The Perspective of the Early Church Historians

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I

As a historical religion, early Christianity had two tasks, to record its own history and to set forth, for both pagans and Christians, the Christian interpretation of the history of the world, and specifically the Christian interpretation of the history of the Roman Empire. The early Christian historian had to set about working out a new philosophy of history—which would be, in effect, a theology of history. The Christian interpretation of history, as showing the purpose of God and the sovereignty of God in human affairs, must take the place of the traditional pagan interpretation (or interpretations), according to which the events of history were guided or determined by Fate, or by Chance, or by great men who appeared at certain junctures, or, in the case of the Roman state, by the actions of the "good" emperors or the "bad" emperors.

Here, as with other spiritual and intellectual problems of the early church, the Christian historian was made aware from the outset of his work that he was a pioneer; and Eusebius was the great pioneer. His work was literally epoch making, as the first attempt to show in detail the way in which history had been a manifestation of the power of God and his concern for human affairs.[1]

But Eusebius wrote in the special atmosphere of the first emancipation of the church, and there were problems of historiography that he was not called upon to face. These problems made themselves apparent as the Christian Roman Empire began to follow the new path upon which it had entered, somewhat uncertainly, in the days of Constantine; and so it is to Eusebius' successors that we must look for the treatment of the problems that had not formed a part of Eusebius'

[1] On Eusebius' life and writings, see J. Quasten, *Patrology* III (Westminster [Md.] 1960) 309–345. Two convenient works which give a useful account of his work as a historian are D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London 1960) and R. L. P. Milburn, *Early Christian Interpretations of History* (London 1954) ch. iv.

task. In view of the church's continuing experience, Eusebius' successors found they had to give further study to the large themes of the church historian's conception of the nature of the church and the nature of the Christian life.

So our interest in the church historians who wrote in the fifth and sixth centuries, Socrates, Sozomen and Evagrius, is not only in their accounts of an epoch-making period in the history of the early church, but in their understanding of the nature of church history at a time when church history itself was a relatively new subject. This too was a time when the Christian historian, whether his subject was secular or ecclesiastical history, had to work in a culture in which pagan historiography was still active, representing a cultural tradition much older than Christianity. The Christian historian was not merely a Christian historian. He was a representative and protagonist of a new kind of history to which a certain section of his society would be hostile.

Thus when a church historian set out to be a continuator of the great Eusebius, there were questions of approach and method that he had to decide for himself. Eusebius, writing at the turning point in the history of the church, had demonstrated in definitive terms that there was a Christian interpretation of history, different from the pagan interpretation. But with the reign of Constantine the church had come to occupy a new place in the state and in society; and so any writer who desired to continue Eusebius' fundamental work had to make his own decision—with Eusebius as only a general guide in some respects —as to how he was to portray the life of the church. The role of the Christian emperor; the relations of the church and the emperor; the relations of the church and the pagans; the church among the barbarians; the church's own internal troubles—all these Eusebius had treated, both in his *Ecclesiastical History* and in other writings. Here was the material, but how was it to be organized and presented? The epoch of Eusebius and Constantine had come to an end with the close of this wonderful episode in its history. As the church set off on a new course, troubles and questions arose that Constantine and Eusebius may not have foreseen. There was a pagan revival led by the emperor Julian, and after Julian's death pagan propaganda was skilfully maintained at a high level by writers of the calibre of Themistius and Libanius. The state encountered new problems—which pagan historians were blaming on Christianity. A large task awaited the Christian church historian. How was he to set about it?

The three authors whom we are considering here show how it was possible to follow various lines. Let us try to see what they thought of their opportunity and their obligation.

II

Socrates, the painstaking and methodical jurist, who lived from 380 to 440, opens his *Ecclesiastical History* with the statement that as the continuator of Eusebius he will begin his work by repairing certain omissions of Eusebius.[2] He also declares that he will not attempt a display of words—he condemns the flowery style of Philip of Side, one of his predecessors [*HE* 7.27]—but he will make it his main purpose to lay before the reader the information he has been able to collect from documents and from the oral reports of those who were personally familiar with the events he records. The reader is impressed, very early in the work, by Socrates' care to quote official documents complete.

