

Church in Rome in the First Century (G. Edmundson)

In 1913, George Edmundson gave the University of Oxford's Bampton Lectures an eight lecture series on the Church in Rome in the first century. Edited here with headings and selective portions of the lecture, this article is intended to help one understand the nature of the first century church in Rome. The lectures can be seen in its entirety at: George Edmundson: Church in Rome in the First Century - Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

Rome of the first century

Rome in the first century of our era occupied a position of influence unique in the annals of history. It had become the magnetic centre of the civilised world, and it was itself the most cosmopolitan of cities that have ever existed. The Rome of Claudius and of Nero was the seat of an absolute and centralised Government, whose vast dominion stretched from the shores of the Atlantic to the borders of Parthia, from Britain to the Libyan deserts, over diverse lands and many races, all of them subdued after centuries of conflict and of conquest by the Roman arms, but now forming a single empire under an administrative system of unrivalled flexibility and strength, which enforced obedience to law and the maintenance of peace without any unnecessary infringement of local liberties or interference with national religious cults. One of the most remarkable features of this great Empire was the freedom of intercourse that was enjoyed, and the safety and rapidity with which travelling could be undertaken. Never until quite modern times has any such ease and security of communication between place and place been possible. And this not merely by those admirable military roads which were one of the chief instruments for the maintenance of the Roman rule and for the binding together of province with province and of the most distant frontiers with the capital; the facilities for intercourse by water also were abundant and were, except during the winter months, freely used. The Roman Empire, as a glance at the map reveals, was - even at its zenith - essentially a Mediterranean power. Its dominion consisted mainly of the fringe of territory encircling that sea. In the midst stood the capital. The greatest cities of the Empire were ports, and Rome itself, the chief among them, was dependent upon sea-borne traffic for its daily food.

At the beginning of the Christian era the population of the imperial city has been estimated at not less than 1,300,000, of which more than one half were slaves. The entire number of citizens owning private property was very small - a few thousands only. Each of these possessed vast numbers of slaves, who were trained to perform every kind of work, so that a considerable portion of the free inhabitants found themselves without occupation or employment. In the time of Julius Caesar no fewer than 320,000 were supported by the state, and though Augustus was able to reduce this multitude of paupers to 200,000, the number afterwards rapidly increased. This huge population was, as has been already said, one of the most cosmopolitan that has ever been gathered together to form one community. This was due in the first instance to the practice of selling prisoners of war, and the inhabitants of captured cities, as slaves. The institution of slavery therefore implied that in every wealthy household in Rome there was a great mixture of races, and the custom of manumission on a large scale was continually admitting batches of persons of foreign extraction to many privileges of citizenship. Thus was formed the large and important class of freedmen (*liberti*) containing men of culture and ability, who not only filled posts of responsibility in their former masters' households but not seldom became rich and rose to high official positions in the state. Freedmen indeed and the descendants of freedmen played no small part in the history of the times with which we are dealing, and Christianity found among them many of its early converts and most earnest workers. But the freedmen and the slaves by no means comprised all the foreign population of Rome at this epoch. The legionaries were recruited in all parts of the empire; the Pretorian camp contained contingents drawn from distant frontier tribes. Traders, travelers, adventurers of every kind thronged to Rome - particularly from the East. So did the preachers and teachers of many philosophies, cults, and modes of worship, Greek, Egyptian, and Phrygian. The very language of ordinary everyday life in Rome had become Greek, and the whole atmosphere of the great city was in no small measure orientalised.

Jews in Rome before Christianity

Amongst this large alien element in the population the Jews formed one of the most marked and important sections. Their position indeed was at once singular and exclusive, for they had privileges accorded to none others. The origin of the Jewish colony at Rome may be traced back to 63 B.C., when Pompeius after the capture of Jerusalem brought back a

