

The dome of Hagia Sophia was not there to mark an object of veneration, as domes did in martyria;...

the thought of crowning Hagia Sophia with a dome related to the sanctity of the whole building as an earthly analogue to heaven. The visible universe was concretized in the Byzantine mind as a cube surmounted by a dome. We sometimes speak of "the fall of the Roman Empire," as though, on a particular day, there was a sudden collapse. In fact, it was more a gradual transformation, occurring over more than a century, marking the change from a pagan empire to a Christian empire. Constantine's relocation of the entire imperial bureaucracy of the old Rome on the Tiber to the New Rome at the mouth of the Black Sea in 330 was symbolic of a number of sweeping changes in the Roman world. It was no longer the old Rome, as that term had been used before. The empire fashioned by Augustus and enlarged by Trajan had come apart, as the social cooperation and mutual trust that had enabled the empire to function were disappearing by the third century. Although numerically there were now more Roman citizens, they were no longer free but tied by law to the land or to their occupations. Along the length of the northern borders, Germanic tribes were pressing for admission into the empire, and they in turn were being pressed from behind by other tribes being driven west from deep in central Asia by the Huns. One by one, Germanic tribes were allowed across the borders, and although they they provided excellent soldiers for the Roman army, the character of Rome and of its life. Spero Konof, A History of Architecture, 1985 Roman life focused on temporal comforts and pleasures, as the Roman bath well illustrates. The bath was designed to serve the needs of the body in its pools and exercise gardens, to feed the mind in its libraries, and to reward the eyes in its vast molded spaces lined in multicolored marble brought from the far corners of the Roman Empire. After Constantine, however, this emphasis of Roman life on the here and now was gradually replaced with a very different concern for the hereafter through the influence of a new religion that reshaped the way Romans began to think about the world and themselves. Even as the Roman Empire began to come apart politically, it was being reshaped from within, so that the primary emphasis was no longer on secular concerns but on religious concerns. As a result, new building needs arose, necessitating new building types. Courts, administration buildings, and houses continued to be built as required, but real architectural innovation shifted to solving the problem of how to house communal groups of worshippers. This new church building, however, was at first not elaborate in form or detail, as the baths had been. Those external qualities of architecture that had appealed to a cultivated visual sensibility gradually were replaced by an architecture of simpler elements, fostering a sense of mysticism. Things were meanwhile gradually changing [13.1]. The other change, and the one that had the most far-reaching effect, was the impact of the new religion that had sprung up in a backwater of the empire, in the rebellious and troublesome province of Palestine. At first a sect among the Jews, the new faith was quickly embraced by adherents in Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, and the city of Rome itself. In roughly a century the religion spread from twelve disciples in Galilee to a tenth of the population in the Roman Empire, dramatically transforming the empire from within. This change in the hearts of the believers was so all-embracing that, when they went to carve the date of building on the walls of their new houses of worship, they used not the year of reign of the current emperor, as was typical for most Roman buildings, but the year of the lord to whom they owed a far deeper, more personal spiritual allegiance. They scratched "A.D." for anno domini, the

