A MONUMENT
TO
ST. AUGUSTINE
A MONUMENT
TO
SAINT AUGUSTINE

ESSAYS ON SOME ASPECTS OF HIS THOUGHT
WRITTEN IN COMMEMORATION
OF HIS 15TH CENTENARY

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A Monument to Saint Augustine
Essays on Some Aspects of His Thought Written in
Commemoration of His 15th Centenary

By D'Arcy, M. C., Blondel, Maurice, et al.

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COMPILER'S NOTE

When this volume was first planned it was thought that it would be possible to review within its limits the main directions in which St. Augustine's thought flowed and came to make itself felt at selected points in history. But it was later realized that a single volume could not possibly do justice to its subject if it pretended to anything beyond superficial treatment. Thus the compiler was left with the problem of making a selection of the available material. He had the alternative of sinking disconnected shafts or quarrying in quarters more or less contiguous. He chose the latter in the belief that a collection of essays could be formed at once unified within itself and approaching the special needs and interests of its readers - who might thus read it, indeed, as written: in personal sympathy, in commemoration.

So it happens that here is a monument which attempts to be worthy and appropriate while acknowledging that it is by no means complete. It is dedicated to the more general aspects of St. Augustine's thought: to St. Augustine the Philosopher, the Sociologist and the Man of Letters, not to St. Augustine the Doctor of Grace and the Ecclesiologist. Indeed the latter aspects are so important and have given rise to such a vast specialized literature that it is necessary to devote a separate volume to them, which is already in course of preparation.

The present volume rightly comes first as it attempts to evaluate the general influence which St. Augustine has had in Western thought and culture and his meaning for us at the present day.

Finally, the compiler would like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Fr. John-Baptist Reeves, O.P., and to Mr. Christopher Dawson for their help at every stage of his work, which otherwise could never have been accomplished.

T. F. B.
EPINICIUM AUGUSTINI

De profundis tenebrarum
Mundo lumen exit clarum,
Et scintillat hodie.

Olim quidem vas erroris
Augustinus, vas honoris
Datus est Ecclesie.

Verbo Dei dum obedit,
Statim credit et accedit
Ad baptismi gratiam.

Quam imprimis tuehatur
Verbis, scriptis exeuntur
Erroris fallaciam.

Firmans fidei, formans mores,
Legis sarae perversores
Verbi necat gladio.

Obnatescit Fortunatus,
Cedunt Manes et Donatus
Tante lucis radio.

Mundus marcens et inanis,
Et doctrinis tritus vanis,
Per pestem hereticam.

Multum capuit fructum ferre,
Dum in fines orbis terræ
Fidem sparsit unicam.

1 Sequence from a Mass in honour of St. Augustine by Lancillotto Cornello,
O.S.A. Sancti Augustini Vita, Antwerp, 1616.
EPINIGIUM AUGUSTINI

Clericali vitae formam
Conquadravit iuxta normam
Catus apostolici.

Sui quippe nihil habebant
Tanquam suum : sed vivebant
In communi clerici.

Sic multorum pro salute
Diu vivens in virtute,
Dormivit cum patribus.

In extremis nil legavit,
Qui nil suum estimavit,
Immo totum reputavit
Commune cum fratribus.

Salve gemma Confessorum,
Lingua Christi, vox celorum,
Scriba vitae, lux Doctorum,
Presul beatissime.

Qui te Patrem venerantur
Te ductore consequantur
Vitam in qua glorientur
Cum sanctorum agmine. Amen.
CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

ST. AUGUSTINE AND HIS AGE,

I. THE DYING WORLD
II. THE CITY OF GOD
"The world itself now bears witness to its approaching end by the evidence of its failing powers. There is not so much rain in winter for fertilizing the seeds, nor in summer is there so much warmth for ripening them. The springtime is no longer so mild, nor the autumn so rich in fruit. Less marble is quarried from the exhausted mountains, and the dwindling supplies of gold and silver show that the mines are worked out and the impoverished veins of metal diminish from day to day. The peasant is failing and disappearing from the fields, the sailor at sea, the soldier in the camp, uprightness in the forum, justice in the court, concord in friendships, skill in the arts, discipline in morals. Can anything that is old preserve the same powers that it had in the prime and vigour of its youth? It is inevitable that whatever is tending downwards to decay and approaches its end must decrease in strength, like the setting sun and the waning moon, and the dying tree and the failing stream. This is the sentence passed on the world; this is God's law: that all that has risen should fall and that all that has grown should wax old, and that strong things should become weak and great things should become small, and that when they have been weakened and diminished they should come to an end."

ST. CYPRIAN, Ad Demetrianum, c. iii.
I. THE DYING WORLD

St. Augustine has often been regarded as standing outside his own age—as the inaugurator of a new world and the first mediæval man, while others, on the contrary, have seen in him rather the heir of the old classical culture and one of the last representatives of antiquity. There is an element of truth in both these views, but for all that he belongs neither to the mediæval nor to the classical world. He is essentially a man of his own age—that strange age of the Christian Empire which has been so despised by the historians, but which nevertheless marks one of the vital moments in the history of the world. It witnessed the fall of Rome, the passing of that great order which had controlled the fortunes of the world for five centuries and more, and the laying of the foundations of a new world. And Augustine was no mere passive spectator of the crisis. He was, to a far greater degree than any emperor or general or barbarian war-lord, a maker of history and a builder of the bridge which was to lead from the old world to the new.

