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The Transformation of Early
Christianity from an Eschatological
to a Socialized Movement

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The Transformation of Early Christianity
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CHAPTER I
THE POLITICAL THEORIES
OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

When Christianity came into the world it found a number of different political theories already in existence. These various conflicting concepts; Hebrew, Greek and Roman, influenced Christianity in varying degrees and in varying degrees were influenced by Christianity. Christianity as such added no new ideas to the current stock of political notions. The Hebrew Christian retained his Jewish theory; as did the Greek and the Roman in perhaps a less degree. The development of the Christian conception of the state, the Church, and history generally is a process of elimination, selection, adaptation, and synthesis of the various elements of political theory current in contemporary Hebrew and pagan thought.

The characteristic modern separation of Church and State, the divorce between religion and government, existed as a matter of fact in early Christianity. But it was forced upon the Christians by the historical situation. As an idea it was foreign alike to Jews and Christians, Greeks and Romans. It was contrary to the whole body of contemporary political theory. The union of Church and State in the Fourth century, which has been so deplored by many modern historians and moralists was in reality perfectly inevitable. The social mind of the whole ancient world made any other course impossible either to Christians or Pagans once Christianity had developed to the point where it was the most powerful religious force in society.

The theocratic nature of Jewish thought and practice is generally recognized but the close connection of religion and government in the pagan educational system is not perhaps so much emphasized. To quote Pollock: "It costs us something to realize the full importance of philosophy to the Greek or Roman citizen who had received a liberal education. For him it combined in one whole body of doctrine all the authority and influence which nowadays are divided, not without contention, by science, philosophy, and religion in varying shares. It was not an intellectual exercise or special study, but a serious endeavor to gather up the results of all human knowledge in their most general form, and make them available for the practical conduct of life."¹

It was this fact which made Christianity's progress among the educated classes so slow. Once it had made its way, however, the taking over of political control by the Church was both easy and natural.

¹ F. Pollock, *Essays in Jurisprudence and Ethics*, p. 314.

One of the most notable characteristics of the New Testament and of all early Christianity in its relation to the existing political system was the doctrine of obedience to the constituted authorities. That a man like St. Paul should advocate submission to a man like Nero seems like the negation of elementary morality. The reasons for this attitude are many. In this paper we are concerned only with one of them – but possibly the most important one. The submissiveness of the early Christians to tyranny and despotism was not due primarily to impotence nor yet to excessive mildness of disposition. Many emperors before Constantine were deposed and slain by political groups smaller and feebler than the Christians. St. Paul and St. Ignatius, to go no farther, were not by nature pacifists. It would be difficult to find a book of a more militant tone than the Revelation of St. John.

The main reason for the political non-resistance of the early Christians is to be sought in their philosophy; their views of the world. These views were of a very special and very peculiar kind. They were in large part either directly inherited from Jewish thought or adapted from it. While they are in some respects inconsistent with one another, they have a common element. They are all catastrophic. In all of them the catastrophe is more or less immediately imminent.

The Old Testament Prophets taught the establishment, in the indefinite future, of an eternal Messianic kingdom on this present earth. For a long time this hope was cherished by every Jew. But some time before the beginning of the First Century B.C. a change took place. The old conception was abandoned, slowly indeed, but at last absolutely. In its place arose a belief which developed into Chiliasm or Millenarianism. Perhaps the first clear statement of this new idea is to be found in the book known as I Enoch. In this work which dates from 104-95 B.C., the Messianic kingdom is for the first time conceived of as of temporary duration. The resurrection and final judgment which in the preceding form of belief were the prelude to the everlasting Messianic kingdom on earth, are now transposed to the end of the transitory, early kingdom of the Messiah. This temporary earthly kingdom is no longer the final abode of the risen righteous. They are to enjoy a blessed immortality in the eternal heaven.²

We have in this author a practically complete statement of later Christian Chiliasm. There is indeed one important feature missing. The specific duration of the Messianic kingdom is not given. The advent of the kingdom also is not pressingly imminent.

In the Parables 94-64 B.C. we find certain other elements. This writer holds to the eternal Messianic kingdom but the scene of this kingdom is not the earth as at present existing but a new heaven and a new earth. The Messiah is no longer a mere man but a supernatural being. Four titles characteristic of the New Testament are for the first time applied to him: "The Christ," "The Righteous One," "The Elect One," "The Son of Man." He executes judgment on man and enjoys universal dominion. The resurrection is not of the old body but of a body of glory and light, of an angelic nature, in short a spiritual body, though the specific word spiritual is not used.³

In the other eschatological works of this period: e.g. Psalms of Solomon 70-40 B.C. Judith (circa 50 B.C.) [one reference]; The Sibylline Oracles III 1-62 (before 31 B.C.); The Epitomiser of Jason of Cyrene (between 100-40 B.C.) and the fragmentary Zadokite Work, 18 B.C., the tradition of the temporary kingdom is carried on but without the addition of any concepts essential to our purpose.

In the first century A.D., still confining ourselves to specifically Jewish Apocalyptic literature we find various changes taking place. The eternal Messianic kingdom passes largely out. The temporary Messianic kingdom becomes an eternal national one. The interest of the individual Jew comes to center on his own lot in the future life.⁴ We have to pass a number of writers; Assumption of Moses, Philo, etc., before we come to the specific statement of Chiliasm proper, i.e., the duration

² Cf. I Enoch XCI-CIV.

³ Cf. Parables in I Enoch XXXVII-LXXI.

