

The Pilgrim Church - Part 3

by E.H. Broadbent

E.H. Broadbent's sermon explores the historical and theological significance of Augustine's life and teachings, addressing the challenges faced by the early Church and the emergence of monasticism.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 20:28, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 2:8, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 4:12, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Church History", "False Doctrine"

Description

E.H. Broadbent preaches about the historical events surrounding the Fall of Rome, the teachings of Augustine and the controversies he faced, the rise of false doctrines like Pelagianism and Sacerdotalism, the emergence of Monasticism led by figures like Benedict of Nursia and Bernard of Clairvaux, and the missionary activities during troubled times. The sermon also delves into the persecution of Priscillian and his followers, highlighting the discovery of Priscillian's writings that revealed his true character and teachings.

Transcript

[Fall of Rome]

In one year great provinces such as Spain and Gaul were destroyed. The inhabitants, long accustomed to peace, congregated mostly in the cities for the sake of the ease and pleasure afforded there, saw the armies which had so long guarded their frontiers disappear; the cities were wiped out, and a cultivated and luxurious population, which had avoided the discipline of military training, was massacred or enslaved by Pagan barbarians. Rome itself was captured by the Goths under Alaric (410), and that great city was plundered and desolated by barbarian hosts. In 476 the Western Roman Empire came to an end, and in the vast regions where it had so long reigned, new kingdoms began to grow up. The Eastern part of the Empire continued, until, in 1453, nearly a thousand years later, Constantinople was captured by the Mohammedan.

[Augustine 354-430]

One of the great figures of history meets us at this period, Augustine (354-430),^[17] whose teachings have left an indelible mark on all succeeding ages. In his voluminous writings and especially in his "Confessions", Augustine reveals himself in so intimate a way as to give the impression of being an acquaintance and a friend. A native of Numidia, he describes his early surroundings, thoughts, and

impressions. His saintly mother, Monica, lives again in his pages as we read of her prayers for him, of her early hopes, and of her later sorrow as he grew up in a sinful manner of life, of her faith in his eventual salvation, strengthened by a vision and by the wise counsel of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. His father was more concerned for his material, worldly advancement.

Though seeking light he found himself hopelessly bound by a sinful, self-indulgent life. For a time he thought he had found deliverance in Manichaeism, but soon perceived its inconsistency and weakness. He was affected by the preaching of Ambrose, but yet found no peace. When he was 32 years of age and was employed as a teacher of rhetoric in Milan, he had reached a desperate state of distress, and then, to use his own words:

"I flung myself down, how I know not, under a certain fig-tree, giving free course to my tears.... I sent up these sorrowful cries, 'How long, how long? To-morrow and to-morrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?' I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house and oft repeating, 'Take up and read, take up and read.' Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words, nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon.... I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell--'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' No further would I read, nor did I need, for instantly, as the sentence ended--by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart--all gloom of doubt vanished away."

This, his conversion, caused the greatest joy, but no surprise, to his praying mother Monica, who, as they were returning to Africa a year later, died in peace. Augustine was baptised by Ambrose in Milan (387) and became later Bishop of Hippo (now Bona) in North Africa (395). His busy life was one of constant controversy. He lived at the time when the Western Roman Empire was breaking up; indeed a barbarian army was besieging his city of Hippo when he passed away. It was the fall of the Western Empire that led him to write his famous book the "City of God". Its full title explains its aim: "Though the greatest city of the world has fallen, the City of God abideth for ever".

[Augustine and the Compulsory Unity]

His view, however, of what the City of God is led him into teachings that have given rise to unspeakable misery, the very greatness of his name accentuating the harmful effects of the error he taught. He, beyond others, formulated the doctrine of salvation by the Church only, by means of her sacraments. To take salvation out of the hands of the Saviour and put it into the hands of men; to interpose a system of man's devising between the Saviour and the sinner, is the very opposite of the Gospel revelation. Christ says: "Come unto Me" and no priest or church has authority to intervene.

