

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

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Extract from "The Two Republics"

CHAPTER 1 - ANCIENT SUN WORSHIP

IN the history of mankind no form of idolatry has been more widely practiced than that of the worship of the sun. It may well be described as universal; for there is scarcely a nation in which the worship of the sun in some form has not found a place. In Egypt, the oldest nation of historic times, under the names of Ra and Osiris, with half a dozen other forms; in Phenicia and the land of Canaan, under the names of Baal, Melkarth, Shamas, Adoni, Moloch, and many other forms; in Syria, Tammuz and Elagabalus; among the Moabites, under the names of Baal-peor and Chemosh; among the Babylonians and Assyrians, under the names of Bel and Shamas; among the Medes and Persians and other kindred nations, under the name of Ormuz and Mithra; among the ancient Indians, under the name of Mitra, Mithra, or Mithras;¹ in Greece, under Adonis, Apollo, Bacchus, and Hercules; in Phrygia, under the term Atys; and in Rome, under Bacchus, Apollo, and Hercules; -- in all these places, and under all these forms, the sun was worshiped by all these peoples. The myth of Hercules alone will illustrate the wide-spread practice of this worship: "The mythology of Hercules is of a very mixed character in the form in which it has come down to us. There is in it the identification of one or more Grecian heroes with Melkarth, the sun-god of the Phenicians. hence we find Hercules so frequently represented as the sun-god, and his twelve labors regarded as the passage of the sun through the twelve signs of the zodiac. he is the powerful planet which animates and imparts fecundity to the universe, whose divinity has been honored in every quarter by temples and altars, and consecrated in the religious strains of all national. From Meroe in Ethiopia, and Thebes in Upper Egypt, even to Britain, and the icy regions of Scythia; from the ancient Taprobana and Palibothra in India, to Cadiz and the shores of the Atlantic; from the forests of Germany to the burning sands of Africa; -- everywhere, in short, where the benefits of the luminary of day are experienced, there we find established the name and worship of a Hercules.

"Many ages before the period when Alcmena is said to have lived, and the pretended Tyrrhian hero to have performed his wonderful exploits, Egypt and Phenicia, which certainly did not borrow their divinities from Greece, had raised temples to the sun, under a name analogous to that of Hercules, and had carried his worship to the isle to Thasus and to Gades. Here was consecrated a temple to the year, and to the months which divided it into twelve parts, that is, to the twelve labors or victories which conducted Hercules to immortality. It is under the name of Hercules Astrochyton, or the god clothed with a mantle of stars, that the poet Nonnus designates the sun, adored by the Tyrians. He is the same god,' observes the poet, 'whom different nations adore under a multitude of different names: Belus on the bank of the Euphrates, Ammon in Libya, Apis at Memphis, Saturn in Arabia,² Jupiter in Assyria, Serapis in Egypt, Helios among the Babylonians, Apollo at Delphi, AEsculapius throughout Greece,' etc. Martianus Capella in his hymn to the sun, as also Ausonius and Macrobius, confirms the fact of this multiplicity of names given to a single star.

"The Egyptians, according to Plutarch, thought that Hercules had his seat in the sun and that he traveled with it around the moon. The author of the hymns ascribed to Orpheus. fixes still more strongly the identity of Hercules with the sun. He calls Hercules the god who produced time whose forms vary, the father of all things, and destroyer of all. He is the god who brings back by turns Aurora and the night, and who, moving onward from east to west, runs through the career of his twelve labors; the valiant Titan who chases away maladies, and delivers man from the evils which afflict him.'" -- Anthom.³

By whatever name or under whatever form the sun was worshiped, there was always a female divinity associated with it. Sometimes this female was the moon sometimes the earth, sometimes the atmosphere, and at other times simply the female principle in nature. In other forms it was the idea of a male and female blended in one, as in the case of Baalim. The female sometimes appeared as the wife of the one with whom she was worshiped; sometimes

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

as both the sister and the wife, as in the case of Osiris; yet again as the wife of some other god; and often not exactly as a wife at all, but simply as a female associate. With Osiris was associated Isis; with Baal, Ashtaroth, or Astarte; with Bel, Mylitta; with Shamas, Anunit; with Adonis, Venus; with Hercules, Omphale; with Apollo, Diana; with Atys, Cybele. Sometimes they were worshiped in the images of the male and female human figure; sometimes in the form of a bull and a heifer, as in Osiris and Isis; sometimes in a form in which the human and the beast were blended; sometimes in a simple carved disc for the male, and a piece of carved wood for the female, as in some forms of Baal and Astarte; sometimes in the form of stones which had fallen from heaven, but mostly in the form of cones or obelisks⁴ which they themselves had shaped to represent the male, and of other shapes to represent the female. And yet in unison with all these the sun itself was worshiped, especially at its rising, by a bow or prostration, or kissing of the hand.

In none of these forms, however, not even in the naked shining sun, was it the literal object that was worshiped, but certain functions or powers, of which these were but the representations. It was observed that the sun in co-operation with the earth and the atmosphere which gave rain, caused all manner of verdure to spring forth and bear its proper fruit. It was held, therefore, that the sun was the supreme formative power, the mighty author of fruitfulness, and that the greatest and most glorious manifestation and exertion of his powers were employed in reproduction. Sun worship was therefore nothing more nor less than the worship of the principle of reproduction in man and nature. And as the influence of the real sun was extended over and through all nature, so this principle was extended through all worship.

"All paganism is at bottom a worship of nature in some form or other, and in all pagan religions the deepest and most awe-inspiring attribute of nature was its power of reproduction. The mystery of birth and becoming was the deepest mystery of nature; it lay at the root of all thoughtful paganism, and appeared in various forms, some of a more innocent, others of a most debasing type. To ancient pagan thinkers, as well as to modern men of science, the key to the hidden secret of the origin and preservation of the universe, lay in the mystery of sex. Two energies or agents, one an active and generative, other a feminine, passive, or susceptible one, were everywhere thought to combine for creative purposes; and heaven and earth sun and moon, day and night, were believed to co-operate to the production of being. Upon some such basis as this rested almost all the polytheistic worship of the old civilization; and to it may be traced back, by stage, the separation of divinity into male and female gods; the deification of distinct powers of nature, and the idealization of man's own faculties, desires, and lusts; where every power of his understanding was embodied as an object of adoration, and every impulse of his will became an incarnation of deity." -- "Encyclopedia Britannica."⁵

As the sun was the great god, the supreme lord, and as he exerted his most glorious powers in reproduction, it was held to be the most acceptable worship for his devotees so to employ themselves and their powers. Consequently prostitution was the one chief characteristic of sun worship wherever found. As the association of a female without reference to relationship was the only requirement necessary to worship, the result was the perfect confusion of all relationships among the worshipers, even to the mutual interchange of garments between the sexes. In the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus there is a faithful record of such a result among the sun worshipers of the land of Canaan whom the Lord caused to be blotted from the earth. The prohibition in Deuteronomy xxii, 5 -- "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment" -- was aimed directly at this practice in sun worship.

