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(This forms Appendix 12 of *The First Church of Rome*)

NICOLAUS AND THE NICOLAITANS

(Appendix 12 of the First Church of Rome at <http://www.christianhospitality.org/resources/first-church-rome-online/content/first-church-rome20.html>)

The Cult of the Nicolaitans and Bishop Nicolaus of Myra.

The modern “Santa Claus” is the ancient ecclesiastic Nicolaus of Myra. All the standard Lives of Nicolaus date him to the time of Diocletian and Constantine, in the second half of the third and the first half of the fourth centuries AD, c. AD 250-350, and represent him as present at the Council of Nicea AD 325. (“Nicolaus Myrdan” is listed bishop No. 305 as present in the Nicene Council in Euty chius’ Arabic Origins of the Church, ed. Selden, Euty chii Ecclesiae Origines, London, 1642, p. 114. Mirdan [or, Myrdan] in Aramaic means “Apostate”. Perhaps an original “Nicolaus Myran”, Nicolaus of Myra, has been altered in this text to read “Nicolaus Myrdan, Nicolaus the Apostate”.) There are no contemporary accounts of Nicolaus’ life, only later legendary ones. Falconi in the 18th century disputed this dating and concocted a theory that Nicolaus flourished in the early sixth century AD and died in AD 551. His sole authority for the redating was a chronological notice placed at the end of a single manuscript Life of Nicolaus in the Vatican, but one amongst many other manuscripts which followed the usual dating. The Life, as it happens, makes no reference to Diocletian and Constantine, and this seemed to Falconi to support his theory. The chronological notice he made so much of, if it referred, as Falconi thought, to the historical date of the death of Nicolaus, placed it in AD 685. That would have been the termination of a long ministry of Nicolaus as Archbishop of Myra, lasting several years, described in the body of the Life. Unfortunately, as Falconi knew, other historical sources referred to a different Archbishop of Myra in AD 685 called Polyeuctus, No. XXXV in the list of Archbishops, from around AD 680 to AD 692 (Falconi, Vita, Prologomena p. 44). Instead of abandoning the idea that this chronological notice referred to the date of the death of Nicolaus, on the grounds that it contradicted historical sources, Falconi reasoned that perhaps the scribe had made a mistake about which Emperor Justinian it was in whose reign Nicolaus died: originally it could have been Justinian I, Emperor in the 6th century AD, but the scribe wrongly thought it was Justinian II in the following century, and composed or rewrote the chronological notice to fit his mistaken idea. If Nicolaus died in AD 551, in the reign of Justinian I, there would be no conflict with the list of known Archbishops of Myra. Falconi suggested the chronological notice should be amended accordingly and reconstructed to date Nicolaus’ death in the reign of Justinian I. To achieve this end, Falconi had to amend it in no less than three places, when it is only a single sentence long! This, of course, is a weak foundation on which to build a radical thesis on the chronology of the life of Nicolaus.

Apart from the chronological notice, Falconi’s manuscript accords generally with the other extant accounts of the life of Nicolaus. It contains, in fact, more than the usual detail about Nicolaus’ very early life and is of particular interest to us for that reason. The chronological notice, when rightly interpreted, dates the original composition of the Life to the 7th century AD, and this makes it the earliest record to have survived of Nicolaus’ biography.

The details of the chronological notice, at the very end of Falconi’s manuscript, are as follows:

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From *Vita Sancti Nicolai* MS. Vat. 821 p. 215ff., ed. N. C. Falconi(us) *Sancti Nicolai Acta Primigenia*, Naples 1751, p. 1ff.

Vita s. 33, ed. Falconi, Vita p. 29:

“The servant of God and most sainted bishop Nicolaus breathed his last, in the kindness of God, on December 6, the fourth day, Indiction 13, in the reign of our Christ-loving King Justinian, the 18th year, in the time of the most sainted Archbishop and Patriarch Macarius.”

It was assumed by Falconi that this chronological notice was intended to date the historical day of the death of Nicolaus. He then used it to support his theory that Nicolaus did not live in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries AD, as the common ecclesiastical tradition and other *Vitae* represented, but in the 6th century, and that the subject of this *Vita*, the famed “wonder-working” ecclesiastic, Nicolaus of Myra, was, in fact, Nicolaus of Pinara, whose obit he computed to have been AD 551 in the reign of Emperor Justinian I. However, the chronological notice could only support Falconi’s theory in the amended form suggested by Falconi himself, viz. if it was amended to read as follows: “Indiction 15 [not “13”], year 25 [of the Emperor’s reign, not “year 18”], and “in the time of the most sainted Archbishop and Patriarch Eutychius [not “Macarius”], and on the assumption that the Justinian referred to was Justinian I, whose 25th year (Falconi’s presumed date for the obit of Nicolaus) was AD 551. (Falconi, op. cit., Prologomena p. 12.) Falconi had concocted, in fact, a brand new chronological notice which had nothing in common with the original. It is much more likely the chronological notice, as it actually appears in the text, is of the kind commonly appended to ancient manuscripts, and relates to the date of the composition of the *Vita*, not to the obit of its subject: in other words, it should be read as follows: “The servant of God and most sainted bishop Nicolaus breathed his last, in the kindness of God, on December 6, [and his feast-day, December 6, this year, the year the Life has been completed and subscribed is] the fourth day [Wednesday], Indiction 13, in the reign of our Christ-loving King Justinian, the 18th year [of the Emperor’s age], in the time of the most sainted Archbishop and Patriarch Macarius.” The notice, in that case, marks the *Vita* as having been completed and/or subscribed on the well-known Feast-day of Nicolaus, December 6, which was indeed, in the year stated here (assumed, for the sake of the argument, to be the year the manuscript was subscribed), a Wednesday, the “fourth day” of the week: the Byzantine Emperor at that time was Justinian, the second of that name, whose rule began in AD 685: that year was the “13th” in the then current Indiction cycle, in which December 6 was a Wednesday. (The Indiction cycle was a 15-year Taxation cycle instituted by Constantine in the 4th century and used thereafter as a system of chronology.) That year, AD 685, included the commencement of the Emperor’s “18th year” of life, since he took the throne at the age of 16 (that is, during his “17th year” according to the ancient Greek terminology), and celebrated his next birthday, which would be, in that case, the “18th year” referred to here, some time during its course.

Falconi had further to believe that the supposed obit of his 6th century Nicolaus in the reign of “Justinian” was misdated by medieval scribes to the reign of Justinian II, and hence the reference here to the Archepiscopal term of Macarius, which historically synchronized with Justinian II, rather than to that of Eutychius, who was Archbishop in the reign of Justinian I, in AD 551. (Prologomena p. 13.) He quoted in this connection a Frankish chronicle which stated that one “blessed” (*beatus*) Archbishop Nicolaus flourished in the reign of Constantinus Pogonatus and died in Myra in the reign of Justinian II in AD 673. According to Falconi, the writer of this entry was referring to the famous Nicolaus, but was mistaken as to the date of his death, since he was basing himself, he supposed, on nothing more than

the fact that Nicolaus died in the reign of some Emperor called Justinian (originally, as Falconi reasoned, Justinian I), but the chronicler concluded the Justinian intended was Justinian II. Here, too, Falconi had to imagine the ancient scribe had made a mistake, if he was to maintain his conjectural theory. Actually, Nicolaus was a common name in the 7th century of the Frankish chronicler, and there is nothing in the Frankish chronicle itself to suggest the Nicolaus referred to is the famous “wonder-working” ecclesiastic. The adjective “blessed” is not particular to Nicolaus: another “blessed” prelate, Arbogastus, is mentioned in the same chronicle in the entry immediately following the one about Nicolaus. Several prelates called Nicolaus served at the shrine in Myra, and the chronicle could be referring to any one of these, or to some other Archbishop Nicolaus of Myra who is not otherwise attested. An “Archbishop Nicolaus” preceded and ordained the more famous Nicolaus, according to the Vita published by Falconi, and there were at least two other Archbishops of Myra called Nicolaus: No. XXVII in Falconi’s list (Prologomena p. 41) at the end of the 5th century, and No. XLI in the 9th century. At the particular time mentioned in the Frankish chronicle, AD 673, there is a break in the Catalogue of named Archbishops of Myra, the break running from c. AD 568 up to c. AD 680 (Polyeuctus, No. XXXV, being attested Archbishop of Myra in AD 680) and covering the terms of five anonymous Archbishops (Prologomena p. 44): the last of these, presumably, on the evidence of the Frankish Chronicle, was a Nicolaus (obit AD 673). In any case, the date in Falconi’s Vita, assumed by Falconi to be the date of the obit of the famous Nicolaus, is 685, not 673. Still, the coincidence of the Archbishop’s name (Nicolaus) and Emperor’s reign (Justinian II) in the Frankish chronicle and in Falconi’s Vita, when the chronological notice is taken at face value, does suggest a reason for the composition of Falconi’s Vita, viz. that the recent death of an Archbishop Nicolaus at Myra in AD 673 led to the impulse in the breast of some Monothelite monastic writer to compose a celebratory edition of the Life of Myra’s “wonder-working” patron. It can be concluded the writer was a Monothelite because the Archbishop Macarius referred to in the chronological notice was an heretical Monothelite bishop of Antioch, not the recognized and orthodox Archbishop of Constantinople who had authority over Myra and the rest of Lycia at that time. Macarius would only be acceptable to a Monothelite. This fact also provides a reason for the relegation of the Vita on the part of the medieval ecclesiastical establishment to the obscurity from which Falconi retrieved it in order to establish his thesis.

Essentially, then, Falconi’s thesis was that the original “Saint” Nicolaus was the “wonder-working” sixth-century Nicolaus of Pinara. He understood the Vita he discovered in the Vatican Library to be a summary of the miracles of that sixth-century Nicolaus for the historically unfeasible reasons outlined *supra*. The Nicolaus of the common ecclesiastical tradition, datable to the time of Constantine and the Nicene Council, Falconi understood to be a mythical figure fabricated by fusing the story of the “miracle-working” sixth-century Nicolaus with an earlier “Martyr Nicolaus” who was one of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. The “Martyr Nicolaus” was, indeed, a contemporary of Constantine, but had nothing to do with the Nicene Council. Since Falconi’s time other documents have come to light containing versions of the Life of Nicolaus. The earliest so far discovered which represents Nicolaus as a contemporary of Constantine is the work of one Michael the Archmandrite, datable to the early ninth century AD. The full array of manuscripts tends to confirm the existence of a bishop of Myra so called in the time of Constantine, but it is still commonly believed Falconi’s sixth-century “Nicolaus of Pinara” was confused with that earlier Nicolaus. In other words, the only difference between Falconi’s thesis and the popular modern construct is that, in the latter, an admitted, though still very legendary, bishop Nicolaus of Myra contemporary with Constantine has ousted the “Martyr Nicolaus” of Sebaste

of the former as the earlier of the two Nicolauses fused in the ecclesiastical tradition.

Now, setting aside Falconi's chronological conjectures, as well as the modern construct built upon them, and reverting to the traditional chronology for the reasons stated *supra*, we have a very interesting picture of a cult in Myra in the early pre-Nicene age, formed from the details furnished by the *Vitae* of Nicolaus, including particularly the one published by Falconi. First, there is Nicolaus himself, the "wonder-working" ecclesiastic celebrated in legend, born around AD 260-280. Another Nicolaus served as "Archdeacon" and "Vicar" to him during his episcopate. The "wonder-worker" is said to have been brought for ordination as a ten-year-old to be reader in the shrine at Myra by his uncle, also called Nicolaus, of the preceding generation, who was therefore, presumably, born at least as early as c. AD 200. The "Archbishop", so termed (Gk. *Arkhepiskopos*), who ordained the young Nicolaus, was also called Nicolaus. Being, like the uncle, of that earlier generation, Archbishop Nicolaus must have flourished c. AD 200-250. The Archbishop Nicolaus served at the shrine in Myra dedicated to "Martyr Nicolaus". As Falconi remarks: "Densa nubes Nicolaorum! What a thick cloud of Nicolauses!" (Op. cit., Prolegomena, p. 5.) Since the Archbishop's generation spanned the first half of the third century, and the term Archbishop implies a well-established cult at that time, we should date the construction of the shrine to at least the generation preceding, say around AD 150. That would mean the "Martyr Nicolaus" flourished in the first half of the second century or earlier. Clearly the "Martyr Nicolaus" was the founder of the cult in Myra which was centered on his tomb. At least three important people who served at the shrine thereafter bore the name Nicolaus, which they appear to have adopted from the martyred founder. (Falconi, op. cit., Prolegomena, p. 4.) In the generation prior to c. AD 150, the most likely period for the founder Nicolaus to have been martyred was around the beginning of that generation, at the turn of the second century, when Jewish nationalist fervor was at its peak, and Christians, being bracketed with Messianic Jews, were persecuted, rather than towards its close around AD 150, when Christians were left relatively undisturbed by the secular authorities. That would mean the "Martyr Nicolaus" was active towards the close of the first century AD. This is precisely when the Apostle John in exile on the Isle of Patmos (AD 96) condemned the "Nicolaus cult" or "Nicolaitans" (KJV "Nicolaitanes"). The word means "cultists who go under the name of Nicolaus". In the earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse, dating to c. AD 260, that of Victorinus of Pettavium (on Apoc. ch. II. v. 6), the Nicolaitans are identified as those "false and troublesome men, who as *ministers going under the name of Nicolaus* [Latin *sub nomine Nicolai ministri*], made themselves a heresy". This precisely describes the phenomenon found in Falconi's *Vita*, according to which the pre-Nicene officials presiding over the tomb at Myra, the very contemporaries of Victorinus, called themselves "Nicolaus". A similar sentiment is found in Theodoretus (Haeret. Fabul. lib. 3. cap. 1): "[The Nicolaitans were they who] deceitfully bestowed on themselves the appellation that belonged to him [Nicolaus]."

Falconi attempted to identify the "Martyr Nicolaus" but was handicapped by his belief that the traditional chronology required emendation. He noted that the "wonder-working" Nicolaus was commonly identified with the Nicolaus after whom a church in Blachernae at Constantinople was named, built by Justinian I in the sixth century AD. (Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, I. 6, Falconi, op. cit., Prolegomena, pp. 26, 61, 64f.) However, this church was first called the church of the *martyrs* "Saint Priscus and Saint Nicolaus", and was only in later ages known as the church of "Saint Nicolaus" *solo nomine*. The "wonder-working" Nicolaus was a "confessor" (a person imprisoned for his faith) not a "martyr" (one who died for the faith). This induced Falconi to look back through the ecclesiastical

records for two martyrs called Priscus and Nicolaus: the martyr Nicolaus, he reasoned, associated or confused, as he came to be, with the “wonder-working” Nicolaus, would be the “Martyr Nicolaus” celebrated at the tomb in Myra, and at the church in Blachernae. He found two martyrs with the requisite names amongst the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Turkey, who suffered under Licinius c. AD 318. (Falconi, op. cit., Prologemena, pp. 4, 26.) This date suited Falconi’s chronology, as he believed the “wonder-working” Nicolaus (described in the Life as having frequented the shrine of the “Martyr Nicolaus”) flourished a couple of centuries later than AD 318. Even then, some objected to Falconi’s identification on the grounds that the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were always celebrated as a group of forty, without cults devoted to named individuals amongst them. That rather weighty objection is compounded by the much weightier one that Falconi’s chronology does not pass historical muster. The traditional date for the “wonder-working” Nicolaus around the time of the Nicean Council, and the chronological consequences treated *supra*, necessitate a date for the “Martyr Nicolaus” before c. AD 150, and more probably towards the end of the first century AD. Falconi would have found only one Christian circle which included disciples named Priscus and Nicolaus in that earlier era, and that was the circle of the “seventy”. These were the seventy (or seventy-two) personal disciples of Jesus, who were sent out by Him, in addition to the more famous twelve, as missionaries throughout the land of Israel c. AD 29-33. Many of them, according to ecclesiastical legend, conducted missions thereafter in foreign lands. The Priscus who appears amongst the seventy in the traditional list ascribed to Dorotheus (dating from around the 6th century) is said to have been bishop of Colophon, and is elsewhere described as a martyr, but the text ascribed to Dorotheus implies Priscus is identical to the Biblical Priscilla. Some texts of Dorotheus and other accounts actually exchange the name Priscilla for Priscus. Priscilla, also called Prisca, is paired with Aquila as a companion of Paul in the Book of Acts and Letters of Paul. The suggestion is that Priscus (or Priscilla) served first amongst the seventy, and later in the mission of Saint Paul. The Nicolaus who also appears in the list ascribed to Dorotheus, was, according to that same stream of tradition, the Nicolaus who served in a subsequent period of his life as one of the seven deacons in the Book of Acts, and supposedly, later still, became a bishop “of Sapria” (location unknown) or “of Samaria”, and, along with Simon Magus, began then to deviate from orthodox faith. The heretical sect called the “Nicolaitans” took its name from him. Falconi himself admitted there was only one well-attested Christian called Nicolaus in the pre-Nicene age — which was demanded by the traditional chronology he rejected as the actual era of the “Martyr Nicolaus”, — and that was the deacon Nicolaus of the Book of Acts. (Falconi, op. cit., Prologemena, p. 4.) If we accept the logic of Falconi by which he proposed to identify the “Martyr Nicolaus”, but not his chronological theory, nor the particular individual identified by him, that Nicolaus, — the Nicolaus who appears with Priscus in the list of the seventy, — must be the martyr Nicolaus celebrated along with Priscus at the church in Blachernae in Constantinople, and the “Martyr Nicolaus” of the shrine in Myra. The Nicolaus of the seventy, supposed to be the same person as the deacon Nicolaus of the Book of Acts, is not known otherwise to have been martyred, but then since he was alleged to be the founder of an heretical cult, he may not have been granted the honorific title “martyr” (meaning a “witness”, Greek *martur*, of Jesus, faithful unto death), even if he had suffered, in the event, for his beliefs. Likewise, the deacon Nicolaus of the Book of Acts is only described as a “bishop of Sapria” or “of Samaria” in these lists of the seventy, and not in the more reliable literature. It is equally possible the “bishop Nicolaus of Sapria/Samaria” was an heretical teacher who adopted the name of Nicolaus the deacon, because the latter was thought to have offered his wife to be used sexually as “common property”, and was consequently admired in heretical circles as an exponent of Christian libertinism.

