Conclusion

The history of paganism in early Spain has been difficult to write because of the meagerness of the source material. For the most part only the merest gleanings of source material are extant. Thus, for example, the inscriptions in the pre-Christian period enable us to know the names of many of the gods worshiped in Spain, but tell us little or nothing of the religious rites performed in their honor. In the very important matter of the religion of the Germanic peoples who entered the Peninsula we have no means of knowing whether or not paganism was still deeply rooted among them. Early writers, both pagan and Christian, who have dealt with Spain say very little that is specific about paganism in the Peninsula. We are rather well informed, it is true, by a sermon of St. Martin of Braga about the pagan beliefs that flourished in Galicia in the sixth century, but we do not know whether the efforts of the saint were successful in suppressing them. Conciliar and civil legislation yields information only of a very general character contained as it is in prohibitions. Almost nothing remains to show us what success the measures taken against pagan survivals had attained as the Visigothic Kingdom drew to an end. Nevertheless in spite of these difficulties an analysis of the evidence presented in the preceding pages offers some interesting conclusions.

It is not until the Roman domination had been firmly established in Spain that we become acquainted through literary and epigraphical sources with the religion of the Peninsula. In this period the religious cults in Spain may be conveniently classified into two main divisions: those of the native population and those introduced by the Roman conquerors. The native cults predominated in western and northwestern Spain (modern Portugal and Galicia). In eastern and southern Spain, where the worship of the native gods had already disappeared at least by the time of the early empire, the Greco-Roman deities were worshiped by the natives as well as by the Romans, and there also the imperial cult attained its greatest popularity. The mystery religions of the empire were restricted mainly to the orientals who had settled in Spain and in the case of Mithraism to the soldiers stationed there.

The beginnings of Christianity in Spain are veiled in the greatest obscurity, and it is only at the Council of Elvira at the beginning of the fourth century that we have our first glimpse into the organization of the Spanish Church. By the beginning of the fourth century Christianity had become deeply rooted in the Romanized provinces of Baetica and Carthaginiensis and among its adherents were members of the Spanish aristocracy. Though the bishops at Elvira were uncompromising in their rejection of idolatry, they refrained from doing anything that might awaken the wrath of the civil authorities or arouse the pagan slaves to deeds of violence.

The Edict of Toleration, the gradual adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the State, and the anti-pagan legislation of the Christian emperors in the fourth century gave a death blow to the pagan religion of Rome. Pagan inscriptions in Spain, relatively so abundant in the first three centuries of the Christian Era, are seldom found there in the fourth century. But the prudence of the imperial authorities in refusing to allow the destruction of the pagan temples in Spain points to the fact that many people in the Peninsula were still attached to the old religion.
Christian Spain had escaped the harmful influences produced in other countries by the great Arian and Donatist heresies, but in the closing years of the fourth century it was troubled by the heresy of Priscillianism. This error included a considerable number of doctrines ultimately derived from paganism. The attempts of the ecclesiastical authorities to crush it at the first Council of Toledo increased the dissension in the Spanish Church, for some of the bishops of Baetica and Carthaginienis refused to sanction the leniency of the council toward the Priscillianist bishops who had recanted their errors. It was not until the first Council of Braga in the second half of the sixth century that Priscillianism was suppressed.

The barbarian invasions of Spain in the opening years of the fifth century, which threw the whole Peninsula into confusion, had a marked influence upon the history of paganism. The Sueves were pagan upon their entry into Spain and doubtless many of the rank and file of the Arian Visigoths had but a thin veneer of Christianity. In the kingdom which the Sueves founded in Galicia in 464 Arianism was the State religion, and, as in Visigothic Spain during the [149] Arian period, the rulers were out of sympathy with, if not openly antagonistic toward their Catholic subjects. Furthermore, there is nothing to indicate that the Arian bishops at this time were active in suppressing paganism. Hence during the fifth and the greater part of the sixth century the ecclesiastical authorities were greatly hampered in the evangelization of the people. It was only after the Sueves and Goths had embraced Catholicism that any successful efforts could be made against the paganism that still survived.

In Galicia the leading spirit in the struggle against paganism was St., Martin of Braga, the Apostle of the Sueves. As we learn from his De correctione rusticorum the paganism which Martin encountered in the country districts of Galicia consisted in magical beliefs and practices and the superstitious cult of trees, stones and fountains. St. Martin was relatively mild in his attitude towards those who practiced idolatry. Nowhere in his sermon does he advocate the use of physical punishment against idolaters. Paganism in his opinion was due not to malice, but to ignorance. He believed that once the people had become thoroughly acquainted with the teachings of their faith and the absurdity and sinfulness of paganism they would abandon their superstitious beliefs and practices. This mildness of the saint is in striking contrast to the severity which St. Caesarius of Arles, St. Eligius, and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Visigothic Spain showed toward idolaters.