Augustine in his zeal for the unity of the Church and his genuine abhorrence of all divergence in doctrine and difference in form, lost sight of the spiritual, living, and indestructible unity of the Church and Body of Christ, uniting all who are sharers, by the new birth, in the life of God. Consequently he did not see the practical possibility of the existence of churches of God in various places and in all times, each retaining its immediate relation with the Lord and with the Spirit, yet having fellowship with the others, and that in

spite of human weakness, of varying degrees of knowledge, of divergent apprehensions of Scripture and of practice.

His outward view of the Church as an earthly organisation, naturally led him to seek outward, material means for preserving, and even compelling, visible unity. In controversy with the Donatists he wrote:

"It is indeed better ... that men should be led to worship God by teaching, than that they should be driven to it by fear of punishment or pain; but it does not follow that because the former course produces the better men, therefore those who do not yield to it should be neglected. For many have found advantage (as we have proved and are daily proving by actual experiment) in being first compelled by fear or pain, so that they might afterwards be influenced by teaching, or might follow out in act what they had already learned in word ... whilst those are better who are guided aright by love, those are certainly more numerous who are corrected by fear. For who can possibly love us more than Christ, who laid down His life for the sheep? And yet, after calling Peter and the other Apostles by His words alone, when He came to summon Paul ... He not only constrained him with His voice, but even dashed him to the earth with His power; and that He might forcibly bring one who was raging amid the darkness of infidelity, to desire the light of the heart, He first struck him with physical blindness of the eyes. Why therefore should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return? ... The Lord Himself said 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in' ... Wherefore if the power which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season, through the religious character and faith of kings, be the instrument by which those who are found in the highways and hedges--that is, in heresies and schisms--are compelled to come in, then let them not find fault with being compelled."

Such teaching, from such an authority, incited and justified those methods of persecution by which Papal Rome equalled the cruelties of Pagan Rome. So a man of strong affections and quick and tender sympathies, departing from the principles of Scripture, though with good intentions, became implicated in a vast and ruthless system of persecution.

[Pelagius--5th Century]

One with whom Augustine had much controversy was Pelagius.[18] He was a native of the British Isles, came to Rome at the very beginning of the fifth century, when about thirty years of age, and, although a layman, soon came to be recognised as a writer of ability on the Scriptures and as a man of excellent uprightness of life. Augustine, though later his great doctrinal antagonist, bears witness to this. Derogatory reports published afterwards by Jerome appear to have had their origin less in matters of fact than in the heat of controversy.

In Rome Pelagius met Celestinus, who became the most active exponent of his teachings. Pelagius was a reformer; the laxity and self-indulgence of the lives of most professing Christians deeply grieved him and he became a strenuous preacher of practical righteousness and sanctification.

Too exclusive occupation with this aspect of truth led him to over-emphasise the freedom of the human will and to minimise the operations of Divine grace. He taught that men are not affected by Adam's transgression, unless it be by his example; that Adam must have died even if he had not sinned; that there is no original sin, and that the actions of every man are in accordance with his own choice. Therefore perfect righteousness is possible to every man. Infants, he said, are born without sin. Here he came into direct conflict with Catholic teaching.

He taught infant baptism but denied that it was the means of regeneration, affirming rather that it introduces the child into a state of grace, into the Kingdom of God, into a condition where it is capable of obtaining salvation and life, sanctification and union with Christ. Augustine in opposing this teaching read to his congregation an extract from a work of Cyprian written a hundred and fifty years before, in which it is stated that infants are baptised for the remission of sin, and he then entreated Pelagius to abstain from a teaching which was divergent from so fundamental a doctrine and practice of the Church.

Pelagians would not use the prayer, "forgive us our sins," regarding it as unsuitable for Christians, seeing that we need not sin; if we do, it is of our own will and choice, and such a prayer could only be the expression of an unreal humility.

The conflict as to the doctrines of Pelagius and Celestinus became widespread and it occupied much of the time and energies of Augustine, who wrote voluminously on the subject. Councils were held; those in the east acquitted Pelagius; those in the west condemned him, a result due to the influence of Augustine in the Latin churches, which had led to their accepting more definite, dogmatic statements concerning the relation between the will of God and the will of man than those in the east.