The sacrifice of virginity was the most acceptable offering that ever could be made in the worship of the sun. Indeed, until this sacrifice had been made, no other offering was

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

acceptable. One ancient writer saw the manner of worship of Bel and Mylitta in Babylon, and has left a record of what he saw. He says: --

"The Babylonians have one most shameful custom. Every woman born in the country must once in her life go and sit down in the precinct of Venus, and there consort with a stranger. . . . Venus is called Mylitta by the Assyrians." -- Herodotus.⁶

Baal-peor, by whose shameful worship Balaam succeeded in bringing evil upon Israel when he failed in his own efforts to curse them, was the god which in Moab presided over such characters as above described by Herodotus in Babylon. This particular system of worship did not prevail outside of Egypt and the Eastern nations. In Greece and Rome the worship was through Bacchus, Hercules, Apollo, etc., and was more in the form of festivals -- mysteries -- celebrated with obscene symbols and in most lascivious rites. The rites of Bacchus are thus described: --

" The worship of Bacchus prevailed in almost all parts of Greece. Men and women joined in his festivals dressed in Asiatic robes and bonnets, their heads wreathed with vine and ivy leaves, with fawn skins flung over their shoulders, and thyrsi or blunt spears twined with vine leaves, in their hands. They ran through the country shouting Io Bacche ! Euoi ! Iacche ! etc., swinging their thyrsi, beating on drums, and sounding various instruments. Indecent emblems were carried in procession, and the ceremonies often assumed a most immoral character and tendency. The Woman, who bore a chief part in these frantic revels, were called Bacchae Maenades Thyiades Euades, etc. " -- Anthon.⁷

In the mysteries Bacchus was identified with Osiris, and was worshiped as the sun. In India, Schiva and his worship were identical with Bacchus and his worship. "The two systems of worship have the same obscenities, and the same emblems of the generative power." -- Anthon.⁸ "An obscure native of Greece brought first to Etruria, and shortly afterwards to the more congenial soil of Rome, the mysterious orgies of Bacchus, which had already obtained an infamous celebrity in the East. The horrible wickednesses which were perpetrated at the initiations, at which the passions of the youth of either sex were inflamed by wine and music, secrecy and security, had been practiced by the devotees without remorse for some time, before they were discovered. . . . The Bacchanalia, though constantly interdicted, continued to reappear in the city." -- Merivale.⁹

The worship of the Phrygian Cybele and Atys was common in Greece five hundred years before Christ, and was introduced into Rome about 547 B. C., when an embassy was sent to the king of Pergamus to ask for the stone which represented Cybele, and which was said to have fallen from heaven. The king gave up the stone, which was taken to Rome. A temple was built, and a festival established in her honor. The festival was called Megalesia, and was celebrated annually in the early part of April, and is thus described: --

"Like Asiatic worship in general, that of Cybele was enthusiastic. Her priests named Galli and Corybantes, ran about with dreadful cries and howlings, beating on timbrels, clashing cymbals, sounding pipes, and cutting their flesh with knives. The box-tree and cypress were considered as sacred to her, as from the former she made the pipes, and Atys was said to have been changed into the latter." -- Anthon.¹⁰

The universality of the worship of the sun in Hercules has been already shown. Of the manner in which his worship was conducted, we have the following account: --

"It seems to have been marked by an almost delirious sensuality. Married and unmarried females prostituted themselves at the festival of the gods. The two sexes changed their respective characters; and tradition reported that Hercules himself had given an example of this, when, assuming the vestments and occupation of a female, he subjected himself to the

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

service of the voluptuous Omphale. The Lydian Hercules was named Sandon, after the robe dyed with sandyx, in which Omphale had arrayed him, and which the females of the country imitated in celebrating his licentious worship." -- Anthon.¹¹

In Rome and Italy, "The worship of Hercules was from an early date among the most widely diffused; he was, to use the words of an ancient author, adored in every hamlet of Italy, and altars were everywhere erected to him in the streets of the cities and along the country roads." -- Mommsen.¹²

As before stated, the almost numberless forms of sun worship were practiced in Canaan. In the practice of these fearful abominations they had so corrupted themselves that in the expressive figure of the Scripture, the very earth had grown so sick that it was compelled to vomit out the filthy inhabitants. "The land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." Lev. xviii, 25. All of this the God of heaven taught his people to renounce. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled): that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God." Lev. xviii, 26-30.¹³

In all these prohibitions the people were taught to shun as the terrible plague that it was, every suggestion of the evil influences of the worship of the sun. They were to break down all the sun-images and carved stocks -- groves -- that might be found anywhere in all the land which the Lord had given them. See Ex. xxiii, 24; xxxiii, 13, 14.

In yet another and most comprehensive way the Lord taught his people to shun every indication of the worship of the sun. As has been shown, the devotees of the sun worshiped with their faces toward the east. When God established his worship with the children of Israel in the very midst of the sun worshipping nations round about, at first a sanctuary was built and afterwards a temple, where he dwelt by the glory of his presence. To the door of this sanctuary every form of sacrifice and offering was to be brought, and there they were to worship. And the door of that sanctuary (the temple also) was always toward the east, in order that all who would sacrifice to Jehovah and worship him, would in so doing turn their backs upon the sun and its worship; and that whoever joined in the worship of the sun, had first to turn his back upon Jehovah.

Through the periods of the judges there were lapses into sun worship among the children of Israel, but they were restored to the worship of the Lord, and by the influence of Samuel and David, and Solomon in his early days, the whole nation was separated from sun worship in all its forms, and united in the pure worship of Jehovah. Yet in his later years Solomon turned from the Lord, and "loved many strange women, together with daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in into you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtaroth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods." 1 Kings xi, 1-8.

After the death of Solomon, the ten tribes separated themselves from Judah and Benjamin, and under the kingship, and by the direction, of Jeroboam, established a false worship through the two golden calves copied from Egypt, one of which was placed in Bethel and the other in Dan. Each of the successors of Jeroboam walked in the way of Jeroboam "and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin," unto the time of Omri, who in this wicked way "did worse than all that were before him." "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." 1 Kings xvi, 30-33.

From this it is evident that as corrupt and degrading as was the worship established by Jeroboam, that of the sun was far worse. Ethbaal was a priest of Baal and Astarte, who assassinated the king and made himself king in his stead. Jezebel brought with her into Israel the worship of Baal and Astarte,-- the male and female sun, -- and established it to such an extent that in a few years there were four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred of Astarte, and only seven thousand people in all Israel who had not joined in the wicked worship. Elijah began a reformation, but the worship and the gods introduced by Jezebel remained in some measure till the reign of Jehu, who gathered every worshiper of Baal to a general assembly in honor of Baal, and slew them all. "And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel and that were in Dan." 2 Kings x, 26-29.

Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and with her, sun worship through Baal and Ashtaroth was introduced into the kingdom of Judah; for Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the Lord." 2 Kings viii, 18. This worship of Baalim continued till the time of Hezekiah, who "brake the images [sun images] in pieces, and cut down the groves [Ahseras, representations of Ashtaroth], and threw-down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin." 2 Chron. xxxi, 1. By Manasseh, however, this worship was all restored in its fullest extent; "for he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars in the house of the Lord whereof the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be forever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son Hinnom: also he observed times and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made in the house of God of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name forever." 2 Chron. xxxiii, 3-7.

This image which he set in the house of the Lord was rather a double image of Baal and Ashtaroth, which he put up above the altars of Baal in the house of the Lord. The cloisters about the temple were used as stables for the horses which were dedicated to the sun. By the

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

side of the temple he built houses for the priests and priestesses of the Baalim, where the women wove hangings for the figures of Astarte.

Happily, Manasseh was succeeded by Josiah, who annihilated this whole system. "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father : and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images that were on high above them he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images he brake in pieces and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them."

"And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua, the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. . . . And he defiled Topheth, which is the valley of the children of Hinnom. that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron." 2 Chron. xxxiv, 3,4 ; 2 Kings xxiii,7-12

Yet by the time that Zedekiah reigned, there was again a serious lapse not tonly into certain forms of sun worship, but into the open worship of the literal sun. Ezekiel was among the captives in Babylonia, and by the Spirit of God he was taken in a vision to Jerusalem, and was caused to see the abominations that were being practiced there. First, he was caused to see the image of Jealousy in the very entry way to the altar of sacrificies, before the house of the Lord.

He was told to turn, and he would see greater abominations than this. He then saw, "and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them Stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up."

Again he was told to turn, and he would see yet greater abominations than this that they were doing. He was then brought " to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north : and, behold, there sat women weeping] for Tammuz."

And he was told to turn yet again, and he should see greater abominations even than this. "And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, and they worshiped the sun toward the east." Eze.viii,16.

