

15. Sabbath Keepers in India

Apostolic Origin

WE SHALL now briefly trace the apostolic Christian Sabbath - keepers from Antioch in Syria to their farthest mission stations in old China. Thomas Yeates in his "Indian Church History" (London: 1818), has collected from several sources statements that all agree on the points he presents, that the apostle Thomas travelled through Persia into India, where he raised up many churches. "From thence he went to China, and preached the gospel in the city of Cambala, [which is] supposed to be the same with Peking, and there he built a church." - *"Indian Church History," p. 73.* "In the year 1625, there was found in a town near Si-ngan-fu, the metropolis of the province of Shin-si, a stone having the figure of a cross, and inscriptions in two languages. . . . Chinese and Syriac follows: *'This Stone was erected to the honour and eternal memory of the law of light and truth brought from Ta-Cin, and promulgated in China.'* [The inscription consists of 736 words, giving] a summary of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith." - *Id., pp. 86-88.*

That the missionaries who brought the gospel to China were Sabbath-keepers can be seen by the following extract from the inscription:

"On the seventh day we offer sacrifice, after having purified our hearts, and received absolution for our sins. This religion, so perfect and so excellent, is difficult to name, but it enlightens darkness by its brilliant precepts." - *"Christianity in China," M. l'Abbe Huc, Vol. I, chap. 2, pp. 48-49, seq. New York: 1873.*

Returning to India we shall find traces of the Sabbath among those churches also. And they had retained the Bible in the ancient language used by the church at Antioch, where the name "Christians" originated. (Acts 11: 26)

"It was in these sequestered regions that copies of the Syriac Scriptures found a safe asylum from the search and destruction of the Romish inquisitors, and were found with all the marks of ancient purity." - *"Indian Church History," T. Yeates, p. 167.*

"Whatever may be the future use and importance of those manuscripts, one thing is certain, and that is, they establish the fact that the Syrian Christians of India have the pure unadulterated Scriptures in the language of the ancient church of Antioch, derived from the very times of the Apostles." - *Id., p. 169.*

Thomas Yeates shows that they kept "Saturday, which amongst them is a festival day, agreeable to the ancient practice of the church." - *Id., pp. 133, 134.*

The Armenians of India and Persia had evidently received their faith from the same source as the other Christians of India. Rev. Claudius Buchanan, D. D., says of them:

"The Armenians in Hindostan are our own subjects. . . . They have preserved the Bible in its purity; and their doctrines are, as far as the Author knows, the doctrines of the Bible. Besides, they maintain the solemn observance of Christian worship, throughout our Empire, on the seventh day; and they have as many spires pointing to heaven among the Hindoos, as we ourselves." - *"Christian Researches in Asia," p. 143. Philadelphia: 1813.*

The Jacobites, another branch of the original Christians of India, can add one more link to this evidence. Samuel Purchas, the noted geographer and compiler, said of them:

"They keep Saturday holy, nor esteem the Saturday fast lawful, but on Easter even. They have solemn service on Saturdays, eat flesh, and feast it bravely, like the Jews." - *"Pilgrimmes," Part 2, Book 8, chap. 6, p. 1269. London: 1625.* (We must remember that the papal church demanded all to fast on the Sabbath, but these Christians refused to obey her.)

J. W. Massie says of these Indian Christians:

"Remote from the busy haunts of commerce, or the populous seats of manufacturing industry, they may be regarded as the Eastern Piedmontese, the Vaudois of Hindustan, the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth through revolving centuries, though indeed their bodies lay as dead in the streets of the city which they had once peopled." - *"Continental India," Vol. 2, p. 120.*

Papal Persecution

Mr. Massie further says of these Christians:

"Separated from the Western world for a thousand years, they were naturally ignorant of many novelties introduced by the councils and decrees of the Lateran; and their conformity with the faith and practice of the first ages laid them open to the unpardonable guilt of heresy and schism, as estimated by the church of Rome. 'We are Christians, and not idolaters,' was their expressive reply when required to do homage to the image of the Virgin Mary. . . . LaCroze states them at fifteen hundred churches and as many towns and villages. They refused to recognise the pope, and declared they had never heard of him; they asserted the purity and primitive truth of their faith since they came, and their bishops had for thirteen hundred years been sent, from the place where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians." - *Id., Vol. II, pp. 116, 117.*

When the Portuguese (Roman Catholics) came to Malabar, India, in 1503, "they were agreeably surprised to find upwards of a hundred Christian churches on the coast of Malabar. But when they became acquainted with the purity and simplicity of their worship, they were offended. 'These churches,' said the Portuguese, 'belong to the Pope.' 'Who is the Pope?' said the natives, 'we never heard of him.' The European priests were yet more alarmed, when they found that these Hindoo Christians maintained the order and discipline of a regular church under Episcopal jurisdiction: and that, for 1300 years past, they had enjoyed a succession of Bishops appointed by the Patriarch of Antioch. 'We,' said they, 'are of the true faith, whatever you from the West may be; for we came from the place where the followers of Christ were first called Christians.'" - *"Christian Researches in Asia," Claudius Buchanan, D. D., p. 60. Philadelphia: 1813.*