Unfortunately, although there is no lack of historical evidence, the real importance of this period is seldom appreciated. Ever since the Renaissance the teaching of ancient history has been treated as part of the study of the classics and consequently comes to an end with the age of the Antonines, while the teaching of modern history is equally bound up with the nationalist idea and begins with the rise of the existing European peoples. Consequently there is a gap of some five hundred years from the third to the seventh century in the knowledge of the ordinary educated person. It lasts from the collapse of the old Empire in the third century A.D. to the break-up of the reconstituted
Eastern Empire in the seventh century under the stress of the Mohammedan invasions. This is the period of the Christian Empire, the Empire of Constantine and Justinian, the age of the Fathers and of the great councils. It deserves to be studied as a whole and for its own sake, instead of piecemeal and from conflicting points of view. Hitherto the secular historians have confined themselves to one side of the evidence and the ecclesiastical historians to the other, without paying much attention to each other's results. We have to go back to the days of Tillemont to find an historian who is equally competent in both fields. The modern historians of the period have shown themselves notably unsympathetic to its religious achievements. The greatest of them—Gibbon and the late Professor Bury—were free-thinkers with a strong bias against Christianity, while the remainder, from the days of Finlay and Burckhardt and Gregorovius to Seeck and Stein and Rostovtzeff in our time, all write from a secularist point of view. This is peculiarly unfortunate, not only because by far the larger part of the historical evidence has a religious character, but still more because the whole historical development becomes inexplicable when viewed from a purely secular standpoint. To neglect or despise the religious achievement of the age is as fatal to any true understanding of it as a complete disregard of the economic factor would be in the case of nineteenth-century Europe. For the real interest and importance of that age are essentially religious. It marks the failure of the greatest experiment in secular civilization that the world had ever seen, and the return of society to spiritual principles. It was at once an age of material loss and of spiritual recovery, when amidst the ruins of a bankrupt order men strove slowly and painfully to rebuild the house of life on eternal foundations.

This vital revolution owes nothing to the coming of the new peoples. It was already accomplished while the Roman
Empire was intact and the Eternal City was still inviolate. Yet it was this change rather than the material collapse of the Roman state which marks the real break between the ancient classical civilization and that of the Byzantine and medieval world.

Rome had won her world empire by her genius for military and political organization, but her positive contribution to culture was comparatively small. She was rather an agent in the expansion of culture than its creator. Her part was that of the soldier and engineer who cleared the way and built the roads for the advance of civilization. The cosmopolitan culture which became common to the whole Roman Empire was itself mainly the creation of the Hellenic genius. It had its origins in the life of the Greek city-state and had already acquired the character of a world civilization in the great states of the Hellenistic world. Alexander the Great and his successors had made it their mission to spread this civilization throughout the lands that they had conquered. All over the East, from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea to the Oxus and the Indus, countless cities sprang up which in their constitution, their social life, and their buildings were modelled on the pattern of the Greek city. And each of these cities became a centre of diffusion for Western culture. The peasants no doubt continued to live their own life and served their new masters as they had served so many conquerors in the past, but the upper and middle classes were by degrees drawn into the privileged society and were either completely Hellenized or at least acquired a superficial veneer of Greek manners and culture. A single type of urban civilization gradually came to prevail throughout the Hellenistic world.

Rome in her turn took this inheritance from the great Hellenistic monarchies and carried on their work. But she did so in a strictly practical and utilitarian spirit. At first, indeed, her attitude was entirely selfish, and she organized
the world only to exploit it. Roman capitalists, money-lenders, slave-dealers and tax-gatherers descended on the East like a swarm of locusts and sucked the life out of the dependent communities. Every Roman, from the aristocratic capitalist like Brutus or Lucullus down to the meanest agent of the great financial corporations, had his share in the plunder. The age of the Republic culminated in an orgy of economic exploitation which ruined the prosperity of the subject peoples and brought Rome herself to the verge of destruction.

The crisis was averted by the foundation of the Empire. Julius Caesar and Augustus put an end to the misrule of the capitalist oligarchy and the tyranny of military adventurers and returned to the Hellenistic ideal of an enlightened monarchy. The provinces recovered their prosperity, and alike in the Hellenistic East and the Latin West there was a fresh expansion of urban civilization. For two centuries the ancient world enjoyed an age of continuous material progress.

