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The Barbarian Settlements (Fifth to Seventh Centuries)

I

THE MEDIEVAL west was born on the ruins of the Roman world. This was both a help and a hindrance to it; Rome both fed it and paralysed it. And Rome's first bequest was the dramatic choice symbolized by the legend of its origin, in which the enclosed Rome of the *pomerium* and of the *templum* triumphed over the Rome without limits or walls which the unlucky Remus had planned in vain.

Even in its successes, the history of Rome, destined to be enclosed by Romulus, was merely the history of a compound on a grand scale. The Eternal City gathered a territory around itself which it widened by conquests until an optimal perimeter for defence was reached. In the first century, it tried to close off its territory behind the *limes*, the western world's equivalent of the Great Wall of China. Within this boundary Rome exploited its empire, without creating anything. No technical innovation had occurred since the Hellenistic age. Rome's economy was fed by pillage; successful wars provided slave manpower and precious metals drawn from the hoarded treasures of the east. Rome excelled in conservative skills such as warfare, which was always defensive in spite of appearing to be a series of conquests; law, which was founded on a framework of precedents and fended off innovation; a sense of the state which assured the stability of institutions; and architecture, an outstanding example of an art meant to endure.

This masterpiece of ultraconservatism, Roman civilization, was attacked in the second half of the second century by the forces of destruction and renewal. The great crisis of the third century undermined the unity of the Roman world. The heart of the empire, Rome and Italy, seized up, no longer pumping blood to the limbs which were trying to lead their own existence. The provinces freed themselves, and then turned into conquerors. Spaniards, Gauls, and

Orientals invaded the Senate. The emperors Trajan and Hadrian were Spanish by origin, Antoninus Pius Gaulish. In the Severan dynasty the emperors were African, the empresses Syrian. Caracalla's edict of 212 granted the right of Roman citizenship to all the inhabitants of the empire. This ascent of the provinces shows the rise of centrifugal forces as much as the success of Romanization. The medieval west would inherit this struggle: was it to be unity or diversity, Christendom or nation states?

A more serious imbalance was caused by the west losing its substance to the profit of the east. Gold disappeared to the east, to pay for luxury imports produced there, or for which it acted as an entrepôt; Jewish and Syrian merchants monopolized long-distance trade. Western cities bled away while oriental cities prospered. Constantine's foundation (324–30) of the new Rome, Constantinople, was a physical manifestation of this eastward slide of the Roman world. This east–west division was also to be a feature of the medieval world: attempts at union between the two would be unable to resist what from now on was a diverging evolution. The schism was rooted in the realities of the fourth century. Constantinople would enable Rome's continued existence and, while appearing to be prosperous and prestigious, would allow Rome's death agony to drag on within its walls until 1453. The pauperized, barbarized west had once more to climb step by step in a rise which, at the end of the middle ages, would open to it the routes of the entire world.

Even more serious was the fact that the Roman citadel from which the legions departed to capture prisoners and booty was itself besieged and soon captured. The last great victorious war occurred under Trajan, and, after 107, the gold of the Dacians was the last great nourishment for Roman prosperity. The drying-up of supplies from outside was accompanied by internal stagnation, above all the population crisis which made the shortage of slave labour acute. In the second century Marcus Aurelius initiated a barbarian offensive on the Danube, where he died in 180. The third century saw a general assault on the *limes*, which was staved off less by the military successes of the Illyrian emperors at the end of the century and their successors than by the lull produced by welcoming some barbarians as federates or allies into the army or into the frontier lands inside the empire. These were the earliest occurrences of a fusion which would characterize the middle ages.

The emperors thought that they could avert their fate by abandoning the tutelary deities, who had failed, for the new God of the Christians. The renewal under Constantine seemed to justify their hopes: under the aegis of Christ prosperity and peace appeared to return. It was only a short respite. Moreover, Christianity was a false ally for Rome. To the Church, the Roman structures were only a framework on which it could model itself, a foundation on which it could support itself, an instrument for strengthening itself. As a religion

with a universal vocation, Christianity was hesitant to shut itself up in the limits of a particular civilization. Of course it was to be the principal agency by which Roman civilization was to be transmitted to the medieval west. Of course it was to inherit from Rome and from its historical origins a tendency to turn in on itself. But against this closed religion the western middle ages were also to know an open religion, and the dialogue between these two faces of Christianity was to dominate this whole period. The medieval west took ten centuries to decide whether it was to be a closed or an open economy, a rural or an urban world, a single citadel or many mansions.

II

Although we can trace the beginnings of the agitation from which the medieval west was to be born to the Roman crisis of the third century, it is right to consider the barbarian invasions of the fifth century as the event which precipitated the changes, gave them a catastrophic turn of speed, and profoundly modified their form. Germanic invasions were not a novelty for the Roman world in the fifth century. Without going back as far as the Cimbrians and the Teutons, who had been beaten by Marius at the start of the second century BC, we should bear in mind that the Germanic menace had been a permanent burden on the empire since the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-80). The barbarian invasions had been one of the essential elements of the third century crisis. The Gaulish and Illyrian emperors at the end of the third century averted the danger for a time. However - to restrict ourselves to the western part of the empire - the great raid of the Alamans, the Franks, and other Germanic peoples, who ravaged Gaul, Spain, and northern Italy in 276, foreshadowed the great onslaught of the fifth century. It left badly healed scars such as a devastated countryside and ruined towns; it precipitated economic change (agriculture declined and towns shrank); and it encouraged a fall in population and changes in society. Peasants had to put themselves under the increasingly heavy protection of great lords who also became the leaders of military followings. The position of the *colonus* or small tenant farmer grew closer to that of the slave. Sometimes peasant misery was transformed into revolts, such as those of the African Circumcelliones and the Gaulish and Spanish Bagaudae whose revolt was endemic in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Similarly in the east a barbarian people appeared who were to forge ahead and to play a crucial role in the west: the Goths. In 269 they were halted by the emperor Claudius II at Niš. However, they occupied Dacia and won a dramatic victory at Adrianople over the emperor Gratian on 9 August 378.

This was not the decisive event depicted with horror by so many 'romanophile' historians - 'We could stop here,' wrote Victor Duruy, 'for nothing remained of Rome: beliefs, institutions, Senate, military organization, arts, literature, all had disappeared' - but it was nonetheless the thunderclap before the storm that would submerge the medieval west. We are better informed about the Goths than about most other invaders through Jordanes' *History of the Goths*, which is tendentious, it is true, because he himself was of barbarian origin, and late; it was written in the middle of the sixth century. However, it makes use of serious written and oral documentation, in particular Cassiodorus' lost *History of the Goths*. Historians and archaeologists have broadly confirmed what Jordanes tells us about the *Wanderungen* of the Goths, from Scandinavia to the sea of Azov, by way of Mecklenburg, Pomerania and the Pripet marshes. In about 230 they founded a state in southern Russia.

> Now from this island of Scandza, as from a hive of races or a womb of nations, the Goths are said to have come forth long ago under their king, Berig by name. . . . Soon they moved from here to the abodes of the Ulmerugi, who then dwelt on the shores of Ocean. . . . But when the number of the people increased greatly and Filimer, son of Gadaric, reigned as king - about the fifth since Berig - he decided that the army of the Goths with their families should move away from that region. In search of suitable homes and pleasant places they came to the land of Scythia, called Oium in their tongue. Here they were delighted with the great richness of the country, and it is said that when half the army had been brought over, the bridge whereby they had crossed the river fell in utter ruin, nor could any thereafter pass to or fro. For the place is said to be surrounded by quaking bogs and an encircling abyss. (Mierow, 1915, p. 57)

The causes of the invasions are of little importance for us. The growth of population and the attraction of more fertile territories, which Jordanes mentions as causes, probably only came into play after an initial impulse which might well have been a change in climate, a cold spell which, from Siberia to Scandinavia, reduced the cultivable land and pasture of the barbarian peoples. This would have set them in motion, with one tribe pushing the next, towards the south and west as far as the western extremities such as Britain (most of which was later to become England), Gaul (which was to be France), Spain (whose southernmost portion was to take the name of the Vandals, Andalusia), and Italy (which was to preserve the name of its late-arriving invaders only in the north, in Lombardy).

