

**Lessons from Church History**

**Book IV:**

**The Rise of Papal Supremacy**

**(192-313 A.D.)**

**By**

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## **Book IV:**

### **The Rise of Papal Supremacy**

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# Chapter 1

## Baptism

As the third century dawned, Rome had just begun to assert its primacy over the rest of the churches. Ambition and the desire for power are usually symptoms of evil motives, though often soothed by high sounding words designed to make power acquisition seem for the good of all. Historical records reveal this to be the case with the Roman Church.

It was not that Rome had produced any distinguished scholars or personalities that would have earned them the right of primacy. In the first four centuries, Rome produced only two who made any impression upon the Church--Callistus (217-222) and Damasus (366-383). When Victor died at the turn of the second century, the people voted for Zephyrinus to replace him, though Hippolytus was much better educated. Perhaps the people saw too much spiritual pride in Hippolytus to want him as their bishop.

Up to this time, the Church had been careful—perhaps overly careful—to screen the converts, so as not to be overwhelmed by those with low morals who desired to be Christians. New converts had had to undergo a time of teaching (catechism) before their baptism. Meanwhile, they were considered to be “half Christians.” It is apparent that the Church had long since lost the distinction between faith and baptism (as set forth in the prophetic types of Passover and the Red Sea).

They had also forgotten the origins of baptism (Leviticus 14), in which the priest was not called to heal the leper, but to inspect him to see if God had already healed him. Lev. 14:3-7 says,

**<sup>3</sup> And the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus, the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, <sup>4</sup> then the priest shall take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. . . <sup>7</sup> He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean . . .**

If the leper had been healed by God, then the priest was called to *bear witness* to that divine healing by baptizing him, so that the ex-leper could re-join the congregation (“Church”). The priest was NOT to baptize the leper unless he had already been healed of his leprosy. This is illustrated in Luke 5:14, where Jesus healed the leper and then told him to show himself to the priest “*for a testimony*” (i.e., “witness”).

This carried into the New Testament, for leprosy speaks of mortality and death. Baptism is a symbolic act of transferring a person from death to life. The priest or minister was *not called to do an act of salvation* (spiritual healing), but was called only to be a *witness* to what God had already done in him by faith. Thus, the purpose of baptism was not to bestow salvation, but to bear witness of his faith in Christ which had already justified him before God.

Baptism, then, allowed the believer to join the *earthly* congregation (“church”), the local community of believers. But the man’s prior faith determined his position in the Universal Church, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

This distinction appears to have been lost quite early in the loss of Hebrew influence and when the study of the Apostolic writings largely displaced the study of the law and prophets. The Apostles wrote largely to clarify the law and the prophets and to show how Jesus Christ fulfilled both in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The New Testament was not intended to replace the Old Scriptures, but to supplement them and clarify them in the light of Pentecost.

If the Church had retained its Hebrew roots and an understanding of the law, they would have seen that baptism was instituted under Moses. The book of Hebrews, in fact, comments directly upon those “baptisms” performed in the Old Testament in Heb. 9:10, saying,

**<sup>10</sup> since they relate only to food and drink and various washings [*baptismos*], regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.**

These baptisms are also called “sprinkling” in verses 13, 19, and 21. Thus, the author of Hebrews shows his knowledge of the law of the cleansing of lepers in Leviticus 14 as well as the various ceremonial washings performed at the laver in the Tabernacle of Moses. These were performed by sprinkling or pouring to show their heavenly origin.

Most Christians today have read the story of Naaman, the Syrian, who was healed of leprosy by submitting to baptism in 2 Kings 5. In verse 10 the prophet told Naaman to wash [*rachats*] in the Jordan seven times, according to the law in Lev. 14:7. The text does not actually specify the mode of washing, but verse 14 says,

**<sup>14</sup> Then he went down and dipped [*tabal*, “wash”] himself seven times in Jordan according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.**

Interestingly enough, the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) translates *tabal* above with the Greek equivalent, *baptizo*, which is the origin of our English word *baptism*. The Septuagint establishes the Hebrew-Greek equivalents, so that we know how to express Hebrew concepts using Greek words. Because the Septuagint had been completed long before the time of Christ, the Hebrew-Greek equivalents had been established by long usage centuries before the book of Hebrews was written. It is clear, then, that the idea of baptism was established by Moses, not by John the Baptist. John was a priest who learned the art of baptism by observation and by practice in the temple.

The Greek-speaking Church, however, seemed to forget that the terminology of the New Testament was not meant to express Greek ideas but *Hebrew concepts* that had been long established in the Old Testament. The law’s concept of baptism was one of the casualties of the Greek mindset in the early Church, as the Greek Christians came to interpret the Greek New Testament through the eyes of Greek culture. They adopted Greek definitions of the term and applied it in the same spirit as could be found in the Greek temples.

The Grecian temples initiated people into their “mysteries” by baptism also. In their view, no one could know their god without being so initiated. This carried over into the Church as well, turning baptism into a Greek-style initiation rite, instead of a Hebrew-style double witness of something that God had already done in a man’s heart.

Once the early Church accepted this Greek concept of initiation by baptism, it contributed greatly to the idea that the organizational church was the True Church. This put the bishop or priest into the place of determining, by his act of baptism, who should be saved and who should not be saved. This put God into the place of witnessing man’s saving act, rather than man bearing witness to God’s saving act. In practice, this usurped the place of God and put men’s eternal destiny in the hands of the priesthood which could deny or confer salvation upon any man.

As time passed, there came to be no distinction between a Church member and a true Christian believer, or between the earthly organization and the True Church. The bishop determined who was and who was not a true believer. This is the underlying usurpation of power that transformed Christianity from a relationship with God to a relationship with the organized church and the men who led it.

But such is the nature of the Church as prophesied in the life of King Saul, who usurped power in his belief that he could do as he willed. He thought God had to bear witness to him since he had been anointed king. This condition of the Church was prophesied also in the fact that the Pentecostal offering was leavened (Lev. 23:17). It was prophesied again in the story of Eli, who refused to correct his sons, thus corrupting the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:22-24).

It was at the close of the second century that these problems were great enough to come to the surface. In 192 Victor assumed the power to excommunicate bishops in other parts of the world if they disagreed with the manner in which they celebrated Passover. The assumption was that he had the power not only to exclude people from the church, but also to exclude them from heaven itself.

Victor, then, set the tone for the third century in the history of the Church. From Victor to Constantine the Church began to take the form of religion. Prior to Constantine, the Roman government had used its civil power to suppress Christianity itself. But Constantine, after briefly granting freedom of conscience, was persuaded to use civil power to suppress “heresies” in the attempt to bring unity to the Church and to the Empire.

And so, this book takes us to the point where the Church was granted official status as a *religio licita*, and to the point in time where the Roman government used its power to help the bishops determine which doctrines were officially *Christian* and which were *heresies*. By these means, heretical groups were outlawed and did not enjoy the same status *religio licita* as the mainstream religion.

## Chapter 2

# Origen of Alexandria

Persecution broke out in 202 A.D. when Emperor Severus decided to enforce an old law prohibiting anyone to convert to Judaism or to Christianity. Origen's father, Leonides, was imprisoned and martyred. Origen wrote to him during his imprisonment, beseeching him not to deny Christ for their sake. He was fearless and zealous for the Gospel, and he would have exposed himself to the Roman authorities had not his mother hidden his clothing to prevent him from leaving the house.

The family had some wealth, but when Origen's father was executed, the government confiscated their property. This reduced the family to abject poverty. However, a wealthy lady took Origen into her house and provided for him. He insisted upon supporting himself, so he opened a grammar school. The following year, Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria, appointed Origen, now age 18, to replace Clement as head of the Theological School. Clement had fled to Antioch.

In 213 Origen went to Rome, where he visited both Zephyrinus and Hippolytus. He apparently tried to stay neutral in the conflict over who was the true bishop of Rome. Yet it is said that he all but agreed with Hippolytus, no doubt admiring his learning.

After his visit to Rome, Origen went to Arabia at the invitation of Bedouin tribes who had requested Christian teaching. He returned to Alexandria in 216 about the time of another massacre of Christians. Origen then moved to Caesarea in Palestine, where the bishops persuaded him to teach in the church. But now, because Origen had not been formally ordained, Demetrius began to become jealous of Origen's influence. Origen was loved for his character, humility, diligence, and scholarship, and as other bishops began to sing his praises, Demetrius began to act more and more like King Saul when the women sang about David in 1 Sam. 18:7, 8,

**<sup>7</sup> And the women sang as they played and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." <sup>8</sup> Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him, and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"**

So once again, the denominationalist spirit of Saul began to rise up in the church of Alexandria. Demetrius wrote a letter to Alexander, the bishop of Jerusalem, and to Theocritus, bishop of Caesarea, complaining that they were allowing an unordained minister to teach the people. They replied that this practice had been sanctioned in the past several times and was not so unusual. Demetrius did not like their answer and sent a letter to Origen, ordering him to return at once to Alexandria. Origen complied humbly and resumed his position as head of the Theological School.

From this we can see that the bishops were becoming more concerned about their clerical positions than in teaching the people. Jerusalem and Caesarea had not been fully infected yet with this wrong spirit. When they recognized a scholar, they still prized truth more than ordination papers. Not so with Demetrius.

This took place under the rule of Elagabalus, the Roman Emperor (218-222). Elagabalus was barely 14 when he began to rule, after the assassination of his predecessor. In his four years he married five times, which violated the Roman conscience. Finally, his grandmother, Julia, joined in a plot to have him killed by his cousin, Alexander, who then took his place as emperor.

Alexander's mother, Mammaea, lived in Antioch, and she was a Christian. She heard of Origen and wrote him a letter, inviting him to come and teach. The bishop of Alexandria was no doubt frustrated, but could do nothing about it, for Mammaea sent a military escort to bring Origen to Antioch! Alexander himself does not appear to have been a Christian as such, but he did favor the Christians and unofficially recognized Christianity as a legal religion. According to Schaff,

"He [Alexander] placed the busts of Abraham and Christ in his domestic chapel with those of Orpheus, Apollonius of Tyana, and the better Roman emperors, and had the gospel rule, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,' engraven on the walls of his palace and on public monuments." (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, p. 59)

When Origen finally left Antioch, he returned via Caesarea, where the bishops ordained him as a presbyter in order to avoid further problem with Demetrius.

But Demetrius was less interested in procedure as he was in jealously maintaining control over Origen. He resented the action of the bishops, but since he could do nothing about the ordination, he simply declared Origen to be unfit for the priesthood on the grounds that he was a eunuch.

The plot thickens. Two decades earlier, in 206, Origen had taken Jesus' words in Matt. 19:12 more literally than he ought to have done. In his zeal, he had emasculated himself. At the time, Demetrius had applauded his actions, for he did not yet perceive Origen to be a threat to his influence. But years later, after the bishops of Palestine bypassed him in ordaining Origen, he used this to condemn Origen as being unfit for the priesthood. Of course, he was speaking of the law found in Leviticus 21:20, where a priest was not to be physically deficient in any way.

That law was applied physically in the time of the Levitical priesthood, but was applicable only spiritually in the Melchizedek priesthood. Here, then, is another example of how the Church was reverting to an Old Testament type of priesthood in its misunderstanding of the law. Demetrius made life miserable for Origen until he finally packed up and moved to Palestine permanently in 231. Demetrius then excommunicated him for insubordination, but the order was largely ignored, for the other bishops knew the bad character of Demetrius and loved Origen's humility and scholarship.

Origen's excommunication had nothing to do with the things he taught--and certainly not for his teaching on Universal Reconciliation. He was condemned as a schismatic for leaving Alexandria without the blessing of the domineering bishop and for accepting ordination at the hands of the bishops of Jerusalem and Caesarea though he was a self-made eunuch.

Demetrius died shortly afterward. The bishops who succeeded him ignored but did not formally reverse the order of excommunication. For this reason, it was used against Origen long after he had died in the great controversy that arose in the year 400.

Origen continued to teach and write in Palestine where he was greatly loved. But after just four years, in 235 A.D., a new round of persecution arose under Maximin, and Origen was forced to go into hiding. Eventually he fled to Athens. Maximin was a Gothic commander in the Roman army. He was said to be eight feet tall. He got the attention of the Emperor by running beside his horse for miles over rough terrain. Maximin never saw Rome itself, for he ruled from his military camp.

But Maximin did not like Christians and reacted against the favor shown to the Christians under his predecessor, Alexander, whose Christian mother, as we said, had brought Origen to Antioch to teach the Word. Origen thus lost his safe anonymity as his political enemies searched for him. But Maximin ruled only three years, and Origen continued to travel and teach.

The next emperor, Gordian, ruled from 238 to 244, and then Philip the Arabian came to the throne (244-249). The emperors were generally chosen by the army, which was made up of many nationalities from the empire. *Philip was the first Christian Emperor*, and his wife with him. However, the Catholic Church has been reluctant to identify him as a Christian, because he was not exactly the model of Christian charity before coming to the throne.

Philip was the son of a bandit-chief that had been promoted rapidly by Emperor Gordian until Philip induced the troops to kill the emperor and give him the throne. Eusebius speaks of him in Eccl. Hist., VI, xxxvi,

“He, there is reason to believe, was a Christian, and on the day of the last Easter vigil he wished to share in the prayers of the Church along with the people, but the prelate of the time [Babylas, bishop of Antioch] would not let him come in until he made open confession and attached himself to those who were held to be in a state of sin and were occupying the place for penitents. Otherwise, if he had not done so, he would never have been received by him in view of *the many accusations brought against him*. It is said that he obeyed gladly, showing by his actions the genuine piety of his attitude towards the fear of God.”

More than a century later, Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, praised Babylas for his high standards in his sermon, *De Sancto Babyla*. So it is likely that this penance actually did take place. Though secular scholars always seem to assume that people never change, the record shows that Philip's character did change. Most likely he did not become a Christian until after he had become emperor of Rome.

Philip's successor was Decius (249-251), who reacted against Philip's favor toward Christians by instituting the worst persecution of the century. In that persecution, Origen was imprisoned and cruelly tortured for his faith. He never recovered from his injuries, but the prison guards allowed him to escape after Decius and his son were killed in battle in 251. Origen died two years later in the city of Tyre.