The Pope in Rome, Innocent, was appealed to, and welcomed the opportunity of emphasizing his authority. He excommunicated Pelagius and all his followers, but his successor, Zozimus, reinstated them. The western bishops, meeting in Carthage, were able to win the support of the civil power, and Pelagius and his supporters were banished and their goods confiscated. Pope Zozimus seeing this, changed his view and also condemned Pelagius. Eighteen Italian bishops refused submission to the Imperial decree, one of whom, Julian, Bishop of Eclanum, contended with Augustine with ability and unusual moderation, pointing out that the use of force and the change of mind of a Pope are not the right weapons with which to deal with matters of doctrine.

Pelagius taught much that was true and salutary, but the characteristic doctrine of Pelagianism is not only contrary to Scripture, but also to the facts of human nature. Men are aware of their corrupt and fallen nature and of their bondage under sin, and the facts of life manifest it. Our real partaking of the life and nature of one man, the first Adam, sharing his sin, subjected as he to death, makes it possible for our whole race to be brought into a real relationship with the one Man, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, opening the way for any man, by his own choice and faith, to become a partaker of His eternal life and Divine nature.

The first three centuries of the Church's history prove that no earthly power can crush it. It is invincible to attacks from without. The witnesses of its sufferings, and even its persecutors, become its converts and it grows more rapidly than it can be destroyed. The following period of nearly two hundred years shows that the union of the Church and the State, even when the powers of the mightiest Empire are put into the Church's hands, do not enable her to save the State from destruction, for, in abandoning the position which her very name implies, of being "called out" of the world, and of separation to Christ, she loses the power that comes from subjection to her Lord, exchanging it for an earthly authority that is fatal to herself.

[False Doctrines]

The Church of Christ has been subjected not only to the violence of outward persecution and the seductions of earthly power, but also to the assaults of false doctrines. From the third century to the fifth, four such forms of doctrine were developed, of so fundamental a character that their workings have never ceased to affect the Church and the world.

1. Manichaeism assails alike the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of Nature that God is the Creator of all things. The opening words of the Bible are: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1. 1); and it reveals man as the crown of Creation, in the words, "So God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1. 27). Reviewing everything that He had made, God saw that it was "very good" (Gen. 1. 31). Manichaeism, by attributing the visible and corporeal to the work of a dark and evil power and only that which is spiritual to the true God, struck at the roots of the Divine revelation, of which Creation, the Fall, and Redemption are essential and indivisible parts. From the erroneous view of the body spring, on the one side, the excesses of asceticism, regarding the body as only evil; on the other side many degrading practices and doctrines encouraged by failure to see in the body anything but that which is animal, losing sight of its Divine origin and consequent capacity for redemption and restoration to the likeness of the Son of God.

2. Arianism: The most glorious revelation, that in which all Scripture culminates, is that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, made known to us by becoming man, and by His sacrificial death making propitiation for the sin of the world. Arianism, by denying the divinity of Christ, declaring Him to be, though the first and highest, yet a created Being, keeps man immeasurably distant from God, prevents us from knowing Him as God our Saviour, and would leave us to the vague hope of attaining to something higher than we now experience, by improvement of our own character.

3. Pelagianism denies the teaching of Scripture as to the implication of all mankind in Adam's transgression. Affirming that Adam's sin only affected himself and his own relations with God, and that each human being born into the world is originally without sin, it weakens man's sense of his need of a Saviour, prevents his coming to a true knowledge of himself, and leads him to seek salvation, partly at least, in himself. The recognition of our share in the Fall is intimately connected in Scripture with our share in the atoning work of Christ, the second Adam; and, while individual responsibility and free will are insisted upon, this is not to the exclusion of, but in conjunction with, the teaching as to the will of God and the racial connection of mankind. This, while involving all in the same condemnation, includes all in the same salvation.

