CLAUDIUS OF TURIN

I

CLAUDIUS, Bishop of Turin for some years during the ninth century, is one who has not received the attention he deserves. His present obscurity is due in part to that unhappy division of the period between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance into the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages, by which all prior to the eleventh century fell within the "Dark Ages", a time few have thought worthy of study in comparison with the many who have treated of the later period, and in part to the undeserved censures and suspicions which involved Claudius in an atmosphere of quasi-heresy. Professor M. L. W. Laistner, of Cornell University (*Thought and Letters in Western Europe*, A.D. 500-900), has written " Even good mediaevalists are at times prone to be somewhat cavalier towards anything prior to the eleventh century and to the rise of the universities. No reasonably informed person, it is true, any longer believes in the 'Dark Ages'—a prolonged period of hopeless barbarism succeeding on the fall of the Western Empire. But in the English-speaking countries, at least, where so much has been published, whether of specialised research, or of broader interpretation, in the later Middle Ages, the early centuries have attracted little attention." Thus scholars have in the main left Claudius alone, and the little information made available about him has generally taken the form of a speculation as to whether he can be regarded as a founder of the evangelical movement which emerges in history as the Waldensian sect of the later centuries or not. The proximity of Turin to the Waldensian valleys, and the slight resemblances between his views of worship and "Puritan" opinions and those of the followers of Peter Waldo has permitted of a good deal of theorising. It is impossible to say that a link can be established; but it is open to us to believe that influences remained after the ninth century which bore fruit long after.

The facts of the life of Claudius now available are not numerous. He was a Spaniard, and this racial origin led to the

charge at one time or another that he had imbibed the views, condemned as heretical, of Felix, Bishop of Urguel. Thus, in a passage in Migne (*Patrologia Latina*, *vol.* CIV) he is described as "Iconoclasta obstinatissimus, discipulus Felicis Urgellitani praesulis." The views of Felix appear to have been a form of Adoptianism, condemned by the Council of Frankfort, a heresy of an oriental type. In early days Claudius had fought against the Saracens, and it has been suggested that from them he learnt to detest images, and determined to combat that growing culture that seemed to destroy the spiritual character of the Gospel. He was a man of great erudition, and, as such, found himself in an age, the age of Charles the Great, in which learning was held in the greatest honour. Under Charles he became a master of the Imperial schools at Aix-la-Chapelle about A.D. 814. It is also stated (*Histoire Littéraire de la France*, *iv.* 223) that he had been master of a Royal School in Aquitaine, (supposed to have been Ebreuil). By the favour of the Emperor Louis the Pious he became Bishop of Turin in A.D. 818 (Neander says A.D. 814). At Turin he met with much opposition and peril, and had to face the threats of Saracen invasion. The Saracens, settled in Spain, constantly raided Gaul and North Italy, despite their set-back at the hands of Charles Martel. Notwithstanding the bitter controversies of which he was the centre Claudius remained at Turin till his death about A.D. 839.

We have mentioned above, the suggestion that his years of episcopal labour in Turin laid the foundations for the later Waldensian movement. This is not a recent hypothesis. Jacques Basnage (*Histoire de la Réligion des Eglises Reformées*) a writer of the Huguenot period wrote (*vol. i*, pt. 4) "The Churches of France in the ninth century had the same sentiment on the cult of images as the Reformed hold to-day. They taught that God alone merits our prayers and sacrifices; they venerated the martyrs by following their examples." He quotes Remy of Auxerre: "We never sacrifice to the martyrs, but solely to God," and goes on to speak of the succession of the disciples of Claudius of Turin in the valleys of Piedmont down to the Reformation. Against this must be set the opinion of a writer of more recent times. Dr. Reginald Lane Poole (*Illustrations of the History of Mediaeval Thought and Learning*, 2nd ed. 1920) says: "It is hazardous, if not impossible, to connect Claudius in any direct way with the appearance of similar opinions, whether in the

Waldenses centuries later, or in those isolated puritan outbreaks which confront us in the course of mediaeval history."

II

We now have to consider the place of Claudius in the religious history of his age, and to estimate his contribution to Christian theology, and thus to justify our effort to bring him to readers' notice, as offering a lesson of abiding value.

