

The Pilgrim Church - Part 6

by E.H. Broadbent

E.H. Broadbent's sermon explores the historical development and challenges of the early Christian church, focusing on the contributions of key figures and events in shaping doctrine and unity.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Matthew 19:21, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 2:21

Topics: "Church History", "Reformation Theology"

Description

E.H. Broadbent preaches about the early Christian movements, focusing on the teachings of Pierre de Brueys and Henri of Cluny who emphasized returning to the Scriptures and rejecting certain practices of the Roman Church. The followers were known by various names like Petrobrussians and Henricians, but they themselves did not acknowledge any specific founder. The Albigenses, a name given to them later, faced trials and confessions of faith that varied in degree from Roman Catholic beliefs. Despite spiritual unrest and diverse ideas, these believers, often called 'Good Men,' lived lives of simplicity and piety, contrasting with the clergy's self-indulgence.

Transcript

[Homilies of Afrahat]

Among the writings which remain from that time are the Homilies of Afrahat, called "The Persian Sage." [35] The sharp dividing line between the Roman Empire and the countries outside of it is illustrated by the fact that these "Homilies", which contain an exposition of doctrine and practice, do not even mention the Council of Nicaea nor Arius nor Athanasius, though written at the very time when there was such violent agitation about them among the churches of the West.

The first homily is on Faith, and teaches:

"For this is Faith: When a man shall believe in God the Lord of all, that made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all that in them is, Who made Adam in His image. Who gave the Law to Moses. Who sent of His Spirit in the Prophets. Who sent moreover His Messiah into the world. And that a man should believe in the coming to life of the dead. And believe also in the mystery of baptism. This is the Faith of the Church of God. And that a man should separate himself from observing hours and sabbaths and months and seasons and enchantments and divinations and chaldaism and magic and from fornication and from revelling and from vain doctrines, the weapons of the Evil One, and from the blandishment of honeyed words, and from blasphemy and from adultery. And that no man should bear false witness and that none

should speak with double tongue. These are the works of the Faith that is laid on the true Rock, which is the Messiah, upon whom all the building doth rise."

Afrahat condemns the teachings of Marcion and of Mani; he points out that there are many things which we are not able to understand, acknowledges the mystery of the Trinity but deprecates curious questions, saying:

"Above the heavens, what is there--who doth suffice to tell? Beneath the earth, what is laid? There is none to say! The firmament--upon what is it stretched out, or the heavens--upon what are they hung? The earth--on what is it pillowed, or the deep--in what is it fixed? We are of Adam, and here, with our senses, we perceive little. Only this we know: that God is One, and His Messiah One, and One the Spirit, and one the Faith and one Baptism. More than this far it doth not help us to speak; and if we say more we fall short, and if we investigate we are helpless."

Afrahat's study of prophecy led him to the conclusion that the attacks of Persia on the Roman Empire must of necessity fail.

[Synod of Seleucia AD 410]

The persecution of Christians in Persia, when Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire, strained to the utmost the relations between the two Empires, and when (399) Yezdegerd I succeeded to the Persian throne the Roman Emperor sent to him the Bishop Maruta to negotiate for relief for the believers. He proved to be a skilful diplomat and, in conjunction with Isaak who had been ordained Grand Metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon obtained permission from the Persian king to call a Synod at Seleucia (410), to reorganise the Persian Church so largely destroyed by persecution. At this Synod two royal officials presented Isaak as "Head of the Christians".[36]

Maruta had brought a letter from the bishops of the West, which, having been translated from Greek into Persian and shown to the king was approved by him and ordered to be read before the assembled bishops. Its requirements were accepted by all. Coming as they did out of great tribulation, the Persian Christians were willing to concede much to those who promised them peace. In the account of the Synod it is said that it was held:

"...in the eleventh year of Yezdegerd the victorious Great King, after the churches of the Lord had found peace and quiet, after he had given to assemblies of Christ liberation and help to glorify Christ boldly in their bodies in life and death after he had removed the cloud of persecution from all the churches of God and the night of oppression from all the flocks of Christ. For he had given commandment that in all his empire the temples destroyed by his ancestors should be beautifully restored, that the altars thrown down should be carefully served, and that those who had been tested and tried by blows and bonds for God's sake should be set at liberty. This took place on the occasion of the election of our honourable great Father before God, Mar Isaak, Bishop of Seleucia, and head of the bishops of all the East, who before God was worthy of the grace of the rule of all the East, whose presence and government opened the door of mercy to rest and peace of the people and of the Church of God, whose humility and great honourableness was brighter than all bishops of the East before him ... and through the messenger of peace sent to the East in the mercy of God the wise Father and honourable Head, Mar Maruta, the bishop, who brought about peace and unity between East and West. He took pains to build up the churches of Christ so that the godly laws and right true canons which were established by our honourable fathers the bishops in the West should be set up in the East for the edifying of the truth and of the whole people of

God. And through the care of various bishops of the Roman lands all our churches and assemblies in the East received, though they be far from us in body, compassionate love and gifts."

There was genuine rejoicing in deliverance from oppression, and thanksgiving to God for His great work on their behalf; prayer also for the king that God might add days to his days, that he might live for ever. They said that in this glorious moment of the Synod their souls were as though they had stood before the throne of Christ's glory; "We forty bishops", they said, "gathered from various parts, listened with great desire, to hear what was written in the letter from the bishops of the West." The letter laid down that there should not be, unnecessarily, two or three bishops in one town, but one bishop in each town and its district. Bishops were not to be appointed by less than three bishops acting with the authority of the Metropolitan. The dates of feasts were settled. All the canons of the Council of Nicaea in the time of Constantine were read and were signed by all present.

Mar Isaak said: "Anyone who does not agree with these praiseworthy laws and excellent canons and does not accept them, may he be accursed from all the people of God and may he have no power in the Church of Christ." It is recorded further: "All we bishops together confirmed it after him with Amen, and we all spake as he." Then Mar Maruta said: "All these explanations, laws, and canons shall be written, and at the close we will all sign them and confirm it in an everlasting covenant." Mar Isaak said: "I subscribe at the head of all." Then all the bishops from different places promised after him: "We also all accept it with joy and confirm what has been written above by our signature at the foot."

Having brought all this before the king, Isaak and Maruta addressed the bishops again, saying: "Formerly you were in great trouble and went about in secret. But now the Great King has procured you great peace. And as Isaak went in and out before the Great King, he, according to his good pleasure, has made him Head of all Christians in the East. Especially since the day when Bishop Maruta came has the favour of the Great King brought much peace and quietness to you."

The regulations were then given for the appointment of future Heads by Isaak and Maruta or their successors, with the approval of the reigning king. Further, of the Head they said: "And no one shall form a party against him. If anyone shall rise against him and contradict his will it must be told to us. We will then tell the Great King and the evil that he has done, whoever it may be, shall be judged by him." Then we left, Isaak and Maruta saying to us that all these things should be written, all that is useful for the service of the Catholic Church. This was gladly accepted, and it was agreed that anyone who set his own will against these ordinances should be utterly excluded from the Church of Christ, and his wound should never be healed, also the king should bring bitter punishment upon him.

There were many other ordinances, as, that the clergy should be celibate and not married as before; that bishops unable to be present on account of distance should be bound by what had been agreed upon; while some bishops, who from the beginning had opposed Isaak, were condemned as rebels. Meetings in private houses were forbidden the boundaries of parishes were fixed, and only one church was to be permitted in each.

[Uniformity of East and West]

Thus were East and West united, bishops being sent to various parts to regulate all differences. Parties and divisions were to exist no more.

The death of Isaak revealed the uncertainty of such arrangements, depending, as they did upon the will of the king. Numbers of the nobility having joined the churches, the jealousy of the magi was stirred and the king, remaining attached to his old religion was influenced by his priests. Isaak was no longer there to mediate, and when some of the Christian priests, puffed up with the importance of their new official positions, defied the king to his face, he, impatient of contradiction, executed several of them on the spot. On the death of the king general and severe persecution ensued under his successors, Yezdegerd II and Bahram V.

A change of far-reaching consequence was meanwhile being prepared for the Syrian and Persian churches by events that were happening in the West.