All that is meant in this we cannot tell; but this much is certain, that, in the estimate of Jehovah, as bad as was the worship of Astarte, and however much it provoked to jealousy; as bad as was the worship of all manner of abominable beasts; as bad as was the worship of Tammuz; yet worse than all these, even though in them were embodied some forms of sun worship -- more abominable than all these was the setting of the face toward the east, in the worship of the sun itself. This was to turn the back upon the Lord; to leave him and his worship behind; and, in worshipping the visible sun, to choose all that was included in all the

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

forms of its worship that might be known. This was open apostasy -- the renunciation of all that was good and the acceptance of all that was bad.

Now, aside from the lascivious rites of Bacchus and Hercules, and beyond the fearful orgies of Cybele, this very form of worship prevailed in the Roman empire. The worship of the sun itself was the principal worship of the Romans in the time of Constantine. The sun, as represented in Apollo, was the chief and patron divinity recognized by Augustus. "Apollo was the patron of the spot which had given a name to his great victory of Actium; Apollo himself, it was proclaimed, had fought for Rome and for Octavius on that auspicious day; the same Apollo, the sun-god, had shuddered in his bright career at the murder of the dictator, and had terrified the nations by the eclipse of his divine countenance . . . Besides building a splendid temple to Apollo on the Palatine Hill, the emperor sought to honor him by transplanting to the Circus Maximus, the sports of which were under his special protection, an obelisk from Heliopolis [city of the sun] in Egypt. This flame-shaped column was a symbol of the sun, and originally bore a blazing orb upon its summit." -- Merivale.¹⁴

To Sol Deus invictus -- the sun, the unconquerable god -- were attributed the world-wide conquests of the Roman power. The greatest and most magnificent temple that ever was built on earth, except only that built by Solomon, was erected by Antoninus Pius, emperor of Rome, at Baalbek, in honor of the visible shining sun.

But it was in Elagabalus that the worship of the sun received its strongest imperial impetus. The way that he became emperor was this : The emperor Caracalla was murdered near Antioch, March 8, A.D. 217, and there Macrinus became emperor in his stead. Caracalla's mother committed suicide shortly afterward, and then Macrinus commanded Julia Maesa, her sister, to leave Antioch with her family. She went to Emesa where a considerable body of troops was stationed, and where was a temple of the sun which the troops frequented in their worship. Julia's grandson, Bassianus, was made high-priest of the sun in this temple. In this young man the troops "recognized," or thought they recognized, the features of Caracalla." Julia took particular pains, by the careful distribution of money, to deepen this impression, and May 16, 218, he was declared emperor by the troops at Emesa. He asserted his hereditary right to the office because of his relationship of Caracalla.

The rebellion rapidly spread among the troops throughout the province. Officers who tried to check it were murdered, and the power of young Bassianus daily grew.

Macrinus assembled his troops, and left Antioch to quell the insurrection. A battle was fought, and Macrinus was slain, thus ending a reign of eighty-seven days, and Bassianus became emperor in fact, June 7, A.D. 218. He assumed the name of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, and sent letters to the Senate announcing his accession to the empire in the place of Macrinus. Not being ready just then to go to Rome personally, he sent a picture of himself which he commanded to be placed in the Senate house over the altar of victory. "He was drawn in his sacerdotal robes of silk and gold, after the loose flowing fashion of the Medes and Phenicians; his head was covered with a lofty tiara, his numerous collars and bracelets were adorned with gems of an inestimable value. His eyebrows were tinged with black, and his cheeks painted with an artificial red and white." -- Gibbon.¹⁵ The name under which the sun was worshiped at Emesa, where Bassianus was high-priest, was Elagabalus. His accession to the office of emperor he attributed to the favor of this sun-god. Therefore as emperor he assumed the name of Elagabalus as greater and more honorable than any that might be derived from any other source, and by this name alone is he known in history.

When he went to Rome, the "black conical stone" from Emesa, the symbol of the functions of the sun, was taken with him, and as he moved "in a solemn procession through the streets of Rome, the way was strewn with gold dust; the black stone, set in precious gems, was placed on a chariot drawn by six mill-white horses richly caparisoned. The pious emperor held he

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

reins, and supported by his ministers, moved slowly backwards, that he might perpetually enjoy the felicity of the divine presence. In a magnificent temple raised on the Palatine Mount, the sacrifices of the god Elagabalus were celebrated with every circumstance of cost and solemnity. The richest wines, the most extraordinary victims, and the rarest aromatics, were profusely consumed on his altar. Around the altar a chorus of Syrian damsels performed their lascivious dances to the sound of barbarian music." -- Ginnon.¹⁶

It was in perfect harmony with the rites of sun worship everywhere that all the laws of nature and decency should be violated and subverted by Elagabalus; that he should have a long train of concubines, and a rapid succession of wives; that a vestal virgin should be taken by force from her sacred retreat to feed his passion ; and that he should put on the dress, and play the part, of a woman, while he publicly assigned to another the title and the place of husband to himself. All these things belonged with the worship of the sun, and all this Elagabalus did, not as emperor, but as imperial high-priest and representative of the sun. As emperor and high-priest of the sun, it was his chief purpose, and "it was openly asserted, that the worship of the sun, under his name of Elagabalus, was to supercede all other worship." -- Milman.¹⁷

As soon as Aurelian became emperor, March, A. D.270, he began the erection of a temple of Rome in honor of the sun. In A. D. 272 he made an expedition against Zenobia, who had established her authority in the East with her capital at Baalbek. When he had overthrown her power and captured her capital city, he left an officer with a garrison of troops to govern the city while he returned to Europe. The people arose and murdered the governor and his soldiers. Aurelian returned and gave up the people to indiscriminate massacre, and made of the city itself a heap of ruins. The only attempt he made to repair it was to restore the temple of the sun, which Antoninus had built. When he returned to Rome in A. D.274, he celebrated a triumph, which, in magnificence and the abundance of treasures, was second to none that Rome had ever seen. At this time also he dedicated his magnificent temple to the sun.

"A considerable portion of his oriental spoils was consecrated to the gods of Rome ; the Capitol, and every other temple, glittered with the offerings of his ostentatious piety; and the temple of the sun alone received above fifteen thousand pounds of gold. This last was a magnificent structure, erected by the emperor on the side of the Quirinal Hill, and dedicated soon after the triumph, to that deity whom Aurelian adored as the parent of his life and fortunes. His mother had been an inferior priestess in a chapel of the sun; a peculiar devotion to the god of light, was a sentiment which the fortunate peasant imbibed in his infancy; and every step of his elevation, every victory of his reign, fortified superstition by gratitude." -- Gibbon.¹⁸

The immediate predecessor of the emperor Diocletian died on his way from Persia to Europe. The fact of his death was concealed from the army for a time, which gave rise to a strong suspicion that he had been murdered. When Diocletian was chosen emperor, he therefore deemed it necessary to purge himself of all suspicion by a means which would prove satisfactory to all. He did it by a solemn oath in the face of the sun. "Conscious that the station which he had filled, exposed him to some suspicions, Diocletian ascended the tribunal, and raising his eyes towards the sun, made a solemn profession of his own innocence, in the presence of that all-seeing deity." -- Gibbon.¹⁹ And it was the oracle of the sun -- Apollo -- at Miletus, which he consulted before he issued the decree of persecution, to which he was so strongly urged by Galerius, who was prompted by his mother, a fanatical worshiper of Cybele.