large number of prisoners, who were sold as slaves. But the Jew, as a slave, was always difficult to deal with, through his obstinate adherence to his ancestral faith and peculiar customs, and so many of these slaves were speedily manumitted that they were able to form a community apart on the far side of the Tiber. Julius Caesar from motives of expediency showed especial favour to the Jews, and his policy was continued by Augustus and, except for brief intervals, by his successors. The privileges thus conferred were very great, and included liberty of worship, freedom from military service and from certain taxes, the recognition of the Sabbath as a day of rest, the right of living according to the customs of their forefathers, and full jurisdiction over their own members. Once in the reign of Tiberius the worshippers of Jahveh and of Isis fell under the heavy displeasure of the emperor; some were punished, others expelled from the city, and the consuls were ordered to enlist 4000 Jews for military service in the malarious climate of Sardinia, 19 A.D. The determination of Caligula to set up a statue of himself in the Temple of Jerusalem aroused a storm of opposition, which would undoubtedly have brought a fierce persecution upon the Jews but for the assassination of the tyrant (41 A.D.), before his design was carried into effect. Claudius, however, on his accession at once renewed all the old privileges, and took steps to allay the fanatical passions stirred up by the action of his half-insane predecessor. From this time forward the Jews were never compelled to take part in Caesar - worship. To them alone of all the peoples of the empire was this concession made.

This Jewish colony in Rome seems from the descriptions of contemporary writers to have had the same characteristics as the Jewish colonies in European cities throughout the Middle Ages, and indeed much as we see them today. A large proportion of these Roman Jews were very poor, living in rags and squalor, making a precarious livelihood as hawkers, peddlers, and dealers in second-hand goods. Above these were then, as now, the moneylenders, larger traders, and shopkeepers, and at the head the wealthy financiers, and in the days of Tiberius and his successors many members of the Herodian family made Rome their home and lived on terms of close intimacy with the Imperial circle. It is a curious fact that the Jewish race, while hated and despised by the people of Rome, should have been endowed with so many immunities by the Emperors, and above all that its exclusive religion and ceremonial rites should have possessed such an attraction as undoubtedly they did possess, and should have drawn so many adherents from all classes. The truth is that the privileges, as I have said before, were granted from motives of pure expediency. The Jewish race was numerous, it had settlements in practically every important city in the empire, and it was financially indispensable. The number of Jews in Rome in 5 B.C. has been estimated at 10,000; in Egypt, 1,000,000; in Palestine, 700,000; in the whole Roman Empire (out of a total population of fifty-four to sixty millions) four to four and a half millions.

As 4000 adult males were actually sent to Sardinia in 19 A.D. it may safely be said that a quarter of a century later, allowing for the natural growth of population, for fresh batches of slaves receiving manumission, and for immigration from outside, the total Jewish settlement in Rome would not be less than 30,000 and might reach 50,000.

Everywhere the Jew however held aloof from his Gentile neighbours, and his absolute refusal to mingle with them and to share their life could only be met either by coercion or by favoured treatment. To the wise statesmanship of the dictator Julius the latter course commended itself, and the permanence of the policy he adopted is sufficient proof of its prescience. The attractiveness of Judaism, as a religious cult, is more difficult to explain. It had neither the mysticism nor the sensuousness of the worship of Isis or of Cybele. Yet although the Jew was hated and scorned, his religion became to a surprising degree the mode in Rome, especially among ladies of the patrician houses. The number of actual proselytes of Gentile origin was large, and still larger the number of those whom St. Luke in the Acts styles 'God-fearers' (σεβόμενοι τὸν Θεόν), i.e. people who adopted the Jewish monotheism, attended the synagogue services, and observed the Sabbath and certain portions of the ceremonial law. These 'God-fearers,' in every place where Jewish communities were to be found, formed a fringe round the Synagogue of bodies of men and women, who, in this age of religious eclecticism, without altogether abandoning their connexion with Paganism, had become semi-Jews.

