and humble and penitent, and ought now to be received into the church.” It was a political conversion, and as such was accepted, and Constantine was a heathen till near his death. As to his final penitence and acceptance—“Forbear to judge.”

Without being considered harsh in our judgment, we may be permitted to say that just before his death Constantine did become sincerely converted to that form of Christianity that resulted from union with paganism.

No courtier could be more obsequiously devoted to an im-

perial patron than was Eusebius to Constantine. His *Life of Constantine* is one continued eulogy. Everything that the emperor did was heavenly in his eyes.

While Eusebius doubtless went beyond other bishops in his servile complaisance, because he received more personal favors than the others, his statements may be taken as fairly presenting the attitude of the church, and its blindness in spiritual matters; and it most certainly presents Constantine in the most favorable light as a Christian, that it was possible to do.

Read now one of the “Christian” acts for which Eusebius so highly lauds him. In chapters 58 and 59 of his fourth book Eusebius describes the magnificent church which Constantine built at Constantinople in honor of the apostles—and himself. In chapter 60 he proceeds as follows:

All these edifices the emperor consecrated with the desire of perpetuating the memory of the apostles of our Saviour. He had, however, another object in erecting this building; an object at first unknown, but which afterwards became evident to all.

He had, in fact, made choice of this spot in the prospect of his own death, anticipating with extraordinary fervor of faith that his body would share their title with the apostles themselves, and that he should thus even after death become the subject, with them, of the devotions which should be performed to their honor in this place. He accordingly caused twelve coffins to be set up in this church, like sacred pillars in honor and memory of the apostolic number, in the center of which his own was placed, having six of theirs on either side of it.

Thus, as I said, he had provided with prudent foresight an honorable resting-place for his body after death, and, having long before secretly formed this resolution, he now consecrated this church to the apostles, believing that this tribute to their memory would be of no small advantage to his own soul.

Nor did God disappoint him of that which he so ardently expected and desired. For after he had completed the first services of the feast of Easter, and had passed this sacred day of our Lord in a manner which made it an occasion of joy and gladness to himself and to all, the God through whose aid he performed all these acts, and whose zealous servant he continued to be even to the end of life, was pleased at a happy time to translate him to a higher and better sphere of being.⁷³

Such as the extraordinary faith of Constantine, and such was the idea of faith and of service to God that was held by one of the most learned bishops of the day. We leave the readers to decide whether this was Christian faith or heathen superstition.

The paganism of the church is shown by the fact that, in accordance with Constantine's "extraordinary fervor of faith," he was worshiped after his death. Paintings were dedicated to his memory, which

...embodied a representation of heaven itself, and depicted the emperor reposing in an ethereal mansion above the celestial vault.

His body was placed in the church which he had prepared for it.

The earthly tabernacle of his thrice blessed soul, according to his own earnest wish, was permitted to share the monument of the apostles; was associated with the honor of their name, and with that of the people of God; was honored by the performance of the sacred ordinances and mystic service; and enjoyed a participation in the prayers of the saints.

Thus, too, he continued to possess imperial power even after death, controlling, as though with renovated life, a universal dominion, and retaining in his own name, as Victor, Maximus, Augustus, the sovereignty of the Roman world.⁷⁴

⁷³ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, ch. 60.

⁷⁴ *Life of Constantine*, book 4, ch. 71.

In the next chapter he is compared with Christ, with whom he divided honors. Much more might be added in this line, but this is sufficient to show that Constantine was never anything but a pagan, regarding Christ as one of the gods and himself as another, and that the church was in the same condition. It accepted him as its patron because it, like himself, was pagan in sentiment.

It is pertinent, therefore, to note the particular form of paganism to which Constantine was devoted. Gibbon says:

Whatever symptoms of Christian piety might transpire in the discourses or actions of Constantine, he persevered till he was near forty years of age in the practice of the established religion; and the same conduct which in the court of Nicomedia might be imputed to his fear, could be ascribed only to the inclination or policy of the sovereign of Gaul. His liberality restored and enriched the temples of the gods; the medals which issued from his imperial mint are impressed with the figures and attributes of Jupiter and Apollo, of Mars and Hercules, and his filial piety increased the council of Olympus by the solemn apotheosis of his father. Constantius.

But the devotion of Constantine was more peculiarly directed to the genius of the sun, the Apollo of Greek and Roman mythology; and he was pleased to be represented with the symbols of the god of light and poetry. The unerring shafts of that deity, the brightness of his eyes, his laurel wreath, immortal beauty, and elegant accomplishments, seemed to point him out as the patron of a young hero.

The altars of Apollo were crowned with the votive offerings of Constantine, and the credulous multitude were taught to believe that the emperor was permitted to behold with mortal eyes the visible majesty of their tutelary deity, and that, either waking or in a vision, he was blessed with the auspicious omens of a long and victorious reign. The sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Decline and Fall*, ch. 20, par. 3.