"These Christians met the Portuguese as natural friends and allies, and rejoiced at their coming. But the Portuguese were much disappointed at finding the St. Thomas Christians firmly fixed in the tenets of a primitive church; and soon adopted plans for drawing away from their pure faith this innocent, ingenuous, and respectable people." - *"Indian Church History," Thomas Yeates, p. 163. London: 1818.*

When the Jesuit, Francis Xavier, and his colaborers, were sent to India, they displayed the true spirit of Romanism. "The Inquisition was set up at Goa, in the Indies, at the instance of Francis Xaverius, who signified by letter to Pope [King] John III, Nov. 10, 1545, 'that the Jewish wickedness spread every day more and more in the parts of the East Indies, subject to the kingdom of Portugal, and therefore he

earnestly besought the said king, that to cure so great an evil, he would take care to send the office of the Inquisition into those countries. [Accordingly the Inquisition was erected there.] The first Inquisitor was Alexius Diaz Falcano, sent by Cardinal Henry, March 15, A. D. 1560. . . . The language of F. Xavier, used on this occasion, is truly suspicious, and that under the mask of correcting 'the Jewish wickedness,' is rather to be construed an avowed design against the liberties, the independence, and the firmness of the native Christians of Malabar, who refused to acknowledge the Pope's supremacy, and with a true Protestant zeal bravely resisted the Catholic tyranny." - *Id.*, pp. 139, 140.

"The Jewish wickedness" of which Xavier complained was evidently the Sabbath-keeping among those native Christians, as we shall see in our next quotation. When one of these Sabbath-keeping Christians was taken by the Inquisition, he was accused "of having *Judaized*; which means, having conformed to the ceremonies of the Mosaic law; such as not eating pork, hare, fish without scales, &c., of having attended the solemnization of the Sabbath." - "*Account of the Inquisition at Goa*," Dellon, p. 56. *London: 1815.*

"The Inquisitors, by degrees, begin to urge him in this way 'If thou hast observed the law of Moses, and assembled on the Sabbath day as thou sayest, and thy accusers have seen thee there, as appears to have been the case; to convince us of the sincerity of thy repentance, tell us who are thine accusers, and those who have been with thee at these assemblies.'"

Dellon then suggests that in the mind of the Inquisitors "the witnesses of the Sabbath are considered as accomplices." - *Id.*, p. 58.

Some have thought that these Sabbath-keepers were relapsed Jews, but Dellon declares:

"Of an hundred persons condemned to be burnt as Jews, there are scarcely four who profess that faith at their death; the rest exclaiming and protesting to their last gasp that they are Christians, and have been so during their whole lives." - *Id.*, p. 64.

"The prisoner, who was entirely innocent, would be given over to the civil arm to be burned, unless he confessed the very crimes of which he was accused, and signed his confession, and also named six or seven of his accusers. But, not being told who they were, he might have to name many before striking the right ones, and, as his accusers were supposed to have been eyewitnesses to his Sabbath-keeping, they might be Sabbath-keepers, who, like himself, were in the clutches of the Inquisition. His only hope, therefore, was to name some of his brethren, who would then be taken by the inquisitors, and forced to repeat the same experience to free themselves. Thus the prison would be filled with people who were tortured for guilt of which they were innocent, or to remain in solitary confinement and terrible suspense and agony of mind until the Auto da Fe, or public burning, which took place every two or three years." - *Id.*, pp. 53-60, 67. And whether they were released or executed, their property was confiscated to the Inquisition. Dr. C. Buchanan says:

"When the power of the Portuguese became sufficient for their purpose, they invaded these tranquil Churches, seized some of the Clergy, and devoted them to the death of heretics. . . .

They seized the Syrian Bishop Mar Joseph, and sent him prisoner to Lisbon: and then convened a Synod at one of the Syrian Churches called Diamper, near Cochin, at which the Romish Archbishop Menezes presided. At this compulsory Synod 150 of the Syrian Clergy appeared. They were accused of the following practices and opinions: 'That they had married wives; that they owned but two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; that they neither invoked Saints, nor worshipped Images,

nor believed in Purgatory; and that they had no other orders of names of dignity in the church, than Bishop, Priest, and Deacon.' These tenets they were called on to abjure, or to suffer suspension from all Church benefices. It was also decreed that all Syrian books on ecclesiastical subjects that could be found, should be burned; 'in order,' said the Inquisitors, 'that no pretended apostolical monuments may remain.'" - *"Christian Researches in Asia," p. 60.*

The papacy had adopted the policy that all remains of the pure, apostolic church, whether persons or books, should be carefully eradicated, so that no trace of them might betray the sad fact that the Roman church had fallen away from the apostolic purity. And she has also tried to destroy all accounts of her persecution during the Dark Ages, so that her tracks would be covered up.