Expulsion from Jerusalem

St. Luke sketches for us the steps by which Christianity emerged from the condition of a strictly Jewish sect to that of a universal religion intended for all mankind. It will be seen that the enlargement of view, which is so clearly traced, was very gradual; that it came from below rather than from above; from the subordinates, to some extent from the rank and file, rather than from the acknowledged leaders. On the Great Day of Pentecost when St. Luke so carefully enumerates the various nationalities from which the great crowd of pilgrims was drawn, it should be noted that St. Peter addresses them as 'Men of Israel,' and his whole discourse is that of a man concerned only with proving to an assembly of Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of their sacred Scriptures. The passage is in fact a striking testimony both to the wide extent of the Jewish Diaspora and to the fact of the intense love and reverence for the Holy City and for the injunctions of the Mosaic Law, which brought together such a throng of worshippers from far-distant regions, including people speaking many different tongues, to this feast at Jerusalem. In the list of those forming St. Peter's audience we find the names of six different peoples and the inhabitants of nine different districts, and it is implied that Jews from these various places had come up specially for the occasion - with one exception. The phrase 'the sojourning Romans, Jews as well as proselytes' seems capable of only one interpretation, that St. Luke is here referring to a body of Roman Jews and converts to Judaism, who were temporarily residing in Jerusalem, and whom it may be permitted with considerable probability to identify with the 'Synagogue of the Libertines' mentioned in Acts vi. 9. Among this body may have been numbered the Roman Christians Junias and Andronicus, who were some quarter of a century later saluted by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans 'as men of mark among the Apostles and who were in Christ before me.'

In his record of the period that follows St. Luke makes it quite clear that the first organised Christian community was at Jerusalem, not in Galilee. After the day of Pentecost when certain of the multitude exclaimed 'Are not all these that speak Galilaeans?' - there is not a word in the Acts to indicate that the early Church had any connexion with Galilee. The Twelve, whose authority, as being derived directly from the Lord, no one called in question, made Jerusalem their headquarters from this time forward, and from this centre carried on their mission work. But that mission work was limited to Jews. The Twelve, moreover, we are expressly told, visited the Temple regularly and they seem to have conformed in every way to the regulations of the Mosaic Law, and to have differed from the Jews amongst whom they lived only in that they taught that the crucified Jesus, to whose Resurrection from the Dead they bore personal testimony, had by His Resurrection proved Himself to be the Messiah. Among the Twelve St. Peter on every occasion takes the lead and is the spokesman of the rest, and occupies a position of undisputed pre-eminence. In all that they did during these years, which immediately followed their Lord's departure from them, it is scarcely possible that these personal disciples should not have been acting in strict accordance with their Master's last commands. Eventually they were to go forth upon a wider mission to the nations, but for awhile - an ancient tradition of considerable weight says definitely for twelve years - they were to abide at Jerusalem, and restrict themselves to proclaiming in its simplest form the message of the Gospel to the Palestinian Jews, meanwhile resting in the promise that in the future whenever fresh calls should be made upon them they should receive illumination and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Not until the sixth chapter of the Acts do we find any indication of a widening of view. But here reading between the lines of the brief narrative one cannot but feel something more than a suspicion that the movement of which the appointment of the Seven was the outcome, and at the head of which St. Stephen placed himself, was not one with which the Twelve were at the time in entire sympathy. The work to which St. Stephen specially addressed himself was the preaching of the Gospel to the members of those Synagogues which were set apart for the use of the Hellenistic settlers and sojourners in Jerusalem, i.e. for Jews of foreign origin, speaking a foreign tongue, and trained amidst Gentile associations. Those mentioned seem to belong in order of importance to the chief Jewish Colonies of the Dispersion. The first place, be it noted, is assigned to the Libertines or Roman freedmen, men conspicuous probably alike for their wealth and their close connexion with the Imperial City. Then come the Alexandrians, members of a Jewish settlement of ancient date and high culture, in numbers exceeding probably the entire population of Palestine. And after them the Cyrenians, second only to the Alexandrians in number, and like them thoroughly Hellenised. Lastly, mention is made of those of Cilicia and Asia - traders no doubt connected by ties of family and business with those characteristically Graeco -

Asiatic cities, Tarsus and Ephesus. Among such a body of 'Hellenists' the message of the Gospel would naturally be interpreted in a larger and more universal sense than in those stricter 'Hebrew' circles to which as yet the Twelve had chiefly directed their appeal.

What we do know is that St. Stephen's ardour and activity and the special character of his teaching speedily aroused the intense enmity of the Jewish rulers. He was seized, brought before the Sanhedrim, and without proper trial or condemnation in a sudden outburst of fanatic fury stoned to death. It was the signal for a persecution which scattered far and wide those who had attached them-selves to him and the doctrines that he taught.