Everywhere from Britain to Arabia and from Morocco to Armenia wealth and prosperity were spreading, new cities were being founded, and the more backward peoples were adopting a higher form of civilization. And nowhere was this process more striking than in Africa, where even today the stately ruins of so many Roman cities still remain to impress the modern tourist with their evidence of vanished civilization. Even a comparatively remote and unimportant town like Timgad, in North Africa, possesses public buildings and monuments finer than those of many a modern city of vastly superior wealth and population. It had its theatres and amphitheatres in which free spectacles were provided for the entertainment of the people. It had porticoes and basilicas

1 It is a characteristic that Brutus, who was regarded in later times as a model of republican virtue, quarrelled with Cicero because the latter was forced to reduce the interest on Brutus's loans to the impoverished cities of Cilicia from forty-eight per cent. to a beggarly twelve per cent.!
where the citizens could attend to public business or idle away their leisure time. It had baths and gymnasia, libraries and lecture halls, and temples which were not, like our churches, destined solely for religious worship, but were the centre of civic ceremonial and public festivities. There has probably never been an age in which the opportunities for living an enjoyable and civilized existence were so widely diffused. For the ancient city was not, like the average modern town, a factory or a place of business; it existed for the enjoyment of its citizens and it was the centre of an active communal life, lived in public and at the public expense.

This was most strikingly exemplified at Rome itself, where the Greek democratic principle of the right of the citizen to be fed and amused at the expense of the state had been carried to its extreme conclusions. These rights were the only remaining privilege of the Roman democracy, which had completely lost all share in the government of the Empire, but, so far from disappearing with the loss of political rights, they continued to expand down to the last period of the Empire. The corn dole had been limited by Augustus to some 200,000 citizens, but even so it involved a vast organization, the traces of which are to be seen in the remains of the great public corn dépôts at Ostia, and the setting aside for the use of the capital of the chief corn-growing areas of the Mediterranean world—Egypt and Sicily. Moreover, in the course of time the free distribution of other articles such as oil, wine and bacon were added to the corn dole. Gifts of money had been common even in republican times, and during the reign of Augustus no less than six distributions of between £2 and £3 10s. per head were made to between 200,000 and 320,000 persons.

No less important was the amusement of the people. The games of the circus and the amphitheatre involved enormous
expenditure and occupied a considerable part of the year. Apart from the special festivals, which might last as long as a hundred days on end, the regular games took up sixty-six days a year in the time of Augustus, and had increased to a hundred and seventy-five days by the fourth century.

Finally, vast sums of public money were absorbed by the public buildings. To some extent this expenditure served ends of real value, above all in the case of the great aqueducts which ensured to Rome a better water supply than that of most modern capitals. For the most part, however, it was entirely unproductive. The Colosseum – which has stood for eighteen centuries as a symbol of the material power of imperial Rome – was created to serve the brutal amusements of the Roman populace. The imperial palaces and fora, with their temples and libraries and porticoes, provided a sumptuous background for the social life of the Court and the capital. But the most characteristic monuments of the imperial period are the thermae, which continued to increase in size and splendour down to the age of Diocletian and Constantine. They were not mere public baths in our sense of the word, but true palaces for the people, of vast size, containing baths and gymnasia, lecture-rooms and libraries, and adorned with the masterpieces of Greek and Hellenistic art. Public building on such a scale far surpassed anything that the modern world has yet seen. Imperial Rome became a city of gold1 and marble, a worthy incarnation of the Dea Roma whom her subjects worshipped. And the same ideal was pursued by all the cities of the Empire according to their capacity. Each tried to surpass its neighbour in the splendour of its public buildings and the number of its games and festivals. Not only millionaires, like Herodes Atticus,

1 She was literally a "golden city," for the growing scarcity of precious metal which characterized the later Empire is attributed by historians in part to the enormous quantities of gold which were used to gild the roofs and domes of the temples and public buildings of Rome.
but every citizen of moderate wealth, used his money unstintingly in the service of his native city, either by building baths, theatres and porticoes, or by providing public spectacles or endowments for educational and charitable purposes.

All this testifies to a high level of material culture and to an admirable development of public spirit on the part of the citizen class, but from the moral and spiritual point of view it was less satisfactory. All the vast development of material prosperity and external display had no spiritual purpose behind it. Its ultimate end was the satisfaction of corporate selfishness. The religious element in ancient culture, which had been the inspiration of civic patriotism in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., had almost disappeared from the cosmopolitan civilization of the imperial age. The temples and the gods remained, but they had lost their spiritual significance and had become little more than an ornamental appendage to public life and an occasion for civic ceremonial. For the educated, the only real religion was philosophy—a philosophy which provided high moral ideals for the élite, but which was incapable of influencing the mass of society.

The true religion of society was not the philosophic paganism of men like Marcus Aurelius or St. Augustine's correspondent, Maximus of Madaura, but the cult of material pleasure and success. Christianity had more to fear from Trimalchio than from Julian, and the real Anti-christ was not Apollo, but Belial, "the prince of this world." And this is fully recognized by the majority of Christian writers from the time of St. Paul down to the fifth century. St. Augustine himself, in a well-known chapter of The City of God, reveals the naked materialism which lay behind the opposition of pagan society to Christianity, and shows that it was as irreconcilable with the old Roman traditions as with Christian teaching. Its ideal was not civic virtue
and patriotism, but to have a good time and bigger and better shows. "They do not trouble," he writes, "about the moral degradation of the Empire; all that they ask is that it should be prosperous and secure. 'What concerns us,' they say, 'is that everyone should be able to increase his wealth so that he can afford a lavish expenditure and can keep the weaker in subjection. Let the poor serve the rich for the sake of their bellies and so that they can live in idleness under their protection, and let the rich use the poor as dependants and to enhance their prestige.... Let the laws protect the rights of property and leave men's morals alone. Let there be plenty of public prostitutes for whosoever wants them, above all for those who cannot afford to keep mistresses of their own. Let there be gorgeous palaces and sumptuous banquets, where anybody can play and drink and gorge himself and be dissipated by day or night, as much as he pleases or is able. Let the noise of dancing be everywhere, and let the theatres resound with lewd merriment and with every kind of cruel and vicious pleasure. Let the man who dislikes these pleasures be regarded as a public enemy, and if he tries to interfere with them, let the mob be free to hound him to death. But as for the rulers who devote themselves to giving the people a good time, let them be treated as gods and worshipped accordingly. Only let them take care that neither war nor plague nor any other calamity may interfere with this reign of prosperity.'"

