The Religious Festivals of Ovid's Fasti Adapted for Use in the Early Christian Church

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THE RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF OVID'S FASTI
ADAPTED FOR USE IN THE EARLY
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting and, at the same time, most important aspects in which one may study the ancient classics is that of the contribution they made to Christian culture. Such a contribution understands that a particular civilization has reached a certain level of development in matters intellectual, religious, social, esthetic, and technical. When, then, in the constantly changing course of history, this civilization cedes her position to another whose claim to prominence has dominated, the former passes along to the latter the legacy of her level of development to be used as a foundation in the development of the latter. Any rising civilization which refuses to recognize and utilize, in so far as it can, this connection with what has gone before is guilty of a lack of wisdom.

An excellent example of this general principle is the instance we shall consider in this thesis, the cultural contribution of pagan antiquity to the new Christian civilization. Greece and Rome at the time of Christ were highly developed in many ways. The Greek culture had embodied a deep knowledge of human nature
and appreciation of beauty. Rome stood for order, discipline, practicality. No one with a reliable knowledge of the times would say that the pagan culture was perfect or that all the individuals living within that culture were beyond reproach. But, notwithstanding the existing excesses, the pagan culture had much that was good in it, much that was worthwhile handing down to later generations.

When we speak of Christianity building on other cultures, we treat of an almost unique situation. Christianity was not just another natural structure, which had arisen by natural force to hold the sceptre for a century or two or three. Christianity in those days meant the Church, and the Church meant, as it means today, the Mystical Body of Christ. Here we have a supernatural reality sent to penetrate and sanctify the natural and to remain forever.

But, as the old saying goes, the supernatural builds on the natural. The Mystical Body, the continuation of Christ in the world, has its supernatural core, but this core is manifested through the medium of natural externals. While membership in the Church would always mean life on a supernatural plane, it would in no way deny or neglect life on a natural plane. The Church would breathe a new spirit into humanity, but never attempt to remove that same humanity from the natural structures of which it found itself a part.

The men entrusted with establishing this supernatural society
would have to examine closely what they found in pagan civilisation—the intellectual, religious, social, esthetic, and technical advances which had been made to that time. They could, and would, take up the great amount of good to be found there. The good would have to be separated from the bad, but, with that process accomplished, the pagan culture would find itself one of the natural foundation stones in the edifice of Christianity.

At present we will consider the pagan contribution to Christianity only in the field of religion. Speaking of a contribution in this particular line constitutes perhaps the most delicate subject since in no other line is the contrast between natural and supernatural so bold, nor the necessity for accuracy so acute. But once we have narrowed our present point of view to religious contribution, we still find ourselves in the vast, and widely-written-about, subject of comparative religion.

As a matter of fact, even the field of comparative religion has recently become a bit more organized through the use of a higher insight which has synthesized the striking hypotheses of the last two centuries into more consistently intelligible form. It might be well to note here the general outlines of this synthesis as presented by the contemporary scholar, W.K.C. Guthrie.\(^1\) He traces the roots of the various theories on the "origin of religion:" "Philology did indeed draw attention to the value of the

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the comparative method for the study of mythology, a method which has kept its place at the center of the whole science of religious history. The positive lesson which comparative philology taught was that the various names of a number of gods occurring in the myths of different peoples speaking Indo-Germanic tongues could be shown to have a common origin. 2

Guthrie shows how the mythology center of interest in comparative religions branched out into two later groups; one centered around studies in anthropology, the other interesting itself in archeology. The former group had various stages which held the "origin" of religion to be in fetishism, the cult of the dead, animism, totemism, and magic. The group of archeologists had their Panbabylonian stage and their Panegyptian stage. He concludes:

The philological studies on which these conclusions were based were in their early youth. This meant, first, that the actual identifications were sometimes wrong, and, secondly, that in the first flush of discovery they were regarded as a kind of magic key and forced into locks which they did not really fit. This undue widening of the sphere of application of a new method or theory, just because it is new, is something which will meet us at every stage. We must be prepared to recognize it and discount it, not forgetting that without the enthusiastic sense of discovery which lies behind it, neither this science nor any other could probably advance at all. 3

In these few sentences it is not our intention, any more than

2Ibid., 5.
3Ibid.
it was that of Professor Guthrie, to "dispose of" data gathered in the field of comparative religions. However, it must be noted that the conclusions of the experts in the field are not always as accurate as their research data. Consequently, their generalizations must be accepted only with caution.

Not only are we limiting ourselves in this thesis to the religious contribution of the pagan culture to the Christian, but we will narrow our field of consideration even further. The contribution examined here will be in the area of liturgy, the specific question of religious festivals. We will examine certain Roman festivals, those described by the writer Ovid in his Fasti, and trace their connection with later Christian festivals.

The question will be in each case: is there a connection? To answer the question we will examine the feast in its pagan context, taking our description from Ovid, and, where necessary for completeness, from other pagan Roman sources. Then we will trace the corresponding Christian feast from its origins in the Church to see if any connection may be legitimately drawn between the two. Finally we will study briefly the adaptations made by Christianity of the pagan festival and consider, in general, the underlying idea expressed in the two celebrations.

Of all the feasts celebrated by the Christian Church, there appear to be five which can trace a connection to a corresponding pagan Roman feast. The first is a celebration ad prohibendum ab idolis which took the place of the pagan rites in honor of Janus
on the opening day of the year. This is to be distinguished from the later Feast of the Circumcision as we know it today. The latter did not appear in the official calendars until the ninth century, by which time the earlier rite ad prohíbendum had fallen out of use.

The second Christian feast connected with pagan rites is that of the Chair of Saint Peter which took the February twenty-second place of the Caristia or Cara Cognatio. A third is the Christian Major Litany which replaces the pagan Robigalia. The fourth is that of Saint Peter in Chains which, occurring annually on August first, takes the place of solemn celebrations in honor of the Emperor Augustus. The fifth instance of substitution involves the pagan feast of Sol Invictus and our Christian Christmas.

Of course, in regard to a number of feasts, the authorities dispute the connection between pagan and Christian celebrations. An example of such is the pagan Lupercalia, which some have held as the forerunner of the Christian Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The weight of evidence in this case leads us to deny the connection, although much scholarly work has been based on the opposing view.

Of the five certain connections mentioned above, only three could be based on Ovid's account in the Fasti, since August first and December twenty-fifth, occurring in the second half of the

year, are not treated in the six books of the work which have survived. The first of January is considered by Ovid, but is not of great importance. The Christian rite ad prohibendum ab idolis was in no way an adaptation but rather a direct opposition measure, unlike the other instances of substitution which we will treat. Ad prohibendum did not survive the centuries. The Christian feast of the Circumcision is of a completely different origin. The dispute over the Lupercalia, of course, falls within the January-June scope of the Fasti.

We shall accordingly consider the Caristia-Saint Peter instance as well as the Robigalia-Major Litany case in separate chapters. We shall also devote a chapter to the problem of the Lupercalia since it has been the object of so much scholarly controversy. In addition, an analysis of the work done on this particular historical problem will provide an interesting instance of the care needed in dealing with matters of comparative religion.

The cases of January first, August first, and December twenty-fifth will be taken up in an appendix for the sake of completing the picture.

Before proceeding with the first specific treatment of a feast, there are a few general points of background to be understood first: an examination of the credentials of Ovid and his Fasti, as well as a presentation of the Church's attitude toward adopting other religious cultures.

Publius Ovidius Naso was born at Sulmo in northern Italy on
March 20, 43 B.C. His family held equestrian rank and his father was of sufficient means to provide Ovid with a fine education under the best teachers in Rome. Although his training up to the age of twenty suited him for an advocate's position, he never practiced himself in this line.

Ovid spent his early twenties studying in Athens and in visiting the famous sites of the Greek world. He returned to Rome where he held some minor offices of state. When he reached the age of twenty-four, however, and had become eligible for the quaestorship, he retired from public life.

About Ovid's private life during the next years, up to the age of fifty, we know very little. He had had two unsuccessful marriages in his early years. His third wife and he found great happiness together and the marriage lasted for the remainder of Ovid's life. During these years Ovid wrote his love poetry which disdained even the loose-living society of first-century Rome. He also began work on the fifteen books of his Metamorphoses and a number of the twelve books (of which only six survive) of his Fasti, "the finest monument preserved to us of the liturgy of ancient Rome."5

In the year 8 A.D., when Ovid was fifty-one, there suddenly appeared an imperial decree ordering the poet's banishment. The charge given was corrupting the public morals by his love poetry

5Edward K. Rand, Ovid and His Influence (Boston, 1925), p. 89.
with the *Ars Amatoria* receiving special mention. Actually this poetry had been published ten years before the decree of banishment; one finds it hard to believe that this alleged reason explains completely (or at all) the emperor’s motivation. The actual reason for Augustus’ action will always remain a matter of historical speculation. The conditions of the exile were not so difficult as they might have been, since Ovid was allowed to retain his property, and Tomi, on the shore of the Black Sea, the place of exile, was preferable to some desolate rock in the Aegean where many offenders had been sent.

While the next eight years were gloomy ones for Ovid, they were not empty as regards literary composition. He wrote his *Tristia* and the four books of the letters from Pontus, as well as preparing for publication the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. He begged repeatedly to have his sentence repealed, but Augustus and his successor, Tiberius, never relented. Ovid died sometime before September first in the year 17 A.D.; his body was not allowed to rest at Rome, but was buried in Pontus.

"In a rich and leisurely society the antiquarian has usually little difficulty in gaining a hearing." Such was the situation in Ovid’s and Augustus’ Rome. Augustus did all he could to revive religious customs and surround them with the honors of tradition;

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7 Ibid., 82.
this was another of his steps in consolidating the empire. He re-
built temples, which had fallen into ruin during the civil wars, he
established priesthods, and designated festivals to be celebrated.
"Religion, in fact—its history, its ritual, all its ancient associa-
tions—became the subjects of popular interest; and, as might be
expected, a fashionable poet could do no otherwise than recog-
nize in his verses the growth of this new taste among his country-
men."8

The Fasti were modelled on the Aetia of the Greek poet, Calli-
machus, and can be described as "a sort of handbook of the Ro-
man Calendar, or as a poetical almanac, or as a ritual in verse."9
The work proved a popular source of reading material and, of course,
coincided nicely with Augustus' schemes for religious rejuvenation.
The Fasti were begun and a good deal of them finished before the
decree of banishment. The final touches were added in Pontus.

Ovid certainly drew from the sources of his contemporary, Livy,
and from the official Roman Calendar of that day; very probably
he drew from Ennius, Quintus Fabius Pictor, Varro, and Verrius
Flaccus; possibly from the Annales Maximi, drawn up by the pont-
tiffs and forming the real basis of authentic Roman history.

The Fasti, originally composing the record of all the twelve
months of the Roman calendar, had twelve books, one to a month.

8Ibid., 83.
9Ibid., 84.
Ovid begins with January, according to the Julian calendar reform, and continues through to December. At the beginning of each book he tries to determine the etymology of the month's name. There follow accounts of astronomical occurrences, religious ceremonies, matters of ritual, the anniversaries of the dedications of temples and altars, while Ovid uses every opportunity to introduce some historical or mythological legend.

When estimating the value of the Fasti to the student of Roman religion, Warde Fowler says:

Ovid's work merits all praise as a literary performance, for the neatness and felicity of the versification and diction; but as a source of knowledge it is too much of a medley to be used without careful criticism . . . . No great scholar himself, he aimed at producing a popular account of the results of the work of scholars, picking and choosing here and there as suited his purpose, and not troubling himself to write with scientific accuracy . . . . Still, when all is said, a student of the Roman religion should be grateful to Ovid; and when after the month of June we lose him as a companion, we may feel that the subject . . . loses with him . . . literary interest.10

As an example of the inadequacy of the Fasti, the lack of complete description and scientific accuracy referred to above, we might instance the Fasti description of the Lupercalia. We hardly derive a satisfyingly full account of the festive rites from Ovid. We have to go to contemporary works to fill in the details. However, Ovid remains fully reliable on this score, that he mentions all the Roman festivals. This is enough to justify

his Fasti as the point of departure in the present consideration. Once Ovid has mentioned the feast and has given some pertinent description, we can supplement his information from other sources and so be prepared to trace the feast into Christian times.