At the beginning of Book II, the author tells us how, following the original publication of Books I and II, he read the writings of Athanasius and also obtained some letters written by eminent persons at this period; and on the basis of all this new material he was compelled to revise Books I and II. He also mentions material that he had omitted from the first edition in order to keep it from becoming bulky.

When an ancient book was published in parts, as Socrates' apparently was, the author had a privilege modern authors do not enjoy, namely, the opportunity of replying in later parts to criticisms of earlier installments. In this way Socrates, in the introduction to Book V, gives us for the first time an extended statement of his purpose. Not having provided this in the earlier Books, he had apparently incurred criticism. Some readers, he says, had commented unfavorably on his having included secular matters in an ecclesiastical history. In reply, Socrates offers three reasons for his choice. First, he sought to lay before his readers an exact statement of fact. Second, he attempted

[2] For the bibliography of the modern studies of Socrates' work, see G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I: *Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker*[2] (Berlin 1958) 508–510; B. Altaner, *Patrologie*[6] (Freiburg 1960) 214; and Quasten, *op.cit.* 532–534. See also Milburn, *op.cit.* 144–148. The quotations of Socrates' work in English used here are taken, with occasional modifications, from the translation of A. C. Zenos in *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Ser. II, II (reprint Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1957).

to save his readers from becoming satiated with the repetitions of the contentious disputes of the bishops and their insidious designs against one another. Finally, and "more especially," he intended that "it might be made apparent that whenever the affairs of the state were disturbed, the affairs of the church, as if by a kind of sympathy, became disordered also." Socrates goes on to describe the evidence of history which makes it clear that secular and ecclesiastical affairs necessarily affect each other:

> *Whoever will attentively examine the subject will find that the mischiefs of the state and the troubles of the church have been inseparably connected: for he will perceive that they have either arisen together, or immediately succeeded one another. Sometimes the affairs of the church come first in order; then commotions in the state follow; and sometimes the reverse, so that I cannot believe this invariable interchange is merely fortuitous, but am persuaded that it proceeds from our iniquities, and that these evils are inflicted upon us as merited chastisements.*

In this light Socrates takes as leading themes two lessons of history. He sets out to describe the attacks made by heretics and pagans on the unity and peace of the church, and the rôle of the orthodox emperors as the defenders of unity and the promoters of peace. To the student of these events, the records of history show that the course of events both in the church and in the state are guided by Divine Providence.[3] History proves, for example, that the prayers of the pious emperors, especially Constantine, Theodosius the Great and Theodosius the Younger, often turned battles and other events in favor of the Romans.[4] It is the teaching of history, Socrates writes, that when the emperor is virtuous and pious, the state as a whole prospers in both the civil and the ecclesiastical departments; and so it is one of the emperor's chief responsibilities to maintain order in the church as well as the state.[5] Here of course the emperors would be following the example of Constantine, according to the theory of the imperial power in the Christian state laid down by Eusebius.[6] Thus,

[3] Socrates, *HE* 1.16, 5.10, 6.6, 7.20. There may be a corruption of the text in 1.16 but the meaning is clear.

[4] Socrates, *HE* 1.18, 1.34, 7.23, 7.42–43.

[5] Socrates, *HE* 1.7, 1.9–10, 1.16, 1.34, 3.26, 5.10, 7.22, 7.40.

[6] See Norman H. Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London 1955) 168–172.

in Socrates' view, one of the mainsprings of history is the succession of emperors who have governed the Roman state for good or ill. This was a theme adapted from secular historical writing. Socrates' older contemporary Themistius, the pagan court orator at Constantinople, had repeatedly treated the theme of the "good emperors," who formed a kind of canon of the sovereigns under whom the Roman state prospered.[7] In developing his own list of "good emperors," Socrates was not able to go back to Augustus, as Themistius was, but he showed in detail the policy and actions of emperors such as Constantine and Theodosius the Great which promoted the happiness and welfare of both state and church.[8] Thus the Christian emperors became heroes of the history of the Christian Roman Empire, along with heroic priests such as Athanasius. The emperors indeed emerge as much more real and effective personalities than the bishops whom Socrates has occasion to mention.