[Nestorius ?-c. 471]

Nestorius,[37] a preacher in Antioch, born at the foot of Mount Taurus in Syria, was appointed (428) by the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II to the bishopric of Constantinople, where his lively eloquence and energy added to the importance of his high position. He had been influenced by the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who, opposing the growing tendency to make the Virgin Mary an object of worship, had insisted on the impropriety of giving her the title "Mother of God". Theodore's teaching had not been generally condemned but when Nestorius taught the same, likewise running counter to the popular desire to exalt Mary, he was accused of denying the real Divinity of the Lord. The rivalry between the bishoprics of Alexandria and Constantinople, and between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch, made Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, more than willing to take advantage of the opportunity to attack Nestorius. A council was called at Ephesus. This was entirely dominated by Cyril who, without waiting for the bishops favourable to Nestorius to arrive, condemned him. Bitter quarrelling ensued, and the Emperor, for the sake of peace, though he had at first refused to confirm the decision of the Council, eventually deposed and then banished Nestorius, who passed the remainder of his life in circumstances of privation and danger, exchanging his activity and popularity in Constantinople for poverty and isolation in an oasis of the Egyptian desert.

He did not hold or teach the doctrine attributed to him, and his exclusion, though nominally on a point of doctrine, was really due to personal jealousy on the part of his episcopal colleague Cyril. A considerable number of the bishops, refusing assent to the judgement pronounced on Nestorius, were finally expelled and took refuge in Persia, where they were well received, the influx of so many capable and experienced men being the means of reviving the churches and giving fresh impetus to the spreading of them into still more distant regions. The name Nestorian was then applied to all the Eastern churches (though they did not themselves accept it, but protested against it) and they were supposed to hold the doctrine improperly attributed to Nestorius and equally unacceptable to them. They were distinct from, and opposed to, both the Byzantine and the Roman churches, and one of themselves wrote of them: "They are unjustly and injuriously called Nestorians; whereas Nestorius was never their patriarch, nor did they even understand the language in which he wrote; but when they heard how he defended the orthodox truth of two natures and two persons in one Son of God and one Christ, they gave their confirmation to his testimony because they themselves had entertained the same doctrine. So that it may rather be said, that Nestorians followed them, than that they were led by him."

[The Bazaar of Heraclides]

While in exile Nestorius wrote his own account of his belief,[38] and the following is from "The Bazaar of Heraclides" a title concealing his name in order that the book might escape destruction.

Writing on the obedience of Christ, he says:

"And therefore He took the form of a servant, a lowly form, a form that had lost the likeness of God. He took not honour and glory, nor worship, nor yet authority, though He was Son, but the form of a servant was acting with obedience in the person of the Son, according to the mind of God; having His mind and not its own. Nor did it do anything that it wished, but only what God the Word wished. For this is the meaning of the 'form of God,' that the form of the servant should not have a mind or will of its own, but of Him whose the person is and the form. Wherefore the form of God took the form of a servant and it did not avoid aught of the lowliness of the form of a servant, but received all, that the (Divine) form might be in all; that without stint it might make it to be its own form. For because He took this form, that He might take away the guilt of the first man and give to his nature that original image which he had lost by his guilt, it was right that He should take that which had incurred the guilt and was held under subjection and servitude, together with all its bonds of dishonour and disgrace; since, apart from His person it had nothing divine or honourable or independent.... Now when a man is saved from all the causes from which disobedience arises, then truly and without doubt is he seen to be without sins. And therefore He took of the nature that had sinned, lest by taking of a nature which is incapable of sins, it should be thought that it was by nature that He could not sin, and not through His obedience. But though He had all those things that belong to our nature--anger and desire and thought--and these things also were developing as He grew gradually in age; yet they were made firm in the purpose of obedience....

"Nor did He undertake obedience in the matter of those things in which there is a certain incentive of honour, of power, of renown, but rather in those that are poor and beggarly and contemptible and weak, and might well balk the purpose of obedience: things which have absolutely no incentive to obedience, but rather to slackness and remissness. And He received no sort of encouragement; but from Himself alone came His desire of obedience to God and of loving what God wills. And therefore He was needy in all things. But though He was forcibly drawn by contrary things, in nothing did He decline from the mind of God; although Satan employed all these means to withdraw Him from the mind of God. And Satan sought to do this the more because he saw that He was in no wise anxious, for He was not seen at first to work any miracles, nor did He appear to have a charge to teach, but only to be in subjection and keep all the commandments.

