

THE PELAGIAN HERESY: OBSERVATIONS
ON ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT

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PREFACE

This study concerns the Pelagian heresy: in a specific sense, its chronological development, but more generally its social and political background. The primary objective was to investigate a particular generation of people--those Romans who lived in the twilight days of late antiquity--and to determine how the events which shaped their existence related to Pelagius' career. As such the topic encompasses rather broad horizons. Hopefully, I have been relatively successful in approaching this breadth without too radically sacrificing depth.

Various people and institutions have aided me in the production of this work. I welcome the opportunity to thank them now. On a purely academic level, I am indebted to the members of my doctoral committee: Drs. Neil Hackett, Theodore Agnew, Paul Bischoff, Douglas Hale, and David Levine. Two institutions of higher learning have been instrumental for allowing me access to their libraries. To the library staffs at the United States Air Force Academy and the University of Colorado at Boulder, I wish to express my gratitude for their generosity of time and sources.

I am convinced, however, that the deciding factor in the production of any thesis is the encouragement and support of one's acquaintances, friends, and family. In this respect, I have been favored by a group of dear and remarkable people whose contributions have been varied. Two "role models" have suggested that it is possible to remain calm under pressure and surmount the frustrations which come with any complex production. To Dr. Hazel Barnes, Chairman of the Classics Department at the University

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A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

Certain titles have been abbreviated throughout the text. These works are as follows:

By Augustine:

De Civ. Dei De Civitate Dei
De Gestis De Gestis Pelagii
De Grat. Christi De Gratia Christi
De Pecc. mer. De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptis-
mo parvulorum
De pecc. orig. De peccato originali
De perf. just. De perfectione justitiae hominis
De Spir. et Lit. De Spiritu et Littera

By Jerome:

Dialog. ad. Pel. Dialogus adversos Pelagianos

In addition, there are miscellaneous references. Theodoret, Eusebius, Socrates and Sozomen all produced works which are called The Ecclesiastic History or Historia Ecclesiastica. They will be abbreviated herein as HE.

There are also numerous entries from the Theodosian Code or Codex Theodosii. These will be listed as CT.

Unless specified, all dates in the text refer to A. D.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The history of an idea is often a circuitous affair, all the more so if that idea is theological in nature. A case in point is the heresy which grew up around the person of Pelagius and culminated in the famous ecclesiastic duel between him and St. Augustine in the years immediately prior to 420 A. D. Pelagian attitudes have continued to surface from time to time, nagging reminders of an argument long since officially closed. The durability of Pelagius' fascination is in large measure due to the fact that he touched on one of the central issues of Christian dogma. At its most rudimentary level, Pelagianism is identified with a belief in human goodness and perfectability, as opposed to the Augustinian alternative: the inevitability of sin and the resultant need for divine Grace in effecting salvation. Although Pelagius' view was pronounced unacceptable by the Roman Church, the basic argument between the two viewpoints refused to retire quietly and permanently. Given the complexity of the issue, it will probably remain forever unresolved.

If Pelagius warrants attention as a theologian--and one modern scholar places him in the category of a "great and innovative" theologian¹--he is also interesting because his career spanned the event-filled days of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. He saw the triumph of Catholicism (aided by imperial fiat) against paganism and variant strands of Christianity. During travels throughout the Mediterranean world, he met, influenced, taught, and bickered with the most important people of

late antiquity. He watched barbarian encroachments and strained relations with Constantinople grow away at the dwindling political stability in the West. In short, Pelagius is a noteworthy figure from a noteworthy age.

There is, however, a major problem in approaching the Pelagian heresy. It is an extremely complex subject, at times discouragingly amorphous as a topic. It involved a variety of personalities, all dynamic individuals worthy of biographical elaboration. It produced torturous theological arguments. It covered great geographical scope. We could easily investigate its influence on Africa, Italy, Palestine, and Britain. It was influenced by secular developments and Church history alike. Any one approach is bound to do an injustice of some sort. To investigate each aspect of the heresy allows for breadth at the expense of depth. Yet a narrower focus cannot completely account for the heresy as an entire phenomenon. Perhaps it is the lesser evil to take the heresy as a social movement which illuminated the Roman Empire at a critical time of change and assimilation. On this basis, the study will resemble something of an anthology: interrelated essays focusing on the various contributing factors involved.

Chronologically we are working with about thirty-five years: the time from (roughly) 384, when Pelagius first appeared in Rome, to 418, when he disappeared from view. These dates are a logical choice in another respect. They overlap important social and political happenings under the Theodosian house. As for the topics we shall discuss, three are of primary significance. Each requires some elaboration as to the inherent problems and major questions we hope to clarify.

I. The Theological Argument. It goes without saying that we must elaborate the major debate between Pelagius and Augustine. St. Jerome must also be taken into account. In addition to the contribution he made to the theological debate, recent scholarship has attempted to cast Jerome,

rather than Augustine, as the initiator of the controversy.² This is a tenuous theory, and it is Augustine whose name is forever tied to the theological offensive which left Pelagius excommunicate. Yet the triad must be taken into consideration. Furthermore, we must look into Pelagius' possible motives for drafting his particular outlook. One of the ironies of this heresy was that Pelagius consistently maintained that he was defending orthodoxy against the menace of heterodox systems. If today's scholars are correct, Manichaeism was the primary culprit against which Pelagius labored: and this by using Augustine's earliest Christian treatise for quotations and logic.

Two complications must be kept in mind when we deal with the respective philosophies of Pelagius and Augustine. First, precisely what do we mean when we say "Pelagian" theology? In one sense, it is an inaccurate eponym. We would do better to term certain ideas "Caelestinian" or "Julian" after two admirers who took Pelagius' views to their logical and most radical conclusions. Pelagius himself espoused views far less eccentric; and yet Augustine addressed all three men within the context of the "Pelagian" heresy. Approximately half of Augustine's "anti-Pelagian" writings are directed at persons other than Pelagius. To focus on those Augustinian treatises which deal specifically with Pelagius is to truncate the Bishop's greater theological system of Grace. But the alternative is to expand our topic to unwieldy proportions.³

As a second complication, the writings of each disputant cannot be said to represent a unified system of thought. More often than not they were reactions to a given situation. For many years Pelagius remained a respectable Churchman (so respectable, in fact, that Augustine could praise him for his work⁴). But as the furor of ecclesiastic brawling intensified, Pelagius modified his theology to suit the occasion and the

audience. What he said to the Eastern bishops was different from what he told Westerners. Which was "Pelagian"? For his part, Augustine also did some timely redaction. The African bishop was consistently embarrassed by the fact that Pelagius borrowed freely from De Libero Arbitro: Concerning the Free Will. This was an early work which reads as authentically "Pelagian" as anything the heretic himself produced. Augustine later clarified his own views, but only after confused parishioners asked for his reaction to Pelagius. In short, we are working with two philosophies which emerged piecemeal, at least partially as reactions to external circumstances.

Because of these two characteristics, it will be beneficial to define very precisely what we intend to encompass in the expression "Pelagian" heresy and literature. Fortunately, we can establish relatively precise perimeters to that definition. The theological issue crystallized rather quickly after 411 and for seven years continued until it was finally resolved by papal and imperial intervention. It is true that pockets of Pelagian sympathizers continued to exist for some time, undeterred in their choice of philosophies. But Pelagius himself does not figure importantly following 418. We will also concentrate on the treatises involved in this phase of the controversy. These will be elaborated below.

II. The Relation between the Eastern and Western Churches. Pelagius was received in strikingly different manners by the Eastern and Western Churches. He fared well in the East. Greek ecclesiastics supported him against the attacks of Augustine, Jerome, and Orosius--Westerners all. Furthermore, while Rome condemned him as heretical in 418, the East waited for more than two decades to follow suit, and then only when Pelagianism had become grafted onto another and more objectionable

heresy. And still the heresy was not eradicated. It lingered for a century longer in a modified form known as semi-Pelagianism. In 539 the Council of Orange, reiterating emphatically Augustine's logic, put the final end to the heresy. But once again it was the West which was concerned, not the East. Part of this, of course, can be explained on the basis that Eastern theologians usually differed with their Western counterparts in perspective and emphasis. But we hope to demonstrate that a growing hostility between the two sections of the Empire, in religious and other matters, was partially responsible for the different reception Pelagius enjoyed. This will be told almost entirely from the Western point of view: the Church as a whole was quite content to refer the heresy to Rome on the basis that it was indeed a Western problem.

III. Social and political patterns. Pelagius' career can largely be explained on the basis that he was originally the right voice at the right time. When conditions changed, as they did most dramatically in the middle of his career, his appeal waned. Faulty theology cannot be dismissed as a primary reason Pelagius fell into disfavor, but more is involved.

One of the curiosities of Pelagius' life is the way it divides into two very neat portions. Once the favorite of aristocratic Roman families and Eastern bishops, nothing more is heard of him following official denunciation. It is noteworthy that Pelagius' troubles began almost to the moment when he left Rome, fleeing Alaric's approach. It is possible that these circumstances were related. To decide how accurate such a possibility might be, it will be necessary to investigate two subjects: the nature of the "factions" which attached themselves to Augustine and Pelagius, and the effect of historical events upon such factions.

The fulcrum around which both subjects rotate is the Roman aristocracy. Pelagius' original support came from leading families in Rome. Given the nature of fifth-century Africa, Augustine's "faction" had the same base. Jerome's association with Roman aristocrats is well known. If any description can be applied to the Roman nobility at this time, it would stress uncertainty, change, and opportunism. How would such circumstances enhance a theology which says, in effect, that man is in control of his own destiny? The Pelagian heresy probably has as much to say about fifth-century Rome as about fifth-century theology.

By its very nature, any investigation of the Roman nobility will include the politics of the age. The aristocracy imagined itself to be a counterpoise to the imperial court in Milan or Ravenna and at one or two critical moments did indeed approach a semblance of autonomy. One aspect of this political maneuvering may well have affected Pelagius. It was through the Roman aristocracy that paganism made its last tired attempt to stave off the ascendancy of the Christian Church. The attempt was defeated by time, a process of assimilation, and the Theodosian edict Cunctos populos, which made it binding upon all citizens of the Empire to become Catholics. The resultant ingression of nominal Christians vulgarized the Church. Pelagius was noted for a morality so strict it bordered on elitism. His followers were exhorted to the same. How does this relate to his initial appeal?

In attempting to elaborate such topics, we are favored by one circumstance. The literature of the age is comparatively abundant. The sources fall roughly into four categories: (a) the theological treatises themselves; (b) personal correspondence and forensic material; (c) imperial and ecclesiastic histories; and (d) legal codices. Some description of these sources is in order.

The three ecclesiastics primarily involved in the dispute--Pelagius, Augustine, and Jerome--have left sizeable bodies of work. Pelagius, as the central figure of a heresy, has been comparatively well-documented. Some seventy pieces of "Pelagian" literature survive from antiquity, snatches from letters and sermons. These are generally found in the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. While authorship of the various fragments is the subject of some debate⁵, the theology is sufficiently normative to aid in defining what Pelagius' attitudes were. Taken in conjunction with statements from Augustine and Jerome, we can define with a fair degree of accuracy a "Pelagian" theology. As for materials which come unquestionably from the hand of Pelagius, five works are of key importance. Four are preserved in fragmentary form by Augustine, a situation which warrants some caution on our part. These include the Letter to Demetrias, On Nature, On Free Choice, and the Letter to Innocent. These pieces were composed some time between 412 and 418 as the debate raged. A fifth piece has been preserved independently. Pelagius' Exposition on the Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul is the only work which survives from the heresiarch's period of "acceptability": *i. e.*, it was written sometime between 384 and 409, when he resided in Rome. This particular work has been edited and annotated by Alexander Souter.

Orthodox views are (unsurprisingly) better documented. The Augustinian response is voluminous. The anti-Pelagian treatises and their dates are as follows: On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, from 412; On Man's Perfection in Righteousness, 415; On Nature and Grace, 415; On the Proceedings of Pelagius, 417; On the Grace of Christ, 418; and On Original Sin, 418. In addition we should take into account Augustine's early anti-Manichaean On the Free Will, which seems to have inspired Pelagius.

Jerome must also be kept in mind. In 415 he wrote the Dialogue against the Pelagians. This is a valuable source for understanding purely Pelagian ideas. At variance with his usual acerbity, Jerome limited himself to a comparatively dispassionate appraisal of rival theology. Furthermore, Jerome and Augustine kept in regular contact with each other. Jerome, in fact, produced more letters than any other Latin author beside Cicero. Letters between the two Churchmen and their acquaintances offer a great deal of insight into the chronological development of the controversy.

Lesser Churchmen had things to add to the discussion. While delivering an anti-Pelagian volley to the Eastern Church, Augustine's young protégé Orosius produced the Liber Apologeticus. This particular work is invaluable, for it supplies the only eye-witness account of Pelagius' career in the East. Marius Mercator, a Roman cleric, distinguished between Pelagius and the eccentric Caelestius, a follower who caused much trouble for Pelagius. Moreover, Mercator preserved papal reaction to the entire affair. Mercator's and Orosius' writings can be found in the Patrologiae Latinae series edited by J. P. Migne. Another vital source of information comes in the form of the so-called Palatine Collection, a body of ecclesiastic documents dealing with the Pelagian and Nestorian heresies. The collector himself is unknown, but he preserved all secretarial material dealing with the two heresies: papal remonstrances, imperial rescripts, and the decisions of pertinent synods.⁶

The history and life-style of the Roman aristocracy are likewise comparatively well-documented. The age was one which prided itself on literary output. Would-be Ciceros and Plinys abounded. A large portion of the extant material is in the form of letters between this nobility and the notables of Italy and Africa. And when the aristocracy was not

busy producing what it considered to be witty letters, it was often at odds with the Theodosian dynasty and the Christian Church. Arguments and interaction between these groups, preserved largely in oratorical exchanges, fill considerable space. Symmachus and his circle are key figures in this context. Their letters and orations are contained in the edition of Otto Seeck. In a different genre, Macrobius gave an interesting view into the state of life and religious affiliations in fourth-century Rome. The Saturnalia is the last tribute to a way of life that was rapidly disappearing. While much of the Saturnalia is purely pedantic--a lengthy discussion of Vergil's literary excellence--the work is valuable in that its interlocutors are twelve of the most celebrated Roman aristocrats of the day, men whose names keep appearing in political and religious contexts.

The Christian Church had its own champions engaged against the pagan party of Rome. Prudentius battled Symmachus in political terms, his Contra Symmachum being the most germane to the issue at hand. The letters of St. Ambrose must also be taken into account, as the Bishop of Milan (himself a Roman aristocrat) was quite capable of highly sophisticated political manipulation. Furthermore, Christian attitudes toward the pagan element in Rome are the subject of two fragmentary poems. Perhaps the most interesting thing about these is their dating: they have been identified as coming from the last decade of the fourth century, precisely the time Pelagius lived in the city. It was also the decade when Theodosius applied pressure to hasten pagans into the Christian Church and the Roman aristocracy responded, at the first opportune moment, with an attempted coup. The fragments have self-explanatory titles: the Carmen ad senatorem ex Christiana religione ad idolorum servitutem conversum and the Carmen adversos paganos. These poems have

been edited and are found in the works of Hartel and Mommsen, respectively.⁷

Various "historians" detail much of Western political activity during the period under consideration. For different reasons, each is somewhat tendentious and must be approached with reservations. Ammianus Marcellinus concentrated on imperial history from Nerva to the death of Valens in 378. While this slightly antedates our boundaries, Ammianus does illuminate trends that continued into the fifth century, notably the tension between different groups of Roman society. A self-named "miles et Graecus," Ammianus had little love for the Roman aristocracy or the Christian Church and his work is slanted accordingly.

Zosimus was also a pagan with the same bias as Ammianus. However, his work is particularly valuable because of the time period he elaborates. The Historia Nova focuses on events in the Western Empire from 393 to the sack of Rome in 410. He is the best source of information for the pattern of Alaric's activity.

For details on the reign of Honorius and the career of Stilicho, attention must be paid to Claudian. Although he gives some useful historical detail, Claudian was also the official court poet. The glowing panegyrics which he addressed to the mediocre Honorius must be taken as the questionable praise of a hanger-on. The pertinent works by Claudian are as follows: The War against Gildo, On the Third Consulship of Honorius, On the Fourth Consulship of Honorius, On the Sixth Consulship of Honorius, On Stilicho's Consulship, and The Gothic War.

In addition Orosius put his hand to historical composition. The Historia Ecclesiastica and Historia contra paganos are apologetic efforts and as such are filled with certain inaccuracies and biased reasoning. However, there is also a glimmer of insight and helpful detail.

Furthermore, Orosius is valuable if only as a Westerner among a group of Easterners. The age was one in which prolific Church historians worked. Most were Greek authors, whose interest was primarily in Eastern developments. Their works are, however, quite pertinent to the issue of general Church history and for occasional remarks about political happenings. Sozomen, Socrates, Theodoret, and Philostorgius all produced books entitled The Ecclesiastic History. We shall have occasion to quote these histories below.

Beside the preceding sources, we have a sizeable number of imperial rescripts and legal codices, from which can be inferred the needs and habits of fourth and fifth-century society. In particular, the sixteenth book of the Theodosian Code should be consulted. It deals entirely with religious matters. The fifth chapter of that book, entitled De Haereticis, gives some indication of the scope of unorthodox sects during the period under question. The tenth chapter is devoted exclusively to legal attacks upon paganism.

With this background in mind, we can now turn to an investigation of the Pelagian heresy as a product of its times.

FOOTNOTES

¹Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley, 1967), 248.

²See especially, Robert Evans, Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals (New York, 1968), 6-43.

³Anti-Pelagian polemic relating to people other than Pelagius himself include the following Augustinian works:

On the Soul and Its Origin, 419.

On Marriage and Concupiscence, 419-420.

Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, 420.

Against Julian, 420-421.

On Grace and Free Will, 426-427.

On Rebuke and Grace, 426-427.

On the Predestination of the Saints, 428-429.

On the Gift of Perseverance, 428-429.

Against the Second Reply of Julian, 430.

These can be found in various editions of Augustine's works. One of the better sources is Volume 5 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956).

⁴See especially, De Pecc. Mer., 3:1:1.

⁵John Morris, "Pelagian Literature," Journal of Theological Studies, 16 (April, 1965), 26-60.

⁶This can be found in J. P. Migne ed., Patrologiae Latinae (Paris, 1862), Volume 48.

⁷The Carmen ad senatorem is located in Hartel's biography of St. Cyprian (Berlin, 1887), pages 302 to 305 of the Appendix. The Carmen adversos paganos can be found in Hermes, 4 (1870), 350-363.

⁸Roman History, 31:16:9.

CHAPTER II

THE TIMES AND THE HERESY

Pelagius no doubt represents a case in which the age made the man. What is known of Pelagius emphasizes that he was grappling with the time, its excesses and outlooks. His theological interpretation and personal conduct were reactions against the uglier side of society: and there was much to react against.

Among other things, Pelagius was a man with an answer: the belief that the individual could count for something. Take responsibility and act upon it, he was saying. From the number of his admirers and the tenacity with which they held to their cause, it is evident that people wanted to hear what he had to say. In one sense this was surprising, for Pelagius insisted on a strict, disciplined existence. To understand the appeal of a demanding rigorism, it is necessary to recall the extreme instability of his world. With chaos pressing everywhere, and on such a scale that the individual could not possibly affect or control his immediate circumstances, it was perhaps comforting to at least control one's own existence. Small consolation, perhaps, but something to be done in the face of anarchy.

And anarchy, unfortunately, was the hallmark of the day. The world which Pelagius knew was one of transition and assimilation. As such it was also a mass of ambiguity. For every trend, for every viewpoint and philosophy, a contradiction could be found. Among all the aspects of late antiquity, this must be remembered when we approach the topic of Pelagi-

anism.

Here was the Roman Empire at low ebb, soon to dissolve entirely but still possessed of a surprising vitality and staying power. It was, in short, a twilight realm. To today's scholarship, endowed with the luxury of hindsight, it was an age of great instability and atrophy: economically, socially, culturally, politically. Whether contemporaries realized what we know now is a moot point. For every gloomy Orosius, wondering if the barbarians were not preferable to imperial rule, there was an optimistic Ausonius or Numantianus, singing of Rome's glorious past and future.

The most prominent feature of Pelagius' day was its violence, at every level and in every respect. The fourth century opened and closed with massacres of innocent foreigners at the order of the Emperor. On lesser levels, violence was just as pronounced. A page might be beaten to death for loosing a hunting dog too early.¹ And in more generalized terms the age was violent, largely because the Empire was for all practical purposes in a state of constant siege. All life revolved around this very simple fact. Capitals were established on the basis of military necessity, finances were geared to the situation, and society was kept in its place to feed the army.

Since the middle of the fourth century, citizens of the Empire had been victimized by periodic incursions from foreign tribes. In the East, the Persians, led by the vigorous Sapor, posed a constant threat. They were never completely neutralized. The West was in almost constant turmoil. To the northwest, Picts and Scots overran Britain repeatedly.² Huns and Alans pressed along the Danube; Quadi and Sarmatians terrorized Pannonia and pushed as far south as Aquileia.³ From time to time the Berber tribes of Africa made forays against the centers of population there. Added to these peoples, the western Emperor had to contend with

Franks, Goths, Alemanni, Saxons, and Burgundians.

And the danger was not entirely from the foreigners without. Anarchical times always breed opportunism, and during the last years of the fourth century, various Roman magistrates aspired to the purple. One coup after another checkered the age. Would-be Emperors disrupted the peace in Gaul, Britain, and Africa. The historian Ammianus summed up this grey time succinctly: "It was as if a war trumpet had given the signal throughout the whole Roman world."⁴ Another man, of completely different temperament and purpose, corroborated this viewpoint. St. Jerome urged his friend Rusticus to leave Gaul and become a monk in Palestine, arguing not the glories of monasticism, but the horrors of the day. Let Rusticus dally too long amid the frightful conditions of his native land and the results would be only too predictable.⁵

Jerome's escapism pervaded society in one form or another. The flow of pious souls to the monastery was developing the appearance of a flood in the offing; and whatever the sincerity of their religious motives, there is the lingering suspicion that some merely felt the need to flee an unpleasant world. Others, such as the cultivated circle of the Roman aristocrat, hid successfully by becoming antiquarians. The letters of Symmachus made small mention of the disasters engulfing the Roman state, but dwelt at length on the majesty of dactylic hexameter and the difficulty of securing healthy crocodiles for the games.⁶ Still others escaped literally, absconding to the hills to avoid financial responsibilities.

Economic troubles were as bad as, and the result of, the chaotic military situation. By Pelagius' day the economic ills which helped topple the Roman Empire were well advanced, having had several centuries to fester. It is possible that the process which led to the bleak conditions of late antiquity began as early as Republican days. The conquests of the

second and first centuries B. C. had poured foreign gold into Italy, allowing further expansion. So long as the imperial government had a good supply of money readily available, paying for wars and border garrisons presented little problem. Unfortunately, the flow of gold in substantial quantities dwindled early, leaving Rome with the dilemma of policing its expansive borders against unwanted visitors. By the third century A. D., Septimius Severus was giving grim, if realistic, advice: "Pay the soldiers well," he is reported to have said, "and forget everyone else."⁷

To pay for constant vigilance required some imagination. The treasury had no reserves and no system of credit financing. Thus, the Emperors were faced with only one logical resort: taxation, whose misapplication forced further troubles on the Empire. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that sound money no longer existed. By the mid-third century, the state issued denarii which contained only 2% silver. Under Aurelian in 275, the coinage was devalued 8 to 1.

By the fourth century, emergency measures had become, by long usage, a way of life. Society was becoming stratified, aided in its compartmentalization by the economic ills. The burden of taxation (which, needless to say, was not progressively graduated) had fallen upon those least able to bear it: small landowners, merchants, decurions from the towns. The middle class, the curiales, was held to the municipal services and imperial taxes traditionally required of it. The legal codices of the day are filled with disabilities imposed on this class lest it escape its duties to the fisc. The curiales could not go abroad without the governor's permission; if they did leave and remained away five years, their property was confiscated; if they had no children, three-quarters of their property reverted to the state at their death.⁸ Many succumbed. The lower classes also felt the pinch of hard times. The coercive power of the state was employed often

enough to extort labor, food, and supplies from its citizens. The peasantry was also caught in the cycle. Seeking the security of the large estates, these coloni were gradually transformed from tenant farmers to serfs.

Predictably, as the poorer elements of society found it more and more difficult to cope financially, the wealthy aggrandized their holdings. The aristocracy, joined by nouveaux riches from the imperial services, became richer still, retaining estates and buying out less fortunate people. In short, society was on its way to becoming a caste system.⁹

The sad economic and social conditions of the fourth century were paralleled by political incompetence. With the exception of Constantine and Theodosius, emperors of the century were remarkably maladroit. Some, like Valentinian, were cruel; some, like Honorius, merely incapable. Often they were proclaimed by the soldiery, with regard not to the size of their talents, but the size of their pocketbooks. This was particularly unfortunate at a time when crisis called for strong and able leaders. Problems were all the more pronounced during the last quarter of the century. Coups and barbarian activity intensified.

To meet these repeated crises, Emperors embarked upon a policy which would prove ultimately disastrous. In 382 Theodosius initiated a policy of some consequence for later events. The Visigoths, partially Romanized and Arian Christians, asked for permission to settle within the Empire as a federate people. Theodosius consented. Over the years these foreigners came to dominate the important military commands and to direct the more pliable Emperors. Stilicho, Bauto, and Arbogast were such generals. And if the foederati were instrumental in holding back bands of less civilized invaders--Huns, Slavs, Tartars--they were still the object of hatred from the older, more established citizens of the Empire. Various writers of late antiquity inveighed against their presence, perhaps not so much be-

cause the foederati were objectionable per se, but rather that their existence merely confirmed that the Empire could no longer maintain itself without extraordinary means. Sozomen spoke for everyone when he said:

He (the Emperor) neglected to recruit the army by Roman levies; and despising those veterans by whose bravery he had subdued his enemies in foreign wars, he put a pecuniary value on that militia by which the inhabitants of the provinces, village by village, had been accustomed to furnish. He ordered the collectors of his tribute to demand eighty pieces of gold for every soldier, although he had never before lightened the public burdens. This change was the origin of many disasters to the Roman Empire subsequently.¹⁰

Still, against the generally unhappy scenery of the late fourth century, the Empire showed a resilience. It was capable of assimilating new citizens. Goths, Franks, and Vandals were absorbed and Romanized, despite the natives' xenophobia. And even in such a violent age, society made attempts to better itself. Through Christianity's influence, the harsher customs were jettisoned. Debtors could no longer be scourged, conditions were ameliorated for women, children, and slaves. Society itself, despite trends to the contrary, remained fluid. Men of talent were still capable of climbing high. The period is filled with tales of people travelling from one side of the Empire to the other, and this on a regular basis. Jerome made note of one Firmus, who travelled from Palestine to Ravenna to Sicily to Africa on a mission in behalf of two noble Roman women. And Firmus had much company in his travels.¹¹ In short, while conditions were bleak, they were certainly not desperate.

Such was the general world in which Pelagius functioned. Very little is known of the man's early life. Legends, which always attach themselves to the famous or the controversial, are the only things which remain concerning his origins. He is said, by remarkable coincidence, to have been

born on the same day as St. Augustine: that is, on November 13, 354. A more reliable tradition identifies him as British. Antiquity always referred to Pelagius as a native of the British Isles. Augustine remarked once that he was known as "Pelagius Brito" to distinguish him from another Pelagius.¹² Orosius termed him "noster Britannicus." And Jerome, who never overlooked an opportunity to insult someone, rendered Pelagius a "Scotus": "Irish" in its strictest meaning, but "barbarous" in a more general sense.¹⁴

What is known of Pelagius' early days in Britain is equally vague. The man's name, obviously, is not Celtic. It is Greek, and this again produces conjecture. Pelagius, "man of the sea," might be a transposition of the Celtic "Morgan." Possibly, Pelagius was Greek. One modern scholar suggests that his father could have been an imperial functionary stationed in Britain.¹⁵ Certainly Pelagius' education would suggest that he came from a relatively affluent background. His knowledge of the classics was refined to the point that Jerome once called him a "homo latinissimus."¹⁶

The earliest date we can apply to Pelagius with any degree of accuracy is approximately 384, the time at which he arrived in Rome to study law. Why Pelagius came to Rome at this particular time is uncertain. If indeed he was British, rather than Irish, it is curious that he left Britain at a moment when conditions were particularly anarchical. At exactly this time, rebellious legions had raised their favorite to the purple and were soon to invade Gaul with him. The relation between Pelagius' departure for Rome and the state of British affairs remains uncertain.

What is certain, however, is that Pelagius indeed arrived in Rome-- in both senses of the word. As the center for legal training, Rome was unparalleled. And as the center of advancement and influential patronage, Rome had no other equal in the West beside the court at Milan. The city

certainly appealed to Pelagius. Twice Augustine commented on the length of the Briton's residence there: "in urbe Roma, ubi ille diu vixit,"¹⁷ and again, "in urbe diutissime vitam duxerat."¹⁸ Certainly Pelagius had found his niche and did not leave until extreme circumstances necessitated a mass exodus by the city's wiser, and wealthier, citizens.

He had also found his calling. Within a decade of his arrival, Pelagius left the study of law for a more appealing occupation: a career in the Church. Scholars unanimously agree that Pelagius came to Rome a Christian; he was not converted while there. As a British Christian, Pelagius would have been commendably orthodox. Jerome, a critic difficult to please, remarked that believers in Britain "worship the same Christ and observe the same rule of truth as the rest of the Christian world."¹⁹ Although Pelagius was never authentically associated with any monastic institution, he was known throughout his career as a monk. Augustine himself specified this fact: Pelagius monachus.²⁰

In this capacity, Pelagius' residence in Rome would prove to have long-lasting consequences. It was there that he attracted the attention of influential patrons. Augustine mentioned that the Briton was a friend of Paulinus of Nola, a theologian of some note.²¹ More important still, Pelagius was drawn into the orbit of Rufinus of Aquileia, an eminent cleric. Rufinus became a significant acquaintance in three respects.

First, he circulated among high Roman society. Through Rufinus, Pelagius gained introduction to the most substantial Roman families. Pelagius met the Probi, who had provided the first Christian senator after Constantine's conversion and whose matriarchs, at this time, were aunts to the Western consul. Pelagius was most likely a protégé of the gens Anicia, one of the highest placed Roman families. Certainly he was known to Anicia and Juliana, two of Rome's greatest ladies.²² Again through Ru-

finus, Pelagius was introduced to Melania, a noblewoman soon to be canonized for her charity and ascetic life.

Second, Rufinus' theology and way of life were things which had some influence over the Briton. The extent of that influence is debated but it unquestionably shaped Pelagius' career.²³ Rufinus in certain respects gravitated Eastwardly. He had been trained in Alexandria and was theologically attuned to the Eastern tradition. He was noted for his translation of Origen's philosophy and St. Basil's monastic Regulae. It is possible that Pelagius himself spent some time in the East. He certainly had a profound admiration for John Chrysostom, the controversial Bishop of Constantinople.²⁴ Whatever the validity of that suggestion, it is true that Rufinus intensified a certain association with the Eastern tradition.

It is significant that Rufinus particularly emphasized moral precepts, rather than metaphysical speculation. Like Pelagius after him, Rufinus stressed that the desire to do the right thing could effect marvelous results: and this desire, according to Rufinus, was instilled in people through "Grace."²⁵ Again like Pelagius, Rufinus directed his advice primarily toward aristocratic women. An opening passage from Rufinus' translation of St. Basil is especially revealing as to his purpose and philosophy of religious instruction:

His (Basil's) work is moral in nature, fit for guiding souls toward the good life and for relieving them in their labors. In this it is also most suitable for religiously-minded women . . . since it is not burdened with questions of a dogmatic nature. Rather, it goes along as a limpid stream, flowing softly and with sufficient calm.²⁶

Catholic society in Rome appreciated moral strictures from its mentors, perhaps more than explanations of the theological concepts upon which those strictures were based. In this respect we can understand some of

Pelagius' appeal. He was known for his probity and for admonishing his followers to the same conduct.²⁷

There is a third influence which Rufinus exercised upon Pelagius, in this case with a negative effect. If Rufinus reinforced Pelagius' anthropological theology and introduced the Briton to important connections, he probably also provided his associate with an enemy of some significance. Pelagius' friendship with Rufinus was poorly calculated to please St. Jerome. Jerome would later prove to be a formidable opponent. He was one of the most influential (if controversial) Churchmen of the age; so much so that a modern scholar places him with Ambrose and Augustine in a "Western triumvirate."²⁸

Jerome was learned; his fame as an exegete requires little elaboration. It was that expertise which caused Pope Damasus to commission him with production of the Vulgate. What is pertinent here is the fact that Jerome had an extensive network of acquaintances. He knew popes, bishops, governors, and aristocrats in all parts of the Empire. And considering his personality, which would brook no insult (real or imaginary) to himself or his faith, Jerome would become a dangerous adversary. When the furor surrounding Pelagian theology became acute, Jerome would be found behind the scenes, writing letters and prodding people to action.