But Socrates did not find his task an easy one. He spent much labor on his accounts of the doctrinal disputes and the maneuvers of the bishops, and at the close of his work he writes, perhaps a little wearily [*HE* 7.48]:

> *We shall here close our history, praying that the churches everywhere, with the cities and nations, may live in peace; for as long as peace continues, those who desire to write histories will find no materials for their purpose.*

Socrates, then, believed that there was a need for church history, not solely or primarily as a history of the church as an institution and of its internal affairs, but as an account of the church as an element of stability in the life of the state as a whole. Eusebius had effectively presented the figure of the ideal Christian Roman Emperor, and Socrates followed this theme in his pictures of the successors of Constantine down to Theodosius the Younger in his own day. Perforce the work had to be filled with the details of controversy, and Socrates has not much sympathy for the contentions of the bishops[9] or for the ignorant and undisciplined conduct of the common people in the

[7] Themistius, *Orations*, pp. 75–76, 114, 129, 137, 155, 173, 237, 261–262, 274, 279 ed. Dindorf. A new edition of the orations of Themistius, edited by the late H. Schenkl and by G. Downey, is being published in the Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. Vol. I is to be published in March 1965, vol. II later in 1965, vol. III in 1966.

[8] See especially the passages quoted above nn. 4 and 5.

[9] Socrates, *HE* 2.15, 3.24, 5.20.

large cities, especially Alexandria, whose citizens he says were the worst behaved of all.[10] But Socrates' great theme is the vitality of the church, which by the will of God survived the attacks of the heretics and the pagans. At the same time he shows that the history of the church demonstrates that the church has not lived wholly by itself but that it has needed the support of the orthodox emperors, who were chosen by God and guided by God. This is clear from what he says in the preface of Book V, in which he declares that he has "continually included the emperors in these historical details; because from the time they began to profess the Christian religion, the affairs of the church have depended on them."

History has shown, then, that the emperor is a necessary part of the church's life, as Eusebius labored to demonstrate. To this extent, the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates partakes of the nature of an imperial panegyric; but the panegyrical element is not mere adulation. It is designed to draw attention to the true character of the Christian imperial office, and it seems evident that here Socrates was attempting to counter the pagan picture of the emperor. The pagan emperor had been traditionally endowed with a set of official virtues,[11] and the eminent pagan apologist Themistius had through a series of reigns, from Constantius to Theodosius the Great, composed a famous set of addresses to the sovereigns in which he elaborated on the theme of *philanthropia*, love of mankind, as the prime virtue of the Roman emperor.[12] Socrates, trained in the rhetorical tradition of the day, can hardly have escaped knowing the discourses of Themistius, which remained literary models throughout the Byzantine period.

It is plain from their choice and treatment of their themes that Themistius and Socrates, as spokesmen for paganism and for Christianity respectively, were each attempting to refute the teaching of the hostile party. Themistius, in his position as court orator, wrote with some personal knowledge of Christian doctrine,[13] and Socrates, as a

[10] Socrates, *HE* 7.13.

[11] See M. P. Charlesworth, "The Virtues of a Roman Emperor: Propaganda and the Creation of Belief," *ProcBritAcad* 23 (1937) 105–133; *idem*, "*Providentia* and *Aeternitas*," *HTR* 29 (1936) 107–132; Harold Mattingly, "The Roman 'Virtues'," *HTR* 30 (1937) 103–117.

[12] Themistius, *Orations* 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19. See G. Downey, "*Philanthropia* in Religion and Statecraft in the Fourth Century after Christ," *Historia* 4 (1955) 199–208; *idem*, "Themistius and the Defense of Hellenism in the Fourth Century," *HTR* 50 (1957) 259–274; J. Kabiersch, *Untersuchungen zum Begriff der philanthropia bei dem Kaiser Julian* (Wiesbaden 1960).