4. Sacerdotalism would make salvation to be found only in the Church and by means of its sacraments administered by its priests. At this time, of course, the Church meant the Roman Church, but the doctrine has been applied to themselves, and still is, by many other systems, larger and smaller. Nothing is taught more clearly and insistently by the Lord and the Apostles than that the sinner's salvation is by faith in the Son of God, in His atoning death and resurrection. A church or circle which claims that in it alone salvation is to be found; men who arrogate to themselves the power of admission to or exclusion from the Kingdom of God; sacraments or forms that are made into necessary means of salvation, give rise to tyrannies that bring untold miseries on mankind and obscure the true way of salvation that Christ has opened to all men through faith in Him.

[Rise of Monasticism]

The decline of the churches in spirituality, their departure from the New Testament pattern, and their consequent growing worldliness, subjection to human systems, and toleration of sin, not only provoked efforts to reform them, or to establish reformed churches, as seen in the Montanist and Donatist movements, but also led some seekers after holiness and communion with God to withdraw themselves from all intercourse with men.[19] Circumstances in the world, devastated by barbarians, and in the Church, deflected from its proper testimony in the world, made them hopeless either of intercourse with

God in daily life or of fellowship with the saints in the churches. So they retired into desert places and lived as hermits, in order that, freed from the distractions and temptations of ordinary life, they might by contemplation attain to that vision and knowledge of God for which their souls craved. Influenced by the prevalent teaching as to the evil of matter, they counted on an extreme simplicity of living and ascetic practices to overcome the hindrances which they judged the body to present to spiritual life.

[Anthony 250-356]

In the fourth century the hermit Anthony in Egypt became celebrated for his solitary life, and many, stirred to emulate his piety, established themselves near to him, imitating his manner of living, and he was persuaded to lay down a rule of life for them. Hermits increased in number, and some practised great severities on themselves; Simeon Stylites was one who gained renown by living for years on the top of a pillar.

[Monasticism]

Soon a further development took place, and Pachomius, in Southern Egypt, early in the fourth century founded a monastery where those who retired from the world lived no longer alone, but as a community. Spreading both into the Eastern and Western churches, such communities came to be an important part of the life of the peoples.

[Benedict 480-550]

About the beginning of the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia, in Italy, gave a great impetus to this movement, and his rule of life for the monastic bodies prevailed beyond all others. He occupied the monks less exclusively with personal austerities and turned their activities into the performance of religious ceremonies and into the service of men, giving especial attention to agriculture. The monasteries of the Benedictine order were one of the principal means by which Christianity was spread among the Teutonic nations during the seventh and eighth centuries.

From Ireland also, by way of the Isle of Iona and through Scotland, the Columban monasteries and settlements prepared and sent out devoted missionaries into Northern and Central Europe.

As the Popes of Rome gradually came to dominate the Church and to occupy themselves in intriguing and fighting for temporal power, the monastic system drew to itself many of those who were spiritual and who had desires after God and after holiness. A monastery, however, differed widely from a church, in the New Testament sense of the word, so that those souls that felt themselves impelled to flee from the worldly Roman Church did not find in the monastery what a true church would have provided. They were bound under the rules of an institution instead of experiencing the free workings of the Holy Spirit.

[Bernard of Clairvaux 1091-1153]

The various monastic orders that arose followed one course of development.[20] Beginning with poverty and severest self-denial, they became rich and powerful, relaxed their discipline and grew into self-indulgence and worldliness. Then a reaction would induce some to begin a new order, of absolute self-humiliation, which in its turn traced the same cycle. Of such reformers were Bernard of Cluny, early in the tenth century, and Stephen Harding of Citeaux in the eleventh. It was in the Cistercian monastery at Citeaux that Bernard, afterwards Abbot of Clairvaux, spent some of his earlier years; he came to exercise an influence above that of kings and Popes, but a more lasting and happier memorial of him remains in

some of the hymns which he wrote.