But fierce though the persecution was, St. Luke expressly tells us, it did not touch the Twelve. 'They were all,' we read 'scattered abroad, except the Apostles.' Apparently at this time the accusers of Stephen did not regard the Twelve, and the Judaeo - Christians who held with them, as men 'speaking against this Holy Place and trying to change the customs that Moses hath delivered unto us.' As yet they (the original Apostles) seem not to have offended the susceptibilities of the High-Priestly caste by any neglect in their outward observance of the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law. But this scattering abroad of the friends and disciples of Stephen was to be, under God's providence, gradually productive of great results. It led directly to the conversion of Saul the persecutor. It brought Philip, one of the Seven, to Samaria, where many were converted by his preaching. Such indeed was his success that for the first time the Apostles broke through their rule of confining themselves to Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, and Peter and John, the two leaders, were sent to take official charge of the new field of missionary operations. And there at Samaria (mark the emphasis Luke lays upon the incident) Peter was confronted with the man who, under the name of Simon Magus, was according to tradition to exercise a large, perhaps a decisive, influence upon his action at a critical point in his career.

Nor was this all. After an interval, probably of some three years, we find that persecution has for the time entirely ceased, and that already the Christian Church is peacefully and firmly established throughout the whole of Judaea, Galilee and Samaria, and Peter engaged on a tour of visitation in all parts. Finally he reaches Joppa and there takes up his abode for some time in the house, we are told, of one Simon a tanner. Now this very fact, that the Apostle chose to reside with a man whose trade in the eyes of strict orthodox Judaism was unclean, points to the advance he had already made in casting himself loose from the fetters of Jewish prejudice. The vision which sent him to Cornelius was probably the reflection of the doubts and questionings which had been previously filling his thoughts and an answer to his prayers. It was a preparation for that which was to follow, for his visit to the Roman centurion was not merely to teach him that the law which forbade intercourse between Jew and Gentile was henceforth done away, but to open his eyes to the startling and all - important fact that it was the revealed will of God that uncircumcised Gentiles should be admitted to the full privileges of Christianity. The question how far such Gentiles would have to conform to the Jewish law was indeed not yet settled, nor was it to be settled without much prolonged and even embittered controversy in the years that were to come. The collocation by St. Luke in juxtaposition of the defence of St. Peter to the brethren at Jerusalem for his action in regard to Cornelius, and of the news reaching those same brethren that certain men from Cyprus and Cyrene, on their own initiative, without sanction or authority from the Mother Church, were preaching to the Greeks at Antioch and had converted a large number of them to the faith, was clearly intentional. St. Peter's apologia was apparently somewhat grudgingly accepted, for there is little of spontaneous enthusiasm about the words - 'and when they had heard these things they held their peace and glorified God, saying "Then also - ἄρα γε καὶ - to the Gentiles hath God granted repentance unto life."

On receiving information, therefore, about what was occurring at Antioch, it was only natural that those at the head of the Church in Jerusalem should determine to send to the Syrian capital one of their own body with instructions to inquire personally into the truth of the reports that had reached them, and to establish official control over a movement which seemed at first sight to be revolutionary, and which was in fact a long step in advance towards a totally new conception of the mission of Christianity in the world.

Joseph, surnamed Barnabas, whom they selected as their emissary, was a man singularly well qualified for dealing wisely and sympathetically with the new situation. He had been intimately associated from the very first with the Jerusalem Church. He was at once a Levite and a Cypriote Hellenist, and the surname which was given to him by the Apostles themselves tells us that he was a man endowed with prophetic gifts for the exposition and interpretation of Scripture. And he was to remain for some years, probably to the end of his life, a mediator and reconciler between the opposing schools of thought and ideals of Christianity associated later with the names of St. James and St. Paul. It is noteworthy how large a part Barnabas, who had now gone to Antioch as the representative of the Church at Jerusalem, took in preparing the way for him who was to be pre-eminently the Apostle of the Gentiles. The two men may possibly have first become friends in their youth, when Saul of Tarsus was studying at the feet of Gamaliel. In any case when Saul, three years after his memorable conversion, came up to Jerusalem to make the acquaintance of Peter, he found, perhaps not unnaturally, that the brethren looked askance at the erstwhile persecutor, until Barnabas took him by the hand and, as it were, stood voucher for his good faith. His reception, however, on this occasion appears to have been so far discouraging that Saul withdrew for a considerable time to his native place Tarsus. Thither Barnabas after a brief sojourn at Antioch now went to seek in his retirement the man whom he knew to be specially well fitted to act as his colleague at this juncture. His judgment and prevision were more than justified. For a whole year, we read in the Acts, Barnabas and Saul taught with such success that the assemblies of the faithful, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin, met together harmoniously and in such numbers that even in this vast city, of mixed population, professing every known variety of religion, the new sect became sufficiently large and well known to attract public attention. The scoffing nick-name, Christiani, was now for the first time given to the disciples of Jesus by the pagan Antiocheans - a term of shame and reproach, which soon was to become a title of glory.