But it was in Constantine that, after Elagabalus, the sun found its most worshipful devotee. As emperor of Rome he had to show some deference to the other gods, and therefore on the medals which were issued in honor of his victories, there were the figures of Jupiter and Mars, as well as of Hercules and Apollo. Up to the period of his war with Maxentius, A. D.312, "all that we know of Constantine's religion would imply that he was outwardly, and even

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

zealously, pagan. In a public oration, his panegyrist extols the magnificence of his offerings to the gods. His victorious presence was not merely expected to restore more than their former splendor to the Gaulish cities ruined by barbaric incursions, but sumptuous temples were to arise at his bidding, to propitiate the deities, particularly Apollo, his tutelary god. The medals struck for these victories are covered with the symbols of paganism. Eusebius himself admits that Constantine was at this time in doubt which religion he should embrace." Milman.²⁰

Thus as emperor, and to satisfy the prejudices of the people, some respectful deference was shown to other gods, but "the devotion of Constantine was more peculiarly directed to the genius of the sun, the Apollo of Greek and Roman mythology; and he was pleased to be represented with the symbols of the god of light and poetry. The unerring shafts of that deity, the brightness of his eyes, his laurel wreath, immortal beauty, and elegant accomplishments, seemed to point him out as the patron of a young hero. The altars of Apollo were crowned with the votive offerings of Constantine; and the credulous multitude were taught to believe that the emperor was permitted to behold with mortal eyes the visible majesty of their tutelary deity; and that, either waking or in a vision, he was blessed with the auspicious omens of a long and victorious reign. The sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine." -- Gibbon²¹

In the time of Constantine, and in Constantine himself. the worship of the sun occupied the imperial seat, and was the imperial religion of Rome. It will be necessary in another chapter to trace the same thing among the people of the empire.

¹ This is so among the Hindus of India, even to this day. " The most sacred and the most universally used -- even to the present day -- of all Vedic prayers is that composed in the Gayatri meter, and thence called Gayatri, or , as addressed to the vivifying Sun-god, Savitri : `Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the Divine vivifier; may he enlighten our understanding."

"Turning toward the Eastern sky, he repeats the Gayatri or Savitri . . . This prayer is the most sacred of all Vedic utterances, and like the Lord's prayer among Christians, . . . must always among Hindus take precedence of all other forms of supplication. The next division of the service is called Upasthana (or Mitro-pasthana) because the worshiper abandons his sitting posture, stands erect with his face toward the rising sun, and invokes that luminary under the name of Mitra. The prayer he now repeats is Rig-veda iii, 59, of which the first verse is to the following effect :

" ` Mitra, raising his voice, calls men to activity.

Mitra, sustains the earth and the sky.

Mitra, with un waking eye, beholds call creatures.

Offer to Mitra the oblation of butter ! '

The use of this hymn is the morning service of every Hindu." -- " Religious Thought and Life in India." chap i last par., and chap. xv, par., 41,57.

² Sun worship, with that of the other heavenly bodies, continued till the rise of Mahomet. The father of Mahomet, when a boy, was devoted as a sacrifice to the sun, but fortunately was ransomed. (See Gibbon," Decline and Fall," Chap. 1, par 9.) It was from the horrors of sun-worship that Mahomet turned Arabia.

³ "Classical Dictionary," article "Hercules."

⁴ The obelisk, or Cleopatra's Needle, brought from Egypt and now standing in Central Park, New York City, is one of these stone sun-images.

⁵ Article "Christianity."

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

⁶ Book i, chap excix.

⁷ "Classical Dictionary, Bacchus.

⁸ Id.

⁹ "History of Romans Under the Empire, " chap xxii, par. 19,20.

¹⁰ "Classical Dictionary," article "Cybele."

¹¹ Id., "Hercules."

¹² "History of Rome, " book i chap. xii, par. 25.

¹³ Read also the whole of Leviticus chapters xviii,xx.

¹⁴ "Romaus Under the Empire." chap xxxiii, par .13.

¹⁵ "Decline and Fall,"chap. vi, par. 22.

¹⁶ Id., par. 23.

¹⁷ "History of Christianity," book ii, chap. viii, par. 22.

¹⁸ "Decline and Fall," chap.xi, par.43.

¹⁹ Id., Chap. xii, par.41.

²⁰ "History of Christianity," book iii, chap. 1, par. 36.

CHAPTER 2 - THE FALLING AWAY -- THE GREAT APOSTASY

WHEN Paul was at Thessalonica, he preached to the people about the second coming of the Lord. After he had gone away, he wrote to them a letter in which he said more about this same event, and in his writing he made it so much of a reality, and his hope was so centered in the event that apparently he put himself among those who would see the Savior come, and wrote as though he and others would be alive at that time. He wrote: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [go before] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. iv, 15-17.

The Thessalonians not bearing in mind what he had told them when he was there, misinterpreted these strong and apparently personal statements, and therefore put into the apostle's words a meaning that he did not intend should be there. Upon this they fell into the mistake of supposing that the second coming of Christ was immediately at hand, and was so near that they could even live without working until he should come. This idea had been worked up quite fully among them by persons pretending to have received revelations by the Spirit; by others pretending that they had received word from Paul to that effect; and yet others went so far as to write letters to that effect, and forge Paul's name to them. These facts coming to the apostle's knowledge, he wrote a second letter to correct the mistakes which, in view of the teaching he had given when he was present with them, they were wholly unwarranted in making.

In his second letter Paul did not modify in the least the doctrine that Christ is coming, or that he will then certainly gather his people to himself. There was no mistake in the doctrine concerning the fact of his coming. The mistake was in the time when they expected him to come. This is the point which the apostle corrects in his second letter, and writes thus: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." 2 Thess. ii, 1-8.

All this he had taught them when he was there with them, and therefore reminded them, in the fifth verse, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? Then, having recalled to their minds the fact, he simply appeals to their knowledge, and says, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he [the son of perdition] might be revealed in his time." (This plainly sets forth the prophecy of a great falling away or apostasy from the truth of the gospel. The purity of the gospel of Christ would be corrupted and its intent perverted. The falling away of which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, is referred to in his counsel to the elder to the church at Ephesus, whom he called to meet him at Miletus. To them he said: "For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Acts xx, 29-31.

This warning was not alone to the people of Ephesus in the three years that he was there. It is seen through all his epistles. Because of this readiness of individuals to assert themselves, to get wrong views of the truth, and to speak perverse things, the churches had constantly to be checked guided trained, reproved, and rebuked. There were men even in the church who were ever ready to question the authority of the apostles. There were those who made it a business to follow up Paul, and by every possible means to counteract his teaching and destroy his influence. They declared that he was not an apostle of the Lord at all, but of men; that he had never seen the Lord; that he was simply a tent maker going about over the country working at his trade, and passing himself off as an apostle. Others charged him with teaching the doctrine that it is right to do evil that good may come.

But it was not alone nor chiefly from these characters that the danger threatened. It was those who from among the disciples would arise speaking perverse things, of which an instance and a warning are given in the letter to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker; of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." 2 Tim. ii, 15-18.

Nor yet was it with such as these that the greatest danger lay. It was from those who would arise not only speaking perverse things, but "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." Through error of judgment, a man might speak perverse things with no bad intention; but the ones here mentioned would speak perverse things purposely and with the intention of making disciples for themselves -- to draw away disciples after them instead of to draw disciples to Christ. These would pervert the truth and would have to pervert the truth, in order to accomplish their purpose. He who always speaks the truth as it is in Jesus, will draw disciples to Jesus and not to himself. To draw to Christ will be his only wish. But when one seeks to draw disciples to himself, and puts himself in the place of Christ, then he must pervert the truth, and accommodate it to the wishes of those whom he hopes to make his own disciples. This is wickedness; this is apostasy.

There was another consideration which made the danger the more imminent. These words were spoken to the bishops. It was a company of bishops, to whom the apostle was speaking when he said: "Of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." From that order of men who were chosen to guide and to care for the church of Christ, from those who were set to protect the church -- from this order of men there would be those who would pervert their calling, their office, and the purpose of it, to build up themselves, and gather disciples to themselves in the place of Christ. To watch this spirit, to check its influence, and to guard against its workings, was constant effort of the apostle; and for the reason as stated to the Thessalonians, that the mystery of iniquity was already working. There were at that time elements abroad which the apostle could plainly see would develop into all that the Scriptures had announced. And scarcely were the last of the apostles dead when the evil appeared in its practical workings.