Milman gives an account of the dedication of the new city, Constantinople, stating that:

The emperor himself held a golden statue of the Fortune of the city in his hands. An imperial edict enacted the annual celebration of this rite. On the birthday of the city, the gilded statue of himself, thus bearing the same golden image of Fortune, was annually to be led through the hippodrome to the foot of the imperial throne, and to receive the adoration of the reigning emperor.

He then adds:

The lingering attachment of Constantine to the favorite superstition of his earlier days may be traced on still better authority. The Grecian worship of Apollo had been exalted into the oriental veneration of the sun, as the visible representative of the Deity, and of all the statues which were introduced from different quarters, none were received with greater honor than those of Apollo. In one part of the city stood the Pythian, in the other the Sminthian deity. The Delphic tripod, which, according to Zosimus, contained an image of the god, stood upon the column of the three-twisted serpents, supposed to represent the mythic python.

But on a still loftier, the famous pillar of porphyry, stood an image in which (if we are to credit modern authority; and the more modern our authority, the less likely it is to have invented so singular a statement) Constantine dared to mingle together the attributes of the sun, of Christ, and of himself. According to one tradition, this pillar was based, as it were, on another superstition. The venerable Palladium itself, surreptitiously conveyed from Rome, was buried beneath it, and thus transferred the eternal destiny of the old to the new capital.

The pillar, formed of marble and of porphyry, rose to the height of a hundred and twenty feet. The colossal image on the top was that of Apollo, either from Phrygia or from Athens. But the head of Constantine had been substituted for that of the god. The scepter proclaimed the dominion of the world; and it held in its hand the globe, emblematic of uni-

versal empire. Around the head, instead of rays, were fixed the nails of the true cross.⁷⁶

Is it any wonder that Milman closes the paragraph above quoted with this question:

Is this paganism approximating to Christianity, or Christianity degenerating into paganism?

It certainly is a union of the two; and as the mingling of a clear stream with muddy water makes the whole impure, so the union of Christianity with paganism could produce only paganism in fact, although it was Christianity in name.

⁷⁶ *History of Christianity*, book 3, ch. 3.

13. Constantine, the Church, and Sunday

MUCH has been made of the fact that when Constantine issued his famous Sunday edict, he did it out of regard to the wishes of the church, even though he himself was a pagan. This cannot be denied, but we need only remind the reader that the church for which he legislated was already quite thoroughly paganized. Neo-Platonism had fully prepared the way for Constantine.

Recall Mosheim's statement that the bishops had purposely multiplied rites for the purpose of making the pagans more friendly to them, adopting those of the heathen, and remodeling those that it originally had, so that by the close of the third century most of the Christian institutions had the aspect of pagan mysteries.

The bishops, moreover, as we have learned, acquiesced in Constantine's regulating the affairs of the church. Submission to his will was the price that they paid for his protection; so that even if the church had not been paganized to the extent of adopting all the heathen festival days, they would not have hesitated at receiving one more.

But the Sunday institution had gone hand in hand with sun worship in the church. The heathen calendar regulated the amusements of the people, and Sunday, like other heathen festival days, was a day of pleasure.

That Sunday was not regarded as a sacred day in the church is, perhaps unintentionally, witnessed by Mosheim in these words:

The first day of the week, on which Christians were accustomed to meet for the worship of God, Constantine required, by a special law, to be observed more sacredly than before.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Century 4, part 2, ch. 4, sec. 5.

The peculiar law reads thus:

Let all the judges and town-people, and all artisans, rest on the venerable day of the sun. But let those who are situated in the country freely and at full liberty attend to the cultivation of their fields: because it often happens that no other day is so fit for sowing corn or planting vines; lest, by neglecting the proper occasion, they should lose the benefits granted by divine bounty.

It is of this edict that *Chambers' Encyclopedia* (article "Sunday") says:

Unquestionably the first law, either ecclesiastical or civil, by which the Sabbatical observance of that day is known to have been ordained, is the edict of Constantine, 321 AD.

Schaff says that:

Constantine is the founder, in part, at least, of the civil observance of Sunday, by which, alone, the religious observance of it in the church could be made universal and could be properly secured.⁷⁸

Thus showing that the day was not held sacred previous to that time. As it was adopted from heathenism, it was observed after the manner of the heathen, as a holiday. The "Continental Sunday" is therefore the original Sunday. Those who devote the day to picnics, to sports, racing, wrestling, etc., are observing Sunday according to the original custom.

A few more extracts, out of an abundance of material, will suffice to show that the union of paganism and Christianity—a union in which the former gave up its name and the latter its character—was consummated over the bond of Sunday observance. The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* says:

Sunday (*dies solis*, of the Roman calendar, "day of the sun," because dedicated to the sun), the first day of the week, was

⁷⁸ *Church History*, volume 2, sec. 75.

adopted by the early Christians as a day of worship. The “sun” of Latin adoration they interpreted as the “Sun of Righteousness”....No regulations for its observance are laid down in the New Testament, nor, indeed, is its observance even enjoined.

Summing up Constantine’s acts, Schaff says that he

...enjoined the civil observance of Sunday, though not as *Dies Domini*, but as *Dies Solis*, in conformity to his worship of Apollo, and in company with an ordinance for the regular consulting of the *haruspex* (321).