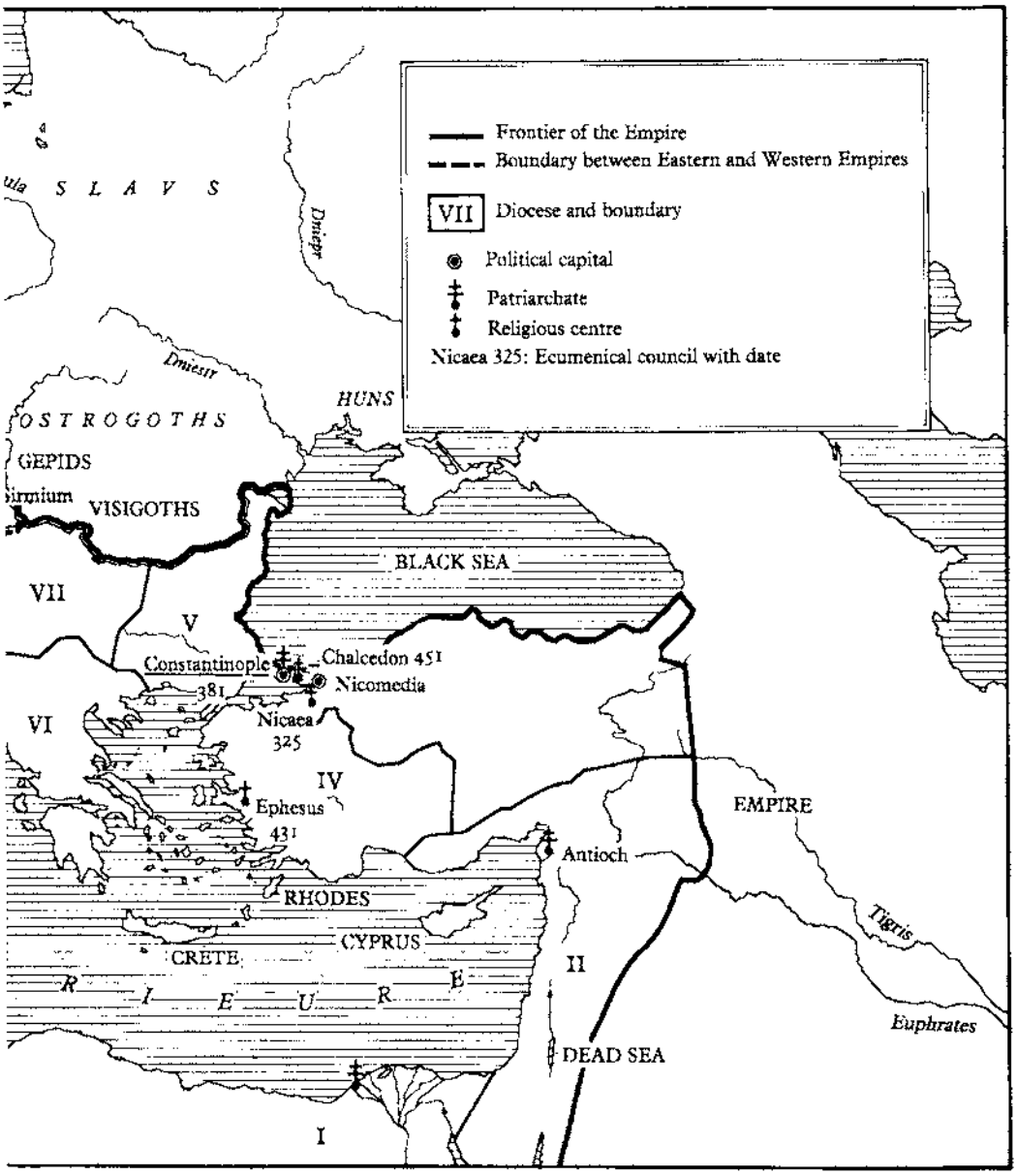
Certain aspects of the invasions are of greater importance. First, the invaders were almost always fleeing. They were fugitives driven on by peoples stronger or more cruel than they. Their cruelty was frequently of a desperate nature, especially when the Romans refused them the asylum which they often asked for peacefully. St Ambrose, at the end of the fourth century, saw clearly that

these invasions were a set of chain reactions. 'The Huns threw themselves on the Alans, the Alans on the Goths, the Goths on the Taifali and the Sarmatians, and the Goths, driven out of their homeland, have pushed us back in Illyricum. And there is no end!' As for Jordanes, he emphasizes that if the Goths took up arms against the Romans in 378 it was because they had been quartered on a tiny piece of territory without resources, where the Romans sold them the flesh of dogs and of unclean animals at an exorbitant price, making them exchange their sons as slaves for a bit of food. It was famine that armed them against the Romans. The Romans were, traditionally, ambivalent towards the barbarians. Depending on the race involved and the circumstances, they were soon disposed to welcome the people who pressed at their gate, and they respected their laws, their customs and their originality by giving them the status of federates. Thus they disarmed the barbarians' aggressiveness and turned them into soldiers and peasants for their own profit to ease the manpower crisis in the army and the countryside. The emperors who practised such policies were not highly regarded by the traditionalists, for whom the barbarians were closer to beasts than to men: this was the second, and more common Roman attitude to barbarians. The Greek historian Zosimus said 'Constantine opened the door to the barbarians . . . he was the cause of the ruin of the empire'. Ammianus Marcellinus denounced the blindness of Valens, who, in 376, organized the crossing of the Danube by the Goths. 'In this expectation various officials were sent with vehicles to transport the savage horde, and diligent care was taken that no future destroyer of the Roman state should be left behind, even if he were smitten with a fatal disease. . . . With such stormy eagerness on the part of insistent men was the ruin of the Roman world brought in' (Ammianus Marcellinus, 1952, iii, p. 405). Similarly Theodosius, a great friend of the Goths, *amator generis Gothorum* according to Jordanes, came under attack.

Among these barbarians, some acquired a special renown for hideousness and cruelty. Here is Ammianus Marcellinus' famous description of the Huns:

> The people of the Huns . . . exceed every degree of savagery. Since there the cheeks of the children are deeply furrowed with the steel from their very birth, in order that the growth of hair, when it appears at the proper time, may be checked by the wrinkled scars, they grow old without beards and without any beauty, like eunuchs. They all have compact, strong limbs and thick necks, and are so monstrously ugly and misshapen, that one might take them for two-legged beasts or for the stumps, rough-hewn into images, that are used in putting sides to bridges . . . they have no need of fire nor of savoury food, but eat the roots of wild plants and the half-raw flesh of any kind of animal whatever, which they put between their thighs and the backs of their horses, and thus warm it a little. They are never protected by any buildings, but they avoid these like the tombs, which are set apart from everyday use. . . . They dress in linen

Map 7 The Roman world at the end of the fourth century


Frontier of the Empire
Boundary between Eastern and Western Empires
VII Diocese and boundary
Political capital
Patriarchate
Religious centre
Nicaea 325: Ecumenical council with date
S L A V S
Dniepr
Dniestr
HUNS
OSTROGOTHS
GEPIDS
VISIGOTHS
BLACK SEA
VII
V
VI
IV
II
I
Constantinople
381
Chalcedon 451
Nicomedia
Nicaea
325
Ephesus
431
Antioch
RHODES
CYPRUS
CRETE
EMPIRE
Tigris
Euphrates
DEAD SEA

cloth or in the skins of field-mice sewn together, and they wear the same clothing indoors and out. But when they have once put their necks into a faded tunic, it is not taken off or changed until by long wear and tear it has been reduced to rags and fallen from them bit by bit. . . . They are almost glued to their horses. . . . From their horses by night or day every one of that nation . . . eats and drinks, and bowed over the narrow neck of the animal relaxes into a sleep so deep as to be accompanied by many dreams. (Rolfe, 1952, iii, pp. 382-3)

And in the sixth century the Lombards were to succeed, after so many atrocities, in distinguishing themselves by their ferocity: 'savages of a worse ferocity than is normally the case with Germanic ferocity'.

Of course the authors of these descriptions were mainly pagans who, as heirs of the Greco-Roman civilization, detested the barbarian who was annihilating this civilization from both without and within, by destroying it or by cheapening it. Yet many Christians for whom the Roman empire was the lucky cradle of Christianity felt the same repulsion for the invaders. St Ambrose saw in the barbarians enemies deprived of humanity, and exhorted the Christians to armed defence of 'the native land against the barbarian invasion'. Bishop Synesius of Cyrene referred to all the invaders as Scythians - a symbol of barbarism - and applied to them Homer's advice in the *Iliad* to 'drive out these cursed dogs which Fate brought'. However, other sources convey a different tone. St Augustine, while grieving over the woes of the Romans, refused to see the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 as anything other than a piece of random ill-fortune such as many others experienced in Roman history. He stressed the fact that, unlike most conquering Roman generals, who made themselves famous for sacking the towns they had conquered and exterminating their inhabitants, Alaric had agreed to treat the Christian churches as refuges and had respected them.

Everything in the way of devastation, massacre, pillage, arson and ill treatment which was committed in this disaster was done because these are customs of war. But what happened in a new way is that this barbarian savagery, by an amazing change in the face of things, has shown itself mild to the extent of choosing and designating the biggest basilicas to fill them with people. Within them no one was to be touched; no one was to be seized from them, and to them many people were led by compassionate enemies with a view to their liberation. No one was to be led away into captivity from these places, not even by cruel enemies: this must be attributed to the name of Christ and to Christian times. . . .

Yet the most extraordinary source came from a simple monk who was not motivated as were the aristocratic bishops to preserve the Roman social order. In about 440, Salvian, who described himself as 'priest of Marseilles', and who

was a monk on the island of Lérins, wrote a treatise called *Concerning the Government of God*, which was an apology for Providence and an attempt to explain the great invasions. The cause of the catastrophe was interior. It was the sins of the Romans - Christians included - which had destroyed the Empire. Their vices had delivered it up to the barbarians. 'Against themselves the Romans were far worse enemies than their enemies outside, for although the barbarians had already broken them, they were being destroyed even more by themselves'. In any case, what could the barbarians be reproached for? They knew nothing of religion; if they sinned it was unconsciously. Their morals and culture were different. Why condemn what was different?

The Saxon race is cruel, the Franks are perfidious, the Gepids inhuman, the Huns unchaste. But are their vices as culpable as our own? Is the unchastity of the Huns as criminal as our own? Is the perfidy of the Franks as blameworthy as our own? Is a drunken Alaman as reprehensible as a drunken Christian? Is a rapacious Alan as much to be condemned as a rapacious Christian? Is deceit in a Hun or a Gepid surprising, since he is not aware that deceit is a fault? Is perjury in a Frank something unheard of, since he thinks that perjury is an ordinary way of talking, and not a crime?

Above all - aside from his personal choice which can be disputed - Salvian gives us the underlying reasons for the success of the barbarians. Of course there was military superiority. The superiority of the barbarian cavalry emphasized the full force of the superiority of their weaponry. The weapon of the invasions was the long, slicing, pointed sword, a slashing weapon whose terrible effectiveness was the origin of the literary exaggerations of the middle ages: helmets cut open, heads and bodies split in two down to, and sometimes including, the horse. Ammianus Marcellinus noted with horror a deed of arms of this type, which was unknown among the Romans. Yet there were barbarians among the Roman armies, and, once the surprise of the first shocks had worn off, military superiority was quickly shared by the other side.