"While He was consorting with all men, and surrounded on all sides by all the commandments, which showed that He had the power to disobey, in the midst of them all He behaved manfully, using nothing peculiar or different from others for His sustenance, but availing Himself of such things as were usual, like other men; that it might not be supposed that he was preserved from sin by aids of this sort, and that He could not be preserved without these things. And therefore in eating and drinking He observed all the commandments. And through fatigue and sweat He remained firm in His purpose, having His will fixed to the will of God. And there was nothing that could withdraw or separate Him therefrom; for He lived not for Himself but for Him whose own the person was; and He kept the person without stain and without scar; and by its means He gave victory to the human nature."

After speaking then of Christ's baptism and temptation and telling how He was sent to preach salvation, Nestorius continues: "For God did not by means of death compass man's destruction, but brought him to a better mind and gave him helps ..."

After showing then that it was the purpose of Satan to bring man a second time, and this time utterly, to destruction by inducing him to put Christ to death, he continues:

"And He died for us erring ones; and He brought Death into the midst because it was necessary that he should be destroyed. And He did not hold back even from this that He Himself should submit to Death; for by this He won the hope of Death's undoing ... and it was with this same hope that He undertook obedience with immense love--not that He Himself should be cleared of guilt, but that He might pay the penalty for us and not that He should gain the victory for Himself, but for all men. For as the guilt of Adam established all under guilt, so did His victory acquit all."

When the Eastern Churches, outside the Roman Empire, came under the stigma of "Nestorianism" and were branded as heretics, the Persian rulers saw that there was no longer any danger of their becoming allies of Constantinople or Rome, so there was given to them a liberty greater than they had ever before enjoyed. This, with the impetus given by the exiles from the West who had found a refuge among them, led to a further development of energy and zeal in preaching the Gospel among the heathen round about and beyond them. At the same time the influence was strengthened which aimed at organizing the churches under one head, so that not only were churches founded further and further afield, but bishoprics also were formed and bishops appointed to take charge of the new churches and keep them in touch with the central organization.

Thus love to the Lord and compassion for the heathen carried these messengers of the Gospel to the most remote parts, accomplishing extraordinary journeys, and their word was accompanied by the saving power of the Holy Spirit, but at the same time the centralization that had developed caused the increasing departure of the centre from the teachings of Scripture to be reproduced in the new churches, introducing from the beginning an element of weakness which bore its fruit later.

[Churches Throughout Asia]

So many were turned to the Lord that bishoprics were established in Merv, Herat, and Samarcand, in China, and elsewhere. Near Madras and at Kattayam in Travancore tablets have been found on which are inscriptions of the seventh or eighth century, one of which reads: "In punishment by the cross (was) the suffering of this One; He who is the true Christ, and God alone, and Guide ever pure". Churches were numerous in various parts of India; in the eighth century a certain David was appointed metropolitan of the bishoprics in China. In a list of metropolitans in the ninth century, those of India, Persia, Merv, Syria, Arabia, Herat, Samarcand, are named, and others are mentioned who, on account of being so far away from the centre, are excused from attending the quadrennial synods and instructed to send in reports every six years and not to neglect the collection for the support of the Patriarchate.

These ardent missionaries reached all parts of the Continent of Asia; their bishoprics were established in Kambaluk (Pekin), Kashgar and Ceylon; they penetrated also into Tartary and Arabia. Their churches came to include the greater part of the population in Syria, Irak, and Khorasan, in some districts adjoining the Caspian, and among some of the Mongol tribes. They translated the Scriptures into several languages. There is a record from the ninth or tenth century of their having translated the New Testament into Sogdianese, an Indo-Iranian language. Near Singan-fu[1] a slab was found containing a long inscription in Syriac and Chinese, dating from the reign of Te Tsung (780-3). At the top is a cross and the heading "Monument commemorating the introduction and propagation of the noble law of Ta Ts'in in the Middle Kingdom". Among other things it records the coming of a missionary, Olopun, from the Empire of

Ta Ts'in in 635 bringing sacred books and images, tells how the books were translated, the doctrine approved by the imperial authority and permission given to teach it publicly. It describes the spread of the doctrine, and how, later, Buddhism made more progress, but under Hiuan Tsung (713-755) a new missionary, Kiho, came and the Church was revived.