This indictment of the spirit of hedonism and materialism which dominated Roman society runs through all the writings of the Fathers and is supported by many non-Christian writers. Even allowing for the exaggerations of the moralist, there can be little doubt of its substantial truth. Nor was this spirit confined to great cities such as Rome and Antioch and Carthage; it was also characteristic of

1 Condensed from De Civitate Dei, II, xx; cf. Ep. cxxviii, 3, 14.
provincial society, as St. Jerome testifies in a characteristic sentence about his own countrymen. It is a mistake to suppose that the age of the Empire was a religious one because it was marked by so many new religious movements. The mystery religions and the tendency towards mysticism and asceticism are a proof of the religious bankruptcy of society which drove the religious-minded to seek spiritual life outside the life of the city and of society in an esoteric ideal of individual salvation. Even Stoicism, the one sect of the time which inculcated a disinterested ideal of social duty, was fundamentally an unsocial and individualistic creed. The reigning culture had become almost completely secularized, and the religious and the social instincts were becoming opposed to one another.

The one exception to this tendency is to be found in the Jewish tradition, and that was the one religious tradition which had preserved its independence in face of the cosmopolitan Hellenistic culture. The attempt of the Seleucid kings to Hellenize Judea had led to the great national rising of the Maccabean period, which was nothing less than a crusade against Hellenism, and though the Roman Empire succeeded in breaking down the material resistance of the nation, it could not overcome their spiritual opposition. The Jews remained a people apart, and refused to submit to the dominant culture or to share in the life of the city. The primitive Church inherited this tradition. The Christians claimed, no less than the Jews, to be a people apart—"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." But this claim no longer involved any political aspirations. Throughout the centuries of persecution the Christians remained faithful to the teachings of St. Peter and St. Paul and submitted to the imperial government as a power ordained of God. St. Clement's noble prayer on behalf of

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1 "In mea enim patria, rusticitatis vernacula, deus venter est et de die vivitur, sanator est ille qui dixit or:"—Ep. vii, 9.
princes and rulers would not be out of place in the altered circumstances of a Christian society.

But this political loyalty to the Empire as a state only throws into stronger relief the irreconcilable hostility of Christianity to the imperial culture. The Church was to a great extent an alternative and a substitute for the communal life of the city-state. It appealed to all those elements which failed to find satisfaction in the material prosperity of the dominant culture—the unprivileged classes, the poor and the oppressed, the subject oriental populations, and above all those who were dissatisfied with the materialism and sensuality of pagan society and who felt the need for a living religion on which to base their lives.

Consequently it was inevitable that Christianity should come into conflict with the pagan government and society. To the ordinary man the Christian was an anti-social atheist, "an enemy of the human race," who cut himself off from everything that made life worth living. To the authorities he was a centre of passive disaffection, a disloyal subject who would not take his share of the public service or pay homage to the emperor. The Christian, on his part, regarded the official worship of the emperor as a supreme act of blasphemy—the deification of material power and the setting up of the creature in place of the Creator. So long as the Empire confined itself to its secular function as the guardian of peace and order, the Church was ready to recognize it as the representative of God, but as soon as it claimed an exclusive allegiance and attempted to dominate the souls as well as the bodies of its subjects, the Church condemned it as the representative of Antichrist. Thus the denunciations of the Apocalypse are as integral a part of the Christian attitude to the Empire as St. Paul's doctrine of loyal submission. To St. John the official cultus of the Emperor, as organized in the province of Asia, is the worship of the Beast, and Rome herself, the Dea Roma of the state.
religion, is the great harlot enthroned upon the waters, drunken with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. It is, however, important to notice that Rome is not described as a conquering military power, but as the centre of a luxurious cosmopolitan culture, the great market in which all the merchants of the earth congregate. It is the triumphant materialism of Rome, not her military and political oppression, which is denounced in the Apocalypse.

Nothing can give a more vivid impression of the failure of material civilization to satisfy the needs of the human soul than St. John’s vision of the arraignment of the great heathen world power before the eternal justice by the souls of its innocent victims. Ancient civilization had set itself in opposition to the religious spirit and had alienated the deepest forces in the mind of the age, and thereby its ultimate doom was sealed. There is a remarkable passage in one of the sermons of St. Gregory in which he looks back from the disorder and misery of the age in which he lived to the material prosperity of the world in which the martyrs had suffered. In his own days the world seemed dying. “Everywhere death, everywhere mourning, everywhere desolation.” In the age of Trajan, on the contrary, “there was long life and health, material prosperity, growth of population and the tranquillity of daily peace, yet while the world was still flourishing in itself, in their hearts it had already withered.”