No sooner were the apostles removed from the stage of action, no sooner was their watchful attention gone, and their apostolic authority removed, than this very thing appeared of which the apostle had spoken. Certain bishops, in order to make easier the conversion of the heathen; to multiply disciples, and by this increase their own influence and authority; began to adopt heathen customs and forms.

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

When the canon of Scripture was closed, and the last of the apostles was dead, the first century was gone; and within twenty years of that time the perversion of the truth of Christ had become widespread. In the history of this century and of this subject the record is, --

"It is certain that to religious worship, both public and private, many rites were added, without necessity, and to the offense of sober and good men." -- Mosheim.¹

And the reason of this is stated to be that -- "The Christians were pronounced atheists, because they were destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests, and all that pomp in which the vulgar suppose the essence of religion to consist. For unenlightened persons are prone to estimate religion by what meets their eyes. To silence this accusation, the Christian doctors thought it necessary to introduce some external rites, which would strike the senses of the people, so that they could maintain themselves really to possess all those things of which Christians were charged with being destitute. though under different forms." -- Mosheim.²

This was at once to accommodate the Christian worship and its forms to that of the heathen, and almost at one step to heathenize Christianity. No heathen element or form can be connected with Christianity or its worship, and Christianity remain pure.

Of all the ceremonies of the heathen, the mysteries were the most sacred and most universally practiced. Some mysteries were in honor of Bacchus, some of Cybele, but the greatest of all, those considered the most sacred of all and the most widely practiced, were the Eleusinian, so called because celebrated at Eleusis in Greece. But whatever was the mystery that was celebrated, there was always in it as an essential part of it, the elements of abomination that characterized sun worship everywhere, because the mysteries were simply forms of the wide-spread and multiform worship of the sun. Among the first of the perversions of the Christian worship was to give to its forms the title and air of the mysteries. For says the record: --

Among the Greeks and the people of the East, nothing was held more sacred than what were called the mysteries. This circumstances led the Christians, in order to impart dignity to their religion, to say that they also had similar mysteries, or certain holy rites concealed from the vulgar and they not only applied the terms used in the pagan mysteries to Christian institutions, particularly baptism and the Lord's supper, but they gradually introduced also the rites which were designated by those terms." -- Mosheim.³

That this point may be more fully understood we shall give a sketch of the Eleusinian mysteries. As we have stated, although there were others, these were of such preeminence that they acquired the specific name by way of -- the mysteries. The festival was sacred to Ceres and Proserpine. Everything about it contained a mystery, and was to be kept secret by the initiated. "This mysterious secrecy was solemnly observed and enjoined on all the votaries of the goddess; and if any one ever appeared at the celebration, either intentionally or through ignorance, without proper introduction, he was immediately punished with death. Persons of both sexes and all ages were initiated at this solemnity, and it was looked upon so heinous one of the heaviest accusations which contributed to the condemnation of Socrates. The initiated were under the more particular care of the deities, and therefore their lives were supposed to be attended with more happiness and real security than those of other men. This benefit was not only granted during life, but it extended beyond the grave, and they were honored with the first places in the Elysian fields, while others were left to wallow in perpetual filth and ignominy." -- Anthon.⁴

There were the greater and the lesser mysteries. The greater were the Eleusinian in fact, and the lesser were invented, according to the mythological story, because Hercules passed near Eleusis, where the greater mysteries were celebrated, and desired to be initiated, but as he was a stranger and therefore could not lawfully be admitted, a form of mysteries was adopted into which he could be initiated. These were ever afterward celebrated as the lesser, and were

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

observed at Agrae. In the course of time the lesser were made preparatory to the greater, and the candidate must be initiated into these before he could be initiated into the greater. "No person could be initiated at Eleusis without a previous purification at Agrae. This purification they performed by keeping themselves pure, chaste, and unpolluted during nine days, after which they came and offered sacrifices and prayers, wearing garlands of flowers, and having under their feet Jupiter's skin, which was the skin of a victim offered to that god. The person who assisted was called Hudranos, from hudor, water, which was used at the purification; and they themselves were called the initiated. A year after the initiation at the less mysteries they sacrificed a sow to Ceres, and were admitted into the greater, and the secrets of the festivals were solemnly revealed to them, from which they were called inspectors.

"The initiation was performed in the following manner: The candidates, crowned with myrtle, were admitted by night into a place called the mystical temple, a vast and stupendous building. As they entered the temple, they purified themselves by washing their hands in holy water, and received for admonition that they were to come with a mind pure and undefiled, without which the cleanliness of the body would be unacceptable. After this the holy mysteries were read to them from a large book called petroma, because made of two stones, Petrai, fitly cemented together; and then the priest proposed to them certain questions, to which they readily answered. After this, strange and fearful objects presented themselves to their sight; the place often seemed to quake, and to appear suddenly resplendent with fire, and immediately covered with gloomy darkness and horror." -- Anthon.⁵ After initiation, the celebration lasted nine days.

These mysteries, as well as those of Bacchus and others, were directly related to the sun for "the most holy and perfect rite in the Eleusinian Mysteries was to show an ear of corn mowed down in silence, and this was a symbol of the Phrygian Atys." -- "Encyclopedia Britannica."⁶

The Phrygian Atys, as we have before shown, was simply the incarnation of the sun, and the mysteries being a form of sun worship, the "sacred" symbols cannot be described with decency. Having given in a previous chapter the characteristics of the celebration of the worship of the sun, it is not necessary to describe the actions that were performed in the celebration of the mysteries that were performed in the celebration of the mysteries after the initiation, any further than is spoken by the apostle with direct reference to this subject. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." Eph. v, 11, 12.

It was to accommodate the Christian worship to the minds of a people who practiced these things that the bishops gave to the Christian ordinances the name of mysteries. The Lord's supper was made the greater mystery, baptism the lesser and the initiatory robe, and the celebration of the former. After the heathen manner also a white garment was used as the initiatory robe, and the candidate having been baptized, and thus initiatory robe, and the candidate mysteries, was admitted into what was called in the church the order of catechumens, in which order they remained a certain length of time, as in the heathen celebration, before they were admitted to the celebration of the Lord's supper, the greater mystery.

"This practice originated in the Eastern provinces, and then after the time of Adrian (who first introduced the pagan mysteries among the Latins) it spread among the Christians of the West." The reign of Hadrian was from 117-138. Therefore, before the second century was half gone, before the last of the apostles had been dead forty years, this apostasy, this working of the mystery of iniquity, had so largely spread over both the East and the West, that it is literally true that "a large part, therefore, of the Christian observances and institutions even in this century, had the aspect of the pagan mysteries." -- Mosheim.⁷

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

Nor is this all. In the previous chapter we have abundantly shown the worship of the sun to have been universal. These apostates not being content with so much of the sun worship as appeared in the celebration of the mysteries, adopted the heathen custom of worshipping toward the East. So says the history: --

"Before the coming of Christ, all the Eastern nations performed divine worship with their faces turned to that part of the heavens where the sun displays his rising beams. This custom was founded upon a general opinion that God, whose essence they looked upon to be light, and whom they considered as being circumscribed within certain limits, dwelt in that part of the firmament from which he sends forth the sun, the bright image of his benignity and glory. The Christian converts, indeed, rejected this gross error [of supposing that God dwelt in that part of the firmament]; but they retained the ancient and universal custom of worshipping toward the east, which sprang from it. Nor is this custom abolished even in our times, but still prevails in a great number of Christian churches." -- Mosheim.⁸