In the eighth and ninth centuries a kind of authority in spiritual matters still lingered in Byzantium, the Eastern counterpart of the now defunct Empire of the West. The powers of the Western Emperor in spiritual and to some extent in temporal affairs had tended for long enough to gather in the hands of the Bishop of Rome, but there had been no distinct breach between Eastern and Western Christianity. Yet the Pope was pushing forward his universal claims, and needed only the support of some powerful Western monarch to advance his ambitions to success. In our period that Western monarch for the first time was emerging. The empire of Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was ready to become the second of the Two Swords. Its support would enable the Bishop of Rome to feel quite independent of the Eastern Emperor, who had still power over parts of Italy, and also to assert himself finally as the superior of the Patriarchs of Constantinople. Western jealousy of the East was enhanced by the reforming zeal of the Eastern Emperors. In A.D. 726 the Eastern Emperor, Leo Isauricus, had delivered a public address in which he favoured the overthrow of the venerated images which to his mind (and rightly) had come to occupy too great a place in popular devotion. This Emperor was a man of great ability, a soldier, a legislator, a statesman. The breaking of images by Imperial order (Iconoclasm) provoked great indignation, both in East and West. Pope Gregory III with a council of ninety-three bishops excommunicated the Iconoclasts. Leo died in 740, and his son, Constantine V, began the persecution of image-worshippers in earnest. He aimed at restoring primitive simplicity, and attacked Mariolatry and relics. The strife continued till his death in 775. His daughter-in-law, Irene, became Regent for her ten-year-old son, and began to restore the images, and convoked a council of bishops and monks to Nicaea in A.D. 787. This council restored the images, though it did not end the dispute, which lasted into the ninth

century. The attitude of the Popes was, of course, sympathetic to image-worship, and among the Franks the hostility of the Iconoclastic Emperors met with little sympathy. A synod held at Gentilly in A.D. 767 by Pippin, Charles the Great's predecessor, had refused to endorse the Imperial policy.

Nevertheless, the absence of Frankish bishops from the Council of Nicaea (called the second General Council of Nicaea), left Charles unprepared for the Council's findings. He was presented with the results. He summoned his theologians to discuss the matter, and also sent to England where Alcuin, his great pedagogue, was at the time. The result of these deliberations was the work known as " Libri Carolini", of which some have supposed Alcuin was the author, though it is more probable that he was a collaborator with others. The position adopted was a mediating one in regard to this image-controversy. The essential part of the argument of these books is, according to Dr. Laistner, that while saints ought to be venerated, their images are only to beautify churches, and to remind us of their good deeds. These " Caroline books " were composed in A.D. 790, and it is alleged that their very moderate attitude to images was due to revulsion of feeling against the extremes of the decrees of Nicaea, since these were presented to the Franks through the medium of a bad or misleading translation. A Council of Frankish bishops, with representative bishops from England and Spain and elsewhere, was held in A.D. 794 at Frankfort, which condemned the second Council of Nicaea and all worship of images. The expression used was " the Greek synod at Constantinople", for the last session had been held in that city, and the word " Greek " was doubtless intended to limit its authority and deprive it of oecumenical significance. T. Hodgkin (*Italy and her Invaders, vol.* viii) says that the Frankfort synod accused the Nicaean of directing that the same adoration and service should be rendered to the holy images which was rendered to the Trinity. "This last statement was due to a misunderstanding, probably due to a mistranslation of the proceedings of the Council they condemned. The fact that the mistranslation was the work of a scribe in the Lateran shows how careless was the Papal Chancery." As against Dr. Hodgkin's acceptance of the misunderstanding of the text of the decrees of Nicaea we may quote Palmer's *Treatise on the Church of Christ* (pt. 4, ch. 10) where it is said that Charles the

Great received a copy direct from Constantinople. At Nicaea the definition of faith read was that " Salutation and the adoration of honour ought to be paid to the images, but not the worship of *Latria ;* nevertheless it is lawful to burn lights before them, and to incense them, for honour so paid to the image is transmitted to the original, which it represents."