One last general remark about the Fasti is in order here in this introductory chapter. Ovid's poetry, especially the Metamorphoses, has had a considerable influence on later literature. Ovid's tales are a common source of folklore and mythology for the world's literary masters, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, to mention a few. The point we wish to note here is that Ovid's Fasti, while a reliable enough account of Roman religious practices, can in no way be said to have had a similar influence on later religious practice. As the succeeding chapters will make clear, Christianity in no sense received inspiration from Ovid's accounts to adopt like ideas and practices into its liturgy. Actually such a caution seems unnecessary. Yet it is not altogether a waste of time to restate in what way the Fasti enter into the framework of this thesis.

With these few remarks on Ovid and his Fasti, we pass on to another point necessary for evaluating the religious contribution of pagan Rome to the early Christian Church. The Church, from the earliest times, recognized the external element in religious observance. "The external worship of God, if it is not to remain vague and indefinite, finds expression on the one hand through
certain elements belonging to the senses, such as signs and words, and on the other hand it is connected with places and times. 12 The question is whether or not the Church might adopt existing pagan externals for her use as a vehicle in communicating her supernatural vitality.

In referring to the ceremonies connected with the pagan mystery religions, it has been well said:

Now we would be surprised if in the Christian liturgy we should find no echo of these things. Christianity, arising at such a time, could not entirely exclude such popular religious conceptions and currents. For these currents, in so far as they represented a valid longing for true salvation prepared the way for what Christianity alone could give. Moreover, these popular religious conceptions offered to Christianity a method of propagating its teachings. Even for its most sacred mysteries it could find in these popular images and formulas the expression of its own overflowing wealth of new and inner life. These popular religious ideas could be changed into Christian coin and thus Christianity be made intelligible to the Hellenism by which it was surrounded. 13

The same can be said of the externals of pagan festivals. Christianity had so much content of its own that there would never be a question of borrowing content—only of borrowing external form to help express the content. "C' est tout, et ce n' est pas assez pour dire comme on l' a fait, que le paganisme est entré dans le Christianisme, ou plutôt que le Christianisme s' est super-

12Kellner, p. 1.

posed au paganisme, qu'il est surtout une religion de 'superposition.'

The Church was, from its beginnings, realistic. Its leaders recognized the difference between form and content. That Christianity was something altogether new and revolutionary there could be no doubt. "Au fond, dans sa doctrine, dans son enseignement, dans sa discipline, dans l'ensemble de sa liturgie, l'Eglise reste essentiellement, radicalement hostile au paganisme. Pas de pacte possible entre ces deux ennemis; l'un des deux doit périr."

But with the content properly protected, the Church realized that in matters of form more freedom was possible. "Il ne faut pas partir de ce principe que tout est mauvais dans le paganisme. Le mal, c'est d'avoir détourné au profit des idoles, un culte légitime. Mais la prière, les supplications, les genuflexions, les prostrations, les litanies, l'encens, la pompe des cérémonies, les fêtes, les chants, les ex-votos, tout cela est en soi indifférent, je veux dire, peut être appliqué au culte du vrai Dieu, ou à celui des dieux du paganisme."  

For the first three centuries after Christ, Christian litur-


16 Ibid., 380.
gy led an underground existence in the catacombs. The ceremonies of the Church were, of necessity, most simple. Once Christianity had received official recognition, she found herself confronted with a public role demanding external ceremony to a much greater extent.

She took what remained of pagan forms, sifted them, and adopted what she thought proper. This was but the first instance of such adaptation in the history of a church which labored under the command to seek all nations.

Christian leaders realized that their converts from paganism, while sincere in their renunciation of the essentials of the pagan cult, were, at the same time, understandably attached to old rites and celebrations. Whenever possible, the Church tried to accommodate her converts in this matter. Early churchmen carefully examined the ancient rites and customs to salvage what they could for use, involving no compromise to Christian principles.

The classical document is a letter written by Pope Saint Gregory the Great to the Abbot Mellitus who was on his way to do missionary work with Saint Augustine in England:

... the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples; let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed.
He concludes:

For there is no doubt that it is impossible to efface everything at once from their obdurate minds; because he who endeavors to ascend to the highest place, rises by degrees or steps, and not by leaps. 17

With these introductory remarks made, we can now proceed to a consideration of the feasts in question.

17 "To his most beloved son, the Abbot Mellitus; Gregory, the servant of the servants of God," in Venerable Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, I, 30, trans. John Stevens (London, 1944), pp. 52-53.
CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF THE LUPERCALIA

AND THE PURIFICATION

The first pagan Roman celebration suggesting a possible connection with a later Christian feast is the February celebration of the Lupercalia. The Lupercalia proved to be one of the most long-lived of the pagan celebrations, lasting as it did until the fifth century A.D. Authorities during the centuries since the fifth have differed as to whether there is a definite connection between the pagan and Christian celebrations. As has been pointed out in the previous introductory chapter, the amount of scholarly controversy justifies a consideration of the matter in the present treatment.

Ovid describes the Lupercalia in the second book of his Fasti:

*Tertia post Idus nudos aurora Lupercos
aspicit, et Fauni sacra bicornis eunt,
dicite, Pierides, sacrorum quae sit origo,
attigerint Latias unde petita domos.*

*Cur igitur currant, et cur (sic currere mos est)
nuda ferrant posita corpora veste, rogas?
ipse deus velox discurrere gaudet in altis
montibus et subitas concipit ipse fugas;*
The participants in the Lupercalia rites met at the cave called the Lupercal, situated at the foot of the south-western corner of the Palatine Hill. This cave was revered as the place where the flooded Tiber had left the twins, Romulus and Remus, and where the she-wolf had found them and nourished them through infancy. The cave very probably derives its name from this animal, "illa loco nomen fecit." The name of the feast itself, Lupercalia, comes either directly from the name of the cave or from the Luperci, the celebrants.

The ritual for which the Luperci gathered had been one of long standing in Roman history. Ovid traces its origins to the Arcadian worship of Pan, which god he associates with the Roman woodland deity, Faunus. To make the connection more specifically Roman, Ovid tells a story directly connecting the nude running of the festival with an event in the lives of Romulus and Remus. The

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2The story of Romulus and Remus and their adventures in infancy are described in the Fasti, II, 381-482.
4Warde Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 311.
6Ibid., 359-380. In the course of his two hundred line description of the Lupercalia, Ovid introduces several asides which provide interesting reading, but they do not have a strict bearing on our account of the Lupercalia ritual.
beating, a later part of the ceremony, is also provided with a note of authenticity by Ovid's connection of it with Romulus' later days. 7

Ovid is not alone in so construing the history of the festival. Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his Early History of Rome indicates too that such a connection was a matter of common agreement:

Ac primum quidem Pani Lycaeo, monitur Themidis (Pan enim apud Arcades deorum antiquissimus habetur, ost Que in summo apud eos honore) invento loco apto quem Romani Lupercal appellant, nos vero Lycaenum diceremus . . . . in ara hic deo statuta sacrificium more patri fecerunt, quod et nostra aetate Romani mense Februario, post hibernum solstitium, nihil de pristino ritu mutantes, faciunt. 8

Since Ovid was more interested in describing the Lupercalia's origins than in narrating the ceremonies as they occurred in his lifetime, we turn to a much more satisfactory account of the rites performed as related in Plutarch's Romulus:

For the priests slaughter goats, and then, after two youths of noble birth have been brought to them, some of them touch their foreheads with a bloody knife, and others wipe the stain off at once with wool dipped in milk. The youths must laugh after their foreheads are wiped. After this they cut the goats' skins into strips and run about, with nothing on but a girdle, striking all those who meet them with the thongs, and young married women do not try to avoid their blows, fancying that they promote conception and easy childbirth. A peculiarity of the festival is that the

7Ibid., 429-452.

Luperci sacrifice a dog also. 9

Along with the sacrifice of the goats and dog, sacred cakes made by the Vestal Virgins were also offered; these cakes came from the first ears of the previous year's harvest. Once the blood-milk rite had been performed, the young men sat down to a sumptuous feast meal.

With the meal finished, the Luperci began the final stage of their celebration. They ran about the city, girt only in the skins of the sacrificed animals, beating any women they happened to encounter. "...quo opertebat juvenes qui collam Palatinum incoelabant post peractum sacrificium ex Lupercali prefectos pagum nudos cursu circumire, pellibus victimarum recens mactatarum pudenda succinctos." 10 Plutarch describes the rite:

At this time many of the noble youths and of the magistrates run up and down through the city naked, for sport and laughter striking those they meet with shaggy things. And many women of rank also purposely get in their way, and like children at school present their hands to be struck, believing that the pregnant will thus be helped to easy delivery, and the barren to pregnancy. 11

A few comments on the rites just described are here in place. Ovid's reference to Faunus as the god of the feast must be taken

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10 Dionysius, I, 80, Kiessling, p. 50.

with some caution, since a number of others differ with him. Livy
says the god in question was a certain Innuus,\textsuperscript{12} about whom we
know little else. The modern commentators differ just as do the
ancients. Fowler suggests that perhaps the name of the god was a
secret.\textsuperscript{13} A later authority, Franz Altheim, takes Lupercus as a
god in himself, developing the theory with elaborate documentation.\textsuperscript{14}
Another recent writer takes this view:

The god of the Lupercalia is given many names—Faunus, Pan, Lupercus, Lyceus, Innuus—even Bacchus and Juno
are mentioned— . . . Late writers refer to a Februus,
the personification of the month, who is once named as
honored by the Luperci. There was, in fact, no general
agreement as to the identity of the god. This leads to t
the modern suggestion that the Lupercalia was originally
a magical rather than a religious rite, and hence did
not involve a reference to any particular deity.\textsuperscript{15}

We are also in doubt as to the identity of the priest of the
Lupercalia rites. Ovid tells us that it was the Flamen Dialis,
priest of Jupiter,\textsuperscript{16} but Plutarch says specifically that the Flamen
was allowed to touch neither goat nor dog.\textsuperscript{17} The goat and the

\textsuperscript{12}Tit\lspace Livi\lspace Ab\lspace Urbe\lspace Condita,\lspace I, 5.

\textsuperscript{13}Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 313.

\textsuperscript{14}Frantz Altheim, A History of Roman Religion, trans. Harold

\textsuperscript{15}William M. Green, "The Lupercalia in the Fifth Century,"
Classical Philology, XXVI (January, 1931), 64. The magical ori-
gin theory is that of Frazer, Fasti Commentary, II, 335.

\textsuperscript{16}Fasti, II, 282.

\textsuperscript{17}Plutarch, Morals, "Roman Questions," 111, trans. Isaac
Chauncy (Boston, 1870), II, 261-263.
dog were actually considered victims of great natural holiness and
were used on very rare occasions. 18

The smearing-wiping-laughing ritual has an obscure origin.
Many theories have been proposed and are considered at length by
Fowler. 19 For our general consideration suffice it to say that it
seems highly probable the rite is symbolic of expiation. This
interpretation would fit in well with the other parts of the cere-
mony, the earlier piaculum and the later lustratio.