It is more than likely that Pelagius met Jerome sometime between 382 and 385, when both men were in Rome. There is also fair indication that Jerome and Pelagius took a mutual dislike to one another from the first meeting. Given Jerome's well-known propensity for lasting and encompassing grudges, Pelagius may have fallen foul of the exegete simply because of his relationship to Rufinus. Prior to 382 Jerome had had intermittent battles with Rufinus, largely over Origenist philosophy. Following 393 Jerome again engaged in literary salvos with Rufinus. Pela-

gius was undoubtedly caught up in the hostility between the two men.

It is almost certain that Jerome and Pelagius encountered each other in the home of some influential person. Rome's wealthy residents prided themselves on learned discussions, with religion forming a favored topic. It was evidently fashionable to talk about religious considerations at soirées. The letters of Volusianus, for example, suggest that Augustine's answers to the Roman nobleman were passed round from person to person.²⁹ And the fact that Augustine, Jerome and Pelagius all addressed congratulatory letters to the same young girl argues for this type of social contact. Considering the close-knit nature of the Roman aristocracy, with its extended friendships and associations, it is quite possible that Jerome and Pelagius encountered one another under such circumstances. Furthermore, Pelagius and Jerome were probably drawn to the circle of the same people. Each man sought to foster asceticism, something which recommended itself to certain members of the nobility at this time. Like-minded people would have congregated and invited clerics to join their meetings.

These circumstances suggest the probability that Pelagius and Jerome were acquainted. Against this background, there is a curious letter from Jerome which may add to our knowledge of Pelagius. The Letter to Domnio³⁰ mentions an unspecified monk, whose description conforms very precisely to those things which we do know about Pelagius, both from Jerome's later works and other sources. In his letter to Domnio, Jerome described a man who always had a crowd around him; who took special care of women; a man with no formal Church training; a man who expressed strong opposition to the Jovinian heresy; a monk who had access to the highest Christian families; a man who was physically very large. Jerome ended his epistle by stating that he and this particular monk had taken an immediate dislike

to each other. If we are correct in assuming that Pelagius was indeed the subject of this letter, we have a fair indication of his life at Rome.

Other personality traits can be gleaned from the literature of his opponents. Augustine is the most reliable source of information about Pelagius as an individual. At variance with Jerome and Orosius, who were given to exaggeration and caricature, Augustine remained charitable and objective. The Bishop of Hippo made numerous references to Pelagius' sobriety and zeal for Christian life.³¹ He inspired loyalty and admiration in others. Augustine reported that "the doctrines associated with his name were warmly maintained and passed from mouth to mouth among his reputed followers."³² Pelagius' personal behavior at least partially responsible for his effect on others. The Briton's admonitions to asceticism and morality were most surely practised in his own life, to the extent that he inspired two young aristocrats to adopt asceticism by his own example.

There was a darker side, however. His enemy Jerome later accused him of pride.³³ And Augustine suggested that Pelagius was very clever at hiding his true opinions, susing his followers instead to propagate the more objectionable theories.³⁴ There was a certain peculiar opportunism pervading Pelagius' behavior when the controversy raged, a fact which casts a shadow over the man.

But this controversy lay in the future. During his time in Rome, Pelagius merely acted as a friend and advisor to the mighty. It is impossible to completely unravel the nature of Pelagius' connections, but one modern scholar plausibly suggests that the Briton was attached to the household of some senatorial family.³⁵ Certainly he used his time in the city to produce theological treatises. It is ironic that the future here-

siarch was almost slavishly devoted to the defense of orthodoxy. He systematically refuted Manichaeism, Jovinianism, and Arianism, beliefs all declared heterodox.³⁶ Manichaeism was especially troublesome to Westerners at this time. In his battle with that sect, Pelagius was happy to quote from St. Augustine's De Libero Arbitrio, a fact which later proved most embarrassing to the African bishop. Arianism was also beleaguering the West, as numerous proscriptions in the Theodosian Code attest.³⁷ Jovinianism, however, was the most menacing, if only because of its proximity. It seemed to claim Rome as its stronghold, a situation which occasioned the convention of an Italian synod in 390. This synod pronounced the sect heretical, largely on the basis that Jovinians believed all sins to be equal.³⁸ This heresy also eschewed infant baptism. Augustine and Jerome later attempted to cast Pelagius as Jovinian in inspiration.

Whatever the truth of this accusation, Pelagius' residence in Rome was marked by nothing other than total respectability. He produced a treatise on the Trinity and a commentary of the Epistles of St. Paul. Such was the nature of Pelagius' exposition that Augustine himself was able to say:

. . . I read certain writings of Pelagius, a holy man, as I heard, and of no small Christian devotion, writings which contained small letters of exposition about the apostle Paul³⁹

Indeed, Pelagius may have lived out a life of moderate acclaim and unquestioned orthodoxy had it not been for an unfortunate choice of companions. While in Rome Pelagius formed a friendship with one Caelestius, another monk whose personality combined theological eccentricities with a great enthusiasm for expounding his views to any available listeners. There is no doubt that Caelestius was the most vocal and objectionable of the two. Augustine recognized this fact. "Caelestius . . . incredi-

bili loquacitate," he wrote. And compared to his British friend, Caelestius was "pertinacior, mendacior, vel certe . . . liberior et astutior."⁴⁰

If Caelestius was responsible for drawing unfavorable attention to Pelagius, the Briton had nonetheless begun leaning toward questionable views. Sometime around 405 Pelagius was formulating beliefs which would forever be associated with his name--with or without Caelestius' help. Long before the Briton left Rome, he was disposed toward an anthropological interpretation of Grace. Prior to 411 Augustine had received reports that "he (Pelagius) disputed against the Grace of God."⁴¹

Moreover, the Bishop of Hippo told that Pelagius, while in Rome, had flown into a rage over a passage from the Confessions. In the tenth book of that work, Augustine had cast all activity to God's prerogative: "Da quod iubes et iube quod vis."⁴² Pelagius reportedly declared that he could not tolerate such an attitude. From his standpoint, this was perfectly understandable. Pelagius was known to be disgusted with the lax moral climate of contemporary society. He felt that "determinism" and "human helplessness" were too often used as an excuse for moral flabbiness. He also disliked "ignorance" as a pretext for misbehavior. To counteract these tendencies, he evolved a theology suited to his tastes:

In dealing with ethics and the principles of a holy life, we first demonstrate that the power to decide and to act are inherent in human nature. Then we show what it can achieve, lest the mind be careless and sluggish in its pursuit of virtue in proportion to its lack of belief in its own power.⁴³

Hence his emphasis on human responsibility was adopted at least in part to counteract antinomianism. For this reason Augustine's statement was particularly unacceptable. From this incident can be traced the first direct indication of a coming disjuncture between the two Churchmen.⁴⁴

A further hint came in 405 or 406. At that time Pelagius addressed

a letter to his friend Paulinus of Nola, a respected bishop. Pelagius himself thought the letter to be an encomium to God's Grace. Augustine did not. To Pelagius Grace was best viewed as a cleansing from sin, but as a result of illumination: that is, from a natural faculty. Pelagius did not regard Grace as a strictly theological doctrine. Related to this explanation of Grace was a peculiarly Pelagian interpretation of the Fall and original sin. Pelagius rejected the notion of original sin, declaring that Adam's transgression was in no way transmitted to his descendants. Augustine later received a copy of this particular letter and asserted that its contents were unacceptable. The African bishop found himself "absolutely uncertain" what Pelagius meant by the term "Grace." Was it a remission of sins, an example of Christ's life, or a help toward good living?⁴⁵

As Pelagian theology crystallized, other events occurred which would bring the controversy to a head. The first was Pelagius' displacement from Rome. Critical times had begun to disquiet Italy, particularly the approach of Alaric in 409. As the Gothic tribes progressed southward through the peninsula, the wealthier citizens fled to estates in Africa, Egypt, and Palestine. Amid this press of aristocrats, Pelagius and Caelestius made their way to Sicily, where they may have propagated their ideas.⁴⁶ It soon became apparent that they could not return to Rome and so they proceeded on their way throughout the Mediterranean world.

By 410 the pair were in Africa, ironically preceded by a reputation for being commendably upright clerics. Augustine could report, "Pelagii nomen cum magna eius laude cognovi."⁴⁷ The pair passed through Hippo Regius, Augustine's town. Augustine himself was away at the time, busy with the Donatist heresy. The great African bishop, then aged 57, was at the height of his powers and prestige.

The future adversaries were not destined to meet. Augustine did, however, issue Pelagius a letter of welcome, as was customary under the circumstances. Sometime between 411 and 413 the two Churchmen exchanged a second series of letters, again as a formal courtesy. The wording of Augustine's second letter was somewhat ambiguous and could be interpreted in a variety of ways:

I am most grateful to you for being so kind as to favor me with a letter giving news of your welfare. May the Lord reward you with good things, my beloved lord and much desired brother. May you always be blessed in them and may you live forever with the eternal God. Although I do not recognize myself in the eulogies which your letter contains, I cannot be ungrateful to your good will toward me. I urge you rather to pray for me that I may become such, by the Lord's help, as you believe I am now. May you remain safe and pleasing to the Lord. Remember us, beloved lord and much desired brother.⁴⁸

Pelagius would later use this second letter as an indication--incorrect, as it happened--that Augustine endorsed his ideas.

During the sojourn in Africa, Caelestius began explaining his theories with an ill-advised ardor. He evidently made quite an impression on certain Roman emigres and residents of Carthage. Augustine related that the heretical Caelestius had "deceived a great many persons and was disturbing the brethren who remained unconvinced."⁴⁹ It is important to note that Pelagius himself had departed for Palestine before his compatriot became so talkative.

Murmurs of dissent began to circulate. Eventually several formal complaints against Caelestius were presented to Aurelius, Archbishop of Carthage. A written account of Caelestius' most objectionable statements finally convinced Aurelius to summon a council. Six points were held to be in error:

1. Adam would have died even if he had not sinned, be-

cause he was a mortal man. (Adam mortalem factum, qui sive peccaret, sive non peccaret, moriturus fuisset.)

2. Adam's sin injured only himself, not all humanity. (Quoniam peccatum Adae ipsum solum laesit et non genus humanum.)
3. New-born children are in the same condition as Adam was before the Fall. (Quoniam parvuli qui nascuntur in eo statu sint in quo fuit Adam ante praevaricationem.)
4. It is not true that because of the death and the sine of Adam all mankind dies. Neither is it true that because of Christ's resurrection, all men rise again. (Quoniam neque per mortem vel praevaricationem Adae omne genus hominum moritur, neque resurrectionem Christi omne hominum genus resurgit.)
5. The Law, as well as the Gospel, leads to heaven. (Quoniam lex sic mittit ad regnum caelorum quomodo et Evangelium.)
6. Even before the coming of Christ, there were men without sin. (Quoniam et ante adventum Domini fuerunt homines impeccabiles, id est sine peccato.)⁵⁰

Caelestius was examined on these points. Augustine, who was not present at the synod, related that on the second point Caelestius expressed doubt that sin was inherited. To support his contention, Caelestius noted that even within the ranks of the Church, there was considerable diversity of opinion regarding original sin. When pressed by the Africans to name someone who doubted the validity of original sin as a theological concept, Caelestius would cite only Rufinus of Aquileia.⁵¹

According to Augustine, the synod was particularly concerned with the third point relating to infant baptism. Again Caelestius fell back upon his assertion that sin is not inherited, thereby negating any need for baptism as a remission of sin. At this juncture, the synod demanded that he recant. Caelestius refused to do so. Excommunication was then pronounced against him. In return, Caelestius threatened to appeal his case to Rome, a subject which was then particularly reprehensible to the Af-

ricans.⁵²

Caelestius immediately departed for Ephesus, where he attempted to secure for himself a place among the body of priests. But his absence in Africa did not end the controversy. A group of his admirers remained, influential and vocal enough to irritate the orthodox. Augustine's friend Marcellinus had dark views on Caelestius and requested that the Bishop put his hand to polemical treatises. Not the least of their crimes was the fact that the Pelagians were possessed of a missionary fervor. It was then, during 410, that Augustine first entered the foray. He obliged Marcellinus by producing De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione et de Baptismo Parvulorum. In that work Augustine asserted that by Grace it is possible, though not probable, for man to live sinlessly. An elaboration of this potentially confusing theory was in order. Augustine then composed De Spiritu et Littera, which stressed that the working of the Holy Spirit was the method by which Grace was bestowed and implemented, rather than by any human faculty.

Augustine's works did not result in stemming the proliferation of Pelagian pronouncements. Augustine received a letter from a Sicilian named Hilary, who was concerned about "some points which certain Christians at Syracuse maintain."⁵³ These points were precisely those which Caelestius had espoused at Carthage. The Pelagians in Africa, moreover, had become more restive than before, perhaps offended by Augustine's assault. These malcontents attacked the Bishop in return, arguing that he was innovative and they orthodox.⁵⁴ In reality it is difficult to see that either side was innovative. Augustine sounded much like St. Cyprian in his attitudes toward infant baptism. For his part, Pelagius had certain parallels with Tertullian. Indeed, one of the ironies of this ecclesiastic brawl was the nature of the insults exchanged. Pelagius and Augus-

tine argued that the other had invented novel theories, while Jerome saw old heresies lurking in Pelagius' teachings: notably Origenism and Jovinianism.⁵⁵

While Augustine wielded his weaponry against Pelagianism, he remained on good terms with Pelagius himself. He was always quite clear on this point. "Hominem non odi, sed eius vitia."⁵⁶ Furthermore, Augustine made a very curious remark concerning Pelagius' ideas. He mentioned that certain of those ideas bordered on acceptability.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it was a proximity, not an actual acceptability. Christians throughout the Mediterranean region were still confused.

Sometime following 411 the distinction between Caelestius and Pelagius had become blurred. The quarrel was no longer merely with the outspoken Caelestius. It was with a system of ideas which were somehow related to the Briton as well. This still remains problematic: precisely who should be named heresiarch. The ancients always identified the heretics as Pelagiani, and Augustine noted that Pelagius allowed others to propagate his theories. Furthermore, Pelagius never denied that the loquacious Caelestius was speaking for him. Still, there is no explanation why attention diverted from Caelestius to Pelagius himself.

Yet this did occur: the attack more and more focused on the Briton. Two of Pelagius' own followers, young men named Timasius and James, addressed doubts to Augustine. They sent the Bishop a copy of Pelagius' On Nature and asked for a response. Augustine refuted the Pelagian work with On Nature and Grace, written early in 415.

On Nature was normative Pelagianism, produced while the Briton resided in Palestine. Its author described Grace as a natural faculty, not a supernatural agency. Furthermore, Pelagius stressed that probability was not the primary subject of his treatise, but rather possibility:

"Nos . . . de sola possibilitate tractamus."⁵⁸ For Pelagius it was certainly possible for a person to live sinlessly. If this were not the case, the scriptures would not contain quotations enjoining man to be sinless. God would certainly not expect the impossible from His creatures.

Augustine's objection was with Pelagius' thoroughly inadequate explanation of Grace. The response in On Nature and Grace was irenic. Augustine suggested that human nature had originally been created in a sound condition, but was now corrupted by sin. Man himself was incapable of eradicating that corruption from his soul. Only the Grace of Christ could effect that change, a Grace freely given and not based on merit.⁵⁹

In 415 Augustine was also given a copy of an anonymous document which was circulating in Sicily. It was generally believed that Caelestius was the author. The document contained a series of sixteen conundrums, designed to make anti-Pelagian arguments appear specious. An example:

Again it must be asked: what is sin? Is it a natural quality or is it something accidental? If it is in the nature of things, it is not sin; but if, on the other hand, it is accidental, it can disappear. And what can disappear can be avoided. And what can be avoided--that, a man is able to do without.⁶⁰

Augustine's rejoinder to this unhappy logic came in his essay De Perfectione Iustitiae Hominis. In keeping with the anonymous pamphleteer's style, Augustine gave curt and pointed replies.

The forementioned activity was confined to Africa and Sicily. But while Augustine was battling Pelagian admirers in his own immediate region, Pelagius and Caelestius were faring well in the East. Caelestius had indeed secured for himself a place in the body of priests at Ephesus, the Eastern Church being either ill-informed or unconcerned over Western developments. Pelagius had ensconced himself in Jerusalem, surrounded by former Roman patrons. Palestine had become the prime location for

monastic-minded aristocrats. But it was not so much Roman patronage that would serve Pelagius well over the next few years. It was Eastern patronage. The Briton found himself admitted to the select circle of John, Bishop of Jerusalem.

But Pelagius' old nemesis was also in the area. Jerome lived in Bethlehem with a group of Roman ascetics. From his vantage point, Jerome could literally watch Pelagius' activity. It should be noted that Jerome and Pelagius' new patron thrived on a hearty animosity for one another. In 394 Jerome had argued with John over Origenism; and John's part in the events to follow is still the subject of uncertainty. To Greek ecclesiastical historians he was "a man of exemplary piety."⁶¹ But the Latins had reason to suspect him. Jerome and others considered John too close to unorthodoxy, so much so that Jerome prayed, "Lord, grant John correct belief."⁶²

Moreover, there was a growing undercurrent of hostility in Palestine. The number of Westerners swelling Latin monasteries appealed very little to their Greek counterparts. And there was more than a hostility of East and West. The Latins were divided among themselves. Jerome's monastery was inhabited by noble daughters of the Albini. Recently a second Latin group had settled in Jerusalem: this the monastery founded by Rufinus and Melania, of the gens Anicia. Tension developed between the two groups and never quite resolved itself.⁶³ This thread of hostility was little calculated to calm tempers once agitation about Pelagius began in Palestine.

Pelagius undoubtedly had Jerome's ill-will the moment he arrived from Africa. In 414 their rivalry probably sharpened. Both men addressed letters to Demetrias, daughter of a noble Roman family, on the occasion of her becoming a nun. It is not clear whether the two clerics were aware

of the other's letter. Jerome's version urged that Demetrias not fall prey to "followers of Origen," which might easily have been an oblique reference to Pelagius and his supporters.⁶⁴ For his part, Pelagius addressed the girl in typical fashion: "In keeping with my usual practice, I will call attention to the powers of human nature, the goodness of which can be measured by looking to the Author in whose image it was made."⁶⁵ He mentioned Grace only twice in passing, with little emphasis, and preferred to focus on practical advice. He viewed the responsibility to behave properly as a part of noblesse oblige and pointed out the importance of vigilance. Pelagius further stated that Demetrias should praise herself for her inner riches, a statement which elicited strong reaction from Augustine.⁶⁶

By 414 Jerome was little disposed to treat Pelagius charitably. Pelagius' good fortunes in the East, his continued ties with the Roman nobility, and objectionable theology were too much to bear. Jerome began voicing his displeasure. In Pelagius, Jerome saw the spectre of many old heresies. His Letter to Ctesiphon complained of Pelagius' major shortcomings, not the least of which was the fact that the Briton comported himself "quasi mus": just like a rat.⁶⁷ In 415, when Pelagius came under formal scrutiny by the Eastern primates, Jerome published the Dialogue against the Pelagians. The document is remarkable for the unusual restraint with which Jerome assailed his opponent. Considering the relative positions Pelagius and Jerome enjoyed with John of Jerusalem, it is understandable that Jerome deleted his more energetic denunciations. In fact the old exegete informed Augustine that he was "going through a difficult time when it has been better for me to keep silent than to speak." He also urged his African friend to put up a front of unanimity, lest the heretics conclude that they had developed ill-feeling

between themselves.⁶⁸ Clearly the Pelagians were well-entrenched in Palestine.

Accordingly, Jerome refrained from mentioning Pelagius specifically in the Dialogue. Cast in the form of a conversation between a Pelagian and a defender of the faith, the work focused primarily on two points. First, Jerome insisted that Pelagius closely resembled past heresies and philosophies: notably, Stoicism, with its emphasis on ἀπάθεια⁶⁹. Second, Jerome scoffed at the possibility of a man living sinlessly. Pelagians, according to the elderly scholar, were trying to philosophize a theological issue. Moreover, because the soul is housed in the body, earthly perfection was an impossibility. Overlooking the fact that this was also Stoicism, Jerome remarked that the natural debility of the body does not allow the soul to possess all virtues at the same time and forever. Even the apostles had sinned. Grace and perfection, therefore, could be imputed only to God Himself.⁷⁰

While Augustine labored studiously in Africa and Jerome in Palestine, a third Latin was making his way into the midst of the altercation. In 415 Orosius, a native of Spain, travelled to Africa to confer with Augustine on religious matters. Augustine then sent Orosius to Palestine, bearing letters to Jerome regarding the Pelagian affair.⁷¹ With Orosius' arrival events accelerated rapidly, possibly because another extreme personality had been added to a triad of eccentrics that included Jerome and Caelestius. Orosius was known to be petulant and easy to anger and therefore not the most auspicious candidate to arbitrate a dispute.

Bits of news had filtered eastward before Orosius, suggesting that Pelagius, if not a confirmed heretic, might be of suspicious reliability. The rancor between him and Jerome was well known in Palestine. Corroboration from the West that Augustine also had misgivings prompted Bishop

John to call a synod to investigate the matter more thoroughly. The synod convened in July of 415.

Orosius began by speaking of the agitation in Africa, which related more closely to Caelestius than to Pelagius. The Briton was asked whether his own doctrines had been attacked by Augustine, a man respected by the Eastern fathers as a defender of orthodoxy. Pelagius reportedly replied, "What is Augustine to me?"⁷² Not to be outdone in tactlessness, Orosius managed to insult Bishop John. Given the nature of ecclesiastic power structures, John was not inclined to take Augustine's decisions as unqualified law for the Palestinian dioceses. Thereupon, Orosius chastised the Greek bishop for not adhering to Latin orthodoxy.⁷³

The controversy was rapidly crystallizing into a rift between East and West. Arrayed against Pelagius were Orosius, Jerome, Augustine, and the Council of Carthage. It soon became obvious that their opinions carried little weight with the Eastern clerics. Orosius was not unaware of the major problem:

Thereupon, Bishop John attempted to complete (the investigation) without hearing anything from us, so that we confessed ourselves to be accusers: this to the judge himself. The response we heard most often from everyone was, "We are not his accusers."⁷⁴

Nonetheless, Orosius continued his accusations, hampered somewhat by the fact that he (unlike Pelagius) spoke no Greek and had to present his case through an interpreter. Orosius asserted that Pelagius had taught that a man could, of his own volition, be without sin: a view patently heretical. In reply, Pelagius answered that it is from God alone that such a possibility is given, somewhat skirting the issue. The Greek ecclesiastics were not entirely satisfied. Therefore, Pelagius anathematized anyone who said that without God's help man could advance in perfection.⁷⁵

John approved and asked Orosius for his approbation of Pelagius: or did Orosius deny the necessity for God's aid? Orosius was at a loss for words. This was clearly an impasse.

For lack of a better reply, Orosius fell back upon an underlying issue to prevent Pelagius' acquittal by the Orientals. As he said himself:

When we stated that this was a Latin heretic, that we were Latins, and that this heresy was more of a Latin affair to be decided by Latin judges, the Bishop produced a new decision, confirming our reasoning and intention: that emissaries and letters be sent to Innocent, the Roman Pontiff, so that he might make a decision for all to follow.⁷⁶

Thus the synod adjourned without coming to a formal decision about Pelagius. However, Orosius and the Latins had not seen the last of the controversy. The Spaniard was completely taken aback when, less than two months later, Bishop John personally attacked him. John accused Orosius of stating that God's aid did not allow man to live sinlessly. John had, in other words, convoluted Orosius' own attack against Pelagianism. In response, Orosius drafted his Apology, an explanation which was addressed to John's clergy at Jerusalem.

Furthermore, two other Western clerics residing in Palestine instigated a second investigation. They were two Gallic bishops who had fled to the East when they fell into disfavor for supporting the abortive coup of Constantine III. Heros of Arles and Lazarus of Aix were disconcerted by Pelagius' writings and the anonymous pamphlet attributed to Caelestius. They presented a libellus, a formal complaint, to Eulogius, the primate of Palestine. Thereby they managed to circumvent the uncooperative John.

A second Palestinian council was convened at Diospolis in December, 415. This synod was a particularly ludicrous affair, which prompted Jerome (never at a loss for a descriptive phrase) to describe it as "that miserable council."⁷⁷ Neither of Pelagius' Gallic accusers was present.

One was ill, the other unwilling to present his case alone.⁷⁸ Pelagius made the most of the day, explaining his views and going so far as to present a letter from Augustine. Pelagius misrepresented Augustine's intent. The letter had been written two years earlier under different circumstances. The African bishop had sent the letter, polite and restrained, as a warning that Pelagius not stray into heterodoxy. The wording was vague, and Pelagius obviously put it to good use.⁷⁹ The Eastern clergy was duly impressed by this seeming indication of Pelagius' acceptability.

The Briton was then called upon to clarify seven points from the libellus which had occasioned the synod. He did so to the satisfaction of the Eastern churchmen. His replies have ever since been the subject of some dispute. It is not understood to what extent his answers were purposely equivocal. It is possible that his theology had undergone a change (as had Augustine's); it is possible that his use of an interpreter at this synod slanted his responses; and it is also possible that Pelagius conveniently squeezed his views into the confines of orthodoxy.⁸⁰

Four of the seven points were peripheral to the issues that the Africans found objectionable: whether the Kingdom of Heaven was promised in the Old Testament; whether the devil himself was subject to salvation; whether evil entered thoughts; and whether the Church on earth was pure and holy. The other three charges dealt with Pelagianism as the West defined it.

First, Pelagius was reputed to have said that a man cannot be without sin unless he has a knowledge of the Law. Gerald Bonner gives an example of the way in which Pelagius responded:

When asked if he had indeed declared that no man can be without sin unless he have a knowledge of the Law, he replied, "Certainly, I did. But not in the way that my accusers think. I did not say a man cannot sin who has a knowledge of the Law; but, he is helped to avoid sin by a knowledge of

the Law. As it is written, 'He has given the Law for a help.'⁸¹

The second article charged against Pelagius concerned his statement that all men are ruled by their wills. In reply Pelagius explained that he was merely emphasizing that man was responsible for any action he freely willed. Last, Pelagius was questioned on his alleged assertion that man can be without sin if he wills it. To this Pelagius said that such a possibility came only through the working of God's Grace.⁸² The Eastern clerics were satisfied on these counts.

There was, however, some uncertainty among the Greek fathers as to Pelagius' association with Caelestius. Pelagius replied incisively to the major issue. Asking the clerics to recall his actions at the first synod, Pelagius advised his audience that he already had anathematized any person holding unorthodox views. The synod then reiterated Church teachings. Pelagius affirmed his belief in such doctrines, and again anathematized any dissenter.⁸³ This was enough for the Council of Diospolis. Pelagius was declared orthodox.⁸⁴

This was the event which exploded growing Western hostility. Augustine was exasperated to his limit. Pelagius' misuse of the Bishop's letter was not well received. Prior to 415 Augustine had refrained from naming Pelagius specifically in his polemics, choosing instead to attack only theories. From this time, he had no such compunctions and intensified his attacks. Furthermore, Augustine no longer confined himself to writing learned treatises. He began contacting influential people.

Augustine was incensed enough--or so sensitive to the threat Pelagius represented--to break with Church protocol. He dispatched a letter, unsolicited by Bishop John, to Jerusalem. The opening was out of character for someone of Augustine's known tact. It bordered on rudeness. Augustine mentioned that he was convinced that the East had no couriers;

otherwise he would surely have received a letter from John informing him of the Pelagian affair. Thereupon, Augustine warned John about the British monk. He enumerated the more objectionable teachings which Pelagius espoused. Then Augustine advised John to reconsider the esteem in which he held Pelagius and to carefully survey Pelagian "orthodoxy."⁸⁵

Augustine's impatience may have been justified. Pelagian supporters had begun to make themselves especially obnoxious. They were quick to note inconsistencies between Augustine's present hostility and the viewpoint he expounded some twenty years earlier in De Libero Arbitrio. In that early work Augustine produced statements which sounded very close to the things Pelagius was saying. And with good cause: both sought to combat Manichaeism by stressing human responsibility. In De Libero Augustine had said little about Grace as a theological concept, a fact which the Pelagians rather gleefully pointed out. Furthermore, Pelagius' admirers were not hesitant to quote Augustine in support of their cause, an approach which proved highly embarrassing to the Bishop.⁸⁶

Following Pelagius' acquittal, Augustine received a group of tactless letters. These epistles gloated over the results at Diospolis and elaborated Pelagian theology in all its most pejorative sense. Augustine did not identify the author(s)--and by this time he would not have hesitated to name Pelagius personally--but he had decided views on the arrogance of the letters.⁸⁷

Whatever the source of the letters, Pelagius himself was busy writing. His Defense of the Free Will was published in 416. Undoubtedly the Briton had cause to feel confident in his station. Well-entrenched in the East, he still enjoyed the protection and the good will of the Palestinian clerics. Furthermore, Augustine remarked that his adversary was becoming popular among the people of Jerusalem: "Pelagius is established

in Jerusalem and is said to lead many astray."⁸⁸

The African councils, however, were unforgiving and did not allow Pelagius to go unchallenged. A provincial assembly at Carthage listened to details from Orosius in 416. He explained the events which had transpired in Palestine. Moreover, he presented to the African fathers letters from Jerome, Heros, and Lazarus, all of whom inveighed against Pelagius, Caelestius and their elastic theology.⁸⁹ In the meantime, further news arrived from the East, little designed to enhance Pelagius' image. Bands of Greek monks had assaulted Jerome's monastery at Bethlehem. A Latin deacon had been killed. Jerome himself had escaped a severe beating by hiding in a tower. The old exegete was convinced that John of Jerusalem had sanctioned the attack.⁹⁰ More important, rumor had it that these ruffians were supporters of Pelagius. They reportedly attacked Jerome for his anti-Pelagian activity. Whether accurate or not, the rumors angered the Africans. They drafted a letter which formally anathematized Caelestius and Pelagius.

The letter was forwarded to Rome, urging Pope Innocent to endorse the action of the African Council. This particular letter came from the province of Africa Proconsularis and was signed by Aurelius of Carthage and 67 bishops. In the meantime the Numidian clergy (including Augustine) produced a letter of similar intent. Fifty-nine signatures were included. This letter was also dispatched to Rome. Moreover, leading African bishops wrote personally to Innocent to call special attention to Pelagius' peculiar use of the word "Grace." A copy of Pelagius' Defense of the Free Will was enclosed, with certain passages marked.

For his part, Augustine was disturbed not only by Pelagius' unorthodox theology. He also suspected the Briton of mendacity. There were a series of curious discrepancies between what Pelagius told the East and

what he told the West. Whether this was evidence of deliberate prevarication is difficult to say. Augustine was, after all, receiving his information second-hand. Nonetheless, the Bishop was troubled by a number of inconsistencies and has left these doubts preserved in On the Proceedings of Pelagius and On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin. For the East, Pelagius had anathematized Caelestius, disavowing responsibility for any of his compatriot's extreme views. Yet in a letter to Augustine, Pelagius refused to reject any statements he had made about original sin. On that point his views paralleled those of Caelestius. The Bishop was also disgruntled by Pelagius' use (or misuse) of patristic writings to substantiate his views. Ambrose and Cyprian had been misquoted, and Pelagius had attempted to pass off statements by the pagan philosopher Xystus as pronouncements by Pope Sixtus. Perhaps the most damning evidence of Pelagius' duplicity, if indeed it was duplicity, was the omission of a critical word. Pelagius had told Westerners that they could avoid sin "easily" if they so desired; to Easterners he merely speculated that it was "possible" to avoid sin.⁹¹

Augustine's misgivings were not fully elaborated in the letter to Innocent. The Africans simply apprised the Pontiff of the fact that Pelagius had said, "God has made us men, but we have made ourselves good."⁹² Innocent's aid was solicited in crushing such heresy.