Whatever the truth about his identity, the tomb at Myra was believed to be that of the pre-Nicene Nicolaus, the founder of the cult and companion of Priscus, and that must be the Nicolaus of the Nicolaitans.

Serious questions remain, of course, about the reliability of these ecclesiastical traditions. Was the Priscus of the seventy really the Priscilla of the Book of Acts? The answer, almost certainly, is no, if only because Priscus is described as a male, in fact a bishop, and the name Priscilla is female (Priscilla being the wife of Aquila). Was Nicolaus the deacon one of the seventy, and later in life a bishop in Sapia/Samaria who deviated from the true faith? There is no historical evidence to substantiate this story either, and it is doubtful even that any complete record of the names of the seventy was preserved. The lists of the seventy that survive differ amongst themselves, and are apocryphal. But certainly there existed a *tradition* that Priscus and Nicolaus served amongst the seventy, and that Nicolaus was the deacon of the Book of Acts, and became an heretical bishop in Sapia/Samaria. In other words, the founder of the heretical Nicolaitan cult was *believed* to have been one of the seventy, the deacon of Acts, the bishop in Sapia/Samaria, etc. Justinian's church in Blachernae, like many others in the Medieval period, was erected in honor of a saint whose history is obscure, if not totally invented. However, the association of the martyrs Priscus and Nicolaus of Justinian's church with the cult in Myra, and therefore with the "Martyr Nicolaus" around whom it centered, as well as the evident heterodoxy of that cult, as compared to orthodox sub-Apostolic Christianity of the pre-Nicene age, detailed more fully hereafter, confirm the identity of this "Martyr Nicolaus" with the Nicolaitan Nicolaus. It would make sense for that Nicolaus to have operated later in life in Lycia, either as an orthodox missionary (like Paul and his followers), or as an heretical bishop (as his supposed mentor Simon Magus subsequently migrated to Rome), and finally to have suffered "martyrdom" there (as Paul actually was, and Simon Magus was alleged to have been, martyred in the vicinity of Rome). A few details of that "martyrdom" were preserved at Blachernae, namely that Nicolaus was burned to death, in company with Priscus (who suffered a different death), and another "martyr" Martinus. Asseman thought the church in Blachernae was dedicated to Priscus and Nicolaus, and not to Martinus also, because the remains of the former alone were preserved there. Indeed, the obscurity surrounding these "saints" implies there was something in the historical background that was being suppressed. Presumably Priscus and Nicolaus were revered at Blachernae as two of the seventy disciples of Jesus who suffered martyrdom, and were interred in the church in that location, and Nicolaus also, perhaps, as the deacon of the Book of Acts, without reference to the widespread belief that this Nicolaus was the founder of the heretical cult. There were powerful ecclesiastical voices in the East, like Clement of Alexandria, who denied that the deacon Nicolaus had anything to do with the heresy which hijacked his name, so the dedication at Blachernae might have been allowed to stand on its own, quite speculative, merits.

The name Sapia of the place where the Nicolaus of the seventy served as bishop is problematic. A location of that name is not otherwise known. Sapia was the common reading in the Latin West in the Renaissance, based on the Western manuscript tradition in the later Medieval period. It was, for example, the reading used by Baronius in his Ecclesiastical Annals. Other manuscripts read "Samaria" and this is the preferred modern reading. Sapia means "dregs" in Greek — an unlikely place-name. The fact that Sapia alternates with Samaria in different lists of the seventy suggests the two names arose as the result of a pun in an Aramaic milieu, as we shall see; and, indeed, Dorotheus is said to have drawn on Greek and "Hebrew" — meaning what we would call Aramaic — sources to compile his list.

In Aramaic the name Samaria is spelled *Smryn*. Aramaic in antiquity was commonly written without vowels, and the reader was expected to supply the vowels mentally as he read. The pronunciation of a word or name intended by the original author might easily be mistaken, given the lack of vowel signs. In this case, and presuming the author meant Samaria, the consonants *Smryn* would be pronounced by the reader “Shomrayin”, that is, “Samaria”. (The initial *s* is read here as *shin*, a “sh” sound, not *sin*, an “s” sound; the consonant *s* in Aramaic has both qualities.) Thus, in Greek translations of the Aramaic, we find Nicolaus described as “bishop of *Samaria*”. However, for some unknown reason, another translator did not read the word this way. Instead, he read the same set of consonants thus: “Sh’marin”. This means “Dregs” in Aramaic (Greek *Sapria*). Perhaps he knew Nicolaus was never a bishop in Samaria. In which case, he may have concluded the word was a demeaning reference to those heretics over whom Nicolaus exercised authority. Nicolaus was “bishop of the Dregs [*Sapria*]” in the sense that he was “bishop of the *Nicolaitan heretics*”. It may have been, further, a play on some original place-name, similar to the sobriquet “Myrdan” (“the Apostate”) presumed to have been applied to the Nicolaus listed amongst the bishops present at the Council of Nicea, instead of that Nicolaus’ original title “of Myra”.

With this in mind, we should consider the possibility that the locality written in Aramaic *Smryn* in the presumed original Aramaic text of the list of the seventy, was somewhere other than Samaria. Indeed, there is no traditional-cum-archaeological evidence associating a notable ecclesiastic Nicolaus with Samaria in Palestine, apart from the bare mention in the various translations of the lists of the seventy. There is an abundance of such attestation, on the other hand, at Myra in Lycia. Now, the topographical name Myra (Greek *Mura*) was also spelled *Smyra* (Greek *Smura*), with an initial *s*. This Greek word *smura* is formed from the same consonants as another Greek word, *smuris*, which means “emery” or “sharp rock used for grinding or polishing”. The grammatical terminations, only, are different (*-a* instead of *-is*). The Greek word *smuris*, furthermore, is derived from a Semitic (Aramaic/Hebrew) word *shamir*, which is spelled in unpointed (vowel-less) script *Smr*. But *Smura*, the Lycian topographical name (that is, Smyra, Myra), was originally plural: “Ta Smura”, meaning “The Sharp Rocks”, if derived from that Semitic root. In Aramaic unpointed script this plural form of the name would be, precisely, *Smryn*, “Sharp Rocks”. Therefore, a Nicolaus described, in the presumed Aramaic original text of the list of the seventy, as the bishop of *Smryn*, pronounced *Sh’mirin*, would be the bishop of *Smyra/Myra in Lycia*. That Nicolaus was held to be the bishop of Myra under this very form of the name, is proven by the Armenian ecclesiastical traditions referring to him as bishop of *Zmiwrin*, which is the Armenian form of the name Smyra/Myra. Here the initial Armenian *z* stands for the Greek *s* of *Smyra/Smura*. (Even in Greek this initial sibilant of the topographical name is sometimes written with a *Z*.) But the longer form of the Armenian name is precisely what one would expect of a transcription of the Aramaic *Sh’mirin*. Indeed, Armenian traditions draw largely on those of the Aramaic-speaking Church of Syria. Perhaps, more exactly, the Armenian is a transcription of an intermediary Greek transcription of the Aramaic *Shm’irin*, in which the first vowel “i” is represented in Greek by *upsilon* (“u” as in *Smura/Smuris* from *Shamir*). Thus the original Aramaic *Sh’mirin* would be transcribed in Greek as *Smurin* (alternatively *Zmurin*), then in Armenian as *Zmiwrin*. The unique sound of the Greek *upsilon* is represented in Armenian by “iw”. Some have misunderstood the Armenian *Zmiwrin* as a reference, not to Smyra/Myra in Lycia, but to Smyrna (Izmir) in Asia, which is comparable to the misreading of the presumed original Aramaic *Sh’mirin* as “Samaria”.

It may be that glossators subsequently punned on the name in the lists of the seventy, turning the

original heretical Nicolaus of Smyra/Myra into a bishop “of the Dregs” (the Aramaic *Smryn* being deliberately mispronounced *Sh'marin*), or “of Samaria” (the Aramaic being likewise mispronounced *Shomrayin*), in the sense that Smyra/Myra was a new “Samaria” (hotbed of heresy). The last would be a counterbalance to the claims of the cultists at Myra, attested in the various Lives of the “wonder-working” Nicolaus, that their shrine was a new “Sion” and “Jerusalem”.

The Armenian tradition referred to which names Nicolaus as bishop of *Zmiwrin* confirms the existence of two notable bishops so called. One is celebrated in the Armenian liturgy two weeks earlier than the other. The identical duplication of name and person is implied in the dedication of the Church at Blachernae. One Nicolaus was a martyr, the other a confessor, as we have seen. The two were popularly confused. The martyr, in the Nicolaus legend, was the occupant of the tomb at the center of the cult in Myra. Later historical sources confirm the existence of two Nicolauses who were confused with each other. When the Crusading adventurers from Bari in Italy in the eleventh century AD raided the Cathedral at Myra, they removed from a coffin there the remains of the “wonder-working” Nicolaus, famous for his “miracles” and his role as anti-Arius warrior at the Council of Nicea. They professed to be protecting these “sacred relics” from the inroads of marauding Saracens. A second group of adventurers a short while thereafter, this time from Venice, attempted to supply their native city with relics of equal worth. When the Venetians arrived at the Cathedral in Myra, the Greek Orthodox clergy, under considerable pressure, showed them the broken coffin and averred that the remains of the “wonder-working Saint” were no longer in Myra, but had been removed to Bari. The Venetians were not satisfied, and contended that the remains of the “real Nicolaus” must still be somewhere in the building. The men of Bari had only removed one body. Still in the Cathedral were the remains of the Uncle Nicolaus who had mentored the more famous “Saint”. Those remains, however, were of no interest to the Venetians. Also in the Cathedral were the relics of one “Saint Theodore”. The Venetians were determined to find the remains of what they imagined to be the “genuine Nicolaus”. Since the “wonder-working” Nicolaus was famous for providing the faithful with never-failing proof of his sanctity in the form of an oil (Greek *muron*, like *Mura* = Myra) which allegedly flowed from his bones, the Venetians became interested in an odiferous effluence which they perceived to be emanating from a different part of the building. Breaking into a coffin there they found inside the relics of a different Nicolaus, oozing oil, and these, they were convinced, were the remains of the actual “Saint”. They hastened off to Venice with their booty (which included also the remains of Uncle Nicolaus and Theodore). Thereafter there was constant rivalry between Venice and Bari over their contending claims to possession of the remains of the genuine “Saint”. Since the clergy at the shrine in Myra confirmed Bari had the original “wonder-worker’s” remains, there is no reason to doubt that Bari to this day houses the relics of the Confessor. The only other ecclesiastic called Nicolaus known to have been buried in the shrine in Myra, apart from the Confessor’s Uncle, was the Martyr Nicolaus. Venice, clearly, has the remains of the latter. Still, the rival claims of the two cities, as to which of them possesses the relics of the Confessor, the “wonder-working” ecclesiastic, illustrate the circumstance by which the Martyr and the Confessor became confused, as at Blachernae.

If a tradition happened to have survived which directly associated the fourth-century “wonder-working” bishop Nicolaus with the Nicolaitans, there would still be a doubt about its validity, as it might be held the names in this case, too, had become confused. But there exists more than mere evidence, in fact, contemporary proof, of the heretical beliefs of the fourth-century Nicolaus of Myra. In the Encomium (“Praise”) of Nicolaus authored by the eighth-century ecclesiastic Andreas Cretensis

(§6 in Falconi, op. cit., p. 79, in Gustav, Hagios Nikolaos, Bd. I, XVII Andreas Cretensis Encomium, §7, p. 425f.), reference is made to a previously unidentified exposition of the “wonder-working” Nicolaus addressed to one Theognis, a bishop of the heretical Marcionites, which is said to have had the effect of winning over that heretic to the “faith”. The passage reads as follows: (Andreas Cretensis, Encomium of Nicolaus of Myra, §6 [§7]) “For on one occasion, when, as they say, you [viz. Nicolaus] were inspecting the tendrils of the True Vine, you came across Theognis of blessed memory, at that time the bishop of the church of the Marcionists, and, putting forth a protracted Scriptural exposition, admonished him in such a way as to convert the man and bring him back to a right mind; and equally, the faintest trace of bitterness intervening, you uttered with uplifted voice and in a spirit of mild affection, that Apostolic pronouncement, and thus declaimed: ‘Come, brother, be reconciled, before the sun sets on our wrath’”. It has escaped the notice of commentators and theologians that a variant form of the name of the Marcionite bishop in the Encomium is *Diognitus* (Gustav, *ibid.*, p. 425, var. l. 19, MS B [Berolinensis Graecus, fol. 43, II saec. XII], otherwise written *Diognetus*, Falconi, *ibid.*, footnote 3, citing Beatillus, lib. 2. c. 3), instead of Theognis or Theognes. The “convert” Theognis, or Diognitus/Diognetus, is believed to be the same Theognis (called by Hilary of Poitiers likewise *Diognitus*), who was the Arian bishop of Nicea at the time of the Nicene Council. The form Diognitus (or Diognetus) is important, because the Epistle written to him by Nicolaus is still extant, though its authorship until now has escaped detection. It is the Epistle to Diognetus, so titled, which was published by Henry Stephens in the sixteenth century amongst the works of Justin Martyr, and republished in the nineteenth century from a single manuscript preserved in the Reuchlin Library, which was destroyed in the ravages of war later that century. The Epistle to Diognetus has been dated anywhere from the early second century AD to some time in the fourth. Since the author was, in fact, according to the reference in Andreas Cretensis, Nicolaus of Myra, it is actually datable to the turn of the fourth century AD. It is remarkable, considering that in the form of the Epistle to Diognetus the world to this day possesses an authentic “Letter from Santa Claus”!

The problem with that otherwise commendable discovery is that the Epistle to Diognetus is heretical, more precisely, heretical Gnostic. It terminates in Chapter XII with a curious exegesis of the account in Genesis of the Tree of Life, which identifies it with what in Genesis is its exact opposite, the Tree of Knowledge, and the word “knowledge” in Greek is *Gnosis*. According to the author of the Epistle (here shown to be Nicolaus of Myra), Eve only died because she ate of the Tree of Knowledge (a.k.a the Tree of Life) with a wrong *understanding*. Rightly perceived, the author says, Gnosis (“Knowledge”) *is* Life. The modern Eve, eating the fruit of Gnosis, is not corrupted, and does not die, but is held still to be “virgin”, and obtains eternal life. The obvious heretical slant of this final chapter of the Epistle has led to its being excised by critics from the substance of the work, as though it formed no part of the original. Evidence of a different authorship is hard to find, though it has been asserted the person of the addressee changes in this last section from singular (“thee”) to plural (“you”). In reality the identical change of person is found in the earlier sections of the Epistle: sometimes the author (Nicolaus) addresses Diognetus personally (“thee”), sometimes he addresses the pagans amongst whom he classes Diognetus, for the sake of the argument, in a wider audience (“you”). As a bolster to the idea that the final section is a later addition, it has been pointed out that there is a break in the manuscript at the end of Chapter X, which was marked by the scribe as having existed in the copy he used as the basis of his work. It has then been suggested the whole of Chapters XI and XII following the lacuna were added from an unrelated source. However, this argument fails in light of the fact that a similar break occurs,

and is likewise marked by the scribe, earlier in the document, and no such addition can be contemplated there. The theory attempts to remove the taint of Gnosis from the whole document, but that is a thankless task, as the earlier portions show similar evidence of promoting an heretical form of Christianity. No doubt the hardest evidence was contained in the text that once filled the two lacunae. In addition, the reference in Andreas Cretensis to the conversion of Diognetus by Nicolaus of Myra, whilst the latter was “inspecting the tendrils of the True Vine”, implies the final section and its exposition of the Tree of Knowledge/Life in the Paradise of God appeared in the original.

The details of the particular strand of heresy might be deduced from the fact that, firstly, the work itself is Gnostic (given that Chapter XII is an integral part of the work), and the fact that, secondly, it was written in order to “convert” a Marcionite (that is, a Docetic) Gnostic from the error of his ways. This implies the author was a Gnostic of the opposite brand to the Docetic or Marcionite, that is, a Dynamic Monarchian (otherwise known as Adoptionist, or Psilanthropist). This opposite brand of Gnosis saw Jesus as a mere man (in Greek *psilanthropos*, whence the name of the heresy Psilanthropism), and held the *Dunamis*, or Power (Spirit) of God, which was the Christ or Messiah, descended on the “mere man” Jesus at his baptism, thus bestowing the title Christ upon him. (Whence the denomination Dynamic Monarchianism for the same heresy.)