⁴ Cf. Apocalypse of Baruch; 4 Ezra, 4 Maccabees.

of the Messianic kingdom for 1000 years. In the Book of The Secrets of Enoch commonly known as II Enoch (1-50 A.D.) we find for the first time the doctrine which was taken over to make the Christian Millennium. The writer of II Enoch was an Egyptian Jew. He says that as the world was made in six days, its course will run for six thousand years. The 6000 years will be followed by a Messianic kingdom of rest and blessedness lasting 1000 years. After that follows the final judgment, "The great day of the Lord."

Passing now to the New Testament, it is only necessary for our purpose to enumerate three different concepts of the Messianic kingdom that are found therein. In these concepts contemporaneous Jewish ideas are taken with more or less transformation.

The first conception perhaps holds the idea of a present world kingdom but puts emphasis on the futurity of the kingdom. Its ultimate consummation is not by gradual, natural development, but by the catastrophic reappearance of Christ. This Second Advent is to be preceded by tremendous portents of the most terrible sort.

The second conception is that the kingdom is already present in Christ's appearance as the Messiah. It is to grow by the natural laws of spiritual development to its full realization. A considerable length of time is conceived as necessary for the attainment of mature growth. The consummation of the kingdom in the Second Advent is to be unexpected and sudden and none but the Father knows when it will take place.

The third conception, that of Chiliasm, is that the Second Advent of Christ is close at hand. Anti Christ and his confederates are to be destroyed at Megiddo. Satan is to be bound for 1000 years during which is the Millennium, when the martyrs are raised in the first resurrection and reign with Christ at Jerusalem. This conception is found in the Revelation and perhaps I Cor. XV, 24-27. All the essential elements of it are to be found in pre-existing sources, e.g., the 1000 years in II Enoch, the reign of the saints in Testaments of the XII Patriarchs, etc.

These three conceptions were variously confused in early Christianity. All the New Testament writers hold, for instance, to the immediately imminent Second Advent. How many of them were Chiliasts we have no way of knowing. The earliest, Christian writing extant outside the New Testament, which deals with this subject is perhaps Papias, 70-155 A.D. He is a most materialistic Chiliast and quotes II Baruch as an authentic utterance of Christ handed to himself by apostolic tradition.⁵

Barnabas is another apostolic Chiliast. He expressly teaches a millennial reign of Christ on earth. The six days of creation are the type of six periods of 1000 years each. The seventh day is the millennium, since with God "one day is as a thousand years." The earthly, millennial sabbath is to be followed by an eighth and eternal day in heaven. The Millennium is near at hand. Barnabas does not quote Revelation. His views can be drawn equally well or better from II Enoch, I Enoch and other Jewish sources.

The first Chiliast we know of to get into disrepute was the famous heretic, Cerinthus, (last part of first century). His heresy had nothing to do with his Chiliasm, as it seems to have been a sort of Judaistic Gnosticism and Gnosticism in general was not favorable to Chiliasm. However the fact that so abhorrent a heretic held Chiliastic views did not help those views in the judgment of later Christians.

About the end of the first century also Chiliasm came into rather disreputable prominence as a leading doctrine of the Ebionites, a sect of antitrinitarian Judaistic-Christian heretics. This sect was wide spread though not particularly numerous and aroused the bitter antagonism of the orthodox. As in the case of Cerinthus, their heresy had nothing necessarily to do with Chiliasm. But here again Chiliasm had the misfortune to get into bad company.

⁵ Irenaeus Adv. Haer. V 33. II Baruch XXIX.

In the middle of the second century Chiliasm appears to have been the belief of the majority of Christians though it never found formal expression in any creed. Justin Martyn, 110-165 A.D., tells us that Christ is to reign with the patriarchs for 1000 years in a rebuilt Jerusalem. He bases this belief on Rev. XX, 4-5 and says he holds this doctrine as part of the body of Christian faith. He adds, however, that "many good and true Christians think otherwise." This later statement is the more notable as it is the only difference between orthodox Christians which he mentions. He places the Ebionites outside the Christian pale.

The first non-Chiliasts we meet with in Christian history are the Gnostics. Of their actual position on Chiliasm we know practically nothing except by inference. They did not apparently fight it. They simply tacitly ignored it. In the long and minute descriptions of various Gnostic systems that have come down to us nothing is said on the subject; but the systems as outlined leave no place for the Chiliastic doctrines.

The first open enemies of Chiliasm that are to be found in the Church are the Alogi, a sect that flourished in Asia Minor about 160-180 A.D. According to Harnack: "The representatives of this movement were, as far as we know, the first in the Church to undertake a historical criticism, worthy of the name, of the Christian scriptures and the Church tradition."⁶ They were rationalistically inclined, desired to keep prophecy out of the Church and denied on essentially the same internal grounds as modern students, the Johannine authorship of the Revelation and also of the Fourth Gospel. With less reason they ascribed the Revelation to the heretic Cerinthus. Unfortunately we know but little about them. Hippolytus wrote against them and defended the apostolic authorship of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel in two books now lost. But the Alogi are criticised only mildly, and indeed Irenaeus does not class them as heretics at all. Opposition to Chiliasm was manifestly not looked upon as an important matter in the last quarter of the second century – at least in Rome.⁷ To this same period belong the writings of Gaius of Rome who asserts that the Heretic Cerinthus wrote the Revelation, and also those of Bishop Melito of Sardis, a saint of great repute, who was an ardent Chiliast. So that at this period both Chiliasm and non-Chiliasm would seem to be perhaps equally wide spread and certainly equally permissible. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons 120-202 A.D., was a strong Chiliast. He describes in minute detail the overthrow of the Roman Empire, the reign of Anti-Christ for 1260 days (three and half years) the visible advent of Christ, the binding of Satan, the joyful reign of Christ in the rebuilt Jerusalem with the risen saints and martyrs over the nations of the world for a thousand years. Then follows the temporary raging of Satan, the last victory, the general resurrection and judgment, and the consummation of all things in a new heaven and a new earth.