The next step in addition to this was the adoption of the day of the sun as a festival day. To such an extent were the forms of sun worship practiced in this apostasy, that before the close of the second century the heathen themselves charged these so-called Christians with worshipping the sun. A presbyter of the church of Carthage, then and now one of the "church Fathers," who wrote about A. D. 200, considered it necessary to make a defense of the practice, which he did to the following effect in an address to the rulers and magistrates of the Roman empire: --

"Others, again, certainly with more information and greater verisimilitude, believe that the sun is our god. We shall be counted Persians perhaps though we do not worship the orb of day painted on a piece of linen cloth, having himself everywhere in his own disc. The idea no doubt has originated from our being known to turn to the east in prayer. But you, many of you, also under pretense sometimes of worshipping the heavenly bodies, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise. In the same way, if we devote Sunday to rejoicing from a far different reason than sun worship we have some resemblance to those of you who devote the day of Saturn to ease and luxury though they too go far away from Jewish ways, of which indeed they are ignorant." -- Tertullian.⁹

And again in an address to all the heathen he justifies this practice by the argument, in effect, You do the same thing, you originated it too, therefore you have no right to blame us. In his own words his defense is as follows: --

"Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a wellknown fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity. What then? Do you do less than this? Do not many among you, with an affectation of sometimes worshipping the heavenly bodies, likewise move your lips in the direction of the sunrise? It is you, at all events, who have admitted the sun into the calendar of the week; and you have selected its day, in preference to the preceding day, as the most suitable in the week for either an entire abstinence from the bath, or for its postponement until the evening, or for taking rest and banqueting." -- Tertullian.¹⁰

This accommodation was easily made, and all this practice was easily justified, by the perverse minded teachers, in the perversion of such scriptures as, "The Lord God is a sun and shield" (Ps. IXXXIV, II); and, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." Mal. iv, 2.

As this custom spread and through it such disciples were multiplied, the ambition of the bishop of Rome grew space. It was in honor of the day of the sun that there was manifested the first attempt of the bishop of Rome to compel the obedience of all other bishops, and the fact that this attempt was made in such a cause, at the very time when these pretended

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

Christians were openly accused by the heathen with worshipping the sun, is strongly suggestive.

From Rome there came now another addition to the sun-worshipping apostasy. The first Christians being mostly Jews, continued to celebrate the passover in remembrance of the death of Christ, the true passover; and this was continued among those who from among the Gentiles had turned to Christ. Accordingly the celebration was always on the passover day -- the fourteenth of the first month. Rome, however, and from her all the West, adopted the day of the sun as the day of this celebration. According to the Eastern custom, the celebration, being on the fourteenth day of the month, would of course fall on different days of the week as the years revolved. The rule of Rome was that the celebration must always be on a Sunday -- the Sunday nearest to the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year. And if the fourteenth day of that month should of the Jewish year. Sunday, then the celebration was not to be held on that day, but upon the next Sunday. One reason of this was not only to be as like heathen as possible, but to be as unlike the Jews as possible: this, in order not only to facilitate the "conversion" of the heathen by conforming to their customs, but also by pandering to their spirit of contempt and hatred of the Jews. It was upon this point that the bishop of Rome made his first open attempt at absolutism.

We know not precisely when this began, but it was practiced in Rome as early as the time of Sixtus I, who was bishop of Rome A. D. 119-128. The practice was promoted by his successors, and Anicetus, who was bishop of Rome A. D. 157-168, "would neither conform to that [Eastern] custom himself, nor-suffer any under his jurisdiction to conform to it, obliging them to celebrate that solemnity on the Sunday next following the fourteenth of the moon." -- Bower.¹¹ In A. D. 160, Polycarp, bishop of Ephesus, made a journey to Rome to consult with Anicetus about this question, though nothing special came of the consultation. Victor, who was bishop of Rome A. D. 192-202, likewise proposed to oblige only those under his jurisdiction to conform to the practice of Rome; but he asserted jurisdiction over all, and therefore presumed to command all.

Accordingly, after having taken the advice of some foreign bishops, he wrote an imperious letter to the Asiatic prelates commanding them to imitate the example of the Western Christians with respect to the time of celebrating the festival of Easter. The Asiatics answered this lordly requisition by the pen of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, who declared in their name, with great spirit and resolution, that they would by no means depart, in this manner, from the custom handed down to them by their ancestors. Upon this the thunder of excommunication began to roar. Victor, exasperated by this resolute answer of the Asiatic bishops, broke communion with them, pronounced them unworthy of the name of his brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church of Rome." -- Mosheim.¹²

In view of these things it will readily be seen that between paganism and this kind of Christianity it soon became difficult to distinguish, and the third century only went to make any distinction still more difficult to be discerned.

In the latter part of the second century, there sprang up in Egypt a school of pagan philosophy called the "Eclectic." The patrons of this school called themselves "Eclectics" because they professed to be in search of truth alone, and to be ready to adopt any tenet of any system in existence which seemed to them to be agreeable to their ideas of truth. They held Plato to be the one person above all others who had attained the nearest to truth in the greatest number of points. Hence they were also called "Platonists."

"This philosophy was adopted by such of the learned at Alexandria, as wished to be accounted Christians, and yet to retain the name, the garb, and the rank of philosophers. In particular, all those who in this century presided in the schools of the Christians at Alexandria, Athenagoras, Pantaenus, and Clemens Alexandrinus, are said to have approved of

it. These men were persuaded that true philosophy, the great and most salutary gift of God, lay in scattered fragments among all the sects of philosophers; and therefore, that it was the duty of every wise man and especially of a Christian teacher, to collect those fragments from all quarters, and to use them for the defense of religion and the confutation of impiety. Yet this selection of opinions did not prevent them from regarding Plato as wiser than all the rest, and as especially remarkable for treating the Deity, the soul, and things remote from sense, so as to suit the Christian scheme." -- Mosheim.¹³

In the end of the second century, and especially in the first forty-one years of the third, there flourished in Alexandria one of these would-be-philosophers -- Ammonius Saccas by name -- who gave a turn to the philosophy of the Eclectics, which caused his sect to be called the New Platonists. The difference between the Eclectics and the system founded by Ammonius was this: The Eclectics held, as above stated, that in every system of thought in the world there was some truth, but mixed with error, their task being to select from all these to form one harmonious system. Ammonius held that when the truth was known, all sects had the same identical system of truth; that the differences among them were caused simply by the different ways of stating that truth; and that the proper task of the philosopher was to find such a means of stating the truth that all should be able to understand it, and so each one understand all the others. This was to be accomplished by a system of allegorizing and mystification, by which anybody could get whatever he wanted out of any writing that might come to his notice.

One of the earliest attaches to this philosophy from among those who professed to be Christians, was Clement of Alexandria, who became the head of that kind of school at Alexandria. These philosophers "believed the language of Scripture to contain two meanings; the one obvious, and corresponding with the direct import of the words; the other recondite, and concealed under the words, like a nut by the shell. The former they neglected, as of little value, their study chiefly being to extract the latter: in other words, they were more intent on throwing obscurity over the sacred writings, by the fictions of their own imaginations, than on searching out their true meanings. Some also, and this is stated especially of Clement, accommodated the divine oracles to the precepts of philosophy." -- Mosheim.¹⁴

The following highly edifying explanation by Clement, of the Scripture relating to the fish which Peter caught, will illustrate this system of interpretation: --

"That fish then which, at the command of the Lord. Peter caught points to digestible and God-given and moderate food. And by those who rise from the water to the bait of righteousness, he admonishes us to take away luxury and avarice, as the coin from the fish; in order that he might displace vainglory; and by giving the stater to the taxgatherers and rendering the Caesar the things which are Caesar's might preserve to God the things which are God's. The stater is capable of other explanations not unknown to us, but the present is not a suitable occasion for their treatment. Let the mention we make for our present purpose suffice, as it is not unsuitable to the flowers of the Word; and we have often done this, drawing to the urgent point of the question the most beneficial fountain, in order to water those who have been planted by the Word."¹⁵