[13] G. Downey, "Allusions to Christianity in Themistius' Orations," *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962) 480–488.

jurist in Constantinople, must have had some acquaintance with the traditional pagan political theory. While the Christians since the time of Eusebius and Constantine had regarded piety as the leading virtue of the Christian emperor, the pagans portrayed *philanthropia* as the virtue by which the sovereign, be he pagan or Christian, should be chiefly guided. In this pagan-Christian encounter, *philanthropia* was to the pagan what *eusebeia*, piety, was to the Christian. Themistius had had great success, over many years, in putting forward the doctrine of imperial *philanthropia*, and we may plausibly suppose that Socrates had the pagan propaganda of imperial *philanthropia* in mind when he wrote of the emperor's *eusebeia* and its power.[14] In this sense, church history, in the minds of Socrates and his Christian audience, took on an apologetic function.

So the emperor, in Socrates' account, represents a channel of God's control over the course of history. The demonstrated power of the piety of the orthodox emperors, whose prayers were answered for the good of their people, and the demonstrated vitality of the church and its ability to resist the attacks of heretics and pagans, as set forth in Socrates' narrative, show that Christianity is the truth. And so church history, representing the Christian interpretation of history, is the true interpretation of history.

Here again, Christian history becomes apologetic, if not polemic; for pagan historians, after the rise of Christianity, had devoted much learning and skill to the theme that the pagan interpretation of history was the true one,[15] and so it became one of the tasks of Socrates and his fellow workers to drive out this false view of history.

III

The limited means of publication available in that day, the slowness of travel, and the difficulty of locating and then gaining access to unpublished material, all had their effect on the writing of church history. Just as Socrates had had occasion to criticize Eusebius for omitting information, and then had had to revise part of his own work on the basis of material he had not at first known about, Sozomen, an-

[14] For examples of Socrates' portrayal of the *eusebeia* of the emperor, see *HE* 1.9 (=Migne *PG* LXVII, 89B); 1.34 (=168B); 7.22 (=785C). At the same time Socrates writes of *philanthropia* as one of the important qualities of the Christian emperor (*e.g. HE* 1.9=96C).

[15] See the study of Walter E. Kaegi, "The Emperor Julian's Assessment of the Significance and Function of History," *ProcAmPhilosSoc* 108 (1964) 29–38.

other jurist interested in church history, found occasion to criticize Socrates, and decided it was necessary to write another church history covering the same period.

Sozomen, some years younger than Socrates, came to his task with a somewhat different background.[16] He had been born near Gaza and had made his literary studies there. Gaza was a celebrated center of literary and rhetorical activity, and many distinguished men of letters had had their training under the teachers there.[17] Thus, while Sozomen eventually became, like Socrates, a jurist at the imperial capital, he must have been of a somewhat different temperament, and his book indicates that he had come to a different view of the needs and possibilities of church history.

Sozomen begins his work with the predictions in the Old Testament of the coming of Christ, and he says that he had originally intended to write a church history "from the beginning,"[18] but had given up this idea because it had already been done by several writers including Eusebius. However, by way of introduction, he wrote two Books (now lost) on the history of the church from the ascension of Christ to the deposition of Licinius. His account of his ideas, prefixed to the preserved work, serves to establish the perspective against which he wishes his book to be viewed.

In his narrative Sozomen in the main follows the account of Socrates. Somewhat ungratefully, he never mentions the name of Socrates, though he names his other sources; but he makes an effort to verify Socrates' information and to correct and expand his predecessor's account where necessary. He finds new sources and thus provides a substantial amount of important material not found in Socrates.

Along with this effort to be complete and accurate (though in fact he was somewhat uncritical in his use of his material), Sozomen endeavoured to give his work more general appeal by using what he considered a more elegant literary style than Socrates had employed and by introducing material he thought would be more interesting, such as accounts of ascetics and of miracles. A dragon "of enormous size" even makes his appearance, in an edifying story [*HE* 7.26]. Official documents which Socrates had quoted complete are summar-

[16] For the bibliography of the modern studies of Sozomen, see Moravcsik, *op.cit.* 510–512; Altaner, *loc.cit.*; Quasten, *op.cit.* 534–536.

[17] See G. Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine: A Chapter in Literary History," *HarvLibBull* 12 (1958) 297–319; *idem*, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* (Norman [Okla.] 1963).