The ascription of genuine divine inspiration to the Sibylline Oracles by the early Church writers is well known. It is a noteworthy fact that the Chiliasts⁸ seem to be much more inclined to quote the Oracles than the non-Chiliasts. The Christians' addiction to the Oracles called forth the derision of Celsus.⁹ Origen makes no defense and it is at least possible to conjecture that the reason is that he disapproved of the use made of the Oracles by the Chiliasts. The Oracles were of course made use of by all sorts of agencies which for any reason wished ill to the Roman authority and yet dared not indulge in secular sedition. Some enthusiastic Chiliast put forth an Oracle, probably in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, which was more definite than prudent. According to this prediction the end of Rome and the final consummation of all things was due in the year 195-196 A.D.¹⁰ There is reason to believe that this prophecy represented the belief of a considerable number of Christian Chiliasts. While there is no extant evidence to that effect, it is a rational deduction, that when the year 195-196 A.D. passed

⁶ Hist. of Dogma, Vol. III, p. 19.

⁷ Ens. H. E. VI 27-2.

⁸ Justin Martyn, Tertullian, Lactantius.

⁹ Ad. Celsus LXI.

¹⁰ Sib. Orac. VIII, 148 seq.

without any unusual occurrences, the prestige of the persons trusting the Oracle would be damaged. So far as these persons were Chiliasts, Chiliasm would suffer in repute. That this was actually the case is as nearly certain as any logical conclusion about psychological reactions well can be.

About the year 156 A.D. there arose in Phrygia the movement called Montanism. Essentially it was a reaction against the growing secularization of Christianity. It spread to the rest of Asia Minor, Egypt, Italy, Spain, and especially Carthage and surrounding districts in North Africa. It was the strongest movement in favor of a revival of primitive Puritanism that occurs in early Church history. It lasted in the East almost till the Arab Invasion; in the West it did not die out until the time of Augustine. The Montanists are the most pronounced Chiliasts we meet with. Not indeed in their theory but in their practice. One Syrian Montanist bishop "Persuaded many brethren with their wives and children to go to meet Christ in the wilderness; another in Pontus induced his people to sell all their possessions, to cease tilling their lands, to conclude no more marriages, etc., because the coming of the Lord was nigh at hand."¹¹ The Montanist prophetess, Prisca, about 165 A.D. said: "After me there will come no other prophetess but the end." A peculiarity of eastern Montanistic Chiliasm was the idea that Christ would reign not in Jerusalem but in Pepuza, a small town in Phrygia. In accord with this idea Montanus tried to get all believers to settle in this town to await the Lord's coming. The western Montanists however, of whom Tertullian was chief, held to the regular belief that the Messianic kingdom would be centered in Jerusalem.

Because of certain theological beliefs aside from Chiliasm, the Montanists aroused the antagonism of the Church authorities. The earliest Church councils to be met with after New Testament times were called for the purpose of dealing with Montanism which was finally denounced as a heresy and after the triumph of the Church some imperial edicts were issued against the sect. For the first time in the attack on Montanism at the end of the second and early part of the third Century we find Chiliastic beliefs referred to as 'carnal and Jewish.' There is no formal condemnation of Chiliasm as such, but once more, and much more seriously than in the case of the Ebionites, Chiliasm suffered from being associated in the minds of orthodox Christians with heresy and schism. It would however be very easy to exaggerate the effect of this and it is necessary to bear in mind that while the literature of Montanism is fairly considerable, Chiliasm is an entirely subordinate matter in the controversy and indeed seems sometimes to be mentioned merely casually. The Chiliastic writers are perhaps more inclined to view Montanism leniently. Irenaeus does not include it in his list of heresies.

Its association with Montanism brought Chiliasm into disrepute and suspicion with the Church hierarchy and it is not surprising that beginning with the last years of the second century we find a deliberate system of suppression adopted by certain ecclesiastical authorities – notably in Egypt. As we shall try to show later, the declension of Chiliasm can be only very imperfectly explained by official antagonism. But so far as this declension can be ascribed to individuals, the three great Alexandrian divines; Clement, Origen, and Dionysius have a prominent part. The influence of these men counted the more as it was consistently exercised in the same locality with increasing force during a period of more than half a century. The first of these writers, Clement (150-216 A.D.) does not specifically refer to the Chiliasts but there are a number of passages where he evidently has them in mind.¹² However the probability is that this very refraining from direct attack made his efforts the more successful. He emphasizes the fact that scriptural statements – particularly scriptural numbers – are not to be taken literally but are to be understood as of mystical significance. If Clement consciously aimed at the extirpation of Chiliasm (which is not absolutely certain) he at any rate took the most effective means for accomplishing that result. The great presupposition upon which Christian Chiliasm has been based is that of the literal interpretation of Scripture. By attacking that presupposition Clement caused the doctrine to be questioned by many persons whose attachment to

¹¹ Hippolytus, Com. on Daniel.

¹² Strom. VII, 17; VI 16; IV 25; V 6, 14.

