

ishment about to befall it in the endless barbarian invasions that spread ruin and death all around: to Bishop Maximus, the ravaging barbarian hordes were a scourge sent by God to chastise his people for their many transgressions. In this time of troubles, he warned them, safety and salvation could not be found behind the city's walls, but only through prayer and sincere repentance; the pursuit of a truly Christian form of life was the only way to avert God's wrath.

Maximus thus appears as a kind of prince-bishop, typical of the tumultuous transitional age in which he lived. Although the Emperor Theodosius had made Christianity the sole official religion of the empire and banned the old pagan cults, they did not immediately disappear at the emperor's bidding. Although Christianity now enjoyed the backing of the state and was guided by the forceful leadership of bishops like Maximus, or Eusebius of Vercelli, it only gained acceptance slowly and gradually; the old gods did not die easily. Maximus's struggle against the deeply-rooted paganism of his diocese was part of a vast, long-drawn cultural conflict fought out throughout the dying Roman empire. Meanwhile, as the political and military strength of the empire waned, the institutional Church was assuming the leadership of state and society. Maximus resembled his near-contemporaries Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Tours, and Augustine, bishop of Hippo, all ecclesiastical potentates who, like him, did not hesitate to pick up the reins of political authority in addition to conducting their pastoral duties. His successors on the episcopal throne of Turin would follow his example. Like Maximus, they ministered to their flock's material needs, tried to protect the city from the barbarian hordes that threatened it, cared for the refugees who fled before them, and ransomed the captives seized by the barbarians. They continued to foster the cult of the three Theban martyrs, which by now had spread to southern France and across northern Italy. But they also began to stimulate popular devotion to St John the Baptist. His cult had first been celebrated at Rome, and spread from there across Christendom. By the mid-fifth century a vigorous traffic had sprung up in supposed relics of the saint, in response to the popularity of his cult. At some point in the mid-fifth century a pious woman supposedly carried one of these relics, a bleeding thumb, to the episcopal see of Maurienne across the Alps, where it became the object of veneration. It aroused the jealousy of the bishops of Turin, who coveted it for themselves. Their initial attempts to acquire it failed, but at some time in the seventh or eighth century this relic was transferred to the main episcopal basilica at Turin, which was then dedicated to him. From that time St John the Baptist became the city's patron, and remains so down to the present day.