Innocent acted slowly enough, but to African satisfaction. The Pope may well have been caught at a disadvantage. Pelagius was personally known to him, although on what terms is uncertain. Furthermore, Augustine alluded to the strength of Pelagius' following in Rome.⁹³ Yet news of assault on Jerome shocked both the Pope and the imperial court. However unappealing the real Jerome might be at close range in Palestine, in Rome he was still admired as the learned linguist who had graced the

city some thirty years before. And noble Romans had been among the members of Jerome's monastery so rudely victimized, many of them women. It was also becoming evident that this heresy needed to be suppressed immediately. Already it had attracted obstinate adherents in Italy, Sicily, and Africa, and it showed signs of establishing itself in the East. The rancor and duration of the Arian debate was still fresh in memory. When Innocent perused the marked copy of Pelagius' writings, he found it to be "full of many blasphemies, with nothing pleasing--indeed, nothing not highly displeasing--worthy of being condemned and trampled underfoot by all."⁹⁴ Thus, in January of 417, Pope Innocent sent indignant letters to Jerusalem and excommunicated Pelagius.⁹⁵

Within two months of the excommunication, Innocent was dead. His successor Zosimus added one final chapter to the controversy. The new Pontiff was visited by Caelestius, who expressed his wish to be guided in orthodoxy by the Pope. Zosimus may have been of Greek origin, a fact which some scholars suggest might have prejudiced him in favor of Pelagius and his Eastern enclave. Zosimus convened a Roman synod. Here Caelestius made a defense which was impressive to the new Pope. Zosimus excommunicated Heros and Lazarus, two major agitators. Furthermore, the Pope addressed a letter to the African bishops. It was strongly worded, chastising them for their provocative actions.⁹⁶

Shortly thereafter Zosimus received a letter of explanation from Pelagius endorsed by a well-respected Eastern bishop. The Pope was now disposed to acquit Pelagius, and he urged the Roman council to such action. Innocent's excommunication was reversed. This was highly unusual. Pelagius must have had substantial support in the city to cause Zosimus to rescind the decision of his predecessor. A second letter was drafted to the Africans, worded in even harsher terms, to announce Zosimus' action.

This took place in September of 417. For their part, the Africans were unwilling to let the matter pass. More letters went to Rome, protesting Zosimus' decision. From Palestine Jerome contributed his thoughts on the situation.⁹⁷

If African opinion was united, Roman opinion was not. This would prove to be a decisive factor. A faction of the Roman council disagreed with Zosimus and found an articulate leader in Marius Mercator. Still the Pelagians were able to mount a formidable offensive. Caelestius was still in Rome to support his cause. And Julian of Eclanum provided the Pelagians with an able ally. Julian was a member of the nobility, an Anicius and uncle to the Demetrias for whom Pelagius, Jerome, and Augustine had all composed letters of advice. Julian also brought with him an extensive network of connections throughout Italy and Africa. He was also a very polished dialectician.

Tensions between the two Roman factions worsened. In keeping with its long tradition of rioting, the city was wracked with violence. Brawls, triggered by religious considerations, broke out throughout Rome. One riot was said to be so bad that the combatants threw holy scripture at one another when no other weapons were available.⁹⁸

It was the threat of civil disturbance that once and for all decided the outcome of the issue. The Emperor Honorius, residing in Ravenna, would not tolerate such unrest. In April, 418, he issued a rescript which condemned Pelagius and Caelestius. The heresiarchs were to be arrested and exiled, Honorius evidently being under the impression that Pelagius was also in Italy. The Emperor was eager to have done with the heretics lest "ignorantium mentes saeva persuasione perverterent . . . secretis tractibus."⁹⁹

Zosimus himself was beginning to doubt the wisdom of his previous

actions. Dissent among the Roman clergy was rife. Furthermore, the Pope had received a copy of Pelagius' exposition of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Zosimus found portions of the work questionable. In addition the Africans were determined to have their way, with or without papal endorsement. In May, 418, a council was held in Carthage, attended by over 200 bishops. At this council nine canons were passed against Pelagian theology.

It was becoming obvious that the anti-Pelagians were not to be deflected from their goal. They had produced African intransigence, imperial condemnation, and Roman disquiet. These factors were enough to influence the wavering Zosimus. Shortly after the Emperor's rescript, Zosimus issued a document known as the Epistola Tractoria. Therein the Pope excommunicated Pelagius and reiterated orthodox teaching on Grace and original sin.

Zosimus informed Constantinople of his decision. In Italy the secular authorities were called upon to enforce the decision. Nonetheless, eighteen Italian bishops refused to endorse the Tractoria. Julian of Eclanum led the resistance and would in fact remain vocal and active against Augustine for more than a decade.

It is likely that Africa was also the scene of some coercive measures. Pelagian supporters were still active, and Africans had always been willing to use secular muscle to enforce their notion of orthodoxy. Such was the history of the Donatist heresy earlier. Moreover, the military leader of Africa was a personal friend of Augustine, and the Bishop certainly had no compunctions against the use of secular intervention in defense of the faith.

Pelagius himself dropped from view at this point. The irrepressible Caelestius appeared at various places thereafter, but of Pelagius him-

self nothing more is known after 418. It has been established that the Palestinian council, impressed by the united front of imperial and papal opposition, expelled Pelagius from Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ Most authorities assume that Pelagius then drifted to Alexandria, which gave rather free rein to eccentrics. Moreover, it is known that Pelagianism found support with Nestorius, a bishop of Alexandria whose own views were soon enough to fall into disfavor in the East.

Pockets of Pelagian sympathizers surfaced occasionally after 418. A mutant strand of theology known as Semi-pelagianism caused trouble for some years in southern Gaul. Italy was not entirely quiet. But 418 was the critical year; after that point nothing more was heard of the British heretic as an individual.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Amnianus, Roman History, 29:3:6.
- ²Loc. cit., 20:1:4.
- ³Loc. cit., 29:6:8.
- ⁴Loc. cit., 26:4:2.
- ⁵Jerome, Ep. 122.
- ⁶Symmachus, Epp. 2:46 and 5:56.
- ⁷Dio Cassius, Roman History, 77:15:2.
- ⁸Samuel Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire (London, 1899), 257-258.
- ⁹The most important discussion of this phenomenon is probably still in Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages, tr. Philip and Mariette Leon (New York, 1931), 100-128.
- ¹⁰HE, 7:23.
- ¹¹Jerome, Ep. 172.
- ¹²Augustine, Ep. 186:1.
- ¹³Orosius, Liber Apologeticus, 12.
- ¹⁴Jerome, Prologue in Jeremiah, 8.
- ¹⁵John Ferguson, Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study (Cambridge, 1956), 37.
- ¹⁶Jerome, Ep. 50; see also, Georges de Plinval, Pélage: ses écrits, sa vie et sa réforme (Lausanne, 1943), 73.
- ¹⁷Augustine, Ep. 177:2.

- ¹⁸De pecc. orig., 21:24.
- ¹⁹Jerome, Ep. 46:10.
- ²⁰De gestis, 14:36; see also, Jerome, Ep. 50:1: "de trivio, de completis, de plateis circumforanum monachum rumigerulum, rabulam, vafrum tantum ad detrahendum, qui per trabem oculi sui festucum alterius nititur erurere.
- ²¹Augustine, Ep. 186:1.
- ²²For the conversion of Anicianus Julianus, see Prudentius, Contra Symmachum, 1:552-553. On Pelagius' connections with the nobility, see Peter Brown, "Patrons of Pelagius: the Roman Aristocracy between East and West," Journal of Theological Studies, 21 (April, 1970), 56-72.
- ²³Evans, Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals, 9-25.
- ²⁴Ferguson, 44; Plinval, 112.
- ²⁵F. X. Murphy, "Sources of the Moral Teaching of Rufinus of Aquileia," Studia Patristica, 6 (1959), 153.
- ²⁶Rufinus, Praefatio Rufini in Homilia Basilii, in Patrologiae Latinae, 31:1723.
- ²⁷Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma, Volume 5, tr. Peter Becker (New York, 1961), 172.
- ²⁸August Frazer, A History of the Church, tr. Neil Buchanan (New York, 1969), 84.
- ²⁹Augustine, Epp. 135 and 137.
- ³⁰Jerome, Ep. 50.
- ³¹De pecc. mer. 3:1 and 3:6; De gestis, 22:46.
- ³²De gestis 46:6.
- ³³Dial. ad Pel., 1:1.
- ³⁴De gestis, 50.
- ³⁵Brown, ibid.

³⁶Philip Schaff, A History of the Christian Church, Volume 3: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964), 791-792.

³⁷CT 16:5:5; 16:5:8; 16:5:14; 16:5:15; 16:5:17; 16:5:42; and 16:5:48.

³⁸Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, Volume 2: A. D. 326-429, tr. Henry Oxenham (Edinburgh, 1896), 392.

³⁹Augustine says, in De pecc. mer., 3:1: "Verum post paucissimos dies legi Pelagii quaedam scripta, sancti viri, ut audio, et non parvo propectu Christiani, quae in Pauli apostoli epistolas expositionis brevisimas continerent."

⁴⁰De pecc orig., 13:4.

⁴¹De gestis, 46:22.

⁴²Confessions, 10:29, is the source of the quotation. The story of Pelagius' angry response was reported in De grat. Christi, 35:38.

⁴³Ep. ad Dem., 6.

⁴⁴Augustine related this story in De dono perseverantiae, 53: "Cum libros Confessionum ediderim ante quam Pelagiana haeresis exstitisset in eis certe dixi deo nostro et saepe dixi, 'Da quod iubes et iube quod vis.' Quae mea verba Pelagius Romae, cum a quodam fratre et episcopo meo fuissent eo praesente commemorata, ferre non potuit et contradicens aliquanto commotius paene cum eo qui illa commemoraverat litigavit."

⁴⁵De grat. Christi, 38:2.

⁴⁶See especially a letter written by Pelagius to a recently widowed Roman lady, preserved in fragmentary form in Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique, 12:680. Also, see suggestive comments made by Augustine, Epp. 156 and 157.

⁴⁷De gestis, 46:2.

⁴⁸Augustine, Ep. 146.

⁴⁹De gestis, 19:8.

⁵⁰The text of the proceedings was preserved by Marius Mercator in Commonitorium super Nomine Caelestii, in his Opera, in Patrologiae Latinae, 48:67-70.

- ⁵²Ibid.
- ⁵³Augustine, Ep. 156:2.
- ⁵⁴Augustine, Ep. 157.
- ⁵⁵Jerome's phrase is "nova ex veteri haeresis;" see especially, Commonitorium in Hieronymum, 1:17, 1:46, and 1:56.
- ⁵⁶De grat. Christi, 3:1.
- ⁵⁷De Nat. et Gr., 12:11:2.
- ⁵⁸Quoted by Augustine in De Nat. et Gr., 7:8.
- ⁵⁹See especially, De Nat. et Gr., 3:3-4:4.
- ⁶⁰De perf. iust., 2:3.
- ⁶¹Theodoret, HE, 5:35:1.
- ⁶²Adver. Iohannes, 14:7.
- ⁶³J. N. D. Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (New York, 1975), 200.
- ⁶⁴Jerome, Ep. 130.
- ⁶⁵Quoted in M. Kathryn Krabbe, Epistula ad Demetriadem: De Vera Humilitate, A Critical Text and Essay (Washington, D. C., 1965), 8.
- ⁶⁶Augustine, Ep. 188.
- ⁶⁷Jerome, Ep. 133:14.
- ⁶⁸Augustine, Ep. 172:14.
- ⁶⁹Dialog. ad. Pel., 2:2.
- ⁷⁰Loc. cit., 1:36.
- ⁷¹Augustine, Ep. 172:1.
- ⁷²Orosius, Liber Apologeticus, 4.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Loc. cit., 5. Orosius stated: "Porro autem episcopus Iohannes nihil horum audiens a nobis exigere conabatur, ut accusatores nos ipso iudice fateremur. Responsum saepissime est ab universis, 'Nos accusatores huius non sumus.'"

⁷⁵De gestis, 30:54.

⁷⁶Orosius, loc. cit., 6: "Dein cum . . . claremus, Latinum esse haereticum, nos Latinos, haeresim Latinis magis partibus notam Latinis iudicibus disserandem . . . novissimam sententiam protulit (episcopus) confirmans tandem postulationem intentionemque nostrum, ut ad beatum Innocentium, papam Romanum, fratres et epistulae mitterentur, universis quod ille decerneret secuturis."

⁷⁷Jerome, Ep. 137:2.

⁷⁸Augustine, Ep. 166:15.

⁷⁹Orosius, loc. cit., 7.

⁸⁰Robert Evans, "Pelagius' Veracity at the Synod of Diospolis," Studies in Medieval Culture, (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1967), 71-80. See also, Gerald Boner, "How Pelagian was Pelagius? An Examination of the Contentions of Torgny Bohlin," Studia Patristica, 9 (1963), 350-359.

⁸¹Quoted in Gerald Bonner, St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies (Philadelphia, 1963), 335.

⁸²Plinval, 286-287.

⁸³De gestis, 2:24.

⁸⁴Loc. cit., 20:44.

⁸⁵Augustine, Ep. 179.

⁸⁶Augustine later explained himself in the Retractions. Those passages which Pelagians took particular delight in quoting were: De Libero Arbitrio, 1:1; 1:12; 1:13; 1:14; 1:16; 2:1; 2:18; 3:1; 3:3; 3:6; 3:17; and 3:18.

⁸⁷De gestis, 30:55.

⁸⁸Augustine, Ep. 176:4.

- ⁸⁹Augustine, Ep. 175.
- ⁹⁰Jerome, Ep. 138.
- ⁹¹De pecc. orig., 12.
- ⁹²Augustine, Ep. 177:14.
- ⁹³Ibid.
- ⁹⁴Augustine, Ep. 188:11.
- ⁹⁵Jerome, Epp. 136 and 137; see also, Augustine, Epp. 181:8 and 182:6.
- ⁹⁶Bonner, St. Augustine, 342.
- ⁹⁷Jerome, Ep. 141.
- ⁹⁸Ferguson, 109.
- ⁹⁹Quoted in P. R. Coleman-Norton, Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A. D. 535 (London, 1966), 217.
- ¹⁰⁰See especially Jerome's remark, from Ep. 138:7, that "Catiline has been driven not only from the capital but from the borders of Palestine." Also, Plinval, 330, and Ferguson, 114.

CHAPTER III

THE ISSUES

Such was the furor surrounding the Pelagian heresy itself. Regarding the actual ideas involved in the dispute, there are three primary directions which scholars take. First, some deal with the effect which Augustinian arguments had upon subsequent Catholic (and for that matter, Protestant) dogma. This approach obviously extends the issue far past our period. Second, it is possible to investigate Pelagius' views for what they were originally designed to combat. This is slightly different from what they represented purely by themselves. The third choice is to concentrate simply on the debate between the two Churchmen at the very time. It is not entirely possible to divorce this aspect from the other two, but it is most pertinent to the issue at hand.

Even with this qualification, a certain amount of pruning is necessary. The Pelagian controversy touched a number of issues, each inter-related. Original sin involved infant baptism, which involved the necessity of Grace, and so forth. There is not the space to embark upon a lengthy discussion of each point. Volumes could (and have been) devoted to each portion of the argument. Moreover, it is difficult to completely pin down the issues. The argument fluctuated. If one takes the anti-Pelagian writings on a chronological basis, the topic and major emphasis changed almost annually. In 412, for example, De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum directed its message primarily toward infant baptism. In 415 Grace was the favored topic; by 418 it was

original sin. In fact Augustine's complete system of thought was not formulated until Pelagius had passed from view. Furthermore, even during the time of Pelagius' activity, the debate could change. Until 415, for example, Augustine tolerated Pelagius' suggestion that there were indeed just people who lived without sin. "I should allow this possibility, through the Grace of God and the man's own free will."¹ And again, "We can, after a fashion, agree with those who bear this opinion."² After 415 Augustine steadfastly denied this attitude.

We are therefore faced with the prospect of approximating, rather than defining, the major systems of thought involved. For Pelagius' part, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate his actual pronouncements from those of his followers. The extant manuscripts do not clarify the problem, and Augustine and Jerome do not always distinguish what Pelagius said from what the Pelagians said. There is, after all, a considerable distinction between the two. Despite these problems, it is possible to enumerate the more salient arguments of the controversy. First, however, a short elaboration of the other two aspects of Pelagian theology seems warranted.

In the first respect, suffice it to say that those doctrines which the Catholic Church even now espouses had their origin in the Pelagian-Augustinian debates. Augustine was the first theologian to synthesize the doctrines of the Fall, original sin, and the need for God's Grace. Each doctrine had existed before, but as something of an independent concept. It was Augustine's distinction to weave them into a whole. The Council of Carthage, held in 418, adopted canons which were taken verbatim from Augustine. A century later, the Council of Orange (Arausio) reiterated those canons. Today they remain official teaching. Before proceeding to the salvos exchanged between the two churchmen on specific issues, it

would be beneficial to quote those canons. This will give some perspective to the major issues. Basically, the Augustinian position can be divided into three primary categories:

(a) Original sin. Herein, Augustine asserted that Adam was immortal before the Fall (canon 1). However, the result of his disobedience to God, beside the loss of his immortality, was the transmission of sin to his descendants. This condition was directly responsible for the need of baptism in order to remit that sin (canon 2). Those children who are not baptised cannot expect to enter heaven (canon 3). It is not altogether certain whether this last stipulation is authentically Augustinian: The Council may have been inspired to incorporate this canon from its own ideas. Nonetheless, it is in the spirit of Augustinian teachings.

(b) The necessity of Grace. In canon 4, the Council of Carthage gave a definition to the role of Grace. It was not merely the pardon of past sins, as the more extreme Pelagians insisted, but was an aid to prevent future sins. The nature of this help was such that it revealed the Law as an instruction toward proper living. It also instilled in mankind a love of the good, so that "we may also love and be able to act." (Canon 5). Canon 6 emphasized that Grace was an absolute necessity.

(c) Impeccability. Pelagian supporters had buttressed their statements by references to persons who allegedly lived sinless lives. Canons 7 to 9 eschewed such references. I John 1:18 was quoted as the most definitive reference against impeccability: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Anathema was pronounced against those who maintained that the saints were blessed with the ability not to sin.

Since the fifth century, various groups have claimed Augustine as their champion, largely on the basis of his anti-Pelagian theology. Remembering that Augustine pictured Grace as freely and mysteriously given,

with no reference to the individual's merit, it comes as no large surprise to find that Luther was an Augustinian monk before his break with Catholicism. Moreover, enemies of free will have found in Augustine support (real or imaginary) for their viewpoints. Wycliffites, Calvinists, and Jansenists have all quoted the Bishop to lend respectability to their attitudes. From this it is obvious that the underlying issues of the Pelagian controversy continued to trouble Christendom long after the affair was considered officially closed.

The second focus presents one supreme irony. Most modern authorities on Pelagius seriously doubt if the man should be considered a heresiarch. Since around 1930 the tendency has been to rehabilitate Pelagius from the unsavory reputation which he endured during earlier times. Alexander Souter, Torgny Bohlin, and Georges de Plinval all suggest that Augustine either misunderstood Pelagius' intent or exaggerated it. Rather than presenting his views as probabilities (so the modern view goes), Pelagius merely meant to suggest possibilities.³

Further, if these scholars are correct in their appraisals, Pelagius wrote what he did at the very outset of his career as a refutation of Manichaeism. Never was he interested in attacking orthodoxy. Such an activity should have been considered laudable by Church authorities. Manichaeism had come to challenge Christianity seriously during the fourth century, attracting converts at a prodigious rate.⁴ The magnetism of this sect can be substantiated by Augustine's own career. Its views need not be elaborated in detail; it is enough to say that the Manichees insisted upon a stringent determinism. Man was basically a pawn in a hostile world dominated by the powers of evil. As such free will was non-existent. Moreover, man himself was divided between a good soul and an evil soul. Under these circumstances, he could hardly function as an

independent, morally responsible agent. Pelagius would have none of this.

In his battle with Manichæism, the argument continues, Pelagius relied heavily on the early Augustinian treatise, De Libero Arbitrio, which had been written with the same enemy in mind. When Augustine entered battle with Pelagius, in other words, he was also joining battle against himself. To combat Pelagius, Augustine possibly reverted to deterministic principles. Catholic authors deny that this is so, but Protestants have seized upon this irony unmercifully. Adolph Harnack, for example, summed up this outlook by reporting "numerous contradictions and remnants of Manichæism in the Augustinian rebuttals."⁵

It is possible to make too much of this approach: i. e., seeking to determine Pelagius' real inspiration. If we allow modern suggestions that Manichæism was the culprit, we must inevitably wonder why Pelagius never mentioned this commendable fact to his Catholic opponents. It would most certainly have served him in good stead. And if we intend to investigate the source of Pelagius' motivations, we need to take into account his contemporaries' suspicions. None of his enemies ever suggested that Manichæism was involved. Jerome was convinced (at various times) that Pelagius was a Stoic, a Pythagorean, or a Jovinian.⁶ Augustine himself was capable of accusing the Briton of "novel opinion" and "ancient error" (that is, Jovinianism) in the same paragraph.⁷ Furthermore, these modern studies do not take into account the fact that Augustine considered the issue of "possibility" peripheral. The Bishop mentioned explicitly that he was aware of the qualifications Pelagius put upon his theories; still, the ramifications alone were objectionable.⁸ In short, this second approach is highly nebulous.

And Pelagius' real adversary may not have been so much a person or a philosophy after all. There can be no doubt that Pelagius was fighting

an age: an age of laxity which produced only nominal dedication to religious discipline. Pelagius' attack on superficial belief resulted in an almost grim rigorism. Free will became a pressing responsibility. Augustine and Jerome both made note of the fact that Pelagians literally taught hell-fire and brimstone for individuals who lapsed in their Christian responsibilities.⁹ Augustine reported that one of Pelagius' favorite sayings was "in die iudicii iniquis et peccatoribus non esse parcendum, sed aeternis eos ignibus exurendas."¹⁰ For Pelagians, a slight transgression, a lie, a moment of unkindness might leave the sinner condemned to eternal punishment. It is only a small exaggeration to claim, "According to Pelagius, every man who could have acted better than he did is going to hell."¹¹ Thus, to view Pelagius as the champion of human liberty and Augustine as a dreary authoritarian somewhat misses a crucial point. In a sense Augustine is the kinder of the two, for he makes allowances for human imperfectability.

With these comments in mind, we can now approach the third focus, the actual conversation between the two churchmen. Here, two further qualifications are in order before we proceed. The discussions between Pelagius and Augustine never quite converged. In the first place, Pelagius was a moralist and not a theologian. Theology in its strictest sense was lacking on Pelagius' side. His precepts were merely the rules of good behavior. He never affected to dogmatic speculation. In fact, he went so far as to deny that his views were in any way dogmatic.¹² Augustine presented an entirely different approach. Second, the emphasis in each system of thought was different. In effect we are dealing with two different topics. Pelagianism was fundamentally concerned with free will. The doctrine of Grace, never fully elaborated, floated through Pelagian discussion, somewhat disembodied from the major concern. With

Augustine the emphasis was practically reversed. Grace was the primary question; statements about human nature were ancillary. In one sense it would be problematic for Augustine to treat the question of human nature at any length. There is something inherently unsettling about a theory which talks of a good Creator producing mankind in such a condition that transforming Grace becomes necessary. Whatever the difficulties of each system, however, it remains true that there was a dichotomy of interest and emphasis.

Pelagians derived their views on the nature of things from their conception of God. He was pictured as good and just. The theme of justice pervaded the Pelagian system, causing scholars to remember that both Pelagius and Caelestius had training in the law. At Carthage before his excommunication, Caelestius had remarked that one can surmise God's existence from the existence of justice.¹³ And he even went so far as to claim, "Nothing can be proven from the holy scriptures which justice itself cannot maintain."¹⁴

If God is indeed just and good, so the Pelagians reasoned, it is logically inconsistent to view His creations as anything else. Pelagians evidently stretched this dictum to encompass a variety of things, creations and institutions included. Augustine remarked that the Pelagians were distinguished by their praise of "creaturae . . . nuptiarum . . . legis . . . liberi arbitrii . . . (et) sanctorum."¹⁵ Furthermore--and this was critical to further Pelagian theories--this goodness was fundamentally a part of nature and could not be changed unless nature itself was somehow convoluted. In other words, because there was no natural evil, there could be no natural sin.

This led to Pelagius' view of humanity. The Briton evidently had rather favorable notions of mankind--provided, of course, that it live

up to its God-given potential. "Nature was created so good it needs no help," he wrote to Demetrias.¹⁶ And again, "God is as good as He is just and made man such that he is capable of living without sin, if only he is willing."¹⁷ As a part of this natural order, humanity enjoyed a variety of advantages. It was endowed with freedom of will and reason, which directed the exercise of that will.

To Pelagius, freedom of will meant simply the freedom to choose the good. Evil was interpreted as the wrong use of free will: a momentary arrogation of the will toward forbidden things. Sin could not be construed as a substance (this being an overt reference to Manichaeian teachings); nor was it the inherent taint which Augustine was to hypothesize. It was something almost superficial. Pelagius likened a wrong choice to rust: it might disfigure the external condition, but it could be corrected. Its effects were technically reversible.¹⁸

To describe evil as an element, nature or substance would be to render God Himself less than just. As a creative deity, He would be responsible for the existence of such an entity. Pelagians also asserted that evil could not be inherited; for once inherited it could not be eliminated. It would be fixed in the nature of things. In Concerning Original Sin, Augustine has Pelagius say:

All good or evil, by which we are considered either praiseworthy or blameworthy, is not born with us, but is done by us. We are born with the capacity for either thing. We are created, as it were, without virtue or vice. Only the exercise of the will, which God implanted, is in man.¹⁹

Pelagius posed a question to his opponents. If man is a tabula rasa, how would it be possible for him to be corrupted by an action: that is, by a non-substantial thing? Something of substance can conceivably taint or maim a human being, but not an action. That is merely wrong choice.

The remedy is to rectify the process of choice.

This was particularly uninspired reasoning, but it led to one of the most important attitudes of the Pelagians. Little was so critical to Pelagius as the effect of habit (consuetudo) in shaping human character. It was a primary theme in his Letter to Demetrias and was used in his other treatises to explain human sinfulness.

According to Pelagius, the individual who habitually allowed himself to indulge in reprehensible activity became enmeshed in sin. Eventually the individual would lose the ability to direct his free will, so inured would he become to one type of behavior. By contrast the person who fell into the habit of probity and upright behavior would eventually work his way free of sin's debilitating hold. This, of course, was a process that must be aided by God's Grace. As we shall see below, Pelagius had a very particular view of that concept. It is not entirely clear how Pelagius viewed the process of avoiding sin, how much of a struggle it might be. To Western audiences, Pelagius noted that man could avoid sin "easily." In the East, however, he omitted that qualification and said only that it was a "possibility."²⁰

To undergird his arguments, Pelagius cited examples of human beings who had supposedly lived sinless lives. Isaac, Joseph, Noah, and even certain pagans were accorded that status. Hereupon, Pelagius had the opportunity to expound upon one of his favorite themes. If man could live sinlessly--as exemplified in the lives of the aforementioned worthies--he was morally obliged to do so. Christ Himself had enjoined His followers to be perfect, even "as your Father in heaven is perfect." Pelagius insisted, therefore, that it was possible: how else could God have made such an injunction and retain His justice?

If Pelagius saw fairness as part of God's responsibility, he was also very demanding in his appraisal of man's duties. Nothing appears with more emphasis in Pelagian writings than the notion of human responsibility. Augustine commented on this characteristic: "How ardent is the zeal which Pelagius entertains against those who find a defence for their sins in the infirmity of human nature."²¹ This particular perspective kept Pelagius' argument on one level. The difference between good people and bad depended solely on a choice of action. Choice for Pelagius was very close to logical decision. He did not take into account the motivations for deciding one course of action as opposed to another; nor did he pay attention to the emotions which often determine human behavior.

In fact, there is more than a suggestion of rationalism which pervades the Pelagian treatises. Very little reference is made to the supernatural element inherent to religion. If he had small interest in the supernatural element, it followed that he should stress the absolute independence of human liberty. As a moralist, Pelagius was inclined to do so; otherwise, the individual lost all praise or culpability for his actions. This particular outlook naturally found its way into Pelagius' teaching on original sin. He emphatically rejected the doctrine: "How can one be subjected by God for the guilt of that sin which he knows is not his own? If it is natural, it is not his own. Or if it is his own, it is voluntary and can be avoided."²² Pelagius logically had two objections to original sin. It was intrinsically unjust and would impinge on any independence mankind might enjoy. "Whatever is fettered by natural necessity," he explained, "is deprived of determination of the will and deliberation."²³

Adam himself, the agent responsible for original sin, fared poorly at the hands of all Pelagians. They held that he was an ordinary human

being. Outside of his unique time in history, Adam had no outstanding advantages or significance. Due to the nature of life, Adam would have died regardless of whether he sinned or not. More to the point, Adam had sinned. Pelagians were insistent that this lamentable event established an undesirable precedent and example, but had no other results. Adam's sin injured only himself. The rest of humanity is born into the world as Adam was before his crime. Augustine alluded to this topic when he reported that the Pelagians

contend that if baptism cleanses away the old sin, those children who are born of two baptized parents must be free of this sin, for they could not transmit to their children what they did not themselves possess. Besides, Pelagius says, if the soul is not of transmission, but only the body, then only the later has transmission of sin and it alone deserves punishment. They allege that it would be unjust for the soul, which is now only born and comes not of the lump of Adam, to bear the burden of so alien a sin. They likewise say that it cannot by any means be conceded that God--who remits to a man his own sins--should impute to him another's.²⁴

Thus, original sin and Adam's part in it could find no place in the Pelagian system.

However, two problems were involved with this synopsis, problems which Pelagius' enemies did not fail to note. How was humanity to recognize the good, which Pelagius insisted it could attain? And what of the poor creatures who had become inextricably mired in unworthy activity?

To answer these problems, Pelagius called upon his concept of Grace. For the Briton, this doctrine always faced two directions. God may have instituted the process, but it was man's responsibility to act upon it. Balancing these two aspects led to certain ambiguities which the Pelagians never quite resolved.

In Pelagius' treatment, Grace manifested itself in three roles.

First, there was the so-called "Grace of creation." To Pelagians, there was within the nature of things the possibility that man could live sinlessly. Pelagius himself was emphatic that this situation was the result of God's creative talents. "The actual capacity of not sinning lies not so much in the power of the will as in the necessity of nature. Whatever is placed in the necessity of nature undoubtedly appertains to the Author of Nature--that is, to God."²⁵ In other words, Grace could be loosely construed as the transmission of the ability not to sin.

This hypothetical possibility was itself subdivided into three components. "We localize the possibility in nature itself, willing in freedom of choice and the realization of the effect (produced). The first one--that is, possibility--properly belongs to God, who confers it on his creature. The other two, willing and existence, should be referred to man, because they flow from his freedom of choice."²⁶

To attain this actualization, mankind must make use of its free will. The exercise of the free will is aided by the other two aspects of Pelagian Grace.

The "Grace of Enlightenment" or "Grace of Revelation" helped humanity toward its goal of perfection. Enlightenment came from a number of sources. The Law was of paramount importance. For Pelagians, its purpose was to teach people how "we ought to live."²⁷ It was also a gauge of human activity. With the existence of the Law, humanity lost any excuse for behaving unfittingly out of ignorance. The prophets of the Old Testament were another source of education. They provided the reasonable man with an example of how he should acquit himself. Adam's example had been unreasonable. This point was particularly damaging for the Pelagians, for it left the person of Christ unexplained and certainly made little allowance for His unique activity as redeemer. Caelestius

had been condemned at Carthage for maintaining that the Law and the Gospel were equally efficacious in leading humanity to salvation. And Augustine inveighed repeatedly against Pelagius' neglect of Christ in the pattern of salvation.²⁸

The third subdivision was the "Grace of Remission of Sins." To Pelagius sin presented a problem in that it debilitated man. It caused him to fall into a habit whereby he forfeited his free will and spiralled ever downward into unacceptable behavior. It was because of this pattern that Christ's intervention was necessary. He was indeed an exemplar, but also a redeemer in a somewhat constrained sense. Redemption of sin was implemented through the sacrament of baptism.

To the Pelagians baptism was important solely because it broke the pattern of bondage to sin (through habit) and restored to man his freedom. Thereupon, mankind could take up Christ's example and act accordingly. Never did Pelagius mention the Holy Spirit as an integral part of this process. Augustine castigated the Briton for suggesting merely that the Holy Spirit allowed humanity to resist the snares of the devil "more easily" than it could by its own resources.²⁹ There was no talk of the Paraclete indwelling a human being.

Nor did Pelagius pay any deference to the notion that God's concurrence directed every aspect of human life. Jerome caught this theological shortcoming and lost no opportunity to pillory his adversary for it: "Just listen to this sacrilegious statement. 'If I wish to bend my finger, to move my hand, to sit, to stand, to walk--is the help of God always necessary?'"³⁰

Once again we have returned full circle to man's autonomy and free will. With his penchant for categorization, Pelagius also subdivided the will, upon which he based all human activity. How did it function? What

were its methods of actualization? For Pelagius the will was a tripartite entity. He used the expressions "posse," "velle," and "esse" to describe it. Or, to use Augustine's paraphrase, any action is comprised of three parameters. There must be the possibility of doing it, the wish to do it, and the realization of the wish. "Nam cum tria constituat atque distinguat, quibus divina mandata dicit impleri: possibilitatem, voluntatem, actionem."³¹

For the first component, Pelagius gave ample praise to God as the source:

In the will and in good works there is praise for man--or rather, for God and man. For God has given the possibility of will and work, and He always assists the possibility with His Grace. For it is certainly of God alone that man is able to will a good thing and bring it to completion. This one quality--possibility--is able to exist without the other two, will and action. But these latter two cannot exist without the first.³²

It was on this basis, that he stressed the necessity of God's actions to initiate human freedom, that Pelagius was able to claim orthodoxy. With a fair degree of accuracy, he maintained that he had never denied the absolute necessity of God's help to effect perfection.