Chiliasm would doubtless have only been strengthened by direct attack upon that tenet in particular. He prepared the way for the open and far more powerful attacks upon Chiliasm made by his great successor in the Catechetical School, Origen (185-254 A.D.). The position of this great theologian is the most equivocal of any writer who has attained eminence in Christian theology. How far anything he wrote is to be considered as orthodox is a most difficult matter to determine. The fact that Origen opposed Chiliasm, taken by itself, apart from the subsequent fate of the doctrine, could just as easily be made a commendation as a condemnation of that belief. Almost alone among Christian men Origen has been removed from the calendar of Catholic saints after having been duly received as a saint for the space of more than a hundred and fifty years. This unique fact, which is of course of far more importance for theology than for history, has nevertheless a bearing on our subject. The condemnation of Origen came too late to save the Chiliastic apologetic in the East but it very possibly may have had an indirect influence in the matter of continuing the repute of western Chiliasm.

Origen attacked Chiliasm in two vital points: First he insisted even more strongly than Clement upon the figurative or mystical or 'typical' interpretation of Scripture. In this regard he specifically quotes a number of Chiliastic passages of scripture and definitely says that their meaning is to be taken figuratively.¹³ But more important than that, he definitely substitutes the theory of progressive development of the intellectual and spiritual element of man for the physical and sensuous earthly kingdom of the Chiliasts. This was certainly a great gain for the anti-Chiliastic theory which for the first time took a logical and comprehensible if a somewhat metaphysical form. However it must be admitted that the argument of Origen though wonderfully clear headed and almost miraculously modern¹⁴ is too purely intellectual and cast in too philosophical a form to have any direct influence on ordinary individuals. It was doubtless quite in place in the Catechetical School and among scholars in the great centers of ancient learning but outside those limits its influence – at least directly – must have been very small. Nepos, an Egyptian bishop, answered Origen in a book entitled: "Refutation of Allegorists." This book is lost but we know that it was considered by the Chiliasts to be a work of the most powerful and indeed irrefutable sort. In the Arsinoite nome (on the west bank of the Nile south of Memphis) the Chiliastic doctrines were held by whole villages together and Dionysius the Great (Bishop of Alexandria 247-264 A.D.) found it necessary to visit this region and hold a public argument and instruction in order to avert a schism. By the tact and conciliatory attitude of the Bishop the Chiliasts were either won over to the non-Chiliastic view or at least expressed their gratification at the conference. It would appear, however, as if this synod or meeting was not sufficient to destroy the influence of Nepos' book so Dionysius wrote in refutation of it two books "On the Promises." Except for a few fragments these books have perished. We know merely that the first book contained a statement of the non-Chiliastic view and the second a detailed discussion of the Revelation in relation to Chiliasm and to the views of Nepos.

However, Dionysius, who was well aware that as long as the 'Revelation of St. John' was received as a genuine work of the Apostle it would be difficult to oppose Chiliasm, gives a very strong argument against the apostolic authorship while diplomatically saying at the beginning of his discussion that he is able to agree that the Revelation is the work of a holy and inspired man.¹⁵ There is no reason to doubt that this refutation of Nepos by Dionysius met with success wherever Christian Hellenisticism exercised influence. But it by no means extirpated Chiliasm in Egypt. For many generations after its author's death Chiliasm was still believed by the monks of the Thebiad. In fact a large number of Jewish Apocalypses which the early Christians accepted as inspired are preserved to us bound up in Coptic and Ethiopic copies of the scriptures. The Alexandrians had, however, succeeded so well

¹³ De Princ, II, 11.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g., A. R. Wallace, The World of Life.

¹⁵ Eus. H. E. VII 25.

that in the subsequent period there are only two defenders of Chiliasm in the Eastern Church that are worthy of mention. These two are Methodius of Tyre and Apollinaris of Laodicea.

Methodius 260-312 A.D. was bishop first of Olympus and Patara in Lycia and afterwards of Tyre in Phoenicia. He is notable for his opposition to Origen and for his relatively more spiritualized Chiliasm. He maintains that in the Millennium, death will be abolished and the inhabitants of the earth will not marry or beget children but live in all happiness like the angels without change or decay. He is very careful to insist upon the literal resurrection of the body, however, and emphasizes the fact that the risen saints while like the angels do not become angels.¹⁶ He died a martyr at Chalcis in Greece.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (300? -390 A.D.) is a notable figure in Christological controversy but unfortunately very little that he wrote has come down to us, and of that little the authenticity is not entirely unimpeachable. We are constrained to get his Chiliastic views from the writings of his theological opponents and unfortunately there is not wanting evidence to the effect that these opponents, Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, notable Christians as they were, were not lacking in bias. Gregory¹⁷ calls the Chiliastic doctrine of the Apollinarians 'gross and carnal,' a 'second Judaism' and speaks of 'their silly thousand years delight in paradise.' Basil¹⁸ calls the Chiliasm of Apollinaris 'mythical or rather Jewish,' 'ridiculous,' and 'contrary to the doctrines of the Gospel.' This is, so far as the writer is aware, the first instance in which any great theologian goes to such extremes and Basil's language, though strong, is not altogether without an element of hesitation and questioning. In short it would seem that he asserted more than he felt sure of being able to prove – no rare phenomenon unfortunately in certain of the great contraversialists. If Basil's statements are to be taken at their face value Apollinaris was indeed the most Judaizing Christian in his Chiliasm of any of whom we have record. He would seem to justify Basil's jibe 'we are to be altogether turned from Christians into Jews,' for in his Messianic kingdom not only is the Temple at Jerusalem to be restored but also the worship of the old Law, with high priest, sacrifices, the ashes of a heifer, the jealousy offering, shew bread, burning lamps, circumcision and other such things which Basil indignantly denounces as 'figments,' 'mere old wives' fables' and 'doctrines of Jews.'¹⁹ Although Apollinarianism was condemned by a council at Alexandria as early as 362 A.D. and Roman councils followed suit in 377 and 378 and the second Ecumenical Council in 381 and though Imperial degrees were issued against it in 388, 397 and 428 it persisted for many generations. The last condemnation on record is that of the Quinisextum Synod 691 A.D.