_in cordibus aruerat_—that was the innermost secret of the fall of ancient civilization. It had lost its roots in the human soul and was growing more and more empty and sterile. The vital centre of the society of the future was to be found, not in the city-state, but in the Christian _ecclesia._

Are we, then, to conclude with Renan that the rise of Christianity was the real cause of the decline of the Empire?

1 St. Gregory, _Hom. xxvii._
— that "Christianity was a vampire which sucked the life-blood of ancient society and produced that state of general enervation against which patriotic emperors struggled in vain"?\(^1\) Certainly the victory of Christianity does mark a most profound and vital aspect of the decline of the old culture, but it does not follow that it was directly responsible for it. The cosmopolitan urban culture of the later Empire broke down through its own inherent weaknesses, and even before the victory of Christianity it had already failed to justify itself on sociological and economic grounds.

In spite of its apparent prosperity and its brilliant outward appearance, the vast development of city life under the Empire was out of all proportion to its real strength. It was an elaborate superstructure built on relatively weak and unstable foundations. For the urban civilization of the imperial age was essentially the civilization of a leisured class, a society of consumers, which rested on a foundation of slave labour and rural serfdom. The vast civic expenditure on public buildings and public games was unproductive and entailed an increasing drain on the economic resources of the Empire. And at the same time the process of urbanization led to a similar exhaustion of human resources. For the citizen class was extremely sterile and had to be constantly recruited by new elements usually drawn from the class of freedmen. Moreover, neither the upper nor the lower classes of the city provided suitable military material, and the Empire came to rely more and more on the rural population, especially the natives of the recently conquered and less civilized provinces, for its supply of troops.\(^1\)

The Roman Empire and the process of urbanization which accompanied it were, in fact, a vast system of exploitation which organized the resources of the provinces and concentrated them in the hands of a privileged class. The system

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\(^1\) Renan : 
Marc-Aurèle, p. 589.
worked well so long as the Empire was expanding, for there was no lack of new territory to urbanize and new masses of cheap slave labour with which to cultivate it. But the close of the period of external expansion and internal peace at the end of the second century put an end to this state of things and the Empire was left with diminishing resources to face the growing menace of external invasion and internal disruption. In spite of its apparent wealth and splendour, the urban society of the Empire had no reserve forces either of men or of money, and it was unable to face the crisis. The wealthy provincial bourgeoisie, which had been the backbone of the Empire in the second century, was financially ruined and lost its hold on the government. Power passed to the soldiery who belonged by origin to the peasant class and had no sympathy with the civic tradition.1

Thus the third century witnessed a social and constitutional revolution of the most far-reaching kind. The great break in the history of the ancient world—the end of the old society and the inauguration of a new order— took place not in the age of St. Augustine, when the barbarians conquered the western provinces and the unity of the Empire was destroyed, but more than a century earlier, in the age of military anarchy which followed the fall of the house of Severus. When the Illyrian soldier-emperors succeeded in stemming the tide of anarchy and beating back the enemies of Rome, the Empire which they re-established was no longer the same state. The old civic society was moribund, and neither the Senate, nor the Italian citizen body, nor the provincial city-states, were any longer strong enough to form a satisfactory basis of government and administration. Only the army and the imperial power itself had survived as living forces. But the emperor was not only the first magistrate

1 According to Rostovtzeff (op. cit., ch. xi), the motive force of this revolution is to be found in the class conflict between the peasant soldiery and the urban bourgeoisie, which he compares to the class conflict of bourgeois and proletariat in our own times.
of the Roman republic, he was also the representative of the great Hellenistic monarchies which had themselves inherited the absolutist traditions of the oriental state. In the East, and above all in Egypt, the organization of society was entirely different from that of the Græco-Roman world. Instead of a free citizen class, based on slave labour, practically the whole population consisted either of serfs or officials and priests. The institutions of the city-state, private property and slavery hardly existed. The whole economic life of Egypt was directly controlled by the state, and every class was bound to its special task. It was, in fact, a great system of state socialism, in which the state was the one landowner and organized the manufacture and distribution of goods by means of state monopolies and state factories and warehouses.

It was from this source that the new principles were derived on which Diocletian and his successors based their work of reorganization. The imperial office itself acquired the characteristics of an oriental kingdom. The emperor ceased to be primarily the princeps of the Roman state and the commander-in-chief of the Roman armies and became a sacred monarch surrounded by the ceremonial and solemn ritual of an oriental Court. "The Sacred Palace" became the centre of government and the apex of a vast official hierarchy. The Empire was no longer a federation of city-states, each of which was a self-governing unit, but a centralized bureaucratic state which controlled the life of its members down to the minutest detail. Society was based on the principle of compulsory state service, and every class and occupation was subjected to state regulation and tended to become a fixed hereditary caste. The trades which were most essential to the public service, especially those connected with the food supply, were organized as hereditary guilds which were corporately responsible for the fulfilment of their obligations. The same principle was applied even
more strictly to the land, on which the state depended in the last resort alike for its food supply and its revenue. Consequently the government did all in its power to prevent land going out of cultivation. The peasant, whether a slave or a freeman, was bound to his holding and was forbidden to abandon its cultivation or to migrate elsewhere. If a holding became derelict, and no owner could be found, the neighbouring land-holders were jointly responsible for its cultivation and taxes. In the same way, the members of the citizen class became corporately liable for the payment of taxes on the whole city territory, and were bound to their curia – their town council – just as the peasant was bound to his land, so that a citizen who attempted to escape his financial burdens by entering the army or migrating elsewhere was liable to be arrested and sent back to his curia, like a runaway slave.