The truth was that the barbarians benefited from the active or passive complicity of the mass of the Roman population. The social structure of the Roman empire, in which the lower levels were increasingly being crushed by a minority of the rich and the powerful, explained the success of the barbarian invasions. Let us listen to Salvian:

The poor are despoiled, the widows groan, the orphans are trodden underfoot, to such an extent that many of them, including people of good birth who have received a superior education, take refuge among the enemies. So as not to perish under public persecution, they go and seek Roman humanity among the barbarians, because they can no longer support barbarian inhumanity among the Romans. They are different from the people among whom they take refuge; they share none of their manners or their speech, and

if I might dare say so, nothing, furthermore, of the foetid odour of the barbarians' bodies and clothes. Yet they prefer to adapt themselves to this dissimilarity of customs rather than to put up with injustice and cruelty among the Romans. So they emigrate among the Goths or the Bagaudae, or among the other barbarians who are powerful everywhere, and they have absolutely no cause to repent of this exile. For they prefer to live freely under an appearance of slavery to being slaves under an appearance of liberty. The title of Roman citizen, once not only greatly esteemed, but bought at a high price, is nowadays repudiated and avoided, and is not only regarded as being cheap, but also as being abominable. . . . Hence it comes about that even those who do not flee to the barbarians are, even so, forced to become barbarians, as has happened to most Spaniards and to a large proportion of the Gauls, and to all those who, over the whole extent of the Roman world, are constrained to be no longer Romans by Roman iniquity. Let us now speak of the Bagaudae who, despoiled by evil and cruel judges, beaten, and killed, after having lost the right to Roman liberty, have also lost the honour of the Roman name. And we call them rebels and lost men, when it is we who have forced them to become criminals.

Everything is said in that passage: the connivance between the barbarians and the rebels, the Goths and the Bagaudae, and the change in the condition of the Roman masses, which was barbarizing them before the barbarians had arrived. André Piganiol, who claimed that 'Roman civilization did not die a natural death [but that] it was assassinated', uttered three untruths, for Roman civilization in fact killed itself, there was nothing natural about this suicide, and yet Roman civilization did not die of it, for civilizations are not mortal, and Roman civilization survived, beyond the barbarians, throughout the middle ages and beyond.

To tell the truth, the settlement of many a barbarian on Roman soil was carried out with general approval. The panegyrist of Constantius Chlorus declared at the start of the fourth century:

The Chamavian tills for us. He who has ruined us so long by his pillaging is now busy enriching us; behold him, clad as a peasant, wearing himself out by working; he visits our markets and brings his beasts there to sell them. Great tracts of uncultivated land in the territories of Amiens, Beauvais, Troyes and Langres are once more growing green, thanks to the barbarians.

We hear similar tones from another Gaul, the rhetor Pacatus, who came to Rome in 389 to declaim the panegyric for Theodosius. He congratulated the emperor on having made the Goths who had been enemies of Rome into peasants and soldiers in its service. In the midst of the ordeals, farseeing minds perceived the solution of the future, the fusion of barbarians and Romans. At the end of the fourth century the rhetor Themistius predicted, 'For the

moment, the wounds which the Goths have inflicted on us are still fresh, but soon we shall find in them companions at feasts and in war, taking part in public functions'. These predictions were too optimistic, for although in the long run reality was to resemble Themistius' somewhat idyllic picture, it was with this important difference, that the conquering barbarians admitted the conquered Romans to their sides.

Even so, from the very beginning there were certain circumstances which favoured acculturation between the two groups. The barbarians who settled in the empire in the fifth century were not young but savage peoples, barely departed from their forests or their steppes, as they have been depicted by their contemporary detractors or by their modern admirers. Although they were not the relics of a weakened race, as Fustel de Coulanges exaggeratedly claimed, 'torn apart by its long interior struggles, enervated by a series of social revolutions, and which had lost its institutions', they had evolved considerably in the interval since those often century-old developments which had finally cast them upon the Roman world. They had seen and learned much, and retained what they had learned quite well. Their paths had led them into contact with cultures and civilizations from which they had borrowed customs, arts, and skills. Directly or indirectly, most of them had experienced the influence of Asiatic cultures, of the Persian world and of the Greco-Roman world itself, especially within its eastern half which, in the process of becoming Byzantine, remained the richest and the most brilliant. They brought with them refined skills in metal-working such as damascening and goldsmithing, leather-working, and the wonderful art of the steppes with its stylized animal motifs. The barbarians had often been captivated by the culture of neighbouring empires, and they had conceived an admiration for their knowledge and luxury which was doubtless clumsy and superficial but not lacking in respect.

The Huns of Attila were no longer exactly the same as the savages described by Ammianus Marcellinus. Although the picture of Attila's court being open to philosophers is a legend, it is striking that in 448 a celebrated Gaulish physician, Eudoxius, compromised by his relations with the Bagaudae, took refuge with the Huns. In the same year Priscus, a Roman ambassador from Constantinople to Attila, met a Roman from Moesia, a prisoner who had stayed with his new masters and who was married to a barbarian woman. He boasted to Priscus of the social organization of the Huns compared with that of the Roman world. Jordanes, who was admittedly biased, writing in the sixth century said of the Goths,

> In their second home, that is, in . . . Dacia, Thrace and Moesia, Zalmoxes reigned, whom many writers of annals mention as a man of remarkable learning in philosophy. Yet even before this they had a learned man Zeuta, and after him Dicineus. . . . Nor

did they lack teachers of wisdom. Wherefore the Goths have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were nearly like the Greeks, as Dio relates, who wrote their history and annals with a Greek pen. (Mierow, 1915, p. 61)

The face of the barbarian invaders had been transformed by another crucial fact. Although some of them had remained pagan, another part of them, not the least, had become Christian. But, by a curious chance, which was to have serious consequences, these converted barbarians – the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Burgundians, Vandals, and later the Lombards – had been converted to Arianism, which had become a heresy after the Council of Nicaea. They had in fact been converted by followers of the 'apostle of the Goths', Ulfilas, the grandson of Christian Cappadocians who had been taken prisoner by the Goths in 264. The 'Gothicized' child had been sent in his youth to Constantinople where he had been won over to Arianism. Returning as a missionary bishop to the Goths, he translated the Bible into Gothic for their edification and turned them into heretics. Thus what should have been a religious bond was, on the contrary, a subject of discord and sparked off bitter conflicts between Arian barbarians and Catholic Romans.

There remained the attraction exercised by Roman civilization upon the barbarians. Not only did the barbarian chiefs appeal to the Romans as counsellors, but they often tried to ape Roman customs and to decorate themselves with Roman titles – Consul, Patrician, and so on. They appeared not as enemies but as admirers of Roman institutions. At the most one could take them for usurpers. They were merely the last generation of those foreigners, Spaniards, Gauls, Africans, Illyrians, and Orientals, who had little by little reached the highest offices and the imperial dignity itself. Furthermore no barbarian ruler dared to make himself an emperor. When Odoacer deposed the western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476, he sent back the imperial insignia to the emperor Zeno in Constantinople, signifying that one single emperor was enough. 'We admire the titles granted by emperors more than our own,' wrote a barbarian king to an emperor. The most powerful of them, Theodoric, took the Roman name of Flavius and wrote to the emperor, '*ego qui sum servus vester et filius* – I who am your slave and your son' – and declared to him that his only ambition was to make his kingdom 'an imitation of your own, a copy of your unrivalled empire'. It was not until 800 and the time of Charlemagne that a barbarian chief dared to make himself emperor. Thus each camp seemed to have yielded ground to the other. The decadent Romans, inwardly barbarized, descended to the level of the barbarians who had outwardly been licked into shape and polished.

It is still far from reality to see the barbarian invasions as a period of peaceful settlement, an outbreak of 'tourist trips' as they have been jokingly called.

These were above all times of confusion, a confusion which arose chiefly out of the very mixture of the invaders. On the course of their journey the tribes and the peoples had fought each other; some had been subjected to others, and they had been mixed together. Some formed ephemeral confederations, such as the Huns whose army swallowed up the remains of conquered Ostrogoths, Alans, and Sarmatians. Rome tried to play off one lot against another, and hurriedly attempted to Romanize the first arrivals and turn them into a tool for use against the following groups which had remained more barbarian. The Vandal Stilicho, guardian of the Emperor Honorius, used an army of Goths, Alans and Caucasians against the usurper Eugenius and his Frankish ally Arbogast.

A unique source, the *Life of St Severinus*, as told by his disciple Eugippius, is full of information about minor but significant events on a key frontier, that of the middle Danube, from Passau to Klosterneuburg, in the second half of the fifth century. Severinus, a Latin who had come from the East, attempted to organize resistance among the remnants of the Roman populations of Ripuarian Noricum, with the help of the Germanic tribe of the Rugii and their kings, against the pressure of other invaders, Alamans, Goths, Heruli and Thuringians, who were ready to force a passage across the river. The hermit-monk went from one fortified place where the Romano-Rugian population had taken refuge to another, and battled against heresy, paganism, and famine. He met the barbarian raids with spiritual weapons, material ones being in short supply. He put the inhabitants on their guard against imprudent behaviour. To leave the camps to go to pick fruit or to take in the harvest was to expose onself to being killed or taken prisoner by the enemy. By his words, by miracles, by the power of saints' relics, he intimidated the barbarians or won them round. He had no illusions. When optimistic or thoughtless men asked him to obtain from the Rugian king the right for them to engage in trade he replied 'What is the use of thinking of merchandise in places where no merchant will be able to go any longer?' Eugippius gives a wonderful description of the confused events in stating that the Danube frontier was permanently involved in trouble and in ambiguous situations: '*utraque Pannonia ceteraque confinia Danuvii rebus turbabantur ambiguis*'. All organization, whether military, administrative or economic, was disintegrating. Famine had settled in. Attitudes and feelings were becoming increasingly rough and superstitious. Gradually the inevitable happened. The fortresses fell one by one into the hands of the barbarians. Finally, after the death of the man of God, who had become the all-purpose leader of these demoralized groups, Odoacer decided to deport those who remained to Italy. The deportees brought Severinus's body with them and ended up installing this relic in a monastery near Naples. Such was and such was to be for many

decades the common outcome of the *res ambiguae* or ambiguous events of the invasions.