As to the two runners themselves, each of them represented
one of the two colleges of the Luperci. These colleges are supposed
to have originated from the priesthcods of the Fabii and the
Quinctii. 20 "In Caesar's time noble youths and magistrates felt
no shame in playing the part, even the consul Antony appearing
conspicuously in 44 B.C. Under Augustus, membership in the two
colleges of Luperci was awarded as a mark of honor to selected
youths of equestrian rank." 21

The runners followed the course of the pomoerium at the foot
of the Palatine Hill. As they went they struck at women they met
with thongs cut from the hides of the sacrificed animals. The in-

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18 The oxen, sheep, and pigs were the usual offerings. The dog
was offered only to Robigo, the Lares Praestites, and Mana Geneta;
the goat was offered only to Bacchus and Aesculapius.

19 Fowler, Roman Festivals, pp. 315-318.

20 Ibid., 319-320.

21 Green, p. 65.
tention in this beating was to produce fertility and easy childbirth:

Nupta, quid expectas? non tu pallentibus herbis
nec prece nec magico carmine mater eris;
excipe fecundae patienter verbera dextrae,
jam soeer optatum nomen habeit avi. 23

The practice of whipping parts of the body to drive away evil spirits interfering with fertilization is an old one and is found among many ancient peoples. 23

When we attempt an exact explanation of the very purpose of the Lupercalia, we meet the same difficulties which arose in connection with the god honored and the priest officiating. Fowler's description of the Lupercalia as "one of the oldest and most interesting, but at the same time most obscure and debated, festivals in the Roman year" 24 sums up the situation accurately. Since the rites are so obscure, many varying interpretations have been offered by authorities on Roman religion as to the real purpose of the feast.

Fowler singles out as significant the interpretation of the German scholar, Deubner. One of Deubner's main contentions is

22Fasti, II, 425-428, Frazer, I, 80.

23Confer Frazer's commentary on the above lines of the Fasti, II, 344-346. Confer also Fowler, Roman Festivals, 320-321.

24Fasti Commentary, II, 328.

that the Lupercalia must be interpreted not under the hypothesis of one original festival, but rather with a view to developments in the ritual over a long period of time.

For our purposes here it is only necessary to point out that by Ovid's time the festival carried two main ideas: the Lupercalia had the purpose of warding off sterility and was also, in a wider sense, a feast of purification. Ovid himself is clear enough on both points. In describing the origin of the feast he recounts:

\[\text{augur erat (nomen longis intercident annis,} \]
\[\text{nuper ab Etrusca venerat exul humo),} \]
\[\text{ille caprurn maactat, jussae sua terga puellae} \]
\[\text{pellibus exsectis percutienda dabant,} \]
\[\text{luna resumebat decimo nova cornua motu,} \]
\[\text{virque pater subito nuptaque mater erat.} \]

Earlier in the same book of the Fasti, when he speaks of the naming of the month, Februarius, Ovid gives as one possible interpretation:

\[\text{mensis at his dictus, secta quia pelle Lupercal} \]
\[\text{omne solum lustrant idque piamen habent.} \]

And Plutarch adds:

Of the months which were added or transposed by Numa, February must have something to do with purification, for this is nearest to the meaning of the word, and in this month they make offerings to the dead and celebrate the festival of the Lupercalia, which, in most of its features, resembles a purification. 26

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26Fasti, II, 443-448, Frazer, I, 80-82.
27Ibid., 31-32, Frazer, I, 54.
Frazer, in his commentary on the *Fasti*, leans toward "the view that the festival was one of purification which, by ridding the community of the evil powers of barrenness and disease that had infested it in the past year, set free the kindly powers of nature to perform their genial task of promoting the fertility alike of women, of cattle, and of the fields." 29

Now that we have considered the Lupercalia as it was celebrated in Ovid's day, we pass on to our particular question: what connection, if any, links this pagan festival to the Christian Feast of the Purification? Two noted authorities on Roman religion have come to the following conclusions:

And as the Luperci, who performed the rites, were one of the most ancient priesthoods of Rome, so they outlived all the rest, for they continued to celebrate their quaint ceremonies in the capital even after the establishment of Christianity. In A.D. 497 the Pope Hilarius sternly rebuked the Emperor Anthemius for suffering these clowns to cut their old capers to the scandal of pious folk; and it was not till A.D. 494 that the festival was suppressed by Pope Gelasius I and converted into the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin. 30

Warde Fowler concludes his study of the Lupercalia with these words:

*It is singular that a festival of a character so rude and rustic should have lived on in the great city for centuries after it had become cosmopolitan and even Christian. This is one of the many results due to the religious enterprise of Augustus, who rebuilt the de-

29 *Fasti* Commentary, II, 340.

30 Ibid., 328.
cayed Lupercal and set the feast on a new footing. It continued to exist down to the year 494 A.D. when the Pope Gelasius I changed the day (February 15) to that of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.31

Both Frazer and Fowler have based their contentions upon the authority of the seventeenth century historian, Cardinal Baronius. Upon examining the Cardinal's *Annales Ecclesiastici* we find that he records Pope Gelasius' censure and abolition of the Lupercalia. He then adds the conjecture that the Feast of the Purification was instituted to take the place of the pagan feast.32 As a matter of fact, this conclusion of Cardinal Baronius was too hasty. We shall now re-examine the facts to prove his conjecture inaccurate.

That the pagan Lupercalia continued up into the fifth century A.D. there can be no doubt. "The Lupercalia, then, must be considered as belonging to the class of superstitions which lingered on among a nominally Christian people."33 Saint Augustine mentions the celebration in the latter part of his *De Civitate Dei*, written about 426.34

Pagan worship had been forbidden in a long series of laws, the first of which was enacted in 341 A.D. Severe penalties were prescribed and the last organized resistance by the pagans was crushed.

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33 Green, p. 62.
34 Aurelius Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XXVIII, 12.
by Theodosius I at the battle of Frigidus in 393 A.D. Occasional rioting continued, but the observance of the rites, in general, was suppressed by 408 A.D. Somehow or other the Lupercalia seems to have survived the suppression.

When, through the efforts of Pope Gelasius, the Lupercalia too was finally suppressed, the pontiff addressed a letter to a group of senators in which he defended at length his position in the matter. He was in the strange position of defending his position not against pagans, but against his own Christian flock who were attached to the Lupercalia celebration and deeply resented the efforts of their spiritual leader to remove pagan remnants from their midst. Gelasius realizes this unusual set of circumstances and does not hesitate to condemn it:

Quomodo autem non [in] hanc [spiritalis adulterii] partem non recidit, quicumque se Christianum videri velit et profiteatur et dicat, palam tamen publiceque prae dicare non horreat, non refugiat, non pavescat ideo morbos signi, quia daemonia non colantur et deo Februario non litetur, ei deo, ubi haec delirantia compoterit? Quomodo praevaginatior non est, qui in has blasphemiae profanitates incurrirt? Quomodo sacrilegus non aestimetur, qui abjurata unius Dei providentia et potestate, quam confessus, ad prodigiosas superstitiones et vana figmenta seducitur?35

Gelasius goes into detail to show that the feast as celebrated in his time should have no claim on the beliefs or affections of his Christian people.

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The evidence, then, as to the Lupercalia at this late date shows that it was the performance of the superstitious Christian mob. They thought of it as a purificatory rite by which evils might be avoided for the state, its benefits even extending to outlying portions of Italy. . . . But, though the rites retained the name of Lupercalia, they were considerably altered. Nude runners, not the ancient Luperci, ran to and fro singing sportsive verses in which conspicuous scandals might be aired for the amusement of the people and the humiliation of the offender. As to other practices of the day we have no complete evidence, and may suspect that they had suffered radical modification at the hands of several generations through which they had passed.36

The Pope brings out all those features of the fifth century celebration. He asks of what help the Lupercalia, even properly celebrated, has been up to that day in warding off pestilence.37 He emphasizes the fact that the fifth century runners were of the lowest class with no honor accompanying their office in the celebration. He goes so far as to challenge the senators to take part in the rite themselves if they really believe it is so necessary to their well being.38 The misdeeds and scandals of the hour, the Pope contends, were publicized so as to make the crime more attractive than deserving of shame.39

There is doubt as to whether the animal sacrifice and the beating of women remained a part of the fifth century ceremony or

36Green, p. 69.
37Cæsarius, CSEL, XXXV, 457, 13.
38Ibid., 458-459, 17.
whether, along with the participation of the nobility, these features had been eliminated from the ritual. In any event, whether the feast was celebrated according to strictly classical pagan procedure or had been adapted in the days since Ovid, the Pope concludes: "Sed inquis vel imaginem ipsius rei non debere moveri. Si prodost, si salutare est, cur imago potius apud nos et non ipsa sit veritas? Aut si certe nec tune profuit, quando ritu integro, sicut dicitis, tractabatur, quid quaeritis ejus imaginem cujus nec ipsam profuisse cornitis veritatem?"

Up to now we have considered what Pope Gelasius did say, and why he said what he did. But let us hasten to notice what he did not say. In such a lengthy treatment of the Lupercalia rites as was his letter to the senators, he said nothing at all about substituting something suitable in its place. Holweck confirms this omission: "Romae tempore S. Gelasii Papae ignota orat ista solemnitas [Purificationis Mariæ Virginis] . . . . Gelasius enim ipse

40Green, pp. 67-69.

41Gelasius, CSEL, XXXV, 462, 27.

42It might be well to note here that when Gelasius referred to the spirit involved in the fifth century rites as a demon, he does not thereby reject its reality. He would be completely in the tradition of the Church apologists in regarding this demon as actually existing, though as wholly evil. Saint Augustine refers to such demons (De Civitate Dei, XV, 23). It may well have been that the Christians under Gelasius’ rule realized this and wanted to continue the superstitious practices of the Lupercalia as a protective measure. The issue was not as to the reality of the demons, but as to whether such superstitious practices were the correct remedy against them.
in libro contra Andromachum se quidem prohibuisse scribit, ne Christiani in Urbe Lupercalia [Feb. 15] celebrarent; at de feste novo a se instituto silet. 

Examining the origins of the Christian Feast of the Purification, we find that it first appeared in the eastern Church and gradually worked its way west. It did not appear in the West for more than a century after Gelasius' condemnation of the Lupercalia. The two feasts can hardly, therefore, be said to have a close connection.

We hear of the celebration of the Purification in the eastern Church from an account which would date it at least as early as the fourth century: "Solemnitatem Hierosolymis actam esse tradit, anno 386, peregrina Pictaviensis [Silvia seu Egeria] cum processione die 15 [14] Februarii." Abbot Cabrol is no doubt referring to this same piece of evidence when, in commenting on a theory which would connect the Lupercalia and the Purification, he says, "Mais il ne serait pas difficile de prouver que cette fête de la Purification existe déjà a IVe siècle, à Jerusalem, au mois de février, et l'on conviendra qu'en Palestine, elle n'a rien à faire avec les coutumes païennes de Rome." 

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44 Ibid., 26.
45 Cabrol, Semaine d'ethnologie, II, 390.
By the Jewish law, every mother after having given birth to a child was considered as having contracted a legal stain which prevented her from taking part in public worship. She was obliged to present herself at the temple a specified number of days after the birth of her child (forty in the case of a male child; eighty in the case of a female) to be purified. According to the account in Saint Luke's Gospel, Mary came on the fortieth day after the birth of Jesus to fulfill this prescription of the law. Here it was that the meeting with the aged Simeon and Anna took place.

The commemoration of this event in Our Lord's life spread through the early centuries as Christianity itself grew. We have already noticed its existence in Jerusalem in the fourth century. In 542 A.D. the Emperor Justinian extended the Feast of the Purification to Constantinople.

The first evidence, however, of the feast's having reached Rome is to be found in the Celasian Sacramentary, dated somewhere near the end of the seventh century. Here the feast is referred to as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin and listed as celebrated in Rome on the fifteenth of February. This date was

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48 This sacramentary bears Pope Celasius' name, but was actually written some years after his death. Confer L. Duchesne, Christian Worship: Its Origins and Evolutions (London, 1903), pp. 125-134.
49 Sacramentarium Celasianum, 2, 8.
soon changed to the second of the same month and a procession added by Pope Sergius I.