Under these conditions the old civic ideal of the leisured classes passed away and was replaced by that of the servile state. The urban aristocracy lost its economic prosperity and its social prestige, and its place was taken by the members of the official hierarchy and by the great landowners who stood outside the curia and who were strong enough to hold their own against the exactions of the taxgatherers and the oppression of the bureaucracy. Society tended more and more to return to an agrarian foundation, and the city-state was no longer the vital centre of the whole social structure, as it had been during the eight classical centuries of Mediterranean culture.

But this social revolution involved no less fundamental changes in the relations of the Empire to religion. The old official cultus was essentially bound up with the institutions of the city-state, and now that these had lost their vitality the state was in danger of being left without any religious foundation. The new unitary state required a religion of a more universal character than the polytheistic cults of the
city-state possessed, and, as a matter of fact, we observe throughout the third century a tendency towards a vague semi-philosophic monotheism in pagan society. This tendency finds expression in the worship of the sun, which was adopted by Aurelian and his successors as the tutelary deity of the Empire. No doubt it owed much to Syrian and Persian influences, but we see in the writings of Julian how easily it adapted itself to the ideals of contemporary philosophic speculation and how well suited it was to serve as a principle of inspiration in the religious life of the age and as the official cult of the new orientalized monarchy.

Nevertheless, this solution was not destined to prevail. For Constantine, instead of contenting himself with the vague solar monotheism which had been the religion of his house, made an abrupt break with tradition and found a new religious basis for the Empire in an alliance with the outlawed and persecuted Christian Church. It was an act of extraordinary courage, and it is not altogether surprising that many historians, from the time of Gibbon to Ferdinand Lot in our day, should regard it as an act of madness which endangered the stability of the Empire by sacrificing the interests of the most loyal and influential part of the citizens in order to conciliate an unpatriotic minority. Yet it is possible that Constantine, even as a statesman, was more far-sighted than his critics. The Church was the one living creative force in the social and spiritual life of the age. It brought to society just those elements of freedom, private initiative and co-operative action of which the Empire itself stood most in need.

The life had gone out of the civic organization, and citizenship meant little more than the obligation to pay taxes. The citizenship of the future was to be found in the Church. It

1 Cf. especially the hymn of the army of Licinius to the Summus Deus which has been preserved by Lactantius: De mort. persecut. xivii, 6.
2 Oratio iv.
was a far wider citizenship than that of the old city-state, since it was open to all, even to the slave, and the poor enjoyed a specially privileged position. They were the *plebs Christi*, the people of Christ, and the wealth of the Church was in a very real sense "the patrimony of the poor." In the same way the functions of the city magistrates as the representatives and protectors of the people passed to the magistrates of the new society – the Christian bishop. While the former had become mere puppets in the hands of the bureaucracy, the latter was the one independent power in the society of the later Empire. The choice of the bishop was the last right which the people preserved, and we know from countless instances how eagerly they availed themselves of it. A man who had the gift of leadership and who was trusted by the people was liable to be elected, whether he wished it or not. In the case of St. Ambrose we see a high secular official, who was not even baptized, being chosen bishop of the most important see in North Italy by popular acclamation and ordained in spite of his personal wishes. Even more strange is the case of Synesius, a Neo-platonist and a man of letters who was chosen bishop of Ptolemais in Lybia mainly on account of his patriotism and as a bold defender of the rights of his fellow-citizens.¹

The Christian bishop was, in fact, the dominant figure in the life of the time. His position was something entirely new, for which no precedent can be found in the old religion of the city-state or in the priesthoods of the oriental mystery religions. Not only did he possess enormous religious prestige as the head of the Christian Church, but he was the leader of the people in social matters also. He occupied the position of a popular tribune, whose duty it was to defend the poor and the oppressed and to see that the strong did not

¹ In the case of St. Augustine’s successor we have an instance of a more regular and ecclesiastical type of election, and the report of the proceedings which has been preserved in St. Augustine’s letters (ccxiii) shows how closely the procedure resembled that of a civic assembly.
abuse their power. He alone stood between the people and the oppression of the bureaucracy. He was not afraid to withstand an unjust law or to excommunicate an oppressive governor, and the life and correspondence of St. Ambrose or St. Basil or Synesius or St. Augustine himself shows how frequently a bishop was called upon to intervene between the government and the people, and how fearlessly he performed his duty. On one occasion it is recorded that the praetorian prefect was so offended by St. Basil’s freedom of speech that he declared that he had never in his life been spoken to in such a manner. “No doubt,” replied St. Basil, “you have never met a bishop.”