While at Antioch under the leadership of Barnabas the preaching of the Gospel was thus making rapid progress, events were taking place in Judaea of critical importance for the future of the Church. The peace which the Christians in Palestine enjoyed in the period preceding the conversion of Cornelius had been due, not to any increase of good-will on the part of the Jewish rulers, but to the fact that these were too much occupied at that time with their own serious troubles. The order given by the Emperor Caligula to place his statue in the Holy of Holies had filled the whole nation with horror and made them resolve rather to be massacred than allow such a profanation of the Temple. The assassination of Caligula alone averted a general revolt. According to Josephus, Herod Agrippa, who was then in Rome, played a very important part in securing the peaceful accession of Claudius, who rewarded him for his services by bestowing upon him, in addition to Galilee, Peraea and the territory beyond the Jordan with which he had been invested by Caligula, also Judaea, Samaria and Abilene, making his kingdom thus equal in extent to that of his grandfather Herod the Great. Claudius became emperor, January 24, 41 A.D., and towards the end of that year King Agrippa went to Palestine with the intention of using every means to ingratiate himself with his new subjects. He was especially desirous of impressing them with his careful observance of the Mosaic law and his zeal for the national religion, being to some extent suspect through his long residence in Rome and alien descent. Accordingly having gone to Jerusalem to keep the first Passover after his accession, he resolved to give a signal mark of his fervour as a defender of the faith, by the summary execution of James the son of Zebedee. Possibly he was the only one of the Christian leaders on whom for the moment he could lay hands. But finding his action had pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also, and, as the days of unleavened bread had already begun, he placed the Apostle in prison under the strictest guard with the intention of bringing him forth before the people as soon as the Passover was over. The story of his escape as told by St. Luke, which ends so abruptly, has every internal mark of having been derived directly from the maid-servant Rhoda, whose name is otherwise so unnecessarily mentioned. We learn from this graphic narrative that the house in Jerusalem where the disciples were accustomed to hold their gatherings for prayer was that of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and the aunt of Barnabas. It was to this house that the Apostle naturally turned his steps, as soon as he found himself outside the prison gates, but with no intention of remaining in so well known a spot. As he entered the room with a movement of his hand he at once checked their cries of astonishment, briefly told his tale, probably almost in the rapid words recorded, asked his hearers to repeat it to James and the brethren, and then immediately, while it was still dark, he went out to betake himself to a more secure hiding-place. And as the Apostle disappears into the obscurity of the night, so does he, so far as his active career is concerned, disappear henceforth from the pages of St. Luke's history.

There are difficulties in this brief account of the Herodian persecution of the spring of 42 A.D. There is no hint that the Twelve were at Jerusalem at this critical time. St. Peter himself does not seem to have been there when St. James was beheaded. His parting words point to two conclusions: (1) that the other James, the Lord's Brother, was already the recognised head of the Jerusalem community; and (2) that the speaker had no expectation of being able to tell his tale to 'James and the brethren' in person. The explanation however lies to our hand, if we accept the ancient and well-attested tradition of which I have already spoken, that the Lord Jesus had bidden his Apostles to make Jerusalem the centre of their missionary activity for twelve years, after which they were to disperse and go forth to preach to the nations. Already before Herod Agrippa struck his blow the Twelve had begun to set out each one to his allotted sphere of evangelisation, the care of the Mother Church being confided to James, the Lord's Brother, assisted by a body of presbyters, of whom he was one, but over whom he presided with something of monarchical authority. It would be an anachronism to give him the Gentile title of Bishop, but in this earliest constitution of the Jerusalem Church we have the model which other Churches were to follow and out of which episcopacy grew.