When Origen had first moved to Caesarea in 231 to get away from the oppression of Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, two brothers from a rich family came to study under him. They were Gregory and his brother Athenodorus. Origen instilled in them the love of the Scriptures, and they later introduced Origen's teachings toward the shores of the Black Sea. Gregory later was made the bishop of Caesarea and was known as one of the most eminent bishops of the day. He was called Gregory Thaumaturgus, "Wonder Worker."

In the introduction to Gregory Thaumaturgus, we read in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VI, p. 3,

"Alexandria continues to be the head of Christian learning . . . We have already observed the continuity of the great Alexandrian school; how it arose, and how Pantaenus begat Clement, and Clement begat Origen. So Origen begat Gregory, and so the Lord has provided for the spiritual generation of the Church teachers, age after age, from the beginning. Truly, the Lord gave to Origen a holy seed, better than natural sons and daughters."

The author was speaking of spiritual seed, of course, for these men were not related physically. Origen, the eunuch, was given "a holy seed, better than natural sons and daughters." This is a reference to Isaiah 56:4, 5, which is the promise of God to eunuchs.

Origen was, without question, the dominant personality of the first half of the third century. He was loved, not feared, for his influence did not proceed from high position in the Church or by force, but he earned respect for his diligence, character, and scholarship, sealing all these with faith in the midst of torture.

Hosea Ballou writes in his 1829 book, The Ancient History of Universalism, p. 147,

"Throughout the long period of nearly a century and a half . . . there is not an intimation found that Origen's Universalism gave any offence in the church, notwithstanding his writings, the meanwhile, underwent the severest scrutiny, and were frequently attacked on other points . . . Even the few who treated his name with indignity, uniformly passed, in silence, over the prominent tenet of Universal Salvation."

This is a remarkable statement, for it shows that Universal Reconciliation either was accepted universally or at least was a non-issue prior to the fifth century when it came under attack for reasons of Church politics. Origen had died in the city of Tyre, and Methodius, the bishop of that city, disagreed with Origen on a number of points—but not on Universal Reconciliation. Origen taught that the resurrection of the dead would not involve physical bodies, but spiritual only. Methodius disagreed (as I do as well). Origen taught that the witch of Endor had actually raised up Samuel himself (1 Sam. 28:15). Methodius disagreed.

The way Origen is castigated today for his position on Universal Reconciliation, one would think that he was an anomaly of church history. But as Ballou points out about Methodius' writings, "in all his search for errors, Universalism escaped without a censure" (p. 150). This was the case until the year 400. Ballou concludes on p. 166,

". . . that the doctrine of Universal Reconciliation was regarded in the church as neither heretical nor even unpopular; that the standard of orthodoxy, so far as it concerned that particular point, was then supposed to require only a belief in future punishment."

Future punishment was universally pictured as "fire," and there were differences in opinion as to the specific nature of this "fire." All seemed to believe that it was coercive to force men to believe and to give up their wicked ways. Most (if not all) never contemplated that punishment to be unending. It was said to be merely *eonian*, "pertaining to an eon," which was a limited period of time. Ultimately, the judgment of God would end with the reconciliation of all things.

## Chapter 3

# Tertullian of Carthage

While Origen was rising as the foremost biblical expositor in the East, Tertullian was the greatest Latin writer of the West. Tertullian was born around 145-150 A.D. and died about 220, though some date his death as a very old man about 240 A.D.

Tertullian was a Roman lawyer and teacher of rhetoric until he was thirty or forty years old, at which time he became a Christian. His conversion is generally dated around 185 A.D. when Clement was taking over the great School in Alexandria after Pantaenus set off as a missionary to India.

The Roman world in which Tertullian found himself saw the Roman Church divided into three main groups. Besides the “orthodox” group represented by Victor, there were the heretical followers of Marcion and the followers of Montanus.

Marcion taught a type of reformed Gnosticism. Whereas the earlier Gnostics had heathen mythology as their basic teaching, with elements of Christianity added to it, Marcion pretended that his Gnostic teachings were based upon the Bible. Marcion first cut the Bible away from its historical roots in typical Greek fashion, for the Greeks were accustomed to mythological religion. He treated Christianity as a new religion, pitting the Old Testament in opposition to the New, instead of seeing the New as a development rooted and based in the Old.

Marcion also taught that there were three primal forces in the universe. First, there was the good and gracious God, revealed by Christ. Second, there was the devil, who ruled physical matter and heathenism. Thirdly, there was the Creator, the finite, imperfect, angry Jehovah of the Jews. He seems to have differed with the earlier Gnostics and Greeks, who taught that the Creator was the Demiurge—a “devil” figure—for he taught that the devil and the Creator were different beings. Yet he believed that the God of the Old Testament was essentially an inferior Jewish God. There are people today who believe the same, thinking that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful and bad-tempered God, while the New Testament God (Jesus) is a God of Love. Obviously, Marcion did not believe that Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the Old Testament Jehovah.

Justin, the Christian philosopher, was in Rome to combat Marcion until his martyrdom in 166, and Tertullian continued the opposition after his conversion in 185.

The third schismatic group that had arisen in Rome during the last half of the second century was Montanism. Montanus was from a small town in Phrygia in Asia Minor. Though some of his beliefs were novel, his primary characteristic was his fanatical application of *holiness*, which in itself is a good thing, but often ends in fleshly self-righteousness. Montanus fell into some kind of ecstatic experience, which, if we knew its precise nature, would probably be easily seen in some sections of the Pentecostal Church today. He considered himself to be the inspired organ of the Paraklete, the Comforter. With him also were two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, who left their husbands to be part of this prophetic ministry team led by Montanus.

Montanism called itself the “New Prophecy” movement. It was a reaction against both clericalism and the perception of reduced holiness in the Church. Montanus taught that all believers were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, to the point of making priesthood superfluous. In many ways, they fell into the same error as found in the Korah rebellion. Korah rebelled against the legitimate authority of Moses on the grounds that God speaks to all men. We read of this in Numbers 16:3,

**<sup>3</sup> And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”**

Korah’s argument appeared to be sound, for it is certainly true that the whole congregation (Church) is holy, and God certainly speaks to all men. So why should people submit to the authority of Moses and Aaron? Many were taken in by Korah’s argument, not recognizing the nature of a half-truth. The fact that God has called all men does not mean that He has cast aside all spiritual authority.

The opposite problem (clericalism) was manifested when the people demanded that Moses hear God and tell them what He said—making Moses the one responsible to hear God on their behalf (Ex. 20:18-21). These twin problems, these

two “horns of the bull” represent two extremes. At Mount Sinai, the people failed to recognize that God wanted to speak to all men, not just Moses. Their refusal put too much responsibility upon Moses.

Later, in the Korah rebellion, the people rejected ALL spiritual authority on the grounds that all men are equal before God. This view attempted to remove all legitimate authority from Moses.

Montanus represented the view of the Korah rebellion. It resonated with many people because the Church leaders had usurped too much authority and were beginning to deny the people the right to hear God for themselves. As in the days of Moses, first the people demanded that their leaders hear God on their behalf, and then reacted to this when Montanus gave them the arguments of Korah.

Montanus’ view seemed to be based in truth, but in its outworking was found to be rooted in rebellion against God. The Montanists thought of themselves as the spiritual (*pneumatic*) Christians, and considered the other Christians to be fleshly, or soulish (*psychical*). The Montanists thus represented a Pentecostal revival of sorts, complete with tongues and prophecy. Their opponents were the more “orthodox” believers, who would today be called the *traditional* churches. By this time in history, the gifts of the Spirit were largely a thing of the past, though even the orthodox churches firmly believed in prophecy and even miracles.

But Montanism attacked the Church as being inferior, less holy, and more carnal. In its blind zeal for holiness, it alienated the mainstream Church and set a standard of righteousness that was unattainable for the average Christian. When such standards are set, it is not long before believers find it necessary to pretend to be what they are not in order to retain the image of holiness. In time, such believers labor under guilt until they can stand it no longer. Discouraged and disillusioned by imperfections, they leave the Church and think of themselves as “lost forever.” They tried, but could not be good enough to be true Christians, so they give up and try to obtain some happiness on earth before they die and go to hell.

Nonetheless, by the end of the second century, much of the Church had already fallen into the original problem that surfaced in the days of Moses. It was the problem of clericalism—sending Moses up the mount to hear God on behalf of the people. The common people had steadily lost the right to hear God for themselves. This was an unconscious development in the Church as it struggled for unity, for in practice, however many believers are allowed to hear God’s voice is how many opinions there will be. In the face of multiplied opinions without a corresponding increase in love, there can be no unity without an increase in threats and fear tactics to hold the Church together.

As love wanes, unity can be maintained only by fear. This, in turn, reinstates the spirit of the Old Covenant. Fear is the glue of the Old Covenant, while Love is the glue of the New Covenant.

Into this disunified Roman-Christian world, Tertullian was thrust. Tertullian was born in Carthage (in North Africa), where His father served as captain of a Roman legion. Tertullian received a good education and could write in Greek as well as Latin.

Tertullian was the first of the great Latin writers. Because of his talent, the Latin Church began to gain prestige. Whereas the Apostolic Church was Hebrew, and the second-century Church literature was Greek, Tertullian’s Latin writings put the Latin Church onto the path of dominance by the following century. Keep in mind, however, that the great Latin fathers came from Carthage, and not Rome.

The ancient rivalry between Carthage and Rome left its individualistic imprint upon the Carthaginian Christians. Tertullian had been made a presbyter in the Roman Church around 190 A.D., but showed his individuality as well as his zeal for holiness by joining the Montanists around 199 A.D. Jerome later excuses Tertullian, telling us that he was driven to the Montanists by the envy and insulting treatment he received at the hands of the Roman bishops at the time, particularly Zephyrinus, who succeeded Victor in 198 A.D.

After leaving the Roman Church, Tertullian returned to Carthage, where he composed most of his important writings. Much of Tertullian’s efforts were spent in dealing with the heretics, for Montanism was not so much a heresy as such, but a reform movement.

It was common Church belief that a person could be baptized only once, and that this act washed away all past sin. For any sins committed subsequent to baptism, the sinner had to do penance. Tertullian believed that baptism should be performed upon infants, in order to ensure their salvation as quickly as possible. But, he said, there were seven “deadly sins” by which even believers might lose their salvation. So baptized believers were held to a high moral standard.

Tertullian condemned the moral laxity (so-called “greasy grace”) of the Roman Church for offering forgiveness through penance to believers who had sinned grossly.

Others believed that baptism should be put off so that the sins of one's youth could be covered by baptism. Many even put off baptism until their death beds, as did the Emperor Constantine later.

# Chapter 4

## The Writings of Tertullian

The Christian philosophers wrote to fellow philosophers, in order to convince them that Christianity was the true Philosophy. Tertullian, on the other hand, pleads for Christians as a lawyer. Philip Schaff tells us in his History of the Christian Church, Vol. II, p. 830,

“. . . Minucius Felix pleads for Christianity as a philosopher before philosophers, to convince the intellect; Tertullian as a lawyer and advocate before judges, to induce them to give fair play to the Christians, who were refused even a hearing in the courts.”

As a lawyer familiar with past decrees and other judicial records, Tertullian was able to refer his readers to the official records on file in the Roman courts. In his Apology, a “confession of faith” addressed to the Emperors of Rome, he reminds them that the Emperor Tiberius himself had looked with favor upon Jesus, saying in chapter V,

“Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. Consult your histories; you will find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome.”

Nero, of course, was the first to persecute the Christians (64 A.D.) more than 30 years after its inception. Tertullian again reminds his Roman readers in Apology, XXI,

“All these things Pilate did to Christ; and now in fact a Christian in his own convictions, he sent word of Him to the reigning Caesar, who was at the time Tiberius. Yes, and the Caesars too would have believed on Christ, if either the Caesars had not been necessary for the world, or if Christians could have been Caesars.”

He tells his readers to consult the official records mentioning the time of darkness when Jesus was on the cross (Luke 23:44). He says in Apology, XXI,

“In the same hour, too, the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves have the account of the world-portent still in your archives.”

The sun and moon were positioned opposite each other on that day. As the sun began to set that day, there was a lunar eclipse at 5:10 p.m. while Joseph and Nicodemus were hurrying to bury Jesus before sundown. But science tells us that one cannot have a lunar eclipse and a solar eclipse on the same day. Tertullian tells us, then, that this was a supernatural darkness that took place during the crucifixion, and that it was a matter of public record in the archives of Rome.

Tertullian also reminds his readers of the answer to prayer that Emperor Marcus Aurelius had received when his Christian troops prayed for rain in 164 A.D. Apology, V reads,

“So far from that, we, on the contrary, bring before you one who was their protector, as you will see by examining the letters of Marcus Aurelius, that most grave of emperors, in which he bears his testimony that that Germanic drought was removed by the rains obtained through the prayers of the Christians who chanced to be fighting under him. And as he did not by public law remove from Christians their legal disabilities, yet in another way he put them openly aside, even adding a sentence of condemnation, and that of greater severity, against their accusers.”

Tertullian makes the point that Christianity—unlike Judaism—was under an apostolic mandate to submit to the Romans and to pray for their peace. In chapter XXX, he writes,

“Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.”

Tertullian goes so far as to attribute the lack of internal enemies to the fact that there were so many Christians in every city.

“If we are enjoined, then, to love our enemies, as I have remarked above, who have we to hate? If injured, we are forbidden to retaliate, lest we become as bad ourselves; who can suffer injury at our hands? In regard to this, recall your own experiences. How often you inflict gross cruelties on Christians, partly because it is your own inclination, and partly in obedience to the laws! . . . Yet, banded together as we are, ever so ready to sacrifice our lives, what single case of revenge for

injury are you able to point to, though, if it were held right among us to repay evil for evil, a single night with a torch or two could achieve an ample vengeance?