This conclusion is confirmed by the Epistle’s content. The personal name of Jesus, the name of the Son of Man, of Jesus as a human, for example, appears nowhere in the work, but only the titles of divinity, Son of God, the Logos, Christ, etc. More significantly, and in a number of places, that same Christ (*Christos*) is identified as the *Dunamis* (“Power”) of God. In fact, this “immortal” *Dunamis* is even said (illogically) to have been he who suffered and became the atonement for the sins of mankind, whereas the orthodox Christian belief is that the human Jesus thus suffered and atoned by His blood, and was, by that very act, the Kinsman (human) Redeemer. A translation of the Epistle to Diognetus is appended with notes showing where it reveals its Dynamic Monarchian bias.

The particular type of Dynamic Monarchianism that was popular in the days of Nicolaus of Myra was that espoused by Paul of Samosata. His doctrine is described by those who knew him as Artemonite, Artemon being a second-century Dynamic Monarchian who operated happily at that time in the First Church of Rome. Later, the First Church of Rome adopted a different kind of Monarchianism, known as Modalism. Paul of Samosata, and Artemonites or Dynamic Monarchians like him, held that Jesus was a mere man, though, indeed, born of a virgin, and the Christ Spirit descended on him at his baptism. Christ, God, Son, Holy Spirit, Logos, according to that theory, were different terms for the same being. Thus there was no difference between the Father and the Son: they were *homoousios*, meaning “one and the same entity”. The orthodox held, on the contrary, that “Son” was a different concept or reality to “Father”, and that these two realities, though different aspects of One God, must be distinguished from each other in the way the Scriptures defined. The blurring of distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit was characteristic of Monarchians of whatever school, including Dynamic Monarchians. The Modalist Monarchians, or Sabellians, differed from the Dynamic Monarchians, not in their view of the nature of the divinity, but in their understanding of Jesus. The Dynamics held Jesus to be a man like others, even if virgin-born, whereas the Modalists saw him as an apparitional manifestation of God (called the “Son”), more divine than human. In that respect Modalism was an offshoot of earlier Docetic Gnosis. Both schools of Monarchianism were happy with the term *homoousios* to describe the nature of God Himself.

Arius was originally a disciple of the Dynamic Monarchian Paul of Samosata, but later conceived his own heresy, in which the Son was held to be a being created by the Father, and not the same entity (*homoousios*). Nicolaus of Myra, being a Dynamic Monarchian somewhat in the mold of Paul of Samosata, did not sympathize at all with Arius in his deviation from his master's teaching, and thus opposed him in the Council of Nicea. That Council unequivocally upheld the watchword "homoousios" as the aptest term to define the nature of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. This, of course, represented the authentication by the Council of Nicea of Monarchian heresy. It suited the Eastern Nicolaitans and the followers of Paul of Samosata, as well as the Western Modalist Monarchians of the First Church of Rome. It totally excluded the followers of Arius, and disaffected many of the orthodox, like Eusebius of Caesarea, who were wary of its connotations, and could only accept it with significant qualifications. The Monarchians called the orthodox "Semi-Arians" by way of reproach, implying their concept of a distinction between Father and Son was similar to that espoused by Arius, though, in fact, the orthodox rejected utterly the Arian idea that the Son was a created being, and held to His Divinity in the absolute sense. The Nicean Council out-manoevered the orthodox, putting them at a theological disadvantage vis-a-vis the Monarchians. Its principal aim was to muzzle the orthodox followers of Origen, who staunchly upheld the Scriptural distinction of the three "realities" (*hypostaseis*), Father, Son and Spirit. It achieved that aim, but did not exclude them. That process took a while longer. It was partially achieved later, as we shall see, when the followers of Origen known as the Cappadocian Fathers came in conflict with the Nicolaitan system in AD 371.

The first four "Ecumenical" Church Councils accepted as such by the First Church of Rome (the second belatedly) were vehicles used by the Nicolaitans to establish their Monarchian agenda. (For a revealing summary history of the councils see the Supplementary note, [below](#), [>>>](#).) This could be expressed as follows: "1) Jesus as God is a one-dimensional being, 2) in the sense that the three dimensions of his being are merely different ways of viewing the one dimension, 3) so that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the mother of God, 4) to the exclusion of any real humanity in him." These phrases formed the substance of the four Creeds published by the first four Church Councils, thus:

1) Nicea AD 325: "Jesus as God is a *one-dimensional being* ..." — WATCHWORD: *homoousios*

2) Constantinople AD 381: "... in the sense that the three dimensions of his being are merely different *ways of viewing* the one dimension ..." — WATCHWORD: *prosopa*

3) Ephesus AD 431: "... so that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the *mother of God* ..." — WATCHWORD: *Theotokos*

4) Chalcedon AD 451: "... to the *exclusion of any real humanity* in him." — WATCHWORD: *enhypostasis*

The first step in the process of Monarchianizing the "Catholic" communion was to declare Father, Son and Spirit to be "homoousios", that is, a single transcendent entity in a one-dimensional sense. There could be no thought for the Monarchians of this God's condescending, of taking on a bodily form, spiritual or material, called the Son of God; he must forever be sublimely transcendent and separated from the lower world of matter, like the Supreme Being in pagan philosophy. This God might be viewed in three modes (*prosopa*, "faces, masks, character-roles"), as a "Father, Son and Spirit", but these modes in the Monarchian system were not three distinct realities or unfolding phases in the scheme of redemption (*hypostaseis*, "distinct realities"), but eternal aspects of that one-dimensional

transcendant God. This transcendant threefold being either descended on the merely human Jesus, as envisaged by the Dynamic Monarchians, at some stage in his earthly existence, or manifested himself in a fantastical sense “as a man”, from conception to death, according to the Modalist Monarchian theory. For the latter, the Modalists, Mary was the “Mother of God” (*Theotokos* [a Greek word employed by Origen in the sense “She who experienced the birth (-tokos) of God (*Theo-*)”]), not in the Origenic sense, but in the sense that she conceived and bore the God who merely appeared to be a man, and was therefore titled justly in Latin “Mater [Mother] Dei [of God]”. For the Dynamics, the transcendant threefold being (God) descended on the mere man Jesus, and then was said to have “appeared” in the world (*epiphaneia*). Being in all major respects the same as the pagan Supreme Being, the god of light, the sun-god, the date for this “appearance” was fixed by the Dynamics as January 6th, which was the date of the New Year in Egypt, when the sun-god “appeared anew” in the world. In the earlier Dynamic scheme, this “appearance” took place at Jesus’ baptism, when the “light of God” descended like a dove upon him. For the later Dynamics, this “appearance” or “birth” of the light was recognized to be the “birthday of the Son of God”, that is the “Orthodox” Christmas day, the very same January 6th. For both schools of Monarchianism the real humanity of Jesus was denied. For the Modalists, he was not real in any sense. For the Dynamics, the real human Jesus was irrelevant and, indeed, a cypher, a mere empty vessel through which the transcendant threefold God operated. They both accepted the theory, encapsulated in the word *enhyposstasis*, coined for the purpose, that the humanity was utterly irrelevant in the history of redemption, and that the humanity, though existent in some sense, was absorbed totally “in” [Gk. *en-*] the divinity of the “hyposstasis” of “God the Son”. Both schools rejected the Scriptural doctrine of the followers of Origen that the humanity and divinity were “fused” or “mixed together” in Jesus Christ, thus constituting the God-man.

The Monarchian theology was honed to perfection at the Council of Chalcedon. Thereafter, during the sixth century, in the reign of Justinian, the “Three Chapters” anathematized and outlawed under three headings (“chapters”), and as a signal act symbolizing the eradication of Origenism, the doctrines of Theodorus, Theodoretus and Ibas, three notable teachers of the school of Origen, all by that time deceased. The Bible-honoring pre-Nicene faith of the martyrs of Jesus was now persecuted as “Semi-Arian” or “Nestorian” heresy. The demeaning title “Semi-Arian” was adopted after the Council of Nicea, and “Nestorian” after the Council of Ephesus.

Only by accepting the Scriptural doctrine of Origen regarding the God-man could the true relationship between, and the real union of, God and man at the Incarnation be safeguarded. The Origenic belief was that the human soul of the man Jesus was created on the Sixth Day of Creation along with all other human souls, but there “fused” with the divine Logos, or Son of God, like fire in a red-hot metal bar at the anvil. This united divine and human Soul then descended at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, as all merely human souls descend at birth, upon the material body before created in the womb of Mary at the Conception, and thus was born, as the Scriptures said, “Christ [Gk. *Christos*, the “Anointed One”, that is the perfect human soul already “anointed” with the Spirit or Logos], the Lord [Gk. *Kurios*, that is, God, the Spirit and Logos Himself through that union]”. Failing that, the “Catholic” church, so called, was left with a mere cypher of humanity animated by God instead of a human soul, as the Dynamic Monarchians held, or with an apparitional man manifesting God, according to the Modalist Monarchian belief. Since the Eastern Greek-speaking “Orthodox” communion rejected “Western” Modalism in any form, and also rejected the Origenic doctrine, they fell in the Dynamic camp. By their opponents in the West they were classed as “Arian” in the full sense of the term, whilst the Origenists under Eusebius of

Caesarea, according to them, were the “Semi-Arians”. Arianism held that the “Logos became flesh” (in the sense that God inhabited a mere body-shell), not man in the full sense, and denied the existence of the purely human soul or spirit in the person of Jesus, which is consistent with its Dynamist, Artemonizing background. Strictly-speaking they belonged to the latter-day “Nicolaitan” wing of the Dynamic Monarchian school. Nicolaus, accordingly, has always been more honored as an historical “Saint”, rather than as a semi-mythic Christmas sprite, in the East than in the West. Modalism was the accepted deviation in the First Church of Rome, that is in the Western or “Roman Catholic” communion. These were condemned by their opponents in the East as “Sabellians”, though strictly speaking, at least in Rome itself, they belonged to the “Callistian” camp of that heresy. Both sprung from the same roots in pre-Nicene Gnostic Nicolaitanism.

The cult to which the “wonder-working” Nicolaus belonged, therefore, to conclude, was the cult of the Nicolaitans condemned by John the Apostle. Indeed, if this was not the cult in Myra, what was it? There is no other sect known to have existed in the vicinity of Asia, where John the Apostle ministered, which bore such a peculiar name. The cult in Myra was separated by no more than a single province from John’s Asia. In fact, an “ancient” (and clearly heretical) ecclesiastical custom in pre-Nicene times, referred to in the sixth Nicene Canon, was that the “Exarch” bishop of Asia exercised powers of ordination, even, over the “Metropolitan” of Lycia, where Myra was located. (Falconi, *op. cit.*, Prolegomena, p. 27.) Perhaps, originally, the “Exarch bishop” of Asia was the Gnostic Adoptianist heretic Carpocrates, who operated in Asia in the time of John, and the “Metropolitan” in Lycia the priest who attended the shrine of “Martyr Nicolaus” at Myra, since some thought the Nicolaitans were merely Carpocratians under another name. The Nicolaitans, like the cult at Myra, are known also to have survived well into the third century, as they are listed amongst still-existing heretical sects by several ecclesiastical writers at the beginning of the third century. This was the era of the Archbishop Nicolaus who ordained the famed “wonder-working” Nicolaus at the shrine in Myra. Their doctrine and practice was certainly heretical by Apostolic pre-Nicene standards, though it was equally as certainly the typical Christianity, or what passed for such, in Medieval times.

The strange, un-Apostolic, practice relating to the ordination of the “Metropolitan” bishop of Myra by the “Arch-” bishop in Asia crops up a little later as an important marker in the history of the Church in Myra. As we have pointed out, the Nicolaitan cult continued to exist in Myra from early Apostolic times to at least the era of the famous “wonder-working” Nicolaus around AD 300. Indeed, there is a hiatus in the ecclesiastical history of Myra between the reign of Domitian towards the end of the first century AD, and the year AD 371. (See for the details of this and the following matter, Falconi, *op. cit.*, Prolegomena, pp. 33ff.) The traditional Greek Orthodox account was that the first bishop of Myra, Nicander, was appointed by the Apostle Paul’s emissary Titus, whose field of service was in the neighboring island of Crete. Nicander of Myra suffered martyrdom for his faith in the reign of Domitian. Following that there is a complete blank in the standard pre-Nicene authorities, as well as in the later Greek Orthodox accounts: not a mention of any other bishop in Myra, or of any lay-member. When the record recommences in AD 371 we find the un-Apostolic Asian ordination practice an issue of considerable importance. At that time there was a circle of Apostolic believers in Turkey who were disciples of Origen. Origen was the disciple of Hippolytus, Hippolytus the disciple of Irenaeus, Irenaeus of Polycarp and Polycarp of the Apostle John. These Apostolic believers, known as the “Cappadocian Fathers”, were the successors of Origen’s disciple, Gregory, who was the original and authentic “wonder-working” missionary of the region. Included in their number was a distinguished

visitor from Gaul, Hilary of Poitiers. He was the mentor of the Spirit-filled, and even more abundantly wonder-working evangelist of Gaul, Martin of Tours. A prominent member of the circle of the “Cappadocian Fathers” was Basil of Caesarea. He wrote in a letter, still extant, that he had been informed on reliable authority that there were individuals in Lycia, including in Myra, who wished to disassociate themselves from the professing Church of their region, which was dependent on the ecclesiastical authorities in Asia, and *was in heresy* (on account, that is, of the un-Apostolic ordination practice recognized by the Council of Nicea). Basil made arrangements for these individuals to be ordained by Apostolic brethren. Amongst the new ordinands was Tatianus of Myra. He appears later as the recognized presbyter of Myra in a Council at Constantinople in AD 381. That happy outcome was reversed in the next few years, since the bishop of Myra immediately following Tatianus, called (appropriately) Prohaeresius, was ordained in what Basil termed the “heretical” circle, dependent on the “Archbishop” of Ephesus in Asia. Prohaeresius, and several ordinands in the vicinity of like persuasion, were removed from office in yet another reversal of ecclesiastical policy, on the grounds that they had received their office through “simony”. “Simony” is the buying and selling of episcopal positions of the kind proposed by Simon Magus in the Book of Acts: hence “simony” from “Simon”.

We need not follow the vicissitudes of ecclesiastical maneuvering any further, since the events recounted already establish what we need to know about the early centuries of Myran Church history. That is, at the end of a long hiatus in the ecclesiastical history of Myra, which lasted from the time of Domitian, in the last decade of the first century AD, up to the first half of the fourth century AD, the Church in Myra emerges into the light of history *involved in heresy*. That heresy included the ordination of the “Archbishop” or “Metropolitan” of Myra by the “Archbishop” of Ephesus in Asia. But this is precisely the practice followed by the later Medieval ecclesiastical authorities in Myra, the record of whose pre-Nicene history was preserved in the “wonder-working Saint Nicolaus” legend. In other words, the hiatus in the pre-Nicene ecclesiastical history of Myra is filled by the account already outlined of the cult of Nicolaus of Myra, that is, of the Nicolaitans. The supposed founder of this cult, the “Martyr Nicolaus”, was, most probably, as already demonstrated, a contemporary of John the Apostle in the reign of Domitian, and may well have been the famous deacon of the Book of Acts. He was buried in a shrine at Myra built at least as early as c. AD 150. It would seem likely this Nicolaus replaced the martyred Apostolic bishop Nicander in the reign of Domitian himself c. AD 96, and, indeed, Domitian is known to have been influenced in his persecution of Jewish Christians by heretical opponents of authentic Jewish Christianity. An “Archbishop” called Nicolaus (named thus after the founder of the cult) served at the shrine as early as the first half of the third century AD and ordained the “wonder-working” Archbishop Nicolaus towards the end of that same century. The “wonder-working” Nicolaus lived on well into the middle of the fourth-century AD. His *heretical* successor was ousted (and was not recognized, as a consequence, in official court circles) through the offices of Basil and the other “Cappadocian Fathers”, and replaced by the Apostolic Tatianus in AD 371. That situation was reversed in the case of the succeeding bishop, Prohaeresius, reversed again through the interposition of Chrysostom, and reversed yet again a little later, when the Nicolaitan regime consolidated its power in the Imperial Court. There persisted, however, for obvious reasons, a reluctance to own up to the origin of the officially-recognized cult in Myra, and it was not till much later, and principally after the translation of the corpse of the “wonder-working” Nicolaus from Myra to Bari in Italy in the 11th century AD, that the “Sainthood” of Nicolaus of Myra was widely accepted.

If the founder Nicolaus, buried in Myra before c. AD 150, was, indeed, the deacon of the Book of Acts,

it is probable he himself was untainted by heresy. However, the cult which developed at the shrine, whose adherents liked to name themselves Nicolaus after the founder, was Nicolaitan, that is, Gnostic of the Dynamic Monarchian school. The Nicolaus who attended the Council of Nicea, the famous “wonder-working” Nicolaus of the Christmas festivities, “Santa Claus”, was a leading proponent of the same heresy, as proven by his authorship of the Letter to Diognetus.

