

memory of the sibyl survived as a Christian seer. The *Dies irae*, that tremendous hymn of doom written by a disciple of St Francis of Assisi, began with the words:

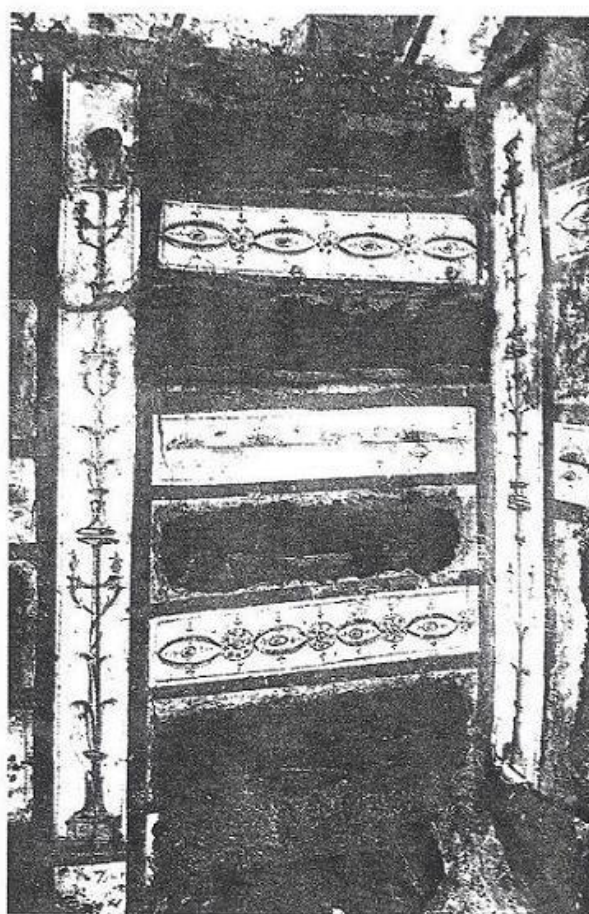
*Dies irae, dies illa  
Solvat saeculum in favilla,  
Teste David cum sibylla.  
Day of wrath! That day  
Will burn the world in ashes,  
As foretold by David and the sibyl.*

The early Christian Fathers used the prophecies of the sibyl in commending their faith to the Romans. In the Middle Ages prophecies about Christ were put into the mouths of the sibyls. The sibyl was mentioned by Dante and painted by Raphael, and Michelangelo portrayed five sibyls on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in the Vatican. She had become a symbol of the continuity of faith from the old religions to the new.

#### THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

##### *The church in the house*

The Jews went to a building for their prayers, the synagogue. In the earliest years, when many of them were Jews or God-fearers, the Christians were sometimes able to use the synagogue for Christian prayers. But their place of meeting was the house of one of their members; preferably a person with a large house because it would have a big room. We hear of a room so full, when a famous preacher came, that a young man had to sit on the windowsill and during the service he nodded into sleep and fell out of the window. As the number of Christians in a town grew, they might buy a house. The property had to be owned in trust; the person in whose name it was registered was known as the *episcopus* – 'overseer' or 'custodian'. He would also be the chief person in the congregation, and thus *episcopus* came to have its meaning of 'bishop'. The congregation would turn the inside of the house into a meeting room with as much space as possible. This 'house church' was the



Ornamented tombs in a Rome catacomb, that of St Peter and Marcellinus.

first sort of church. Specially built places of worship were being constructed by AD 200, when we know that one existed at Edessa on the eastern borders of Syria. A church at Antioch in Syria was reputed in the fourth century to have been built in the time of the apostles. This cannot be true; long after the apostles the congregations still met in houses.

The word 'church', and the Scottish kirk and German *Kirche* and Russian *tserkov*, come from the Greek word *kuriakos*, 'belonging to the Lord'. The adjective was first used to refer to the 'Lord's supper' – that is, the Holy Communion – and the Lord's day. But by AD 300 the name began to be used as a noun, *kuriakon*, 'the Lord's place', to mean a church. The word for the congregation was *ekklesia*, or in the more familiar Latin spelling *ecclesia*. When St Paul wrote letters to groups of Christians, he used various words: 'to you who are chosen and set apart in Rome' (or in Philippi, or in Colossae); 'to the *ecclesia* of God which is at Corinth' (or in Salonika); or,