Whatever the merit of Pelagius' system--and it should be admitted that it did appeal to serious-minded Christians--there were flaws. On a purely common-sense level, it is obvious that a person cannot always act on what he wills, no matter how strong might be his intent. Pelagius relied too much on reason and example to inspire humanity toward lofty goals. This alone was enough to make him suspect, and somewhat justified Jerome's complaint that Pelagius philosophized religion. Other critics saw this flaw and often cited St. Paul's lament in rebuttal: "The good I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I practice."³³

Long before Pelagius ever set foot on African soil, Augustine had wrestled with that very paradox. In one sense, Augustine was a natural spokesman against Pelagius, for the Bishop had personally experienced the frustrations of attempting by himself to live the good life. This struggle is recorded most vividly in the Confessions, published sometime around 405. A lengthy passage underscored the primary fallacy of Pelagian thought:

I could have wished it and yet had not. Thus I did so many things in situations where willing was not identical with the power to act. Yet I did not do the thing which was incomparably more attractive to me and which I was capable of executing just as soon as I had the will to act. For, as soon as I had willed it, then surely, I willed. In this case, the ability was identical with the will, and the act of willing was itself the performance. Yet it was not done. It was easier for my body to obey the slightest wish of my soul, moving its members at a mere nod, than for my soul to obey itself in carrying out--in the will alone--of a great act . . . What is the source of this monstrosity? The mind commands the body and is immediately obeyed. The mind commands itself and is resisted . . . the mind commands the mind to will, yet it does not do it. It commands that the will's actions be performed and it would not issue the command unless it willed it. Yet its command is not carried out.³⁴

And it will be remembered that it was a quotation from that very work which had so enraged Pelagius: "Command what You will; give what You command." The two men seemed destined to clash.

In one respect there was no argument. The fact of free choice was never under question. Both men took the concept to be a common-place. It was in the nature of things. But the character and usage of the liberty were viewed in diametrically opposed fashion.

For Augustine, experience alone taught that man was not the rather admirable creature Pelagius had in mind. The Bishop began from the supposition that humanity was a massa peccati. There can be no possible way

of rescuing the guilty except by Grace--Grace freely given, for mankind cannot merit God's mercy by its own actions.

For Augustine, Grace represented an aid especially adapted to mankind's need because the Fall had altered nature. Augustine maintained that original sin impinged on man's liberty. Humanity now existed in such a condition that it was incapable of making decisions on a totally individual basis. Prior to the Fall, Adam had (according to Augustine) every possible advantage: "Summa in carne sanitas, in animo tota tranquillitas."³⁵ Nonetheless, some defect in Adam, ambiguously defined as pride, caused him to aspire to more.³⁶ This was the first product of human free will.

Augustine never quite addressed himself to the full circumstances of the Fall. Why did Adam choose to disobey? This question was further clouded by the fact that Augustine once asserted that God could have, if He had so chosen, created man incapable of sinning.³⁷

The most likely explanation for Augustine's assertion is that it would have negated free will. The Bishop was at pains to express his belief that mankind certainly had freedom of choice:

Do we then by Grace make void free will? God forbid. Nay, rather we establish free will. For neither is the Law fulfilled except by free will. But the Law brings a knowledge of sin, faith brings the acquisition of Grace against sin, Grace brings the healing of the soul from the disease of sin, and with the health of the soul comes freedom of will, by free will the love of righteousness, and by the love of righteousness the accomplishment of the Law.³⁸

To modern readers what Augustine had further to say about free will seems curious at the very least and unfair at the worst. In one respect there were for Augustine only two choices which free will could make. It is in the power of the will to turn toward God or toward evil. This

decision determines one's happiness or unhappiness. The individual acts which are termed "good" or "bad" are only minor portions of this greater choice.

If we come from this larger choice to investigate the individual actions which a person wills, Augustine is explicit. Time and again the Bishop reiterated that free will was capable of and responsible for evil, but not for good: free will, that is, taken merely by itself. "When I say to you that without the help of God you can do nothing, I mean nothing good. You have freedom of choice to act evilly without the help of God." So Augustine advised his congregation.³⁹

Augustine was emphatic on this point. For whatever goods humanity accomplished, praise must be given to God alone. Augustine's rationale was explained in the Retractions. He reasoned that God, as the supreme Good, was the source of all other goods manifested on earth, whether they be great, moderate, or small. Augustine defined virtue as the good use of man's freedom of choice. From this he deduced that virtue was derived from God.⁴⁰

Although man could not claim the credit for any good actions he performed, he still needed Grace merely to will that good. After the Fall, mankind had an absolute necessity for Grace to effect its salvation as well. Here Augustine differentiated the Grace which aided present generations from the Grace which Adam, unique among all humans, had enjoyed. Adam alone had an independent freedom of will, untainted by original sin. But sin, entering the world after Adam's transgression, completely altered the situation. Since the Fall, therefore, there have existed a completely different freedom of will and Grace.

Original sin was viewed as something of a congenital disease which enfeebled mankind. It had brought physical death into the world, of

course: "For the wages of sin is death." But it also brought a type of psychic death. The Bishop maintained:

Whoever suggests that man's nature at any period did not require the second Adam for its physician because it was not corrupted by the first Adam is convicted as an enemy of the Grace of God . . . From the moment when "by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin," the entire mass of our nature was ruined beyond doubt and fell into the possession of the destroyer. And from him, no one--no, not one--has been delivered or is being delivered or will be delivered except by the Grace of the redeemer.⁴¹

This psychic death stripped away any natural endowments which Adam had enjoyed, including freedom of choice. Augustine stated it very bluntly. Augustine meant nothing so rudimentary as the ability to choose one action or another. It was, rather, a loss of that freedom which existed in Paradise: to have full righteousness with immortality. In some way never completely explained the Bishop suggested that humanity as a whole shared this particular loss of freedom because it also shared guilt for Adam's sin. Why this should be the case was not fully elaborated, and it was a viewpoint which separated Augustine from the majority of his Eastern colleagues.⁴²

Paradoxically, Augustine did argue for the integrity of the free will. The fact that man has a will was self-evident. To Augustine it deserved no comment. Yet the Bishop never fully clarified his position concerning the nature of free will. In one place it was described as "a neutral power . . . inclining either toward faith or unbelief."⁴³ In other places it is described as availing for nothing but sin.⁴⁴

In general, therefore, the legacy of mankind was a tendency to weakness. To rectify this situation, Christ was incarnated. For Augustine, Christ was infinitely more than an exemplar. No other method was sufficient to extricate humanity from the condition in which Adam had placed

it beside the Grace of Christ. "Neither knowledge nor the divine Law, nor our nature, nor the remission of sin alone constitutes Grace. But it is given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that by it, the Law may be accomplished, our nature delivered and our sin vanquished."⁴⁵

Augustine would have none of Pelagius' three-faceted Grace, with its emphasis on reason and education. Nor did the Bishop view Grace as merely a cleansing of past sins. Rather, it was the supernatural process by which man was implanted with a love of the supreme Good; that is, with a love of God. It was this mysterious love that would cause humanity to conceive an ardent desire to adhere to its Maker. This in turn would produce a desire for proper living.⁴⁶ Here Augustine touched briefly on a concept which Pelagius ignored.

How does mankind, even endowed with Grace, turn from its evil past to embrace the good? In other words, how is Grace put into practice in daily life? Augustine noted that something far more powerful than free choice was required. This entailed the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Augustine called Him "the finger of God" who touched people's hearts and directed them to perform according to God's plan.⁴⁷

Enlightenment and the Law were not the way to inspire humanity to the Christian life. Augustine was very clear. Whatever its necessity, the Law was the mode by which man was actually condemned. In this the Bishop was totally at odds with Pelagius' reliance on the Old Testament as a guide and incentive to commendable behavior. Far from being a list of regulations to mold human action, the Law was (perhaps regrettably) the gauge on which improbity was measured. This was the primary theme of De Spiritu et Littera. The fourteenth through twenty-first chapters of that work are devoted to illustrating the insufficiency of the Law. Augustine reasoned that the Law merely showed humanity how to live together with

other human beings. Man's relationship to God was on an entirely different plane. And in a different work Augustine explained his outlook further:

. . . The Law is not only unprofitable, it is absolutely prejudicial, unless Grace assists it. The utility of the Law may be shown by this: that it obliges all whom it proves guilty of transgression to betake themselves to Grace for deliverance and help overcome their evil lusts. It commands, rather than assists. It discovers disease, but does not heal it.⁴⁸

Again, Grace was seen to be remedial. The mode by which the remedy was conferred on humanity was through the sacrament of baptism. Since 325 orthodox Christians had accustomed themselves to the idea that there was "one baptism for the remission of sin" as stipulated in the Nicene Creed. However, the Christian world was not of one mind concerning the sacrament. It was still widely practiced to defer baptism until very late in life, often on one's deathbed. But infant baptism was becoming common also. Clearly the timing of baptism said very definite things about the way in which the purpose of the sacrament was perceived. The Pelagian controversy merely clarified thinking on this matter.

Augustine could not countenance the Pelagian--or, more accurately, Caelestialian--attitude that unbaptized infants enjoyed eternal life. The Bishop's objection was obvious. By 414 his dogmatic pronouncements had become emphatic, shifting slightly from an earlier view that baptism was, under certain circumstances, unnecessary.⁴⁹

But if baptism was an obligatory sacrament, it did not necessarily confer the assurance of salvation. To Augustine it was "mirandum" that God should choose to bestow Grace indiscriminately. This logically led to Augustine's theory of predestination, more accurately related to his battles with Julian of Eclanum than with Pelagius. For this reason we need not elaborate fully. However, Augustine's thoughts were beginning

to crystallize in the earlier stages of the controversy. For Augustine it was enough to realize that God, for His own mysterious reasons, elected some to receive Grace but not others. On this point, Augustine's Pelagian opponents castigated him mercilessly. It was, so they said, totally inimical to the idea of liberty and human free will. Augustine countered by protesting that a person is still free to acquiesce to God's wishes or go his own way. Furthermore, in his very earliest work, Augustine suggested that if God's "predestination" took away free will, an argument could be made for the idea that man's freedom might impinge on God's free will.⁵⁰ In protest, the Pelagians accused Augustine of reintroducing the pagan concept of Fate--draped in Christian rhetoric, perhaps, but still Fate. "Sub nomine gratiae," inquiunt Pelagiani, "ita fatum assuerunt," Augustine reported.⁵¹

Thus we have come once again to the major problem between the two men, a problem which perhaps remains one of the most perplexing issues of Christian theology: how to reconcile God's prerogative with humanity's freedom to act. The issue was never satisfactorily resolved: centuries later, groups still argued over the basic problem. Moreover, even at the time of the Pelagian-Augustinian confrontation, certain issues within each system of thought were left dangling. Pelagius, for example, never addressed himself to the question of the precise extent with which God's Grace interacts in human life. Nor did he answer the critical question of why people with the best intentions still fall below their potential. Are certain sins worse than others; and if so, why? For his part, Augustine's suggestions are not altogether satisfying. Why God should impute to the rest of humanity Adam's sin was never fully explained. And the Bishop's reliance upon "mysterious are the ways of the Lord" is a somewhat less than satisfying way to distract attention from the basic unfairness of

predestination.

Whatever the drawbacks or merits of each system, we have sketched the major concerns within the Pelagian heresy. If nothing else, the heresy helped to crystallize orthodoxy, while at the same time underscoring one of the great recurring paradoxes of the Christian faith.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹De pecc. mer., 2:7.
- ²Augustine, Ep. 157:5.
- ³These views are expounded in the following works: Alexander Souter, Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul, (Oxford, 1927); Torgny Bohlin, Die Theologie des Pelagius und Ihre Genesis, (Uppsala, 1957); and Georges de Plinval, Pelage: ses écrits, sa vie, et sa réforme. (Lausanne, 1943).
- ⁴Geo Widengren, Mani and Manichaeism, tr. Charles Kessler (New York, 1965), 118.
- ⁵History of Dogma, Volume 5, 217.
- ⁶Jerome, Ep. 133:10.
- ⁷De pecc. mer., 3:12.
- ⁸De Spir. et Lit., 3:5.
- ⁹Eugene Portalie, A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine, tr. Ralph J. Bastian (Chicago, 1960), 189.
- ¹⁰De gestis, 3:9-10. See also, Orosius, De arbitrii libertate, 16-18, and Jerome, Dialog. ad. Pel., 1:28.
- ¹¹Harnack, loc. cit., 192.
- ¹²De gestis, 16:6.
- ¹³De perf. iust., 15:7.
- ¹⁴Quoted by Harnack, loc. cit., 192.
- ¹⁵Contra duas epist. Pel., 3:24.
- ¹⁶Epis. ad Dem., 11.

¹⁷De Nat. et Grat., 50:9.

¹⁸Loc. cit., 60-61.

¹⁹De pecc. orig., 14:5.

²⁰Loc. cit., 9:3.

²¹De Nat. et Grat., 7:8.

²²Loc. cit., 34:6.

²³Loc. cit., 54:2.

²⁴De pecc. mer., 14:1.

²⁵De Nat. et Grat., 59:4.

²⁶De grat. Christi, 1:4, 5.

²⁷De Spir. et Lit., 14:3.

²⁸Loc. cit., 4:2.

²⁹De grat. Christi, 28:13.

³⁰Jerome, Ep. 133:5.

³¹De grat. Christi. For an explanation of this three-faceted Grace, see Margaret Zednik, In Search of Pelagius: A Reappraisal of the Controversy with St. Augustine (Austin, Texas, 1975), 28-36.

³²De grat. Christi, 4:7.

³³Romans 7:14.

³⁴Confessions, 8:8:19-21.

³⁵De Civ. Dei, 14:26:3.

³⁶Loc. cit., 14:27.

³⁷Portalie, 205.

³⁸De Spir. et Lit., 52:3.

³⁹Sermo, 156:1.

⁴⁰Retractions, 1:9:6.

⁴¹De pecc. orig., 34:5.

⁴²De Nat. et Grat., 4:7.

⁴³De Spir. et Lit., 58:7.

⁴⁴Loc. cit., 5:4.

⁴⁵Loc. cit., 28:7.

⁴⁶See especially, Augustine, Ep. 217:5.

⁴⁷De Spir. et Lit., 28:9.

⁴⁸De grat. Christi, 1:9.

⁴⁹De Civ. Dei, 18:7.

⁵⁰De Libero Arbitrio, 3:36.

⁵¹Contra duas epist. Pel., 2:5:10.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOCATIONS: ROME AND AFRICA

We have seen something of Pelagius' personal history and teachings. We have also delineated some of the larger developments in the life of the late Empire. Still, it would be beneficial now to point out more specific details about Pelagius' immediate environment. In this case we are talking about Rome, where he spent such a large part of his life, and the province of Africa. Africa was undoubtedly the scene of Pelagius' downfall. The Church there immediately took a dislike to him. Thus, even though Pelagius' actual residence in Africa was of very short duration, we must discuss some of the characteristics of the province. To understand the man, we must understand his environment.

Africa

As mentioned above, Africa and not Rome first found Pelagius unacceptable. In particular, Pelagius was associated with Africa Proconsularis, the modern Tunisia. It was there that he drew the majority of his support. Augustine himself, as Bishop of Hippo Regius, was Numidian. The most substantial difference between Proconsularis and Numidia was economic in nature. Africa Proconsularis was more commercial, more urbanized, more receptive to new ideas. Numidia was more of an agricultural center, an area of great estates.

During Pelagius' day, Roman Africa was curiously composite. It was

at once an urbanized center and one of the most important agricultural regions of the West. As with other provinces, it was the cities which reflected Roman influence. The cities represented Latin culture, and herein Africa had a long, proud heritage. The African culture which had flourished during the second and third centuries had been the most dazzling in the West. In literature African authors outshone any Latin rivals during the period of the Antonines and Severans; in Africa ecclesiastics had first produced Latin Church writings. When Pelagius lived, Africa was just beginning to slip from this pinnacle.

Because of its pattern of early colonization, Africa was an anomaly. Since the first century B. C., Italian settlers had flooded the province, bringing with them all the accoutrements of Roman life: administration, law, customs. Later still, Rome provided Africa with Christianity. This point is of some importance. If the supposition is correct that Roman missionaries (rather than orientals) proselytized Africa, then the province was the home of the most purely Latin Christianity, for Rome itself had derived Christianity from non-Western sources. What Pelagius encountered in Africa reflected this history of colonization. A Latinized ruling class was superimposed on lower orders of "Punic" or "Berber" derivation. Augustine himself made note of this indigenous population which still spoke the lingua Punic and primarily inhabited the non-urban areas.¹

One striking feature of fourth-century Africa was its heavy population. Africa Proconsularis in particular was densely populated. It was a network of towns, many of which engaged in trade with Italy. One estimate sets the number of cities at 200 for Africa Proconsularis and 500 for the rest of Africa. Most of these were equipped with all the normal municipal paraphernalia.²

Carthage alone made Africa important. It was considered one of the

chief cities of the Empire, and second in the West behind Rome itself. Augustine spoke of "duae tantae urbes Latinarum litterarum artifices Roma et Carthago."³ Carthage was a city of schools, largely law schools.⁴ The city was also a show-place for talent. Influential Romans frequented the city and upon recognizing a person of merit might secure for him a position at the imperial court or in Rome. Lactantius was so highly regarded that he was called to the capital to teach Constantine's son. And Augustine made his start in a similar fashion, catching the eye of Symmachus and eventually ending as a teacher of rhetoric in Milan.⁵

The most important link between Rome and Africa was always economic. Traditionally, Africa was the province of huge estates. As early as the first century A. D., Pliny noted this characteristic.⁶ The pattern was no different in Pelagius' time. By the fifth century three primary groups controlled most of Africa's land. First, the Church (both Catholic and Donatist) had begun to collect tracts of land, usually as bequests from the pious. Augustine related that the church at Hippo Regius owned property twenty times larger than his father's farm; no large holding, by any means, but an indication of an emerging trend.⁷ Second, the Emperor himself was the greatest single landowner in Africa. Emperors from Nero to Diocletian had acquired various estates in the province. In Pelagius' time, Honorius added more to the imperial holdings, so that an estimated one-fifth of African land was under his control.⁸ The third important landowner, of course, was the Roman aristocrat. North Africa was practically owned and technically governed by the Roman nobility. The link between Africa and Rome had been further strengthened during the fourth century when Africa became, almost exclusively, Italy's granary. There is no doubt that during the fourth century, the aristo-

crat extended his influence in the province. He possessed the funds to simply buy out lesser individuals, and he was not above the darker method of persuasion. The Theodosian Code found it necessary to stipulate, "transactiones quae per potentiam extortae sunt, praecipimus infirmari."⁹ This was in 415.

Two factors contributed to the growing influence of the senatorial aristocracy in Africa. First, there was the fact that the province was technically governed by the Roman Senate, not the Emperor. There was always a dual sovereignty in Africa, however, since no Emperor was content to ignore any territory of the Empire. But the Senate's de iure grasp on certain administrative posts gave its members leverage in Africa which they did not possess elsewhere. Second, land aggregated to an ever-narrowing circle of ownership. These factors implied more than economic and administrative considerations. As John Matthews points out:

In those provinces which the senators governed most regularly, in Italy and Africa, the areas of their political and their social and economic lives coincided precisely. Their behavior as governors was consistent with this situation. They can be seen inheriting family clientelae in the towns which they had in their charge as governors and forming new links of patronage. Such connections would undoubtedly be carried over into their private life when they left office, and they contributed cumulatively to the vast spreading network of obligations and services by which the towns of Italy were linked with their residential aristocracy and those of Africa with the men who were the largest landowners in the province.¹⁰

As the fourth and fifth centuries progressed, Africa came under increasingly close scrutiny from both imperial and senatorial services. As Italy's granary, protection of the province was of great importance, particularly when Constantinople began to drain Egyptian corn away from Ostia.¹¹ No theme appears with more regularity in the literature of the period than a fear of famine, an apprehension intensified by the know-

ledge that the plebs of Rome became violent in inverse relation to the supply of food.¹² This fact brought Africa to the fore as a paramount concern, and it naturally strengthened the links between the province and Rome.

Because of the need to guard the African grain supply, the governor of the province (named by the Senate in Rome) was provided by the Emperor with a staff of advisors and assistants. The greed of this civil service was common knowledge.¹³ Diocletian had been forced to institute local concordia as a means of protest against overbearing officials.¹⁴ Part of the problem was due to the fact that imperial and senatorial officials never completely acted in concert. Symmachus was known to grumble about the quality of those "helpers" whom the Emperor provided. He complained that the civil servants created the errors which he was expected to correct.¹⁵

Fortunately for Symmachus and his circle, the late fourth century allowed them to depose the imperial bureaucracy--or the outsiders who filled its ranks. Imperial attention was rivetted on more pressing matters elsewhere. The aristocracy thus had more freedom to maneuver politically. Moreover, the imperial bureaucracy, formerly closed to the Roman nobility, was opened to persons of senatorial rank during the 380's.¹⁶ Directly because of this policy, Roman aristocrats came to dominate Italy and Africa. More and more noble Roman names appear in the African fasti of the period. Usually, it was the junior members of the great families who filled the posts in Africa. Because it was comparatively easy to defend, the province offered the beginning of a political career, not its culmination.

In one respect, however, Africa did cry for experience and talent on the part of its officials. The fourth and fifth centuries were times of

almost constant activities. At the very beginning of the fourth century the Saharan tribes made periodic raids on populated regions, necessitating refortification and the construction of roads better suited to troop movement.¹⁷ In 363 the first in a series of internecine battles prompted the Berber tribes to intrigue and revolt. Numidia and Mauretania were kept in such turmoil--"disloyal schemes and thefts . . . war and civil discord," as Ammianus said¹⁸--that the Emperor was forced to send imperial forces to save the situation. Again in 392, 397, and 410 these tribes disrupted the entire North African area. This threatened Italy's well-being, for the African insurgents cut the grain supply. It should be stressed that the Roman nobility governing the province did little to impede the activity of these malcontents. So long as Rome itself was supplied and aristocratic estates untouched, the senatorial officials did little to relieve imperial shortages.¹⁹

The indigenous population was given cause for resentment at this time. Closely overlapping Pelagius' career came a rather peculiar "attack" on the curial class. Increasingly severe laws were promulgated to keep these local worthies in check. This was a distinct change from the policy of the mid-fourth century. During Julian's reign, the curiales were given the benefit of tax exemptions.²⁰ But toward the end of the century, from roughly 385 onward, the curial class was held to its rank and to the taxes and duties incumbent upon it. In 386, for example, the Theodosian Code declared that desertion of one's rank would lead to forfeiture of his land.²¹

Nor were the humbler members of society totally content with their lot. The coloni were, in Africa as elsewhere, becoming an integral part of the socio-economic structure. In Africa at least, the Lex Manciana specified all the obligations of and protections afforded to the coloni.

It is impossible to determine if any patterns of alliance arose within the African social structure. It is known that the coloni in Africa petitioned the Emperor successfully in an effort to alleviate the oppressions of senatorial officials.²² But it is also known that the coloni relied upon local aristocrats to protect them from the rapacity of imperial tax collectors.²³ The only thing which is certain is that the seigneurs expected reciprocity for their aid. For our purposes, one of the most noteworthy instances of this was the demand for allegiance to the landowner's religious preference. The extent of such influence is attested by the fact that Honorius enforced orthodoxy through the nobles of Africa.²⁴ Augustine further hinted at this pattern when he commented on the speed with which the peasantry could be Donatized or Catholicized by the example of their patron.²⁵

Beside a certain social unrest, Africa was plagued throughout the century with religious dissent. We shall later elaborate African religious tendencies in detail, but for the time being, two points need to be mentioned. For exactly a hundred years before Pelagius set foot in Carthage, two groups had bickered and occasionally bloodied each other in defense of what each defined as orthodoxy. This, of course, was the Donatist controversy which drained vitality from the African Church. In addition to supporting fanatic Christians, Africa was also the stronghold of paganism. In this respect, the province was merely an extension of Rome, which was notorious as an oasis of pagan religions. It is not surprising that Julian the Apostate was particularly favored and fondly remembered in Africa. Fulsome public inscriptions honored him: "restitutor sacrorum" in Thibilis; "restitutor libertatis et Romanae religionis" in Casae.²⁶ Augustine pointed out certain towns which were especially obstinate in refusing to give up the old ways.²⁷ As late as 421

popular agitation forced the Emperor to reopen the temple of Dea Caesetis in Carthage.²⁸ In short, Pelagius and Augustine encountered each other in an area which was not unanimously agreed on its religious loyalties. This fact undoubtedly gave more urgency to Augustine's defense of orthodoxy.

Rome

According to Ammianus, the city of Rome, even in late antiquity, was unquestionably the glory of the world. Constantinople was too new to rival it, and the cities of the East lacked Rome's prestige. During a state visit in 357, the Emperor Constantius III (newly from the provinces) was "dazzled by the city's magnificence."²⁹ Certainly Rome had cause for pride. Everywhere were reminders of an illustrious past and indications of continued good fortune. Supporting a population estimated at 250,000³⁰, Rome was enhanced by eleven forums, ten basilicas, twenty-eight libraries, a number of triumphal arches, palaces, theatres, tombs of ancient heroes, the Colisseum and the Capitol itself. The city was serviced by nineteen aqueducts and twenty-nine roads leading to agricultural areas in the vicinity.³¹

Beyond its physical character, the city was distinguished by a personality which made it unique. It was the residence of an aristocracy which, in Pelagius' day, dominated southern Italy, Sicily, and North Africa. From the outset it might be best to point out an important fact. During this period one might say that there were two Italies. Things were decidedly different between the northern and southern portions of the peninsula. Rome had long since ceased to function as political capital. Emperors established capitals purely upon the dictates of mili-

tary necessity. At the turn of the fifth century, northern Italy had become imperial territory for strategic purposes. Surrounding the Emperor was a body of administrators and foreigners, often manning the legions. A military cemetery in Concordia contained Syrians, Batavians, and Ostrogoths.³² Moreover, federate peoples had settled in the north as tax-paying subjects. Ammianus, for example, makes reference to the Alemanni living on the Po.³³ Even religious differences were divided north and south. Northern Italy was more Christianized, with a complex of cities adhering either to Arianism or Catholicism. During the last years of the fourth century, Milan became a center of militant orthodoxy, not only through the efforts of St. Ambrose, but also at the direction of the Emperor Theodosius and his "coterie espagnole pieuse."³⁴

Things were far different from Rome southward. The city held an unquestioned distinction. For generations Rome had claimed a purpose and a mission in directing the destinies of the masses. Long after the aura of the Caesars had departed, victim to the anarchy of the third century, the myth still persisted. And however far removed from reality, the mystique of Roma Aeterna confounded bishops and emperors in their various efforts.

If the city was able to accomplish the latter, it was because it supported the only homogenous and readily identifiable organ of government within the Empire beside the Emperor himself. The Senate at Rome, which shall be elaborated in greater detail below, came to be identified with certain causes, notably the preservation of the old religion. This, ironically, came to a head at precisely the time the Roman Church was becoming a powerful force to be reckoned with. We should not be overly surprised. Rome was always an anomaly in any category: financially, politically, intellectually. As late as 416 it was impossible to find a

unanimous opinion about Rome's future. Celebrations throughout the Empire were held regularly to commemorate the founding of the city; and optimistic poets could be counted on to make effusive predictions. Rutilius Numantianus, for example, had particularly bright hopes: "Rome alone need not dread the distaff of the Fates . . . the span which remains is subject to no bounds, so long as earth shall stand and heaven uphold the stars."³⁵ At the same time, one could find any number of gloomy outlooks. The Sibylline Books had a long tradition that a disaster would one day cause Rome's collapse, an event which disgruntled provincials awaited eagerly, if we may believe Augustine.³⁶ When it became obvious that some type of fin de siècle was at hand, people found explanations to suit their viewpoint. The Christians blamed the pagans--Augustine's City of God being the most famous polemic. And the pagans blamed the Christians. Pluvia deficit, Christiani causa, went the proverb. The expression tells much about the psychology of the age.

Rome was the first city of the West. It was the residence of Italy's nobility, who were responsible in large part for the encomia addressed to Eternal Rome. Rome was their town, to be suitably touted. Ausonius, Symmachus, Macrobius--all idealized the city and all were pagan notables. This class shall be dealt with below.

Below the aristocrats was the great mass of commoners. We know far less about them than the nobility, and for the obvious reasons. Literature from a monarchical age is almost exclusively about, for, and by the aristocracy. Information about the lower classes must either be inferred or it lies in reference to the aristocracy which, in this case, acted as prime mover in the life of the city. This is a feature of any age, but due to the interlocking nature of the Roman patronage system, it is particularly relevant here.

However, salient features can be constructed about the humbler citizens of Rome, with whom Pelagius is known to have spent some time.³⁷ Of primary importance was the fact that the lower classes were capable of upward mobility. Rome was an excellent place to start. Much emphasis has been placed by earlier historians upon the suggestion that late Roman society fell into carefully graduated classes. Imperial edicts no doubt contributed to this situation. And Roman society had traditionally been structured along timocratic lines. This alone would suggest a social pattern broken into neat delineations, gradations of wealth being required for hereditary status. However, there is a growing body of opinion which holds that tightly constrained guilds and hereditary occupations were not so rigid as had been thought.³⁸ The careers of the men involved in the Pelagian controversy would support such a conclusion.

Constantine himself had been instrumental, almost a century before, in fostering social mobility. By advancing an "aristocracy of service," Constantine had broadened the horizons of ambitious and talented commoners, as well as intensifying an existing dichotomy between traditional and imperial aristocracies. To be precise, this process had begun in earnest approximately a generation before Constantine, who himself represents its fruition. Around 260 army reforms had barred the senatorial aristocracy--the same group based in Rome--from holding military commands. Primarily this action was motivated by the desire to reserve commands for true talent at a time when the Empire was most definitely in need of proficient commanders. It is also possible that the Emperors ("new men" and increasingly of non-Italian origins) saw this as an opportunity to rid themselves of the tensions and impediments associated with working with men of long pedigrees.

Whatever the motivation for the army reforms, they spelled oppor-

tunity for the lower classes. There were two other great avenues of advancement: the imperial bureaucracy and the Church. Until the fifth century, when the Church became more and more the domain of the aristocrat, the religious hierarchy was very egalitarian. Once during the third century, the Church at Rome had for its bishop a former slave, whose previous owner (a freedman) was chamberlain to the Emperor.³⁹ Pelagius entered the scene just as the pattern was changing, as aristocrats began to see the Church as a suitable career. Of the intellectual luminaries of Pelagius' day, only one was from an aristocratic family. That was Ambrose. But more and more as the fifth century progressed, the commoners found themselves displaced from the higher ranks of the Church.

Opportunity for upward mobility was a generalization which applied to the lower classes of the entire Empire. More specific information about the lower classes in Rome itself is harder to obtain. Rome undoubtedly witnessed a certain amount of hostility and tension, particularly among the plebs. Two reasons suggest this possibility. First, the city contained a sizeable foreign population which the native Roman disliked. Second, a tradition for faction and violence attended Roman life. Politics was the most notorious outlet for violent behavior, but ecclesiastical matters (which were actually the same thing) could also rouse the mob to action. This pattern dominated the outcome of the Pelagian controversy.

Since Augustan times foreign elements had swollen Rome's population. Some were merchants; some were associated with the various Eastern religions which gained a popular following during the Empire.⁴⁰ As early as the second century, classical authors such as Martial and Juvenal lamented the influx of foreigners.

