

JEROME
A Thumb Sketch of his Life and Times

Jerome was born in Stridon in Dalmatia or Pannonia, (Hungary), which appears to have been very near to the modern city of Trieste. This was between 337 AD and 353 AD and he died in 420 AD.

He was responsible for the Vulgate Translation of the Bible into Latin. He was also mainly responsible for introducing the ascetic life into Western Europe. His writings more than any other depict the general and ecclesiastical life of the times. Here, as the Hellenic Civilisation of ancient Greece and Rome was dying, the simultaneous birth of both Western "Christian" Civilisation and the Orthodox Eastern "Christian" Civilisation was taking place. (See Ref 1 Vol 12 p.558/561 - the inverted commas are mine). Before Jerome's eyes the City of his birth Stridon, was destroyed by the Goths. (AD 377). In AD 410 Rome was sacked by Alaric and refugees from Rome and Italy crowded into Bethlehem where Jerome was living as the Head of a monastery.

The marriage of Alaric's successor, Adolphus, to the Emperor's sister, Galla Placidia, leaves an interesting architectural monument in Ravenna. This is the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, (Ref 2 Vol 2 p p169/170), which externally is remarkably like the 7th century Visigothic Church of Sao Fructuoso de Montelios near Braga, Portugal. (Ref 3 opp. p81). The interior of the Portuguese Church has Visigothic columns whereas that of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia has some of the finest earliest Christian mosaics, pre Western and pre Byzantine. The Church in Portugal is believed by some to have been rebuilt in the 11th century after being destroyed by the Moslems. However, the writer, having visited both sites, believes that externally it is very close in ethos to its sister building in Ravenna. After all, the Visigoths arrived in Spain and Portugal in 415 AD.

Like Jerome, the Visigoths were involved in the controversy over the "hypostases" or "trinitarian" nature of God. Leuvigild, King of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo, (AD 561 to 584), argued "I accept without question that Christ is the son of God and equal to the Father. What I cannot believe is that the Holy Ghost is God, for that is written in none of the Scriptures". (Ref 4 p349).

Gregory of Tours, who was a Roman Catholic, when he heard this reported to him, answered as follows :- "How depressing this is! What a wicked argument! What a poisonous belief! How depraved his mind must be! What of

the saying of our Lord: 'God is Spirit'? What of the saying of Peter to Ananias: 'Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' What also of the words of Paul, when he reminds us of the mystical gifts of God; 'But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he wills?' Anyone who does exactly as he wishes is plainly in subjection to none."

Obviously the Arian doctrine of the Visigoths had changed from the earlier doctrine held at the time of Jerome as we will note below.

Jerome travelled extensively but regrettably very little of his travels were reported by him because he vowed not to write about secular matters after he had a terrifying dream. At this time his travels in Thrace, Pontus, Bithynia and Cappadocia would have been of great value, if only he had recorded them.

Jerome was not a great theologian but he was involved with many of the theological controversies of the time. He considered the Roman Pontif as the head of the Christian Church and he defended the value of sacred relics and places.

Some of the controversies and religious doctrines that he was involved are noted below.

(1). Hypostases (Ref 5 p.xxix & 18/19)

In a letter by Jerome to Pope Damasus in Rome in 376/377AD, he writes : "(2) which is the correct terminology, to speak of three "hypostases" in the Godhead, or one? In the same letter he points out the confusion which has arisen because the Church in the East speaks of one essence and three substances, the Western of one substance and three persons!

(2).Origenism (Ref 5 p.xiv)

The works of Origen,(c AD 254), were again reviewed in the 4th and 5th century. The main doctrines of Origen were:-

- (a) The subordination of the Son to God
- (b) His doctrine that the souls of men came into the world as a result of a fall from a previous state of being.
- (c) Men may rise again to an angelic state and the material body would pass away.
- (d) All spiritual beings, including the fallen angels, will be schooled into obedience so that the universe may be brought back into harmony.

Because of his views on (a) above he was called the father of Arius. We will see below where his views on transmigration of the soul come from.

(3) Pelagianism (Ref 5 p.xiv)

Pelagius and Caelestius, monks of Britain, came to Rome in 409 AD and maintained that the doctrine of free will and the possibility of man living without sin against the Augustinian doctrine of Grace, which asserted the helplessness of man and issued in absolute predestinarianism. The writer will review this doctrine in a separate research study. (See penultimate paragraph p.5)

(4) Luciferians (Ref 5 p.319/334).

Jerome's "The Dialogue against the Luciferians" is a long story about a domestic matter relating to the manner in which Arians, once they had renounced their heresy, should be accepted back into the Roman Catholic fold. It does not really deal with the two main points of the Arian doctrine which were the subordination of the Son to God and the belief that the Holy Spirit was not a third person or essence of the Godhead. (Above we noted that the Visigoths had later accepted the equality of the Son with the Father).

This work of Jerome, however, does reveal some interesting information which is listed below. In the dialogue, Jerome uses two people called Luciferian and Orthodoxus. Below the two are identified in the dialogue respectively by the letters L and O unless otherwise shown.