III

We have then witnessed the religious atmosphere in which Claudius, the scholar and teacher, lived, and described one of the burning topics of his day. His only outstanding colleague who shared his views was Agobard, Bishop of Lyons.

Claudius had not concealed his opinion that even the moderate position of the Caroline books was wrong. Dr. A. J. MacDonald (*Authority and Reason in the Early Middle Ages*) says that writers like Claudius and Agobard maintained more faithfully the orthodox attitude of the West than their detractors who, by stoutly emphasising the worship of images, were innovators. These opponents drew strength from the tendency to extend tradition by an appeal to the findings of later councils, even provincial councils, and the principle of authority began to be set up as a defence against the growing resort to rational methods.

The source of the doctrine expounded by Claudius was undoubtedly Holy Scripture. He was the most prolific commentator on Scripture of his age. Later exegetists such as Hrabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mainz, who are better known, did not scruple to borrow from the works of Claudius, suppressing his name, perhaps because of the suspicion of heresy. This may account for the fact that in the Middle Ages Claudius was almost unknown, and most of his expositions of the Books of the Bible still lie in manuscript unprinted. A MS. of his commentary on St. Matthew, for example, is in Berlin, others, we believe, are in Vienna. The *Enarratio* in Galatians will be found in Migne, *Patiologia Latina*, *vol.* CIV, along with a letter to Abbot Theodemir on Leviticus, Answers to Questions on the Books of Kings, Preface to St. Matthew's Gospel, Prefaces to commentaries on St. Paul's Epistles, Exposition on Philemon, and a short chronology of the Bible. " He," says Dr. Laistner, "speaks with exemplary modesty and even diffidence of his performance. He had undoubtedly read very deeply in theological literature, but

though endowed with an original mind, he did not allow it scope in his commentaries." Reverent awe for Augustine and unrivalled knowledge are due to his early stay in Lyons, where the Cathedral library was rich in the works of that Father.

Both he and Agobard showed freedom of judgment, and this was only possible during the Carolingian Renaissance, as in later centuries the tyranny of the Church would have suppressed them. We have only to recall the fate of Gotteschalc, almost in their time, to realise this.

The close study of Holy Scripture could not fail to awaken Claudius to the realisation that in Christ there is direct and open access to the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God. He knew that there was no other Mediator than our Great High Priest in heaven, he knew that salvation was by faith and God's grace, not by merit or by the intercession of the Saints. He knew, also, the spiritual dangers of the baptized paganism of his age. He did, with voice and pen, the work of an evangelist. As Dr. Lane Poole says: " His fearless pursuit of the principles he had learned in the course of a wide study of the Fathers makes Claudius a signal apparition at a time when the material accessories of religion were forcing themselves more and more into the relations between men and God. The worship of images, of pictures, of the Cross itself, belief in the mediation of Saints, the efficacy of pilgrimages, the authority of the Holy See, seemed to him but the means of deadening the responsibility of individual men. Claudius was sure that if a man has a direct personal interest in his own welfare, if he does not rely on spiritual processes conducted by others on his behalf, nor tie his faith to material representations of the unseen, he can be the better trusted to walk aright. The freedom of the Gospel he is never tired of contrasting with the bondage of the law, a bondage which he saw revived in the religious system of his own day". It is obvious that this hostility to the bondage of the law drew strength from his study of Galatians, and his commentary is concentrated on that great emancipation. His Latin style may not be the best, for his age was not the Augustan one, but his meaning is generally clear enough. It is not to be wondered at that his enemies should have called him " perniciosissimus hostis Ecclesiae", and " Dei ac verae fidei hostis".