The first dating of the feast in this Gelasian Sacramentary is an almost certain indication that the feast originated in the East and was from there transferred to the western Church. For the Purification according to the Jewish law was set for the fortieth day after the birth and, since the Birth of Our Lord was long believed in the east to have occurred on the sixth of January, the fifteenth of February would have fallen as the fortieth day. However, the Nativity of Our Lord in the western Church was commemorated from the earliest centuries on December twenty-fifth. "Romae insuper Purificatio numquam agi potuit die 15 Februrii, quia Natale semper actum est die 25 Decembris." Any festival, therefore, originated in the West would have been set for the second of February. As we have seen, the date of the feast transferred from the East was very soon changed to correspond with western tradition.

As at the time [fourth century] the Epiphany on January sixth was believed in the east to be the birthday of Our Lord, the fortieth day after it must have commemorated the Presentation in the temple, or the feast of Simeon, as the Echternach Calendar calls it. When this celebration was later transplanted from the East and adopted by Rome it necessarily fell on February second, the

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50 The Feast of the Purification apparently took a long time to catch hold in the western Church. It is not found in the earlier lectionaries and calendars. Confer Kollner, p. 175.

51 Holweck, p. 28.
fortieth day from December twenty-fifth, which had been adopted as the western date for the Nativity. 52

Some sources try to connect the Lupercalia with the Purification through the link of a candlelight procession. 53 This tenet is a dubious one since, as we have seen, candlelight does not enter directly into the Lupercalia rites. It might, however, have been one of the additions of Christian centuries up to the time of Gelasius. Thurston comments thus on the validity of such a theory: "Whether a procession with blessed candles was attached to that celebration with the express object of replacing the heathen procession of the Lupercalia, it seems now impossible for us to determine; but seeing that a similar procession, as Bede is careful to mention, was also organized in Rome on the other great feasts of Our Lady, the substitution at best must have been of a very vague and general character." 54

We can conclude, therefore, that it is impossible to hold the Purification as a substitute for the Lupercalia. For Gelasius, the one who destroyed the Lupercalia, very probably knew nothing of the Feast of the Purification; certainly he did not institute a celebration of such a feast in the western Church. And when the celebration of the Purification did become recognized in the West, it was an adoption of a similar commemoration from the East, which

54 Thurston, p. 235.
had been in existence for at least one hundred years before Gelasius' pontificate. Presented with this evidence, we will have to agree: "On a vouler voir dans l' institution de cette fête et le choix de ce date un souvenir de la fête païenne des Lupercales mais cette interprétation a dû aussi être abandonnée." 55

Since there is no historical connection, it would be difficult to speak of a linking idea. However, it might be well to note how Gelasius' Christians felt the need to ward off pestilence and lack of fertility. In commemorating the purification of one who in no way needed purifying, the Church does not try to draw a parallel. But she certainly uses this idea of purification in her institution of the forty days of Lent, although the pestilence and lack of fertility fought against here are of a much more spiritual nature.

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CHAPTER III

THE CARISTIA AND THE FEAST

OF SAINT PETER'S CHAIR

Having completed our analysis of the Lupercalia-Purification problem, we now come to a consideration of a more clear-cut example of the principles discussed in the first chapter. For in the Roman Caristia we have an unquestioned example of a pagan feast eventually adopted by later Christianity.

We still find ourselves in February, the last month of the Roman calendar year before the Julian reform. The general character of the February, end of the year, festivals appears to be quite a serious one in comparison with the rites of late December and January where the days were occupied with "a series of joyful gatherings of an agricultural people in homestead, market-place, crossroads."\(^1\) The predominating note of February becomes the fulfilment of duties, and of purification, in the sense of placating the gods for any unintentional offences committed and of warding off hostile forces which might prevent fertility of all kinds.

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\(^1\)Warde Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, p. 298.
during the coming seasons of reproduction and growth.

With this theme for the entire month, it is clear why the characteristic rites of the period are the Lupercalia and the Parentalia, a ritual in honor of the dead. The dies parentales began on the thirteenth of the month and continued until the twenty-first, the day known as the Feralia, the only public holiday of the nine days. During the nine day period, however, all the temples were closed, marriages were forbidden, and the magistrates did not appear with their insignia.

With their dead properly commemorated, the Roman people then paused for a day, the twenty-second of the month, to recognize their loved ones still alive.

Upon the commemoration of the departed followed immediately, on the twenty-second of February, the festival of surviving relatives—the chari—named in consequence the Charistia or Cara Cognatio. The celebration had no recognized place among the functions of the official worship of the state, and no public festivals were provided for it. Nevertheless, it was a very popular feast, and struck its roots deeper into the life of the people than any of the official festivals.

Few of the ancient writers mention the Caristia. Valerius Maximus offers a brief account: "Convivium etiam solemnne maiores instituerunt, idque Caristia appellaverunt, cui praeter cognatos et affines nemo interponebatur: ut, si qua inter necessarias per-

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2 Ibid., 305-308.
3 Kellner, p. 302.
sonas, querela esset orta, apud sacra mensae, et inter hilaritatem animorum, fautoribus concordiae adhibitis tolleretur."

Martial makes a brief mention of the day of family celebration in one of his epigrams, referring to it as, "luce propinquorum," or what might be translated, "Family Day."

Our main source of information on the Caristia, however, comes from Ovid's Fasti:

Proxima cognati dixer Caristia cari,
et venit ad socios turba propinqua deos.
selicet a tumulis et, qui periere, propinquis  
protnus ad vivos ara referre juvat  
postque tot amissos, quicquid de sanguine restat,  
aspicere et generis denumerare gradus.

Certainly we have pictured here one of the finest aspects of the Roman spirit, family love and loyalty. The various family members return from their visit to the family tomb where they recalled their departed loved ones and performed the prescribed rites in honor of them. Now it gives them joy to turn their thoughts to those still alive, rejoicing in their affection and companionship.

The bond of their family ties, they now realize, must overcome all the petty disagreements which have arisen during recent months. The feast is a feast of reunion:

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6 Fasti, II, 617-622, Frasier, I, 92-94.
innocui veniant: procul hinc, procul impius esto
frater et in partus mater acerba suos,
cui pater est vivax, qui matris digerit annos,
qua premit invisan socrus iniqua nurum.
Tantalidae fratres absint et Jasonis uxor
et quae ruricolis semina tosta dedit,
et soror et Procne Tereusque duabus iniquus
et quicunque suas per scelus auget opes.
dis generis date tura boni (Concordia furtur
illa praecipue mitis adesse die)
et libate dapas, ut, grati pignus honoris
nutriat incinctos missa patella Lares.7

Here Ovid enumerates the various causes of domestic conflict, along
with their prototypes from mythology and history. The two brothers
referred to are Atreus and Thyestes, grandsons of Tantalus, said to
have alternately been kings of Mycenae. Thyestes is famous for
debauchery with his brother's wife and incest with his own daugh-
ter, Atreus for the murder of his brother's sons. Along with them
is mentioned Jason's wife, Medea, who slew her own children out of
revenge for her husband's infidelity. Ino is mentioned—a woman
who plotted to murder her stepchildren and, finally, Tereus, un-
faithful to his wife Procne in seducing her sister, Philomela. We
can hopefully suppose that the quarrels of the Roman family did
not ordinarily rise to the level of these examples of domestic
treachery. But whatever the grievance, let all now gather together
to burn incense before their family gods and offer food to the
household Lares in pledge of family solidarity.

Ovid adds these final words:

7Ibid., II, 523-534, Frazer, I, 94.
The final toast of the family celebration should be directed to Caesar, the father of their country and guide of their national destiny. At the climax of the day all the families, each united in love, turn to their common father in a pledge of loyal affection.

We do not know the date of the Caristia's origin. However, Ovid writes of it as though it were well known in his day. No special characteristic ritual appears to be involved other than the preliminary offering of food to the Lares and the final tribute to the emperor. The main feature of the Caristia remained the family meal where all the members joined in forgetting their differences with one another. "All ranks joined in celebrating it; the portraits of the ancestors of each family were adorned with garlands, a sacrificial meal was presented to the household gods, incense was burnt, and a pig was offered in sacrifice; where quarrels had broken out in a family, harmony was again restored, and the religious ceremonies were performed amid the rejoicings of all; the deeds of famous members of the family were recited and the day concluded with a banquet, which lasted until a late hour."  

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8Ibid., II, 635-638, Frazer, I, 94. The arrangement of "bene vos [Lares], bene te [Augustus]" clearly indicates the attribution of divinity to the emperor.  

9Kellner, pp. 302-303.
The family celebration of Caristia continued on through the time of Christ and through the early Christian centuries. "Such a festival must have been highly popular. It seems to have been observed everywhere Latin was spoken, in Africa as well as in Gaul." The celebration spread from the home to the schools, as Tertullian tells us. The walls of the school were hung with garlands and presents were given to the teacher.

One of the earliest Christian calendars in existence was compiled by Polemius Silvius, Bishop of Sion in the upper valley of the Rhone. It dates from 446 A.D. Special effort was made in this calendar to omit everything heathen; only historical and meteorological notices remained from the pagan calendars. Under the date of February twenty-second, however, we find these words, "Dispositio Saneti Petri et Pauli. Cara Cognatio, ideo dicta, quis tunc, etsi fuerint vivorum parentum odia, tempore obitus deponantur." It is clear that the Ferialia rites for the dead had, by this time, been subsumed under the Caristia reconciliation. Worthy of note too is the fact that in the upper Rhone territory (then part of Gaul) the change from the Caristia had been made in favor of a

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10Ibid., 303.


12Kalendarium Antiquum Polemii Silvii, in PL, XIII (Paris, 1845), 678.
commemoration of Saints Peter and Paul and not the Chair of Saint Peter. The most important point here, however, is the evidence that the pagan Cara Cognatio had been allowed to remain where all other pagan remnants had been swept out. We can be certain that the attempt here was to draw some connection between the Caristia with all its good points and the Christian liturgy. Otherwise the Caristia would have met a fate similar to the other pagan festivals in Polemius' calendar.

Polemius Silvius' attempt to change the Caristia into a festival of Saints Peter and Paul did not go beyond the immediate area of his own territory. Commemorations of Saints Peter and Paul were already established elsewhere on the twenty-ninth of June.13 But the Christians in these other localities began to insert in the February calendar a commemoration of the Chair of Saint Peter. From the fifth to the ninth centuries the greater number of calendars and martyrologies carry the designation of February twenty-second as Cathedra Petri.

Before analyzing the connection between the Caristia and the Chair of Saint Peter, it might be well to note a few points with regard to the latter celebration.

Cathedra from the earliest Christian times has stood as the symbol of authority in the Church. It referred to the throne of the Bishop situated behind the main altar of the basilica, where he remained seated when not taking part directly in the liturgical

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13Kollmer, p. 305.
action. The festival of Saint Peter's Chair, then, is a festival in honor of Saint Peter's authority.

The significance of this feast is expressed in the words of the collect for the day: 'God who on this day hast given Blessed Peter to be head after Thee of the Church...,' i.e., the occasion of the feast was not the foundation or organization of one particular church, either Rome or Antioch, but the appointment of Saint Peter to be head of the whole Church in general, or, in other words, the bestowal of the Primacy upon him, or his ordination as bishop, as others prefer to have it... From the fourth to the ninth century we find this feast of the twenty-second of February [Cathedra Petri] without further specification.\(^\text{14}\)

However, a change of interpretation of the extent of Saint Peter's authority involved further distinctions. When the words, Cathedra Petri, were no longer taken as referring to the Primacy or the episcopal and teaching office in general, but as referring to some definite episcopal see, then the question was asked: the see of Antioch or the see of Rome?\(^\text{15}\)

The further history of this festive doublet, January eighteenth and February twenty-second,\(^\text{16}\) does not directly concern us

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\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., p. 306. Actually the collect for the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter (both at Rome and Antioch) begins, according to the edition of the Missale Romanum in use at the present time, "Deus, qui beato Petro Apostolo tuæ, collatis clavibus regni coelestis, ligando atque solvendo pontificium tradidisti..." (Missale Romanum, 5 ed. [New York, 1945], p. 453). This rephrasing, however, only tends to make more emphatic the element of pontifical authority in contrast to ordinary episcopal authority.

