

The subject of worship in the Catacombs is one of interest ; for in some of these chapels, beyond all question, the primitive believers assembled for religious rites. That, during persecution, the bishops conducted divine services in the Catacombs, is a matter of record ; and many of the places prepared for this purpose remain, as the chapel of St. Priscilla, said to contain the stone coffin of a martyr with a platform behind it, at which the leader officiated, according to the practice of the early Church. Sometimes, as in the cemetery of St. Agnes, we find chapels connected in a series opening into each other, probably constructed during the dark days, when public worship was made penal, and their arrangement unmistakably indicating a congregational purpose. Says the historian Mommsen, "This union of devotion with interment, development of the grave into a cemetery, of the cemetery into a church, is essentially Christian; one might, perhaps, say, is Christianity." Imbedded in the cement closing the graves are often found small vessels containing traces of a red fluid. It is believed that after the celebration of the Sacrament, which almost invariably accompanied a funeral in the primitive Church, the remains of the consecrated elements were placed here as a sort of religious memorial. Still existing baptisteries prove that the sacrament of baptism also was administered. The most remarkable is in the Catacomb of St. Pontianus. Ten steps lead down to a basin deep enough for immersion, and supplied by a spring. On the wall above is a fresco of the baptism of our Lord; who, however, is not immersed, but stands in the pool up to His waist, while water is being poured upon His head. Some chambers had armed seats and benches cut of the tufa, and supposed to indicate school-rooms for catechumens; though this is uncertain. But of infant baptism there is strong evidence. For there are graves of children, but a few years or months old, whose epitaphs speak of them as "neophytes." And no neophyte was received into the Church until he had been baptized.

There are a few springs and wells. But how far these crypts served as dwellings is uncertain. Unquestionably, however, they were often used as places of refuge from the fury of the heathen, in which believers, especially the clergy (naturally the first objects of attack), might secrete themselves until the storm had passed. They generally had different entrances; so, if one were watched, there might be escape by another. But they were not always safe asylums. There is record of one poor man, who, surprised in the act of devotion, found here his death and burial. And Stephen, Bishop of Rome, was caught here, allowed to finish the service in which he was engaged, then thrust back into his chair and beheaded. In the Catacombs of Paris was once found a spring. It was called "The Spring of Oblivion," and adorned with an inscription from Virgil. This was replaced by the more appropriate words of Christ: "Whosoever