IV

When Claudius entered upon his episcopal labours at Turin he found a widespread cultus of saints and relics, and churches full of images—"Inveni omnes basilicas contra ordinem veritatis sordibus anathematum et imaginibus plenas.". He at once began a reforming campaign, and ordered all pictures and images to be removed, and forbade the observance of saints' days, and all mention of them in the liturgy, which led to intense excitement among the people. The fact that he was able to do this shows the primitive independence of the local diocese. The quasi-papal authority of the Archbishop of Milan does not appear to have had any restraining power, and the liberty to revise the liturgy seems not to have been denied. The security enjoyed by Claudius was partly due to the protection of the Frankish Emperor, but also partly to the lack, in that age, of the centralisation of all ecclesiastical oversight in the Bishops of Rome. The age of papal autocracy had not yet dawned, and in the times of which we write the Popes were more concerned to established their rule over Southern Italy against the claims of the Eastern Emperor than to engage in conflict with a reformer who might have behind him the support of the Frankish State and ruler. The same support protected him against local animosity, since the opponent of popular superstition would be in danger from the fanaticism of the ignorant bereft of their idols. Claudius saw clearly that in his time materialism of the crudest kind left no possibility that images in churches could be accepted by the people on merely aesthetic grounds. The position of the Caroline Books might be acceptable to the educated, but could not control the ignorant. The discrimination even of the Second Council of Nicaea could only be appreciated by the spiritual, and even then, later developments showed that this was an insufficient safeguard. "If the people," said Claudius, "worship the images of saints after the fashion of demons (i.e., after the fashion of the old gods of the district), they have not left idols, but changed only the names." Naturally he was attacked, and accused of heresy, to which he replied: "Nothing can be more false. I preach no sect, but hold the unity and teach the truth of the church. Sects, heresies and superstitions I have always tried to stamp out. I have fought with them, and with the help of God I will not cease to do so." He attacked every visible symbol, as an enemy of the true

worship of the heart, and not content with this, he went further, and became a pioneer in condemning the usurped authority of the See of Rome, declaring that the authority claimed for Peter ceased at his death. In this he anticipated the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, and those outspoken men who prior to the Reformation had declared the same principles. The authors of the " Defensor Pacis," Wyclif, and many others, would have hailed him as one of themselves. One of his great affirmations was " He is not to be called apostolic who sits in an apostle's seat, but he who does the work of an apostle." Like our reformers he saw that the earthly Church is but an imperfect copy of that ideal Church which it represents.

Claudius was not entirely alone in his protests, for during his episcopate a Council held at Paris, A.D. 825, agreed with him to some extent, in refusing to approve the command of Pope Hadrian to adore images, saying that such adoration was superstitious and sinful, and declaring that his collection of patristic testimonies was little to the point. This council also condemned the decrees of Nicaea. Yet such was the conservatism of this Council (or one that shortly followed it) that it condemned Claudius for excessive zeal in breaking down crosses and images. The bishops clung still to the conception of these things set out in the Caroline Books.

It is possible that this Council had before it the book written by Claudius, his *Apology* addressed to his friend, the Abbot Theodemir, in which his convictions were given full expression. The bishops are said to have condemned the book, and Claudius called them " an assembly of asses". He was probably right. The controversy then took in a new form, and two of the pious venerators of images, Dungal, an Irishman, and Jonas, Bishop of Orleans (this latter at the Emperor's request) essayed to reply to Claudius.

Our knowledge of Claudius' *Apology* is due to the fact that Dungal and Jonas both (especially Jonas) incorporated long passages from it in their answers. Both of these are in Migne, *Patrologia Latina ;* Dungal in vol. cv, and Jonas in vol. cvi. The older writers agree in calling Dungal " Reclusus", i.e., a solitary, of the Abbey of St. Denys, near Paris, but a recent writer, Dom Louis Gougaud, (*Gaelic Pioneers of Christianity*), says that the Dungal in question was not the recluse, but a priest at Pavia, a city convenient to Milan, and not remote from Turin.[1]

[1] F. X. Funck (*Church History i*) supposes the recluse to have been the priest at Pavia.

It is due to these writers to say that they give quite fair representation to the views expressed by Claudius in his apology. That text being lost, unless some day it may turn up, if there are still in European libraries any uncatalogued collections of MSS.; we are fortunate in having the substance incorporated in the replies of his adversaries. Here are two specimens of Claudius' teaching preserved by Jonas—

"Let no man trust in the intercession and merit of the Saints, because unless he holds the same faith, justice and truth they held, he cannot be saved."

"God commanded men to bear the Cross, not to adore it; they wish to adore that which they will not spiritually or bodily carry with them. To worship God thus is to depart from Him".

Again, Claudius' emphasis on true faith has no suspicion of antinomianism about it, for we find (*Enarratio in Galat.* iv.) that he insists that faith alone will not suffice for life if a man does not love his neighbour as himself.