The ancient pre-Nicene sect of the Nicolaitans played a pivotal role in the spread of the Gnostic heresies, according to the heresy-hunters of the early Church. The Nicolaitans belonged to the Adoptianist or Dynamic Monarchian wing of the Gnostic movement, which also spawned the Artemonite heresy. It was the Artemonite heresy, according to an ancient ecclesiastical tradition, to which all the bishops of the First Church of Rome (later known as the “Roman Catholic Church”) belonged, from its first heretical bishop Sixtus, to bishop Victor in the late second century AD. Victor then introduced a new variety of theology, Noetianism (a Modalist Monarchian system), which led to a reworking of the First Church’s dogma. Still, significant elements of the original Artemonite (Dynamic Monarchian) doctrine and practice remained, including particularly, the only innovative element Artemon is known to have introduced, the Christmas celebration. Christmas is thus a specifically Artemonite, or, we might say, using an earlier terminology, Nicolaitan, festival. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Nicolaus of the Myra cult (“Santa Claus”) playing such an important part in the festivities. This element goes back to an early phase of the heresy’s development.

Specifically the Winter Solstice festival adopted by the Gnostics as the birthday of Jesus was a form of the Egyptian cult of Osiris and Isis in which a cut-down pine-tree was set up at the end of the mid-winter month. Originally this tree was the “Myrrh” tree of Byblos. The modern, botanical name is Tamarisk (*tamarix gallica*). It has leaves like pine-needles, and exudes the substance known in antiquity as *muron* (myrrh), or “manna”. From the latter term it received its alternative name *tamarix mannifera*, “the manna-bearing tamarisk”. In more northerly climes a pine-tree was substituted for the original tamarisk, on account of the fact that the leaves of the oriental tree were like pine-needles, that the pine tree exuded sap in a similar way, and that the tamarisk itself did not flourish in colder lands. The trunk of the Myrrh tree represented in Egyptian mythology the body of the goddess, — known accordingly as Myrrha or Myra, — in which the god Osiris (or Adonis, Tammuz, or Attis) was enclosed. Alternatively the trunk was believed to be the backbone of Osiris himself. It was commonly, though erroneously, thought the city of Myra in Lycia was named after the goddess Myra because of the identity of the names. And Myra was the home of the cult of Nicolaus. The tree is illustrated on coins of the city topped by an image of the goddess (Myra, or Myrrha the mother of Adonis, Tammuz, Osiris, or Attis, but in Myra identified with the Greek goddess Artemis, the Roman Diana). This “sacred” tree was transposed into the paganizing Christianity of the First Church of Rome, closely connected with Bishop Nicolaus of Myra. Bishop Nicolaus is “Santa Claus” and the tree the Christmas Tree, still today most often topped by the image of a female sprite (the Christmas Tree fairy). This was not grafted onto the cult of Nicolaus at some later time, but was an essential element from the earliest phase of it. Already in Falconi’s *Life of Nicolaus*, chronologically the most ancient form of the ecclesiastic’s biography, and professing to have been written by a contemporary of the “wonder-worker”, the “sacred” *muron* is mentioned which was (and still is) believed to exude from the bones of Nicolaus. In the Osiris myth, similarly, the tree exuding *muron* was the *backbone* of Osiris. In Falconi’s *Life*, furthermore, there is said to have been celebrated in honor of the “forefather” Nicolaus, that is the “Martyr Nicolaus” entombed in the central shrine, a festival called Rosalia. The Rosalia or “Rose

festival” was a sensuous pagan feast celebrated by the worshipers of the identical god of the Myrhh tree, Adonis (Osiris, Tammuz, Attis). The “roses” from which it acquired its name, otherwise known as “narcissus” flowers, were eaten in the god’s mysteries as they contained a torpor-inducing “narcotic” (this word being derived from the name of the flower, *narc-issus*), the effects of which simulated the death of the god. In the Encomium of Nicolaus by Andreas Cretensis (in Gustav, Hagios Nikolaos, Bd. I, XVII, Encomium, §10, p. 427f.), Andreas claims the Rosalia celebrated in honor of Nicolaus had transformed the pagan Greek celebration into a Christian one. Actually it represented the paganizing and perverting of the Christian faith by the admixture of polytheistic ritual. Nicolaus himself was treated as a re-embodiment of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, or Attis, exuding *muron* like the ancient tree-god.

Egyptian paganism spread in a popular form throughout the Roman Empire in the era immediately preceding the Nicene age. In popular Egyptian paganism commoners, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or otherwise, as well as kings, queens and princes of Egypt, as in ancient times, were identified with Osiris when they died, and hence were held to have been “justified” before the heavenly tribunal. Devotees, and particularly zealous or saintly devotees, of whatever religious persuasion, might be held to have become “one with Osiris” amongst those who adopted the trappings of Egyptian paganism. Jesus thus became for them “Osiris-Jesus”, Nicolaus, “Osiris-Nicolaus”, and so forth. To this day in the Balkans Nicolaus of Myra is worshiped under the name Hizir, which is the Muslim Khidr, or Al Khidr, the “Verdant One”. Al Khidr is an Islamic “saint” who has been substituted for the dying and reviving god of the fertility cults of the ancient East, particularly for the multiform Hermes of Hermeticism, the quasi-monotheistic High god of late Imperial Roman solar pantheism. Hermes was the Egyptian Pan or Amun, and he was identified in turn with Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, Attis etc. Al Khidr likewise might be identified with any “saint” held to have triumphed over the powers of the grave. Al Khidr *is* Saint George, Saint Nicolaus, Elijah, Melchizedek, Eliezer, etc. etc. He *was* identically the Egyptian Hermes, and the Syrian Tammuz, and, for Hindus on the Indus, still *is*, the Matsya incarnation of Vishnu. It would be as natural and understandable for Al Khidr Nicolaus (“Santa Claus”) to appear riding through the clouds on his reindeer-driven sleigh, as it would be for Al Khidr Vishnu to appear riding through the same clouds on his magic storm-bird Garuda.

Other characteristic elements of the Artemonite brand of Nicolaitanism (Gnosticism) which the First Church of Rome originally espoused, survived in medieval Romanism and even to the present day. A comparison of these characteristic elements with the Nicolaus cult in Myra, shows they represent the same brand of heresy.

The Nicolaus cult in Myra gave impressive titles to its ministers, like “Archbishop” and “Archmandrite”. Such titles were anathema to the simple Apostolic and sub-Apostolic Church, where the “elder” (*presbuteros*) was the only authority, the shepherd of the flock, and elders who functioned as welfare providers were known as “supervisors” (*episkopoi*). There was no such thing in Apostolic Christianity as an “Archbishop” over the lesser “bishops” of the local churches. That was a hierarchy of the kind found in pagan priesthoods, but not in Apostolic Christianity. However the paganizing phenomenon of hierarchy and titles spread much more widely when the Roman Empire was Christianized and the customs of the First Church of Rome were bolstered by the Empire. Thus, we see an element of church practice typical of the Nicolaus Myra cult being promoted by the First Church of Rome as it rose to power, and, it must be remembered, the background of the First Church of Rome

was Artemonite and therefore Nicolaitan. The common elements in Nicolaitanism as it survived in the First Church of Rome and the Nicolaus cult in Myra are further evidence of a genetic connection between the two.

The Nicolaus cultists in Myra loved to “go on pilgrimage” to holy sites, particularly Jerusalem, where they revered the “Holy Cross” and the “Holy Sepulcher”. Nicolaus’ uncle is known to have followed this practice, and his protégé, the “wonder-working” Nicolaus himself, followed in his footsteps. Again Apostolic Christianity eschewed such reverence for material objects and places, characteristic, as it was, of pagan superstition. The First Church of Rome, on the contrary, promoted pilgrimages of the identical kind, particularly, to Jerusalem, as soon as it received official sanction from Emperor Constantine. The Emperor’s mother, Helena, conducted a well-publicized pilgrimage to identify the “True Cross” in Jerusalem and the correct site of the Holy Sepulcher. This was a precise duplication of the pilgrimage of the two Nicolauses of Myra only a generation before. The supposed “True Cross” was discovered by Helena in a *temple of Venus* located (as was believed) on the site of the Sepulcher of Jesus. This gives the lie to the authenticity of the relic, and hints at its actual character: it was a cross incorporating the letter “T” (Hebrew *tav*), the initial letter of the name Tammuz (Osiris, Adonis, Attis). It was a variation, in other words, on the Egyptian “djed” pillar of Osiris, that is, the Myrrh Tree. Venus was the Roman name of the Mother/Wife of Osiris, otherwise Myrrha, Myra, Artemis etc. It was called the “True Cross” by the Nicolaus cult, because “Christ”, according to their doctrine, was not the “mere man Jesus” who had been crucified on the historical cross. Hence that cross, the historical cross glorified by Apostolic believers as a badge of honor representing Redemption by the Sacrifice of the Messiah, was not their “True Cross of Christ”. On the contrary, the “True Cross”, according to the cultists, was the mystic Cross of the Nicolaitan “Christ”, that is, of the pagan god of light who had supposedly descended on “the mere man Jesus” at his baptism. This “Christ” was the sun-god of Imperial Rome, otherwise Osiris, Adonis, Tammuz, Attis. Their “True Cross” was the Myrrh Tree Cross. That this theme underpinned the pilgrimage of the two Nicolauses to Jerusalem is evidenced by the fact that Uncle Nicolaus made the trip to Jerusalem when the “wonder-working” Nicolaus was a child (Gk. *paidion*, Falconi, Vita, *op. cit.*, §3, p. 2, the Greek word denoting an infant up to seven years old, Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Lexicon*, s.v.). At that time the Temple of Venus still stood on the site, therefore the “Dear”, and “Life-giving” Cross which received his “worship” there (*ibid.* §3, p. 3), the identical Cross Nicolaus visited in the days of Constantine, when the Temple had been destroyed and replaced by a Church (for the second visit, see *ibid.* §15, p. 13f.), was at that time *located in the Temple of Venus*. This Cross can only have been the Crux Ansata of the Egyptian Venus, the Ankh sign, a “T” shape mounted by a circle representing the sun-god, modified somewhat, as it was on the Labarum of Constantine, to represent the initial letters *Chi Rho* in the name “Chrestus” or “Christus”. The Nicolaitans worshiped their god “Christ” hanging on it, precisely as the Attis worshipers did, and on the very same day, March 25th, now held, in the Christianized Empire, to be the day “Christ” was crucified. This was the Nicolaitan “Pascha” (Passover). Indeed, all three principal Jewish festivals, Passover (near the Spring equinox), Pentecost (late Spring, early Summer) and Tabernacles (at the Jewish New Year in the Fall), had now been “Christianized”, or, rather “Paganized”, in the Nicolaitan calendar. Pascha or Passover was celebrated with the relic of the “True Cross”, as described here, on the day of the sun (Sunday), immediately following the first full moon after the equinox (March 25th). The Rosalia was celebrated around the beginning of May, particularly on Whitsunday, Dominica de Rosa, the Sunday of the Rose, when the “roses” bloomed; it replaced

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(This forms Appendix 12 of *The First Church of Rome*)

Pentecost, when the first sprouts of the Jewish harvest were ingathered, which was renamed, accordingly, Pascha Rosa or Rosata (Falconi, op. cit., p. 28, footnote [1]). The New Year festival of the “Nativity” of “Christ” (the sun-god, January 6th in the East, December 25th in the West) replaced the Jewish New Year festival of Tabernacles.

Following is the Heretical Epistle of Nicolaus of Myra to the Marcionite Diognetus.

THE HERETICAL EPISTLE OF NICOLAUS OF MYRA TO DIOGNETUS

The translation is Harmer (1891) with modifications. The modifications attempt to represent more accurately the precise nuance of the Greek, or (more usually) represent a translation of what actually appeared in the MS, instead of modern conjectures and alterations. Text in bold and notes of mine in braces {} bring out the Dynamic Monarchian heresy of the author, and other incidental details. The Chapter headings have been added by me.

Diognetus the Marcionite is commended for his previous interest in Christianity

SINCE I see, most excellent Diognetus, that thou hast been exceedingly anxious to understand the religion of the Christians {viz. in Diognetus' current Marcionite phase}, and that thy enquiries respecting them are distinctly and carefully made, as to what God they trust and as to how, in their worship of Him, they disregard the world itself and despise death, and take no account of those who are regarded as gods by the Greeks, neither observe the superstition of the Jews, and as to the nature of the affection which they entertain one to another, and of this new development or interest, which has entered into men's lives now and not before: I gladly welcome this zeal in thee, and I ask of God, Who supplieth both the speaking and the hearing to us, that it may be granted to myself to speak in such a way that thou mayest hear how to become better, and to thee that thou mayest so listen that I the speaker may not be disappointed.

An attack on paganism and idolatry

2. Come then, clear thyself of all the prepossessions which occupy thy mind, and throw off the habit which leadeth thee astray {viz. Diognetus' Marcionite beliefs}, and become a new man, as it were, from the beginning, as one who would listen to a new story, even as thou thyself didst confess. {This comment shows Nicolaus is intending to treat Diognetus, for the sake of the argument, as a potential convert from idolatry, rather than a professing Christian. Henceforward he addresses his imagined pagan audience in the second person plural, "ye", and Diognetus himself as "thee".} See not only with thine eyes, but with thine intellect also, of what substance or of what form they chance to be whom ye {the pagans} call and regard as gods. Is not one of them stone, like that which we tread under foot, and another bronze, no better than the vessels which are forged for our use, and another wood, which has already become rotten, and another silver, which needs a man to guard it lest it be stolen, and another iron, which is corroded with rust, and another earthenware, not a whit more comely than that which is supplied for the most dishonorable service? Are not all these of perishable matter? Are they not forged by iron and fire? Did not the sculptor make one, and the brass-founder another, and the silversmith another, and the potter another? Before they were molded into their shape by the crafts of these several artificers, was it not possible for each one of them to have been even now changed in form to that which was proper for each? Might not the vessels which are now made out of the same material, if they met with the same artificers, be made like unto such as these? Could not these things which are now worshiped by you, by human hands again be made vessels like the rest? Are not they all deaf and blind,

are they not soul-less, senseless, motionless? Do they not all rot and decay? These things ye call gods, to these ye are slaves, these ye worship; and ye end by becoming altogether like unto them. Therefore ye hate the Christians, because they do not consider these to be gods. For do not ye yourselves, who now regard and take note of them, much more despise them? Do ye not much rather mock and insult them, worshipping those that are of stone and earthenware unguarded, but shutting up those that are of silver and gold by night, and set guards over them by day, to prevent their being stolen? And as for the honors which ye think to offer to them, if they are sensible of them, ye rather punish them thereby, whereas, if they are insensible, ye reproach them by propitiating them with the blood and fat of victims. Let one of yourselves undergo this treatment, let him submit to these things being done to him. Nay, not so much as a single individual will willingly submit to such punishment, for he has sensibility and reason; but a stone submits, because it is insensible. Therefore ye convict his sensibility. Well, I could say much besides concerning the Christians not being enslaved to such gods as these; but if any one should think what has been said insufficient, I hold it superfluous to say more.

An attack on sacrifice in the Law of Moses

3. In the next place, I fancy that thou art chiefly anxious to hear about their not practicing their religion in the same way as the Jews. The Jews then, so far as they abstain from the mode of worship described above, do well in claiming to reverence one God of the universe and to regard Him as Master; but so far as they offer Him this worship in methods similar to those already mentioned, they are altogether at fault. For whereas the Greeks, by offering these things to senseless and deaf images, make an exhibition of stupidity, the Jews considering that they are presenting them to God, as if He were in need of them, ought in all reason to count it folly and not religious worship. For He that made the heaven and the earth and all things that are therein, and furnisheth us all with what we need, cannot Himself need any of these things which He Himself supplieth to them that imagine they are giving them to Him. But those who think to perform sacrifices to Him with blood and fat and whole burnt offerings, and to honor Him with such honors, seem to me in no way different from those who show the same respect towards deaf images; for the one class think fit to make offerings to things unable to participate in the honor, the other class to One Who is in need of nothing. {The argument here is defective because it takes no account of the Covenant of God with natural Israel, which authorized the animal sacrifices, and still does so in the case of those Israelites who accept Jesus as the Messiah.}

An attack on other practices in the Law of Moses

4. But again their scruples concerning meats, and their superstition relating to the sabbath and the vanity of their circumcision and the dissimulation of their fasting and new moons, I do [not] suppose you need to learn from me, are ridiculous and unworthy of any consideration. For of the things created by God for the use of man to receive some as created well, but to decline others as useless and superfluous, is not this impious? And again to lie against God, as if He forbad us to do any good thing on the sabbath day, is not this profane? Again, to vaunt the mutilation of the flesh as a token of election as though for this reason they were particularly beloved by God, is not this ridiculous? And to watch the stars and the moon and to keep the observance of months and of days, and to distinguish the arrangements of God and the changes of the seasons according to their own impulses, making some into festivals and others into times of mourning, who would regard this as an exhibition of godliness and not much more of folly? That the Christians are right therefore in holding aloof from the common silliness and error of the Jews and from their excessive fussiness and pride, I consider that thou hast

been sufficiently instructed {here Diognetus is said to have been instructed in anti-Jewish polemics, as all Marcionites were}; but as regards the mystery of their own religion, expect not that thou canst be instructed by man {here the supposed mysterious inner meaning of the Law is said to be conveyed to man only through the operation of the Logos, viz. in the Dynamic Monarchian doctrine espoused by Nicolaus, which opposed the divinity Christ to the “mere man” Jesus, and not in the Marcionism previously espoused by Diognetus}.