“If we desired, indeed, to act the part of open enemies, not merely of secret avengers, would there be lacking in strength, whether of numbers or resources? . . . For what wars should we not be fit, not eager, even with unequal forces, we who so willingly yield ourselves to the sword, if in our religion it were not counted better to be slain than to slay? . . .

“For if such multitudes of men were to break away from you, and betake themselves to some remote corner of the world, why, the very loss of so many citizens, whatever sort they were, would cover the empire with shame; nay, in the very forsaking, vengeance would be afflicted. Why, you would be horror-struck at the solitude in which you would find yourselves, at such an all-prevailing silence, and that stupor as of a dead world. You would have to seek subjects to govern. You would have more enemies than citizens remaining. For now is the immense number of Christians which makes your enemies so few--almost all the inhabitants of your various cities being followers of Christ. Yet you choose to call us enemies of the human race, rather than of human error.”

Toward the end of his Apology, he gives his famous statement about the martyrs, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”

It was common Church belief that a person could be baptized only once, and that this act washed away all past sin. For any sins committed subsequent to baptism, the sinner had to do penance. Tertullian believed that baptism should be performed upon infants, in order to ensure their salvation as quickly as possible. But, he said, there were seven “deadly sins” by which even believers might lose their salvation. So baptized believers were held to a high moral standard. Tertullian condemned the moral laxity (“greasy grace”) of the Roman Church for offering forgiveness through penance to believers who had sinned grossly.

Others believed that baptism should be put off so that the sins of one's youth could be covered by baptism. Many even put off baptism until their death beds, as did the Emperor Constantine. Thus, there were two opposing opinions about when to be baptized. Because of the general opinion that baptism washed away only those sins committed in the past, some thought that one should postpone baptism until later when more sins could be washed away.

But because baptism was also considered to be necessary for salvation, others thought that baptism should be administered as quickly as possible. This is how infant baptism came to be an accepted practice.

Meanwhile, in far-off Britain, the Church continued its quiet progression—not *because of* Rome, but in spite of her. Tertullian speaks of the prophecies in the Psalms and in Isaiah of the gospel going out into the whole earth, and then shows how Christianity, not Judaism, has fulfilled this prophecy. He writes in An Answer to the Jews, VII,

“For upon whom else have the universal nations believed, but upon the Christ who is already come? For whom have the nations believed--Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and they who inhabit Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia, and they who dwell in Pontus, and Asia, and Pamphylia, tarriers in Egypt, and inhabitants of the region of Africa which is beyond Cyrene, Romans and sojourners, yes, and in Jerusalem Jews, and all other nations; as for instance, by this time, the varied races of the Gaetulians, and manifold confines of the Moors, all the limits of the Spains, and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons--inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ, and of the Sarmatians, and Dacians, and Germans, and Scythians, and of many remote nations and of provinces and islands many, to us unknown, and which we can scarce enumerate?”

Christians were welcome in areas of Britain that the Romans found dangerous, perhaps north of Hadrian's wall or in parts of Wales. The gospel had spread from Britain to India and had prospered.

## Chapter 5

# Montanism

There was apparently a political power struggle in the Roman Church in 198 A.D. after Bishop Victor died. The outcome was that Zephyrinus was voted in as bishop instead of Hippolytus. Tertullian was a presbyter in the Roman Church at this time and may also have been a candidate for bishop, but the fact that shortly after the election he left Rome and returned to North Africa, the place of his birth, tells us that he was not a supporter of Hippolytus. But Jerome also tells us that he joined the Montanists because of the abuse he received at the hands of Zephyrinus. So it is certain that he was not a supporter of Zephyrinus either and, in fact, must have been perceived as another political rival.

Hippolytus and Tertullian each were more capable of the position from an intellectual position. Hippolytus himself calls Zephyrinus “an uninformed [or ignorant] and shamefully corrupt man” in Book IX of A Refutation of All Heresies. Hippolytus himself was well read, for in ten volumes under this title he refuted virtually every Greek philosophy and Church heresy up to his own time. He obviously felt that he was intellectually entitled to the bishopric, based upon his knowledge of heresies and what was orthodox Christian doctrine.

Tertullian apparently was not impressed. The fact that he turned to Montanism shows that he rejected soulish (intellectual) knowledge as a qualifier for the bishopric. The Montanists focused upon being spiritual, rather than soulish. So it is likely that after the Roman Church had split, Tertullian found a home in neither camp, and for this reason he returned to North Africa where he made a name for himself.

In my view, intellect is good, as long as it remains subject to one's spiritual side, for it is the spirit of man that houses the Holy Spirit of God. Intellect is not evil in itself, but yet its tendency since Adam's sin has been to dominate or overrule the spirit when it does not understand the ways of the spirit. The soul tends to believe its perceptions, which are based upon its own limited experience and education. The soul mistrusts the spirit, because the spirit lives by divine revelation that is outside of soul's earthly experience.

The ideal, however, is for the soul to subject itself to the leading of the spirit (and therefore the Holy Spirit as well), for that is true Faith. Faith is not devoid of intellectual activity, nor yet of physical things. True Faith merely subordinates these things to the divine revelation of the spirit. Body and soul then become the willing servants of the spirit, saying “Amen” to all that the spirit reveals and leads them to do.

The difficulty in this, of course, is in the fact that people have a hard time distinguishing between the soul and the spirit. There have been more “heresies” determined by soulish study than true revelations by the spirit. This I attribute largely to the idols of one's heart, as Ezekiel 14 calls them. These “idols” are the soul's strong opinions or desires, emotional scars, and past circumstances where we have rejected truth or the leading of the spirit.

Most of these idols are hidden, in that we think they are gods (or the Holy Spirit), but in fact they are mere counterfeits—“graven images,” so to speak—gods created in our own image and likeness. Because we are convinced that these are truly God, it is difficult to see otherwise. Jesus said in Matt. 6:23, “*If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*” In other words, if we perceive the darkness as light, the darkness is even greater. If we perceive the idol to be God, we stand little chance of overthrowing it. All such idols blind us and bias us against true revelation, and only by the grace of God can we be healed and set free of those idols in the heart.

Yes, I speak from a certain amount of personal experience here. I have seen some great idols come crashing down in certain past crises in my life. But there is no way that I can count the remaining idols, for if I could do so, I would have removed them long ago. So I have learned that I can only put my trust in God's grace, that He will work in my heart to accomplish what I cannot do on my own. Meanwhile, I share that which my heart currently believes, in the hope that these things can be of help to some of you as well. For a more complete Bible study on the idols of the heart, see chapter 2 of my book, Hearing God's Voice.

Montanus, I think, discovered some very good truths, and these are the things that attracted Tertullian. Montanus wanted to walk by divine revelation, rather than soulish intellectualism. Montanus saw a developing problem of clericalism, whereby men were subject to men, rather than to God. He wanted all men to have a direct relationship with God, rather than subject their revelation to the souls of intellectual heresy hunters such as Hippolytus. But, in regard to the Montanists, Philip Schaff says in his History of the Christian Church, Vol. II, p. 424,

“But they only brought another kind of aristocracy into the place of the condemned distinction of clergy and laity. They claimed for their prophets what they denied to the Catholic bishops. They put a great gulf between the true spiritual Christians and the merely psychical; and this induced spiritual pride and false pietism.”

In theory, Montanus had some good truth. But in practice, he ran headlong into the problem of heart idolatry. He merely turned from the heart idolatry of the Church Hierarchy to a more personal heart idolatry. In practice, he merely substituted one graven image for another. Now, instead of depending upon Church leaders, with their heart-idols, to determine truth and heresy, he now had to depend upon himself, not knowing that he too had idols that were only shaped differently from those in the Church.

Maximilla, one of the two women who accompanied Montanus, prophesied: “After me, there is no more prophecy, but only the end of the world.” I do not know when she died, but I know that the end of the world did not occur then. Further, I have heard much prophecy in my own time and experience, so I know it has not yet ceased. But in such a statement, Maximilla manifests spiritual pride, which is certainly not a fruit of the Spirit. It comes out of the very soul realm that the Montanists condemned in others.

We do not know much detail about the two women who left their husbands to follow Montanus, but similar “leading of the Spirit” is all too common even today. I have been utterly amazed at how many “prophets” eventually get the “revelation” that they are to engage in fornication, adultery, or polygamy. We read about others who were “told by God” to murder others—even their own children. Here is where the written word has a primary value, for it provides us with revelation from past prophets with which to compare and judge our own revelation. And in the area of morality, here is where the law has special value. *I have never known a lawless prophet to escape immorality, fraud, or thievery.*

Lawlessness is inevitably accompanied by legalism, for when one discards the law of God, one always begins to replace it with the traditions of men. Thus, Schaff tells us on page 425,

“Finally, the Montanistic sect was characterized by fanatical severity in asceticism and church discipline. It raised a zealous protest against the growing looseness of the Catholic penitential discipline, which in Rome particularly, under Zephyrinus and Callistus, to the great grief of earnest minds, established a scheme of indulgence for the grossest sins and began, long before Constantine, to obscure the line between the church and the world. Tertullian makes the restoration of a rigorous discipline the chief office of the new prophecy.

“But Montanism certainly went to the opposite extreme and fell from evangelical freedom into Jewish legalism; while the Catholic Church in rejecting the new laws and burdens defended the cause of freedom.”

Montanism's holiness movement attempted to correct what it saw as substandard Christianity. But in judging the Church without an understanding of the law by the mind of Christ, they merely established more rigorous man-made laws. The same legalism seen in those days has continued to the present, differing only in form. In the early days it was expressed in the ideas of celibacy, although the fact that God established marriage in the beginning hindered them from making their case. They finally settled upon the belief that sexual relations were based upon “passion,” and that those who overcame such desires were more spiritual than others. Many Church bishops were married, but expressed their preference for celibacy. Schaff tells us on page 409,

“At the same time the tendency towards clerical celibacy set in very early, and made steady and irresistible progress, especially in the West. This is manifest in the qualifications of the facts and directions just mentioned. For they leave the impression that there were not many *happy* clerical marriages and model pastors' wives in the early centuries; nor could there be so long as the public opinion of the church, contrary to the Bible, elevated virginity above marriage.”

It seems to me that the early Church leaders had not yet discovered the distinction between an Old Covenant marriage and a New Covenant marriage, which I set forth in my book, Old and New Covenant Marriage. If their concept of a perfect marriage was one where the wife was a bondswoman like Hagar (Gal. 4:22-25), it is little wonder that the bishops had so few happy marriages. It is too often the same today, except that non-Catholic clergy today have the advantage in that they do not normally denigrate marriage itself.

And so developed the idea of clerical celibacy, even though it was well known that Peter, Paul, and Philip were married men. Schaff says on page 412,

“Sacerdotal marriage was first prohibited by Pope Siricius (A.D. 385), then by Innocent I (402), Leo I (440), Gregory I (590), and by provincial Synods of Carthage (390 and 401), Toledo (400), Orleans (538), Orange (441), Arles (443 or 452), Agde (506), Gerunda (517).”

In more recent years various churches have been free to establish their own legalisms, such as dress codes, hair codes, jewelry, makeup, and even reading the comic section of the newspapers on Sundays. Smoking and drinking are prohibited in other circles as defilements of God's Temple. While we certainly have biblical statements about many of these things, most of them are not absolute prohibitions but appeals to moderation in all things.

There ought to be some standard of righteousness (i.e., right behavior) in any Church fellowship. Call it "Holiness," if you will, but in my view, holiness cannot be measured by one's actions, but one's heart. Actions, of course, often reveal the heart, but judging such things is not always easy and obvious. The danger comes when the Church leaders who establish these legalisms have little knowledge of biblical law. Likewise, the more they know about Church history, the more they might see where such legalisms lead. The real value of studying Church history is to have some way of understanding and avoiding the mistakes of the past.

# Chapter 6

## The Precedent for Papal Supremacy

Whereas the second century Church focused most of its attention upon heresies, the third century Church began to see open corruption in the Church, particularly beginning with the Church in Rome. Interestingly enough, this corruption manifested immediately after Bishop Victor put the Roman Church on the path toward its claim of sovereignty over the other bishops in the Church.

If you recall, I have taken note of Philip Schaff's view that the Papacy had evolved in three steps represented by Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Cyprian. Schaff credits Cyprian with solidifying the view that Church membership was necessary for salvation, saying that it led to the final step—that salvation was possible only when in fellowship with the *Roman Church*.

Obviously, Cyprian would not have made that final leap, for he himself was a critic of the Roman bishops on various issues, as Schaff himself acknowledges. It was obviously left to others to attribute salvation to the word of the Roman pontiff. As I said, the precedent for that view actually began fifty years earlier with Victor.

Let me quote Joseph McCabe for a moment. McCabe went to seminary to become a Roman Catholic priest back in the 1890's, but soon was so disillusioned that he not only left the seminary and the Church, but also became an avowed atheist. He could not take the hypocrisy and immorality at the school. Anyway, he wrote many books opposing Catholicism, including A History of the Popes in 1939.

I have found that it is always helpful to read opposing viewpoints, because each side digs out facts that the other side would rather suppress. In reading both sides, we tend to get more of the truth, even if each side uses the facts according to their own particular biases. Anyway, McCabe writes on p. 39,

“The Bishop of Carthage and head of the African Church at the time was Cyprian, one of the most esteemed of the Latin Fathers. Because he somewhere acknowledges that the Roman is ‘the principle Church’ and ‘the source of sacerdotal unity,’ Catholic apologists unanimously quote him as one who recognized the Pope's supremacy. Yet we still have the lengthy letters which Cyprian wrote to Cornelius and his successor, and in these Cyprian, from first to last, scornfully repudiates the Roman claim to have any sort of authority in Africa.”

You see, Zephyrinus and especially his successor, Callistus (218-222), had lowered the moral standards for fellowship in the Church. This steady decline was greatly resisted by the other “holiness” bishops, including Cyprian. Cyprian excommunicated certain corrupt priests under him, and refused to allow them to be reinstated in the ministry. But those priests then went to Rome to appeal their case to the “grace” bishop (Cornelius), who was much more lenient. Cyprian writes to the bishop of Rome to give his side of the story. McCabe writes of this on page 40,

“He assures Cornelius [Roman bishop, 251-253] that the priests who have appealed to him are 'a band of desperadoes' whom he had very properly excommunicated. He describes ‘the pseudo-bishop’ who accompanies them as ‘an embezzler of money entrusted to him, the violator of virgins, the destroyer and corruptor of many marriages.’ They have appealed to Rome only because, since the days of Callistus, absolution is cheap there, and the Pope had no right to listen to them. ‘For,’ he says, (*Ep.* 14), ‘it is decreed by all of us, and is equally fair and just, that the case of every man should be judged where the crime was committed.’