\(^\text{15}\) Kellner, p. 306.

\(^\text{16}\) "Il semble qu'il n'y ait eu à l'origine qu'une seule fête, celle du 22 février, où l'on solennisait le souvenir de l'épiscopat ou l'apostolat de saint Pierre à Rome. L'édition d'Antioche est due en réalité au rédacteur de l'édition auxerroise du martyrologe hiéronymien et n'a pas de valeur historique." (Fer-
here. As a matter of fact, the February twenty-second celebration was eventually confined to the authority of Saint Peter at Antioch, at least as far as the title of the feast was concerned (we have already seen how the collect of the Mass traces a wider scope). Suffice it to say here that this February twenty-second feast has always been one referring to and honoring Church authority.

We can now sum up our present position. We have seen that the Caristia climaxed the Parentalia commemorations of the dead, although the Caristia and Parentalia were, in pagan times, separate. We have traced a definite connection of the Caristia through Polemnius Silvius to the Sion institution of a commemoration in honor of Saints Peter and Paul. The remainder of Christianity replaced the same Caristia with a feast in honor of Saint Peter's authority, represented by the symbol of his chair. Now we can proceed to analyze the underlying connection.

What had come down from pagan times which the Church wished to adopt, a commemoration of the living, of the dead, or of both? By Christian times the Caristia had taken on the office of the Ferialia, memorial rites for the dead members of the family, as well as the office the feast itself had always had, that of fostering union among the members of the family yet living. In general, a bond of union was affected among all the members of the family, living and dead.

[W]e see that the Feralia [the closing of the Parentalia rites] and the Caristia are no longer [6th century] separate; the preacher [who had condemned excess in Caristia banquets] speaks only of the meals and gifts which were offered on behalf of the departed. These continued on into Christian times, and in Gaul took place on the twenty-second of February, although this was not the correct date for the Feralia. It seems, then, that in many places the memory of both living and dead was celebrated on one and the same day, and this was always the twenty-second of February. 17

Despite the opinion of some outstanding authorities18 that the Caristia was from early pagan days principally concerned with rites in honor of the dead, we can conclude from Ovid's account that, while the Caristia followed closely upon the Feralia, it did indeed have a separate character pertaining to living relatives.

However, when mention is made of the connection between the Caristia and the Chair of Saint Peter, authorities seem to take it for granted that the latter was inserted to substitute for the pagan ritual in honor of the dead only. From these statements, it would seem that the Caristia not only absorbed the Feralia, but indeed lost its own characteristic note of family celebration among living members.

Typical of such presentations of the situation is Cabrol's article: "Mais quelle raison fit choisir le 22 février? Il paraît bien que ce fut le désir de remplacer par une fête chrétienne le

17 Kellner, p. 303.
souvenir d' une solennité païenne qui se célébrait à ce même jour par des festins et des autres manifestations profanes en l' honneur des défunts de chaque famille. C' était la cara cognatio ou Caris-
tia, célèbre dans les annales de la liturgie païenne. 19

Many centuries earlier a liturgical commentator gave this ex-
planation, attributing the whole Caristia to rites for the dead:

Fuit enim consuetudo veterum ethnorum ut singulis annis mense Februarii certo quopiam die epulas ad paren-
tum suorum tumulos apponerent quas nocte daemones cons-
sumabant . . . . Hae autem consuetudo atque hujusmodi falsae opinionis error a Christianis vix extirpari potuit. Quod quidem cum viri sancti animadvertissent, ac penitus illam consuetudinem exstinguere voluissent, instituerunt festum de Cathedra S. Petri, tam de illa quae fuit Romae quam quae Antiochiae, idque illo eodem die quo abominanda illa ab ethnibus fiebant, ut solem-
ni hoc festo parvas istius consuetudinis festum omno exstinguereetur. Unde etiam ab illis epulis festum hoc appellatum est beati Petri epularum. 20

These commentators would have, then, a Christian feast inserted to replace improper pagan rites with no intrinsic connection supposed between them. Certainly the reference to banquets does not go far in explaining a connection. Why should Saint Peter be connected with a banquet? Why not "festum beati Pauli vel Joannis epularum?" They do not explain just why the Chair of Saint Peter should replace the Caristia, even supposing it to be a commemo-
ration of the dead only.

19 Cabrol, DACL, III1, 77.

Now granting that the commemoration of Saint Peter took the place of the meals for the dead as only an arbitrary substitute for misguided pagan religious sentiment, we clearly have a proved historical connection, even though it be more or less extrinsic to the two feasts concerned. But we might well try to discover a more intrinsic connection.

Let us suppose that, as seems historically to have been the case, the Feralia rites were adopted by the Caristia and that the pagan feast in Christian times had reference to both living and dead members of the family, as Kellner indicates above. 21 If we were to look for a greater common denominator which would include both the Caristia and the Feralia, whose purpose it seems to have assimilated, we would discover it in the theme of reconciliation. The spirit of the Feralia led the individual families to recall their dead members, to make every effort to insure their happiness in their new existence beyond the grave, and to unite with them in spirit, in so far as that was possible. This character of the Parentalia in general comes especially clear when one contrasts it with the motivation behind the May Lemuria rites, where the dead were feared as evil spirits which each family must ward off by means of charms and supplications. 22

21 Confer note 17 above.

22 Fowler, Roman Festivals, pp. 107-109.
Now the pagan Caristia was based on an ethically sound idea, although colored by pagan sacrifice which had to be supplanted by Christian rites. The notion of reconciliation was in itself as important to the Christian as it had been to the pagan. But once we have generalized the Caristia spirit to reconciliation, among living and dead, we are still faced with the question: why did the majority of Christian communities choose the commemoration of the Chair of Saint Peter to substitute for the Gara Cognatio?

Certainly there was no independent reason why a feast of Saint Peter, let alone one of his authority, should have been designated for the twenty-second of February. "The choice of the day was not suggested by any Christian tradition." 23 The leading writers on the subject just state the fact that there was a substitution made. Their only reason for the substitution is that the pagan ritual had to be corrected. "On croit assez généralement aujourd'hui parmi les liturgistes que cette date aurait été choisie pour la fête de la chair de saint Pierre, afin de détourner par les magnificences de une fête chrétienne les fidèles qui auraient été portés à se mêler à la fête païenne." 24

Although apparently no official record remains to support the hypothesis, it does not seem too far fetched a conjecture to trace

23 Duchesne, p. 278.

24 Gabrol, Semaine d'ethnologie, II, 384; confer also Duchesne, p. 278; Kellner, p. 304.
a definite intrinsic connection between the Caristia and the Chair of Saint Peter in particular, as follows.

The Roman goal of reconciliation among the members of the family reflects their ideal of pietas, recognizing the devoted loyalty due to members of one's family. As we have seen, Ovid climax ed his account of the Caristia with a toast to Caesar, the father of the family of the state. Now, when we recall that the keynote of the Saint Peter's Chair commemoration was a reminder of the respect and loyalty due to the authority seated in the papal chair, the connection between the pagan and the Christian celebrations rises from the level of utility—substituting the first Christian idea that came along for the pagan spirit—to the stage where a more carefully thought out parallel is suggested. Filial respect and devotion are as valid and necessary in the Christian structure as they were in the pagan.

It is unfortunate that we do not have more records available which would state the reasons for replacing the pagan feasts with particular Christian commemorations. We must generalize from such stated principles as those of Pope Gregory referred to in the introductory chapter. Provided the pagan rite was not of itself completely anti-Christian, the general pagan structure could, in any particular case, be replenished with the new vitality of Christian content. Let the idols be thrown out, but the temples themselves preserved. So in the case of the Caristia, the general theme of the celebration was one of love and respect. The actual rites
could be omitted without destroying the character of the festival.

Having now considered the Lupercalia and the Caristia, we leave Book Two of the Fasti to take up Book Four where the next instance of Christian adaptation summons our attention.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROBIGALIA AND THE

MAJOR LITANY

Thus far in our consideration of pagan feasts and their Christian adaptations we have treated two possible connections. First we examined one instance where no historical connection either intrinsic or extrinsic could be proved. We then advanced to another pagan feast which, although it has a definite historical link with later Christian rites, leaves us to speculate as to the possible continuity of thought between the two. Now we have come to the most satisfying instance of all, where both the intrinsic and extrinsic connections are obvious.

The ancient Robigalia ranks among the earlier pagan religious celebrations.1 Connected with the important agricultural aspect of Roman life, it was of great natural interest, especially to the people of earlier Roman times. That the Robigalia is connected with the Christian Major Litany there can be no doubt. Here indeed we have another example of the Church's recognition of a le-

gitimate desire of the people, prayer for a safe harvest. We shall investigate, first of all, the pagan festival in its particulars and then trace its adaptation by Christianity.

Ovid begins his description of the Robigalia:

Sex ubi, quae restant, luces Aprilis habebit, in medio cursu tempora veris erunt, et frustra pecudem quaeres Athamantidos Helles, signaque dant imbres, exoriturque Canis.²

The important point for our consideration in these lines is that April has six days left. So we are immediately orientated to the exact date, April twenty-fifth. The poet mentions, in addition, the setting of the constellation of the ram,³ which he supposes as taking place on this day. Actually, Ovid has set far too late a date for this particular astronomical event.⁴ His dating of the rising of the dog star is also mistaken, unless he meant "setting" instead of rising, in which case he would have been only six days away from the correct date, May first.⁵ These details, however, do not directly effect the dating of the Robigalia for which, as we have seen, Ovid specifically fixes the day. These movements of the stars, therefore, do not concern us here.

Ovid continues with a personal account of the Robigalia ritual:

²Fasti, IV, 901-904, Fraser, I, 240.
³The story connected with this constellation has been related in detail earlier: Fasti, III, 851-876.
⁴Fasti Commentary, III, 404.
⁵Ibid., 404-405.
This passage would appear to locate Ovid approaching Rome from Nomentum, a town some fourteen or fifteen miles northeast of Rome. At first glance this would appear to place him coming along the Nomentine Way which enters the city through the Colline Gate. Some difficulty is posed by a note in the Praenestine Calendar affixed to the notice of the Robigalia. This note places the Robigalia sacrifice at the fifth milestone of the Claudian Way, hardly on one's way from Nomentum. It would seem, however, that we are left a certain freedom of choice between the two alternatives since the scholars on Roman religion have proposed sound theories for both interpretations. We shall here follow the interpretation which has Ovid crossing from the Nomentine Way to the Claudian Way. On the one hand it seems rather difficult to ignore completely the note in the Praenestine Calendar. On the other, many authorities in pointing out the similarities between the Robigalia and the Christian Major Litany indicate that the route of the Christian procession was the same as that of the pagans.

6Fasti, IV, 905-908, Fraser, I, 240.

7FERIAE ROBIGO VIA CLAUDIA AD MILLIARIUM V NE ROBIGO FRUMENTIS NOGEAT. SACRIFICIUM ET LUDI CURSORIBUS MAJORIBUS MINORIBUSQUE FIUNT.”--”Praenestine Calendar,” in Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, ed. Theodore Mommsen (Berlin, 1863 --), I2 (1893), 253.