V

The origin of the *Apology*, addressed as we have seen, to Theodemir, is told in the *Histoire Littéraire de la France par des Religieux Bénédictines de S. Maur, vol.* IV., as follows—Theodemir was Abbot of Psalmodia, in the diocese of Nîmes, about A.D. 815. He was a friend of the Emperor Louis, and also of Claudius, at least till 823. Claudius had dedicated to him his commentary on Genesis, and Theodemir asked him for a commentary on Leviticus. At the conclusion of this commentary on Leviticus Claudius began to declare himself against the cult of images "through misunderstanding a passage of Augustine".[1] The news of this having spread widely Theodemir warned Claudius, in letters full of charity, to renounce these errors contrary to the faith of the Church. Claudius took offence, and wrote a book "full of bitterness and insults against the Catholic Church" under the title of *Apology*. Theodemir died soon after, apparently without answering Claudius, and in 827 Dungal issued his reply. So the matter is summarised by the

[1] "And therefore we may not have as a religion the cult of dead men. Because they lived piously they have no claim to such honours that they should wish to be worshipped by us. They are therefore to be honoured by our imitation, not to be adored on account of their religion. If they lived ill they are not to be worshipped. What the highest angel worships is to be worshipped by the lowest man." (Claudius—*In Libros Informationum Litterae et Spiritus super Leviticum ad Theodemirum abbatem.* In fine operis.)

Benedictines. They quote Dom Mabillon as saying Dungal was Irish, (Scot was the current word at that time) as the name readily indicates, and Du Pin as saying that he was a deacon. Gougaud, we have noted, describes him as a priest. The Benedictines continue that Dungal prepared himself by two years' study and discussion of the authoritative Fathers of the Church. His method was to cite a passage of Claudius, and then to comment on it. Thus we learn that the three propositions put forward by Claudius were (i) that we ought not to have images; (ii) that we ought not to adore the Cross; (iii) that we ought not to honour relics. On this last ground Claudius condemned pilgrimages to the tombs of the Saints, and naturally, pilgrimages to Rome. Dungal was no great reasoner; instead he heaps up passages from the Fathers, and tries to show that the usage of the Church was always contrary to the opinions of Claudius. One remarkable feature of his reply is the use made of the Christian poets, such as Prudentius, and Paulinus of Nola. Most poets, even very minor ones, are addicted to symbols and concrete imagery, witness our hymnbooks! We need not therefore be impressed by this class of demonstration. Indeed this defect is recognised by the Abbé Fleury, *Histoire Ecclesiastique, tom. x. (ed.* 1720),when he writes that Dungal employs nothing but authority, and argues that the principal proof in the matter has always been the tradition and constant practice of the Church. He maintains that Claudius in rejecting the Cross, declares himself enemy of the Passion and Incarnation, and therefore the Jews praise him, and name him as the wisest of Christians, and he, on his part, gives great praise to them and to the Saracens.

Fleury gives an interesting sidelight on the whole controversy when he writes that " Louis the Pious, seeing that in Italy a great section of the people were badly instructed in the truth of the Gospel, appointed Claudius Bishop of Turin, and he began to preach and instruct with great application. Among other abuses which he found in the country was the excessive cult of images, which by an ancient custom went very near to superstition. To retrench this he went to the opposite excess, and by indiscreet zeal he effaced, broke, and took away all the images and crosses in his diocese." If the ignorance of the people led Louis the Pious to choose as their bishop his leading biblical expositor, Claudius may reasonably have supposed that his mission, under imperial sanction, was to effect cleansing and

reform. It is true that later the pious Emperor took alarm, and commissioned Jonas to refute his protégé, but that was only when Claudius developed into a thoroughgoing Protestant.