[18] Sozomen, *HE* 1.1 (=Migne *PG* LXVII, 857c): ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.

ized by Sozomen, evidently to spare the reader from tedium, though documents which Socrates did not mention, which Sozomen is using for the first time, are quoted complete.

The result, in spite of Sozomen's sometimes careless use of the evidence, is a work that for many readers would have been more interesting than Socrates' book; and because Sozomen treats subjects Socrates omitted or mentioned only briefly, such as the development of the monastic life, the conversion of the barbarians outside the empire, the work of Christian scholars and literary men, and so on, Sozomen's history actually gives a fuller picture of the progress of Christianity and its place in the state than Socrates had undertaken. Sozomen, for example, gives a detailed and rather thrilling account of the career of John Chrysostom as bishop of Constantinople, where Socrates had treated Chrysostom's activity much more briefly. At the conclusion of his introductory chapter, Sozomen declares that one of his purposes in writing his book is to inspire his readers to a better way of life by his account of the origins of the monastic life. On the whole, Sozomen reveals the mind of his age more clearly than Socrates does.

Another way in which Sozomen's work differs from that of Socrates is the relatively greater attention he gives to the refutation of pagan claims and to accounts of the pagan attacks on the church and pagan criticisms of the conduct of Christian emperors.[19] Here again church history takes on its apologetic and polemic rôle.

The close connection of the course of church history with the emperor is an aspect of contemporary thought especially clear in Sozomen's work. Sozomen goes beyond Socrates in the detail which he devotes to this theme, and not only did he dedicate his work to Theodosius the Younger, with a panegyrical preface praising the emperor's piety and his rewards to scholars, but the book itself was offered to the emperor for his revision before it was published. Much more than Socrates, Sozomen was intent upon showing the historical significance of the piety of the orthodox emperors and in exhibiting the rôle of the emperors as guardians of the church. To Sozomen, history shows that "Christianity is supported, and its advancement secured, by the providence of God" [*HE* 1.7]. One of the functions of church history is to demonstrate that the progress of the faith has been made possible

[19] Sozomen, *HE* 1.5, 5.1ff, 5.9–11, 5.16. Sozomen, for example, devoted more space to Julian the Apostate than Socrates had done.

by the zeal of the clergy, the labors of the apologists ("philosophers," as Sozomen calls them) who have won the attention of the pagans, and the support of the emperors [*HE* 3.17]. Sozomen writes of the piety (*eusebeia*) of the emperor as one of the emperor's most important qualities.[20]

Finally, we may note another aspect of church history in which Sozomen goes beyond Socrates. Socrates had been primarily interested in the eastern half of the empire and usually had spoken of the West only in connection with the western views on the theological disputes which were centered in the East. Socrates mentions the capture of Rome by Alaric in one brief chapter [*HE* 7.10], without comment on its significance. In contrast, Sozomen, whether because of his connection with the imperial house or on the basis of his independent thought, writes at some length on the different histories of the eastern and western halves of the empire. He points out the significance for the rift between East and West of the way in which the bishop of Rome and the western clergy reacted in a personal way to the deposition by the Arians of the eastern bishops who supported the Nicene faith [*HE* 3.7]; and in his account of the capture and sack of Rome by Alaric, which he describes at somewhat greater length than Socrates does, he contrasts the prosperous state of the eastern empire under its orderly government with the disorders and troubles in the West, where many usurpers kept the state unsettled [*HE* 9.6]. To this extent Sozomen's work may be taken to represent the official sentiments of the government at Constantinople. In the context of the times, however, Sozomen may not have thought of himself as writing "official history," for the rôle of the emperor being what it was, the imperial patronage of history would seem only natural.

IV

A century and a half after the death of Socrates and Sozomen, Evagrius wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* covering the period from the close of their histories to 593.[21] Writing at the age of fifty-eight [*HE* 4.29], Evagrius the jurist decided that it would improve his work if he collected in a separate volume the documents and letters and other

[20] Sozomen, *HE*, *praefatio* (=Migne *PG* LXVII, 845A). In the same passage (845B) Sozomen speaks of the imperial *eusebeia* and *philanthropia* together.

