support from those who felt that the chanting obscured the meaning of the words. Athanasius of Alexandria tried to meet the difficulty by demanding speech rhythm in chanting the psalms. On the other hand, the musicians had their chance with the singing of the Alleluia, the performance of which became quite long and elaborate. In his *Confessions* Augustine records how moving he found the psalm chants in use at Milan, observing that, while he felt guilty of a grave fault if he found the music more important to him than the words, he knew that the words were invested with a far greater power to come home to the mind when they were associated with music of haunting beauty. Augustine observes that there is no emotion of the human spirit which music is incapable of expressing, and that it is excessive austerity to exclude it from church services.

What music the early Christians sang can hardly be told. Only a solitary specimen, the third-century Egyptian papyrus already mentioned, has been preserved. The surviving Greek and Latin manuscripts containing musical notation belong to the medieval period. It is highly probable that the singing in the great centres like Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome, provided a model for the imitation of smaller towns. By the end of the sixth century the chanting practised at the city of Rome had become a model for other Western churches; and by the ninth century responsibility for the invention of the Roman system came to be ascribed to Pope Gregory the Great, so that the local Roman chants were known as 'Gregorian'.

By a comparable process many of the hymns used in the Western churches quietly became ascribed to Ambrose. There were also other poets whose hymns achieved wide recognition. Venantius Fortunatus (540–600), bishop of Poitiers, wrote hymns of genuine sensitivity and pathos – *Vexilla Regis*, *Pangue Lingua*, and *Salve Festa Dies* remain in use today. Rather earlier in the sixth century at Constantinople there lived the greatest hymn-writer of the Eastern churches, Romanos, who died soon after 555. A converted Jew, he came to Constantinople from Syria and wrote hymns for Justinian's splendid foundations in the capital. He created

the Kontakion,[1] an acrostic verse sermon of many stanzas, each stanza being sung from the pulpit by a soloist with an answering refrain from the choir. Romanos partly inspired the author of the most famous of Greek Lenten hymns, the so-called *Akathistos* (i.e. to be sung standing) in honour of the Blessed Virgin.

CHRISTIAN ART[2]

The second of the Ten Commandments forbade the making of any graven image. Both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria regarded this prohibition as absolute and binding on Christians. Images and cultic statues belonged to the demonic world of paganism. In fact, the only second-century Christians known to have had images of Christ were radical Gnostics, the followers of the licentious Carpocrates. If the emperor Alexander Severus actually had a private chapel with statues of Orpheus, Abraham, Apollonius and Christ, as he is uncertainly reported to have done (above, p. 110), it must have given a bitter-sweet gratification to his Christian subjects. Yet before the end of the second century Christians were freely expressing their faith in artistic terms. Tertullian mentions cups on which there were representations of the Good Shepherd carrying his sheep. Clement of Alexandria gives instruction about the picture appropriate for a Christian's signet ring. In antiquity signet rings were not a luxury, but indispensable for correspondence. Clement recommends that Christians should use seals with representations that, without being specifically Christian, are readily capable of a Christian interpretation, such as a dove, a fish, a ship, a lyre, or an anchor. They should avoid seals with symbols suggesting idolatry or drink or erotic passion. It is noteworthy that Clement's suggestions for appropriate seals are all types that a pagan might use; that is, they are neutral from a

1. The Kontakion got its name in the ninth century from the rod (*kontos*) round which the text was rolled.

2. The scope of this brief history does not include illustrations. Much can be found in e.g. W. F. Volbach, *Early Christian Art*; D. Talbot Rice, *The Art of Byzantium*, etc.

religious or moral point of view, and either pagans or Christians could happily use them. Likewise the Good Shepherd carrying his sheep was a conventional pagan symbol of humanitarian concern, *philanthropia*. The Christians were taking a common type and investing it with a new meaning possibly with reference to Christ the good shepherd of his sheep (John x). Another conventional type which the Christians soon began to use was the 'Orans', the figure with hands uplifted in prayer.

It was the same story with church buildings. The first Christian churches were ordinary private houses, and remained so until the time of Constantine. When the time came for the church building to acquire a 'public' character, the architects used existing forms, such as the rectangular basilica with an apse. The conventional form was so filled with new content that an optical illusion was created that the basilica, or the Good Shepherd, or the Orans type was distinctively Christian. But this was not at first the case at all.