“A few years later Cyprian sent a contemptuous letter (*Ep.* LXVII) to the successor of Cornelius, Pope Stephen. The Bishop of Arles has joined the Novatianists, and the other bishops of Gaul have appealed to the Pope to condemn him. Another proof of recognition of Papal supremacy, says the apologist. Yet it is plainly stated in Cyprian's letter that the bishops of Gaul have appealed equally to Carthage and Rome, and Cyprian is scolding the Pope because he has not done *his* part. ‘We who hold the balance in governing the Church’ is Cyprian's description of himself and the Roman Bishop. Pope Stephen, another pompous mediocrity, threatens anathemas, and Cyprian gathers his eighty African bishops in council; and they sent (*Ep.* LXXII) as disdainful a reply to the Pope's claim as any Protestant would make today. They wrote:--

“ ‘We judge no man, and we cut off no man for differing from us. None of us regards himself as the Bishop of Bishops or seeks by tyrannical threats to compel his colleagues to obey him.’

“Cyprian, the greatest Christian leader of the third century, head of one of the chief branches of the Church and more famous for learning and piety than any Pope in four centuries, wrote pages in this vein; and Rome retorted by calling him ‘a false Christ’ and ‘false Apostle’ and refused hospitality to his envoys. Yet I do not know a single Catholic writer who does not claim that Cyprian recognized the supremacy of the Pope!”

That is quite an indictment. It is no wonder that many have sought to conceal these Cyprian epistles.

# Chapter 7

## Grace vs. Holiness

The first half of the third century, while the mighty Origen was humbly distinguishing himself in the East, a continuing line of non-entity bishops of Rome briefly bubbled to the surface and then were forgotten in history, having contributed little that was original to the history of the Church.

It is clear, however, that this was the beginning of corruption in Rome. Since its bishops were elected by the people in a rather democratic way, the relaxed morality of the bishops and the easing of the more rigid standards of the past established bishops that the people wanted. Like people, like priest (Hos. 4:9). Perhaps it was a reaction against the Holiness movement that had prevailed in the Church for the previous 150 years. But it is plain that Rome was skewered on the other horn of the bull.

When men fell into sin or denied Christ during a state persecution, the bishops had imposed heavy judgment upon “the lapsed,” that is, those who denied Christ. If the Christ-deniers had been of the clergy, they were considered to be unworthy of the position, and if they continued to baptize, their baptism was not recognized by other bishops. If ordinary Christians fell into one of the “seven deadly sins,” listed by Tertullian, they were no longer recognized as Christians at all. After all, once baptized, their sins were said to be washed away just once, and the heavenly rule, they said, was that they could not be baptized a second time. Post-baptism sins were only washed away by penance, but certain sins were “unpardonable.”

With such a doctrine, it is no wonder so many postponed their baptisms until their death beds, taking a chance on losing their salvation (so they thought). The rigor of the Church in those days encouraged people to engage in death-bed conversions. In practical terms, it is obvious that such a law of baptism was flawed as much as modern laws that result in the opposite effect intended by the law.

Compare, for example, the practice of giving a dowry before marriage. In the Bible, the husband (or his family) gave a dowry to the wife (i.e., her guardian), who was to use it as a kind of Investment Trust. Over the years it would grow. The longer the wife was married, and the more children she might have, the more financial security she had in case her husband died. The dowry (50 shekels of silver, or 100 days of common labor) served also as alimony in case of divorce.

But in many countries today, such as in India, the dowry is paid in reverse. The woman's father pays a dowry to the husband—in essence, paying the man to marry her. Since the money is his, the wife has no security in case of disaster. Often, the man demands more money after the marriage, and if the woman's family does not pay, she often encounters an “accident,” such as being burned by hot water. Essentially, the dowry is often used as blackmail to extract more money from the woman's family.

Having a baby girl can be very expensive to a family in India, and so today there are entire villages with 50 boys to one girl. The girls are either aborted, left to die, or given to orphanages that are packed with girls. This is an example of how a law (or even a custom) can be unjust. If unjust, it is certainly not something that came from the heart of God. God's true laws bring justice, prosperity, and life, not death (Deut. 30:19).

And so, as a general rule, if we see that a law brings injustice and death, it is a sure sign that it has come from the mind of man, rather than the mind of God—or it has been understood and applied incorrectly because man has not known or understood the mind of the Divine Legislator.

In the early Church, the rejection of the rigid standards seems to have begun with Zephyrinus in Rome (198-217 A.D.), and his policy was strengthened by his advisor and successor, Callistus (217-222). Schaff tells us of him, “In short, he considered no sin to be too great to be loosed by the power of the keys in the church. And this continued to be the view of his successors.”

Thus, the Roman bishops were reacting to the rigid moral standards of the day by which the Church measured its true believers. It was a classic case of the clash between Holiness and Grace. Should the Church determine the salvation of Christians by their holiness or should they consider the blood of Christ to be sufficient for ALL sins—even those of lapsed Christians?

Rome chose Grace, and thus became vulnerable to lawlessness. The rest of the Church continued to choose Holiness, and thus remained vulnerable to legalism. The Church has struggled with these two horns of the bull in every generation

since that day to find the balance between the two paths. Is there such a thing as Lawful Grace? Is there a Non-legalistic Holiness? I believe so, but it cannot be achieved by submission to men in an organization usurping the title of “The Church.” The moment an organization begins to usurp the place of Christ, it will put away the law of God in favor of its own traditions, creating lawlessness. And since those traditions are man's interpretation of the mind of Christ, they can never truly reflect the holiness of God, so lawfulness is replaced by legalism.

Lawfulness is obedience to the law of God with an understanding of the mind of Christ, the Author of the Law. Legalism is obedience to men who have usurped the place of Christ and substituted their own traditions, their flawed interpretations of the law.

Callistus' bishopric in Rome nearly perfectly coincided with the Emperor Elagabalus, who had a great reputation for debauchery. Callistus' bishopric extended slightly into the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus, who allowed Callistus to build a “temple” (separate building devoted to gathering for worship) for the first time. Up until then, the people appear to have met in homes, which accounts for the great number of clergy under the authority of the bishop.

Recall that Mammea, the mother of Alexander Severus, was a Christian. Alexander protected not only Christians, but also Jews and Nazarenes. He was one of the first to enforce religious freedom. There was no persecution of Christians under Alexander Severus, under whose reign Callistus died. But in later history, the Church claimed Callistus to have been a martyr in order to list him among the saints.

The relaxed standards of morality in Rome made it easier for people to become Christians, and so the Church membership grew by leaps and bounds. The side effect of this was that soon the more rigid members were outvoted when it came to electing their bishops. Thus, Zephyrinus was elected in 198, and the Holiness Party left the Church to follow Hippolytus, the first “Anti-Pope.” Thereafter, they excommunicated each other, as is usual, and the Church remained split until 235. The two rival bishops (Hippolytus and Pontian) were exiled together to work in a Sardinian mine. From that vantage point, old doctrinal issues did not seem so important any more, and they were reconciled.

Even a temporary split, of course, ensured that the Grace Party took firm control of the official Church of Rome. Grace was extended to the great sinners who would have been excommunicated earlier with no possibility of salvation extended to them. But Grace was established at the expense of moral integrity.

The Roman Church split again in 251 when it elected Cornelius as bishop. Though he had no ambitious desire for the office and was not a man of any great learning, he was elected by 16 bishops who happened to be in Rome at the time. In doing so, they bypassed the learned Novatian, who had served during the vacancy in the previous year after the martyrdom of Bishop Fabian. Novatian then broke away and became Rome's second “Anti-Pope.”

# Chapter 8

## Novatian

As I wrote earlier, the Roman bishop, Pontian, was able to reconcile with Hippolytus in 235 and resolve the long-standing schism while the two bishops were condemned to work side by side in the Sardinian mines. When Pontian learned that he was to go into exile, he resigned the bishopric in order not to leave his people leaderless in Rome, and Anteros filled his position for about a month before dying.

It happened then that an earnest believer in the countryside named Fabian had come to the city to visit the church. Eusebius reports in Eccl. Hist., VI, xxix,

“When the brethren had all assembled with the intention of electing a successor to the bishopric, and a large number of eminent and distinguished men were in the thoughts of most, Fabian, who was present, came into no one's mind. But suddenly out of the blue a dove fluttered down and perched on his head (the story goes on), plainly following the example of the descent upon the Saviour of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. At this, as if moved by one divine inspiration, with the utmost enthusiasm and complete unanimity, the whole meeting shouted that he was the man, and then and there seized him and set him on the bishop's throne.”

No doubt this helped to secure the unity of the Roman church, for a sign like this was surely accepted by both groups as a divine endorsement. He remained bishop of Rome from 238-249 through the reign of Philip, the first Christian Emperor of Rome.

As I wrote earlier, the Roman Emperor, Philip the Arabian, ruled from 244-249 and became a Christian during that time. Decius, his successor, hated Philip, and so he persecuted the Christians viciously in the two years of his reign. Fabian was martyred in January of 250 and after a 14-month interim was succeeded by Cornelius.

In the same persecution, Alexander, the bishop of Jerusalem also gave confession of his faith before the governor's court at Caesarea and died in prison at a ripe old age. The bishop of Antioch, Babylas also died in prison under Decius. It was in this persecution that Origen was also arrested and tortured horribly in the attempt to get him to deny the faith. Fortunately for him, however, Decius died a year later, and Origen's prison guards allowed him to escape, having been impressed with his testimony and kindly manner. Origen never recovered from his injuries, but he died peacefully in the city of Tyre two years later in 253 and received an honorable burial from Methodius, the bishop of Tyre.

The Church in Antioch suffered greatly from the Decian persecution. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote a letter to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, about this persecution, and Eusebius quotes from it in Eccl. Hist. VI, 41,

“First, they seized an old man named Mtras, and ordered him to utter blasphemous words; when he refused, they beat him with cudgels, drove pointed reeds into his face and eyes, took him to the suburbs, and stoned him to death.

“Next, they took a female convert named Quintas to the idol's temple and tried to make her worship. When she turned her back in disgust, they tied her feet and dragged her right through the city over the rough paved road, bumping her on the great stones and beating her as they went, till they arrived at the same place, where they stoned her to death.

“The Christians retired and gradually withdrew; like those to whom Paul paid tribute, they took with cheerfulness the plundering of their belongings. I do not know of anyone, except possibly one man who fell into their clutches, who up to now has denied the Lord.

“Next they seized the wonderful old lady Apollonia, battered her till they knocked out all her teeth, built a pyre in front of the city, and threatened to burn her alive unless she repeated after them their heathen incantations. She asked for a breathing space, and when they released her, jumped without hesitation into the fire and was burnt to ashes.”

These are just a few of the examples in this lengthy report quoted by Eusebius.

But some of the Christians denied Christ in the persecution. Out of this persecution came a new Church controversy about how to treat these Christians who had denied Christ in the face of torture and threats. Novatus, a presbyter in the Roman Church, took a very dim view of these “lapsed” Christians. Eusebius says that Novatus . . .

“regarded them with lofty contempt; there was no hope of salvation for them now, even if they did everything in their power to prove their conversion sincere and their confession wholehearted. So he set himself up as leader of a new sect, whose members in the pride of their hearts entitled themselves the ‘Pure’.”

A synod was convened in Rome to deal with this new controversy, attended by 60 bishops and many presbyters and deacons. Eusebius continues,

“The result was a unanimous decree that Novatus, his companions in presumption, and any who thought fit to approve his attitude of hatred and inhumanity to brother-Christians, should be regarded as outside the Church, but that those brothers who had had the misfortune to fall should be treated and cured with the medicine of repentance.”

I suspect that part of synod's discussion included Peter's denial of Christ three times, and then his subsequent repentance and Christian witness.

Bishop Cornelius wrote to Fabius of Antioch a letter to say that Novatus had long had the ambition of becoming a bishop. The account says that he tricked three “simple-minded” bishops into coming for a visit to Rome, and then was able to get them drunk. While drunk, “he forcibly compelled them to make him a bishop.” One of the three bishops in question later repented and asked for forgiveness, telling the story.

Those who followed Novatus were forced to swear an oath of allegiance to him before being given communion: “Swear to me by the Blood and Body of the Lord Jesus Christ never to desert me and turn to Cornelius.” (Note Matt. 5:33-37, where Jesus says not to swear at all.) This, of course, made it doubly difficult to leave Novatus and return to the regular congregation in Rome that was led by Cornelius.

The underlying problem was that Novatus was angry when Cornelius was elected bishop instead of him. His predecessor, Fabian, had been martyred by Decius on January 21, 250, and for a time there was a vacancy, because they felt it wise not to put anyone in danger by electing him as the next bishop. After 14 months, the vacancy was finally filled by the election of Cornelius in March of 251. But during the vacancy, Novatus served as an interim official in Rome to carry on the correspondence with the other bishops. The election of the unknown Cornelius angered him, and so he found an excuse to break away and form his own church.

Novatus is thus known as the second “anti-pope” (after Hippolytus). The schism was felt throughout the Church, however, for each side appealed to foreign bishops. Some agreed with Novatus that the Christ-deniers had forfeited their salvation forever, but most agreed with Cornelius. And so the second-century Church seemed to be characterized by conflicts between those who espoused Holiness, and those who espoused Grace.

The next controversy to be resolved was whether or not to recognize the baptism performed by Novatian clergy. Some felt that the validity of baptism had more to do with the faith of the one being baptized; others, however, put more emphasis upon the Church itself and its authority to grant salvation by baptism. Here is where the view of Cyprian of Carthage became important, for it established the Church authority to grant salvation. It put the Church into the position of determining who was and who was not a Christian, according to his relationship to the Church, rather than to his relationship with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it was this issue, more than any other, which usurped the authority of Christ as High Priest. This is the heart of the definition of Antichrist.