8Fraser holds for the literal and obvious interpretation of Ovid's words. He solves the apparent contradiction in accounts: “We need not suppose, nor indeed is it likely, that the Robigalia
The day set apart for this purpose [illustration] at Rome was the twenty-fifth of April, a traditional date, being that on which the ancient Romans celebrated the festival of the Robigalia. The principal ceremony of the latter was a procession, which setting out from the Flaminian Gate, made its way towards the Milvian Bridge, and arrived at length at a suburban sanctuary some distance off, that is, at the fifth milestone on the Claudian Way. The Christian procession which replaced it followed the same route as far as the Milvian Bridge.9

As he walks towards his destination, Ovid comes upon the Robigalia procession. The worshippers are dressed in white for this procession to the country for, as Tibullus tells us,

Casta placent superis, pura cum vestes venite.
Et manibus puris sumite fontis aquam.10

The priest in question is the Flamen Quirinalis, the third in rank of the three Roman flamens.11 He was about to sacrifice to the goddess Robiga.12 She was the deity who controlled mildew and was celebrated in a single place; it seems more probable that . . . rites to avert it [pestilence] were performed in many places."---Fasti Commentary, III, 409. The only possible way of transferring Ovid to the Claudian Way is to suppose that he went directly to his gardens situated near the meeting point of the Claudian Way and the Flaminian Way. Confer Mommsen, CII, I2, 316. In this case he would have had to come through the city or to have made a wide circuit of it in passing from the Nomentine Way to the Claudian Way.


11Fasti Commentary, III, 412.

12The sex of the deity is disputed. Ovid here uses the feminine form (Robigo) as opposed to the masculine (Robigus). The masculine is probably more correct. Confer Fasti Commentary, III, 406-407.
could either ruin the crops or let them prosper at her will. This mildew, or red rust, is caused by dampness acting along with high temperatures and attacks cereal crops when the ear is beginning to form.\(^{13}\) The idea behind the mildew deity was an ancient one, just as ancient as the desire for a successful crop, over against the destructive mildew of Mediterranean farms.

The goddess is appeased by the sacrifice of a dog and a sheep. So the flamen carries with him the entrails of one of each of these animals preparing to burn them at Robigo's shrine. A reddish colored dog was used for the purposes of sacrifice, probably, as Fraser suggests, on a homeopathic principle, "either to promote a ruddy color in the ripening corn, or more probably to avert the rust red of mildew."\(^{14}\)

Ovid becomes interested in the Robigalia procession and is eager to find out more about it:

protinus accessi, ritu ne nescius esset;
edidit haec flamen verba, Quirine, tuus:

There follows the prayer of the priest:

aspera Robigo, parcas Cerialibus herbis,
et tremat in summa leve casumen hume,
tu sata sideribus caeli nutrita secundis
crescere, dum fiant falcibus apta, sinas,
vis tua non levis est: quae tu frumenta notasti,
maestus in amissis illa colonus habet.
nec venti tantum cereri nocuere nec imbres.

\(^{13}\)Fowler, Roman Festivals, pp. 68-89; Fasti Commentary, III, 410.

\(^{14}\)Fasti Commentary, III, 410; Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 91.
With this prayer completed, the flamen advances with his instruments of sacrifice:

    dixerat: a dextra villis mantele solutis
    cumque meri patera turis acerra fuit,
    tura focis vinumque dedit fibrasque bidentis
    turpiaque obscenae [vidimus] exta canis.16

As he finishes the sacrificial meal the flamen turns to Ovid to answer the question the poet had interjected:

    tum mihi 'cur detur sacris nova victima, quaeris.'
      [quassieram] 'causam percipe' flamen ait.
    'est Canis, Icarium dicunt, quo sidere moto,
    tosta sitit tellus, praecipiturque segis.
    pro cane sidereo canis hic imponitur arae,
    et quare pereat, nil nisi nomen habet.'17

This last mythological reference pertains, of course, to the dog star.18 As was pointed out before, Ovid is clearly mistaken

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15Fasti, IV, 911-932, Fraser, I, 242. Of interest in line 913 is Ovid's relating the stars with the weather. The ancients believed there was a causal connection between the two.

16Ibid., 933-936, I, 242.

17Ibid., 937-942, I, 242-244.

18Fasti Commentary, III, 414-416.
in associating the rise, or even the setting, of this star with the Robigalia rites. It is true that a special sacrifice of dogs was offered to placate the dog star, but this event was separate from the Robigalia rites, and its exact timing each year was determined by the use of omens. Just why the dogs were pleasing to Robigo was "unknown both to priest and poet."  

In addition to the procession and sacrifice, some games were staged out in the open. "The red mildew was at times so terrible a scourge that the Robigalia in early Rome, when the population lived on the corn grown near the city, must have been a festival of very real meaning. But later on it became obscured and gave way to the races mentioned in the Praenestine Calendar." Actually little is known of these games; Ovid does not mention them. They always took place after the more strictly religious portion of the Robigalia events. They have no particular importance for our present consideration.

So much, then, for a general picture of the Robigalia according to Ovid, the fullest account of the festival to have come down to us. We can now proceed to a consideration of the extension of the Robigalia into Christian times. We might well begin with the general notion of a litany.

Litaniae is the name given to a solemn procession of

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19 Ibid., 407-408. Fowler apparently does not make this distinction of sacrifices (Roman Festivals, p. 90).
20 Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 90
21 Ibid., 91.
clergy and people accompanied by prayer at which sacred pictures and emblems are carried. It was impossible to perform such devotions in the days before Constantine. But when Christianity became a recognized religion they were quickly adopted, and all the more so as the heathens had similar practices which they performed frequently and at stated times . . . . [T]he Christian processions are a continuation of the heathen processions they replaced. 22

The processions of ancient Rome were of two types: the *amburvalia* (from *urbs*) and the *ambarvalia* (from *arva*). The former type was held within the city, the latter, outside the city walls. The *Robigalia* procession was, of course, of the second type, where the prayer and sacrifice were intended for the safeguarding of the harvest. Warde Fowler brings out the point that the *lustratio* in general, of which the procession was an element, came to have less real significance as Roman religion grew more sophisticated:

Though it is interesting to try to get at the root idea of these processions of *lustratio*, we must remember that in the Rome of history they had lost not only such magical meaning as they ever had, but also much of the religious meaning which in the course of time was superimposed on them . . . . They grew up in the religious experience of the Romans . . . . But meaningless as they were, the stately processions remained, and could be watched with pride by the patriotic Roman all through the period of the empire, until the Roman Church adopted them to its own ritual and gave them . . . a new meaning. 23

So the *Robigalia* processions, while rich in form, had lost a great deal of their original significance. This was an ideal situation

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for Christian authorities. They could use the form of the processions, revive the original spirit of begging divine help for a successful crop. All this could be accomplished with little to fear from the dangerous pagan content which rendered so many pagan festivals utterly useless for Christian purposes.

The earliest documentation we have which traces a definite connection between Robigalia and the Major Litany dates from the sixth century, the time of Gregory the Great. In the appendix to his letters we find the following fragment wherein he treats of the Major Litany:

Solemnitas annuae devotionis nos, filii dilectissimi, admonet, ut litaniam quae major ab omnibus appellatur sollicitis as devotis debeatam, auxiliante Domino, mentibus celebrare, per quam a nostris excessibus ejus misericordiae supplicantes purgari aliquatenus mereamur. Considerare etiam nos convenit, dilectissimi, quam variis continuissique calamitatibus pro nostris culpis atque offensionibus affligamur, et qualiter item eclectis pietatis nobis subinde medicina subveniat. 24

Pope Gregory then adds the specific directions:

Sexta igitur feria veniente, a titulo beati Laurentii martyris, qui appellatur Lucinae, egredientes ad boscum Petrum apostolorum principem, Domino supplicantes cum hymnis et cantis spiritualibus, propereamus ut ibidem, saecra mysteria celebrantes, tam de antiquioribus quam de praesentibus beneficiis pietati ejus, in quantum possimus, referre gratias mereamur.

There are several interesting points to notice in the above

24 Appendix ad Sancti Gregorii Epistolae, III, PL, LXXVII (Paris, 1895), 1329.
25 Ibid., 1330.
quoted passage. First of all Gregory uses the phrase, "Solemnitas annuae devotionis," which indicates that this is not some special occasion he is talking about in the year 591 A.D. but rather the coming celebration of an annual event. Also the words, "litaniam quae major ab omnibus appellatur," show that here was no new observance, since the people already held it a custom and called it the Major Litany.

Now this litany just referred to must be carefully distinguished from the extraordinary litany of 590 A.D., ordered by the same Gregory. The occasion was a flood in the autumn of 589 A.D. which poured into Rome and left plague in its wake. "Subsecuta est de vestigio clades, quam inguinariam vocant. Nam medio mense undecimo adventiis, primum omnium... Pelagium papam percutit, et sine mora extinxit: quo defuncto, magna strages populi de hoc morbo facta est." Gregory was elected to rule the Church and ordered a special litany of supplication and penance to take place.

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26 This directive of Pope Gregory is entered under the date of 591 A.D. by Jaffé (Philip Jaffé, Recusta Pontificum Romanorum 2 ed. (Leipzig, 1895), I, 150). Duchesne gives the date as seven years later. "The most ancient authority for this ceremony is a formula convoking it found in the Register of Gregory the Great, which must have been used in the first instance for the year 598." —Duchesne, p. 288. The exact dating of the Gregorian exhortation does not make a great deal of difference to the present consideration, so long as the Litania Major is distinguished from the Litania Septiformis.

"Proinde, fratres carissimi, contrito corde, et correctis operibus, ab ipso feriae quartae primo diluculo, septiformem Litaniam juxta distributionem inferius designatam devota ad lacrinas mente veniimus, ut districtus Judex cum culpas nostras nos punire considerat, ipse a sententia propositae damnationis parent."

The Major Litany must also be distinguished from the Litaniae Minores, held today before the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord and commonly known as the Rogation Days. These litanies originated in Gaul and were only much later adopted by Rome.

That part of the country [Gaul] had been visited for a considerable period by various calamities and earthquakes. On Easter night, 469, the royal palace in Vienne was struck by lightning, which caused such a panic among the entire congregation assembled in church, that they fled from the building. [Bishop] Mamertus put himself in connection with the civil authorities and along with them organized the litanies, which had been used before this time, but in an informal and irregular manner . . . . This institution was soon imitated throughout the whole of Gaul.

In distinguishing the litanies, major and minor, Kellner adds:

"In Rome the litanies of Rogation Week . . . were first adopted

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26Ibid., I, 1, 482, PL, LXXI, 528-529. This was the Litanía Septiformis in which the seven groups (clergy, monks, religious women, laymen, children, married women, and widows) met, each at different Roman churches and at a given hour went in procession, singing the litanies, to the Basilica of Mary Major. This litany, although described by Gregory of Tours and other biographers of Gregory the Great, is never mentioned by Gregory himself. The Litanía Septiformis is either an expansion of the already existing Litanía Major, or is an altogether separate function, in either case enlarged or instituted because of the plague of 590 A.D. Confer also Kellner, pp. 192-193; Duchesne, p. 288.

29Kellner, p. 191.
under Leo III, 795-816, through the Frankish influence then domi-
nant there . . . . The procession of the twenty-fifth of April
belonged especially to the city of Rome and the name Litania
Major is due to the fact that the processions of Rogation Week
were introduced only later. 30

Thus far we have seen that the Major Litany, while in some way
similar to Pope Saint Gregory's Litania Septiformis, and to Bishop
Mamertus' Litaniae Minores, is altogether independent of them in
origin. It would be well to mention here too that, while the
Major Litany is set for the twenty-fifth of April each year, it has
no connection with the Feast of Saint Mark, the Evangelist, which
was appointed for the same date some centuries after the establish-
ment of the Major Litany. The separation is evident, when, in a
given year, the Feast of Saint Mark moves to a later date because
of the proximity of Easter, the Major Litany does not move with it,
but remains on the twenty-fifth of April. 31

Returning to the Major Litany at Rome, referred to by Pope
Saint Gregory at the end of the sixth century, we recall that he
speaks of it as though the litany on that particular day had been
a long-standing custom. There are no records to trace it back
carefully to the Robigalia processions, but the circumstances of the
two occasions are at least a strong indication that a connection

30 Ibid., 193.
31 Kellner, p. 190; Cabrol, Semaine d' ethnologie, II, 385.
had been recognized and encouraged by Christian authorities.