The confusion was heightened by terror. Even if we allow for exaggerations, the tales of massacres and of devastations which fill the sources of the fifth century leave no doubt about the atrocities and destruction which accompanied the 'outings' of the barbarian peoples. Here is a description by Orens, bishop of Auch of Gaul after the great invasion of 417:

> See with what suddeness death weighed on the entire world, how the violence of war has struck the people. Not the rough soil of thick woods or of high mountains, nor the current of rivers with swift whirlpools, nor the shelter formed by the sites of citadels or the ramparts of towns, nor the barrier formed by the sea, nor the sad solitudes of the desert, nor the gorges, nor even the caverns which are overhung by dark crags have been able to escape from the barbarians. Many perished the victims of lies, many of perjury, many were denounced by their fellow-citizens. Ambushes did much evil and so too did popular violence. Whoever was not subdued by force was subdued by famine. The mother succumbed wretchedly with her children and her husband, and the master together with his serfs fell into slavery. Some provided food for dogs; many were killed by their burning houses, which then provided them with a pyre. In the towns, the estates, the countryside, at the crossroads, in all the districts, here and there along all the roads were death, suffering, destruction, arson and mourning. All Gaul was reduced to smoke on a single pyre.

And in Spain Bishop Hydatius wrote:

> 'The barbarians unleashed themselves throughout all Spain; the scourge of plague raged equally. The tyrannical exactors pillaged the wealth and resources hidden in the towns and the soldiery drained them away. There was a famine so atrocious that, under the empire of hunger, men devoured human flesh. Mothers killed their infants, cooked them and fed on their bodies. Animals became accustomed to eating the bodies of those who had died of hunger, by the sword or of sickness, and even killed men in full vigour: not content with feeding off the flesh of corpses, they attacked the human race. Thus the four scourges of the sword, of famine, of plague and of animals raged thoughout the entire world, and the predictions of the Lord through his prophets were realized.

Such is the grisly overture with which the history of the medieval west begins. Through ten centuries it was to continue to set the tone; the sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts were to be the evil protagonists of this history. Of course, it was not the barbarians alone who had brought them. The ancient world had known them and they were ready to return in force at the moment when the barbarians unleashed them. But the barbarians gave unheard-of force to this unleashing of violence. From now on the broadsword, the long sword

of the great invasions, later to be that used by the knights, stretched a murderous shadow over the west. Before the work of construction could slowly begin again, the west was gripped for a long period by a frenzy of destruction. The men of the medieval west were indeed the offspring of the barbarians; they resembled the Alans described by Ammianus Marcellinus:

> Just as quiet and peaceful men find pleasure in rest, so the Halani [Alans] delight in danger and warfare. There the man is judged happy who has sacrificed his life in battle, whilst those who grow old and depart from the world by a natural death they assail with bitter reproaches, as degenerate and cowardly; and there is nothing in which they take more pride than in killing any man whatever: as glorious spoils of the slain they tear off their heads, then strip off their skins and hang them upon their warhorses as trappings. No temple or sacred place is to be seen in their country, not even a hut thatched with straw can be discerned anywhere, but after the manner of barbarians a naked sword is fixed in the ground and they reverently worship it as their god of war, the presiding deity of those lands over which they range. (Ammianus Marcellinus, 1952, iii, 394–5)

This passion for destruction was expressed by the chronicler Fredegar in the seventh century when he put these words in the mouth of the mother of a barbarian king exhorting her son, 'If you wish to perform an exploit and to make a name for yourself, destroy all that other people have built up and kill the entire people whom you have conquered; for you cannot put up a building better than those constructed by your predecessors and there is no finer exploit with which you can make your name.'

III

Following by turns a rhythm of slow infiltrations and fairly peaceful advances and one of sudden offensives accompanied by battles and massacres, the barbarian invasions profoundly modified the political map of the west (which was nominally under the authority of the Byzantine emperor) between the start of the fifth and the end of the eighth century. From 407 to 429 Italy, Gaul, and Spain were ravaged by a series of raids. The most spectacular episode was the siege, capture and sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths in 410. The fall of the Eternal City stupefied many. 'My voice is choked and sobs interrupt me while I dictate these words,' groaned St Jerome in Palestine. 'The city which conquered the universe is itself conquered.' The pagans accused the Christians of being the cause of the disaster for having driven the tutelary deities out of Rome. St Augustine made a pretext of the event to define the relations between earthly and divine society in *The City of God*. He took the

blame away from the Christians and reduced the event to its true proportions: a chance, though tragic deed. It was to happen again, this time without bloodshed (*sine ferro et igne*) in 455 under Genseric and the Vandals. Vandals, Alans, and Sueves ravaged the Iberian peninsula. The Vandals' settlement in the south of Spain, though shortlived, gave Andalusia its name. As early as 429 the Vandals, the only barbarians to possess a fleet, crossed over to North Africa and conquered the Roman province of Africa, that is to say Tunisia and eastern Algeria. In 412 after the death of Alaric, the Visigoths flowed back out of Italy into Gaul, and then into Spain in 414, before doubling back in 418 to settle in Aquitaine. Moreover, Roman diplomacy was operating during each of these stages. It was the emperor Honorius who turned the Visigothic king Athaulf towards Gaul, and on 1 January 414 Athaulf married a sister of the emperor, Galla Placidia, at Narbonne. Again, it was Honorius who incited the Visigoths to dispute Spain with the Vandals and the Sueves after the murder of Athaulf in 415, and then summoned them back to Aquitaine.

The second half of the fifth century saw decisive changes take place. To the North, Scandinavian barbarians, Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, started to occupy Britain between 441 and 443 after a series of raids. Some of the conquered Britons conquered the sea and came to settle in Armorica, from then on called Brittany. However, the main event was certainly the formation of Attila's Hun empire, though ephemeral, for it made everything move. Firstly, as Genghis Khan was to do eight centuries later, Attila united the Mongol tribes who had passed into the west in about 434, and then defeated and absorbed other barbarians. He maintained ambiguous relations with the Byzantine empire for a while, rubbing shoulders with its civilization while reconnoitring it as prospective prey (just as Genghis Khan was to do with China). Finally, after an attempt on the Balkans in 448, he let himself be persuaded to advance on Gaul. Here the Roman Aetius, thanks chiefly to Visigothic forces, halted him in 451 on the Catalaunian plain. The Hun empire fell to pieces and the hordes turned back eastwards after Attila's death in 453; he was to go down in history, in the phrase of an obscure ninth-century chronicler, as 'the scourge of God'.

It was a confused period of strange personalities and situations. A sister of the emperor Valentinian III, Honoria, took her steward as a lover. Angered by this, her august brother punished her by exiling her to Constantinople. Acting out of temperament and spite the princess had a ring sent to Attila, whom women found fascinating. Valentinian hastened to have his sister married before the Hun claimed his betrothed, and with her half the empire as a dowry. Attila, returning from Gaul, invaded northern Italy in 452, captured Aquileia and led away part of the population into captivity. Six years later, the

prisoners, who had been thought dead, returned, and found that their wives had remarried. The patriarch, embarrassed, consulted with Pope Leo the Great, who passed judgement as follows: those returning should have back their wives, slaves, and goods. But the women who had remarried were not to be punished, except if they refused to return to their former spouses, in which case they were to be excommunicated.

The emperor had established a new people in the empire, the Burgundians, who briefly settled at Worms, whence they tried to invade Gaul. However, they suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Aetius and his Hun mercenaries. The events of 436 in which their king Gunther was killed were to be the starting-point of the epic of the Nibelungen. In 443 the Romans allowed them to occupy Savoy. In 468, the Visigoths once more took up the conquest of Spain, which they completed in ten years. Then Clovis and Theodoric came on the scene. Clovis was the head of the Frankish tribe of the Salians, who had slipped into what is now Belgium and then into the North of Gaul during the fifth century. Clovis gathered around him most of the Frankish tribes, and subjected northern Gaul to him by triumphing over the Roman Syagrius at Soissons, which was to be his capital, in 486. He repulsed an invasion of the Alamans at the battle of Tolbiac and finally in 507 conquered Aquitaine from the Visigoths, whose king, Alaric II, was defeated and killed at Vouillé. When he died in 511, the Franks were masters of the whole of Gaul except Provence.

By now the Ostrogoths too had surged into the empire. Under the leadership of Theodoric they attacked Constantinople in 487 and were turned aside to Italy, which they conquered in 493. Installed at Ravenna, Theodoric reigned there for 30 years and, if the panegyrists do not exaggerate too much, let Italy experience a new golden age, governing it with Roman advisers such as Liberius, Cassiodorus, Symmachus and Boethius. He himself had lived from the age of eight to eighteen at the court in Constantinople as a hostage, and was the most successful and the most attractive of the Romanized barbarians. He restored the *pax romana* in Italy but intervened against Clovis only in 507, forbidding him to add Provence to Aquitaine which he had conquered from the Visigoths. He did not want Clovis to reach the Mediterranean.

At the start of the sixth century, the division of the West seemed assured between the Anglo-Saxons in a Britain cut off from all links with the continent, the Franks who held Gaul, the Burgundians confined to Savoy, the Visigoths masters of Spain, the Vandals settled in Africa, and the Ostrogoths ruling in Italy. In 476 a trivial event had passed practically unnoticed. A Roman from Pannonia, Orestes, who had been Attila's secretary, gathered some of the remains of his army after his master's death - Scyrians, Heruli, Turkilingi, Rugii - and put them at the disposal of the empire in Italy. He became master

of the militia and made use of this to depose the emperor Julius Nepos in 475 and have the latter's young son Romulus proclaimed in his place. But in 476 the Scyrian Odoacer, the son of another of Attila's favourites, rose up at the head of another group of barbarians against Orestes. He killed him, deposed the young Romulus and sent the western imperial insignia to the emperor Zeno in Constantinople. The event does not seem to have stirred contemporaries much. However, 50 years later an Illyrian in the service of the Byzantine emperor, the count Marcellinus, wrote in his chronicle, 'Odoacer, king of the Goths, obtained Rome. . . . The Roman empire of the west, which Octavius Augustus, the first of the emperors, had begun to rule in the year 709 AUC, came to an end with the little emperor Romulus.'