# Chapter 9

## The Decian Persecution

In 1 Samuel 13, King Saul established a prophetic type of the Church that finds its fulfillment in the middle of the third century. Saul was at war with the Philistines, and he was to await Samuel's arrival to make the sacrifice before the battle. He waited seven days, but Samuel still had not arrived. By this time the soldiers were beginning to desert the army, “and the people were scattering from him” (vs. 8). So finally, Saul made the sacrifice himself (1 Sam. 13:9).

As soon as he was finished, however, Samuel arrived and told Saul in verses 13, 14,

**<sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”**

Samuel is a type of Christ in this story, while Saul is a type of the Church in the Pentecostal Age. Because Christ delayed His coming, the Christians were scattering, and the bishops felt the need to usurp the authority of Christ in order to keep unity in the Church.

The events of history in the days of Cyprian manifest the fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy more than any other time. The persecution under Roman Emperor Decius was meant to destroy or scatter the Church, and Cyprian reacted in the same manner as Saul had done.

Hans von Campenhausen's The Fathers of the Latin Church, page 37, tells us,

“Although Jerome presumed that Cyprian had begun as a professor of rhetoric, we should perhaps suppose rather that he envisaged the career of a higher government official. . . With Cyprian began the line of 'curial' bishops who attempted to perform their ecclesiastical office in the magisterial style of the consuls and pro-consuls, with whom he did not shrink from being directly compared (*Ep.* 37, 2). Compared with the Greek East, this was a novel and specifically Western type of Catholic priesthood.”

The development of this Roman-style Church government began with Cyprian, but he himself was in some ways driven to it by the fallout from the Decian persecution from 249-251 A.D. During that persecution, great numbers of Christians either fled, obtained certificates of sacrifice through bribery, or actually did sacrifice to the pagan gods.

Cyprian himself went into hiding, insisting afterward that it was purely for the benefit of the Church. That may have been true, but most leaders in the past had considered persecution and martyrdom to be the will of God and submitted to it without fleeing. His conduct gave old rivals opportunity to attempt to overthrow him and replace him with more courageous leaders. After all, they could point to courageous examples of the bishops of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Caesarea, who had been martyred in the same persecution. And so a sizable section of the African Church renounced obedience to Cyprian and allied themselves with those who confessed Christ and lived to tell about it.

A key rival was Felicissimus. Hans von Campenhausen writes in his book, The Fathers of the Latin Church, p. 45,

“A certain Felicissimus, who had been ordained deacon against Cyprian's will, and had taken charge of the congregational purse, dared to take a stand against him publicly, and when Cyprian excommunicated him, five other presbyters eventually joined the opposition. . . In these circumstances he pointed time and again to the bishop's office as the one decisive ministry, which sustains the church. He who leaves the holy altar of the bishop and changes his allegiance to the wicked party of Felicissimus is lost to the people of Christ, and can never again join them.”

On page 48, the author continues,

“Even more significant historically is Cyprian's writing on the unity of the church . . . The security of the institutional church meant for Cyprian the security of salvation, and of Christian faith itself, for which he suffered, lived, and fought. The church is the Bride of Christ, the 'mother church' for all faithful; 'you cannot have God for your father unless you have the church for your mother' (*de Un.* 6). Outside her there is no salvation. . .

“One cannot separate a ray from the light, a branch from the tree, a creek from the spring without its vanishing, withering, drying up. This unity of the church, however, exists because of the bishop's office. The church is in the bishop as the bishop is in the church (*Ep.* 66, 8). Woe to those who will not recognize this!”

On page 49 von Campenhausen concludes,

“So the unity of the Catholic church became a tangible, firm, and canonical reality in church politics, which determined the order of the Western church as far as Spain and Gaul.”

In other words, here was the point where the Roman form of government was transferred to the Church and where the Church was firmly identified as the earthly organization beyond the point of return. The Church was now seen as a “tangible” reality—that is, bound fully to the earthly structure itself, defined by the presence of the bishop, and its extent measured by the scope of men's obedience to the bishop.

The Decian persecution, then, which was intended to scatter the Church, actually succeeded only in solidifying its organizational unity and consolidation of political power. In the process, Cyprian's eloquent writings gave later generations many quotable one-liners that would be remembered to the present day.

The key, however, is in understanding the most basic flaw that few seemed to comprehend in those days. That flaw is in identifying the Church with the organization rather than with the people, and in making membership the requisite to salvation. While it is true that one cannot be a Christian apart from the Church, the truth is simply that Christians who have a direct relationship with Christ are the sum total of the true Church, regardless of whether or not men bear witness of them.

While it is certainly possible to be a true Christian and also be submitted to men (whether civil or religious governments), it is equally true that those men lack the authority to lock the gates of heaven to those who do not submit to their decrees. They have authority only to expel people from the organization, not from heaven. To act otherwise is to become "antichrist" in the biblical sense of the word.

The Decian persecution also raised the issue of how to treat those who had denied Christ. The Holiness movement insisted that such people were lost forever and should not be re-admitted to communion. The Grace movement, of which Cyprian was a part, established that these should be re-admitted after a time of penance. The penitential time frame should be established according to the nature of the offence. In other words, those guilty of bribing officials to obtain sacrificial papers were re-admitted sooner than those who had actually sacrificed to the pagan gods.

Cyprian found common cause with Cornelius of Rome, for both bishops were confronted with anti-popes. Novatus was the anti-pope of Rome, while Felicissimus was the anti-pope of Carthage. (The term “Pope” was in those days applied to a number of major bishoprics, including Rome, Carthage, Alexandria, and later Constantinople.)

Cornelius was martyred by Decius in 251, and after a short reign by Lucius, Stephen succeeded him and became the first to claim true papal status, demanding that Cyprian submit to him in their dispute over heretical baptisms. Cyprian declared himself to be Stephen's equal in authority, and the sparks flew.

# Chapter 10

## Cyprian and Stephen

Stephen was the bishop of Rome from 253-257. He adopted the position that the baptism of heretics could be recognized as legitimate, no doubt based on the idea that salvation was a matter between the individual and Christ, rather than upon the witness of the bishop.

This, of course, ran contrary to the position established by Cyprian. How could an apostate heretic confer the gift of the Holy Spirit when he himself was possessed by the devil and had himself already lost the Holy Spirit? Thus, the root of the issue was whether or not the Holy Spirit came from the bishop or directly from God at the time of baptism.

Cyprian's position had been established by Tertullian, as well as an even earlier Council of 70 African bishops in Carthage during the bishopric of Agrippinus. But Stephen now decided to recognize not only baptism at the hand of heretics, but also the ordinations of Novatus, the first anti-pope, a policy designed to bring these back into the unified fold of the Roman bishop. Stephen could point to the reconciliation of Novatus with Pontian while working in the Sardinian mines, but holiness-minded Cyprian could see only that schismatics were a danger to the Church and needed to be permanently excommunicated.

Now it happened that in Spain, two bishops had been deposed by the other bishops for obtaining certificates of sacrifice (by bribing the government officials). The first was Basilicus, the bishop of Leon and Astorga; the second was Martial, bishop of Merida. In addition, they were accused of other enormous crimes (which may or may not have had validity).

At any rate, these bishops went to Rome and appealed their case to Stephen, who, without examining the case, took their side and re-instated them to their bishoprics. The other bishops of Spain, of course, were scandalized by this and sent emissaries to Cyprian in Carthage to appeal for support. Cyprian assembled a Council of 28 bishops, who confirmed the deposition of Basilicus and Martial.

Cyprian then sent two priests to Rome to inform Stephen of the Council's decision. Stephen would neither receive them nor speak with them, nor even to offer them hospitality. Instead, he excommunicated Cyprian and the bishops of Africa, writing a letter so arrogant that it scandalized the whole Church. Cormenin writes of this in his History of the Popes, Vol. I, p. 41,

“Firmilius, bishop of Caesarea, addressed a long letter to St. Cyprian, in which he testified the great esteem and profound affection he entertained for him; at the same time he exhibited his indignation against the pope [Stephen], and spoke of him in the following words: ‘Can we believe that this man has a soul and a body? Apparently, his body is crooked, and his mind disordered. He does not fear to speak of his brother Cyprian as a false Christ, a false prophet, a fraudulent workman’ . . .”

Cyprian responded to Stephen's accusations by calling him “arrogant, obstinate--the enemy of Christians, the defender of heretics, and with preferring human traditions to divine inspiration.” From an organizational standpoint, Stephen took the position of Papal Primacy for the first time since Victor's failed attempt in 192. Cyprian took the Episcopal position, saying, as von Campenhausen tells us,

“Every leader of a congregation has the right to decide for himself freely according to his own discretion; he will have to answer for his actions to the Lord alone (*Ep. 72, 3*).”

In other words, Cyprian essentially believed in multiple papacies who could differ but who would cooperate with each other and treat each other as equals. But this position would prove to be weak, for as the bishoprics grew in number, it became more and more difficult to maintain that very standard of unity that Cyprian prized so highly. Thus, the Episcopal position was doomed from the start, for once the bishops were allowed to maintain differences of opinion and of doctrine, the disunity could only spread until the deficiencies of human nature and ambition would split the Church. At that point, to maintain Cyprian's viewpoint, the Church would have to determine in which half of the divided Church salvation resided?

It is not that I would oppose an Episcopal system of Church government in favor of Roman primacy. I am simply saying that democratic forms of government work best with small groups or countries, but the combination of size and moral corruption demand more laws and tighter controls to maintain governmental unity.

From a practical standpoint, this shows clearly why the government of “Saul” cannot endure but must at some point be replaced with “a man after God’s own heart,” that is, the government of the overcomers. And, in fact, this is what Samuel prophesied to King Saul in 1 Samuel 13:14.

The inevitable conclusion is that Pentecost, with its mere “earnest of the Spirit,” is insufficient to bring righteous government into the earth. The Kingdom of God can only be established under “David,” not “Saul,” under the Feast of Tabernacles, not under Pentecost. And for this reason, Pentecost is given to us as a leavened feast (Lev. 23:17), to show us this great truth.

Decius died in 251 and was replaced by Gallus, who was killed in 253. Valerian then became Emperor and ruled from 253-259, when he was taken captive by the Persians. In the early part of Valerian's reign he was favorable toward the Christians. Eusebius tells us that he “filled his whole palace with godfearing people, making it a church” (Ecc. Hist. VII, x). But in the summer of 257 A.D. Valerian changed his mind and issued an edict ordering tighter restrictions on the Christians. He tried at first to restrict the growth of Christianity without bloodshed and simply banished leaders or put them under house arrest.

Cyprian was placed under house arrest and assigned to his own lodging. But later, Valerian ordered that the lives of the clergy should no longer be spared. Cyprian knew then that his days were numbered. Though he could have escaped, this time he was determined not to do so. He was brought into custody, sentenced, and taken to the place of execution. There he knelt to pray for the last time, and when he was ready, he paid his executioner 25 gold pieces for his labor and was beheaded.

There are differing accounts of how Pope Stephen died in Rome. He was apparently condemned to the wild beasts, but when a temple of Mars suddenly collapsed, the guards ran away, leaving him alone. He escaped into the cemetery, thinking he was safe, but soldiers caught up with him and beheaded him there.

Thus ended the life of both Stephen in Rome and Cyprian in Carthage. Their deaths brought an end to their disputes without really resolving the issue of Roman primacy or their differences in regard to heretical baptism. Insofar as heretical baptism is concerned, the issue would again divide the Church during the Donatist controversies in the next century.

# Chapter 11

## The Valerian Persecution

Emperor Valerian at first favored the Christians and “filled his whole palace with godfearing people, making it a church of God,” Eusebius tells us. This gave the emperor a first-hand view of Christians and allowed him to see if these Christians in Rome practiced what they preached. Sadly, the fact that he turned against Christians speaks for itself and should act as a sobering lesson to Christians.

Valerian was taken captive by the Persians toward the end of 259 or early 260 at the Battle of Edessa. He was the only Roman Emperor ever to be taken prisoner, and his capture shook the Roman world. So it might be helpful to give a little background to this military conflict.

The Persians had overthrown the Parthians a few decades earlier after revolting in 220 A.D. Up until that time, Parthia and Rome had been the two major superpowers of the Western World, fighting periodic battles along the Euphrates River that usually formed their border.

In 215 the Roman Emperor Caracallus concocted a scheme in which he pretended to desire peace with Parthia. In connection with this, he proposed to marry the daughter of the Parthian King. The Parthian people were overjoyed at the prospect of an eternal peace with Rome, and many came to Ctesiphon (Parthia's winter capital) for the royal wedding. The Roman army came also, supposedly to escort the Emperor.

When the Roman army arrived, Caracallus' true designs came to light, because the army immediately began to slaughter the Parthian people. They even went so far as to desecrate the royal graves of the Parthian kings—something that they would not have dared to do even to the Catacombs of Rome, where so many Christian martyrs were buried. The Parthians marched on Nisibis, the Roman headquarters. The Roman army assassinated Caracallus for putting them in such a position. The new Emperor, Macrinus, tried to appease the Parthians, but they were now too angry and bent on revenge to desire peace.

Needless to say, this desecration brought about one of the most massive world wars in history. Both sides gathered soldiers from the ends of their empires for the three-day battle in 217. The battlefield was piled so high with the dead that it hindered the battle itself, because the living soldiers soon could hardly see each other! But the battle at Nisibis ended with the greatest Parthian victory ever achieved over the Romans.

Nonetheless, such a battle greatly weakened the Parthian Empire, and in 220 one of its provinces, Persia, took its opportunity to revolt against King Artabanus IV of Parthia. A battle in 227 virtually ended the great Parthian Empire, which had existed since 250 B.C. The new Persian Empire then pushed into Armenia and drove the so-called “lost tribes of Israel” into Europe.