Having described the route of the ancient Robigalia procession, Duchesne continues:

The Christian procession which replaced it followed the same route as far as the Milvian Bridge. It set out from the Church of Saint Laurence in Lucina, the nearest to the Flaminian Gate, held a station at Saint Valentine outside the walls, and afterwards at the Milvian Bridge. From there, instead of proceeding along the Claudian Way, it turned to the left towards the Vatican, stopped at a cross the site of which is not given, and again in the paradise or atrium of Saint Peter, and finally in the basilica itself, where the station was held.32

Once we have the outline of the facts constructed, the process of filling in the picture comes easily.

Litanies were solemn supplications, instituted to implore the blessing of heaven on the fruits of the earth . . . . It is not a matter of wonder that Christian practice on this point should coincide with customs anterior to it. The same necessities, the same apprehension of dangers, and the same trust in Divine help, inspired rites mutually resembling each other. The practice was based on the idea of a kind of lustration of the cultivated lands, in which the future harvest was giving indication of its promise.33

It is worthy of note that in the passage referred to above from the Register of Saint Gregory’s letters34 the Pope makes no

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32 Duchesne, p. 288. In the light of these Christian similarities to the pagan route outlined in the Praenestine Calendar, it seems better to take the interpretation of Ovid’s “Memento . . . redirem” as referring to the final stage of a journey to end at his gardens, which interpretation would locate him on the Claudian Way.

33 Ibid., 287-288.

34 Confer footnote 24 of this chapter.
specific reference to crops but speaks in general of a spirit of penance and thanksgiving for God's gifts. His general statements would in no way exclude the specific purpose of the annua solemnitas as the prayer for the safety of the year's crops. The commentators seem to favor this interpretation. James Fraser has his own particular slant: "The Roman Church long continued on the same day [the twenty-fifth of April], but under the name of Saint Mark instead of Mildew, the procession of the Robigalia which Ovid witnessed nearly two thousand years ago . . . . To this day the Catholic Church continues to pray for the crops on the twenty-fifth of April, as the flamen of Quirinus used to do on the same day in olden time."35 The historian, Grisar, in referring to the same connection writes:

The Christian procession on Saint Mark's Day was in some sense the outcome of this heathen custom, for as soon as the pagan procession had fallen into disuse, or perhaps even in the time of its decline, the ceremonial described was adopted by the Roman Bishops, though, of course, it was carefully divested of its heathen character. The ecclesiastical procession was held in honor of the true God, to implore, through the intercession of the Saints, His blessing on the harvest . . . . Thereby the Church sought to compensate the people for a cherished custom of their ancestors, and, at the same time, more effectually to withstand any surviving remnants of Paganism. Instead of songs of praise to the gods, the verdant pastures resounded with the Church's hymns, the Kyrie

35 Fasti Commentary, III, 410-411. Fraser's inference that Saint Mark replaces Mildew has already been refuted, as we have seen, in the separation of the Major Litany from the Feast of Saint Mark. Confer also Fowler, Roman Festivals, p. 91.
Elision, and psalms. 36

Such, then, is the story of this second instance of Christianity adopting a pagan festival. The common spirit is one of humble supplication to the power of God to spare those who pray to Him from the misfortunes which He could send to them. The Reverend F.X. Lasance in his commentary on the liturgical year sums up: "The people were thus taught that it was not the favor of the heathen god, but a devout life, humble prayer, and the intercession of the saints . . . which would disarm the justice of God offended by our sins . . . . The Church preferred to give a spiritual significance to observances implanted in the hearts of the people rather than suppress them." 37


Having considered in detail three of the Fasti festivals, we might now list some conclusions which occur to one after such an investigation. The first remark pertains directly to Ovid's work; two further comments refer more to the aspect of Christian liturgical adaptations.

In the introductory chapter mention was made of Ovid's contribution to our knowledge of Roman religion. Our particular considerations here have certainly borne out that fact. In the case of the Lupercalia, Ovid's account, while not the only one extant, is one of the more substantial among the others and is especially valuable, sketching, as it does, the mythological background for the Lupercalia scene. Even though this latter aspect does not concern us directly, we can easily see why the Fasti account is often quoted by comprehensive commentators on Roman religion.

Certainly in the cases of the Caristia and the Robigalia does our debt to Ovid stand out clearly. Ovid's description of the Caristia, emphasizing its note of love among the living members of the family, provides one of the only accounts of the *cava cognatio*...
independent of its later synthesis with the Feralia rites. In the Robigalia instance we have a personal eye witness account of the rites during the period of the early empire, which helps fill out the more jejune descriptions, as in the Praenestine Calendar. This total picture suggests a striking parallel with the later Christian Major Litany, even before careful historical investigation on the point.

A second observation would emphasize the need for extreme care in this matter of comparative religions, or, in our case, comparative liturgies. The example of the Lupercalia, as we have considered it, shows what can result from a general statement made without scholarly attention to the details involved.

Not too many years ago Herbert Thurston wrote against such radical religious reductionists as James Frazer asking them "in vain for one scrap of positive evidence to support an hypothesis which is entirely based on a priori argument." Later in the same article he sums up his case against Frazer in words which would hold in refutation of any categorical statements, presented without proof, reducing Christian practice to a mere copy of what had gone before it:

In conclusion, I will only say that while one can in some measure sympathize with Doctor Frazer's ardour in generalizing and in his eagerness to reduce the

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2. Thurston, The Month, CIX, 238.
working of man's religious instincts to some sort of law, one loses all confidence in a guide who is so blind to the fatal facility of his processes. Were Doctor Frazer only to realize that his theories have explained away everything in the Christian religion . . . one might suppose that this reflection would give him pause. After all, Christianity has played some part in the world's history and has exercised some influence on the destinies of mankind; and yet on Doctor Frazer's principle it would appear that never yet was there an institution so lacking in initiative, so helpless, so receptive, so full of compromises, as this poor Catholic Church which some of us are foolish enough to think divinely inspired.3

And to these words of Father Thurston we might add this telling point which those writers overlook who would generalize Christianity and her liturgy into a mere copy of what has gone before:

A la fin, l'un des deux champions fut terrassé. Le paganisme romain est bien mort. Si l'on veut, ce n'est plus comme religion, qu'une langue morte, que l'on étudie avec intérêt, mais qui n'est plus parlée par personne et dont nous rétenons encore quelques vocables. Et n'est-il pas curieux que ces souvenirs qui ont surnagé n'aient été sauvés que parce que l'Eglise les adopta? . . . Ironie des choses, c'est la liturgie chrétienne qui a entouré dans ses bandelettes quelques-unes de ces reliques du passé, et l'a empêché ainsi de mourir tout entier.4

As in the Lupercalia we have seen an example of unfounded generalization, so too in the Caristia and the Robigalia have we noticed the frail threads of documented connection which one must

3Ibid., 239.
4Cabrol, Semaine d'ethnologie, II, 392.
carefully trace before making definite statements. "For actual 'borrowing,' indeed, one way or the other, we must inevitably maintain a severe and critical standard of evidence before admitting probability." 5

The need for scholarly accuracy in such matters is becoming more and more widely recognized today and sweeping statements, such as those which Thurston censured, are falling more and more under suspicion.

But the general lesson has been learned that any religious phenomenon must be studied in the context of the particular culture in which it is observed, and is being applied today both in England and America. It is of course by no means bound up with the evolutionary hypothesis in its nineteenth century form, the a priori assumption that because religion is so integral a part of life, the simplest and most primitive societies must necessarily exhibit the religious beliefs furthest removed from our own. 5

The conclusions from hasty scholarship have lately been re-examined and found not so easily drawn in the light of careful scholarship. It is indeed regrettable that we have not more evidence of Christian liturgical evolution during the first three centuries after Christ. The lack of such evidence has become apparent in our considerations both of the Caristia and the Robigalia. However, such a lack is understandable enough in the light of the status of Christianity during the first centuries of its existence.


The Church, up to the time of the Edict of Milan, faced continuous persecution. Her ministers would not only have not had the leisure to study liturgical adaptations, but as a matter of fact any such adaptations were out of the question on principle. Up until the fourth century, there was no will to compromise in any way with the pagan way of doing things. And by the fourth century, when a possibility for compromise on minor points showed itself, Christianity had its main liturgical structure formed, the Mass rite, the forms of the Sacraments, and the main outlines of her Church year. With the Christian triumph, more latitude was available in adopting elements from pagan liturgy. Consequently the two or three centuries following 313 A.D. are those which yield evidence of liturgical adaptation. This has been apparent from our three specific considerations of Lupercalia, Caristia, and Robigalia.

Having reflected upon Ovid's contribution to the subject matter at hand, and having emphasized the necessity for accurate scholarship in this field of comparative liturgies, we might pass on to a third summary conclusion. In a sense this will be a re-statement of the principles laid down in the first chapter. Now, however, they will be brought back into focus in the context of the particular festivals which we have considered. And we again ask ourselves: what connection is there between pagan Roman and later Christian liturgy?

In the whole matter of the pagan liturgical heritage to
Christianity, we are struck by the actually small amount of carry-over. There were, of course, the general characteristics of Roman liturgy which reflected the spirit of pagan Rome in general and her religious system in particular. "For however new was the inspiration which was the essential living germ of our religion, yet that germ was of necessity planted in soil full of other religious ingredients, which found their way into the sap of the plant as it grew towards maturity."7 These general characteristics of pagan Roman religion were a part of the people not so much because they practiced a certain religion, but because they were citizens of Rome and naturally inherited the traits which went with being a Roman. In this way, a Roman Christian would bring to the practice of his religion the same natural virtues which had colored his observance of pagan rites. "There was, in fact, a legacy, not indeed a spiritual one, but yet one of some small value, left by the old Roman religion to the Latin Church."8

Fowler continues with an elaboration of the heritage of general characteristics which are to be distinguished, as we said, from any specific liturgical contribution, such as a certain festival:

As an example of the orderly, sane, and decent character which the Church inherited from the Roman religion, I might recall . . . the lustratio, that slow and orderly processional movement in which the old Romans delighted, and which is familiar still to all

7Fowler, Religious Experience, pp. 452-453.
8Ibid., 457.
travellers in Italy. Another is the tender and reverential care for the resting places of departed relatives. There is in the sacra privata of the Parentalia, and especially of the Caristia which concluded it, something that suggests the Christian attitude towards the dead and in some dim way too the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. 

Certainly the careful approach of Fowler is to be preferred to such misleading conclusions as, "In the ingathering and conservation of all that was worthwhile in pagan antiquity is seen to be its [Christianity's] chief glory." 

Christianity did inherit these general attitudes from the pagan Roman structure and, when she was free to adopt them officially, she did so in proper measure. But such general characteristics and attitudes are different from specific acts of ritual. The similarities between Caristia and Saint Peter's Chair and between Robigalia and the Major Litany are to a large extent similarities of idea, family love and prayer for protection from pestilence.

In the case of the Caristia the basic idea was realised in the practical details of sacrifices to the household gods and a meal in which the entire family took part. The Feast of Saint Peter's Chair does not claim such special observances, unless one were to

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11 Fernand Cabrol, "L' idolâtrie dans l' Église," Revue pratique apologétique, V (October 1, 1907), 45-46.
see in the Sacrifice of the Mass celebrated on February twenty-second similarities to the sacrifice and common meal of pagan times. In this case one would be forced to acknowledge that the Mass is also offered every other day of the year and February twenty-second can scarcely be said to hold a claim on the ideas of sacrifice and common meal.