The fifth century saw the disappearance of the last great figures in the service of the western emperor: Aetius, 'the last of the Romans', who was killed in 454, Syagrius, who was handed over by the Visigoths to Clovis, who had him beheaded in 486, and the barbarians Stilicho, the Vandal patrician and guardian of the emperor Honorius, executed on the orders of his ward in 408, Ricimer, a Sueve, also with the title of patrician, master of the western empire until his death in 472, and finally Odoacer, who was caught in a trap by Theodoric the Ostrogoth and killed by the latter's own hand in 493.

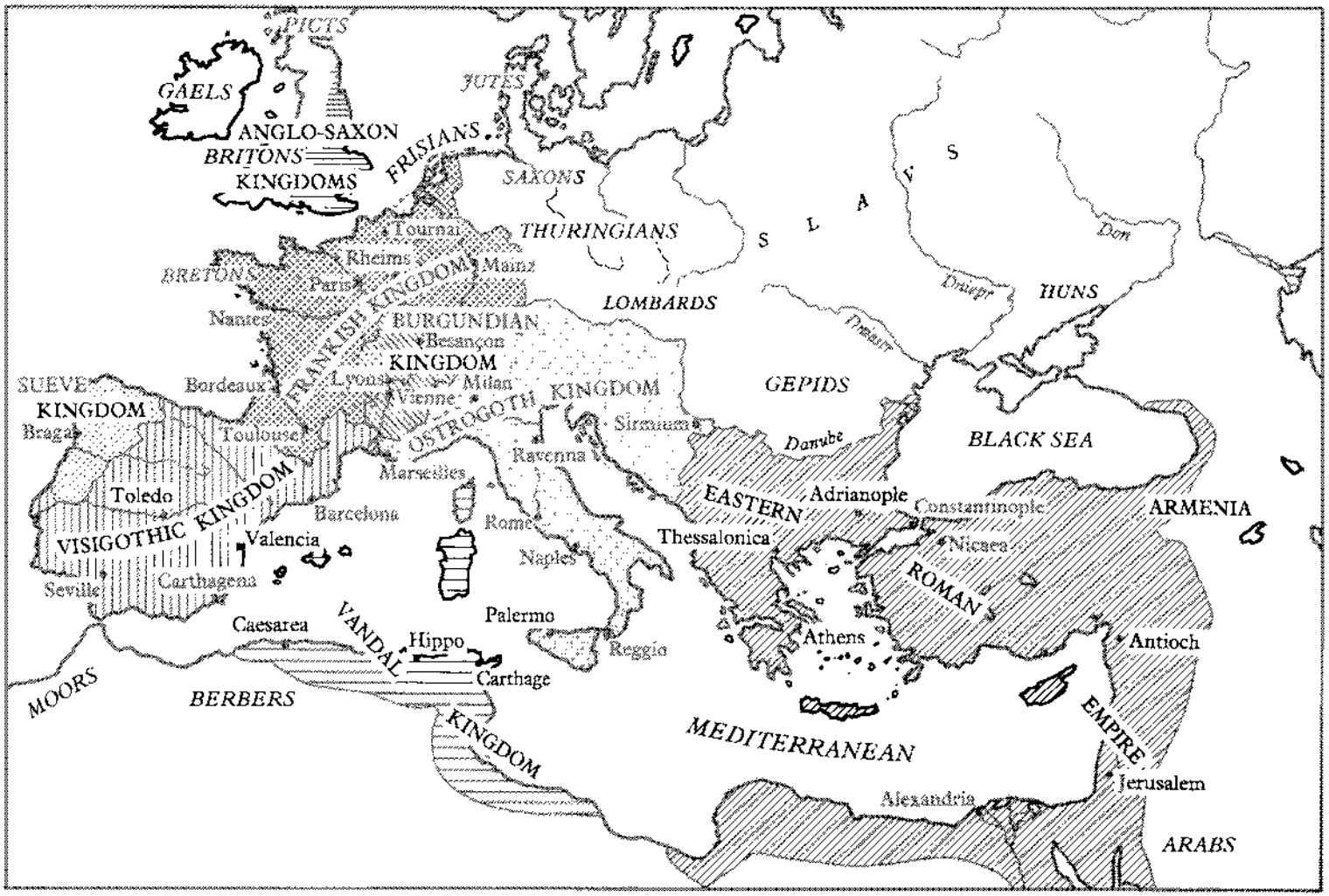
Until this point the policy of the emperors of the east had been to limit the damage: to prevent the barbarians from taking Constantinople by buying their retreat at a high price, and to divert them to the western part of the empire. They contented themselves with a vague submission from the barbarian kings whom they showered with titles such as Patrician and Consul, and they tried to keep the invaders out of the Mediterranean. The *mare nostrum* was not only the centre of the Roman world, but remained the essential artery of its trade and food supply. In 419 a law issued at Constantinople punished anyone who tried to teach the barbarians 'sea matters' with the death penalty. As we have seen, Theodoric later took up this tradition on his own account and prevented Clovis from reaching the Mediterranean by taking over Provence. However the Vandals had checked these Byzantine pretensions by building the fleet which allowed them to conquer Africa, and to raid Rome in 455.

Byzantine policy changed with the accession of Justinian in 527, a year after the death of Theodoric at Ravenna. Imperial policy abandoned passivity and went over to the offensive. Justinian wanted to reconquer, if not the entire western half of the Roman empire, at least the most important part of its Mediterranean territories. He appeared for a time to have succeeded. Byzantine generals liquidated the Vandal kingdom in Africa (533–4) and Gothic rule in Italy, with more difficulty, between 536 and 555. In 554 they seized Betica from the Spanish Visigoths. These were ephemeral successes which weakened

Byzantium a little more towards the dangers from the east and drained the strength of the west all the more, especially as from the year 542 the ravages of bubonic plague were added to those of war and famine. Most of Italy, with the exception of the Exarchate of Ravenna, Rome and its environs, and the extreme south of the peninsula, was lost between 568 and 572 to new invaders, the Lombards. These had been pushed southwards by yet another Asiatic invasion, that of the Avars. The Visigoths reconquered Betica by the end of the sixth century, and finally the Arabs conquered North Africa after 660.

The great event of the seventh century – even for the west – was the emergence of Islam and the Arab conquests. We shall observe the significance for Christendom of the formation of the Muslim world later on. Here let us examine merely the effect of Islam on the political map of the west. First of all the Arabs snatched the Maghreb from western Christendom; then they overwhelmed Spain, which they conquered with ease from the Visigoths between 711 and 719, apart from the north-east where the Christians remained independent. They briefly dominated Aquitaine, and especially Provence, until Charles Martel halted them in 732 at Poitiers. The Franks drove them back south of the Pyrenees, the Arabs making a complete withdrawal after the fall of Narbonne in 759.

The eighth century was indeed the century of the Franks. Their rise in the west was steady from Clovis' time, in spite of certain setbacks, such as their repulse by Theodoric. Clovis' master-stroke had been to convert himself and his people not to Arianism, like the other barbarian kings, but to Catholicism. Thus he could play the religious card and benefit from the support, if not of the papacy, which was still weak, at any rate of the powerful Catholic hierarchy and the no less powerful monastic foundations. In the sixth century the Franks had already conquered the kingdom of the Burgundians, between 523 and 534, and then Provence in 536. The sharing out of lands and rivalries between Clovis' descendants slowed down the rise of the Franks. In the early eighth century their future even seemed to be compromised by the decadence of the Merovingian dynasty, which has passed into legend with the image of the *rois fainéants*, and by the decadence of the Frankish clergy. By then the Franks were no longer the only orthodox Catholics of western Christian Europe. The Visigoths and the Lombards had abandoned Arianism for Catholicism and Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) had undertaken the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, which he entrusted to the monk Augustine and his companions. The first half of the eighth century saw Catholicism penetrate into Frisia and Germany thanks to Willibrord and Boniface. Yet at the same time the Franks once more grasped hold of all their opportunities. The clergy reformed themselves under the direction of Boniface and the young, enterprising dynasty of the Carolingians replaced the feeble Merovingian line.



Map 8 The barbarian kingdoms in the sixth century

The Carolingian mayors of the palace had probably really held the reins of Frankish government for decades, but Charles Martel's son, Pippin the Short, took the decisive step of giving the Frankish leadership within the Catholic church its full weight. He concluded an alliance with the pope which was favourable to both sides. He recognized the pope's temporal power over the part of Italy around Rome. Grounded on a document forged by the papal chancery between 756 and 760, the so-called Donation of Constantine, the papal state or Patrimony of St Peter was born and established the temporal power of the papacy, which was to play such a large role in the political and moral history of the medieval west. In return the pope allowed Pippin the title of king in 751 and came north to anoint him in 754, the same year in which the papal state made its appearance. Foundations had been laid which were, half a century later, to permit the Carolingian monarchy to group together the largest part of the Christian west under its rule, and thence to re-establish the western empire for its own benefit. But, during the four centuries which separated the death of Theodosius (395) from the coronation of Charlemagne (800), a new world had been born in the west, which had slowly grown out of the fusion of both the Roman and the barbarian worlds. The western middle ages had taken shape.

IV

The medieval world resulted from the meeting and the fusion of two worlds which were already evolving towards each other. Roman and barbarian structures converged while in the process of being transformed.

Since at least the third century the Roman world had been growing further away from itself. A single edifice, it embarked upon a process of continuous disintegration. In addition to the great divide which was cutting the west off from the east there was growing isolation between the different parts of the west. Trade, which had above all been an interior trade between provinces, declined. The area of diffusion of agricultural or manufactured products destined for export to the rest of the Roman world, such as Mediterranean oil, Rhenish glass, or Gaulish pottery, became restricted. Coins became scarcer and of poorer quality. Cultivated surfaces were abandoned and the number of *agri deserti* (deserted fields) increased. Thus the physiognomy of the medieval west began to be sketched out: a splintering into tiny cells, withdrawn into themselves, separated by 'deserts' – forests, moors and wastes. 'In the middle of the debris of great cities, only scattered groups of wretched peoples, witnesses to past calamities, still attest to us the names of an earlier age,' wrote Orosius at the start of the fifth century. This piece of evidence (among many others),

confirmed by aracheologists, underlines an important fact: cities were decaying, hastened by the destruction of the barbarian invasions. Admittedly it is only one aspect of the general consequences of the violence of the invaders, who destroyed, ruined, impoverished, isolated, and reduced. Admittedly the towns were a favourite target because their accumulated riches acted as a provocation and a lure. They were the most severely battered victims. But they were not relieved from their ordeal because their existing population was depleted by an evolutionary process. This disappearance of the townsfolk was only one result of the disppearance of the trade commodities which were no longer arriving to supply the urban market. The urban population was a group of consumers who fed themselves by imports. When the lack of coins left the townspeople without buying power, when the trade routes ceased to feed the urban centres, the citizens were forced to take refuge near places of production. It was the necessity of feeding themselves which above all explains the flight of the rich to the land, and the exodus of the poor on to the estates of the rich. Here too the barbarian invasions, by throwing the economic network into confusion and by dislocating the trade routes, hastened the shift of the population into the countryside without actually causing it.