(a). Custom in the Church of Rome (Ref 5 p.324)

Listen to Luciferian

"Don't you know that the laying on of hands after baptism and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a custom of the Churches? Do you demand Scripture proof? You may find it in the Acts of the Apostles. And even if it did not rest on the authority of the Scriptures the consensus of the whole world in this respect would have the force of a command. For many observances of the Churches, which are due to tradition, have acquired the authority of the written law, as for instance, the practice of dipping the head three times in the laver, and then, after leaving the water, of tasting mingled milk and honey in representation of infancy: and again, the practice of standing up in worship on the Lord's day, and ceasing from fasting on every Pentecost; and there are many other unwritten practices which have won their place through reason and custom. So you see we follow the practice of the Church, although it may be clear that a person was baptised before the Spirit was invoked."

(b). The Origin of Christian Teaching (Ref 5 p.325)

Orthodoxus comments:-

"Heresy is subtle, and therefore the simple-minded are easily deceived. To be deceived is the common lot of both layman and bishop. But you say a bishop could not have

been mistaken. The truth is, men are elected to the episcopate who come from the bosom of Plato and Aristophanes. How many can you find among them who are not fully instructed in these writers? Indeed all, whoever they may be, that are ordained at the present day from among the literate class make it their study not how to seek out the marrow of Scripture, but how to tickle the ears of the people with flowers of rhetoric. We must further add the Arian heresy goes hand in hand with the wisdom of the world, and borrows its stream of argument from the fountains of Aristotle."

(c). The Word of the Fishermen or the Philosophers
(Ref 5 p.326 - L).

"I beseech you lay aside the methods of the philosophers and let us talk with Christian simplicity; that is if you are willing to follow not the logicians, but the Galilean fishermen."

(5) The Origin of the Soul (Ref 5 p.272)

Augustine writes to Jerome on the difficult question of the "origin of the soul" asking his views. Augustine's view was that the soul is immortal and incorporeal and that it falls into sin is due not to God but to its own free choice.! The damnation of unbaptized infants is assumed!

Augustine's view of the authority of the Bible is disclosed in Chapter 2 of his Book XI in the "City of God". (Ref 6 p.431) In a nutshell, Augustine acknowledges that the Bible is the outstanding authority in which we should put our trust in concerning that those things we need to know for our good and yet are unable of discovering for ourselves. He goes on to say that other things are within reach of our senses as such things are "before our senses" just as things accessible to our sight are "before our eyes"! For things out of reach of our senses, we must rely on other witnesses who, we believe, have or have had those things within reach of their senses. Further, he believes that for invisible things which are out of our own perception, we ought to put our trust in witnesses who have learnt of those things, when they have been once presented to them in that immaterial light, or who behold them continually so displayed!

These views of Augustine and the customs of the Roman Church have opened the doors of Christianity to the absurdities which have smothered the word of God.

Just where do these weird ideas come? Many were adopted from pagan religions and from Greek and Roman Philosophers.

Amongst the philosophers who greatly influenced the churchmen after the disciples had passed away, Plato was the key.

Plato, (427-347 B.C.), believed in the "immortal soul"; "heaven and hell"; "transmigration of the soul" where human beings sometimes became animals on the way down and progressed back to human beings on the way up! Plato's trinity was the 3 daughters of Necessity; Lachesis who sang of things past; Clotho of things present and Atrophos of things to come! (Ref 7 Part XI p387/401).

Where did Plato get these ideas from? The answer is from paganism. H.P.D. Lee, the translator of Plato's "The Republic", states that much of Plato's detail on the doctrine of transmigration was borrowed from contemporary sources, probably Orphic. (See Ref 7 Part XI p393).

Rev. Richard William Morgan, (1814-1899), author of the book, "St Paul in Britain", also had made a careful study of Welsh Druidism. He states "The ramifications of Druidism penetrated, indeed, into Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor; nor did Plato hesitate to affirm that all streams of Greek Philosophy were to be traced, not to Egypt but to the fountain of the West." Morgan goes on to write "A more celebrated Druid, Pythagoras, founded a school in Italy the effects of which, though he himself and many of his leading scholars perished in a popular commotion, were never obliterated; the transmigration of souls, their pre-existence and immortality, the true theories of the heavenly bodies and their revolutions, the severity of the esoteric system with its silence and secrecy, being observed by various Italian sects down to the Christian era". (Ref 8 p49).

The Druidic trinity was conceived as " the creator of the past, the saviour of the present, the renovator of the future." (Ref 8 p55).

A footnote on page 56 of Morgan's book acknowledges that Druidism owes it much of its origins to the Chaldean faith, that is the Babylonian Mystery Religion! (See Revelations 17 v5).

This brief summary intended to be "A Thumb Sketch of the Life and Times of Jerome" seems to have ended up as "A Thumb Sketch of Christian Theology vs Philosophy and Pagan Practice.". This subject is being studied by the writer and "An Outline of Christian Theology vs Philosophy and Pagan Practice" is planned as Book 8 in the writer's "Lost Israel".

We are indebted to Jerome for his "dialogues" which often have given us both sides of the story, a rare quality.

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Douglas S Morley
8 Pinafore Court
Duncraig, Perth
Australia WA 6023

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Telephone (09) 4477226