The practice of slavery also swelled the city's foreign population. By the fifth century, numbers of Germanic slaves filled Roman homes, a

particularly disquieting situation when their kinsmen were ravaging the Italian peninsula. Roman fears may easily have been justified. During Alaric's siege, great numbers of slaves deserted to the Gothic camp, presumably slaves of Germanic origin. It is possible that Alaric also received helpful information from sources inside the city; again, probability suggests that the informants would have been such slaves.⁴¹ It is undeniable that tension between Roman and Gothic elements surfaced at times when barbarian encroachments came too close. In 376, for example, at the time of the great Danubian crossing, hysteria overcame the Italian population. Thousands of innocent Gothic families living in north Italy were massacred before tensions finally subsided.⁴² The federated military chieftains, on whom later Emperors relied, found themselves impeded in their efforts by Roman prejudice. Stilicho in particular was hindered by the suspicions and dislike of the people of Rome, aristocrat and commoner alike.⁴³ It is noteworthy that this prejudice was less racial than cultural in nature. Whatever its particular characteristics, however, xenophobia formed part of the fabric of fifth-century Rome.⁴⁴

Violence as a means of political persuasion has been alluded to earlier. It contributed to the very complexion of the city. This particular phenomenon was related to the demands of the patronage system, which remained in usage throughout the late Empire. Commoners, as members of the great seigneurs' clientelae, were expected to conform to the political preference of the patron. While aristocrats did not object to becoming crude among themselves in the Senate House⁴⁵, they were loath to do so in public. Their constituents had no such compunctions. Traditional loyalties and antipathies could and often did continue for generations.⁴⁶ Although imperial times had brought a respite from the

bloody disturbances of the first century B. C., the pattern was never entirely broken. As imperial control loosened under the pressures of the fourth and fifth century, factional disputes appeared with more regularity in Rome. Mobs and massive confrontations were not unusual.⁴⁷ In times of famine the crowd became especially foul-tempered. Ammianus mentions no fewer than five instances between 355 and 367 when the plebs had to be suppressed. Shortages of wine and corn caused two outbursts; a religious dispute triggered another riot; and ill-advised remarks by Roman aristocrats inspired outraged commoners to commit arson.⁴⁸ The letters of Symmachus are filled with apprehension, knowing as he did that the hostility within Rome was aggravated when the annona was delayed.⁴⁹ Ambrose, Zosimus, and Orosius also commented on this very phenomenon.⁵⁰

Besides rioting in the streets, the common Roman engaged in other reprehensible activities. He was notorious for pilfering and for defacing public monuments. "Vandalism" was an inaccurately chosen term to describe destructive pastimes. The common Roman was probably far more destructive to his city, if only because he had a longer period of time to work. The Emperors were forced repeatedly to protest against civic destructions, addressing their displeasure to the urban prefect. The Theodosian Code three times set up stringent punishments for looting: in 365, 376, and 390. Throughout the next century, repeated attempts were made to reverse the trend of a seemingly endemic malady.⁵¹

The vices of the common people are well catalogued indeed. The patristic writings abound in unfavorable comments about the people's habits. Ammianus also found the commoners of Rome distasteful. Their fondness for taverns and the arena prevented him from finding "anything worth mentioning or important that was being done in Rome."⁵² Amusements

such as the games and the theatre, which drew censure from the Church, were frequented on a regular basis until well after the sixth century.⁵³

Still, despite the city's preoccupation with carrying on as usual, Rome was shaken rudely at exactly the time Pelagius resided there. From 383 onward the West was totally disrupted. The movements of Alaric's Goths were extremely complicated. But the city watched and reacted and interacted with the events from this time until 410. Pelagius was directly affected; and for this reason, we will elaborate Alaric's movements as an appendix to the history of the city of Rome.

Alaric

For residents of Rome, the undeniable indication that disaster lurked close at hand came in 378. That, of course, was the year in which two-thirds of the Roman army perished with its Emperor at Adrianople. The German tribes along the Danube had been set in motion by Huns pressing hard to their rear. Hungry and rebuffed in their attempts to treat with Roman dignitaries, the Visigoths met the Emperor Valens eight miles outside the city and defeated him. Constantinople itself narrowly escaped capture, defended--ironically enough--by a contingent of Saracen troops.⁵⁴

From this point, Gothic movement directly affected Italy and, more specifically, Rome itself. After their success at Adrianople, the Goths became aimless, roaming through Achaia and Pannonia: happily for the Empire, which found itself totally disorganized. The surviving Emperor was Gratian, then aged nineteen. Realizing the bleakness of the situation, Gratian enlisted the talents of a co-emperor. This was Theodosius, who was "universally considered capable of guiding the reins of government."⁵⁵

Antiquity's assessment was correct. Theodosius the Spaniard came to the throne well prepared to deal with mounting crisis: his father had served the Empire well, notably in Africa, and Theodosius himself had experience as the military leader of Spain.

Immediately he was faced with the necessity of crushing the Goths, now fallen to the status of scattered, marauding bands. By 379 he had cleared Greece of their presence. But in 383 the legions of Britain rebelled against the Emperor in the West. Discontent with the legitimate princeps--said to spend his days favoring foreigners and hunting animals⁵⁶--the legions elevated their general Magnus Clemens Maximus to the purple.⁵⁷ With him, the army sailed for Gaul. There they quickly took control and for four years effectively ruled Britain, Gaul, and Spain. In 387 an attempt was made to wrest Italy itself from the young Valentinian II. It is a commentary on the times that, as his excuse for coup, Maximus used the argument that he was defending orthodoxy: the young Emperor was Arian and had made threats against St. Ambrose. And Maximus conveniently planned to rescue Ambrose in Milan, the imperial capital.⁵⁸ The Bishop, by the way, was less than enthusiastic about his potential rescue.

At this point, Theodosius intervened from the East. The usurper Maximus was captured in his stronghold at Aquileia and the West restored to Valentinian. Valentinian turned out to be yet another in the long line of ineffectual rulers. Under dire circumstances he was reported to have bemoaned, "Although Emperor, I have no power."⁵⁹ It happened that Valentinian was correct, for within five years Theodosius had to rescue Italy a second time. In 392 Valentinian was found dead under suspicious circumstances. It was suspected that he had been murdered by Arbogast, the barbarian magister equitum. Whatever the truth of that story, Arbogast

was unwilling to declare himself Emperor. Instead, he gave that honor to Eugenius, a pagan accepted by the Senate in Rome. For two years Theodosius prepared his army in the East. In the West, during this time, the Senate had its last day in the sun, turning life to the old, pre-Christian ways. In 394 Theodosius marched, with an army containing 20,000 Goths, marshalled by Alaric.⁶⁰ On September 5, 394, Theodosius met the Western forces on the Frigidus and there defeated the usurpers; usurpers who, it is noteworthy, were able to mount an opposition comparatively well-matched to the imperial forces.⁶¹ Once again "legitimate" rule was restored in the West.

This time Theodosius appointed his son Honorius heir to the Western provinces, with Arcadius to the Eastern. Shortly thereafter, Theodosius died. Upon his death, two primary developments characterized the political history of the day and shaped the very times during which Pelagius and his opponents played out their individual histories. First, the East and West now eyed each other with open hostility and suspicion; second, Alaric repeatedly threatened Italy and, upon occasion, Africa.

Theodosius' death had precipitated a crisis. Immediately, the Visigoths moved. Alaric, while in the employ of Theodosius, had personally witnessed all the internal debility undermining the Empire: the weakness of the legions; the reluctance of the provincials to fight; the oppressions of the tax collectors, which bred resentment among the citizens of the Empire; and perhaps worst of all, the ill-feeling and lack of cooperation between Arcadius and Honorius. The moment was auspicious, and Alaric's Goths turned against the East. First, the bands marched through Macedonia and Thessaly. To deal with them, a Western army hastened from Italy.

This was the army led by Stilicho. For thirteen years, from 395 to

408, Western fortunes revolved directly around this man and his success in holding Italy intact. Theodosius had appointed this half-barbarian military leader to guide and aid Honorius, who was ten years of age when he took the throne. Stilicho made use of Theodosius' old troops to meet the Goths. Following the Battle of Frigidus, the Constantinopolitan troops had not been demobilized. Furthermore, the army which Rome had supplied Eugenius now marched with Stilicho to crush the Goths. But oddly enough, Stilicho's attempt to rescue the East was impeded by the Eastern Emperor. Arcadius dismissed the Roman contingents back to Italy and demanded that the Eastern troops be recalled to Constantinople, thereby leaving Alaric well-entrenched in Greece.⁶²

In 396, Stilicho and the Western legions took matters into their own hands. This time they successfully ousted Alaric from Greece. Arcadius rewarded their exertions by appointing Alaric to the position of Vicarius Daciae, in which capacity the Goth's power increased enormously. Westerners were disgusted. Claudian, the court poet of Honorius, knew well that Alaric's strength was enhanced primarily because the East and West could not agree: "Hic est . . . quem discors odiisque anceps civilibus orbis, non sua vis tutata diu."⁶³ Situated strategically on the cross-road of East and West, Alaric collected taxes, enlisted recruits, and kept each half of the Empire wondering which direction he would turn in his next attack.

By 400 Alaric had decided. The West appeared the weakest. The story goes that he was goaded by a voice, admonishing him: "Rumpe omnes, Alarice, moras. Hoc impiger anno Alpubus Italiae ruptis: penetrabis ad Urbem."⁶⁴ From this point there is a lacuna in our knowledge of Alaric's activity. The sources are confused and give a picture of random movement, and ill-defined priorities. The only thing which seems to be certain is that the Goths spent three years in Italy, besieging the Emperor

and making depredations at others. To defend Italy, Stilicho pulled legions home from as far away as Britain and Gaul.⁶⁵ Evidently Stilicho was able to deflect the Goths at this time.

Yet no sooner had Alaric departed the peninsula that a compatriot turned against Italy. In 405 Radagaisus brought 200,000 Goths to Italy; Radagaisus, described by Orosius as "by far the most savage of Rome's past and present foes."⁶⁶ By this time Roman tempers had become sharp in the face of repeated catastrophes. The Senate became rather loud in its complaints that Italy was continually endangered because the old religion had been abandoned.⁶⁷ Once again, however, Stilicho's talents saved the peninsula. Radagaisus was surrounded in the mountains near Florence and starved into submission.

Three years later Alaric returned. Conditions in the West had progressively deteriorated, as he well knew. In 407 yet another coup erupted in Britain. In this case it was one Constantius who followed what was by now a traditional pattern. Acclaimed by his troops, he sailed to Gaul and proceeded to maraud that unhappy province, along with a swarm of Franks, Vandals, Alans, and Alemanni. Furthermore, the West was once again at odds with Constantinople, this time over possession of Illyricum. War between the two halves of the Empire was narrowly averted. There was talk of collusion between Stilicho and Alaric to attack the East jointly.⁶⁸

Whatever the truth to that rumor, Alaric did demand payment for neutrality in Italy. Stilicho himself took that demand to the senators at Rome--the only group with funds enough to bribe the Goth. They grumbled ("Non est ista pax, sed pactio servitutis"⁶⁹), but they paid. Alaric was kept from Rome for the first time.

Unfortunately for the city, Stilicho was falling into disfavor at

Honorius' court. With his fall, all hope of defending the peninsula was lost. His end was precipitated in 408 by a mutiny of troops in northern Italy. These were Italian troops, which hated Stilicho as an outsider. Stilicho's most powerful friends were slain, as was his bodyguard. Stilicho himself perished; and his death was followed by the massacre of the wives and children of the foederati in the cities of Italy.⁷⁰

With Stilicho dead and Italy in chaos, Alaric marched for the final time. There was little opposition to the movement. Rome was his target: Honorius was inaccessible in Ravenna, and Rome offered great wealth. The city was covered with warehouses, used to store goods from the great estates. During Theodosius' day, 290 of these warehouses were known to be in use throughout the city, some of them as safety-deposit vaults.⁷¹ The city was besieged and survived only by paying Alaric an exorbitant ransom. So passed 408.

The following year, Alaric still treated with Rome, in this case through the agency of a usurper. Alaric was interested in a treaty of alliance in order to legitimize his position in the Empire.⁷² For his people, he demanded a settlement in Noricum or Pannonia. In return he would defend the West against other invaders. Secure behind the marshes of Ravenna, Honorius refused such terms. Alaric, now beyond patience, marched on Rome to secure his terms there. And the Senate, equally impatient with the ungrateful Honorius, was willing enough to cooperate. To effect this treaty, a new Emperor was required. This the Senate provided in the person of Attalus, the praetorian prefect. It is worth mentioning that Attalus, although not a pagan, was the next best thing for senatorial sentiments: an Arian.

Attalus had grandiose plans. The Senators were blandished with suggestions that this new Emperor would restore the ancient honors and

bring Egypt and the East under Italian control.⁷³ First, however, Attalus needed to bring Italy under his own control. For several tense months in the early part of 410, there was a good possibility that the two Emperors in Italy would march against each other. Attalus, in fact, did move toward Ravenna, with threatening letters proceeding him. Fortunately for Honorius, a contingent of infantry arrived from Constantinople and sent Attalus scurrying southward.

Rome itself was beginning to feel too well the pinch of misfortune. Famine threatened the city. Honorius' loyal lieutenant, Heraclian, held Africa for his master. He cut the annona, and Rome hungered to the extent that cannibalism was suspected.⁷⁴ Hereupon, Alaric counselled Attalus to send troops to Africa and secure the grain shipment. Attalus vacillated and was deposed for his indecision. Once again Alaric sought to deal with Honorius himself. Rebuffed once more in his overtures, Alaric now turned for the third and final time against Rome. This time the city fell, quickly and by surprise, in August of 410.

The capture was necessarily a horrible occurrence. Jerome, with a characteristic delight in morbid dramatics, tells dreadful tales of the event: palaces burnt, elderly widows beaten to death to disclose the hiding places of imaginary wealth, and so forth.⁷⁵ But comparatively speaking, the Sack of Rome was not the tremendous holocaust of popular imagination. Alaric, as an Arian Christian, gave orders that churches should not be desecrated. Furthermore, the right of asylum was honored, especially in the great basilicas of Peter and Paul.⁷⁶ Naturally, these sanctuaries became packed with refugees--those unlucky enough not to have fled Alaric's approach earlier, as had Pelagius and the nobles who formed his circle of admirers.

The fall of Rome was a terrible psychological blow. Writers around

the Empire noted the setback. Augustine, in particular, felt compelled to produce The City of God to explain that the event was really not that terrible: which means, of course, that it really was.

But still, the fall of Rome went no further than being a psychological blow. The city's capture had little pronounced effect on politics. It sent thousands of refugees hastening elsewhere. It resulted in some destruction to the city. But the legitimate ruler was still on the throne in Ravenna, rescued by his Eastern colleague. As Emperor, Honorius rejected the demands of Alaric--who now, unable or unwilling to remain in Rome with an army of occupation, attempted unsuccessfully to sail for Africa. Although the next few years saw constant movement of barbarians and usurpers in Spain and Gaul⁷⁷, Italy itself remained unscathed for forty-two years. During that time, life fell back into traditional patterns. Society went about its age-old habits, and the city was rebuilt. Rome, in short, made a successful attempt to return to normalcy. This was the city's primary concern when the furor concerning Pelagius became acute.

FOOTNOTES

¹Augustine, Ep. 199:38.

²Gilbert Charles-Picard, La Civilisation de L'Afrique Romaine (Paris, 1959), 22.

³Augustine, Ep. 118:21.

⁴See Juvenal's remark that Africa was the "nurse of lawyers," in Satire 11:3.

⁵Confessions, 8:13.

⁶Natural History, 17:35.

⁷Augustine, Ep. 83:11.

⁸B. H. Warmington, The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Invasion (Cambridge, 1954), 64.

⁹CT, 3:1:9.

¹⁰Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A. D. 364-425 (Oxford, 1975), 28-29.

¹¹Claudian, De Bello Gildonico, 1:58-62. Rome, personified, declares, "Videbam Punica Nilivae concurrere carbasa velis, cum subit par Roma mihi . . . Aegyptia riva in partem cessere novae."

¹²See CT 11:1:2; 11:13:16; 14:15:3; 17:38:31. Various letters of Symmachus express the same apprehension. See Epp. 3:55, 4:54, and 4:74 wherein the pagan aristocrat stated that hostility and tension were aggravated "cum provinciis Africis nec ad victum tenuem frugum tritura responderit et adportata ex aliis terris semina vicinum annus expectet."

¹³CT 1:16:7 stipulates, "Cessent iam nunc rapaces officium . . ."

¹⁴Ammianus, Roman History, 28:6:1-30.

¹⁵Relatio 17; quoted in Fritz Pedersen, Late Roman Public Professionalism (Odense University, 1976), 29.

¹⁶Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity (London, 1971), 120.

¹⁷R. M. Haywood, "Roman Africa," in Tenney Frank, An Economic Survey of the Roman Empire, Volume 1 (New York, 1975), 66.

¹⁸Ammianus, Roman History, 29:5:6.

¹⁹For example, see Claudian, De Bello Gildonico. The instances are as follows. In 393 Gildo aided Eugenius at Theodosius' expense. In 397 Gildo aided Arcadius against Honorius. Heraclian in 410 sided at one point with Attalus against Honorius. In each instance the Roman aristocracy did nothing to aid their Emperor: and this in their capacity as governors of various posts in Africa.

²⁰CT 11:16:10 and 12:1:50.

²¹CT 12:1:114.

²²John J. Van Nostrand, "The Imperial Domains of Africa Proconsularis," University of California Publications in History, Volume 14 (1928), 9.

²³Loc. cit., 28.

²⁴CT 16:5:52.

²⁵Augustine, Epp. 58 and 66.

²⁶Quoted in Warmington, 36.

²⁷E. g., Madauros (Ep. 16) and Sufes (Ep. 80).

²⁸Gaston Boissier, La fin du paganisme: étude sur les dernières luttes religieuses en Occident au quatrième siècle (Paris, 1894), 114.

²⁹Ammianus, Roman History, 16:10.

³⁰Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages, tr. Philip and Mariette Leon (New York, 1931), 70.

³¹Curiosum Urbis Romae, quoted in Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, Roman Civilization. Sourcebook II: The Empire (New York, 1955), 488-489.

- ³²Matthews, 201.
- ³³Ammianus, Roman History, 28:5:14.
- ³⁴The phrase is Piganiol's: see L'Empire Chrétien (Paris, 1947), 218. See also Augustine's remark in De Civ. Dei, 5:26: "de fide ac pietate Theodosii Augusti . . ."
- ³⁵De Suo Reditu, 133-138.
- ³⁶See especially, "Against the Letter of Parmenianus," 1:10:16.
- ³⁷Jerome, Ep. 50.
- ³⁸See especially, Ramsey MacMullen, "Social Mobility and the Theodosian Code," Journal of Roman Studies, 54 (1964), 435-455.
- ³⁹Brown, 66.
- ⁴⁰Samuel Dill, Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius (New York, 1964), 546 ff.
- ⁴¹Sozomen, HE 9:6. See also, Lidia S. Mazzolani, The Idea of the City in Roman Thought, tr. S. O'Donnell (Bloomington, Indiana, 1970), 205.
- ⁴²Ammianus, Roman History, 31:4:11.
- ⁴³Stilicho was hated by people with backgrounds as divergent as Jerome, Symmachus, Rutilius Numantianus, and Orosius. See especially, Alan Cameron, "Theodosius the Great and the Regency of Stilicho," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, 73 (1968), 247-280.
- ⁴⁴Charles Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York, 1957), 345.
- ⁴⁵Ammianus, Roman History, 31:4:11.
- ⁴⁶Peter Brown, "The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West," Journal of Theological Studies, 19 (1968), 57.
- ⁴⁷Ammianus, Roman History, 27:3:11-12.
- ⁴⁸Loc. cit., 15:7:3; 19:10 and 27:3, respectively.
- ⁴⁹See note 12 above.

⁵⁰Zosimus, Historia Nova, 7:7. Orosius, Historia contra paganos, 7:42:12; Ambrose, Ep. 1:18.

⁵¹Donald R. Dudley, Urbs Roma: A Sourcebook on the City and its Monuments (Aberdeen, 1967), 32.

⁵²Ammianus, Roman History, 14:6:26.

⁵³Peter Llewellyn, Rome in the Dark Ages (New York, 1970), 36. See also, Augustine, Confessions, 6:8.

⁵⁴Socrates, HE, 5:1; Sozomen, HE, 7:1.

⁵⁵Sozomen, HE, 7:2.

⁵⁶Socrates, HE, 4:34.

⁵⁷Ammianus, Roman History, 31:10:18-19; Zosimus, Historia Nova, 4:26:5.

⁵⁸Socrates, HE, 5:11.

⁵⁹Theodoret, HE, 5:14; Sozomen, HE, 7:13.

⁶⁰Zosimus, Historia Nova, 4:44.

⁶¹Loc. cit., 4:45-47.

⁶²Thomas Hodgkins, The Dynasty of Theodosius (Oxford, 1898), 97.

⁶³De Bello Getico, 565-567.

⁶⁴Loc. cit., 545-546. See also, Socrates, HE, 7:10.

⁶⁵Hodgkins, 103.

⁶⁶Orosius, Historia contra paganos, 7:37.

⁶⁷Zosimus, Historia Nova, 9:14.

⁶⁸Sozomen, HE, 8:25.

⁶⁹Hodgkins, 107.

⁷⁰See above, note 43.

⁷¹Tenney Frank, 135.

⁷²Sozomen, HE, 9:7.

⁷³Loc. cit., 9:8.

⁷⁴Loc. cit., 9:9.

⁷⁵Jerome, Ep. 105.

⁷⁶Sozomen, HE, 9:12.

⁷⁷A. H. M. Jones, The Later Roman Empire (Oxford, 1964), 312.

CHAPTER V

THE PATRONS: THE ROMAN ARISTOCRACY

What is known of Pelagius' individual history comes as something of an addendum to the history of the late Roman aristocracy. They were his patrons and, presumably, his friends. Furthermore, the history of Rome and Africa is largely the story of their lives. Southern Italy, Sicily, North Africa and the cenobite communities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem were the domain of the Roman nobility: in short, wherever Pelagius went, he was in their company.

Three important developments were afoot as Pelagius moved among the high families of Rome. First, it is ironic that at precisely the time when Western fortunes were at low ebb--gauged on the basis of economic debility and ever-closer barbarian encroachments--indications of a Roman resurgence were present: a resurgence, that is, of senatorial and ecclesiastic fortunes. The Roman aristocracy consistently aggrandized itself at the expense of those social groups immediately above and below. While the lower classes lost their lands to these families, the Western Emperor witnessed a diminution of his political control by the same Roman senators.

It is also important that Pelagius arrived in Rome at a time when this particular aristocracy was undergoing perhaps the most dramatic transformation of its history. It was in the process of being Christianized. For the nobility this represented far more of a change than the ordinary

citizen. The old Roman religion, whatever its deficiencies, was always meshed with the concept of Roma Aeterna; and the nobility, as the heirs of a long, long tradition of Roman greatness, took their proudest identity as guardians of that tradition.

Last of all, the aristocracy was involved in activity deriving from a combination of the first two developments. Pelagius' time in Rome precisely overlapped that period during which the senatorial aristocracy engaged in political activity directed against the Emperor. It used as its excuse displeasure at the Emperor's religious policy. Attempts at Christianization of society were taken poorly by certain members of the Roman community.

What did this mean for Pelagius? Primarily that he was active during a period not only of troubled times, but of social fluidity and an ambivalence on the part of society toward its immediate circumstances. All the tensions and uncertainties related to such times were present in Rome and those areas of aristocratic influence. It was a time of questioning. Was society still classically Roman or something new? Pagan aristocrats favored the first alternative, while others (Churchmen in particular) leaned toward the second. It took a long time to decide. The literature of the age shows a curious--perhaps confused--amalgam of the old and new. Claudian, addressing praise to the Most Christian Honorius, mentioned all the notables responsible for the Emperor's high station: his mother and father, of course, but also Diana and Minerva.¹ Fifty years later Sidonius Apollinaris could at one and the same time be a Catholic bishop and call on the Olympian deities to honor the consul-elect.² Given Pelagius' combination of Christian dogma and classic philosophy, he fit very neatly into this pattern of fluidity.

Nowhere was this fluidity and ambivalence more prominent than in

the story of the Roman aristocracy. Its history forms an integral part of Pelagius' environment and for that reason must be considered. Because the subject is rather complex, it will be best to subdivide this topic into several smaller categories.

The Aristocracy of Rome

It was a small number of senatorial families which came to dominate fifth-century Rome. "Senatorial" is an important qualification, for the Senate represented the nexus of the Italian nobility. The two most important houses during this period were the Anicii and the Caeonii, which were related. Pelagius and Jerome were both known to have had connections with these families. These houses were also related to the Maecii, the Scipiones-Gracchi, the Memmii, the Symmachi, and the Valerii-Messalae. Only the Scipiones-Gracchi and the Valerii-Messalae could accurately claim great antiquity.³ The rest had origins going back only as far as the second century A. D. But by fifth-century standards, even that was an old family. In many cases this longevity was exaggerated to ludicrous proportions. Jerome was especially fond of mentioning the genealogies of his noble friends at Rome. It is not unusual to find that Rogatus, the father of St. Paula, claimed descent from Agammemnon.⁴ It is unlikely that anyone really believed such a tale, but the significant fact is that Rogatus felt the need to tell it. Always the aristocracy displaced a tendency to atavism. This was understandable in a society which based itself on class stratification and very strong traditions and yet faced unprecedented change.

This interrelated group of families constituted the leading landowners of Italy, Sicily, and North Africa. Their tastes, education, and

lifestyle were remarkably uniform. Possessing a series of estates throughout the Empire, they had developed a network of acquaintances and relatives. The fifth-century aristocrat was not sedentary. He travelled regularly to visit friends and inspect estates.

If the aristocracy was accustomed to travelling, it is nevertheless true that Rome remained the base of political activity. There was an anomaly here. The fifth-century aristocrat, leading citizen of city and country, at variance with his Republican forebears, disliked a political career as such. Otium was the favored concept: a private life devoted (ideally, at any rate) to study and the tending of one's possessions. Nonetheless, political office was an unavoidable and, in a certain respect, necessary evil. Since the time of Diocletian, the nobility had been inflated and infused with numbers of "new men."⁵ Little distinction could be found between the higher and lower echelons. All were designated clarissimi. It became the custom to distinguish oneself by adding the title "spectabilis" to one's title, indication that the person was higher on the social scale. By the fifth century, this title was a fair indication that its owner was a member of the older, more established nobility.⁶ And the "spectabilis" derived from holding political office.⁷

There remained a standard cursus honorum which a man of substance was expected to climb. In Pelagius' day a very clear pattern had emerged, which combined the aristocrat's desire for otium with his need to hold office. Though their tenures were usually short, the senators of Rome dominated the political appointments through southern Italy and North Africa.⁸ The questorship and praetorship were the places where the young noble began. Largely ceremonial in the late Empire, they afforded him experience in administration and were a stepping stone to other things.

Provincial governorships followed, usually in regions of Italy, Sicily, and Africa. After this stage of his career, an aristocrat could be expected to take the proconsulship, usually of Africa, sometimes of Asia or, more rarely, of Achaia. The pinnacle of the cursus was the prefecture of Rome. Unless the Emperor personally intervened to place a favorite in this position, the prefecture remained the monopoly of the very great families. Between 300 and 430, the Anicii and Caesonii provided at least twenty prefects and were related to numerous others.⁹ With the Emperor ensconced in another city, the urban prefect assumed extensive powers, both judicial and administrative.

Beside political power, other benefits accrued to the aristocracy. For the century before Pelagius arrived in Rome, the nobility had busied itself amassing fortunes. It was proverbially wealthy. Symmachus, for example, was not considered to be one of the most affluent senators. Yet he owned estates in Samnium, Apulia, Sicily, Mauretania Caesarensis, and Africa Proconsularis. He also owned fifteen country homes and three residences in Rome itself.¹⁰ Such holdings were the results of long ancestries. The declining birth rate, disastrous to Rome in other respects, allowed great private fortunes to accumulate in fewer and fewer hands over a period of generations. The policy of intermarriage among the great families aided the process further.¹¹ And troubled times, which invariably press the lower elements even lower, enabled the nobility to enlarge its holdings. In Rome residences of the wealthy took on the appearance of self-contained entities. Olympiodorus, a Greek writing in the 430's, described his impressions upon seeing Rome in person: "Each of the large houses of Rome possessed everything which a city might contain--race tracks, forums, temples, fountains, and different baths. One house becomes a town; the city contains five thousand towns."¹²

Olympiodorus may have been exaggerating, but his point is clear.

The aristocracy was also favored with legal privileges. Since the second century A. D., juridical practice had established a system of dual penalties differentiating between so-called humiliores and honestiores. As a further distinction, the Italian aristocracy was exempt from certain punishments to which its provincial counterpart was subject. By the third century, senators were immune from the death penalty, except for the crime of treason. Needless to say, the aristocrat was used to such amenities as special seats at the games, free public meals, the right to wear distinctive dress, and high-sounding epithets to dignify his name.¹³

As luminaries of society, the aristocracy is fairly well documented. The writers of antiquity were fascinated with the nobility, although not always favorably impressed. As ambivalence characterizes so much of late imperial history, so it characterizes the more personal picture which is left of these people. Two descriptions emerge, both extreme. The aristocracy was subdivided, according to its chroniclers, into four categories: the pagan and the Christian, the dissolute and the saintly. Any combination of the four was possible, and the ancient writers described them all.

Writers of every background and outlook catalogued the moral degeneracy of the day, a blight which must be kept in mind when we deal with Pelagius. His admonitions to upright behavior came at a time when such advice was both sorely needed and appreciatively received by a nobility which laid claim to a long heritage of "Roman virtue."

Ammianus had little love for the aristocracy, but then he was an outsider who had been snubbed by the city's worthies. At the very least he found them lazy, superficial, and ostentatious.¹⁴ Greed dictated their

actions.¹⁵ Ammianus may have been correct on this last count, for Rome's residents found a ready supply of money absolutely necessary. From all indications it was more expensive to live in Rome than anywhere else in the Empire. It is not surprising: the concentration of purchasing power naturally drove prices upward. Classical authors unanimously identified the culprit. It was the aristocrat. His extravagant life-style caused prices to escalate in the city.¹⁶

Worse yet, the pleasure-seeking ways of the nobility led to an outbreak of adulteries and murders. Indeed, it became so bad that the Emperor was forced to order torture and capital punishment against a formerly exempt class.¹⁷ Jerome corroborated this bleak picture. His letters castigated the nobility, particularly censuring the lack of respect which youngsters showed their elders and citing cases of young girls who ran away from home.¹⁸

One phenomenon which was noted by the writers of the age was the persistence of superstition in society. Aristocrats were as susceptible to its allure as the lower orders. Ammianus reported that one aristocrat was executed for teaching his son the arts of black magic.¹⁹ Somewhat earlier Ausonius had mentioned that people still dedicated articles to the old deities. Augustine lamented the concern of pious Christians to determine auspicious days.²⁰ Prudentius, a fellow Christian, talked about the presence of astrologers in Rome, and this was during the very years of Pelagius' residence there.²¹ The pattern was quite clear. Immorality and superstition cut across all lines; they were prevalent among men and women, young and old.

Yet while part of society labored hard to tarnish itself, another part was intent upon living what it defined as the good life. This definition varied from circle to circle. For persons such as Symmachus

and his friends, this meant continuing the old customs. The aristocracy had a very definitive opinion of itself. Symmachus, with little deference to understatement, was quite convinced that the Senate, keeper of ancient custom, represented pars melior humani generis.²² This exalted place naturally entailed noblesse oblige.

First, there was family dignity to be maintained. The "better" elements of Roman society had a very strict code of rules for decorous living. These people would have understood Pelagius' emphasis on habit and proper behavior, for the nobility paced their lives to the demands of protocol. Intoxication and extravagance in the form of lucullan tables were considered gauche; proper conversation, buided by prescribed rules, were not. Macrobius elaborated the spirit of this society in the Saturnalia:

We ought always to feel respect for those bygone days, because it is to them that belong the generations of men who won this empire for us by blood and sweat--clear evidence of their wealth of virtues. But it must be confessed that with all their abundant virtues, those times had their faults as well, some of which have been corrected by the sober habits of our age.²³

Among those faults which Macrobius and his sober associates corrected were dancing, singing, reciting Greek verses, and telling jokes.²⁴

Still, if the aristocrat was expected to be a paragon of dignitas, he was also expected to be open-handed, munificent in his outlay of funds toward traditional public entertainments. This was all part of the patronage system. Such niceties as public games honoring a son's entry into politics were viewed as occasions to advertise the family's wealth. Noble houses vied with one another in providing ever grander displays, well after Alaric's capture of Rome. In this, as in other things, the nobility kept up the ancient ways and the mos maiorum.

Christianization

If the aristocracy had a common life-style, it was nonetheless divided among itself on one vital issue: religion. Rome was long the bastion of paganism, for reasons which were economic and political as well as strictly religious. This was ironic, for it occurred at a time when the Roman Church was seriously beginning to claim primacy for itself.