The shift to the country was not only an economic and demographic phenomenon but was at the same time, and primarily, a social phenomenon, which was shaping the face of medieval society. Contemporaries, and, following them, a number of historians of the Late Empire, were particularly struck by the fiscal aspect of this development. The townspeople are supposed to have fled into the country away from the clutches of the tax-collectors, and, falling from Charybdis to Scylla, the urban poor are supposed to have passed under the control of the great lords and become rural slaves. Salvian wrote:

> That is what is most serious and most revolting. . . . When those of whom we speak have lost their houses and their lands following an act of brigandage or when they have been driven out by the tax-collectors they take refuge in estates belonging to the great and become the *coloni* of the rich. Like that all-powerful and also maleficent woman who had the reputation of changing men into beasts, all the people who have settled on the estates of the rich undergo a metamorphosis as though they had drunk from the cup of Circe, for the rich begin to consider those whom they have welcomed as strangers who did not belong to them as their own property. These genuinely free people are transformed into slaves.

What is important to us is that Salvian's explanation, in spite of the small truth it contains, betrays above all an antifiscal obfuscation. This is a way of thinking which is not exclusively the property of medieval minds and which all too often masks the real, more profound causes. The disorganization of the

exchanges increased hunger and the hunger pushed the masses into the countryside and subjected them to the servitude of the 'breadgivers', the great lords.

In this ruin of the antique trade network the first victim was the Roman road. The medieval road, which, in material terms, was more of a lane, was to be something different and was to emerge later. In the intervening period only the ways provided by nature, that is to say navigable rivers, existed between the wastes which the land routes no longer managed to cross. Hence the rerouting, along river courses, of the shrunken circulation network of the early middle ages. Simultaneously the urban map was readjusted, as Jan Dhondt has clearly shown. 'From the end of the Roman period, road circulation was giving way to water circulation, bringing with it a correlative shift in urban life. . . . The cities in decline are those which were situated at road junctions, without access to a waterway.' For example, Cassel and Bavai, which had been important land nodal points in the Roman period, went into eclipse, and Tongres dwindled slowly in the fifth century and gave way to Maastricht on the Meuse. But it must be added that not all the navigable rivers, not even all the largest ones, were promoted to the rank of communication routes. The continual invasions to the east and centre of Europe, especially the Avar invasion, the Slav incursions, and the resistance put up by the Saxons and other peoples in Germany to conversion to Christianity, disqualified the Danube, the Vistula, the Oder and the Elbe and even limited the role of the Rhine. The most important route was the one which went up the Rhône, the Saône, and down the Moselle and the Meuse, linking the Mediterranean with the English Channel and the North Sea.

The conversion of England to Christianity in the seventh century, and the diversion westwards of Scandinavian trade impeded by the Avar invasion, turned the coast between the Seine and the Rhine into a preferred place for passenger crossings (notably pilgrims going to Rome) and for the transport of goods. This explains the prosperity of the ports of Quentovic, at the mouth of the Canche, and of Duurstede, at the mouth of the Rhine, from the seventh to the ninth centuries. Marseilles and Arles, which were active in the Merovingian period, declined after 670 because the Alpine land routes experienced a renewal, which was connected with the re-establishment of peace in Northern Italy once the Lombards had settled. This also revived the Po for traffic. The Seine, the Loire, and the Garonne were also much frequented routes, serving Rouen and Paris, Orléans and Tours, Toulouse and Bordeaux, although their mouths into the sea were of less importance, since they opened on to an ocean on which men were increasingly afraid to risk themselves. On the other hand the Arab conquest turned both the Ebro and Douro into frontiers and their depopulated valleys into 'deserts'.

It should not be believed, however, that this movement, chiefly on rivers, bore a sizeable trade. There was traffic in some essential products such as salt. Salt is mentioned being carried on the Moselle between Metz and Trier by a sleeping boatman, thus displaying, according to Gregory of Tours, the miraculous help of St Martin. Salt was also exported by the monks of Noirmoutier to the continent. There were products which had become semi-luxuries, such as wine or oil. St Philibert, abbot of Jumièges at the end of the seventh century, received a cargo of oil from his friends in Bordeaux. Above all there were precious objects, fine stuffs and spices which oriental merchants, called 'Syrians' (chiefly Jews) brought to the west, or, once they had settled in the west, received from their fellow countrymen. The monetary history of this period witnesses to the scarcity and compartmentalization of exchanges. Gold coins barely circulated any longer, and when they were struck by Merovingian rulers, it was chiefly so that they could display their status. It was out of a wish to exercise the prerogative of a sovereign, rather than out of economic need. The increase in the number of mints, far from being connected with active trade, underlined how limited was the diffusion of money. It had to be somehow or other produced locally like the other objects necessary to a fragmented economic life.

The social phenomenon of the shift to the country was only the most spectacular aspect of a development which was to impress a fundamental character on medieval society, one which was to remain fixed in people's attitudes much longer than in material reality. This was a professional and social compartmentalization. The avoidance of certain professions and the mobility of rural labour had led the late Roman emperors to make certain trades hereditary and had encouraged the great landlords to attach tenant farmers to the land, the farmers being destined to replace the slaves who were becoming increasingly scarce. Men who were necessary to an economy which could no longer supply itself from external supplies, and which was becoming fixed on the spot, had to be kept on hand. One of the last emperors of the West, Majorian (457-61), bewailed the 'tricks used by all those men who do not wish to stay in the state of life in which they were born'. Medieval Christian Europe was to turn the desire to escape from one's lot into a major sin. 'Like father, like son' was to be the rule in the western middle ages, inherited from the late Empire. To remain in one place was the opposite of changing, and above all of succeeding. The ideal was a society of *manants* - a French term for villeins, derived from the Latin verb *manere*, to remain. It was a stratified society, boxed off horizontally.

The barbarian invaders managed to slip into these strata or to install themselves by force in them without great difficulty, mainly because they had ceased being nomads long before. They had often halted and only external

pressures such as climatic changes or elbowing from other races, perhaps accentuated by internal developments, had made them move once more. The invaders were, to repeat, fugitive sedentaries. They probably retained habits from their nomadic period, which was fairly recent, and an echo of these was to sound effectively throughout the middle ages. To quote Marc Bloch's apt phrase, they had substituted the 'nomadism of the fields' for the 'nomadism of men', that is to say that they practised a seminomadic agriculture, shifting temporary cultivation within a given perimeter by clearing marginal land, or rather by assarting, and by cultivating burnt clearings and by field rotation. However one interprets the famous phrase of Tacitus speaking of the Germans in the first century, '*Arva per annos mutant et superest ager*', it clearly indicates that changing cultivated areas and having a permanent landholding went together.

Probably, too, stockrearing retained a favoured place in the barbarian economy, for it constituted not only a form of property which the farmer could take away if he had to move, but also a visible sign of wealth and, occasionally, a means of exchange. It has been noted that out of 500 cases of theft provided for by the Salic Law at the start of the sixth century, 64 concern domestic animals. When, in the middle ages, land became the basis of wealth, the peasant remained attached to his cow, pig, and goat by ties which went beyond economic utility and manifested a residual way of thinking. In certain regions the cow was for a long time to remain a money of account, a unit by which wealth and exchanges could be valued.

It has even been stressed that attachment to individual rural property was more developed among the barbarians than among the Romans on the morrow of the invasions. Chapter 27 of the Salic Law on theft, *de furtis diversis*, is very detailed and extremely severe towards injuries to this property, such as letting animals wander through someone else's harvest, cutting hay in someone else's meadow, gathering grapes from his vine or ploughing his field. The attachment of the small barbarian peasant to his personal property, his allod, was without doubt all the stronger because he was determined to affirm his independence - a normal attitude on the part of a colonist installed in a conquered territory who wants to show his superiority over the indigenous masses who are subject to the great landlords. Of course, most allods - and some allods were owned by the conquered as well as by the conquerors - were gradually absorbed by the great feudal estates characteristic of the middle ages. But at the level of usufruct if not of property agricultural crimes and misdemeanours are treated as very serious in custumals, penitentials and confessors' manuals throughout the whole of the middle ages. Indeed, the peasant was never more unwilling to put up with the domination of his lord than when the latter heedlessly rode across his serf's

or his tenant's land at the head of his pack; the humiliation aggravated the material damage.

As a final point, it is clear that the barbarian groups who settled peacefully or by force on Roman territory were not, or were no longer, if they had ever been, egalitarian societies. The barbarian could try, in the face of the conquered, to avail himself of the status of a free man, which was all the dearer to a small farmer because he *was* a small farmer. In reality social categories, if not classes, had already been created among the invaders by an already advanced process of social differentiation. There were powerful and weak, rich and poor who easily transformed themselves into great and small proprietors or occupants on the conquered land. The legal distinctions of the early medieval law codes could give the illusion of a cleft between the completely free barbarians whose slaves were enslaved foreigners, and the descendants of the Romans in a hierarchy of free and unfree. Social reality was stronger. It quickly separated from each group the *potentiores* or powerful, whether of Roman or barbarian origin, from the *humiliores* or the humble.