In the case of the Robigalia, however, besides the underlying idea, we have the more concrete item of inheritance, namely the procession. The Church even goes so far as to follow the pagan route outside the city. But where the Roman flamen had continued on to a sacrifice of animal entrails at the shrine of Robigo, the Christian group turned off in the direction of Saint Peter's Basilica and the culmination of their intercessory prayers in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

It might be well to point out here that, in addition to the procession, Christianity adopted several other accidentals of religious worship from pagan times, such as holy water and hymns.

Besides these, elements such as processionals and lights were taken over from the court ritual of the later Roman emperors to solemnize the Christian liturgical functions. Even certain of the

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Christian vestments had their origin in the customs and dress of pagan times. However, the early Christian ministers did not wear special vestments when officiating in liturgical worship, but only their best street clothes. These street clothes were similar, of course to those of the pagans, but the similarity could be considered an indirect liturgical adaptation.\textsuperscript{15}

Such items as water, lights, and special clothing constitute signs conveying an inner meaning such as that of adoration or of purification. They are not even proper to any one particular liturgical feast, but are rather the incidental details of a service which add, in their own way, to the general effect. As such, they are not so important as a particular ceremony, and are no more an essential part of Christianity than they were of paganism. They represent, as it were, the transcendent religious ideas of adoration, reverence, purification, and so forth. Any theory which would use these external details to prove some sort of religious evolution from pagan Rome to Christianity would be relying, to say the least, on a superficial argument.

So we can see that in the matter of liturgical spirit there is precious little ground for comparison between paganism and Christianity, the two festivals of Caristia and Robigalia alone giving any evidence of adaptation. When one descends to the level of

specific liturgical festival rites, there is almost no relation at all. And these findings immediately pose the question: with a religious structure as fully developed as that of pagan Rome, why was there so little actual adaptation? The answer is easy enough. Christianity did not borrow from paganism to any greater extent, because her own structure was rich enough on its own.

That the Church adopted some liturgical idea or rite in no way indicates that she felt the need to do so. It was more a question of looking at the given situation and deciding to adopt an idea or a practice which was, in itself, in no way evil, and which also happened to be dear to the hearts of recent converts. The spirit of family love and the need for public intercessory prayer were certainly elements in the Christian faith long before any adaptations from pagan liturgy were even considered. But since the pagans had grown accustomed to a special day to commemorate their bonds of family union and to a yearly procession for the intention of a fruitful harvest, why should not the Church take these facts into consideration and use them for her own ends? "[I]l ne suffit pas renverser et de détruire, il faut savoir faire la part du bien et du mal, et, pour parler avec l' Évangile, ne pas arracher avec l' ivraie le bon grain."16

The small extent of actual connection between the two liturgies is especially evident when one considers that, from the full

16 Cabrol, Revue pratique Apologétique, V, 46.
calendar described by Ovid, only two connections can be historically justified. The Church took no chances in allowing a connection when any higher principle was at stake. The Caristia and Robigalia were certainly among the ranks of minor pagan festivals. If the Church had intended to "take over" parts of paganism, she would have missed many opportunities in not adopting the major Roman celebrations. As was noted in the calendar of Polemius Silvius, the pagan festivals were, with one exception, obliterated.

Thus it can be said, in the last analysis, that while liturgical adaptation offers no intrinsic impossibility, still, in any particular instance, the Church will proceed with great care in such adapting operations. In the case of the pagan Roman festivals, less use rather than more was made of the earlier celebrations—and this no doubt for excellent reasons. And when one has sufficiently sifted the conclusions of writers on comparative religions, he finds himself confronted with the policy of the Church as it worked itself out in the case of pagan Roman liturgy—and as it would in future instances of adaptation—a basically sound principle prudently applied.
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APPENDIX

AUGUST FIRST, DECEMBER TWENTY-FIFTH,

AND JANUARY FIRST

In order to get a complete picture of the pagan contribution to the Christian liturgical calendar, we will now look briefly at the histories of three dates: August first, December twenty-fifth, and January first.

In the Roman calendar, before the reform of Julius Caesar, March was the first month of the year. While the three succeeding months had their own proper names, the six months after these were designated merely by their numerical position in the calendar.

Hence the month after June was Mensis Quinotilis and the following months, Mensis Sextilis, Mensis September, October, November, and December. With the Julian reform, of course, the names of these latter six months had little real meaning. Julius Caesar appropriated the first of these numerically named months to his own honor and Mensis Quinotilis became Mensis Julii. Caesar Augustus, not to be outdone, changed Mensis Sextilis to Mensis Augusti, with elaborate celebrations in his own honor to be held on the first day of the new August.

The devotion of the Christian Church to the chains of Saint Peter dates from the early centuries after the death of Christ and
the martyrdom of His Apostles. These chains were preserved in
the Church of the Apostles on the Esquilina, which church was often
referred to simply as Vincula Petri. The building was reconstruc-
ted and enriched by the eastern royal family, especially the Em-
press Eudocia, in the time of Pope Sixtus III (432-440 A.D.). The
feast of dedication of this newly adorned shrine took place on the
first day of August in a year sometime before the middle of the
fifth century. For that reason, the day became liturgically
specified by the title of Saint Peter's Chains, and not because
the first of August commemorates the actual date of the Apostle's
liberation from captivity. "This festival was peculiar to Rome,
and was never imported to the East or into the countries of the
Gallican rite."2

A specific festival in honor of Saint Peter's Chains does not
appear in the Church calendars until the eighth century, but even
then it traces its dating not to any actual commemoration of Saint
Peter's release from prison, but to the dedication of the Roman
basilica in the early part of the fifth century. Why was August
first chosen for the occasion?

"As the first of August from the time of Augustus was a day
of pagan religious observance and rejoicing, it is possible that it
was designedly chosen."3 "On croit assez généralement que cette

1Confé Duchesne, Christian Worship, pp. 260-261; Kellner,
Heortology, pp. 287-288; Cabrol, Semaines d'ethnologie, II, 383-386.
2Duchesne, p. 281.
3Ibid.
date du ler août, anniversaire de la dédicace de la basilique, fut choisie pour remplacer la fête païenne d'Auguste. So there is no completely proved connection; but the speculation of authorities about a set of circumstances, not too easily explained by coincidence, is our only authorization for such a theory.

The next date we consider is December twenty-fifth. Fixing the celebration of Christ's birth on this day is the work of the western Church. The eastern church had appointed January sixth for the celebration, but later they accepted the date of the western designation. This was accomplished during the latter part of the fourth century and the first part of the fifth century. The problem of dating Christmas in the western Church has a rather complicated history; as a foundation for sound theories it must be remembered:

For the Christian Church at large during the first three centuries of her existence, the anniversary of Our Lord's birth passed comparatively unmarked and unhonored . . . . [E]ven though the memory of that wonderful journey to Bethlehem must have been indelibly imprinted upon Our Lady's heart, the knowledge as to the precise date of its occurrence, if communicated to others, had, in the course of a few generations, faded and perished. St. Luke, though he gives some slight indication of the year, is silent about the day; and the epoch of the enrolling made by Cyranus, the governor of Syria, is for many reasons so hard to determine that scarcely any problem in chronology has been so much disputed than the date of the true, as distin-

4 Cabrol, Semaine d' ethnologie, II, 384.
5 Holweck, Calendarium Festorum, p. 413.
guished from the conventional, beginning of the Christian era.

"The important thing to notice . . . is, that in every western calendar, in Rome, in Africa, in Gaul, and in Spain, the feast of the Nativity was fully recognized from the fourth century onwards, and was universally assigned to December 25th, the eighth day from the Kalends of January." \(^7\) There was a decision made on the date, and the decision was agreed to by all. What was the evidence which forced all to the same conclusion?

In answer to this question, Thurston says that the reasons come to two. First of all there was the opinion that Good Friday had taken place on a March twenty-fifth. Since Our Lord would have lived an integral number of years, the Incarnation must have taken place on another March twenty-fifth. This reasoning very probably influenced the Church authorities of the time to fix a date nine months after the twenty-fifth of March. Thurston maintains that, along with this argument, they were led to their choice by a desire to replace with a Christian feast the pagan Mithraic festival of the Unconquered Sun (Sol Invictus), \(^8\) which

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\(^6\) Herbert Thurston, S.J., "Christmas and the Christian Calendar," Part One, American Ecclesiastical Review, XIX (December, 1898), 562.

\(^7\) Ibid., 566

\(^8\) The Mithraic cult of the sun was very popular in pagan Rome during the third century. It had Persian origins, however, and was only Roman by adoption.
commemorated the winter solstice. This second reason is the one which touches our consideration.

A striking piece of evidence is used by Thurston to substantiate the replacement of the Sol Invictus.

Early Christian literature seems both to recognize and appropriate to Our Lord the language of the pagan feast. To take but two, and not the earliest instances out of many, Saint Leo, in one of his sermons, blames some of his brethren to whom 'this day of our festival seems honorable, not so much for the birth of Christ as for the birth of the new sun, as they call it.' And another author of the same period says: 'People call this day the birthday of the unconquered [invicti natalem]; and who, I should like to know, is so indemitable as our Master, who triumphed over death?'

Here again, we have no direct evidence to establish, without doubt, the connection between the Sol Invictus and Christmas; however, the indirect references to a connection, along with the absence of any historical contradictions, lead us to the conclusion that there very probably is a link between these two feasts, similar to the links between the Caristia and Robigalia and their Christian replacements.

Neither August first nor December twenty-fifth fall under

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10In addition to Thurston's article on this subject confer Thomas J. Shahan, The Beginnings of Christianity (New York, 1903), pp. 137-155; Herbert Rose, Ancient Roman Religion (London, 1948), pp. 147-152; Duchesne, pp. 257-259; Kellner, pp. 127-158; Cabrol, Semaine d'ethnologie, II, 388-389; Raymond V. Schoeder, S.J., "St. Chrysostom and the Date of Christ's Nativity," Theological Studies, III (February, 1942), 140-144.

Ovid's January-June scope. The poet does, however, consider at length the story behind January first. This consists of an imaginary dialogue between the poet and the god, Janus, providing an elaborate description of Roman customs and history, especially with regard to the first day of the year. The festival in honor of Janus grew to be of great importance to the people of pagan Rome. "C' était aussi un jour de réjouissances, qui allaient trop souvent jusqu' au désordre ou à l' orgie, comme toutes les fêtes païennes."

The January first holiday continued in the early centuries of the Empire. "Nothing is more plainly written across the homiletic and conciliar literature of the early Christian centuries than the fact that unceasing efforts were made to eradicate the idolatrous and superstitious practices associated with the 'Kalends' as the first of January was called par excellence. The heathen philosopher, Libanius, at the beginning of the fourth century testifies that this stood out from all other religious celebrations. It was the one survival of paganism which really counted, and which was universally observed throughout the Roman Empire."
With the Epiphany and Christmas not yet popular observances, the Church looked for some means to counteract the excesses of January first. She decided on meeting the enemy head on, by instituting a Mass and special prayers ad prohibendum ab idolis, to be observed by Christians on January first. This custom has not survived to our own times.

The Feast of the Circumcision on January first originated later, its date being set by the eighth day from Christmas. Thus the Circumcision was never intended to substitute for a pagan feast.

Actually this January first instance is extremely striking evidence of the Church's attitude to pagan usage. Where the pagan customs could be adopted, effort was made in that direction. But where there was question of a pagan observance infected by idolatry and excess of all kinds, the Church did not hesitate to stand her ground. Not only did she refuse to compromise here, but she set up a special rite to oppose the pagan celebrations.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by J. Leo Klein, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classics.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 18, 1958
Date

Raymond V. Schoderb, S.J.
Signature of Adviser