Nicolaus’ system not differentiated from the predominant culture (except in the sacred meal)

5. For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life. Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life {though Apostolic Christianity was distinguished from the surrounding pagan culture by its higher, Scriptural, ethics and morality}, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvelous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their table in common, but yet it is not common. {The word “common” (Greek *koine*) is used in the Scriptures to denote things ritually unclean according to the Law of Moses. Here the Law of Moses is not in view, as proved by the preceding arguments. So the “sacred” or “uncommon” meal is on the order of the “Passover of the Lord” mentioned in Chapter XII. This is a Christianization of Jewish ritual, not evidenced in New Testament Christianity.} They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life. They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life. War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility.

A Neo-Platonic interpretation of Christianity as the “Soul of the World”

6. In a word, what the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through the divers cities of the world. The soul hath its abode in the body, and yet it is not of the body. So Christians have their abode in the world, and yet they are not of the world. The soul which is invisible is guarded in the body which is visible: so Christians are recognized as being in the world, and yet their religion remaineth invisible. The flesh hateth the soul and wageth war with it, though it receiveth no wrong, because it is forbidden to indulge in pleasures; so the world hateth Christians, though it receiveth no wrong from them, because they set themselves against its pleasures. The soul loveth the flesh which hateth it, and the members: so

Christians love those that hate them. The soul is enclosed in the body, and yet itself holdeth the body together; so Christians are kept in the world as in a prison-house, and yet they themselves hold the world together. The soul though itself immortal dwelleth in a mortal tabernacle {here the souls of men in general are considered to be immortal, whereas in the New Testament, immortality of the soul is vouchsafed only to the Christian faithful: otherwise “the soul that sins, that soul shall die”}; so Christians sojourn amidst perishable things, while they look for the imperishability which is in the heavens. The soul when hardly treated in the matter of meats and drinks is improved; and so Christians when punished increase more and more daily. So great is the office for which God hath appointed them, and which it is not lawful for them to decline. {The analogy is spurious, as Christians are not the “Soul of the world”, but the body of Christ on earth, separated from the world by the sanctifying influence of the indwelling Spirit of God. The whole argument smacks of Neo-Platonic philosophy and not Scriptural Christianity.}

Christ in Nicolaus’ system is the divine Dunamis sent down from heaven, not a human being

7. For it is no earthly discovery, as I said, which was committed to them, neither do they care to guard so carefully any mortal invention, nor have they entrusted to them the dispensation of human mysteries. {Compare the final sentence of this Chapter. The meaning is that salvation was achieved only through the divine Dunamis, not by any man, that is, not by the “mere man” Jesus.} But truly the Almighty Creator of the Universe, the Invisible God Himself from heaven planted among men the truth and the holy teaching which surpasseth the wit of man, and fixed it firmly in their hearts, not as any man might imagine, by sending (to mankind) a subaltern, or angel, or ruler, or one of those that direct the affairs of earth, or one of those who have been entrusted with the dispensations in heaven, but the very Artificer and Creator of the Universe Himself, by Whom He made the heavens, by Whom He enclosed the sea in its proper bounds, Whose mysteries all the elements faithfully observe, from Whom the measures of the courses of the day received the means to keep them, Whom the moon obeys as He bids her shine by night, Whom the stars obey as they follow the course of the moon, by Whom all things are ordered and bounded and placed in subjection, the heavens and the things that are in the heavens, the earth and the things that are in the earth, the sea and the things that are in the sea, fire, air, abyss, the things that are in the heights, the things that are in the depths, the things that are between the two. Him He sent unto them. Was He sent, think you, as any man might suppose, to establish a sovereignty, to inspire fear and terror? Not so. But in gentleness [and] meekness has He sent Him, as a king might send his son who is a king. He sent Him, as sending God; He sent Him, as unto men; He sent Him, as Savior, as using persuasion, not force: for force is no attribute of God. He sent Him, as summoning, not as persecuting; He sent Him, as loving, not as judging. For He will send Him in judgment, and who shall endure His presence? {The scribe wrote here: “I found a break like this in my copy of what is an extremely ancient document”.} [Dost thou not see] them thrown to wild beasts that so they may deny the Lord, and yet not overcome? Dost thou not see that the more of them are punished, just so many others abound? These look not like the works of a man, they are the Power {*Dunamis*} of God; they are proofs of His presence {Gk. *parousia*}. {The *Parousia* is thus the “Coming”, not of a “mere man” (Jesus), but of the Dunamis of God Himself, both in creation and redemption.}

God was already known to pagans before His coming

8. For what man really doubted what God was, before He came? {This implies salvation can be achieved through the unregenerate mind without Christian conversion.} Or dost thou accept the empty

and nonsensical statements of those pretentious philosophers: of whom some said that God was fire (they call that God, whereunto they themselves shall go), and others water, and others some other of the elements which were created by God? And yet if any of these statements is worthy of acceptance, any one other created thing might just as well be made out to be God. Nay, all this is the quackery and deceit of the magicians; and no man has either seen or recognized Him, but He revealed Himself. And He revealed (Himself) by faith, whereby alone it is given to see God. For God, the Master and Creator of the Universe, Who made all things and arranged them in order, was found to be not only friendly to men, but also long-suffering. And such indeed He was always, and is, and will be, kindly and good and dispassionate and true, and He alone is good. And having conceived a great and unutterable scheme He communicated it to His Child alone. For so long as He kept and guarded His wise design as a mystery, He seemed to neglect us and to be careless about us. But when He revealed it through His beloved Child, and manifested the purpose which He had prepared from the beginning, He gave us all these gifts at once, participation in His benefits, and sight and understanding of (mysteries) which none of us ever would have expected.

The immortal Dunamis (the Son of God) was the atonement for sins

9. He thus knew all things, in respect of dispensation, in Himself with the Child, as long as He permitted us during the former time to be borne along by disorderly impulses as we desired, led astray by pleasures and lusts, not at all because He took delight in our sins, but because He bore with us, not because He approved of the past season of iniquity, but because He was creating the mind of righteousness, that, being convicted in the past time by our own deeds as unworthy of life, we might now be made deserving by the goodness of God, and having made clear our inability to enter into the kingdom of God of ourselves, might be enabled by the Power {*Dunamis*} of God. And when our iniquity had been fully accomplished, and it had been made perfectly manifest that punishment and death were expected as its recompense, and the season came which God had ordained, when henceforth He should manifest His goodness and Power {*Dunamis*}, as the single Love of the exceeding great kindness of God, He hated us not, neither rejected us, nor bore us malice, but was longsuffering and patient, and so accounting took upon Himself our sins, and Himself parted with His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but His righteousness would have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God? O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation, O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in the Righteous One, and the righteousness of One should justify many that are iniquitous! Having then in the former time demonstrated the inability of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed a Savior able to save even creatures which have no ability, He willed that for both reasons we should believe in His goodness and should regard Him as nurse, father, teacher, counselor, physician, mind, light, honor, glory, strength and life, to have no concern for clothing and provision.

Physical death is not real, and God is the eternal fire which will punish the wicked

10. This faith, if thou also desirest, apprehend first full knowledge of the Father. For God loved men for whose sake He made the world, to whom He subjected all things that are in ... [the earth?], to whom He gave reason and mind, whom alone He permitted to look up to him, whom He created after His own image, to whom He sent His only begotten Son, to whom He promised the kingdom which is in

heaven, and will give it to those that have loved Him. And when thou hast attained to this full knowledge, with what joy thinkest thou that thou wilt be filled, or how wilt thou love Him that so loved thee before? And loving Him thou wilt be an imitator of His goodness. And marvel not that a man can be an imitator of God. He can, if God willeth it. For happiness consisteth not in lordship over one's neighbors, nor in desiring to have more than weaker men, nor in possessing wealth and using force to inferiors; neither can any one imitate God in these matters; nay, these lie outside His greatness. But whosoever taketh upon himself the burden of his neighbor, whosoever desireth to benefit one that is worse off in that in which he himself is superior, whosoever by supplying to those that are in want possessions which he received from God becomes a God to those who receive them from him, he is an imitator of God. Then, though thou art placed on earth, thou shalt behold that God liveth in heaven; then shalt thou begin to declare the mysteries of God; then shalt thou both love and admire those that are punished because they will not deny God; then shalt thou condemn the deceit and error of the world; when thou shalt perceive the true life which is in heaven, when thou shalt despise the apparent death which is here on earth, when thou shalt fear the real death, which is reserved for those that shall be condemned to the eternal fire that shall punish those delivered over to it unto the end. Then shalt thou admire those who endure for righteousness' sake the fire that is for a season, and shalt count them blessed when thou perceivest that fire [The scribe marked a lacuna here and wrote: "Here too the copy had a break".]

The revelation of the Logos is ongoing in Nicolaus' circle

11. Mine are no strange discourses nor perverse questionings, but having been a disciple of Apostles {viz. in some earlier incarnation as Nicolaus the deacon?} I come forward as a teacher of the Gentiles, in respect of the traditions handed down to those who have become worthy disciples of the ministers of truth. For who that has been rightly taught and has been regenerated by the loving Word does not seek to learn distinctly the lessons revealed openly by the Word to the disciples; to whom the Word appeared and declared them, speaking plainly, not perceived by the unbelieving, but relating them to disciples who being reckoned faithful by Him were taught the mysteries of the Father? For which cause He sent forth the Word, that He might appear unto the world, Who being dishonored by the people, and preached by the Apostles, was believed in by the Gentiles. This Word, Who was from the beginning, Who appeared as new and yet was proved to be old, and is engendered always young in the hearts of saints, He, I say, Who is eternally to-day accounted a Son, through Whom the Church is enriched and grace is unfolded and multiplied among the saints, grace which confers understanding, which reveals mysteries, which announces seasons, which rejoices over the faithful, which is bestowed upon those who seek her, even those by whom the pledges of faith are not broken, nor the boundaries of the fathers overstepped. {There are six occurrences of the Greek verbal root *phan-*, meaning "be manifest, experience an epiphany", in the preceding five sentences. These occurrences are underlined. This is a significant word for Dynamic Monarchians as the Dunamis was believed by them to have descended on "the mere man" Jesus at the "Epiphany" (same verbal root), viz. at his baptism.} Whereupon the fear of the law is sung, and the grace of the prophets is recognized, and the faith of the gospels is established, and the tradition of the apostles is preserved, and the grace of the Church exults. If thou grieve not this grace, thou shalt understand the discourses which the Word holds by the mouth of those whom He desires when He wishes. For in all things, that by the will of the commanding Word we were moved to utter with much pains, we become sharers with you, through love of the things revealed unto us.

The Tree of Life is the Tree of Gnosis from which Eve may eat uncorrupted

12. Confronted with these truths and listening to them with attention, ye shall know how much God bestoweth on those that love (Him) rightly, who become a Paradise of delight, a tree bearing all manner of fruits and flourishing, growing up in themselves and adorned with various fruits. For in this garden a tree of Knowledge {Gnosis} and a tree of Life hath been planted; yet the tree of Knowledge {Gnosis} does not kill, but disobedience kills; for the scriptures state clearly how God from the beginning planted a tree of Life in the midst of Paradise, revealing Life through Knowledge {Gnosis}; and because our first parents used it not genuinely they were made naked by the deceit of the serpent. For neither is there Life without Knowledge {Gnosis}, nor sound Knowledge {Gnosis} without true Life; therefore it is planted with each in proximity to the other. Discerning the force of this and blaming the Knowledge {Gnosis} which is exercised apart from the truth of the injunction which leads to Life, the apostle says, Knowledge {Gnosis} puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (I Corinthians 8. 1.) {Nicolaus thus explains away, to his own satisfaction, Paul's condemnation of Gnosis, as used, in Paul's day, to excuse the eating of foodstuffs sacrificed to idols.} For the man who supposes that he knows anything without the true Knowledge {Gnosis} which is testified by the Life, is ignorant, he is deceived by the serpent, because he loved not Life; whereas he who with fear recognizes and desires Life plants in hope expecting fruit. Let your heart be Knowledge {Gnosis}, and your Life true reason, duly comprehended. Whereof if thou bear the tree and pluck {this word is defective in the MS} the fruit, thou shalt ever gather the harvest which God looks for, which serpent toucheth not, nor deceit infecteth, neither is Eve corrupted, but is held to be virgin, and salvation is set forth, and the apostles are filled with understanding {as if the apostles themselves might be considered ignorant without Gnosis}, and the Passover of the Lord proceeds forward {viz. presumably forward on to the fruitful feast of the Rosalia, or "Pascha Rosata", of the founder Nicolaus, about the time of Pentecost, as evidenced by the reference earlier to plucking the fruit, and to wax-tapers in the succeeding phrase, the myrrh tree of Myra being a source of oil and wax}, and the wax-tapers are gathered together, and [all things] are arranged in order, and as He teacheth the saints the Word is gladdened, through Whom the Father is glorified, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Supplementary Information on the Councils of the Arian Age

From

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I have made only one amendment to the text of this admirable historical review of the Councils of the Arian age, and that is to substitute for the over-generous words "orthodox" and "orthodoxy" the more precise terms "anti-Arian" or "anti-Arian party" and "anti-Arianism". The reason should be obvious in light of the nature of the doctrines and creeds of the various anti-Arian parties examined *supra*.

Ibid., pp. 598-601 THE COUNCILS OF THE ARIAN AGE.

"Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, promulged his heresy about the year 317. He almost instantly drew disciples, and, after a very short period, numbered among his followers seven hundred

devoted virgins, twelve deacons, two bishops, and the intimate friend, afterwards the biographer, of Constantine. The emperor, in some official documents, did his utmost to represent the controversy between Arius and his opponents as a dispute “about the most pitiful trifles;” and a council of one hundred Libyan and Egyptian bishops having, in 320, been summoned to meet at Alexandria to decide it, he sent a bishop who was in his confidence to preside, and to attempt a compromise between the belligerents. But the council condemned Arius and deposed him from his office. The heresiarch retired to Palestine, and, in a remarkably short time, made so many disciples as to be able to stand at bay against both condemnation and deposition. His followers convoked the council in Bithynia, and succeeded in influencing all its decisions in his favor. Arius was pronounced orthodox, and restored to communion; the proceedings of the council of Alexandria were condemned and circular letters were addressed to bishops at a distance, requesting them to recommend the decisions of Bithynia to the churches in Egypt. Council was now committed against council. One portion, though a small one, of the clergy, stood as deeply pledged in favor of Arius, as the majority did against him. A more suitable opportunity for Constantine making a first great experiment in ecclesiastical legislation could not have occurred. He affected to see the peace of the church in danger, and resolved instantly to adopt the bold measure of convoking, by his imperial authority, an ecumenical or general council, the decrees of which should possess the definitive authority of a rule of faith.

“The council of Nice was held in the year 325, and consisted of three hundred and eighteen bishops, besides a large number of presbyters. Constantine summoned it exactly as if it had been a civil assembly, acting overtly in his own name, and in virtue of his authority as emperor. If he consulted ecclesiastics, it was only to avail himself of their information, and neither to obtain their advice nor to employ their influence, much less to recognize the authority which they, and they only, had been used to exercise in the convoking of ecclesiastical assemblies. His act was the creating of an altogether novel imperial prerogative, and constituted the consummation, or principal and most effective part, of the great achievement of uniting church and state. His summons was acknowledged to be authoritative. All obeyed it more or less from regard to his favor or apprehension of his resentment. Whoever stood committed as either the partisans or the opponents of Arius, hastened to Nice, that they might obtain a victory, or might avert proscription by succumbing to the emperor; and others, who had no stake in the Arian controversy, were, in a painful number of instances, animated by the base ambition of clerical preferment, or the love of imperial largesses. Some were provided, at the emperor’s cost, with conveyances to the place of rendezvous; most or all, while there, were maintained free of expense; many were entertained at the imperial table; and, excepting the small minority who became condemned or suspected, all were loaded with the money of the state, or sunned in the rays of court favor and patronage. The council, all things considered, made a truly noble defense of anti-Arianism; though they grievously sullied it, and rendered it the remote cause of many a prolific evil, by achieving it under the shadow of the imperial eagle, and under alliance with the Roman legions. The council, led on by the celebrated Athanasius, deposed Arius, condemned his opinions, and drew up what they intended to be an inexpugnable anti-Arian creed. Constantine immediately ratified the council’s decrees, commanded them to be received by all the churches, drove Arius and some bishops who adhered to him into banishment, and decreed the punishment of death against all persons who should read or possess any Arian writings.

“Constantine appears to have been actuated, in all his conduct relating to the Nicene council, by motives of mere worldly policy; and, so far as he had any definite notions or possessed a positive creed, was probably an Arian at heart. He, at all events, soon became, it not avowedly opposed to anti-Arianism, at least coldly affected toward it, and willing, perhaps desirous, to see it prostrated, or at least buffeted and humbled, by the partisans of Arianism. In 328, or only three years after convoking the council of Nice, he recalled Arius from banishment, and declared him to have been unjustly condemned. Athanasius, the leader of the anti-Arian party at Nice, had then become bishop of Alexandria, and refused, though commanded by the emperor, to restore Arius to his office as presbyter. Constantine, finding from Athanasius’ contumacy that he had invested the anti-Arian clergy with powers which they might incline to wield less according to the variations of his caprice than according to their own opinions or convictions, authorized Eusebius of Nicomedia and other Arian leaders to brandish against them weapons akin to their own, and to make a possible reprisals in the way of condemning and proscribing them, and of making them obnoxious to persecution. Commotions and temporary local anarchies were the consequence. The emperor could think of extinguishing the conflagration he had kindled, only by convoking another council, and ordering the entire affair of Arius to be rejudged. He, accordingly, convened, in 335, the council of Tyre; which dealt with that of Nice exactly as the council of Bithynia had dealt with that of Alexandria. All the decrees of Nice respecting Arius were condemned; decrees solemnly reinstating him and his followers in communion, and in the enjoyment of all their ecclesiastical privileges or offices, were adopted; and Athanasius, the champion of anti-Arianism, was accused of the foulest crimes, compelled to appear virtually as a prisoner, tried, condemned, and handed over to the civil power to be banished into Gaul. Not only did Constantine convoke this inglorious council, but he commissioned one of his officers to overawe it, or to protect it against tumults within itself, by a body of the imperial guards. The proceedings were those rather of a lawless mob, or of a company of bandits, than of an assembly of divines; and they would, to all appearance, have terminated in the open murder, or, at least, the serious maltreatment, of Athanasius, had he not been rescued and subsequently protected by a military force.