In this case, as in others mentioned, we see the unfortunate fate of Chiliasm in getting mixed up with heresies with which it, as such, had nothing to do. The extraordinary detestation which overtook Apollinaris as arch-heretic par excellence seems to have finally discouraged Chiliasm in the Eastern Church. It was reckoned as a heresy thereafter and though it appears sporadically down to our own day it is of no more interest for our purpose.

In the Western Church Chiliasm prevailed until the time of Augustine. It seems to have provoked very little discussion or controversy. Hippolytus, 235 A.D., carries on the Chiliastic tradition of Irenaeus but with a certain degree of assured futurity about the Second Advent not found in the earlier writers. This pushing of the Second Advent into the future is a marked feature of Western Chiliasm. By a weird use of 'types' Hippolytus proves with entire conclusiveness to himself that the Second Advent is to occur in the year 500 A.D.²⁰ The overthrow of Rome has a prominent part in his elaborate description of the last times but he veils his statements with a certain amount of transparent

¹⁶ Discourse on the Resurrection, I, 9 seq. See also Conviv. IX, 1, 5.

¹⁷ Ep. CII, 4.

¹⁸ Ep. CCLXIII, 4.

¹⁹ Cp. CCLXV, 2.

²⁰ Frag. Dan. I, 5, 6.

discretion.²¹ He has in all other essential respects the same ideas as Irenaeus but expressed in a less naïve form. He is a transition figure. His Second Advent is far enough off to allow some considerable latitude for the building up of the ecclesiastical hierarchy which was the business of Rome and he emphasizes the point that the "gospel must first be preached to all nations." John the Baptist reappears as the precursor of Christ.

Commodianus, a North African bishop, 240 A.D., represents the generation after Hippolytus. His two poems present rather different versions of Chiliasm. The first is a simple and rather pleasing version.²² The only notable variation it contains is that the risen saints in the Millennial Kingdom are to be served by the nobles of the conquered anti-Christ. The second poem is an apologetic against Jews and Gentiles. "The author expects the end of the world will come with the seventh persecution. The Goths will conquer Rome and redeem the Christians; but then Nero will appear again as the heathen anti-Christ, reconquer Rome and rage against the Christians three years and a half. He will in turn be conquered by the Jewish and real anti-Christ from the East, who, after the defeat of Nero and the burning of Rome, will return to Judea, perform false miracles and be worshipped by the Jews. At last Christ appears with the lost tribes, as his army, who had lived beyond Persia in happy simplicity and virtue. Under astounding phenomena of nature he will conquer anti-Christ and his host, convert all nations and take possession of the holy city of Jerusalem."²³ This double anti-Christ is perhaps the most notable variation. This idea reappears later, as does the Nero return which would seem to have been current belief.

There are perhaps only two other writers before Augustine that are worthy of mention, Victorinus and Lactantius. Victorinus, bishop of Poetovio, i.e., Petair in Austria, martyred 304 A.D., is the earliest exegete of the Latin Church. His 'Commentary on the Apocalypse' has come down to us in bad shape. The Chiliasm is of a type which may be described as formal and ritualistic in the sense that it is expressed in a matter of fact way as something not needing explanation, much less proof. There are only two new ideas: "The first resurrection is now of the souls that are by the faith, which does not permit men to pass over to the second death"²⁴ and "Those years wherein Satan is bound are in the first advent of Christ even to the end of the age; and they are called a thousand according to that mode of speaking wherein a part is signified by the whole – although they are not a thousand."²⁵

Lactantius the preceptor of Crispus, son of Constantine, brings us to the Chiliasm of the established Church. The end of the present age and the coming of the millennial kingdom are at the latest 200 years in the future, probably nearer, but the event instead of being looked toward to, is dreaded. The forthcoming destruction of Rome is bewailed. The world is safe as long as Rome stands. Nero is to be anti-Christ. "They who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy and beloved of God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges. The nations shall not be entirely extinguished, but some shall be left as a victory for God, that they may be the occasion of triumph to the righteous and may be subjected to perpetual slavery."²⁶ The Chiliasm of Lactantius is proved from the Sibylline Oracles and from the philosopher Chrysippus, a Stoic. For the rest Lactantius repeats the traditional Christian and pre-Christian Jewish Chiliastic concepts with very little variation, but it is evident that the fact that the fall of Rome is dreaded will work out a change. The Chiliasm of Lactantius is unstable, not that there is the slightest breath of doubt about

²¹ De Christo et Antic. 50.

²² Instructions, LXXX.

²³ Schaff Hist., ii, 855. Sec. LXVII of poem.

²⁴ Comm. XX 4.5.

²⁵ Comm. XX 1.3.

²⁶ Div. Ins. Bk. 7 XXIV.

it, but that the attitude of mind which looked forward with dread to the Second Advent could be depended upon to find a theory for postponing it. Chiliasm is ready for its transformation.