year of the lord, reckoned from the date of birth of the son of a Judean Jewish carpenter. The force that was transforming the new Roman Empire was Christianity. In 284, Diocletian found himself head of a splintering empire. Rent by a half-century of civil war, the empire was too big and too complex for one person to rule. He had divided the empire into east and west portions, setting up two co-equal emperors, each titled Augustus and each assisted by a subordinate Caesar designated as successor. Diocletian himself ruled the Eastern, Greek-speaking half of the empire, which consisted of Greece, Asia Minor, and Egypt; his co-emperor, Maximian, ruled the Latin-speaking half, which comprised Italy, Gaul, Africa, and Spain. The city of Rome ceased to be the western center of imperial rule, as the imperial seat was alternately at Trier, Germany, or in Milan; in the east, it was at Nicomedia, in north west Turkey. In 305, Diocletian abdicated and retired to the fortress-palace he had built for himself at Spalato (Split), on the Yugoslavian coast, forcing Maximian to step down as well. The two remaining Caesars soon faced other aspirants to the imperial throne, and civil war again erupted. In the West, the contest was now between Constantine in Trier and Maxentius in Rome. When Constantine marched on Rome in 312, Maxentius inexplicably left the safety of the city walls and confronted Constantine's army where the Via Flaminia crosses the Tiber on the Mulvian Bridge. Constantine's biographer, Eusebius, recorded that in a dream on the eve of battle, Constantine had a vision in which he saw a cross in the sky with the inscription *in hoc signo vince*, "in this sign conquer." He thereupon had the letters chi and rho, the first letters of the name christos, emblazoned on his soldiers' standards, and marched out to defeat Maxentius, becoming emperor in the West. From that date, Constantine embraced the Christian faith, becoming its champion and defender, and in 313, he issued the Edict of Milan, in which Christianity was given full equality with other religions in the empire (significantly, he himself was not a confirmed communicant and was not baptized until just before his death). He continued his struggle with the Eastern Caesars and, by 324, was sole ruler of a once-more united Roman Empire. The religion that Constantine now proclaimed had at first been given little notice in Rome, for there were so many mystery religions then being practiced in the empire. To understand the appeal of Christianity for first-century Romans, one needs to understand the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The son of a carpenter, he was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in southern Palestine. Jesus studied Jewish scripture and, at about the age of thirty, began a career as an itinerant rabbi, or teacher. He preached brotherly love, charity, humility, and adherence to the spirit of Jewish law, but he enraged Jewish religious authorities by forgiving sins in the name of God, whom he called his Father. He strongly criticized hypocritical religious practices that outwardly adhered to the letter of Jewish law but promoted insensitivity to true human needs. Religious authorities were also infuriated that Jesus' followers believed him to be the christos, Greek for "the anointed," the promised Messiah, the son of God, who would deliver Israel from Roman rule. Instead of armed political revolt, Jesus preached personal spiritual renewal. Eventually, Jewish religious authorities forced the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to have Jesus crucified, a degrading form of execution usually reserved for state criminals. But on the third day after his death, Jesus' disciples believed, he rose from the dead and later ascended to heaven. Initially, the followers of Jesus were Jews in Palestine. As Hellenized Jews from around the eastern Mediterranean came to Jerusalem for religious festivals, converts were made, since the teachings of Jesus fit well with late Classical Greek

philosophy, particularly in his emphasis on a renewal of spirit and the nurturing of the soul rather than an endless search for purely physical gratification; Jesus' emphasis on personal moral rectitude fit nicely with the ideals of the Stoics. Soon, groups of these converted Hellenized Jews were found in Alexandria, in Egypt, and in most of the major cities of Asia Minor. The most important factor in spreading Christian teaching was the work and travels of Paul of Tarsus, a native of the city in Cilicia, in southwestern Turkey. A well-educated Jew, he was also a Roman citizen and thus able to travel freely to the early Christian communities in Asia Minor and Greece. The letters he wrote in Greek to these early churches quickly became sacred scripture for the early Christians. When Paul was arrested and about to be scourged, he reminded the centurion that it was unlawful to whip an uncharged Roman citizen; subsequently, when Paul was brought before the Roman governor, Felix, Paul claimed his right as a citizen to have his case heard by the emperor Nero. Accordingly, Paul was sent to Rome, where he joined Peter, one of the original apostles who had journeyed there. Both were later executed as criminals against the state when Nero began persecution of the Christians after his death in 64. At first, the teachings of Jesus appealed to slaves and artisans, those for whom the hardships of earthly life held little appeal and for whom a heavenly paradise was far more appealing, but gradually Roman patricians embraced the faith as well. By 200, numerous Christian communities had sprung up throughout Palestine, in Syria, over half of Asia Minor, in Greece, and in central Italy and Rome. Scattered groups also were located in Gaul and North Africa. By 400, parts of Spain were Christian, as was nearly all of Gaul, Italy, and Egypt. In another two centuries, Ireland was staunchly Christian, as was all of Spain, a large part of England, portions of North Africa, most of Yugoslavia and the Balkans, and all of Turkey and Armenia, stretching to the Caspian Sea. As the early Christian churches proliferated, despite periodic suppression by Roman authorities, an early form of church organization developed, with volunteer episkopoi, overseers or bishops, supervising the congregations in a single city. There might also be presbyters, councils of elders. Eventually, the bishop of Rome was accorded primacy among the bishops in the Latin West, since it was believed that Peter had been the first bishop of Rome and had received his authority directly from Jesus. As Christ had said, "You are Peter [petros in Greek], and upon this rock [petra in Greek], I shall found my church." The metropolitan bishop of Constantinople, who described himself as the Universal Patriarch, was accorded first rank among the Eastern, Greek-speaking Christians. This division between the two heads of the church, coupled with the difference in language, would in time also split the church itself.