And this, of the Saviour's miracle of turning the water into wine, also helps to an understanding of the excellent wisdom of this philosophy: --

"He gave life to the watery element of the meaning of the law, filling with his blood the doer of it who is of Adam, that is, the whole world; supplying piety with drink from the vine of truth, the mixture of the old law and of the new word, in order to the fulfillment of the predestined time."¹⁶

Of the benefits children will derive from a starvation diet, he gives this valuable instruction: --

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

"They say that the bodies of children, when shooting up to their height, are made to grow right by deficiency in nourishment. For then the spirit, which pervades the body in order to its growth, is not checked by abundance of food obstructing the freedom of its course."¹⁷

The close resemblance between the pagan philosophy and that of the New Platonists is illustrated by the fact that but one of the classes concerned could tell to which of them Ammonius Saccas belonged. The pagans generally regarded him a pagan. His own kind of Christians counted him a good Christian all his life. The genuine Christians all knew that he was a pagan, and that the truth of the whole matter was that he was a pretended Christian "who adopted with such dexterity the doctrines of the pagan philosophy as to appear a Christian to the Christians, and a pagan to the pagans."¹⁸ He died A. D. 241.

Clement is supposed to have died about A. D. 220, and the fame and influence which he had acquired -- and it was considerable -- was far outshone by Origen, who had been taught by both Clement and Ammonius. Origen imbibed all the allegorical and mystifying processes of both Ammonius and Clement, and multiplied upon them from his own wild imagination. He was not content with finding two meanings in the Scriptures as those before him, but took the secondary sense, the hidden meaning, and added to it four additional meanings of his own. His system then stood thus: First, All scripture contains two meanings, the literal and the hidden. Second, This hidden sense has within itself two meanings, the moral and the mystical. Third, The mystical has within it yet two other meanings, the allegorical and the anagogical. According to this method of mysticism, therefore, in every passage of Scripture there are at least three meanings, and there may be any number from three to six.

His explanation of it is this: First, Man is composed of three parts, a rational mind, a sensitive soul, and a visible body. The Scriptures resemble man, and therefore have a three-fold sense; (a) a literal sense which corresponds to the body; (b) a moral sense corresponding to the soul; and (c) a mystical sense which corresponds to the mind. Second, As the body is the baser part of man, so the literal is the baser sense of Scripture; and as the body often betrays good men into sin, so the literal sense of Scripture often leads into error. Therefore, those who would see more in the Scripture than common people could see, must search out this hidden meaning, and yet further must search in that hidden meaning for the moral sense. And those who would be perfect must carry their search yet farther, and beyond this moral sense which they found in the hidden meaning they must find the mystical sense, with its additional train of allegorical and anagogical senses.

As in this system of philosophy the body of man was a clog to the soul and hindered it in its heavenly aspirations, and was therefore to be despised, and by punishment and starvation was to be separated as far as possible from the soul, it followed that the literal sense of Scripture, which corresponded to man's body likewise, was a hinderance to the proper understanding of all the hidden meanings of the Scripture, and was to be despised and separated as far as possible from the hidden sense, and counted of the least possible worth. Accordingly, one of the first principles of this teaching was the following: --

"The source of many evils lies in adhering to the carnal or external part of Scripture. Those who do so will not attain to the kingdom of God. Let us therefore seek after the spirit and substantial fruit of the word, which are hidden and mysterious." -- Origen.¹⁹

And the next step was but the logical result of this; namely: --

"The Scriptures are of little use to those who understand them as they are written." -- Origen.²⁰

By such a system as this it is evident that any one could find whatever he pleased in any passage of Scripture, and that the Scripture could be made to support any doctrine that was

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

ever invented by the wildest fancy of the veriest fanatic. Even though the doctrine might be flatly contradictory to the Scripture, the Scripture could be made fully to agree with and teach the doctrine.

From this sketch of Platonism as held by Origen, the essential truth of the following passage will be readily seen : --

"This new species of philosophy, imprudently adopted by Origen and other Christians, did immense harm to Christianity. For it led the teachers of it to involve in philosophic obscurity many parts of our religion, which were in themselves plain and easy to be understood; and to add to the precepts of the Saviour no few things, of which not a word can be found in the Holy Scriptures. . . . It recommended to Christians various foolish and useless rites, suited only to nourish superstition, no small part of which we see religiously observed by many even to the present day. And finally it alienated the minds of many, in the following centuries, from Christianity itself, and produced a heterogeneous species of religion, consisting of Christian and Platonic principles combined." -- Mosheim.²¹

On the part of real Christians, those who loved the truth as it is in Christ, there was strong opposition from the first to this whole system of philosophy with its mystification and allegory. "But the friends of philosophy and literature gradually acquired the ascendancy. To this issue Origen contributed very much; who, having early imbibed the principles of the New Platonism, inauspiciously applied them to theology, and earnestly recommended them to the numerous youth who attended on his instructions. And the greater the influence of this man, which quickly spread over the whole Christian world, the more readily was his method of explaining the sacred doctrines propagated." -- Mosheim.²²

While this effort was being made on the side of philosophy to unite all religions, there was at the same time a like effort on the side of politics. This was the aim of Elagabalus, A. D. 218 to 222. We have already shown that it was the ambition of Elagabalus to make the worship of the sun supersede all other worship in Rome. It is further related of him that a more ambitious scheme even than this was in the emperor's mind, which was nothing less than the blending of all religions into one, of which "the sun was to be the central object of adoration." -- Milman.²³ But the elements were not yet fully prepared for such a fusion. Also the shortness of the reign of Elagabalus prevented any decided advancement toward success.

Alexander Severus -- A. D. 222 to 225 -- held to the same idea, and carried it into effect so far as his individual practice was concerned. "The mother of Alexander Severus, the able, perhaps crafty and rapacious, Mammaea, had at least held intercourse with the Christians of Syria. She had conversed with the celebrated Origen, and listened to his exhortations, if without conversion, still not without respect. Alexander, though he had neither the religious education, the pontifical character, nor the dissolute manners of his predecessor, was a Syrian, with no hereditary attachment to the Roman form of paganism. He seems to have affected a kind of universalism: he paid decent respect to the gods of the capitol; he held in honor the Egyptian worship, and enlarged the temples of Isis and Serapis. In his own palace, with respectful indifference, he enshrined, as it were, as his household deities, the representatives of the different religions or theo-philosophic systems which were prevalent in the Roman empire, -- Orpheus, Abraham, Christ and Apollonius of Tyana. . . . The homage of Alexander Severus may be a fair test of the general sentiment of the more intelligent heathen of his time." -- Milman.²⁴ His reign was also too short to accomplish anything beyond his own individual example. But the same tendency went rapidly forward.

On the side of philosophy and the apostasy, the progress was continuous and rapid. About the middle of this century, Origen and Celsus, a pagan philosopher, held a protracted discussion upon the respective merits of the pagan and the Christian philosophy. And the standing of the two systems at this time, is well described in the following statement: --

"Heathenism, as interpreted by philosophy, almost found favor with some of the more moderate Christian apologists. . . . The Christians endeavored to enlist the earlier philosophers in their cause; they were scarcely content with asserting that the nobler Grecian philosophy might be designed to prepare the human mind for the reception of Christianity; they were almost inclined to endow these sages with a kind of prophetic foreknowledge of its more mysterious doctrines. 'I have explained,' says the Christian in Minucius Felix, 'the opinions of almost all the philosophers, whose most illustrious glory it is that they have worshiped one God, though under various names; so that one might suppose either that the Christians of the present day are philosophers, or that the philosophers of old were already Christians.'