In the century between Lactantius and Augustine there is no Chiliast of note in the west. It is abundantly evident however, from the works of Augustine that Chiliasm was common during that period as well as in the time of Augustine. Indeed Augustine himself was a Chiliast though probably not an exceedingly literal one, during his early period in the Church.²⁷ It is certain that he never regarded the doctrine as heretical. Even in the very book in which he puts forth the doctrine which eventually superseded Chiliasm he says: "This opinion would not be objectionable if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath[27] shall be spiritual and consequent on the presence of God."²⁸ We have in this quotation a hint as to the reason why he abandoned Chiliasm. He elaborates this in the immediately following passage: "As they say that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal."²⁹

Disgust with this literal interpretation of the scripture was thus one of the reasons which drew Augustine away from Chiliasm. A more direct reason was that he had an idea of his own as to how the Chiliastic Scriptural passage³⁰ should be interpreted.

The discussion in which he vanquishes the Chiliastic concept is a model of contraversial method. It would be difficult to find its superior either in sacred or profane polemics. Perfectly conscious of his own powers to make Chiliasm appear at once absurd and ridiculous he refrains from doing so. Abundantly able though he was to refute the Millennians point by point he deliberately foregoes that method of attack. His argument which overthrew an ancient, famous, and widespread doctrine of primitive Christianity contains hardly a line either of refutation or condemnation. It is perhaps the finest example in Christian literature of the 'positive apologetic.' The Chiliastic literature, even that which has come down to us, contains so much that is fantastic and ludicrous that it would have been very easy for a man of far less power than Augustine to hold it up to contempt and scorn. It abounds in the same kind of absurdities and incongruities as the pagan myths which provoked so many stinging pages from the early apologists and from Augustine himself. The fact that Augustine did not yield to the temptation to make his opponents ridiculous is in the highest degree creditable to his head and his heart. He did not violate the precepts of Christian charity and he obtained a victory greater than would have been within even his power had he yielded to the natural temptation of a great intellect to show up the mental inferiority of his opponents.

It is interesting to compare Augustine's treatment of Chiliasm with Origen's. The two men are very comparable as regards extent and variety of knowledge, intellectual power, and philosophic insight. They are very unlike however, in their treatment of the subject. Origen simply explains away the whole Chiliastic concept or rather so spiritualizes it that nothing resembling the original idea is left. His whole insistence is that it must be taken figuratively, and without the least warrant he asserts that his interpretation is "according to the understanding of the apostles."³¹ He makes the whole subject so subjective, so intellectual, so metaphysical that there is left no content for the ordinary man to hold to in place of that which is demolished. In the overthrow of Eastern Chiliasm Origen holds as conspicuous a position as Augustine in the overthrow of Western. He did away with a doctrine, too carnal perhaps, but at any rate concrete and comforting, and he substituted an intellectual abstraction. For instance in explaining, or better explaining away, the Chiliastic feasts in the New Jerusalem he

²⁷ C.D. XX 7.

²⁸ I.e., the Millennium.

²⁹ C.D. XX 7.

³⁰ Rev. XX.

³¹ De Prin. II, 11, 3.

says:³² "The rational nature growing by each individual step, enlarged in understanding and in power of perception is increased in intellectual growth; and ever gazing purely on the causes of things it attains perfection, firstly, viz., that by which it ascends to the truth, and secondly that by which it abides in it, having problems and the understanding of things and the causes of things as the food on which it may feast. And in all things this food is to be understood as the contemplation and understanding of God, which is of a measure appropriate and suitable to this nature, which was made and created, etc."

This kind of thing is the intellectual equivalent of the process in physics by which the scientist takes some tangible solid body and proceeds first to liquify it, then to volatilize it and finally to blow it entirely away. We strongly suspect that the Eastern Chiliasts felt that the whole thing was a kleptistic legerdemain by which they were deprived of a favorite doctrine without receiving anything in place of it.

Augustine's method differs *toto caelo* from this. While Origen handles the subject like a metaphysician, Augustine handles it like a statesman. His doctrine is just as concrete as the one he displaces. He takes nothing away without giving something equally tangible and of better quality in its place. The transition from Chiliasm to the Origenistic conception of the future, would be, for the ordinary person, an incredible and almost impossible intellectual feat. The transition from Chiliasm to the Augustinian conception of the future is natural, easy, and perfectly within the power of a very ordinary and commonplace mentality. As a matter of fact it made its way without the smallest difficulty into the religious consciousness of the whole of western Christianity. Any person who aims at changing the theological opinions of others can find no better manual of method than the twentieth book of the *City of God*. Augustine was very careful to keep all the symbols, catch words, and paraphernalia of Chiliasm. He was careful not only to keep them all but to keep them all in their literal sense. He explains away none of them and allegorizes none of them. By carefully preserving the ancient shibboleths he was easily able to empty them of their former content. He holds to the millennium, the idea that is, of thousand years, as firmly as any Chiliast but he says the thousand years is to be reckoned as dating from the establishment of the Church on earth i.e., the first coming of Christ. So he is careful to preserve the phrase: "The Reign of the Saints"; he merely substitutes for the Chiliastic content of that phrase the very comfortable and plausible doctrine that the saints are his own Christian contemporaries. He is very skillful, not to say flattering, in his method of 'putting this across.' So he retains similarly the old formula about the two resurrections – but makes the first resurrection out to be the marvelous transformation and participation in the resurrection of Christ which the Christian experiences by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. More important still is his new content for the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven." This instead of a state of future blessedness becomes the already existing church on earth. Finally he indulges in a long and apparently straight faced discussion as to whether the reign of anti-Christ – which he preserves in its most literal form with the regulation duration of three years and a half – whether this is to be reckoned as part of the thousand years or not. This inconsequential detail is labored at length in such a manner as to delight the soul of any good Bible reading Chiliast. By preserving till the last this single element of Chiliasm which he leaves untouched and then treating it in the good, old, religious fashion of Irenaeus or some other primitive worthy, he very skillfully disarms criticism and it is only by a strong effort that the reader realizes what a tremendous blow has been struck at the original Chiliastic doctrine.