“Athanasius appealed from the council of Tyre to Constantine, and desired to have its proceedings reviewed in the imperial presence. Eusebius, who had been the leader in the council, appeared, along with other bishops, at Constantinople. The emperor heard both parties, examined all the decrees, investigated the grounds on which they had been adopted, and decided to fiat the deeds of the council, and to depose and banish Athanasius. He continued all the transactions at Tyre, and commended the bishops as wise and good men. The people of Alexandria having exclaimed against the banishment of Athanasius, and excited tumults to demand his return, Constantine denounced them as madmen and traitors, and repeated his confirmation of the Tynan decrees. He soon after, in 336, invited Arius to Constantinople, and ordered the bishop of the capital to patronize and promote him. But Arius did not live to reap the favors designed for him; and he was soon followed to the long last home of the oppressors and the oppressed by the prime mover of the horrible events and the rapid alternations of truth mid error which had begun to sweep over the church — Constantine himself.

“The empire was divided among three brothers — Constantius, Constantine, and Constans; the east being assigned to the first, and the west to the two latter. Constantine, in whose territories

he was exiled, sent home Athanasius from banishment; but he had no power to protect him in the east, and he did not live long to offer him a refuge even in the west. Constantius from the first was the partisan of the Arians, and Constans was equally the partisan of the anti-Arian party; and the former established Arianism throughout the one half of the empire, while the latter established anti-Arianism throughout the other. Their father had vacillated between the two creeds, and had favored them by turn; but he bequeathed all his Arian predilections to Constantius, and all his anti-Arian predilections to Constans, and gave the brothers equal shares of power and territory to contest with each other the merits of their respective faith. Anti-Arianism was poised on the sword's point of Constans, and Arianism on the sword's point of Constantius; and on the wide sword of the vast Roman empire, the brothers fought, each for the honor in ascendancy of his party, till A. D. 350, when Constans became the victim of domestic sedition. During the whole twelve or thirteen years of their divided sway, the clergy of their respective 'establishments' opposed council to council, and curse to curse, with lusty and indefatigable zeal. The antagonist councils fulminated against each other with the roar and the regularity of responding batteries; and those of the Arians — simply because, the armies which supported them became the victors in the field — eventually silenced those of their opponents.

“Immediately after the death of the younger Constantine, Constantius summoned a council at Antioch; and, in adopting the measure, viewed the recall of Athanasius by the emperor of the west, as the act of aggression. The council of Antioch condemned anti-Arianism, placed an Arian bishop in Athanasius' see of Alexandria, and issued an Arian or semi-Arian confession of faith. Instant retaliation was made by the Julian council of Rome, — a council convoked in that city under the bishop Julius. This assembly vindicated Athanasius, condemned the Arians, and reenacted the decrees and confession of Nice.

“Constans and Constantius, worn out with the contest between their respective 'establishments,' made a demonstration to restore 'uniformity,' by means of a joint council, assembled at the junction of their territories. The place appointed was Sardica, a city of Moesia. But either the arrangements were faulty or the anti-Arian emperor grossly manoeuvred his brother; for when the council met, there were present about three hundred bishops from the west, and only seventy from the east. The latter angrily protested against such an unfairly constituted body proceeding to business, and withdrew to Philippopolis; justly regarding the assembly as *ex parte*, and, after their withdrawal, exclusively of the western church. The Sardicans condemned Arianism, cursed the Arians, vindicated Athanasius, re-confirmed the creed of Nice, and — in order to follow up their triumph and give stability to their cause — enacted several canons respecting the primacy of the see of Rome, which have ever since been quoted as the conciliar magna charta of the papacy. Some of these canons — or some which are quoted as Sardican — have been proved to be fabrications; but others, which are confessedly genuine, decreed most undue authority to the bishop of Rome, and greatly expedited the progress of the papal domination. The council of Sardica was, within a fraction, as numerous as that of Nice, and yielded little or nothing to it in 'venerableness' of character, or purity of motive. Why it is not esteemed 'general' no reason can be assigned, except that the bishops of the east, who were all Arians, withdrew from it, and held a separate council at Philippopolis. The latter assembly reversed all the decrees of Sardica, cursed Athanasius, Julius, and all the leaders of the anti-Arian party, and enacted a confession of faith somewhat ambiguous, but resembling on the whole that of Antioch. Athanasius was thus a

saint in the east and a demon in the west; anti-Arianism was the path to heaven in the western church, and the path to hell in the eastern; while cursing, delivering to Satan, proscription, and shedding of blood, upheld the common cause of the self-styled 'Catholic church' all over the civilized world.

"The Sardican council was a triumph; but it was a triumph won by chicanery, and destined to be of short continuance. Constantius was winning triumphs of another sort in the field of battle; and, eventually becoming the sole ruler of the empire, he rapidly united the churches of the west and the east, and achieved a general proscription of the Nicene faith. He found it good policy to sanction those decrees of Sardica which exalted the power of the Roman bishop; and by allowing the proud prelate to appoint two delegates, to correspond in importance to two deputed by Himself, he succeeded in organizing, A.D. 353, a council at Arles, which adopted his views, and Arianized the creed of all the churches of the west.

"The clergy of the western established church were now as facile in renouncing anti-Arianism as those of the eastern church had been after the council of Tyre, and especially after the death of Constantine. Many ecclesiastics, almost from the moment when Christianity was established, ceased to contend for doctrines, and, whatever their professions were, contended in reality for only secular honors, preferments, state endowments, large revenues, and authority and dominion. They of the west knew well the temper of Constantius. They were aware that, to depose one anti-Arian bishop in Constantinople, he had not scrupled to install an Arian at the expense of murdering 3150 citizens; and they were conscious how highly he was exasperated against themselves, in consequence of their fervid support of the prolonged contest carried on against him under Constans. When, therefore, the council of Arles, which assembled in their own territories, and was composed principally of their own party, yielded to his pleasure and declared against anti-Arianism, they generally made its decrees a pretext for either adopting Arianism, or taking shelter in compromise or in ignominious silence.

"Some, however, still openly contended for the faith of Nice, and most were known to be only temporizing. Constantius, therefore, convoked, in 355, a grand 'general council' at Milan, consisting of three hundred bishops from the west, along with a proportion from the east, and greatly excelling that of Nice in the impartial selection of its members, while it fully equaled it in both respectability and numbers! This council *ought* to have been anti-Arian. Greatly the majority of its members were bishops of the western establishment, who had often fought the battles of the Nicene creed against the Arians; and Eusebius, Dionysius, and especially the famed 'fathers,' Hilary and Lucifer, nobly sacrificed their worldly interests, and, in the very teeth of the emperor's influence and certain resentment, firmly led the debates in favor of Trinitarianism. But sycophancy to the monarch and the love of state favor and emoluments triumphed; a venal majority basely apostatized; and decrees were enacted condemning the Nicene confession, delivering to Satan all who should profess it, and lauding the Arians as the only advocates of truth. Sardica was in all justice the *second* 'general council;' and this of Milan, far above every pretension of Nice, was *the third*. Were the first of Constantinople, or what ecclesiastical historians call 'the second general council,' adopted, instead of Nice, as the test of ecumenicity, not only Milan and Sardica, but at least Tyre and Antioch, must also be received as 'general.' Now, every general council, according to the church of Rome, is

‘infallible;’ and, according even to many a self-styled Protestant, every general council till that of Chalcedon, or till the year 451, is of ‘ecclesiastical authority.’ Yet the councils of Tyre, Antioch, and Milan were all Arian, while that of Sardica was the conciliar parent of the Papacy! But why name these councils? There followed at least two others which, out of all comparison, excelled in every property of being ‘general,’ every council till the middle of the dark ages.

“The council of Sirmium, in 357, was for a season greatly more celebrated than that of Nice, even though it wanted the attraction of novelty, and was only one of a cluster which hung on one another’s skirts with rapid and constant succession. Sozomen says it consisted of Greeks and Latins, and appears to intimate that the numbers of the parties were nearly equal. The Latins, according to Binnius, amounted to more than three hundred; and, if the Greeks were in proportion, the entire assembly was between double and treble the bulk of the Nicene. The Sirmians issued *three* confessions of faith, the first evasive but unfavorable to anti-Arianism, the second rankly Arian, and the third denying our Lord’s supreme godhead, but affirming his ‘similarity’ to the Deity. The third confession, according to current phrase, was *semi*-Arian, and expressed the sentiments of that subdivision of the Arian party to which Constantius was attached. To issue three creeds, or even two, was unexampled conduct in a council; but what shall we think of three having been issued, which were discrepant in doctrine, which embodied the opinions of antagonist parties, and each of which was sanctioned or enforced by curses upon all persons who should believe the others? But the second creed was intended to destroy the first, and the third to destroy both the first and the second. Constantius disapproved the first as too favorable to anti-Arianism, and menaced ‘the fathers’ of the council with the confiscation of their revenues, if they did not rescind it, and enact another. They trembled for their money and secular honors, and, with excess of zeal, hastened in the strongest terms to anathematize what they had decreed. They now overshot the mark as far as they at first shot short of it, and displeased Constantius as much by their rampant Arianism, as they had formerly done by their sneaking anti-Arianism. But ‘the infallibles’ were nothing daunted; and, instructed by failure and experiment as to what would best please the royal fancy, fell again to creed-making, and were at last honored with imperial approbation, and declared to have sanctioned ‘the truth.’ They first made a miserable attempt to compromise Unitarianism and Christianity; they next boldly denied ‘the only Lord God who bought them;’ and not till they gilded mortal error with such pretenses as rendered it less vulnerable and more specious than when exhibited in its naked deformity, did they become, according to the principle of the church of Rome, ‘an infallible tribunal.’ Never was more ample display made of theological profligacy and unprincipled venality, than by the Sirmians; and never was proof on any subject clearer than that these properties resulted, in their case, from enslavement to the civil power.

“Liberius, the cotemporaneous bishop or ‘pope’ of Rome, subscribed the second confession of Sirmium; and, on being shortly afterwards sent into exile, he was succeeded in his office by Felix, a declared Arian. There were thus at the same moment two bishops of Rome, or a pair of ‘anti-popes,’ both of whom had abjured the Trinitarian faith. This fact is constantly adduced in controversy with Roman Catholics as conclusive evidence against the Romish pretensions to papal infallibility, and to an uninterrupted succession of anti-Arian Romish bishops. But why is not the cotemporaneous defection from the faith of the whole body of bishops at Sirmium, and the apostasy to Arianism of the entire ‘Catholic church’ of the world, — why are not these facts,

which occurred in less than forty years after the first civil establishing of Christianity, adduced as evidence equally conclusive against all the pretensions of every self-styled successor of the original ‘Catholic church,’ and against the alleged conservation of anti-Arianism and maintenance of sound standards of faith by means of civil influence?

“The council of Sirmium would seem to have set Arianism on the firmest basis, and to have honored it with a final triumph. But Constantius desired a demonstration in its favor, still more decided. He conceived the notion of two cotemporaneous councils, one in the east and another in the west, to concur in the same sentiments, and decree the same creed. He knew that anti-Arianism still smoldered throughout the western church; he was aware of having not alone awed previous councils by his authority, but influenced their decisions by the presence and votes of eastern bishops; and he now desiderated a council composed wholly of Latins or bishops of the west, to echo the voice of a consentaneous council, composed wholly of Greeks, or of bishops of the east. He, accordingly, summoned the two councils to meet in 359, the one at Ariminum and the other at Seleucia. The council of Ariminum was composed of, some say four hundred, others say six hundred bishops, who all belonged to the western church, and were the choicest supporters of anti-Arianism which the epoch could produce. Only about eighty were known to have been carried away in the general defection after the accession of Constantius, or had in any manner professed to adopt or abet Arianism. The emperor purposely convoked the boldest and best partisans of the Nicene creed, and excluded, as far as possible, from their assembly whatever might be pleaded as the influence of an Arian party. What he calculated on as the instrument of his power to mold them to his will, was simply and emphatically the influence of state patronage and domination. He knew well, from experience, the practical power and prevalence of clerical venality; and he had made frequent experiment, always with success, of the facility with which a royal threat to deprive men of benefices, or to deprive the church of the state’s support, could array a whole body of ecclesiastics against what they believed to be the truth. He relied, therefore, entirely on his personal influence as the dispenser of state favors, and confidently expected, without other aid, to make ‘the holy fathers’ decree the creed which he desired. His confidence was fully justified by the event. The council, foolishly flattering its hopes with the deceptive liberality and the seeming favorableness to anti-Arianism of the principles on which it was convoked, made a stand at the outset for the Nicene creed, and even proceeded to enact curses against the Arians. But it suddenly stopped, and careered fairly round, when at the utmost speed of its excited zeal Constantius gave ‘the fathers’ a single short hint as to certain consequences which would follow their persisting in anti-Arianism; and he had the satisfaction immediately to hear them *una voce*, cursing the faith of Nice, and confirming the third confession of Sirmium. “Here,” says Dr Greir, a living ecclesiastical writer of the church of Ireland, “Here the frailty of human nature was signally displayed; as this very council, (which had decreed for the Nicene standard of faith,) yielding to the imperial mandate, fully concurred in the Arian hypothesis.”

“The council of the Greeks, assembled at Seleucia, consisted of one hundred and sixty bishops. Though the eastern or Arian clergy had here an open field and no opponents, they were divided among themselves, and split into a variety of sub-arian sects. Leonas, the quaestor, attended as the emperor’s deputy, professedly to prevent tumult, but in reality to hold them in leading strings; and, on their becoming obstreperous, and proceeding to mutual recrimination and

violence, he angrily withdrew, telling them that his presence was not required to enable them to scold and quarrel. They agreed, by a majority, to re-enact the Arian creed of Antioch. But a numerous body, who knew that this was not the creed most popular at court, appealed to the emperor, and prayed him to review the council's decision. Constantius summoned before him a deputation from each of the sects or parties who had voted; and, using little ceremony, obliged them all to adopt and subscribe the third confession of Sirmium. He thus made his own authority supersede and compel that of the council, even after its sessions had been closed, and its decrees had been issued. He was as fond of 'uniformity' as any 'Christian (!) kings' who have succeeded him; and, not satisfied that simply Arianism should be the universal faith, he obliged first the Sirmians, next the Ariminians, and finally the Seleucians, to adopt the particular phasis of it which was impressed on his favorite 'confession.'

"Constantius probably felt that the irregularity of his conduct towards the Seleucians was injurious to 'uniformity,' and might afterwards be pleaded as a reason to impugn the established faith; and he, next year, 360, summoned another council of the Greeks to meet at Constantinople, and, without much management, elicited from them a regular confirmation of the third confession of Sirmium. He now had made, not alone Arianism, but that special modification of it which he best loved, universally triumphant; and had fully established it as the conciliar and standard faith of the whole Roman empire. But he lived little more than twelve months to mature or enjoy the fruits of his exploit. He died in 361, and was succeeded by his nephew, Julian, who is usually styled 'the Apostate.'

Ibid., pp. 709-711 THE COUNCILS OF THE ARIAN AGE. No. II.

"JULIAN was a persecutor. With such examples as those of his Christian uncles and grandfather before him, to say nothing of his heathen predecessors, he could not, unless by saving conversion to God or by extraordinary enlightenment, have learned the practice of toleration. But though an apostate and a pagan, he was the very impersonation of mildness, compared to either the Arian Constantius, or the anti-Arian Constantine and Constans. His first act was to proclaim limited religious liberty. He would have no civil establishment of religion; and while he upset that of the Christians, or, as they then were, the Unitarians, he forbore to plant another in its place. He revoked all the prescriptions of both Constans and Constantine, and recalled to civilized homes the crowds of persecuted beings whom they had sent into exile. The Donatists, or anti-Arian Dissenters, banished by Constans, and the Trinitarians, or quondam members of the Catholic church, banished by Constantius, alike heard the trumpet which proclaimed Julian emperor, as the ancient Jewish captives heard the trumpet of the year of jubilee. How grievous a libel was the church of Constantine upon Christianity, when it rendered *Christian princes* such monsters, that the accession of even an apostate and a heathen to royal power, was an event of mercy to oppressed thousands of the people of God!

"The anti-Arian party rallied on the return of their leaders from exile, and, for the first time since the epoch of Sardica, were able to convene a council which adhered to the faith of Nice. Athanasius, immediately after Julian's succession, rose from long continued proscription, and summoned a council to meet in his own city of Alexandria. This assembly anathematized the

councils under Constantius, and decreed the resuscitation of the Nicene confession.