"These advances on the part of Christianity were more than met by paganism. The heathen religion, which prevailed at least among the more enlightened pagans during this period, . . . was almost as different from that of the older Greeks and Romans, or even that which prevailed at the commencement of the empire, as it was from Christianity. . . . On the great elementary principle of Christianity, the unity of the supreme God, this approximation had long been silently made. Celsus, in his celebrated controversy with Origen, asserts that this philosophical notion of the Deity is perfectly reconcilable with paganism." -- Milman.²⁵

The emperor Decius, having no sympathy with any religion, philosophy, or morality, but that of the old original Roman, did his best to restore it throughout the empire. Hence the persecution, as described in Chapter IV of this book. Valerian followed closely the course marked out by Decius; but in the forty years of peace to religion, from the edict of toleration by Gallienus to the edict of persecution by Diocletian, all these elements worked steadily forward in the same general direction. Of the progress of the apostasy during this time, we have a powerful illustration in the practice of Gregory Thaumaturgus, the "wonder-worker."

Gregory was a pupil and a convert of Origen's. Origen strongly urged him "to devote his acquirements in heathen science and learning, to the elucidation of the Scriptures." When he left Origen's school at Alexandria, he returned to Pontus, and became bishop of Neo Caesarea, A. D. 240 to 270, and how fully he followed the advice of Origen is shown by the following: -

"When Gregory perceived that the ignorant multitude persisted in their idolatry, on account of the pleasures and sensual gratifications which they enjoyed at the pagan festivals, he granted them a permission to indulge themselves in the like pleasures, in celebrating the memory of the holy martyrs, hoping that, in process of time, they would return of their own accord, to a more virtuous and regular course of life.' There is no sort of doubt that, by this permission, Gregory allowed the Christians to dance, sport, and feast at the tombs of the martyrs, upon their respective festivals, and to do everything which the pagans were accustomed to in their temples, during the feasts celebrated in honor of their gods." -- Mosheim.²⁶

Neo Caesarea was one of the most important cities in Pontus. Yet so diligently did Gregory thus employ the talents committed to him by Origen, that it is related of him that whereas "there were said to be only seventeen Christians in the whole city when he first entered it as bishop, there were said to be only seventeen pagans in it at the time of his death."²⁷ It is manifest, however, from Gregory's practice, that those who were by him brought to the Christian name were as much pagan as before except in the mere matter of the name.

In the time of Diocletian, that which was known as paganism was so far different from the original paganism of Rome that Milman plainly designates it as the "new paganism." This new paganism was so little removed from the apostate form of Christianity which we have traced, as really to differ from it only in name. The standing of the two systems at the accession of Diocletian is thus described : --

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

"Among the cares of his administration, he by no means neglected the purification of the ancient religions. In paganism itself, that silent but manifest change of which we have already noticed the commencement, had been creeping on. . . . This new paganism, as has been observed, arose out of the alliance of the philosophy and the religion of the old world. These once implacable adversaries had reconciled their differences, and coalesced against the common enemy. Christianity itself had no slight influence upon the formation of the new system; and now an Eastern element, more and more strongly dominant, mingled with the whole, and lent it, as it were, a visible object of worship. From Christianity, the new paganism had adopted the unity of the Deity, and scrupled not to degrade all the gods of the older world into subordinate demons or ministers. The Christians had incautiously held the same language: both concurred in the name of demons; but the pagans used the term in the Platonic sense, as good but subordinate spirits, while the same term spoke to the Christian ear as expressive of malignant and diabolic agency. But the Jupiter Optimus Maximums was not the great Supreme of the new system. The universal deity of the East, the sun, to the philosophic was the emblem or representative; to the vulgar, the Deity. Diocletian himself, though he paid so much deference to the older faith as to assume the title of Jovius, as belonging to the lord of the world, yet, on his accession, when he would exculpate himself from all concern in the murder of his predecessor, Numerian, appealed in the face of the army to the all-seeing deity of the sun. It is the oracle of Apollo of Miletus, consulted by the hesitating emperor, which is to decide the fate of Christianity. The metaphorical language of Christianity had unconsciously lent strength to this new adversary; and, in adoring the visible orb, some, no doubt, supposed that they were not departing far from the worship of the 'Sun of Righteousness.'" -- Milman.²⁸

Diocletian himself really contemplated the same fusion of all religions into one, with the sun as the one great universal deity, which Elagabalus had contemplated in his day; but by Galerius and the leading philosopher of the new paganism, he was persuaded to use all the power of the State in the effort to make paganism alone supreme over and against every form and every profession of the Christian name. The result, however, was as already related, that Galerius was compelled to issue a public edict confessing his failure.

Then came Constantine, the best imperial representative of the new paganism, and the most devout worshiper of the sun as the supreme and universal deity, with the avowed purpose, as expressed in his own words, "First to bring the diverse judgments formed by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity." In Constantine the new paganism met its ideal and the New Platonism -- the apostate, paganized, sun worshiping form of Christianity -- met its long-wished-for instrument. In him the two streams met. In him the aspiration of Elagabalus, the hope of Ammonius Saccas and Origen, and the ambition of the perverse-minded, self-exalted bishops, were all realized and accomplished -- a new, imperial, and universal religion was created. Therefore, "The reign of Constantine the Great forms one of the epochs in the history of the world. It is the era of the dissolution of the Roman empire ; the commencement, or rather consolidation, of a kind of Eastern despotism, with a new capital, a new patriciate, a new constitution, a new financial system, a new, though as yet imperfect, jurisprudence, and, finally, a new religion." -- Milman.²⁹

The epoch thus formed was the epoch of the papacy; and the new religion thus created was the PAPAL RELIGION.

¹ "Ecclesiastical History," Century ii, part ii, chap. iv, par. 1, Murdock's translation.

² Id., par. 3.

Ancient Sun Worship and Its Impact on Christianity

- ³ Id., par. 5.
- ⁴ "Classical Dictionary," Eleusinia.
- ⁵ Id.
- ⁶ Article "Mysteries."
- ⁷ "Ecclesiastical History," Century ii, part ii, chap. iv, par. 5.
- ⁸ Id., par. 7, Maclaine's translation.
- ⁹ "Apology," chap.xvi.
- ¹⁰ "Ad Nationes," book i, chap. xiii.
- ¹¹ "History of the Popes," under "Pius" and "Anicetus."
- ¹² "Ecclesiastical History," Century ii, part ii, chap. iv, par. 11, Maclaine's translation.
- ¹³ Id., chap. i, par. 6, Murdock's translation.
- ¹⁴ Id., chap. iii, par. 5.
- ¹⁵ "The Instructor," book ii, chap. i.
- ¹⁶ Id. chap. i.
- ¹⁷ Id., chap. i.
- ¹⁸ Note to Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," Century ii, part ii, chap. i, par. 7, Maclaine's translation.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Maclaine's Mosheim, Century iii, part ii, chap. iii, par. 5, note.
- ²⁰ Id. With such a system as this for a basis, it is logical enough that the Catholic Church should forbid the common people to read the Scriptures. For Origen is one of the chiefest fathers of the Catholic Church ; and "from the days of Origen to those of Chrysostom, there was not a single eminent commentator who did not borrow largely from the works of" Origen. "He was the chief teacher of even the most orthodox of the Western Fathers." -- Farar's "History of Interpretation," last paragraph under "Origen."
- ²¹ Id., Century ii, part ii, chap. i, par. 12, Murdock's translation.
- ²² Id., Century iii, part ii, chap. i, par. 5.
- ²³ "History of Christianity," book ii, chap viii, par. 22.
- ²⁴ Id., book ii, chap. viii, par. 24.
- ²⁵ Id., par. 28.
- ²⁶ "Ecclesiastical History," Century ii, part ii, chap. iv, par. 2, note. Maclaine's translation.
- ²⁷ "Ante-Nicene Library," Gregory Thaumaturgus, introduction, par. 1.
- ²⁸ "History of Christianity," book ii, chap. ix, par. 7.
- ²⁹ Id., book iii, chap. i, par. 1.