Let us see what the changes of Augustine amount to. It is not less than the total destruction of Chiliasm, or at the very least the postponement of the end of the world till the year 1000 A.D. Augustine's doctrine is essentially that of the ordinary, orthodox, Bible Christian today. Sometime in the future – Augustine said possibly in the year 1000 A.D. – Christ was to come again to the earth. Then follows the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and heaven and hell. The questions about the three years and a half of anti-Christ, together with Gog and Magog – great favorites with

³² De Prin. II, 11, 7.

the Chiliasts – are held to be insoluble as to the time of their appearance; whether to be reckoned as part of the thousand years or immediately succeeding it.

It is commonly said that Augustine is responsible for the belief that the world was to come to an end in the year 1000 A.D. This is not strictly correct. Augustine nowhere makes that direct assertion. He nowhere – so far as the writer is aware – even implies it. What he does is to offer it as a possible alternative hypothesis to the idea that the thousand years, (since 1000 is the cube of 10,) is to be taken as a statement of the total duration of the world. As the matter is of some interest we give the original passage in Dod's translation:³³ "Now the thousand years may be understood in two ways so far as occurs to me: either because these things happen in the sixth thousand of years or sixth millennium (the latter part of which is now passing) as if during the sixth day, which is to be followed by a sabbath which has no evening, the endless rest of the saints, so that, speaking of a part under the name of the whole, he calls the last part of the millennium – the part that is which had yet to expire before the end of the world – a thousand years; or he used the thousand years as an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to mark the fullness of time. For a thousand is the cube of ten... For the same reason we cannot better interpret the words of the psalm. "The word which he commanded to a thousand generations," than by understanding it to mean, "to all generations."

The above sketch summarizes essentially all that has survived about the Chiliasm of the early Church. The Chiliastic passages in the Church literature up to and including Augustine, though rather widely scattered, are not great in bulk. If printed together they would make only a moderate sized pamphlet. But their importance is by no means to be measured by their size. Chiliasm, better than any other movement of the early period, serves as a standard for measuring the degree of the socialization of Christianity. It comprises the only body of doctrine which passed from practically universal acceptance to practically universal repudiation during the period when the Church changed from a small esoteric cult to a dominant factor of society. Considered from this point of view, the causes of the decline of Chiliasm possess a historical importance out of all proportion to the importance of Chiliasm itself. More than any other religious movement of the time Chiliasm was free from the direct pressure of distinctly religious influences. Its declension was more nearly a case of unconscious social and psychological determinism than any other contemporary theological phenomenon. Its chief supporters and opponents are not to be regarded so much as factors in its history, as points where the socializing forces operating in the early Church become for the moment visible.

Certain facts stand out even in the short epitome we have given. Chiliasm never became powerful in the great cities. It survived longest and was most popular in regions³⁴ comparatively cut off from the great centers of civilization. Hellenizing influences were unfavorable to it, Romanizing influences indifferent to it.

The reasons for this are numerous and most of them have been treated sufficiently by previous investigators, but in the writer's judgment certain other important influences have been either slighted or entirely ignored. We shall consider one or two.

The supremely important fact in early Christian history is the development of the concept of "The Church" as an independent, self-existing, metaphysical entity. This metaphysical entity was conceived as embodying itself in the whole body of believers; living, dead, and yet to be born. The entity was eternal, indestructible, and in its essence immutable. Although partially embodied in a visible society its essential being was conceived as independently sustained in the nature of the universe. It was an idea in the strict Platonic sense. No concept like this is found in the contemporary pagan cults. Even the Jewish concept of the 'chosen people' is ethnic or national rather than purely religious and it has no tinge of that metaphysical existence which is the most notable element in the

³³ City of God in Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, 1st Series, Vol. II, p. 427.

³⁴ E.g., Lydia, Phrygia, The Thebaid.

Catholic concept of the Church. The elements out of which 'the Church' concept was constructed were four: two Roman, one Greek and one Hebrew. The Roman lawyers, in the process of fitting a municipal legal system to a world empire, evolved the twin legal entities, 'state' and 'sovereignty.' These entities were endowed with divers qualities; eternity, immutability, etc., but especially with the quality of having existential reality apart from any individual embodiment thereof. Greek philosophy contributed the idea of the Cosmopolis, the ideal world-city in which the fullest development of human personality was to be attained. This concept was as purely metaphysical as the self-existing, absolute 'state' of the Roman law, but unlike the Roman concept it had no concrete existence. The Jewish contribution was that of the 'chosen people,' 'the elect nation.' These four concepts were transferred from their original loci to the Christian society. The fact that all of these concepts were combined and centered on the same social group and the further fact that each of these concepts supplemented the others in a remarkable way resulted in the formation of one of the most powerful ideas in religious history.

This Church concept, thus built up, had already become widespread in the time of Augustine and this fact helps us to understand the otherwise unintelligible success of that saint in combatting Chiliasm. The real truth is seen to be that Augustine's ideas succeeded because they were not peculiarly his at all – they already existed, implicitly but really, in the mind of the generation which he addressed. The elements of the concept 'the Church' being what they were, Augustine's explanation of, or rather abolition of, Chiliasm follows of inevitable logical and intellectual necessity. It was the genius of Augustine that he recognized and gave formulated, concrete expression to this accomplished fact and it is no derogation of his genius to say that had he never existed the accomplished fact would eventually have been given expression to by some one else.