How Christianity came to Rome

The dispersion of the Hellenist disciples of St. Stephen, after the persecution in which their brilliant leader died a martyr's death, was the direct cause of the evangelisation first of Samaria and then some years later of Syrian Antioch. Philip, like Stephen one of the Seven, preached in Samaria meeting with great success, and there encountered a certain man, Simon by name, who gave himself out to be some great one, and who had by his sorceries astonished and drawn to him great numbers of the people. On the news of this state of affairs being brought to the Apostles at Jerusalem, Peter and John were dispatched in the name of the Twelve, to deal with the situation authoritatively. The result for a time, according to the Acts, was the triumph of St. Peter, Simon himself being baptised and seeking to be endowed by the Apostle with a portion of his wonder - working spiritual gifts. And as with Samaria so it was with Syrian Antioch. Men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had been obliged to fly from Jerusalem 'upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen,' after preaching in their own native regions found their way to Antioch, and preaching in that city of mixed nationalities, not only to Jews but also to the Greeks, converted many. This news again, that a Church was arising in the Syrian capital with a considerable Gentile element in its midst, when it reached the Twelve at Jerusalem, led to immediate action being taken. Barnabas was sent to exercise super-vision over the new movement, and to see that a precedent of far-reaching consequences should not be established with-out the knowledge and sanction of those in authority.

Events at Rome probably followed on precisely the same lines. Just as the men of Cyprus and Cyrene in the face of persecution made their way back to their own homes carrying with them the message of the Gospel, so would it be with some of 'the sojourners of Rome' belonging to the Synagogue of the Libertines. They would return to the capital inspired by the spirit and example of St. Stephen to form there the first nucleus of a Christian community. As I have already suggested, St. Paul's salutation to Andronicus and Junias seems to point to these two men as the leaders of this first missionary band. Among those converted would be, as at Antioch, both Jews and Gentiles.

Some time may well have elapsed before any news of these first small beginnings of Christianity in Rome reached Jerusalem. Possibly St. Peter's intercourse with Cornelius the centurion and his relatives and friends at Caesarea first made him acquainted with the fact that the Gospel had obtained a foothold in the capital, for the body of troops to which Cornelius belonged – the Cohors Italica - consisted of volunteers from Italy. From this source too he may in due course have learnt that Simon Magus was in Rome, and that there as in Samaria previously he was proclaiming himself 'to be the Great Power of God' and was leading many astray by his magical arts.

This information in any case, whether derived from Cornelius or from Roman Christians, who came up for the feasts, would reach the Apostles about the time when their twelve years' residence in Jerusalem was drawing to a close, and when, according to tradition, they divided among themselves separate spheres of missionary work abroad. To St. Peter, as the recognised leader, it may well have been that the charge of the Christian Church in the Imperial capital should have been assigned as the post of honour. If so, it will be seen that the persecution of Herod Agrippa only hastened on a

journey already planned. After his imprisonment and escape St. Peter's first object would be to place himself out of the reach of the persecutor and to set about his voyage as quickly as possible. If so, his arrival at Rome would be in the early summer of 42 A.D., the date given by St. Jerome.

That Peter visited Rome between the years 62 A.D. and 65 A.D. and that he was put to death there by crucifixion is admitted by everyone who studies the evidence in a fair and reasonable spirit. This is not a tradition, it may rather be described as a fact vouched for by contemporary or nearly contemporary evidence. On this point no statement could be stronger than that of Professor Lanciani: 'I write about the monuments of Rome from a strictly archaeological point of view, avoiding questions which pertain or are supposed to pertain to religious controversy. For the archaeologist, the presence and execution of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome are facts established beyond a shadow of doubt by purely monumental evidence.' It is now generally conceded that the first epistle bearing the name of Peter was written from Rome. The 'Apocalypse of St. John' and the 'Sibylline Oracles' show that Babylon was a common synonym for Rome in the second half of the first century. The language of Clement of Rome in his Epistle to the Corinthians leaves no doubt—for it is the witness of a contemporary—that Peter was martyred at Rome. 'But leaving ancient examples let us come to the athletes who were very near to our own times, let us take the illustrious examples of our own generation. Peter who through unjust jealousy endured not one or two but many sufferings and so having borne witness - μαρτυρήσας - departed to the place of glory that was his due.' The statement in the apocalyptic 'Ascension of Isaiah' - also the work of a contemporary - that 'a lawless king, the slayer of his mother, will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted. Of the Twelve one will be delivered into his hands' can scarcely refer to another event than the death of Peter at the time of the Neronian persecution. A comparison of St. John xxi. 18, 19 with St. John xiii. 36, 37 and with 2 Peter i. 14 is evidence as to the manner of that death. The question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel or of 2 Peter is immaterial, for the writers, whoever they were, belong to the first century, and the testimony to the received belief of the Christian Church which they give is authentic.

