

lative effect of these successive incursions wore down Roman imperial power in Italy and finally provoked its downfall: in 476 the last emperor in the west, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by his military commander, the Germanic chieftain Odoacer. In the place of the Roman empire Odoacer established a shadowy new political structure, the Kingdom of Italy. This new kingdom was destined to have a tumultuous history, in which Augusta Taurinorum – soon to be known simply as Taurinum – would play a vital and troubled role.

5. *The Coming of Christianity.*

In the power vacuum left by the collapse of Roman administrative and political institutions a new center of authority had emerged: the local bishop, representing the rising power of the Christian Church. Through the first three centuries of its existence Christianity was a proscribed religion, but in spite of official disapproval and intermittent persecution the underground communities of Christians had built up their own administrative structures and forms of leadership: eventually, by default, their leaders would step in to take the place of the moribund Roman authorities. In 313 the new Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, officially recognizing the Christian Church and granting it full toleration. Constantine understood that the Christian Church had come to constitute a parallel authority within the empire, and intended to use it to bolster and reinforce the battered structure of the imperial government. In 395 the Emperor Theodosius outlawed all other cults and made Christianity the empire's sole religion. Ecclesiastical and political power were now inextricably intertwined. As imperial power waned and secular officials disappeared in the fourth and fifth centuries, bishops everywhere took over both the spiritual and the political leadership of the urban communities. The cities, where Christianity was by now well entrenched, became the centers from which the faith radiated into the countryside, where attachment to the old religions had remained much stronger. At Taurinum, or Turin as we shall now start to call it, the bishop became a dominant force in urban politics. For many centuries he would maintain this ascendancy over the urban community, sometimes alone and unchallenged, sometimes collaborating with the secular authorities, but frequently at odds with them too.

The early history of Christianity in Piedmont is shrouded in legend. Later hagiographic tradition recounts how a legion of Christian soldiers from Thebes in Egypt, bound for Gaul under their commander Mauricius,