Early Christian paintings first appear not in churches but as funerary decoration in the Roman catacombs. The style of painting is not dissimilar to that found on many ordinary pagan houses at Pompeii. Human beings are in nothing so conservative as in funeral customs, and in the decoration of tombs and sarcophagi many of the conventions of the pagan workshop were simply continued. It would be extremely surprising if anything else had happened. Catacomb art is full of old motifs and, since the technique and style are popular, no large aesthetic claims can be made for it. The content, however, is of much greater interest than the form. The motifs of pagan convention which the Christians used were symbols which were capable of Christian reinterpretation. The four seasons might suggest life from death. The peacock symbolized immortality, the dove peace hereafter; above all the fish, the Greek word for which (*IXΘYC*) formed an acrostic 'Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour', was a favourite Christian emblem, especially of the eucharist. About 182 the Phrygian bishop Abercius (or Avircius) of Hieropolis wrote his own epitaph containing his autobiography. 'A disciple of the pure Shepherd', he explains, he had visited the Roman

church, 'a golden-robed and golden-sandalled queen', and had also travelled through Syria to Nisibis; everywhere he had found brethren – 'with Paul before me I followed, and faith everywhere led the way and served food everywhere, the Fish from the spring, immense, pure, which the pure Virgin caught and gave to her friends to eat for ever, with good wine, giving the cup with the loaf'. It was part of the same group of angling or nautical symbols when the Christians used anchors in paintings or in the design of sarcophagi. The epistle to the Hebrews had spoken of hope as the anchor of the soul. Or the journey through life could naturally be compared to a storm-tossed voyage ending in the heavenly harbour.

But besides these themes and symbols which a Christian would understand but which a pagan would not read with the same meaning, there were certainly paintings with biblical scenes: Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, the sacrifice of Isaac, Moses striking water from the rock, Jonah and the great fish, Daniel in the lion's den, the three young men in the burning fiery furnace, and others. The favourite New Testament themes were the baptism of the Lord, the Paralytic carrying his bed or being let down through the roof of the house to Jesus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the raising of Lazarus, and Peter walking on the water. The earliest known example of a church with such pictures on the walls is the third-century house church at Dura on the Euphrates, where a private house built in the first century A.D. was adapted for Christian use in the year 232. This little house church was rather overshadowed at Dura by a large and opulent Jewish synagogue nearby, the walls of which were splendidly decorated with Old Testament scenes and figures. The Dura synagogue proves conclusively that the Jews could have elaborate decoration in their synagogues if they wished, and probably early Christian representations of biblical scenes owed much to Jewish models. It is probably significant that in the choice of biblical scenes favoured by the early Christian artists Old Testament subjects outnumber New Testament scenes in the period before Constantine. One particular example of Jewish precedent may be

given. The Phrygian town of Apamea had a Jewish population which disregarded the claims of Ararat to be the site where Noah's ark ran aground and affirmed that on a hill near their city they had the very remains of the ark itself. (The place was among the sites visited by that curious traveller and antiquarian, Julius Africanus – above, p. 103). Late in the second century and early in the third, the town mint of Apamea issued a series of coins portraying Noah and his ark. The type so very closely resembles the manner in which Noah is portrayed in Christian catacomb art that it is very difficult to deny a connexion. Probably, therefore, other Old Testament scenes in early Christian art were taken from Jewish models.

With the conversion of Constantine the Church no longer had to be reticent in expressing its faith. Churches became public buildings. In architecture, sculpture, mosaic decoration, and in paintings the symbols of Christianity and the themes of the gospel provided a rich material for artistic expression, and some of the greatest achievements in the civilization of late antiquity lie in the realm of art. But the process had already begun within the church even before Constantine appeared. The Spanish council of Elvira recorded its shocked disapproval of some churches with paintings on the walls, but the fact that such places existed was not suppressed, and the tide became a flood in the course of the fourth century.