The city itself had always been notorious as a soil on which exotic beliefs could flourish. As early as the second century, Juvenal had complained about the influx of strange people and strange religions.²⁵ The fourth century was similarly receptive to eccentric beliefs. The Saturnalia refers to a variety of religions, all Eastern. Curiously, however, Macrobius is silent about Christianity. He makes absolutely no mention of this threat. As to other sects, Manichaeism was so prevalent in the city that the Theodosian Code had an entry proscribing it specifically from Rome.²⁶ One of the city's leading noblemen, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, was a votary of Mithra and acted as priest at the taurobolium.²⁷

Part of the city's dynamics during Pelagius' residence there involved the interaction of these last die-hard pagans with Catholicism. From the mid-fourth century onward, Christianity did at last steadily infiltrate the Roman aristocracy. No doubt that it had some minor successes prior to this period. As early as Flavian times, there were suggestions that certain members of the aristocracy--possibly related to the imperial family--were Christians.²⁸ And when Zosimus related that Constantine was able to lure a few aristocrats to Constantinople to serve in the new Senate, chances are that they were Christians also.²⁹

Christianity had a consistent pattern of infiltration. It was the nature of this religion to get a first foothold within the home. Jerome referred to this friend Paula's circle of devout women as a domestica ecclesia.³⁰ Always it began with the women of the household. An example can be traced in the Caeonii Albini. In Pelagius' day, several ladies of this family joined Jerome's famous group of aristocratic "nuns." St. Marcella and St. Paula were Albinae. The first conversions within this great house had come approximately fifty years earlier. Marcella and Asella, two sisters, were attracted to the new religion. In the next generation, the men of the family married Christian women. By 400, with the third generation, Christianity was dominant in the family. The eldest sons remained pagan, but their parents, friends, allies and children were Christians; on their deathbed, the sons capitulated and were baptized.³¹

Thus, when Pelagius was active, families were still divided among themselves but the Church was in the ascendant. This meant largely that clear-cut lines were somewhat difficult to find. As in any age, personal affinity dictated alliance or enmity as much as "ideological" considerations. Jerome is our best witness to such a phenomenon. Given personal preference, he could praise or condemn his co-religionists with equal facility. And it was the same for him with pagans. Publius Caeonius Albinus, whom he liked, was the object of his respect.³² Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, whom he did not like, was "miserabilis Praetextatus . . . homo sacrilegus et idolorum cultor."³³ In keeping with the fluidity of Roman society, Christians and pagans often formed close friendships among themselves, sometimes at the exclusion of co-religionists. Symmachus, for example, had an entire network of seemingly peculiar friendships. While he did not care for his cousin St. Ambrose or his fellow-pagan

Praetextatus, Symmachus got on remarkably well with Pope Damasus.³⁴ Symmachus recommended Christian bishops to his brother and friends³⁵, and Damasus defended Symmachus from an accusation of torturing Christians when the pagan nobleman was prefect of Rome.³⁶

Still, it was a period of resistance from the more obstinate nobles. Two reasons can account for this. First, the Church had certain practices and features which did not recommend themselves to the aristocracy. Second, the nature of the Roman tradition was such that it would inevitably oppose conversion.

On the first count, there is no doubt that the Church made itself objectionable to the nobility. Ecclesiastical leaders attacked the tradition most dear to the aristocracy: the mos maiorum. It was not merely that the Church and pagan aristocracy faced each other as champions of the old against the new. The Church, with its origins and holy scriptures, came too close to the lower, foreign elements of society. The aristocracy, with its tenacious hold on classicism and the old ways, had great problems in accepting what it considered a vulgarism. As Pierre Labriolle points out:

When St. Ambrose wrote the Emperor Gratian, 'I give my first allegiance to the Catholic Church, then to your laws,' a subordination pregnant with consequences posed a menace. When the same Ambrose invited young girls, tempted by the religious life, to triumph over the resistance of their families; when St. Jerome admonished a young friend to trample on his father's body, if necessary, if he opposed his vocation . . . the families felt attacked in their just prerogatives. Monastic propaganda excited emotion: what could people think, these devotees of purely Roman tradition? Stupor, bitterness, indignation . . . They all repeated with Symmachus, 'We defend the fates and the laws of our ancestors.'³⁷

Prudentius was no doubt an example of Christian tactlessness at its worst. He argued against Symmachus when that great aristocrat appealed for relig-

ious toleration. Prudentius attacked his opponent on sensitive grounds. Pagans long held that Rome's greatness was a direct result of the observance of the old cults. In mocking the old ways, Prudentius insulted Rome itself and, by extension, the city's proudest citizens.³⁸

One of the reasons the Church had made itself somewhat less than appealing was the fact that it was on the offensive: the pagan was definitely on the defensive. Arnaldo Momigliano has pointed out that Christian polemic antedated the pagan counterattack. Not until the middle years of the fourth century did pagans produce their own propaganda. For example, Eusebius had written his Ecclesiastic History in 312; Lactantius, On the Death of the Persecutors in 337; Athanasius, Life of St. Anthony in 360. On their side, pagans produced works following 360: the Historia Augusta and Ammianus' History among them.³⁹

Part of the hostility lay, ironically, in an unresolved similarity of outlooks. Look closely enough and there can be found a contiguous attitude on the part of Roman pagans and Christians about the nature of things. Both viewed history in a linear fashion: the only problem was determining who initiated the pattern and why. This was the specific argument in Rome between its various citizens.⁴⁰ There was, after all, something similar between Christ's words to Peter's Church ("the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"⁴¹) and Jove's promise to the Romans (His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: imperium sine fine dedi.⁴²) Still, there was one major difference. Paganism could accommodate a Christ in its pantheon; Christianity could certainly not accept a Jove in its. Christianity demanded of the pagan that he reject his religion in toto.

This was particularly unacceptable due to a peculiarity within the Roman tradition. Roman religion being what it was, the paterfamilias

acted as family priest. In Roman custom, it was through his person that the gens was perpetuated. In a sense, then, conversion to Christianity represented a desertion not of the old religion, but of one's family. It was a defection from those rites within the home which pertained to the sanctity of the family: the family as a quasi-religious entity stretching back through countless generations. This, of course, related to the men. Because the women of the household were not central to such rites, their Christianization was not quite so dramatic an event.

Moreover, the nature of the traditional religion was such that it joined state and religion in something of a patriotic expression. The well-known practice of Emperor worship (which even Constantine did not abrogate) was as much a patriotic as a religious activity. The aristocracy, which stood firmly on its heritage, was naturally somewhat loath to break with the old religion, for in a sense it was unpatriotic. As William Boyd states:

Since the dawn of Roman history, its representatives had received political privileges and exemptions from economic obligations to the state, while in return religion gave a moral support to political institutions. The new career of the Church that began with Constantine wrought a vast change in this aspect of Roman civilization. The alliance of paganism and Emperor was dissolved. In its place there developed a union of the Christian Church and the state. Yet the ancient religious institutions were so intimately associated with national tradition and custom that the transformation from old order to new was a gradual one.⁴³

Boyd is correct in emphasising the "privileges and exemptions" which attended the old cults. There were decidedly practical reasons for the Roman nobleman to remain pagan. Often the aristocrats of Rome constituted the priesthood of various cults. Until relatively late, the priesthoods remained tax-exempt.

Senatorial Political Resurgence

Politically, paganism had its advantages as well: if nothing else, it was a tag which distinguished the aristocrat from the Christian imperial court, the court of non-Italians and parvenues. We should be somewhat hesitant about depicting too rigid a dichotomy between the court and Senate. The Senate was moribund, and it is a solecism to present it as a viable rival to the imperial complex at Milan or Ravenna. However, there was indeed a pattern of senatorial political activity which threads through Pelagius' time in Rome: it always involved the pagan senators either tacitly supporting a coup elsewhere or actively fomenting rebellion from Rome. In short, Pelagius would have seen his patrons in fine form as revolutionaries. As it happened, their attempts were somewhat inept and easy to crush. But the Senate was stirring and emphasizing its distinction from the court.

If we look closely at the Roman nobility of the time, one of its outstanding characteristics was precisely that distinction: it formed a closely-related, homogenous entity distinct from the imperial court. From the beginning of the Principate, the Senate in Rome rivalled the Emperor. Never mind that the rivalry was ineffectual; by its very existence the Senate offered an identifiable counterpoise. Augustus' diplomatic formula, which presented the Emperor as a primus inter pares, was precisely that: a formula. It did not entirely erase the natural tension between two organs of control. The tension, in fact, was never entirely resolved. The Senate, of course, continued to shrink in authority through the centuries: in Pelagius' time it was held in such low esteem by its own members that its quorum had to be fixed at fifty.⁴⁴ Yet so long as it existed, a showplace for the aristocracy, there was a potential rival to imperial authority. The years of Pelagius' residence

in Rome had several displays of such rivalry.

The relation between the Western aristocracy and the Emperor repeatedly fluctuated during the fourth century. The opening years saw a period of hostility between the two. Diocletian in particular had pared down senatorial prerogatives, reducing the offices for which senators were eligible, then expanding the imperial bureaucracy and filling it with persons of non-aristocratic origins.⁴⁵ Ex-bakers were known to catapult to positions of power.⁴⁶ With Constantine, however, a major reversal of policy seems to have taken place. Nobles were again prominent in public affairs. Furthermore, toward the very end of the fourth century, Theodosius implemented a policy which signalled the aristocracy's triumph. The Emperor now allowed noblemen to serve in the imperial bureaucracy. From Theodosius' day onward, the Italian nobility came to dominate the peninsula and points south. Whatever disdain the old order might feel in joining an organization previously manned by parvenues, senators more and more began to acquiesce to practicality. The ingression of the nobility into the Western imperial bureaucracy was just under way when Pelagius arrived in Rome. It would continue for almost a century, at which time the Italian nobility was, at long last, again the master of its own house.

Toward this end, the crises of the fourth and fifth centuries rebounded, ironically, to the benefit of the senatorial aristocracy. The Emperor's attention was focused on self-defense, not on curtailment of the nobility. M. T. W. Arnheim suggests that:

In eliminating the emperor, the invasions only strengthened the underlying amalgam of economic, social and political forces, centrifugal in tendency and aristocratic in tone, which had been prominent since the reign of Constantine and which were to continue to dominate Western Europe for close to a thousand years.⁴⁷

The city looked to its nobility for leadership, when it became obvious that the Emperor could not be relied upon for popular, or even efficacious, action. It took a great deal of prodding to make the nobility actually obstruct imperial activity. Still, during Pelagius' stay in Rome, this unusual event occurred not once but three times when circumstances were favorable. What is more surprising, but certainly an indication of political reality, was the fact that twice during these same years the Senate was approached independently by foreigners eager for an alliance. In 387 and 389 the Persians, long the Empire's most annoying neighbor, made overtures to the city of Rome.⁴⁸

The pagan senatorial party at Rome was marshalled by three members of the high aristocracy, all related to one another: Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, Symmachus himself, and Virius Nichomachus Flavianus. The three could be seen at court, petitioning various emperors to restore pagan rights. Throughout the late fourth century such prerogatives had been steadily eroded by imperial edict. Symmachus, for example, approached Theodosius and argued for the restoration of toleration for all religions of the Empire. It is noteworthy that pagan fortunes fluctuated in direct relation to the effect of St. Ambrose (himself related to Symmachus) on different emperors. The young Gratian, for example, was disposed to follow Ambrose's advice verbatim, while Theodosius was more discriminating.

Unfortunately for the pagan cause, the effect of Ambrose was not the only factor at work. The pagans were divided among themselves, once again underscoring the ambivalence of the times. Personal animosities posed a problem: Symmachus, for example, did not get on well with Flavianus.⁴⁹ Theoretical differences also caused friction. One group of aristocrats favored the ancient Roman Olympian religion, precisely because

it was ancient and Roman. "Consuetudinis amor magnus est," Symmachus aphorized.⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that Symmachus based his plea for religious toleration on a belief in the multiplicity of divinity, arguing that "one road" could not lead to so great a mystery.⁵¹ The other group favored Eastern religions, which evidently enjoyed a notable resurgence throughout the fourth century. According to Macrobius, Praetextatus headed a band of nobles who practiced a monotheism deriving from sun worship. This group maintained "that the various activities of a single deity are to be regarded as equivalent to many gods. This is the origin of the maxim proclaimed by the leading philosopher that 'the Whole is One.'"⁵²

Internal dissension notwithstanding, the pagan party did have its moment. From 382 the aristocracy had been restive. At that time the emperors had revoked the policy of toleration which allowed Christianity and paganism to coexist. In 382 Gratian, prodded by Ambrose, withdrew funds to maintain public cults, removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate in Rome, and refused to accept the title of Pontifex Maximus. This last action was the most serious, for it cut off funds from the imperial fisc which supported the priesthoods.⁵³ Praetextatus, Symmachus, and Nichomachus led embassies to the Emperor, urging him to rescind anti-pagan laws. Their efforts were unsuccessful in their lifetime, but it is curious that the Altar of Victory reappeared in the Roman Senate under Honorius.⁵⁴

With the accession of Theodosius, things appeared to be more favorable for the pagans of the West. Politically, he vacillated: some years saw an influx of Christians into the bureaucracy, others an influx of pagans. To the extreme displeasure of Ambrose, Nichomachus Flavianus was made prefect of Italy in 390. But this even-handed distribution of offices came to an abrupt end in the next year. In 391 Theodosius became

almost militantly anti-pagan.

For reasons which are not thoroughly understood, Theodosius became intent to appear Most Christian Sovereign in 391. This rather dramatic decision was somehow related to an incident in Greece that year. On the Emperor's order, some 4000 people were massacred in Thessalonica, an act which brought thunderous denunciations from Ambrose. And Theodosius-- so the interpretation goes--was so guilt-stricken that he fell under the complete domination of the Bishop of Milan.⁵⁵ Ambrose undeniably guided the Emperor in penance, one form being the removal of pagan administrators from the ranks of the imperial bureaucracy. A more strident form of attack came in the implementation of additional anti-pagan legislation. Temples were ordered closed; state funds were no longer to subsidize any pagan cults. Specific legislation was directed against the Roman aristocracy.⁵⁶

At the first opportunity the nobles of Rome answered Theodosius in kind. It will be remembered that Theodosius, a strong and capable personality, was Emperor in the East. In the West, Valentinian II wore the purple. This particular nonentity had been deposed in 392 by the usurper Eugenius. Eugenius himself was a member of the Roman aristocracy and owed his position as Valentinian's replacement to the backing of Arbogast, a barbarian army commander. Eugenius sought to legitimize his position by appeal to Theodosius, for Eugenius was "careful to attempt only what was safe."⁵⁷ Still, Theodosius refused to acknowledge the upstart. Thereupon, Eugenius turned to the Roman Senate, which was quite happy to recognize one of its fellows as Emperor.⁵⁸

For some time the Senate operated autonomously, basking in Eugenius' good will. The situation came to be so serious that Theodosius was forced to march on Italy and restore imperial control. Until the Emperor and

his Eastern armies arrived, paganism had its last day in the sun. Haruspicy was revived; the Sibylline Books were dusted off and brought forth; the temple of Hercules in Ostia was refurbished.⁵⁹ Even the mint got into the spirit of things. Some wit struck coins that year depicting Nero and other anti-Christian figures such as Apuleius and Apollonius of Tyana.⁶⁰ In a burst of wishful thinking, pagans began to circulate the oracle that within a year's time, Christianity would be defunct.⁶¹ Pagan resurgence, however, was short-lived. Theodosius brought it to a quick close in 394. The Battle of Frigidus completely crushed Eugenius' attempt at emperorhood.

Sixteen years later, however, the Senate was back to similar tricks, this time treating with Alaric when Honorius failed to protect Rome satisfactorily. The pattern was practically the same. The Senate again raised one of its own to the throne, only to have him ousted after a short period. Once order and legitimate rule had been restored, this usurper was executed.

So much for pagan political activity, which came erratically and left little permanent impact. After 410 the Senate settled back to its quiet ways and did not attempt anything obstructive. Perhaps it had learned its lesson during the years of political activism. Imperial power was on the wane; the only visibly successful organization in the Roman West was the Church. Time and assimilation would eventually unite the West's successful class with its most successful organization. Pelagius was present when this process began.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Claudian, The Fourth Consulship of Honorius, 160-164.
- ² Sidonius, a fourth-generation Christian, introduced his "Panegyric on Anthemius" with references to Mars, Mercury, Dryads, Pans, Apollo and Jove.
- ³ M. T. W. Arnheim, The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire (Oxford, 1972), 119.
- ⁴ Jerome, Ep. 108:3. This penchant for long pedigrees had always been a mark of the Roman aristocracy. As early as the second century, Juvenal used it as the theme of his eighth Satire.
- ⁵ Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, Roman Civilization. Sourcebook 2: The Empire, (New York, 1966), 473.
- ⁶ Arnheim, 17.
- ⁷ CT, 16:5:52.
- ⁸ A. H. M. Jones, A History of Rome through the Fifth Century, Volume 2 (New York, 1970), 281.
- ⁹ John Matthews, Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A. D. 364-425 (Oxford, 1975), 15.
- ¹⁰ Symmachus, Ep. 7:66.
- ¹¹ Peter Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," Journal of Theological Studies, 19 (1968), 96.
- ¹² Quoted in Walter Kaegi, Byzantium and the Decline of Rome (Princeton, New Jersey, 1968), 89.
- ¹³ Peter Garnsey, Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1970), 44.
- ¹⁴ Ammianus, Roman History, 14:6:1.

- ¹⁵Loc. cit., 28:4:1.
- ¹⁶See especially, Juvenal, Satire, 3:147-231.
- ¹⁷Ammianus, Roman History, 28:1:11.
- ¹⁸Jerome, Ep. 107.
- ¹⁹Ammianus, Roman History, 28:4.
- ²⁰De Civ. Dei, 5:7.
- ²¹Contra Symmachum, 2:449-457.
- ²²Symmachus, Ep., 1:52.
- ²³Saturnalia, 3:14:2.
- ²⁴Loc. cit., 3:14:9.
- ²⁵See especially, Juvenal, Satire 3:62-76; 14:92. 106.
- ²⁶CT 16:5:9.
- ²⁷Terrot R. Glover, Life and Letters in the Fourth Century (New York, 1924), 73.
- ²⁸Hans Conzelmann, History of Primitive Christianity, tr. John E. Steely (New York, 1972), 130.
- ²⁹Zosimus, Historia Nova, 2:31:3.
- ³⁰Jerome, Ep. 30:14.
- ³¹Jean Danielou and Henri Marrou, The Christian Centuries. Volume 1: The First Six Hundred Years, tr. Vincent Cronin (New York, 1964), 298.
- ³²Jerome, Ep. 107:1.
- ³³Jerome, Contra Iohannem Hierosolymitanum, 8.
- ³⁴Symmachus, Ep. 1:64.
- ³⁵Ibid.

³⁶For Symmachus' indictment, see CT 1:6:9.

³⁷Pierre de Labriolle, La réaction païenne: étude sur la polemique antichrétienne du I^e au IV^e siècle, (Paris, 1942), 348: Quand Saint Ambroise écrivait à l'empereur Gratian 'reverentiam primum ecclesiae Catholicae, deinde etiam legibus vestris deferri,' une subordination grosse de conséquences dessinait déjà sa menace. Quand le même Ambroise invitait les jeunes filles tentées par la vie religieuse à triompher coute que coute de la résistance des leurs; quand Sait Jerome . . . exhortait une jeune ami à fouler au besoin le corps de son père, si, s'opposant a sa vocation, celui-ci se couchait sur le seuil de la porte, les familles se jugeaient atteintes dan leurs plus justes prerogatives . . . Propagande ascetiques soulevait de l'emoi: que pouvaient penser, à ce prix, les fervents des traditions purement romaines? Stupéarr, amerture, indignation, voilà quels âcres sentiments leur âme était traivaillée. Et tout repétaient avec Symmaque: 'Instituta maiorum patriae iura et fata defendamus.'"

³⁸Contra Symmachum, 2:448-768.

³⁹Arnaldo Momigliano, The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century (Oxford, 1963), 80-81.

⁴⁰It was an underlying theme in the debates between Symmachus and Prudentius for the return of the Altar of Victory to the Senate House, for example.

⁴¹Matthew 16:18.

⁴²Vergil, The Aeneid, 1:278.

⁴³William Boyd, "The Ecclesiastic Edicts of the Theodosian Code," Columbia Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, Volume 24, Number 2 (1905), 125.

⁴⁴Symmachus, Ep. 6:3.

⁴⁵Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages, tr. Philip and Mariette Leon (New York, 1931), 16-17.

⁴⁶Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity (London, 1971), 58.

⁴⁷Arnheim, 8.

⁴⁸Claudian, The Sixth Consulship of Honorius, 70.

⁴⁹John Alexander McGeachy, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West (Chicago, 1942), 17.

⁵⁰Symmachus, Ep. 9:1.

⁵¹Symmachus, Relatio, 2:14.

⁵²Saturnalia, 17:4:5; see also, Saturnalia, 1:17:2: "Nam quod omnes paene deos dumtaxat qui sub caelo sunt, ad solem referunt, non vana superstio sed ratio divina commendat."

⁵³Zosimus related the reaction to Gratian's refusal in the Historia Nova 4:36:5. Among other reactions came a piece of dry wit from the Roman Senate which saw the reality of a present political crisis. Gratian timed his refusal to coincide with a coup led by Maximus in Gaul. The Senators reportedly declared, "If the Emperor does not wish to be pontifex, we'll get another pontifex--Maximus." ἔι μὴ βούλεται ποντίφες ὁ βασιλεὺς ὀνομάσεται, ταχίστα γενήσεται ποντίφες - Μάξιμος.

⁵⁴Claudian, The Sixth Consulship of Honorius, 597-598.

⁵⁵N. Q. King, The Emperor Theodosius and the Establishment of Christianity (Philadelphia, 1960), 78-80.

⁵⁶CT 16:10:10.

⁵⁷Claudian, The Fourth Consulship of Honorius, 370.

⁵⁸See especially, Symmachus, Ep. 30:1.

⁵⁹Herbert Bloch, "A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West," Harvard Theological Review, 38 (1945), 199-200.

⁶⁰N. Q. King, "The Pagan Resurgence of 393--Some Contemporary Sources," Studia Patristica, 4 (1959), 476.

⁶¹Augustine, De Civ. Dei, 18:53.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH OF PELAGIUS' DAY

Pelagianism bears the distinction of being the first great Latin heresy, Donatism being less a heresy than a schism. Pelagianism itself might be regarded as a microcosm of the Christian Church as a whole: the infighting, the chaos, the use of secular authority. If it underscored the negative side of the fourth-century Church, it also pointed out the positive strengths: Christianity sincerely attempting to better itself and define its beliefs.

Moreover, the Pelagian heresy took place during a very significant period in the history of the Church. In at least three respects the Church was in commotion, seeking to consolidate its position and adapt to the times. First, the fourth century brought very distinct indications that all was not well between East and West. The most blatant expression of growing tension came in 342, when Eastern primates literally refused to associate with Latin colleagues at the Synod of Sardica. The Pelagian heresy was only a continuation of this growing separatism. Second, the Church had become the official state religion at precisely the time Pelagius arrived in Rome to begin his career. The Church was contending with the last vestiges of paganism and die-hard Christian sects. Third, the Church had come to terms with the secular government. Precisely how were the Church and state to cooperate? The West always differed from the East in its answer.

During our period, Church history largely revolves around the fact

that it was still consolidating those changes which attended Constantine's conversion a century prior. For a hundred years the Church had attempted to meld with the imperial order. As with Roman society in this time of change, the Church demonstrated a series of ambiguities.

Constantine's dramatic and enigmatic conversion in 313 put the Church into a new category. No longer was Christianity a religio illicita, subject to periodic proscriptions. Much has been made of Constantine's conversion: since the nineteenth century some 400 books have attempted to explain the event.¹ A common misconception attributes to Constantine's decision the triumph of the Church as official religion. In fact it was not so simple. The process extended far longer than Constantine's tenure of office. Constantine never made Christianity the state religion. He merely removed official censure from the Christian Church. It was not until late in the century, under the Theodosian house, that Christianity indeed became the official religion. In the half-century or so between Constantine and Theodosius, the Church indeed witnessed great growth and activity. Still, it was a period of parabolic fluctuations. Other religions were still tolerated: several, including Manichaeism, were remarkably vigorous. The government itself adopted no consistent religious policy until late in the century. During the opening and middle years of the century, political conditions dictated how the government related to Christianity. Toleration of heresy and paganism came a number of times and usually indicated the appearance of some crisis. Threats from without necessitated a unified populace. The government could ill afford disgruntled pagans or heretics. With the march of the Goths in 376, for example, Valens was forced to reinstate a policy of toleration, thereby rescinding certain entries in the Theodosian Code. Once the danger passed, the Emperors speedily proscribed certain heresies

again.²

The vicissitudes of the Christian Church were subject to the eccentricities in government leaders. In 362 Julian, on personal whim, emphasized freedom of conscience for the subjects of the Empire: "unicuique quod animo inbibisset, colendi libera facultas est."³ Valentinian, under Arian influence, reiterated the same condition in 370. But toward the close of the century, the Theodosian dynasty cast its lot with orthodox Catholicism. Instability was as prevalent as ever, but at this time the imperial family was unwilling to suffer the existence of pagans and heretics. Legislation favoring the Church came steadily after 382.

The crucial statement issued by Theodosius after he assumed the throne was entitled Cunctos populos. Issued jointly with his co-emperor, it stipulated:

We desire that all peoples who fall beneath the sway of our imperial clemency should profess the faith which we believe to have been communicated by the Apostle Peter to the Romans and maintained in its traditional form to the present day, the faith which is observed likewise by the pontiff Damasus and by Peter of Alexandria . . . We should believe in one deity, the sacred Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to be worshipped with equal majesty. And we require that those who follow this rule of faith should embrace the name of Catholic Christians, adjudging all others madmen and ordering them to be designated as heretics . . . condemned as such, in the the first instance to suffer divine punishment, and therewith, the vengeance of that power which we, by celestial authority, have assumed.⁴

With this edict, the Church was in a unique position. Aided by secular power, Christianity pulled in various die-hards--and this de iure. Pelagius himself operated within this very milieu, wherein a religion of choice had recently become a religion of obligation.

A religion of obligation in itself was not overly surprising. It paralleled very closely a development in the political character of the

late Empire. The so-called "Dominate" inaugurated under Diocletian was merely confirmed by the Emperors of the fourth century. Within an absolute monarchy, there is always the tendency to impose the ruler's religion on his subjects: cuus regio, eius religio. This concept, theoretical in nature, was brought closer to realization with every reign of the fourth century. The Sixteenth Book of the Theodosian Code shows the pattern clearly. From Constantine to Theodosius the Emperors built and endowed churches, granted immunities and benefits to the Catholic clergy, and intervened to the point of defining orthodoxy.⁵ Coeval with these favors to the Church, the Emperors progressively loosened ties with paganism--which was, after all, a somewhat nagging reminder of a political system that existed more in memory than in fact. Throughout the last quarter of the fourth century, the assault on paganism came in almost annual installments. In 382 the Emperor Gratian refused the title of Pontifex Maximus, a title which Constantine had not eschewed.

In refusing the title Gratian effectively divorced the state from pagan religion. His action had three primary consequences: (a) it stopped the government payments which defrayed the cost of sacrifices and paid the salaries of priests; (b) it confiscated temple properties; and (c) it removed the Statue of Victory from the Senate House in Rome.⁶ This, taken in conjunction with Theodosius' other anti-pagan measures, spelled the end of an already moribund religion. By the end of the century, Christian mobs had begun destroying pagan temples in all corners of the Empire.⁷

With its rival deposed, the Church was in a position for tremendous growth. Barriers which blocked the Church from proselytizing were lifted. Conversion multiplied among groups hitherto hostile: Eusebius, for example, noted at the beginning of the century that Christians could be

found among provincial governors and the imperial family itself.⁸ New episcopal sees cropped up everywhere, witness to the proliferation of the faith. Theological activity during this century also intensified. And it is symptomatic of the Church's vitality that the important minds of the century were clerics, not politicians. The imperial ranks drew mediocrities, never luminaries to compare with the likes of Ambrose or Augustine.

Obviously the Church grew for reasons other than Christianity's inherent appeal. Every inducement from political expedience to economic advantage to mere lethargy was at play. The Theodosian Code and Zosimus both note that pagans were excluded from the civil service early in the fifth century. Conversions resulted from this fact. The poem Carmen ad senatorem ex Christiana religione ad idolorum servitutem conversum gives an incisive picture of the way in which religious allegiances were changed in relation to political conditions. A Christian senator in Rome quickly reverted to the old religion once political conditions within the city made it expedient to do so.

This point underscores the basic ambiguity of fourth-century Christianity: while there is no doubt that the Church was significantly strengthened, the effects of the Church-State alliance were ambivalent. It is obvious that we can focus on either of two developments: the positive or the negative factors involved. We have noted above the benefits to the Church accruing from state favor. The state itself benefited. Society became regulated by Christian morals and modulated its year to the Christian calendar. Legislation of the period reflected Christian influence, noticeably in the realm of slavery.⁹

Negatively, the Church became in certain respects the ancillary of the government. As the Empire became permanently embattled, it enlisted

the help of its ecclesiastic leaders. The Emperor began to justify his position de gratia Dei. A panegyric addressed to Constantine observed that the Emperor "receives and bears the image of Supreme Kingship and so steers and directs in imitation of his superior the helm of all the affairs of this world."¹⁰ And from 314 onward, the Church willingly excommunicated any who refused military service.¹¹ Such subtle shifts of policy eventually redounded to the disadvantage of the Church.

This perspective leads us to the side of fourth-century Church history which shall be emphasized here: the negative side of Church life. This is not to deny the positive effects and developments. But other and darker aspects were also present. In view of the fact that Pelagius sought first of all to counteract the less appealing factors of Christian life, it is pertinent to investigate the negatives.

Foremost, while the fourth century saw the eventual triumph of Christianity, it did not see the emergence of a Church united. Quite the contrary was true. Herein is an anomaly. How was it possible for a Church rent by considerable faction to make such dramatic gains?

In the broadest sense, the fourth century brought the seeds of an eventual schism between East and West. Beside a different series of theological priorities, the political circumstances in each half of the Empire fostered the rift. Sometimes it was a mere disinterest, sometimes an actual hostility: whichever, the two Churches were not in accord.

From 305 until 395 (that is, from the abdication of Diocletian until the death of Theodosius) the Empire had a single ruler for only twenty-two years. Otherwise there were multiple rulers. This multiple leadership caused predictable problems, religiously as well as politically. On occasion the Emperors promulgated conflicting laws. The most noteworthy instance involved Arianism. Constantius and Valentinian in the West,

Valens and Constans in the East: two different reactions to the legality of the sect influenced imperial policy. Closer to Pelagius' time, the East and West were definitely separated and antagonistic. From 395 to 408, the Emperors Honorius and Arcadius eyed each other suspiciously and their respective Churches followed suit.

The Germanic invasions also had their effect on Church relationships. The East, more heavily populated and well-financed, was able to bear the brunt. The West was not. With the demise of the Western Empire--symbolized in the sack of Rome--there appears another division. This one was more psychological in nature. Attitudes concerning Church-State relationships always differed between East and West. The West was traditionally pessimistic about the value of secular authorities. The City of God lamented very little the passing of Rome and can be viewed as the statement par excellence of ecclesiastic outlooks in the West. The tradition was merely continued in Orosius' distasteful remarks about the Roman government and in Salvian's rueful observations.¹²

Crises within the Church itself attended the fourth century. At a time when ecclesiastic leaders could have been converting newly-arrived barbarian tribes and obstinate pagans, they chose instead to turn knives against each other. It was a century replete with heresy. In a sense heresy entails a dynamic Church: people must be theologically inquisitive to produce eccentric dogma. Furthermore, a case can be made for the fact that until Christianity was officially recognized by secular authority, heresy was technically impossible. When Christianity was itself a religio illicita, any variant belief was as acceptable or as reprehensible as "orthodox" thought. But given official sanction, it was inevitable that orthodoxy must be defined and, once defined, enforced. Here again it was Theodosius, not Constantine, whose activity was decisive. Theodosius was

explicit that Catholicism was the orthodox belief. Three years following Cunctos populos, Priscillian died in Spain--the first heretic executed by secular authority.¹³

Whatever its dynamics, heresy plagued the Church. Look anywhere throughout the Empire during the fourth century and there can be found heresies of varying seriousness. Friends and enemies of the Church were both aware of the divisiveness which was so pronounced during the period. Julian the Apostate made good use of the enmity which Christians felt toward one another. He repealed anti-heretical legislation precisely so that Christians could hate at each other.¹⁴ Ammianus stated it succinctly: "Christians are more dangerous enemies to one another than are the wild beasts."¹⁵

Ammianus bordered very closely on the truth. Arianism kept the entire Empire in turmoil for almost a century. Particularly acute in the East, it also surfaced in the West and was noticeably troublesome in Milan. In 343 the Christian Church attempted to convene a council of bishops for the entire Empire. The Greek fathers refused to sit with their Western colleagues.¹⁶ Their rationale was based purely on localism. Arianism was an Eastern phenomenon to be dealt with by the East. Seventy years later Orosius used precisely the same reasoning: sectionalism argued to the extreme. Arianism made the rift of East and West particularly discernible. Socrates stated explicitly that feeling ran so high "that from that time the Western Church was severed from the Eastern; and the boundary of communion between them was the mountain called Soucis, which divides the Illyrians from the Thracians."¹⁷ Sozomen also made note of the "dissension and calumny" deriving from this pitiful state of affairs.¹⁸

And Arianism was one of many. In Spain, as mentioned above, Pris-

cillianism caused undercurrents of dissent. In Gaul the so-called Bagaudae went beyond unacceptable theology; their violence required rather substantial military repression. In Africa the conflict between Donatists and Catholics dragged on for years. In Rome several heresies had to be extirpated: Montanism first, then Jovinianism, and Manichaeism recurrently. The Theodosian Code is also filled with a list of other nuisances: Eunomianism, Appollinarianism, Photinianism.¹⁹

Beside these heresies, the Church faced other distractions. Catholicism, the universal Church, had just attained supremacy when a series of regional regrouping emerged--regrouping far more specific than a vague duality of East and West. Certain alliances and traditional rivalries seem to have strengthened intensified at this point. Rome itself began making statements in the direction of primacy, using Petrine succession as its rationale. Admittedly the statements were somewhat ambiguous and taken seriously only when the Pope himself was a dynamic individual. But the assertions had at least begun: witness, for example, that in 386 the Council of the Vatican for the first time expressed that it was acting ad sancti apostoli Petri reliquias.²⁰

Not to be outdone, the Council of Constantinople declared for its primate a place second only to the Bishop of Rome. At the time it was a somewhat presumptuous claim, for Constantinople still played a secondary role in Church affairs. Nonetheless, the temerity was justified. Constantinople was beginning to encroach administratively in European Thrace and Asia Minor, to the displeasure of the Bishop of Ephesus. In the East, Jerusalem competed with Caesarea. And the Bishop of Alexandria, very much the master of his own house, was known to intervene too often outside Egypt. Traditionally friendly with Rome, problems developed late in the century: the Bishop of Alexandria meddled with Constantinopolitan affairs

and had to rely on backing by the Pope to justify his activity.²¹ For its part Africa centered about the powerful see of Carthage. With a long heritage of Latin Christianity behind them, the Africans were accustomed to acting autonomously and listening to the Bishop of Rome when and if it suited their predilections. The way in which the Pelagian controversy was conducted merely underscored this tradition of African independence.