Many women also sought refuge from the world in the nunneries which grew up. These religious houses, both for men and women, were, during dark and turbulent times, sanctuaries for the weak and centres where learning was preserved amid the prevailing barbarism, and where the Scriptures were copied, translated, and read. Yet they were a fruitful soil for idleness and oppression, and the religious orders came to be active instruments in Papal hands for the persecution of all who endeavoured to restore the churches of God on their original foundation.

The gradual transformation of the New Testament churches from their original pattern into organizations so different from it that its relation to them came to be scarcely recognizable, seemed as though it might continue until all was lost. The effort to save the churches from disunion and heresy by means of the episcopal and clerical system not only failed, but brought great evils in its train. The expectation that the persecuted churches would gain by union with the State was disappointed. Monasticism proved unable to provide a substitute for the churches as a refuge from the world, becoming itself worldly. There remained, however, through all these times one thing capable of bringing about restoration. The presence of the Scriptures in the world supplied the means which the Holy Spirit could use in the hearts of men with a power able to overcome error and bring them back to Divine truth, and there never ceased to be congregations, true churches, which adhered to the Scriptures as the guide of faith and doctrine, and the pattern both for individual conduct and for the order of the Church. These, though hidden and despised, yet exercised an influence that did not fail to bear fruit.

During these troubled times, missionary activity did not cease, but was carried on with zeal and devotion. Indeed, until in the eleventh century the Crusades absorbed the enthusiasm of the Catholic nations, there was a constant testimony, which gradually subdued the barbarian conquerors and carried the knowledge of Christ to the distant lands from which they came. Nestorian missionaries travelled as far as China and Siberia and established churches from Samarcand to Ceylon. Greeks from Constantinople passed through Bulgaria and penetrated the depths of Russia, while the heathen nations of Central and Northern Europe were reached by missionaries both from the British and Roman Churches. In North Africa and in Western Asia there were more who professed Christianity than there are today.

The errors, however, which prevailed in the professing churches were reflected in their missionary work. There was no longer the simple preaching of Christ and founding of churches as in the early days, but, with a measure of the truth there was also insistence on ritual and on legal observances; and when kings came to confess Christianity, the principle of Church and State led to the forcible outward conversion of multitudes of their subjects to the new State religion. Instead of churches being founded in the different towns and countries, independent of any central organisation and having direct relations with the Lord, as in Apostolic days, all were drawn into one of the great organizations which had its centre in Rome or Constantinople or elsewhere. What is true on a large scale applies also on a small, and the harmful workings of this system are seen wherever, instead of sinners being led to Christ and given the Scriptures as their guide, they are pressed into membership of some foreign denomination or taught to look to some Mission for guidance and supplies, the development of the gifts of the Holy Spirit among them being hindered, and the spread of the Gospel among their countrymen retarded.

300-850

A purer form of missionary work, however, than that which went out from Rome, spread from Ireland, through Scotland to Northern and Central Europe. Ireland^[21] first received the Gospel in the third or fourth century, through merchants and soldiers, and by the sixth century it was a Christianised country and had developed such missionary activity that its missions were working from the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic to those of the Lake of Constance.

Monks from Ireland seeking places of retirement from the world, established themselves on some of the islands between Ireland and Scotland. Iona (Hy), called the "Isle of Saints", where Columba settled, was one point from which missions went into Scotland, and the Irish and Scottish monks preached in England and among the heathen on the Continent.

Their method was to visit a country and, where it seemed suitable, found a missionary village. In the centre they built a simple wooden church, around which were clustered schoolrooms and huts for the monks, who were the builders, preachers, and teachers. Outside this circle, as required, dwellings were built for the students and their families, who gradually gathered around them. The whole was enclosed by a wall, but the colony often spread beyond the original enclosure.

Groups of twelve monks would go out, each under the leadership of an abbot, to open up fresh fields for the Gospel. Those who remained taught in the school, and, as soon as they had sufficiently learned the language of the people among whom they were, translated and wrote out portions of Scripture, and also hymns, which they taught to their scholars.