The mention of the images shows what declension there had been from the original purity of the Gospel and this departure prepared the way for the triumphs of Mohammedanism that were to come. Moreover, as numbers increased so greatly the moral character and testimony of the Nestorians, or Chaldeans, degenerated. About 845 the Chinese Emperor Wu Tsung dissolved many religious houses, both Christian and Buddhist, and compelled their numerous inmates to return to normal, secular life, special stress being laid on their rejoining the ranks of those who paid ground rent, and taking their places again in the family circles to which they belonged. Foreigners among them were to be sent back to their native country.

[The Great Muslim Invasion]

As the great Mohammedan invasion swept over Persia large numbers of the Chaldean, or Nestorian, Christians were either scattered or absorbed into Islam, especially in Arabia and southern Persia. When order was restored, however, and the Abbaside Caliphs were reigning in Bagdad, Syrian Christians became prominent at the court as doctors and as teachers of philosophy, science and literature. In 762 the Catholikos removed from Seleucia, which was ruined, to the new capital of the conquerors, at Bagdad.

[Genghis Khas 1162-1227]

The rise of Genghis Khan and his immense conquests, heading (1258) to the capture of Bagdad by the Mongols, did not greatly affect the Syrian Church. The heathen Mongol rulers were tolerant, and they employed Nestorians in important political negotiations with the western powers, with the object of combining with them for the destruction of Islam. Active in these negotiations was a Chinese Nestorian, Yabh-alaha III, who rose from lowly rank to be Catholikos of the Syrian Church (1281-1317).

From the seventh century to the thirteenth the Syrian Church was as important in the East as the Roman and Greek Churches were in the West. It covered immense territories and included very large populations. From Persia and Syria it had spread until it had numerous and long established missions in India and China. The majority of the peoples of Turkestan, with their rulers, had accepted Christianity, and in the chief centres of Asia the Christian church was to be found along with the heathen temple and the Mohammedan mosque.

[Nestorian Graves]

In the neighbourhood of the hot salt-lake Issyk-kul, high among the mountains of Russian Turkestan, two cemeteries have been found.[39] On hundreds of the tombstones are crosses and inscriptions which show that they mark Nestorian graves. They cover the period from the middle of the thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century. The names of most of the Christians buried there show them to have been of Tartar race, then as now, the prevailing nationality of that country. The inscriptions are in Syriac and in Turkish.

Among the many natives of the country there are also some Christians from other lands--a Chinese woman, a Mongol, an Indian, a Uigur--showing that the believers in the different countries of Central Asia had communications with each other.

There are references to the learning and gifts of some and to their devoted service among the churches, often the word "believer" is added to the name, and there are expressions of affection and of hope. Among the inscriptions are the following: "This is the grave of Pasak. The aim of life is Jesus our Redeemer"--"This is the grave of the charming maiden Julia"--"This is the grave of the priest and general, Zuma. A blessed old man, a famous Emir, the son of General Giwargis. May our Lord unite his spirit with the spirits of the fathers and saints in eternity"--"This is the grave of the church visitor Pag-Mangku, the humble believer"--"This is the grave of Shliha the celebrated commentator and teacher, who illuminated all the monasteries with light; son of Peter the august commentator of wisdom. His voice rang as high as the sound of a trumpet. May our Lord mix his pure soul with the just men and the fathers. May he participate in all heavenly joys"--"This is the grave of the priest Take who was very zealous for the church".

[Tamerlane 1336?-1405]

There was great rivalry between the Nestorian missionaries and those of Islam for the favour of the Mongol khans. In this struggle Islam was victorious and Syrian Christianity began to wane. In the beginning of the fifteenth century, Timur, or Tamerlane had already established his Empire, making Samarcand its centre. Although a Mohammedan, he sacked Bagdad and generally wrought such unparalleled devastation that great parts of Asia never recovered from it, and Christianity rapidly diminished in western Asia.