Part of the problem lay in the fact that no see had indeed attained primacy. Traditionally, there was a hierarchy. Rome was afforded (grudgingly in some instances) the apex, on the basis that Peter and Paul had graced its community with apostolic approval. Alexandria was second; this on the tradition that St. Mark had founded its community. Antioch held third rank. Paradoxically, five sees were held to be equally prestigious. These were Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria. Each jealously guarded its supremacy in local matters. When the occasion presented itself, various sees would meddle in the affairs of others. The Eastern primates, for example, were happy to "depose" Pope Julius in 345 when his views did not uphold their own. In turn the Western bishops called censure upon their Eastern brothers and deposed them.²² Later, in 408, Constantinople saw fit to expel a delegation of bishops from Rome, without listening to the appeals they brought from Pope Innocent.²³ There was always tension between Alexandria and Constantinople, as evidenced most pointedly in the controversy over John Chrysostom. This wrangle pulled Rome into the center. For eleven years Rome and Constantinople broke communion with each other over that very case. Their mutual silence lasted from 404 to 415.²⁴ Moreover, Rome and Jerusalem had problems getting along: Rome was held in high esteem because it was the locale of Peter and Paul's martyrdom, Jerusalem as the scene of Christ's ministry and death.

This growing disaffection between Churches can be substantiated in the ecclesiastic histories that abound in the period. There is a definite parochialism to be seen. Westerners talk about Western concerns, Easterners about their happenings. One is hard pressed to find an overview of the Church as an encompassing entity. There is absolutely no sense of an Oecumene. Eastern histories deal almost exclusively with the catalogue of Eastern heresies: this is the case with Sozomen, Socrates, and Theodoret. When the West is mentioned, it is peripherally. A list of bishops will include Western counterparts. Occasionally a derogatory remark will be made about the "others." The best example of this tendency probably comes from Socrates:

The Roman episcopate, like that of Alexandria, degenerated into the present state of secular domination. Thenceforth, the Roman bishops would not suffer even those who perfectly agreed with them in matters of faith and whose purity of doctrine they extolled, to enjoy the privilege of assembling in peace, but stripped them of all they possessed. From such tyrannical bigotry the Constantinopolitan prelates kept themselves free.²⁵

This was Socrates' entry for the year 412, when Pelagius was in the process of establishing himself in the East.

The commentary from Socrates is not unusual and is, in fact, in the best tradition of ecclesiastic polemic. Religious combatants necessarily see their opponents as more than mere adversaries. Furthermore, the entire tradition of classic polemic tended toward almost appalling invective. Church writers often leaned more toward this mordant tradition than toward Christian charity. What one Churchman said about another often went beyond the boundaries of good taste. Jerome's work is filled with this type of thing²⁶, but the ultimate example of such extremism can be found in a letter addressed to Pope Innocent. In 404 a fellow cleric

wrote the Pontiff, castigating John Chrysostom, the controversial bishop of Constantinople:

John persecuted his brothers, driven by the same malicious spirit by which King Saul was possessed. He murdered the servants of the saints. He is a mangy (contaminatus), godless, plague-stricken, insane, raging tyrant, who in his folly asserts that he has promised his soul to the devil for adultery.²⁷

Clerics found much during the fourth century to criticize. There is no doubt that the Church became victimized from within. If imperial favor had ended the threat of persecution, it also brought with it a more relaxed attitude to Church discipline. Writers of the late fourth century decried a clergy gone soft. Clerics became so notorious for extorting money from widows that a secular law was passed to invalidate the practice.²⁸ It is noteworthy that both Ambrose and Jerome applauded the law.²⁹ Seduction and captation were also so prevalent as to require secular restrictions.³⁰ St. Jerome had particularly damning words to say:

There are some who wiggle their way into the priesthood or deaconate in order to have easier access to the women. Their only concern is their clothes and their perfumes. Their hair is crimped, their fingers glitter with rings . . . to look at them, you would think they were fiances, not clerics. Some of them devote all their pains--in fact, all their life--to knowing the names and addresses and habits of the great ladies . . . His calls? He has worked out a time-table and knows all the short cuts. He all but forces his way into the ladies' very bedrooms while they are still sleeping. If he notices a cushion, he raises it and admires it and fingers it. He complains he hasn't got anything like it and he doesn't have to ask for it--he's given it.³¹

What was left for the pious Christian, disheartened by Jerome's fat and venal priests? Here again, the Church was in a state of transition. It was a time to redirect priorities. In the early third century, Tertullian had made his famous observation that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Martyrdom had long been considered the high-

est expression of Christian devotion. With imperial favor, martyrdom had effectively disappeared. As mentioned before, the Church was also becoming vulgarized when an ingress of nominal Christians flooded its ranks. Furthermore, Christians of several generations' standing were becoming lax. No longer kept in line by eschatological expectations, a large portion of Christendom was becoming morally undisciplined. Pierre de Labriolle describes the Christianity of the day and its devotion to the faith:

The majority was a devoted crowd, but more credulous than believing, among whom were the neophytes converted the day before. Many of the catechumens escaped the influence of a clergy which was small in number and tended to coalesce into a caste; almost all new believers were attached by ties of blood to close alliances: spouses, brothers, or grandparents who continued to live as pagans. This is what constituted the greater part of the Christian population.³²

Augustine still had to contend with parishioners who confused Christ with the ancient gods and heroes.³³

It is not overly surprising that under such circumstances there was a tendency toward elitism in serious circles. People with genuine interest in the faith sought to express themselves. Pelagius found one method; Augustine, with his somewhat mystical bent, another. There was also a third alternative which became fashionable during the fourth century. This was monasticism.

Monasticism, of course, was not an exclusively Christian phenomenon. Various philosophical schools had admonished their adherents to asceticism, the most famous example being the Neoplatonic retreat in the Egyptian desert. By Pelagius' day the Christian world was being regaled with stories of successful and laudable monks. In a sense it was an age obsessed with successful and laudable people. The pagans still had as much

studies, according to God, made him a Ciceronian instead.³⁸ Still, there was a certain irresistible dynamism to the monastic movement. Like the Church itself, monasticism was a trend too powerful to stop, internal tensions and ambiguities notwithstanding. All the great saints and Church figures of the day were either monks or roundly applauded the movement. Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine supported monasticism enthusiastically. Augustine, indeed, wrote the first monastic rule for the West: for his home town of Tagaste in 388/389 and for Hippo Regius in 391/393.

There is no need to detail such commonplaces as the structure of the Church or its calendar. By Pelagius' time the Catholic Church was organized along the lines we know today. It was everywhere based on hierarchical structure, with the only divergence from modern practice being the fact that congregations often elected their clergymen. Such was Augustine's career. Nor do we need to say much about Church councils beside the fact that the fourth century used them increasingly to decide ecclesiastic affairs. Synods were very numerous.

Still, the history and particular circumstances of each regional Church were different. The African and Roman Churches, for example, had distinct "personalities" all their own. On this specific level, we need to investigate each, for they are pertinent to an understanding of Pelagius' career.

The Roman Church

In Pelagius' day the Roman Church had a long and honored history behind it. Still, it had not yet attained an undisputed primacy which would allow it to dictate unilaterally. The Roman Church was undoubtedly regarded as a primus inter pares, and it had been since very early times. Before proceeding to specific historical details within the Church, we

enthusiasm as ever for the ancient heroes: Vergil's Aeneid was still popular.³⁴ Christians merely found their own counterparts.

Originating in the East, monasticism spread westward and was becoming established at Rome--on a very tentative footing--just as Pelagius arrived. The Western world was introduced to monasticism through the tales of Eastern men of devotion. Rome had its first direct encounter with monasticism in 335. Athanasius, directly involved in the great Arian turmoil, was banished to the West. Coming to Rome for support, he was accompanied by monks who fascinated the city. Moreover, the influential Life of St. Anthony was published and circulated at this time. Each Eastern ecclesiastic history devotes a goodly portion of its pages to the praises of famous monks.³⁵

The West reacted with uncertainty. Beneath the interest and occasional admiration, there lurked a suspicion of extreme monasticism. The zeal of Eastern monks in destroying pagan property put them in the category of shock troops. An entry in the Theodosian Code ordered them to uninhabited regions lest they instigate trouble and violence in the towns.³⁶ Asceticism went against Roman tradition. Jerome's circle of aristocratic nuns caused confusion to their class, for their behavior belied the ideals to which the nobility adhered.³⁷ This was not the civilizing and learned monasticism of the seventh and eighth centuries. In many cases it was a flight from the world, paralleling in the religious sphere the flight of the curiales to the hills. It rejected a decadent society, but it sought to hide rather than improve. And the monasticism of the period could not quite mesh the Graeco-Roman intellectual culture with Christianity. Jerome wrestled with the problem. Such is the significance of his horrifying nightmare. Upon attempting to enter heaven, Jerome pleaded his case: he was a Christian. But he was ejected because his classical

should enumerate a few reasons why the see of Rome was able to occupy a place of prestige and power within the greater Christian world.

Two early historical quirks are probably responsible for the esteem which Rome consistently enjoyed. Neither has to do with the hackneyed expression that as capital of the world, Rome's prestige deflected to its Church.

First, Rome had the distinction of claiming that honored martyrs had ended their lives there. No ancient author, no rival see, ever disputed that Peter and Paul had died in Rome. The frequency with which the ancient writers cited the apostles' martyrdom suggests how much of an impression it must have made.³⁹ If Rome had not been the actual scene of Jesus' ministry, it did have highly significant links with his lieutenants. Their identity was especially meaningful. Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter, apostle to the Jews: a Catholic Church in its literal sense. As time wore on the Church as a whole placed great emphasis on apostolic succession. Here Rome was unequalled in importance. Furthermore, the cult of the martyrs was highly honored, and this was especially true in the fourth century.

Second, Rome had probably been a thriving Christian community at precisely the time when the original mother Church at Jerusalem came into eclipse. Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70; the Christian Church there was dealt a severe blow in the resulting displacement.⁴⁰ It was necessary for someone to assume direction of a movement which showed every indication of continued growth. Which remaining church could take Jerusalem's place?

Here Rome had certain advantages over possible rivals. There is indication that the Roman Church was relatively strong in numbers and enjoyed a good reputation from the very earliest times. In the decade of

the 50's, St. Paul had praised the Roman congregation because "the whole world" had heard of its faith.⁴¹ Ten years later, when the Neronian persecution decimated the community, the Christians of Rome were still reputed to be a "multitudo ingens."⁴² Thus we have reports from a friend and an enemy of the new faith to the effect that the Roman Church was comparatively large and active.

The reasons for the Church's strength relate to circumstances and to the nature of the city. Contrary to popular belief, which enjoys dwelling on the horrors of the arena, the Roman Church consistently endured less persecution than its provincial sisters. Nero's brutalities are notorious, so much so that they obscure a critical fact. The most severe persecutions took place outside Rome. This is not to deny that the Roman Church was harassed by sporadic executions. But these usually involved small numbers of people and may well have provided good publicity for the faith. Even under the persecutions of Decius and Diocletian, the Roman Church was spared all but the milder of pogroms. The bloodiest reprisals afflicted the Churches of Gaul and Asia.

Furthermore, the nature of the city was always conducive to the reception of any new religion. And in this Christianity was no different than Mithraism, Manichaeism, or any other sect. Mention has been made above concerning the itinerant habits of the city's residents. This constant motion must have been a boon for the early proliferation of Christianity. Moreover, it was a cosmopolitan town, accustomed to foreign faces and foreign cults. Christianity had arrived in the city at precisely the time when many Romans became interested in mystery religions. The traditional Roman religion had become sterile and meaningless for many. They sought better objects for their devotion.⁴³ The Roman government came to grips with the reality of the situation. Augustus repealed legis-

lation that made it illegal for a Roman citizen to be converted to a foreign religion.⁴⁴

Against this background Christianity was in a position to attract the city's residents, and not only the lower classes, as common misconception has it. In several respects the city was prepared for Christianity. First, the Church offered a sense of stability--welcome news to a populace recently freed from civil war and bloody proscriptions. Likewise, Christianity's emphasis on morality would have appealed to certain people. The best Roman tradition valued moral restraint and a proper respect for divinity.⁴⁵ And Christianity came to Rome at a time when important ideas were beginning to stir. Not the least of these was a growing tendency toward universalism. Politically the Empire could foster nothing else. Correlative to this, there was a leaning toward religious universalism or, as we would say, monotheism. The Jews of Rome had set the stage for such an outlook, but it was also prevalent in other religions within the city: witness for example the famous passage from Apuleius regarding the cult of Isis.⁴⁶ Finally, the city had a dual introduction to Messianic expectations. In its most specific sense, the Jews of Rome undoubtedly talked of the coming Messiah as did Jews everywhere. But native Romans had been apprised of a similar possibility through the surprising agency of political propaganda. There was a considerable store of Latin literature heralding the coming of a golden age, literature which was meant to glorify Augustus' reign. Vergil's Fourth Eclogue was the most noteworthy example. It eulogized an unidentified "Man of Peace" who would initiate a new age. It was accepted by the medieval Church as a prophecy of Christ. Whether the earliest Christians did also is uncertain; but it does serve to illustrate the variety of ideas which were current in Rome at exactly the time the Church

was establishing itself there.

The Christian Church was undoubtedly in Rome by the reign of Claudius. The first allusion to Roman Christianity comes from Suetonius who related that Claudius "Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuan-
tes Roma expulit."⁴⁷ Several other ancient writers made mention of this event.⁴⁸ Most modern scholars place the date of the expulsion at 49.

Suetonius' account presupposes two things. First, Rome's encounter with the Christians was an unpleasant affair. Rome was a violent town. Petty squabbling would have drawn little attention, let alone an imperial decree. Claudius was certainly not antisemitic, so it seems likely that the outburst in the Jewish quarter must have been fairly serious to bring any notice. This fact underscores a characteristic which surfaces time and again in the Roman Church. It was riddled with factions. Periodic brawls embarrassed the more restrained Church members. The rancor concerning the Pelagian affair was merely an entry in a long list of disagreements within the Roman Church.

Second, Suetonius' statement shed light on the origin of the Church in Rome. It evidently arose in the Jewish quarter. There is nothing to argue against the possibility that Christianized Gentiles brought the new faith to Rome. But on this basis of the passage from Suetonius and the history of Christianity in other cities, the balance of probability points toward the Jewish quarter. Moreover, a short reference in Acts 2:10 suggests the same thing. Among those who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost were: οἱ ἐπισημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, Ἰουδαῖοι τε καὶ προσήλυτοι.

In this respect it is highly significant that Rome contained one of the great Jewries of antiquity. Seven ancient synagogues and three Jewish cemeteries have been excavated in Rome. It is estimated that around 30,000 Jews inhabited the imperial city during the first century.⁴⁹ In

the city various people adopted Jewish customs if not the Jewish religion itself. They were said to observe the Sabbath and train their children in Mosaic law.⁵⁰ Until relatively late, it is possible to discern Jewish influence in the Roman Church. Second century literature, for example, had a strong Jewish cast to it. The thread of Judaism in the Roman Church is important to remember when dealing with Pelagius: its presence can be detected in the emphasis which both he and Caelestius placed upon the Old Testament and the Law.

It should be noted, however, that there was also a strong hellenizing tendency in the Roman congregation from the very start. One would expect a latinizing trend. However, it is ironic that Africa led the way in Latin Christianity, not Rome. For the first two centuries of its existence, Rome's Church had distinctly Greek overtones, certainly normal for a city wherein half the residents spoke Greek.⁵¹ Southern Italy in particular had a strong heritage. Known as "magna Graecia" from its days of Greek colonization, it furnished St. Paul with his first Christian welcome in Italy.⁵²

With these general observations in mind, we can investigate some of the developments within the Roman Church. The first century was a period of rapid expansion. The new faith was afforded enough publicity to draw attention, but enough peace to draw strength. And the first century was witness to one of the ironies of Christian history. The stereotype which depicts Christianity as a slave's religion during its infancy cannot be fully substantiated. All circumstances indicate that the Church at Rome made headway both numerically and socially during its first years. It may be more accurate to say that it became more firmly a slave's religion after the government discouraged aristocratic interest.

It is fairly clear that the Church made inroads among the great Ro-

man families very early. Paul greeted members of Narcissus' household; Narcissus' was the secretary of Claudius.⁵³ Moreover, the apostle sent greetings to Nero's household.⁵⁴ In keeping with the pattern that continued for centuries, Christianity infiltrated the nobility itself through female members. The first suspected conversion among the nobility was that of a woman. Pomponia Graecina fell under momentary censure for contracting a case of "externae superstitionis."⁵⁵ The terminology is nebulous, but she was known for a life of extreme austerity and morality. And there are many Pomponii to be found in the catacombs, including a Pomponius Graecinus.⁵⁶ It is likely that this Graecina was the progenetrix of a noble Christian family.

The next "datable" event affecting the Roman Church can be ascribed to the mid-fifties. At this time Christians received theological instructions from Paul himself. The Epistle to the Romans, from a historical rather than theological viewpoint, is interesting for the light it sheds on the Church as a body. Paul's letter suggests that the Roman community was definitely symbiotic, necessitating one type of advice for Jews and another for Gentiles. The relationship between the two must have been adequately harmonious, for Paul does not hint at any ill-feeling or schism.

The following decade provided the Roman Church with its most famous happenings. This was the time when Paul came to Rome for trial. Nero's reign was a time of great misfortune. In 64 came the first persecution. The story is well known and need not be retold. It is noteworthy, however, that Roman sources saw the persecution as a salutary measure toward the elimination of an unsavory cult. Suetonius in particular portrayed the event as such, appending it to a list of long-needed reforms. Peter was said to have perished at this time, although modern

Church scholars debate the accuracy of that tradition.

Antiquity never did, however. Its veracity was attested by Dionysus in Greece, Clement and Origen in Alexandria, Irenaeus in Gaul, and Tertullian in Africa. In 140 the cult of the two martyred apostles was well-established in Rome itself. Late in antiquity it was mentioned by Eusebius, Lactantius, and Sulpicius Severus. In short, Rome's listeners believed the tale of apostolic martyrdom and afforded the Church there prestige attending that occurrence.

By the 90's the Roman Church was well aware of its position in the Christian world. Clement saw fit to send words of advice to the Corinthian Church when it was embroiled in one of its periodic schisms. Significantly, Clement offered conciliatory words in the name of the Roman Church itself.⁵⁷ Furthermore, there were still Jewish overtones to his letter: Judaic terminology and allusion to Old Testament figures predominate.

By Antonine times the Roman Church was producing literature which was admired throughout the Christian community. It should be noted that there was nothing overly sophisticated about these works, not in the sense of the African Church literature which would soon follow. Didactic Christian "manuals" came from the capital, the most famous being the "Shepherd of Hermas." Written in Greek--which would remain Rome's ecclesiastic language until the mid-third century--the "Shepherd" still contained Jewish overtones. It had certain similarities to Essene asceticism, and it emphasized a duality of spirits within the universe. This point is of some importance: Rome was beginning to have problems with dualist heresies. In the second and third centuries, it was Gnosticism which was most troublesome. In Pelagius' day, it was Manichaeism. These sects claimed to be the true Christianity and gave the Church serious competi-

tion. As early as the second century, Marcion founded a Gnostic Church in Rome. He and the more eccentric Valentinus created problems in the city and ended their days in exile, self-imposed or otherwise.⁵⁸

The Roman Church was strong enough to expel the objectionable sect, and this at a time when accolades were beginning to pour in from various points within the Empire. Ignatius, a Syrian, extolled the dignity of the Church at Rome.⁵⁹ Around 140 Asian Christians conferred with Rome on the dating of Easter. By the time of Marcus Aurelius, Rome received the statement of primacy par excellence: Irenaeus' Against Heresies. The fact that Irenaeus was a Greek living in Gaul illuminates somewhat the esteem in which Rome was held.

It was in the mid-third century that Latin Christianity came into its own. The reasons why the Roman Church gradually changed from Hellenistic/Judaic tones to more purely Latin are not entirely clear. Perhaps it was no more than a natural process of attrition and change. But the change did come.

Moreover, Christianity had spread to the West. By 250, it had centers in Gaul, Spain, northern Italy, and Illyricum. Cyprian noted the proliferation, writing from Africa.⁶⁰ Carthage and Rome always remained the primary centers, cores around which Christianity spread net-like to the countryside.

To cope with this increase, Rome grew administratively. By 200 the city was choosing bishops from native-born citizens.⁶¹ A hierarchy of orders was established beneath the bishop, and the city was subdivided about this time for more effective government.

In 251 the Church witnessed another controversy, triggered by the problem of what to do with the so-called lapsi: that is, those who had recanted their faith under torture and then sought readmittance to the

Church. Two popes were elected by rival factions. Novatian sent envoys to Africa, Alexandria, Gaul, and Antioch in an attempt to garner support for his cause.⁶² Cornelius was more successful: he convoked a council in Rome which condemned his opponent. It is characteristic of this city that Novatian congregations were still active in 415, as the Pelagian controversy was underway.⁶³

At the same time that Novatianism stirred the city, a more serious problem was developing. The third century brought with it anarchy and hard times. Decius required all citizens of the Empire to sacrifice to the national deities. Out of this came the worst of persecutions. Nothing is known of its magnitude in Rome, other than the fact that Pope Fabian lost his life. Silence in this case most likely indicated that the Roman Church once again escaped the horrors which fell heavy elsewhere. Seven years later, another persecution broke out. This one was noteworthy for the light it shed on the prosperity of the Roman Church. High-ranking laity and Church dignitaries were especially singled out. Their property was confiscated to fill the treasury--certain indication that the Church held substantial wealth. Eusebius corroborated this suspicion, for he mentioned that as early as the second century the Roman Church was sending financial aid to places as far away as Arabia, Syria, and Cappadocia.⁶⁴

In 260 Gallien ushered in a period of peace for the Church in general with an edict of toleration. Moreover, Rome benefited from a gratuitous statement from the Emperor. He was called upon to decide who should occupy the see of Antioch. It was decided that the bishop should occupy the see of Antioch. It was decided that the bishop should be whoever was "in communion with the bishops of the Christian doctrine in Italy and Rome."⁶⁵ The criterion for legitimacy was thus said to be

agreement with Rome.

From this point the story of the Roman Church involves consistent growth and increasing self-consciousness. Popes came now almost exclusively from native-born Romans. Marcus, Julius, Liberius, Damasus, Siricus, Innocent: the Popes were all natives. Only Zosimus, who figured prominently in the Pelagian controversy, may have broken the pattern. The Papacy itself became a resplendent office. Ammianus, who was not the kindest of critics, portrayed the glamor of the pontificate at this time:

I do not deny when I consider the ostentation that reigns at Rome that those who desire such office and power are justified in laboring with all possible exertion and vehemence to obtain their wishes. For after they have succeeded, they will be secure for the future, being enriched by offerings from matrons, riding in carriages, dressing resplendently, and feasting luxuriously, so that their entertainments surpass even royal banquets.⁶⁶

Constantine's conversion merely aided this trend. Imperial benefactions left the Church in Rome more amply endowed.

More specifically, the history of the fourth-century Church is overshadowed by one primary fact: Rome began acting consciously as a counterpoise to the East, something which had formerly been lacking. Rome stood firm for the Nicæan Creed, something severely challenged by Eastern primates. It also took the side of Athanasius in the complex workings of the Arian heresy.

It was natural that Rome should move in this direction. Diregarding all theological considerations, Rome was the only natural candidate to balance out the East. Politically, of course, the weight of the Empire was shifting Eastward. The establishment of Constantinople merely intensified the split of East from West. Moreover, Rome was the only western

patriarchate. Given political sectionalism, the inability of East and West to agree on theology, and a generation of energetic popes, and it was inevitable that Rome would assert more noisily than ever before the prestige it had always enjoyed.

Pope Liberius stood for Roman primacy and Nicaean orthodoxy in the middle of the century. In this instance the Pope defied imperial orders by opposing Arianism. For his efforts Liberius was deposed. Later he was reinstated in the pontifical office: notably, after the people of Rome had expressed their displeasure with the Emperor in a series of ugly riots.⁶⁷

Liberius had also been responsible for the first overt statement of Roman primacy to the Christian world. In 343 the Council of Sardica initiated a period of Roman assertiveness. At this synod Rome made its position clear: it claimed for itself the right to decide the appeals of the entire Oecumene; for the Pope, the right to send his legates to decide issues in provincial disputes.⁶⁸ It is symptomatic that the Eastern clerics literally walked out of this council.

During the very time Pelagius resided in Rome, the Church there was still consolidating its position. Toward the later half of the century, Rome maneuvered with Milan for dominance in Italy. Two factors contributed to the tension in the peninsula. First, Milan had become the imperial capital. Rome had lost that distinction some years before. With Christian emperors, the Christian capital became the center of gravity. Second, Milan had for its bishop the great Ambrose, whose talents at manipulation were prodigious.

Contemporary with Ambrose, Pope Damasus ruled from Rome. Jerome was particularly favored by this pontiff, and it is possible that Pelagius might have been acquainted with him. Damasus was the first in a series

of remarkable popes who would take Rome ever closer toward real primacy. Damasus came to prominence under ugly circumstance. In 367 the election of Rome pope was disputed. Each time supporters of the two candidates died. The worst brawl left 137 people dead.⁶⁹ Periodic criticism about Damasus' entry into the pontificate marred his career. Moreover, his rather flamboyant life-style was the target for much gossip. The great pagan Vettius Agorius Praetextatus made note of Damasus' penchant for high living. Asked to become a Christian, Praetextatus laid down his conditions: "Make me the Bishop of Rome and then I shall become a Christian."⁷⁰ The Pope's fondness for female company was also the subject of talk. His critics called him the "matrinarum auriscalpius": the ladies' ear-tickler.⁷¹

In spite of the criticism, Damasus proceeded on a rather successful career. He pushed through his policies; he parried with pagan aristocrats while remaining on remarkably friendly terms with some of them. He fostered the cult of the martyrs, embellished the catacombs and churches of Rome, and commissioned Jerome to edit and collate the multitude of biblical manuscripts then in circulation. Damasus was perhaps motivated to define a normative Christianity. He laid particular stress on canonicity. A council of 374 promulgated a list of books from the Old and New Testaments which the Roman Church held to be canonical.

Moreover, Damasus had to wrestle with eccentrics in the Roman Church. Novatianism, condemned a century before, still had adherents. But that sect was not the primary problem. Manichaeism was making a stir, despite imperial proscriptions. During Damasus' tenure, a new distraction grew strong enough to demand attention. This was the belief circulated by Jovinian. The West was periodically preoccupied with the question of baptism. In this case, Jovinian suggested that baptism once and for all

cleansed a person of sin and guilt. Obviously, this was an open call for antinomianism and had to be dealt with decisively. A council was convened in 394 and condemned the heresy. Pelagius would have been in Rome at the time. His exact relationship with Jovinian attitudes is uncertain; Jerome was convinced that Pelagius fostered Jovinian attitudes and it is possible to see a logical connection between certain of the ideas within each system.

In 402 another great pontiff assumed power. This was Innocent. Siricius had ruled between Damasus' death and Innocent's accession. Siricius himself had merely continued policies begun by Damasus, whipping the Italian clergy into line and again promulgating Roman supremacy. But it was Innocent, whose rule lasted until 417, who so directly affected the Pelagian controversy. Innocent's attention was focused primarily Eastward. The furor created by the deposition of John Chrysostom created a rift between Rome and Constantinople. In a sense, Pelagianism came as a timely stroke of luck for Rome. Innocent's activity in the controversy could be construed as a claim for Roman primacy in the East. Jerome clearly indicated that he interpreted the situation in that light. Letters 136 and 137 in Jerome's collection preserve the Pope's actions; and there is no doubt that Innocent offered his comments about Pelagius with primacy in mind. Innocent's words to John of Jerusalem were definitely those of a supreme authority to his underling. In this respect, Pelagius was once again caught in the middle of fifth-century developments.

The African Church

For nearly three centuries North Africa led Western Christianity in literature and theological brilliance, a tendency which paralleled Africa's hegemony in secular Latin literature. Unlike its Roman counter-

part, very little is known of the origins of the African Church. A plausible theory presents the African community as an offshoot of the Roman Church. Certainly missionaries would have come from the imperial city, considering the close ties between Italy and Africa in other respects. The Sahara stopped effective contact with Egypt, and although Carthage dealt with Eastern merchants, its primary contact was with the West.

The terminus a quo for African Christianity is 180 A. D. In that year, a series of persecution bloodied North Africa. In July martyrs perished in Madauros and Scillium, both in Numidia. We know much of this particular martyrdom, for the Acta of the victims' last moments are preserved, significantly in Latin. It was a short-lived martyrdom, ending in some eleven deaths. Men and women of the villages were executed.⁷³

After this violent beginning the African Church seems to have proliferated rapidly, particularly in Carthage. By 212 Tertullian could say:

If we are willing to die, what would you do with so many thousand people, with these men and women, these living beings of every sex and age, of every condition, who would come forward to hand themselves over to you? How many butchers, how many swords would you need? What would happen to Carthage thus decimated by you when everyone would recognize there his near relatives, his neighbors, perhaps the men and women of your own rank, the leading citizens, and the parents, or the friends of your friends?⁷⁴

We must allow for some exaggeration, but this is not total hyperbole. Harnack's studies have pointed to a steady growth in the African Church. At the time of St. Cyprian (i.e., around 250) Christianity was stronger in Africa than in any other Western province. Its particular strongholds were Africa Proconsularis and Numidia. The strength of the African Church was evidenced by the number of bishoprics. In 220 Africa contained be-

tween 70 and 90 bishoprics. In 250 there were around 150; and by 320, following the great persecution of Diocletian, there were at least 250 bishoprics.⁷⁵

The number of bishoprics is not the only way in which African Christianity can be gauged. There are at least three other parameters to be considered.

Geographically, Christianity went only as far as the Roman frontier. No bishopric ever went beyond. The Romans had failed to penetrate the heavily forested mountainous regions prevalent in ancient north Africa.⁷⁶ The Berber population was never Christianized. This point brings us to a second factor to be considered.

Socially and racially, the African provinces were divided into three strata. The base of society was Berber. As mentioned above, Christianity had little or no influence on this sector. The middle section was comprised of "Punic" inhabitants, residing primarily in the old Phoenician coastal towns. Here the Church influenced many, although it is uncertain whether it appealed to "Punic" sensibilities or merely did well in urban regions. Christianity was always and foremost a religion of the cities. Lastly, the top stratum of society was the Graeco-Roman population in the towns. Here the Church was at its most successful.⁷⁷ It is noteworthy that in the catalogue of martyrs for 180, the victims had both Latin and Punic names.

On the third level, African Christianity can be viewed linguistically. The language here was always Latin, in distinction from Rome itself. Theological treatises were always Latin; and the Bible in use in Africa was also Latin, probably the oldest of Latin Bibles.⁷⁸ It was different from the Roman Bible. Possibly it was part or parcel of Marcion's Bible, with its heavy emphasis on the Pauline writings and its one Gospel.⁷⁹ It is

noteworthy that Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings rely almost exclusively on quotations from Paul's epistles. An occasional reference from the Gospel of St. Luke will appear; and from St. John more rarely: this gospel, if Docetic in intent, as some modern scholars would have it, follows in the Gnostic-Manichean mainstream. But whatever its origins, the African Bible was a Latin/Western work. Africans knew no other tradition and never had to collate two heritages. For the commoners, this Latin usage something of a problem. No written translation was ever made for Punic-speaking Africans.⁸⁰ As late as our period, Augustine himself needed a Punic interpreter for his Punic congregation.⁸¹

The African Church consistently had a personality of its own. Foremost, and possibly the explanation for the Church's rapid growth, was the fact that it was always highly unified. The Bishop of Carthage was definitely the pole around which African Christianity converged. The importance of the bishop was a strong belief in the African Church from the earliest days. In the mid-third century Cyprian emphasized that the Church was a unity entailing the unanimous cooperation of the bishops. The basis of this unity was the fact that the bishops were successors to the apostles. And Cyprian saw the apostles as equal in authority and rank. This was perhaps necessary, since Carthage had no tradition of visitation by an apostle, alone of all the great sees except Constantinople. And the New Rome could at least stand on imperial favor.