VI

Jonas of Orleans was an opponent of greater weight than Dungal. He had the consciousness of the Emperor's authority behind him, and had also much higher ecclesiastical standing. The ancient city of Orleans, not too far from the famous ecclesiastical centre of Tours, must have had alert and intelligent life. Jonas was Bishop there in 821. The Benedictines (*Histoire Littéraire*) tell us that Jonas' work against Claudius was well advanced when he heard of the death of Claudius, and he therefore suspended his writing; but learning later that " that heretic " had left disciples and writings in which he revived Arianism, he continued his work. The accusation that Claudius had revived Arianism was probably a malicious effort to slander the dead, on a level with the charges made during his life-time that Claudius was a disciple of Felix of Urguel. Incidentally, we may note again that Claudius was a Spaniard, and Spain was one of the countries of the West, if not the chief of them, in which Arianism rooted itself for long enough. The charge would thus be faintly plausible propaganda against the deceased bishop's Protestant convictions.

Jonas follows the method of Dungal, and is rich in patristic extracts, and also quotes with approval Walafrid Strabo, his contemporary, the learned German monk. A brief summary of the reply of Jonas may be found in Natalis Alexander's *Historia Ecclesiastica V.* This Dominican writer of the seventeenth century argues as though Claudius were one of his contemporaries whom he felt bound in duty to refute.

Jonas quotes the words of Claudius " Haec idcirco dico, ut nemo de merito vel intercessione sanctorum confidat ". He claims with great exaggeration that Claudius has departed from the ecclesiastical traditions, and he lays down imperiously what he conceives the Fathers to have said about the veneration and adoration of statues. When he comes to treat of scripture authority he can do so in but meagre fashion. He quotes a passage (Matt. xxiv. 30) about the sign of the Son of Man, another (Gal. vi. 14) about glorying in the Cross, and another, (Col. i. 20) about the blood of the Cross, all of which refer only

to Christ and not to the wood of the Cross. He then goes on to aver that images and statues are to be adored, that the Saints are mediators, so that we are saved by their intercessions, that pilgrimages are to be made to Rome to the tomb of the apostles, that the power of judgment after death remains with the saints. He quarrels with the occasional obscurity of Claudius' language, and generally displays no willingness to appreciate the ground of his opponent's protests.

The Magdeburg Centuriators (Basel ed., 1624), *Cent. ix. c. 5*, describe the three books of Jonas as invectives rather than refutations. Like the present-day reader, they do not see why a writer who says adoration should be given to the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, only should be condemned, even when he holds that to prevent idolatry pictures and statues should be abolished. It is likewise unreasonable to condemn a man for teaching that as true repentance can be achieved anywhere it is a mistake to go to Rome on penitential pilgrimage, or for teaching that men ought not to run after relics of the saints. Claudius had called this last practice " Ethnica superstitio ", saying that just as men had formerly in ignorance of the true God worshipped Jupiter, Saturn and Mercury, so now they worship Peter and Paul. " Nomen mutatur, error vero idem ipse permanet semper."

The Centuriators might have added that Claudius attacked vested interests when he opposed pilgrimages to tombs of saints or to Rome, because the pilgrims brought money to the custodians of the shrines, and a widespread teaching of the futility of such devotions would have injured the Church's purse rather than its piety. People did not like Claudius' logic when he said some shut themselves up in monastries for the sake of penitence, but if true penitence is only to be found in Rome these enclosed penitents are only made worse since they cannot go to the one source of what they seek.

Had the comparatively free atmosphere of the days of Louis the Pious continued there would have been many, we are sure, who would have taken up the burden and the lesson of Claudius and perpetuated his teaching. As it was, tolerance faded, tyranny grew and the worldly cosmopolitan church sought mainly temporal enrichment and worldly power. Steadily it climbed by devious ways into Caesar's seat and claimed the things that were Caesar's in its self-assured complacency that

none could question its hold on the things of God. It was a long time till the sixteenth century, but for six hundred years obscure men here and there in Europe, Albigenses, Lollards, Waldenses, Hussites, as well as many noble, bore witness to a purer faith, and deeper reverence for God. In the annals of Protestantism Claudius deserves an honoured place. Filial piety among the Reformed may go back in thought at times to the devout expositor in the Imperial schools of the great Emperor; picture him as he studies the Holy Word; and then see him as the zealous bishop amid the foot-hills of the Alps, there fulfilling in scriptural faith the vision of the priest reclaiming men from their idols to serve the living God, fighting the good fight, renewed daily at the fountain-head—" I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help."

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