In the Spanish kingdom of the Goths there is no such figure in the struggle against paganism as St. Martin of Braga. Among the Goths the leadership was in the hands of the councils and civil authorities. When the bishops of Spain met at the third council of Toledo (589) to celebrate the conversion of king Recared they realized that paganism was "deeply rooted throughout almost the whole of Spain." The council authorized the bishop and secular judge in their respective localities to punish idolaters and to destroy the places which were sacred in the eyes of the superstitious. The lack of source material in the period immediately following this council prevents us from knowing whether the council's efforts succeeded or failed. From the silence about this abuse at the fourth council of Toledo (633) it would seem that paganism was no longer regarded as a serious menace. For a slightly later date the Visigothic Code of [150] civil law is an important source concerning the history of Spanish paganism. The survivals of paganism mentioned there are magic and divination. Corporal punishments, exile, and in some cases even death were the penalties meted out to magicians and diviners. This law code also reveals the primitive ideas about magical potions which still persisted in Spain.

The long reign of Receswinth, who promulgated this code, witnessed a noticeable decline in the organization of the Church, which seems to have led indirectly to the revival of pagan beliefs and practices among the people. At two of the national councils of Toledo in the closing years of the seventh century the bishops took action against those who worshiped at the sacred trees, stones and fountains. The measures which the councils ordered were severe physical punishments upon the offenders and heavy fines upon those who connived at their idolatry. During this period of decline there
was also a revival of the pagan Germanic practice of the ordeal, which was legalized in what was probably the last law incorporated in the Visigothic Code.

This study has emphasized the indirect means made use of in Visigothic Spain in combating paganism: the education of the clergy, the exorcisms, and blessings of the Mozarabic rite, and the establishment of rural parishes and monasteries. The instruction of the clergy formed a notable part of the work of St. Isidore of Seville, and doubtless this education made the Spanish clergy better equipped to instruct the people and show them the folly and malice of paganism. The exorcisms and prayers of the Spanish Church supplanted and counteracted pagan practices and customs which survived among the people. The establishment of parish churches and monasteries in rural districts, which followed the restoration of Spain to religious unity in 589, brought the influence of Christianity closer to the peasants among whom paganism had cast the deepest roots.

From an examination of all the available evidence it is possible to draw some definite conclusions about the types of paganism that survived in Spain, the localities in which paganism flourished, the classes of people who were guilty of superstitious practices, and the means used to combat paganism.

In the period of which we have been treating the two principal forms of paganism that survived were the cult of trees, stones and fountains and the practice of magic and divination. "Sacred" trees, stones and fountains were still the centers of superstitious worship in the sixth and seventh centuries as they had been in pre-Christian times. Magic and divination were particularly difficult to eradicate. Priscillianism inculcated among the people a belief in the efficacy of magic and astrology. St. Martin of Braga in the sixth century found the peasants of Galicia pronouncing incantations over herbs, and seeking by superstitious means to divine the future. The Visigothic Code and the acts of the councils contain a number of laws against the practice of magic and divination.

If we examine the history of paganism in Spain from a geographical standpoint we find that pagan beliefs and practices were strongest in Galicia. The evidence brought forward in the first chapter shows quite clearly that the native deities were especially popular among the people of that region. In the fourth century, when Christianity was already in a flourishing condition throughout southern and eastern Spain, it had merely penetrated into the cities of northwestern Spain. Moreover Priscillianism with its pagan beliefs and practices had been popular among the people of Galicia, and for almost a hundred years (464-550), Arianism had been the predominant religion in the Suevian kingdom. Hence it is not surprising that St. Martin in the sixth century found paganism very rife among the peasants, whose religious instruction had been so much neglected. In this same section of Spain in the closing years of the Visigothic kingdom St. Valerius also found evidences of paganism among the people. In other parts of Spain paganism did not disappear entirely with the coming of Christianity. St. Pacianus in the last quarter of the fourth century found many pagan practices in vogue among the people of Barcelona. The third council of Toledo (589) realized that the long period of time during which the Arians had been predominant in Spain had led to the spread of paganism. Later on in the middle of the seventh century, when a marked decline had taken place in the ecclesiastical discipline, two of the national councils called attention to the growing evil of idolatry and superstition. The severity which these councils showed towards idolaters and the threat of removing from office any bishop or judge negligent in prosecuting idolaters would seem to indicate that paganism was widespread in the Peninsula.

In Spain as elsewhere paganism continued longest in the country districts. This is evident from the works of St. Pacianus in the fourth century, from the sermon of St. Martin of Braga in the sixth century, and from the writings of St. Valerius and the conciliar legislation of the seventh century. In the closing years of the Visigothic kingdom the canons on paganism show that superstition was very prevalent among the slaves. At two of the Spanish councils in the seventh century the bishops deemed it
necessary to punish clerics found guilty of consulting magicians and diviners and those priests who practiced magic rites themselves.

We are rather well informed about the means adopted to suppress paganism in Visigothic Spain and in Galicia. In Visigothic Spain the means most often used against idolaters were civil penalties, and as a rule corporal punishment, though in punishing magicians the Visigothic Code was not as harsh as the Theodosian Code. St. Martin of Braga, as has already been pointed out, followed a policy of mildness. He did not sanction the use of force in the suppression of idolatry, and emphasized the necessity of religious instruction. Which of these two methods proved more successful in practice is difficult to determine. Little is known about the history of Galicia in the period subsequent to Martin's death, while the lack of contemporary documents in Spain for the period immediately after the Moorish conquest makes it impossible to draw any definite conclusions about the survivals of ancient paganism.