[John of Monte Corvino 1247-1328]

When the Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries[40] of the thirteenth and following centuries, in the course of their arduous travels, discovered the lost country of Cathay to be the same as newly-discovered China, they found numerous Syrian Christians there. The Franciscan, John of Monte Corvino, a missionary who died in China about 1328, wrote: "I departed from Tauris, a city of the Persians, in the year of the Lord 1291 and proceeded to India ... for thirteen months, and in that region baptised in different places about one hundred persons.... I proceeded on my journey and made my way to Cathay, the realm of the Emperor of the Tartars, who is called the Grand Cham. To him I presented a letter of our Lord the Pope, and invited him to adopt the Catholic Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, but he had grown too old in idolatry. However, he bestows many kindnesses upon the Christians, and these two years past I am abiding with him. The Nestorians, a certain body who profess to bear the Christian name, but who deviate sadly from the Christian religion, have grown so powerful in these parts that they will not allow a Christian of another ritual to have ever so small a chapel, or to publish any doctrine different from their own."

The Archbishop of Soltania, writing about 1330, refers to John of Monte Corvino: "He was a man of very upright life, pleasing to God and men ... he would have converted that whole country to the Christian Catholic faith, if the Nestorians, those false Christians and real miscreants, had not hindered him ... (he) was at great pains with those Nestorians to bring them under the obedience of our mother the holy church of Rome; for without this obedience, he told them, they could not be saved. And for this cause those Nestorian schismatics held him in great hate."

The Nestorians were said to number more than 30,000 in Cathay and to be very rich, having handsome and devoutly ordered churches, with crosses and images in honour of God and the saints. "It is believed that if they would agree and be at one with the Minor Friars, and with other good Christians who dwell in that country, they would convert the whole country and the emperor likewise to the true faith."

John of Monte Corvino himself, describing his methods of work, complains that his brethren do not write to him and is much concerned at the news that comes through from Europe--tells of a travelling doctor "who", he says, "spread abroad in these parts the most incredible blasphemies about the Court of Rome and our Order and the state of things in the West, and on this account I exceedingly desire to obtain true intelligence...." He begs for suitable helpers and says that he has already translated the New Testament and Psalter into the language of the country, "and have caused them", he adds, "to be written out in the finest penmanship they have; and so, by writing, reading, and preaching, I bear open and public testimony to the law of Christ."

[Chinese Scriptures]

When Robert Morrison was learning Chinese in London before going out for the London Missionary Society to his great work of translating the Bible into Chinese, he was shown and studied a Chinese manuscript that had been found in the British Museum, which contained a Harmony of the Gospels, the Book of the Acts, and the Pauline Epistles and also a Latin-Chinese Dictionary, supposed to be the work of an unknown Roman Catholic missionary of the 16th century.

In the Chinese annals, after a description of the close of the Mongol and the rise of the Ming Dynasty (1368), this comment is made:

"... a native from the Great Western Ocean came to the capital, who said that the Lord of Heaven, Ye-su, was born in Ju-tê-a which is identical with the old country of Ta Ts' in (Rome); that this country is known in the historical books to have existed since the creation of the world for the last 6000 years; that it is beyond dispute the sacred ground of history and the origin of all worldly affairs; that it should be considered as the country where the Lord of Heaven created the human race. This account looks somewhat exaggerated and should not be trusted...."

With the exception of a numerous and interesting body of Syrian Christians on the Malabar coast of South India, and some remnants around Urumiah, near their original home, these Persian and Syrian churches have disappeared from Asia where they were once so widely spread.

[Decline of the Syrian Churches]

Until the end of the third century they retained a large measure of Scriptural simplicity in the ordering of their churches. Separated to some extent from the theological discussions that occupied the West, the apostolic messengers who went out from these churches threw their energies into incessant travelling, and were successful in spreading the Gospel and founding churches as far as the most remote parts of Asia. In the fourth century, when the churches in the Roman world had respite from the persecution they had suffered, those in Persia and the East entered into a time of fiery testing such as they had not hitherto experienced. This they endured, and their faith and patience prevailed. They were weakened more at this time by the federating scheme of Papa ben Aggai than by the losses they had suffered through persecution, and this prepared the way for the introduction of the Roman church system at the Synod of Seleucia at the beginning of the fifth century. The system here was necessarily modified by the fact that in the Persian Empire and in further Asia the rulers remained Pagan, and those who had seen in the union of Church and State in the time of Constantine one chief reason of the corruption of the churches in the West, might have expected better things in the East, where such a union could not take place.