[21] For the bibliography of modern studies of Evagrius see Moravcsik, *op.cit.* 257–259 and Altaner, *op.cit.* 216.

written sources that Socrates and Sozomen had quoted or paraphrased in the main text of their histories.[22] This volume of documentation has not been preserved, but the effect of course is that the text of the *Ecclesiastical History* moves much more rapidly and the whole work is considerably shorter than the histories of Socrates and Sozomen. In some passages, indeed, the narrative seems almost superficial. It is interesting to read the histories of Socrates and Sozomen omitting the quotations or summaries of documents, to see how their works would seem if they had been written on Evagrius' plan.

As one would expect, Evagrius sees church history in many respects as his predecessors did. To him, this history is the story of the battle against the demon who is the enemy of the good [*HE* 1.1]. God takes vengeance on his enemies [*HE* 1.7], though one effect of the heresies was to make the faith stronger [*HE* 1.11]. The course of history is ruled by Divine Providence, which sometimes acts in ways which were unexpected at the moment, though the purpose eventually became clear [*HE* 5.11]. Misconduct of the people of the empire is punished by divine wrath, in the form of earthquakes, pestilence, or other disasters.[23] The emperor is still a key figure in the history of the church, and Evagrius praises the "good" emperors and condemns the "bad," though his praise even of the "good" emperors who had recognized and rewarded his own merits is less fulsome than the panegyrical passages in Socrates and Sozomen.[24] Piety is one of the most important virtues of the emperor, and is accompanied by justice toward the emperor's subjects.[25] Like Socrates and Sozomen, Evagrius takes as heroes the emperors and the holy men rather than the bishops. Again like Sozomen, Evagrius makes a point of writing in an elegant style, though he is rather more given to literary display, for example in the description of the plague which is modelled on the famous passage in Thucydides [*HE* 4.29], the *ekphraseis* or descriptions in the traditional literary form of the Church of St. Euphemia in Chalcedon in which the synod was held [*HE* 2.3] and of St. Sophia in Constantinople [*HE* 4.31], the lyrical account of the marriage of Maurice and

[22] See *HE* 6.24, the concluding chapter of the work.

[23] Evagrius, *HE* 2.13, 4.8, 4.29.

[24] Evagrius, *HE* 2.1, 3.1, 4.30, 4.32, 4.39, 5.1, 5.13, 5.19, 6.1.

[25] The Emperor Marcianus was pious and just toward his subjects (*HE* 2.1 = Migne *PG* LXXXVI *bis*, 2489A). Evagrius in several passages speaks of the *eusebeia* and the *theosebeia* of the Emperor Maurice: *HE* 5.21 (= 2836B), 6.1 (= 2844D–2845A). The Emperor Tiberius II was *philanthropos* (*HE* 5.13 = 2820A).

Constantina Augusta [*HE* 6.1], and the vivid account of the mutiny of the troops which was brought to a peaceful conclusion by the Patriarch Gregory [*HE* 6.4–12].

But there are other respects in which Evagrius' conception of church history differs from those of Socrates and Sozomen. There must have been strong opinions on this subject, for Evagrius like his predecessors feels it necessary to defend his use of secular material in his church history [*HE* 3.40]. Indeed Evagrius devotes relatively much more space to secular affairs than his predecessors. One wonders how far this wider point of view is to be traced to the circumstance that Evagrius was born in Antioch and wrote his history there, and thus saw the affairs of the empire in a different perspective from the views of Socrates and Sozomen, who wrote in the imperial capital and so might be thought to have less interest in the provinces. A lively interest in the history and antiquities of his native city gives Evagrius' work a highly individual stamp and supplies an important example of the devotion to the native *polis* which continued to be a characteristic feature of life in the Greek cities of the eastern empire.[26]

One of the reasons for this interest in the secular history of the empire is also connected with one of the ways in which Evagrius' work is most individual, namely his polemic against pagan historians. Indeed Evagrius takes much more direct notice than his predecessors did of pagan attacks on the church and of the tendentious writings of pagan historians. Midway in Book I he declares that one of the purposes of church history is to answer the sneers of the pagans, who asserted that it was the business of the bishops to depose others who had already become bishops "and to be ever devising some addition to the faith" [*HE* 1.11]. Evagrius goes on to make a vigorous attack on pagan beliefs and practices, and we are reminded of the evidence for significant survivals of pagan beliefs and rites in Syria all through the sixth century.[27]

Evagrius returns to the subject in Book III, in which he makes a warm attack on the pagan historian Zosimus' history of the Roman Empire [*HE* 3.40f]. Writing in the middle of the fifth century as a high official under Theodosius the Younger, Zosimus had tried to show that the empire began to decline at the time of the coming of Christi-

[26] The importance of cities as components of the empire is well brought out by Synesius in his address *On Kingship* (9 and 14) delivered before the Emperor Arcadius (A.D. 395–408).