Thus the settlement of the barbarians, reinforced by a tradition of coexistence which in some areas went back to the third century, could be fairly quickly followed by a more or less complete fusion. Except in a limited number of cases it is pointless to look for ethnic characteristics in what we can learn of the types of farming practised in the early middle ages. One should chiefly reflect that in the area of farming, which more than any other is one of a permanent state or the *longue durée*, it would be absurd to reduce the causes of diversity to a confrontation of Roman traditions and barbarian customs. Geographical considerations and different trends which had grown up in a past going back to the Neolithic age formed a heritage which was probably more decisive. What was important (and what is obvious) is that the whole of the population was borne along on the same movement: a shift to the countryside and the advance of the great estates.

Place names bear witness to this. Taking French names as an example, we should note first of all that personal names can be deceptive since the fashion quickly spread among Gallo-Romans of giving their children Germanic names out of social one-upmanship. Moreover the invaders, although they influenced vocabulary, and, to a more limited extent, syntax (for example, the word order determinant + determined as in Carlepont, from Caroli Pons, as opposed to the reverse, such as Pontoise from Pons Isarae) adopted Latin instead of imposing their own language. Or rather, they adopted low Latin, then developing and becoming vulgarized just as the economy was becoming ruralized. The significant feature of place names is the increase in names containing '*court*' and '*ville*'. These are indiscriminately preceded by Gallo-Roman or Germanic personal names and betray the advance of the big estate,

the *curtis* (chiefly in Lorraine and Artois and Picardy), or *villa* (in the same regions and also in the Ile-de-France and Beauce). In the etymology of Martinville (Martini Villa, Vosges), or of Bouzonville (Bosonis Villa, Moselle, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Loiret), it is not the Gallo-Roman Martin or the Germanic Boso who is important, but the *villa* indicating the big estates to which they both gave their names.

Naturally the intermingling ran into obstacles. For some of the barbarians the most serious of these were probably their small numbers and, until their conversion to Catholicism, their adherence to paganism or above all to Arianism. Of course, according to Marc Bloch, 'the action of one civilization upon another is not necessarily in proportion to the balance of the numbers present'. It is still true that the barbarian peoples, especially after they were divided into small groups settled on Roman territory, had a strong desire not to lose the traditions and customs to which they were attached, and that this wish was particularly reinforced by the fear of being numerically submerged by the older inhabitants. The only people for whom a likely numerical estimate is known are the Vandals under Genseric at the moment of their embarkation for Africa in 429. They numbered 80 000. Neither the Visigoths, nor the Franks, nor any other group of invaders is supposed to have exceeded 100 000. The estimate that the total number of barbarians after their settlement in the Roman west formed 5 per cent of the whole population cannot be far from the truth.

Moreover the barbarians had a tendency, at least at the start, to avoid the towns where there was more fear of being absorbed, although the 'capitals' of the barbarian kings, Braga, the capital of the first Catholic barbarian king, the Sueve Rechiarus (448–56); Toulouse, Barcelona, Merida, Toledo, the Visigothic capitals; Tournai, Soissons, Paris, the Frankish capitals; Lyons, the Burgundian capital; Ravenna, the capital of Theodoric the Ostrogoth; and Pavia and Monza, the Lombard capitals, must have had a high proportion of barbarian inhabitants. Moreover, some of the barbarian kings, notably the Franks, preferred to reside on their large estates, in their *villae*, rather than in urban 'palaces'. They too were moving to the country and were adopting the life of the great landholder. In the country it might happen that the new settlers remained gathered in a village whose name preserves their memory, such as Aumenancourt (Marne) which recalls the Alamans, Sermaise (Seine-et-Oise) the Sarmatians, Franconville (Seine-et-Oise) the Franks, Goudourville (Tarn-et-Garonne) or Villegoudou (Tarn) the Goths. Even more interesting, perhaps, are the place names in Flanders, Lorraine, Alsace and Franche-Comté where one finds the collective suffix *-ing* which indicates the following or *familia* of a Frankish, Alaman, or Burgundian chief. Thus we find Racrange (Moselle), derived from Racheringa, the people of Racher. Or above all there

are the numerous names in *fère* or *fara* indicating among the Franks, Burgundians, Visigoths and Lombards the Germanic family group which had to settle as a group to ensure its cohesion. Such are La Fère (Aisne), Fère-Champenoise (Marne), Lafavre (Isère), La Fare (Bouches-du-Rhône, Hautes-Alpes, Vaucluse) and the Italian names in '*fara*'.

In the same way the barbarians' desire to preserve their identity can be found in the legislation of the early middle ages where the principle of the 'personality of laws', so foreign to the Roman jurisdictional tradition, appears. In a barbarian kingdom it was not the case that every man was subject to a single law valid for all the inhabitants of a territory: he was judged according to the judicial custom of the ethnic group to which he belonged - the Frank according to Frankish tradition, or rather according to the tradition of his Frankish group, such as the Salian tradition, the Burgundian according to Burgundian custom, and the Roman according to Roman law. Hence there were astonishing disparities. Rape of a virgin was punished by death for a Roman but by a fine for a Burgundian. On the other hand a woman married to a slave was considered by Roman law to be only a concubine and she did not lose her free-born status, whereas Salic law reduced her to servitude. There was such a danger that confusion might result in the new states that an intense effort at legal compilations occurred at the start of the fifth century. The fragments which survive, some of which are later redactions, are very diverse in character. The Edict of Theodoric has the unusual feature of being, in fact, not based on the 'personality' of laws. It wishes to impose the same jurisdiction on all the 'nations', Roman and barbarian, living under its domination. The Ostrogoth Theodoric the Great was indeed the last true heir of the Roman tradition in the west. The Salic law, composed in Latin under Clovis, has only come down to us in a text of the late eighth century which is overloaded with additions and, perhaps, corrections; it codified the customs of the Salian Franks. The celebrated *Lex Gundobada*, written in Latin and promulgated by Gundobad, king of the Burgundians, who died in 516, defined the relations between Burgundians and also between Burgundians and Romans. The customs of the Visigoths were codified first by Euric (466-84) and later by Liuvigild (568-86). Fragments of the code of Euric have been discovered in a palimpsest in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, while parts of the code of Liuvigild have been pieced together using a later code which quoted them as *lex antiqua*. The Edict of Rothari for the Lombards of 643 was enlarged by several of his successors. From the Alamans survives a *Pactus* of the seventh century and a *Lex Alamannorum* of the early eighth century which were influenced by Frankish legislation, just as the *Lex Baiuvariorum* was imposed on the Bavarians in the middle of the eighth century by their Frankish protectors. Although it was the need to codify and write down their own laws which was particularly

great for the barbarians, several barbarian kings thought it necessary to provide a new legislation destined for the Romans. This generally involved adaptations and simplifications of the Theodosian Code of 438. Thus we have the Breviary of Alaric (506) among the Visigoths and the *Lex Romana Burgundiorum* among the Burgundians.

The legal diversity was not as great as one might think, firstly because the barbarian laws were very similar to each other, and secondly because in each kingdom one code tended to have precedence over the others, and finally because the Roman influence, fairly strong from the start, as among the Visigoths, tended, given its superiority, to become explicit. The influence of the Church, especially after the conversion of the Arian kings, and the unifying tendencies of the Carolingians in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, contributed to a decline or a disappearance of the personality of laws in favour of their territoriality. As early as the reign of the Visigoth Recceswinth (652–72), for example, the clergy forced the king to publish a new code which would be as much applicable to the Visigoths as to the Romans. However, the particularist legislation of the early middle ages strengthened the tendency to compartmentalization which lasted throughout the middle ages. As we have seen the roots of this lay in the fragmentation of the population, of the occupation and management of the land and of the economy. This reinforced the parochial outlook, the *campanilismo* which were characteristic of the middle ages. Sometimes, indeed, people openly laid claim to the jurisdictional particularism of the early middle ages. As late as the tenth and eleventh centuries the *Lex Gundobada* was invoked in Cluniac charters to justify a personal status which in fact depended on local customs. In the twelfth century we encounter in the acts of Modena opposition between the indigenous people *romana lege viventes*, 'living under Roman law', and a French or Norman colony (probably the one which brought the Arthurian legends portrayed in the sculptures of the Romanesque cathedral) who are defined as *salica lege viventes*, 'living under the Salic law'.

V

Of course the barbarians adopted as far as they could whatever was superior in the legacy of the Roman empire, especially in the cultural field, as we shall see, and in political organization. Yet here as there they hastened, encouraged and exaggerated the decadence which had begun under the late empire. They turned a decline into a regression. They combined a threefold barbarism, their own, that of the decrepit Roman world and that of the old primitive forces, which lay below the Roman varnish and had been freed by the dissolving of

the varnish under the impact of the invasions. The regression was chiefly a quantitative one. The barbarians destroyed human lives, great buildings, and equipment necessary for the economy. The population fell sharply; art treasures were lost; the roads, workshops, warehouses, irrigation systems, and cultivated areas fell into decay. The destruction was further prolonged in that the ancient monuments in ruin served as quarries from which people removed stones, columns and ornaments. The barbarian world, incapable of creating or producing, 'redeployed'. In this impoverished, underfed, weakened world a natural calamity succeeded in completing what the barbarians had begun. From 543 bubonic plague from the east ravaged Italy, Spain, and a great part of Gaul for more than half a century. After this came the bottom of the abyss, the sad seventh century, which could well be described by the old expression 'the dark ages'. Two centuries later, with some literary grandiloquence, Paul the Deacon conjured up the horror of the plague in Italy.

> Villas or towns hitherto full of crowds of people were plunged in a day into the deepest silence by a general flight. Children fled leaving the bodies of their parents unburied, parents abandoned the steaming entrails of their children. If by chance anyone remained to bury his neighbour he condemned himself to remaining himself unburied . . . . The world was brought back to the silence prior to the creation of man: no voices in the fields, no whistling shepherds . . . . The harvests waited in vain for a reaper and the grapes were still hanging on the vines at the onset of winter. The fields were turned into cemeteries and the houses of men into dens for wild beasts . . . .