They were free to marry or to remain single; many remained single so that they might have greater liberty for the work. When some converts were made, the missionaries chose from among them small groups of young men who had ability, trained them specially in some handicraft and in languages, and taught them the Bible and how to explain it to others, so that they might be able to work among their own people. They delayed baptism until those professing faith had received a certain amount of instruction and had given some proof of steadfastness. They avoided attacking the religions of the people, counting it more profitable to preach the truth to them than to expose their errors. They accepted the Holy Scriptures as the source of faith and life and preached justification by faith. They did not take part in politics or appeal to the State for aid.

All this work, in its origin and progress, though it had developed some features alien to New Testament teaching and Apostolic example, was independent of Rome and different in important respects from the Roman Catholic system.

In 596, Augustine, with 40 Benedictine monks, sent by Pope Gregory I, landed in Kent and began the missionary work among the heathen in England which was to bear such abundant fruit. The two forms of missionary activity in the country, the older, British, and the newer, Roman, soon came into conflict. The Pope appointed Augustine Archbishop of Canterbury, giving him supremacy over all British bishops already in the land. A national element accentuated the struggle between the two missions, the British, Celts, and Welsh being opposed to the Anglo-Saxons. The Church of Rome insisted that its form of Church government should be the only one permitted in the country, but the British order continued its resistance, until in the 13th century its remaining elements were absorbed into the Lollard movement.

[Boniface 672-755]

On the Continent the widespread and established mission work of the Irish and Scottish missionaries was attacked by the Roman system under the active leadership of the English Benedictine Boniface, whose policy was to compel the British missionaries to submit, at least outwardly, to Rome, or be destroyed. He obtained State aid, under the direction of Rome, for the enforcement of his design. Boniface was killed by the Friesians in 755. The system he inaugurated gradually extinguished the earlier missions, but their influence strengthened many of the movements of reform which followed.

A Harmony of the four Gospels called "Heliand" (i.e., "the Saviour"), written about 830 or earlier, an alliterative epic in the old Saxon language, was doubtless written in the circles of the British mission on the Continent. It contains the Gospel narrative in a form calculated to appeal to the people for whom it was written, and is remarkable for being free from any adoration of the Virgin or the saints, and from most of the characteristic features of the Roman Church at that period.

350-385

In the fourth century a Reformer appeared, and a work of Reformation was wrought which affected wide circles in Spain, spread into Lusitania (Portugal) and to Aquitania in France, making itself felt in Rome also.

[Priscillian]

Priscillian was a Spaniard of wealth and position, a learned and eloquent man of unusual attainments. In common with many of his class he was unable to believe the old heathen religions, yet was not attracted by Christianity, and preferred classic literature to the Scriptures, so he had sought refuge for his soul in the prevalent philosophies, such as Neo-Platonism and Manichaeism. He was converted to Christ, was baptised, and began a new life of devotion to God and separation from the world. He became an enthusiastic student and lover of the Scriptures, lived an ascetic life as a help towards fuller union with Christ by making his body more fit to be a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and though a layman, preached and taught diligently. Soon conventicles were organised and meetings held with a view to making religion a reality which should affect the character, and large numbers of persons, especially of the educated class, were drawn into the movement. Priscillian was made Bishop of Avila, but it was not long before he encountered the hostility of a part of the Spanish clergy.

Bishop Hydatius, Metropolitan of Lusitania, led the opposition, and at a Synod held in 380 at Caesaraugusta (Saragossa) accused him of Manichaean and Gnostic heresy. The proceedings were not successful until political necessities led the Emperor Maximus, who had murdered Gratian and usurped his place, to desire the aid of the Spanish clergy; but then, at a Synod in Burdigala (Bordeaux) in 384, Bishop Ithacus, a man of evil repute, joined the attack, accusing Priscillian and those to whom they attached the title "Priscillianists", of witchcraft and immorality, and the accused were brought to Treves (Trier), condemned by the Church, and handed over to the civil power for execution (385). The eminent bishops, Martin of Tours and Ambrose of Milan, protested in vain against this; Priscillian and six others were beheaded, among them a distinguished lady, Euchrotia, widow of a well known poet and orator.