In the same way, it was the bishop rather than the city magistrate who inherited the civic tradition of popular oratory. While the Forum and the Agora were silent, the Churches resounded to the applause and exclamations of crowds who were still swayed by the voice of the orator. In St. John Chrysostom’s homilies On the Statues, delivered to the people of Antioch when the fate of their city hung in the balance, we hear the last echo of the great Hellenic tradition of oratory which goes back to the golden age of Athenian democracy. And if the sermons of St. Augustine lack the classical grace of his great Syrian contemporary, they are no less interesting as examples of genuine popular oratory adapted to the simpler and less refined tastes of an ordinary provincial audience.

The Church was also taking the place of the state as the organizer of charity and of the support of the poor. Every church had its matriculum, or list of persons in receipt of regular relief, and enormous sums were spent in every kind of charitable work. All over the Empire, hospitals, orphanages and hostels for travellers were being built and endowed; so that the basilica was often the centre of a whole quarter which lived by and for the church. Thus the Church stands out in this dark age as the one hope of humanity both
spiritually and materially. It saved the individual from being entirely crushed under the pressure of the servile state and it opened to him a new world of social and spiritual activity in which the free personality had room to develop itself.

Hence, when the final collapse of the imperial government in the West took place the bishop remained the natural leader of the Roman population. He was the representative of the old secular culture as well as of the new spiritual society, and it was through him, above all, that the continuity of Western civilization was preserved.

In the fourth century, however, these diverse traditions were still far from being completely reconciled with one another. There were, in fact, three distinct elements – and even three distinct societies – in the culture of the later Empire.

There was the new religious society of the Christian Church, with its tradition of independent spiritual authority; there was the city-state, with its Hellenistic traditions of intellectual and material culture; and there was the Empire itself, which more and more was coming to represent the oriental tradition of sacred monarchy and bureaucratic collectivism. The Church no longer held itself entirely aloof

1 R. Salomé: *Notre Pays*, p. 52.
from secular society, but it had not yet succeeded in Christianizing it. The civic culture remained pagan in spirit and, to a great extent, in outward form. But while the Church remained hostile to the paganism and immorality of civic life, as seen above all in the public shows and the games of the amphitheatre, she could not refuse to recognize the value of the classical tradition in its intellectual aspects. The Fathers were, almost without exception, men who had passed through the schools of rhetoric and whose minds were steeped in classical literature. St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen had studied at the university of Athens, the centre of pagan culture; St. John Chrysostom was the most brilliant pupil of Libanius, the greatest heathen professor of his time; St. Augustine was himself a professional teacher of rhetoric; while St. Jerome is, of all his generation, the most typical representative of the rhetorical tradition in all its strength and weakness.

Consequently the patristic culture is a blend of Christian and classical elements. The writings of St. Ambrose are as full of reminiscences of the classics as those of a Renaissance scholar. The two Apollinarii, St. Gregory Nazianzen, Paulinus and Prudentius did their best to create a Christian literature based upon classical models. It is true that in the case of St. Augustine we see a gradual evolution from the Christian humanism of Cassiacum to the anti-Pelagian severity of his later years. But it is easy to exaggerate the change, since he continued to realize the educational value of classical literature and to acknowledge his sympathy with the Platonic tradition. Nor must we attach too much importance to the famous vision in which St. Jerome was condemned as “a Ciceronian and not a Christian.” After all, as he himself observed, when Rufinus taxed him with inconsistency, it was only a dream, and in spite of his visionary experience he ultimately returned to his Plato and Cicero.

This fusion of the old culture with the new religion was
of incalculable importance for the future of Europe. Although the secular culture of the ancient city passed away with the city itself, the patristic culture lived on in the Church. The course of studies which St. Augustine had described in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* became the programme of the monastic schools, and bore fruit in men like Bede and Alcuin. Thanks to the work of the Fathers and of their age, the mediæval world never entirely lost touch with the tradition of ancient civilization.

In the same way the relations between the Church and the imperial order were becoming more intimate in this period. Although the Church condemned the cruelty and the oppression of the weak which were so prevalent during the later Empire, she was wholly favourable to the principles of authority and hierarchy on which the imperial order was based. The ideal of a world state which should secure universal peace and the reign of law was thoroughly in harmony with Christian principles; indeed, the political unity of the world empire seemed to be the natural counterpart of the spiritual unity of the Catholic Church. Hence we find a new attitude to the Empire in the Christian literature of the fifth century—an appreciation of the positive services which Rome had rendered to the cause of humanity and a realization of the common unity of Roman civilization—*Romania*, to use Orosius's expression—as something greater and more permanent than even the political structure of the imperial state. At the beginning of the fifth century the Spaniard Prudentius already anticipates Dante's belief in the providential mission of the Roman Empire as a preparation for the world religion of Christianity. "In all parts of the world," he writes, "men live to-day as members of the same city and children of the same hearth. Justice, the forum, commerce, the arts and marriage unite the inhabitants of the most distant shores; from the mingling of so many different bloods, a single race is born. Such is the
fruit of the victories and triumphs of the Roman Empire: thus has the road been prepared for the coming of Christ.”