[27] See G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton 1961) 555 n.219, 558f, 563f; *cf.* (for paganism in the fifth century) 483f, 491f.

anity in the time of Augustus. Evagrius, addressing Zosimus in the second person and writing in the heated language employed in polemic, maintains that, contrary to Zosimus' assertions, history shows that Roman power spread with the increase of the faith; and he cites the lives of the emperors to show that many of the pagan rulers, before the time of Constantine, died by violence, while the Christian emperors with one or two exceptions (which Evagrius admits) died peacefully. But in this comparison it must be remembered that Evagrius speaks only of the emperors of the East and does not take into account any of those in the West.[28]

V

Evagrius' vigorous polemic against Zosimus is a further reminder of the existence of different schools of thought on the nature of church history. Should church history be confined to an account of the history of the church as an institution, or should it be broadened to depict the life of the church in the world? There were evidently supporters of both views. Should the church historian engage in open polemic with pagan writers, or should he allow the church's story to refute their claims by implication? The church historian, sometimes working under imperial auspices, might choose different ways of dealing with these questions. Yet the church historians' task had a basic unity, for all the historians and their readers would agree that church history was properly and essentially a record of the power of God and of the action of God in human affairs. Thus church history was a test of the truth of the faith, setting forth the good and the evil in the church's story, and showing how evil was in due course overcome by good. The church historian was writing a narrative of events that were ultimately controlled by God, and his task was to show how this control remained in effect even when men thought it was they who were in control. Hence the church historian had a special vocation within the church, not only as a narrator of events, but as a channel through which the truth of the faith was proclaimed.

We may say, then, that what we see in Evagrius as we see it in his predecessors, is the consciousness that the church had become not only the interpreter but the custodian of history. Indeed, the church's responsibility here was not confined to church history. Evagrius, when

[28] This topic is treated in greater detail by Walter E. Kaegi in a forthcoming study.

he excoriated Zosimus for his false interpretation of the history of Rome, was doing more than delivering a traditional Christian attack on an enemy of the faith. He was in effect asserting that the church, in virtue of the revelation that had been made to it and in view of the demonstrated results of its faith in this revelation, was now the true interpreter of both ecclesiastical history and secular history.

This claim was not unrelated to the vision of the church as Evagrius and his peers understood it. Evagrius tells how the Patriarch Gregory of Antioch brought to a peaceful end a mutiny of the troops that the government and the high officers of the army had been unable to deal with [*HE* 6.4–13]. The church was the sanctifier of the whole of life, and as custodian of a tradition of responsibility for both the mundane and the spiritual lives of its members, it was guardian of the whole existence of the empire. Where paganism could offer a "philosophy of history," Christianity could provide a theology of history.

It will have been noticed that the three historians with whom this study is concerned were all jurists. This should not be taken to mean that at this period church history was primarily the concern of laymen. One thing it means is that history was not yet primarily a professional specialty, the exclusive domain of the specially trained scholar. The writing of history was open to anyone with the requisite intellectual qualifications and literary training. More particularly, the activity of our jurists suggests that the writing—and thus the reading—of church history was considered to be of paramount concern to all members of the church, and the way in which they went about their work indicates that these historians were acutely aware of the religious responsibility that lay upon anyone who undertook to write history. Looked at from this aspect, the history of the church became an element of the cohesiveness of the empire and the church and at the same time became a part of the personal history of the individual who was a member of the empire and the church.[29]

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[29] This is an expanded version of a paper read at the meeting of the American Society of Church History in Washington, D.C., December 28, 1964.