But a solitary brief visit to Rome after St. Paul had previously spent in that city two years of fruitful work does not account for the position assigned by tradition to St. Peter in relation to the Roman Church. Though the two names are on several occasions coupled together, as joint founders of the Roman Church, in all the earliest notices in which the two are named together the name of Peter stands first. Thus Ignatius in his Epistle to the Romans written about 109 A.D. says: 'I do not command you like Peter and Paul; they were Apostles; I am a condemned criminal.' Dionysius of Corinth 171 A.D. writing to Soter bishop of Rome speaks 'of the plantation by Peter and Paul that took place among the Romans and Corinthians.' Irenaeus a few years later is filled with respect for 'the most great and ancient and universally known Church established at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles Peter and Paul, and also the faith declared to men, which comes down to our own time through the succession of her bishops. For unto this Church, on account of its more powerful lead, every Church, meaning the faithful who are from everywhere, must needs resort; since in it that tradition which is from the Apostles has been preserved by those who are from everywhere. The Blessed Apostles, having founded and established the Church, entrusted the office of the episcopate to Linus. Paul speaks of this Linus in his epistles to Timothy, Anencletus succeeded him, and after Anencletus, in the third place from the Apostles, Clement received the episcopate.' Now Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, and acquainted with others who had known St. John, and who in 177 A.D. became bishop of Lyons, had spent some years in Rome. This passage was written, as he tells us, in the time of Eleutherus, probably about 180 A.D.

Eusebius of Caesarea has left us two lists of the Roman bishops, one in his 'Ecclesiastical History,' the other in his 'Chronicle.' The first is the list of Irenaeus, the beginning of which has just been quoted. The second is derived from the lost 'Chronicle' of Hippolytus, bishop of Portus, written about half a century later. In the 'Chronicle' St. Peter's episcopate at Rome is stated to have lasted twenty-five years. In the 'Ecclesiastical History' we read - 'under the reign of Claudius by the benign and gracious providence of God, Peter that great and powerful apostle, who by his courage took the lead of all the rest, was conducted to Rome.' In other passages his martyrdom with that of Paul is represented as taking place after Nero's persecution. The interval between these two dates would roughly be about twenty-five years. Now it is evident that these figures, derived as they are from men like Irenaeus and Hippolytus, who had access to the archives and

traditions in Rome itself, cannot be dismissed as pure fiction. They must have a basis of fact behind them. Eusebius tells us 'that after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter Linus was the first that received the episcopate at Rome.' Now the date of this martyrdom was according to the received tradition the fourteenth year of Nero or 67 A.D.; if then we deduct twenty-five years, we arrive at 42 A.D., which is precisely the date given for St. Peter's first visit to Rome by St. Jerome in his work 'De Viris Illustribus.' Remembering that Jerome was a translator of the Eusebian Chronicle his words may be taken to embody a close acquaintance with Eusebius' works, including his lost 'Records of Ancient Martyrdoms,' and with the sources that he used. Jerome writes as follows: 'Simon Peter, prince of the Apostles, after an episcopate of the Church at Antioch and preaching to the dispersion of those of the circumcision, who had believed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, in the second year of Claudius goes to Rome to oppose Simon Magus, and there for twenty-five years he held the sacerdotal chair until the last year of Nero, that is the fourteenth.' Now here amidst a certain confusion, which will be dealt with presently, a definite date is given for Peter's first arrival at Rome, and, be it noted, it is the date of his escape from Herod Agrippa's persecution and his disappearance from the narrative of the Acts.