“Julian survived Constantius only twenty months, and was succeeded, in 363, by Jovian, who, in his turn, lived to rule the empire little more than half a year. Jovian was by profession a Christian, and presumed to be friendly to a civil establishment of Christianity. But as it was imperfectly ascertained to what creed he felt attached, a most inglorious rivalry occurred among parties to secure his favor, obtain possession of the restored benefices, and become the lords of the ascendant, and the persecutors of opponents. No party could conjecture who should be made *the church*, and who should be treated as “heretics” or Dissenters. Athanasius wrote to Jovian, and the most influential anti-Arian bishops, crowded his saloons, to bias him in favor of the Nicene creed; and so well did they succeed, or so well was he of his own accord disposed towards them, that they hoped to have carried the whole “ecclesiastical fortress” by a coup de main. A council was summoned to meet at Antioch. The anti-Arian party crowded thither to secure a triumph, and the Arians, alarmed at the appearances at court, ran to apostatize, or to trim their sails to the shifting wind. The council, though composed to a degree of bishops who had been leading partisans of Arianism, decreed unanimously for the confession of Nice. But a body of bishops in the country around Constantinople, who formed a particular *bed* of the Arian party, were more consistent; and, though prospects were against them, they declared in favor of their former creed, and importuned Jovian to adopt it. The emperor, if he disliked their theology, at least admired their consistency, and seems to have felt supreme contempt for both the conduct of the majority of Arians toward himself, and the conduct of the anti-Arian party under Constantius. He decided to dismiss all parties, and as far as practicable to show exclusive favor to none. He said, “I hate contention, and love those only who study peace,” and added, that “he would trouble none on account of their faith, and would show favor to such as became leaders in restoring order, and terminating contention.” Themistius the philosopher said sarcastically, regarding the competitions of parties to become Jovian’s established church, “the people worship, not God, but the purple.”

“Jovian was succeeded, in 364, by Valentinian and Valens, the former in the western empire, and the latter in the eastern. These two brothers were, in all ecclesiastical respects, nearly the counterpart of Constans and Constantius. Valentinian was anti-Arian, Valens was Arian; and each established in his own section of the empire, the party to which he was attached. Valentinian hardly required to confiscate the ecclesiastical edifices of the Arians. The great body of the clergy had abjured the confession of Sirmium at the accession of Jovian; and when Valentinian endowed the anti-Arian party, few remained to protest against his act, or to be excluded from its pecuniary benefits. But so many as continued attached to Arianism, he allowed not only to live unmolested, but to retain possession of their churches.

“Valens was of a less easy temper. He at first simply declared in favor of Arianism, and evinced no disposition to persecute its opponents. But the anti-Arian party suddenly exasperated him by the proceedings of one of those nurseries of mischief, and hotbeds of corruption, — the councils. They craved leave to hold a council at Lampsacus, in order, as they alleged, to amend and settle the formularies of their faith. Valens had already tolerated a council at Illyricum, which simply re-enacted the Nicene creed, and conducted itself with propriety; and, conceiving that the proposed council at Lampsacus was designed to act with similar propriety, he readily

gave permission for its being held. But the Lampsacians, after holding sessions during two months, commenced to hurl impotent anathemas against all Arian bishops, and to pronounce sentence upon them of deposition from their sees. Valens was justly enraged, and instantly retaliated. He convoked a council of Arians, who responded to the curses of Lampsacus, and sentenced the anti-Arian bishops to deposition; and, having power all on his side, he fiated the council's decrees, and carried its sentence into execution. If the anti-Arian party were persecuted, they could blame only their own absurd and mischievous proceedings. Valens showed them a heathen sort of mercy which, all unprincipled though it was, excelled any kindness they would have shown to their opponents: he gave them all, including the bishops who had voted at Lampsacus, an opportunity to subscribe the Arian confession, and retain possession of their benefices; and not till they declined his offer, did he depose any or send them into banishment. A few having preferred consistency to apostasy, he construed their rejection of his clemency as hurling defiance at his power, and as evincing malignant contumacy; and commenced violent persecutions against the anti-Arian party, causing some to be whipped, some to be imprisoned, multitudes to be fined, and not a few to be put to death. The Arian bishops were constantly the advisers, and often the executioners of his cruelty; and they appear never to have forgotten, that had the Lampsacians gained the ascendancy, they themselves would have suffered all which they counseled to be indicted on their opponents. Valens pursued his sanguinary policy till his death, which occurred in 378.

“Gratian, the son of Valentinian, succeeded both his father and his uncle in the empire; and, after the death of the latter, he recalled all the anti-Arian party of the east who had been sent into banishment, and restored the deposed bishops to their sees. Theodoret says, he drove the Arians, as if they had been wild beasts, out of all the churches. But Socrates and Sozomen say that, excepting the Manichaeans and two other small sects, he tolerated all bodies of professing Christians, and protected them, by a special law, in the possession of their churches and public celebration of their worship. No council of note was held during Gratian’s reign.

“Theodosius, usually styled the Great, succeeded to the empire in 379. He became for anti-Arianism all and more than all that Constantius was for Arianism. The creed of Nice was propagated by him, and made universally triumphant, exactly as the creed of Sirmium had been by Constantius. He banished, imprisoned, and murdered men, and pillaged, destroyed, and confiscated churches, till he deprived Arianism of “a local habitation” and he convoked councils, dictated their decrees, and fulminated the thunders of their anathemas, till he deprived it almost of “a name.” This man of violence is a greater hero with many historians, and a higher object of panegyric, than even Constantine. Simply because he exterminated Arianism with the sword, or at least drove it by bloody violence to a skulking refuge among the unconquered Goths and Vandals, he is honored, in all the rolls of “ecclesiastical authority,” as the second human being who presided in, that object of a dark world’s supreme veneration — “a general council.” Though the council which, in 381, he convoked at Constantinople, consisted of only 160 bishops, and was in all respects inferior to upwards of a score of those which were held during the fifty-seven years interval from that of Nice, yet it is unanimously declared by the church of Rome, the church of England, and some other parties, to have been “the second general council,” and to have completed the work of Nice in “settling” or “defining” the anti-Arian faith on doctrines respecting the Godhead. We shall reserve a sketch of this assembly as

the subject of a separate paper.

“The councils of the fourth century, or all which were either summoned or patronized by the emperors, were the mere machinery of state policy, and served alike the purposes of the anti-Arian party and the heterodox. Never were there more awful instruments than they of theological profligacy, blasphemous daring, and subjugation of principle to frontless venality. Jortin reckons their number to have been *forty-five*, thirteen of which were anti-Arian, fifteen Arian, and seventeen semi-arian, or similar, at its conclusion, to Sirmium. He reckons only such, however, as had pretensions to being “general,” or were remarkable for influence or number!. The real total of councils, during the fourth century, *is ninety-one*; and, excluding a few which did not discuss the Arian question, they were divided as to their support of creeds, in nearly the proportions of the “forty-five” of Jortin.

“A fouler libel on Christianity than the history of these councils, was never written. Call them Christian assemblies, and you identify Christianity with wickedness and outrageous contradictions. A child may see that the councils, *per se*, did not influence one jot the cause of either Arianism or anti-Arianism. Parties and creeds vacillated, alternated, rose or fell, not as councils decreed, but as emperors patronized. Nothing depended on the doctrine of successive councils, of everything on the opinion of successive emperors. The public creed followed the doctrine of the court, and the decrees of councils followed the public creed. Emperors summoned councils, not to model or originate a confession, but to succumb to one which had been poised on the sword’s point, and to curse another which the sword had been unsheathed to hew to pieces. All the imperial councils were sustained at the state’s expense. The public roads were crowded with equipages employed in conveying ecclesiastics; many towns of the empire were emptied for a season of their inhabitants, to afford accommodation to influxes of bishops, imperial retainers, and protecting parties of the military; and the public coffers were exhausted of their contents, and sent a begging at the heels of Roman legions for the means of defraying the enormous costs of conciliar curses and clerical corruption.

Ibid., pp. 724-726 THE SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL.

“THEODOSIUS was a vigorous promoter of uniformity. He speedily extirpated by sword and faggot, almost every remnant of both Arianism and paganism from the empire. But he esteemed his benefactions to Christianity only half bestowed, till he should bring to light, and persecute to destruction, all minor departures from the anti-Arian faith. He wrote from Thessalonica to the sects in Constantinople, — sects not in separation from one another, but in joint communion with the established or ‘Catholic’ church — to enjoin “that they should be all of the same religion as Damasus, bishop of Rome, and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, and that all should worship a trinity of persons in the Godhead, as consubstantial in nature, and equal in honor;” and he added, that whoever should disobey his injunction, would be treated as heretics, and exposed to excommunication and infamy, and subjected to condign and summary punishment.

“This fulmination of the emperor was directed principally against the Macedonians. These were a rising sect who pleaded the equal Godhead of the Father and the Son, but denied the personality of the Holy Ghost, representing him as simply a divine energy diffused throughout

the universe; and in consequence of adroitly turning into ridicule the Nicene dogma respecting one person of Godhead's procession from another, they made many disciples among the anti-Arian party, while, through the subtleness of their views, they occupied vantage ground in dealing with the Arians. Their creed was exceedingly erroneous; yet while as sound as the Nicene respecting the Father and the Son, it possessed a less assailable, though a destructive blemish respecting the Holy Ghost. "The procession of a person" was a notion obnoxious to philosophy and right reason, and could be palliated by the mistaken exposition of only one text of scripture; but "a divine energy diffused through out the universe," was a notion fitted to mystify, and was plausibly advocated by the adduction of several texts. The Macedonians, in consequence, bade fair to supplant the Nicenians; and in all probability, they would speedily, as to numbers, respectability, and array of clerical power, have become 'the Catholic Church,' had they not been checked and "extirpated," by "a solemn league" of the endowed clergy with the imperial power. Macedonius, their founder, who, as bishop of Constantinople, stood at the head of the eastern church, was obnoxious to both the Arian emperors and the anti-Arian. He was condemned and deposed by the council of Constantinople in 360, and sent into exile by Constantius; and he shared none of the clemency which that emperor's anti-Arian successors extended to his Nicene fellow-sufferers. Macedonianism was alike offensive to the followers of Nice and the followers of Sirmium; and next to the suppression of Arianism and Paganism, it became the prime object of the churchman's curse, and the courtier's crusade, under "the golden reign" of Theodosius.

"The celebrated council convoked against this heresy, passes under two misnomers: it is usually called, "the Second General Council," and "the *first* council of Constantinople." We saw in a former sketch that it was upwards of the twentieth or thirtieth General Council; and from having noticed at least two previous councils in Constantinople, we must infer it to have been at least the *third* held in that city. Rome's historians usually suppress whatever is unfavorable to their church's pretensions; and they design, by the two misnomers in the case of the council against the Macedonians, to bring that assembly and the council of Nice into immediate juxtaposition, and to obliterate, as far as practicable, all trace of the odious train of some fourscore conflicting councils which intervened.

"The Second General Council" — to adopt the current phrase — was held in Constantinople, A.D. 381. Only 150 bishops were present, or at least took part in the proceedings, or constituted the tribunal. To the 150 were added 36 who belonged to the Macedonians; but these were summoned and admitted, either for the sake of form, or more probably as culprits to take their trial; and they are never mentioned by historians as having formed a portion of the assembly.

"Theodosius convoked the council, and afterwards fiated its decrees, solely by his proper authority as emperor. "The holy fathers," in a letter addressed to himself, mention their having been convoked by him, and speak of his summons as their warrant for holding their sessions. Both Socrates and Sozomen attest the fact; and they add that the assembled bishops laid their acts at the emperor's feet, and desired only him to legalize and confirm them.

"Binnius says that Gregory Nazianzen was president. But had Gregory filled the office, his only act would, in all probability, have been to interdict the proceedings, and dissolve the assembly, as disgraceful to Christianity. He felt pious indignation at the position which the council

occupied, and holy contempt for the uproar and sycophancy and corruption which characterized its acts. The members, he says, “were a body of wasps or magpies,” and they “croaked or gabbled like cranes or geese.”

“The council, in its first canon, confirmed the Nicene creed, and cursed all who refused to use it as the symbol of their faith. They next condemned the doctrine of the Macedonians, and decreed an addition to the Nicene confession. After the words “the Holy Ghost,” they added “the Lord the Quickener proceeding from the Father, whom with the Father we worship and glorify, and who spake by the prophets;” and they cursed all who, having already subscribed the decrees of Nice, should refuse to adopt these additional words, as of equal authority, and as equally essential to the anti-Arian expression of the truth of God.

“Certain historians usually speak of this act in a manner highly characteristic. Dr. Grier says, “To this sentence, all the Christian churches in the world have in all ages given their assent, while, with grateful reverence, they have assigned to the bishops, who pronounced it, the second in order among the General Councils.” Now some “Christian churches” reject “the *procession* of the Holy Ghost” as an offensive invention of man, and regard “the procession from the Father,” which was authoritatively sanctioned at Constantinople, as an unscriptural and unphilosophical conceit, quite akin to “the procession from the Son,” which was invented by the Romish divines of the dark ages; and these churches think that by rejecting the concept, they hold the true personality of the Holy Ghost, and the equal divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit, with firmer tenure than either Conciliarists or Romanists, and do the doctrines respecting the Trinity the high justice of committing them to the issue rather of the simple expositions of scripture, than of the perplexing and self-discrepant definitions of philosophizing theology. Other “Christian churches,” while they receive the doctrine of “the procession of the Holy Ghost,” have no idea of “giving their assent” to the domineering and “cursing,” *and judicial* “sentence” of the council of Constantinople; nor, while they believe themselves indebted for an article of their faith, only to the instruction of scripture, have they any fancy to look “with grateful reverence” to *any* assembly of bishops, or to “assign” to that of Theodosius a better or holier character than was attested of it by its holy, evangelical cotemporary, Gregory Nazianzen. Dr Grier took altogether too high a flight when he spoke of the debt of “grateful veneration,” and of “assent,” which “all the Christian churches in the world,” owed, for an important doctrine in their creed, to “the Second General Council.”

“Dr Mosheim talks in the same style as Dr Grier. He says: “The council put a stop by its authority to the growing evil (of Macedonianism,) and *crushed* this rising sect before it had arrived at its full maturity. A hundred and fifty bishops who were present at this council *gave the finishing touch* to what the council of Nice had left imperfect, and *fixed* in a full and *determinate* manner *the doctrine of three persons in one God*, which is as yet received among the generality of Christians. This *venerable* assembly did not stop here; they *branded with infamy* all the errors, and *set a mark of execration* upon all the heresies that were hitherto known.” Now the manner in which “the venerable assembly” exercised “authority,” “crushed” sects, “branded with infamy,” and “set marks of execration,” was first to fire off a volley of *curses*, and next to let slip the blood-hounds of persecution. Instantly on finishing their “anathemas,” they laid them before the emperor, and prayed him to fiat and enforce them.

Church and state made common cause; and the church having cursed, the state was bound to kill. Theodosius immediately issued two edicts prohibiting the Macedonians and all the other condemned sects from assembling for religious service, confiscating their own places of worship and forbidding them to enter others, menacing punishment if they should preach or pray even under the open canopy of heaven, and ordering all magistrates, under pain of severe penalties, to place the contumacious under arrest.

“Many parties evaded the Constantinopolitan confession. Though made ultimately “full and determinate” by the power of the sword, the creed proved at first more flimsy and imperfect than the worst modern acts of parliament; and it offered ample arch-way to “the coach and six” of many a theological charioteer, who drove dashing through it, and laughed at both its canons and its curses. Theodosius dealt with the new difficulty like a true type of the popes of Rome. He imitated the conduct of Constantine toward the Donatists; and, finding that a council had failed to “define the faith,” he resolved to make “a full and determinate settlement” of his own. He convened the leaders of all parties, and ordered each to deliver to him a separate declaration of opinion; and, after receiving a mass of papers, he prayed or affected to pray to God, to discover to him which contained the correct statement of revealed truth. He then perused the whole, tore all to pieces except one, declared the paper of his choice to contain the true exposition of the Constantinopolito-Nicene creed, and issued a sanguinary edict to degrade, rob, imprison, or murder all who should not adopt it. Such were the worthy measures by which Theodosius made the cause of anti-Arianism triumphant, and which have procured for him “the grateful veneration” of millions, and induced them to hail him as “Theodosius *the Great*.”

““The second general council” ordained seven canons; the third of which is even more remarkable for discipline, than the first is for doctrine. By this third canon, the council decrees that the bishop of Constantinople, on account of that city being “New Rome,” shall rank next to the bishop of Rome. The primacy of the Roman see was here fairly recognized. Such Protestants, indeed, as admit “the ecclesiastical authority” of the council, feeling themselves hard pressed with this canon by the advocates of the papacy, contend that the primacy was one merely of rank or honor, and not of authority, and that it stood on the basis, not of apostolical succession from Peter, but of the metropolitical status of the city. But what avail these pleas? The very essence of them is a concession, if not of primacy *jure divino*, at least of primacy by right of ecclesiastical consent and conciliar decree — of the consent of the church styled “Catholic,” and of the decree of a council, declared to be “General” and admitted to be of “authority.” Concede such a primacy as this, and, to be consistent, you must, to say the least, send all your church canons for approval to Rome, and place the archbishop of Canterbury at the feet of the Roman pope. If even the patriarch of Constantinople was second to the Roman bishop, on what pretense can it be pleaded that “the primate of England” is his equal?