Among its other characteristics, the African Church was the home of extremists. In the third century, Montanism caught on, a rigorist sect which preached morality on the basis of eschatological expectations. In the third century the see of Carthage had three factions wrangling among themselves over questions concerning apostasy.⁸² During the fourth century Donatism kept the province in cyclical upheaval. In short, the pro-

vince was attacked by periodic bouts of moralism.

In keeping with its enthusiasm for extremism, the African Church had a strong reverence for its tradition of martyrdom. Its history opens with a tale of death, and Donatists brought criticism upon themselves by their exaltation of suicide as a mode of martyrdom. In point of fact, a rather grisly thread of fatalism pervaded the African Church. The lurid Apocalypse of Peter, a most distasteful piece of apocrypha, originated most likely in Africa. Its horrors certainly correlate to the grim outlook of clerics there. God was always viewed as a harsh taskmaster, with man literally His slave. This should be emphasized, for it has a certain bearing on the Pelagian-Augustinian battle. A tradition which posits man's slavery to God can hardly identify man as an independent entity, morally responsible for his own actions.

That Africans should view man as the slave of God is to be expected. The province had an indigenous cult which emphasized the same point. The cult of Saturn, originally Semitic, was strongly expiatory. Human sacrifice was not unknown.⁸³ This old religion was quite primitive, not being modified (as in Phoenicia) by contact with Greek thought. It was also firmly entrenched in Africa: severe rioting broke out when Christian enthusiasts attempted to close the temple of Saturn in 399.⁸⁴

Two other oriental influences can be detected in African religious history. There was a strong Rabbinic tradition, especially in Carthage. African Christianity bordered closely on Judaism. It celebrated the same Sabbath; it granted levitical status to priests; and it recognized judicial and administrative functions in lay officials--a fact which caused tension between Africa and Rome in regard to Rome's claim to primacy.⁸⁵ Tertullian remarked that Christianity stood near to the Jewish religion. In turn Jews referred to Christians as "Nazarenes," perhaps seeing them

as heretical Jews, rather than adherents of a separate religion. One modern scholar suspects that in Africa, the Jews and Christians maintained a common front against the pagans.⁸⁶

Africa was also a stronghold of dualist sects. Gnosticism came first, and later Manichaeism from Persia. The latter cult invaded Africa early, perhaps by 275. It has been suggested that Manichaeism and Donatism were the dominant Christian sects until Augustine's time, with Catholicism occupying a third position.⁸⁷ Manichees, it is worth noting, eschewed the Old Testament, preferring instead the Sibylline oracles and the cult of Hermes Trismegistos. The god of the Old Testament they held to be a power of evil. While Manichees claimed to be the representatives of true Christianity, they still viewed Jesus as an exemplar rather than a redeemer. Moreover, they held that Jesus was incorporeal; baptism was dismissed as an essential sacrament. Knowledge, not any supernatural remission of sins, was seen to be the remedy. Manichees also taught a creator god similar to the Semitic Saturn revered so intensely throughout Africa: a deity morose and savage, "iudicem, ferum, belli potentem."⁸⁸

Whatever its tendencies toward extremism, African Christianity's best-known feature was its ability to produce leading ecclesiastic thinkers. From approximately 200 until Augustine's day, Africa led the West. By 400 other areas were beginning to outstrip Africa, notably Aquitaine. But the north African provinces were still proud of their heritage.

At the close of the second century, Tertullian had opened the way. With him and his age, Christianity became militant. It was the time of the first apologetic offensives. While Tertullian investigated various aspects of Christian life, he is best known for skillful assaults on paganism.

Tertullian was therefore an expositor; the next luminary was a man of activity. This was Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage during the middle years of the third century. His career was most significant for two aspects of his life as Church leader.

First, he reiterated, some sixty years after Irenaeus, the notion of a universal church, with an emphasis on the unity thereof. Unlike his predecessor, Cyprian made no specific deference toward Roman primacy. It was not that Cyprian denied the concept. He merely did not enumerate specific prerogatives. Scholars ever since have debated Cyprian's exact stance. His treatise De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate emphasized oneness. Such words as unanimitas, consensio, and concors fill his pages. But curiously, within the same document, Cyprian stressed the equal authority of the bishops. Cyprian supposed that there was a monarchical structure to the Church, with the bishop occupying the apex of that structure. Logically, this posited that there be some leader of the group. Yet Cyprian failed to follow his argument to its logical conclusion.

It is noteworthy that Cyprian came into conflict with Stephen, the Bishop of Rome. A recurrent theme of Western Church history involved baptism, its precise meaning and usage. The details need not be elaborated here; it is sufficient to point out that Africa and Rome were at odds in the 240's over this very issue. And it is indication of Africa's prestige that Spanish recusants went to Carthage, not to Rome, for vindication of their situation. In this affair, it was not so much a question of Roman primacy, but a situation in which a well-known and respected bishop eclipsed the Pope--much the same way in which Ambrose overshadowed Siricius a century and half later. Cyprian's prestige throughout antiquity was tremendous. His Saint's Day was celebrated in Rome, Constantinople, Spain, and, of course, all of Africa.⁸⁹ More-

over, he was revered throughout the East. It was not by coincidence that when Augustine joined battle with Pelagius, he undergirded his arguments with quotations from Cyprian, not merely on the basis of Cyprian's doctrinal relevancy, but for the benefit of Eastern clerics whose regard for Cyprian was well known.⁹⁰

Cyprian was important in the sense that he became a fulcrum upon which revolved another ecclesiastic disagreement. One of the most outstanding features of African Church history is the famous Donatist controversy. While the rest of Christendom wrestled with the Christological problem of Arianism, African clerics battled over issues somewhat more mundane. Cyprian was a cry-word for each side.

Following Cyprian's martyrdom in 257, the Church in Africa experienced a period of extensive growth. The Emperor Gallien issued an edict of toleration in 260. From that point until 303, when Diocletian implemented the last of persecutions, the Church had approximately a generation of peace and stability. During this period, the number of bishoprics probably doubled for the Christian world.⁹¹

The effects of this growth were not entirely positive. There is evidence of spiritual laxity. It was a period of material prosperity. Tales have been passed down from the age itself of bishops who became more concerned for their churches' wealth than their clerical duties.⁹² Apostasy was more pronounced when the persecution did develop. By 305 Church leaders had to reach a decision about what to do with the recusants. Cyprian had faced a similar problem in his lifetime, following the Decian persecution. He had been successful in avoiding a schism. But by 311, when the first wave of Donatism broke forth, things were different. A sizeable disagreement could not be held back this time.

The incident which initiated a century of ill-feeling and bloodshed

was the selection of Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage. Some 70 Numidian bishops objected to this choice, on the basis that Caecilian had been ordained by a recusant. To Numidian thinking, this invalidated his standing as a priest. From this point on, two Churches existed side by side in Africa, each claiming to be the true Catholic Church. Notably, the Donatists did not alter doctrine. In all points except one their outlooks agreed with their neighbors.

Much has been made in an attempt to cast Donatism, like heresies everywhere, as a form of racial or social protest.⁹³ While the theory may have some merit, it is still inconclusive. In the case of Donatism, no definite patterns of alignment can be substantiated. There is certain indication that Donatism was particularly favored by the poorer elements, the coloni.⁹⁴ But the nobility was equally divided between the two Churches.

Numidia, which was to be the locale of Augustine's bishopric, was the stronghold of Donatism. Augustine mentioned that he was outnumbered in the town of Hippo Regius.⁹⁵ The situation was more complex in Africa Proconsularis. There the Catholics outnumbered their opponents; but paganism was also influential, and the province found itself split three ways on the subject of religion.

Between 347 and 362 the Catholic Church was given a respite. On the first date, Donatism was officially proscribed. Leaders of the movement were exiled and their properties confiscated. The later date represents the point at which Julian, with clever intent, legalized the sect again. The Apostate was rewarded for his efforts. Trouble again erupted from 362 until 377, at which time Donatism was once again declared illegal. From this point until 411, when imperial edicts and a long history of serious Catholic opposition finally destroyed Donatism's appeal,

Africa was kept in turmoil. The imperial government was hampered in its efforts to crush Donatism because of the provincial governors who often ignored their responsibility to ferret out the heretics. The majority of these governors were pagan aristocrats from Rome, whose zeal for defending orthodox Catholicism was less than it might have been.⁹⁶

On two counts the Donatists managed at last to make themselves so reprehensible that the imperial government attacked the sect decisively. Bloody encounters had always punctuated the Donatist controversy. Toward the latter part of the century, the situation worsened. References from Catholic authors about "circumcelliones" became increasingly frequent. These were the radical fringe of the Donatist movement. They particularly disrupted public order. Evidently they came from the very lowest order of society. They became troublesome because they were itinerant and given to violence.

Moreover, in 385 the Donatist primate of Numidia became identified with Gildo, an insurgent who led an abortive coup against imperial rule. This bit of bad politics incited the Emperor to promulgate a series of increasingly repressive edicts.⁹⁷ Coupled with this development came an intensive Catholic counterattack. Augustine was primarily responsible. It seems that Catholic encounters with the Donatists had been somewhat uninspired prior to Augustine. Catholics did not actively contest Donatist elections to various bishoprics, for example.⁹⁸

But with the arrival of Augustine and imperial censure, Donatism was doomed. Augustine spent some nineteen years of effort combatting the rival sect. Beginning in 392, the Bishop of Hippo embarked on a career of anti-Donatist polemic. Beside composing theological arguments, Augustine relied on more practical measures. He was not hesitant to urge governors and landowners to use their power to convert

the schismatics. There was a danger involved, as Augustine knew: "il-
los periculosum est exhortari."⁹⁹ Yet Augustine insisted, so that by
the time Pelagius was newly arrived in Africa, Donatism was on its way
to extinction.

Such are the various developments and characteristics of the Afri-
can Church prior to the Pelagian affair. It had seen a great history
and had also fallen into the sorrowful state of schism and ill-feeling.
Furthermore, it was beginning to see its position as the leader of Wes-
tern Christendom fall away to other areas of the Latin Empire. These
facts must be kept in mind to understand the furor which greeted the
Pelagian heresy.

FOOTNOTES

¹William Boyd, "The Ecclesiastic Edicts of the Theodosian Code," Columbia Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, 24 (1905), 126.

²Charles Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York, 1957), 292.

³CT 9:16:9.

⁴CT 16:1:2: Cunctos populos quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum in tali volumus religione versari quam divinum Petrum apostolum tradidisse Romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat quamque pontificem Damasum sequi claret et Petrum Alexandriae episcopum virum apostolicae sanctiatis, hoc est, ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub parili maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus. Hanc legem sequentes Christianorum nomen iubemus amplecti, reliquos vero demones vesanosque iudicates haeretici dogmatis infamiam sustinere . . . divina primum vindicta, post etiam motus nostri, quem ex caelesti arbitrio sumpserimus, ultione plectendos.

⁵See especially, CT 16:5:1.

⁶John Steinmann, St. Jerome and His Times, tr. Ronald Mathews (Notre Dame University, 1959), 201

⁷Sozomen, HE 7:15; Socrates, HE 5:16; Theodoret, HE 5:21, 5:22, 5:27.

⁸Eusebius, HE 8:1:2 and 8:1:3.

⁹Jean Danielou and Henri Marrou, The Christian Centuries. Volume 1: The First Six Hundred Years, tr. Vincent Cronin (New York, 1964), 322.

¹⁰Eusebius, De laudibus Constantini, 1:6.

¹¹Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, tr. Philip and Mariette Leon (New York, 1931), 50.

¹²See especially, Arnaldo Momigliano, The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century (Oxford, 1963), 12-16.

¹³Pierre de Labriolle, The History and Literature of Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius, tr. Herbert Wilson (London, 1924), 305-310.

¹⁴Sozomen, HE, 5:5.

¹⁵Ammianus, Roman History, 22:5:4.

¹⁶Theodoret, HE, 2:7.

¹⁷Socrates, HE, 2:22.

¹⁸Sozomen, HE, 3:13.

¹⁹CT 16:5:11 gives the lengthiest list of heretical sects.

²⁰Edward H. Landon, The Manual of the Councils of the Holy Catholic Church, Volume 2 (Edinburgh, 1909), 284.

²¹Socrates, HE, 6:17.

²²Sozomen, HE, 3:11, 3:12.

²³Loc. cit., 8:28.

²⁴Loc. cit., 8:26.

²⁵Socrates, HE, 7:11.

²⁶David F. Heimann, "The Polemical Application of Scripture in St. Jerome," Studia Patristica, 12 (1975), 309-316.

²⁷Quoted in Chrysostomus Bauer, John Chrysostom and His Time, Volume 2, tr. M. Gonzaga (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960), 329.

²⁸CT 9:19:3.

²⁹Ambrose, Ep. 18:14-15; Jerome, Ep. 52:6.

³⁰John Ferguson, Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study (Cambridge, 1956), 9.

³¹Jerome, Ep. 22:28.

³²Pierre de Labriolle, Histoire de l'Eglise, IV: De la mort de Theodose a l'election de Gregoire le Grand (Paris, 1937), 80: "Une foule devote, mais plus crédule que croyante, dans laquelle des néophytes, convertis de la veille, ont la majorité numerique, beaucoup de catéchumenes échappant à l'influence d'un clergé peu nombreux et qui tend à se former en caste, presque tous les nouveaux fideles attachés par les liens du sang à des alliés tres proches, époux, freres, ou beauxparents qui continuent à vivre dans le paganisme. C'est ainsi que l'on peut se représenter le 'gros' de la population chrétienne."

³³Augustine, Sermo 114.

³⁴The fourth book of the Saturnalia is devoted entirely to a favorable criticism of the great poem.

³⁵Sozomen, HE, 3:14; 3:16; 6:20; 6:28.
Theodoret, HE, 4:26; 4:27; 4:28; 4:29.
Socrates, HE, 1:13; 1:21; 4:23; 4:24.

³⁶CT 16:3:1 and 16:3:2.

³⁷J. N. D. Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (New York, 1975), 93-94.

³⁸Jerome, Ep. 22:30: "Ciceronianus es, non Christianus."

³⁹It is mentioned by Dionysus in Greece, Clement and Origen in Alexandria, Irenaeus in Gaul, and Tertullian in Africa. It appears in later authors as well: Eusebius, Lactantius, and Sulpicius Severus.

⁴⁰Barbara C. Gray, "Movements of the Jerusalem Church during the First Jewish War," Journal of Ecclesiastic History, 24 (1967), 1-7.

⁴¹Romans 1:8.

⁴²Tacitus, Annals, 14:44.

⁴³Samuel Dill, Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius. (London, 1904), 545-546.

⁴⁴Michael Grant, The World of Rome (New York, 1960), 84.

⁴⁵It is noteworthy, for example, that Aeneas' major recommendations were that he was pius and possessed virtus.

⁴⁶In Book 11:4, Isis lectures a neophyte: "En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina saecu-

lorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitem, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, que caeli luminosa culmina . . . Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum Matrem, hinc autochthones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusini vetustam deam Cererem, Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatem isti, Rhamnusiam illi, et qui nascentis dei soli inchoantibus illustrantur radiis Aethiopes utrique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii caerimoniis me propriis percolentes, appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem.

⁴⁷Suetonius, Claudius, 25.

⁴⁸Beside Suetonius, the incident is mentioned by Dio Cassius (Roman History, 60:6); Acts 18:2; and Orosius (Historia contra paganos, 8:6:15).

⁴⁹Philip Schaff, A History of the Christian Church, Volume 1: Apostolic Christianity (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1910), 372.

⁵⁰Juvenal, Satires, 3:15; 6:544; and 14:96.

⁵¹Schaff, *ibid.*

⁵²Acts 28:14.

⁵³Romans 16:11.

⁵⁴Philippians 4:22.

⁵⁵Tacitus, Annals, 13:32:4.

⁵⁶Jules Lebreton and Jacques Zeiller, The History of the Primitive Church, Volume 1, tr. Ernest Messinger. (New York, 1942), 72.

⁵⁷Clement, First Letter to the Corinthians, 1:1.

⁵⁸E. E. Blackman, Marcion and His Influence (Cambridge, 1948), 19.

⁵⁹Ignatius, Letter to the Romans, 4:3, in Cyril Richardson, Early Christian Fathers (New York, 1967), 102-106.

⁶⁰Cyprian, Ep. 4:6.

⁶¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, History and Expansion of Christianity: The First Five Centuries (New York, 1937), 359-360.

⁶²Cyprian, Ep. 7, quoted in Labriolle, History and Literature, 138.

⁶³For the year 418, Socrates noted that "the sect flourished exceedingly in the imperial city, possessing many churches there which were attended by large congregations." HE, 7:11.

⁶⁴Eusebius, HE, 4:23.

⁶⁵Danielou, 207.

⁶⁶Ammianus, Roman History, 27:3:14.

⁶⁷Sozomen, HE, 4:15.

⁶⁸Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Church from the Original Documents, Volume 2: A. D. 326-429, tr. Henry Oxemham (Edinburgh, 1896), 122.

⁶⁹Ammianus, Roman History, 27:3:12.

⁷⁰Jerome, Against John, 8.

⁷¹Quoted in Kelly, 82.

⁷²Jerome, Epp. 41 and 42.

⁷³Labriolle, History and Literature, 55.

⁷⁴Tertullian, Ad Scapulam, 4.

⁷⁵Hans Lietzmann, The Founding of the Church Universal: A History of the Early Church. Volume 2, tr. Betram Lee Woolf (New York, 1950), 225.

⁷⁶A. N. Sherwin-White, "Geographical Factors in Roman Algeria," Journal of Roman Studies, 34 (1944), 4.

⁷⁷C. P. Groves, The Planting of Christianity in Africa (New York, 1952), 65.

⁷⁸Lietzmann, 217.

⁷⁹W. H. C. Frend, "The Gnostic-Manichæan Tradition in Roman North Africa," Journal of Ecclesiastic History, 4 (1953), 20-21.

⁸⁰Adolph Harnack, A History of Dogma, Volume 2, tr. Neil Buchanan (New York, 1961), 279, n. 3.

⁸¹Pierre Mesnagne, Le Christianisme en Afrique, I: Origins (Paris, 1914), 262-263.

⁸²Danielou, 199.

⁸³W. H. C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (New York, 1964), 275.

⁸⁴Augustine, Ep. 50.

⁸⁵Frend, Martyrdom, 276.

⁸⁶W. H. C. Frend, Religion, Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries (London, 1976), 293.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem, 1:14.

⁸⁹Augustine, Sermo, 63:1.

⁹⁰Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley, 1967), 356.

⁹¹B. H. Warmington, The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest (Cambridge, 1954), 77.

⁹²Optatus, HE, 1:17.

⁹³See especially, W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa (Oxford, 1952).

⁹⁴Warmington, 87.

⁹⁵Augustine, Ep. 58.

⁹⁶The Theodosian Code laments that the "iudicum profanorum improbitas" impeded governmental measures: 16:5:4.

⁹⁷CT 16:5:41; 16:5:39; 16:6:4.

⁹⁸Frend, Donatist Church, 214-216.

⁹⁹Augustine, Ep. 58:3.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters, we have investigated something of Pelagius' life, his teachings, his environment, his patrons, and the times during which all these things interacted. There still remains a major puzzle to be faced. Why did Pelagius--the "holy man" of Augustine's own admission--fall into disrepute and disfavor? Given the fact that his theology was not extreme and well within the spirit of popular Catholicism; given the fact that his supporters were substantial members of society; and given the fact that he was actually favored by part of the Christian Church, it is rather surprising that he should have fallen--and particularly that he fell so quickly.

It is easy enough to comprehend why Pelagius would come to prominence. That offers little problem. Jerome and Augustine were probably correct in seeing in Pelagius a combination of philosophy and theology. Naturally the two Churchmen saw this situation as a negative thing. But the society of the day probably attached no value judgment to such a combination. It was neither positive or negative. It was merely typical. The age was highly elastic in its ability to combine and appreciate the new and the old. There is no more illustrative example of this tendency than a picture given by Jerome. In one of his letters, he tells of Publilius Caeionius Albinus, Stoic and one time flamen dialis, holding his young Christian granddaughter on his lap while the child practised her Christian hymns.¹ Such fluidity in Roman society merely afforded Pelagius

his place.

And Pelagius' patrons afforded him support throughout the world of late antiquity. In view of the interlocking nature of the Roman patronage system, he would have had supporters from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. This fact relates to a rather curious phenomenon that made its appearance during the days of the late Empire. A. H. M. Jones has pointed it out²: a phenomenon which might best be termed an ever-narrowing parochialism. It was the tendency to become more localized in one's loyalties. Jones talked of class parochialism, with curiales or nobles coalescing tightly and looking to their own advantage. We have noted manifestations of this trend--churches becoming narrower in their outlooks, protecting prerogatives to the boundaries of the diocese; Roman aristocrats in Africa allowing insurgents to make havoc of imperial property so long as the aristocrats' was left untouched. Pelagius' career suggests that he may have benefitted from the same pattern. His support in Rome must have come from aristocrats seeking to protect one of their own.

These two points are rather obvious explanations for Pelagius' rise to prominence. There are less obvious reasons as well. First and foremost, Pelagius was an elitist. Whatever his detractors might say about this tendency, it appealed to the age. The Christian Church had always been subject to periodic outbreaks of elitism in different forms. Yet always there was a common link: strict morality appeared as the distinctive feature of Pelagius' precursors. Novatians, Montanists, and Donatists followed the same pattern. Elitism, in other words, was in the tradition of things. It was not some novel attitude to be feared. Pelagius came at a time when elitism would almost predictably have appeared again. The tenor of Christian life, as we have seen, had taken a decid-

edly downward turn following the promulgation of Cunctos populos. Serious believers would naturally have favored exhortations to an elitism based on high Christian morals. It gave a purpose to life--and also a distinction from the motley band of "Christians" now thronging the Church. Whatever his other qualifications, the nobility would have naturally been attracted to Pelagius on the basis of his moral precepts. The nobility itself had rather stringent notions that it should behave--and if not all nobles took that unwritten code to heart, there were at least some who did. Here Pelagius touched a favorite theme of the class and the age itself: responsibility. It appears regularly in the legal codices of late antiquity, the notion that the individual had responsibilities. The state and the patronage system emphasized the same thing: responsibilities to and from the parties involved. It is natural that this outlook should extend to religious considerations.

On this point, Pelagius' teachings fell into the spirit of the day. It was not merely that he recommended excellences which had traditionally been favored, such as probity or humility. His underlying rationale fit very neatly into a pattern which pagans and Christians both took for granted. Ancient religious attitudes bordered very closely on viewing good behavior as a quid pro quo. Late fourth century thinking was permeated with the notion that people and states quite simply got what they deserved. It appears in the political system: behave (i. e., fulfill such onerous obligations as taxation) and in return the citizen will receive protection and the privilege of living in Roman society. The same thought can be detected in religious attitudes: observe the correct ceremonies, pay Deity its just dues, and in return the individual can expect something. The old Roman religion operated off this premise. It is no coincidence that the old formula was do ut das or that the priest prayed

with hands turned upward, as if to catch a benefaction falling from heaven. This attitude is the major theme of every history, pagan or Christian, which was produced during late antiquity. A pagan, being questioned why Rome fell, invariably answered that the contract had been abrogated: with the old rituals abandoned, heaven was displeased. The Christian historians, Orosius and later Salvian, answered the question in much the same fashion: in this instance, heaven was displeased because the old rituals had not been abandoned. But the underlying rationale is not different. On a more personal level, the attitude appeared also. We have already quoted Macrobius, when he said baldly that Rome's greatness was a direct indication that her people were virtuous. If reduced to its barest essentials, Pelagius' teaching was founded on the same notion of quid pro quo: let the individual act virtuously and he will merit Grace. If anyone went contrary to tradition, it was Augustine. Grace, totally unrelated to anything the person might do, was not in the mainstream of classical thinking.

So it is readily understandable how Pelagius would have found a niche for himself. Why he was ousted from that favored spot is not so readily understandable. More precisely, it is curious why the furor, which eventually brought his downfall, began in the first place.

To understand why he was ostracized, once the controversy did gain momentum, it is necessary to look to the city of Rome. The furor there began and ended rather suddenly. There is no indication that Pope Innocent was familiar with the heresy before the African councils called his attention to the matter in 417. His responses to Jerome, Augustine, and John of Jerusalem made no suggestion that he had followed the heresy earlier. And when Honorius issued his rescript condemning Pelagius, he was evidently unaware of the Briton's whereabouts. Although Pelagius was in Palestine,

the Emperor ordered him out of Italy. Innocent's actions are understandable. Once apprised of objectionable theology, the Pope acted. What was Honorius' motivation? No doubt that Honorius was unwilling to see the city of Rome torn by further strife. As we have seen, Rome was always a hotbed of discontent. Periodic violence had always marred the city's peace: and perhaps at an accelerated pace during Pelagius' lifetime. In 368 the city had lived under something of a reign of terror during the prefecture of Maximinus, with citizens of all ages and classes victimized³; and we have noted the riots which periodically disrupted the city; the rivalry between pagans and Christians within a city of special significance for both; the hostility engendered by the Jovinian heresy of 394; and the privations during the years of Alaric's activity. By 418 the city hardly needed to be torn by a major schism. Among other things, Arianism's disruptive powers were well-remembered. It had caused political, as well as religious, reverberations. Pelagianism--if its hold in Rome was as great as Augustine suggested--might have the capacity to do the same. Honorius certainly needed no uncertainties in Rome itself. The city had recently proven politically unpredictable. From the Emperor's standpoint, what Rome needed above all else was normalcy. With Pelagius declared unorthodox by one Pope, Honorius had every cause to declare against the Briton and hopefully bring the business to a quick and decisive close.

For the city itself, normalcy was sorely needed. Rome needed peace to rebuild--figuratively, as well as literally. Following Alaric's expedition against the city, Rome was in a fit of reconstruction. Refugees were returning, and social patterns were falling back into well-worn grooves. The last thing Rome's practical citizens needed in 418 was a disagreement which would unsettle the equilibrium.

But these observations concern things which before and after the fact. The questions still remains: why did Pelagius initially become objectionable to the Church? On this point, we must look to Africa. Rome and Italy may have issued the documents which officially discredited Pelagius, but Africa originated the censure. African hostility was so strong that it disregarded the East, defied one Pope, kept an issue alive and eventually caused the Roman Church--little disposed to acquiesce to provincial colleagues--to oust a once-respected and powerfully supported member. Why would African clerics have found Pelagius objectionable enough to sustain such agitation?

On a very obvious level, Pelagianism represented a system which went against African tradition. We have noted above how there were indeed differences between Africa's form of Latin Christianity and Rome's, even down to the form of Bible used.⁴ Pelagius had the misfortune to eschew, or at least underplay, concepts which were at the very core of African sentiment. African theologians had always emphasized two theological points which directly overlapped Pelagius' system: baptism and original sin. Original sin was undoubtedly an essentially Western concern. The East spent its days pondering Christology. But the West had more practical interests: notably anthropology and soteriology. The common link is original sin; and here the West--especially Africa--was fascinated. Africa, in fact, may very well have produced the concept. It is certainly present in Tertullian, who expressed belief in a malum animae, suggesting that each individual has some vicarious part in the universal guilt. This bleak outlook runs consistently through African tradition. Cyprian took up the ramifications of Tertullian's thought. Cyprian himself insisted that infant baptism was an absolute necessity, precisely because this malum animae did exist. This tradition can be detected at the Coun-

cil of Carthage, which condemned Caelestius in 411; we have noted already how this synod chose to attack the heretic most severely for his stand against those concepts. In this respect, Augustine was merely heir to a tradition which simply could not countenance Pelagius' system.

Moreover, Africa was introduced to Pelagius at exactly the time when Catholicism could ill afford any dissension. Africa had seen its share of splinter groups. We have noted above the various heresies that appeared in Africa: Montanism and, most recently, Donatism. Donatism had, in fact, been defeated the very year Pelagius arrived. More disturbing, perhaps, was the fact that Pelagius arrived with a group of Roman emigres. If their religious affiliations were not altogether certain, their ability to influence the religious preferences of their clientelae throughout Africa was. Augustine and the Cathaginian clergy certainly had to be aware of the potential hazard of a heresy that appealed to the Roman aristocracy. Here it is important to underscore a crucial point. In Africa, Catholicism had only recently established itself as the orthodox faith. W. H. C. Frend, the most prominent expert on the religious history of Roman Africa, has emphasized this fact. Until Augustine's lifetime, Catholicism had remained in third position behind Donatism and Manichaeism. For this reason, African Churchmen were far more apprehensive of a threat such as Pelagius than their Roman counterparts. In Rome Catholicism had always been the most established Christian "sect." African Catholicism did not enjoy that luxury. When Pelagius arrived, the Church in Africa could simply not tolerate the dissension he might cause.

Moreover, Pelagianism represented a type of dissension which would be particularly reprehensible to Africa. Taken to its most radical conclusion, Pelagianism would prove to be detrimental to the Church as an

institution. Jerome and Augustine both caught this nuance. Pelagius was, however inadvertently, attacking the Church as well as original sin or baptism for infants. Pelagius' theology basically could get along well enough without a Church. His system was based on an individual contract, as it were, between God and the person involved. We have seen Pelagius' legalism, his rationalism, his list of sinless figures: everything points in the same direction. Demote Christ to the role of an exemplar, doubt the validity of the sacraments, and inevitably one must wonder why a Church is necessary. The Church, after all, exists to dispense sacraments. Moreover, Pelagius' elitism logically runs the same direction: it set a group apart and argued against the unity of the whole.

Africans may well have been more sensitive to this aspect of Pelagianism than fellow Christians elsewhere. Africa was perhaps unique among the Western Churches. In Africa the Latin Church acted as a unifying factor within a population more heterogenous than elsewhere. Peter Brown speaks of Augustine's attempt to Latinize his congregation through the Church. Again, African tradition was at odds with Pelagius: as we have seen before, Cyprian's most notable work emphasized the unity of the Church.

If Pelagius' teaching ran contrary to African sentiments, it also ran counter to the age in one respect. Late antiquity was really not the time to stress individualism. Everywhere more and more emphasis was being placed on the "whole" as opposed to its component parts. It is noteworthy that legislation of 407 militated against heresy not because it corrupted the individual, but "because any offense which is committed against divine religion involves an injury to all."⁸ There is no doubt that the Theodosian house fostered a partnership of state and Church:

and here we mean not so much a body of religious-minded people as an institution which formed part of society's very structure. During Pelagius' residence in Rome, the Western world was taught to pace itself to the wishes of that institution. The calendar had recently been changed to coincide with the Christian year. The clergy were granted sanctions to protect their position: the penalty of sacrilege being imposed upon any who sought to disturb the Church. Contemporary with this, there was a subtle attack upon the individual's role in Roman society, eroding the rights of the family.

In short, we are dealing with a Church that stressed conformity and a state which wanted such a Church. Under such conditions, it was hardly possible for a theology which stressed individualism to thrive or garner official approbation. For this reason, Pelagius was bound eventually to come into disfavor. It was his misfortune to find his match in Africa, where the internal characteristics of that province's Christianity went contrary to his outlooks and where a theologian of Augustine's capacity took umbrage against him.

Above all else, Pelagius' career emphasized the ambiguity of his age. On the one hand, his message was precisely what his society wanted to hear; on the other, its ramifications did not suit the developments of the day. And in this respect, Pelagius' career was shaped from first to last by his time in history.

FOOTNOTES

¹Jerome, Ep. 107:13.

²A. H. M. Jones, The Roman Economy: Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History (Totowa, New Jersey, 1970), 71.

³Ammianus, Roman History, 29:1.

⁴For the differences in local Church traditions, see especially Sozomen, HE, 7:19.

⁵W. H. C. Frend, "The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa," Journal of Ecclesiastic History, 4 (1953), 14-24.

⁶Jerome mentions that "the enemies of the Church are my enemies," in Dialog. ad. Pel., 1:18; and Augustine suggests the same thoughts in Ep. 178:3, where he states, "A new heresy is trying to rise up against the Church of Christ, but is not yet broken away from the Church . . . Your Reverence can see with us how opposed these teachings are to the Grace of God and how they aim at overturning the foundations of the whole Christian faith."

⁷Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley, 1967), 14.

⁸Codex Justinianus, 1:5:4, quoted in Charles Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York, 1957), 333.

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