Nevertheless, the older puritanism was not stifled or killed. About 327 the learned historian Eusebius of Caesarea received a letter from the emperor's sister Constantia asking him for a picture of Christ. She evidently supposed that an authentic likeness was more likely to be obtainable in Palestine than elsewhere. Eusebius wrote her a very stern reply. He was well aware that one could find pictures of Christ and of the apostles. They were for sale in the bazaars of Palestine, and he had himself seen them. But Eusebius did not think the painters and shopkeepers selling these mementoes to pilgrims were Christians at all. Similarly at Caesarea Philippi he had seen a group of bronze statuary in which a woman bending on one knee stretched out her hand as a

suppliant to a standing man whose hand reached towards her. From Eusebius' description the group was evidently a type familiar on Hadrian's coins, showing the emperor restoring rights to his provinces. By 300, however, Hadrian was forgotten. The citizens of Caesarea Philippi were now interpreting the bronze pair to represent Jesus healing the woman with the issue of blood, and could even show visitors the house where she lived. (This interpretation of the Hadrianic statues, which adorned a fountain in a public square, was so widely accepted that under Julian they were damaged by pagan vandals.) The story told by Eusebius has an incidental interest in marking the first step towards the creation of the medieval legend of Veronica.[1] His own attitude to the statues is one of sympathetic interest, but takes it for granted that only pagan artists would dream of making such representations.

A similarly iconoclastic view was taken by Epiphanius of Salamis (p. 184) who was horrified to find in Palestine a curtain in a church porch with a picture of Christ or some saint. He tore it down and lodged a vehement protest with the bishop of Jerusalem. Though Epiphanius did all he could to prevent the introduction of pictures in churches, he was fighting a losing battle. By 403, when he died, portrayals of Christ and the saints were widespread. It was a move of popular devotion roughly contemporaneous with the rise in the veneration of the Blessed Virgin who, by 400, was occupying a mounting place in private devotion that was soon to pass into the official liturgy. The first known church dedicated to her is that at Ephesus where the council of 431 was held (p. 198). In the next decade Pope Sixtus III

1. The Veronica legend arose from a remarkable fusion of several legends. By the fourth century the woman with the issue of blood was named Berenice. According to one form of the Abgar legend (above, p. 61), current by 400, Christ sent his portrait to a princess of Edessa named Berenice. The two ladies were identified, and in the Latin West the name became Veronica. In later legend she acquired her picture of Christ on a towel which she offered him on the *via dolorosa*. The towel, preserved at St Peter's, Rome, has in modern times attracted less attention than the Shroud of Turin, the work of a fourteenth-century artist for which no claims can be made on historical grounds.

(432–40) built the great church of St Mary Major in Rome with its superb mosaics on the walls and the triumphal arch. The mosaics on the side walls portray Old Testament scenes. Those on the triumphal arch show the Annunciation, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Magi offering gifts and visiting Herod, Herod ordering the massacre of the Innocents, and an apocryphal story of Christ in Egypt. At one time the walls also showed mosaics with a line of martyrs offering their crowns to the Virgin and Child, as in the extant Arian mosaics at S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna; but these have entirely perished. The mosaics of St Mary Major mark a watershed in the development of Mariology. They remain largely within the older tradition in which the Virgin appears in the context of representations of Christ's birth at Bethlehem and is subordinate to Christ. But at the same time the mosaics are the earliest evidence in art for the tendency to accord her an independent position. This independence was accelerated by the popular Monophysite Christology of the fifth century which transferred to St Mary the redemptive value that had been attributed to the humanity of Christ. In a Monophysite devotion Christ as man ceased to be very important; his resurrection was that of a God. Because of this loss of a sense of solidarity between Christ and the rest of the human race, the faithful increasingly looked towards Mary as the perfect representative of redeemed humanity. This theme was powerfully portrayed in Christian art from the sixth century onwards, and was much enhanced by the growing popular belief that the Virgin either had not died or had already been granted resurrection and admission to heaven.

A considerable body of Christian art of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries has survived, and illustrates the very high quality of artistic achievement that characterized the age. The splendid mosaics of the churches at Ravenna or Rome, the Rossano codex of the gospels, the Syriac gospel book written in 586 by the Mesopotamian monk Rabula (now in Florence), the doors of Santa Sabina in Rome, and many other examples, witness to an artistic renaissance of the first distinction, devoted to the expression of Christian themes

and unrestrained by any inhibitions about portraying Christ and the saints. Yet these representations of Christ caused pain to those who remembered an older austerity and reserve. The icons were the object of an undercurrent of mistrust which emerged in the eighth century as the bitter iconoclastic controversy, when the emperor Leo the Isaurian in 726 initiated by edict a full-scale programme of destroying all such pictures. The icons had become an accepted and loved part of church decoration, and were deeply valued by devout souls. The controversy grew into a major conflict between church and State in the Byzantine empire lasting over a century, and (since the emperors were iconoclast and the papacy was not) contributed to a still further widening of the estrangement between Rome and Byzantium.