These Israelites had lived in Parthia for centuries, concentrating on the area between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. They were not known as Israelites, of course, for the nations called them Sakka and Gimirra (or Khumree). Sakka was from the name Isak, or Isaac, and Khumree was the Israelite king known as Omri. Though they lost their name “Israel,” the people themselves certainly existed in large numbers and formed the bulk of that part of the Parthian Empire until its fall.

These Israelites did not return to Palestine, as Dr. A. Neubauer wrote in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1888 (Vol. I), page 15,

“The captives of Israel exiled beyond the Euphrates did NOT return as a whole to Palestine along with their brethren the captives of Judah; at least there is no mention made of this event in documents at our disposal.”

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century A.D., knew of their existence, for he writes in Antiquities of the Jews, XI, v, 2,

“Wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans; while the ten tribes are beyond Euphrates till now; and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers.”

The Euphrates River was the traditional border with Parthia. Hence, it is clear that the Israelite tribes to which Josephus referred in the first century A.D. were living “beyond Euphrates” in Parthia. The Persian uprising, however, pushed a great many of those Israelites into Europe, where they were known as Sakka (Latin: Saxons), Angles (Hebrew

for “bull,” the sign of Joseph), Khumree (Celts), and by many other names. Many Sakka migrated to the Baltic Sea and formed the great Saxon confederation in what is now Germany. The historical significance of the overthrow of Parthia should not be underestimated.

And so, in 260, the Roman Emperor Valerian was taken prisoner, not by the Parthians, but by the Persians. It was a new empire in world history, not to be confused with the first Persian Empire in the days of Cyrus. Valerian’s son, Gallienus, his co-emperor, now became sole Emperor of Rome in 261. Eusebius tells us in Eccl. Hist. VII, xiii,

“Not long afterward Valerian became the slave of the Persians. His son, who now found himself sole ruler, showed more prudence in his conduct of affairs. One of his first acts was to issue edicts ending the persecution against us.”

The churches as a whole entered a time of peace. Nonetheless, Christianity was still technically under the legal restrictions as a *religio illicita*. Eusebius tells us of something that happened in Caesarea while he was a boy. A soldier named Marinus had served in the army with distinction, perhaps in the service of Valerian in the Persian war. As he was about to be promoted to Centurion, a rival stepped forward and accused Marinus of being a Christian. As a Christian, unable to sacrifice to Caesar, Marinus was not allowed to be an officer in the Roman army.

The judge, whose name was Achaeus, asked Marinus about this, and Marinus told him that he was a Christian. The judge gave him three hours to rethink his beliefs. When Marinus returned, he firmly confessed himself to be a Christian, and so he was beheaded that day and promoted to a greater army of saints than the Roman army could have offered.

Astyrius, a Roman Senator, witnessed this execution. He too was a Christian but highly honored by emperors. He picked up the body of the martyr, placed it on a magnificent robe, and gave him an honorable burial. This same man, Astyrius, was known for a prayer of spiritual warfare that he did near a different Caesarea on the slopes of Mount Hermon in northern Palestine. Eusebius tells us in Eccl. Hist. VII, xvii,

“Near Caesarea Philippi, called Paneas by the Phoenicians, on the skirts of the mountain called Paneum, they point to springs believed to be the source of the Jordan. Into these they say that on a certain feast day a victim is thrown, and that by the demon's power it disappears from sight miraculously. This occurrence strikes the onlookers as a marvel to be talked of everywhere. One day Astyrius was there while this was going on, and when he saw that the business amazed the crowd, he pitied their delusion, and looking up to heaven, pleaded through Christ with God who is over all to refute the demon who was deluding the people and stop them from being deceived. When he had offered this prayer, it is said that the sacrifice instantly came to the surface of the water. Thus their miracle was gone, and nothing marvelous ever again happened at that spot.”

# Chapter 12

## Diocletian Divides the Empire

The capture of Valerian left his son, Gallienus, sole emperor of Rome. But it left him in a very precarious position, because the Romans believed that the fate of the empire hinged upon the fate of their emperors, who were, after all, worshipped as gods. In fact, this was, in large part, the underlying reason why the Christians were required to sacrifice to the Caesars. Caesars were the visible gods of the Roman Empire. The prosperity of the empire itself depended upon demonstrating piety toward its primary gods.

For this reason, for about six weeks Gallienus hid the fact that his father had been taken prisoner. And the rest of his eight-year reign was plagued by usurpers who tore large chunks out of the empire and created independent nations. The most significant of these revolts formed the Gallic Empire (260-273), which consisted of Spain, Gaul, Britain, and part of Germany. Though short-lived, it outlived Gallienus himself.

The creator of this Gallic Empire was Postumus, one of the generals sent to defend Gaul while Valerian and Gallienus marched east to fight the Persians. Postumus revolted in 260, perhaps after hearing that Valerian had been taken prisoner. Postumus was, in turn, murdered by his own troops in 268, at which time Spain and Britain declared their independence from the Gallic Empire. This created three independent nations out of what had been a 3-nation empire: Spain, Britain, and Gaul.

Gallienus attempted to recover Gaul, but after being seriously wounded in battle in 263, he made no further attempt to do this. Most of his reign was spent in trying to hold rest of the Empire together. After his death in 268 there were four short-reigning emperors, showing a period of instability in the empire. Then in 284 Diocletian became the emperor and put an end to what historians call “The Crisis of the Third Century.” Diocletian stabilized the Empire and was one of its greatest administrators. But he also brought one of the worst persecutions upon the Church in his later years.

During the reign of Diocletian, a Roman general named Carausius was sent to the English Channel with a fleet to counter pirates and raiders. It appears that he kept the pirated wealth for himself and perhaps even waited for the pirates to raid villages before attacking them, in order to confiscate more wealth. Rome ordered him to be executed, but instead, Carausius declared himself to be Emperor of Britain, taking with him one of the legions from Gaul to add to the three legions already in Britain. He was later defeated in 293 by Constantius Chlorus, the father of Constantine. Carausius finally was killed by his treasurer, Allectus. Allectus, in turn, was defeated by Constantius in 296, and so ended the new Britannic Empire.

Constantius himself had married a Briton, Helen of York, Constantine's Christian mother.

An interesting detail about the reign of Carausius in Britain was that he understood the propaganda value of issuing coins. He issued coins made of good quality silver, contrasting with the debauched currency of Rome. His coins said “Restorer of Britain” and “Spirit of Britain.” He also issued coins with the Latin letters RSR and INPCDA on them.

This puzzled historians for years, until 1998 when they were recognized as an acronym of the sixth and seventh lines of the Fourth Eclogue of the Roman poet, Vergil. The English translation reads, “*The Golden Ages are back, now a new generation is let down from Heaven above.*” In those days Vergil's poem was as famous in Britain as Shakespeare's plays are today.

Some of the coins also read, *Expectate veni*, “Come long-awaited one,” a line in Vergil's *Aeneid*. It appears, then, that Carausius was trying to appear as a messianic ruler, perhaps to appeal to the Christians in Britain, with whom Vergil was considered to be a Roman prophet.

By the year 298 Diocletian had stopped the Persians from invading Syria and had stopped the Germanic invasions in Gaul.

Diocletian instituted some very important reforms that kept the Empire intact for another century. Up to his time, the army was the real power base of the Emperor. Though he ruled technically as a constitutional monarch, it was in fact a dictatorship. Diocletian realized that the Empire was too big to be ruled by a single man, and so he divided the empire into East and West. He elevated Maximian to be Caesar of the West, while he himself ruled the East. Maximian moved his seat of authority from Rome to Milan to be nearer to the frontier, and Rome never again became the seat of government

for the Roman Empire. Later, when Constantine reunited the empire under himself as sole emperor, he built a new capital city and called it Constantinople.

In addition to Diocletian and Maximian, each chose a subordinate Caesar, making a total of four caesars, each ruling about a fourth of the Empire. Diocletian chose Galerius to rule Anatolia, while in the West, Maximian chose Constantius to rule Gaul, Spain, and Britain.

1. Diocletian (Greece, Egypt, Asia)
2. Galerius (Anatolia and Oriens)
3. Maximian (Italy, North Africa)
4. Constantius (Gaul, Spain, and Britain)

Diocletian also recognized that religion added legitimacy to the Emperors, so he took upon himself the old title of *Pontifex Maximus*, making himself not only semi-divine, but also the “high priest.” He chose a new title for himself, *Dominus et deus*, (“Lord and God”). He also adopted for himself the title of Jovius (Jove, or Jupiter), and Maximian took the title of Herculius (Hercules).

In accordance with this new religious monarchy, of course, he frowned upon the Christians who refused to sacrifice to him or to recognize him as “Lord and God.” So he was determined to force their compliance or stamp them out completely. Whereas for the first 20 years he had respected the policy of toleration instituted by Gallienus in 260, he issued three edicts in rapid succession against the Christians in 303 A.D. The forty-year time of peace for the Church ended in one of the bloodiest persecutions ever instituted against them.

Philip Schaff tells us in his History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, p. 66,

“In 303 Diocletian issued in rapid succession three edicts, each more severe than its predecessor. Maximian issued the fourth, the worst of all, April 30, 304. Christian churches were to be destroyed; all copies of the Bible were to be burned; all Christians were to be deprived of public office and civil rights; and at last all, without exception, were to sacrifice to the gods upon pain of death. Pretext for this severity was afforded by the occurrence of fire twice in the palace of Nicomedia in Bithynia, where Diocletian resided.”

The persecution began on February 23, 303 A.D., the Roman feast of *Terminalia*, as a symbolic gesture as if to terminate the Church. The persecution, however, was limited largely to the eastern part of the Empire. In the West (Gaul, Spain, and Britain), Constantius Chlorus and his son, Constantine, did everything possible to spare the Christians. Even so, because they were yet under authority, some churches were destroyed and Christians found martyrdom.

One would think that the Jews would be persecuted as well for not sacrificing to Caesar, but this was not the case. James Carroll writes in Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, page 167,

“But going back to the first century B.C.E., Jews had been exempted from the requirements to offer sacrifices to and utter blessings in the name of pagan gods. When the Church grew apart from the synagogue, Christians lost that exemption, which posed a growing problem as the emperors themselves began, in the third century to claim the prerogatives of deity. Jews were also exempt from military service, but Christians were not.”

Two years after instituting this persecution, Diocletian retired in 305 and persuaded Maximian to do the same in 308. Constantius Chlorus also died in 305. The power-sharing system began to fall apart at that point. In 306 Constantine began his revolt in the West and took Rome in 312.

# Chapter 13

## The Diocletian Persecution

The last 40 years of the third century were relatively free of persecution for the Church. It was a time of unprecedented growth for Christianity, but it came at the expense of its character. Eusebius tells us in Eccl. Hist. VIII, i,

“How great, how unique were the honour, and liberty too, which before the [Diocletian] persecution of my time] were granted by all men . . . to the message given through Christ to the world . . . Witness the goodwill so often shown by potentates to our people; they even put into their hands the government of the provinces, releasing them from the agonizing question of sacrificing, in view of the friendliness with which they regarded their [Christian] teaching. What need I say about those in the imperial palaces and about the supreme rulers? Did they not permit the members of their households--consorts, children, and servants--to embrace boldly before their eyes the divine message and way of life, hardly minding even if they boasted of the liberty granted to the Faith? Did they not hold them in special esteem, and favour them more than their fellow servants? . . .

“How could one describe those mass meetings, the enormous gatherings in every city, and the remarkable congregations in places of worship? No longer satisfied with the old buildings, they raised from the foundations in all the cities churches spacious in plan. These things went forward with the times and expanded at a daily increasing rate . . .

“But increasing freedom transformed our character to arrogance and sloth; we began envying and abusing each other, cutting our own throats, as occasion offered, with weapons of sharp-edged words; rulers hurled themselves at rulers and laymen waged party fights against laymen, and unspeakable hypocrisy and dissimulation were carried to the limits of wickedness. At last, while the gatherings were still crowded, divine judgment, with its wonted [lack of] mercy, gently and gradually began to order things its own way, and with the Christians in the army the persecutions began.

“But alas! realizing nothing, we made not the slightest effort to render the Deity kindly and propitious; and as if we had been a lot of atheists, we imagined that our doings went unnoticed and unregarded, and went from wickedness to wickedness.”

This is how Eusebius explains the Diocletian persecution that broke out in February of 303 A.D., which ordered churches to be destroyed, Bibles burned, and Christians forced on pain of death to sacrifice to the gods. These edicts were issued in Nicomedia, the capital of the Eastern half of the Empire. When the first edict was posted, one of the Christians arrogantly tore it to shreds. Diocletian took this as an act of defiance, of course, and proceeded to persecute Christians out of anger and not merely out of love for the gods or of Roman law.

In spite of this shameful testimony, there were still many courageous believers among them who were able to face death willingly and even with rejoicing, as had their fellow martyrs in previous times. Eusebius tells us that he personally witnessed many of the martyrdoms in the city of Tyre as men were given to the wild beasts.

“When these things were going on, I was there myself and there I witnessed the ever-present divine power of Him to whom they testified, our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, visibly manifesting itself to the martyrs. For some time the man-eaters did not dare to touch or even approach the bodies of God's beloved, but rushed at the others who apparently were irritating and provoking them from outside; only the holy champions, as they stood naked and in accordance with their instructions, waved their hands to attract the animals to themselves, were left quite unmolested. Sometimes when the beasts did start towards them, they were stopped short, as if by some divine power, and retreated to their starting-point. When this went on for a long time, it astounded the spectators, so that in view of the ineffectiveness of the first, a second and third beast were set on to one and the same martyr.

“You would see a youngster not yet twenty standing without fetters, spreading out his arms in the form of a cross, and with a mind unafraid and unshakeable, occupying himself in the most unhurried prayers to the Almighty; not budging in the least and not retreating an inch from the spot where he stood, though bears and panthers breathing fury and death almost touched his very flesh. Yet by some supernatural, mysterious power their mouths were stopped, and they ran back again to the rear. . .

“At last, when these animals had launched their terrible [but harmless] varied assaults, the martyrs were one and all butchered with the sword, and instead of being buried in the earth were given to the waves of the sea.” (Eccl. Hist., VIII, vii).