[Causes of Decline]

But the Roman organization of parishes, clergy, bishops, and metropolitans prevailed, and, abandoning the simple Scriptural order of the churches and their elders, the Syrian churches diverted their energies into the strifes and intrigues and divisions which continually took place among them, owing to the efforts of various men to obtain the influential post of bishop or catholikos. Even the important revivals which occurred at times were unable to stem their downward course seeing that they were the work of dominating persons aiming at strengthening episcopal authority rather than movements of the Spirit among the people, drawing them back through the Word to obedience to the commandments of the Lord.

The Nestorian division, by separating the Eastern Church from the Western, might have been an occasion of reviving, had it led to a return to the pattern of Scripture, but though it stimulated missionary zeal for a time, it did not shake the dominance of the clergy nor faith in the efficacy for salvation of the sacraments they administered. The churches lost much of the benefit of separation from the State when they had a Catholikos or Patriarch who could obtain the help of the secular arm in enforcing his decrees, and through whom the State could exercise an influence on them. They were taught to look to Seleucia or to Bagdad rather than to Christ as their centre; to send their reports to them rather than bring their matters direct to Him "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks", to receive from them bishops for their guidance rather than count on the Holy Spirit to distribute among them the gifts needed for their edifying and for the further preaching of the Gospel.

By this channel, too, the use of images was introduced and extended, weakening the testimony of the Gospel among the heathen idol-worshippers, and destroying its power to resist the incoming tide of Mohammedanism, which overwhelmed and still holds vast territories where once there were the brightest hopes that the knowledge of Christ would prevail.

FOOTNOTES:

[33]"The Syrian Churches" J. W. Etheridge.

[34]"Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous ma Dynastie Sassanide" (224-632). J. Labourt.

[35]"Early Christianity outside the Roman Empire" F. C. Burkitt M.A.

[36]"Das Buch des Synhados" Oscar Braun.

[37]"Nestorius and his Teachings" J. Bethune-Baker.

[38]"The Bazaar of Heraclides of Damascus" J. Bethune-Baker

[39]"Nestorian Missionary Enterprise" by the Rev. John Stewart, M.A., Ph.D (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1928). A valuable work in itself, and also for the references to authorities given, including Chwolson, the translator of the inscriptions quoted.

[40]"Cathay and the Way Thither" Col. Sir Henry Yule. Hakluyt Society.

Chapter V

Waldenses and Albigenses

1100-1230, 70-1700, 1160-1318, 1100-1500

Pierre de Brueys--Henri the Deacon--Sectarian names refused--The name Albigenses--Visits of brethren from the Balkans--The Perfect--Provence invaded--Inquisition established--Waldenses--Leonists--Names--Tradition in the valleys--Peter Waldo--Poor Men of Lyons--Increase of missionary activity--Francis of Assisi--Orders of Friars--Spread of the churches--Doctrine and practices of the Brethren--Waldensian valleys attacked--Beghards and Beghines.

1100-1230

Brethren from Bosnia and other Balkan countries, making their way through Italy, came into the South of France, finding everywhere those who shared their faith. The teaching they brought with them found ready acceptance. The Roman clergy called them Bulgarians, Cathars, Patarenes, and other names, and, following the habit of centuries in Asia Minor and in time Balkan countries, affirmed that they were Manichaeans.