This was the first instance of the execution of Christians by the Church, an example to be followed afterwards with such terrible frequency. After this Martin and Ambrose refused to have any fellowship whatever with Hydatius and the other bishops who were responsible, and when the Emperor Maximus fell, the cruel torture and murder of these saintly persons was recorded with abhorrence and Ithacus was deprived of his bishopric. The bodies of Priscillian and his companions were brought to Spain and they

were honoured as martyrs.

Nevertheless a Synod in Treves approved what had been done, thus giving the official sanction of the Roman Church to the execution, and this was confirmed by the Synod of Braga held 176 years later, so that the ruling Church not only persecuted those whom it called Priscillianists, but handed down as history that Priscillian and those who believed as he did were punished for holding Manichaeian and Gnostic doctrine and because of the wickedness of their lives and this continued for centuries to be the generally received opinion of them.

Although Priscillian had written voluminously, it was thought that all his writings had disappeared, so diligently had they been destroyed. In 1886 Georg Schepss discovered in the library of the University of Würzburg eleven of Priscillian's works, which he describes as being "contained in a precious Uncial M.S. ... which until now had remained unknown." [22] It is written in very old Latin and is one of the oldest Latin MSS. known to exist. It consists of eleven tracts (some parts are missing) of which the first four contain details of the trial, and the remaining seven his teaching. The reading of these, Priscillian's own writings, shows that the account handed down of him was wholly untrue, that he was a man of saintly character, sound in doctrine, and an energetic reformer, and that those associated with him were companies of men and women who were true and devoted followers of Christ. Not content with murdering these people, exiling them, confiscating their goods, the Church authorities have persistently calumniated their memory.

The style of Priscillian's writing is vivid and telling, he constantly quotes Scripture [23] in support of what he advances and shows an intimate acquaintance with the whole of the Old and New Testaments. He maintained, however, the right of the Christian to read other literature, and this was made the occasion of accusing him of wishing to include the Apocrypha in the Canon of Scripture, which he did not do.

He defends himself and his friends for their habit of holding Bible readings in which laymen were active and women took part, also for their objection to taking the Lord's Supper with frivolous and worldly minded persons. For Priscillian the theological disputations in the Church had little value, for he knew the gift of God, and had accepted it by a living faith. He would not dispute as to the Trinity, being content to know that in Christ the true One God is laid hold of by the help of the Divine Spirit. [24]

He taught that the object of redemption is that we should be turned to God and therefore an energetic turning from the world is needed, lest anything might hinder fellowship with God. This salvation is not a magical event brought about by some sacrament, but a spiritual act. The Church indeed publishes the confession, and baptises, and conveys the commands or Word of God, to men, but each one must decide for himself and believe for himself. If communion with Christ should be broken it is for each one to restore it by personal repentance. There is no special official grace, laymen have the Spirit as much as clergy.

He exposes at length the evil and falsity of Manichaeism, and his teaching, from the Scriptures, is entirely opposed to it. Asceticism he regarded not as a chief thing in itself, but as a help towards that entire union of the whole person with God or Christ, from which the body cannot be excepted, because of its being the habitation of the Spirit. This is rest in Christ, experience of Divine love and leading, incorruptible blessing. Faith in God, who has revealed Himself, is a personal act which involves the whole being in acknowledgment of dependence on God for life and for all things. It brings with it the desire and the decision to be wholly consecrated to Him. Moral works follow of themselves because in receiving the new life the believer has received into himself that which contains the very essence of morality. Scripture is not only historical truth, but is at the same time a means of grace. The spirit feeds upon it and finds that every

portion of it contains revelation, instruction, and guidance for daily life. To see the allegorical meaning of Scripture requires no technical training, but faith. The Messianic-typical meaning of the Old Testament and the historical progress of the New are pointed out, and this not only for the sake of knowledge, but as showing that not some only, but all the saints are called to complete sanctification.

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