Early Christian Architecture

During the early periods of persecution, Christians tried not to draw attention to themselves. They gathered quietly in the homes of fellow Christians, collecting donations to help those in their group who needed aid and sharing a communal meal of bread and wine to commemorate the supper that Christ had shared with his disciples on the eve of his death. During this communion, the faithful believed that the spirit of the resurrected Christ was in their midst. At first, there was no need for specialized architecture, for the small Christian groups adapted their worship to the available spaces in private homes. The church, or ekklesia (which in Greek means "the assembly"), was not a physical structure but the people themselves. Those who desired to become Christians could watch the first part of worship, but then had to withdraw to another room or to the peristyle of larger houses, while the confirmed celebrated the agape, "love feast, and the

cucharist, "thanksgiving"; only those who had been ritually baptized could participate in the Mass of the Faithful. When the occasion demanded, as when Paul visited Ephesus, a hall might be rented. In the city of Dura-Europus, established by Alexander's army on the Euphrates River (now on the Syrian-Iraqi border), there was discovered one of oldest known Christian church buildings [13.2] This house, built in about 230 adjacent to the town wall, was soon converted for the use of the congregation in about 231–232. As it happened, both this building and a nearby Jewish synagogue were preserved when the buildings were subsequently filled with earth to strengthen the wall during an attack by the Persians in 257. In modifying the house for church use, two rooms were merged by the removal of a wall, and another chamber was made into a baptistery with the construction of a small pool covered by a canopy on four columns. As Christianity spread beyond the Jews along the length of the Mediterranean, variations in religious interpretation inevitably sprang up and the problem of heresy emerged. By 385, Christianity had only recently emerged from the subject of imperial persecutions, began to order the death of Christian heretics. Such was the growing power of church authorities that in 390, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, was able to excommunicate Emperor Theodosius and force him to rescind an imperial decree. Four years later, Theodosius banned pagan religions altogether, making Christianity the sole religion of the empire. Faced with the deteriorating political situation the west and desiring to be closer to the threatened Danube frontier, Constantine had shifted the capital of the empire eastward. He selected the old Greek city of Byzantium, on a peninsula jutting into the Bosphorus, the narrow neck of water that connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea—at the juncture of Asia and Europe. There, he built a new Christian capital city, free of the entrenched pagan traditions of old Rome, and filled it with new administrative buildings and churches. In 330, the entire mechanism of government was moved to this New Rome, which was now called Constantinople ("Constantine's City"). Constantine took an active role in church administration, personally determining church doctrine and policy. He saw himself as the earthly vicar of Christ the Eternal King, as is evident in the letter addressed to his bishops. In it, he admonished them to inform him promptly of divisions within the church, for "by them God may be moved not only against the human race, but also against me myself to whose care by His heavenly will He has entrusted the guidance of the affairs of earth."⁴ He soon learned just how extensive those differences of interpretation were. In 325, only a year after he reunited the empire and made Christianity the favored imperial religion, he was obliged to hold an ecumenical, or universal, Council at Nicaea to settle the question of the Arian heresy. The result of this council was the Nicene Creed, which all Christians thereafter were obliged to embrace. With Christianity's shift from being a clandestinely practiced faith of comparatively few to the official state religion, from private, secreted worship to large congregational gatherings, there arose the problem of devising a building type appropriate both functionally and symbolically for public worship. Unlike older religions, in which individuals made private offerings, Christianity was a congregational religion, with a liturgy (from the Greek leitourgia, "public service") in which the faithful gathered together as a communal body to offer gifts and share a common meal. The Christians required not only buildings that would accommodate large numbers of converts but also enclosed spaces that would facilitate hearing the spoken word and chanted psalms. Clearly, the ancient Roman temple form could not be used, for it was doubly unsuitable: first, it did not have broad