But this new far-seeing spirit of Christian patriotism was confined to a small aristocratic circle, to men of letters like Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola. The average man who felt the heavy hand of the taxgatherer and the quarter-master could not take so wide a view. The pessimism and defeatism of Salvian is no doubt inspired by moral preoccupations, but he also expresses the criticism and discontent which were widespread in the society of the time. The Church, as the representative of the poor and the oppressed, could not be a whole-hearted supporter of the existing order. In the west, at least, the adherents of the old religion still claimed to be the true representatives of the national Roman tradition, and attributed all the misfortunes of the Empire to its abandonment of the service of the gods. It was natural that patriotic Romans, like Symmachus, should feel that the destinies of Rome were inseparably bound up with the religion of Numa and Augustus. To them the new religion, like the new capital, was an oriental parvenu, fit only for slaves and foreigners. A true Roman, they felt, could not abandon the temples and altars which had become doubly sacred from their glorious past.

In fact, even at the end of the fourth century the situation of Christianity in the west was still not altogether secure. Many of the highest positions in the Empire were in the hands of pagans, and the prætorian prefect, Flavian Nicomachus, took advantage of the revolt of Arbogast and Eugenius in 392–394 to reinstitute pagan worship and to reconsecrate the city by a solemn lustral purification. Moreover, the events which followed the victory of Theodorus

1 Prudentius: Contra Symmachum, 582–91. Cf. Peristephanon, II, 419 seq. The same idea appears in the anonymous De Vocatione Gentium, II, xvi, and is developed at greater length by St. Leo, Sermo lxxii. It had, however, already appeared in the East, though in a less specifically Roman form, in the writing of Eusebius (esp. Theophany, III, i–ii) and in the Apology of Melito of Sardis.
only served to justify the criticism of the pagans. The reign
of the miserable Honorius witnessed a continuous series of
disasters, and if, as Claudian hoped, the conservative party
could have found an able leader in the person of Stilicho,
it is possible that there might have been yet another pagan
reaction.

But this was not to be. Stilicho fell, and his fall was
followed by that of Rome itself. To pagan and Christian
alike it seemed the end of all things—in St. Jerome's words,
"the light of the world was put out and the head of the
Empire was cut off." It is true that Alaric's raid on Rome
was not in itself decisive; it was an episode in a long-drawn­
out tragedy. Every year the tide of barbarism rose higher
and fresh territories were overwhelmed. It is the tendency
of modern historians to minimize the importance of the
invasions, but it is difficult to exaggerate the horror and
suffering which they involved. It was not war as we under­
stand it, but brigandage on a vast scale exercised upon an
unwarlike and almost defenceless population. It meant the
sack of cities, the massacre and enslavement of the popula­
tion and the devastation of the open country. In Macedonia
the Roman envoys to Attila in 448 found the once populous
city of Naissus empty save for the dead, and they were forced
to camp outside. In Africa, if a city refused to surrender, the
Vandals would drive their captives up to the walls and
slaughter them in masses so that the stench of their corpses
should render the defences untenable.

"The mind shudders," wrote St. Jerome, "when dwelling
on the ruin of our day. For twenty years and more, Roman
blood has been flowing ceaselessly over the broad countries
between Constantinople and the Julian Alps, where the
Goths, the Huns and the Vandals spread ruin and death.
. . . How many Roman nobles have been their prey! How
many matrons and maidens have fallen victims to their
lust! Bishops live in prison, priests and clerics fall by the
sword, churches are plundered, Christ’s altars are turned into feeding-troughs, the remains of the martyrs are thrown out of their coffins. On every side sorrow, on every side lamentation, everywhere the image of death.”

And this was in 396, when the storm was only beginning. It was to last, not for decades, but for generations, until the very memory of peace was gone. It was no ordinary political catastrophe, but “a day of the Lord” such as the Hebrew prophets describe, a judgement of the nations in which a whole civilization and social order which had failed to justify their existence were rooted up and thrown into the fire.

It was in this age of ruin and distress that St. Augustine lived and worked. To the materialist, nothing could be more futile than the spectacle of Augustine busying himself with the reunion of the African Church and the refutation of the Pelagians, while civilization was falling to pieces about his ears. It would seem like the activity of an ant which works on while its nest is being destroyed. But St. Augustine saw things otherwise. To him the ruin of civilization and the destruction of the Empire were not very important things. He looked beyond the aimless and bloody chaos of history to the world of eternal realities from which the world of sense derives all the significance which it possesses. His thoughts were fixed, not on the fate of the city of Rome or the city of Hippo, nor on the struggle of Roman and barbarian, but on those other cities which have their foundations in heaven and in hell, and on the warfare between “the world-rulers of the dark æon” and the princes of light. And, in fact, though the age of St. Augustine ended in ruin and though the Church of Africa, in the service of which he spent his life, was destined to be blotted out as completely as if it had never been, he was justified in his faith. The spirit of Augustine

continued to live and bear fruit long after Christian Africa had ceased to exist. It entered into the tradition of the Western Church and moulded the thought of Western Christendom so that our very civilization bears the imprint of his genius. However far we have travelled since the fifth century and however much we have learnt from other teachers, the work of St. Augustine still remains an inalienable part of our spiritual heritage.