“The effect of the third canon of ‘the second general council,’ was to mature the two infant papacies of the East and of the West, which were created in embryo by Constantine. That emperor raised four bishoprics to a supreme rank over metropolitans, as he raised the latter over archbishops, and these again over suffragans. Two of Constantine’s supreme four were destined, in the course of the Mahommedan conquests, to become extinct; but while all were still in their glory, the two which eventually survived, were placed by the canon in the rank of “first” and

“second.” That which the canon declared “first,” became “the papacy” of the Western church; and that which it declared “second,” became “the primacy” or papacy of the Eastern.

“The bishops of the Western church refused at first to recognize “the second general council;” but, on finding it fiatd by the emperor, they were obliged to succumb. Nothing but the exploits of Theodosius in “enforcing” its decrees, rendered the council originally “general” and nothing but the same exploits, regarded through the medium of the success which they achieved in “extirpating” dissenters, has won for it the continued fame of “a general council” to the present hour. Not only were its members few in number; but they were partially selected, and in no sense included a representation of the general church. The bishops of the West wrote several letters and sharp protests against it to the bishops of the East, before its proceedings commenced; and, owing to its recognition of the Roman primacy, they probably never would have sanctioned it, had they not been compelled. They and the prelate of Rome are called, in their letters, “fellow-bishops;” and they owed it, in a great measure, to the “holy general council,” though in a still greater measure to the council’s imperial dictator, that they had so soon to acknowledge him as their master.

“A council of western bishops was held at Aquileia in the same year as the council of Constantinople. This was convoked by the emperor; and, acting wholly as his puppet, servilely responded to the council of the East. A circumstance to be remarked is, that it reported its decisions through the provincial civil magistrate, the prefect of Italy.

Ibid., pp. 790-793 “THE THIRD GENERAL COUNCIL.”

“FIFTY years elapsed between what the Romish and the Anglican churches call the second and the third general councils, the former having been convoked at Constantinople in 381, and the latter at Ephesus in 431. During the interval, upwards of sixty councils were held, some of which, as to both the number of members and the countries represented, were not less general than either “the second” or “the third.” More than the half, owing chiefly to the local prevalence of Donatism, were held in Africa, and presented little else than fulminations against dissenters, and invocations of the civil power to coerce and extirpate. Except to read a continuous and unvarying tale of cursing and intolerance, a tale almost wholly unrelieved by any other incidents than those of oppression and bloodshed, an examination of the sixty councils and upwards, affords no material for information or remark.

“The real, though not ostensible, occasion of the third general council, was the mutual personal jealousy of Nestorius and Cyril, arising out of a struggle to aggrandize their respective sees. The former was patriarch of Constantinople, the latter patriarch of Alexandria; and both were violent persecutors, and excessively ambitious. Their respective sees, along with those of Rome and Antioch, had been equally raised by Constantine I. to jurisdiction over metropolitans, as these had been raised to jurisdiction over archbishops and bishops; but while declared to be still equal in authority, those of Rome and Constantinople were constituted by “the second general council” respectively first and second in rank, while those of Alexandria and Antioch, followed jointly as third. Chrysostom, Nestorius’ predecessor, so improved his advantage, as to add three new provinces to his jurisdiction; and Nestorius, with greatly increased zeal, labored to acquire

similar power to what was eventually grasped by the bishops of Rome. Cyril yielded nothing to Nestorius in either diligence or ambition, and he toiled under the influence both of vexation that his see had lost ground, and of angry determination to take reprisals on the see of Constantinople. To depress the latter was to exalt his own; and as he could injure the tree only through its occupant, he directed his efforts against the person of Nestorius.

“The pretext on which he seized was that of heresy. Nestorius, more watchful against the encroachments of fatal superstition than most of his contemporaries, objected and inveighed against the term Theotokos, or “Mother of God,” which, in stupid idolatrous veneration, had begun to be generally applied to the Virgin Mary; and referring to “the flesh,” or human nature of Christ, as that alone which the Virgin “conceived,” he exclaimed, “How can I call that God which was once but two or three months old?” Cyril immediately sent to Nestorius what he called the only true exposition of the faith, — that “God was born according to the flesh, and that the Virgin Mary, having brought into the world what was both God and man, is the mother of God;” and he called upon Nestorius to adopt this exposition, and acknowledge his own sentiments to be heterodox. Nestorius retorted the charge of heresy on Cyril, declaring that Mary was in no sense “mother of *God*,” and could not be called more than “mother of Christ.” But he unhappily pushed his originally just distinction to so great a length as constructively to deny what is termed “the hypostatical union,” maintaining apparently that the two natures of Christ were so distinct and apart as to be two persons. Yet he erred chiefly in words; for he regarded “Christ” as truly and even emphatically *one*. Cyril had him now in his meshes, and spared no pains to have him speedily crushed. He found zealous partisans in the communities of monks, chiefly in consequence of their principal strength having existed in Egypt; now he only needed the support of the bishops of Rome and Antioch, in order to procure a general condemnation of Nestorius. He immediately sent messengers to Celestine of Rome, and John of Antioch, with copies of his own exposition and that of Nestorius, accompanied with every argument of flattery and adulation to induce their declaring against the latter. John disappointed him, and stood by Nestorius; but Celestine, partly imposed upon by a monk’s translation of Cyril’s letter, the language of which the Latin bishop did not understand, and partly manoeuvred by the terms of compliment and excessive deference which were addressed to him, became as willing and edgy a tool as Cyril could have desired. He summoned a council at Rome, condemned Nestorius as a heretic, pronounced him deposed from his bishopric, if he should not within ten days recant his sentiments, and committed the execution of his sentence to Cyril; commending the latter for his zeal in behalf of anti-Arianism, and, in return for the same compliment offered to himself, addressing him by the pompous pontifical title, — “*His Holiness*.”

““His Holiness,” Cyril, made the most of the Roman “bull.” He sent copies to the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem; and though the former had declared for Nestorius, he so awed them by the coalition between Celestine and himself, as to procure their joint advice with his own, that Nestorius, for the sake of preventing confusion and scandal, should quietly vacate his bishopric. Nestorius, instead of complying, appealed to a general council, which he on his own part, and Cyril on his, had, in anticipation of a mutual struggle, requested the emperor to convoke. But though Cyril had his measures concocted for the final appeal, he convened a council of his own, and procured from it a decree that Nestorius should be degraded. He next published his

exposition that Mary is “the mother of God,” and appended to it twelve curses against all persons who should not receive it as the symbol of anti-Arianism. Nestorius returned the curses, but despised the sentence of deposition, and trusting to the strength of his favor with Theodosius, renewed his appeal to a general council. Cyril took advantage of his sanguine confidence, undermining him with the emperor, using influence against him with the courtiers, and intriguing with such dexterity amongst the bishops as to reduce most of them under his own control. He finally succeeded, when the general council summoned by Theodosius had been convoked, to procure his own appointment as president; or, more properly, he manoeuvred to prevent the council from being either “general” or impartial, and succeeded in organizing in its stead a cabal of his own partisans, with himself at its head.

“Theodosius II. the emperor, issued summonses to bishops throughout the empire, and appointed Count Candidian to represent the imperial authority. Cyril was promptly at the place of assembly with the whole body of the Egyptian bishops, and as many of those of Asia as were favorable to his views. Neither the bishops of the West, nor those of the patriarchate of Antioch, could have been expected for some days after he arrived. But the former, though his partisans, were few in number; while the latter were both of large force, and zealous partisans of Nestorius; and when united to a considerable body of Nestorius’ own bishops already on the ground, they would present a front which Cyril might be scarcely able to penetrate. He hurried, therefore, to constitute a council of such bishops as he had around him, and in violation of all rule and decency, as well as in defiance of the remonstrances of the emperor’s representative and the protest of the bishops who were opposed to him, proceeded to business as if the legal number of members had been present. In one day his precious council pronounced sentence of deposition and anathema against Nestorius, and transacted all the real designs for which the general body had been summoned. This inglorious cabal of Cyril is the “holy” and “infallible” and “most sacred” thing, called in history “the third general council.” So literally was it a petty, personal, ex-parte cabal, that even Count Candidian and the bishops under the patriarch of Constantinople, refused to be present, all, except the creatures and personal partisans of Cyril, having protested and withdrawn the instant that “his holiness” declared against waiting for the Syrian and Latin members. Those who withdrew were sixty-eight in number, leaving Cyril with one hundred and sixty.

“The council’s precipitate proceedings occasioned one of the most extraordinary cursing-matches on record. John, patriarch of Antioch, arriving with twenty-six of his bishops, five days after it had deposed Nestorius, took post at the Ephesian inn, and thence at the head of an antagonist council, returned upon Cyril the compliments which had been paid to Nestorius. His council accused Cyril of having acted from the most malignant motives, and of having been the author of all the commotions which had recently agitated the peace of the church; and they summarily deposed him from his bishopric, and annulled the decisions of his cabal. Cyril’s party — or “the third general council” — immediately reassembled in Mary’s church, and, being now strengthened by the arrival of the Latins, confirmed their former proceedings. Count Candidian implored them to desist, and made strenuous efforts to reconcile and unite them to the party of John, but without effect. The two councils maintained the array of antagonist hosts, and from their respective positions, the one at St Mary’s and the other at the inn, fired off at each other volleys of condemnations and curses. Their quarrel was espoused by monks and

citizens, and spread from the two places of assembly to private dwellings and the public streets. Candidian vainly attempted to preserve the civil peace. Violence and clamor, sedition and blood, defiled the entire city. Nor was this signal feud of “the church militant” confined to Ephesus, but it sent the shouts of its war-cry throughout all the eastern provinces. “The bishops and people were so enraged against each other, that there was no passing with any safety from one province or city to another, because every one pursued his neighbor as his enemy, and without any fear of God revenged themselves on one another.”

“How the two councils would have terminated their contention, had they been allowed “ample scope and verge enough,” it is impossible to conjecture. Both sent repeated deputations to the emperor, each using its utmost skill to precipitate all the fury of the civil power upon the other. The two had decreed opposite doctrines as to *Mary* being the “mother of God,” and as to the conflicting expositions which Cyril and Nestorius had given of the union of Christ’s Godhead and manhood, and each appealed to the Nicene creed as the warrant for its decision, and invoked the emperor to fiat its decrees as the only true and scriptural statement of the faith. Theodosius was exasperated, as well he might, at their scandalous conduct, evincing as it did the most violent personal partisanship, the most unprincipled sacrificing of doctrine and sentiment to the intrigues of ambition, and the most reckless disregard of the concord of the church, the peace of the state, or the safety of human life. He declared against both councils, and sent notification that he would punish alike their respective leaders, and depose both Cyril and Nestorius. Cyril, however, was a master of intrigue, and managed, through the instigation of the Constantinopolitan monks, who were his creatures, and through a great ostentation on his own part of regret, moderation and holy zeal, to induce Theodosius to summon the two councils together, with the view of personally hearing and reviewing their debates. The emperor, in consequence, assembled the contending parties at Chalcedon, and heard with great patience their antagonist reasonings and respective appeals. But he was all the while a mere puppet of dexterous clerical manoeuvre. At the very moment when the Nestorian party had won decided advantage, and looked with confidence for a decision against their opponents, Theodosius suddenly departed, with the cabal of Cyril, to Constantinople, where he fiat, without modification, the decisions of the anti-Nestorians at Ephesus, proclaimed Cyril of Alexandria and Celestine of Rome to be the champions of the faith, and drove Nestorius into a miserable, lingering, fatal banishment in the midst of the Libyan wilderness.

“These proceedings of Theodosius rendered the cabal of Cyril at Ephesus “the third general council.” The imperial power alone decided what was the Catholic faith; for had that power been turned against Cyril, the antagonist creed would have been established, or had it, as seemed at one period most probable, been employed against both Cyril and Nestorius, neither creed would have been esteemed true. “The third general council,” though most stupidly and absurdly admired by many moderns, was held, among the ancients, and even among the incipient Romanists of Italy, at its true value. The Eastern church generally denounced it as characterized by fury, tyranny, blindfold malignity, perfidy towards man, and rebellion against God. Dionysius, who wrote in 527, and whose collection of the councils possessed the highest authority among the Latins, and most generally represented their opinions, entirely omitted to mention it, having clearly regarded it as either too disreputable or too defective in every requisite of an authoritative council to bear being noticed. Gennadius declared it guilty of

blasphemy; Isidorus accused it of seeking revenge, instead of seeking the truth; and even Candidian, the imperial minister, whose duty it was to have been neutral, and simply to have preserved the peace, could not forbear to describe it as an assembly of unprincipled rioters.

“The Eastern bishops, headed by John of Antioch, determinedly opposed the council’s, or rather the emperor’s decisions, for a series of years; and they were eventually reduced to obedience only by a vigorous process of deposition, confiscation, and civil violence against the more refractory. Theodosius published a law, based on a decree of the council, that whoever should embrace the opinions or employ the language of Nestorius, if ecclesiastics, should be expelled from their churches, and, if laymen, should be cursed and proscribed; and he caused this law to be executed with a vigor which, while it effectually set up the authority of the third general council in the Eastern Catholic church, suddenly made Nestorianism formidable as a system of dissent, diffusing it far and wide throughout and beyond the empire, and roughly nursing it into so durable a strength that it lived in force during every century of the middle ages, and survives in antiquated greatness till the present day.

“The acts or decrees of the council are separately not worth notice, though, viewed in connexion with the history of the council, they throw much light on the progress of papal error.

“The seventh or last canon ordained that the jurisdiction of bishops was inviolable. Though the jurisdiction as it then existed, was, not alone civil and secular, but altogether the creation of the state, the council pronounced it to be *jure divino*, or a jurisdiction of so sacred and sublimated a nature, that no power of man might dare to modify or infringe it. The state which created it might alter its own civil jurisdictions, but if it presumed to alter this — except indeed to fortify and aggrandize it — then, said the council, “*anathema sit!*” This decree was a main step to clerical independence of the civil power — that independence, or rather independent domination, which soon after made every priest an irresponsible tyrant, and which during a thousand years enthralled all Europe, and laid the prerogatives of princes and the liberties of nations bleeding and victimized at the feet of insulting priestcraft.

“The sixth act of the council decreed Cyril’s exposition against Nestorius to be the true faith, or the only correct transcript of either the doctrine of the Bible or the doctrine of the Nicene creed. Mary’s title, “the mother of God,” which had occasioned the whole Nestorian controversy, was in consequence decreed to be ascribed to her on pain of anathema. The foundation was thus laid, not alone for the hundred idolatries of the modern “Litany of Loretto,” but for all the spiritual worship of the Virgin and all the religious invocation of the saints which, along with the consequent belief in the mediation of creatures, constitute the main fabric of Romish superstition and “damnable heresies.” Whoever admits “a general council” to be infallible, or authoritative, or instructive, or otherwise than peculiarly fallible, can with no consistency challenge Romanists for calling Mary “queen of heaven,” “queen of angels,” “mother of the Creator,” “spouse of the Eternal Spirit,” and “tabernacle of the Trinity;” for he finds “the general council of Ephesus,” stamping the alleged seal of heaven, or the seal of the universal church’s approbation on these guiltiest expressions of idolatry, when it bowed to Mary as “the mother of God,” and uttered its thunders against all men as accursed heretics, who should confess her only as “the mother of Christ.”

“The decree in which the council enacted this blasphemy, was frightfully persecuting, and struck at the rights of private judgment more fatally than even at primitive spiritual worship. This decree ordained, that “whoever should compose, write, or utter any other faith than that of Nice,” as explained by themselves, or more properly by the exposition of Cyril, “should suffer the punishment of heretics, and, if ecclesiastics should be removed from their office, and if laymen, driven from communion.” Appeal to the word of God was essentially condemned; the rights of conscience were annulled; and all liberty destroyed of *believing* or *thinking* otherwise than according to conciliar decrees. Here was set up a rule of faith which vindicated positively every doctrinal abomination of the church of Rome. Popery follows all which was decreed at both Nice and Ephesus; it literally acts on the canon of the latter respecting the Nicene creed; and it carries out the principle on which the canon is based, to the reception of all and chiefly such things as general councils have ordained.

“But the most extraordinary proceeding of the Ephesian council appears in what are termed its “acclamations.” The sum of these was, “The one faith of Celestine, the one faith of Cyril, the one faith of the council, and the one faith of the whole world! To Celestine a second Paul, to Cyril a second Paul, the whole council gives thanks.” These insane cries were the council’s Amen, or confirmation to its doctrinal decisions. Celestine of Rome and Cyril of Alexandria were, with unblushing blasphemy, set up as *the rule of faith* to the council, to the whole world, and to all after ages. Need we wonder that “the mystery of iniquity” was so soon after developed in its mature horrors? Or can we fail to see that its “abomination of desolation” had already made the church “desolate,” — having robbed her of the charter of her salvation, the Bible, as her only appeal and guide, and shamelessly put the creature in the temple of the Creator, exalting it as lord of the conscience, and an object of spiritual adulation? “The Roman see,” says Socrates, writing respecting the period of the Ephesian Council, — “The Roman see as well as that of Alexandria, having transgressed the limits of the priesthood, has long degenerated into tyranny.” How real and terrible had this “tyranny” become, when it made such slaves of the whole “third general council,” that they decreed the faith and consciences of all the world to be dragged at the chariot wheels of Cyril and Celestine!”