The strength of the iconoclasts lay less in their theological arguments, which were too technical to be in the long run persuasive,[1] than in their instinct that images were associated with the idolatry Christianity had come to destroy, and that the representations of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints, owed too much to pagan precedents. In this instinct there was a measure of truth. The representation of Christ as the Almighty Lord on his judgement throne owed something to pictures of Zeus. Portraits of the Mother of God were not wholly independent of a pagan past of venerated mother-goddesses. In the popular mind the saints had come to fill a role that had been played by local heroes and deities.

But it was inevitable that iconoclasm should be understood as an attack on aids to devotion which frail mortals needed, and to which they had become accustomed by tolerably long use over more than a century before the outbreak

1. The principal iconoclast arguments were: (*a*) the second commandment; (*b*) man alone is the earthly image of God; (*c*) to portray Christ implies a Nestorian separation of the humanity from the divine nature; or, if not that, it implies a circumscribing and limiting of the divine nature which cannot be so limited.

The iconodules replied: (*a*) we venerate not the icons but those whom they depict; (*b*) honour addressed to Christ's servants the saints is relative, not an absolute worship; (*c*) icons are a necessary consequence of the invocation of saints; (*d*) if value is ascribed to relics, why not also to icons? (*e*) the second commandment was only temporary legislation; (*f*) icons aid devotion and are universally used.

of the controversy. John of Damascus saw iconoclasm as implying a pessimistic, Manichee view of matter. The charge was no doubt very unfair. The exquisite cross in the mosaic of the apse at St Irene in Istanbul, the decoration of which belongs to the iconoclastic period, is in itself sufficient to refute the notion that the eighth-century iconoclasts were utterly indifferent or hostile to aesthetic values. They were not Philistines but conservatives wanting their religion the old way, as it had been in their grandfather's time before the artists had been encouraged to let themselves go. But they were also unconsciously repeating in a new form and a new idiom something of the old attack of the spiritualizing Origenists upon the 'Anthropomorphites' who needed to picture the God to whom they prayed (above, p. 185).

The decision to restore icons was taken by the empress Irene (780-90). In face of strong hostility in both Church and army her firm hand led the second Council of Nicaea (787) formally to condemn the iconoclasts. The failure of Irene and her successors to achieve prosperity for the empire brought a reaction in favour of iconoclasm again from 814 until 843, the iconophile cause being maintained meanwhile by the monks of Studios at Constantinople under their abbot Theodore. But on the first Sunday in Lent 843 the empress Theodora restored the icons for the last time with a procession that in the eyes of posterity marked 'the triumph of Orthodoxy', and made possible the gradual redecoration of the churches under the patriarch Photius from 858 onwards.

Conclusion

THE first historian of the Church, Eusebius of Caesarea early in the fourth century, saw the story of the emergent Christian society as one of successive conquests over obstacles and attacks – over government persecution, over heretical deviation, over paganism. He was tempted to see evidence of the power of Christianity in its social or worldly triumphs, expressed in the favour of sympathetic emperors, or in the construction of splendid church buildings, or in the adherence of distinguished intellectuals like Origen. Towards such triumphalist assumptions a twentieth-century Christian is likely to be cool and reserved. But Eusebius was no doubt right in seeing the successive controversies as making much of the stuff of church history, and most of the main issues then faced by the church in its formative period have remained virtually permanent questions in Christian history – questions which receive an answer but are then reiterated in a modified shape in each age.

The central questions of the apostolic age turned on the continuity or discontinuity of the church with Israel. Those who wanted to assert the continuing validity of the Mosaic Law, and Gentiles who, at the opposite extreme, urged the radical abandonment of the Old Testament were alike rejected. The accepted way became St Paul's *via media*. The Old Testament retained a permanent place in the Christian Bible as the history of a divine education of the race, a tutor to bring men to Christ, and a book to be interpreted in the light of Christ. In consequence the Church may never have felt completely at home with the Old Testament, but it has never been able to do without it.

With the sub-apostolic age (roughly 70–1.
mission, for whose liberty St Paul had foug
but painfully, passed through a vigorous ex