Eusebius again tells us (VIII, ix),

“I was in these places and saw many of the executions for myself. Some of the victims suffered death by beheading, others punishment by fire. So many were killed on a single day that the axe, blunted and worn out by the slaughter, was broken in pieces, while the exhausted executioners had to be periodically relieved. All the time I observed a most wonderful eagerness and a truly divine power and enthusiasm in those who had put their trust in the Christ of God. No sooner had the first batch

been sentenced, than others from every side would jump on to the platform in front of the judge and proclaim themselves Christian.”

Eusebius lists a few of the Church leaders who died in this persecution: Anthimus, bishop of Nicomedia was beheaded; Lucian a presbyter in the same city; Tyrannion, bishop of Tyre; Zenobius, presbyter at Sidon; Silvanus, bishop of Emesa who was given to the wild beasts; Zenobius, “the best of physicians” died by hot plates applied to his sides; Silvanus, bishop of Gaza was beheaded with 39 others; two Egyptian bishops, Peleus and Nilus were burned at the stake. There are too many to mention, of course.

But two years into the persecution, Diocletian was struck down with mental illness, forcing him to retire in 305. He was replaced by Maximian, the other Caesar of the East who had ruled under him. But he was soon replaced by Licinius as Emperor of the East, by the common vote of the princes.

Shortly afterward, Constantius also died and was replaced by his son, Constantine, in the West. The sheer number of caesars and emperors that had been created by Diocletian brought about a contest as the Empire was brought back gradually under a single head. In the end it was Constantine who won. First he overcame Maximian’s son, Maxentius, who had assumed power in the West (Rome), and in 324 he overcame Licinius in the East. Once he was firmly established as sole Emperor of Rome, he called for a Church Council at Nicea in 325 to settle the Aryan controversy in regard to the Trinity and whether Christ always existed or was created at some point.

The persecutions were always limited in the areas where Constantine ruled, but when he took Rome at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, he was finally in a position to do more. In 311 he issued his famous Edict of Toleration, in which he allowed religious freedom for all. This was followed two years later by the Edict of Milan, signed by both of the co-emperors, Constantine and Licinius. These Edicts for the first time officially made Christianity a *religio licita*, a lawful religion.

Constantine has often been maligned as a pagan pretending to be a Christian, a sun-worshipper at heart, a politician who used Christians as a power base to gain power. These charges are inaccurate, as we can see by his earlier history. Born and raised in Britain by a Christian mother, Helen, he was favorable to Christians from his early life. It is doubtful if he really knew what it was to be a genuine Christian. Christianity was usually presented as a religion that one joins. By that standard of measure, we should not be surprised if Constantine did things that we would not condone by our standards today.

Certainly, he was not responsible for church corruption, which already existed. He is to be credited with giving Christianity freedom. What the Church did with that freedom is another matter entirely. Later, he asked the religious leaders to decide which doctrine was correct in the Arian controversy, and he used the force of law to back their decision. But once again, the Church leaders were responsible to know the Scriptures and to know the mind of Christ. Constantine was a new believer, schooled only in military and political matters. If he made mistakes, the bishops ought to have told him. But instead, the leaders delighted in appealing to the Emperor to enforce their excommunications against heresies, instead of permitting freedom of conscience.

# Chapter 14

## Constantine

Diocletian had divided the Empire as early as 285, shortly after becoming Emperor. He ruled from Nicomedia in Asia Minor; Maximian from Milan in Italy. Each one deputized a Caesar, who in theory was an equal, but in practice a subordinate.

Maximian deputized Constantius, who ruled the Northwest portion of the empire from Trier, in Gaul. In order to consolidate his position with Maximian, Constantius divorced his wife Helena to marry Maximian's daughter, Theodora.

Diocletian's caesar was Galerius, who consolidated his position by marrying Diocletian's daughter, Valeria. She came to be known as Galeria Valeria (of course!).

Galerius ruled Armenia and the easternmost part of the empire. Galerius was the one most responsible for pushing Diocletian into persecuting the Christians in 303. Many historians believe that Galerius was the one who set the fires in Diocletian's palace in Nicomedia in order to blame the Christians and motivate Diocletian to persecute the Church.

Diocletian seems to have gone mad in 305 and retired. He then told Maximian, his counterpart from Milan, to retire also. Then Constantius, the father of Constantine, died in 306 at York in Britain. This would have left Galerius as sole emperor, but young Constantine was elevated by his troops to replace his father as Augustus of the Western Empire.

But Maximian also came out of retirement, disavowed his forced abdication, and reasserted his claim as co-emperor of the West with his son, Maxentius. This put them in direct conflict with Constantine. Maximian soon became fearful and came to Trier to make peace with Constantine. The peace was secured by marriage when Maximian's daughter, Fausta, was given to Constantine as his wife.

The first edict granting toleration to at least a limited portion of the Roman Empire was issued in 306. It was done by Constantine on behalf of Spain, Gaul, and Britain, and also by Maxentius on behalf of Italy and North Africa. This toleration put an end to the persecutions in the West.

But when Maximian's son, Maxentius, saw himself losing power, he staked his own claim as emperor of the West. His father, Maximian, found himself squeezed between a rock and a hard place, but had little choice but to back Maxentius. This put Maxentius and Constantine in conflict, and their armies met in 310. Maximian was then killed, while his son Maxentius lived to fight again until 312, when he was thrown off the Milvian Bridge and drowned.

The Emperor of the East was Licinius, who met Constantine at Milan in 311. They issued a JOINT Edict of Toleration at that time to bring to the East (the Balkans) what had already been established in the West.

In 312 Constantine marched into Italy to meet the army of Maxentius at the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Constantine's British and Gallic army was largely demoralized from being so far from home and was in need of a morale booster. Just before the battle, Constantine told the troops of a wonderful vision that he had received of a cross in the sky above the words, *In Hoc Signo Vincas*, "In This Sign, Conquer."

Putting the sign of the cross on their armor, they won the battle, and Constantine pushed Maxentius off the bridge into the Tiber River, where he drowned. This put Constantine as sole Emperor of the Western half of the Roman Empire. Licinius ruled the East until 324, when Constantine united the entire Roman Empire back under a single ruler after nearly 40 years of division.

Meanwhile, in 313, Constantine and Licinius issued a joint letter to be circulated among the governors of the East, declaring that religious toleration to all. This was known as the Edict of Milan. It officially made Christianity a legalized religion and removed from the Church the requirement to sacrifice to pagan gods or to Caesar. This letter was sent especially to Anatolia and Oriens, the territory farthest east that had been under the rule of Maximian.

Thus, religious toleration was actually a process that took a full seven years to complete (306-313). I find this significant, because 306 was 40 rest-years after the 80th Jubilee from Adam (26 A.D.).

The year 313 was 40 rest-years after Jesus' crucifixion in 33 A.D. The seven years from 26-33 A.D. was Daniel's 70th week, as I showed in my book, Secrets of Time.

I have often stated that the pattern of King Saul's 40-year reign was a pattern for the 40-Jubilee "reign" of the Church under Pentecost. But there is more to it than that. There was a pattern of 40 YEARS, 40 REST-YEARS, and 40 JUBILEES.

The 40-YEAR pattern started from 26-33 A.D., and ended from 66-73 A.D. This was the time of the Jewish Revolt, which saw the destruction of Jerusalem. It ended with the taking of Masada at Passover of 73.

The 40-REST-YEAR pattern had the same starting dates (26-33), and ended from 306-313 A.D.

The 40 JUBILEE pattern again had the same starting dates (26-33), and ended from 1986-1993. These are explained in greater detail in my book, Secrets of Time.

So we see how the story of Constantine plays a large factor in the second of these major Church cycles and is thus important to gain a comprehensive understanding of Church history. Seeing the three "40's" puts Constantine into the context of a much bigger prophetic history of the Pentecostal Age. The Age of Pentecost, in turn, has to be understood in its own context, for there were three major prophetic feast days to consider: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

The Passover Age was from Moses to Christ, beginning with that first Passover when Israel came out of Egypt. It ended at that great Passover when Jesus was crucified.

The Pentecostal Age began with the fulfillment of Pentecost in Acts 2, and began to end in 1993 after 40 Jubilees. Even so, as I have written in the past, there was also a 7 and a half year transition from 1993-2000, correlating to the story of King Saul and his son, Ish-bosheth.

The point is that we are now entering into a Tabernacles Age in long-term prophetic history. Our understanding of the times we live in today will rise or fall upon our knowledge and understanding of the long-term prophetic history of the Bible and the Divine Plan.

# Chapter 15

## The Christian Empire

The transformation of the Roman Empire into a Christian Empire took considerable time. It was not completed until the time of Theodosius, who outlawed sacrifice in 381 and finally made Nicene Christianity the religion of the Empire in 391.

But Theodosius also re-divided the empire, which Constantine had reunited earlier in the century. Constantine's prime directive was to unite the empire, and he accomplished this in 324 after the battle of Chrysopolis, where he defeated Licinius, the ruler of the Eastern Empire. But Theodosius divided the Empire once again between his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius at his death in 395.

Constantine himself had two roles to play: Emperor of all Rome, and Christian. As a political equal to Licinius, he was unable to do everything that he wanted, and so he accommodated Licinius prior to 324. He started out with a policy of religious toleration, giving equality to Christians and pagans. Only later did he begin to restrict paganism. It appears that his political goal of re-uniting the Empire spilled over into his ideas of uniting not only Christianity under Christ, but also in uniting the pagan religions under a monotheistic “sun god” of their own.

Hence, one of his first acts was to issue coins—a secular act in itself—with inscriptions *Sol Invictus*, “to the Unconquered Sun.” These were minted in the mints that he controlled: London, Trier, and Lyons. The Sun was a monotheistic symbol of the Universal Godhead, used by pagans, but also in a positive sense in the Bible in reference to the True God (Psalm 19:4; Mal. 4:2). The moon represents the Church which is supposed to reflect the glory of God—i.e., the Sun. The difference, of course, is in the manner of worship and whether or not one worships the literal sun or He whom it represents.

Constantine found this symbol useful, in that it was acceptable to all religion and yet promoted monotheism. The pagan Romans, of course, worshipped many gods, and yet recognized a Most High God, a King of the gods. Constantine began to bring paganism into monotheism as a first step toward unifying the Empire. James Carroll's book, The Sword of Constantine, p. 185, theorizes that the minting of coins to the Sun was designed to fool Licinius, who did not really understand the underlying difference between Christianity and the pagan Sun-cult. Carroll writes,

“The year 315 was decisive for Christian-pagan relations too. By then Licinius, Augustus in the East, had realized that, despite similarities with the sun deity, the Christian God was different and would not readily take a place among the other gods of the Roman pantheon. It may well have occurred to Licinius that he'd been had by Constantine, for whom toleration was only the first step toward a new, Christian domination. Licinius saw too late that the Milan Edict itself gave a kind of primacy to Christianity: 'Christian religion' was named first, and Roman paganism, like all paganism, was referred to as 'any other cult.' The growing influence of Christianity would enhance Constantine's power and diminish his own. Seeing this, Licinius began to purge Christians from his civil service. The act gave Constantine the pretext he needed to declare war against yet another brother-in-law.”

In 315 Constantine prohibited Jews from proselytizing. This was one of the first steps toward undoing his policy of toleration. But Constantine continued using *Sol Invictus* on the coins until 321. After that, it appears that this inscription served no further useful purpose, and it was dropped. In 324 Constantine became sole emperor of the Empire.

His first act was to call a Christian Council to bring unity to the Church in the latest controversy—the Arian controversy. This became the Council of Nicea in 325 and the father of the “Nicene Creed,” focusing mainly upon the issue of the Trinity. The argument of Arius was that “If Jesus is the Son of God, then there was a time when He was not.” Though this controversy was won by the Trinitarians, the issue took decades to settle among the people themselves. The fourth century Church was characterized more by this controversy than by any other issue.

From Constantine's viewpoint, unity was essential. He believed that religious unity was important in maintaining the political unity and strength of the Empire. He did not take a position either way in this controversy at the Council of Nicea and personally wavered often even in later years. His goal was to bring the bishops together to discuss and argue their points and come to a unified consensus of opinion. In this, he succeeded only in securing two positions—a majority opinion and a strong minority opinion.

Constantine is one of the most loved and hated figures of Church history. There are many today who blame him for all the problems in the Church, when in fact, the bishops were main problem in the Church. Constantine and his successors

empowered the Church (i.e., the bishops), and together these carnally minded men laid the foundations of the future problems of corruption. Constantine should be held accountable for any political problems in the Empire; the Church bishops should be held accountable for any spiritual problems in the Church.

Those who blame Constantine for the spiritual problems in the Church should ask themselves if they would prefer that the Emperor continue the Diocletian persecution. Persecution does have its way of keeping some purity in the Church, after all. But if we blame him for this, then we should also blame every king, president, and legislator that votes to give religious freedom to Christians today. That does not seem like a feasible position.

To blame Constantine for the spiritual problems is largely unjust, for it loses sight of the most obvious fact that Constantine stopped the persecutions of the Church! That was the greatest victory for the Church since the cross itself. He sought to pay reparations to the Church and give back all the Church property that had been confiscated by earlier Emperors. That, too, was only equitable and just, for it recognized that the Church and individual Christians had been unjustly robbed.

Yet there are always unintended consequences, even to good policies. Most notable is that the bishops soon saw that they had *spiritual* authority over Constantine, as much as Constantine had *political* authority over them. The bishops began to appeal to the Emperor, not only to obtain justice, but soon to enforce doctrinal Orthodoxy established by the Church Councils. Constantine was only too willing to do this, because he agreed fully with the bishops that unity was of primary importance. And thus, the Arian dissenters were exiled, and their churches (property and bishoprics) given to Trinitarian bishops.

So both the political and religious authorities felt an overwhelming need to establish unity. Since this kind of policy had not really been tried before, there were few (if any) examples in history from which to learn. It was inevitable that they all had a greater confidence in the power of Pentecost than was warranted. They did not seem to understand that Pentecost was a leavened feast, and this leaven would only manifest in a greater way once the Church had been pulled from the “fire” of persecution.