[Pierre de Brueys ?-c. 1126]

In addition to the circles to which these belonged, others were formed within the Church of Rome,[41] the result of spiritual movements which developed in such a way as to bring multitudes of persons, who belonged nominally to that communion, to leave the religious services to which they had been accustomed, and to gather around those who read and expounded to them the Word of God. Prominent among such teachers was Pierre de Brueys, an able and diligent preacher who for twenty years, braving all dangers, travelled throughout Dauphiny, Provence, Languedoc, and Gascony, drawing multitudes from the superstitions in which they had been brought up, back to the teachings of Scripture, until he was burned at St. Gilles (1126). He showed from Scripture that none should be baptised until they had attained to time full use of their reason; that it is useless to build churches, as God accepts sincere worship wherever offered; that crucifixes should not be venerated, but rather looked upon with horror, as representing the instrument on which our Lord suffered; that the bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, but are symbols commemorative of His death; and that the prayers and good works of the living cannot benefit the dead.

[Henri of Cluny]

He was joined by Henri, a monk of Cluny in deacon's orders, whose striking appearance, powerful voice, and great gift of oratory compelled attention, while his denunciation of the crying evils that abounded, his convincing expositions of Scripture, and his zeal and devotion, turned very many to repentance and faith, among them notorious sinners, who were converted and became changed in life. Priests who tried to oppose were terrified by the power of his preaching and at the sight of the multitudes that followed him.

Undeterred by the violent death of his elder and admired brother and fellow-worker, he continued his testimony until Bernard of Clairvaux, at that time the most powerful man in Europe, was called to oppose him as being the only one who could hope to do so successfully. Bernard found the churches deserted and the people wholly turned from the clergy, and although Henri was obliged to flee from his powerful opponent, all Bernard's oratory and authority could only put a temporary check on the movement, which was not dependent on any individual but was a spiritual one affecting the whole population. Henri was able to elude capture for a long time and continue his fearless work, but falling at last into the hands of the clergy he was imprisoned and either died in prison or was put to death there (1147).

In accordance with the inveterate habit of attaching some sectarian name to any who endeavoured to return to the teaching of Scripture, many were called at this time Petrobrussians, or Henricians, names which they themselves never acknowledged. Bernard of Clairvaux complained bitterly of their objection to taking the name of anyone as their founder.

He said:

"Inquire of them the author of their sect and they will assign none. What heresy is there, which, from among men, has not had its own heresiarch? The Manichaeans had Manes for their prince and preceptor, the Sabellians Sabellius, the Arians Arius, the Eunomians Eunomius the Nestorians Nestorius. Thus all other pests of this stamp are known to have had each a man, as their several founders, whence they have at once derived both their origin and their name. But by what appellation or by what little will you enroll these heretics? Truly by none. For their heresy is not derived from man, neither through man have they received it...."

[The Name Albigenses]

He then comes to the conclusion that they had received it from demons. The name Albigenses^[42] does not appear until after the Council held at Lombers near Albi about the middle of the twelfth century. The people brought for trial then made a confession of faith which did not differ much from what a Roman Catholic might have made; but as they had a conscientious objection to taking an oath in confirmation of what they had said they were condemned. This confession, including as it did a declaration of belief in infant baptism, shows that those affected by the religious movements of the time differed among themselves in their degree of divergence from the teachings of the dominant Church. In a time of such spiritual unrest, all kinds of strange and fanciful ideas took root, and both truth and error found fruitful ground. Some persons who were examined and punished appear to have been Mystics, and although many who were accused of being Manichaeans had no sort of connection with them, yet instances were found of those who held Manichean doctrine, and these were readily confounded with others innocent of such teaching.

Among the people the brethren were most frequently called "Good Men", and there is general testimony to the fact that their manner of life was a pattern to all, and especially that their simplicity and piety were a contrast to the self-indulgence of the clergy.

At St. Félix de Caraman, near Toulouse, in 1167, a conference of teachers of these churches was held at which an elder from Constantinople took a leading part; he brought good news of the progress of the churches in his own district and also in Romania, Bulgaria, and Dalmatia. In 1201 the visit of another leader, from Albania, was the occasion of widespread revival in the South of France.

Some among the brethren devoted themselves entirely to travelling and ministering the Word, and were called "the Perfect," and, in accordance with the Lord's words in Matthew 19. 21, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me", they possessed nothing, had no home, and literally acted upon this command. It was recognised that all are not called to such a path, and that the majority of believers, while acknowledging that they and all they have belong to Christ, should serve Him while remaining in their families and continuing in their usual occupations.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/eh-broadbent/the-pilgrim-church-part-6/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net