And further on he says:

Constantine, in 321, forbade the sitting of courts and all secular labor in towns, on “the venerable day of the sun,” as he expresses himself, perhaps with reference at once to the sun-god, Apollo, and to Christ, the true “Sun of Righteousness.”⁷⁹

This, as Gibbon says, would not offend the ears of his pagan or his Christian subjects, for both had already united in the worship of the sun-god, Apollo, the former as the veritable supreme God, and the latter as his representative.

Schaff, speaking of the church’s conformity to paganism in the adoption of heathen festivals, and of the identity of martyr-worship with hero-worship, which we have already noticed at some length, says:

Chrysostom mourns over the theatrical customs, such as loud clapping in applause, which the Christians at Antioch and Constantinople brought with them into the church. In the Christmas festival, which from the fourth century spread from Rome over the entire church, the holy commemoration of the birth of the Redeemer is associated—to this day, even in Protestant lands—with the wanton merriments of the pagan Saturnalia. And even in the celebration of Sunday, as it was introduced by Constantine, and still continues on the

⁷⁹ Volume 2, sections 2, 17.

whole continent of Europe, the cultus of the sun-god Apollo mingles with the remembrance of the resurrection of Christ; and the widespread profanation of the Lord's day, especially on the continent of Europe, demonstrates the great influence which heathenism still exerts upon Roman and Greek Catholic, and even upon Protestant Christendom.⁸⁰

But the influence of heathenism upon Christendom is seen in the recognition in any way whatever of Christmas and Sunday; the fact that in Europe they are still connected with revelry and amusements simply shows that in a large part of Christendom the primitive heathen custom is retained unchanged.

The work of attaching sacredness to Sunday was a very gradual one. In fact, as already stated, it is not accomplished yet to any extent on the continent of Europe. In the latter part of the fourth century the Council of Laodicea enacted the following canon:

Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.

This was in harmony with Constantine's sentiment that they ought not to have anything in common with the detestable Jews. The pagan usurper had by this time quite crowded out the true Sabbath of Jehovah.

But, as in open heathendom, so in professed Christendom, "the wild solar holiday" was accompanied, not with the blessings of the Spirit, but with the spirit of licentiousness. This is shown by the fact that the Council of Laodicea found it necessary to enact the following canon:

⁸⁰ Schaff, volume 2, sec. 74

None of the higher or lower clerics and ascetics, nor any laymen, in a word, no Christian, may bathe in the same bath with females, for this is the greatest reproach among the heathen.

It is worthy of note that the canon enjoining Sunday sacredness (if possible) was number 29, and that this one is number 30.

It was not till 469 AD that the emperor Leo abolished in the Eastern Empire the exemption clause which Constantine's edict made in favor of farmers, and required them to rest the same as mechanics.⁸¹

The spirit that prompted the paganized church to show more and more deference to Sunday is shown in the edict of the Council of Laodicea. It was hatred of anything that savored of the Jewish religion. There was no longer any care for making the Jews favorable to Christianity, as in the former days when the church was weak. The church now had the support of the empire, and the Jews were thenceforth persecuted, as they are in Catholic countries even to this day. The spirit that would utterly repudiate the Sabbath of the Lord, which the Jews observed, at least nominally, is shown in Constantine's letter, regulating the time of the celebration of Easter, after the Council of Nice. Said he:

Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.⁸²

It needs no argument in the presence of such testimony as this, to show that the fourth commandment was not thought of as supporting Sunday observance.

It was not until the time of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in England, that the theory was first sprung that the observance

⁸¹ See Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, century 4, part 2, ch. 4, note 9.

⁸² *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 18.

of Sunday was enjoined by the fourth commandment.⁸³ Dr. Nicholas Bound published a book in 1595, entitled *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, which is the sole foundation of the observance of Sunday as a Sabbath. The reason why Bound endeavored to make the Bible responsible for Sunday observance was that the Puritans did not wish to seem to have received anything from the Catholic Church, and as they were determined to hold to the Catholic Sunday, they invented the idea that in doing so they were obeying the commandment of the Lord.

This pleasing delusion satisfied the people, and has greatly delighted many souls since, until now the base origin of Sunday is quite generally forgotten. They have made for it a pedigree, and now boast of its lordly birth, as is quite common with many modern aristocrats who sprang from a very obscure family a few generations ago.

And now we may leave the subject with the candid reader, who will, we are sure, agree that we have done just what we proposed to do. We have not quoted from a single Catholic document, and we have carefully avoided using the testimony of any writer that could by any means be considered as favorable to Sabbath observance. All our quotations are from men who believe that the Sunday is of divine authority; consequently it is of the greatest weight.

May the Lord enable the reader to believe that...

Jeremiah 10

³ The customs of the people are vain,

—and to inquire for the old paths, the way cast up by the Lord himself.

“What is the chaff to the wheat?”

Jeremiah 23:28

⁸³ See Schaff, volume 2, sec. 75, note 4, p. 383.