There was a decline in skills which was to leave the medieval west deprived for a long time. No one any longer knew how to quarry, transport or work stone, and stoneworking faded into the background to make way for a return to wood as the essential material. The art of glassmaking in the Rhineland disappeared with the natron which was no longer imported from the Mediterranean after the sixth century, or was reduced to coarse products made in huts in the forest in the area around Cologne. Artistic taste, as we shall see, underwent a regression, and so did morals. The penitentials of the early middle ages – lists of the punishments to be applied to each type of sin – surely belong in the 'hells' of libraries. Not only did the old stock of peasant superstitions re-emerge, but all the sexual perversions ran riot and acts of violence turned nastier – blows, wounds, gluttony, drunkenness. Augustin Thierry's *Récits des temps mérovingiens*, faithfully drawn from the best sources, chiefly Gregory of Tours, and adding nothing except a clever literary *mise-en-scène*, has for more than a century familiarized us with the unleashing of barbarian violence. It was all the more savage because the high rank of the perpetrators assured them relative impunity. Only imprisonment and murder put a brake on the

excesses of these Frankish kings and queens whose rule Fustel de Coulanges defined as 'despotism tempered by assassination'. 'In that time many crimes were committed . . . each saw justice in his own will', wrote Gregory of Tours.

The refinement of the tortures used was to give inspiration to medieval iconography for a long time to come. The Romans had not submitted the Christian martyrs to the torments to which the Catholic Franks exposed their own martyrs. 'It was common to cut off the hands and the feet and the end of the nose. Eyes were torn out, faces were mutilated with red-hot irons, pointed sticks were jabbed under fingernails and toenails . . . when the wounds began to heal up again after the pus had flowed out, they were reopened. If necessary a physician was summoned so that, once the victim was cured, he could be tortured with a longer agony'. St Leodegarius or Léger, bishop of Autun, fell into the hands of his enemy, Ebroin, mayor of the palace, in 677. His tongue was cut out, his cheeks and lips were slashed, he was forced to walk barefoot across a pool strewn with stones as sharp and piercing as nails, and finally his eyes were put out. Again, there was the death of Brunhild, tortured for three days and finally tied to the tail of an untamed horse which was whipped until it bolted . . . . What is most striking is the unemotional language of the law codes. Here is an extract from the *lex Salica*: 'For tearing off someone else's hand, or a foot, an eye, the nose, 100 solidi, but only 63 if the hand remains attached; for tearing off the thumb 50 solidi, but only 30 if it remains attached; for tearing off the index finger (the finger used to pull the bow with) 35 solidi; any other finger 30 solidi; two fingers together 35 solidi; three fingers together 50 solidi'.

Administration and the majesty of government also regressed. The Frankish king, enthroned by being raised on a shield, bore as his whole insignia a lance in place of a sceptre or a diadem, and as a distinctive sign he had long hair; he was a *rex crinitus*, a Samson-king with long hair who was followed from villa to villa by several scribes, domestic slaves and his bodyguard of *antrustiones* . . . . All of this was adorned with astounding titles borrowed from the vocabulary of the late empire. The chief groom was the count of the stable or constable, the bodyguards were the counts of the palace, and the pack of drunken soldiers and uncouth clerics were 'magnificent' or 'illustrious' men. Since there was no longer any revenue from taxation, the king's wealth was reduced to chests of gold coins, pieces of glass and jewellery which his wives, concubines and legitimate and illegitimate children disputed at his death just as they carved up his lands and even the kingdom.

And what of the Church? In the disorder of the invasions, bishops and monks, such as St Severin, had become the all-capable leaders of a disorganized world. To their religious role they added a political one, that of negotiating with the barbarians; an economic role, that of distributing foodstuffs and alms; a social

role, protecting the poor against the rich; and even a military role, organizing the resistance or fighting 'with spiritual weapons' where material weapons no longer existed. By the force of circumstances they had served an apprenticeship in government by clergy, in the confusion of the secular and ecclesiastical powers. Through penitential discipline and the application of canon law (the early sixth century was a period of councils and synods paralleling the codification of civil law) they attempted to fight against violence and to ameliorate people's behaviour. Of the two Manuals of St Martin of Braga, who became the archbishop of the capital city of the Sueve kingdom in 579, the first, *De correctione rusticorum* laid down a programme for correcting the behaviour of peasants, and the second, the *Formula vitae honestae*, dedicated to the king, Mir, laid down the moral ideal of the Christian ruler. Their success was to persist throughout the whole of the middle ages. However, whether they were barbarized themselves or whether they were incapable of fighting against the barbarism of the ruling class and the masses, the ecclesiastical leaders ratified a regression in spirituality and religious practice – God's judgement proclaimed through ordeals, an unheard-of development of the cult of relics, and the strengthening of sexual and food taboos in which the most primitive biblical tradition was linked with barbarian customs. 'Cooked or raw' an Irish penitential declared, 'reject everything which has been contaminated by a leech.'

Above all the Church pursued its own interest, without worrying itself about the *raison d'état* of the barbarian states any more than it had done about the Roman empire. Through the grants which it demanded from the kings and the great men, even the most humble, it accumulated lands, revenues, and exemptions. In a world where hoarding was constantly making economic life yet more sterile, the Church seriously affected production by draining it away. The bishops, who almost all belonged to the aristocracy of the great landowners, were all-powerful in their towns and their dioceses and tried to be so throughout the kingdom. St Avitus, bishop of Vienne, who exercised what amounted to a primacy in the Burgundian kingdom in the early sixth century, favoured the expansionist aims of the Frankish Clovis, who had become a Catholic, over the Arian Burgundian kings. Caesarius of Arles was arrested by Alaric in 505, summoned by Theodoric to Ravenna in 512 to vindicate his behaviour against the Arian king. Whether or not St Remigius said to Clovis at his baptism, 'Bow your head, proud Sicamber' he certainly meant Clovis' head to be bowed, and the heads of Clovis' successors too, to the yoke of the Church, which was easily identified with the yoke of God. St Eligius (Eloi) played on his status and his usefulness as a goldsmith to capture the favour of Dagobert. St Leodegarius, as we have seen, displayed such strong political ambitions that Ebroin martyred him. Above all the bishops, with Gregory of Tours in

the lead, preached resistance to taxation, which lessened the wealth of the churches. Thus they removed from the kings the very means of government which on the other hand they wanted to reinforce, to make it serve the interests of religion and the Church.

Finally, wishing to make use of each other, the kings and bishops neutralized and mutually paralysed each other. The Church tried to lead the State and the kings to direct the Church. The bishops set themselves up as counsellors and as critics of the rulers in all areas, forcing them to turn canons of church councils into civil laws, while the kings, even once they had become Catholic, nominated the bishops and presided over these very councils. In the seventh century in Spain, the conciliary assemblies became veritable parliaments of the Visigothic kingdom. They imposed an antisemitic legislation which increased the economic difficulties and the discontent of the inhabitants, who later welcomed the Muslims, if not with open arms, at any rate without hostility. In Gaul the interpenetration of the two powers, in spite of the efforts of the Frankish kings to entrust the offices of their household and their government to laymen, and in spite of Charles Martel's brutal confiscation of part of the huge ecclesiastical estates, was such that the decadence of the Merovingian monarchy and the Frankish clergy went hand in hand. Before starting to evangelize Germany, St Boniface had to reform the Frankish clergy. This was to be the start of the Carolingian renaissance.

Indeed during this period the Church underwent real eclipses, at least in certain regions. Some areas reverted to paganism (as in England in the fifth and sixth centuries), and there were long vacancies in episcopal sees. The episcopal lists for Périgueux have a gap from 675 to the tenth century, for Bordeaux from 675 to 814, for Châlons from 675 to 779, for Geneva from 650 to 833, for Arles from 683 to 794, for Toulon from 679 to 879, for Aix from 596 to 794, for Embrun from 677 to 828, and for Béziers, Nîmes, Uzès, Agde, Maguelonne, Carcassonne and Elne from the end of the seventh century to 788. The return to paganism, the struggle between the priestly class and the warrior class, and the reciprocal paralysis of clerical and royal power also heralded the middle ages. Perhaps the cause above all was the tendency of the Church to set up a government by the clergy which dominated Christendom only to take it away from the things of this world. The pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604), the most glorious of this period, is also the most significant. Gregory, a former monk who was elected pope during a crisis caused by the plague in Rome, thought that these calamities announced the end of the world. For him the duty of all Christians was to do penance, to detach themselves from this world to prepare themselves for the one which is to come. He only contemplated extending the Christian religion, whether in the case of the Anglo-Saxons or the Lombards, in order better to fulfil his

role as the shepherd from whom Christ at the Last Judgement would relentlessly demand an account of his flock. The models he put forward in his works of spiritual edification were St Benedict, who represented monastic renunciation, and Job, who represented a complete stripping away of possessions and resignation. 'Why continue to reap when the reaper cannot survive? Let each consider the course of his life and then he will understand that the little that he has suffices'. The words of the pope, which were to have so much influence on the medieval mind, are themselves a doorway to the middle ages, which were an age of contempt for the world and of rejection of the Earth.

The west had, so to speak, been sliding down a slope since the late Roman empire, to the point where it often seems that continuity was winning over change, in the classic debate between the historians to know whether the early middle ages were the epilogue of the ancient world or the beginning of the new times (but is not every age, or almost every age, one of transition?). But here one senses that the point of arrival was so distant from the point of departure that the people of the middle ages themselves from the eighth century right up to the sixteenth felt the need to return to Rome because they felt that they had indeed left it. In each medieval renaissance the clerics affirmed, even more than a nostalgia for a return to Antiquity, the sense of having become something different. In any case, they never seriously contemplated coming back to Rome. When they dreamed of a return it was of Him who would bring them back to Abraham's bosom, in the earthly paradise, to the house of the Father. In their eyes, to bring back Rome to earth merely meant to restore it, to transfer it: *translatio imperii, translatio studii.* The power and knowledge which at the start of the middle ages had been in Rome had to be transferred to new seats, just as they had once been transferred from Babylon to Athens and then to Rome. To be reborn was to set out again, not to return. The first relaunching occurred in the Carolingian period, at the end of the eighth century.