internal spaces suitable for housing scores or hundreds of people, and second, it so thoroughly symbolized pagan gods and Roman emperor worship. The public buildings, and the type they selected was the basilica (see 12.9, 12.101). The basilica had originally been devised for public gatherings, and its symbolic connotation, having to do with the equitable administration of earthly justice, was positive. It was a simple matter to replace the small altar devoted to the emperor with one at which the Eucharist, or ritual communal meal, could be celebrated. Since the basilica was axial in spatial organization, that axis served to focus attention on the altar. The only real substantive change was shifting the entrance from the middle of the long sides to the end opposite the apse and altar. The other building type favored by the early Christians had a centralized plan, whether round, octagonal, or square, and was derived from royal tombs; the octagonal tomb of Diocletian built for himself in his palace compound at Spalato is an example. The centralized plan was also derived from the pagan heroa, a building commemorating the deeds of a divinity or the deceased member of a prominent family. Early Christians began to employ this form for martyria, structures marking the place of suffering or execution of a martyr, and also for burial mausoleums of prominent Christians. A passage from Revelation provided the basis for this practice: "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." Centralized buildings also came to be used for baptisteries, where believers symbolically died to their old life and rose renewed, reborn from the water; an octagon was the form used for the baptistery of the Lateran Basilica in Rome, the first baptistery in the city, built circa 315. Constantine put the imperial treasury at the disposal of church officials in building numerous churches, particularly at the sites held most sacred by the Christians. In building major churches in Rome as well as in Palestine, he and his bishops gave direction to the later development of church architecture at both ends of the empire during the next thousand years. In Italy, basilican axial churches were favored, while in the East, centralized plans were favored. Almost immediately after officially recognizing Christianity, in 313, Constantine donated the imperial palace he had inherited, the former palatial residence of the Laterani family in Rome, for the residence of the bishop of Rome. Soon thereafter, construction on the cathedral began next to the palace. The new building would be dedicated to Saint John, or San Giovanni in Laterano. The term basilica refers first to a public gathering place and only second to a particular form of public building. Cathedral, however, means specifically a church containing the official chair of the bishop, the cathedra, from which official pronouncements are made "from the chair," ex cathedra; hence, a basilica may be a cathedral but that is not always the case. The Lateran cathedral, as the principal parish church of Rome, was large, measuring about 245 feet (75 m) in length and 180 feet (55 m) in width. It could hold several thousand worshippers. Unfortunately, it was extensively rebuilt in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and little of the Constantinian building remains. The other major Constantinian church in Rome was the Basilica of Saint Peter, built outside the walls of the city on the Vatican Hill, in an area that had formerly been a cemetery, next to the remains of the Circus of Nero. It was in this circus, according to tradition, that Peter had been crucified and then hastily buried nearby. The place of his interment was soon venerated, and it was over this martyrion that the Constantinian church was built, begun about 319–322 and finished about 329 (the forecourt atrium probably not until 390). It was an immense basilica, rivaling the Basilica Ulpia in size [13.3, 13.41].

The principal portion, the nave of the basilica, was 301 feet (92 m) long; along the sides ran two aisles, making the total width 216 feet (65.9 m). The nave rose in a clerestory pierced with many tall windows to a ceiling height of 104.5 feet (31.8 m); thus, the ceiling was almost exactly half as high as the building was wide. Attached to the nave at the west end was a cross arm, on transept, 297 feet (90.7 m) long and 69 feet (21 m) wide, giving the plan of the basilica the form of a T. (The resemblance of such a basilican form to that of a cross became deeply symbolic for these early Christians.) From the center of the transept extended a semicircular apse capped by a half dome; the apse was centered directly over the tomb of Peter and thus served as a martyrium. Unlike the Lateran basilica, Saint Peter's was a pilgrimage church, and although not used for services every day, it needed to be extremely large to accommodate crowds on special festival days. Saint Peter's and other early churches were clearly derived from the great imperial basilicas, but additional modifications were necessitated by the special needs of Christian worship. The secular basilicas for hearing litigation had been entered from the middle of the long sides. In the new church basilicas, entry was from one end, where a vestibule, or narthex, was created, with the altar placed at the far end in the semicircular apse. Outside, preceding the narthex, a large atrium forecourt ringed with colonnades was added where the unbaptized with drew during the Mass of the Faithful. At Saint Peter's, entrance to the atrium was through an imposing propylon or gate. Including the narthex and atrium, the total length of Saint Peter's was 669 feet (203.9 m) from transept to propylon. Subsequent churches in Italy and other parts of the West tended to follow the pattern provided by the Constantinian basilicas. An example is Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill, Rome, built 422–432 [13.5]. Another well-preserved example is San Apollinare, in Classe, the harbor town of Ravenna; this church was built around 532–549 and was paid for largely by the financier Julianus Argentarius (the freestanding campanile, or bell tower, is of a later date) [13.6, 13.7, 13.8, Plate 7]. The church has seen some changes over time; the floor of the apse was raised to allow for a crypt below, and some of the marble veneer of the interior has been removed. Nevertheless, the Corinthian arcade of veined Hymettos marble from Greece and the