If they had had a revelation of the Feast of Tabernacles, they might have avoided this, seeing that perfection could come only through this third great feast. But God had not yet opened their eyes to this truth. As the Church became more and more powerful, ultimately eclipsing even that of the political empire itself, it seemed to be settled truth that the Pentecostal Age would increase until the reign of the Church covered the entire earth. The Kingdom of God would be brought in through Pentecost.

The irony is that as the Church's political power grew, the power of the Holy Spirit was seen less and less. As the Church became more religious, it lost more of the character of Christ Himself. Here is where it would have been most helpful for the people to have understood the story of King Saul and how the Church was the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Saul, rather than of David (as they fancied). If they had made this connection, they might have been able to avoid the same rebellion against God that characterized Saul.

Likewise, the priesthood of the Church was fast reverting to an Old Testament style of priesthood. It came to look more and more like the Levitical, rather than the Melchizedek priesthood. In fact, the cross itself, which Constantine had turned into a conquering sword, restored to the Church the military evangelism that had characterized the Old Covenant and Joshua's conquest of Canaan.

The point is that we are now entering into a Tabernacles Age in long-term prophetic history. Our understanding of the times we live in today will rise or fall upon our knowledge and understanding of the long-term prophetic history of the Bible and the Divine Plan.

# Chapter 16

## The Cross Becomes a Sword

The progression of the Kingdom in history is portrayed by the feast days of Israel when viewed from the perspective of prophecy. Moses led Israel out of Egypt on Passover, bringing the Kingdom into a Passover Age—the first of a series of three ages. The Passover Age ended officially when Jesus died on the cross on Passover 1480 years later.

Those who believed in the Passover Lamb (justified by faith) are those who, in effect, "passed the test of Passover" and were moved into the next grade level—Pentecost. These became known as the "Church," though more specifically they formed the Pentecost Church, as distinct from the Passover Church that Moses had formed. Acts 7:38 calls Israel "the Church in the wilderness." I equate this with the Passover Church, when viewed in this manner.

The Pentecost Church was the transitional Church into that final perfect one, which I would call the Tabernacles Church—or the Church with the anointing of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth).

2000 years ago the majority of the people failed to pass the Passover test (Faith) and to graduate into Pentecost. This has occurred also with the Church of Pentecost. Instead of moving forward into Tabernacles, they have reverted back to the perceptions and limitations of the Passover Age. Even so, there has always been a minority which has continued to move forward instead of backward. These are the Overcomers.

The Passover Age began with great miracles—the Ten Plagues on Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness. But it was not Pentecost. The people did receive OPPORTUNITY to enter Pentecost at Mount Sinai, when God came down as fire and spoke the Ten Commandments to the people. Everyone heard God in their own language. That day came to be celebrated as the "feast of weeks" thereafter, and it received its current Greek name over a thousand years later—*Pentecost*.

It is evident that the Holy Spirit was present and operative even in the Passover Age. The Holy Spirit is not limited to Pentecost, but functions and manifests in a greater way. Israel had opportunity to grow rapidly from Passover (leaving Egypt), to Pentecost (hearing God's voice, receiving the Spirit at Sinai), and even to Tabernacles (entering the Promised Land). They could have "graduated" within a period of just two years. But though this was God's WILL (*thelema*), it was not God's PLAN (*boulema*).

Under Moses, God granted Israel the ability to leave Egypt, thereby typifying those who are Justified by Faith in the blood of the Lamb. That is the Passover experience, not Pentecost, and it speaks of all true believers who have Faith. In any age, the Church, by definition, consists not of organizational members, but of people with a genuine heart-experience of Justifying Faith.

In other words, the "True Church" consists of those who have experienced Passover in their hearts and have a direct relationship with Jesus Christ.

But in the prophetic type under Moses we find that Israel was unable to go beyond Passover. When they came to Pentecost, they ran away from the voice of God at Sinai (Ex. 20:18-21). Verse 19 says,

**<sup>19</sup> Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."**

Scripture says that their hearts were hardened, their eyes were blinded, and their ears were stopped, and this situation was still present with them 40 years later (Deut. 29:4). The reason for this was because God intended to work on a much longer time frame than just the individual Israelite's experience. He intended to slow down the process and work through three AGES. And so the eyes and ears of the people were not opened until after Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:32). This unlocked their hearts and opened up to them the Pentecostal Age, which they entered seven weeks later.

A few people drew near to God in the upper room for Pentecost, desiring to hear His voice. Unlike Israel, they were unafraid, and they were rewarded with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), which those of the previous Age were unable to experience.

But within a few centuries we find from reading Church history that they lost nearly all of what they had gained on the day of Pentecost. A few miracles continued to occur, of course, but miracles did not set them apart from the Passover

Age. Many miracles occurred under the anointing of Passover. What was the real difference between these two Ages? What did the Pentecostal Church lose? How did they revert to Passover?

In a word, the issue was the Holy Spirit. But how did this play out in experience? The Holy Spirit came primarily in the form of the Voice of God manifesting in the Fire. It is also pictured as a SWORD, because of the "flaming sword" of the Cherubim (Gen. 3:24) as well as the sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Christ (Rev. 19:15). A sword coming out of one's mouth is a symbolic representation of the WORD OF GOD, and the sword is the tongue by which it is spoken.

It is a Hebrew idiom in Scripture that the "edge" of the sword is the Hebrew word PEH, which means "mouth." It is literally the BLADE of the sword, but the Hebrew word is MOUTH. So the sword coming from the mouth of Christ in Rev. 19:15 is a word picture of Hebrew origin.

When Israel refused to hear the Voice of God in Exodus 20, they rejected the Sword that comes from the mouth. They rejected Pentecost, and so the fulfillment of that feast was postponed for many centuries. If they had accepted that sword, history would have been quite different. The most immediate difference is that they could have conquered Canaan by the Sword of the Spirit instead of the physical sword. But in rejecting the spiritual sword, they were left only with the physical sword.

And so, the Passover Age was characterized by carnal things, including the physical sword by which they would conquer Canaan. Yes, God was in it, but it was not the perfect order, nor did all that bloodshed really reflect the heart of God. Did God really hate the Canaanites? Did He really desire their blood? Was the God of the Old Testament a God of vengeance, rather than a God of Love? NOT AT ALL. The Canaanite genocide was the result of Israel's refusal to obtain the greater weapon of the Sword of the Spirit, by which they could have CONVERTED the Canaanites by the power and demonstration of the Spirit.

The fulfillment of Pentecost in Acts 2 shows us how the alternative Sword would have worked on the Canaanites, had that Sword been Israel's "weapon of choice." Jesus said to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He said to "kill" them by baptism. What we call the Great Commission is actually the operation of the Sword of the Spirit, which Israel was offered but rejected at Mount Sinai.

Unfortunately, by the fourth century the Church had lost this Sword of the Spirit. Constantine then picked up the physical sword by which he conquered. As a military general and Emperor, we might expect this of him. However, the Church later adopted this policy when it began to assume political authority, and this represented a major shift from Pentecostal-Age thinking back to Passover-Age thinking. The Church should have known better than to do this.

The Church reverted back to its Passover level of experience. Pentecost's Sword of the Spirit was discontinued. The focus of the Church began to shift from the resurrection back to the Cross. The Cross became a physical Sword. And the Church soon learned to conquer men by military might and to convert men by force of arms.

This is the real significance of Constantine's vision of the sword in the sky with the words, "In this sign, conquer." If he had known anything about the Sword of the Spirit, he might have used a different sword. But like Israel of old, he did not. His experience was military, and he certainly did not have the time to learn about such spiritual things by that time. Few bishops at that time would have been capable of enlightening him on this. So he assumed that he was to conquer by military force. When the Church followed his example, it marked the greatest turning point in the Church in its reversion from Pentecost to Passover.

When I speak of the Passover Age, the term itself is to be understood in relation to the Pentecostal Age and the Tabernacles Age. But there is another way to look at this, a way which is more familiar: Old Testament time and New Testament time.

In most people's eyes, the Old Testament extends back from the cross; the New Testament extends forward from the cross. But if I were to use the term "Old COVENANT" and "New COVENANT," these times frames take on new significance.

The Old Covenant was instituted by Moses, not by Adam, and it reached its culmination at the cross when Jesus was crucified. And so, technically speaking, the Passover Age is nearly identical to the time of the Old Covenant. The New Covenant time, however, covers both the Pentecostal Age and the Tabernacles Age. The New Covenant began with Pentecost but is completed with Tabernacles, insofar as its manifestation is concerned.

And so, when I speak of the Passover method of conquering Canaan, I really mean an Old Covenant method, which is by the fleshly arm of military might. Even though God had told Joshua to do it that way, and though God certainly was

there to ensure military success, even so, we cannot take this method to be divinely sanctioned today. Under the New Covenant, we are expected to possess a greater weapon, having better armor, as Paul says in Eph. 6:11-17.

When we were children, our parents allowed us to do things in an imperfect way, because we were not capable of more. They winked at our childish ways. But when we became adults, more was expected of us, and if we revert to childish ways, the law frowns upon us and treats us rather shabbily. So it is with God. The military conquest of Canaan was suitable under the Old Covenant, given the fact that Israel had refused the Sword of the Spirit (the voice of God) at Mount Sinai.

But after receiving the Sword of the Spirit in the upper room (Acts 2), more was expected of Christians. This greater responsibility involved an entirely new method of conquest, as well as a greater territory. Instead of being called to kill the Canaanites by the sword, Christians were called to baptize all nations into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by the power of the Sword of the Spirit.

The difference between these two swords is seen in the fact that at Sinai, the Levitical priests took physical swords and killed 3,000 people after they were found worshipping the golden calf (Ex. 32:28). But at Pentecost, the Melchizedek priests took their spiritual swords to the streets and converted 3,000 people—death by baptism. This was done by Melchizedek priests under a New Covenant, using a Spiritual Sword. Their sword was much sharper than Joshua's under the Old Covenant. Heb. 4:12 describes it:

**<sup>12</sup> For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

Try doing all that with a physical sword! It will not work.

As long as the Church was oppressed by the Roman government, it had no sword with which to defend itself. It never occurred to Christians to foment a revolution to overthrow Rome. Instead, they complied with the Divine Plan. In Daniel 7:22 it was shown by revelation that the “little horn” extension of the iron kingdom would be given dominion over God's people until the time that the jurisdiction would be given to the saints of the Most High.

When Constantine began the process of giving dominion to the Church, Christians assumed themselves to be the “saints of the Most High.” It never occurred to them that they were about to become the “little horn” by assuming power when the Empire began to crumble and fall a century later.

(In their blindness, they also identified themselves with David, rather than King Saul.) They did not realize that this “little horn” was actually the Roman *Church* that would come out of the Roman *Empire*. Instead, the Christians assumed that the time of the little horn would be skipped, and that now the jurisdiction was being passed to the Church.

Blindness, of course, is part of how God fulfills prophecy without us realizing it. Once the assumption was made that the time of the “little horn” was either past or skipped altogether, the way was cleared for the Church to begin assuming political power. At first, this was done by using the favor of the Emperor. The Church began to request that the Emperors prosecute “heretics” as criminals. Many of these really were heretics, but their method of dealing with them was simply wrong. As the Church itself manifested more and more the rebellion of King Saul, its prototype, it eventually began to persecute “David” as well.

“David” is represented by the overcomers in the types and shadows, for he was crowned on a Jubilee, whereas Saul was crowned on the day of “wheat harvest,” or Pentecost (1 Sam. 12:17).

When the Church began persecuting the overcomers, using the precedent-setting tactics of the earlier centuries, it fully began to manifest not only the character of Saul but also the “little horn,” which was to wage war against the saints and overcome them (Dan. 7:21).

Here is where it is important to understand the book of Revelation, for it continues where Daniel leaves off. It shows the outworking of the plan over a period of 1,260 “days” (years, really). But that is another study in itself.

It has been my observation that when Christians lack the Holy Spirit, they look for a carnal solution as a secondary option. But because the carnal option is not very biblical in itself, they justify it by asking God's blessing upon the carnal option. “Lord, bless my sword, that it may smite your enemies.” When the New Covenant does not seem to work, we tend to revert back to Old Covenant methods.

The real solution would be to fast and pray and seek God's face until we receive power from on high. But that takes too long and is too troublesome for most Christians. Furthermore, the path back to the New Covenant is not easy, for it was abandoned long ago. In my opinion, the Church will not find that path easily, but will have to fight carnally until it is exhausted and realizes that there is no hope left. Only then will they truly be ready to trust in God's deliverance.

Meanwhile, the Church justifies and supports the Zionists in their Old Testament methods in fighting the Palestinians. Many think that it would be wrong for Christians to murder Palestinians, but it is morally acceptable for Jews to do this. This view is based upon the Dual Covenant theology—the idea that the New Covenant saves Christians, while the Old Covenant saves Jews.

By extension, the Old Covenant method of establishing the Kingdom becomes acceptable behavior for today. Because they identify the Palestinians with the Canaanites of old, and identify the Jews with the Israelites under Joshua, the genocide of Palestinians takes on an air of morality as well as assuming a prophetic mandate.

This Zionist ideology justifies much sin and does not understand that Yahweh—the Lawgiver—was Jesus Christ in His pre-existent form. Exodus 15:2 and Isaiah 12:2 prophesies: “*Yahweh has become my Yashua*” [i.e., salvation]. Jesus came to explain the Law, not to put it away (Matt. 5:17). And so my intent has been to explain how Yahweh and Jesus can appear to be so different and yet be One.

One of the greatest keys is to understand that the physical sword was given to Israel ONLY BECAUSE they had rejected the greater Sword of the Spirit at that first Pentecost at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. Theoretically, if Israel had been able to accept Pentecost in Moses' day, there would have been no Canaanite genocide, for they would have all been converted by the power of God, repenting on their faces for their idolatry and wicked practices.

But in the divine plan, Pentecost was reserved for the time AFTER the cross. The revelation has been given, and we are now responsible for it. Once we understand the problem, we then know how to pray and what to repent of. We can then seek God's face until He pours out His Spirit from on high.