Another little considered element in Chiliasm is that of masochism, and sadism, the two being merely the opposite sides of the same psychical phenomenon. This element is found more or less prominently in all the Chiliastic literature from the early fragment of Papias to the elaborate discussions of Augustine. The masochistic phenomena are the most remarkable characteristics of the early martyrdoms and if a collection were made of the masochistic passages of the writings of the Chiliasts, the bulk of them would be as great as that of the Chiliastic passages proper.

It is necessary to bear in mind that masochism necessarily, in any advanced society, disguises itself under some socially acceptable form of sentiment or emotion, i.e., admiration for the constancy of the confessors or martyrs, suffering as a mark of the true Church, etc. It is always associated with the reality or idea of struggle. It has a high 'survival value' in the struggle for existence by heightening individual power in conflict. Like other human characteristics it is seen most clearly in the exaggerated form it assumes in its crowd manifestations. Its most evident expression is in the 'mob mind.' Our problem, then, is to discover how the declension of Chiliasm is to be explained by the transfer of the masochistic element in it to other vehicles of expression. The masochistic element was a vital factor in Chiliasm; without it almost the whole force of 'the thousand years reign of the saints' is lost. The explanation of the transfer is difficult. Undoubtedly some of the masochistic values of Chiliasm were taken over by the various, previously mentioned concepts that combined to make up the idea of the Catholic Church. 'Extra ecclesia nulla salus' accounts for part of the phenomena previously expressed Chiliastically. It is notable in this connection that there is no word of Chiliasm in Cyprian. But a more important transfer was that which took place in the course of the development of the doctrine of purgatory. It may perhaps seem incongruous to say that purgatory took over the values of the millennium and from the point of view of formal theology it is so. But the only point we are trying to make here, namely, the fundamental fact of the expression of masochistic impulses, is as evidently shown in the purgatory as in the millennium concept. The desire for a heightened sense of self-realization, a richer content of experience, is the cause of the appearance of both concepts and they are closely allied psychologically. This fact comes out in the large part played by the Chiliasts in

the evolution of the purgatory concept.³⁵ What we find here is a concurrent declension of Chiliasm and development of purgatory. For about two centuries the two concepts existed side by side; then the superior social value of purgatory asserting itself, that doctrine gradually took over the masochistic values of Chiliasm; the supersession of the later being rendered thereby more rapid and easy.

However it is probably that the transfer of the psychological values from Chiliasm was more to be ascribed to the rising asceticism of the early Church than to the concept of the Church as such, or even to the rise of the purgatory concept. Asceticism in some form is a permanent element in any wide spread religion and the values later expressed in Christian asceticism were in the earlier period mediated through Chiliasm. When St. Paul advocated abstinence from marriage 'because the time is short' he was not expressing asceticism. He was expressing a sensible idea based on belief in one of the chief Chiliastic doctrines, the immediate imminence of the Second Advent. In the case of such teachers as Tertullian the doctrine of marriage is the result of a combination of Chiliasm and asceticism. At a later date asceticism took over the doctrine of celibacy as meritorious on its own account but it never outgrew the original Chiliastic view that it was a logical preparation for the Second Advent. In other words restriction in matrimony whether Chiliastic or monastic is due to the same inherent element in human nature, i.e., the masochistic. Similarly those good Phrygian Chiliasts who abandoned all their possessions and went out into the desert to meet the Lord were moved by the same psychological impulse that actuated the monks of the Thebaid. Historically the one set of concepts imperceptibly gave way to the other. Those same Thebaid monks are a good illustration of the fact. Some of them, at least in the earlier stages of the movement, were influenced more by Chiliastic concepts than by monastic ones. Many were influenced by both. Here again the superior value of the ascetic concepts for the ecclesiastical organization determined the eventual survival of the monastic institution. But whatever the conceptual images employed to give expression to the masochistic impulse, that impulse was psychologically the same. Organized monachism furnished a more convenient outlet for the stronger masochistic impulses than Chiliasm and so superseded it. The fact that monachism grew in proportion as Chiliasm declined is in this respect merely a case of trans-shipment. The vehicle was different but the goods carried were the same.

There are numerous other social and psychological, as well as economic causes for the declension of Chiliasm but they can perhaps be more conveniently considered in connection with the socialization of the early Church.

³⁵ Clem. Alex. Paed., iii, Strom. VII. Origen, Hom. on Num., XXV. Hom. on Ps. XXVI. Lactantius, VII, 20.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY CHURCH AND PROPERTY CONCEPTS

The Chiliasm of the early Christians had a direct bearing upon their attitude toward the property institutions and property concepts of the time. Neither the declension of Chiliasm nor the progressive socialization of the Church can be understood without some consideration of the attitude of the Christians toward property, and conversely the effect of the existing economic system upon the Christians.

The early Church made its appearance in a world where the institution of private property was supreme in fact and very largely unquestioned in theory. It is recognized with perfect clearness by all the ancient thinkers who refer to the subject that their civilization was based upon the property rights of man in man. It is not true that slavery was invariably considered part of the unalterable law of nature. Aristotle expressly states that a sufficient development of mechanistic technology would abrogate slavery. But such a technological development was not expected nor indeed wished for. Contempt for mechanical processes of industry was universal, with the dubious exception of the application of science to military engines. There is a similar unanimity in regard to commercial enterprise. Money obtained by ordinary mercantile methods was considered as dishonestly acquired. It was assumed as self-evident that the merchant had to be a thief. Interest on money was of course reprobated as contrary to nature.³⁶

³⁶ Cf. Plato, *Laws*, V, 742. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1:X, XI. Cicero, *De Officiis*, II, XXV. Seneca, *De Beneficis*, VII, X.

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